

**Date and Time:** Monday 9 September 2024 16:38:00 CEST

**Job Number:** 233026923

**Documents (100)**

1. [*Increased support for EU farmers through rural development funds*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?id=urn:contentItem:65H1-J091-JDG9-Y3V6-00000-00&idtype=PID&context=1516831)

**Client/Matter:** -None-

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2. [*Ukraine : how short-term crises eclipse long-term climate risks*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?id=urn:contentItem:657D-GH21-JDNW-40JF-00000-00&idtype=PID&context=1516831)

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3. [*Food security alarm as war adds pressure*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?id=urn:contentItem:650H-0MH1-JCBW-N1GF-00000-00&idtype=PID&context=1516831)

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4. [*Europe's blueprint for the future*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?id=urn:contentItem:65DM-TCJ1-JDJN-63BT-00000-00&idtype=PID&context=1516831)

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5. [*What are dairy companies saying - and doing - on the war in Ukraine ?*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?id=urn:contentItem:64Y8-8MC1-DYNP-M405-00000-00&idtype=PID&context=1516831)

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6. [*Warnings that almost a third could quit pig sector as losses expected to reach 160m*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?id=urn:contentItem:652X-0VG1-JC8V-41S4-00000-00&idtype=PID&context=1516831)

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7. [*Richard Wright: European Commission tackles food security worries*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?id=urn:contentItem:6505-BNK1-JBN3-50JY-00000-00&idtype=PID&context=1516831)

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8. [*Six Key Themes For Europe Agribusiness*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?id=urn:contentItem:65DM-0J11-F0J5-84J3-00000-00&idtype=PID&context=1516831)

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9. [*Speakers Concerned by Unequal Geographic Representation among Staff, Limited Career Prospects for Some, as Fifth Committee Reviews Progress in Human Resources Reform*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?id=urn:contentItem:64YV-J6K1-JDG9-Y0KG-00000-00&idtype=PID&context=1516831)

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10. [*Nearly Five Years into Colombia ’s Historic Peace Agreement, Unprecedented Strides in Justice Marked alongside Lingering Violence, Experts Tell Security Council*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?id=urn:contentItem:634X-WX21-F0YC-N20T-00000-00&idtype=PID&context=1516831)

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11. [*Border Security (Executive Session); Congressional Record Vol. 167, No. 162 (Senate - September 20, 2021)*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?id=urn:contentItem:63NK-X4G1-F0YC-N508-00000-00&idtype=PID&context=1516831)

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12. [*Dee River Basin District in England programme of measures: mechanisms summary*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?id=urn:contentItem:65GB-RRF1-JDG9-Y1NH-00000-00&idtype=PID&context=1516831)

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13. [*Remarks by Commissioner Gentiloni at the Spring 2022 Economic Forecast press conference*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?id=urn:contentItem:65G5-6SX1-F0YC-N36G-00000-00&idtype=PID&context=1516831)

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14. [*War in Europe Russia and the West: between sanctions and war*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?id=urn:contentItem:64WX-RRS1-JCM4-60SC-00000-00&idtype=PID&context=1516831)

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15. [*Federal Register: Standards of Performance for New, Reconstructed, and Modified Sources and Emissions Guidelines for Existing Sources: Oil and Natural Gas Sector Climate Review Pages 63110 - 63263 [FR DOC #2021-24202]*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?id=urn:contentItem:643B-GTS1-JDG9-Y40B-00000-00&idtype=PID&context=1516831)

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16. [*-UC Davis receives $ 12.9 million grant aimed at improving health through precision nutrition*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?id=urn:contentItem:64KF-MJ21-F0K1-N1BB-00000-00&idtype=PID&context=1516831)

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17. [*Government must 'be open' to reviewing supports for pig sector as situation evolves*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?id=urn:contentItem:65B3-CJG1-JC8V-426J-00000-00&idtype=PID&context=1516831)

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18. [*Cadogan Petroleum Plc - Annual Financial Report*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?id=urn:contentItem:65B9-BB41-JB72-128B-00000-00&idtype=PID&context=1516831)

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19. [*BlackRock Greater Europe Investment Trust Plc - Final Results*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?id=urn:contentItem:6410-KT61-DXP3-R056-00000-00&idtype=PID&context=1516831)

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20. [*Savannah Resources reports audited financial results for year ended December 31, 2021*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?id=urn:contentItem:655P-4SW1-JC0X-H3P7-00000-00&idtype=PID&context=1516831)

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21. [*Testimony of Secretary of the Treasury Janet L. Yellen before the Financial Services Committee, U.S House*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?id=urn:contentItem:655M-97S1-JDG9-Y36F-00000-00&idtype=PID&context=1516831)

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22. [*TOP NEWS SUMMARY: Russian military enters Kiev as West apply sanctions*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?id=urn:contentItem:64VW-XXG1-JBN8-N0MP-00000-00&idtype=PID&context=1516831)

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23. [*G7 foreign ministers' meeting in Germany , 2022: communiqué*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?id=urn:contentItem:65GK-03J1-F0YC-N0DX-00000-00&idtype=PID&context=1516831)

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24. [*Ukraine war detonates EU food security debate, but will sustainability be collateral damage?*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?id=urn:contentItem:64Y3-FHY1-DYNP-M3B5-00000-00&idtype=PID&context=1516831)

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25. [*Discrimination against mobile European Union citizens before and during the first COVID-19 lockdown: Evidence from a conjoint experiment in Germany*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?id=urn:contentItem:63X0-16M1-JBMY-H2JC-00000-00&idtype=PID&context=1516831)

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26. [*NEWS BULLETIN NO. 11771*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?id=urn:contentItem:64K6-MSJ1-F12K-R263-00000-00&idtype=PID&context=1516831)

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27. [*Live updates: Putin approves 'volunteer fighters' to Ukraine*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?id=urn:contentItem:64YY-BCY1-JDJN-62V1-00000-00&idtype=PID&context=1516831)

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28. [*[ANALYSIS] Post-pandemic strategy: Change in direction or just some lipstick?*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?id=urn:contentItem:633D-CMG1-F11P-X3MP-00000-00&idtype=PID&context=1516831)

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29. [*Targeted Investments to Promote Gender Equality Key for Ensuring Climate Resilience Plans Result in Female Empowerment, Protection, Speakers Tell Women’s Commission*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?id=urn:contentItem:6514-SRG1-JDG9-Y1KP-00000-00&idtype=PID&context=1516831)

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30. [*Shelby: Senate Passes FY22 Package, Important Domestic Funding*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?id=urn:contentItem:6508-NSC1-JDG9-Y0K0-00000-00&idtype=PID&context=1516831)

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31. [*BlackRock Grtr Eur Half-year Report -2-*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?id=urn:contentItem:65DP-N8G1-JCXB-20PR-00000-00&idtype=PID&context=1516831)

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32. [*Groups call for protests against Libya 's poll cancellation*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?id=urn:contentItem:64CV-82F1-JDJN-64F5-00000-00&idtype=PID&context=1516831)

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33. [*Pensana Plc - Interim results for the 6 months ended 31 Dec 2021*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?id=urn:contentItem:653X-6Y91-JB72-154D-00000-00&idtype=PID&context=1516831)

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34. [*Wage supplement will be extended if necessary, PM says*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?id=urn:contentItem:64CV-82F1-JDJN-64FV-00000-00&idtype=PID&context=1516831)

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35. [*The European Green Deal and the role of the 2023-2027 CAP*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?id=urn:contentItem:62SF-MYC1-JCF9-44W9-00000-00&idtype=PID&context=1516831)

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36. [*BlackRock Latin American Investment Trust Plc - Final Results*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?id=urn:contentItem:654B-56K1-JB72-12R4-00000-00&idtype=PID&context=1516831)

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37. [*Final Results and Accounts*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?id=urn:contentItem:64VM-NB51-F0NJ-D08R-00000-00&idtype=PID&context=1516831)

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38. [*Darius McDermott: Investing through the uncertainty in Europe*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?id=urn:contentItem:64XC-X3F1-JD7R-N1HG-00000-00&idtype=PID&context=1516831)

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| News | Timeline: 20 mei 2021 tot 20 mei 2022; Locatie: International; Plaats van publicatie: Europe; Taal: English |

39. [*FOOD PRICES UNDER UOKOK SUPERVISION More expensive on a plate*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?id=urn:contentItem:64NH-VW91-JBK9-203D-00000-00&idtype=PID&context=1516831)

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| News | Timeline: 20 mei 2021 tot 20 mei 2022; Locatie: International; Plaats van publicatie: Europe; Taal: English |

40. [*Climate change extreme and seasonal toxic metal occurrence in Romanian freshwaters in the last two decades—case study and critical review*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?id=urn:contentItem:671W-P2B1-JCWX-C1TG-00000-00&idtype=PID&context=1516831)

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| News | Timeline: 20 mei 2021 tot 20 mei 2022; Locatie: International; Plaats van publicatie: Europe; Taal: English |

41. [*Live updates: Germany to send anti-tank weapons to Ukraine ; France intercepts Russian cargo ship*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?id=urn:contentItem:64WB-7MH1-F11P-X39J-00000-00&idtype=PID&context=1516831)

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| News | Timeline: 20 mei 2021 tot 20 mei 2022; Locatie: International; Plaats van publicatie: Europe; Taal: English |

42. [*NEWS BULLETIN NO. 11780*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?id=urn:contentItem:64MN-P031-F12K-R19N-00000-00&idtype=PID&context=1516831)

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43. [*Morocco : 'I refuse to be drawn into territorial disputes,' says OCP CEO Mostafa Terrab*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?id=urn:contentItem:62VV-KDJ1-JCH9-G138-00000-00&idtype=PID&context=1516831)

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44. [*Plastic pollution in the Arctic*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?id=urn:contentItem:693W-H851-F129-P049-00000-00&idtype=PID&context=1516831)

**Client/Matter:** -None-

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45. [*Federal Rgister: Wagner-Peyser Act Staffing Pages 23700 - 23744 [FR DOC #2022-07628]*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?id=urn:contentItem:658K-P5J1-F0YC-N2MV-00000-00&idtype=PID&context=1516831)

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46. [*NEWS BULLETIN NO. 11815*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?id=urn:contentItem:64X7-GCY1-JDKJ-154S-00000-00&idtype=PID&context=1516831)

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| News | Timeline: 20 mei 2021 tot 20 mei 2022; Locatie: International; Plaats van publicatie: Europe; Taal: English |

47. [*Morocco Monthly Briefing October 2021*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?id=urn:contentItem:641W-8HC1-JC8V-42G4-00000-00&idtype=PID&context=1516831)

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48. [*Blinken on Ukraine : 'Suffering is likely to get worse before it gets better' - live*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?id=urn:contentItem:64XD-86K1-JBNF-W4R6-00000-00&idtype=PID&context=1516831)

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49. [*Russian bond default 'imminent', as inflation jumps; markets surge as oil falls back - as it happened*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?id=urn:contentItem:64YF-8SK1-JBNF-W2RP-00000-00&idtype=PID&context=1516831)

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50. [*Elevated fires during COVID-19 lockdown and the vulnerability of protected areas*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?id=urn:contentItem:671W-P2M1-JCWX-C2NR-00000-00&idtype=PID&context=1516831)

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51. [*Stakeholder engagement, flexible proactiveness and democratic durability as CSR strategic postures to overcome periods of crisis*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?id=urn:contentItem:66GB-PY91-DY4C-F0KV-00000-00&idtype=PID&context=1516831)

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52. [*BlackRock Greater Europe Investment Trust Plc - Half-year Report*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?id=urn:contentItem:65DP-N8G1-JB72-14GR-00000-00&idtype=PID&context=1516831)

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53. [*Boris Johnson pledges to say 'a lot more' on 'partygate' row after police investigation*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?id=urn:contentItem:64SK-8JV1-DY4H-K0Y8-00000-00&idtype=PID&context=1516831)

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54. [*Australia politics live updates: Frydenberg expects 'close' battle to hold seat; Lambie disputes Hanson preference deal claims; 50 Covid deaths*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?id=urn:contentItem:65B0-1YJ1-JBNF-W1KH-00000-00&idtype=PID&context=1516831)

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55. [*Briefing by Alexei Zaitsev, Deputy Director of the Information and Press Department of the Russian Foreign Ministry, Moscow, May 6, 2022*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?id=urn:contentItem:65DG-N091-JDG9-Y4R5-00000-00&idtype=PID&context=1516831)

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56. [*Israel and the Palestinians: From the Two-State Solution to Five Failed “States”*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?id=urn:contentItem:62R5-6351-JDG9-Y234-00000-00&idtype=PID&context=1516831)

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57. [*European Robotic Liquid Handling Devices for Genomics Market Forecast to Reach $ 665.8 Million by 2026*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?id=urn:contentItem:63YH-3J01-F0K1-N098-00000-00&idtype=PID&context=1516831)

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58. [*Braime Group PLC Annual Results for the Year -2-*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?id=urn:contentItem:65B3-GHG1-F0CC-S42P-00000-00&idtype=PID&context=1516831)

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59. [*UK records 26,068 cases, most since January - as it happened*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?id=urn:contentItem:631P-4D01-JBNF-W27S-00000-00&idtype=PID&context=1516831)

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| News | Timeline: 20 mei 2021 tot 20 mei 2022; Locatie: International; Plaats van publicatie: Europe; Taal: English |

60. [*LEGISLATIVE SESSION; Congressional Record Vol. 167, No. 139 (Senate - August 04, 2021)*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?id=urn:contentItem:639K-7BY1-JDG9-Y1M2-00000-00&idtype=PID&context=1516831)

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61. [*Live updates: Zelenskyy says Russia carries out more airstrikes*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?id=urn:contentItem:65GK-6DJ1-JDJN-60H8-00000-00&idtype=PID&context=1516831)

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62. [*Mitch McConnell says he will not support Ketanji Brown Jackson nomination - as it happened*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?id=urn:contentItem:652N-NW31-DY4H-K30D-00000-00&idtype=PID&context=1516831)

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63. [*Labor launches first federal election ad; 26 Covid deaths - as it happened*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?id=urn:contentItem:6511-3951-DY4H-K2BW-00000-00&idtype=PID&context=1516831)

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64. [*Learning to live with climate change: lessons from Los Angeles*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?id=urn:contentItem:63C8-CXR1-F039-6237-00000-00&idtype=PID&context=1516831)

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65. [*AMERICA CREATING OPPORTUNITIES FOR MANUFACTURING, PRE-EMINENCE IN TECHNOLOGY, AND ECONOMIC STRENGTH ACT OF 2022; Congressional Record Vol. 168, No. 52 (Senate - March 23, 2022)*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?id=urn:contentItem:6544-FN71-JDG9-Y07C-00000-00&idtype=PID&context=1516831)

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66. [*Climate Change and Cascading Risks from Infectious Disease*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?id=urn:contentItem:673K-K051-JCWX-C461-00000-00&idtype=PID&context=1516831)

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| News | Timeline: 20 mei 2021 tot 20 mei 2022; Locatie: International; Plaats van publicatie: Europe; Taal: English |

67. [*LEGISLATIVE SESSION; Congressional Record Vol. 168, No. 53 (Senate - March 24, 2022)*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?id=urn:contentItem:6544-FN91-JDG9-Y3YP-00000-00&idtype=PID&context=1516831)

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68. [*Highlights from Central Asian press, websites 18 Jun 21*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?id=urn:contentItem:62Y5-RJG1-DYRV-33VB-00000-00&idtype=PID&context=1516831)

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69. [*Morocco Monthly Briefing February 2022*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?id=urn:contentItem:64Y8-8MB1-JC8V-42B4-00000-00&idtype=PID&context=1516831)

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70. [*“A purer form of government”: African American constitutionalism in the founding of Liberia*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?id=urn:contentItem:671W-P2K1-JCWX-C05D-00000-00&idtype=PID&context=1516831)

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71. [*Firms going from strength to strength despite challenging times Angela McGowan, regional director of the CBI, on what the Top 100 Companies tells us about the economy*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?id=urn:contentItem:644V-79S1-JCBW-N2J6-00000-00&idtype=PID&context=1516831)

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72. [*NEWS BULLETIN NO. 11659*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?id=urn:contentItem:63PR-WYD1-JDKJ-10JX-00000-00&idtype=PID&context=1516831)

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73. [*Supreme Court of Ireland Decision: Kelly v Minister for Agriculture & Ors (Approved) [2021] IESC 62\_3 (15 September 2021)*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?id=urn:contentItem:63MJ-2C01-F0YC-N1KR-00000-00&idtype=PID&context=1516831)

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74. [*Liberal senator denies making 'dog noise' at Lambie after culture review handed down - as it happened*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?id=urn:contentItem:6466-6PK1-JBNF-W3CJ-00000-00&idtype=PID&context=1516831)

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75. [*Reserve bank holds interest rates at record low; 38 Covid deaths reported - as it happened*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?id=urn:contentItem:6552-PCP1-JBNF-W3RV-00000-00&idtype=PID&context=1516831)

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76. [*NEWS BULLETIN NO. 11813*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?id=urn:contentItem:64WR-80F1-F12K-R0D7-00000-00&idtype=PID&context=1516831)

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| News | Timeline: 20 mei 2021 tot 20 mei 2022; Locatie: International; Plaats van publicatie: Europe; Taal: English |

77. [*Pupils across Gloucestershire receive A-level results*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?id=urn:contentItem:63BF-K641-JD39-X34R-00000-00&idtype=PID&context=1516831)

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78. [*More than 260 troops evacuated from steelworks - as it happened*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?id=urn:contentItem:65FX-TC81-DY4H-K1X6-00000-00&idtype=PID&context=1516831)

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79. [*DANONE : A solid set of Full-Year 2021 results; A strong finish to the year*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?id=urn:contentItem:64VG-GP31-JDPT-Y4XW-00000-00&idtype=PID&context=1516831)

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80. [*Federal Register: Endangered and Threatened Wildlife and Plants; Review of Species That Are Candidates for Listing as Endangered or Threatened; Annual Notification of Findings on Resubmitted Petitions; Annual Description of Progress on Listing Actions Pages 26152 - 26178 [FR DOC #2022-09376]*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?id=urn:contentItem:65D1-KHP1-JDG9-Y1JH-00000-00&idtype=PID&context=1516831)

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81. [*Jacob Rees-Mogg warns Cabinet colleagues against 'never-ending' restrictions*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?id=urn:contentItem:62XK-CR91-DY4H-K21N-00000-00&idtype=PID&context=1516831)

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82. [*Leaders face off in final debate - as it happened*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?id=urn:contentItem:65DR-TSJ1-DY4H-K34Y-00000-00&idtype=PID&context=1516831)

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83. [*Federal Register: Extension and Redesignation of South Sudan for Temporary Protected Status Pages 12190 - 12201 [FR DOC #2022-04573]*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?id=urn:contentItem:64XS-XNS1-JDG9-Y3NG-00000-00&idtype=PID&context=1516831)

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84. [*Nation records highest death toll for the pandemic following grim two weeks of rising numbers - as it happened*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?id=urn:contentItem:64K8-NXJ1-JBNF-W4H0-00000-00&idtype=PID&context=1516831)

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85. [*Russia - Ukraine war: Zelenskiy vows to 'punish atrocities' as family dies trying to evacuate Irpin - live*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?id=urn:contentItem:64XV-1MB1-JBNF-W1MH-00000-00&idtype=PID&context=1516831)

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86. [*War and strange non-death of neoliberalism: The military foundations of modern economic ideologies*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?id=urn:contentItem:62RJ-F4K1-JBMY-H1WT-00000-00&idtype=PID&context=1516831)

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87. [*Morocco Monthly Briefing June 2021*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?id=urn:contentItem:6365-JRH1-DYRW-V044-00000-00&idtype=PID&context=1516831)

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88. [*- University of Bristol : Palaeontologist, infectious disease mathematical modeller, anaesthetist and ecologist receive Queen's Birthday Honours*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?id=urn:contentItem:62X9-RRC1-JD3Y-Y1HX-00000-00&idtype=PID&context=1516831)

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89. [*LEGISLATIVE SESSION; Congressional Record Vol. 168, No. 50 (Senate - March 21, 2022)*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?id=urn:contentItem:652D-90F1-F0YC-N4WT-00000-00&idtype=PID&context=1516831)

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90. [*Russia - Ukraine war: Zelenskiy 'ready to speak to Putin'; Russia to cut electricity supply to Finland after Nato decision - live*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?id=urn:contentItem:65F8-X371-DY4H-K2TR-00000-00&idtype=PID&context=1516831)

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91. [*Lauding Pandemic Response, Sixth Committee Speakers Urge Programme of Assistance to Have More Diverse Educational Materials, Resume In-Person Courses*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?id=urn:contentItem:63X7-K171-F0YC-N04C-00000-00&idtype=PID&context=1516831)

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92. [*As it happened: A Levels results day 2021 across Dorset and the New Forest*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?id=urn:contentItem:63BF-K641-JD39-X2PF-00000-00&idtype=PID&context=1516831)

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93. [*Nigeria Monthly Briefing March 2022*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?id=urn:contentItem:656H-D5G1-DYRW-V4K4-00000-00&idtype=PID&context=1516831)

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94. [*Conflicts of sovereignty over EU trade policy: a new constitutional settlement?*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?id=urn:contentItem:671W-P2N1-F0C0-31HD-00000-00&idtype=PID&context=1516831)

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95. [*Putin's Munich speech should have been heeded by the West [Video]*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?id=urn:contentItem:65FR-V5J1-JCMN-Y36R-00000-00&idtype=PID&context=1516831)

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96. [*Alberta Labour Relations Board decision: United Food And Commercial Workers Union, Local No. 401 v Cargill Ltd. , 2022*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?id=urn:contentItem:65DX-7D01-F0YC-N02R-00000-00&idtype=PID&context=1516831)

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97. [*CARBIS BAY G7 SUMMIT COMMUNIQUÉ*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?id=urn:contentItem:62XR-M051-F0YC-N09X-00000-00&idtype=PID&context=1516831)

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98. [*Eurozone faces stagflation as prices surge; Russia cuts interest rates as recession looms - as it happened*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?id=urn:contentItem:65B9-MHB1-DY4H-K0W2-00000-00&idtype=PID&context=1516831)

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99. [*Morocco Monthly Briefing September 2021*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?id=urn:contentItem:63TW-WRG1-JC8V-42HD-00000-00&idtype=PID&context=1516831)

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100. [*Greater Female Participation, Gender-Responsive Approaches Key for Tackling Climate Change, Natural Disasters, Speakers Stress as Women’s Commission Opens Session*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?id=urn:contentItem:650Y-KBJ1-JDG9-Y21D-00000-00&idtype=PID&context=1516831)

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# [***Increased support for EU farmers through rural development funds***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:65H1-J091-JDG9-Y3V6-00000-00&context=1516831)

Impact News Service

May 20, 2022 Friday

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**Length:** 549 words

**Body**

Brussels: European Commission has issued the following news release:

Today, the European Commission proposed an ***exceptional*** ***measure*** funded by the European ***Agricultural*** Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) to allow Member States to pay a one-off lump sum to farmers and agri-food businesses affected by significant increases in input costs. Such increases in prices, notably for energy, fertiliser and animal feed, are disrupting the ***agricultural*** sector and rural communities, leading to liquidity and cash flow problems for farmers and small rural businesses active in ***processing***, marketing or development of ***agricultural*** products. By directly addressing these cash-flow challenges, helping to keep them afloat, the support will address the market disturbances and thus contribute to global food security.

***Agriculture*** Commissioner JanuszWojciechowskisaid: “Farmers, with the support of the Common ***Agricultural*** Policy, continue to relentlessly prove their worth by producing food under difficult circumstances. After the COVID-19 pandemic, they are now being heavily hit by the consequences of the Russian ***invasion*** of Ukraine. For some, survival is at stake. With this ***measure***, the latest in a series deployed under the CAP, we support them so they can keep producing the food the world needs, care for their land and provide for their families. ”

Once adopted by the co-legislators, this ***measure*** will allow Member States to decide to use available funds of up to 5% of their EAFRD budget for the years 2021-2022 for direct income support for farmers and SMEs active in ***processing***, marketing or development of ***agricultural*** products. This represents a potential budget of €1.4 billion in the EU. Member States are required to target this support to beneficiaries who are most affected by the current crisis and who are engaged in circular economy, nutrient management, efficient use of resources or environmental and climate friendly production methods. Selected farmers and SMEs could receive up to €15,000 and €100,000 respectively. The payments should be made by 15 October 2023. To make use of that ***exceptional*** possibility, Member States will have to submit a modification to their rural development programme(s) introducing this new ***measure***.

Today's ***exceptional*** proposal follows the €500 million support package for EU farmers adopted on 23 March in the framework of the Communication on “safeguarding food security and reinforcing the resilience of food systems”. In these two ***measures***, the Commission encourages Member States to support farmers engaged in sustainable practices.

In this context, the Commission is also stepping up its monitoring of the main ***agricultural*** markets impacted by the war. Following a decision published today, Member States will have to notify the Commission their monthly level of stocks of cereals, oilseeds, rice and certified seeds of these products held by relevant producers, wholesalers and operators. The European Commission has also launched a dedicated dashboard presenting up-to-date, detailed statistics on prices, production, and trade of milling wheat, maize, barley, rapeseed, sunflower oil, and soya beans at EU and global level. This provides market operators a timely and accurate picture of the availability of essential commodities for food and feed.

**Load-Date:** May 21, 2022

**End of Document**



[***Ukraine: how short-term crises eclipse long-term climate risks***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:657D-GH21-JDNW-40JF-00000-00&context=1516831)

just-food global news

April 6, 2022 Wednesday 7:00 AM GMT

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**Length:** 1090 words

**Byline:** Ben Cooper

**Body**

The fact official pandemic-related legal restrictions in the UK were repealed on the very day Vladimir Putin launched Russia s ***invasion*** of Ukraine is, in itself, a coincidence, a minor historical detail of no great significance even to the UK.

However, this dovetailing of a new stage in the pandemic and the Ukraine conflict does in some way serve to underscore the unrelenting disruption and instability the world is enduring. Covid-19 has showed how a global crisis can seriously hamper efforts to combat climate change but, owing to its implications for global energy and food supply, the Ukraine crisis could constitute a far more serious impediment to climate action.

The unfolding consequences of the conflict in the energy and food sectors closely mirror one another. Inflation and security of supply are the chief concerns but the question of retrenchment on ***measures*** aimed at addressing climate change has also been much discussed, particularly in the EU.

The EU has announced an  ***exceptional*** and temporary derogation  allowing the production of any crops for food and feed purposes on fallow land, while maintaining the full level of green subsidies for farmers. The aim is to expand EU production capacity and compensate for the limited availability of fertile land.

In addition, EU member states will be permitted, if they wish, to amend their Common ***Agriculture*** Policy (CAP) National Strategic Plans, already filed with the EU Commission and set to run from 2023 to 2027, in response to the Ukraine crisis.

While the EU Commission said this would give countries scope to strengthen resilience, reduce energy dependence and expand sustainable production capacity, campaigners fear countries will use this opportunity to water down their own environmental commitments.

As in relation to energy, the Ukraine conflict has sparked fierce debate between campaigners and vested interests regarding whether climate targets or policies need to be trimmed back in response to the global turmoil. There have been accusations that some lobbyists are using the conflict opportunistically to pressure policymakers for new concessions within the EU s Farm to Fork ***agricultural*** strategy, notably by overstating the food security threat in the EU.

It would be more than distasteful if lobbyists have been deliberately exaggerating the extent of food insecurity the EU, given the very real and alarming threats to food security elsewhere.

While further food inflation and supply chain disruption are the primary threats to developed nations, developing countries are in far greater peril with regard to food security. Russia and Ukraine combined represent in excess of 30% of the global trade in wheat, while accounting for more than 50% of the global market for sunflower oils, seeds and meals. Such is Ukraine and Russia&#8217;s significance as ***agricultural*** producers that up to 500m people are now at serious risk of what is being termed collateral hunger .

The cost-of-living and supply issues relating to food and energy in developed countries are serious and demand action but have to be seen in the context of the far greater food security crisis emerging elsewhere. Furthermore, if there are instances where ***measures*** taken by developed countries could exacerbate the food security risks poorer nations are facing, most egregiously with unnecessary food export bans, the priorities should be crystal clear to all.

The developing food security crisis underlines the inextricable link between climate action and maintaining global food security. In the context of the Ukraine crisis, the two issues are inseparable and the same will be true as the world continues to tackle the climate emergency over the coming decades.

While environmentalists are concerned agri-food lobbyists are looking to undermine climate change ***measures***, short-term exigencies cannot be disregarded. The EU appears to have settled on a reasonable balance with its suite of ***measures***. Campaigners pushing for no concessions to be made whatsoever argue sustainable ***agriculture*** reforms build resilience that will bolster the food system against future shocks of the kind it is currently experiencing. While that may be true, ensuring long-term resilience and dealing with immediate shortages and disruptions are different objectives. The former cannot be disregarded but the latter demands immediate action.

The need to balance current extremities against the need for urgent action addressing long-term objectives speaks to a critical challenge the climate emergency poses for policymakers. The outcome of the COP26 climate conference demonstrated all too vividly how short-term concerns outweigh longer-term challenges.

Clearly, enduring two global crises without respite is ***unprecedented*** but, as the ***process*** of tackling climate change continues, there will always be shorter-term issues to distract policymakers from extremely long-term overall climate objectives. Crucially, the timeframes for the Paris climate goals are of an entirely different order from the election cycles governments work to.

The Ukraine conflict also meant the latest report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), published in late February, has received little coverage. Interestingly, the report emphasises the interconnectedness of climate change with other threats. As the report was launched, one of its authors commented policymakers tend to view climate change as a single issue when in fact it is a matrix of risks .

Climate policy may, one hopes, not always be competing for government bandwidth with more immediate global cataclysms, as has been the case for the past two years, but governments will never have the luxury of dealing with climate change alone. Katharine Hayhoe, chief scientist for the Nature Conservancy, has described climate change as the ultimate threat multiplier , making any issue policymakers face harder to solve.

In a fairly parlous state following the COP26 conference last November, the UN-led climate ***process*** has been further hampered by recent events, not least because it was agreed at the summit that countries would use the coming year to revise climate targets and raise ambitions with the aim of getting the ***process*** back on track. That the envisaged scaling-up of commitments will be achieved amid the current crisis seems unlikely to say the least. Meanwhile, the fact the COP27 conference in November is to take place in Egypt, one of the countries expected to be most seriously affected in terms of food security, is all the more poignant.

**Load-Date:** April 18, 2022

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[***Food security alarm as war adds pressure***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:650H-0MH1-JCBW-N1GF-00000-00&context=1516831)

The Courier

March 14, 2022 Monday

Edition 1, National Edition

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**Section:** NEWS; Pg. 33

**Length:** 353 words

**Byline:** Richard Wright

**Body**

Brussels has held the first meeting of its new European food crisis group to discuss food security.

Its role has been given new significance by events in Ukraine.

Before the end of this month the agenda will move on to firm policies to tackle rocketing input costs and concerns around food shortages and prices.

The commission could face a battle if it tries to stick to green plans in the face of the food and energy crisis hitting all members.

A looming decision is whether to suspend setaside and fallow policy to increase production.

The crisis meeting also heard that Ukraine will face problems because most seed for its key crops is imported, and those channels have been closed by the Russian ***invasion***.

The commission is also looking at triggering the crisis reserve to apply ***exceptional*** ***measures*** to help pig farmers facing poor prices and out-ofcontrol input costs.

Global food prices were rising before the war.

According to the latest figures from the UN Food and ***Agriculture*** Organisation (FAO), prices rose by 3.9% January to February. They are at an all-time high on the FAO index and up more than 20% in a year. The FAO says this is down to limited stocks for trade and the impact of inflation in energy and fertiliser costs.

Despite higher prices the FAO says pressure on margins has discouraged expansion in production, meaning the problem will get worse, with the added impact of the loss of Ukrainian exports.

Elsewhere, the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) says high-pressure ***processing*** (HPP) could improve food safety and reduce waste without compromising quality.

The ***process*** is a no-heat preservation technique that can be used for liquids, including milk, and crucially for a wide range of finished products.

It is particularly effective at eliminating listeria in ready-to-eat foods, including cooked meats, and effective against salmonella and E.coli.

The longer the high pressure period the greater the effect. Taste and quality are not affected.

The use of HPP is not regulated at an EU level, but the EFSA finding may trigger new rules allowing food processors to use it on both raw and prepared food.

**Graphic**

GRAIN DRAIN: Crop sowing in Khmelnytsky, Ukraine, where seed imports have been hit.

**Load-Date:** March 14, 2022

**End of Document**



[***Europe's blueprint for the future***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:65DM-TCJ1-JDJN-63BT-00000-00&context=1516831)

Malta Today

May 9, 2022 Monday

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**Length:** 2022 words

**Byline:** Nicole Meilak

**Body**

Six months of working groups and citizens' panels have culminated in 325 proposals put forward by Europeans on the future they want for the bloc.

Last week the Conference on the Future of Europe came to a close, with a document of ***measures*** and proposals presented across nine chapters. The conference's final event will take place in Strasbourg next Monday with speeches from European Parliament president Roberta Metsola, Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and current Council President Emanuel Macron.

The final document is the fruit of months of deliberation among citizens from all 27 member states to set the agenda for the EU's coming years. People were able to participate in events across the bloc and submit ideas on the EU's multilingual digital platform. On Europe Day, the report will be hande

With the final proposals drafted, we take a look at some of the key highlights from the document and identify what Maltese people contributed to the project.

What did Malta put forward?

Maltese people put forward several ideas and proposals throughout the conference. Many called for a common European army and others raised concern on working conditions and the reintegration of elderly people in the active population.

Regarding migration, many Maltese participants expressed discomfort with unregulated non-EU migration and advocated for a common migration policy at EU level. At one Maltese event people discussed increasing internship opportunities for young people in school.

Many contributed to the subject of digital rights, with calls to ensure internet access for all. However, data privacy was a key concern among participants at an event on health in Malta.

Climate change and the environment

EU countries, especially the warmer states in the south, are starting to grapple with the material effects of climate change such as wildfires and floods. In fact, one of the ***measures*** put forward by the conference is to support reforestation and afforestation, including forests lost by fire.

But most of the proposals hinge around sustainable ***agriculture***, enhanced energy security, and better awareness on sustainability and climate change.

Energy independence became a key issue over the winter for the EU. The colder months were dominated by record-high gas prices, and the conflict in Ukraine underlined Europe's dependence on Russia for its energy imports.

Throughout the conference, EU citizens stated that they want more investments in renewable energy and storage methods while reducing dependencies from oil and gas imports.

For the just transition, citizens said that workers and jobs should be protected throughout. They called for adequate funding for the transition and resource, and a reform of the tax system with fairer taxation and anti-tax fraud ***measures***.

Job well done: CFOE co-chairs MEP Guy Verhofstadt (European Parliament) and Vice-President Dubravka Sucia (European Commission) give each other a celebratory hug

Health

The health recommendations adopted by the conference focus on access to healthy food, strong healthcare systems, and health literacy to promote prevention.

One of the ***measures*** concerns medicinal dependency on third countries. One of the National Citizens' Panel's recommendations was to ensure strategic autonomy at EU level so that member states avoid becoming too dependent on other countries for medicines and medical devices. This is particularly important for essential and priority medicines, but also for innovative medicines and treatments such as biotechnology solutions.

To increase access to health, people proposed developing first aid courses while improving the general understanding of mental health issues. They further proposed recognising, in terms of taxation, hormonal contraception products for medical reasons such as fibromyalgia and endometriosis.

Economy and jobs

COVID-19 and the ***invasion*** of Ukraine had significant impacts on the EU economy, while transnational challenges like inequality and fair taxation persist. In light of this, European citizens are calling for sustainable economic growth that enhances the competitiveness of the block while deepening the Single Market.

The ***measures*** put forward for this include enhancing upward social and economic convergence of the Single Market by completing existing initiatives such as the Banking Union and the Capital Markets Union. Citizens also want special attention to be given to SMEs in all new initiatives by adopting the "Think Small First" principle in all EU's legislative proposals.

Citizens called for more inclusive labour markets to ensure fairer working conditions. One ***measure*** wants to ensure that statutory minimum wages can guarantee workers a decent quality of life by adopting clear criteria, such as living costs and inflation, when setting minimum wage levels.

On tax, citizens said that there should be harmonising and coordinating tax policies within the member states to prevent tax evasion and avoidance, avoiding tax havens within the EU and targeting offshoring within Europe.

EU in the world

Several proposals concern the EU's foreign policy direction and its place in wider geopolitics. Elements to this include strengthening autonomy in key strategic sectors, including in the field of energy production. This includes linking foreign trade with climate policy ***measures*** while pursuing common purchases of imported energy and sustainable energy partnerships and developing EU domestic sources of energy.

Citizens proposed building an ethical and environmental dimension to EU trade and investment relations. For example, the EU would restrict imports and sales from countries that allow forced and child labour while establishing partnerships with developing countries and helping them transition towards green energy sources with mutually favourable trade deals.

In terms of a Common Foreign and Security Policy, citizens are keen on changing the decision-making procedure from being one of unanimity to one of a qualified majority. People also called on the EU to strengthen its common security through a joint armed forces that would be used exclusively for self-defence purposes. It would only be deployed outside European borders in ***exceptional*** circumstances, preferably under a legal mandate from the UN security council without competing with or duplicating NATO.

Rights, rule of law, security

Last month the European Commission triggered the "conditionality mechanism" against Hungary, a ***process*** by which Hungary's funds will be slashed due to its rule-of-law breaches. This was the first time the mechanism was used since it came into force in January 2021.

In light of this, citizens said that the EU must effectively apply the conditionality regulation and evaluate its scope, even considering extensions to new areas regardless of their relevance for the EU budget.

Where media is concerned, citizens want the EU to strictly enforce competition rules in the media sector to prevent large media monopolies and ensure media pluralism and independence from undue political, corporate or foreign interference. They further proposed more awareness on disinformation and unintentional dissemination of fake news through mandatory school trainings on media literacy.

On living conditions, citizens called for EU-wide criteria on anti-discrimination in the labour market and incentivising private companies to employ people that are usually most subject to discrimination, such as youths, elders, women and minorities. The incentives could take the form of subsidies or temporary quotas.

Digital transformation

Digital literacy and access to the internet were key recommendations made at the conference. People want to ensure that fast, affordable, secure and stable internet access can be provided everywhere in the EU, with children, families, elder people and vulnerable groups considered a priority.

Citizens also proposed strong cybercrime responses against large scale attacks. This would be done by increasing the financial and human resources of Europol and the European Cybercrime Center and building joint European cyber defence capabilities against large scale attacks. Another layer to this is to ensure similar sanctions and quick enforcement in member states in the event of a cybercrime attack.

COVID-19 propelled remote working as a viable and mainstream alternative to traditional office working. On this, citizens want the EU to pursue initiatives that support remote working, such as through digital training and providing resources for ergonomic equipment for home offices.

European democracy

The Conference on the Future of Europe has often been described as an ***unprecedented*** democratic exercise, and citizens want to make sure that such democratic participation becomes a regular feature even between European elections.

One ***measure*** put forward includes periodical citizens' assemblies, where participants are selected randomly, with representativeness criteria, to inform decisions taken by EU institutions. If the outcome of an assembly is not taken on board by the institutions, the decision should be duly justified.

On more direct democratic issues, citizens called for EU-wide referendums to be carried out in ***exceptional*** cases on matters particularly important to all European citizens. Such referendums would have to be triggered by the European Parliament. They also want EU electoral law amended to harmonise electoral conditions like voting age and election date among member states for the European Parliament elections, including a shift towards Union-wide lists.

Another ***measure*** calls for the European Parliament to be granted the right of legislative initiative and the ability to decide on the budget of the EU. Regarding the EU decision-making ***process***, citizens seem to shun unanimous voting and instead want issues to be decided on by way of qualified majority, expect when admitting new members to the bloc or changing treaties.

And to the delight of those who, understandably, confuse the European Council with the Council of the European Union, citizens recommended that the EU should change the names of certain institutions to clarify their functions. For example, the Council of the EU could be called the Senate of the EU, or the European Commission could be called the Executive Commission of the EU.

Migration

On legal migration, citizens want a European entity to be set up for migrants' access to the EU labour market while promoting upwards convergence on working conditions harmoniously throughout the union. With regards to irregular migration, citizens expect the EU to participate actively in places outside the EU from where there is is a high outflux of migrants.

Beyond this, citizens proposed increasing EU financial, logistical and operational support for the management of first reception to better integrate refugees and regular migrants in the EU, or repatriation of irregular migrants from the bloc.

People also want the Dublin system to be revisited in order to guarantee solidarity and fair sharing of responsibility, including the redistribution of migrants among member states. Additionally, they propose that asylum seekers with relevant qualifications should be given access to the labour market.

Youth and culture

During the conference citizens said the EU should focus on the specific needs of young people across all relevant policies. To do this, people suggested having citizens' panels with children aged 10 to 16 in schools to help inform decision-making ***processes***.

People further proposed putting an end to youth minimum wages across the bloc and banning unpaid internships on the labour market and outside formal education. They went on to recommend specific policies to avoid brain drain, a ***measure*** most relevant for Malta where small size offers limited opportunities for young people.

European exchange programmes like Erasmus+ and DiscoverEU are some of the union's flagship initiatives, and citizens want the EU to strengthen these programmes to ensure more widespread and diverse participation in such programmes. They also suggested adding new elements to these initiatives, such as a civic service objective or cultural passes.

**Load-Date:** May 10, 2022

**End of Document**



[***What are dairy companies saying - and doing - on the war in Ukraine?***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:64Y8-8MC1-DYNP-M405-00000-00&context=1516831)

DairyReporter.com

March 8, 2022 Tuesday 10:51 AM GMT+1

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**Length:** 2566 words

**Byline:** Jim Cornall, , [*Jim*](mailto:Jim)

**Body**

Following Russia's ***invasion*** of Ukraine, and the subsequent sanctions imposed upon Russia, doing business with the world's largest country is becoming increasingly complicated.

Amid calls for boycotts of companies still doing business in Russia, some companies have been announcing their positions on humanitarian efforts, as well as on doing business in both countries.

Danone to continue operations in Russia

French-headquartered global dairy giant Danone issued a statement by general secretary Laurent Sacchi on the conflict.

"At Danone, we are all deeply affected by what we are seeing every day since the ***invasion*** of Ukraine.​

"Danone and all its employees express their solidarity with the people who are now suffering the atrocities of war.​

"Since the beginning of the conflict, our first priority has been for the safety of our employees in Ukraine, with whom we remain in constant contact. We continue to be moved by their bravery."​

The company said one of its two factories has closed in Ukraine, the second was closed but has managed to resume operations.

"Our teams in Poland, Romania and several other countries have spontaneously offered to host their Ukrainian colleagues. We have received many messages of generosity and solidarity from "Danoners" all over the world who are asking how they can help. We will work to support them in their offers and expand on their actions and initiatives,"​ the company said.

Danone said if the war lasts for a long time it will lead to increasing difficulties for the population affected to get hold of basic goods.

"As a food company, and because of our raison d'être, Danone is well attuned to the importance of these issues.​

"To support humanitarian aid, which is the immediate priority, we have made a donation of (EURO)500,000 ($544,000) to the Red Cross. This will be used to supply water, food and medicine. In addition, Danone will match fund every euro donated by our employees for humanitarian efforts. We are also working with the Red Cross to explore how we can bring a variety of basic necessities to Ukraine. Our teams in neighboring countries are actively involved in collecting and distributing goods to refugees."​

The company said it has suspended all investment projects in Russia, but currently maintains its production and distribution of fresh dairy products and infant nutrition, to "meet the essential food needs of the local population.​

"We continue to monitor and assess, in real time, how the situation evolves and will, of course, apply the decisions of the French authorities with whom we remain closely coordinated."​

Valio stops Russian operations

Finland borders Russia, and its biggest dairy company, the cooperative Valio, has ceased operations in its neighbor to the east.

"We strictly condemn Russia's attack on independent Ukraine. Ethically, Valio cannot continue operations in Russia; therefore, we are ending business operation in Russia," ​said Valio's CEO Annikka Hurme.

Valio has one ***processed*** cheese factory near Moscow, contract manufacturing partners and sales offices in St. Petersburg and in Moscow. Valio employs approximately 400 people in Russia. Annual sales of Valio in Russia have been approximately (EURO)85m ($92.5m). Valio's subsidiary in Russia is 100% Finnish-owned by Valio.

"The exit ***process*** will start immediately. The decision to end the business and ramp down operations involves many details that we have been working on,"​ the company said.

Last week, Valio stopped all exports from Finland to Russia and Belarus. In addition, imports of ingredients and packaging materials from Russia to Finland were stopped.

Arla suspends operations in Russia

Arla Foods has initiated preparations to suspend its business in Russia. This will cover both its local operations and imports, which the company said were much reduced by the embargo put in place in 2014.

The company is continuing its work to be ready to provide food aid to Ukraine and its refugees in neighboring countries, working with the Red Cross and other humanitarian organizations. Arla is also donating (EURO)1m ($1.1m) to the Red Cross.

CEO Peder Tuborgh said, "The impact and consequences of Russia's ***invasion*** of Ukraine are tragic, I share the hopes of so many around the world, that a peaceful resolution is found quickly. We are now taking action to suspend our operations in Russia and are focused on how to support our 70 colleagues in Russia who are directly affected by this."​

Fonterra stops butter shipments but facilities stay open

New Zealand dairy cooperative Fonterra has presence in Russia in both Moscow and St. Petersburg.

Simon Tucker, director global sustainability, stakeholder affairs and trade, told Dairy Reporter, "Our people's safety is our top priority. We have seven people based in Moscow with Fonterra Russia and about 35 people based in Saint Petersburg with Fonterra's joint venture Unifood. Both entities continue to operate at this time, however we are keeping an eye on the situation and will take actions as required. The businesses do not supply sanctioned individuals or entities, including Russian military or security forces. ​

"Fonterra exports a small amount of product to Russia, primarily butter, totaling about 1% of our annual exports. While food, including dairy, is generally exempt from international sanctions regimes and can be traded, we have suspended shipments of product to Russia while we continue to monitor developments. This includes assessing the impact on both payment infrastructure and our supply chain to Russia."​

Elopak paying Ukraine staff

Elopak said it is deeply concerned by the tragic developments in Ukraine and stands with all those who are suffering at this time. Elopak has wholeheartedly condemned the unprovoked attack by the Government of Russia and supports the resulting economic sanctions implemented by the EU and other actors.

"This war has an enormous human cost. As a result of the ongoing and escalating conflict, Elopak is today announcing the suspension of all activities in Russia with immediate effect and until further notice. Elopak's plant in Fastiv, Ukraine, has already been temporarily closed as we work to protect the safety of our colleagues and their families. ​

"We will continue to pay the salaries of our 336 employees directly affected until further notice. As part of the vital food supply chain, Elopak continues to monitor and evaluate the situation. We are assessing how best we can adapt our operations to support continued access to essential goods across the Eastern European Region. ​

"Our overriding priority remains the personal safety and security of our employees in Ukraine. We are in constant touch with our co-workers in Kyiv and Fastiv and have established a steering group that is working to support them and their loved ones."​

The decision is not expected to impact Elopak's operations outside of Russia, Belarus and Ukraine.

Farmers stand with all those suffering from the war in Ukraine

The European Milk Board​ calls for an immediate end to the war in Ukraine. "We strongly condemn the attack against the territorial sovereignty and people of Ukraine. Farmers stand with all those, in all countries, who are suffering from this war.​

"We urge dairies in the EU to stop their exports to Russia and to send their products to Ukraine as emergency relief. Likewise, we urge the EU itself to make use of its position and stop exports to Russia.​

"How can we help? In addition to participating in demonstrations calling for an end to the war - held in various countries - donating medicine, food and essential goods is also possible. We encourage you to donate to credible organizations in your different countries. We thank you for your support!"​

Stora Enso stops production and sales in Russia

Stora Enso today announced it will stop all production and sales in Russia until further notice due to the ongoing ***invasion*** in Ukraine. Stora Enso has three corrugated packaging plants and two wood products sawmills in Russia, employing around 1,100 people. The company will also stop all export and import to and from Russia. A mitigation plan has been activated to secure availability of input materials from other sources.

"The war in Ukraine is unacceptable and we are fully behind all sanctions. We will now focus all our attention on supporting our customers and the well-being of our employees,"​ said Annica Bresky, president and CEO.

Stora Enso's sales in Russia is approximately 3% of total Group revenues. The impact on Stora Enso's sales and EBIT is not material.

Europe must equip its ***agriculture*** with a food shield to face the consequences of two major crises: the war in Ukraine and climate change.

Ekosem-Agrar AG suspends guidance for the 2022 financial year

The executive board of Ekosem-Agrar AG, which is the German holding company for the Russian milk producer EkoNiva Group, said it has decided to suspend the forecast for the 2022 financial year.

The company said this was due to "the currently considerable imponderables regarding the operating business as well as the financing possibilities due to the increasing restrictions in connection with the Russia-Ukraine conflict, resulting both from sanctions against Russia and from Russian countermeasures."​

For the year 2022, the company said it had previously assumed an increase in net sales of more than 20% for each of the three main areas of raw milk production, crop production and milk ***processing***. Earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation and amortization (EBITDA) and cash EBITDA were expected to increase disproportionately compared to the previous year.

The board of management said it will publish an adjusted guidance "as soon as largely reliable parameters for adjusting the forecast are available."​

The company did not respond to Dairy Reporter's questions about involvement in Russia.

Ukraine ***agriculture*** organization to join Copa and Cogeca

***Agricultural*** group Copa and Cogeca held a coordination meeting with its members on the humanitarian situation arising from the war in Ukraine.

It said the solidarity of the farming community with the Ukrainian people is real and visible in all member countries.

It noted farmers are starting to welcome refugees to their farms, and the first convoys organized by farmers are on their way, along with food, supplies and financial donations. Copa-Cogeca will be publishing information for farmers, cooperatives and any citizen who wants to support the actions undertaken by the EU ***agricultural*** community [*on its website*](https://copa-cogeca.eu/)​.

In the coming days, Ukraine's ***agricultural*** organization UNAF​ (Ukrainian National Agrarian Forum) will join the European farming community by becoming a Copa and Cogeca partner.

Ramon Armengol, Cogeca president, said, "Welcoming our Ukrainian colleagues to Copa and Cogeca is the natural extension of this expression of solidarity that is taking place on the ground by farmers and their cooperatives. The European farming community is mobilising at all levels to provide concrete support to the Ukrainian people and refugees arriving in all member states."​

On the political and economic front, the organization said initial analyses show the importance of the reconstruction challenges that European ***agriculture*** will face in the short and medium term, noting the war will have worldwide repercussions for several years to come.

"Most productions will be directly or indirectly impacted. It is therefore essential to have a European response that equals the humanitarian and economic disaster,"​ Copa and Cogeca said.

"***Exceptional*** situations call for ***exceptional*** ***measures***. The speed of application of these ***measures*** is of crucial importance. Some sectors already heavily affected by the price increases resulting from the Covid and energy crises must be supported without delay, while other farmers need clear policy guidance as they start sowing."​

Christiane Lambert, Copa president, said, "Since the Russian government is using food security as a weapon, we must counter it with a food shield. As with energy, in ***agriculture*** we strongly believe that it is possible to strengthen our strategic autonomy while continuing to make progress on sustainability. Pitting these two dimensions against each other, as we have heard in Brussels in recent days, is unproductive. We need to rearm our ***agriculture*** today to face these two major crises at the same time: the war in Ukraine and climate change."​

Copa and Cogeca said food security is highly strategic and still very relevant.

"A paradigm shift is needed in the way Brussels thinks about ***agriculture***, starting with the objectives set out in the Farm to Fork. Farmers and cooperatives are now waiting for concrete guidelines and actions as a solution to food, energy, climate, and environmental challenges. As the current President of the AGRIFISH Council, French Minister Denormandie, rightly declared at the end of the ***exceptional*** meeting of the Council on Wednesday, it is urgent to unleash the potential of European ***agriculture*** to mitigate the effects of this war. ​

"Copa and Cogeca are asking to be able to cultivate all available land in 2022 to compensate for the blockage of Russian and Ukrainian production. Everything must be done to prevent disruptions in supply chains, which will inevitably lead to shortages in certain parts of the world. This is an essential question of food sovereignty and democratic stability."​

AAK temporarily halts deliveries to, and sales in, Russia

Ingredient company AAK has decided to temporarily halt deliveries to, and sales in, Russia. Even though AAK is a supplier in the food sector, which is not subject to sanctions, the company said it has become very difficult to secure compliance to sanctions related to logistics and trade flows as well as third parties.

AAK has a sales office in Ukraine with approximately 10 employees, and the company said their safety is the main focus.

"We are in continuous dialogue with them and will do our utmost to ensure their continued safety,"​ AAK said.

Russia makes up for 3% of AAK's volumes, as ***measured*** in metric tons, and Ukraine makes up less than 1%. AAK said it is continuously evaluating the situation and will respond accordingly.

Tetra Laval donates to Ukraine

Tetra Laval, the group which comprises Tetra Pak, Sidel and DeLaval, is donating (EURO)2m ($2.2m) to humanitarian support to Ukrainians in Ukraine and those that have been forced to flee to neighboring countries.

"We are deeply distressed by the war in Ukraine and join all parties calling for peace. To reflect our sense of values, we will do what we can to support local humanitarian efforts,"​ said Lars Renström, chairman of the Tetra Laval Group.

The company is donating (EURO)1m to UNICEF's Drive for Ukrainian Children to support the more than half a million children already affected by the war, and a further (EURO)1m will be allocated to secure safe food distribution for refugee camps mainly in collaboration with Tetra Pak's local customers.

Tetra Laval was approached for its position on working in Russia but did not respond to requests for comment.

Unilever and Nestlé, both of which have operations in Russia, also did not respond to requests for comment.

Wimm-Bill-Dann Foods is one of the biggest dairy companies in Europe, with a greater than 30% share of the dairy market in Russia. It is owned by PepsiCo. Dairy Reporter also approached PepsiCo for comment, but the company did not respond.

**Load-Date:** March 8, 2022

**End of Document**



[***Warnings that almost a third could quit pig sector as losses expected to reach 160m***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:652X-0VG1-JC8V-41S4-00000-00&context=1516831)

Irish Examiner

March 17, 2022 Thursday

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**Section:** FARMING; Pg. 1

**Length:** 830 words

**Byline:** Rachel Martin

**Body**

Pig sector losses as a result of below-cost prices are expected to reach 160m by March 2023, Teagasc analysts have said, warning that up to 30% of Irish pig farmers are at risk of closure.

Over the 18-month period from September 2021 to March 2023, the analysts estimate an average 600-sow pig unit will incur losses of 663,000.

The second quarter of 2022 is expected to be the most difficult for the industry, with losses of 47.2m expected. It compares with losses of 23m from September to December 2021 and 39.6m in the first quarter of this year.

The situation is expected to ease later in 2022, with losses of 34m expected in quarter three and 13m forecast for the final three months of the year. A further 3.5m is expected to be lost in early 2023.

The sector was already struggling largely as a result of African swine fever, Brexit and Covid-19 before the recent input cost price surges following Russia's ***invasion*** of Ukraine. However, this has now exacerbated the crisis.

Irish pig farmers have put forward proposals for a 100m emergency pig aid package they say is needed to save the sector.

The document drafted by the Irish Farmers Association, Meat Industry Ireland (MII), and Irish Grain and Feed Association (IGFA) was sent to ***Agriculture*** Minister Charlie McConalogue on Tuesday.

The document, which has been seen by the *Irish Examiner*, outlines a range of ***measures*** including the immediate establishment of a pig stability fund.

While we acknowledge this fund will require sizeable state support, the importance and economic value of the sector merits this intervention as, without it, the sector's long-term future and its contribution to the economy is in real jeopardy.

The Irish pig sector supports over 8,000 jobs and generates around 1.7bn of output across primary and value-added sectors.

IFA president Tim Cullinan said: "The Irish pig sector is currently engulfed in possibly the worst crisis in its history.

"Teagasc estimates that pig farmers are losing on average around 56,000/month and rising and that 5% of pig farmers have already been forced into a decision to exit the sector, with a further 20 to 30% at serious risk."

Mr Cullinan said the association welcomed the initial 7m direct financial support via the Pig ***Exceptional*** Payment Scheme to pig farmers, but much more help was needed.

"This is not in any way adequate to address the industry losses that Teagasc estimate will reach around 160m. In order to address the current grave difficulties facing the sector, IFA in conjunction with Meat Industry Ireland (MII) and the Irish Grain and Feed Association (IGFA) have jointly developed a proposal to establish a pig stability fund," Mr Cullinan said.

"This fund, partly funded by a statutory levy on all finished pigs sold or exported, will help somewhat alleviate the massive financial pressure being felt on pig farms. It will also work in the medium-term to address the volatility impacting the sector.

"Detail on this proposal is attached for urgent consideration by you and your Department officials."

Speaking to this newspaper, Kildare pig farmer Roy Gallie, who also chairs the IFA Pigs Committee, said: "It won't stop at 30% if losses keep going as they are. It is simply unsustainable.

"We need an injection of money either from the EU or Government. It needs to happen as soon as it can.

"People are making decisions by the day of whether they are going to stay in pigs or stop serving."

From his interactions with members, Mr Gallie estimated that as many as 10% of pig farmers had already stopped serving their herds.

"If you stop serving, you now have nine months to get out of your piggery. That nine months will be costly because at the end of it you will still have a debt. Getting out only covers the feed. What we are getting for the pigs only covers the pig and you've got all the other nonfeed costs for the next nine months to cover as well."

***Measures* called for**

Farmers are primarily calling for the government to establish, without delay, a state-administered fund to provide an immediate cash injection to pig farmers to avoid the demise of the sector at primary and ***processing*** level.

This fund will be jointly funded by a state contribution along with a long-term fund sourced by way of a new statutory levy.

The levy would be compulsory on all farmers producing finished pigs within the sector and would be charged at 90 cents per pig (the equivalent of around 1 cent/kg) on all pigs slaughtered in the Republic or exported to the North. Based on the 2021 output, this would generate a revenue stream of around 3.6m/annum based on the expected output of approximately 4m pigs a year.

Based on a 14-year payback period, this constitutes a direct farmer contribution of around 50m.

They are calling for a commitment from the State to initially fund the farmer contribution of 50m along with an additional upfront funding from the State of 50m. The former will be repaid by the revenue from the newly-established statutory levy.

**Graphic**

Picture, **Gerard O'Leary of O'Leary Poultry in Macroom, Co Cork, looking for a buyer for this Rhode Island hybrid at the Bandon Mart, West Cork**. Picture: Dan Linehan

**Load-Date:** March 25, 2022

**End of Document**



[***Richard Wright: European Commission tackles food security worries***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6505-BNK1-JBN3-50JY-00000-00&context=1516831)

thecourier.co.uk

March 12, 2022 Saturday 5:00 PM GMT

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**Length:** 423 words

**Byline:** Nancy Nicolson

**Body**

Brussels has held the first meeting of its new European food crisis group to discuss food security.

It was created from a review of the response to Covid, but its role has been given new significance by events in Ukraine.

The first meeting was effectively a meet and greet, but before the end of this month the agenda will move on to firm policies to tackle rocketing input costs and concerns around food shortages and prices.

The European Commission could face a battle if its tries to stick to its green plans in the face of a food and energy crisis hitting every member state.

A looming decision is[*whether to suspend set aside and fallow arrangements*](https://www.thecourier.co.uk/fp/business-environment/farming/3086030/we-want-to-play-our-part-scottish-farmers-appeal-for-rule-changes-to-allow-increased-food-production/) to increase crop production.

**Seed**

The crisis meeting also heard that Ukraine will face problems because most seed for its key crops is imported, and those channels have been closed by the Russian ***invasion*** of key ports.

Meanwhile the European Commission is considering triggering the crisis reserve under the CAP to apply ***exceptional*** ***measures*** to help pig farmers facing poor prices and out of control input costs.

Global food prices were rising even before the Russian attack on Ukraine made them worse.

According to the latest figures from the UN Food and ***Agriculture*** Organisation prices rose by 3.9 per cent in February compared to January.

This brings prices to an all time high on the FAO index and leaves them more than 20% ahead of the same month last year. The FAO says this is down to a perfect storm of limited stocks available for trade and to the impact of cost inflation from energy and fertiliser costs.

Despite higher prices the FAO says pressure on margins has discouraged any expansion in production, meaning the problem will get worse, with the added impact of the loss of Ukrainian exports.

***Processing***

Elsewhere, the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) says high-pressure ***processing*** (HPP) could improve food safety and reduce waste without compromising quality.

The ***process*** is a no-heat preservation technique for a range of products and can be used for liquids, including as an alternative to pasteurisation for milk, and crucially for a wide range of finished products.

It is particularly effective at eliminating listeria in ready to eat foods, including cooked meats, and effective against salmonella and E coli.

The longer the high pressure period the greater the effect, but taste or quality are not affected.

The use of HPP is not regulated at an EU level , but the EFSA finding may trigger new rules allowing food processors to use it on both raw and prepared food.

[*Link to Image*](https://wpcluster.dctdigital.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/54/2022/03/shutterstock_2089162336.jpg_43237419-1crn1ym01-e1647079305719-940x564.jpg)

**Load-Date:** March 12, 2022

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[***Six Key Themes For Europe Agribusiness***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:65DM-0J11-F0J5-84J3-00000-00&context=1516831)

Business Monitor Online

May 18, 2022 Wednesday

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**Length:** 3823 words

**Highlight:** The surge in commodity prices over Q421-Q122 and the 2022 Russia-Ukraine War challenges drive food-security concerns. In particular, elevated fertiliser prices will weigh on fertiliser application, ***agricultural*** yields and production. With French President Emmanuel Macron’s reelection in April 2022, we expect him to return to his reform agenda and promote the use of nuclear energy to create green hydrogen and green ammonia at the EU level. We anticipate that both farming activity and food manufacturing will experience continued disruption in 2022 due to worker shortages associated with Covid-related illness, but this is likely to be temporary as the rapid rollout of vaccines means that any new travel or working restrictions are likely to be minimal. Concerns over Europe's meat trade prospects have intensified due to the outbreaks of African swine fever and European avian influenza, and there is a possibility that tighter trade controls will be introduced in 2022. The European Commission (EC)'s reforms to the Common ***Agricultural*** Policy, proposed in May 2020, are the Farm to Fork Strategy and Biodiversity Strategy for 2030. Collectively, these two initiatives are at the heart of the European Green Deal, which seeks to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Finally, new ***measures*** proposed by the EC under the guise of improving the environment and limiting deforestation will make exporting ***agricultural*** products to the region even more difficult, if not impossible.

**Body**

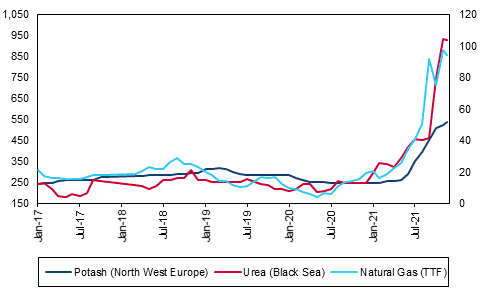
**Key View**

* The surge in commodity prices over Q421-Q122 and the 2022 Russia-Ukraine War challenges drive food-security concerns. In particular, elevated fertiliser prices will weigh on fertiliser application, ***agricultural*** yields and production.

1. With French President Emmanuel Macron's reelection in April 2022, we expect him to return to his reform agenda and promote the use of nuclear energy to create green hydrogen and green ammonia at the EU level.
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5. Finally, new ***measures*** proposed by the EC under the guise of improving the environment and limiting deforestation will make exporting ***agricultural*** products to the region even more difficult, if not impossible.

**1. High Fertiliser Prices Are A Downside Risk To Application And Harvesting Yields** Fertiliser prices in Europe have surged since H221 owing almost entirely to the high cost of natural gas (the main input cost behind ammonia). At the same time, concerns about exports of potash from Belarus, given the recent sanctions imposed by the EU and the US, have put upward pressure on the domestic price of potash. High fertiliser prices going into the 2022/23 season will potentially squeeze farmer margins but we expect a trend towards precision application to help reduce input costs. The 2022 Russia-Ukraine War is driving up input prices and the subsequent sanctions on Russia and Belarusian fertiliser exports will potentially result in EU farmers paying a price premiums for alternatively sourced fertiliser or deciding to look for cheaper alternatives to keep costs low.

**High European Fertiliser Prices Likely To Reduce Fertiliser Application In 2022** Europe - Regional Fertiliser Prices, EUR/short tonne (LHS) & Natural Gas Price, EUR/MWh (RHS) *Source: Bloomberg, Fitch Solutions* High fertiliser costs will add further upward pressure to ***agricultural*** production costs, which have already increased dramatically over the last year due to higher prices of diesel fuel, labour and electricity. These higher costs, along with our expectation that ***agricultural*** prices will decline in 2022, mean that farmer incomes in Europe will probably fall during this time.Most farmers may seek to reduce their fertiliser use, which would weigh on yields and ***agricultural*** production, or perhaps even plant more wheat relative to corn. Wheat is less fertiliser intensive than corn. In addition, some farmers may decide to leave the sector altogether or retire early.The cost of producing ammonia in Europe has become unprofitable as the surge in natural gas prices has outpaced that of fertiliser prices. Some major producers, including Germany's **BASF**, Norway's **Yara**, Hungary's **Nitrogenmuvek**, and Austria's **Borealis**, have already or are considering either halting or curtailing production. Europe will, therefore, probably have to import more fertiliser in 2022, probably from Egypt and the US, which would impose additional costs on farmers. European farmers tend to source their fertiliser in the autumn and winter months.The reduction in domestic ammonia production has also sparked concerns about a possible shortage of carbon dioxide (a by-product of the Haber-Bosch ammonia production ***process***). Carbon dioxide is used heavily in the food and drink industry as it used to preserve food (modified atmosphere packing, dry ice), stun animals prior to slaughter and create the fizz in carbonated drinks. While there is currently not a shortage of carbon dioxide in Europe, we highlight this as a risk which could potentially lead to severe disruption in the food and drink sector and would result in higher consumer food and drink prices. **Related Research**



* Soaring Fertiliser Prices Likely To Weigh On ***Agricultural*** Production, Particularly Corn, September 24 2021

1. Agribusiness Key Themes For 2022, November 29 2021

**2. French President Emmanuel Macron Likely To Resume His Reform Efforts** French President Emmanuel Macron won the second-round runoff of France's presidential election on April 24, winning 58.5% of the vote while far-right candidate Marine Le Pen secured 41.5%. This makes Macron the first incumbent to secure a second term since Jacques Chirac in 2002, bolstering political stability in Europe at a time when geopolitical risk looms high on the continent. We expect him to return to his reform agenda in H222 both domestically and at the EU level.Domestically, Macron's future policies will focus on structural reforms to enhance the country's long-term growth profile, and also on increasing energy and food independence amid the war in Ukraine. That said, Macron's ability to push through his reform agenda will depend on the performance of his La Republique En Marche! party at the next legislative elections in June.Leading up to the election, we expected Macron to delay the passage of EU-negotiated free trade agreements with Brazil, New Zealand and Chile, among other markets, to ensure that France's ***agricultural*** sector remain protected. However, his opposition to all these trade agreements will probably dissipate given his election win. Nevertheless, even if they are eventually passed, it will probably take several years for any changes to tariffs and product regulations affecting ***agricultural*** goods to be fully enforced.Macron is also likely to intensify his reform of the EU, as France holds the EU rotational presidency in H122. The changes made to the EU's main ***agricultural*** policy, the Common ***Agricultural*** Policy (CAP), were finally voted on in November 2021 after several years of tense negotiation, and we doubt that there will be any new changes. However, the EU's energy and environmental reforms still need to be debated, and this may have some indirect impact on the ***agricultural*** sector via rules on fertiliser production.With regard to food independence, Macron has announced that he would negotiate with the EC to reduce environmental restrictions surrounding the EU's Farm to Fork strategy. Though the strategy is not binding, it aims to reduce the use of pesticides and fertilisers by 50% and 25% respectively, while increasing the share of organically farmed land to 25% by 2030, a strategy the president deems no longer feasible amid the war in Ukraine.Many fertilisers, particularly nitrogenous fertilisers (which boost harvesting yields), require ammonia as an industrial feedstock. Ammonia is produced by mixing hydrogen and nitrogen together, but this ***process*** is currently very polluting to make since this 'grey' hydrogen is created as a by-product of combining natural gas and steam. However, the development of 'pink' hydrogen (hydrogen produced via nuclear energy) is much more environmentally friendly compared with grey hydrogen and can also be used a feedstock to create ammonia and, therefore, nitrogenous fertilisers.In November 2021, Macron announced EUR1.9bn in new funding to develop pink hydrogen as part of his EUR30bn France 2030 investment plan. While no money has actually be spent yet, this investment plan is an indication of his future policy proposes , and it seems likely that Macron will use his influence within the EU to intensify ongoing EU efforts to decarbonise ammonia and fertiliser production as an indirect way of supporting French business interests. **Related Research**

* Macron To Win Presidential Election, Energy And Food Independence A New Priority, March 30 2022

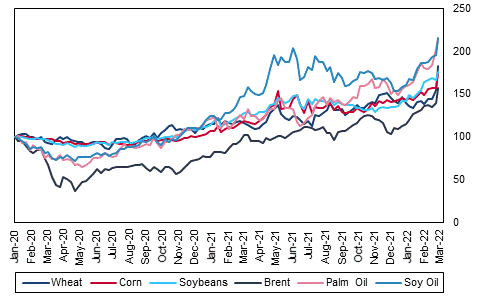
1. Key Elections Coming Up In 2022 In India, France, Brazil, Australia, The US And Elsewhere: Potential Impact For Agribusiness, December 10 2021

**3. Russia-Ukraine War Will AggravateCovid-19 Impact On Europe's Agribusiness**Covid-19 had some negative impact on Europe's agribusiness sector in 2020 and 2021. While we expect that both farming activity and food manufacturing will experience some disruption in 2022 due to worker shortages associated with Covid-related illness, we suspect that this will be temporary as the rapid rollout of vaccines means that any travel restrictions are likely to be minimal. **In terms of policy, Covid-19 has led to the following:**

* The EU's support package for the ***agricultural*** and food sectors most affected by the coronavirus crisis was announced in April and May 2020. The ***measures*** include private storage aid (especially for dairy and livestock) and flexibility in the implementation of market support programmes for wine, fruit and vegetables, and olive oil. The package also includes an ***exceptional*** derogation from EU competition rules.

1. Regarding trade, concerns over food supply and prices led to the imposition of some trade restriction policies in 2021, particularly from Russia, which has lowered its Feburary-June 2022 wheat export quotas. Given the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine war, these restrictions are unlikely to be lifted.

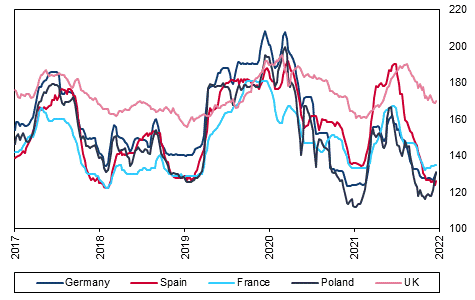
In the wake of Russia's ***invasion*** of Ukraine, the commodities markets are grappling with high volatility and significant uncertainty. Within the agribusiness sector, grains prices continue to soar as supply issues are faced with inelastic demand, while softs are under some pressure from poor investor sentiment amid slowing economic growth and consumption. A similar divergence is being observed within energy, where we see strong prospects for further gains in gas prices as Russian supplies to Europe come under increasing threat, whereas oil price gains are likely to be capped by weak demand, especially from China where the resurgence of Covid-19 has triggered stringent lockdowns.***Agricultural*** prices have staged a stunning rally in the weeks after the outbreak of the war almost entirely because of investor concerns about production and exports prospects in Russia and Ukraine. The price of CBOT wheat has surged to over USc1,000/bushel, just over 20% more than before Russia's ***invasion*** of Ukraine, with large upward moves also seen in CBOT corn and vegetable oils, such as sunflower, palm and soy oil. Russia and Ukraine collectively account for around 30% of global wheat exports, more than 15% of global corn exports and most of the world's sunflower oil production. Concerns about higher energy-related costs (diesel fuel, fertiliser etc.) and possible labour shortages (as workers are displaced) have also put upward pressure on ***agricultural*** prices across the board. ***Agricultural* Prices Have Surged Since The Start Of War In Ukraine** Selected Commodity Prices *Note: Index, Jan 1 2020 = 100. Source: Bloomberg, Fitch Solutions* ***Agricultural*** exports volumes have fallen sharply, particularly to Europe, in large part due to the tighter trade credit conditions, higher shipping and insurance costs, fear of (secondary) sanctions, and risk of material damage. Many Western multinational companies are refusing to operate in both countries as well as in Belarus, a top potash fertiliser exporter and prominent supporter of Russia, due to the heightened operational risks.While we expect Russian and Ukrainian ***agricultural*** trade to be increasingly diverted to China (due to its recent lifting of wheat import restrictions from Russia and the government's refusal to sanction either country) and an increasing proportion of ***agricultural*** products to be stored, we think that ***agricultural*** exports from both countries will remain low over the short term amid the lingering operational risks. Lower ***agricultural*** exports will keep global ***agricultural*** availability constrained, put downward pressure on global stocks and help keep ***agricultural*** prices elevated during this time.The price of natural gas, which is used in the fertiliser manufacturing ***process***, hit record highs in recent days following the Russian ***invasion*** of Ukraine. Production in Europe will suffer from the higher energy and fertiliser prices, but high spot ***agricultural*** prices and a greater availability of labour (from Ukraine) should help maintain production levels. EU regulation clamping down on the use of fertilisers and pesticides, which can boost harvesting yields, are also likely to be delayed or at least toned down to limit rises in food prices. However, we doubt that GM seeds will be approved due to ongoing concerns about the potential negative impact that it would have to biodiversity. **Related Research**



* Weekly Commodities Strategy: Metals Plunging Over Chinese Lockdowns, To Stabilise In H2, May 5 2022

1. Global ***Agricultural*** And Macroeconomic Conditions Will Support Rollback Of Food Protectionist Policies, May 17 2020
2. Quick View: Russia Wheat Tariff Disruption Limited For Now, December 24 2020
3. EU Vaccination Update: Rollout To Gain Momentum, But Downside Risks Are Elevated, March 19 2021
4. Russian Cereal Exports To Rebound In 2022/23, Despite Elevated Export Taxes, October 6 2021

**4. Livestock Disease Issues Set To Persist With ASF, Avian Influenza** We do not expect African swine fever (ASF) to reduce European pork production in 2022 for three key reasons. First, ASF cases in the EU are largely in wild boar. Second, the ASF outbreaks are primarily centred in Romania, which is far away from Europe's main pork production hubs. Major producers, including Spain and France, have not reported any ASF cases. Germany announced plans in September 2021 to build a boar-free zone along its border with Poland, which would help contain the spread of the disease. Finally, the EU and its top-producing member states are in a relatively strong position to deal with any further outbreaks due to its zoning restriction policy. This should prevent the mass culling of pigs witnessed in China and Vietnam, which was the primary reason behind the slump in Asian pork production during 2019 and 2020.The biggest risk to livestock production, at least in Europe, is a potential shortage of industrial-grade carbon dioxide resulting from a decline in ammonia production. Carbon dioxide is used to alleviate the suffering of animals (particularly pigs and poultry) by stunning prior to slaughter. If there is a lack of carbon dioxide then alternative methods of stunning, such as electrical stunning, would have to take place, and this is typically both slower and more expensive. As most countries, particularly in Europe, only allow meat produced at registered slaughterhouses to enter the food chain, the liquidation of livestock could be significantly delayed. Some farmers may even be forced to liquidate their livestock early to avoid overcrowding on farms, which would depress livestock production.Nevertheless, we expect the presence of ASF in Europe to continue to disrupt EU pork trade flows throughout 2022. Some EU producers, such as Spain, are likely to increase their pork exports to Asian markets, while German exports are likely to remain depressed as a result of restrictions imposed by China in September 2020. Relatively low exports, coupled with robust production, are likely to keep EU pork prices low for much of 2022. European pork prices have experienced a renewed slump since June 2021 due to the emergence of ASF, and we do not expect pork prices to return to their Q120 level until the disease is fully brought under control. **EU Pork Prices To Remain Low In 2022** Selected EU Countries & UK - Pork Prices, EUR/100kg *Source: ADHB, Fitch Solutions* We anticipate that poultry production will hold steady in 2022 across almost all of the European countries that we monitor, with Poland and the UK all likely to produce over 2.0mn tonnes of poultry. However, the downside risks to our forecasts have risen as increasing numbers of highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) have been reported across Europe. As of December 19 2021, the EU's Animal Disease Information System had reported outbreaks in almost all EU member states as well as in the UK. We expect more outbreaks to be reported across Europe as birds migrate. Nevertheless, the EU member states and the UK are in strong positions to manage HPAI outbreaks in poultry due to the use of tracking technology, which should help mitigate some of the impact on poultry production.



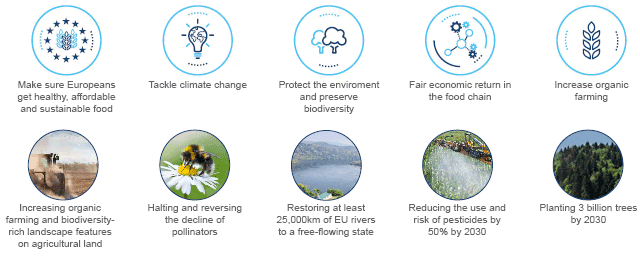
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| Production Growth Despite Avian Flu |
| Selected EU Countries & UK - Poultry Production, '000 tonnes |
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| *e/f = Fitch Solutions estimate/forecast. Source: National sources, Fitch Solutions* |

**Related Research**

* Low EU Pork Prices Into 2021 As Trade Disrupted, Production Flat, November 16 2020

1. African Swine Fever: Risk To EU Pork Trade Remains Muted For Now, July 24 2019
2. Europe Avian Influenza Cases To Rise, EU Export Disruption Softened By Internal Market, November 30 2020

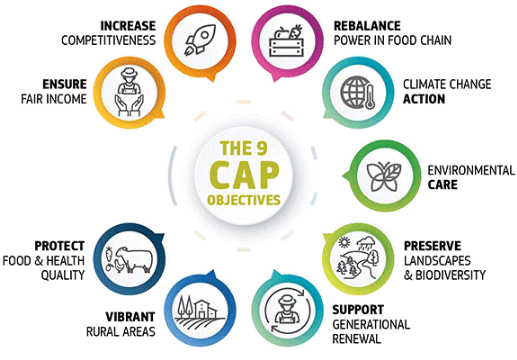
**5. CAP Reform And European Green Deal** On May 20 2020, the EU released the outline of its Farm to Fork (F2F) Strategy and its EU Biodiversity strategy. The two mutually reinforcing strategies are meant to be at the heart of the European Green Deal and will strive to make the European food system fair, healthy and environmentally friendly while helping the EU recover from the Covid-19 outbreak. The Biodiversity Strategy For 2030 tackles biodiversity loss, such as the unsustainable use of land and sea, the overdevelopment of natural resources, pollution, and invasive alien species. The F2F strategy aims to reduce the environmental and climate footprint of the EU food system while proposing ***measures*** to ensure that the healthy option is the easiest for EU citizens. To achieve these goals, the EU says that farmers will get support from the CAP and the Common Fisheries Policy through new streams of funding and eco-schemes to take up sustainable practices. **Multi-Faceted Impacts Of The European Green Deal** EU - Farm To Fork (top) & Biodiversity 2030 Strategy Goals *Source: European Commission, Fitch Solutions* The CAP plays a foundational role in supporting European ***agriculture***, especially in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, and the EU believes that it will be significant in managing the transition to sustainable food production systems to achieve Europe's climate objectives. According to the EC, 40% of the CAP's budget will be climate relevant. A substantial share of EU funding for biodiversity comes from the CAP, meaning that the CAP will help support the EU 2030 Biodiversity agenda.There have been previous attempts to reform the CAP in a more environment-friendly direction, but this was largely seen as a failure that led to few environmental benefits and increased the bureaucratic burden on farmers. The EU is largely in agreement and has confirmed the need to simplify and modernise the CAP. Consequently, the CAP will change in two fundamental ways. First, it will shift the emphasis from compliance and rules towards results and performance. Second, the traditional one-size-fits-all approach will be replaced with a more flexible system, where member states have more freedom to decide how best to meet CAP objectives. **Related Research**



* Alternative Protein: Evolution Ahead In Plant-Based Ingredients, Implications For Agribusiness, January 29 2021

1. New Zealand Trail-Blazing Ag Emissions Regulations, Which Markets To Follow?, January 19 2021
2. Quick View: EC Report Opens Up Potential Loosening Of GM Seed Regulation In Europe, May 4 2021
3. Quick View: How Will New COP26 Deforestation Pledge Impact ***Agricultural*** Production?, November 4 2021

**Key Objectives Drive Future CAP Strategy** European Commission - Nine CAP Objectives *Source: European Commission, Fitch Solutions***6. New Deforestation Rules Likely To Reduce *Agricultural* Imports, Particularly From Brazil** The EU's CAP, already restricts imports into the bloc, but new ***measures*** recently proposed by the EC under the guise of improving the environment and limiting deforestation will make exporting ***agricultural*** products to the region even more difficult if not impossible.Aside from environmental ***measures*** associated with the CAP, there are a few ***measures*** worth highlighting. One is the EU's proposed **carbon border adjustment mechanism** which is set to introduce a levy to compensate for the difference in greenhouse gas (GHG) abatement costs. ***Agricultural*** crops within the EU do not require GHG abatement and would, therefore, be unaffected by this policy, but the production of fertilisers do, and this ***measure*** should lead to the EU importing less fertiliser from Russian, Moroccan and Egyptian producers as they would now be subject to higher export tariffs. However, producers in these countries would still be able to their product elsewhere.Another key policy initiative is that the EU has also proposed **banning the import of commodities linked to deforestation** as part of its attempt to reduce GHG emissions and limit biodiversity loss. French President Emmanuel Macron has stated that he would seek to introduce this. The proposal, first published in November 2021, targets six ***agricultural*** commodities (soy, beef, palm oil, wood, cocoa and coffee, as well as derived products, such as leather) and requires firms to ensure that only deforestation-free products are allowed to be sold in the EU market. Other commodities, such as rubber, are likely to be targeted later. Satellite technology will be used to monitor the rate of deforestation and each country will benchmarked, with enhanced scrutiny applied for products exported from high-risk areas.If implemented, this proposal would almost certainly reduce the EU's imports of soy (from Brazil and Argentina), beef (from Brazil, Argentina and, possibly Australia), palm oil (from Indonesia, Malaysia and elsewhere in Asia), cocoa (from Cote d'Ivoire and Ghana) and coffee (from Brazil, Ethiopia and elsewhere). As it is difficult to source most of these goods from elsewhere, these ***measures*** will put upward pressure on domestic prices and would support the consumption of alternative products, such as rapeseed and olive oil (competing vegetable oils to soy and palm oil), poultry instead of beef and sugar-based confectionary instead of chocolate. The EU is a major producer of these alternative products and would benefit if the ***measure*** passed. The main loser would be major ***agricultural*** exporters of the targeted products where land and water are scarce resources, such as Brazil, which is perhaps why Brazilian Foreign Minister Carlos Alberto Franco Franca publicly criticised the EU proposals in December 2021 as being 'protectionist'.



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| Tighter Environmental ***Measures*** To Contribute To Decline |
| EU - Palm Oil Consumption, '000 tonnes |
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| *e/f = Fitch Solutions estimate/forecast. Source: Fediol, USDA, Fitch Solutions* |

**Load-Date:** May 19, 2022

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[***Speakers Concerned by Unequal Geographic Representation among Staff, Limited Career Prospects for Some, as Fifth Committee Reviews Progress in Human Resources Reform***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:64YV-J6K1-JDG9-Y0KG-00000-00&context=1516831)

Impact News Service

March 10, 2022 Thursday

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**Length:** 9545 words

**Body**

New York: The United Nation has issued the following press release:

Amid praise for efforts to strengthen the United Nations internal anti-corruption ***measures***, ensure gender parity and promote high standards of competence among its staff, delegates in the Fifth Committee (Administrative and Budgetary) today pointed to continued imbalances in the equitable geographic representation among Secretariat employees and limited career prospects for existing personnel as major sources of concern.

In a wide-ranging discussion on human resources management, Cameroon ’ s representative, speaking for the African Group, expressed regret over stalled progress on the longstanding issue of geographic representation, lamenting that senior managers in the Secretariat are “far away” from reaching the target of appointing 50 per cent of staff from unrepresented and underrepresented States to posts subject to geographic distribution.

On that point, Pakistan ’ s delegate, speaking for the “Group of 77” developing countries and China, joined others in urging the Secretary-General to step up his efforts, especially at the senior levels. He recalled the system of desirable ranges established in 1960, which ***measures*** progress towards achieving a wide equitable geographical distribution of Secretariat staff. “We stand ready to engage in negotiations to advance the sixty-year-old mechanism,” he assured.

Agreeing that the United Nations leadership must “lead by example”, the representative of Switzerland, speaking also for Liechtenstein, supported the Secretary-General ’ s approaches to recruit, develop and retain a mobile, field-oriented, high-performing, multilingual and diverse workforce. Japan ’ s delegate similarly urged the Secretary-General to “bring in fresh ideas” and to promote workforce succession planning in efforts to advance management reform.

The Russian Federation ’ s delegate, speaking also for Belarus, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, meanwhile expressed concern about the prospect of hiring more external candidates, and about proposals put forward on staff mobility — which could further reduce career opportunities for existing staff members. At the same time, he warned against allowing the United Nations to become a “closed club”.

Echoing that concern, Mona Fattah Wahidi, Chairperson of the Staff Council of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), speaking on behalf of the Staff Management Committee staff representatives via videolink, said that while some strategies including agility, accountability and diversity sound promising, deviations remain in recruitment, inadequate career prospects for internal staff, and misuse of the delegation of authority. Staff are being consulted on such matters, but in a nominal way.

The Fifth Committee also discussed how to strengthen accountability in the Secretariat. Christophe Monier, Director of the Business Transformation and Accountability Division in the Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance, introduced the Secretary-General ’ s eleventh progress report on the topic. Abdallah Bachar Bong, Chair of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ), presenting its related report, highlighted the need to define individual accountability and instances of co-responsibility between Headquarters and field locations.

Rounding out the half-day discussion, delegates also focused on supply chain activities within the Secretariat. The representative of the Russian Federation, speaking for the Eurasian Economic Union as well as Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, expressed support for the additional accountability and transparency ***measures*** proposed in the area of competitive bidding. In that ***process***, general procurement principles must be aligned with the values of best value for money, fair international competition and the needs of the United Nations. The Secretary-General also should provide more detailed information on the question of “environmentally secure and sustainable purchases” and consider its possible impact on the diversification of vendors, especially those hailing from developing countries.

Presenting the Secretary-General ’ s related report, Christian Saunders, Assistant Secretary-General within the Department of Operational Support, highlighted several initiatives, notably investments in the transition to a circular supply chain, a revitalized concept for strategic deployment stocks, inventory management and asset optimization and rationalized contract management.

In other business, the Fifth Committee Chair drew attention to comments by the Secretary-General and those of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination on the report of the Joint Inspection Unit (document A/75/551/Add.1), as well as to the related statement by the Secretariat of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination, which will be uploaded to the Fifth Committee website.

Also making presentations today were Martha Helena Lopez, Assistant Secretary-General for Human Resources, who introduced the Secretary-General ’ s report on Secretariat staff demographics, and Elia Yi Armstrong, Director of the United Nations Ethics Office, who presented the Secretary-General ’ s report on activities of the Ethics Office. Fatoumata Ndiaye, Under Secretary-General for Internal Oversight Services, introduced the audit reports of the implementation of post-employment restrictions for staff involved in the procurement ***process***, and of demand and source planning for peace operations. Gopinathan Achamkulangare, Chair of the Joint Inspection Unit, introduced via videoconference a report reviewing contemporary practices by United Nations system organizations in external outsourcing of services to commercial service providers.

Also speaking today were representatives of the United Kingdom, Morocco, China, Mongolia, Philippines and the United States, as well as a representative of the European Union who spoke in observer status.

The Fifth Committee (Administrative and Budgetary) will reconvene at a time and date to be announced.

Human Resources Management

MARTHA HELENA LOPEZ, Assistant Secretary-General for Human Resources, first introduced the Secretary-General ’ s report titled “Composition of the Secretariat: staff demographics” (document A/76/570 and Corr. 1), covering 1 January to 31 December 2020. The report provides an overview of demographic variables, such as age and gender, and structural elements of the workforce, and it covers staff movements and staff subject to the system of desirable ranges. She said the report has undergone substantial upgrades and now provides enhanced analytics data and in-depth analysis on factors that impact the long-term outcome of human resources reform efforts to realize a diverse and inclusive workplace, with staff that reflects the diversity dimensions of the people it serves. Simultaneously, she said efforts are under way to make most demographic information available to all Member States through expanded online reporting. The aim is to make demographic staff data available on a continuous basis, allowing for tailored analysis as needed.

Turning to the report titled “Practice of the Secretary-General in disciplinary matters and cases of possible criminal behaviour, 1 January to 31 December 2020” (document A/76/602), the nineteenth such report, she said it provides an overview of the administrative framework, summaries of individual cases and information taken into account by the Secretary-General when disciplinary ***measures*** have been imposed. It contains statistics on the numbers and types of cases received and the numbers and disposition of completed cases. An additional section contains statistics on the handling of cases received and closed between 1 January and 30 September 2021.

She then drew attention to the Secretary-General ’ s reports from the seventy-third, seventy-fourth and seventy-fifth sessions concerning staff mobility, contributing to the goal of a decentralized and agile management paradigm for the effective management of human resources. Noting that the Secretariat has advanced several reforms, she said her Office presented the Secretary-General ’ s report titled “New Approach to staff mobility: building an agile Organization by providing opportunities for on-the-job learning and skills development (document A/75/540/Add.1). While the report ’ s consideration was deferred, staff mobility remains paramount to the Organization, with staff and managers viewing it as important in addressing the professional growth of staff and allowing employees to benefit from United Nations mandates.

Under the new approach, she said mobility is defined as a way for staff to benefit from diversity in the Secretariat and to acquire skills through continuous learning. It highlights the link between learning and skills development, on one hand, and career fulfilment on the other. Explaining that professional excellence must be the primary career driver, linking advancement with skills acquisition and consequently, learning, she said staff moves in the “Professional and higher” categories, as well as field service in the D and E categories, are expected to double from current levels under the new approach. Attention will be paid to staff working in hard duty stations, with priority given to those staff who have spent more than two years in those stations. The approach will be implemented on a gradual basis and current staff will have the opportunity to opt in. Acknowledging that full implementation of staff mobility is a long-term endeavour, she said amendments to the Staff Regulations and Rules were presented.

To advance agility, she said her Office completed a comprehensive review of the Secretariat ’ s 20-year-old competency framework. It overhauled leadership and management programmes and developed a new career satisfaction framework, with tools and resources to help staff achieve career fulfilment. The geographic representation strategy meanwhile provides a focused approach to make progress in this important area. She went on to recall that in 2018, the Secretary-General requested the General Assembly to lift barriers hindering staff in General Service and related categories from competing for “Professional” level jobs. Efforts aim to extend equal treatment to all candidates for P-2 and non-YPP to G-level staff, and in the field service category, up to the FS-5 level. Efforts also aim to eliminate the “G to P” system. The proposal to remove barriers will not only alleviate difficulties for such staff to achieve career satisfaction but will help improve equitable geographic representation, when un- and under-represented countries are selected for posts.

ELIA YI ARMSTRONG, Director, United Nations Ethics Office, presented the Secretary-General ’ s report titled “Activities of the Ethics Office” (document A/76/76), and provided information on the Ethics Panel of the United Nations. On the strengthening of the independence of the Ethics Office, she said several ***measures*** are currently being considered for approval: Direct presentation of the annual report by the Ethics Office to the General Assembly, which allows the Office to communicate directly to Member States; an enhanced role for the Independent Audit Advisory Committee to strengthen the Secretariat ’ s accountability framework; a proposal for the Ethics Office to be able to consult the Fifth Committee on matters pertaining to the Secretary-General wherein he or she may have a conflict of interest; and a proposal to raise the rank of the Head of the Ethics Office to the level of Assistant Secretary-General.

Noting that the Ethics Office ’ s 2020 report once again highlighted the merits of and rationales for those ***measures***, she outlined the Office ’ s various activities and achievements over the course of 2020, which were mostly accomplished through remote means of communications amid the COVID-19 pandemic. The Office responded to a total of 1,681 requests, with the largest category — requests for ethics advice on conflict-of-interest matters — accounting for 691 requests. As a key annual outreach activity, the Office facilitated the 2020 Leadership Dialogue with the Office of the United Nations Ombudsman and Mediation Services with some 40,000 personnel participating, the largest number since the launch of the Dialogues in 2012-13. The Office also handled 138 enquiries on the policy on protection against retaliation for reporting misconduct or cooperating with duly authorized audits or investigations, she said.

ABDALLAH BACHAR BONG, Chair of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ), introduced that body ’ s related reports on human resources management (documents A/76/733, A/76/724 and A/76/551). He turned first to the report titled “Composition of the Secretariat: staff demographics”, which recommends that the Secretary-General submit an updated human resources strategy at the seventy-seventh session of the General Assembly which addresses issues that have consistently proven challenging. The strategy should also include information on the implementation of recommendations by the Board of Auditors, as well as the impact of lessons learned during the pandemic.

He stressed the need for more extensive analysis of the statistical data in the report, citing in particular the lack thereof on the high number of forecasted retirements in the period 2020-2040. On staff resignations, he said more systematic and comprehensive data collection is needed, including through exit interviews, to enable better trend analysis, identify challenges and strengthen the Organization ’ s operational workforce planning. He trusted that the Secretary-General would ensure that language requirements are clearly defined in job openings. The Secretary-General should address the significant number of vacant posts subject to geographical distribution, as well as the high number of geographical posts temporarily encumbered by staff without geographical status without delay. He also recommended that future reports provide breakdowns of high-level positions, disaggregated information on internal and external appointments, and comparable statistical data on vacant posts and recruitment timelines.

Turning next to disciplinary matters and cases of possible criminal behaviour, he recommended, among other things, that the General Assembly request the Secretary-General to ensure transparency, proportionality and consistency in the exercise of this discretion, and to include in his next report detailed information on the criteria applied in the determination of mitigating and aggravating circumstances. He said managers have the responsibility to lead by example and emphasized the importance of ensuring increased transparency of managers ’ conduct with enhanced accountability. He noted the significant increase in the average time taken to dispose of cases after their referral, recommending that the Assembly ask the Secretary-General to enhance the rate of disposal of cases, including by applying a benchmark that considers the ideal scenario of 3-4 months for the ***processing*** of a case, and to provide an update in his next report. It should also ask the Secretary-General to expedite work on addressing racism and discrimination on the basis of race and to provide an update in his next report.

Finally, he turned to activities of the Ethics Office for 2020, welcoming the increased participation in the voluntary disclosure initiative and noting the Office ’ s efforts to conduct outreach, training and education. More broadly, he noted the increase in the number of inquiries regarding institutional integrity, as well as “limited progress” in establishing a consolidated online gift registry. Regarding the reporting line of the Office, the proposed change has not been justified, he said, reaffirming that any revisions to the Office ’ s stature, reporting line and governance structure would have significant consequences for the Secretariat and the United Nations as a whole. He recommended against the proposal to raise the rank of the Head of the Ethics Office to the level of Assistant Secretary-General, as it has not been justified in terms of the independence of the function or the positioning of the Office within the organizational structure, among other factors. The current D-2 level is appropriate for directing the Office ’ s work.

MONA FATTAH WAHIDI, Chairperson of the Staff Council of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), speaking on behalf of the Staff Management Committee staff representatives via videolink, said staff members at all levels have exerted ***exceptional*** efforts to keep the United Nations operations and services running over the last two years. “This was demonstrated by the up-to-date deliverables and lengthy hours of remote work in such difficult circumstances,” she said. However, such circumstances and insecurity took a substantial toll on staff members ’ physical and mental health. Recognizing efforts by the United Nations management to address staff safety, mental health issues and physical back-to-office challenges, she nevertheless called for more support on those fronts and for the Organization to respond to continuous calls for equal treatment across all categories and levels and reasonably flexible and accommodative arrangements.

On human resources strategies, she reiterated her serious concerns regarding staff members ’ future of work “and the unclear path which the Organization is drawing for its workforce”. While some strategies including agility, accountability and diversity sound promising, deviations remain in recruitment, inadequate career prospects for internal staff, misuse of the delegation of authority and shortfalls in terms of fair representation of different groups. Staff are being consulted on such matters, but in a nominal way. The removal of career advancement barriers for General Service staff and other related categories is one key step towards real rightful reform, she said, expressing support for the previously proposed pilot project through which General Service and related categories of staff may apply to professional posts outside those allocated for the Young Professionals Programme.

She also expressed regret that the Organization is relying more and more on individual contractors instead of directing its efforts towards the improvement of internal expertise and skills. “The talk of new contractual modalities is of great concern to all staff members, and we count on your support to improve the existing conditions of service and make sure that existing contract modalities are used to their maximum potential,” she said, also calling for the implementation of continuous contracts for those eligible staff in all categories and the application of fair use of rosters, which will minimize the recruitment period and motivate staff to compete and enhance their skills and knowledge. Turning to disciplinary matters, she said abuse of authority and harassment of different natures are still occurring in various duty stations where staff sometimes opt to keep quiet to avoid retaliation and lengthy, stressful ***processes***. Staff members need to trust the system to be encouraged to report misconduct, she said.

MUHAMMAD JAWAD AJMAL (Pakistan), speaking on behalf of the “Group of 77” developing countries and China, commended progress made thus far on improving human resources management, especially with regards to the simplification and streamlining of rules and policies and changes in conditions of service. Also praising steps taken to strengthen internal anti-corruption ***measures*** and to ensure a safe environment for staff to report misconduct, he nevertheless said imbalances in equitable geographic representation in the Secretariat remain a major source of concern. Efforts to reach out to potential candidates from unrepresented and underrepresented countries, particularly developing countries, have not been successful. Urging the Secretary-General to step up his efforts in that regard, especially at the senior levels and with due attention to troop- and police-contributing countries, he also recalled the system of desirable ranges established in 1960, which ***measures*** progress towards achieving a wide equitable geographical distribution of Secretariat staff. “We stand ready to engage in negotiations to advance the sixty-year-old mechanism and are willing to embrace changes for the advancement of our Organization,” he said. He also noted with concern that the overall number of women in senior positions remains below 50 per cent, and the percentage of women from developing countries in senior positions is disproportionately low.

He went on to express concern that the average age of Secretariat staff members continues to reflect an upward trend, and that the entry level positions — particularly at P-1 and P-2 levels — continue to fall, which limits the space for achieving important human resources targets, including the rejuvenation of the organization and acquiring fresh talents from the different regions of the world. Language skills also constitute an important factor in the selection ***processes***, and good command of the official languages in specific duty stations should be given due consideration during the recruitment ***process***. “It is imperative that the staff implementing the mandates of the United Nations is doing so in a rule-based environment which also exemplifies diversity, flexibility and dynamism, an environment that motivates and facilitates the staff members to put out their best efforts in serving the rest of the world,” he said.

THIBAULT CAMELLI, representative of the European Union delegation, in its capacity as observer, said that “the wealth of this Organization lies in its people”. Those who work at the United Nations are instrumental to delivering on its mandates, upholding its principles and defending its value, he said. After four years of debate, they should be given the guarantee of an improved labour framework, alongside modern and effective human resources policies. The bloc will continue to support all the Organization ’ s efforts to enhance its workforce diversity. With this in mind, he encouraged further efforts towards achieving gender parity at all levels, including in the field. He also called for the rejuvenation of the United Nations and a new focus on interns and enhanced training. Multilingualism is important, he said, underscoring the need for linguistic diversity to be adequately reflected in human resources management. He looked forward to discussing the Secretary-General ’ s proposals on disability inclusion, which will be presented in a later session.

He went on to welcome the Secretary-General ’ s Global Human Resources Strategy, which includes a more proactive talent acquisition ***process*** and a transformed organizational culture, he said. On the updated approach to staff mobility, he stressed that it is in the interests of staff, their mandates and the people they serve. Further training for staff and managers, as well as a smoother G-to-P transition, is also necessary to give individuals an opportunity to develop their careers to the fullest. The rollout of a robust accountability framework is necessary, he said, in order to address any type of misconduct. He underlined the need to strengthen the independence of the Ethics Office. Finally, in order to translate these goals into tangible and clear guidelines for the Secretariat, he said he looked forward to finalizing discussions on the proposed amendments to Staff Regulations and Rules.

MIKE MARTIN AMMANN (Switzerland), also speaking on behalf of Liechtenstein, said the United Nations workforce is its most valuable asset. “The Organization depends on personnel who bring their expertise and capacity to bear for the realization of all its mandates,” he said, underlining the need for modern and streamlined human resources management that enables a high-performing workforce. Voicing regret that the Committee has not been able to reach agreement on this agenda item for several sessions, he listed three critical areas for the way forward. First, United Nations leadership must “lead by example” and treat human resources management as a clear priority. Modern and appropriate human resources management is key in realizing management reform, which is in turn an essential pillar of other reform ***processes***.

Second, he supported the Secretary-General's approaches to recruit, develop and retain a mobile, field-oriented, high-performing, multilingual and diverse workforce and commended his thorough analysis conducted to identify the root causes of the lack of diversity in recruitment and for launching a Geographical Diversity Strategy. However, more attention is needed to gender equality and workforce rejuvenation, especially in leadership and middle management positions as well as field services. Third, personnel mobility is key to building a highly skilled, dynamic and versatile workforce and offering employees attractive learning and career development opportunities. This is relevant not only to enable the United Nations to meet today's challenges in a highly interconnected and increasingly complex world, but also to ensure the long-term sustainability of the Organization ’ s workforce.

EVGENY V. KALUGIN (Russian Federation), also speaking on behalf of Belarus, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, said the number of reports before the Fifth Committee on human resources management keeps growing each year and requires attention. Describing the recommendations on that topic put forward by the Advisory Committee as a good basis for compromise going forward, he said the group will evaluate all related proposals in line with the questions of enhancing the effectiveness of personnel policy; how they would provide for the needs of the United Nations; and whether they are in line with the financial capacity of Member States. At the present stage, it makes sense to focus on the question of equitable geographical representation. Noting that the group takes a cautious approach to new proposals in that area — and especially to proposed approaches that have not been approved by Member States — he stressed that all procedures must be in line with General Assembly resolutions.

He went on to express concern about the prospect of hiring more external candidates, as well as over new proposals put forward on staff mobility — which could further reduce existing staff members ’ career opportunities — while also warning against allowing the United Nations to become a “closed club”. The personnel of the Secretariat should reflect diversity on various fronts, including cultural attitudes, multilingualism, different generations of staff, and be representative of persons with disabilities. However, he warned that the current proposal being considered on that issue is not fully in line with the guidelines of the International Civil Service Commission (ICSC).

FELIX-FILS EBOA EBONGUE (Cameroon), speaking on behalf of the African Group and associating himself with the Group of 77, said that human resources management is central to the smooth functioning of the Organization, which should better represent the rich diversity of its membership, particularly through equitable geographical representation. The implementation of equitable geographical representation in line with the Charter of the United Nations is long overdue. African States regret that despite the engagement and the readiness of the Group of 77 to achieve some progress on this very longstanding issue during the Assembly ’ s seventy-fifth session, no substantial discussion took place. This is the year that the Committee will show a collective will to engage in frank and sincere negotiations, with the aim of reaching a successful outcome.

The Group notes with concern that senior managers of Secretariat departments and offices are far away from achieving the target of appointing at least 50 per cent of staff from unrepresented and underrepresented Member States to posts subject to geographical distribution, as stipulated in their compacts, he said. The Group once again strongly underscores the need to fast-track the increase of the representation of developing countries at all levels and particularly at senior levels. The Group is equally concerned about the situation of numerous geographical posts occupied by staff who do not meet the geographical criteria. The Group recognizes the efforts of the Secretary-General towards gender parity and believes that more are needed to attract and retain more female staff, particularly from the African continent, to work in field operations.

RICHARD CROKER (United Kingdom) highlighted several areas of importance to his delegation, starting with the issue of mobility. A modern and mainstreamed approach, which harnesses experience from the field and different headquarters while allowing staff to rotate out from the toughest duty stations, will benefit the Organization. Noting the need for career advancement and incentives, he went on to highlight the importance of diversity in terms of geography, gender and age. “But we also encourage the United Nations to be truly representative of the global population […] including staff with disabilities, different ethnicities, races, religions, socioeconomic backgrounds, sexualities and other characteristics,” he said. He also noted that for staff to feel motivated, excellence must be incentivized and rewarded and underperformance dealt with. “Hearing that 99.6 per cent of staff were rated as exceeding or meeting expectations raises questions about how effective the current system really is,” he said.

HIND JERBOUI (Morocco), associating herself with the Group of 77 and China and the African Group, said that the Organization ’ s ability to deliver on its mandate relies on a qualified and diverse workforce. She praised the Secretary-General ’ s efforts to strengthen human resources management and make it more gender-balanced and accountable. She expressed her support for the promotion of an international work force with the highest standards of competence and integrity and welcomed the analysis made regarding the recruitment ***process***. In addition, she welcomed the recommendation to provide equal opportunities to the recruitment of external and internal candidates and the Secretary-General ’ s efforts to ensure wider geographical representation. Further, she welcomed efforts to ensure better gender representation among staff, including senior management positions. She commended the work of the Ethics Office as it endeavours to ensure all staff perform their duties with the high standards of conduct required as members of the international civil service.

KAWASAKI YUTA (Japan) said Member States have failed in previous years to give appropriate guidance to the Secretary-General, and he called for redoubled efforts to do so, while fully taking advantage of negotiations by clusters and more focused discussions of each item. “It is our common priority to achieve a more diversified Organization, based on Article 101 of the United Nations Charter,” he said. He reiterated Japan ’ s request for the Secretary-General to redouble efforts to address the under- and un-representation of some Member States. He expressed concern over the imbalance between the number of entry-level professional posts and those for senior levels within the Secretariat, encouraging the Secretary-General to “bring in fresh ideas” and to promote workforce succession planning and agility in efforts to advance management reform.

RONG SICAI (China) said geographic representation remains a core concern and expressed regret over the lack of momentum for progress achieved between 2016 and 2020. The number of un- and under-represented Member States has reverted to a higher figure, and there are widening gaps in geographical posts, disproportionately from developing countries. He urged the Secretary-General to reinforce targeted policy ***measures*** and to adopt an accountability mechanism for their application, recruiting to geographical posts from the severely under-represented Member States in order to realize the goal of equitable geographic representation by 2030. He welcomed the Secretary-General ’ s introduction of workforce analytics in his latest staff demographics report and expressed hope that the Secretariat provides more data on cross-comparison between different categories, taking stock of progress in recruitment and identifying causes of the persistent human resources management challenges, with corresponding ***measures*** for improvement proposed.

ENKHBOLD VORSHILOV (Mongolia) raised the issue of filling vacant posts, especially at senior levels, expressing trust that the renewed geographic representation strategy will set timebound targets. On gender balance, he welcomed the Secretary-General ’ s commitment to increase female Secretariat staff and looked forward to continued efforts at all levels, including with candidates from un- and under-represented Member States, in line with the Charter ’ s Article 101, with due consideration for geographic representation. He likewise welcomed outreach under way to create equal opportunities for candidates from developing countries, agreeing on the need for an analysis of activities to be taken by the Secretariat. He expressed support for the Secretary-General ’ s efforts to improve human resources management, as well as to strengthen the accountability system and internal anti-corruption ***measures***. He expressed hope that Member States will arrive at a consensual outcome on a human resources management mechanism this year, underscoring Mongolia ’ s continued engagement on these issues.

MARIVIL VILLA VALLES (Philippines), associating himself with the Group of 77, underscored the importance of an inclusive workforce. His delegation acknowledges the improvements made on gender parity in the Organization, especially at the senior level positions for the past years. The ratio of women to total staff in the Professional and higher and field service categories increased from 37.6 per cent to 40.9 per cent during the 2016-2020 period. Noting the launch of the talent pool initiative to better leverage the female workforce within the United Nations common system, he sought updates on these initiatives especially in terms of ***measuring*** their performance levels and delivery of outcomes. The percentage of women participating in the field increased by 0.1 per cent from 2019 to 2020 to 24.3 per cent in peacekeeping operations and special political missions. While expressing support for various ***measures*** to enhance women ’ s participation in the field, he requested the Secretary-General to implement more concrete ***measures*** to ensure diversity among United Nations interns.

CHRISTOPHER P. LU (United States), applauding the determination and flexibility demonstrated by United Nations staff around the world, said discussions of human resources management are in fact closely connected to the Russian Federation ’ s current aggression against Ukraine, which poses one of the greatest challenges in recent memory. Noting that staff members are working tirelessly to respond to the crises emanating from that aggression, he said the United States supports efforts to empower the Organization ’ s managers to make important operational decisions while also advocating for strong accountability and transparency. While reaching agreement on issues related to human resources management at the present session will be difficult, “progress must be made”. For example, there is no reason why Member States cannot agree on various pragmatic ***measures*** proposed by Secretary-General, such as those aimed at enhancing the independence of the Ethics Office, he said.

The representative of the Russian Federation repeated that he rejected false accusations related to his country ’ s “special military operation” in Ukraine, noting that its position has been voiced in the Security Council and the General Assembly on many occasions. He asked the Committee Chair to remind colleagues that the mandate of the Fifth Committee is administrative and budgetary matters, adding that the United Nations has other platforms for considering political matters.

Strengthening Accountability in United Nations Secretariat

CHRISTOPHE MONIER, Director of the Business Transformation and Accountability Division, Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance, introduced the Secretary-General ’ s report titled “Eleventh progress report on accountability: strengthening accountability in the United Nations Secretariat” (document A/76/644). He said the report provides information to demonstrate that the focus on strengthening a culture of accountability at all levels of the Secretariat for effective mandate delivery continued throughout 2021. “As the new management paradigm continues to take root in the Secretariat, senior managers have been empowered to deliver on their mandates, with the expectation that they do so in a transparent, responsible and accountable manner,” he said, adding that the Secretariat remains committed to acting accordingly.

The enhancement of the accountability framework for monitoring delegation of authority was a priority during 2021, he continued. A revised and expanded set of key performance indicators were developed for monitoring the use of delegation of authority, and a phased implementation of the indicators continues. The first statement on internal control was signed by the Secretary-General in May 2021 and published on [*www.reform.un.org*](http://www.reform.un.org) in the six official languages. No significant control issues were identified while opportunities for improvement were identified in some areas. To promote an Organization-wide understanding of accountability, the annual Leadership Dialogue for 2021 led by the Ethics Office focused on accountability, under the question “The Accountability System in the United Nations Secretariat: How do we understand and make it work?”. Meanwhile, the “Values and Behaviours Framework” was introduced to guide how relationships are built within the United Nations, how staff members perform their jobs and how they experience the Organization on a daily basis.

He noted that, in his eleventh progress report, the Secretary-General provided an update on the latest efforts made by the Secretariat to strengthen its accountability system. He outlined the contents of its various sections, including a list of ***measures*** taken to enhance the culture of accountability in the Secretariat. That includes areas such as advancing the implementation of results-based management, strengthening enterprise risk management and the use of evaluation and addressing conduct and discipline issues in terms of prevention, enforcement and remedial actions. Sections III and IV of the report contain conclusions and recommendations, while three annexes contain such information as the status of implementation of resolutions on administrative and budgetary matters, adopted by the General Assembly at its seventy-fifth session.

Mr. BONG, ACABQ Chair, introducing the Advisory Committee ’ s related report (document A/76/728), noted the steps taken to date and trusted that the Secretary-General will continue the efforts to establish a deeply rooted and sustainable organizational culture of personal and institutional accountability in the Secretariat. The concept of an accountability system must be anchored by the existing definition of accountability — which has remained in place since the Assembly ’ s sixty-fourth session — and that it plays a central role in all reform efforts, as well as in all organizational, administrative and operational changes. Staff performance is closely linked to the implementation of the Secretariat ’ s mandated activities, and senior managers ’ compacts and staff members ’ workplans should be aligned with approved programme activities arising from established mandates. There is a need to expand the Organization ’ s results-based fundamentals and to establish a related three-pronged approach for management, budgeting and performance. ACABQ trusts that the Secretary-General will utilize the new evaluation framework ’ s resources and knowledge base and provide updates in his next progress reports. Highlighting a need to define individual accountability and instances of co-responsibility between Headquarters and field locations, he recommended that the Assembly ask the Secretary-General to provide related concrete proposals.

Noting that the reported high rate of timely submission of reports and related information still does not reflect the operational reality of the oftentimes delayed submission of documents, he highlighted the trend whereby important reports and initiatives are finalized shortly after the completion of the Fifth Committee ’ s session or during the Assembly ’ s deliberations. Such late submissions may have implications for the analysis of the related matters and the way forward, he said, pointing to such examples as human resources management matters and the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) evaluation of the accountability system, which will be completed at end of March 2022, instead of June 2021. ACABQ trusts that, in the future, the finalization of reports will be better planned in advance and in accordance with the annually recurring schedules of both ACABQ and the Fifth Committee, and that all Secretariat departments and offices will ensure the timely submission of reports in an appropriate time frame in order to enable a full consideration of all information and documentation by Member States.

Mr. AJMAL (Pakistan), speaking for the Group of 77, said accountability is central to the viability and efficiency of any organization, including the United Nations. Intent on constructively engaging in the review of the accountability system, the Group acknowledges efforts made to report on the status of the implementation of: General Assembly resolutions on administrative and budgetary matters; results-based management; and information on the use and impact of information obtained on the Organization ’ s performance. Underscoring the importance of taking more practical steps of institutional and personal accountability into future progress reports, he said that, given current financial constraints, the Secretary-General must continue strengthening internal controls in the accountability system through the constant monitoring of effective expenditures in order to fully implement agreed mandates and programmes.

Turning to supply chain management issues, he said the Group sees merit in acquiring more data and analysis of several specific aspects related to procurement in the United Nations Secretariat. Also needed is detailed information on such related activities as innovations by the Secretary-General, including the e-tendering project, and financial implications, benefits and efforts made to reach vendors who may be unable to access the system. While acknowledging efforts made to promote business opportunities for vendors from developing nations and those with economies in transition, he said the Secretary-General should continue his efforts and explore additional, innovative ways to promote and sustain procurement from them. Noting with concern that the United Nations Procurement Manual has not been translated into all the six official languages, he recommended action to complete the ***process*** as soon as possible. The Group will further inquire about the Joint Inspection Unit ’ s suspension of the review of the management and administration of the Food and ***Agricultural*** Organization (FAO) and subsequent deferment, on its Director-General ’ s request, and calls for the review ’ s resumption in the next programme of work, he said.

MIKE MARTIN AMMANN (Switzerland), also speaking for Liechtenstein, recalled General Assembly resolution 72/266, which underlines that responsibility is a central principle of management reform — both at the highest levels of leadership and by the whole personnel. He expressed support for a solid system for delegation of authority and accountability that “truly works”. He called for a more robust and effective accountability system, welcoming that the system continues to evolve and encouraging the Secretary-General to continue to bolster it. He awaited with interest the Secretary-General ’ s upcoming report, welcoming next steps for strengthening the delegation of powers. He similarly welcomed efforts by the Joint Inspection Unit, Board of Auditors and ACABQ, as well as results of the current accountability system, from a belief that they will provide pointers for achieving an effective accountability system. He added that the presentation of documents within the time limits is an important part of accountability.

Supply chain activities in United Nations Secretariat

CHRISTIAN SAUNDERS, Assistant Secretary-General, Office of Supply Chain Management, Department of Operational Support, presented the Secretary-General ’ s report on supply chain activities in the United Nations Secretariat (document A/73/613), which replaced the previous biannual submission on procurement activities. Procurement is now correctly seen as a key component of a broader set of functions that serves all Secretariat entities in pursuit of their mandates by ensuring they can get the right goods and services to the right place, at the right time, at the right quality and for the right cost. A discussion on supply chain of the past two years must begin with the pandemic. Supply chain was fundamental to the Secretariat ’ s response.

The Office sourced and delivered life-saving medical equipment, diagnostics, consumables, vaccines and other essential goods and services in an environment of extremely scarce supply and intense competition, he said. The “regular” work continued, amidst ***unprecedented*** global supply chain disruptions that persist today and will likely continue for the foreseeable future. That “regular” work represents the largest and most complex supply chain operations in the United Nations system. The 2020 procurement spending amounted to $2.7 billion, with the highest expenditure in information technology, air transportation, food and catering, fuel, and building and construction. The Office has prioritized the implementation of category management, which seeks market-specific strategies for sourcing goods and services in each major category. This initiative provides clients with global solutions put in place by his Office or in partnership with others. A key component of the Secretary-General ’ s reform was to place decision‑making closer to mandate delivery. The delegation of procurement authority to heads of entity has enabled a nimbler Secretariat and allowed his Office to focus on delivery of key strategic goods and services with high costs and complexity. These delegations are monitored for compliance and risk management by the Business Transformation and Accountability Division in the Department of Management, Strategy, Policy and Compliance.

The present report outlines several key initiatives, including investments in transition to a circular supply chain, a revitalized concept for strategic deployment stocks, inventory management and asset optimization, rationalized contract management, delivery of engineering support services and further mainstreaming requests for proposals in the area of aviation services. Opportunities also exist for much greater ***process*** automation, digitalization and integration across the supply chain and uniformed personnel management. The Office will strive to better align its activities with peacebuilding and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development with a commitment to ensure its clients succeed in implementing their mandates through the provision of effective, innovative, efficient and responsible solutions. Moreover, the Office will seek to mitigate any negative consequences of its activity, and to create positive contributions to local communities through infrastructure development, including the introduction of renewable energy, capacity-building, business partnerships and transfer of skills.

Mr. BONG, ACABQ Chair, introducing the Advisory Committee ’ s related report, (document A/76/722), said that, while the Secretary-General ’ s report provides a comprehensive overview of the activities of the Office of Supply Chain Management, he sees the merit of more data and analysis related to specific aspects of that supply chain management, in particular on procurement and recommended that the Assembly ask the Secretary-General to submit his report on an annual basis, with an adequate level of details and analysis, and an emphasis on the Secretariat ’ s procurement activities. Future reports should also include a detailed organizational chart of the Office with clear reporting lines. He expressed concern over the current low level of cooperation and harmonization system-wide in the supply chain, in particular procurement matters and recommended that the Assembly ask the Secretary-General to conduct an assessment and provide updated information on the progress made in his next report. The report should also include information of the application of emergency procurement ***measures*** in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, including lessons learned and best practices.

Among other observations and recommendations, the Advisory Committee notes the overall trends and drivers for reduced spending in 2020 and 2021, due essentially to the pandemic and the changing landscape of peacekeeping, including the liquidation and downsizing of missions, he said. It trusts that the Secretary-General will provide in his future reports more detailed analysis of the movements of spending, including demand analysis and explanation of changes, as well as justifications for increases under some major commodities, in particular information and communications technology (ICT).

Recalling the Board of Auditors ’ recommendations on the timely launch of an expanded set of indicators to cover areas of identified risks related to the delegation of authority, including the lack of segregation of procurement duties, he recommended that the Assembly ask the Secretary-General to provide detailed information in his next report. Further, there should be continued assessment of the performance of the supply chain management and detailed information on the accountability framework for procurement and the model policy framework, including on the role of the Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance in monitoring and evaluating the procurement function. On aligning the supply chain with the 2030 Agenda, he noted that the Assembly had not considered for approval the concept of environmentally friendly and sustainable procurement and has asked the Secretary-General to prepare a comprehensive report on the content of and criteria for such a concept. In order for the Assembly to consider this matter, the Secretary-General must do more to refined the understanding of the concept and how it can be applied in practical terms to the United Nations.

FATOUMATA NDIAYE, Under-Secretary-General for Internal Oversight Services, first introduced the report of the audit of implementation of post-employment restrictions for staff involved in the procurement ***process*** (document A/76/139), which covers implementation of the Secretary-General ’ s bulletin, prohibiting staff members involved in the Organization ’ s procurement ***processes*** from seeking or accepting employment or any form of compensation or financial benefit from a United Nations contractor or vendor during or, for a defined period, after their service.

She said OIOS concluded that strong preventive controls, including training and other awareness raising activities, were needed to apprise staff of the provisions of the bulletin and to help them meet its objectives. However, these controls were not being implemented effectively because of inadequate ***processes*** and lack of data to identify the staff who should be the focus of such interventions. Moreover, key terms had not been defined in the bulletin to clarify the scope of its application and limit its provisions to a core group of staff based on an assessment of risks. The audit made five recommendations that are being implemented, including for the revision of the Secretary-General ’ s bulletin on post-employment to clarify its applicability and procedures for reporting violations.

She then turned to the report of the audit of demand and source planning for peace operations (document A/76/595), which was conducted at United Nations Headquarters and in six peacekeeping missions: United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA); United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA); United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA); United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF); United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP); and the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL).

She said the audits assessed the adequacy and effectiveness of activities and information management systems used to develop demand and source plans as part of the supply chain management ***process***. The audits found that the missions had made progress in developing demand plans, enabling the Department of Operational Support to improve the visibility of field missions ’ requirements of goods and services. However, these plans were not yet realistic enough to serve as a basis for budget proposals, or granular enough to be effectively used for acquisition and delivery planning and for category management. A high number of year-end purchases and the suboptimal use of internal sourcing options and system contracts indicated a need for further improvement, she added.

GOPINATHAN ACHAMKULANGARE, Chair of the Joint Inspection Unit, introduced via videoconference the report entitled, “Review of contemporary practices in the external outsourcing of services to commercial service providers by United Nations system organizations” (document A/75/551), examining the current status of external outsourcing in United Nations entities, which amounts to an average of more than $3 billion annually across the system. Its objective was to assess the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to using the option of external outsourcing, and to outline existing enabling legislation and policy.

Describing methodology, he said a major challenge of the review was to distinguish outsourcing from procurement. Several new areas have been subjected to external outsourcing, from ICT services, to conducting surveys, to media coverage of the official visit of the executive heads, to name a few. Among the findings, he said none of the organizations have a dedicated policy or guidelines on outsourcing, and only two formal definitions of outsourcing exist. As a proportion of total procurement expenditure, outsourcing ranges between 20 and 60 per cent in half of the 23 Joint Inspection Unit participation organizations that provided data. He pointed out that 93 per cent of overall outsourcing expenditure from 2012 to 2018, totalling just under $21 billion, is accounted for by just six organizations.

Among other actions, he recommended that the executive heads of organizations develop a common Organization-wide definition of outsourcing, as well as corresponding approaches and procedural guidelines. They should assess the use of supply sources from vendors in developing countries and economies in transition and increase it as applicable. They should also ensure that sourcing of any strategic, sensitive or high-value service from a commercial service provider is preceded by the conduct of a strategic analysis and ensure that these services are subject to periodic review. Criterial for the extension of outsourced service contracts beyond standard timeframes also should be developed.

Mr. KALUGIN (Russian Federation), speaking on behalf of the Eurasian Economic Union, as well as Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, expressed support for the additional accountability and transparency ***measures*** proposed in the area of competitive bidding. Those will help suppliers better understand the logic used by the United Nations, and better compete among themselves. However, in the course of bidding, general procurement principles must be aligned with the values of best value for money; fairness, integrity and transparency; fair international competition; and the needs of the United Nations. The Secretary‑General ’ s report on that topic must be broadened and become more analytical. He should also provide more detailed information on the question of “environmentally secure and sustainable purchases” and consider its possible impacts on the diversification of vendors, especially those hailing from developing countries. Meanwhile, he said, it is premature at the present stage to discuss the notion of broadening the ***process*** of requests for proposals.

**Load-Date:** March 11, 2022

**End of Document**



[***Nearly Five Years into Colombia’s Historic Peace Agreement, Unprecedented Strides in Justice Marked alongside Lingering Violence, Experts Tell Security Council***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:634X-WX21-F0YC-N20T-00000-00&context=1516831)

Impact News Service

July 14, 2021 Wednesday

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**Length:** 4408 words

**Body**

New York: The United Nation has issued the following press release:

Vice President Emphasizes Accord’s 15-Year Timeframe, Vowing Bogotá Will Protect Those ‘Who Have Laid Down Their Weapons and Opted for Peace’

Colombia has notched ***unprecedented*** achievements in transitional justice as the fifth anniversary of its landmark peace agreement approaches, the senior United Nations official in the country told the Security Council today, as delegates noted both strides and lingering challenges that led recently to large-scale protests across the country.

Carlos Ruiz Massieu, the Secretary-General’s Special Representative and Head of the United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia, briefed the Council on the Secretary-General’s latest report (document S/2021/603), noting that the peace ***process*** in Colombia stands at a critical juncture nearly five years after the signing of its Final Peace Agreement — which formally ended more than fifty years of civil conflict — in 2016. The reconciliation ***process*** achieved a new milestone in April, when former combatants from the now-defunct Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejército del Pueblo (FARC-EP) armed group accepted responsibility for crimes against humanity and war crimes involving hostage-taking and other serious deprivations of liberty.

He also noted that the Special Jurisdiction for Peace indicted 11 former army officials and a civilian for crimes involving assassination and forced disappearances presented as deaths in combat. Further, hundreds of victims’ bodies have been found thanks to information provided by former guerrillas, paramilitary actors and State agents, which has given their families “tranquillity after years of painful uncertainty”. He said all of those developments — which were unthinkable in Colombia until recently — have been possible thanks to the Final Peace Agreement.

It will take time, he continued, to disarm the structure and identities inherited from the five-decades-long conflict and achieve reconciliation. Noting that the Verification Mission plays an important role in ensuring compliance with sentences handed down by the Special Jurisdiction for Peace, which is Colombia’s transitional justice mechanism, he voiced concern over continued violence against former FARC-EP members and members of the new FARC political party ahead of 2022 elections. In that context, he urged Colombian society and institutions to view the Final Peace Agreement as an opportunity to help tackle the longstanding issues facing the country.

Melissa Herrera, Founder and Director of the Latin-American civil society group Viva la Vida, also briefed the Council, describing the 2016 peace agreement as a symbol of hope for the young people of Colombia. While recent protests have amplified the challenges faced by youth, they stand ready to engage in dialogue and social change. She offered several recommendations for the Council, including considering the gender perspective on youth issues and conducting a visiting mission to her country to consult with this group in all its diversity. “Youth is the missing piece of the puzzle to build peace and we must protect young people,” she stressed.

In the ensuing discussion, Council members welcomed progress made in transitional justice on Colombia’s path towards truth, justice and reconciliation. Many voiced concern, however, over recent social unrest and the deteriorating security situation — including violence against former combatants, social leaders and human rights defenders — as well as a lack of progress on ***agricultural*** reform and land use. Members also underscored the need to fully implement the Final Peace Agreement, calling on all relevant parties to engage in constructive dialogue towards that end with the participation of women and youth.

The representative of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, also speaking for Kenya, Niger and Tunisia, joined other Council members in calling on relevant parties to advance the full implementation of the Final Peace Agreement. Pointing out that no progress has been made on that agreement’s provisions guaranteeing the rights of ethnic communities, she urged the Government to take action to that end and called for enhanced ***measures*** to facilitate the proper reintegration of former combatants into Colombian society.

Mexico’s representative also urged the protection of former combatants, along with human rights defenders and indigenous and Afro-Caribbean communities. The high number of persons displaced by the actions of illegal armed groups is concerning, he added, as are the challenges facing the illicit-crop-substitution programme, which requires greater financial efforts to support more than 100,000 families participating.

The representative of the Russian Federation echoed the need for progress on agrarian reform and ***measures*** to address the deteriorating security situation, noting that increased cocaine production has unavoidably led to rising levels of violence and corruption and territorial clashes have displaced some 7,500 people and claimed the lives of 64 others. Meanwhile, he said, no evidence has been given by Government representatives in the area of transitional justice, which raises the question of whether balance can be achieved in that ***process***.

The representative of the United States also voiced concern over growing coca cultivation and production, stressing that the best way to sustainably address that problem is to combine law enforcement efforts with a robust rural development programme and the promotion of legal economic activity. He expressed hope that the Government, in the wake of disruptions resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, will be able to do more in 2021 to help rural farmers.

Also addressing the Council was Marta Lucía Ramírez, Vice President and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Colombia, who stressed that drug trafficking remains a challenge in her country despite Government and societal efforts towards genuine, sustainable peace. Calling for shared international responsibility in addressing this issue — along with the related threats of deforestation and human trafficking — she also emphasized that the Final Peace Agreement was designed to be implemented over 15 years. It has only been five since its signing, and progress — including security ***measures*** the Government enacted to protect FARC political party candidates from assassination or kidnapping — must be acknowledged. The Government will not waver in its efforts to protect those “who have laid down their weapons and opted for peace”, she stressed.

Also speaking were representatives of the United Kingdom, Viet Nam, Norway, India, Ireland, China, Estonia and France.

The meeting began at 10:05 a.m and ended at 12:01 p.m

Briefings

CARLOS RUIZ MASSIEU, Head of the United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia, briefed the Council on the Secretary-General’s latest report (document S/2021/603) and observed that, nearly five years after the signing of the Final Peace Agreement, the ***process*** stands at a critical juncture. Describing a new milestone highlighted in the report, he said that, in April, former combatants from the now-defunct Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejército del Pueblo (FARC-EP) armed group accepted responsibility for crimes against humanity and war crimes involving hostage-taking and other serious deprivations of liberty. Further, the Special Jurisdiction for Peace indicted 11 former army officials and a civilian for crimes involving assassination and forced disappearances presented as deaths in combat. Hundreds of victims’ bodies have also been found thanks to information provided by former guerrillas, paramilitary actors and State agents, which has given their families “tranquillity after years of painful uncertainty”.

He said all of those events — “unthinkable” in Colombia until recently — have been possible thanks to the 2016 Final Peace Agreement. Noting that it will take time to disarm the structures and identities inherited from the five-decades-long conflict and achieve reconciliation, he underscored the importance of the United Nations Verification Mission’s work — endorsed by the Council — in ensuring compliance with sentences handed down by the Special Jurisdiction for Peace. Recalling his recent visit to Montes de Maria, a region historically affected by recurrent violence, he said violence against former FARC-EP members, social leaders and communities persists there and elsewhere, mainly related to illegal armed groups and criminal organizations who thrive in areas characterized by limited State presence, poverty and illegal economies. He expressed concern over persistent violence against, and stigmatization of, former combatants and members of the FARC political party, especially ahead of 2022 elections.

He went on to note that, despite a challenging reintegration landscape, former combatants continue to demonstrate their commitment to building a new life. Parties must continue working together to provide greater certainty to former FARC-EP members and their families, especially by expanding access to housing and land. Underscoring that the Final Peace Agreement’s comprehensive implementation will provide a way to address the root causes of conflict, he urged Colombian society and institutions to view the accord as an opportunity to help tackle many of the longstanding issues facing the country.

MELISSA HERRERA, Founder and Director of the Latin-American foundation Viva la Vida, speaking via video-teleconference, shared that her sister, a university-educated dancer and cultural leader in Nariño department, was executed by an armed group. Describing the Final Peace Agreement as a symbol of hope for the young people of Colombia, she said they want an end to the conflict as well as their guaranteed participation in the peace ***process***. The recent protests in Colombia amplified the voices of youth and the challenges they face, and young Colombians are ready to engage in dialogue and social change. Outlining her work among young women and girls in Nariño to advance the peace ***process*** — in line with Council resolution 2250 (2015) on youth, peace and security — she said she is convinced that the organ’s support for peace in her country has produced results.

Making several recommendations, she suggested that the United Nations Verification Mission’s mandate should include regular reporting on indicators related to the implementation of resolutions 2250 (2015), 2419 (2018) and 2535 (2020) on youth, peace and security. Council members should also consider the gender perspective on youth issues and conduct a visiting mission to Colombia to consult with young people in all their diversity.

She further requested the Government to step up the inclusive participation of young people and women in decision-making at all levels; protect the lives of women and youth, particularly from any form of sexual or gender-based violence; and implement security guarantees for youth who are active in politics. The Government must pursue its investigations into violence directed against women and young people during the implementation of the Final Peace Agreement, and it should roll out programmes to reintegrate young people who were involved in the conflict. “Youth is the missing piece of the puzzle to build peace and we must protect young people,” she stressed, adding that she looks forward to addressing the Council again and discussing the progress being made.

Statements

JAMES ROSCOE (United Kingdom) voiced concerns about human rights violations in Colombia and welcomed the Government’s investigation into the excessive use of violence during recent protests. While those events have been challenging, there is no reason to overlook the achievements made during the reporting period, including significant progress made on transitional justice. Painful truths emerged, but they vindicated the purpose of seeking truth and reconciliation. However, he warned that reconciliation will be impossible if insecurity persists. The Government should do more, including by implementing its policy of dismantling illegal armed groups and increasing the State’s presence in former conflict-affected areas. He also encouraged the Government to accelerate the purchase of land for the reintegration of former combatants.

JUAN RAMÓN DE LA FUENTE RAMIREZ (Mexico) said Colombia is making significant progress along the path to truth, justice and reconciliation. He expressed concern, however, at the high number of persons displaced by the actions of illegal armed groups and called for the implementation of public policies aimed at protecting former combatants, human rights defenders and indigenous and Afro-Caribbean communities. Agreeing with other speakers that the implementation of the Final Peace Agreement should be reassessed as its fifth anniversary approaches, he said strides towards implementing the women, peace and security agenda at the local level are positive steps. However, any peace and reconciliation ***process*** will be incomplete without the participation of young women. Meanwhile, the implementation of the illicit crop substitution programme faces challenges and greater financial efforts are needed to support its more than 100,000 participating families. He reiterated his calls for dialogue and full respect for human rights, welcoming the good offices efforts of the Verification Mission and the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. Despite the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the consequences of several decades of conflict, there are clear reasons to remain hopeful that Colombia will be a great example of peace and reconciliation, he said.

INGA RHONDA KING (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines), also speaking on behalf of Kenya, Niger and Tunisia, called for greater impetus to strengthen the State’s security machinery, aimed at curbing the relentless violence in Colombia. The authorities must also investigate human rights violations and hold perpetrators accountable, she said, adding that transitional justice is a cornerstone of any peace ***process***. Reiterating previous calls for enhanced ***measures*** to facilitate the proper reintegration of former combatants into Colombian society, including adequate access to basic services, she also urged the authorities to implement the Final Peace Agreement’s chapter guaranteeing the rights of ethnic communities, saying there has been no action on its provisions despite recommendations from the Special High Level Body for Ethnic Peoples. She acknowledged efforts by various stakeholders to encourage the Government and the National Liberation Army (ELN) to engage in dialogue, adding that as the peace ***process*** nears its fifth anniversary, the parties must advance its full implementation in order to reap peace dividends and ensure stability and prosperity.

HAI ANH PHAM (Viet Nam) stressed the importance of political will and determination in pursuing the next steps of the Final Peace Agreement going forward. All relevant parties must keep engaging in constructive dialogue to bring about reconciliation, solidarity and progress for all. Underlining the need for the Government, political parties and other actors to address the root causes of instability — including challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic — he also voiced concern about ongoing violence and the killing of social leaders and former combatants, calling upon the relevant parties to make full use of the security guarantee mechanisms provided by the Final Peace Agreement to protect civilians. It is through the well-being of conflict-affected communities that the value of peace will be proven and maintained, he said.

MONA JUUL (Norway) said ending violence requires all human rights violations and abuses to be investigated and perpetrators to be held accountable, including those behind the attack on the helicopter of President Iván Duque Márquez on 25 June. The full, equal, meaningful and safe participation of women, ethnic minorities and youth in the peace ***process*** must be ensured and protection of human rights defenders strengthened. She welcomed the progress made by the Integrated System for Transitional Justice and urged all actors to make full use of the Truth Commission. Describing as historic the assumption of responsibility by former FARC-EP leaders in the case of the Special Jurisdiction for Peace dealing with hostage-taking and severe deprivation of liberties, she declared: “It is ***unprecedented*** that leaders of a former guerrilla group assume responsibility for crimes against humanity and war crimes. ” Such a development should serve as an example for future cases and a step towards accountability and justice.

T. S. TIRUMURTI (India) welcomed Colombia’s approval of a national policy to dismantle illegal armed groups and expressed his hope that a road map for its implementation will be formulated soon. “Integrated and enhanced presence of State authorities throughout the country is fundamental to lasting and durable peace,” he said, adding that the pace of rural reforms, the reintegration of ex-combatants and the implementation of the illicit crop substitution programme must also be kept up. More steps should be taken to ensure the security of social leaders and human rights defenders, and the Special Investigations Unit of the Attorney-General’s Office should be provided with the resources it needs to combat impunity. Voluntary testimonies before the Truth Commission acknowledging past crimes and seeking forgiveness are a welcome development that will contribute positively to national reconciliation, he added.

DMITRY A. POLYANSKIY (Russian Federation) expressed regret that the Council is, once again, witnessing a worsening situation in Colombia due to a deteriorating security environment and a lack of progress in implementing the Final Peace Agreement. Large-scale protests have been occurring, driven by the slow realization of the peace agreement’s provisions pertaining to education and agrarian-sector reform. He pointed out that as 2022 elections near, civilian safety and security remains a serious challenge with territorial clashes having displaced some 7,500 people. Meanwhile, 15 peace ***process*** participants and 49 human rights defenders have lost their lives, and there is little forward progress on agrarian reform and crop substitution efforts. Local communities have only received 3.5 per cent of land promised for ***agricultural*** use, and no more than 7 per cent of families who agreed to destroy drug crops have received compensation. Noting that cocaine production is increasing annually — unavoidably leading to violence and corruption — he also pointed out that, in the area of transitional justice, no evidence has been given by Government representatives. That raises the question of whether balance can be achieved in the ***process***, which is critical because it involves the killing of civilians. He emphasized that peace is “not a voluntary declaration by one side”, but rather a painstaking ***process*** based on constant dialogue.

BRIAN PATRICK FLYNN (Ireland) said the months since the Council last met on Colombia have witnessed a “truly transformative period for peace and reconciliation” in that country, citing a genuine engagement by former FARC-EP members with conflict victims through the Special Jurisdiction for Peace, information provided by such members to the Unit for the Search of Persons Deemed as Missing and the acknowledgement to the Truth Commission of Government responsibility for extra-judicial killings. He nevertheless voiced concern over the threats faced by those engaging with the transitional justice system and the risks of violence against members of political parties ahead of the electoral period. Recent social unrest has also demonstrated the significant structural challenges still facing Colombian society, he said, stressing that full implementation of the Final Peace Agreement relies on dialogue at the local, municipal and national level, particularly on provisions relating to gender and ethnicity.

GENG SHUANG (China), while welcoming positive progress in implementing the Final Peace Agreement, said its full implementation is a long-term ***process*** in which “twists and turns” are inevitable, as evidenced by recent protests. He detailed a broad array of goals towards whose achievement China supports the Colombian Government’s efforts, including strengthening national governance, promoting social reconciliation, creating conditions conducive to holding peaceful elections in 2022, hastening land reform, addressing poverty, promoting sustainable development and strengthening security in high-risk areas. He also expressed appreciation for the Verification Mission’s work, along with the hope that it will coordinate with the United Nations country team to assist the Government in its pandemic response, implementation of the Final Peace Agreement and maintenance of social stability.

JEFFREY DELAURENTIS (United States) said his country’s donation of 2.5 million COVID-19 vaccine doses to Colombia will allow the Government to immunize people in some of the most vulnerable and remote communities. He welcomed the start of a national dialogue to address the recent protests, adding that law enforcement in Colombia must be held to the highest standards of accountability. The acknowledgement in April by former FARC-EP commanders of a policy of kidnapping, and their acknowledgment of responsibility for crimes against humanity and war crimes, is a vital step for truth, justice and reconciliation. It also shows that former FARC-EP members are committed to the Final Peace Agreement. Voicing concern over growing coca cultivation and production, as reported in a recent study by the United States Government, he said the best way to sustainably address that problem is to combine law enforcement efforts with a robust rural development programme and the promotion of legal economic activity. He expressed his hope that, in the wake of pandemic-related disruptions, the Government will be able to do more in 2021 to help rural farmers.

SVEN JÜRGENSON (Estonia) described recent social unrest in Colombia and the polarization of its society as worrying and urged the parties to put aside their differences and seek a resolution through a peaceful dialogue. Security guarantees and structural reforms must also be enhanced, he said, adding that fighting impunity is the key to stopping the violence being committed against former combatants, social and indigenous leaders as well as human rights defenders. Emphasizing the need to bring perpetrators to justice and ensure the security of vulnerable social groups across the country, he stated: “Limited State presence, poverty and illegal armed groups are the main causes of violence and need to be addressed. ” He went on to encourage the Government to continue its vaccination strategy as a third wave of COVID-19 reaches Colombia.

NICOLAS DE RIVIÈRE (France), Council President for July, spoke in his national capacity, commending the efforts of the Colombian Government and people to implement the Final Peace Agreement. He noted, however, that recent weeks have seen social unrest “on an ***exceptional*** scale” and called for dialogue. Colombia is being tested by a new wave of COVID-19, a deteriorating security situation and crimes against human rights defenders, social leaders and former combatants, he said, stressing that State presence must be strengthened in rural areas. Turning to transitional justice, he welcomed the acceptance of responsibility by former FARC-EP leaders and urged all parties to engage with the Truth Commission. Progress must also be made in implementing peace agreement provisions concerning rural reform, land access, crop substitution and political participation, he said.

MARTA LUCIA RAMIREZ, Vice President and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Colombia, said that, despite efforts by the Colombian Government and people towards genuine, sustainable peace, drug trafficking remains a challenge in her country. Pointing out that this important issue did not feature heavily in the Council’s discussion, she expressed hope that former FARC-EP members will commit to addressing it, including by identifying drug trafficking routes, allies and resource distribution. She also called for shared international responsibility in combating the related threats of deforestation, drug trafficking and human trafficking.

Recalling that the implementation of the 2016 Final Peace Agreement — which costs the equivalent of two years of Colombia’s entire gross domestic product (GDP) — was contemplated over a 15-year time frame, she noted that only five years have passed since its signing. Progress should be acknowledged, she said, expressing surprise that the 15-year period was not mentioned in the Secretary-General’s report. Recent violence does not result from a breach of the peace agreement, but rather from criminal activity that existed before it was signed. Citing “undeniable” evidence of strides towards political, economic and social reintegration, she said that, of those reintegrated, 85.7 per cent received Government economic support and 90 per cent received vocational training. Some 1,373 hectares have been authorized for guaranteed housing and land access and $4.2 million has been allocated for the purchase of plots for ***agricultural*** development projects in the Territorial Areas for Training and Reintegration. Security ***measures*** enacted to ensure that no FARC political party candidate was assassinated or kidnapped during the 2019 elections remain in place for 2022.

Emphasizing that the Government will not waver in its efforts to protect those “who have laid down their weapons and opted for peace”, she said the recent protests were primarily linked to suffering experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic and were exacerbated by extreme poverty. For that reason, the Government has been prioritizing the concerns of young people by establishing programmes for free education. The deaths that occurred during the protests — while regrettable — are the result of fringe elements who infiltrated the demonstrations, sometimes armed, to commit vandalism. Noting that police intervention was only necessary in about 11 per cent of the 15,000 demonstrations, she said such action was required in response to the systematic destruction planned by some actors to undermine social stability.

**Load-Date:** July 15, 2021

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[***Border Security (Executive Session); Congressional Record Vol. 167, No. 162 (Senate - September 20, 2021)***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:63NK-X4G1-F0YC-N508-00000-00&context=1516831)

Impact News Service

September 21, 2021 Tuesday

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**Length:** 2945 words

**Body**

Washington: The Library of Congress, The Government of USA has issued the following house proceeding:

Mr. CORNYN. Madam President, the crisis along our southern border is bad and has been getting worse since Joe Biden became President. Last month, more than 200,000 migrants crossed our southern border-- the second month in a row that we have seen a number that high. Since President Biden raised his right hand and took the oath of office on January 20, Customs and Border Protection has stopped more than 1.2 million border crossers. That is nearly triple the total number it was at this point in the Obama administration, and more than eight times the number of migrants stopped at this point during the Trump administration. These numbers have real consequences. Migrants are exploited, abused, raped, and some die on their dangerous trips to our border. Once they arrive, Border Patrol, local law enforcement, and nongovernmental organizations are expected to do a lion's task with a mouse's resources, and the surge of resources to migrants leaves serious security vulnerabilities that are exploited by cartels and criminal organizations. Even before this current crisis with Haitians, Border Patrol officials have told me, just to deal with unaccompanied children and the number of migrants coming to the border, that as many as 40 percent of the Border Patrol have had to leave the front lines of protecting the border, which means that the drug cartels can simply exploit those gaps in the Border Patrol's security line in order to move illegal drugs into the United States that, last year alone, took the lives of more than 90,000 Americans by overdose. As though things weren't challenging enough already, the city of Del Rio, with a population of 35,000 people, has been flooded by a group of nearly 15,000 migrants. Can you imagine? A city of 35,000 sees this huge human tsunami of 15,000 migrants almost exclusively from Haiti. By the way, this ought to demonstrate that this is not just a regional phenomenon. I know the Vice President went down to Central America and said that she talked to the Presidents of the Central American countries, of the Triangle countries, and said: Please don't send your people to the United States. Meanwhile, the green light was on at the border as a result of the refusal to enforce the basic security laws that were put in place by the previous administration. In fact, it looks like the guiding principle of the Biden administration was, whatever the previous administration did, we are going to undo it. They forgot to put an alternative plan in place, and so the people keep coming--1.2 million migrants, just so far, since the Biden administration began. Well, migrants have now set up a camp under the International Bridge in Del Rio, in 100-degree temperatures. And they have been so brazen that they literally have gone back and forth across the river to Mexico to purchase supplies--food, water, or whatever. They have been able to go back and forth virtually at will. Border Patrol and State and local officials have been working around the clock to ease the humanitarian crisis that President Biden and his policies created, and they are being overwhelmed. As I said, Del Rio isn't a huge city with unlimited resources. It is, roughly, 2\1/2\ times the size of the migrant group, and like other border communities, the city has experienced a one-two punch in the last year and a half because of COVID-19. First came the pandemic and a full range of new expenses. Then the strain was compounded by the restrictions on so-called nonessential cross-border travel, which has been in place for a year and a half. Pre-pandemic folks from Mexico, if they had the proper paperwork, would travel across the border to shop, to eat, and to visit family members, and they were huge economic drivers of our border communities. The Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas estimated that, prior to these restrictions, between 40 to 45 percent of all retail activity in Laredo, for example, was attributable to Mexican nationals. That has dried up completely. Leaders in Texas, like the ones I met with in Brownsville last week, are struggling to understand the contradiction between the Biden administration's two different approaches. On the one hand, the administration is saying it is too dangerous for Mexican nationals to visit families in Texas or to shop in our stores because of the virus; but on the other hand, the administration is allowing 1.2 million migrants to cross our borders--untested, unvaccinated, most of whom are simply waved on through into the interior of the United States and told to appear at a future court hearing, which most of them will never show up for. We simply don't know what kind of risks these untested, unvaccinated migrants who are being waved into the interior of the United States could pose to communities in Texas or across the country. Just last week, the Department of Homeland Security Office of Inspector General found that, without stronger COVID-19 testing ***measures*** in place, the Department is putting everyone--migrants, Border Patrol agents, Customs agents, and the local communities along the border--at greater risk. Still, the Biden administration has refused to take any sort of serious action that would stop the flood of humanity coming across our border. Yes, they have paid lip service. They have said: Don't come. Meanwhile, the migrants are on the phone, talking to family in the United States, or they are simply watching American TV as the flood of humanity continues to come across the border without there being any real consequences. On Friday, the current surge of primarily Haitian migrants became so overwhelming that the Biden administration closed a legal port of entry in Del Rio, as well as interior checkpoints. [[Page S6543]] For those of our colleagues who have actually been to the border, they know that Customs and Border Protection checks people as they enter the country at the border, but there are also interior checkpoints because we know many people aren't identified until they are found in an 18-wheeler trailer or embedded in some sort of hiding place or when the drugs that people are trying to smuggle into the United States are found often at the interior checkpoints. Because of the flood of humanity coming across the border because the Border Patrol at Del Rio was so overwhelmed, 400 Border Patrol agents were reassigned from other places, including interior checkpoints, to come help deal with the masses. That created a huge vulnerability for the drug smugglers and human smugglers. So-called nonessential travel was already shut down, but the administration bungled the entire situation so badly that they had to shut down essential trade and travel as well. Last Friday, I spoke with Border Patrol Deputy Chief Manny Padilla-- somebody I have known for years and who used to be the chief of the Rio Grande Valley's sector of the Border Patrol. He told me that the main focus at the time, of course, was trying to deal with the humanitarian crisis of getting food, water, and sanitation to these individuals. Once the most urgent humanitarian needs are met, the ***processing*** and potential removal of migrants will move more quickly. So far, a few thousand migrants have been moved to other Border Patrol sectors for ***processing***. Again, because Del Rio's sector was overwhelmed, they had to bus them as far away as Arizona just to ***process*** people through the border. Some have already been returned to Haiti, and in the coming days, we can expect more flights to move some of the thousands of migrants back home. The Department of Homeland Security has claimed that they will use title 42, a public health authority, to expel the vast majority of migrants. But the administration needs to be honest with us. Will they use this title 42 authority--again, to protect the public health--to expel migrant families, too, and not just single adults? If not, will the Department use the expedited removal authority to swiftly remove these migrant families and, in doing so, deter others from coming? Or will they essentially continue to wave people through, encouraging even more migrants to make their way to the border? And will these migrants that they do have remain in custody until a removal decision is rendered? We know that catch and release simply doesn't work. It can be exploited to the point where people know that, if we don't detain them, we will give them this notice to appear--sometimes called, in Spanish, a permiso--and they will be sent into the interior of the United States, many of whom are never heard from again. The Department of Homeland Security and the administration need to back up their proposed plans of dealing with this crisis--and their public statements--with real and immediate consequences to cut off the flow and deter future immigration. There is a clear and urgent need for Congress to take action, and contrary to what our Democratic colleagues believe, blanket amnesty is not the answer. That will serve as an additional magnet for illegal immigration. Rather than address the crisis at hand, our Democratic colleagues have spent the bulk of this year figuring out how to bend the rules of the Senate to grant citizenship to millions of people who have entered this country illegally. Their plan would have provided legal status to people who entered the country as recently as this year, as long as they would have been 18 years or younger when they had arrived. It would have turned our ag sector on its head by legalizing unlawfully present farmworkers with absolutely no provisions to ensure that our ***agriculture*** producers would have access to a stable workforce. And it would have legalized millions of people with temporary protected status without even addressing the fact that this temporary program has been in existence for three decades. There is a reason that Senate Democrats tried to pass a partisan bill by using the arcane budget procedures instead of the normal legislative ***process***. These policies do nothing to alleviate the crisis that has existed on the border since Joe Biden became President. They fail to address the underlying reason people are unlawfully present and living in the shadows in the first place, and they literally reward illegal immigration. It is unfair to those immigrants who follow our laws and wait patiently in line. Yesterday, the Senate Parliamentarian confirmed what we already suspected, and that is that our Democratic colleagues will not be able to use budget procedures to grant citizenship to millions of undocumented immigrants in a purely partisan budget reconciliation bill. Our Democratic colleagues have said they have a plan B, and while I haven't seen any details about what that might entail, I seriously doubt it will succeed. I hope our colleagues will respect the decision made by the neutral, unbiased guidance of the Parliamentarian and avoid nuking the rules of the Senate to achieve a partisan political goal. In the meantime, there is a clear and urgent crisis on our southern border, and President Biden has proven that he is either unwilling or incapable of addressing it. But Congress also has a duty to take action that can only be done in a bipartisan way. It is not too late for our friends across the aisle to abandon their partisan amnesty plan and work with us on this side to address the actual crisis at hand. And I have a suggestion about where we can start. Last April, Senator Sinema, the senior Senator from Arizona, and I introduced the Bipartisan Border Solutions Act to address this unfettered flow of immigration. I have been proud to also work--we have both been proud to work with two friends and colleagues in the House--Congressman Henry Cuellar, a Democrat, and Tony Gonzales, a Republican. So it is literally a bipartisan and bicameral piece of legislation. Perhaps it is because the four of us live in and represent border States, we have spent time listening and learning from the men and women who safeguard our border and those who care for migrants and those who live in these border communities that are disproportionately impacted. There are a lot of people who talk about what has happened at the border who have never even been there. They inaccurately characterize border communities as unsafe and lawless. They villainize the Border Patrol and other law enforcement agencies for actually enforcing the laws that Congress has passed. And they propose blanket solutions to the complex challenges that exist, which would do far more harm than good. The fact is, the border is a beautiful, safe, and vibrant region. The men and women who lead and protect these communities are doing everything in their power to fairly and humanely respond to the crisis, but they are simply being overwhelmed and asked to do something that is the Federal Government's responsibility. That is why our legislation is important. It would streamline the ***processing*** of migrants in regional ***processing*** centers that would provide new protections for unaccompanied children, one-third of whom have been lost--lost--because they have been placed with sponsors, and when the Federal Government tries to follow up and find out how they are doing, a third of them never respond, and they are lost to the system. Our bill would also expedite legal proceedings and ensure that we have enough immigration judge teams, asylum officers, and staff to do things the right way. A number of groups have endorsed the bill, not partisan groups, and it constitutes a simple starting point that Democrats and Republicans should be able to agree on. Democrats cannot continue to turn a blind eye to the humanitarian crisis on our southern border. To borrow a phrase from a sign held by one Del Rio resident last week: ``No more optics. We want action.'' The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Iowa. Mr. GRASSLEY. Madam President, first, I thank Senator Cornyn for his remarks, particularly the points he made about the ruling of the Parliamentarian. I come to the floor to address the same issue. [[Page S6544]] We received last night guidance from the Senate Parliamentarians regarding the ***unprecedented*** attempt to include wide-ranging immigration provisions in the upcoming reconciliation bill. Now, for the public at large, when they hear the word ``reconciliation,'' it is a ***process*** by which you don't have to have 60 votes in the U.S Senate to get to finality on a bill. But reconciliation is something that has been used only twice, I believe, in the last 5 years. So it is not something that you just willy-nilly go to to get a lot of things done that you couldn't otherwise get done. But this looks like what the Democrat majority is trying to do in the reconciliation bill with the issue of immigration, and so I am thankful for the decision made by the Parliamentarian. That guidance by the Parliamentarian indicated that a proposal to legalize millions of undocumented immigrants is not appropriate for inclusion in a budget reconciliation bill. As ranking member of the Senate Judiciary Committee, my office was deeply involved in the bipartisan discussions that took place with the Parliamentarian on this issue. I will say that I agree with the Parliamentarian's guidance. I think it reflects an obvious truth-- changing the law to legalize millions of undocumented immigrants is a major policy change with significant impact that reaches far beyond the Federal budget and not appropriate for reconciliation. More broadly, reform of our immigration laws is an important public policy issue. It is a topic that many Americans and many Members of Congress on both sides of the aisle care deeply about. It is an issue that inspires fierce debate, sharp disagreements, and great passion in people on both sides of the argument. It does so because, at its core, the issue of immigration is about the policies that we put in place to give people from all around the world one of the most meaningful and precious gifts that we can give--the right to legally establish your life here and, in many cases, pursue American citizenship. And whether you pursue citizenship or not, you have the right to the American dream. And you can see how important that coming to the United States is by just the hundreds of thousands of people so far this year breaking our laws to come into this country. It shows you how ***exceptional*** our great America is and the economic and the political and the social system we have that is so endeared to people all over the world that they want to come here, even breaking our laws to get here. And, of course, whether it is citizenship or the American dream, that is not something that can be boiled down to a Congressional Budget Office score. It is not something that can be reduced to a line item in the Federal budget. I think everyone here in Congress and Americans around the country already knew that. That is what made this most recent attempt to abuse the reconciliation ***process*** by the Democratic leadership even more obvious. As ranking member of the Senate Judiciary Committee, I look forward to continue working with my colleagues on ***measures*** to secure the border and improve our immigration system, but those ***measures*** need to be pursued in a way that complies with the rules of the Senate, not the subterfuge of what we call reconciliation. The recent proposal put forward by Democrats in the Senate clearly was not, and I hope we can engage in a more productive legislative ***process*** moving forward on the subject of immigration. I yield the floor. The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alabama.

**Load-Date:** September 22, 2021

**End of Document**



[***Dee River Basin District in England programme of measures: mechanisms summary***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:65GB-RRF1-JDG9-Y1NH-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

London: UK Government has issued the following news release:

The Water Environment (Water Framework Directive) (England & Wales) Regulations 2017 (referred to as the WFD Regulations) provide a framework for managing the water environment in England.

Under the WFD Regulations, a river basin management plan must be prepared for each river basin district. The plan includes environmental objectives and a summary of the programmes of ***measures*** required to achieve those objectives.

The information on mechanisms presented here underpins the summary programmes of ***measures*** in the updated Dee River Basin Management Plan. It focuses on the statutory and non-statutory mechanisms needed to translate ***measures*** into outcomes.

Mechanisms describe the policy, legal or financial tools needed to implement a particular ***measure***. For example, a legal mechanism may require that a particular activity can only be carried out in accordance with an environmental permit and its conditions. In this case the ***measure*** would be to ensure that all such activities have appropriate permits in place, and the legislation underpinning it provides the ‘mechanism ’ to ensure the environment is protected.

A range of mechanisms can be used, from regulatory interventions for example, permitting and enforcement to non-legislative approaches such as providing advice and guidance. Mechanisms are often used in combination to give effect to particular ***measures***.

A range of mechanisms are available to implement ***measures***.

Legislative ***measures***

These ***measures*** include:

* product controls

1. bans, prohibitions, notices
2. environmental permits and statutory requirements, including registrations, general binding rules, standard permits, bespoke permits, tradable permits and quotas
3. spatial planning policies
4. byelaws

Financial ***measures***

These ***measures*** include:

* financial incentives

1. financial disincentives

Non-legislative ***measures***

These ***measures*** include:

* cooperative agreements

1. voluntary guidance, codes of practice
2. voluntary assurance schemes
3. education, targeted information
4. general campaigns
5. face-to-face advice
6. naming and shaming
7. shared learning, research
8. demonstration projects
9. network building
10. locally driven direct action including catchment based approach

2. Cross-cutting legislation for protecting water

2.1 The 25 Year Environment Plan

The Government ’ s 25 Year Environment Plan sets out its commitment to a comprehensive and long-term approach to protecting and enhancing nature. The wider environment ambition set out in the plan is to leave the environment in a better state than found within a generation.

Now that the United Kingdom has left the European Union, control of important areas of environmental policy has returned to domestic control. The 25 Year Environment Plan seeks to “strengthen and enhance the protections our countryside, rivers, coastline and wildlife habitats enjoy, and develop new methods of ***agricultural*** and fisheries support which put the environment first” (25 Year Environment Plan, Foreword from the Prime Minister). The plan sets out the environmental ambition under a number of goals.

The UK will achieve:

* clean air

1. clean and plentiful water
2. thriving plants and wildlife
3. reduced risk of harm from environmental hazards such as flooding and drought
4. using resources from nature more sustainably and efficiently
5. enhanced beauty, heritage and engagement with the natural environment

Pressures on the natural environment will be managed by:

* mitigating and adapting to climate change

1. minimising waste
2. managing exposure to chemicals
3. enhancing biosecurity

UK policies will focus on:

* using and managing land sustainably

1. recovering nature and enhancing the beauty of landscapes
2. connecting people with the environment to improve health and wellbeing
3. increasing resource efficiency, and reducing pollution and waste
4. securing clean, productive and biologically diverse seas and oceans
5. protecting and improving the global environment

The “clean and plentiful water” goal describes in more detail how the government will address the long term ambition for the water environment. The following will improve at least three quarters of the UK ’ s waters to be close to their natural state as soon as is practicable by:

* reducing the damaging abstraction of water from rivers and groundwater, ensuring that by 2021 the proportion of water bodies with enough water to support environmental standards increases from 82% to 90% for surface water bodies and from 72% to 77% for groundwater bodies

1. reaching or exceeding objectives for rivers, lakes, coastal and ground waters that are specially protected, whether for biodiversity or drinking water in line with the river basin management plans
2. supporting Ofwat ’ s ambitions on leakage, minimising the amount of water lost through leakage year on year, with water companies expected to reduce leakage by at least an average of 15% by 2025
3. minimising by 2030 the harmful bacteria in designated bathing waters and continuing to improve the cleanliness of UK waters. Potential bathers will be warned of any short-term pollution risks

The government has already brought forward many of the actions set out in the 25 Year Environment Plan including a range of supporting strategies and a new Environment Act 2021.

2.2 Environment Act 2021

The Environment Act 2021 will help deliver the government ’ s manifesto commitment to delivering the most ambitious environmental programme of any country on earth. It is part of the wider government response to the clear and scientific case, and growing public demand, for a step-change in environmental protection and recovery.

Acting as one of the key vehicles for delivering the vision set out in the 25 Year Environment Plan, the Environment Act 2021 brings about urgent and meaningful action to combat the environmental and climate crisis. It sets a new and ambitious domestic framework for environmental governance and helps to deliver on the government ’ s commitment to be the first generation to leave the environment in a better state.

The provisions in the Environment Act 2021 will help to manage the impact of human activity on the environment, creating a more sustainable and resilient economy, and enhancing well-being and quality of life. It will engage and empower citizens, local government and businesses to deliver environmental outcomes and create a positive legacy for future generations.

The Environment Act 2021, which principally applies to England only, introduces ***measures*** under a number of broad headings. Find more information on the specific ***measures***:

* environmental governance

1. waste and resource efficiency
2. air quality and environmental recall
3. water
4. nature, biodiversity and conservation covenants

2.3 Bathing waters

Bathing water quality is assessed through the Bathing Water Regulations 2013 which includes microbiological standards and a requirement to provide information about bathing waters on signs at beaches and online. In addition, the public must be informed about bathing water quality and beach management. Waters are classified into 4 categories – excellent, good, sufficient and poor. All bathing waters should meet at least sufficient. Where any waters are classified as poor, advice against bathing must be provided for the following season.

The Environment Agency is the competent authority under the Bathing Water Regulations.

The regulations are supported by other mechanisms that control pollution from particular points or from more widespread, or diffuse, sources (see sections 6 and 7 of this document).

There have been significant improvements in bathing water quality as a result of work by the Environment Agency and partners, including water companies, local authorities and farmers and land-owners. Significant improvements have been made to discharges from water company sewage treatment works and the sewerage infrastructure. These improvements have been funded through the price review of water companies ’ spending, which includes environmental investments.

You can find out more about each bathing water at Bathing water quality on data.gov.uk

There is growing enthusiasm for wild swimming, which may lead to more rivers being designated as bathing waters and being specifically managed for this purpose.

You can find further information about the ***process*** for designating bathing waters at Bathing waters: apply for designation or de-designation.

2.4 Environmental impact assessments

A number of statutory instruments (as listed in this section) require an assessment to be made of the effects of certain development projects, such as large-scale industrial or infrastructure projects, which are likely to have significant effects on the environment. The assessment must be made before the competent authority grants development consent so that it is aware of any likely significant effects of the development on the environment. The aim of the environmental impact assessment is also to ensure that the public are given early and effective opportunities to participate in the decision making procedures.

The project developer must compile the information reasonably required to assess the likely significant effects of the development. The information finally compiled by the applicant is known as an environmental statement. The environmental statement must be publicised. The competent authority must then take into account the environmental statement and any other information which is relevant to the decision when deciding whether or not to give development consent. When considering the available information, the competent authority should identify, describe and assess the impacts on people, plants and animals, soil, water, air, climate and the landscape, the built environment and cultural heritage, including how these factors link together. This enables the competent authority to assess whether a proposed development will have significant impacts on water bodies, and other elements of the environment, whether there are mitigation or avoidance ***measures*** that could remove or reduce any significant adverse effects and whether the development may prevent environmental objectives being achieved.

Statutory instruments cover the consenting procedures for various categories of development, including activities such as forestry and quarrying:

* projects in England that require planning permission are governed by the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017

1. projects that require a marine licence are governed by the Marine Works (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2007 (as amended)

Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations covering other consenting regimes include:

* Environmental Impact Assessment (Land Drainage Improvement Works) Regulations 1999

1. Harbour Works (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 1999
2. Water Resources (Environmental Impact Assessment) (England and Wales) Regulations 2003 as amended
3. Environmental Impact Assessment (Uncultivated Land and Semi-natural Areas) Regulations 2001 (England)

The Environment Agency is a statutory consultee for environmental impact assessments for developments that may affect the water environment. The Environment Agency also acts as a developer for example, for flood risk improvement and waterways projects, and carries out environmental impact assessments for these where needed.

The Environment Agency is a competent authority for certain developments under the Environmental Impact Assessment (Land Drainage Improvement Works) Regulations and The Water Resources (Environmental Impact Assessment) (England and Wales) Regulations.

You can find further guidance on environmental impact assessment as required by the town and country planning regulations.

2.5 Groundwater

Groundwater is protected against pollution and deterioration primarily by the Environmental Permitting (England and Wales) Regulations 2016 (EPR), Water Resources Act 1991 and the Water Environment (Water Framework Directive) (England and Wales) Regulations 2017 (referred to as the WFD Regulations). Directions to the Environment Agency are provided by the Water Framework Directive (Standards and Classification) Directions (England and Wales) 2015 and the Groundwater (Water Framework Directive) (England) Direction 2016.

The WFD Regulations set out objectives for groundwater quantity and quality and provides the framework for achieving good status in all groundwater bodies. The above directions and regulations clarify the requirements for assessing groundwater chemical status, identifying and reversing upward trends in pollutants and ***measures*** to prevent or limit inputs of pollutants into groundwater. In addition, they control inputs of hazardous substances and non-hazardous pollutants and other activities that might lead to accidental losses.

Any activity that meets the legal definition of a ‘groundwater activity ’ requires a permit (unless specifically exempted under the EPR) and carrying on a groundwater activity without a permit is an offence. Permits require conditions to prevent pollution or potentially polluting activities and notices can be served to control or prohibit activities that represent a risk to groundwater.

Enforcement of (***agricultural***) groundwater activity permits are also a part of cross-compliance inspections.

The legislation to protect groundwater are complemented and enhanced by additional ***measures*** including sector specific Groundwater Protection Codes of Practice and ‘The Environment Agency ’ s approach to groundwater protection ’ published on GOV.UK which sets out the policy and positions to how the Environment Agency deals with activities that pose a risk to groundwater.

See further information in the groundwater protection guides.

2.6 Nature conservation

England has nature conservation legislation that all public bodies and others including developers and landowners must comply with. This legislation protects England ’ s natural habitats and species and covers internationally, nationally and locally significant species and habitats. Compliance with this legislation contributes towards the ambitions set out in the 25 Year Environment Plan and will in many cases help to achieve the environmental objectives of this river basin management plan.

You can find out more about the links between nature conservation legislation, the 25 Year Environment Plan and river basin planning in Biodiversity: challenges for the water environment.

There is direct link between the environmental objectives of river basin management plans and the legislation described here, which are mutually supportive. In most cases compliance with nature conservation legislation will help to achieve the environmental objectives of river basin management plans and the other drivers for those plans. For example, improving water quality will also in many cases contribute to the achievement of the nature conservation objectives. For further information see Biodiversity duty: public authority duty to have regard to conserving biodiversity.

The Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 committed the UK to an ambitious approach to managing the marine environment that included the introduction of national Marine Protected Areas known as Marine Conservation Zones. Marine Conservation Zones are areas that protect a range of nationally important, rare or threatened habitats and species. River basin management plans apply out to 1 nautical mile offshore, and so help protect coastal and marine habitats, such as Marine Conservation Zones and other Marine Protected Areas. This includes where protective ***measures*** are applied from source to sea and from catchment to coast.

A summary of the legislation applying in England is as follows:

Regulations 63 and 65 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017. See section 2.6.1 in this document for more information.

Environment Act 1995 s6

Places a general duty on the Environment Agency to such an extent they consider desirable to promote the conservation and enhancement of the natural beauty and amenity of inland and coastal waters and the conservation of flora and fauna dependent on an aquatic environment.

Environment Act 1995 s7

The following applies:

* section 7(1)(a) imposes on the Environment Agency a duty to further conservation and enhancement of natural beauty and SSSIs

1. section 7(1)(b) applies to pollution control functions. It requires the Environment Agency to:

* have regard to the desirability of conserving and enhancing natural beauty

1. conserving SSSI features when formulating or considering any proposals
2. section 7(1)(c) imposes a duty on the Environment Agency to take account of effect of exercising its functions on flora and fauna, it doesn ’ t place more emphasis on designated sites, areas of nature conservation are all to be considered

Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 s125

The following applies:

* places a duty on public bodies to take into account impacts on Marine Conservation Zones (MCZ) and to further the objective of the MCZ

1. where it is not possible to further these objectives, functions must be undertaken in the manner which least hinders the achievement of those objectives
2. if a public authority considers that any of its functions would or might significantly hinder the achievement of the conservation objectives for an MCZ, it must inform the appropriate statutory conservation body of that fact

Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, s28G

Places a duty on public bodies in exercising their functions to take reasonable steps to further the conservation and enhancement of the special features of Sites of Special Scientific Interest.

Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, s28I

Permissions, plans and projects need to be assessed to determine whether they are likely to damage a SSSI, and if they are, to engage in consultation with Natural England.

Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 s28K

The following applies:

* gives Natural England powers to serve a management notice to ensure that conservation or restoration works are implemented

1. empowers Natural England to carry out the works itself and recover the costs from the owner or occupier
2. may require a consent for the works

Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 s14

Prohibits release to the wild of scheduled invasive-non- native species or allowing them to escape into the wild.

Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 s40

Requires public bodies to ‘have regard, so far as is consistent with the proper exercise of those functions (for example, granting licences), to the purpose of conserving biodiversity ’ .

Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 s41

In terms of which habitats and species are considered to be of ‘principal importance ’ under this legislation, Section 41 of the act requires the secretary of state in conjunction with the conservation bodies to draw up a list of species and habitats in England which must be considered for the purpose of s40.

2.6.1 Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations

The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended) aims to protect biodiversity through the conservation of certain natural habitats and wild plants and animals of pan-European importance. The regulations provide for the designation and protection of Special Areas of Conservation for specific natural habitats and species, and Special Protection Areas for birds. Collectively, these sites are referred to as ‘European sites ’ . The individual sites, supported by features of the landscape which help connect them with each other and improve their coherence, collectively make up a national site network of European sites. Prior to UK ’ s exit from the European Union, these sites formed part of the EU ’ s Natura 2000 network. ***Measures*** must be introduced to maintain or restore to ‘favourable conservation status ’ the natural habitats and populations of wild plants and animals identified in the regulations. Water-dependent European sites are ‘protected areas ’ as defined in the Water Environment (WFD) (England and Wales) Regulations 2017.

By policy convention, terrestrial European sites are also notified as one or more Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). More information on SSSIs and conservation can be found in section 2.6

The Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, called the Ramsar Convention, is an intergovernmental treaty that provides the framework for national action and international cooperation for the conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources. Government policy is to treat Wetlands of International Importance (Ramsar sites) in the same way as European sites.

Competent authorities under the Conservation Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended) have duties to protect, conserve and restore European sites.

View Duty to protect, conserve and restore European sites for further information.

The duties include a requirement that competent authorities (including the Environment Agency) carry out an assessment under the Habitats Regulations, known as a Habitats Regulations assessment for any plan or project. A competent authority can usually only allow a plan or project if the Habitats Regulations assessment shows it will not adversely affect the integrity of any European site. There are certain exceptions to this, known as a derogation if a plan or project can pass 3 legal tests. View Regulations assessments: protecting a European site for more information.

2.6.2 Nature Recovery Network

The 25 Year Environment Plan promotes the establishment of a Nature Recovery Network: a bigger, better quality and increasingly connected network of places that are richer in wildlife, support the recovery of species, and are more resilient to climate change and other pressures. The Network will include the existing best areas for nature, such as protected sites and national nature reserves, and an additional 500,000 hectares of created or restored wildlife-rich habitat. The Network will provide wider environmental, economic and social benefits, including carbon capture and recreational enjoyment.

As well as helping wildlife to thrive, the Network will provide wider environmental, economic and social benefits, such as carbon capture, pollination, water quality improvements, flood risk mitigation, and wider public enjoyment and understanding.

River basin planning recognises the connectivity between water bodies from catchments to the sea and that actions in one place can have impacts elsewhere in the system. Taking action to restore connectivity across catchments is vital to the achievement of the environmental objectives of the river basin management plans, addressing the climate and biodiversity crisis. Including river and other waters in the Nature Recovery Network will deliver multiple benefits.

Spatial planning is an important mechanism for achieving a joined-up network of natural habitats that starts to restore the functioning of natural systems. The Environment Act 2021 establishes spatial mapping and planning tools to inform nature recovery: Local Nature Recovery Strategies. It also creates duties and incentives to drive change on the ground and sets the framework for at least one legally binding biodiversity target. These ***measures*** have been designed to work together to enable delivery of the Nature Recovery Network.

2.6.3 Future ***measures*** for biodiversity and water

The Environment Act 2021 makes provision for the setting and reviewing of long term targets for the natural environment. This includes the setting of targets for biodiversity to achieve the ambitions of the 25 Year Environment Plan. Many of the programmes of ***measures*** in the river basin management plans will contribute to achieving Environment Act 2021 targets, and similarly, these targets may drive action which helps achieve the environmental objectives of the plans.

The Environment Act 2021 has several ***measures*** applying to nature conservation and the expectation on public bodies and others on how they will contribute to nature conservation and recovery. Here is a summary of the main ***measures*** in parts 6 and 7 of this document relating to nature conservation and conservation covenants that are expected to help achieve the environmental objectives of the river basin management plans:

* there will be a strengthening of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act duty for public authorities. When implementing the river basin management plans, public bodies, will need to take this revised duty into account

1. local areas will need a Local Nature Recovery Strategy to map and plan priorities for nature recovery at a local and national level, thus helping to direct action and investment towards the creation of a national Nature Recovery Network

* when implementing the river basin management plans, public bodies, other organisations and individuals will need to take these Local Nature Recovery Strategies into account

1. the establishment of natural networks will achieve multiple benefits that will in turn help to achieve the environmental objectives of the river basin management plans
2. new ‘biodiversity net gain ’ ***measures*** will mean that new developments, including housing, will help wildlife to thrive by improving habitats and creating green spaces close to where people live; this provides an opportunity for delivering the environmental objectives of the river basin management plans as part of this biodiversity net gain
3. conservation covenants will allow landowners to create legally binding agreements to conserve land for future generations; this may help to achieve more certainty on the long term management of nature based solutions

2.6.4 ***Measures*** for biodiversity sites

The following planning tools and delivery programmes are used to develop detailed ***measures*** for European sites, Ramsar sites and sites of special scientific interest, in order to achieve their conservation objectives.

Remedies on sites of special scientific interest describe the actions needed to address reasons for adverse condition and restore the site to favourable condition. They are agreed by the organisation responsible for their delivery. They provide a recognised plan of action for restoring the site to favourable condition. Major stakeholders in the management of sites of special scientific interest have access to the database and this drives action to address the site condition. Remedies represent the recognised plan of action that forms the basis of the programme of ***measures*** for European sites.

Site Improvement Plans provide an overview of the issues affecting features at a European site level and the actions required to address them. They were published in 2015 as part of the Improvement Programme for England ’ s Natura 2000 Sites (IPENS). They set out the broader actions that may need to be delivered to support the condition of the site.

As part of the Improvement Programme for England ’ s Natura 2000 Sites (IPENS), Site Improvement Plans and themed action plans have been developed. These enable Natural England, the Environment Agency, and other key partners to plan what, how, where and when to target their efforts on European sites and the areas surrounding them. Site Improvement Plans provide an overview of the issues affecting features at a site level and the actions required to address them. Theme plans are high-level plans that aim to improve management of a range of key issues, for example hydrology and invasive non-native species, on the national network of European sites as a whole. Theme plans provide an over-arching direction, recommendations, or outline approaches that will help achieve the conservation objectives for European sites in England, and complement work already underway on individual sites. Recommended actions and next steps identified in the plans are not necessarily committed or resourced.

Diffuse Water Pollution Plans are tools to help reduce diffuse pollution at protected sites.

Water Level Management Plans are non-statutory site management plans for managing water levels, typically through the use of control structures such as artificial channels, sluices or pumps. They are used in a range of wetland habitats. For European sites and sites of special scientific interest they identify a water level management regime that will help the site achieve its conservation objectives. They are the responsibility of flood risk management authorities acting in consultation with Natural England.

River Restoration Programme is a joint programme between the Environment Agency and Natural England which delivers major river restoration schemes on European Sites.

Lake Restoration Programme is a joint programme between the Environment Agency and Natural England which delivers lake restoration schemes on European Sites.

The Habitat Compensation Programme includes strategic programmes, led by the Environment Agency in close co-operation with Natural England and a range of organisations interested in being part of their delivery. They operate in discrete geographical areas and plan for creation of compensatory habitat to address projected losses of habitat in European sites associated with management of coastal and flood defences.

2.7 Catchment based approach

Responsibility for improving the water and wider environment cannot rest exclusively with government. As river basin planning legislation encourages, all of society has an impact upon and so, needs to contribute to, river basin management plans. In line with the legislation, an approach to engaging with local communities and jointly planning action on an ongoing basis has been established.

The Catchment Based Approach (CaBA) policy framework was established by Defra in 2013 to drive integrated catchment management across England. CaBA has established independently community led partnerships in each of the 106 management catchments across England. They engage local communities and encourage wider participation in identifying the local pressures, agreeing priorities and planning ongoing actions to tackle their priority issues. CaBA catchment partnerships are supported by a national network of Environment Agency catchment coordinators. An independent CaBA National Support Group (NSG) and website has been established to assist innovation and further evolution of the approach.

Evidence shows that strong partnership working yields benefits to deliver ambitions for the water environment and meet the environmental objectives of the river basin management plans. CaBA has a proven track record of delivering and securing outcomes. For every £1 of government investment, the partnerships raise over £3 from non-government sources for local project delivery. The strengths of CaBA catchment partnerships are their convening power. They are an access point for active involvement by public, private and civil society stakeholders. They enable cross sector collaboration to leverage additional resources and mobilise more investment. Over 2,500 organisations are involved nationally in CaBA from public, private and civil society sectors; engaging with over 20,000 stakeholders; delivering nearly 1,000 projects a year to improve catchment resilience.

2.8 Shellfish water protected areas

Coastal and estuarine waters where shellfish and shellfish larvae grow are protected in order to support shellfish life and growth and to contribute to the high quality of shellfish for people to eat. Shellfish water protected areas are designated by government where it is necessary or desirable in order to protect or develop economically significant shellfish production.

The environmental requirements for shellfish water protected areas in England are expressed through the Water Environment (Water Framework Directive) Regulations 2017 and the Shellfish Water Protected Area Directions 2016. The regulations and directions place an obligation on the Environment Agency to ensure that designated waters meet the requirements of shellfish protected areas. This will be achieved by endeavouring to observe the microbial shellfish flesh standard.

Designations were reviewed in 2014/15. Government published the current list of 96 designated shellfish water protected areas in March 2016. Designations are currently being reviewed again by government, as required by regulation 9 of the WFD Regulations.

Shellfish water pollution reduction plans were prepared in 2009. These were updated into shellfish water action plans in 2015. These are being reviewed and updated for current update to the river basin management plans. They summarise the Environment Agency ’ s understanding of each of the 96 shellfish waters in England and detail the actions needed to maintain or improve water quality in shellfish protected areas. You can request a copy of the action plan for a specific shellfish water by contacting the Environment Agency, email [*enquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk*](mailto:enquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk) .

2.9 Strategic Environmental Assessments

The Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 requires a formal environmental assessment of plans and programmes which are likely to have significant effects on the environment. Authorities which prepare and/or take on such a plan or programme must assess the environmental effects and prepare a report, consult environmental authorities and the public, and take the report and the results of the consultation into account during the preparation of the final plan or programme before it is adopted. They must also make information available on the plan or programme as implemented, how the environmental assessment and consultation responses have been taken into account and how the environmental effects are to be monitored.

You can find further information in A Practical Guide to the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive.

3. Efficient and sustainable use of water

Under the WFD Regulations there is a requirement for ***measures*** to promote use of water efficiently and in a way that can sustain future supplies. Mechanisms for the efficient and sustainable use of water include the following.

Water Resources Act 1991 Part II sets out controls for abstraction and drought management.

Water Industry Act 1991 Part IIIA establishes general duties for protecting, managing the quality and sufficiency of supplies and promoting efficient use of water.

Water Act 2003 s 81-83 establishes a duty for the Secretary of State to encourage water conservation and for public authorities (including local authorities and statutory undertakers) to take into account, where relevant, the desirability of conserving water supplied or to be supplied to premises; includes:

* promoting water efficiency through exercise of their land use planning functions

1. production of development plans
2. control of development

Town and Country Planning Act 1990, Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended); set the legal framework for:

* deciding planning applications

1. developing local plans

The Planning Act 2008 defines “nationally significant infrastructure projects”; which must be authorised by means of a Development Consent Order (DCO):

* ***processed*** and examined by the Planning Inspectorate

1. DCO made by the relevant Secretary of State

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2019; Planning Practice Guidance (PPG), 2019 and National Policy Statements:

* NPPF sets out the government ’ s planning policies for England, and how these are expected to be applied

1. presumption in favour of sustainable development
2. NPPF considerations include:

* contributing to protecting and enhancing the natural, built and historic environment

1. helping to improve biodiversity and use natural resources prudently
2. minimising waste and pollution; mitigating and adapting to climate change including moving to a low carbon economy
3. provides planning policy to protect against water pollution
4. National Policy Statements provide policy on water resources and water quality for developments considered nationally significant infrastructure

Environment Act 1995 s 6(2) places a duty on the Environment Agency to conserve, redistribute or augment water resources and to secure their proper use including their efficient use.

Environment Act 2021 sets out proposals for more integrated planning (Water Resources Management Plans and Drainage and Waste Water Management Plans).

Development plans and planning decisions can help to achieve the environmental objectives of the river basin management through the approaches outlined as follows.

Development Plans must be prepared with the objective of contributing to the achievement of sustainable development, as required by s39 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, (as amended).

The NPPF must be taken into account in the preparation of local and neighbourhood plans and is a material consideration in planning decisions. The framework states that planning policies and decisions must reflect relevant international obligations and statutory requirements. The framework sets out that the purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development and the policies in the framework read as a whole constitutes what sustainable development in England means in practice for the planning system. It also sets out a presumption in favour of sustainable development for both planning making and decision taking. For decision making, this means that approving development proposals that accord with the development plan without delay. Where the development plan is absent, silent or out of date, granting permission unless adverse impacts of the development significantly and demonstrably outweigh its benefits or specific policies in the NPPF indicate the development should be restricted. In terms of water policy, it states the planning system should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by preventing both new and existing development from contributing to or being put at unacceptable risk from, or being adversely affected by unacceptable levels water pollution.

The framework also states that local planning authorities should adopt proactive strategies to mitigate and adapt to climate change, taking full account of water supply and demand considerations. Local planning authorities are expected to include strategic policies in their local plans for the provision of infrastructure, including for water supply and wastewater.

The government ’ s Planning Practice Guidance supporting the framework refers to the multiple benefits provided by a healthy water environment and states adequate water and wastewater infrastructure is necessary to support sustainable development. It highlights that local planning authorities should have regard to river basin management plans in exercising their functions; and advocates a catchment based approach to managing water resources through the planning system. It also sets out the water supply considerations in applications for planning permission.

National Policy Statements are being produced for the following types of infrastructure, with the majority now published. These include the following.

Energy National Policy Statements:

* overarching energy

1. renewable energy
2. fossil fuels
3. oil and gas supply and storage
4. electricity networks
5. nuclear power

Transport National Policy Statements:

* ports

1. road and rail networks
2. aviation (not yet published)

Water, waste water and waste National Policy Statements:

* water supply (not yet published)

1. hazardous waste
2. waste water treatment

Each provides policy on water resources and water quality for nationally significant infrastructure projects. There are also specific National Policy Statements about water supply (not yet published) and waste water treatment.

All new homes have to meet the mandatory national water efficiency standard set out in the Building Regulations (of 125 litres per person per day). Where there is a clear local need, local planning authorities can set out, in Local Plans, policies requiring new dwellings to meet the tighter Building Regulations optional requirement of 110 litres per person per day. Where there is an existing plan policy which references the former Code for Sustainable Homes, authorities may continue to apply a requirement for a water efficiency standard equivalent to the nearest new national technical standard until the plan comes up for review. For local plans adopted after 1 October 2015, the optional new standard should only be required through a Local Plan policy if it addresses a clearly evidenced need, and where the impact on viability has been considered. The Environment Agency, who is consulted on all local plans, will advise local planning authorities on a case by case basis.

Local economic growth planning is led by local enterprise partnerships and combined authorities. They are tasked by government to prepare local industrial strategies. The strategies set out the priorities for growth and identify where growth funding can be best used to support those priorities. Domestic growth funds have included the Single Local Growth Fund and European Growth Funds. The criteria for allocation of these funds have included environmental protection and sustainable development, providing an opportunity for water infrastructure that supports efficient and sustainable use of water. This has led to significant investment over recent years on climate adaptation, environmental protection and resource efficiency, covering matters like green and blue infrastructure and sustainable drainage to improve water quality.

Leaving the EU has required a new approach to local growth funding. Government has published Build Back Better: our plan for growth and supported this with new growth funds including the £4bn Levelling Up Fund and plans for a £1.5bn per year UK Shared Prosperity Fund. Environmental improvement is within scope for these funds, but there is no ring fencing of funding for the environment within them.

Government is expected to build on devolution deals with the major cities and offer new arrangements for devolution in a Levelling-Up White Paper to be published in autumn 2021. It is not yet known how this will affect environmental management, but new arrangements for local delivery and governance could provide new opportunities for better local water management.

4. Protection of waters used for abstracting drinking water

The mechanisms protecting the quality or quantity of water also protect surface and ground-water bodies from which raw water for drinking water supplies is abstracted. These mechanisms include statutory protected areas and their related requirements under the WFD Regulations. The Environment Agency ’ s approach to groundwater protection sets out the policy and positions to how the Environment Agency deals with activities that pose a risk to groundwater.

Legislative mechanisms for protecting waters abstracted for raw water for drinking water supplies are as follows.

Water Resources Act 1991 s93 provides the legislation for establishing statutory Water Protection Zones.

Water Industry Act 1991 Part III deals with water supply, sets out general duties for protecting and managing quality and sufficiency of supplies.

Water Supply (Water Quality) Regulations 2016 as amended establishes a risk-based approach to assessment and monitoring of water intended for public supply, requiring water supply operators to consider issues in the environment.

Private Water Supplies (England)Regulations 2016a sets objectives and minimum standards for drinking water from private supplies, and introduces:

* powers for local authorities

1. risk-based assessment element for protection of larger private supplies

Water Environment (Water Framework Directive) (England and Wales) Regulations 2017 requires:

* water bodies used for the abstraction of water intended for human consumption to be identified as statutory Drinking Water Protected Areas

1. ***measures*** put in place aiming to avoid deterioration in quality to reduce the level of purification treatment required to produce drinking water
2. objectives to protect, enhance and restore groundwater bodies and reverse any sustained upward trends to be set out

Environmental Permitting (England and Wales) Regulations 2016 provides regulation to control water discharge and groundwater activities including permitting which protects surface waters and groundwater from pollution.

4.1 Drinking Water Regulations

The Water Supply (Water Quality) Regulations 2016, as amended in 2018, and the Private Water Supplies (England) Regulations 2016, as amended in 2018 protect the health of consumers and make sure that the water is wholesome and safe to drink. Standards are established for the quality of water intended for drinking or for use in food and drink manufacture to protect human health. Drinking water quality is monitored mainly at the tap inside private and public premises and must comply with microbiological and chemical water quality standards. The requirements protect the environment, as sources of raw water abstracted for supply must be as clean as possible to allow inexpensive water treatment.

The Regulations are supported by other mechanisms that control pollution from point and diffuse sources (see sections 6 and 7).

The European Union recast Drinking Water Directive was published in the Official Journal of the European Union on 23 December 2020 and came into force on 12 January 2020. As the transition period expired before the transposition deadline, there is freedom to do things differently. Ministers may choose to amend UK legislation to achieve similar outcomes. The UK Government is keen to ensure drinking water possible is as clean as possible and has been clear that none of the UK ’ s world-leading environmental standards will be weakened and, where possible, will enhance them.

The Drinking Water Inspectorate is the competent authority for the regulation of drinking water quality.

You can find further information on drinking water legislation.

4.2 Drinking Water Protected Areas

Drinking Water Protected Areas are water bodies used now, or may be used in future, for abstracting water for drinking, cooking, preparing food, or in food production businesses. A statutory Drinking Water Protected Area is identified if the water body provides more than 10m3 a day on average or serves more than 50 people. The Environment Agency undertakes risk assessments to identify Drinking Water Protected Areas at risk of deterioration and then uses a risk-based approach for their protection with:

* a general level of protection for all drinking water sources including use of environmental permits to control and prevent pollution of water supplies

1. existing mechanisms for dealing with diffuse and point sources of pollution contribute to protecting the water quality in Drinking Water Protected Areas (see sections 6 and 7), however these mechanisms are not always sufficient to provide the protection needed, particularly from diffuse sources of pollution; Safeguard Zones are established where deterioration risk is identified to focus pollution prevention ***measures*** so Drinking Water Protected Area objectives can be met

Other approaches

Water companies investigate and undertake catchment schemes reducing diffuse pollution to protect and improve their public supply sources, funded through the Price Review ***process***. Catchment schemes can also help to reduce downstream flooding and enhance biodiversity.

5. Abstraction and impoundment of water

Under the Water Resources Act 1991 most abstractions or impoundment of water require a licence although certain exemptions apply. This applies to inland waters, including: rivers, lakes, canals, reservoirs, groundwater, tidal rivers, docks, bays, creeks, and arms of sea.

The mechanisms to control abstraction and impoundment of water are as follows.

Water Resources Act 1991 Abstraction and impoundment licensing system Chapter II of Part II (as amended by Water Act 2003 and the Water Act 2014):

* The Water Resources Act 1991 makes it a requirement to hold an abstraction licence:
* licence conditions manage impacts on the environment, for example, flows and resources

1. all new licences are subject to a time limit and upon renewal are reviewed and amended where necessary

Modification of licences under s51; licence holders may apply to vary or revoke their licence voluntarily.

Modification of licences under s52 and s53; the Environment Agency may vary or revoke an abstraction licence as directed by the Secretary of State.

Section 27 Water Act 2003; withdraws compensation for licence changes (for non- time limited licences) under s52 and s53 necessary to protect the environment from serious damage.

Section 61(4) Water Resources Act 1991; withdraws compensation for licence changes under s52 and s53 where the licence has not been used for the previous 4 years.

Section 58 Water Act 2014 removed Water Companies ’ right to compensation for licence changes under s52 and s53.

Agreements under s20, 20A and s158 Water Resources Act 1991; allows operational arrangements with water companies and other abstractors to reduce the impact of abstractions, for example river support schemes.

Drought orders and drought permits under Chapter III of Part II Water Resources Act 1991; they allow the amendment of controls on authorisations for abstraction and impoundments during droughts.

Restrictions under s57 Water Resources Act 1991 allow the Environment Agency to temporarily restrict abstraction for spray irrigation following an ***exceptional*** shortage of rain or emergency.

Regulations 63 to 65 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended) (see section 2.6.1) and the Water Resources Act 1991 for assessment of effects on European sites.

Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981; s28I; new abstraction and impoundment licence applications need to be assessed to determine whether they are likely to damage a SSSI, and if they are Natural England must be notified.

Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 (NERC) s40; requires public bodies to ‘have regard, so far as is consistent with the proper exercise of those functions (for example, granting licences), to the purpose of conserving biodiversity ’ ; the Environment Act 2021 provisions for:

* amendments to the NERC Act

1. strengthening this duty to require public authorities to take action to enhance and conserve biodiversity
2. introduces a reporting duty

Salmon and Freshwater Fisheries Act 1975:

* s9 and s14 Requires persons responsible for dams to (at their cost) provide and maintain fish passes and screens (that function to the Environment Agency ’ s satisfaction) in any waters frequented by salmon or migratory trout

1. under s11(1) ‘any approval given by the Environment Agency to or in relation to a fish pass may, if in giving it the Agency indicates that fact, be provisional until the Environment Agency notifies the applicant for approval that the pass is functioning to its satisfaction ’

The Eels (England and Wales) Regulations 2009 (which partially implement ‘Council Regulation (EC) No 1100/2007 of 18 September 2007 establishing ***measures*** for the recovery of the stock of European eel ’ , ‘European Council Regulation on Eels ’ , or ‘Eels Regulations ’ ):

* require that ‘a responsible person must immediately notify the Environment Agency of any obstruction occurring since the coming into force of these regulations ’

1. give powers to the Environment Agency to serve notices requiring eel passes on structures and obstructions
2. require the provision of screens on all intakes capable of abstracting at least 20 cubic metres per day, and outfalls, unless exempted by notice by the Environment Agency

Environment Act 2021:

* sets out changes to abstraction licensing that will allow the EA to pay no compensation for certain license modifications

1. these changes will not come into effect until 2028

Time limits have been applied to licences for many years as a way of managing environmental uncertainty. The Water Resources Act 1991, amended by the Water Act 2003 introduced a mandatory requirement for time limits on all new licences. Before then, most licences were granted with no time limit, and some licences in the past may have had an unacceptable effect on the environment. Although the Environment Agency has powers to amend or revoke these licences under the Water Resources Act 1991, compensation may be claimed by the licence holder. (This is not applicable to water companies since the Water Act 2014 or in cases where serious damage has occurred or is at risk of occurring).

The Environment Agency can re-assess the environmental sustainability of a time limited licence when the licence expires and the holder applies for a replacement licence. Where a time limited licence is not sustainable, a new licence will be granted on more restrictive terms or worst case scenario, not at all.

There are currently a number of exemptions from the need for an abstraction or impoundment licence. Some of the exemptions relating to abstraction will be removed when the remaining provisions of the Water Act 2003 are implemented by government. For example the exemption will be removed for trickle irrigation, quarry dewatering, transfers of water for navigation and the previously exempt areas.

Government is committed to the reform of the current abstraction licensing system in England and is finalising its policy approach for reforms to be implemented by the early 2020s.

View the Abstraction licensing strategies (CAMS ***process***) for further information.

Other plans and programmes

The Environment Agency continues to produce Abstraction Licensing Strategies to help ensure a consistent approach to managing water resources and balancing the needs of water users and the environment. They also help inform the public on water resources and the Environment Agency ’ s approach to licensing new abstraction in a particular area. Abstraction Licensing Strategies are set in accordance with WFD Regulations objectives.

The Water Abstraction Plan (2017) sets out how water abstraction management is being reformed over the coming years. It states how this will protect the environment and improve access to water. The plan has 3 main parts:

* making full use of existing regulatory powers and approaches to address unsustainable abstraction

1. developing a stronger catchment focus – bringing together the Environment Agency, abstractors and catchment groups to develop local solutions to existing pressures and to prepare for the future; these local solutions will:

* protect the environment by changing licences to better reflect water availability in catchments and reduce the impact of abstraction

1. improve access to water by introducing more flexible conditions that support water storage, water trading and efficient use
2. supporting these reforms by modernising the abstraction service, making sure all significant abstraction is regulated and bringing regulations in line with other environmental permitting regimes

The Environment Agency publishes Abstraction Licensing Strategies, to help ensure a consistent approach to managing water resources and balancing the needs of water users and the environment. They help inform the public on water resources and the Environment Agency ’ s approach to licensing new abstraction in a particular area. Specifically:

* they provide a consistent and structured approach to local water resource management giving information on water resource availability (where and when) based on environmental needs

1. by 2027 will share information and approaches to ensure a stronger catchment focus is adopted in all catchments

Under the Water Industry Act 1991, water companies are required to prepare Water Resources Management Plans to show how they will manage and develop water resources to supply their customers. Water Resources Management Plans show how companies will balance water demand and supply over a 25 year period. Water Resources Management Plans should ensure an efficient, sustainable use of water resources. They should focus on delivering efficiently the outcomes that customers want, while reflecting the value that society places on the environment.

The Environment Agency sets out the environmental improvements that water companies must make in the Water Industry National Environment Programme (WINEP) every 5 years. Successive water company improvement programmes since privatisation of the industry have resulted in substantial benefits to the water environment. Water companies may need to make changes to their operations to deliver the WINEP, including those needed to meet WFD Regulations objectives such as preventing deterioration in status and to deliver actions needed to meet or move towards good status or potential. This does not replace water companies ’ obligations to meet their legal responsibilities with regards to all existing permits.

The Environment Agency has overall responsibility for safeguarding the environment during drought including overseeing the actions water companies take to secure public water supplies. Plans for each of the Environment Agency ’ s 16 operational areas set out the actions that will be taken at different stages throughout a drought and give details on the arrangements for reporting and communications. Water companies are also required to produce Drought Plans under the Water Industry Act 1991. These set out the ***measures*** that would be taken to minimise environmental impacts and maximise available supplies during a drought.

The National Framework for Water Resources explores the long-term needs of sectors that depend on a secure supply of water including the water needs of the environment. It sets the strategic direction for long term regional water resources planning. The framework looks to ease the pressure on future water supplies by reducing demand, halving leakage rates, developing new supplies, moving water to where it ’ s needed and reducing the need for drought ***measures*** that can harm the environment.

Five regional groups across the country will work up plans tailored to the specific needs of their individual area, bringing together the 17 English water companies, industry regulators, government and other water users. The framework will guide these groups and deliver a national blueprint for future water resources planning from 2025 to 2050 and beyond.

These regional plans, due by September 2023, will inform water company Water Resources Management Plans and will plan to achieve a level of drought resilience so that emergency drought order restrictions, such as providing water only at certain times of the day (rota cuts) or through temporary taps (standpipes) in the streets, are expected to be implemented no more often than once in 500 years on average.

View further information on drought planning.

5.1 Protecting waters

A variety of mechanisms can be used to protect water resources that are used for abstraction. The Environment Agency ’ s Groundwater Protection: Principles and Practice provides guidance on activities involving abstraction of groundwater such as:

* working with developers and local government through the planning system to ensure groundwater and the aquifer are protected

1. ensuring acceptable hydrogeological risk assessment are completed for schemes hazardous to groundwater resources
2. using voluntary agreements or more formal Water Resources Management Arrangements to control abstraction
3. using economic incentives such as water pricing to influence how and when water is used
4. initiation of demand management and water-saving campaigns to manage and reduce demand effectively
5. action to improve river habitat and morphology to complement and enhance actions to maintain or improve river flows and water levels

6. Point source discharges

This section provides a summary of mechanisms for controlling discharges from identifiable point sources by limiting or preventing pollutants entering the water (surface and groundwater) through prior authorisations, general binding rules and emission controls.

Mechanisms to control point and diffuse source discharges are as follows.

Water Resources Act 1991 Works Notices under s161A; any activity polluting or likely to pollute controlled waters can be served a ‘works notice ’ to prevent the activity or require certain improvements or remediate the effects of polluting activity.

Water Protection Zones under s93; can be used to implement specific point source controls within a formally designated zone.

Environmental Permitting (England and Wales) Regulations 2016; it is an offence to cause or knowingly permit a water discharge activity or groundwater activity without an environmental permit, unless that activity is specifically exempted under the regulations:

* permits for point source discharges prevent pollution

1. require a permit with conditions for point source discharges to surface water and to ground and groundwater
2. require a permit for discharges that might lead to inputs of polluting substances to groundwater, including small sewage discharges in Source Protection Zone 1s
3. allows notices to prohibit any activity that might lead to an input of a pollutant to groundwater
4. requires a permit with conditions to control deliberate emissions and minimise accidental losses from major installations; conditions prevent, minimise or render emissions harmless using the best available technologies as directed in guidance notes
5. requires a permit with conditions to control waste management operations

Salmon and Freshwater Fisheries Act 1975; allows for enforcement action against polluters who harm or injure fish, spawning grounds or fish food.

Control of Pollution (Silage, Slurry and ***Agricultural*** Fuel Oil) Regulations 2010; specifies the design, siting, construction and maintenance of Silage, Slurry and ***Agricultural*** Fuel Oil stores.

Control of Pollution (Oil Storage) (England) Regulations 2001; sets minimum design standards for new and existing above ground oil storage facilities.

Water Industry Act 1991 s166; requires consent or a permit for operational (construction or maintenance) discharges by water undertakers relating to water treatment.

Town and Country Planning Act 1990, Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended); Planning Act 2008 (as amended); Planning guidance provided in National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), 2019 and supporting Planning Practice Guidance (PPG), 2019; National Policy Statements:

* planning policy contributes to the protection and improvement of the environment, principally through the consideration of appropriate uses of land

Environmental Protection Act 1990, Part 2A; controls point source discharges from historic contaminated land sites (local authorities lead, with Environment Agency regulating ‘special sites ’ ).

Environmental Damage (Prevention and Remediation) (England) Regulations 2015; require operators to carry out ***measures*** to prevent imminent or actual damage to the environment

6.1 The Urban Waste Water Treatment Regulations

The Urban Waste Water Treatment Regulations 1994 (as amended) regulate the collection and treatment of waste water from homes and industry. They protect the environment from the negative effects of urban waste water and discharges from certain industrial sectors, such as food and drink ***processing*** plants (some of which produce waste that has a similar polluting effect to untreated sewage). Sewerage systems must be provided, to collect sewage and convey it to treatment works whilst limiting pollution from storm overflows. The regulations lay down minimum levels of treatment for urban waste water and emission limits for effluent discharges. These depend on the population served and the type and sensitivity of the receiving waters. Most waste water must have at least secondary treatment (biological treatment). Sensitive receiving waters are identified where sewage requires more stringent, tertiary treatment before discharge into them. One type of sensitive area is for eutrophic waters where nutrients (nitrate or phosphate) stimulate excess growth of algae and other plants damaging the water environment and its uses. Another type of sensitive area is where water is intended for abstraction for use as drinking water but nitrate levels are high. In these areas larger sewage discharges must be treated to reduce their load of nutrients. The regulations also ban the disposal of sewage sludge at sea.

Powers to permit discharges, with conditions to protect the receiving waters, are available under the Environmental Permitting (England and Wales) Regulations 2016 (see section 6.2.1).

Sewerage undertakers are required to develop a programme for improving discharges every five years. This programme, which is approved by Ofwat, the Environment Agency, Drinking Water Inspectorate and Defra, provides the mechanism for funding and implementing the changes necessary to implement the Urban Waste Water Treatment Regulations.

There are financial incentives for sewerage undertakers to comply with permit conditions established under the Ofwat operator performance assessment scheme, which links overall service provision to the price that customers pay.

View Reducing and controlling pollution in wastewater discharges sludge and septic tanks for further information.

6.2 Other plans and programmes

6.2.1 Water industry planning

Discharges from the water industry can be improved by modifying environmental permits. The environmental requirements for the WFD and other directives and regulations are planned through the development of the Water Industry National Environment Programme (WINEP). Water companies should embed the ***measures*** within the WINEP into their business plans. These are then submitted to Ofwat through the five yearly Price Review ***process***. Ofwat will confirm the level of investment that water companies require to meet these environmental needs.

The WINEP for Price Review 2019 has also been used as a mechanism to plan ***measures*** to investigate discharges from sewage treatment works. The WINEP also achieves a range of other outcomes, including improvements for water resources, eel passage solutions and protected area objectives.

Water company business plans will use information from local plans, where available, to help anticipate future demand for waste water treatment and investment that may be required. Where it is justified, Development Plan policies can link the rate of planned development to the available capacity of wastewater treatment infrastructure and require planning authorities to investigate further through, for example, water cycle strategies.

The PR19 Water company price review included a commitment to research the input, transport and fate of microplastics through waste water treatment ***processes***, and those used in the treatment ***process***. The findings will be used to inform next steps.

A water industry Strategic Steering Group (SSG) Micro-plastics Sub-Group drives collaboration across water industry to reduce micro-plastics from wastewater and explore upstream interventions. The Environment Agency are working with the SSG to develop policy options for inclusion of ***measures*** to reduce plastics in PR24.

The principle behind the Environment Agency ’ s regulatory approach is that emissions of plastics biobeads or other plastic media used in treatment should be limited far as reasonably practicable through containment and good management, secured through management conditions in EPR permits.

The Environment Agency strategy for the Safe and Sustainable Use of Sludge (published 17 March 2020) sets out the intention to bring sludge into Environmental Permitting Regulations (EPR). A Statutory Instrument is proposed for April 2022 with an implementation date to move sludge to EPR in April 2023. The aim is to establish regulatory control to reduce micro-plastics entering soil and water.

6.2.2 Spatial planning

The spatial planning system defined by the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended) sets the framework for controlling development. The planning system makes a major contribution to protecting and improving the environment, the quality of life, and local and global ecosystems.

The NPPF states the planning system should protect the environment by preventing both new and existing development from contributing to or being put at unacceptable risk from, or being adversely affected by unacceptable levels of water pollution. Development should, wherever possible, help to improve local environmental conditions such as water quality, taking into account relevant information such as river basin management plans. It also states that planning authorities should include strategic policies which set out an overall strategy for the pattern, scale and quality of development, and make sufficient provision for infrastructure for water supply, wastewater, flood risk and coastal change management, green infrastructure, and planning ***measures*** to address climate change mitigation and adaptation.

The Planning Practice Guidance states adequate water and waste water infrastructure is needed to support sustainable development, highlights that local councils in exercising their functions should have regard to river basin management plans and advocates a catchment-based approach to managing water resources through the planning system.

Other approaches

Defra have produced these groundwater protection codes of practice:

* Sheep dip groundwater protection code

1. Prevent groundwater pollution from underground fuel storage tanks
2. Prevent groundwater pollution from solvents

The codes of practice support the Environmental Permitting (England and Wales) Regulations 2016, and deal with design, construction, operation, management and decommissioning of the relevant facilities.

Highways England has established a register of soakaways and priority outfalls across the strategic road network in England and ranked these in accordance with the risk they may pose to underlying groundwater. This will help direct pollution prevention work.

The Environmental Permitting (England and Wales) Regulations 2016 include permits, standard rules and registered exemptions.

The Water and Abandoned Metal Mines Programme, a partnership between the Environment Agency, Defra and The Coal Authority, was set up in 2011 to tackle the pollution from historic mines. Abandoned metal mines contribute up to half of the metals (for example, cadmium, lead, zinc and copper) found in UK rivers, streams and lakes – as much as all permitted discharges from industry combined. These metals are one of the most widespread causes of chemical pollution in rivers, and can come from both point and diffuse sources.

The Coal Authority also manage the Coal Minewater Treatment Programme which is funded by the Department of Business Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS). They now operate 44 treatment schemes across England to either prevent new pollution breakouts or remediate existing discharges on a priority basis. Pollution from coal mines is more visible and localised than metal mines as the iron rich water causes rivers to turn orange.

7. Diffuse source pollution

Diffuse pollution represents a myriad of smaller, scattered, episodic sources that together have a significant effect. Examples of diffuse pollution include:

* the cumulative effect of many individual activities, such as run-off from transport in urban environments or the poor management practice of soils and nutrients in the rural environment. Although individually they can be small and hard to detect, at a catchment scale they can have a significant impact on groundwater and surface water quality

1. the dispersal of pollutants over a larger area, for example, the leaching of nutrients through soil and underground drainage or run-off from land during rainfall events which erodes soil causing sediment, nutrients and pesticides to pollute surface waters or groundwater

There will be continued focus on taking an integrated approach to effectively tackling diffuse pollution using a mix of advice, incentives, industry led initiatives and regulation. This will include the ongoing development of catchment partnerships and the use of new and innovative techniques such as drone survey ’ s and remote sensing using satellite imagery to inform integrated actions.

You can find further information on the catchment based approach website.

7.1 ***Agricultural*** pollution

***Agricultural*** diffuse pollution has a large and often cumulative impact on the water environment. Mechanisms for managing ***agricultural*** diffuse pollution are as follows.

Water Resources Act 1991, Anti-Pollution Works Notices, s161A, Water Protection Zones s93:

* requires a person to carry out works and operations to prevent or deal with the consequences of any poisonous, noxious or polluting matter or any solid waste entering controlled waters

1. restricts or prohibits activities in order to protect the water environment from entry of poisonous, noxious or polluting matter

Environmental Permitting (England and Wales) Regulations 2016:

* allows enforcement action for various offences where surface water and/or groundwater are polluted

1. requires permits for disposals and discharges that might lead to pollutants entering groundwater, including small sewage discharges in sensitive areas
2. requires permits for spreading waste on ***agricultural*** land to improve or maintain the physical, chemical and biological properties of the soil to grow crops
3. allows notices prohibiting any activity that might lead to an input of pollutants into groundwater
4. requires permits for pig and poultry farms exceeding a certain size, with conditions to protect the environment
5. make sure that ***agricultural*** waste is recovered or disposed of without putting people ’ s health at risk and without using ***processes*** or methods that could harm the environment

Nitrate Pollution Prevention Regulations 2015 on farms within Nitrate Vulnerable Zones require farmers to follow an action programme that reduces the risk of nitrate entering water.

Plant Protection Products Regulations 2011 underpin EC regulation (EC) No 1107/2009 of the European Parliament and of the Council.

Control of Pollution (Silage, Slurry and ***Agricultural*** Fuel Oil) Regulations 2010 (‘SSAFO ’ ); sets standards for all farms storing silage, livestock slurries and ***agricultural*** fuel oil, to minimise the risk of water pollution.

Environmental Damage (Prevention and Remediation) (England) Regulations 2015 (as amended); requires operators to carry out ***measures*** to prevent imminent or actual damage to the environment and remediate.

Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) allows consent to be refused for activities that may damage Sites of Specific Scientific Interest and action against third party damage to Sites of Specific Scientific Interest.

Salmon and Freshwater Fisheries Act 1975 allows for enforcement action against polluters who harm or injure fish, spawning grounds or fish food.

The Sludge (Use in ***Agriculture***) Regulations 1989 makes sure that recycling sludge to ***agricultural*** land is carried out in a way that protects human and animal health and the environment.

Reduction and Prevention of ***Agricultural*** Diffuse Pollution (England) Regulations 2018, known as the Farming Rules for Water (FRfW). These regulations are applicable to all land managers in England and:

* cover nutrient management and soil protection

1. create a clear baseline for both land managers and the regulator from which to work
2. require land management activities to be undertaken in a way to avoid pollution

Sustainable Use of Pesticides Directive (2009/128/EC) is a legislative framework which:

* contributes to reducing the impact of plant protection products on human health and the environment

1. aims to achieve a more sustainable use of plant protection products
2. promotes a significant overall reduction in risks and hazards of using plant protection products consistent with necessary crop protection

7.1.1 Nitrates

Nitrate Pollution Prevention Regulations 2015 are designed to reduce water pollution caused by nitrates from ***agriculture*** sources and prevent further such pollution occurring. It requires nitrate vulnerable zones (NVZs) to be designated as areas of land which drain to waters that contain, or are likely to contain 50 mg/l or more of nitrate, or waters which are, or could become, eutrophic, if no action is taken.

Within these zones farmers are required to follow mandatory rules known as the ‘action programme ’ to reduce the risk of nitrate pollution. The rules cover a requirement for farmers to plan their nitrate use, the storage of manure, place restrictions on the timing and rate of spreading of organic manure and manufactured fertiliser and specify certain spreading controls. A code of good ***agricultural*** practice for voluntary implementation on all farms is also required.

The effectiveness of the action programme and the designations must be reviewed and any necessary revisions made at least every 4 years.

The Environment Agency is the enforcing authority for these regulations.

The Rural Payments Agency also assesses compliance with the NVZ rules which are a ‘statutory management requirement ’ under cross compliance for farmers that are in the Basic Payment Scheme or who claim other direct payments, such as through Countryside Stewardship.

To date, discrete NVZs have been designated in England covering approximately 55% of land. You can find further information at nutrient management nitrate vulnerable zones.

7.1.2 Other plans and programmes

The Common ***Agricultural*** Policy (CAP) has helped to deliver improvements to water quality through 2 mechanisms, cross compliance and the rural development programme. The CAP will transition over a 7 year period and move towards schemes that reward the delivery of environmental benefits. In 2022, the Sustainable Farming Incentive will be rolled out to recipients of the Basic Payment Scheme. The scheme will expand over time. It will start with a core set of sustainable farming actions, which will build gradually.

7.1.3 Environment Land Management

The government is developing Environmental Land Management (ELM) as the main way that public money will be provided to land managers for delivering public goods. ‘Public goods ’ may include outcomes like habitat protection and creation, species recovery, natural flood management, water quality, carbon capture, air quality, and animal health and welfare.

ELM is part of a wider Future Farming and Countryside Programme within Defra which is looking across all elements of regulation, incentive and advice and guidance. It is promised as a key mechanism for achieving the outcomes of the government ’ s 25 Year Environment Plan in relation to: Clean and plentiful water; Clean air; Thriving plants and wildlife; Reduction in and protection from environmental hazards; Adaptation to and mitigation of climate change and Beauty, heritage and engagement with the environment.

There will be 3 levels of support aimed at paying for sustainable farming practices, creating and restoring habitats to support nature ’ s recovery and making landscape-scale change such as establishing new woodland and other ecosystem services. Some options will be universally open to all farmers and land managers, while others will be more targeted at a smaller number of large projects.

ELM is being introduced through pilots and tests from 2021 to 2024. There will be early roll out of some core elements of all components, particularly the Sustainable Farming Incentive, from 2022; with all 3 components fully available from 2024.

7.1.4 Cross compliance

This will be phased out by 2027. However cross compliance currently takes steps towards achieving basic expectations and requirements are encouraged by financial support payments through CAP cross compliance conditions. For a farm business to receive the ‘basic payment ’ in full it must meet certain conditions. The conditions include implementing good soil management and putting a portion of arable land into ‘ecological focus areas ’ and implementing ***measures*** to benefit water quality. These will help prevent deterioration and may significantly reduce the loss of sediment and associated nutrients and pesticides from some catchments. Government supports an advice service to help recipients of these payments to comply with these rules. As transition begins farmers will not have to comply with ‘greening requirements ’ which are not thought to provide much environmental burden but are an additional administrative burden.

7.1.5 Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE)

RDPE currently funds Countryside Stewardship and Countryside Productivity payments. From 2021 onwards this will be replaced by government funding, which has been guaranteed for projects already in place or approved by 31 December 2024 until they close. The ‘***agricultural*** transition (2021 to 2027) ’ will see new mechanisms including the ELM to deliver river basin management plan ***measures***. By 2024, it is expected that 30% to 40% of rural England could be under Countryside Stewardship agreement. Countryside Stewardship financially supports the implementation of ***measures*** over and above legal requirements and good practice. It addresses soil management and the reduction of the effect of nutrients, sediment and faecal bacteria pollution. This will reduce the impact of eutrophication and benefit bathing waters, shellfish waters and drinking waters.

The main ***measures*** delivered by Countryside Stewardship and ELM ’ s are categorised by the following groups:

* enhanced field management, including seasonal livestock exclusion, winter cover crops, buffer and riparian management strips next to watercourses and reduced nutrient applications from fertilisers

1. land use change, including woodland and wetland creation or converting arable land to grassland which requires lower nutrient input
2. water and woodland capital grants, including sediment traps, fencing of watercourses and tree planting
3. re-naturalising rivers and coastal defences, including making space for water and coastal realignment

The uptake of ***measures*** is voluntary and the scheme is competitive; applications are scored for the benefits that they can deliver for water and wildlife. Advice is a critical part of delivering Countryside Stewardship and the CSF programme, both increase the rate of uptake and quality of applications. Countryside Stewardship reduces ***agricultural*** pollution through a mix of land management options and capital grants. Initial modelling indicates higher tier agreements have achieved 12% to 18% and mid-tier 5% to 9% farm-scale pollutant reductions (averaged across nitrate, phosphorus and sediment). Greatest nitrate reductions were from grassland management options associated with reduced fertiliser use or stocking rates (or both), whilst greatest phosphorus and sediment decreases were the result of using buffer strips and increasing over-winter crop cover (The Environmental Effectiveness of the Countryside Stewardship scheme; Establishing a baseline agreement monitoring sample. REF: ECM47452/22965 (ITT 1630). Report by Fera-led consortium, August 2019).

Countryside Stewardship funding is available to create additional woodland and the Forestry Commission give specific advice on applications to this funding. The scheme encourages new woodland agreements that will benefit wider quality and enhance biodiversity. In so doing there is evidence to support the reduction of sediment and nutrients through run off and reduction in localised flood risk.

Other non-RDPE funding is available from the Forestry Commission to create woodland on farmland. Find information on the grants for woodland creation.

Woodland larger than 10 hectares can receive funding for its design through the Woodland Creation Planning Grant (WCPG). This grant provides funding to prepare a Woodland Creation Design Plan that complies with the UK Forestry Standard which can subsequently be used to support further woodland grant applications.

7.1.6 Catchment Sensitive Farming (CSF)

CSF is a joint partnership between Natural England, the Environment Agency and Defra. It is achieving its primary objective of encouraging voluntary action by farmers to help achieve water, national emission ceilings directive and protected site objectives. CSF delivery is focused primarily within the Countryside Stewardship High Priority Areas for Water, covering approximately 35% of England. More than 19,000 farms have received advice. Modelling indicates that the ***measures*** implemented as a result of advice provided have reduced average ***agricultural*** losses of key pollutants by 4% to 12% in target areas since 2006. Around 60% of the ***measures*** which CSF has advised farmers to carry out are subsequently implemented by farmers (Environment Agency (2019) Catchment Sensitive Farming Evaluation Report – Water Quality, Phases 1 to 4 (2006 to 2018). Natural England publication, June 2019).

7.1.7 Drinking water safeguard zones

Safeguard zones are non-statutory areas identifying parts of the catchment where land use activities pose risks to the quality of raw water abstracted for drinking water supplies. Within the zones, ***measures*** are targeted to help meet drinking water protected areas objectives. The Environment Agency develops safeguard zone action plans with water companies and local stakeholders to identify and deliver ***measures*** to meet drinking water protected areas objectives.

7.1.8 Using the leverage of market and industry led mechanisms

Taking a systems approach across the agri-food supply chain from field to fork, the Environment Agency extends its regulatory reach. With evidence at the core, partnerships are built with the industry to encourage greater ownership of its impacts on the natural resources, particularly soil and water, the resources on which it depends. Businesses and organisations in the agri-food supply chain can do much to encourage compliance, reduce environmental impacts and make itself resilient to climate change and other challenges.

The Environment Agency works with farm assurance schemes to influence and provide evidence-based advice on environmental standards, and reward those schemes which demonstrate low risk through good environmental performance through implementing earned recognition.

7.1.9 Additional actions

Government keeps regulatory ***measures*** under review. Defra has been working with interested parties to identify some basic actions farmers could take which reduce diffuse pollution from ***agriculture***. Defra recognises the need for a coherent, simplified regulatory baseline.

Water protection zones can be designated by the Secretary of State under the Water Resources Act 1991 to establish additional statutory provisions to prevent water pollution where evidence shows that existing statutory or voluntary ***measures*** have been or are unlikely to be sufficient to meet environmental objectives. Before a water protection zone is designated, the Environment Agency is required to make an appropriate case to the Secretary of State. The Environment Agency is also required to carry out a public consultation, which will include assessments of the costs and benefits of any proposed ***measures*** to be used within a zone. The size and nature of the zones depends on the location and the nature of the problem.

Diffuse water pollution plans are tools to help reduce diffuse pollution at protected sites. They are non-statutory and are produced jointly by Natural England and Environment Agency. They are used to plan and agree strategic action at the catchment-scale. They are the most frequently identified mechanism for improving the water quality of European sites Protected Areas.

Progress towards reducing the impacts of diffuse pollution can be achieved by:

* better targeting of existing regulatory compliance

1. additional mandatory rules for all farmers that will reduce phosphate in surface waters
2. considering the need the additional use of regulation such as water protection zones
3. promoting incentives (for example, Countryside Stewardship and government sponsored catchment advice) in priority catchments;
4. using additional compliance mechanisms (for example, cross-compliance and farm assurance)
5. engagement by industry led initiatives and partnerships to encourage reinforcement and uptake of ‘key actions for farmers ’ . A set of integrated actions farm businesses can consider to reduce environmental impact

You can find further information from the AHDB website.

Partnership approaches have been successfully adopted by many catchment based schemes, including River Trusts and water company initiatives. Other industry-led campaigns such as the Campaign for the Farmed Environment and Voluntary Initiative approaches also give targeted advice for specific failures, such as those relating to pesticides in drinking water.

Initiatives and key messages for farmers to build on government initiatives include the following.

The Campaign for the Farmed Environment encourages farmers and land managers across England to protect and enhance the environmental value of farmland, through voluntary ***measures*** that sit alongside productive ***agriculture***. It:

* encourages voluntary retention of environmental stewardship options

1. targets ***measures*** to protect soil and water and benefit wildlife
2. promotes ‘tried and tested ’ nutrient management plans to help farmers and growers plan their fertiliser and manure use, meet increasing regulatory demands and protect the environment

The Voluntary Initiative is aimed at minimising the environmental impacts from ***agricultural*** and horticultural use of pesticides, including:

* annual sprayer testing and spray operator training

1. implementation of integrated pest management plan
2. best practice advice on individual pesticides

Development and promotion of ‘Key actions for farmers: resources and waste ’ , to supplement ‘Key actions for farmers: water:

* set clear messages and actions that farmers can take to manage their environmental impact through better management of resources and waste

1. are a collation of messages that are existing regulatory requirements and good practice
2. allow partnerships to use these base documents to develop summary leaflets and training for informing and driving improvements to the environment

Farm assurance schemes include ***measures*** for environmental protection, including:

* Red Tractor assurance which is used by a large proportion of farmers, has some basic standards on environmental protection

1. working with assurance schemes on pollution prevention and waste management guidance
2. working with ‘RSPCA Assured ’ on plastics guidance
3. working with Red Tractor assurance and the National Farmers Union (NFU) to promote better farm waste practices, in particular relation to farm plastics such as silage wrap and crop cover, pig enrichment toys and in food packaging

The Defra Code of Good ***Agricultural*** Practice, which provides practical guidance to help farmers and growers avoid causing pollution.

Biowaste permits are being reviewed, with the aim of restricting plastic contamination in green and food waste feed stocks to reduce plastic contaminated materials being spread to ***agricultural*** land. Along with:

* reviewing the effectiveness of the Quality Protocols for compost and digestate materials and intend to include more protective plastic contamination controls as part of this ***process***

1. working with various partners, including industry representatives, their trade associations and certification bodies, the NFU, WRAP (a charity that promote and encourage sustainable resource use) and the Chartered Institution of Wastes Management on a series of business-led initiatives designed to improve the quality of compost and digestate material and reduce plastic contamination

Secured Interreg funding to run a project ‘Preventing Plastic Pollution ’ in the South West which included:

* working with Defra, to baseline current farm practices in relation to plastic waste management

1. exploring the use of behavioural science to influence farm practices
2. ***measuring*** the effectiveness

7.2 Non-***agricultural*** pollution

All the following contribute to diffuse pollution from non-***agricultural*** sources:

* run off from transport

1. on-street activities such as car washing
2. industrial estates
3. forestry and leisure industries
4. misconnections of foul water into the surface water sewer network
5. discharges from contaminated land and disused mines

Formal mechanisms for managing diffuse pollution from non-***agricultural*** sources are set out in this section. Spatial planning procedures and policies, supported by the planning consultation ***process*** are also valuable mechanisms for reducing diffuse pollution.

Groundwater Protection position statements provide guidance on activities in advisory source protection zones around groundwater abstractions and encourages good practice to protect groundwater.

Mechanisms for managing non-***agricultural*** diffuse pollution are as follows.

Water Resources Act 1991, Anti-Pollution Works Notices s161A, Abandonment of Mines s91A and B as amended and the Mines (Notice and Abandonment) Regulations 1998, Water Protection Zones s93:

* notices can be served on polluters or prospective polluters to prevent or remediate water pollution

1. requires mine owners to notify the Environment Agency if they plan to abandon a mine and to produce a closure plan
2. restricts or prohibits activities in order to protect the water environment from poisonous, noxious or polluting matter

Environmental Permitting (England and Wales) Regulations 2016. Causing or knowingly permitting entry of pollution to inland freshwaters and coastal waters:

* allows prosecution for various offences where surface water or groundwater is polluted

1. require permit for disposals/discharges that might lead to inputs of pollutants to groundwater
2. allows notices to prohibit any activity that might lead to an input of a pollutant to groundwater

Water Industry Act 1991, s101A encourages first time sewerage as a solution where there may be pollution from multiple septic tanks or cesspools, providing certain conditions are met.

Control of Pollution (Oil Storage) (England) Regulations 2001 set minimum design standards for new and existing above ground commercial oil storage facilities.

Authorisation and approval mechanisms for the marketing and use of plant protection products, biocides and veterinary medicines:

* these are enforced through equivalent regulations covering plant protection products, veterinary medicines and biocides

1. require human health and environmental risk assessment of products and requirement for ‘authorisation ’ or ’ approval ’ by the competent authorities before the products can be marketed or used

Environmental Permitting (England and Wales) Regulations 2016:

* allows conditions in permits that can include pollution prevention and other ***measures*** to prevent diffuse pollution, including air emissions that can lead to acidification

1. requirements for secure storage, safe transport and controlled disposal reduce the potential for waste materials of all kinds to enter the water environment

Coal Industry Act 1994 as amended by Water Act 2003 and the Energy Act 2011, and supported by Ministerial Statements and Memorandums of Understanding with the Environment Agency and with Defra provide powers to the Coal Authority to:

* clean up and prevent water pollution from abandoned coal mines through a prioritised programme

1. clean up and prevent water pollution from abandoned mines other than coal subject to available funding

Trade effluent controls under Water Industry Act 1991 regulates discharges and drainage arrangements from certain industrial and trade sites.

The Detergents (Amendment) Regulations 2013 limit the amount of phosphate in domestic laundry detergent and will potentially limit the use of phosphate in dishwasher detergent too.

Environmental Protection Act 1990, Part 2A (remediation of contaminated land) and the Contaminated Land (England) Regulations 2006 as amended provide for notices to require remediation of historically contaminated land to improve the quality of groundwater and surface water.

The Environmental Permitting (England and Wales) Regulations 2016 set rules for the operation of septic tanks and sewage treatment plants, and the conditions that are required to be met (general binding rules) to operate systems without an environmental permit.

Local authority controls for managing non-***agricultural*** diffuse pollution are as follows.

Public Health Acts 1936 and 1961 and the Building Act 1984 gives local authorities powers relation to wrong sewer connections.

Building Regulations 2010 – Part H deals with sewers and encourages the sustainable urban drainage systems approach to surface water drainage (deals with non-mains sewerage systems such as septic tanks).

Building Regulations 2010 – Part J deals with oil storage, and complements the scope of the Control of Pollution (Oil Storage) (England) Regulations 2001.

Flood and Water Management Act 2010, Schedule 3 deals with sustainable drainage.

Town and Country Planning Act 1990, Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended); Planning Act 2008 (as amended); Planning guidance provided in National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), 2019 and supporting National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG), 2019; National Policy Statements (NPSs):

* in England, the NPPG expects that all major developments, and development in areas at risk of flooding, should incorporate sustainable drainage systems unless there is clear evidence that this would be inappropriate

1. conditions can be attached to development permission to require the use of sustainable drainage systems where appropriate and to ensure ongoing maintenance
2. the NPPF also requires land contamination to be considered in spatial planning

Town and Country Planning Act 1990, s215 gives local authorities powers to serve a notice on the owner or occupier of amenity land, or adjacent land, in their area to improve the condition of the land.

7.2.1 Sewage sludge

The Sludge (Use in ***Agriculture***) Regulations 1989 (SUiAR) aim to protect people, animals, plants and the environment against the possible harmful effects from the uncontrolled spreading of sewage sludge on ***agricultural*** land.

They encourage sewage sludge to be used correctly and prohibit it from being applied to soils unless the concentration of heavy metals in the soil is below certain limits. Monitoring must be carried out to make sure that the soil does not exceed these limits after sludge has been spread. Sludge must be treated before it is used, for example, to reduce pathogen levels, unless it is injected or worked into the soil. Animals cannot graze on land that has been spread with sludge, and crops cannot be harvested from the land, for three weeks after the sludge has been spread. Work is currently underway to move sludge from SUiAR and into the Environmental Permitting Regulation (EPR) framework.

Preventing soils becoming contaminated in this way also protects surface water and groundwater from polluted run-off.

All water companies follow the Safe Sludge Matrix, an agreement made in December 1998 between Water UK and the British Retail Consortium, which bans the use of untreated sludge on ***agricultural*** land. There is also a non-statutory code of practice.

Water and sewerage companies are responsible for managing recycling and disposal routes of sewage sludge produced by their sewage treatment works. They must comply with the requirements of the Sewage Sludge Regulations, Environmental Permitting Regulations and the Urban Waste Water Treatment Regulations.

The Environment Agency is the enforcement authority for the relevant legislation.

You can find further information at managing sewage sludge slurry and silage.

The Water Services Regulation Authority (Ofwat) is responsible for ensuring water companies are adequately funded to carry out their functions, including sewage sludge disposal.

Other approaches

Other approaches, such as voluntary mechanisms, include the following.

Highways England manage the strategic road network, they:

* allocated £300m to invest in the strategic road network until 2025, a proportion of this will address water quality issues

1. developed a Drainage Database Management System for the strategic road network to identify and help manage pollution risks
2. invested in a new fleet of salt gritters which optimise salt spreading rates and limit the risks to the water environment
3. carrying out research into alternative de-icing agents

General public awareness raising, such as the Oil Care and ConnectRight campaigns, and environmental information for small businesses on GOV.UK

Influencing developers to construct sustainable drainage systems in new developments, and retrofit in existing developments where practicable. This has now been backed up by amendments to the National Policy Planning Framework.

Education and training, including environmental issues in Construction Industry Training Board sponsored National Vocational Qualifications.

Joint regulator and operator agreements and memoranda of understanding, such as:

* agreements on the use of herbicides with Network Rail and water companies

1. the Environment Agency and Fire Service emergency response agreements
2. the Environment Agency and Coal Authority Memorandum of Understanding

Voluntary codes of practice, such as:

* the Timber Treatment Code of Practice

1. Forest and Water guidelines
2. Metal Finishers code
3. the photo-imaging code
4. the British Marine Federation and Royal Yachting Association Environmental Code of Practice
5. the Charter for Sustainable Cleaning (December 2004) which is driven by the detergents industry and includes key performance indicators in order to monitor progress

United Kingdom Water Industry Research (UKWIR) common framework for capital maintenance planning, and sustainable drainage systems code of practice – an interim code of practice on sustainable drainage systems (published by Construction Industry Research and Information Association).

Industry initiatives such as the Amenity Forum, which is concerned with promoting best practice in using pesticides in the amenity sector, and ***measures*** identified within the UK Strategy for the Sustainable Use of Plant Protection Products to deal with amenity and home and garden use of pesticides.

The Water and Abandoned Metal Mines Programme, implements a programme of ***measures*** to improve the status of water bodies due to the impact of abandoned metal mines (funded primarily by Defra). The Coal Authority delivers a separate programme of ***measures*** to prevent deterioration and improve the status of water bodies due to pollution from abandoned coal mines (funded by BEIS).

Contributing to academic studies and research investigating the contribution of road run off and urban drainage as a vector for micro-plastics (road and tyre wear particles).

Developing partnership initiatives to explore and pilot screening technology or use of wetlands which trap plastics particles at outfalls and from surface water runoff.

Examples of guidance include the following:

* industry sector guides, such as Building a Cleaner Future and Construction Industry Research and Information Association ’ s control of water pollution from construction sites guide

1. supply chain controls, for example including environmental requirements in construction contracts
2. working with the food and drink industry to remove phosphates from food additives
3. best practice and design manuals, such as the Highways England ’ s Design Manual for Roads and Bridges

8. Physical modifications and morphology

Morphology describes the physical characteristics of water environments, including both landforms and the ***processes*** that creates and modifies them. Morphology is a term used in river basin management planning and along with hydrology is known as hydromorphology. Morphology is important for physical habitat, managing flood risk and erosion, and biodiversity. A functioning morphology can help catchments adapt to climate change and other pressures, but also it is important to understand the risk posed by a changing landscape.

It is important that waters and their surrounding landscapes are managed to help improve the morphological condition to help protect and improve the ecology and ecosystem functions. This is done by managing the pressures acting on morphology, restoring the impacts from existing (legacy) physical modifications and managing the impacts from new activities. New development opportunities to seek opportunities to not only protect, but also enhance or restore waters, providing overall net gain.

Section 8.3 provides an overview of mechanisms used to mitigate the impacts from physical pressures, and to enhance and restore the morphology of waters, often lost because of existing and historic modifications. The mechanisms identified relate to the following areas of activity and development – they focus primarily on mechanisms to manage morphology but include reference to hydromorphology where relevant:

* navigation

1. development
2. land drainage
3. flood and coastal erosion risk management
4. dredging, disposal and development in estuaries (transitional waters) and coastal waters
5. other controls, plans and programmes

8.1 Navigation and recreational boating

Along the coast and within estuarine waters, port and harbour authorities have a general duty to exercise their functions with regard to nature conservation and other related environmental considerations. There may also be specific duties that are only applicable to individual port and harbour authorities, which are set out in local legislation such as harbour revision orders. Harbour authorities are also public bodies for the purposes of the WFD Regulations.

This is also the case for inland navigation authorities, which have general environmental duties as well as more specific duties that may be set out in local legislation. The Canal and River Trust is the largest UK navigation authority. The Environment Agency is also a navigation authority and the second largest with 1010km of primarily river navigations in England.

The Green Blue is a joint programme by the Royal Yachting Association and British Marine. It helps the boating community reduce their impact on coastal and inland waters by raising awareness, supporting practical projects and offering easy to follow advice. It has been very successful in influencing boat users, marinas and boatyards to adopt good environmental management and trial innovative solutions; and has also made a significant contribution to reducing the spread of invasive non-native species.

The majority of England ’ s inland navigation authorities also require compliance with the common minimum standards of the Boat Safety Scheme as a requirement of boat licensing or registration.

The Boat Safety Scheme is owned jointly by the Canal and River Trust and the Environment Agency and is a public safety initiative aimed at helping reduce the risks of fire, explosion, carbon monoxide poisoning and pollution on small craft and so keeping visitors to the waterways, as well as navigation authority staff safe.

The work is done by promoting fire safety, carbon monoxide and pollution avoidance advice to help boat owners keep themselves and their crews safe as well as periodic examination of fuel systems, gas systems, electrical systems and appliances. Boats need to comply with common, minimum standards of construction and equipment and undergo an examination every 4 years.

8.2 Development

Under the planning system local councils and other planning authorities must consider environmental protection and enhancement when assessing development proposals. The statutory ***processes*** of Sustainability Appraisal (incorporating Strategic Environmental Assessment), Habitats Regulations Assessment and individual Environmental Impact Assessment ***processes*** (or other relevant assessments) provide a means of screening potential impacts of plans, programmes and individual proposals. Further information is provided in the Planning Practice Guidance supporting the National Planning Policy Framework.

By law, any planning application for development has to be determined against policies in the Development Plan for the area, unless material considerations indicate otherwise. These considerations include the National Planning Policy Framework which states that the planning system should contribute to conserving and enhancing the natural environment by:

* protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, sites of biodiversity or geological value and soils

1. minimising impacts on biodiversity and providing net gains in biodiversity, contributing to the government ’ s commitment to halt the overall decline in biodiversity, including by establishing coherent ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures
2. preventing new and existing development from contributing to, being put at unacceptable risk from, or being adversely affected by, unacceptable levels of soil, air, water or noise pollution or land instability; development should, wherever possible, help to improve local environmental conditions such as water quality, taking into account relevant information such as river basin management plans

The Planning Practice Guidance draws attention to the requirements of the WFD Regulations and highlights that local planning authorities should have regard to river basin management plans in exercising their functions. The guidance provides further information on how planners should take account of impacts on the water environment in Local Plans and planning applications, with reference to the WFD Regulations.

To achieve this, the guidance advises that local planning policies will need to consider water supply, wastewater and water quality issues, including:

* how to help protect and enhance local surface and ground waters that allow new development to proceed

1. the type and location of new development where an assessment of the potential impacts on water bodies may be required

The guidance provides further information on the consideration of planning applications where there are water quality or supply issues.

Where the assessment indicates that the development will have a significant adverse impact on water quality, the proposed development will only be acceptable in terms of the WFD Regulations in the circumstances set out in the river basin management plan.

The consideration of any hydromorphological impacts are likely to be particularly important where new development requires new or changed flood defences or improved coastal defences as these can often be designed to combine improving ecological quality with providing recreation facilities (‘green infrastructure ’ ) for the local community.

8.3 Influencing the final planning decision

Under planning law, an application for planning permission must be determined in accordance with the development plan for the area, unless material planning considerations indicate otherwise. The Environment Agency is a statutory consultee for local plans and is also a consultation body is also a consultation body for developments requiring Environmental Impact Assessment. The Environment Agency ’ s advice, including on the ***measures*** in the river basin management plan, is therefore important in informing local plan policies and land allocations that will provide the basis for future decision on planning applications.

Under the provisions of the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015, the Environment Agency is a statutory consultee for several types of planning application related to statutory duties on flood risk, protection of land and water quality, waste regulation and fisheries. This is an important mechanism for informing planning decisions which can improve the hydromorphological condition of water bodies, where appropriate, and help influence development proposals which have the potential to cause deterioration of a water body. Planning conditions can be proposed to mitigate flood risk, water quality and ecological impacts of proposed development and the Environment Agency already work with local planning authorities and developers to achieve these aims.

National Policy Statements for Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs) in the energy, waste, water and transport sectors ensure that Secretaries of State take account of WFD Regulations objectives when issuing Development Consent Orders.

Some developments may have to be assessed against the requirement to prevent deterioration in ecological status or potential and will have to comply with regulation 19 (New Modifications) of the WFD Regulations. Planning Practice Guidance and National Policy Statements provide more guidance on this. The river basin management plan records decisions that are justified using regulation 19.

The mechanisms for managing development and hydromorphological pressures are as follows.

Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) (England and Wales) Regulations 2017:

* requires an Environmental Impact Assessment for certain activities (listed in the Schedules to the regulations) to determine the likelihood that a proposed project (development or other activity) will have significant environmental effects

1. consenting authorities can modify or reject proposals that would significantly impact on hydromorphological conditions and can secure additional conservation gains as a condition of project approval

Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004:

* ensures the environmental implications are taken into account before certain plans and programmes are adopted; The strategic environmental assessment ***process*** is integrated throughout the development of a plan or programme, notably during data gathering, feasibility of options, development of the preferred option, and monitoring its implementation

1. the Environment Agency is a consultation body to Environmental Assessments (Strategic Environmental Assessments and Environmental Impact Assessments) produced by other public bodies and developers

Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015 establishes the Environment Agency as a statutory consultee for several types of planning application related to Environment Agency ’ s statutory duties on flood risk, protection of land and water quality, waste regulation and fisheries.

Town and Country Planning Act 1990, Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended); Planning Act 2008 (as amended); Planning guidance provided in National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), 2019 and supporting Planning Practice Guidance (PPG), 2019; National Policy Statements (NPSs) Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 s3:

* establishes the sustainable development duty of spatial planning and establishes the principles of and need to produce local plans

1. in England, the National Planning Policy Framework expects that all major developments, and development in areas at risk of flooding, should incorporate sustainable drainage systems unless there is clear evidence that this would be inappropriate
2. conditions can be attached to development permission to require the use of sustainable drainage systems where appropriate, and to ensure ongoing maintenance. Planning agreements (s.106) may also be required

8.4 Land drainage

The Environment Agency has the power to carry out various actions on main river to cleanse, repair or otherwise maintain existing watercourses. It has the power to improve any existing watercourse or drainage by deepening, widening, straightening, raising or otherwise improving, or by removing or altering mill dams, weirs or other obstructions. It has the power to make any new watercourse or drainage or do any other act required for the efficient drainage of any land. Local authorities and Internal Drainage Boards have similar powers to act on ordinary watercourses.

These powers cannot be used to undertake works for the sole purpose of improving the physical condition or conservation interest of rivers, although in some cases it can be possible to realise these benefits additionally.

The Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 gave the Environment Agency amended byelaw-making powers to ensure that the broader effects of drainage systems on the environment can be taken into account when considering flood risk matters under byelaws. The Environment Agency is intending to use these powers to replace regional land drainage byelaws with a single set of national byelaws. By taking greater account of the environmental impacts of land drainage activities these proposed new byelaws will help reduce impacts to hydromorphological conditions in main rivers.

The Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 provide similar byelaw-making powers to local authorities and Internal Drainage Boards. This power could be used by these authorities to redraft their byelaws to help reduce impacts in ordinary watercourses.

8.4.1 Dredging and land drainage

The Environment Agency ’ s Environmental Permitting regime regulate the flood and environmental impacts of dredging activities on a main river. Dredging on ordinary watercourses for the purposes of land drainage, flood risk management or navigation in ordinary watercourses may require an ordinary watercourse consent from the Local Authority or Internal Drainage Board. In all cases the Environment Agency advises that the dredging work adheres to good practice guides.

Mechanisms for managing land drainage are as follows.

Environmental Permitting (England and Wales) Regulations 2016:

* the Environment Agency had regulatory control (through flood defence consenting under section 109 Water Resources Act 1991) of the construction, alteration or repair of structures in, over or under any main river, they are now regulated under the Environmental Permitting regime

1. power is also given to the Environment Agency to alter or remove any unauthorised works and recover the costs of this
2. conditions can be imposed only in relation to the time and manner in which work can be carried out
3. where the main river is an estuary, main river dredging may also require a marine licence unless carried out by harbour authorities for navigation under their own powers

Water Resources Act 1991, s165, Land Drainage Act 1991 s14(2):

* empowers Environment Agency to maintain or improve existing drainage works or to construct new works on a main river

1. power also extends to maintain, improve or construct drainage works for the purpose of defence against sea water or tidal water
2. work can only be undertaken to improve flow conveyance and ensure the efficient working of the drainage system, though other conservation benefits may also be achieved
3. equivalent powers are conferred upon Internal Drainage Boards and local authorities through section 14(2) of the Land Drainage Act 1991
4. any work carried out by third parties that may impact on flow conveyance is subject to a land drainage consent from the relevant authority (Environment Agency, Internal Drainage Board or local authority) – as follows:

Water Resources Act 1991 s107 provides Environment Agency power to serve a notice in regard to main river to ensure that necessary works to improve flow conveyance are carried out, or to undertake the works and recover reasonable costs.

Land Drainage Act 1991, s21 and s25 provides Internal Drainage Boards and local authorities with powers to serve a notice in regard to ordinary watercourses to ensure that necessary works to improve flow conveyance are carried out, or to undertake the works and recover reasonable costs.

Land Drainage Act 1991, s23 provides local authorities and Internal Drainage Boards with regulatory control (through land drainage consenting) of the erection, raising or otherwise altering of mill dams, weirs or other like obstructions to flow:

* written consent is also required for the erection or alteration of any culvert that is likely to affect the flow in ordinary watercourses

Water Resources Act 1991, Schedule 25 as amended by s100 Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 provides power to the Environment Agency to make byelaws necessary for the efficient working of any drainage system and for regulating the effects of any drainage system on the environment.

Land Drainage Act 1991s 66 as amended by s100 Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006. Confers byelaw-making powers on Internal Drainage Boards and local authorities that are deemed necessary for the efficient working of the drainage system and for regulating the effects of any drainage system on the environment. The powers for Internal Drainage Boards only extend to ordinary watercourses.

Environmental Impact Assessment (Land Drainage Improvement Works) Regulations 1999 requires an Environmental Impact Assessment for certain activities (listed in the Schedules of the Regulations) to determine the likelihood that a proposed project (development or other activity) will have significant environmental effects. Consenting authorities can modify or reject proposals that would significantly impact on hydromorphological conditions and can secure additional conservation gains as a condition of project approval.

8.5 Flood and coastal erosion risk management

Under the Flood and Water Management Act 2010, the Environment Agency, lead local flood authorities, district councils, internal drainage boards, water and sewerage companies, and highway authorities have a duty to co-operate to put in place better flood risk management for the benefit of their communities.

An integrated approach to managing water will provide better protection for communities from flooding. Increasing the number of water management schemes within and across catchments will also reduce flood risk and help manage drought risk, whilst also looking at further opportunities for any nationally strategic infrastructure and increasing the provision of sustainable drainage systems.

The Government ’ s Flood Policy Statement included a commitment to reform local flood risk plans by 2026 ahead of a future capital programme to ensure greater alignment with investment. Defra has set up a local flood risk management planning reform advisory group that will bring together key bodies to provide recommendations, advice and views on local flood risk management planning reform to inform future government policy so that local plans (among other objectives) support a catchment based approach; follow an adaptive, long-term approach which accounts for climate change; and identify opportunities to deliver multiple benefits.

The Environment Agency ’ s National Flood and Coastal Risk Management Strategy for England includes a commitment to ‘mainstream the use of nature based solutions ’ to provide ‘climate resilient places ’ . The strategy also links specifically with the river basin management ***process***, as follows.

***Measure*** 1.4.4: From 2021 investments in flood and coastal projects by risk management authorities will help to achieve objectives in river basin management plans and contribute to the government ’ s aim for 75% of waters to be close to their natural state as soon as practicable.

Taking a catchment-based approach will support every place to thrive in a changing climate. Every area of England will have a more strategic and comprehensive plan that drives long-term local action and investment, enabling the full range of actions that could be taken to be considered. Local flood and coastal erosion plans will link with wider plans for an area to seize opportunities to secure multiple benefits. In areas facing significant coastal erosion and impacts from sea levels rising, support will be provided to local areas to help them to implement long-term plans to manage risk.

As part of the Budget in March 2020, the government announced a flood and coastal erosion risk management programme of £5.2 billion over the 6 years from 2021 to 2027. For this new investment programme, the ‘partnership funding ’ arrangements, which determine the level of government funding available to projects, has been updated. This includes changes that provide more funding for flood schemes which use flood and coastal risk management ***measures*** that provide a range of environmental benefits.

The environmental outcomes provided by the flood and coastal erosion investment programme, including the length of watercourses enhanced, are routinely reported by the Environment Agency. Flood and coastal risk management strategies and projects are assessed against river basin management plan objectives and in many cases need a number of consents and permissions where environmental impacts are considered.

8.5.1 Floods Regulations

The Flood Risk Regulations 2009 require the assessment of the risk of flooding, map its potential impact and plan objectives and ***measures*** to reduce potential and significant flood risk, with a focus on human health, cultural heritage, the environment and economic activity.

Lead local flood authorities also prepare local flood risk management strategies under the Flood and Water Management Act 2010. Government ’ s flood policy statement also set out a commitment to reform local flood planning and Defra has set up a local flood risk management planning reform advisory group to help steer the reform so that local plans (among other objectives) support a catchment based approach; follow an adaptive, long-term approach which accounts for climate change; and identify opportunities to deliver multiple benefits.

8.6 Dredging, disposal and development in estuaries, coastal and marine waters

Alongside the terrestrial planning system, there is a system of marine planning and marine licensing for regulating development and other activities in the marine area. In broad terms, this comprises the area seaward of mean high water springs and within estuaries to the extent of tidal influence.

The Marine Policy Statement provides the high-level policy context for marine licensing and is supplemented by 11 marine plans covering all English marine waters. The Marine Management Organisation is responsible for producing the marine plans. This follows a similar approach to terrestrial plans – setting the direction for decision making at a more local level to lead to efficient and sustainable use of marine resources.

The Marine Management Organisation is also responsible for marine licensing in England. Amongst other things, a marine licence is likely to be required for the construction, alteration or improvement of any works; for the deposit of substances or objects from vessels; for the removal of substances or objects from the seabed; and dredging. Certain exemptions can also apply, for example, harbour authorities are often able to undertake dredging under their own powers without a licence.

Unlike terrestrial planning, there are no statutory consultees for marine licensing. However, Defra have issued guidance on the bodies that should be considered primary advisors and regularly consulted by the Marine Management Organisation.

The Marine Management Organisation is also responsible for determining applications for harbour orders. These are a form of statutory instrument which create or amend legislation governing harbour authorities. Amongst other things, they can give harbour authorities power to undertake development and dredging.

The Environment Agency also has a regulatory role in estuarine and coastal waters through mechanisms such as flood risk assessment permits, environmental permitting (to 12 nautical miles, although its role in relation to pollution control in, and permitting of discharges to, water extends only to 3 nautical miles) and abstraction licensing (in tidal rivers, bays, creeks and arms of the sea).

Both the Marine Management Organisation and the Environment Agency have adopted the coastal concordat. This sets out the important principles for coordinating the consenting ***process*** for coastal development. One principle encourages authorities to dispense with consents where appropriate. The Environment Agency has the ability to dispense with flood defence consenting in favour of marine licensing when satisfied that the terms of the marine licence would provide adequate mitigation for flood risk.

Mechanisms for managing development, dredging and disposal in estuaries, coastal and marine waters are as follows.

Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009:

* controls the deposit or removal of any substance or object in, on or under the sea bed including below the mean high water springs mark and in any tidal river to the extent of the tidal influence, from a vehicle, vessel, aircraft, marine or land-based structure or floating container

1. the construction, alteration or improvement of any works either in or over the sea or on or under the seabed and any form of marine dredging
2. requires implementation of marine plans and marine conservation zones

Marine Works (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2007 (as amended):

* requires an Environmental Impact Assessment for certain activities (listed in the Schedules of the Regulations) to determine the likelihood that a proposed project (development or other activity) will have significant environmental effects

Harbour revision and empowerment orders:

* controls the dredging and other activities carried out by harbour authorities within a set area associated with a port or marina

Harbour Works (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 1999:

* requires an Environmental Impact Assessment for certain activities (listed in the Schedules of the Regulations) to determine the likelihood that a proposed harbour and associated activities will have significant environmental effects

In determining marine licence applications, the Marine Management Organisation must consider the need to protect the environment. This may include consideration of physical changes and morphology. Marine licences and harbour orders may also be subject to the same statutory assessment ***processes*** as the terrestrial system, such as environmental impact assessment. Conditions can then be used to mitigate adverse impacts.

As public bodies, the Marine Management Organisation must also have regard to the river basin management plans and any supplementary plans in exercising their functions. This includes assessing and determining marine licence and harbour order applications. Harbour authorities undertaking activities under their own powers must also have regard to river basin management plans.

Important environmental considerations for regulators are potential hydrological effects, interference with other marine activities, possible turbidity, noise, drift of fine materials smothering seabed flora and fauna, habitat loss and impact to designated conservation areas. In this way new physical modifications can be assessed to see if they will cause deterioration of the hydrological and morphological conditions. This will also highlight opportunities to make improvements, where this is possible.

Similar to terrestrial areas, many estuaries and coastal waters have environmental designations and protected sites which must be considered in assessing any consent application. This includes all Marine Protected Areas (Special Areas of Conservation, Special Protection Areas, Ramsar sites, Marine Conservation Zones and Sites of Special Scientific Interest). These additional protections may also help to achieve the environmental objectives of the river basin management plans. Under the Maintenance Dredging Protocol some harbour authorities have produced baseline documents to review whether activities will impact on local protected sites. These assessments can also incorporate the environmental objectives of the river basin management plans in addition to protecting hydromorphological conditions.

UK Marine Policy Statement states that dredged material should not be accepted for disposal where appropriate opportunities exist to reuse and recycle. Restoring estuarine and coastal habitats with dredged sediment should be considered where practical. Restoring these habitats will contribute to river basin management plan objectives by re-naturalising coastal fringes, improving estuarine and coastal water quality, as well as providing many other multiple benefits for people and nature.

8.7 Other plans, programmes and controls

The management of activities with potential to affect hydromorphological conditions is relevant to many different sectors of industry. Consequently managing hydromorphological pressures requires an integrated catchment management approach. The sections below list other relevant mechanisms for managing hydromorphological pressures.

Salmon and Freshwater Fisheries Act 1975, Part II:

* requires that new obstructions to the passage of salmon and migratory trout (or the raising or repair of existing obstructions) be fitted with appropriate fish passes

1. includes powers to serve notice (under section 9) to require these works to be undertaken
2. section 2(4) of this Act makes it an offence to wilfully disturb any river or lake bed, bank or shallow on which any spawn or spawning fish may be

Eels (England and Wales) Regulations 2009:

* enables Environment Agency to serve notice to require removal of an obstruction to eel migration or installation of an eel pass

1. from 1 January 2015 required all water intakes (taking more than 20 cubic metres per day) and outfalls to be screened to prevent entrainment of eel unless exempted by Environment Agency notice

Water Act 2003, s 3 and 4:

* empowers the Environment Agency to license existing unlicensed impoundments or remove or else modify existing unlicensed impoundments where necessary for the protection of the environment by serving notice under section 4

Water Resources Act 1991 sections 161ZA and ZB:

* allows for service of notice or taking action in relation to ‘harm ’ to the physical condition of surface waters

1. harm is defined as an adverse impact on any hydromorphological quality element that is likely to prevent achievement of WFD Regulations environmental objectives
2. Environment Agency use of these powers, which came into effect in December 2009, must explicitly be linked to the achievement of WFD Regulations environmental objectives

Conservation Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended). See section 2.6.1 for more information.

Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, s28G:

* places a duty on public bodies in exercising their functions to take reasonable steps to further the conservation and enhancement of the special features of Sites of Special Scientific Interest

1. limited geographical application

Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, s28J:

* gives Natural England powers to put in place a management scheme to conserve or restore the flora, fauna, geological or geophysical features of Sites of Special Scientific Interest

1. may need Environment Agency (or other drainage authority) consent for the works
2. limited geographical application

Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 s 28K:

* gives Natural England powers to serve a management notice to ensure that conservation or restoration works are implemented

1. empowers Natural England to carry out the works itself and recover the costs from the owner or occupier
2. may need Environment Agency (or other drainage authority) consent for the works

***Measures*** to control diffuse pollution have significant potential to prevent deterioration of hydromorphological conditions, and to restore water bodies to a more natural condition. These mechanisms are discussed in section 7.

Various Environment Agency plans and strategies can also be used to target the mechanisms outlined in this section, including:

* fisheries action plans

1. salmon action plans
2. eel management plans
3. national trout and grayling strategy
4. sea trout and salmon fisheries strategy
5. Biodiversity 2020: a strategy for England ’ s wildlife and ecosystem services
6. species action plans
7. habitat action plans
8. local biodiversity action plans
9. water resources strategy

Many restoration and enhancement projects are undertaken in partnership with, or in some cases solely, by Natural England and other conservation bodies such as the rivers trusts. Many projects are undertaken through voluntary agreements at local level.

9. Fishing and fish stocking

The Environment Agency is responsible for the management of freshwater and migratory fisheries in England. This responsibility extends 6 nautical miles out to sea. The Environment Agency has a specific duty to maintain, improve and develop fisheries, including both migratory and freshwater fish to:

* conserve and maintain diversity of fish and conserve and the aquatic environment

1. enhance the contribution that salmon and freshwater fish make to the economy
2. enhance the social value of fishing

Specifically, the Environment Agency is required to maintain, improve and develop salmon, trout, freshwater fish, lampreys, smelt and eel fisheries. This includes making sure that inappropriate fish species are not introduced and that the diseases or parasites they may carry are adequately controlled.

In most recreational fisheries it has become popular to practice catch and release (almost 100% for coarse fish and eel and more than 70% for salmon) or to re-stock to support the development of new fisheries or assist recovery due to the impacts of environmental incidents. (Note, the Environment Agency policy is generally not to allow salmon stocking given potential impacts to wild fish).

Formal mechanisms to conserve and protect fish populations are as follows:

* national spring salmon byelaws 2018; prohibits the killing of salmon before 1 June in net fisheries and 16 June in rod fisheries each year

1. fisheries byelaws; control fishing activities, such as bans on use of live bait and restricting the fishing methods used as well as fishing seasons and (for net fisheries) times and areas of fishing
2. Aquatic Animal Health Regulations 2009; requires fish farms, suppliers and fisheries to be registered or authorised so that the transfer of fish diseases is better controlled
3. Import of Live Fish Act (ILFA) 1980; controls spread of non-native species. Regulates the import, keeping and release of non-native fish by means of Orders relating to specific listed species
4. the Keeping and Introduction Fish (England and River Esk Catchment Area) Regulations 2015; prohibits the introduction of fish into, and the keeping of non-native fish in, inland waters without a permit
5. Prohibition of Keeping of Live Fish (Crayfish) Order 1996; prohibits (with the one exception of signal crayfish Pacifastacus leniusculus in areas where it has become established) the keeping of any non-native crayfish except under licence
6. Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981; prohibits release to the wild of scheduled invasive-non- native species or allowing them to escape into the wild
7. Salmon and Freshwater Fisheries Act 1975; provides various powers for the protection and management of fisheries, including the introductions of orders that limit the number of nets fishing in a public fishery
8. Water Resources Act 1991; sets out the responsibilities of the Environment Agency in relation to water pollution, water resource management, flood defence, fisheries, and in some areas, navigation
9. Eels (England and Wales) Regulations 2009; allows the Environment Agency to translocate or stock eel, serve notices requiring eel passes in obstructions and requires provision of screens to protect eels

Other approaches

The Environment Agency works with national and local organisations to improve awareness of fisheries problems and encourage good practice. Accreditation schemes that encourage fish welfare and conservation help with this and include schemes that relate to products used by anglers.

Salmon action plans and eel management plans have been prepared that identify a range of pressures that need to be addressed to improve salmon and eel stocks. The Environment Agency ’ s sea trout and salmon fisheries strategy builds on the earlier production of an individual Salmon Action Plan (for each principal salmon river) by progressively integrating ***measures*** into the river basin planning cycle. Whilst the strategy recognises the need to maintain a national overview of salmon conservation, the important component requires individual stocks to be managed effectively. This approach is endorsed by the North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organisation which is an inter-governmental body concerned with salmon conservation at an international level.

Eel management plans are a requirement of the European Union Eel Regulation (see section below) and aim to improve the eel stock in each river basin district. ***Measures*** may include: eel net limitations, closed seasons, maximum size limits, regulation of eel traders, traceability of imports and exports of eels, stocking, reducing losses through entrainment and improved connectivity in rivers.

Local fisheries action plans have been developed in some places in partnership between the Environment Agency and local angling and fisheries groups, with input from conservation and other interest groups. They are based on river catchments, but cover canal and still-water fisheries as well as rivers. They can cover a wide range of subjects from fish habitat through to angling promotion and land management. Each fisheries action plan is different and reflects the concerns and priorities of local angling and fisheries interests.

Schedule 27 of the Water Resources Act 1991 provides the Environment Agency with powers to make emergency byelaws to respond effectively and promptly to unforeseen threats to fish stocks; to operate an authorisation regime for some fishing activities extending the fisheries licensing system. The Act gave powers for Ministers to introduce a new regulatory scheme to manage the movement of live fish in order to protect local and national biodiversity the Keeping and Introduction Fish (England and River Esk Catchment Area) Regulations 2015.

The Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 established Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authorities in England, previously Sea Fisheries Committees, who can introduce byelaws for the regulation of sea fisheries that have an impact on migratory fish, in order to protect these species. Byelaws can be used to control fishing activities to prevent bed sediments being disrupted, bed habitat being removed, flow/sediment dynamics being altered, contaminants being disturbed, and changes to water quality.

The Marine Management Organisation has responsibility for enforcing sea fisheries regulations out to 200 nautical miles or the median line with neighbouring. It also enforces national fisheries ***measures***, including those implemented under the Sea Fish (Conservation) Act 1967 and associated regulations. Controls on the operators of shellfisheries and fish farming are available through Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authorities, the Centre for Environment, Fisheries, and Aquaculture Science register, seabed licences from the Crown Estate and several regulating orders.

The Environment Agency works with the Marine Management Organisation, Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authorities, and Centre for Environment, Fisheries, and Aquaculture Science to enable appropriate ***measures*** to be taken to regulate sea fish for the protection of salmon and other migratory species.

9.1 Eel Regulation

The Eels (England and Wales) Regulations 2009 implement the eel passage ***measures*** of the European Union Eel Regulation by giving the Environment Agency powers regarding provision of eel passes, screens and removal of barriers.

There is a requirement for the development of eel management plans (EMPs) comprising ***measures*** appropriate to effect eel stock recovery based on the pressures eels face within the river basin districts. The target is to achieve migration to sea of at least 40% of historic silver eel biomass levels.

The Environment Agency, on behalf of Defra has produced EMPs for the river basin districts in England and those that cross borders into Wales. The Environment Agency is implementing the EMPs in England. Each plan sets out short-term and long-term ***measures*** to manage and monitor eel populations within each river basin district. ***Measures*** include regulation of eel fisheries, removal of barriers to migration, increasing available habitat and reducing the impacts of entrainment.

You can find further information at increasing eel stocks.

10. Invasive non-native species (INNS)

A non-native species is one that has been transported from its native range to a new region with the assistance of humans. There are around 2000 non-native species established in Great Britain, and 10% to 15% of those have negative impacts. In freshwaters, non-native species have a greater chance of becoming invasive and causing ecological and economic impacts: around 40% of species introduced to freshwaters have a negative impact.

Enhancing biosecurity to reduce the spread and impacts of INNS is a key component of Defra ’ s 25 year plan goals and targets. The ‘Invasive Non-native Species Framework Strategy for Great Britain ’ , Defra, August 2015 (available at the Great Britain Non-Native Species Secretariat website) provides a strategic framework within which the actions of government departments, their related bodies and key stakeholders can be better co-ordinated.

Main ***measures*** in the strategy include:

* educating people on the risks from invasive non-native species, and how to help avoid introducing these species

1. maintaining and developing the web-based shared Non-Native Species Information Portal that shows the distribution of non-native species and more detailed factsheets for many species
2. sharing and developing expertise for early identification of potential problem species that may already be here or on their way, and the best ways to handle them
3. developing a clear framework for rapid responses when invasive species are detected for the first time in Britain
4. encouraging a partnership approach to managing ***invasions*** of species
5. supporting research on cost-effective methods to address established ***invasions***
6. identifying main pathways of ***invasion***

The UK has specific international and national obligations and laws to control the spread of INNS which include:

* the Invasive Alien Species Regulation (IAS Regulation) aims to limit spread, implement controls and prevent risks from INNS. The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and the Invasive Alien Species (Enforcement and Permitting) Order 2019 provide a comprehensive regulatory regime to tackle species of special concern in Great Britain

1. the IAS Regulation and the GB invasive non-native species strategy focus on understanding, management and mitigation of pathways of spread
2. Infrastructure Act 2015 amended the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 Part 4 Environmental control of animal and plant species allowing statutory bodies to serve species control agreements and orders for invasive non-native species
3. Marine Strategy Regulations 2010; sets targets for reduction in risk of introduction and spread of non-indigenous species, in particular invasive species
4. Import of Live Fish Act (ILFA) 1980: controls spread of non-native species and regulates the import, keeping and release of non native fish by means of Orders relating to specific listed species
5. the Keeping and Introduction Fish (England and River Esk Catchment Area) Regulations 2014: prohibits the introduction of fish into, and the keeping of non-native fish in, inland waters without a permit
6. Prohibition of Keeping of Live Fish (Crayfish) Order 1996: prohibits (with the one exception of signal crayfish Pacifastacus leniusculus in areas where it has become established) the keeping of any non-native crayfish except under licence
7. Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981; prohibits sale and releasing to the wild of scheduled invasive-non-native species or allowing them to escape into the wild
8. fisheries byelaws; controls fishing activities, such as bans on use of live bait (or by using the licence schemes described above)
9. Alien and Locally Absent Species in Aquaculture (England and Wales) Regulations 2011; requires permits for movement of non-native fish in aquaculture

Other approaches

The most effective approach to the invasive non-native species pressure is to work in partnership to reduce introductions of new species and slow the spread of those that are already present by applying good biosecurity (***measures*** which reduce the risk of spreading diseases and invasive non-native plants and animals) and promoting the ‘Check, Clean Dry ’ and ‘Be Plantwise ’ campaigns.

Vulnerable locations such as those with high biodiversity value or at risk from plant-induced flooding should have ***measures*** to improve and raise awareness of biosecurity as a priority.

The Environment Agency and Natural England and partners will implement rapid responses to contain and eradicate new ***invasions***, where practicable. National management plans are in place to reduce the further spread of certain species or to reduce their impact where eradication is technically infeasible.

Direct ***measures*** to detect and eradicate invasive non-native species may be taken locally, often in partnership with others (for example with a local action group and as part of Local Biodiversity Action Plans. Flood risk river management programmes often include ***measures*** to manage non- native plant species where they have an impact on flood risk.

11. Direct discharge of pollutants into groundwater

Direct discharges of hazardous substances into groundwater are prohibited by the WFD Regulations which is put into effect through the Environmental Permitting (England and Wales) Regulations 2016 and other legislation noted under section 2 xiii above, subject to certain specific exemptions laid down in the regulations. These exemptions essentially allow a permit to be potentially granted for a direct discharge of pollutant substances to groundwater but only where the discharge does not compromise any of the other WFD Regulations objectives to prevent pollution of groundwater, for example the status of the groundwater body is not reduced and there is no significant rising trend of pollutants that needs to be reversed.

12. Chemicals and priority substances

The WFD Regulations provides for identification of priority substances. The regulations requires progressive reduction of discharges, emissions and losses of these substances and, for a subset of priority hazardous substances, cessation or phasing-out of discharges, emissions and losses within 20 years. It also requires environmental quality standards to be used as criteria for the assessment of good chemical status for surface waterbodies. The initial list of priority substances was agreed in 2001.

The initial list contained 33 priority substances (or groups of substances), of which 13 were identified as priority hazardous substances.

Further standards were implemented in 2015. There are now 45 priority substances of which 21 are priority hazardous substances. This number includes 11 new substances for which the standards came into force in 2018.

Objectives to achieve good chemical status and for progressive reduction of priority substances and cessation of priority hazardous substances are subject to disproportionate cost and technical infeasibility considerations.

A further requirement of the Environmental Quality Standards Directive is to take ***measures*** to ensure, subject to WFD Article 4, that concentrations of certain priority substances that tend to accumulate in sediment or biota (or both) do not significantly increase. The WFD (Standards and Classification) Directions (England and Wales) 2015 has a requirement to establish an inventory of emissions, discharges and losses of the priority substances for each river basin district.

There is a requirement to identify substances that qualify as ‘specific pollutants ’ , that is, substances that are considered to potentially cause environmental problems, but have not otherwise been identified as priority substances requiring action. Environmental quality standards are derived for these using a similar ***process*** to that for priority substances. An initial list of ‘specific pollutants ’ was set out in directions from government to the Environment Agency. The initial directions were revoked and replaced by the Water Framework Directive (Standards and Classification) Directions (England and Wales) 2015. The new directions introduced revised standards for some ‘specific pollutants ’ and introduced new Specific Pollutants to the list. The Environment Act 2021 sets out new powers to allow the Secretary of State to make changes to substances and standards related to the chemical status of surface water or groundwater.

Since June 2009, risks to human health and the environment (including the water environment) have been assessed for many chemicals under the EC REACH (Registration, Evaluation, Authorisation and restriction of Chemicals) Regulations. UK REACH commenced in 2021 and allows control of the use and bringing to market of many chemicals within the UK (see section 12.3).

Many of the mechanisms listed in section 6 (point source pollution), 7 (diffuse pollution) and 12 (Plant Protection Products) can be used to avoid or limit pollution from priority substances and specific pollutants. Other available mechanisms for managing these substances are given below.

***Measures*** for managing substances:

* controls on point or diffuse sources of pollution under the Environmental Permitting Regulations (England and Wales) 2016; places controls on discharges or disposals of substances; eliminates, reduces and renders emissions harmless

1. Control of Pollution Act 1974; bans use of tributyltin (TBT) on boats less than 25m long
2. the Merchant Shipping (Anti-Fouling Systems) Regulations 2009; made it an offense from 1st December 2009, for vessels ’ hulls to be treated with organotin substances (e.g TBT) and for vessels in UK waters from bearing organotin compounds, unless they have a barrier coating
3. International Convention on the Control of Harmful Anti-fouling Systems on Ships of the International Maritime Organization 2008; Introduces an international ban on use of tributyltin (TBT) as an antifoulant on boats
4. world-wide treaty on Persistent Organic Pollutants; bans marketing and use of these substances as implemented by the Persistent Organic Pollutants Regulations 2007 (as amended) bans use of particular substances (persistent organic pollutants) in the UK

Other approaches

The European Union mercury strategy and associated EU and UK mercury regulations and the work of the OSPAR Commission have reduced the use of mercury in industry, including a ban on mercury thermometers (The 1992 OSPAR (Oslo-Paris) Convention is the current instrument guiding international cooperation on the protection of the marine environment of the North-East Atlantic.

The Environment Agency ’ s Memorandum of Understanding with the Coal Authority deals with the prevention of new discharges and remediation of existing discharges from abandoned coal mines, exchange of information, research and to ensure (as far as possible) operators deal with potential pollution from closure of licensed coal mines. Discharges from closed coal mines typically contain iron and manganese (both are Specific Pollutants).

Abandoned metal mines impact up to 1,500km of rivers in England, and are a significant source of metals particularly cadmium (Priority Hazardous Substance), lead and nickel (Priority Substances), zinc and copper (Specific Pollutants). The Environment Agency, Defra and the Coal Authority have been working together since 2011 to identify priority discharges and implement remedial ***measures*** in England through the WAMM Programme.

There are several national initiatives to help minimise the environmental risks from pesticides and prevent further environmental damage. These include the pesticide Voluntary Initiative, the Amenity Forum and other pesticide product stewardship campaigns, Catchment Sensitive Farming and water company catchment schemes. Registration of users and certificates of competence under BASIS minimises the environmental risks from sheep dip and other chemicals and prevents further environmental damage.

12.1 Plant Protection Products Regulation

The Official Controls (Plant Protection Products) Regulations 2020 (legislation.gov aims to prevent adverse impacts from plant protection products by controlling their marketing and use. Plant protection products include herbicides (weed killers), insecticides, fungicides, molluscicides (slug and snail killer) and other pesticide products used to protect plants. Changes are made to enact the requirements on leaving the EU in The Pesticides (Amendment) Regulations 2019.

Active substances must be approved for use in plant protection products. To gain approval, the producers must submit a dossier identifying the active substance (and a plant protection product which contains it); its physical and chemical properties; its effects on target pests; and any possible effects on people, the environment and non-target plants and animals. The dossiers are evaluated by the Chemicals Regulation Directorate of the Health and Safety Executive and a decision is made on whether the substance can be approved for use and any conditions on use should apply across Great Britain. Individual plant protection products which contain those active substances must be authorised at UK level before they can be placed on the market or used. Approved active substances and authorised plant protection products are regularly reviewed, to ensure that they continue to meet modern standards of safety.

The Official Controls (Plant Protection Products) Regulations 2020 applies directly to Great Britain. These are underpinned by the Plant Protection Products (Miscellaneous Amendments) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019, the Plant Protection Products (Fees and Charges) (Amendment) Regulations 2016 and the Plant Protection Products (Sustainable Use) Regulations 2012 administered in the UK by the Chemicals Regulation Directorate, part of the Health and Safety Executive. The Plant Protection Products (Sustainable Use) Regulations 2012:

* contributes to reducing the impact of plant protection products on human health and the environment

1. aims to achieve a more sustainable use of plant protection products
2. encourages a significant overall reduction in risks and hazards of using plant protection products consistent with necessary crop protection
3. the regulations contain specific ***measures*** to protect the aquatic environment and drinking water and require a reduction of pesticide use or risks in specific areas, including protected areas under the WFD

The regulation establishes a framework for promoting ‘best practice ’ in the storage, use and disposal of pesticides, and their packaging. Main features include:

* establishment of national action plans

1. compulsory testing of spray machinery and certification of spray operators, distributors and advisors
2. a ban, subject to derogations, on aerial spraying
3. special ***measures*** to protect the aquatic environment, public spaces and Special Conservation Areas
4. minimising risk of pollution through handling, storage and disposal; and promotion of Integrated Pest Management

The UK ’ s National Action Plan.

The Chemicals Regulation Directorate of the Health and Safety Executive is the competent authority for overseeing implementation of the Plant Protection Products (Sustainable Use) Regulations 2012.

You can find further information at Pesticides-HSE.

12.2 Regulation on Registration, Evaluation, Authorisation and Restriction of Chemicals (REACH)

The REACH etc. (Amendment etc) (EU Exit) Regulations (as amended) aims are to:

* provide a high level of protection for human health and the environment from the use of chemicals

1. make the people who place chemicals on the market (manufacturers and importers) responsible for identifying, understanding and managing the hazards associated with their use
2. encourage the use of alternative methods for the assessment of the hazardous properties of substances, for example, through the Quantitative Structure-Activity Relationships (QSAR) Toolbox software application and read across

UK REACH applies to substances manufactured or imported into the in quantities of 1 tonne per year or more. Generally, it applies to all individual chemical substances on their own, in preparations or in articles (if the substance is intended to be released during normal and reasonably foreseeable conditions of use from an article). Some substances are specifically excluded, for example, radioactive substances, substances under Customs supervision, the transport of substances, non-isolated intermediates, waste and some naturally occurring low hazard substances.

Some substances, covered by more specific legislation, have tailored provisions, including human and veterinary medicines, food and foodstuff additives and plant protection products and biocides. Others have tailored provisions within the UK REACH legislation, as long they are used in specified conditions, such as isolated intermediates and substances used for research and development.

The competent authority for UK REACH is the Health and Safety Executive, supported by others, in particular the Environment Agency. Implementation of UK REACH is by the REACH Enforcement Regulations 2008 and is phased with registration deadlines up to 28 October 2027, depending on the annual tonnages involved.

Find further information on REACH.

12.3 Veterinary and medicinal products

Veterinary and human medicinal products in the UK are regulated by the Defra under the Veterinary Medicines and Residues (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2020.

The Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD) is an Executive Agency of Defra. The VMD is the competent authority responsible for regulating the issue and use of veterinary medicines in the UK, in accordance with European Community and UK legislation.

You can find further information on the Veterinary Medicines Directorate website.

The Veterinary Medicines Directorate of Defra is responsible for preparing opinions on questions concerning medicines for veterinary use. In addition, the Veterinary Medicines Directorate is responsible for conducting the assessment of veterinary medicines for which an UK marketing authorisation is sought. Furthermore, the Veterinary Medicines Directorate prepares scientific guidelines in consultation with the competent authority to help applicants prepare marketing authorisation applications for medicinal products for veterinary use.

Environmental impacts assessments are carried out in 2 phases. In phase one the potential for environmental exposure is assessed based on the intended use of the veterinary medicinal product. Where a potential environmental risk is identified, a detailed procedure of environmental risk assessment is carried out under phase 2. This provides a common basis for the testing of veterinary medicinal products between the UK, the European Union, Japan, United States of America, Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

12.4 Biocidal Products Regulation

Biocides in the UK are governed by The Chemicals (Health and Safety) and Genetically Modified Organisms (Contained Use) (Amendment etc.) (EU Exit) Regulations 2020 which amend the 2019 regulations concerning the making available on the market and use of biocidal products, applies to substances that are used to destroy or prevent the action of harmful organisms by chemical or biological means.

Common examples of biocidal products include rodenticides, disinfectants, wood preservatives and insect repellents. They are used in a wide variety of industries to control organisms such as viruses, bacteria, fungi and animals. The main purpose of act is to:

* harmonise the European market for biocidal products, their active substances and product authorisation

1. provide a high level of protection for people, animals and the environment from the use of biocidal products; authorisation under BPR requires submission and evaluation of data on:

* chemistry of the substances concerned

1. their toxicity to humans
2. their toxicity and fate in the environment

The Health and Safety Executive is the competent authority for EU BPR, which is directly acting. The regulation is enforced by both the Health and Safety Executive and some aspects by local authority inspectors and trading standards officers.

There are 22 different biocidal product types which include disinfectants, preservatives, pest control and speciality biocides such as antifouling products and embalming and taxidermist fluids.

You can find further information at Biocides – HSE.

13. Pollution incidents

Mechanisms set out in sections 6 on point source discharges, 7 on diffuse source pollution and 12 on priority substances can also be used to help avoid or deal with the effects of accidental pollution. Educational programmes and raising public awareness are also valuable mechanisms.

Specific ***measures*** to prevent or reduce the impact of accidental pollution incidents are as follows.

Control of Major Accident Hazard Regulations 2015 in partnership with Health and Safety Executive minimises risks to health and the environment from stored pollutants.

Environmental Permitting (England and Wales) Regulations 2016:

* regulates industrial ***processes*** to minimize accidental emissions

1. makes sure sewerage undertakers (owners and operators) prevent illegal inputs to sewage treatment works
2. introduces notices to prohibit any activity that might lead to an input of a listed substance or WFD pollutant to groundwater

Water Resources Act 1991 Works notices, s161A, Storage of pollutants and use of Water Protection Zones, s93:

* requires action by a responsible person to prevent and remediate pollution

1. minimises and prevents accidents from stored pollutants

Control of Pollution (Oil Storage) (England) Regulations 2001 minimises and prevents accidents from oil storage by setting containment standards.

The Environmental Damage (Prevention and Remediation) (England) Regulations 2015; prevention and remedying of environmental damage to habitats and species protected under EC law and to species or habitat on a site of special scientific interest.

Other approaches

Planning for accident management can help prevent a spill becoming a pollution incident. Emergency planning activities are carried out by a range of organisations, including the Environment Agency, central government local authorities Local Resilience Forums, and by industry and business. Partnerships who work with the Environment Agency to reduce the number and impacts of pollution incidents include the Fire Rescue Service, Highways England, Network Rail, BASIS, British Safety Industry Federation and Oil Care Campaign.

An example is the Maritime and Coastguard Agency ’ s National Contingency Plan which deals with pollution incidents in the marine environment. Owners and masters of ships and the operators of offshore installations have the responsibility for ensuring that they do not pollute the sea. Harbour authorities are responsible for ensuring that their ports avoid marine pollution and for responding to incidents within their limits. The Maritime and Coastguard Agency will also provide national support to ships, offshore installations, harbour authorities and coastal local authorities where this is necessary.

The majority of inland navigation authorities have also taken on the common minimum standards of the Boat Safety Scheme. This is a public safety initiative owned jointly by the Canal and River Trust and the Environment Agency. At least 12 other navigation and harbour authorities have also introduced it. The navigation authorities ’ purposes for the Scheme are to help reduce the risks of fire, explosion and pollution on small craft. This is done by promoting fire safety and pollution prevention advice to help boat owners keep themselves and their crew safe as well as regular examination of fuel systems, gas systems, electrical systems and appliances.

13.1 Control of Major Accidents

The Control of Major Accident Hazards (COMAH) Regulations 2015 aim to provide protection to people and the environment by ensuring that operators who use or store certain dangerous substances (excluding nuclear and radiological hazards) above specified thresholds take all ***measures*** necessary to prevent major accidents. Should an accident occur they also require operators to limit the consequences to people and the environment.

In England, COMAH establishments are regulated by a joint competent authority between the Environment Agency and either the Health and Safety Executive or the Office for Nuclear Regulation.

The regulations establish requirements to assess and manage a wide range of hazards associated with flammable, toxic and environmentally dangerous substances. Operators then need to implement risk control ***measures*** to prevent major accidents including those associated with natural hazards, such as extreme weather events and migratory ***measures*** which limit the impacts should a major accident occur.

Operators of establishments where the largest quantities of dangerous substances are used or stored (known as upper tier establishments) must produce a safety report and an on-site emergency plan. In addition, the relevant local authority must produce an off-site emergency plan, and the public must be told of safety ***measures*** and what to do in the event of an accident.

Find further information on COMAH on the HSE website.

13.2 Environmental Damage (Prevention and Remediation) (England) Regulations 2015 (as amended)

The Environmental Damage (Prevention and Remediation) (England) Regulations 2015, as amended in 2015, 2017 and 2019, seek to prevent and remedy environmental damage to: protected species or natural habitats; sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI); surface water or groundwater; marine waters; or land presenting a threat to human health. They reinforce the polluter pays principle and make operators financially liable for threats of or actual damage.

The competent authorities are:

* the Environment Agency, which deals with damage caused by activities that it regulates and all water damage

1. local authorities, which deal with all land damage and the prevention of damage caused by activities regulated by them
2. Natural England, which deals mainly with damage relating to biodiversity on land
3. the Marine Management Organisation, which deals with damage relating to biodiversity in marine waters if the damage is not caused by an activity regulated by the Environment Agency

The regulations apply only to certain listed activities and to the most serious types of damage:

* damage that would lower the status of a WFD water body

1. damage that adversely affects the site integrity of a Site of Special Scientific Interest or significantly affects the conservation status of a protected species or habitat
2. damage to land that causes a significant risk of adverse effects on human health

Those who carry out the listed activities must prevent and remediate any damage their activities cause. For damage to water and biodiversity, the regulations require much more extensive remediation than under existing legislation.

You can find further information at damage prevention and remediation regulations 2009 guidance for England and Wales.

14. Mechanisms for marine

14.1 Marine Strategy

The UK Marine Strategy Regulations 2010 require the UK to take the necessary ***measures*** to achieve or maintain Good Environmental Status through the development of a UK Marine Strategy. The UK Marine Strategy, made up of Parts One, Two and Three, set out a comprehensive framework for assessing, monitoring and taking action across our seas to achieve the UK ’ s shared vision for ‘clean, healthy, safe, productive and biologically diverse ocean and seas ’ . To help assess progress towards ‘good ecological status ’ , it is broken down into 11 qualitative descriptors: biodiversity; non-indigenous species; commercial fish; food webs; eutrophication; sea-floor integrity; hydrographical conditions; contaminants; contaminants in seafood; marine litter and underwater noise.

There are strong links between the UK Marine Strategy and the River Basin Management Plans (RBMPs) under Water Environment Regulations (WER). The RBMPs address the improvement and protection of the chemical and ecological status of surface waters over the whole river basin ranging from rivers, lakes and groundwater through to estuaries and coastal waters out to one nautical mile at sea (in Scotland it is 3 nautical miles and out to 12 nautical miles for chemical status) and overlap with the UK Marine Strategy in coastal waters. The main areas of overlap are in relation to chemical quality, the effects of nutrient enrichment (eutrophication) and some aspects of ecological quality and hydromorphological condition.

Within the area of overlap:

* the Marine Strategy only intended to apply to those aspects of Good Environmental Status which are not already covered by WER (for example. noise, litter, aspects of biodiversity)

1. UK targets and indicators for ‘good environmental status ’ are aligned as far as possible with existing WER assessment tools and criteria
2. the WER data forms the foundations for the Marine Strategy work, so there is an integration between Good Ecological Status and Good Environmental Status

Marine Strategy and WER also take different approaches to protecting the marine environment:

* WER assesses quality of each part of ecosystem separately, basing overall status on the quality of the worst element

1. Marine Strategy takes a more holistic, functional approach, focussing on all 11 descriptors

UK Marine Strategy Part One

An assessment of marine waters, objectives for good environmental status and targets and indicators to ***measure*** progress towards GES (published December 2012, updated October 2019).

The 2019 updated report concluded that the UK has largely achieved GES for eutrophication, hydrographical conditions, contaminants and contaminants in seafood. However, vigilance is needed regarding possible impacts arising from emerging chemicals and new major infrastructure projects that may pose a risk to marine life. It also set out what targets would be used, and what further action was necessary.

UK Marine Strategy Part Two

Sets out the monitoring programmes to monitor progress against the targets and indicators (published August 2014, updated March 2021).

A key aim for the updated UK Marine Strategy Part Two is to coordinate our actions with other countries, particularly for OSPAR Region II (the Greater North Sea) and OSPAR Region III (the Celtic Seas). The monitoring programmes have been developed with the Devolved Administrations, other government departments and with scientists in the UK Marine Monitoring and Assessment Strategy evidence groups.

In order to improve consistency between the approaches for coastal waters and offshore waters, the monitoring programmes have been aligned with those used for coastal waters under RBMPs where appropriate.

UK Marine Strategy Part Three

Sets out a programme of ***measures*** for achieving good environmental status (published December 2015). An updated version is currently out for consultation (until 29 November 2021), which shows the programme of ***measures*** the UK intends to use to achieve or maintain GES for UK seas over the next 6 years.

14.2 Marine and Coastal Access Act

The UK Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 has committed the UK to an ambitious approach to managing the marine environment that has established a Marine Planning system, inshore fisheries reform, streamlining of licensing, establishment of the Marine Management Organisation (for England and UK matters) and coastal access provisions.

The Marine and Coastal Access Act also enabled the introduction of national Marine Protected Areas known as Marine Conservation Zones. Marine Conservation Zone are areas that protect a range of nationally important, rare or threatened habitats and species.

The UK ’ s Marine Policy Statement provides the policy framework for preparing marine plans and taking decisions affecting the marine environment across the UK. Within the UK, the marine area has been subdivided into inshore and offshore marine planning regions. Development and implementation of marine plans is devolved to the UK administrations with transposing legislation.

In England, the Secretary of State has delegated most marine planning functions to the Marine Management Organisation, which is responsible for the development and implementation of England marine plans.

15. Mechanisms for waste operations

The protection of human health and the environment against harmful effects caused by collection, transport, treatment, storage and disposal of waste is controlled under the Environmental Permitting (England and Wales) Regulations 2016 (as amended) for land based operations. Waste operations in estuarine and marine waters are controlled by the Marine Management Organisation through marine licensing under the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009. A system of permits and plans set out essential factors to be taken into consideration in respect of various waste disposal and recovery operations.

The carriage of waste is regulated by the Control of Pollution (Amendment) Act 1989, Controlled Waste (Registration of Carriers and Seizure of Vehicles) Regulations 1991, the Hazardous Waste (England and Wales) Regulations 2005, and the Waste (England and Wales) Regulations 2011 which include a system of registration and waste transfer notes (now called waste information).

Part II of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 prohibits deposit of waste or knowingly causing or permitting such waste to be deposited in or on any land except in accordance with an appropriate environmental permit. This is reinforced by the waste duty of care which places a duty on those producing waste to ensure that it is only passed to an authorised person and to take appropriate reasonable ***measures*** to prevent the escape of waste from their control or that of another person.

Find further information on:

* waste management

1. whether you need a waste environmental permit
2. ***agricultural*** wastes

16. Plastics in the environment

There is increasing concern about the potential impacts of micro-plastics in the environment. The Environment Agency are working with others to investigate sources, pathways and impacts, using a growing number of studies to inform the work, informed and shaped by knowledge gaps.

The Environment Agency does not currently routinely monitor for micro-plastics in the environment but responds to plastic pollution based on incident reporting. Various research studies and organisations using citizen science approaches have ***measured*** plastic pollution levels, such as nurdles, with data from this work demonstrating some notable hotspots of micro-plastic pollution.

Defra, academia and water companies and the Environment Agency are collaborating to achieve greater harmonisation over sampling and assessment methodologies, definitions and outcomes for monitoring micro-plastics in the environment.

Businesses, leading academics and the Environment Agency are working to investigate the types and quantities of plastics entering the environment, and this research will feed into plans to tackle this type of pollution at source.

There is no Environmental Quality Standard for plastics. The principle is that emissions of plastics biobeads or other plastic media should be limited as far as reasonably practicable and a regulatory approach for point source discharges, such as from wastewater treatment works, is being developed based on this principle.

Through its statutory duties, the Environment Agency already have mechanisms to manage plastic pollution at several stages of manufacture, use and disposal. Examples include regulation through Environmental Permit Regulations of plastic manufacturing, and waste recycling and disposal operations, along with producer responsibility and trans-frontier shipment responsibilities. Where plastic pollution occurs and the source can be identified, the Environment Agency will use its existing powers to take action.

There are a number of government policy initiatives, aimed at strengthening the circular economy for plastics, reducing the amount of plastic waste produced and preventing it escaping into the environment. Initiatives include:

* English and Scottish government ban in 2018 on the sale and production of personal care products containing micro-beads

1. English government brought in a ban in October 2020 of the supply of plastic drinking straws, stirrers and cotton buds to the end user
2. Defra are implementing their Litter Strategy to reduce plastics entering the environment
3. Defra ’ s Resources and Waste Strategy together with BEIS and Treasury policy and financial initiatives set out the ambition and recommendations for a circular economy for plastics

Business-led initiatives to reduce plastic used, increase reuse and recycling the plastics used while preventing losses to environment include:

* WRAP (a charity that promote and encourage sustainable resource use), and Ellen MacArthur Foundation ’ s UK Plastics Pact; a voluntary business led initiative to reduce plastic packaging

1. Business in the Community ’ s Circular Economy Taskforce
2. Operation Clean Sweep; a voluntary scheme that provides a framework of best practice preventing the loss of plastic pellets, flakes and powders across the supply chain from producers to users
3. British Retail Consortium ’ s Global Standards now include pellet management within their revised packaging standard
4. Fishing For Litter providing port waste reception facilities to encourage fishermen to bring back lost or discarded fishing gear
5. the Global Ghost Gear Initiative is a partnership of the fishing industry, private and third sector, academia and governments tackling the issues of lost and abandoned fishing gear and various smaller circular systems whereby ocean plastics are collected and turned back into plastic pellets and products, such as canoes made from these recycled plastics

Various initiatives are led by the third sector, charitable and community based organisations:

* Surfers Against Sewage – Big Spring Beach Clean, Plastic Free Communities, Businesses and Schools

1. Marine Conservation Society – Beach Watch annual survey and beach cleaning campaign, Sea Champions and Plastic Challenge
2. Keep Britain Tidy – Great British Spring Clean and Litter Heroes and behavioural insights research
3. ‘#BinIt4Beaches ’ campaigns: partnership involving the water sector and a range of organisations, including Keep Britain Tidy, Marine Conservation Society, Surfers Against Sewage, water companies and others to raise awareness to prevent plastics being flushed down the drains

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**End of Document**



[***Remarks by Commissioner Gentiloni at the Spring 2022 Economic Forecast press conference***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:65G5-6SX1-F0YC-N36G-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

Brussels, Belgium: European Commission has issued the following press release:

Let me begin with the five key messages emerging from this forecast:

First, compared to our Winter Forecast, published two weeks before Russia's ***invasion*** of Ukraine, growth in the EU economy is revised lower, and inflation higher.

We now forecast the EU economy to grow by 2.7% this year before slowing further to 2.3% in 2023. For 2022, this is 1.3 percentage points lower than projected in February, one of the steepest downgrades between forecasts of recent years. Annual inflation is expected to hit an all-time high of 6.8% this year, and to fall to 3.2% in 2023.

Second, the war has clearly exacerbated the headwinds that were previously expected to gradually fade. These include the sharp rise in commodity prices and the aggravation of existing supply-side disruptions, as well as the emergence of new ones, for instance in transport and logistics.

Third, a strong and improving labour market, decreasing household saving rates, favourable financing conditions and the full deployment of the Recovery and Resilience Facility are set to support the economy.

Fourth, government deficits and debt ratios are forecast to decline this year and next. Governments are in the ***process*** of phasing out the COVID-19 emergency support ***measures*** and the cyclical rebound in revenues is in full swing.

The aggregate budget deficit in the EU should decline from 4.7% in 2021 to 2.5% in 2023. The aggregate debt-to-GDP ratio is projected to continue on the downward trend, falling from 7% in the EU in 2021 (97.4% in the euro area) to 85.2% in 2023 (92.7% in the euro area).

And fifth, uncertainty around the outlook has clearly increased and risks have tilted to the downside and are predominantly related to the duration of the war. Given the ***unprecedented*** nature and size of the shocks affecting the EU economy, our forecast baseline is underpinned by several technical assumptions.

First, the extremely elevated geopolitical tensions are not expected to normalise before the end of the forecast horizon – these are our assumptions; No major disruptions to the supply of energy commodities to the EU economy occur in the forecast horizon – again, this is the assumption (in line with the customary no-policy change assumption, as by the end of April which was the cut-off date of the forecast no such disruptions were observed).

Recognising elevated risks around this baseline, the forecast is accompanied by a model-based scenario analysis that simulates the impact of higher energy commodity prices as well as of an outright cut in gas supply from Russia. And I will come back to these model scenarios at the end.

Real growth projections for the EU this year and next have been revised down under the heavy impact of Russia's ***invasion*** of Ukraine. Still, the European economy is expected to continue expanding as residual support from the post-pandemic re-opening and the strong policy response to the COVID-19 shock still support growth.

I am conscious that the growth projection for this year, 2.7%, may appear benign relative to the size of the shock generated by the war. However, out of this figure, as much as 2 pps is due to the ***exceptionally*** strong rebound of last year. Net of this so-called “carry-over effect”, within-year growth for 2022 has been cut from 2.1% to 0.8%.

In both 2022 and 2023, domestic demand is expected to keep driving growth. In particular, private consumption and investment are set to continue growing, albeit at a weaker pace than previously expected.

Both private consumption and investment are expected to be negatively affected by high inflation, uncertainty, and aggravated supply bottlenecks. At the same time, consumption should continue benefitting from the post-pandemic reopening momentum, a buoyant labour market, lower accumulation of savings and fiscal ***measures*** to offset rising energy. Investment is set to be supported by the full deployment of the RRF and the implementation of the accompanying reforms.

Finally, net exports are projected to provide only a marginal positive contribution to growth, as both export and import volumes slow down.

Inflation has been picking up momentum since early 2021. In the euro area, it rose from 4.6% year-on-year in the last quarter of 2021 to 6.1% in the first quarter of 2022, and then further up to 7.5% in April. This is the highest rate in the history of our monetary union.

This acceleration has been driven by the surge in commodity prices that lifted energy and food price inflation to multi-year highs. At the same time, inflationary pressures are broadening to other categories of goods and services. And this is well visible in the continued rise in core inflation, which eliminates energy and unprocessed foods.

Inflation is expected to peak at 6.9% in the euro area in the second quarter of this year, and gradually decline thereafter, largely reflecting the commodity price assumptions, which are derived from market futures. On an annual basis, inflation in the euro area is projected to reach 6.1% in 2022, before falling to 2.7% in 2023.

Core inflation is forecast to be above 3% in both 2022 and 2023, though falling gradually in 2023.

Recent inflation readings and the inflation outlook for the next two years differ widely across Member States. In 2022 inflation is expected to range from 4.4% in Portugal to 12.5% in Lithuania, with four Member States with inflation below 5% and five above 10%. In 2023 the range is expected to narrow considerably to between 1.8% (Spain) and 7.1% (Poland). Inflation expected in Central and Eastern Europe is visibly higher than in the rest of the EU.

Inflation differentials largely reflect dispersion in retail energy price developments, as well as the importance of energy and food in national consumer baskets.

The main hit to the EU economy comes through commodity markets, primarily surging prices of energy, but also food commodities. Sharply rising commodity prices are depressing household purchasing power and rising production costs for firms, while fuelling inflation.

The war is also weighing heavily on global activity and trade, reducing external demand for EU exports. First, directly, via the fall in trade with the region at war, but also through a major terms-of-trade shock, and exacerbating shortages and various supply-side bottlenecks.

Financial markets are also an important channel of impact. The war triggered a repricing of financial assets, tightening of financing conditions and increased prospects of accelerated normalisation of monetary policy.

Finally, the war has dramatically raised uncertainty and severely dented household and business confidence just as most of the EU was shaking off the pandemic blow.

Supply uncertainty in the aftermath of the war has brought renewed upward pressures on commodity prices. The increase was broad-based and affected metals, ***agricultural*** commodities, but predominantly fossil fuels – gas and oil.

Higher energy and food prices reduce households' purchasing power, especially for lower-income families. This weighs on consumption and dampens domestic demand.

They also increase production input costs, raising producer price inflation across the economy. In the case of energy-intensive industries, this may lead to serious disruptions in the production ***process*** and result in shortages in certain markets.

It is important to stress that the forecast uses the indications coming from markets' futures curves to project developments of commodity prices and does not factor in large-scale interruptions in their supply.

The shockwaves of the Russian ***invasion*** of Ukraine are reverberating globally. The direct impact is related to the collapse of activity and trade across the Eastern neighbourhood of the EU. Indirectly, negative spillovers to global demand come from the surge in commodity prices, disruptions in the supply of raw materials and intermediate inputs, aggravated transport bottlenecks and tightening financing conditions.

Lockdowns in parts of China further weaken the outlook for emerging Asia, with global ramifications through amplified disruptions to logistics and value chains.

Reflecting these headwinds, the growth forecast for the global economy in 2022 has been downgraded by 1.3 percentage points compared to the Autumn Forecast. So global GDP is now expected to expand by 3.2% in 2022 before picking up to 3.5% in 2023.

Global trade has been revised down even more. Following a very strong rebound in 2021, the volume of global imports of goods and services is now forecast to grow by 4.9% and 4.4% in 2022 and 2023, respectively. This is 1.5 percentage points lower than in the Autumn for this year.

The labour market entered 2022 on a strong footing. The EU economy last year created more than 5.2 million jobs and attracted nearly 3.5 million more people into the labour market. In addition, unemployment at the end of 2021 fell below previous record lows.

Employment in the EU is projected to grow by 1.2% this year, though here, too, the annual growth rate is lifted by the strong momentum in the second half of last year. People fleeing the war in Ukraine to the EU are expected to enter labour markets only gradually, with tangible effects only from next year.

Unemployment rates are forecast to decline further, to 6.7% this year and 6.5% in 2023 in the EU. In the euro area, unemployment is projected at 7.3% in 2022 and 7.0% in 2023.

This good employment news is tempered by the fact that in 2022, purchasing power is set to decline in real terms, as wages are not projected to keep up with inflation.

An additional tailwind to growth will come from the decline in the household savings rate. Following a large accumulation of savings during the pandemic, households are now expected to devote more of their disposable income to consumption.

Public investment is expected to increase over the forecast horizon, driven by EU funds and in particular by the Recovery and Resilience facility.

Beyond public investment, RRF grants are largely used to cover capital transfers and current expenditures. The total projected absorption up to the end of 2023 amounts to some 1.3% of EU GDP.

All EU economies are expected to continue growing over the forecast horizon. Following the uneven rebound from the COVID-19 crisis, the effects of the war in Ukraine have extended the list of factors explaining uneven growth outcomes. Seven Member States, including Germany, Spain and Italy, had not reached their pre-pandemic output level by the end of last year.

A few words now on the largest EU economies.

The fallout of the war in Ukraine and COVID-19-related lockdowns in some of China's industrial hubs are hampering economic activity in Germany. Following subdued growth at the beginning of this year, Germany's GDP is expected to slightly contract in the second quarter. The German economy is expected to return to growth in the third quarter. Overall, real GDP is projected to grow by 1.6% this year and by 2.4% the next.

In France, following stagnation in the first quarter, GDP is expected to increase in the second. Services are set to benefit from the full easing of sanitary restrictions while industry shows signs of resilience. Real GDP in France is forecast to grow by 3.1% in 2022 and by 1.8% in 2023.

For Italy, the short-term outlook remains subdued, as the war has dented economic sentiment and exacerbated existing obstacles to growth. Still, real GDP is projected to increase by 2.4% this year. Next year, growth is forecast at 1.9% in 2023, supported by RRF-financed investment.

Spain is forecast to maintain strong growth this year, although the momentum should ease markedly in the second quarter. RRF investments and the recovery of tourism are set to support growth. Real GDP is projected to grow by 4% in 2022 before easing to 3.4% in 2023.

Lastly, Poland entered 2022 on a strong economic footing. A fall in sentiment, a collapse in trade with Russia and Ukraine, and increased inflation weighing on purchasing power are set to decelerate growth in the short term. Overall, the economy is forecast to grow by 3.7% in 2022 and 3% in 2023.

The general government deficit in the EU is forecast to fall from 4.7% of GDP in 2021 to 3.6% in 2022 and further down to 2.5% in 2023. This trend reflects the unwinding of fiscal ***measures*** taken in response to COVID-19 and improvements in the cyclical components of the budget.

The number of countries with a deficit exceeding 3% of GDP fell to 15 in 2021. Under the no-policy change scenario, it is projected to rise to 17 in 2022, before falling back to 11 in 2023.

The additional costs in 2022 related to ***measures*** to mitigate the impact of high energy prices (0.6% of GDP for the EU) and to deal with the humanitarian crisis provoked by Russia (0.1% of GDP) are not – at the moment – enough to outweigh these factors. At the moment we factor in what was decided until the end of April.

Overall, these developments imply a supportive stance in 2022, followed by normalisation in 2023.

The debt-to-GDP ratio for the EU as a whole is set to decline from 89.7% of GDP in 2021 to 85.2%in 2023.

Risks related to the unpredictable evolution of the war and of energy markets dominate the risk balance. This motivates the model-based scenario analysis that I will discuss in the next slide.

Strong inflationary pressures also come with increased risks to financing conditions, in the EU and globally. This includes a stronger-than-currently-expected rise in interest rates that could trigger a correction in the valuation of financial and non-financial (e.g housing) assets, burden the banking sector and reduce the availability of credit. These are risks. The unwinding debt crisis in China's real estate sector continues to pose domestic risks with large negative spillovers to the rest of the world.

A resurgence of the pandemic in Europe and outside also cannot be ruled out. This could cause new disruptions to the EU economy.

On the positive side, domestic demand could prove more resilient to increasing prices if households were to use more of their savings for consumption. Furthermore, investments fostered by the RRF could generate a stronger impulse to activity.

As mentioned earlier, our baseline forecast is accompanied by a model-based scenario analysis that simulates the impact of higher energy commodity prices – this is the adverse scenario – as well as of an outright cut in gas supply from Russia – this is the severe scenario.

In this latter, more severe scenario, GDP growth rates would be around 2.5 and 1 percentage point below the forecast baseline in 2022 and 2023, respectively, while inflation would increase by 3 percentage points in 2022 and more than 1 in 2023 above the baseline projection.

Under both of these scenarios, within-year growth would be in negative territory.

To conclude, Russia's unprovoked ***invasion*** of Ukraine is causing untold suffering and destruction, but is also weighing on Europe's economic recovery.

Last year's strong economic rebound will have a lingering positive effect on growth rates this year. But this should not detract from the impact that the war is having on our economies – even if the strong policy response deployed during the pandemic has boosted our resilience.

Our forecast is subject to very high uncertainty and risks, and other scenarios are possible under which growth may be lower and inflation higher than we are projecting today. In any case, our economy is still in a far from normal situation.

**Load-Date:** May 17, 2022

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[***War in Europe; Russia and the West: between sanctions and war***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:64WX-RRS1-JCM4-60SC-00000-00&context=1516831)

Le Monde Diplomatique (English)

March 1, 2022

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**Length:** 4087 words

**Byline:** Hélène Richard & Anne-Cécile Robert

**Highlight:** With the ***invasion*** of Ukraine, sanctions have turned into an economic war on Russia. Amid supplies of Western arms and threats of nuclear war, can we still avoid further escalation?

**Body**

Democratic Congressman Seth Moulton told reporters in Kyiv last December, ‘If Putin invades, I want him to know that he’ll have trouble buying a soda from a vending machine in the next five minutes.’ In early January the Democrats introduced a bill (1) that set out ‘preventive sanctions’ against Russia, an unusual concept in international relations as it amounted to retaliation for something that hadn’t yet happened.

The bill promised, in the event of ‘significant escalation’, to ban Russia’s major banks from using the dollar and the SWIFT (Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication) financial messaging system, which ***processes*** most of the world’s interbank transactions. Russia also faced an embargo on technology and on the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline becoming operational. These threats failed to dissuade Vladimir Putin.

On the night of 23 February, the Russian army invaded Ukraine, and the West responded with economic reprisals. The wave of new sanctions, imposed in Washington, Paris, London, Berlin and elsewhere will have greater impact than the US and EU’s ***measures*** put in place in 2014. The ban on hundreds of Russian entities or individuals and limited commercial restrictions has grown into an economic stranglehold on the lines of those on Iran, Venezuela or North Korea. The US and EU have agreed other embargoes on wide sectors of the Russian economy, notably energy and banking, excluding some banks from SWIFT (sparing a handful involved in gas supply transactions). While the West has made clear it will not take any military action in Ukraine, it is making Russia pay for its actions. Though not sufficient to ‘force [it] to peace’, in the words of Ukraine’s president Volodymyr Zelensky, at the head of any army which has suffered considerable losses.

Economic pressure has been exerted on adversaries throughout the history of international relations. Napoleon imposed a continental blockade on England in 1806 and Lincoln applied similar pressure to the southern states during the Civil War (1861-65). Such ***measures*** have often been a prelude to conflict and generally remain in place after fighting begins. But in the early 20th century, President Woodrow Wilson, already aware of American economic power, saw that this type of action could be used *instead* of war. When the Treaty of Versailles was being negotiated in 1919, Wilson said, ‘Apply this economic, peaceful, silent, deadly remedy and there will be no need for force. It is a terrible remedy. It does not cost a life outside the nation boycotted but it brings a pressure upon the nation which, in my judgment, no modern nation could resist.’

**Policing international relations**

The following year, a permanent organisation, the League of Nations, was established to police international relations, with its own powers of sanction intended to prevent disputes between countries escalating into war. Aggression by Nazi Germany, Japan and Italy put paid to this ambition. But in 1945 it was revived in the United Nations charter, which established the principle of settling disputes between states peaceably and prohibited the use of force (article 2). In the event of threats to, or breaches of, the peace, the Security Council — and it alone — had the power to impose sanctions to stop conflict.

Article 41 of the charter sets out a non-exhaustive list of possible restrictions: ‘These may include complete or partial interruption of economic relations and of rail, sea, air, postal, telegraphic, radio, and other means of communication, and the severance of diplomatic relations.’ Over time, the menu of sanctions has lengthened to include the economic (commercial and financial), military (arms embargos), diplomatic, cultural and sporting arenas. This is indicative of the UN’s wish to control a practice whose use is inevitably more widespread among the major powers than smaller states.

Apply this remedy and there will be no need for force. It does not cost a life outside the nation boycotted but it brings a pressure which, in my judgment, no modern nation could resist President Woodrow Wilson

But geopolitical rivalries play out outside the UN rules. In 1950 the US pushed for the creation of a Coordinating Committee for Multilateral Export Controls, an unofficial organisation based in the US embassy in Paris, whose aim was to prevent the export of military and civilian products and technologies to communist countries. Throttling the enemy in this way remained part of the US arsenal against Cuba (since 1962), Vietnam (1975-94, though the arms embargo lasted until 2016) and North Korea (since 1950). It was also in this period (1973-74) that the Arab oil-exporting states turned off the tap to Israel and its allies. The Security Council’s use of multilateral sanctions, meanwhile, was limited to symbolic cases: arms embargoes against the racist regime in South Africa (voluntary from 1963, mandatory from 1977), and against the unilateral declaration of independence by whites in Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) in 1965.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 came the so-called ‘decade of sanctions’, during which the UN Security Council imposed 13 sets of sanctions, including an embargo against Iraq in response to Saddam Hussein’s flagrant violation of international law in invading Kuwait in 1990, prompting what became known as the first Gulf war. And then, in 1993, against Muammar Gaddafi’s Libya for its involvement in two deadly terrorist attacks (over Lockerbie, Scotland, in 1988 and Niger in 1989). This had the desired effect: Libya admitted responsibility (1999), abandoned its weapons of mass destruction programme (2003) and agreed to cooperate with international investigations.

**‘We think the price is worth it’**

The US was by now the dominant voice on the Security Council. However, from the 1990s, it also bypassed the UN in imposing coercive ***measures***. Between 1918 and 1998, US administrations restricted trade with sanctioned nations 115 times; 64 of these occasions were during the 1990s, and most of them were unilateral. By 1997, the equivalent of half the world’s population was living under some form of US sanction (2).

However, the UN’s particularly severe trade, financial and military embargo imposed on Iraq in August 1990 was a turning point. It lasted for ten years after the end of the war (the allied response had been authorised by the Security Council), wrecking the country’s economy, strengthening Saddam’s regime (which profited from smuggling) and causing food and medicine shortages. Half a million children died according to Unicef. Yet in 1996 Madeleine Albright, then US ambassador to the UN, said, ‘We think the price is worth it’.

UN Assistant Secretary-General and humanitarian coordinator in Iraq, Denis Halliday resigned in 1998 over the ‘illegal and immoral’ destruction ‘of an entire society’. Though Nelson Mandela had considered sanctions against South Africa’s apartheid regime a necessary evil, the case of Iraq led to mounting criticism of embargoes in general because they hit whole populations indiscriminately without necessarily impacting their leaders. The belief that economic sanctions were inevitably less deadly than sending in troops had been shattered.

These criticisms led to a new category of ‘targeted’ or ‘smart’ sanctions, in contrast to general embargoes, which were now regarded as unfair or ‘indiscriminate’. ‘Smart’ sanctions targeted certain categories of products, such as oil, diamonds, timber or weapons, but excluded necessities such as foodstuffs and medicine. In addition, the UN Security Council — and states bilaterally — designated organisations and private individuals as responsible for international disruption and crimes. In 1998 the Sierra Leone junta and the leaders of Unita (National Union for the Total Independence of Angola), along with their relatives, had their foreign assets frozen and were banned from some countries.

These ***measures*** against individuals, which at first were ***exceptional***, became widespread after 9/11, as part of the pursuit of Al-Qaida leaders and those who funded terrorism. However, Africa remained the continent most affected (Sudan, Kenya, Somalia, Democratic Republic of Congo etc) by concerted ***measures*** aimed individually at heads of state, ministers, military, intelligence or police leaders, warlords and traffickers. In these cases, consensus was more easily achieved among the Security Council’s five permanent members.

But the legal framework remains unclear: individuals are sanctioned without trial and with no real possibility of appeal. Their associates and family could also find themselves targeted. Cases of mistaken identity cause lasting harm. The need for legal safeguards was noted by the European Court of Justice, one of the few courts that can be petitioned (3). But the mechanism remains arbitrary; as recently as 2014, the US and EU sanctioned certain Russian oligarchs for the annexation of Crimea, in which they personally had played no part.

**The moral case for sanctions**

Another little-noted development in the sphere of sanctions is the growing prominence of human rights-based arguments and claims that certain regimes are undemocratic. Whereas in the late 1960s these concerns were used to justify less than 20% of sanctions packages globally, by 2019 that figure had jumped to over 42% (4). The Security Council, whose main mission is to ensure international peace and security, rarely intervenes on these grounds alone: in May 1994, for example, it justified an arms embargo on Rwanda on the grounds that the situation (one of ‘ethnic hatred’, ‘ongoing violence’, ‘refugees’) was a ‘threat to peace and security in the region’. In 2011 the Council cited the risks of repression faced by the Libyan people when it declared an arms embargo on the country and authorised a controversial international military intervention.

But it is mainly at state level, especially in the US and EU, that such justifications are made. The US’s first use of this justification came in 1974 with the Jackson-Vanik amendment to the Trade Act, which made the granting of credits and most-favoured-nation status to the USSR dependent on it liberalising its migration policy. For the first time, a ‘conditional link ... between human rights and trade was established, the originality of which was linking foreign and domestic policy’ (5). The US only normalised its economic relations with Russia in 2012, when the Magnitsky Act was passed. Congress accepted the new trade relationship on one condition: the option of targeting Russian citizens considered responsible for human rights violations, without reference to Russia as a state. The Global Magnitsky Act, passed in 2016 under Donald Trump and retained by his successor Joe Biden, extends its scope to the rest of the world, and to acts of corruption. The list of people and entities targeted by the US now runs to 1,623 pages and nearly 37,000 names...

Since the Maastricht (1992) and Lisbon (2007) treaties, which established the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CSFP), the EU has become the second largest issuer of sanctions in the world after the US. It aims to ‘uphold human rights, democracy, the rule of law and good governance’. Like the US, it has created a new instrument for ostracising individuals who violate human rights, a sort of European Magnitsky. In March 2021 the European Council imposed restrictive ***measures*** on 28 individuals and four organisations from Russia, China, North Korea, Libya, Eritrea and South Sudan.

Like the US, the EU is rather naively playing the white knight role, but this throws up contradictions: the West did eventually sanction Saudi Arabia, if chaotically and with varying degrees of severity, for the 2018 murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi. Yet Israel has escaped any punishment, despite the 2016 UN Security Council resolution which, for the first time, condemned Israel’s settlement activity in Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem, as illegal.

Current debates within the EU over what to do about Russia have led to some rhetorical contortions. Commission president Ursula von der Leyen appeared to support the US position that ‘Nord Stream 2 could not be excluded a priori from the list of [preventive] sanctions’, adding, ‘We want to build the world of tomorrow as democracies with like-minded partners.’ But among the energy partners that might replace Russia, Von der Leyen cited an oil monarchy (Qatar), a dictatorship allied with authoritarian Turkey (Azerbaijan) and a country under military rule (Egypt)...

Playing the white knight calls for spotlessly clean hands. You might think whistleblower Julian Assange, sought by the US and locked up in London, was a dream candidate for political asylum, but no EU member is willing to grant it. And faced with the migration crisis, the 27 member states have ceased to respect the 1951 Refugee Convention. On the eve of the French presidency, Amnesty International expressed concern about the infringement of civil liberties within the EU (6). Suffering from a persistent ‘democratic deficit’, is the EU really in a position to lecture others? The US, meanwhile, has ratified only five of the 18 international human rights treaties.

**Unequally targeted**

The West does not target all dictatorships equally, and the US adjusts the application of its own sanctions regimes according to its current geopolitical interests. For example, India strengthened its military cooperation with Russia in signing a series of contracts worth $13.5bn between 2018 and 2020 without the US activating its 2017 act Countering America’s Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA), which punishes direct or indirect support for the Russian defence sector. This is perhaps because the US hopes to entice India into its anti-China alliance. The US Treasury has been less lenient with European companies. In 2019 it fined 25 of them a total of $1.288bn. The British bank Standard Chartered paid $657m for, among other things, breaching the Iran embargo, and the Italian bank UniCredit coughed up $611m on the same count.

Sanctions, which the US uses bluntly to defend its interests, have an additional role for Europeans, which is more internal than external. Sanctions are the ‘only coercive foreign policy instrument available to the EU’ (7) and therefore carry a strong symbolic charge that enables the Union to appear united on the international stage, affirming its solidity through ***measures*** with a strong moral content. Taking Washington’s side in the domestic conflict between Venezuelan president Nicolás Maduro and his self-appointed challenger Juan Guaidó, EU member states united in deploring a ‘missed opportunity for democracy’ that warranted restrictive ***measures*** when Guaidó’s bid failed (8). But Russia’s attack on Ukraine has changed everything. The EU, previously divided over its positions towards Moscow (the Baltic states favoured confrontation while Germany was more concerned about its gas supplies), are now in lockstep and behind the US.

In invading Ukraine on 24 February, Putin ended French and German diplomatic efforts to resolve the conflict. However, Russia’s UN Security Council veto right excludes all possibility of adopting legal sanctions against this violation of international law. Although the group of countries that have condemned the Russian aggression is large, there are some significant absentees. Starting with Pakistan, India and above all China, which currently faces a new Western military coalition in the Indo-Pacific (the US, UK, Australia and New Zealand).

Moscow has been preparing for such an encounter for several years. The systematisation of sanctions has produced perverse effects, in particular the strengthening of popular support for sanctioned regimes, as in Mali in 2021 and 2022. Knowing that it is permanently exposed to sanctions, Russia decided to adapt and even take advantage of this. Following sanctions in response to its aggression in Ukraine, Russia brought in an embargo on ***agricultural*** imports from the EU, North America, Australia and Norway, thereby boosting domestic production. Russia’s agrifood exports reached a record $30bn in 2020, more than its natural gas exports, making Russia a net exporter of agrifood, a first since Soviet collectivisation.

On the financial side, Russia has tried to protect its banking system from destabilisation by the West. Moscow launched its own financial messaging system (SPFS) in 2015, and a national bank card, Mir, to enable domestic transactions to be ***processed*** in the event of the West ejecting Russia from SWIFT. By 2021, 87% of the population had the Mir card, though it is used for barely a quarter of transactions, since the middle class prefer Western cards, which work abroad.

Similarly, Russia has sought to limit its dependence on the dollar and the US-dominated financial system. Its central bank has built up considerable reserves (equivalent to a third of its GDP) to discourage any attack on its currency. Since 2018, it has massively dumped US Treasuries — a first among emerging powers — and exchanged some of them for Chinese sovereign debt (of which it is now the largest foreign buyer). These ***measures***, though calculated to create a major shock, will not be enough to offset the unexpected decision of the EU, in coordination with the G7, to freeze the assets of Russia’s central bank, which could bring down the country’s entire banking system.

In recent years Russia has been able to count on China’s support in lambasting the ‘international community’ — in the form of the UN — for the proliferation of sanctions since the disappearance of the Soviet Union. ‘Only Security Council sanctions are legal’ and are ‘an important tool to respond to threats in the world,’ Russian deputy UN ambassador Dmitry Poliansky told a Security Council debate this February. In similar vein, Chinese ambassador Zhang Jun said that ‘unilateral coercive sanctions ... only exacerbate power relations.’ The countries that use them are addicted to them like a drug, he suggested, and called on them to give them up immediately. Both Russia and China claim to defend the principle of non-interference in internal affairs (article 2 of the UN charter). On this point, China has been consistent in refusing to recognise the annexation of Crimea. But after this latest incursion of Russian tanks across the Ukrainian border, Beijing has taken a more ambivalent line, denouncing US responsibility in the event of conflict without supporting Moscow’s use of force.

**A preference for unofficial action**

Russia and China do not reject the principle of sanctions. Since 1971, China has limited its trade relations with countries that recognise Taiwan. And Russia suspended chartered flights to Turkey in 2015, reintroduced visas and imposed an embargo on fruit and vegetables after the Turkish army shot down a Russian plane on the Syrian border. But Russia and China prefer unofficial action over formal unilateral ***measures***. Russia imposed a de facto counter-sanction by banning European pork, but officially it’s attributed to outbreaks of African swine fever. China followed a similar approach, removing Lithuania from its customs clearance system after the opening of a de facto Taiwan embassy in Vilnius. More formally, China published a list of 14 grievances against Australia when Canberra called for an investigation into Covid-19’s origins. Meanwhile, Australian exports of textiles, wine and coal are having difficulty gaining entry to China.

Despite this new activism, Russia and China accounted for only 3% of sanctions-related activity (impositions, suspensions, extensions, court rulings) in 2020, well behind the US (53%) (9). Their restraint is partly down to economic reality: neither China nor Russia has the weapon of the dollar. Any threat to ban the dollar allows the US to impose sanctions packages on the world, an ***exceptional*** power that Russia and China are trying to resist. Their bilateral dollar-denominated trade deals fell to 46% in 2020, down from 90% in 2015.

By 1997, the equivalent of half the world's population was living under some form of US sanction

Twenty-three Russian banks are connected to the Chinese financial messaging system (CIPS), compared to only one Chinese bank on the Russian SPFS. But, with traffic representing only 0.3% that of SWIFT, CIPS is a back-up plan, rather than a serious competitor to its Western counterpart.

Compared to China and Russia, Europe seemed to be resigned to impotence. The EU suffered from, but didn’t really react to, the US withdrawal from the Iran nuclear deal in 2018. Despite European pleas, Brussels-based SWIFT promptly removed Iranian banks from its system for fear of US secondary sanctions. The European Commission did try to set up a ‘special purpose vehicle’ to ensure trade continuity with Iran, but its first transaction was only in March 2020, for medical equipment authorised under US law. The mechanism can theoretically be used for oil imports, but only within the framework of US-granted exemptions. In any case, no European group has proved willing to buy Iranian oil: insurance companies won’t guarantee the cargos of the few shipping companies willing to transport it.

**The old taboos have gone**

Russia’s recognition of the self-proclaimed Donbass republics (Donetsk and Luhansk), which violated the integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine, was a sign that eight years of Western sanctions had failed. It sparked a flurry of new retaliatory ***measures***, which have never been successful even when applied to states less powerful and less insulated than Russia. The old taboos have gone. For the first time in its history, the EU has announced that it will deliver arms to Ukraine, and Germany will massively increase its defence spending. Without being backed up by diplomatic action, these ***measures*** are highly unlikely to succeed. Russia, meanwhile, has put its nuclear deterrence forces on ‘special alert’, a worrying sign of escalation.

Two months before Putin’s announcement on the Donbass ‘republics’, former French ambassador to the US Gérard Araud called for realism, tweeting that ‘even dictatorships have legitimate geopolitical concerns’ (15 December 2021). Attempts at dialogue with Moscow hit a wall. Did they come too late? Russia has still not recovered from the West’s recognition of Kosovo’s independence and has continued to express its displeasure at the dismantlement of the major arms control agreements in Europe inherited from the cold war (10). The present war is a reminder of the danger of neglecting collective security matters.

An international policy that increasingly resembles a sequence of faits accomplis on both the Western and Russian sides, followed by ultimatums and retaliatory ***measures***, has revealed itself to be both dangerous and ineffective. This spiral of unilateral actions, a pitiful substitute for diplomacy, has now led to war in Europe.

(1) ‘Defending Ukraine Sovereignty Act of 2022’, US Senate, Washington DC, 12 January 2022.

(2) David Broder, ‘Give presidents a break on automatic sanctions’, *International Herald Tribune,* Neuilly-sur-Seine, 24 June 1998.

(3) Judgment of the Court of Justice of the European Communities (ECJ) no C-415/05, ‘Yassin Abdullah Kadi, Al Barakaat International Foundation v Council of the European Union and Commission of the European Communities’, 3 September 2008.

(4) Gabriel Felbermayr et al, ‘The global sanctions data base’, *European Economic Review,* vol 129, Amsterdam, October 2020.

(5) Pauline Peretz, ‘Un tournant humanitaire de la politique étrangère américaine? Carter et l’émigration des Juifs d’Union soviétique’ (A humanitarian turn in American foreign policy? Carter and the emigration of the Jews from the Soviet Union), *Revue d’histoire moderne et contemporaine,* vol 3, no 54, Paris, 2007.

(6) ‘Amnesty International Recommendations to the French Presidency of the Council of the European Union’, 3 January 2022.

(7) Ramona Bloj, ‘Sanctions, privileged instrument of European Foreign Policy’, *European Issues,* no 598, Robert Schumann Foundation, Strasbourg, 31 May 2021.

(8) See Julia Buxton, ‘Venezuela’s missing future’, *Le Monde diplomatique,* English edition, March 2019.

(9) Ivan Timofeev, ‘Sanctions against Russia: A look into 2021’, report no 65, Russian International Affairs Council, Moscow, 2021.

(10) David Teurtrie, ‘Standoff over Ukraine: why this, why now?’, *Le Monde diplomatique,* English edition, February 2022.

**Load-Date:** March 17, 2022

**End of Document**



[***Federal Register: Standards of Performance for New, Reconstructed, and Modified Sources and Emissions Guidelines for Existing Sources: Oil and Natural Gas Sector Climate Review Pages 63110 - 63263 [FR DOC #2021-24202]***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:643B-GTS1-JDG9-Y40B-00000-00&context=1516831)

Impact News Service

November 15, 2021 Monday

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**Length:** 31781 words

**Body**

Washington: Office of the Federal Register has issued the following notice: Environmental Protection Agency-----------------------------------------------------------------------40 CFR Part 60Standards of Performance for New, Reconstructed, and Modified Sources and Emissions Guidelines for Existing Sources: Oil and Natural Gas Sector Climate Review; Proposed RuleFederal Register / Vol. 86 , No. 217 / Monday, November 15, 2021 / Proposed Rules[[Page 63110]]-----------------------------------------------------------------------ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY40 CFR Part 60[EPA-HQ-OAR-2021-0317; FRL-8510-02-OAR]RIN 2060-AV16Standards of Performance for New, Reconstructed, and Modified Sources and Emissions Guidelines for Existing Sources: Oil and Natural Gas Sector Climate ReviewAGENCY: Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).ACTION: Proposed rule.-----------------------------------------------------------------------SUMMARY: This document comprises three distinct groups of actions under the Clean Air Act (CAA) which are collectively intended to significantly reduce emissions of greenhouse gases (GHGs) and other harmful air pollutants from the Crude Oil and Natural Gas source category. First, the EPA proposes to revise the new source performance standards (NSPS) for GHGs and volatile organic compounds (VOCs) for the Crude Oil and Natural Gas source category under the CAA to reflect the Agency's most recent review of the feasibility and cost of reducing emissions from these sources. Second, the EPA proposes emissions guidelines (EG) under the CAA, for states to follow in developing, submitting, and implementing state plans to establish performance standards to limit GHGs from existing sources (designated facilities) in the Crude Oil and Natural Gas source category. Third, the EPA is taking several related actions stemming from the joint resolution of Congress, adopted on June 30, 2021 under the Congressional Review Act (CRA), disapproving the EPA's final rule titled, ``Oil and Natural Gas Sector: Emission Standards for New, Reconstructed, and Modified Sources Review,'' Sept. 14, 2020 (``2020 Policy Rule''). This proposal responds to the President's January 20, 2021, Executive order (E.O ) titled ``Protecting Public Health and the Environment and Restoring Science to Tackle the Climate Crisis,'' which directed the EPA to consider taking the actions proposed here.DATES: Comments. Comments must be received on or before January 14, 2022. Under the Paperwork Reduction Act (PRA), comments on the information collection provisions are best assured of consideration if the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) receives a copy of your comments on or before December 15, 2021. Public hearing: The EPA will hold a virtual public hearing on November 30, 2021 and December 1, 2021. See SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION for information on the hearing.ADDRESSES: You may send comments, identified by Docket ID No. EPA-HQ-OAR-2021-0317 by any of the following methods: Federal eRulemaking Portal: [*https://www.regulations.gov*](https://www.regulations.gov)/ (our preferred method). Follow the online instructions for submitting comments. Email: [*a-and-r-docket@epa.gov*](mailto:a-and-r-docket@epa.gov) Include Docket ID No. EPA-HQ-OAR-2021-0317 in the subject line of the message. Fax: (202) 566-9744. Attention Docket ID No. EPA-HQ-OAR-2021-0317. Mail: U.S Environmental Protection Agency, EPA Docket Center, Docket ID No. EPA-HQ-OAR-2021-0317, Mail Code 28221T, 1200 Pennsylvania Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20460. Hand/Courier Delivery: EPA Docket Center, WJC West Building, Room 3334, 1301 Constitution Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20004. The Docket Center's hours of operation are 8:30 a.m -4:30 p.m , Monday-Friday (except Federal holidays). Instructions: All submissions received must include the Docket ID No. for this rulemaking. Comments received may be posted without change to [*https://www.regulations.gov/*](https://www.regulations.gov/), including any personal information provided. For detailed instructions on sending comments and additional information on the rulemaking ***process***, see the ``Public Participation'' heading of the SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION section of this document. Out of an abundance of caution for members of the public and our staff, the EPA Docket Center and Reading Room are closed to the public, with limited exceptions, to reduce the risk of transmitting COVID-19. Our Docket Center staff will continue to provide remote customer service via email, phone, and webform. We encourage the public to submit comments via [*https://www.regulations.gov*](https://www.regulations.gov)/ or email, as there may be a delay in ***processing*** mail and faxes. Hand deliveries and couriers may be received by scheduled appointment only. For further information on EPA Docket Center services and the current status, please visit us online at [*https://www.epa.gov/dockets.FOR*](https://www.epa.gov/dockets.FOR) FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: For questions about this proposed action, contact Ms. Karen Marsh, Sector Policies and Programs Division (E143-05), Office of Air Quality Planning and Standards, U.S Environmental Protection Agency, Research Triangle Park, North Carolina 27711; telephone number: (919) 541-1065; fax number: (919) 541-0516; and email address: [*marsh.karen@epa.gov*](mailto:marsh.karen@epa.gov) or Ms. Amy Hambrick, Sector Policies and Programs Division (E143-05), Office of Air Quality Planning and Standards, Environmental Protection Agency, Research Triangle Park, North Carolina 27711, telephone number: (919) 541-0964; facsimile number: (919) 541-3470; email address: [*hambrick.amy@epa.gov.SUPPLEMENTARY*](mailto:hambrick.amy@epa.gov.SUPPLEMENTARY) INFORMATION: Participation in virtual public hearing. Please note that the EPA is deviating from its typical approach for public hearings, because the President has declared a national emergency. Due to the current Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommendations, as well as state and local orders for social distancing to limit the spread of COVID-19, the EPA cannot hold in-person public meetings at this time. The public hearing will be held via virtual platform on November 30, 2021, and December 1, 2021, and will convene at 11:00 a.m Eastern Time (ET) and conclude at 9:00 p.m ET each day. On each hearing day, the EPA may close a session 15 minutes after the last pre-registered speaker has testified if there are no additional speakers. The EPA will announce further details at [*https://www.epa.gov/controlling-air-pollution-oil-and-natural-gas-industry*](https://www.epa.gov/controlling-air-pollution-oil-and-natural-gas-industry). If the EPA receives a high volume of registrations for the public hearing, we may continue the public hearing on December 2, 2021. The EPA does not intend to publish a document in the Federal Register announcing the potential addition of a third day for the public hearing or any other updates to the information on the hearing described in this document. Please monitor [*https://www.epa.gov/controlling-air-pollution-oil-and-natural-gas-industry*](https://www.epa.gov/controlling-air-pollution-oil-and-natural-gas-industry) for any updates to the information described in this document, including information about the public hearing. For information or questions about the public hearing, please contact the public hearing team at (888) 372-8699 or by email at [*SPPDpublichearing@epa.gov*](mailto:SPPDpublichearing@epa.gov) The EPA will begin pre-registering speakers for the hearing upon publication of this document in the Federal Register. The EPA will accept registrations on an individual basis. To register to speak at the virtual hearing, follow the directions at [*https://www.epa.gov/controlling-air-pollution-oil-and-natural-gas-industry*](https://www.epa.gov/controlling-air-pollution-oil-and-natural-gas-industry) or contact the public hearing team at (888) 372-[[Page 63111]]8699 or by email at [*SPPDpublichearing@epa.gov*](mailto:SPPDpublichearing@epa.gov) The last day to pre-register to speak at the hearing will be November 24, 2021. Prior to the hearing, the EPA will post a general agenda that will list pre-registered speakers in approximate order at: [*https://www.epa.gov/controlling-air-pollution-oil-and-natural-gas-industry*](https://www.epa.gov/controlling-air-pollution-oil-and-natural-gas-industry). The EPA will make every effort to follow the schedule as closely as possible on the day of the hearing; however, please plan for the hearings to run either ahead of schedule or behind schedule. Each commenter will have 5 minutes to provide oral testimony. The EPA encourages commenters to provide the EPA with a copy of their oral testimony electronically (via email) by emailing it to [*marsh.karen@epa.gov*](mailto:marsh.karen@epa.gov) and [*hambrick.amy@epa.gov*](mailto:hambrick.amy@epa.gov) The EPA also recommends submitting the text of your oral testimony as written comments to the rulemaking docket. The EPA may ask clarifying questions during the oral presentations but will not respond to the presentations at that time. Written statements and supporting information submitted during the comment period will be considered with the same weight as oral testimony and supporting information presented at the public hearing. If you require the services of an interpreter or a special accommodation such as audio description, please pre-register for the hearing with the public hearing team and describe your needs by November 22, 2021. The EPA may not be able to arrange accommodations without advanced notice. Docket. The EPA has established a docket for this rulemaking under Docket ID No. EPA-HQ-OAR-2021-0317. All documents in the docket are listed in [*https://www.regulations.gov/*](https://www.regulations.gov/). Although listed, some information is not publicly available, e.g , Confidential Business Information (CBI) or other information whose disclosure is restricted by statute. Certain other material, such as copyrighted material, is not placed on the internet and will be publicly available only in hard copy. With the exception of such material, publicly available docket materials are available electronically in [*https://www.regulations.gov/*](https://www.regulations.gov/). Instructions. Direct your comments to Docket ID No. EPA-HQ-OAR-2021-0317. The EPA's policy is that all comments received will be included in the public docket without change and may be made available online at [*https://www.regulations.gov/*](https://www.regulations.gov/), including any personal information provided, unless the comment includes information claimed to be CBI or other information whose disclosure is restricted by statute. Do not submit information that you consider to be CBI or otherwise protected through [*https://www.regulations.gov*](https://www.regulations.gov)/ or email. This type of information should be submitted by mail as discussed below. The EPA may publish any comment received to its public docket. Multimedia submissions (audio, video, etc.) must be accompanied by a written comment. The written comment is considered the official comment and should include discussion of all points you wish to make. The EPA will generally not consider comments or comment contents located outside of the primary submission (i.e , on the Web, cloud, or other file sharing system). For additional submission methods, the full EPA public comment policy, information about CBI or multimedia submissions, and general guidance on making effective comments, please visit [*https://www.epa.gov/dockets/commenting-epa-dockets*](https://www.epa.gov/dockets/commenting-epa-dockets). The [*https://www.regulations.gov*](https://www.regulations.gov)/ website allows you to submit your comment anonymously, which means the EPA will not know your identity or contact information unless you provide it in the body of your comment. If you send an email comment directly to the EPA without going through [*https://www.regulations.gov/*](https://www.regulations.gov/), your email address will be automatically captured and included as part of the comment that is placed in the public docket and made available on the internet. If you submit an electronic comment, the EPA recommends that you include your name and other contact information in the body of your comment and with any digital storage media you submit. If the EPA cannot read your comment due to technical difficulties and cannot contact you for clarification, the EPA may not be able to consider your comment. Electronic files should not include special characters or any form of encryption and be free of any defects or viruses. For additional information about the EPA's public docket, visit the EPA Docket Center homepage at [*https://www.epa.gov/dockets*](https://www.epa.gov/dockets). The EPA is temporarily suspending its Docket Center and Reading Room for public visitors, with limited exceptions, to reduce the risk of transmitting COVID-19. Our Docket Center staff will continue to provide remote customer service via email, phone, and webform. We encourage the public to submit comments via [*https://www.regulations.gov*](https://www.regulations.gov)/ as there may be a delay in ***processing*** mail and faxes. Hand deliveries or couriers will be received by scheduled appointment only. For further information and updates on EPA Docket Center services, please visit us online at [*https://www.epa.gov/dockets*](https://www.epa.gov/dockets). The EPA continues to carefully and continuously monitor information from the CDC, local area health departments, and our Federal partners so that we can respond rapidly as conditions change regarding COVID-19. Submitting CBI. Do not submit information containing CBI to the EPA through [*https://www.regulations.gov*](https://www.regulations.gov)/ or email. Clearly mark the part or all of the information that you claim to be CBI. For CBI information on any digital storage media that you mail to the EPA, mark the outside of the digital storage media as CBI and then identify electronically within the digital storage media the specific information that is claimed as CBI. In addition to one complete version of the comments that includes information claimed as CBI, you must submit a copy of the comments that does not contain the information claimed as CBI directly to the public docket through the procedures outlined in Instructions above. If you submit any digital storage media that does not contain CBI, mark the outside of the digital storage media clearly that it does not contain CBI. Information not marked as CBI will be included in the public docket and the EPA's electronic public docket without prior notice. Information marked as CBI will not be disclosed except in accordance with procedures set forth in 40 CFR part 2. Send or deliver information identified as CBI only to the following address: OAQPS Document Control Officer (C404-02), OAQPS, U.S Environmental Protection Agency, Research Triangle Park, North Carolina 27711, Attention Docket ID No. EPA-HQ-OAR-2021-0317. Note that written comments containing CBI submitted by mail may be delayed and no hand deliveries will be accepted. Preamble acronyms and abbreviations. We use multiple acronyms and terms in this preamble. While this list may not be exhaustive, to ease the reading of this preamble and for reference purposes, the EPA defines the following terms and acronyms here:ACE Affordable Clean Energy ruleAEO Annual Energy OutlookAMEL alternate means of emissions limitationANGA American Natural Gas AllianceANSI American National Standards InstituteAPCD air pollution control devicesAPI American Petroleum InstituteARPA-E Advanced Research Projects Agency-EnergyASME American Society of Mechanical Engineers[[Page 63112]]ASTM American Society for Testing and MaterialsAVO audio, visual, olfactoryBACT best achievable control technologyBOEM Bureau of Ocean Energy ManagementBLM Bureau of Land ManagementBMP best management practicesboe barrels of oil equivalentsBSER best system of emission reductionBTEX benzene, toluene, ethylbenzene, and xylenesCAA Clean Air ActCBI Confidential Business InformationCDC Center for Disease ControlCDX EPA's Central Data ExchangeCEDRI Compliance and Emissions Data Reporting InterfaceCFR Code of Federal RegulationsCH4methanecm centimeterCPI consumer price indexCPI-U consumer price index urbanCO carbon monoxideCOPD chronic obstructive pulmonary diseaseCO2carbon dioxideCO2Eq. carbon dioxide equivalentCOA condition of approvalCOS carbonyl sulfideCRA Congressional Review ActCS2carbon disulfideCVS closed vent systemsDC direct currentDOE Department of EnergyDOI Department of the InteriorDOT Department of TransportationEAV equivalent annualized valueEDF Environmental Defense FundEG emission guidelinesECOS Environmental Council of the StatesEGU electricity generating unitsEIA U.S Energy Information AdministrationEJ environmental justiceEO Executive OrderEPA Environmental Protection AgencyERT Electronic Reporting ToolFERC The U.S Federal Energy Regulatory Commissionfpm feet per minuteGC gas chromatographGHGs greenhouse gasesGHGI Inventory of U.S Greenhouse Gas Emissions and SinksGHGRP Greenhouse Gas Reporting ProgramGRI Gas Research InstituteGWP global warning potentialHAP hazardous air pollutant(s)HC hydrocarbonsHFC hydrofluorocarbonsH2S hydrogen sulfideICR Information Collection RequestIOGCC Interstate Oil and Gas Compact CommissionIPCC Intergovernmental Panel on Climate ChangeIR infraredIRFA initial regulatory flexibility analysiskt kilotonskg kilogramslow-e low emissionLDAR leak detection and repairMcf thousand cubic feetMMT million metric tonsMRR monitoring, recordkeeping, and reportingMW megawattNAAQS National Ambient Air Quality StandardsNAICS North American Industry Classification SystemNCA4 2017-2018 Fourth National Climate AssessmentNEI National Emissions InventoryNEMS National Energy Modeling SystemNESHAP National Emissions Standards for Hazardous Air PollutantsNGL natural gas liquidNGO non-governmental organizationNOAA National Oceanic and Atmospheric AdministrationNOXnitrogen oxidesNSPS new source performance standardsNTTAA National Technology Transfer and Advancement ActOCSLA The Outer Continental Shelf Lands ActOAQPS Office of Air Quality Planning and StandardsOIG Office of the Inspector GeneralOGI optical gas imagingOMB Office of Management and BudgetPE professional engineerPFCs perfluorocarbonsPHMSA Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety AdministrationPM particulate matterPM2.5PM with a diameter of 2.5 micrometers or lessppb parts per billionppm parts per millionPRA Paperwork Reduction ActPRD pressure release devicePRV pressure release valvePSD Prevention of Significant Deteriorationpsig pounds per square inch gaugePTE potential to emitPV present valueREC reduced emissions completionRFA Regulatory Flexibility ActRIA Regulatory Impact AnalysisRTC response to commentsSBAR Small Business Advocacy ReviewSC-CH4social cost of methaneSCF significant contribution findingscf standard cubic feetscfh standard cubic feet per hourscfm standard cubic feet per minuteSF6sulfur hexafluorideSIP State Implementation PlanSO2sulfur dioxideSOXsulfur oxidestpy tons per yearD.C Circuit U.S Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia CircuitTAR Tribal Authority RuleTIP Tribal Implementation PlanTSD technical support documentTTN Technology Transfer NetworkUAS unmanned aircraft systemsUIC underground injection controlUMRA Unfunded Mandates Reform ActU.S United StatesUSGCRP U.S Global Change Research ProgramUSGS U.S Geologic SurveyVCS Voluntary Consensus StandardsVOC volatile organic compoundsVRD vapor recovery deviceVRU vapor recovery unit Organization of this document. 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Executive Order 13211: Actions Concerning Regulations That Significantly Affect Energy Supply, Distribution, or Use I. National Technology Transfer and Advancement Act (NTTAA) J. Executive Order 12898: Federal Actions To Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income PopulationsI. Executive SummaryA. Purpose of the Regulatory Action This proposed rulemaking takes a significant step forward in mitigating climate-destabilizing pollution and protecting human health by reducing GHG and VOC emissions from the Oil and Natural Gas Industry,\1\ specifically the Crude Oil and Natural Gas source category.\2\ The Oil and Natural Gas Industry is the United States' largest industrial emitter of methane, a highly potent GHG. Human activity-related emissions of methane are responsible for about one third of the warming due to well-mixed GHGs and constitute the second most important warming agent arising from human activity after carbon dioxide (a well-mixed gas is one with an atmospheric lifetime longer than a year or two, which allows the gas to be mixed around the world, meaning that the location of emission of the gas has little importance in terms of its impacts). According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), strong, rapid, and sustained methane reductions are critical to reducing near-term disruption of the climate system and are a vital complement to reductions in other GHGs that are needed to limit the long-term extent of climate change and its destructive impacts. The Oil and Natural Gas Industry also emits other harmful pollutants in varying concentrations and amounts, including carbon dioxide (CO2), VOC, sulfur dioxide (SO2), nitrogen oxide (NOX), hydrogen sulfide (H2S), carbon disulfide (CS2), and carbonyl sulfide (COS), as well as benzene, toluene, ethylbenzene, and xylenes (this group is commonly referred to as ``BTEX''), and n-hexane.--------------------------------------------------------------------------- \1\ The EPA characterizes the Oil and Natural Gas Industry operations as being generally composed of four segments: (1) Extraction and production of crude oil and natural gas (``oil and natural gas production''), (2) natural gas ***processing***, (3) natural gas transmission and storage, and (4) natural gas distribution. \2\ The EPA defines the Crude Oil and Natural Gas source category to mean (1) crude oil production, which includes the well and extends to the point of custody transfer to the crude oil transmission pipeline or any other forms of transportation; and (2) natural gas production, ***processing***, transmission, and storage, which include the well and extend to, but do not include, the local distribution company custody transfer station. For purposes of this proposed rulemaking, for crude oil, the EPA's focus is on operations from the well to the point of custody transfer at a petroleum refinery, while for natural gas, the focus is on all operations from the well to the local distribution company custody transfer station commonly referred to as the ``city-gate''.--------------------------------------------------------------------------- Under the authority of CAA section 111, this rulemaking proposes comprehensive standards of performance for GHG emissions (in the form of methane limitations) and VOC emissions for new, modified, and reconstructed sources in the Crude Oil and Natural Gas source category, including the production, ***processing***, transmission and storage segments. For designated facilities,\3\ this rulemaking proposes EG containing presumptive standards for GHG in the form of methane limitations. When finalized, States shall utilize these EG to submit to the EPA plans that establish standards of performance for designated facilities and provide for implementation and enforcement of such standards. The EPA will provide support for States in developing their plans to reduce methane emissions from designated facilities within the Crude Oil and Natural Gas source category.--------------------------------------------------------------------------- \3\ The term ``designated facility'' means ``any existing facility which emits a designated pollutant and which would be subject to a standard of performance for that pollutant if the existing facility were an affected facility.'' See 40 CFR 60.21a(b).--------------------------------------------------------------------------- The EPA is proposing these actions in accordance with its legal obligations and authorities following a review directed by E.O 13990, ``Protecting Public Health and the Environment and Restoring Science to Tackle the Climate Crisis,'' issued on January 20, 2021. The EPA intends for these proposed actions to address the far-reaching harmful consequences and real economic costs of climate change. According to the IPCC AR6 assessment, ``It is unequivocal that human influence has warmed the atmosphere, ocean and land. Widespread and rapid changes in the atmosphere, ocean, cryosphere and biosphere have occurred.'' The IPCC AR6 assessment states these changes have led to increases in heat waves and wildfire weather, reductions in air quality, more intense hurricanes and[[Page 63114]]rainfall events, and rising sea level. These changes, along with future projected changes, endanger the physical survival, health, economic well-being, and quality of life of people living in the United States (U.S ), especially those in the most vulnerable communities. Methane is both the main component of natural gas and a potent GHG. One ton of methane in the atmosphere has 80 times the warming impact of a ton of CO2, and contributes to the creation of ground-level ozone which is another greenhouse gas. Because methane has a shorter lifetime than CO2, it has a smaller relative impact--although still significantly greater than CO2--when considering longer time periods. One standard metric is the 100-year global warming potential (GWP), which is a ***measure*** of the climate impact of emissions of one ton a greenhouse gas over 100 years relative to the impact of the emissions of one ton of CO2. Even over this long timeframe, methane has a 100-year GWP of almost 30. The IPCC AR6 assessment found that ``Over time scales of 10 to 20 years, the global temperature response to a year's worth of current emissions of SLCFs (short lived climate forcer) is at least as large as that due to a year's worth of CO2emissions.'' \4\ The IPCC estimated that, depending on the reference scenario, collective reductions in these SLCFs (methane, ozone precursors, and HFCs) could reduce warming by 0.2 degrees Celsius ([deg]C) (more than one-third of a degree Fahrenheit ([deg]F) in 2040 and 0.8 [deg]C (almost 1.5 [deg]F) by the end of the century, which is important in the context of keeping warming to well below 2 [deg]C (3.6 [deg]F). As methane is the most important SLCF, this makes methane mitigation one of the best opportunities for reducing near term warming. Emissions from human activities have already more than doubled atmospheric methane concentrations since 1750, and that concentration has been growing larger at record rates in recent years.\5\ In the absence of additional reduction policies, methane emissions are projected to continue rising through at least 2040.--------------------------------------------------------------------------- \4\ However, the IPCC AR6 assessment cautioned that ``The effects of the SLCFs decay rapidly over the first few decades after pulse emission. Consequently, on time scales longer than about 30 years, the net long-term temperature effects of sectors and regions are dominated by CO2.'' \5\ Naik, V., S. Szopa, B. Adhikary, P. Artaxo, T. Berntsen, W.D Collins, S. Fuzzi, L. Gallardo, A. Kiendler 41 Scharr, Z. Klimont, H. Liao, N. Unger, P. Zanis, 2021, Short-Lived Climate Forcers. In: Climate Change 42 2021: The Physical Science Basis. Contribution of Working Group I to the Sixth Assessment Report of the 43 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [Masson-Delmotte, V., P. Zhai, A. Pirani, S.L Connors, C. 44 P[eacute]an, S. Berger, N. Caud, Y. Chen, L. Goldfarb, M.I Gomis, M. Huang, K. Leitzell, E. Lonnoy, J.B.R 45 Matthews, T.K Maycock, T. Waterfield, O. Yelek[ccedil]i, R. Yu and B. Zhou (eds.)]. Cambridge University 46 Press. In Press.--------------------------------------------------------------------------- Methane's radiative efficiency means that immediate reductions in methane emissions, including from sources in the Crude Oil and Natural Gas source category, can help reduce near-term warming. As natural gas is comprised primarily of methane, every natural gas leak, or intentional release of natural gas through venting or other ***processes***, constitutes a release of methane. Reducing human-caused methane emissions, such as controlling natural gas leaks and releases as proposed in these actions, would contribute substantially to global efforts to limit temperature rise, aiding efforts to remain well below 2 [deg]C above pre-industrial levels. See preamble section III for further discussion on the Crude Oil and Natural Gas Emissions and Climate Change, including discussion of the GHGs, VOCs, and SO2Emissions on Public Health and Welfare. Methane and VOC emissions from the Crude Oil and Natural Gas source category result from a variety of industry operations across the supply chain. As natural gas moves through the necessarily interconnected system of exploration, production, storage, ***processing***, and transmission that brings it from wellhead to commerce, emissions primarily result from intentional venting, unintentional gas carry-through (e.g , vortexing from separator drain, improper liquid level settings, liquid level control valve on an upstream separator or scrubber does not seat properly at the end of an automated liquid dumping event, inefficient separation of gas and liquid phases occurs upstream of tanks allowing some gas carry-through), routine maintenance, unintentional fugitive emissions, flaring, malfunctions, abnormal ***process*** conditions, and system upsets. These emissions are associated with a range of specific equipment and practices, including leaking valves, connectors, and other components at well sites and compressor stations; leaks and vented emissions from storage vessels; releases from natural gas-driven pneumatic pumps and controllers; liquids unloading at well sites; and venting or under-performing flaring of associated gas from oil wells. But technical innovations have produced a range of technologies and best practices to monitor, eliminate or minimize these emissions, which in many cases have the benefit of reducing multiple pollutants at once and recovering saleable product. These technologies and best practices have been deployed by individual oil and natural gas companies, required by State regulations, or reflected in regulations issued by the EPA and other Federal agencies. In this action, the EPA has taken a comprehensive analysis of the available data from emission sources in the Crude Oil and Natural Gas source category and the latest available information on control ***measures*** and techniques to identify achievable, cost-effective ***measures*** to significantly reduce emissions, consistent with the requirements of section 111 of the CAA. If finalized and implemented, the actions proposed in this rulemaking would lead to significant and cost-effective reductions in climate and health-harming pollution and encourage development and deployment of innovative technologies to further reduce this pollution in the Crude Oil and Natural Gas source category. The actions proposed in this rulemaking would: Update, strengthen, and expand current requirements under CAA section 111(b) for methane and VOC emissions from new, modified, and reconstructed facilities, establish new limits for methane, and VOC emissions from new, modified, and reconstructed facilities that are not currently regulated under CAA section 111(b), establish the first nationwide EG for States to limit methane pollution from existing designated facilities in the source category under CAA section 111(d), and take comment on additional sources of pollution that, with understanding gained from more information, may offer opportunities for emission reductions, which the EPA would present in a supplemental rulemaking proposal under both CAA section 111(b) and (d). In developing this proposal, the EPA drew on its own prior experience in regulating sources in the Crude Oil and Natural Gas source category under section 111 and other CAA programs; applied lessons learned from States' regulatory efforts, the emission reduction efforts of leading companies, and the EPA's long-standing voluntary emission reduction programs; and reviewed the latest available information about new and developing technologies, as well as, peer-reviewed research from emission measurement campaigns across the U.S Further, the EPA undertook extensive pre-proposal outreach to the public and to stakeholders, including three full days[[Page 63115]]of public listening sessions, roundtables with State energy and environmental regulators, a two-day workshop on innovative methane detection technologies, and a nonregulatory docket established in May 2021 to receive written comments. Through this outreach, the EPA heard from diverse voices and perspectives including State and local governments, Tribal nations, communities affected by oil and gas pollution, environmental and public health organizations, and representatives of the oil and natural gas industry, all of which provided ideas and information that helped shape and inform this proposal. The EPA also considered community and environmental justice implications in the development of this proposal and sought to ensure equitable treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income in the ***process***. The EPA engaged and consulted representatives of frontline communities that are directly affected by and particularly vulnerable to the climate and health impacts of pollution from this source category through interactions such as webinars, listening sessions and meetings. These opportunities allowed the EPA to hear directly from the public, especially overburdened and underserved communities, on the development of the proposed rule and to factor these concerns into this proposal. For example, in addition to establishing EG that extend fugitive emission requirements to existing oil and natural gas facilities, the EPA is proposing to expand leak detection programs already in effect for new sources to include known sources of large emission events and proposing to require more frequent monitoring at sites with more emissions. The EPA is also taking comment on innovative mechanisms to ensure compliance and minimize emissions, including the possibility of providing a pathway for communities to detect and report large emitting events that may require follow-up and mitigation by owners and operators. The extensive pollution reduction ***measures*** in this proposal, if finalized, would collectively reduce a suite of harmful pollutants and their associated health impacts in communities adjacent to these emission sources. Further, to help ensure that the needs and perspectives of communities with environmental justice concerns are considered as States develop plans to establish and implement standards of performance for existing sources, the EPA is proposing to require that States demonstrate they have undertaken meaningful outreach and engagement with overburdened and underserved communities as part of their State plan submissions under the EPA. A full discussion of the Environmental Justice Considerations, Implications, and Stakeholder Outreach can be found in section VI of the preamble. A full discussion of Other Stakeholder Outreach is found in section VII of the preamble. As described in more detail below, the EPA recognizes that several States and other Federal agencies currently regulate the Oil and Natural Gas Industry. The EPA also recognizes that these State and other Federal agency regulatory programs have matured since the EPA began implementing the current NSPS requirements in 2012 and 2016. The EPA further acknowledges the technical innovations that the Oil and Natural Gas Industry has made during the past decade; this industry operates at a fast pace and changes constantly as technology evolves. The EPA commends these efforts and recognizes States for their innovative standards, alternative compliance options, and implementation strategies, and intends these proposed actions to build upon progress made by certain States and Federal agencies in reducing GHG and VOC emissions. See preamble section V for fuller discussion of Related State Actions and Other Federal Actions Regulating Oil and Natural Gas Sources and Industry and Voluntary Actions to Address Climate Change. The EPA believes that a broad ensemble of mutually leveraging efforts across all States and all Federal agencies is essential to meaningfully address climate change effectively. As the Federal agency with primary responsibility to protect human health and the environment, the EPA has the unique responsibility and authority to regulate harmful air pollutants emitted by the Crude Oil and Natural Gas source category. The EPA recognizes that States and other Federal agencies regulate in accordance with their respective legal authorities and within their respective jurisdictions but collectively do not fully and consistently address the range of sources and emission reduction ***measures*** contained in this proposal. Direct Federal regulation of methane from new, reconstructed, and modified sources in this category, combined with approved State plans that are consistent with the EPA's presumptive standards for designated facilities (existing sources), will help reduce both climate- and other health-harming pollution from a large number of sources that are either unregulated or from which additional, cost-effective reductions are available, level the regulatory playing field, and help promote technological innovation. Throughout this action, unless noted otherwise, the EPA is requesting comments on all aspects of the proposal to enable the EPA to develop a final rule that, consistent with our responsibilities under section 111 of the CAA, achieves the greatest possible reductions in methane and VOC emissions while remaining achievable, cost effective, and conducive to technological innovation. As a further step in the rulemaking ***process*** and to solicit additional public input, the EPA plans to issue a supplemental proposal and supplemental RIA for the supplemental proposal to provide regulatory text for the proposed NSPS OOOOb and EG OOOOc. In light of certain innovative elements of this proposed rule and the EPA's request for information that would support the regulation of additional sources in the Crude Oil and Natural Gas source category as part of this rulemaking, the EPA is considering including additional provisions in this supplemental proposal and RIA based on information and comment collected in response to this document. As noted later in this preamble, the supplemental proposal may address, among other issues: (1) Ways to mitigate methane from abandoned wells, (2) ***measures*** to reduce emissions from pipeline pigging operations and other pipeline blowdowns, (3) ways to minimize emissions from tank truck loading operations, and (4) ways to strengthen requirements to ensure proper operation and optimal performance of control devices. In addition, and as noted in the solicitations of comment in this document, the supplemental proposal may revisit and refine certain provisions of this proposal in response to information provided by the public. For instance, the EPA is seeking input on multiple aspects of the proposed approach for fugitive emissions monitoring at well sites, including the baseline emission threshold and other criteria (such as the presence of specific types of malfunction-prone equipment) that should be used to determine whether a well site is required to undertake ongoing fugitive emissions monitoring; the methodology for calculating baseline methane emissions and whether it should account for malfunctions or improper operation of controls at storage vessels; and ways to ensure that emissions from wells owned by small businesses are addressed while still recognizing the greater challenges that small businesses with less dedicated staff and resources for[[Page 63116]]environmental compliance may have. The EPA is also seeking input on ways to ensure that captured associated gas is collected for a useful purpose rather than flared, and the feasibility of requiring broader use of zero-emitting technology for pneumatic pumps. Finally, the EPA is seeking comment and information on alternative measurement technologies, which we are proposing to allow in the rule. We have heard strong interest from various stakeholders on employing new tools for methane identification and quantification, particularly for large emission sources (commonly known as ``super-emitters''). Information provided in response to this proposal may be used to evaluate whether a change in BSER from the proposed quarterly OGI monitoring to a monitoring program using alternative measurement technologies is appropriate. Separate from the role of these alternative measurement technologies in a regulatory monitoring program, we are also soliciting comment on ways to structure a pathway for communities to identify large emission events which owners or operators would then be required to investigate, and mechanisms for the collection and public dissemination of this information, for possible further development as part of a supplemental proposal. This preamble includes comment solicitations/requests on several topics and issues. We have prepared a separate memorandum that presents these comment requests by section and topic as a guide to assist commenters in preparing comments. This memorandum can be obtained from the Docket for this action (see Docket ID No. EPA-HQ-OAR-2021-0317). The title of the memorandum is ``Standards of Performance for New, Reconstructed, and Modified Sources and Emissions Guidelines for Existing Sources: Oil and Natural Gas Sector Climate Review--Proposed Rule Summary of Comment Solicitations.''B. Summary of the Major Provisions of This Regulatory Action This proposed rulemaking includes three distinct groups of actions under the CAA that are each severable from the other. First, pursuant to CAA 111(b)(1)(B), the EPA has reviewed, and is proposing revisions to, the standards of performance for the Crude Oil and Natural Gas source category published in 2016 and amended in 2020, codified at 40 CFR part 60, subpart OOOOa--Standards of Performance for Crude Oil and Natural Gas Facilities for which Construction, Modification or Reconstruction Commenced After September 18, 2015 (2016 NSPS OOOOa). Specifically, the EPA is proposing to update, strengthen, and expand the current requirements under CAA section 111(b) for methane and VOC emissions from sources that commenced construction, modification, or reconstruction after November 15, 2021. These proposed standards of performance will be in a new subpart, 40 CFR part 60, subpart OOOOb (NSPS OOOOb), and include standards for emission sources previously not regulated under the 2016 NSPS OOOOa. Second, pursuant to CAA 111(d), the EPA is proposing the first nationwide EG for States to limit methane pollution from designated facilities in the Crude Oil and Natural Gas source category. The EG being proposed in this rulemaking will be in a new subpart, 40 CFR part 60, subpart OOOOc (EG OOOOc). The EG are designed to inform States in the development, submittal, and implementation of State plans that are required to establish standards of performance for GHGs from their designated facilities in the Crude Oil and Natural Gas source category. Third, the EPA is taking several related actions stemming from the joint resolution of Congress, adopted on June 30, 2021 under the CRA, disapproving the EPA's final rule titled, ``Oil and Natural Gas Sector: Emission Standards for New, Reconstructed, and Modified Sources Review,'' 85 FR 57018 (Sept. 14, 2020) (``2020 Policy Rule''). As explained in Section X of this action (Summary of Proposed Action for NSPS OOOOa), the EPA is proposing amendments to the 2016 NSPS OOOOa to address (1) certain inconsistencies between the VOC and methane standards resulting from the disapproval of the 2020 Policy Rule, and (2) certain determinations made in the final rule titled ``Oil and Natural Gas Sector: Emission Standards for New, Reconstructed, and Modified Sources Reconsideration,'' 85 FR 57398 (September 15, 2020) (2020 Technical Rule), specifically with respect to fugitive emissions monitoring at low production well sites and gathering and boosting stations. With respect to the latter, as described below, the EPA is proposing to rescind provisions of the 2020 Technical Rule that were not supported by the record for that rule, or by our subsequent information and analysis. The regulatory text for these proposed amendments is included in the docket for this rulemaking at Docket ID EPA-HQ-OAR-2021-0317. In addition, in the final rule for this action, the EPA will update the NSPS OOOO and NSPS OOOOa provisions in the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) to reflect the Congressional Review Act (CRA) resolution's disapproval of the final 2020 Policy Rule, specifically, the reinstatement of the NSPS OOOO and NSPS OOOOa requirements that the 2020 Policy Rule repealed but that came back into effect immediately upon enactment of the CRA resolution. It should be noted that these requirements have come back into effect already even though the EPA has not yet updated the CFR text to reflect them.\6\ These updates to the CFR text are also included in the docket for this rulemaking at Docket ID EPA-HQ-OAR-2021-0317 for public awareness, but the EPA is not soliciting comment on them as they merely reflect current law. Under 5 U.S.C 553(b)(3)(B), notice and comment is not required ``when the agency for good cause finds . . . that notice and public procedure thereon are . . . unnecessary . . . ,'' \7\ and, as just noted, notice and comment is not necessary for these updates. The EPA is waiting to make these updates to the CFR text until the final rule simply because it would be more efficient and clearer to amend the CFR once at the end of this rulemaking ***process*** to account for all changes to the 2012 NSPS OOOO (77 FR 49490, August 16, 2012) and 2016 NSPS OOOOa at the same time.--------------------------------------------------------------------------- \6\ See Congressional Review Act Resolution to Disapprove EPA's 2020 Oil and Gas Policy Rule Questions and Answers (June 30, 2021) available at [*https://www.epa.gov/system/files/documents/2021-07/qa\_cra\_for\_2020\_oil\_and\_gas\_policy\_rule.6.30.2021.pdf*](https://www.epa.gov/system/files/documents/2021-07/qa_cra_for_2020_oil_and_gas_policy_rule.6.30.2021.pdf). \7\ 5 U.S.C 553(b)(3)(B) is applicable to rules promulgated under CAA section 111(b), under CAA section 307(d)(1) (flush language at end).--------------------------------------------------------------------------- As CAA section 111(a)(1) requires, the standards of performance being proposed in this action reflect ``the degree of emission limitation achievable through the application of the best system of emission reduction [BSER] which (taking into account the cost of achieving such reduction and any non-air quality health and environmental impact and energy requirement) the Administrator determines has been adequately demonstrated.'' This action further proposes EG for designated facilities, under which States must submit plans which establish standards of performance that reflect the degree of emission limitation achievable through application of the BSER, as identified in the final EG. In this proposed rulemaking, we evaluated potential control ***measures*** available for the affected facilities, the emission reductions achievable through these ***measures***, and employed multiple approaches to evaluate the reasonableness of control costs associated with the options under[[Page 63117]]consideration. For example, in evaluating controls for reducing VOC and methane emissions from new sources, we considered a control ***measure***'s cost-effectiveness under both a ``single pollutant cost-effectiveness'' approach and a ``multipollutant cost-effectiveness'' approach, to appropriately consider that the systems of emission reduction considered in this rule typically achieve reductions in multiple pollutants at once and secure a multiplicity of climate and public health benefits. For a detailed discussion of the EPA's consideration of this and other BSER statutory elements, please see sections IV and IX of this preamble. Table 1--Applicability Dates for Proposed Subparts Addressed in This Proposed Action------------------------------------------------------------------------ Subpart Source type Applicable dates------------------------------------------------------------------------40 CFR part 60, subpart OOOO New, modified, or After August 23, reconstructed 2011 and on or sources. before September 18, 2015.40 CFR part 60, subpart New, modified, or After September 18, OOOOa. reconstructed 2015 and on or sources. before November 15, 2021.40 CFR part 60, subpart New, modified, or After November 15, OOOOb. reconstructed 2021. sources.40 CFR part 60, subpart Existing sources.... On or before OOOOc. November 15, 2021.------------------------------------------------------------------------1. Proposed Standards for New, Modified and Reconstructed Sources After November 15, 2021 (Proposed NSPS OOOOb) As described in sections XI and XII of this preamble, under the authority of CAA section 111(b)(1)(B) the EPA has reviewed the VOC, GHG (in the form of limitations on methane), and SO2standards in the 2016 NSPS OOOOa (as amended in 2020 by the Technical Rule). Based on its review, the EPA is proposing revisions to the standards for certain emissions sources to reflect the updated BSER for those affected sources. Where our analyses show that the BSER for an affected source remains the same, the EPA is proposing to retain the current standard for that affected source. In addition, the EPA is proposing methane and VOC standards for several new sources that are currently unregulated. The proposed NSPS described above would apply to new, modified, and reconstructed emission sources across the Crude Oil and Natural Gas source category, including the production, ***processing***, transmission, and storage segments, for which construction, reconstruction, or modification commenced after November 15, 2021, which is the date of publication of the proposed revisions to the NSPS. In particular, this action proposes to retain the 2016 NSPS OOOOa SO2performance standard for sweetening units and the 2016 OOOOa VOC and methane performance standards for well completions and centrifugal compressors; proposes revisions to strengthen the 2016 NSPS OOOOa VOC and methane standards addressing fugitive emissions from well sites and compressor stations, storage vessels, pneumatic controllers, reciprocating compressors, pneumatic pumps, and equipment leaks at natural gas ***processing*** plants; and proposes new VOC and methane standards for well liquids unloading operations and intermittent vent pneumatic controllers, and oil wells with associated gas previously not regulated in the 2016 NSPS OOOOa. A summary of the proposed BSER determination and proposed NSPS for new, modified, and reconstructed sources (NSPS OOOOb) is presented in Table 2. See sections XI and XII of this preamble for a complete discussion of BSER determination and proposed NSPS requirements. This proposal also solicits certain information relevant to the potential identification of additional emissions sources as affected facilities. Specifically, the EPA is evaluating the potential for establishing standards for abandoned and unplugged wells, blowdown emissions associated with pipeline pig launchers and receivers, and tank truck loading operations. While the EPA has assessed these sources based on currently available information, we have determined that we need additional information to evaluate BSER and to propose NSPS for these emissions sources. A full discussion of the solicitation for comment regarding these additional emission sources is found in section XIII of the preamble.2. Proposed EG for Sources Constructed Prior to November 15, 2021 (Proposed EG OOOOc) As described in sections XI and XII of this preamble, under the authority of CAA section 111(d), the EPA is proposing the first nationwide EG for GHG (in the form of methane limitations) for the Crude Oil and Natural Gas source category, including the production, ***processing***, transmission, and storage segments (EG OOOOc). When the EPA establishes NSPS for a source category, the EPA is required to issue EG to reduce emissions of certain pollutants from existing sources in that same source category. In such circumstances, under CAA section 111(d), the EPA must issue regulations to establish procedures under which States submit plans to establish, implement, and enforce standards of performance for existing sources for certain air pollutants to which a Federal NSPS would apply if such existing source were a new source. Thus, the issuance of CAA section 111(d) final EG does not impose binding requirements directly on sources but instead provides requirements for states in developing their plans. Although State plans bear the obligation to establish standards of performance, under CAA sections 111(a)(1) and 111(d), those standards of performance must reflect the degree of emission limitation achievable through the application of the BSER as determined by the Administrator. As provided in section 111(d), a State may choose to take into account remaining useful life and other factors in applying a standard of performance to a particular source, consistent with the CAA, the EPA's implementing regulations, and the final EG. In this action, the EPA is proposing BSER determinations and the degree of limitation achievable through application of the BSER for certain existing equipment, ***processes***, and activities across the Crude Oil and Natural Gas source category. Section XIV of this preamble discusses the components of EG, including the steps, requirements, and considerations associated with the development, submittal, and implementation of State, Tribal, and Federal plans, as appropriate. For the EG, the EPA is proposing to translate the degree of emission limitation achievable through application of the BSER (i.e , level of stringency) into presumptive standards that States may use in the development of State plans for specific designated facilities. By doing this, the EPA has formatted the proposed EG such that if a State chooses to adopt these[[Page 63118]]presumptive standards, once finalized, as the standards of performance in a State plan, the EPA could approve such a plan as meeting the requirements of CAA section 111(d) and the finalized EG, if the plan meets all other applicable requirements. In this way, the presumptive standards included in the EG serve a function similar to that of a model rule,\8\ because they are intended to assist States in developing their plan submissions by providing States with a starting point for standards that are based on general industry parameters and assumptions. The EPA believes that providing these presumptive standards will create a streamlined approach for States in developing plans and the EPA in evaluating State plans. However, the EPA's action on each State plan submission is carried out via rulemaking, which includes public notice and comment. Inclusion of presumptive standards in the EG does not seek to pre-determine the outcomes of any future rulemaking.--------------------------------------------------------------------------- \8\ The presumptive standards are not the same as a Federal plan under CAA section 111(d)(2). The EPA has an obligation to promulgate a Federal plan if a state fails to submit a satisfactory plan. In such circumstances, the final EG and presumptive standards would serve as a guide to the development of a Federal plan. See section XIV.F for information on Federal plans.--------------------------------------------------------------------------- Designated facilities located in Indian country would not be encompassed within a State's CAA section 111(d) plan. Instead, an eligible Tribe that has one or more designated facilities located in its area of Indian country would have the opportunity, but not the obligation, to seek authority and submit a plan that establishes standards of performance for those facilities on its Tribal lands. If a Tribe does not submit a plan, or if the EPA does not approve a Tribe's plan, then the EPA has the authority to establish a Federal plan for that Tribe. A summary of the proposed EG for existing sources (EG OOOOc) for the oil and natural gas sector is presented in Table 3. See sections XI and XII of this preamble for a complete discussion of the proposed EG requirements. As discussed above for the proposed NSPS OOOOb, the EPA is considering including additional sources as affected facilities in a potential future supplemental rulemaking proposal \9\ under CAA section 111(b). The EPA is also considering including these additional sources as designated facilities under the EG in OOOOc in a potential future supplemental rulemaking proposal under CAA section 111(d). As with the proposed NSPS OOOOb, the EPA is evaluating the potential for establishing EG applicable to abandoned and unplugged wells, blowdown emissions associated with pipeline pig launchers and receivers, and tank truck loading operations (assuming the EPA establishes NSPS for these emissions points). As described in section XIII of this preamble, the EPA is soliciting information to assist in this effort.--------------------------------------------------------------------------- \9\ A supplemental proposal would include an updated RIA.---------------------------------------------------------------------------3. Proposed Amendments to 2016 NSPS OOOOa, and CRA-Related CFR Updates The EPA is also proposing certain modifications to the 2016 NSPS OOOOa to address certain amendments to the VOC standards for sources in the production and ***processing*** segments finalized in the 2020 Technical Rule. Because the methane standards for the production and ***processing*** segments and all standards for the transmission and storage segment were removed from the 2016 NSPS OOOOa via the 2020 Policy Rule prior to the finalization of the 2020 Technical Rule, the latter amendments apply only to the 2016 NSPS OOOOa VOC standards for the production and ***processing*** segments. In this proposed rulemaking, the EPA also is proposing to apply some of the 2020 Technical Rule amendments to the methane standards for all industry segments and to VOC standards for the transmission and storage segment in the 2016 NSPS OOOOa. These amendments are associated with the requirements for well completions, pneumatic pumps, closed vent systems, fugitive emissions, alternative means of emission limitation (AMELs), onshore natural gas ***processing*** plants, as well as other technical clarifications and corrections. The EPA also is proposing to repeal the amendments in the 2020 Technical Rule that (1) exempted low production well sites from monitoring fugitive emissions and (2) changed monitoring of VOC emissions at gathering and boosting compressor stations from quarterly to semiannual, which currently apply only to VOC standards (not methane standards) from the production and ***processing*** segments. A summary of the proposed amendments to the 2016 OOOOa NSPS is presented in section X of this preamble. Lastly, in the final rule for this action, the EPA will update the NSPS OOOO and OOOOa provisions in the CFR to reflect the CRA resolution's disapproval of the final 2020 Policy Rule, specifically, the reinstatement of the OOOO and OOOOa requirements that the 2020 Policy Rule repealed but that came back into effect immediately upon enactment of the CRA resolution. The EPA is waiting to make the updates to the CFR text until the final rule simply because it would be more efficient and clearer to amend the CFR once at the end of this rulemaking ***process*** to account for all changes to the 2012 NSPS OOOO and 2016 NSPS OOOOa at the same time. In accordance with 5 U.S.C 553(b)(3)(B), the EPA is not soliciting comment on these updates. Table 2--Summary of Proposed BSER and Proposed Standards of Performance for GHGS and VOC [NSPS OOOOb]------------------------------------------------------------------------ Proposed standards of Affected source Proposed BSER performance for GHGs and VOCs------------------------------------------------------------------------Fugitive Emissions: Well Sites Demonstrate Perform survey to with Baseline Emissions >0 to actual site verify that actual <3 tpy \1\ Methane. emissions are site emissions are reflected in reflected in calculation. calculation.Fugitive Emissions: Well Sites Monitoring and Quarterly OGI >=3 tpy Methane. repair based on monitoring following quarterly appendix K. monitoring using (Optional quarterly OGI \2\. EPA Method 21 monitoring with 500 ppm defined as a leak). First attempt at repair within 30 days of finding fugitive emissions. Final repair within 30 days of first attempt.(Co-proposal) Fugitive Monitoring and Semiannual OGI Emissions: Well Sites with repair based on monitoring following Baseline Emissions >=3 to <8 semiannual appendix K. tpy Methane. monitoring using (Optional semiannual OGI. EPA Method 21 monitoring with 500 ppm defined as a leak). First attempt at repair within 30 days of finding fugitive emissions. Final repair within 30 days of first attempt.[[Page 63119]] (Co-proposal) Fugitive Monitoring and Quarterly OGI Emissions: Well Sites with repair based on monitoring following Baseline Emissions >=8 tpy quarterly appendix K. Methane. monitoring using (Optional quarterly OGI. EPA Method 21 monitoring with 500 ppm \3\ defined as a leak). First attempt at repair within 30 days of finding fugitive emissions. Final repair within 30 days of first attempt.Fugitive Emissions: Compressor Monitoring and Quarterly OGI Stations. repair based on monitoring following quarterly appendix K. monitoring using (Optional quarterly OGI. EPA Method 21 monitoring with 500 ppm defined as a leak). First attempt at repair within 30 days of finding fugitive emissions. Final repair within 30 days of first attempt.Fugitive Emissions: Well Sites Monitoring and Annual OGI monitoring and Compressor Stations on repair based on following appendix Alaska North Slope. annual K. (Optional annual monitoring using EPA Method 21 OGI. monitoring with 500 ppm defined as a leak). First attempt at repair within 30 days of finding fugitive emissions. Final repair within 30 days of first attempt.Fugitive Emissions: Well Sites (Optional) (Optional) and Compressor Stations. Screening, Alternative monitoring, and bimonthly screening repair based on with advanced bimonthly measurement screening using technology with an advanced annual OGI measurement monitoring following technology and appendix K. annual monitoring using OGI.Storage Vessels: A Single Capture and route 95 percent reduction Storage Vessel or Tank to a control of VOC and methane. Battery with PTE \4\ of 6 tpy device. or More of VOC.Pneumatic Controllers: Natural Use of zero- VOC and methane Gas Driven that Vent to the emissions emission rate of Atmosphere. controllers. zero.Pneumatic Controllers: Alaska Installation of Natural gas bleed (at sites where onsite power low-bleed rate no greater than is not available--continuous pneumatic 6 scfh.\5\ bleed natural gas driven). controllers.Pneumatic Controllers: Alaska Monitor and OGI monitoring and (at sites where onsite power repair through repair of emissions is not available-- fugitive from controller intermittent natural gas emissions malfunctions. driven). program.Well Liquids Unloading........ Perform liquids Each affected well unloading with that unloads liquids zero methane or employ techniques or VOC emissions. technology(ies) that If this is not eliminate or feasible for minimize venting of safety or emissions during technical liquids unloading reasons, employ events to the best management maximum extent. practices to minimize venting. Co Proposal Options: Option One--Affected facility would be defined as every well that undergoes liquids unloading. --If the method is one that does not result in any venting to the atmosphere, maintain records specifying the technology or technique and record instances where an unloading event results in emissions. --For unloading technologies or techniques that result in venting to the atmosphere, implement BMPs \6\ to ensure that venting is minimized. --Maintain BMPs as records, and record instances when they were not followed. Option Two--Affected facility would be defined as every well that undergoes liquids unloading using a method that is not designed to eliminate venting. --Wells that utilize non-venting methods would not be affected facilities that are subject to the NSPS OOOOb. Therefore, they would not have requirements other than to maintain records to document that they used non- venting liquids unloading methods. --The requirements for wells that use methods that vent would be the same as described above under Option 1.Wet Seal Centrifugal Capture and route Reduce emissions by Compressors (except for those emissions from 95 percent. located at single well sites). the wet seal fluid degassing system to a control device or to a ***process***.Reciprocating Compressors Replace the Replace the (except for those located at reciprocating reciprocating single well sites). compressor rod compressor rod packing based on packing when annual ***measured*** leak rate monitoring (when exceeds 2 scfm based ***measured*** leak on the results of rate exceeds 2 annual monitoring or scfm \7\) or collect and route route emissions emissions from the to a ***process***. rod packing to a ***process*** through a closed vent system under negative pressure.[[Page 63120]] Pneumatic Pumps: Natural Gas A natural gas A natural gas ***Processing*** Plants. emission rate of emission rate of zero. zero from diaphragm and piston pneumatic pumps.Pneumatic Pumps: Production Route diaphragm 95 percent control of Segment. and piston diaphragm and piston pneumatic pumps pneumatic pumps if to an existing there is an existing control device control or ***process*** or ***process***. on site. 95 percent control not required if (1) routed to an existing control that achieves less than 95 percent or (2) it is technically infeasible to route to the existing control device or ***process***.Pneumatic Pumps: Transmission Route diaphragm 95 percent control of and Storage Segment. pneumatic pumps diaphragm pneumatic to an existing pumps if there is an control device existing control or or ***process***. ***process*** on site. 95 percent control not required if (1) routed to an existing control that achieves less than 95 percent or (2) it is technically infeasible to route to the existing control device or ***process***.Well Completions: Subcategory Combination of Applies to each well 1 (non-wildcat and non- REC \8\ and the completion operation delineation wells). use of a with hydraulic completion fracturing. combustion device. REC in combination with a completion combustion device; venting in lieu of combustion where combustion would present safety hazards. Initial flowback stage: Route to a storage vessel or completion vessel (frac tank, lined pit, or other vessel) and separator. Separation flowback stage: Route all salable gas from the separator to a flow line or collection system, re-inject the gas into the well or another well, use the gas as an onsite fuel source or use for another useful purpose that a purchased fuel or raw material would serve. If technically infeasible to route recovered gas as specified above, recovered gas must be combusted. All liquids must be routed to a storage vessel or well completion vessel, collection system, or be re-injected into the well or another well. The operator is required to have (and use) a separator onsite during the entire flowback period.Well Completions: Subcategory Use of a Applies to each well 2 (exploratory and completion completion operation delineation wells and low- combustion with hydraulic pressure wells). device. fracturing. The operator is not required to have a separator onsite. Either: (1) Route all flowback to a completion combustion device with a continuous pilot flame; or (2) Route all flowback into one or more well completion vessels and commence operation of a separator unless it is technically infeasible for a separator to function. Any gas present in the flowback before the separator can function is not subject to control under this section. Capture and direct recovered gas to a completion combustion device with a continuous pilot flame. For both options (1) and (2), combustion is not required in conditions that may result in a fire hazard or explosion, or where high heat emissions from a completion combustion device may negatively impact tundra, permafrost, or waterways.Equipment Leaks at Natural Gas LDAR \9\ with LDAR with OGI ***Processing*** Plants. bimonthly OGI. following procedures in appendix K.Oil Wells with Associated Gas. Route associated Route associated gas gas to a sales to a sales line. If line. If access access to a sales to a sales line line is not is not available, the gas available, the can be used as an gas can be used onsite fuel source, as an onsite used for another fuel source, useful purpose that used for another a purchased fuel or useful purpose raw material would that a purchased serve, or routed to fuel or raw a flare or other material would control device that serve, or routed achieves at least 95 to a flare or percent reduction in other control methane and VOC device that emissions. achieves at least 95 percent reduction in methane and VOC emissions.Sweetening Units.............. Achieve SO2 Achieve required emission minimum SO2 emission reduction reduction efficiency. efficiency.------------------------------------------------------------------------\1\ tpy (tons per year).[[Page 63121]] \2\ OGI (optical gas imaging).\3\ ppm (parts per million).\4\ PTE (potential to emit).\5\ scfh (standard cubic feet per hour).\6\ BMP (best management practices).\7\ scfm (standard cubic feet per minute).\8\ REC (reduced emissions completion).\9\ LDAR (leak detection and repair).Table 3--Summary of Proposed BSER and Proposed Presumptive Standards for GHGS From Designated Facilities [EG OOOOc]------------------------------------------------------------------------ Proposed presumptive Designated facility Proposed BSER standards for GHGs------------------------------------------------------------------------Fugitive Emissions: Well Sites Demonstrate Perform survey to >0 to <3 tpy Methane. actual site verify that actual emissions are site emissions are reflected in reflected in calculation. calculation.Fugitive Emissions: Well Sites Monitoring and Quarterly OGI >=3 tpy Methane. repair based on monitoring following quarterly appendix K. monitoring using (Optional quarterly OGI. EPA Method 21 monitoring with 500 ppm defined as a leak). First attempt at repair within 30 days of finding fugitive emissions. Final repair within 30 days of first attempt.(Co-proposal) Fugitive Monitoring and Semiannual OGI Emissions: Well Sites >=3 to repair based on monitoring following <8 tpy Methane. semiannual appendix K. monitoring using (Optional semiannual OGI. EPA Method 21 monitoring with 500 ppm defined as a leak). First attempt at repair within 30 days of finding fugitive emissions. Final repair within 30 days of first attempt.(Co-proposal) Fugitive Monitoring and Quarterly OGI Emissions: Well Sites >=8 tpy repair based on monitoring following Methane. quarterly appendix K. monitoring using (Optional quarterly OGI. EPA Method 21 monitoring with 500 ppm defined as a leak). First attempt at repair within 30 days of finding fugitive emissions. Final repair within 30 days of first attempt.Fugitive Emissions: Compressor Monitoring and Quarterly OGI Stations. repair based on monitoring following quarterly appendix K. monitoring using (Optional quarterly OGI. EPA Method 21 monitoring with 500 ppm defined as a leak). First attempt at repair within 30 days of finding fugitive emissions. Final repair within 30 days of first attempt.Fugitive Emissions: Well Sites Monitoring and Annual OGI monitoring and Compressor Stations on repair based on following appendix Alaska North Slope. annual K. (Optional annual monitoring using EPA Method 21 OGI. monitoring with 500 ppm defined as a leak). First attempt at repair within 30 days of finding fugitive emissions. Final repair within 30 days of first attempt.Fugitive Emissions: Well Sites (Optional) (Optional) and Compressor Stations. Screening, Alternative monitoring, and bimonthly screening repair based on with advanced bimonthly measurement screening using technology with an advanced annual OGI measurement monitoring following technology and appendix K. annual monitoring using OGI.Storage Vessels: Tank Battery Capture and route 95 percent reduction with PTE of 20 tpy or More of to a control of methane. Methane. device.Pneumatic Controllers: Natural Use of zero- VOC and methane Gas Driven that Vent to the emissions emission rate of Atmosphere. controllers. zero.Pneumatic Controllers: Alaska Installation of Natural gas bleed (at sites where onsite power low-bleed rate no greater than is not available--continuous pneumatic 6 scfh. bleed natural gas driven). controllers.Pneumatic Controllers: Alaska Monitor and OGI monitoring and (at sites where onsite power repair through repair of emissions is not available-- fugitive from controller intermittent natural gas emissions malfunctions. driven). program.Wet Seal Centrifugal Capture and route Reduce emissions by Compressors (except for those emissions from 95 percent. located at single well sites). the wet seal fluid degassing system to a control device or to a ***process***.Reciprocating Compressors Replace the Replace the (except for those located at reciprocating reciprocating single well sites). compressor rod compressor rod packing based on packing when annual ***measured*** leak rate monitoring (when exceeds 2 scfm based ***measured*** leak on the results of rate exceeds 2 annual monitoring, scfm) or route or collect and route emissions to a emissions from the ***process***. rod packing to a ***process*** through a closed vent system under negative pressure.Pneumatic Pumps: Natural Gas A natural gas Zero natural gas ***Processing*** Plants. emission rate of emissions from zero. diaphragm and piston pneumatic pumps.Pneumatic Pumps: Locations Route diaphragm 95 percent control of Other Than Natural Gas pumps to an diaphragm pneumatic ***Processing*** Plants. existing control pumps if there is an device or existing control or ***process***. ***process*** on site. 95 percent control not required if (1) routed to an existing control that achieves less than 95 percent or (2) it is technically infeasible to route to the existing control device or ***process***.Equipment Leaks at Natural Gas LDAR with LDAR with OGI ***Processing*** Plants. bimonthly OGI. following procedures in appendix K.[[Page 63122]] Oil Wells with Associated Gas. Route associated Route associated gas gas to a sales to a sales line. If line. If access access to a sales to a sales line line is not is not available, the gas available, the can be used as an gas can be used onsite fuel source, as an onsite used for another fuel source, useful purpose that used for another a purchased fuel or useful purpose raw material would that a purchased serve, or routed to fuel or raw a flare or other material would control device that serve, or routed achieves at least 95 to a flare or percent reduction in other control methane and VOC device that emissions. achieves at least 95 percent reduction in methane and VOC emissions.------------------------------------------------------------------------C. Costs and Benefits To satisfy requirements of E.O 12866, the EPA projected the emissions reductions, costs, and benefits that may result from this proposed action. These results are presented in detail in the regulatory impact analysis (RIA) accompanying this proposal developed in response to E.O 12866. The RIA focuses on the elements of the proposed rule that are likely to result in quantifiable cost or emissions changes compared to a baseline without the proposal that incorporates changes to regulatory requirements induced by the CRA resolution. We estimated the cost, emissions, and benefit impacts for the 2023 to 2035 period. We present the present value (PV) and equivalent annual value (EAV) of costs, benefits, and net benefits of this action in 2019 dollars. The initial analysis year in the RIA is 2023 as we assume the proposed rule will be finalized towards the end of 2022. The NSPS will take effect immediately and impact sources constructed after publication of the proposed rule. The EG will take longer to go into effect as States will need to develop implementation plans in response to the rule and have them approved by the EPA. We assume in the RIA that this ***process*** will take three years, and so EG impacts will begin in 2026. The final analysis year is 2035, which allows us to provide ten years of projected impacts after the EG is assumed to take effect. The cost analysis presented in the RIA reflects a nationwide engineering analysis of compliance cost and emissions reductions, of which there are two main components. The first component is a set of representative or model plants for each regulated facility, segment, and control option. The characteristics of the model plant include typical equipment, operating characteristics, and representative factors including baseline emissions and the costs, emissions reductions, and product recovery resulting from each control option. The second component is a set of projections of activity data for affected facilities, distinguished by vintage, year, and other necessary attributes (e.g , oil versus natural gas wells). Impacts are calculated by setting parameters on how and when affected facilities are assumed to respond to a particular regulatory regime, multiplying activity data by model plant cost and emissions estimates, differencing from the baseline scenario, and then summing to the desired level of aggregation. In addition to emissions reductions, some control options result in natural gas recovery, which can then be combusted in production or sold. Where applicable, we present projected compliance costs with and without the projected revenues from product recovery. The EPA expects climate and health benefits due to the emissions reductions projected under this proposed rule. The EPA estimated the global social benefits of CH4emission reductions expected from this proposed rule using the SC-CH4estimates presented in the ``Technical Support Document: Social Cost of Carbon, Methane, and Nitrous Oxide Interim Estimates under E.O 13990 (IWG 2021)''. These SC-CH4estimates are interim values developed under E.O 13990 for use in benefit-cost analyses until updated estimates of the impacts of climate change can be developed based on the best available science and economics. Under the proposed rule, the EPA expects that VOC emission reductions will improve air quality and are likely to improve health and welfare associated with exposure to ozone, PM2.5, and HAP. Calculating ozone impacts from VOC emissions changes requires information about the spatial patterns in those emissions changes. In addition, the ozone health effects from the proposed rule will depend on the relative proximity of expected VOC and ozone changes to population. In this analysis, we have not characterized VOC emissions changes at a finer spatial resolution than the national total. In light of these uncertainties, we present an illustrative screening analysis in Appendix B of the RIA based on modeled oil and natural gas VOC contributions to ozone concentrations as they occurred in 2017 and do not include the results of this analysis in the estimate of benefits and net benefits projected from this proposal. The projected national-level emissions reductions over the 2023 to 2035 period anticipated under the proposed requirements are presented in Table 4. Table 5 presents the PV and EAV of the projected benefits, costs, and net benefits over the 2023 to 2035 period under the proposed requirements using discount rates of 3 and 7 percent. Table 4--Projected Emissions Reductions Under the Proposed Rule, 2023- 2035 Total------------------------------------------------------------------------ Emissions reductions Pollutant (2023-2035 total)------------------------------------------------------------------------Methane (million short tons) a.................... 41VOC (million short tons).......................... 12Hazardous Air Pollutant (million short tons)...... 0.48[[Page 63123]] Methane (million metric tons CO2 Eq.) b........... 920------------------------------------------------------------------------a To convert from short tons to metric tons, multiply the short tons by 0.907 Alternatively, to convert metric tons to short tons, multiply metric tons by 1.102 b CO2 Eq. calculated using a global warming potential of 25. Table 5--Benefits, Costs, Net Benefits, and Emissions Reductions of the Proposed Rule, 2023 Through 2035 [Dollar Estimates in Millions of 2019 Dollars] a---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------- 3 percent discount rate 7 percent discount rate --------------------------------------------------------------- Equivalent Equivalent Present value annual value Present value annual value----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------Climate Benefits b.............................. $55,000 $5,200 .............. ..............Net Compliance Costs............................ 7,200 680 6,300 760 Compliance Costs............................ 13,000 1,200 10,000 1,200 Product Recovery............................ 5,500 520 3,900 470Net Benefits.................................... 48,000 4,500 49,000 4,500 ---------------------------------------------------------------Non-Monetized Benefits.......................... Climate and ozone health benefits from reducing 41 million short tons of methane from 2023 to 2035. PM2.5 and ozone health benefits from reducing 12 million short tons of VOC from 2023 to 2035 c. HAP benefits from reducing 480 thousand short tons of HAP from 2023 to 2035. Visibility benefits. Reduced vegetation effects.----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------a Values rounded to two significant figures. Totals may not appear to add correctly due to rounding.b Climate benefits are based on reductions in methane emissions and are calculated using four different estimates of the social cost of methane (SC-CH4) (model average at 2.5 percent, 3 percent, and 5 percent discount rates; 95th percentile at 3 percent discount rate). For the presentational purposes of this table, we show the benefits associated with the average SC-CH4 at a 3 percent discount rate, but the Agency does not have a single central SC-CH4 point estimate. We emphasize the importance and value of considering the benefits calculated using all four SC-CH4 estimates; the present value (and equivalent annual value) of the additional benefit estimates ranges from $22 billion to $150 billion ($2.4 billion to $14 billion) over 2023 to 2035 for the proposed option. Please see Table 3-5 and Table 3-7 of the RIA for the full range of SC-CH4 estimates. As discussed in Section 3 of the RIA, a consideration of climate benefits calculated using discount rates below 3 percent, including 2 percent and lower, are also warranted when discounting intergenerational impacts. All net benefits are calculated using climate benefits discounted at 3 percent.c A screening-level analysis of ozone benefits from VOC reductions can be found in Appendix B of the RIA, which is included in the docket.II. General InformationA. Does this action apply to me? Categories and entities potentially affected by this action include: Table 6--Industrial Source Categories Affected by This Action---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------- Category NAICS code 1 Examples of regulated entities----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------Industry........................... 211120 Crude Petroleum Extraction. 211130 Natural Gas Extraction. 221210 Natural Gas Distribution. 486110 Pipeline Distribution of Crude Oil. 486210 Pipeline Transportation of Natural Gas.Federal Government................. ................ Not affected.State/local/Tribal government...... ................ Not affected.----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------1 North American Industry Classification System (NAICS). This table is not intended to be exhaustive, but rather provides a guide for readers regarding entities likely to be affected by this action. Other types of entities not listed in the table could also be affected by this action. To determine whether your entity is affected by this action, you should carefully examine the applicability criteria found in the final rule. If you have questions regarding the applicability of this action to a particular entity, consult the person listed in the FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT section, your air permitting authority, or your EPA Regional representative listed in 40 CFR 60.4 (General Provisions).[[Page 63124]]B. How do I obtain a copy of this document, background information, and other related information? In addition to being available in the docket, an electronic copy of the proposed action is available on the internet. Following signature by the Administrator, the EPA will post a copy of this proposed action at [*https://www.epa.gov/controlling-air-pollution-oil-and-natural-gas-industry*](https://www.epa.gov/controlling-air-pollution-oil-and-natural-gas-industry). Following publication in the Federal Register, the EPA will post the Federal Register version of the final rule and key technical documents at this same website. A redline version of the regulatory language that incorporates the proposed changes described in section X for NSPS OOOO and NSPS OOOOa is available in the docket for this action (Docket ID No. EPA-HQ-OAR-2021-0317). The EPA plans to propose the regulatory language for NSPS OOOOb and EG OOOOc through a supplemental action.III. Air Emissions From the Crude Oil and Natural Gas Sector and Public Health and WelfareA. Impacts of GHGs, VOCs and SO2Emissions on Public Health and Welfare As noted previously, the Oil and Natural Gas Industry emits a wide range of pollutants, including GHGs (such as methane and CO2), VOCs, SO2, NOX, H2S, CS2, and COS. See 49 FR 2636, 2637 (January 20, 1984). As noted below, to this point, the EPA has focused its regulatory efforts on GHGs, VOC, and SO2.\10\--------------------------------------------------------------------------- \10\ We note that the EPA's focus on GHGs (in particular methane), VOC, and SO2in these analyses, does not in any way limit the EPA's authority to promulgate standards that would apply to other pollutants emitted from the Crude Oil and Natural Gas source category, if the EPA determines in the future that such action is appropriate.---------------------------------------------------------------------------1. Climate Change Impacts From GHGs Emissions Elevated concentrations of GHGs are and have been warming the planet, leading to changes in the Earth's climate including changes in the frequency and intensity of heat waves, precipitation, and extreme weather events; rising seas; and retreating snow and ice. The changes taking place in the atmosphere as a result of the well-documented buildup of GHGs due to human activities are changing the climate at a pace and in a way that threatens human health, society, and the natural environment. Human induced GHGs, largely derived from our reliance on fossil fuels, are causing serious and life-threatening environmental and health impacts. Extensive additional information on climate change is available in the scientific assessments and the EPA documents that are briefly described in this section, as well as in the technical and scientific information supporting them. One of those documents is the EPA's 2009 Endangerment and Cause or Contribute Findings for GHGs Under Section 202(a) of the CAA (74 FR 66496, December 15, 2009).\11\ In the 2009 Endangerment Findings, the Administrator found under section 202(a) of the CAA that elevated atmospheric concentrations of six key well-mixed GHGs--CO2,CH4, N2O, hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs), perfluorocarbons (PFCs), and sulfur hexafluoride (SF6)--``may reasonably be anticipated to endanger the public health and welfare of current and future generations'' (74 FR 66523, December 15, 2009), and the science and observed changes have confirmed and strengthened the understanding and concerns regarding the climate risks considered in the Finding. The 2009 Endangerment Findings, together with the extensive scientific and technical evidence in the supporting record, documented that climate change caused by human emissions of GHGs threatens the public health of the U.S population. It explained that by raising average temperatures, climate change increases the likelihood of heat waves, which are associated with increased deaths and illnesses (74 FR 66497, December 15, 2009). While climate change also increases the likelihood of reductions in cold-related mortality, evidence indicates that the increases in heat mortality will be larger than the decreases in cold mortality in the U.S (74 FR 66525, December 15, 2009). The 2009 Endangerment Findings further explained that compared to a future without climate change, climate change is expected to increase tropospheric ozone pollution over broad areas of the U.S , including in the largest metropolitan areas with the worst tropospheric ozone problems, and thereby increase the risk of adverse effects on public health (74 FR 66525, December 15, 2009). Climate change is also expected to cause more intense hurricanes and more frequent and intense storms of other types and heavy precipitation, with impacts on other areas of public health, such as the potential for increased deaths, injuries, infectious and waterborne diseases, and stress-related disorders (74 FR 66525, December 15, 2009). Children, the elderly, and the poor are among the most vulnerable to these climate-related health effects (74 FR 66498, December 15, 2009).--------------------------------------------------------------------------- \11\ In describing these 2009 Findings in this proposal, the EPA is neither reopening nor revisiting them.--------------------------------------------------------------------------- The 2009 Endangerment Findings also documented, together with the extensive scientific and technical evidence in the supporting record, that climate change touches nearly every aspect of public welfare \12\ in the U.S with resulting economic costs, including: Changes in water supply and quality due to increased frequency of drought and extreme rainfall events; increased risk of storm surge and flooding in coastal areas and land loss due to inundation; increases in peak electricity demand and risks to electricity infrastructure; and the potential for significant ***agricultural*** disruptions and crop failures (though offset to some extent by carbon fertilization). These impacts are also global and may exacerbate problems outside the U.S that raise humanitarian, trade, and national security issues for the U.S (74 FR 66530, December 15, 2009).--------------------------------------------------------------------------- \12\ The CAA states in section 302(h) that ``[a]ll language referring to effects on welfare includes, but is not limited to, effects on soils, water, crops, vegetation, manmade materials, animals, wildlife, weather, visibility, and climate, damage to and deterioration of property, and hazards to transportation, as well as effects on economic values and on personal comfort and well-being, whether caused by transformation, conversion, or combination with other air pollutants.'' 42 U.S.C 7602(h).--------------------------------------------------------------------------- In 2016, the Administrator similarly issued Endangerment and Cause or Contribute Findings for GHG emissions from aircraft under section 231(a)(2)(A) of the CAA (81 FR 54422, August 15, 2016).\13\ In the 2016 Endangerment Findings, the Administrator found that the body of scientific evidence amassed in the record for the 2009 Endangerment Findings compellingly supported a similar endangerment finding under CAA section 231(a)(2)(A), and also found that the science assessments released between the 2009 and the 2016 Findings, ``strengthen and further support the judgment that GHGs in the atmosphere may reasonably be anticipated to endanger the public health and welfare of current and future generations.'' (81 FR 54424, August 15, 2016).--------------------------------------------------------------------------- \13\ In describing these 2016 Findings in this proposal, the EPA is neither reopening nor revisiting them.--------------------------------------------------------------------------- Since the 2016 Endangerment Findings, the climate has continued to change, with new records being set for several climate indicators such as global average surface temperatures, GHG concentrations, and sea level rise. Moreover, heavy precipitation events[[Page 63125]]have increased in the eastern U.S while ***agricultural*** and ecological drought has increased in the western U.S along with more intense and larger wildfires.\14\ These and other trends are examples of the risks discussed the 2009 and 2016 Endangerment Findings that have already been experienced. Additionally, major scientific assessments continue to demonstrate advances in our understanding of the climate system and the impacts that GHGs have on public health and welfare both for current and future generations. These updated observations and projections document the rapid rate of current and future climate change both globally and in the U.S These assessments include:--------------------------------------------------------------------------- \14\ See later in this section for specific examples. An additional resource for indicators can be found at [*https://www.epa.gov/climate-indicators.---------------------------------------------------------------------------*](https://www.epa.gov/climate-indicators.---------------------------------------------------------------------------) U.S Global Change Research Program's (USGCRP) 2016 Climate and Health Assessment \15\ and 2017-2018 Fourth National Climate Assessment (NCA4). \16\ \17\--------------------------------------------------------------------------- \15\ USGCRP, 2016: The Impacts of Climate Change on Human Health in the United States: A Scientific Assessment. Crimmins, A., J. Balbus, J.L Gamble, C.B Beard, J.E Bell, D. Dodgen, R.J Eisen, N. Fann, M.D Hawkins, S.C Herring, L. Jantarasami, D.M Mills, S. Saha, M.C Sarofim, J. Trtanj, and L. Ziska, Eds. U.S Global Change Research Program, Washington, DC, 312 pp. \16\ USGCRP, 2017: Climate Science Special Report: Fourth National Climate Assessment, Volume I [Wuebbles, D.J , D.W Fahey, K.A Hibbard, D.J Dokken, B.C Stewart, and T.K Maycock (eds.)]. U.S Global Change Research Program, Washington, DC, USA, 470 pp, doi: 10.7930/J0J964J6. \17\ USGCRP, 2018: Impacts, Risks, and Adaptation in the United States: Fourth National Climate Assessment, Volume II [Reidmiller, D.R , C.W Avery, D.R Easterling, K.E Kunkel, K.L.M Lewis, T.K Maycock, and B.C Stewart (eds.)]. U.S Global Change Research Program, Washington, DC, USA, 1515 pp. doi: 10.7930/NCA4.2018 --------------------------------------------------------------------------- IPCC's 2018 Global Warming of 1.5 [deg]C,\18\ 2019 Climate Change and Land,\19\ and the 2019 Ocean and Cryosphere in a Changing Climate \20\ assessments, as well as the 2021 IPCC Sixth Assessment Report (AR6).\21\--------------------------------------------------------------------------- \18\ IPCC, 2018: Global Warming of 1.5 [deg]C. An IPCC Special Report on the impacts of global warming of 1.5 [deg]C above pre-industrial levels and related global greenhouse gas emission pathways, in the context of strengthening the global response to the threat of climate change, sustainable development, and efforts to eradicate poverty [Masson-Delmotte, V., P. Zhai, H.-O. P[ouml]rtner, D. Roberts, J. Skea, P.R Shukla, A. Pirani, W. Moufouma-Okia, C. P[eacute]an, R. Pidcock, S. Connors, J.B.R Matthews, Y. Chen, X. Zhou, M.I Gomis, E. Lonnoy, T. Maycock, M. Tignor, and T. Waterfield (eds.)]. \19\ IPCC, 2019: Climate Change and Land: an IPCC special report on climate change, desertification, land degradation, sustainable land management, food security, and greenhouse gas fluxes in terrestrial ecosystems [P.R Shukla, J. Skea, E. Calvo Buendia, V. Masson-Delmotte, H.-O. P[ouml]rtner, D.C Roberts, P. Zhai, R. Slade, S. Connors, R. van Diemen, M. Ferrat, E. Haughey, S. Luz, S. Neogi, M. Pathak, J. Petzold, J. Portugal Pereira, P. Vyas, E. Huntley, K. Kissick, M. Belkacemi, J. Malley, (eds.)]. \20\ IPCC, 2019: IPCC Special Report on the Ocean and Cryosphere in a Changing Climate [H.-O. P[ouml]rtner, D.C Roberts, V. Masson-Delmotte, P. Zhai, M. Tignor, E. Poloczanska, K. Mintenbeck, A. Alegr[iacute]a, M. Nicolai, A. Okem, J. Petzold, B. Rama, N.M Weyer (eds.)]. \21\ IPCC, 2021: Summary for Policymakers. In: Climate Change 2021: The Physical Science Basis. Contribution of Working Group I to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [Masson-Delmotte, V., P. Zhai, A. Pirani, S.L Connors, C. P[eacute]an, S. Berger, N. Caud, Y. Chen, L. Goldfarb, M.I Gomis, M. Huang, K. Leitzell, E. Lonnoy, J.B.R Matthews, T.K Maycock, T. Waterfield, O. Yelek[ccedil]i, R. Yu and B. Zhou (eds.)]. Cambridge University Press. In Press.--------------------------------------------------------------------------- The NAS 2016 Attribution of Extreme Weather Events in the Context of Climate Change,\22\ 2017 Valuing Climate Damages: Updating Estimation of the Social Cost of Carbon Dioxide,\23\ and 2019 Climate Change and Ecosystems \24\ assessments.--------------------------------------------------------------------------- \22\ National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. 2016. Attribution of Extreme Weather Events in the Context of Climate Change. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. [*https://dio.org/10.17226/21852*](https://dio.org/10.17226/21852). \23\ National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. 2017. Valuing Climate Damages: Updating Estimation of the Social Cost of Carbon Dioxide. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. [*https://doi.org/10.17226/24651*](https://doi.org/10.17226/24651). \24\ National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. 2019. Climate Change and Ecosystems. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. [*https://doi.org/10.17226/25504.---------------------------------------------------------------------------*](https://doi.org/10.17226/25504.---------------------------------------------------------------------------) National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) annual State of the Climate reports published by the Bulletin of the American Meteorological Society,\25\ most recently in August of 2020.--------------------------------------------------------------------------- \25\ Blunden, J., and D.S Arndt, Eds., 2020: State of the Climate in 2019. Bull. Amer. Meteor. Soc, S1-S429, [*https://doi.org/10.1175/2020BAMSStateoftheClimate.1.---------------------------------------------------------------------------*](https://doi.org/10.1175/2020BAMSStateoftheClimate.1.---------------------------------------------------------------------------) EPA Climate Change and Social Vulnerability in the United States: A Focus on Six Impacts (2021).\26\--------------------------------------------------------------------------- \26\ EPA. 2021. Climate Change and Social Vulnerability in the United States: A Focus on Six Impacts. U.S Environmental Protection Agency, EPA 430-R-21-003.--------------------------------------------------------------------------- The most recent information demonstrates that the climate is continuing to change in response to the human-induced buildup of GHGs in the atmosphere. These recent assessments show that atmospheric concentrations of GHGs have risen to a level that has no precedent in human history and that they continue to climb, primarily as a result of both historic and current anthropogenic emissions, and that these elevated concentrations endanger our health by affecting our food and water sources, the air we breathe, the weather we experience, and our interactions with the natural and built environments. For example, atmospheric concentrations of one of these GHGs, CO2, ***measured*** at Mauna Loa in Hawaii and at other sites around the world reached 414 ppm in 2020 (nearly 50 percent higher than pre-industrial levels),\27\ and has continued to rise at a rapid rate. Global average temperature has increased by about 1.1 degrees Celsius ([deg]C) (2.0 degrees Fahrenheit ([deg]F)) in the 2011-2020 decade relative to 1850-1900.\28\ The years 2014-2020 were the warmest seven years in the 1880-2020 record, contributing to the warmest decade on record with a decadal temperature of 0.82 [deg]C (1.48 [deg]F) above the 20th century.\29\ \30\ The IPCC determined (with medium confidence) that this past decade was warmer than any multi-century period in at least the past 100,000 years.\31\ Global average sea level has risen by about 8 inches (about 21 centimeters (cm)) from 1901 to 2018, with the rate from 2006 to 2018 (0.15 inches/year or 3.7 millimeters (mm)/year) almost twice the rate over the 1971 to 2006 period, and three times the rate of the 1901 to 2018 period.\32\ The rate of sea level rise over the 20th century was higher than in any other century in at least the last 2,800 years.\33\ Higher CO2concentrations have led to acidification of the surface ocean in recent decades to an extent unusual in the past 2 million years, with negative impacts on marine organisms that use calcium carbonate to build shells or skeletons.\34\ Arctic sea ice extent continues to decline in all months of the year; the most rapid reductions occur in September (very likely almost a 13 percent decrease per decade between 1979 and 2018) and are ***unprecedented*** in at least 1,000 years.\35\ Human-induced climate change has led to heatwaves and heavy precipitation becoming more frequent and more intense, along with increases in[[Page 63126]]***agricultural*** and ecological droughts \36\ in many regions.\37\--------------------------------------------------------------------------- \27\ [*https://climate.nasa.gov/vital-signs/carbon-dioxide/*](https://climate.nasa.gov/vital-signs/carbon-dioxide/). \28\ IPCC, 2021. \29\ NOAA National Centers for Environmental Information, State of the Climate: Global Climate Report for Annual 2020, published online January 2021, retrieved on February 10, 2021 from [*https://www.ncdc.noaa.gov/sotc/global/202013*](https://www.ncdc.noaa.gov/sotc/global/202013). \30\ Blunden, J., and D.S Arndt, Eds., 2020: State of the Climate in 2019. Bull. Amer. Meteor. Soc, S1-S429, [*https://doi.org/10.1175/2020BAMSStateoftheClimate.1*](https://doi.org/10.1175/2020BAMSStateoftheClimate.1). \31\ IPCC, 2021. \32\ IPCC, 2021. \33\ USGCRP, 2018: Impacts, Risks, and Adaptation in the United States: Fourth National Climate Assessment, Volume II [Reidmiller, D.R , C.W Avery, D.R Easterling, K.E Kunkel, K.L.M Lewis, T.K Maycock, and B.C Stewart (eds.)]. U.S Global Change Research Program, Washington, DC, USA, 1515 pp. doi: 10.7930/NCA4.2018 \34\ IPCC, 2021. \35\ IPCC, 2021. \36\ These are drought ***measures*** based on soil moisture. \37\ IPCC, 2021.--------------------------------------------------------------------------- The assessment literature demonstrates that modest additional amounts of warming may lead to a climate different from anything humans have ever experienced. The present-day CO2concentration of 414 ppm is already higher than at any time in the last 2 million years.\38\ If concentrations exceed 450 ppm, they would likely be higher than any time in the past 23 million years:\39\ at the current rate of increase of more than 2 ppm a year, this would occur in about 15 years. While GHGs are not the only factor that controls climate, it is illustrative that 3 million years ago (the last time CO2concentrations were this high) Greenland was not yet completely covered by ice and still supported forests, while 23 million years ago (the last time concentrations were above 450 ppm) the West Antarctic ice sheet was not yet developed, indicating the possibility that high GHGs concentrations could lead to a world that looks very different from today and from the conditions in which human civilization has developed. If the Greenland and Antarctic ice sheets were to melt substantially, sea levels would rise dramatically--the IPCC estimated that over the next 2,000 years, sea level will rise by 7 to 10 feet even if warming is limited to 1.5 [deg]C (2.7 [deg]F), from 7 to 20 feet if limited to 2 [deg]C (3.6 [deg]F), and by 60 to 70 feet if warming is allowed to reach 5 [deg]C (9 [deg]F) above preindustrial levels.\40\ For context, almost all of the city of Miami is less than 25 feet above sea level, and the NCA4 stated that 13 million Americans would be at risk of migration due to 6 feet of sea level rise. Moreover, the CO2being absorbed by the ocean has resulted in changes in ocean chemistry due to acidification of a magnitude not seen in 65 million years,\41\ putting many marine species--particularly calcifying species--at risk.--------------------------------------------------------------------------- \38\ IPCC, 2021. \39\ IPCC, 2013. \40\ IPCC, 2021. \41\ IPCC, 2018.--------------------------------------------------------------------------- The NCA4 found that it is very likely (greater than 90 percent likelihood) that by mid-century, the Arctic Ocean will be almost entirely free of sea ice by late summer for the first time in about 2 million years.\42\ Coral reefs will be at risk for almost complete (99 percent) losses with 1 [deg]C (1.8 [deg]F) of additional warming from today (2 [deg]C or 3.6 [deg]F since preindustrial). At this temperature, between 8 and 18 percent of animal, plant, and insect species could lose over half of the geographic area with suitable climate for their survival, and 7 to 10 percent of rangeland livestock would be projected to be lost.\43\--------------------------------------------------------------------------- \42\ USGCRP, 2018. \43\ IPCC, 2018.--------------------------------------------------------------------------- Every additional increment of temperature comes with consequences. For example, the half degree of warming from 1.5 to 2 [deg]C (0.9 [deg]F of warming from 2.7 [deg]F to 3.6 [deg]F) above preindustrial temperatures is projected on a global scale to expose 420 million more people to frequent extreme heatwaves, and 62 million more people to frequent ***exceptional*** heatwaves (where heatwaves are defined based on a heat wave magnitude index which takes into account duration and intensity--using this index, the 2003 French heat wave that led to almost 15,000 deaths would be classified as an ``extreme heatwave'' and the 2010 Russian heatwave which led to thousands of deaths and extensive wildfires would be classified as ``***exceptional***''). It would increase the frequency of sea-ice-free Arctic summers from once in a hundred years to once in a decade. It could lead to 4 inches of additional sea level rise by the end of the century, exposing an additional 10 million people to risks of inundation, as well as increasing the probability of triggering instabilities in either the Greenland or Antarctic ice sheets. Between half a million and a million additional square miles of permafrost would thaw over several centuries. Risks to food security would increase from medium to high for several lower income regions in the Sahel, southern Africa, the Mediterranean, central Europe, and the Amazon. In addition to food security issues, this temperature increase would have implications for human health in terms of increasing ozone concentrations, heatwaves, and vector-borne diseases (for example, expanding the range of the mosquitoes which carry dengue fever, chikungunya, yellow fever, and the Zika virus, or the ticks which carry Lyme. babesiosis, or Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever).\44\ Moreover, every additional increment in warming leads to larger changes in extremes, including the potential for events ***unprecedented*** in the observational record. Every additional degree will intensify extreme precipitation events by about 7 percent. The peak winds of the most intense tropical cyclones (hurricanes) are projected to increase with warming. In addition to a higher intensity, the IPCC found that precipitation and frequency of rapid intensification of these storms has already increased, while the movement speed has decreased, and elevated sea levels have increased coastal flooding, all of which make these tropical cyclones more damaging.\45\--------------------------------------------------------------------------- \44\ IPCC, 2018. \45\ IPCC, 2021.--------------------------------------------------------------------------- The NCA4 also evaluated a number of impacts specific to the U.S Severe drought and outbreaks of insects like the mountain pine beetle have killed hundreds of millions of trees in the western U.S Wildfires have burned more than 3.7 million acres in 14 of the 17 years between 2000 and 2016, and Federal wildfire suppression costs were about a billion dollars annually.\46\ The National Interagency Fire Center has documented U.S wildfires since 1983, and the ten years with the largest acreage burned have all occurred since 2004.\47\ Wildfire smoke degrades air quality increasing health risks, and more frequent and severe wildfires due to climate change would further diminish air quality, increase incidences of respiratory illness, impair visibility, and disrupt outdoor activities, sometimes thousands of miles from the location of the fire. Meanwhile, sea level rise has amplified coastal flooding and erosion impacts, requiring the installation of costly pump stations, flooding streets, and increasing storm surge damages. Tens of billions of dollars of U.S real estate could be below sea level by 2050 under some scenarios. Increased frequency and duration of drought will reduce ***agricultural*** productivity in some regions, accelerate depletion of water supplies for irrigation, and expand the distribution and incidence of pests and diseases for crops and livestock. The NCA4 also recognized that climate change can increase risks to national security, both through direct impacts on military infrastructure, but also by affecting factors such as food and water availability that can exacerbate conflict outside U.S borders. Droughts, floods, storm surges, wildfires, and other extreme events stress nations and people through loss of life, displacement of populations, and impacts on livelihoods.\48\--------------------------------------------------------------------------- \46\ USGCRP, 2018 \47\ NIFC (National Interagency Fire Center). 2021. Total wildland fires and acres (1983-2020). Accessed August 2021. [*www.nifc.gov/fireInfo/fireInfo\_stats\_totalFires.html*](http://www.nifc.gov/fireInfo/fireInfo_stats_totalFires.html). \48\ USGCRP, 2018.--------------------------------------------------------------------------- Some GHGs also have impacts beyond those mediated through climate change. For example, elevated concentrations of carbon dioxide stimulate plant growth (which can be positive in the case of beneficial species, but negative in terms of weeds and invasive species, and can also lead to a reduction in plant[[Page 63127]]micronutrients) \49\ and cause ocean acidification. Nitrous oxide depletes the levels of protective stratospheric ozone.\50\--------------------------------------------------------------------------- \49\ Ziska, L., A. Crimmins, A. Auclair, S. DeGrasse, J.F Garofalo, A.S Khan, I. Loladze, A.A P[eacute]rez de Le[oacute]n, A.Showler, J. Thurston, and I. Walls, 2016: Ch. 7: Food Safety, Nutrition, and Distribution. The Impacts of Climate Change on Human Health in the United States: A Scientific Assessment. U.S Global Change Research Program, Washington, DC, 189-216. [*http://dx.doi.org/10.7930/J0ZP4417*](http://dx.doi.org/10.7930/J0ZP4417) \50\ WMO (World Meteorological Organization), Scientific Assessment of Ozone Depletion: 2018, Global Ozone Research and Monitoring Project--Report No. 58, 588 pp., Geneva, Switzerland, 2018.--------------------------------------------------------------------------- As methane is the primary GHG addressed in this proposal, it is relevant to highlight some specific trends and impacts specific to methane. Concentrations of methane reached 1879 parts per billion (ppb) in 2020, more than two and a half times the preindustrial concentration of 722 ppb.\51\ Moreover, the 2020 concentration was an increase of almost 13 ppb over 2019--the largest annual increase in methane concentrations of the period since the early 1990s, continuing a trend of rapid rise since a temporary pause ended in 2007.\52\ Methane has a high radiative efficiency--almost 30 times that of carbon dioxide per ppb (and therefore, 80 times as much per unit mass).\53\ In addition, methane contributes to climate change through chemical reactions in the atmosphere that produce tropospheric ozone and stratospheric water vapor. Human emissions of methane are responsible for about one third of the warming due to well-mixed GHGs, the second most important human warming agent after carbon dioxide.\54\ Because of the substantial emissions of methane, and its radiative efficiency, methane mitigation is one of the best opportunities for reducing near term warming.--------------------------------------------------------------------------- \51\ Blunden et al., 2020. \52\ NOAA, [*https://gml.noaa.gov/webdata/ccgg/trends/ch4/ch4\_annmean\_gl.txt*](https://gml.noaa.gov/webdata/ccgg/trends/ch4/ch4_annmean_gl.txt), accessed August 19th, 2021. \53\ IPCC, 2021. \54\ IPCC, 2021.--------------------------------------------------------------------------- The tropospheric ozone produced by the reaction of methane in the atmosphere has harmful effects for human health and plant growth in addition to its climate effects.\55\ In remote areas, methane is an important precursor to tropospheric ozone formation.\56\ Approximately 50 percent of the global annual mean ozone increase since preindustrial times is believed to be due to anthropogenic methane.\57\ Projections of future emissions also indicate that methane is likely to be a key contributor to ozone concentrations in the future.\58\ Unlike NOXand VOC, which affect ozone concentrations regionally and at hourly time scales, methane emissions affect ozone concentrations globally and on decadal time scales given methane's long atmospheric lifetime when compared to these other ozone precursors.\59\ Reducing methane emissions, therefore, will contribute to efforts to reduce global background ozone concentrations that contribute to the incidence of ozone-related health effects.\60\ The benefits of such reductions are global and occur in both urban and rural areas.--------------------------------------------------------------------------- \55\ Nolte, C.G , P.D Dolwick, N. Fann, L.W Horowitz, V. Naik, R.W Pinder, T.L Spero, D.A Winner, and L.H Ziska, 2018: Air Quality. In Impacts, Risks, and Adaptation in the United States: Fourth National Climate Assessment, Volume II [Reidmiller, D.R , C.W Avery, D.R Easterling, K.E Kunkel, K.L.M Lewis, T.K Maycock, and B.C Stewart (eds.)]. U.S Global Change Research Program, Washington, DC, USA, pp. 512-538. doi: 10.7930/NCA4. 2018. CH13 \56\ U.S EPA. 2013. ``Integrated Science Assessment for Ozone and Related Photochemical Oxidants (Final Report).'' EPA-600-R-10-076F. National Center for Environmental Assessment--RTP Division. Available at [*http://www.epa.gov/ncea/isa/*](http://www.epa.gov/ncea/isa/). \57\ Myhre, G., D. Shindell, F.-M. Br[eacute]on, W. Collins, J. Fuglestvedt, J. Huang, D. Koch, J.-F. Lamarque, D. Lee, B. Mendoza, T. Nakajima, A. Robock, G. Stephens, T. Takemura and H. Zhang, 2013: Anthropogenic and Natural Radiative Forcing. In: Climate Change 2013: The Physical Science Basis. Contribution of Working Group I to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [Stocker, T.F , D. Qin, G.-K. Plattner, M. Tignor, S.K Allen, J. Boschung, A. Nauels, Y. Xia, V. Bex and P.M Midgley (eds.)]. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, United Kingdom and New York, NY, USA. Pg. 680. \58\ Ibid. \59\ Ibid. \60\ USGCRP, 2018.--------------------------------------------------------------------------- These scientific assessments and documented observed changes in the climate of the planet and of the U.S present clear support regarding the current and future dangers of climate change and the importance of GHG mitigation.2. VOC Many VOC can be classified as HAP (e.g , benzene),\61\ which can lead to a variety of health concerns such as cancer and noncancer illnesses (e.g , respiratory, neurological). Further, VOC are one of the key precursors in the formation of ozone. Tropospheric, or ground-level, ozone is formed through reactions of VOC and NOXin the presence of sunlight. Ozone formation can be controlled to some extent through reductions in emissions of the ozone precursors VOC and NOX.Recent observational and modeling studies have found that VOC emissions from oil and natural gas operations can impact ozone levels.\62\ \63\ \64\ \65\ A significantly expanded body of scientific evidence shows that ozone can cause a number of harmful effects on health and the environment. Exposure to ozone can cause respiratory system effects such as difficulty breathing and airway inflammation. For people with lung diseases such as asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), these effects can lead to emergency room visits and hospital admissions. Studies have also found that ozone exposure is likely to cause premature death from lung or heart diseases. In addition, evidence indicates that long-term exposure to ozone is likely to result in harmful respiratory effects, including respiratory symptoms and the development of asthma. People most at risk from breathing air containing ozone include children; people with asthma and other respiratory diseases; older adults; and people who are active outdoors, especially outdoor workers. An estimated 25.9 million people have asthma in the U.S , including almost 7.1 million children. Asthma disproportionately affects children, families with lower incomes, and minorities, including Puerto Ricans, Native Americans/Alaska Natives, and African Americans.\66\--------------------------------------------------------------------------- \61\ Benzene Integrated Risk Information System (IRIS) Assessment: [*https://cfpub.epa.gov/ncea/iris2/chemicalLanding.cfm?substance\_nmbr=276*](https://cfpub.epa.gov/ncea/iris2/chemicalLanding.cfm?substance_nmbr=276). \62\ Benedict, K. B., Zhou, Y., Sive, B. C., Prenni, A. J., Gebhart, K. A., Fischer, E. V., . . . & Collett Jr, J. L. 2019. Volatile organic compounds and ozone in Rocky Mountain National Park during FRAPPE. Atmospheric Chemistry and Physics, 19(1), 499-521. \63\ Lindaas, J., Farmer, D. K., Pollack, I. B., Abeleira, A., Flocke, F., & Fischer, E. V. 2019. Acyl peroxy nitrates link oil and natural gas emissions to high ozone abundances in the Colorado Front Range during summer 2015. Journal of Geophysical Research: Atmospheres, 124(4), 2336-2350. \64\ McDuffie, E. E., Edwards, P. M., Gilman, J. B., Lerner, B. M., Dub[eacute], W. P., Trainer, M., . . . & Brown, S. S. 2016. Influence of oil and gas emissions on summertime ozone in the Colorado Northern Front Range. Journal of Geophysical Research: Atmospheres, 121(14), 8712-8729. \65\ Tzompa[hyphen]Sosa, Z. A., & Fischer, E. V. 2021. Impacts of emissions of C2[hyphen]C5 alkanes from the US oil and gas sector on ozone and other secondary species. Journal of Geophysical Research: Atmospheres, 126(1), e2019JD031935. \66\ National Health Interview Survey (NHIS) Data, 2011. [*http://www.cdc.gov/asthma/nhis/2011/data.htm.---------------------------------------------------------------------------*](http://www.cdc.gov/asthma/nhis/2011/data.htm.---------------------------------------------------------------------------) In the EPA's 2020 Integrated Science Assessment (ISA) for Ozone and Related Photochemical Oxidants,\67\ the EPA estimates the incidence of air pollution effects for those health endpoints above where the ISA classified as either causal or likely-to-be-causal. In brief, the ISA for ozone found short-term (less than one month) exposures to ozone to be[[Page 63128]]causally related to respiratory effects, a ``likely to be causal'' relationship with metabolic effects and a ``suggestive of, but not sufficient to infer, a causal relationship'' for central nervous system effects, cardiovascular effects, and total mortality. The ISA reported that long-term exposures (one month or longer) to ozone are ``likely to be causal'' for respiratory effects including respiratory mortality, and a ``suggestive of, but not sufficient to infer, a causal relationship'' for cardiovascular effects, reproductive effects, central nervous system effects, metabolic effects, and total mortality. An example of quantified incidence of ozone health effects can be found in the Regulatory Impact Analysis for the Final Revised Cross-State Air Pollution Rule (CSAPR) Update.--------------------------------------------------------------------------- \67\ Integrated Science Assessment (ISA) for Ozone and Related Photochemical Oxidants (Final Report). U.S Environmental Protection Agency, Washington, DC, EPA/600/R-20/012, 2020.--------------------------------------------------------------------------- Scientific evidence also shows that repeated exposure to ozone can reduce growth and have other harmful effects on sensitive plants and trees. These types of effects have the potential to impact ecosystems and the benefits they provide.3. SO2Current scientific evidence links short-term exposures to SO2, ranging from 5 minutes to 24 hours, with an array of adverse respiratory effects including bronchoconstriction and increased asthma symptoms. These effects are particularly important for asthmatics at elevated ventilation rates (e.g , while exercising or playing). Studies also show an association between short-term exposure and increased visits to emergency departments and hospital admissions for respiratory illnesses, particularly in at-risk populations including children, the elderly, and asthmatics. SO2in the air can also damage the leaves of plants, decrease their ability to produce food--photosynthesis--and decrease their growth. In addition to directly affecting plants, SO2, when deposited on land and in estuaries, lakes, and streams, can acidify sensitive ecosystems resulting in a range of harmful indirect effects on plants, soils, water quality, and fish and wildlife (e.g , changes in biodiversity and loss of habitat, reduced tree growth, loss of fish species). Sulfur deposition to waterways also plays a causal role in the methylation of mercury.\68\--------------------------------------------------------------------------- \68\ U.S EPA. Integrated Science Assessment (ISA) for Oxides of Nitrogen and Sulfur Ecological Criteria (2008 Final Report). U.S Environmental Protection Agency, Washington, DC, EPA/600/R-08/082F, 2008.---------------------------------------------------------------------------B. Oil and Natural Gas Industry and Its Emissions This section generally describes the structure of the Oil and Natural Gas Industry, the interconnected production, ***processing***, transmission and storage, and distribution segments that move product from well to market, and types of emissions sources in each segment and the industry's emissions.1. Oil and Natural Gas Industry--Structure The EPA characterizes the oil and natural gas industry's operations as being generally composed of four segments: (1) Extraction and production of crude oil and natural gas (``oil and natural gas production''), (2) natural gas ***processing***, (3) natural gas transmission and storage, and (4) natural gas distribution.\69\ \70\ The EPA regulates oil refineries as a separate source category; accordingly, as with the previous oil and gas NSPS rulemakings, for purposes of this proposed rulemaking, for crude oil, the EPA's focus is on operations from the well to the point of custody transfer at a petroleum refinery, while for natural gas, the focus is on all operations from the well to the local distribution company custody transfer station commonly referred to as the ``city-gate.'' \71\--------------------------------------------------------------------------- \69\ The EPA previously described an overview of the sector in section 2.0 of the 2011 Background Technical Support Document to 40 CFR part 60, subpart OOOO, located at Docket ID Item No. EPA-HQ-OAR-2010-0505-0045, and section 2.0 of the 2016 Background Technical Support Document to 40 CFR part 60, subpart OOOOa, located at Docket ID Item No. EPA-HQ-OAR-2010-0505-7631. \70\ While generally oil and natural gas production includes both onshore and offshore operations, 40 CFR part 60, subpart OOOOa addresses onshore operations. \71\ For regulatory purposes, the EPA defines the Crude Oil and Natural Gas source category to mean (1) Crude oil production, which includes the well and extends to the point of custody transfer to the crude oil transmission pipeline or any other forms of transportation; and (2) Natural gas production, ***processing***, transmission, and storage, which include the well and extend to, but do not include, the local distribution company custody transfer station. The distribution segment is not part of the defined source category.---------------------------------------------------------------------------a. Production Segment The oil and natural gas production segment includes the wells and all related ***processes*** used in the extraction, production, recovery, lifting, stabilization, and separation or treatment of oil and/or natural gas (including condensate). Although many wells produce a combination of oil and natural gas, wells can generally be grouped into two categories, oil wells and natural gas wells. Oil wells comprise two types, oil wells that produce crude oil only and oil wells that produce both crude oil and natural gas (commonly referred to as ``associated'' gas). Production equipment and components located on the well pad may include, but are not limited to, wells and related casing heads; tubing heads; ``Christmas tree'' piping, pumps, compressors; heater treaters; separators; storage vessels; pneumatic devices; and dehydrators. Production operations include well drilling, completion, and recompletion ***processes***, including all the portable non-self-propelled apparatuses associated with those operations. Other sites that are part of the production segment include ``centralized tank batteries,'' stand-alone sites where oil, condensate, produced water, and natural gas from several wells may be separated, stored, or treated. The production segment also includes gathering pipelines, gathering and boosting compressor stations, and related components that collect and transport the oil, natural gas, and other materials and wastes from the wells to the refineries or natural gas ***processing*** plants. Of these products, crude oil and natural gas undergo successive, separate ***processing***. Crude oil is separated from water and other impurities and transported to a refinery via truck, railcar, or pipeline. As noted above, the EPA treats oil refineries as a separate source category, accordingly, for present purposes, the oil component of the production segment ends at the point of custody transfer at the refinery.\72\--------------------------------------------------------------------------- \72\ See 40 CFR part 60, subparts J and Ja, and 40 CFR part 63, subparts CC and UUU.--------------------------------------------------------------------------- The separated, unprocessed natural gas is commonly referred to as field gas and is composed of methane, natural gas liquids (NGL), and other impurities, such as water vapor, H2S, CO2, helium, and nitrogen. Ethane, propane, butane, isobutane, and pentane are all considered NGL and often are sold separately for a variety of different uses. Natural gas with high methane content is referred to as ``dry gas,'' while natural gas with significant amounts of ethane, propane, or butane is referred to as ``wet gas.'' Natural gas typically is sent to gas ***processing*** plants in order to separate NGLs for use as feedstock for petrochemical plants, burned for space heating and cooking, or blended into vehicle fuel.b. ***Processing*** Segment The natural gas ***processing*** segment consists of separating certain hydrocarbons (HC) and fluids from the natural gas to produce ``pipeline quality'' dry natural gas. The degree and[[Page 63129]]location of ***processing*** is dependent on factors such as the type of natural gas (e.g , wet or dry gas), market conditions, and company contract specifications. Typically, ***processing*** of natural gas begins in the field and continues as the gas is moved from the field through gathering and boosting compressor stations to natural gas ***processing*** plants, where the complete ***processing*** of natural gas takes place. Natural gas ***processing*** operations separate and recover NGL or other non-methane gases and liquids from field gas through one or more of the following ***processes***: oil and condensate separation, water removal, separation of NGL, sulfur and CO2removal, fractionation of NGL, and other ***processes***, such as the capture of CO2separated from natural gas streams for delivery outside the facility.c. Transmission and Storage Segment Once natural gas ***processing*** is complete, the resulting natural gas exits the natural gas ***process*** plant and enters the transmission and storage segment where it is transmitted to storage and/or distribution to the end user. Pipelines in the natural gas transmission and storage segment can be interstate pipelines, which carry natural gas across state boundaries, or intrastate pipelines, which transport the gas within a single state. Basic components of the two types of pipelines are the same, though interstate pipelines may be of a larger diameter and operated at a higher pressure. To ensure that the natural gas continues to flow through the pipeline, the natural gas must periodically be compressed, thereby increasing its pressure. Compressor stations perform this function and are usually placed at 40- to 100-mile intervals along the pipeline. At a compressor station, the natural gas enters the station, where it is compressed by reciprocating or centrifugal compressors. Another part of the transmission and storage segment are aboveground and underground natural gas storage facilities. Storage facilities hold natural gas for use during peak seasons. The main difference between underground and aboveground storage sites is that storage takes place in storage vessels constructed of non-earthen materials in aboveground storage. Underground storage of natural gas typically occurs in depleted natural gas or oil reservoirs and salt dome caverns. One purpose of this storage is for load balancing (equalizing the receipt and delivery of natural gas). At an underground storage site, typically other ***processes*** occur, including compression, dehydration, and flow measurement.d. Distribution Segment The distribution segment provides the final step in delivering natural gas to customers.\73\ The natural gas enters the distribution segment from delivery points located along interstate and intrastate transmission pipelines to business and household customers. The delivery point where the natural gas leaves the transmission and storage segment and enters the distribution segment is a local distribution company's custody transfer station, commonly referred to as the ``city-gate.'' Natural gas distribution systems consist of over 2 million miles of piping, including mains and service pipelines to the customers. If the distribution network is large, compressor stations may be necessary to maintain flow; however, these stations are typically smaller than transmission compressor stations. Distribution systems include metering stations and regulating stations, which allow distribution companies to monitor the natural gas as it flows through the system.--------------------------------------------------------------------------- \73\ The distribution segment is not included in the definition of the Crude Oil and Natural Gas source category that is currently regulated under 40 CFR part 60, subpart OOOOa.---------------------------------------------------------------------------2. Oil and Natural Gas Industry--Emissions The oil and natural gas industry sector is the largest source of industrial methane emissions in the U.S \74\ Natural gas is comprised primarily of methane; every natural gas leak or intentional release through venting or other industrial ***processes*** constitutes a release of methane. Methane is a potent greenhouse gas; over a 100-year timeframe, it is nearly 30 times more powerful at trapping climate warming heat than CO2, and over a 20-year timeframe, it is 83 times more powerful.\75\ Because methane is a powerful greenhouse gas and is emitted in large quantities, reductions in methane emissions provide a significant benefit in reducing near-term warming. Indeed, one third of the warming due to GHGs that we are experiencing today is due to human emissions of methane. Additionally, the Crude Oil and Natural Gas sector emits, in varying concentrations and amounts, a wide range of other health-harming pollutants, including VOCs, SO2, NOX, H2S, CS2, and COS. The year 2016 modeling platform produced by U.S EPA estimated about 3 million tons of VOC are emitted by oil and gas-related sources.\76\--------------------------------------------------------------------------- \74\ H.R Rep. No. 117-64, 4 (2021) (Report by the House Committee on Energy and Commerce concerning H.J Res. 34, to disapprove the 2020 Policy Rule) (House Report). \75\ IPCC, 2021. \76\ [*https://www.epa.gov/sites/default/files/2020-11/documents/2016v1\_emismod\_tsd\_508.pdf.---------------------------------------------------------------------------*](https://www.epa.gov/sites/default/files/2020-11/documents/2016v1_emismod_tsd_508.pdf.---------------------------------------------------------------------------) Emissions of methane and these co-pollutants occur in every segment of the Crude Oil and Natural Gas source category. Many of the ***processes*** and equipment types that contribute to these emissions are found in every segment of the source category and are highly similar across segments. Emissions from the crude oil portion of the regulated source category result primarily from field production operations, such as venting of associated gas from oil wells, oil storage vessels, and production-related equipment such as gas dehydrators, pig traps, and pneumatic devices. Emissions from the natural gas portion of the industry can occur in all segments. As natural gas moves through the system, emissions primarily result from intentional venting through normal operations, routine maintenance, unintentional fugitive emissions, flaring, malfunctions, and system upsets. Venting can occur through equipment design or operational practices, such as the continuous and intermittent bleed of gas from pneumatic controllers (devices that control gas flows, levels, temperatures, and pressures in the equipment). In addition to vented emissions, emissions can occur from leaking equipment (also referred to as fugitive emissions) in all parts of the infrastructure, including major production and ***processing*** equipment (e.g , separators or storage vessels) and individual components (e.g , valves or connectors). Flares are commonly used throughout each segment in the Oil and Natural Gas Industry as a control device to provide pressure relief to prevent risk of explosions and to destroy methane, which has a high global warming potential, and convert it to CO2which has a lower global warming potential, and to also control other air pollutants such as VOC. ``Super-emitting'' events, sites, or equipment, where a small proportion of sources account for a large proportion of overall emissions, can occur throughout the Oil and Natural Gas Industry and have been observed to occur in the equipment types and activities covered by this proposed action. There are a number of definitions for the term ``super-emitter.'' A 2018 National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine report \77\ on methane discussed three categories of ``high-emitting'' sources:--------------------------------------------------------------------------- \77\ [*https://www.nap.edu/download/24987#.---------------------------------------------------------------------------*](https://www.nap.edu/download/24987#.---------------------------------------------------------------------------)[[Page 63130]] Routine or ``chronic'' high-emitting sources, which regularly emit at higher rates relative to ``peers'' in a sample. Examples include large facilities, or large emissions at smaller facilities caused by poor design or operational practices. Episodic high-emitting sources, which are typically large in nature and are generally intentional releases from known maintenance events at a facility. Examples include gas well liquids unloading, well workovers and maintenance activities, and compressor station or pipeline blowdowns. Malfunctioning high-emitting sources, which can be either intermittent or prolonged in nature and result from malfunctions and poor work practices. Examples include malfunctioning intermittent pneumatic controllers and stuck open dump valves. Another example is well blowout events. For example, a 2018 well blowout in Ohio was estimated to have emitted over 60,000 tons of methane.\78\--------------------------------------------------------------------------- \78\ Pandey et al. (2019). Satellite observations reveal extreme methane leakage from a natural gas well blowout. PNAS December 26, 2019 116 (52) 26376-26381.--------------------------------------------------------------------------- Super-emitters have been observed at many different scales, from site-level to component-level, across many research studies.\79\ Studies will often develop a study-specific definition such as a top percentile of emissions in a study population (e.g , top 10 percent), emissions exceeding a certain threshold (e.g , 26 kg/day), emissions over a certain detection threshold (e.g , 1-3 g/s) or as facilities with the highest proportional emission rate.\80\ For certain equipment types and activities, the EPA's GHG emission estimates include the full range of conditions, including ``super-emitters.'' For other situations, where data are available, emissions estimates for abnormal events are calculated separately and included in the Inventory of U.S Greenhouse Gas Emissions and Sinks (``GHGI'') (e.g , Aliso Canyon leak event).\81\ Given the variability of practices and technologies across oil and gas systems and the occurrence of episodic events, it is possible that the EPA's estimates do not include all methane emissions from abnormal events. The EPA continues to work through its stakeholder ***process*** to review new data from the EPA's Greenhouse Gas Reporting Program (``GHGRP'') petroleum and natural gas systems source category (40 CFR part 98, subpart W, also referred to as ``GHGRP subpart W'') and research studies to assess how emissions estimates can be improved. Because lost gas, whether through fugitive emissions, unintentional gas carry through, or intentional releases, represents lost earning potential, the industry benefits from capturing and selling emissions of natural gas (and methane). Limiting super-emitters through actions included in this rule such as reducing fugitive emissions, using lower emitting equipment where feasible, and employing best management practices will not only reduce emissions but reduce the loss of revenue from this valuable commodity.--------------------------------------------------------------------------- \79\ See for example, Brandt, A., Heath, G., Cooley, D. (2016) Methane leaks from natural gas systems follow extreme distributions. Environ. Sci. Technol., DOI: 10.1021/acs.est.6b04303; Zavala-Araiza, D., Alvarez, R.A , Lyon, D.R , Allen, D.T , Marchese, A.J , Zimmerle, D.J , & Hamburg, S.P (2017). Super-emitters in natural gas infrastructure are caused by abnormal ***process*** conditions. Nature communications, 8, 14012; Mitchell, A., et al. (2015), Measurements of Methane Emissions from Natural Gas Gathering Facilities and ***Processing*** Plants: Measurement Results. Environmental Science & Technology, 49(5), 3219-3227; Allen, D., et al. (2014), Methane Emissions from ***Process*** Equipment at Natural Gas Production Sites in the United States: Pneumatic Controllers. Environmental Science & Technology. \80\ Caulton et al. (2019). Importance of Super-emitter Natural Gas Well Pads in the Marcellus Shale. Environ. Sci. Technol. 2019, 53, 4747-4754; Zavala-Araiza, D., Alvarez, R., Lyon, D, et al. (2016). Super-emitters in natural gas infrastructure are caused by abnormal ***process*** conditions. Nat Commun 8, 14012 (2017). [*https://www.nature.com/articles/ncomms14012;*](https://www.nature.com/articles/ncomms14012;) Lyon, et al. (2016). Aerial Surveys of Elevated Hydrocarbon Emissions from Oil and Gas Production Sites. Environ. Sci. Technol. 2016, 50, 4877-4886. [*https://pubs.acs.org/doi/10.1021/acs.est.6b00705;*](https://pubs.acs.org/doi/10.1021/acs.est.6b00705;) and Zavala-Araiza D, et al. (2015). Toward a functional definition of methane superemitters: Application to natural gas production sites. 49 ENVTL. SCI. & TECH. 8167, 8168 (2015). [*https://pubs.acs.org/doi/10.1021/acs.est.5b00133*](https://pubs.acs.org/doi/10.1021/acs.est.5b00133). \81\ The EPA's emission estimates in the GHGI are developed with the best data available at the time of their development, including data from the Greenhouse Gas Reporting Program (GHGRP) in 40 CFR part 98, subpart W, and from recent research studies. GHGRP subpart W emissions data used in the GHGI are quantified by reporters using direct measurements, engineering calculations, or emission factors, as specified by the regulation. The EPA has a multi-step data verification ***process*** for GHGRP subpart W data, including automatic checks during data-entry, statistical analyses on completed reports, and staff review of the reported data. Based on the results of the verification ***process***, the EPA follows up with facilities to resolve mistakes that may have occurred.--------------------------------------------------------------------------- Below we provide estimated emissions of methane, VOC, and SO2from Oil and Natural Gas Industry operation sources. Methane emissions in the U.S and from the Oil and Natural Gas industry. Official U.S estimates of national level GHG emissions and sinks are developed by the EPA for the GHGI in fulfillment of commitments under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. The GHGI, which includes recent trends, is organized by industrial sector. The oil and natural gas production, natural gas ***processing***, and natural gas transmission and storage sectors emit 28 percent of U.S anthropogenic methane. Table 7 below presents total U.S anthropogenic methane emissions for the years 1990, 2010, and 2019. In accordance with the practice of the EPA GHGI, the EPA GHGRP, and international reporting standards under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, the 2007 IPCC Fourth Assessment Report value of the methane 100-year GWP is used for weighting emissions in the following tables. The 100-year GWP value of 25 for methane indicates that one ton of methane has approximately as much climate impact over a 100-year period as 25 tons of carbon dioxide. The most recent IPCC AR6 assessment has estimated a slightly larger 100-year GWP of methane of almost 30 (specifically, either 27.2 or 29.8 depending on whether the value includes the carbon dioxide produced by the oxidation of methane in the atmosphere). As mentioned earlier, because methane has a shorter lifetime than carbon dioxide, the emissions of a ton of methane will have more impact earlier in the 100-year timespan and less impact later in the 100-year timespan relative to the emissions of a 100-year GWP-equivalent quantity of carbon dioxide: When using the AR6 20-year GWP of 81, which only looks at impacts over the next 20 years, the total US emissions of methane in 2019 would be equivalent to about 2140 MMT CO2. Table 7--U.S Methane Emissions by Sector [Million metric tons carbon dioxide equivalent (MMT CO2 EQ.)]---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------- Sector 1990 2010 2019----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------Oil and Natural Gas Production, and Natural Gas ***Processing*** and 189 176 182 Transmission and Storage.......................................Landfills....................................................... 177 124 114Enteric Fermentation............................................ 165 172 179[[Page 63131]] Coal Mining..................................................... 96 82 47Manure Management............................................... 37 55 62Other Oil and Gas Sources....................................... 46 17 15Wastewater Treatment............................................ 20 19 18Other Methane Sources \82\...................................... 46 47 42 ----------------------------------------------- Total Methane Emissions..................................... 777 692 660----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------Emissions from the Inventory of United States Greenhouse Gas Emissions and Sinks: 1990-2019 (published April 14, 2021), calculated using GWP of 25. Note: Totals may not sum due to rounding. Table 8 below presents total methane emissions from natural gas production through transmission and storage and petroleum production, for years 1990, 2010, and 2019, in MMT CO2Eq. (or million metric tons CO2Eq.) of methane.--------------------------------------------------------------------------- \82\ Other sources include rice cultivation, forest land, stationary combustion, abandoned oil and natural gas wells, abandoned coal mines, mobile combustion, composting, and several sources emitting less than 1 MMT CO2Eq. in 2019. Table 8--U.S Methane Emissions From Natural Gas and Petroleum Systems [MMT CO2 EQ.]---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------- Sector 1990 2010 2019----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------Natural Gas Production.......................................... 63 97 94Natural Gas ***Processing***.......................................... 21 10 12Natural Gas Transmission and Storage............................ 57 30 37Petroleum Production............................................ 48 39 38----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------Emissions from the Inventory of United States Greenhouse Gas Emissions and Sinks: 1990-2019 (published April 14, 2021), calculated using GWP of 25. Note: Totals may not sum due to rounding. Global GHG Emissions. For additional background information and context, we used 2018 World Resources Institute Climate Watch data to make comparisons between U.S oil and natural gas production and natural gas ***processing*** and transmission and storage emissions and the emissions inventories of entire countries and regions.\83\ The U.S methane emissions from oil and natural gas production and natural gas ***processing*** and transmission and storage constitute 0.4 percent of total global emissions of all GHGs (48,601 MMT CO2 Eq.) from all sources.\84\ Ranking U.S emissions of methane from oil and natural gas production and natural gas ***processing*** and transmission and storage against total GHG emissions for entire countries (using 2018 Climate Watch data), shows that these emissions are comparatively large as they exceed the national-level emissions totals for all GHGs and all anthropogenic sources for Colombia, the Czech Republic, Chile, Belgium, and over 160 other countries. What that means is that the U.S emits more of a single GHG--methane--from a single sector--the oil and gas sector--than the total combined GHGs emitted by 164 out of 194 total countries. Furthermore, U.S emissions of methane from oil and natural gas production and natural gas ***processing*** and transmission and storage are greater than the sum of total emissions of 64 of the lowest-emitting countries and territories, using the 2018 Climate Watch data set.--------------------------------------------------------------------------- \83\ The Climate Watch figures presented here come from the PIK PRIMAP-hist dataset included on Climate Watch. The PIK PRIMAP-hist dataset combines the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) reported data where available and fills gaps with other sources. It does not include land use change and forestry but covers all other sectors. [*https://www.climatewatchdata.org/ghg-emissions?end\_year=2018&source=PIK&start\_year=1990.---------------------------------------------------------------------------*](https://www.climatewatchdata.org/ghg-emissions?end_year=2018&source=PIK&start_year=1990.---------------------------------------------------------------------------) As illustrated by the domestic and global GHGs comparison data summarized above, the collective GHG emissions from the Crude Oil and Natural Gas source category are significant, whether the comparison is domestic (where this sector is the largest source of methane emissions, accounting for 28 percent of U.S methane and 3 percent of total U.S emissions of all GHGs), global (where this sector, accounting for 0.4 percent of all global GHG emissions, emits more than the total national emissions of over 160 countries, and combined emissions of over 60 countries), or when both the domestic and global GHG emissions comparisons are viewed in combination. Consideration of the global context is important. GHG emissions from U.S Oil and Natural Gas production and natural gas ***processing*** and transmission and storage will become globally well-mixed in the atmosphere, and thus will have an effect on the U.S regional climate, as well as the global climate as a whole for years and indeed many decades to come. No single GHG source category dominates on the global scale. While the Crude Oil and Natural Gas source category, like many (if not all) individual GHG source categories, could appear small in comparison to total emissions, in fact, it is a very important contributor in terms of both absolute emissions, and in comparison to other source categories globally or within the U.S The IPCC AR6 assessment determined that ``From a physical science perspective, limiting human-induced global warming to a specific level requires limiting cumulative CO2emissions, reaching at least net zero CO2emissions, along with strong reductions in other GHG emissions.'' The report also singled out the importance of ``strong and sustained CH4emission reductions'' in part due to the short lifetime of methane leading to the near-term cooling from reductions in methane emissions, which can offset the warming that will result due to reductions in emissions of cooling aerosols such as SO2. Therefore, reducing methane emissions globally is an important facet in any strategy to limit warming. In the oil and gas sector,[[Page 63132]]methane reductions are highly achievable and cost-effective using existing and well-known solutions and technologies that actually result in recovery of saleable product. VOC and SO2emissions in the U.S and from the oil and natural gas industry. Official U.S estimates of national level VOC and SO2emissions are developed by the EPA for the National Emissions Inventory (NEI), for which States are required to submit information under 40 CFR part 51, subpart A. Data in the NEI may be organized by various data points, including sector, NAICS code, and Source Classification Code. Tables 9 and 10 below present total U.S VOC and SO2emissions by sector, respectively, for the year 2017, in kilotons (kt) (or thousand metric tons). The oil and natural gas sector represents the top anthropogenic U.S sector for VOC emissions after removing the biogenics and wildfire sectors in Table 9 (about 20% of the total VOC emitting by anthropogenic sources). About 2.5 percent of the total U.S anthropogenic SO2comes from the oil and natural gas sector. Table 9--U.S VOC Emissions by Sector [kt]------------------------------------------------------------------------ Sector 2017------------------------------------------------------------------------Biogenics--Vegetation and Soil.......................... 25,823Fires--Wildfires........................................ 4,578Oil and Natural Gas Production, and Natural Gas 2,504 ***Processing*** and Transmission............................Fires--Prescribed Fires................................. 2,042Solvent--Consumer and Commercial Solvent Use............ 1,610Mobile--On-Road non-Diesel Light Duty Vehicles.......... 1,507Mobile--Non-Road Equipment--Gasoline.................... 1,009Other VOC Sources \85\.................................. 4,045 --------------- Total VOC Emissions................................. 43,118------------------------------------------------------------------------Emissions from the 2017 NEI (released April 2020). Note: Totals may not sum due to rounding. Table 10--U.S SO2 Emissions by Sector [kt]------------------------------------------------------------------------ Sector 2017------------------------------------------------------------------------Fuel Combustion--Electric Generation--Coal.............. 1,319Fuel Combustion--Industrial Boilers, Internal Combustion 212 Engines--Coal..........................................Mobile--Commercial Marine Vessels....................... 183Industrial ***Processes***--Not Elsewhere Classified.......... 138Fires--Wildfires........................................ 135Industrial ***Processes***--Chemical Manufacturing............ 123Oil and Natural Gas Production and Natural Gas 65 ***Processing*** and Transmission............................Other SO2 Sources \86\.................................. 551 --------------- Total SO2 Emissions................................. 2,726------------------------------------------------------------------------Emissions from the 2017 NEI (released April 2020). Note: Totals may not sum due to rounding. Table 11 below presents total VOC and SO2emissions from oil and natural gas production through transmission and storage, for the year 2017, in kt. The contribution to the total anthropogenic VOC emissions budget from the oil and gas sector has been increasing in recent NEI cycles. In the 2017 NEI, the oil and gas sector makes up about 25 percent of the total VOC emissions from anthropogenic sources. The SO2emissions have been declining in just about every anthropogenic sector, but the oil and gas sector is an exception where SO2emissions have been slightly increasing or remaining steady in some cases in recent years.--------------------------------------------------------------------------- \85\ Other sources include remaining sources emitting less than 1,000 kt VOC in 2017. \86\ Other sources include remaining sources emitting less than 100 kt SO2in 2017. Table 11--U.S VOC and SO2 Emissions From Natural Gas and Petroleum Systems [kt]------------------------------------------------------------------------ Sector VOC SO2------------------------------------------------------------------------Oil and Natural Gas Production.......... 2,478 41Natural Gas ***Processing***.................. 12 23Natural Gas Transmission and Storage.... 14 1------------------------------------------------------------------------Emissions from the 2017 NEI, (published April 2020), in kt (or thousand metric tons). Note: Totals may not sum due to rounding.[[Page 63133]]IV. Statutory Background and Regulatory HistoryA. Statutory Background of CAA Sections 111(b), 111(d) and General Implementing Regulations The EPA's authority for this rule is CAA section 111, which governs the establishment of standards of performance for stationary sources. This section requires the EPA to list source categories to be regulated, establish standards of performance for air pollutants emitted by new sources in that source category, and establish EG for States to establish standards of performance for certain pollutants emitted by existing sources in that source category. Specifically, CAA section 111(b)(1)(A) requires that a source category be included on the list for regulation if, ``in [the EPA Administrator's] judgment it causes, or contributes significantly to, air pollution which may reasonably be anticipated to endanger public health or welfare.'' This determination is commonly referred to as an ``endangerment finding'' and that phrase encompasses both of the ``causes or contributes significantly to'' component and the ``endanger public health or welfare'' component of the determination. Once a source category is listed, CAA section 111(b)(1)(B) requires that the EPA propose and then promulgate ``standards of performance'' for new sources in such source category. CAA section 111(a)(1) defines a ``standard of performance'' as ``a standard for emissions of air pollutants which reflects the degree of emission limitation achievable through the application of the best system of emission reduction which (taking into account the cost of achieving such reduction and any non-air quality health and environmental impact and energy requirements) the Administrator determines has been adequately demonstrated.'' As long recognized by the D.C Circuit, ``[b]ecause Congress did not assign the specific weight the Administrator should accord each of these factors, the Administrator is free to exercise his discretion in this area.'' New York v. Reilly, 969 F.2d 1147, 1150 (D.C Cir. 1992). See also Lignite Energy Council v. EPA, 198 F.3d 930, 933 (D.C Cir. 1999) (``Lignite Energy Council'') (``Because section 111 does not set forth the weight that be [sic] should assigned to each of these factors, we have granted the agency a great degree of discretion in balancing them''). In determining whether a given system of emission reduction qualifies as ``the best system of emission reduction . . . adequately demonstrated,'' or ``BSER,'' CAA section 111(a)(1) requires that the EPA take into account, among other factors, ``the cost of achieving such reduction.'' As described in the proposal \87\ for the 2016 Rule (85 FR 35824, June 3, 2016), the U.S Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit (the D.C Circuit) has stated that in light of this provision, the EPA may not adopt a standard the cost of which would be ``exorbitant,'' \88\ ``greater than the industry could bear and survive,'' \89\ ``excessive,'' \90\ or ``unreasonable.'' \91\ These formulations appear to be synonymous, and for convenience, in this rulemaking, as in previous rulemakings, we will use reasonableness as the standard, so that a control technology may be considered the ``best system of emission reduction . . . adequately demonstrated'' if its costs are reasonable, but cannot be considered the BSER if its costs are unreasonable. See 80 FR 64662, 64720-21 (October 23, 2015).--------------------------------------------------------------------------- \87\ 80 FR 56593, 56616 (September 18, 2015). \88\ Lignite Energy Council, 198 F.3d at 933. \89\ Portland Cement Ass'n v. EPA, 513 F.2d 506, 508 (D.C Cir. 1975). \90\ Sierra Club v. Costle, 657 F.2d 298, 343 (D.C Cir. 1981). \91\ Id.--------------------------------------------------------------------------- CAA section 111(a) does not provide specific direction regarding what metric or metrics to use in considering costs, affording the EPA considerable discretion in choosing a means of cost consideration.\92\ In this rulemaking, we evaluated whether a control cost is reasonable under a number of approaches that we find appropriate for assessing the types of controls at issue. For example, in evaluating controls for reducing VOC and methane emissions from new sources, we considered a control's cost effectiveness under both a ``single pollutant cost-effectiveness'' approach and a ``multipollutant cost-effectiveness'' approach, in order to appropriately take into account that the systems of emission reduction considered in this rule typically achieve reductions in multiple pollutants at once and secure a multiplicity of climate and public health benefits.\93\ We also evaluated costs at a sector level by assessing the projected new capital expenditures required under the proposal (compared to overall new capital expenditures by the sector) and the projected compliance costs (compared to overall annual revenue for the sector) if the rule were to require such controls. For a detailed discussion of these cost approaches, please see section IX of the proposal preamble.--------------------------------------------------------------------------- \92\ See, e.g , Husqvarna AB v. EPA, 254 F.3d 195, 200 (D.C Cir. 2001) (where CAA section 213 does not mandate a specific method of cost analysis, the EPA may make a reasoned choice as to how to analyze costs). \93\ We believe that both the single and multipollutant approaches are appropriate for assessing the reasonableness of the multipollutant controls considered in this action. The EPA has considered similar approaches in the past when considering multiple pollutants that are controlled by a given control option. See e.g , 80 FR 56616-56617; 73 FR 64079-64083 and EPA Document ID Nos. EPA-HQ-OAR-2004-0022-0622, EPA-HQ-OAR-2004-0022-0447, EPA-HQ-OAR-2004-0022-0448.--------------------------------------------------------------------------- As defined in CAA section 111(a), the ``standard of performance'' that the EPA develops, based on the BSER, is expressed as a performance level (typically, a rate-based standard). CAA section 111(b)(5) precludes the EPA from prescribing a particular technological system that must be used to comply with a standard of performance. Rather, sources can select any ***measure*** or combination of ***measures*** that will achieve the standard. CAA section 111(h)(1) authorizes the Administrator to promulgate ``a design, equipment, work practice, or operational standard, or combination thereof'' if in his or her judgment, ``it is not feasible to prescribe or enforce a standard of performance.'' CAA section 111(h)(2) provides the circumstances under which prescribing or enforcing a standard of performance is ``not feasible,'' such as, when the pollutant cannot be emitted through a conveyance designed to emit or capture the pollutant, or when there is no practicable measurement methodology for the particular class of sources.\94\ CAA section 111(b)(1)(B) requires the EPA to ``at least every 8 years review and, if appropriate, revise'' performance standards unless the ``Administrator determines that such review is not appropriate in light of readily available information on the efficacy'' of the standard.--------------------------------------------------------------------------- \94\ The EPA notes that design, equipment, work practice or operational standards established under CAA section 111(h) (commonly referred to as ``work practice standards'') reflect the ``best technological system of continuous emission reduction'' and that this phrasing differs from the ``best system of emission reduction'' phrase in the definition of ``standard of performance'' in CAA section 111(a)(1). Although the differences in these phrases may be meaningful in other contexts, for purposes of evaluating the sources and systems of emission reduction at issue in this rulemaking, the EPA has applied these concepts in an essentially comparable manner.--------------------------------------------------------------------------- As mentioned above, once the EPA lists a source category under CAA section 111(b)(1)(A), CAA section 111(b)(1)(B) provides the EPA discretion to determine the pollutants and sources to be regulated. In addition, concurrent with the 8-year review (and though not a mandatory part of the 8-year review), the EPA may examine whether to add standards for pollutants or emission[[Page 63134]]sources not currently regulated for that source category. Once the EPA establishes NSPS in a particular source category, the EPA is required in certain circumstances to issue EG to reduce emissions from existing sources in that same source category. Specifically, CAA section 111(d) requires that the EPA prescribe regulations to establish procedures under which States submit plans to establish, implement, and enforce standards of performance for existing sources for certain air pollutants to which a Federal NSPS would apply if such existing source were a new source. The EPA addresses this CAA requirement both through its promulgation of general implementing regulations for section 111(d) as well as specific EG. The EPA first published general implementing regulations in 1975, 40 FR 53340 (November 17, 1975) (codified at 40 CFR part 60, subpart B), and has revised its section 111(d) implementing regulations several times, most recently on July 8, 2019, 84 FR 32520 (codified at 40 CFR part 60, subpart Ba).\95\ In accordance with CAA section 111(d), States are required to submit plans pursuant to these regulations to establish standards of performance for existing sources for any air pollutant: (1) The emission of which is subject to a Federal NSPS; and (2) which is neither a pollutant regulated under CAA section 108(a) (i.e , criteria pollutants such as ground-level ozone and particulate matter, and their precursors, like VOC) \96\ or a HAP regulated under CAA section 112. See also definition of ``designated pollutant'' in 40 CFR 60.21a(a). The EPA's general implementing regulations use the term ``designated facility'' to identify those existing sources that may be subject to regulation under this provision of CAA section 111(d). See 40 CFR 60.21a(b).--------------------------------------------------------------------------- \95\ Subpart Ba provides for the applicability of its provisions upon final publication of an EG if such EG is published after July 8, 2019. Sec. 60.20a(a). The EPA acknowledges that the D.C Circuit has vacated certain timing provisions within subpart Ba. Am. Lung Assoc. v. EPA, 985 F.3d 914 (D.C Cir. 2021), petition for cert. pending, No. 20-1778 (filed June 23, 2001) (Am. Lung Assoc.). However, the court did not vacate the applicability provision, therefore subpart Ba applies to any EG finalized from this proposal. The Agency plans to undertake rulemaking to address the provisions vacated under the court's decision in the near future. \96\ VOC are not listed as CAA section 108(a) pollutants, but they are regulated precursors to photochemical oxidants (e.g , ozone) and particulate matter (PM), both of which are listed CAA section 108(a) pollutants, and VOC therefore fall within the CAA 108(a) exclusion. Accordingly, promulgation of NSPS for VOC does not trigger the application of CAA section 111(d).--------------------------------------------------------------------------- While States are authorized to establish standards of performance for designated facilities, there is a fundamental obligation under CAA section 111(d) that such standards of performance reflect the degree of emission limitation achievable through the application of the BSER, as determined by the Administrator. This obligation derives from the definition of ``standard of performance'' under CAA section 111(a)(1), which makes no distinction between new-source and existing-source standards. The EPA identifies the degree of emission limitation achievable through application of the BSER as part of its EG. See 40 CFR 60.22a(b)(5). While standards of performance must generally reflect the degree of emission limitation achievable through application of the BSER, CAA section 111(d)(1) also requires that the EPA regulations permit the States, in applying a standard of performance to a particular source, to take into account the source's remaining useful life and other factors. After the EPA issues final EG per the requirements under CAA section 111(d) and 40 CFR part 60, subpart Ba, States are required to submit plans that establish standards of performance for the designated facilities as defined in the EPA's guidelines and that contain other ***measures*** to implement and enforce those standards. The EPA's final EG issued under CAA section 111(d) do not impose binding requirements directly on sources, but instead provide requirements for States in developing their plans and criteria for assisting the EPA when judging the adequacy of such plans. Under CAA section 111(d), and the EPA's implementing regulations, a State must submit its plan to the EPA for approval, the EPA will evaluate the plan for completeness in accordance with enumerated criteria, and then will act on that plan via a rulemaking ***process*** to either approve or disapprove the plan in whole or in part. If a State does not submit a plan, or if the EPA does not approve a State's plan because it is not ``satisfactory,'' then the EPA must establish a Federal plan for that State.\97\ If EPA approves a State's plan, the provisions in the state plan become federally enforceable against the designated facility responsible for compliance in the same manner as the provisions of an approved State implementation plan under CAA section 110. If no designated facility is located within a State, the State must submit to the EPA a letter certifying to that effect in lieu of submitting a State plan. See 40 CFR 60.23a(b).--------------------------------------------------------------------------- \97\ CAA section 111(d)(2)(A).--------------------------------------------------------------------------- Designated facilities located in Indian country would not be addressed by a State's CAA section 111(d) plan. Instead, an eligible Tribe that has one or more designated facilities located in its area of Indian country \98\ would have the opportunity, but not the obligation, to seek authority and submit a plan that establishes standards of performance for those facilities on its Tribal lands.\99\ If a Tribe does not submit a plan, or if the EPA does not approve a Tribe's plan, then the EPA has the authority to establish a Federal plan for that Tribe.\100\--------------------------------------------------------------------------- \98\ The EPA is aware of many oil and natural gas operations located in Indian Country. \99\ See 40 CFR part 49, subpart A. \100\ CAA section 111(d)(2)(A).---------------------------------------------------------------------------B. What is the regulatory history and litigation background of NSPS and EG for the oil and natural gas industry?1. 1979 Listing of Source Category Subsequent to the enactment of the CAA of 1970, the EPA took action to develop standards of performance for new stationary sources as directed by Congress in CAA section 111. By 1977, the EPA had promulgated NSPS for a total of 27 source categories, while NSPS for an additional 25 source categories were then under development.\101\ However, in amending the CAA that year, Congress expressed dissatisfaction that the EPA's pace was too slow. Accordingly, the 1977 CAA Amendments included a new subsection (f) in section 111, which specified a schedule for the EPA to list additional source categories under CAA section 111(b)(1)(A) and prioritize them for regulation under CAA section 111(b)(1)(B).--------------------------------------------------------------------------- \101\ See 44 FR 49222 (August 21, 1979).--------------------------------------------------------------------------- In 1979, as required by CAA section 111(f), the EPA published a list of source categories, which included ``Crude Oil and Natural Gas Production,'' for which the EPA would promulgate standards of performance under CAA section 111(b). See Priority List and Additions to the List of Categories of Stationary Sources, 44 FR 49222 (August 21, 1979) (``1979 Priority List''). That list included, in the order of priority for promulgating standards, source categories that the EPA Administrator had determined, pursuant to CAA section 111(b)(1)(A), contribute significantly to air pollution that may reasonably be anticipated to endanger public health or welfare. See 44 FR 49223 (August 21, 1979); see also 49 FR 2636-37 (January 20, 1984).[[Page 63135]]2. 1985 NSPS for VOC and SO2Emissions From Natural Gas ***Processing*** Units On June 24, 1985 (50 FR 26122), the EPA promulgated NSPS for the Crude Oil and Natural Gas source category that addressed VOC emissions from equipment leaks at onshore natural gas ***processing*** plants (40 CFR part 60, subpart KKK). On October 1, 1985 (50 FR 40158), the EPA promulgated additional NSPS for the source category to regulate SO2emissions from onshore natural gas ***processing*** plants (40 CFR part 60, subpart LLL).3. 2012 NSPS OOOO Rule and Related Amendments In 2012, pursuant to its duty under CAA section 111(b)(1)(B) to review and, if appropriate, revise the 1985 NSPS, the EPA published the final rule, ``Standards of Performance for Crude Oil and Natural Gas Production, Transmission and Distribution,'' 77 FR 49490 (August 16, 2012) (40 CFR part 60, subpart OOOO) (``2012 NSPS OOOO''). The 2012 rule updated the SO2standards for sweetening units and the VOC standards for equipment leaks at onshore natural gas ***processing*** plants. In addition, it established VOC standards for several oil and natural gas-related operations emission sources not covered by 40 CFR part 60, subparts KKK and LLL, including natural gas well completions, centrifugal and reciprocating compressors, certain natural gas operated pneumatic controllers in the production and ***processing*** segments of the industry, and storage vessels in the production, ***processing***, and transmission and storage segments. In 2013, 2014, and 2015 the EPA amended the 2012 NSPS OOOO rule in order to address implementation of the standards. ``Oil and Natural Gas Sector: Reconsideration of Certain Provisions of New Source Performance Standards,'' 78 FR 58416 (September 23, 2013) (``2013 NSPS OOOO'') (concerning storage vessel implementation); ``Oil and Natural Gas Sector: Reconsideration of Additional Provisions of New Source Performance Standards,'' 79 FR 79018 (December 31, 2014) (``2014 NSPS OOOO'') (concerning well completion); ``Oil and Natural Gas Sector: Definitions of Low Pressure Gas Well and Storage Vessel,'' 80 FR 48262 (August 12, 2015) (``2015 NSPS OOOO'') (concerning low pressure gas wells and storage vessels). The EPA received petitions for both judicial review and administrative reconsiderations for the 2012, 2013, and 2014 NSPS OOOO rules. The EPA denied reconsideration for some issues, see ``Reconsideration of the Oil and Natural Gas Sector: New Source Performance Standards; Final Action,'' 81 FR 52778 (August 10, 2016), and, as noted below, granted reconsideration for other issues. As explained below, all litigation related to NSPS OOOO is currently in abeyance.4. 2016 NSPS OOOOa Rule and Related Amendments Regulatory action. On June 3, 2016, the EPA published a final rule titled ``Oil and Natural Gas Sector: Emission Standards for New, Reconstructed, and Modified Sources; Final Rule,'' at 81 FR 35824 (40 CFR part 60, subpart OOOOa) (``2016 Rule'' or ``2016 NSPS OOOOa'').102 103 The 2016 NSPS OOOOa rule established NSPS for sources of GHGs and VOC emissions for certain equipment, ***processes***, and operations across the Oil and Natural Gas Industry, including in the transmission and storage segment. 81 FR at 35832. The EPA explained that the 1979 listing identified the source category broadly enough to include that segment and, in the alternative, if the listing had limited the source category to the production and ***processing*** segments, the EPA affirmatively expanded the source category to include the transmission and storage segment on grounds that operations in those segments are a sequence of functions that are interrelated and necessary for getting the recovered gas ready for distribution. 81 FR at 35832. In addition, because this rule was the first time that the EPA had promulgated NSPS for GHG emissions from the Crude Oil and Natural Gas source category, the EPA predicated those NSPS on a determination that it had a rational basis to regulate GHG emissions from the source category. 81 FR at 35843. In response to comments, the EPA explained that it was not required to make an additional pollutant-specific finding that GHG emissions from the source category contribute significantly to dangerous air pollution, but in the alternative, the EPA did make such a finding, relying on the same information that it relied on when determining that it had a rational basis to promulgate a GHGs NSPS. 81 FR at 35843.--------------------------------------------------------------------------- \102\ The June 3, 2016, rulemaking also included certain final amendments to 40 CFR part 60, subpart OOOO, to address issues on which the EPA had granted reconsideration. \103\ The EPA review which resulted in the 2016 NSPS OOOOa rule was instigated by a series of directives from then-President Obama targeted at reducing GHGs, including methane: The President's Climate Action Plan (June 2013); the President's Climate Action Plan: Strategy to Reduce Methane Emissions (``Methane Strategy'') (March 2014); and the President's goal to address, propose and set standards for methane and ozone-forming emissions from new and modified sources in the sector (January 2015, [*https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2015/01/14/fact-sheet-Administration-takes-steps-forward-climate-action-plan-anno-1).---------------------------------------------------------------------------*](https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2015/01/14/fact-sheet-Administration-takes-steps-forward-climate-action-plan-anno-1).---------------------------------------------------------------------------) Specifically, the 2016 NSPS OOOOa addresses the following emission sources: Sources that were unregulated under the 2012 NSPS OOOO (hydraulically fractured oil well completions, pneumatic pumps, and fugitive emissions from well sites and compressor stations); Sources that were regulated under the 2012 NSPS OOOO for VOC emissions, but not for GHG emissions (hydraulically fractured gas well completions and equipment leaks at natural gas ***processing*** plants); and Certain equipment that is used across the source category, of which the 2012 NSPS OOOO regulated emissions of VOC from only a subset (pneumatic controllers, centrifugal compressors, and reciprocating compressors, with the exception of those compressors located at well sites). On March 12, 2018 (83 FR 10628), the EPA finalized amendments to certain aspects of the 2016 NSPS OOOOa requirements for the collection of fugitive emission components at well sites and compressor stations, specifically (1) the requirement that components on a delay of repair must conduct repairs during unscheduled or emergency vent blowdowns, and (2) the monitoring survey requirements for well sites located on the Alaska North Slope. Petitions for judicial review and to reconsider. Following promulgation of the 2016 NSPS OOOOa rule, several states and industry associations challenged the rule in the D.C Circuit. The Administrator also received five petitions for reconsideration of several provisions of the final rule. Copies of the petitions are posted in Docket ID No. EPA-HQ-OAR-2010-0505.\104\ As noted below, the EPA granted reconsideration as to several issues raised with respect to the 2016 NSPS OOOOa rule and finalized certain modifications discussed in the next section. As explained below, all litigation challenging the 2016 NSPS OOOOa rule is currently stayed.--------------------------------------------------------------------------- \104\ See Docket ID Item Nos.: EPA-HQ-OAR-2010-0505-7682, EPA-HQ-OAR-2010-0505-7683, EPA-HQ-OAR-2010-0505-7684, EPA-HQ-OAR-2010-0505-7685, EPA-HQ-OAR-2010-0505-7686.---------------------------------------------------------------------------5. 2020 Policy and Technical Rules Regulatory action. In September 2020, the EPA published two final rules to amend 2012 NSPS OOOO and 2016 NSPS OOOOa. The first is titled, ``Oil[[Page 63136]]and Natural Gas Sector: Emission Standards for New, Reconstructed, and Modified Sources Review.'' 85 FR 57018 (September 14, 2020). Commonly referred to as the 2020 Policy Rule, it first rescinded the regulations applicable to the transmission and storage segment on the basis that the 1979 listing limited the source category to the production and ***processing*** segments and that the transmission and storage segment is not ``sufficiently related'' to the production and ***processing*** segments, and therefore cannot be part of the same source category. 85 FR at 57027, 57029. In addition, the 2020 Policy Rule rescinded methane requirements for the industry's production and ***processing*** segments on two separate bases. The first was that such standards are redundant to VOC standards for these segments. 85 FR at 57030. The second was that the rule interpreted section 111 to require, or at least authorize the Administrator to require, a pollutant-specific ``significant contribution finding'' (SCF) as a prerequisite to a NSPS for a pollutant, and to require that such finding be supported by some identified standard or established set of criteria for determining which contributions are ``significant.'' 85 FR at 57034. The rule went on to conclude that the alternative significant-contribution finding that the EPA made in the 2016 Rule for GHG emissions was flawed because it accounted for emissions from the transmission and storage segment and because it was not supported by criteria or a threshold. 85 FR at 57038.\105\--------------------------------------------------------------------------- \105\ Following the promulgation of the 2020 Policy Rule, the EPA promulgated a final rule that identified a standard or criteria for determining which contributions are ``significant,'' which the D.C Circuit vacated. ``Pollutant-Specific Significant Contribution Finding for Greenhouse Gas Emissions From New, Modified, and Reconstructed Stationary Sources: Electric Utility Generating Units, and ***Process*** for Determining Significance of Other New Source Performance Standards Source Categories.'' 86 FR 2542 (Jan. 13, 2021), vacated by California v. EPA, No. 21-1035 (D.C Cir.) (Order, April 5, 2021, Doc. #1893155).--------------------------------------------------------------------------- Published on September 15, 2020, the second of the two rules is titled, ``Oil and Natural Gas Sector: Emission Standards for New, Reconstructed, and Modified Sources Reconsideration.'' Commonly referred to as the 2020 Technical Rule, this second rule made further amendments to the 2016 NSPS OOOOa following the 2020 Policy Rule to eliminate or reduce certain monitoring obligations and to address a range of issues in response to administrative petitions for reconsideration and other technical and implementation issues brought to the EPA's attention since the 2016 NSPS OOOOa rulemaking. Specifically, the 2020 Technical Rule exempted low-production well sites from fugitives monitoring (previously required semiannually), required semiannual monitoring at gathering and boosting compressor stations (previously quarterly), streamlined recordkeeping and reporting requirements, allowed compliance with certain equivalent State requirements as an alternative to NSPS fugitive requirements, streamlined the application ***process*** to request the use of new technologies to monitor for fugitive emissions, addressed storage tank batteries for applicability determination purposes and finalized several technical corrections. Because the 2020 Technical Rule was issued the day after the EPA's rescission of methane regulations in the 2020 Policy Rule, the amendments made in the 2020 Technical Rule applied only to the requirements to regulate VOC emissions from this source category. The 2020 Policy Rule amended 40 CFR part 60, subparts OOOO and OOOOa, as finalized in 2016. The 2020 Technical Rule amended the 40 CFR part 60, subpart OOOOa, as amended by the 2020 Policy Rule. Petitions to reconsider. The EPA received three petitions for reconsideration of the 2020 rulemakings. Two of the petitions sought reconsideration of the 2020 Policy Rule. As discussed below, on June 30, 2021, the President signed into law S.J Res. 14, a joint resolution under the CRA disapproving the 2020 Policy Rule, and as a result, the petitions for reconsideration on the 2020 Policy Rule are now moot. All three petitions sought reconsideration of certain elements of the 2020 Technical Rule. Litigation. Several States and non-governmental organizations challenged the 2020 Policy Rule as well as the 2020 Technical Rule. All petitions for review regarding the 2020 Policy Rule were consolidated into one case in the D.C Circuit. State of California, et al. v. EPA, No. 20-1357. On August 25, 2021, after the enactment of the joint resolution of Congress disapproving the 2020 Policy Rule (explained in section VIII below), the court granted petitioners motion to voluntarily dismiss their cases. Id. ECF Dkt #1911437. All petitions for review regarding the 2020 Technical Rule were consolidated into a different case in the D.C Circuit. Environmental Defense Fund, et al. v. EPA, No. 20-1360 (D.C Cir.). On February 19, 2021, the court issued an order granting a motion by the EPA to hold in abeyance the consolidated litigation over the 2020 Technical Rule pending EPA's rulemaking actions in response to E.O 13990 and pending the conclusion of EPA's potential reconsideration of the 2020 Technical Rule. Id. ECF Dkt #1886335. As mentioned above, the EPA received petitions for judicial review regarding the 2012, 2013, and 2014 NSPS OOOO rules as well as the 2016 NSPS OOOOa rule. The challenges to the 2012 NSPS OOOO rule (as amended by the 2013 NSPS OOOO and 2014 NSPS OOOO rules) were consolidated. American Petroleum Institute v. EPA, No. 13-1108 (D.C Cir.). The majority of those cases were further consolidated with the consolidated challenges to the 2016 NSPS OOOOa rule. West Virginia v. EPA, No. 16-1264 (D.C Cir.), see specifically ECF Dkt #1654072. As such, West Virginia v. EPA includes challenges to the 2012 NSPS OOOO rule (as amended by the 2013 NSPS OOOO and 2014 NSPS OOOO rules) as well as challenges to the 2016 NSPS OOOOa rule.\106\ On December 10, 2020, the court granted a joint motion of the parties in West Virginia v. EPA to hold that case in abeyance until after the mandate has issued in the case regarding challenges to the 2020 Technical Rule. West Virginia v. EPA, ECF Dkt #1875192.

**Load-Date:** November 16, 2021

**End of Document**



[***-UC Davis receives $ 12.9 million grant aimed at improving health through precision nutrition***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:64KF-MJ21-F0K1-N1BB-00000-00&context=1516831)

ENP Newswire

January 21, 2022 Friday

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**Length:** 1077 words

**Body**

The UC Davis All of Us Research Program has been awarded a five-year, $ 12.9 million grant from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to study the potential of customized diet recommendations to promote health and prevent disease, known as precision nutrition. The unique study is based on optimizing food and dietary patterns for each person.

UC Davis is one of fourteen institutions to receive funding for the Nutrition for Precision Health study.

'Recommendations for optimal nutrition tend to focus on 'one-size-fits-all,' but in the future, we will see more emphasis on personalized public health,' said Sean Adams, a professor in the Department of Surgery. Adams is the scientific director for the UC Davis Center for Alimentary and Metabolic Science and is part of the project's principal investigator team.

Precision nutrition involves creating customized diet recommendations for individuals based on their unique characteristics. It has the potential to prevent and treat diseases like type 2 diabetes, obesity and cancer, and to improve overall health and function across a person's lifespan.

The project is funded by the NIH Nutrition for Precision Health (NPH) initiative and involves investigators from the UC Davis School of Medicine, College of ***Agricultural*** and Environmental Sciences, USDA ***Agricultural*** Research Service on the UC Davis campus, UCLA Center for Human Nutrition, and the Cedars-Sinai Community and Population Health Research Center.

'NPH will take into account an individual's genetics, gut microbes, and other lifestyle, biological, environmental, or social factors to help each individual develop eating recommendations that improve overall health,' said Holly Nicastro, NPH coordinator.

Research insights from a million people

The All of Us Research Program is an ambitious effort led by the NIH to collect genetic, biological, environmental, health and lifestyle data from more than a million people living in the U.S. The data is being used to answer questions that will help improve public health and treat diseases. The nutrition study, NPH, will add yet another component to provide a more complete picture of better health.

'Participants in the All of Us Research Program study are our partners. It is a major team effort,' said Alexander Borowsky, professor of pathology and laboratory medicine and the principal investigator for the grant.

The study presents an opportunity for participants to contribute to research and learn about their health. For example, individuals might learn about genetic traits, medicines that may work best for them, personal disease risks and other health parameters.

'We engage and empower our participants in the ***process*** through representation, advice, plans and protocols. But more importantly, we allow them to learn what the researchers find, and take action from the results we return to them,' said Borowsky.

Precision nutrition - a new approach to health

All of Us will contribute data from existing participants who agree to be a part of the NPH study. That may include genomics, electronic health records, and survey data, such as information on daily life experiences, family health and more.

This rich information will be ***measured*** in a diverse pool of 10,000 participants, allowing the NPH team to identify factors that define specific physiologic responses to different foods and to see how these responses associate with health.

The ***unprecedented*** research effort will be one of the largest, most diverse precision nutrition efforts in the country.

'Food brings people together, and this unique nutrition component of the All of Us Research Program has great potential to communicate to people the value of biomedical research,' said Hugo Campos, a participant ambassador in the UC Davis All of Us Research Program since 2018.

Campos' enthusiasm for the All of Us Research Program is driven in part by his background. He has a chronic genetic condition called hypertrophic cardiomyopathy, a disease in which the heart muscle becomes abnormally thick, making it difficult for the heart to pump blood.

'The inclusion of participants with all types of health status as partners is what makes All of Us so unique,' said Campos.

How to get involved in the All of Us Research Program

UC Davis Health is currently recruiting and enrolling adults for the All of Us Research Program. The nutrition component is expected to begin in January 2023. Everyone 18 and older is eligible to join.

To learn more about the All of Us Research Program, please visit the allofus.ucdavis.edu website. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the UC Davis All of Us Research Program team at [*allofus@ucdavis.edu*](mailto:allofus@ucdavis.edu) or 916-502-5605.

All of Us and Nutrition for Precision Health, powered by the All of Us Research Program, are service marks of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

About the NIH Common Fund

The NIH Common Fund encourages collaboration and supports a series of ***exceptionally*** high-impact, trans-NIH programs. Common Fund programs are managed by the Office of Strategic Coordination in the Division of Program Coordination, Planning, and Strategic Initiatives within the NIH Office of the Director in partnership with the NIH Institutes, Centers, and Offices. More information is available at the Common Fund website: [*https://commonfund.nih.gov*](https://commonfund.nih.gov).

About the All of Us Research Program

The mission of the All of Us Research Program is to accelerate health research and medical breakthroughs, enabling individualized prevention, treatment, and care for all of us. The program will partner with one million or more people across the United States to build the most diverse biomedical data resource of its kind, to help researchers gain better insights into the biological, environmental, and behavioral factors that influence health. For more information, visit [*www.ResearchAllofUs.org*](http://www.ResearchAllofUs.org), [*www.joinallofus.org*](http://www.joinallofus.org), and [*https://www.allofus.nih.gov/*](https://www.allofus.nih.gov/).

About the National Institutes of Health (NIH)

NIH, the nation's medical research agency, includes 27 Institutes and Centers and is a component of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. NIH is the primary federal agency conducting and supporting basic, clinical, and translational medical research, and is investigating the causes, treatments, and cures for both common and rare diseases.

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[Editorial queries for this story should be sent to [*newswire@enpublishing.co.uk*](mailto:newswire@enpublishing.co.uk) ]

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**End of Document**



[***Government must 'be open' to reviewing supports for pig sector as situation evolves***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:65B3-CJG1-JC8V-426J-00000-00&context=1516831)

Irish Examiner

April 14, 2022 Thursday

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**Section:** FARMING; Pg. 1

**Length:** 900 words

**Byline:** Kathleen O'Sullivan

**Body**

Rocketing feed input costs have created an "unbridgeable gap" between production costs and pig prices the producers have warned.

This comes as the Government announced a fresh package of ***measures*** to support farmers including €13m in funding for the pig sector, along with €3m in support for the horticultural sector.

It amounts to about €70,000 for each pig farmer and approximately €100,000 for horticultural growers.

The Government also announced on Wednesday that excise reductions on petrol, diesel, and green diesel will also be extended to Budget Day.

This fresh round of supports come as farmers battle soaring prices for inputs.

Industry and farmer representatives appeared at the Oireachtas joint committee on ***agriculture***, food and the marine on Wednesday, saying that the Government must "be open" to reviewing supports for the pig industry as "circumstances evolve".

Cormac Healy, senior director of Meat Industry Ireland (MII), said fuel price inflation is driving on-farm costs, as well as at ***processing*** level in terms of energy, packaging, transport, and deep-sea shipping rates.

"Over recent years, the sector has faced a series of challenges including Brexit, African swine fever outbreaks in the EU, the Covid pandemic, and a turbulent Chinese market," MII's Philip Carroll said in the opening statement to the committee.

"In Q4 of 2021, producers were already contending with rising feed costs pushing them into a loss-making position.

"However, since the onset of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, we have witnessed an ***unprecedented*** and rapid escalation in grain and protein prices which has crippled the sector.

"Additional shipping costs further increase feed prices in Ireland compared to the continent."

MII said that while this sector has always endured cyclical economic fortunes, the sector "cannot withstand the level of losses it is now encountering".

"Significant stabilisation and liquidity support is urgently required from Government."

Acknowledging the package announced by ***Agriculture*** Minister Charlie McConalogue this week to support pig farmers along with the previously announced €7m Pig ***Exceptional*** Payment Scheme, MII believes this is "insufficient to save the sector from serious long-term damage".

Despite the challenging market environment, the ***processing*** industry has delivered prices to Irish producers "well ahead" of EU average and prices in the main EU pig producing member states over the last year, MII said.

"Depressed prices were exacerbated by rising feed costs over last autumn. Since September, the Irish pig price has been 10% above the EU average price and overall 15% ahead of the price across the seven member states that account for 80% of total EU pigmeat production.

"Processors have done everything possible to support their producer suppliers over this period.

"Pig price in recent weeks has increased by approximately 20c/kg to 170c/kg. Unfortunately, this does not bridge the gap between feed costs and market price, and more support is needed to help bridge this gap through an ***unprecedented*** price cost squeeze."

Irish pig prices have remained the same this week as last with farmers receiving quotes of €1.60c/kg up to €1.64 or €1.66-€1.70/kg. The Irish Farmers' Association market report notes that farmers will "urgently" need more "significant upward movement" for the price they receive for their pigs from the marketplace.

The European market is continuing to improve with pigmeat prices moving upward. The UK and France have passed the €2.00/kg and Spain looks likely to follow suit with its current price of circa €1.98/kg. The average European price is circa €1.80c/kg.

Speaking at the Oireachtas meeting this week, IFA president Tim Cullinan said that the sector is in the "midst of a crisis, the likes of which it has never experienced before".

To prevent the demise of the sector, the IFA, MII, and the Irish Grain and Feed Association are proposing the immediate establishment of a pig stability fund.

Their proposals include the establishment of a state-administered fund to provide an immediate cash injection to pig farmers.

The fund would be jointly funded by a State contribution along with a long-term fund sourced by way of a new statutory levy.

The statutory levy of 90c/pig would be on all pigs slaughtered in the Republic of Ireland or exported to Northern Ireland which, based on 2021 output, would generate a revenue stream of circa €3.6m per annum.

Based on a 14-year payback period, this constitutes a direct farmer contribution of circa €50m, Mr Cullinan said.

A commitment is sought from the State to initially fund the farmer contribution of €50m along with an additional upfront funding from the State of €50m. The former will be repaid by the revenue from the newly-established statutory levy, it is proposed.

Teagasc analysts warned last month that pig sector losses are expected to reach €160m by March 2023, with up to 30% of farmers at risk of closure.

A new report by Teagasc economists has said that the greatest challenges at present are "undoubtedly" being faced by pig farmers, with the average pig farm losing an estimated €166,000 since the year began.

While a rise in pig prices is anticipated over the coming months, pig farmers will continue to lose money in the meantime.

The Irish sow herd has already begun culling 10,000 sows, with a further 12,000 sows deemed at high risk of destocking over the coming weeks, it is warned.

**Load-Date:** April 28, 2022

**End of Document**



[***Cadogan Petroleum Plc - Annual Financial Report***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:65B9-BB41-JB72-128B-00000-00&context=1516831)

PR Newswire UK Disclose

April 29, 2022 Friday 2:00 AM EST

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**Length:** 40693 words

**Dateline:** London, April 28

**Body**

PR Newswire

Cadogan Petroleum plc

Annual Results for year ended 31 December 2021

The Board of Cadogan Petroleum plc, (“Cadogan” or “the Company”), is pleased to announce the Company’s annual results for the year ended 31 December 2021.

Key Financial Highlights of 2021:

Loss for the year: $5.1 million (2020: loss of $1.0 million)Average realized price: $55.7 /boe (2020: $32.9/boe)Gross revenues[1]: $8.8 million (2020: $5.1 million)G&A[2]: $3.7 million (2020: $3.8 million)Loss per share: 2.1 cents (2020: loss of 0.4 cents)Cash at year end: $15.0 million (2020: $13.3 million)

Key Operational Highlights of 2021:

Production: 127,662 bbl (2020: 106,398 boe), a 20% increase year-on-yearGas trading profit of $0.6 million (2020: profit of $0.6 million)Services business loss of $0.06 million (2020: loss of $0.05 million), net of services provided to the group[3]No LTI/TRI[4]ISO 14001 and ISO 45001 certifications revalidated for a new 3-year term

Group overview

In 2021, the Group continued to maintain exploration and production assets, to conduct gas trading operations and to operate an oil services business in Ukraine. Cadogan’s assets are concentrated in the West of the country. Gas trading includes the import of gas from Slovakia, Hungary and Poland and local purchase and sales with physical delivery of natural gas. The oil services business focuses on workover operations, civil works services and other services to satisfy Cadogan intra-group operational needs.

Our business model

We aim to increase value through:

Maintaining a robust balance sheet, monetising the remaining value of our Ukrainian assets and supplementing E&P cash flow with revenues from gas trading and oil servicesPursuing farm-out to progress investments in Ukrainian licensesDiversify Cadogan’s portfolio, both geographically and operationally

Ukraine

West Ukraine

The Group continued to produce oil from its production Blazhiv license located in the West of Ukraine. Production in 2021 continued to grow. The average net production in 2021 was 350 bbl, a 20% increase over the production of the previous year and was the highest in the company’s history. This production result was achieved thanks to the full operation of the 4 wells, the optimization of the operational regimes of these wells and the successful stimulation of Blazhiv-10 well.

In March 2020 and August 2020 Usenco Nadra filed the claims with the Kyiv Administrative Court to acknowledge inaction of the State Service of Geology (SGS) as unlawful, particularly their refusal to issue the Bitlyanska 20-year exploration and development license and requested the Court to carry out commercial activities at the area effective from December 2019. This decision was taken by the subsoil controlling authority notwithstanding that Cadogan had fulfilled all license obligations, obtained all regulatory approvals and timely submitted the application on 19 August 2019 well ahead the license expiry date of 23 December 2019 and the new regulatory framework. During 2021 the claims have not been considered by the Court due to delays caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. In February 2022, the company received the information from a public register that its claim was rejected by the Court. Usenco Nadra did not receive any formal court notification of such decision. Despite the restrictions imposed by the martial law in Ukraine, Usenco Nadra exercised its right for appeal against this decision and submitted an appeal.

East Ukraine

The Pirkovska exploration license expired in October 2015. Astrogaz filed in due time an application for a new exploration and production license, but the Licensing Authority returned it 6 times for different reasons. Despite the efforts of the Company and its reply in due time to each of the comments, the license was not awarded, and the 3-year period for conversion expired in October 2018. In 2019, Astrogaz filed a claim at the Administrative Court for the non-granting of the license by the Licensing Authority. The Court of First Instance, in its decision of October 2020, partly satisfied the claim and confirmed inaction of the Licensing Authority and obliged it to review the application. Astrogaz filed a claim before the Court of Appeal proposing the license award approval. In February 2021, the Court of Appeal rejected Astrogaz claim. In December 2021, the Supreme Court, similar to the Appeal Court, rejected the claim of Astrogaz. This decision will not have any financial impact as Pirkovska license had been totally impaired before.

In 2020, LLC AstroInvest-Energy, a fully owned subsidiary of Cadogan, introduced a claim against the State fiscal authority regarding additional tax assessment and related penalties. The Company won in the Court of First Instance and in the Court of Appeal. The State fiscal authority filed an appeal with the Supreme Court. The hearing and the decision were expected during 2022.

Subsidiary businesses

Cadogan has sold the remaining 7.54 million m3 of gas during the first semester 2021.

Astroservice LLC, the oil services subsidiary, continued to support Blazhiv license wells’ operations.

Italy

The Group owns a 90% interest in Exploenergy s.r.l., an Italian company, which has filed applications for two exploration licenses (Reno Centese and Corzano), located in the Po Valley region (Northern Italy). The leads identified on these licenses have combined unrisked prospective resources estimated to be in excess of 60 bcf of gas.

In February 2019, the Italian Parliament approved a moratorium of 18 months in the award of new licenses and a 25-fold increase of license fees. Exploenergy has subsequently reduced its activity to the minimum required to fulfil its statutory obligations. It has also identified areas which can be voluntarily released in order to mitigate the impact of higher fees, when licenses are awarded, with a minimum impact on their exploration potential.

In 2020, the moratorium was extended. In February 2022, the Plan for the Sustainable Energy Transition of Suitable Areas (“PiTESAI”) was approved by the Ministry for Environmental Transition. It delivers a new framework for the possible resumption of exploration and production activities on land and at sea. Exploenergy is analysing the impact of this new regulation framework on its activities. No exploration and evaluation assets are held on the Group balance sheet in respect of the licences.

In February 2019, the Group entered in a 2-year loan agreement with Proger Management & Partners Srl (“PMP”) with an option to convert it into a 33% equity interest in Proger Ingegneria Srl which in turn held at 31 December 2020 a 75.95% equity interest in Proger Spa. Proger is an Italian engineering company providing services in Italy and in different international areas.

Cadogan did not exercise the Call Option. In February 2021, Cadogan notified PMP that according to the Loan Agreement, the Maturity Date occurred on 25 February 2021. As the Call Option was not exercised, PMP must fulfill the payment of EUR 14,857,350, being the reimbursement of the Loan in terms of principal and the accumulated interest. PMP is in default since 25 February 2021. End of March 2021, PMP requested an arbitration to have the Loan Agreement recognised as an equity investment contract, which is rejected by Cadogan as the terms of the agreement are clear and include the right to repayment at maturity if the Call Option is not exercised.

The arbitration ***process*** is going on. The investigation phase is closed. The decision of the College of Arbitrators is expected in July 2022.

Strategic Report

The Strategic Report has been prepared in accordance with Section 414A of the Companies Act 2006 (the “Act”) and presented hereunder. Its purpose is to inform stakeholders and help them assess how the Directors have performed their legal duty under Section 172 of the Act to promote the success of the Company.

Section 172 Statement

The Company’s section 172 statement is presented on page 35 and 36 and forms part of this strategic report.

Principal activity and status of the Company

The Company is registered as a public limited company (registration number 05718406) in England and Wales. Its principal activity is oil and gas exploration, development and production; the Company also conducts gas trading and provides services.

The Company’s shares have a standard listing on the Official List of the UK Listing Authority and are traded on the Main Market of the London Stock Exchange.

Key performance indicators

The Group monitors its performance through five key performance indicators (“KPIs”):

to increase oil, gas and condensate production ***measured*** on the number of barrels of oil equivalent produced per day (“boepd”);to decrease administrative expenses;to increase the Group’s basic earnings per share;to maintain no lost time incidents; andto grow geographically and operationally diversify the portfolio.

The Group’s performance in 2021 against these KPI’s is set out in the table below, together with the prior year performance data.

Average production is calculated as the average daily production during the yearBasic (loss)/profit per ordinary share is calculated by dividing the net (loss)/profit for the year attributable to equity holders of the parent company by the weighted average number of ordinary shares during the yearLost time incidents relate to the number of injuries where an employee/contractor is injured and has time off work (IOGP classification)

Chairman’s Statement

Our Group is involved in Ukraine since 2007 and is considered as a real foreign investor in this country. The ***invasion*** of Ukraine by the Russian army has left us deeply saddened. This war, as any war, has brought huge suffering and destruction. All the Board stand in solidarity with the Ukrainian population.

The safety of our people is our highest priority. The Group is taking all possible actions to preserve the safety of its employees and meet their needs.

2021 remained another challenging year above any expectation. The pandemic Covid-19, that has been affecting all, and was followed by economic and social instability worldwide and in Ukraine in particular. The ***measures*** that were quickly implemented have allowed to protect our staff and keep the Group’s activities on-going. The effectiveness of these ***measures*** and the dedication of everyone have been essential to achieve this result. Moreover, the Group is proud to report zero fatalities, disabilities, or medical complications among its staff since the beginning of the pandemic.

In 2021, Cadogan continued to be committed to the territory and the communities where we operate and fully financed social programs commitment for 2021 as agreed before with the Lviv Regional Administration and the local communities.

In a highly challenging context, Cadogan has delivered on its strategy of a sustainable platform for growth. During 2021, the oil and gas markets volatility had favorable impact on oil prices. The quick response of the Group and the ***measures*** that were put in place have allowed the Group to mitigate the operational and the economic challenges. The negative impacts were contained, and improvements were brought to our activities despite the year loss.

With the ongoing war in the Country, we are expecting more uncertain times.

Despite all these challenges, the Group was able to improve its fundamentals and operate at high industry standards. This was possible thanks to the commitment of all with a competent and strong management. The Board remain focused on maximizing value from our assets and build a future for getting a profitable company with sustainable growth. Our objective remains the future diversification of our geographical presence and of our activities in sectors providing lower impacts on environment.

Michel Mee—s

Non-Independent Non-Executive Chairman

28 April 2022

Chief Executive’s Review

In 2021, the business worldwide and in Ukraine has managed to operate in the new Covid-19 volatile reality. However, the turbulence which resulted from the pandemic of corona virus has continued to affect Ukraine and Cadogan’s activities. At the same time, during 2021 we witnessed recovery of the Brent oil price exceeding $75 per bbl in December.

With the Covid-19 pandemic, it has been another challenging time for Ukraine as with other countries. The government has been repeatedly tightening restriction ***measures*** to get the virus spread under control and to mitigate Covid pandemic distribution in the country as well as to launch a vaccination plan for the population. Despite these ***measures***, the level of fatalities caused by the virus was one of the highest in Europe.

To keep its personnel safe, the Company continued to implement strict sanitary and hygienic procedures and personal protection, constant medical supervision during the work shift, regular sanitation of cars, offices and facilities. We are proud to report zero fatalities among the staff.

While 2021 witnessed signs of recovery for the oil & gas industry, it has been another difficult year for Ukraine. The government of Ukraine continued making some progress towards the modernisation of its oil & gas legislative framework as well as in its anti-corruption ***measures***. However, this has not yet been sufficient to create a favourable environment for the significant investments needed to increase the Country’s domestic production especially in the time of instability all over the world. At the same time high oil and gas prices have allowed to smoothen the trend of Ukraine’s production decline, mainly due to private operators’ operational activity growth.

In 2021, Ukraine pursued efforts to attract new investments, including in its oil and gas sector, by promoting incentives such as “investment nanny’s”, new areas under e-auctions and award of Production Share Agreement (PSA). However, the already existing risks of military escalation with Russian Federation and the ***invasion*** threats have been a real stopping factor for foreign investments in the oil and gas industry of Ukraine. In this uncertain context, Cadogan remained one of the few truly foreign investors operating in Ukraine’s E&P sector.

Against this challenging background, Cadogan’s operational activities performed as following:

a 20% increase in production, from 106,398 bbl in 2020 to 127,662 bbl in 2021. This allowed the Group to record in 2021 its highest net production rate of 350 bbl per day, a 3 % decrease of overhead (G&A), from $3.8 million in 2020 to $3.7 million in 2021;a challenging year for trading which generated a positive result;a robust balance sheet, with $15 million of net cash, kept mostly in the UK banks;another year without LTIs’

Core operations

Cadogan has continued to safely produce from its Blazhiv field in the West of Ukraine. Oil production has increased by 20% over the previous year. The uninterrupted production of four wells during 2021, and the optimization of the mechanical production regimes with the stimulation of Blazh-10 well, have allowed to achieve such positive results.

Regarding the Bitlyanska 20-year exploration and development license, given the delay to award the license by the State Geological Service (SGS) beyond the regular timeline provided by legislation and the further rejection of the application on the basis of the new regulatory framework that took effect on 25 February 2020, Cadogan filed two claims with the Administrative Court to acknowledge inaction of SGS as unlawful and to grant the right to carry out commercial activities on the Bitlyanska field. In February 2022 the Company received information from a public register that the claim was rejected by the Court. Usenco Nadra has not yet been formally notified by the Administrative Court of this decision. Despite the restrictions imposed by the martial law in Ukraine, Usenco Nadra exercised its right for appeal against this decision.

In the Pirkovska license notwithstanding, the Court of First Instance hearing results and partial satisfaction of LLC Astrogaz claim, the Supreme Court, similar to the Appeal Court, rejected the claim of Astrogaz in December 2021. This decision will not have a financial impact as Pirkovska license had been totally impaired before.

Operational excellence of the Group has been confirmed again by zero LTI or TRI, with a total over 1,400,000 manhours since the last incident, and the renewal of ISO 14001 & 45001 certifications for a new 3-year term.

The activity in Italy has been limited to routine housekeeping.

Non E&P operations

Cadogan sold 7,56 million m3 of gas stored. The Company continues to monitor the gas markets in Europe and Ukraine, but in light of the extreme volatilities the Company follows its prudent and low risk trading strategy.

The oil services activities were used primarily to serve the Group’s wells’ operations.

Proger

In February 2019, Cadogan used part of its cash (euros 13.385 million) to enter into a 2-year Loan Agreement with Proger Managers & Partners, together with a Call Option Agreement to convert it, subject to shareholders’ approval into a 33 % equity interest in Proger Ingegneria which in turn held, as at 31 December 2021, a 96.48% equity interest in Proger.

As at 25 February 2021, being the Maturity Date, the Call Option was not exercised and accordingly to its previous notification Cadogan demanded repayment of the Loan together with the accumulated interest which in total amounted Euro 14,857,350. After five business days, PMP was in default and asked for an additional term that ended on 19 March 2021. The terms of the Loan Agreement provide for an additional default interest of 2%. At this time, the Group reclassified the loan instrument from fair value through profit and loss to a loan at amortised cost. End of March 2021, PMP contested the default situation and the obligation to reimburse and asked for an Arbitration, according to the said Loan Agreement, to get the Loan Agreement recognized as an equity investment contract. Cadogan consider PMP’s arguments as groundless and consider that they are intended to delay PMP reimbursement obligations. The Arbitration ***process*** is ongoing. The investigation phase is closed. The decision of the College of Arbitrators is expected in July 2022.

Outlook

After several months of military confrontation, Russia invaded Ukraine on 24 February 2022. The safety of our employees is our highest priority. We are in daily close contact with them and doing all we can to ensure their safety and their essential needs.

The war is increasingly affecting the economy of Europe and exacerbating ongoing economic challenges, including issues such as rising inflation and supply-chain disruption. The degree to which the Group will be affected by them largely depends on the nature and duration of uncertain and unpredictable events, such as further military action and reactions to ongoing developments by global financial markets. At the beginning of March 2022, the Company stopped its production operations for 3 weeks and was able to resume them after having secured its employees safety, the transactions with its customers and deliveries. Starting the end of March 2022 and till the date of the report the Group is operating in due course, production operates with a full capacity, product shipments are not interrupted.

Despite all the difficulties and uncertain times, the Group has managed to successfully preserve its human, operational and financial assets. Thanks to its flexibility, the Group has been able to manage the fluctuations in commodity prices and is prepared to manage such ongoing situation. However, the delays, due to the pandemic Covid-19 and the arbitration ***process*** with PMP for the recoverability of the loan provided in 2019, have led to postpone the original plans for the business development and the diversification of our activities. The Group maintains its objectives to invest in new activities with a lower impact on environment, to continue to monitor and contain the environmental impact of its existing oil and gas activities, and to diversify geographically its presence. In the current circumstances of the war in Ukraine, its unpredictable duration and the related uncertainties impacting the general economy, our Group will continue to maintain a prudent business development approach taking into account our available resources and the economic momentum of the targeted business areas.

Fady Khallouf

Chief Executive Officer

28 April 2022

Operations Review

Overview

At 31 December 2021, in the west of Ukraine, the Group held working interests in one conventional gas, condensate and oil exploration and production license and was expecting the Court decision for the award of the new license for another one. These assets are operated by the Group and are located in the Carpathian basin in close proximity to the Ukrainian gas distribution infrastructures.

(1)  E&D = Exploration and Development

(2)  The Bitlyanska license expired on 23 December 2019 and its renewal is in the ***process*** of litigation. Usenco filed a claim at the Court of Appeal.

East Ukraine

The Pirkivska production license expired in 2015. Astrogaz applied for a new license. After several years and the end of the 3-year period allowed for conversion of the previous license, the Company initiated court proceedings to defend its rights and to challenge the Licensing Authority’s actions. As the result, the Court of First Instance has partly satisfied the claim and confirmed inaction of the Licensing Authority and obliged it to review the application. Astrogaz introduced a claim with the Court of Appeal proposing license award approval. In its decision of February 2021, the Court of Appeal rejected the Astrogaz claim.  In March 2021, the Company filed an appeal with the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court rejected the claim of Astrogaz in December 2021.

West Ukraine

E&P activity remained focused on maintaining and securing its licenses for the new term and safely and efficiently producing from the existing wells as well as implementing non-invasive production enhancement scenarios within the Blazhiv oil field.

The Bitlyanska license covers an area of 390 square kilometers. Bitlyanska, Borynya and Vovchenska are three hydrocarbon discoveries in this license area. The Borynya and Bitlya fields hold 3P reserves, contingent recoverable resources and prospective resources. Vovchenska field holds contingent recoverable resources.

Borynya 3 and Vovche-2 wells are suspended and routinely monitored. All activities in the area are temporarily on hold until the license award is granted. However, the State Geological Service failed to meet the timeline for responding to the application provided for under legislation and, subsequently rejected the application.

The Group filed to the State Geological Service an application for a 20-year production license 5 months ahead the license expiry date of 23 December 2019. The Group secured approval of the Environmental Impact Assessment study by the Ministry of Ecology, the approval of the Reserves Report by the State Commission of Reserves and the approval of the license award by the Lviv Regional Council. Given the delay to award the new license beyond the regular timeline provided by legislation, Cadogan filed two claims with the Administrative Court to challenge the non-granting of the 20-year production license by the Licensing Authority. During 2021 the claims have not been considered by the Court due to delays caused by the Covid-19 pandemic.  In February 2022 the company received information from public register that its claim was rejected by the Court of first instance. Usenco Nadra has not yet been notified. Despite the restrictions imposed by the martial law in Ukraine, Usenco Nadra exercised its right for appeal.

During 2021, the average gross oil production rated at 350bpd, which is 20% higher than in 2020 (291bpd). Such result was achieved thanks to an uninterrupted production of the four Blazhiv wells supported by optimization of their operational regimes.

In 2021 the Company conducted and completed full hydrodynamic surveys of Blazhiv-1, Blazh-3, Blazhiv-Monastyrets-3 and Blazhiv-10 wells.

For the purpose of geological construction precision of Blazhiv oil field and Monastyretska fold and also identification of new perspective structures within the license area boundary, Cadogan has launched analyses for data reprocessing and reinterpretation of old 2D seismic data. Upon works completion, it is expected to receive required data for field skeleton structural and tectonic modeling.  The structural tectonic and petrophysical modeling of the area, hydrocarbons reserves & resources reassessment as well as the hydrodynamic model refining is planned to be conducted after the completion of the seismic reprocessing/ reinterpretation.

Gas trading

Cadogan thoroughly monitored EU and Ukraine gas markets evolution to define best momentum for trading in the challenging environment of 2021. In 2021, the Company sold 7.56 million m3 at favorable conditions. The Company has no gas in storage at the year ended 31 December 2021. In light of these extreme volatilities, the Company, following its prudent and low risk trading strategy, decided to monitor the appropriate time for resuming trading activity.

Service

The Group continued to provide services through its wholly owned subsidiary Astroservice LLC. The provided services were primarily focused on serving intra-group operational needs in wells’ re-entry/ repairs and stimulation operations, well surveys and field on-site activities.

Other events

After an inspection conducted by Ukraine’s tax authorities in September 2019, Astroinvest Energy LLC was notified of a tax claim related to the historic costs for the liquidation of wells on the Zagoryanska license. The tax authorities notified Astroinvest Energy LLC that they consider recoverable VAT totalling $3.6 million, that has subsequently been used to offset output VAT, to be non-deductible. They additionally consider that the subsidiary’s tax losses carry forward of $15.3 million should be reduced (note 21). Astroinvest Energy LLC has launched a claim against the tax authority’s decision based on the current tax legislation and related court decisions. The Company has won litigation in the Court of First Instance and in the Court of Appeal. The Court’s decision has come into legal force. The tax authorities filed an appeal with the Supreme Court, the decision of which is expected during 2022.

In October 2021 Cadogan has reached an agreement with Actio Law Firm (registered in Ukraine) for the sale of Ramet Holdings Limited, a wholly owned Cypriot subsidiary. This transaction has allowed to minimize related administrative costs and to optimize corporate structure.

Financial Review

Overview

In 2021, the Group increased its production by 20%, and the average realized oil price increased by 69%. As a result, E&E revenue increased significantly compared to the previous year. The Group’s operating divisions delivered a profit of $1.8 million (2020: profit of $0.5 million) (note 5) before the impairment of oil and gas assets which is recognized due to the longer dispute ***process*** on Bitlyanska license award.

The E&P business positively contributed to the financial results of the Group, due to the increase in oil prices and the increase of production volume. The average realized oil price increased by 69% from $32.9 to $55.7 per barrel. The services business focused on providing workover services to the subsidiaries of the Group. The trading business realized all stored gas in the first half and made a positive contribution to the Group’s performance.

Cash position increased to $15.0 million as at 31 December 2021 compared to $13.3 million as at 31 December 2020. This was mostly due to the sales of 7.56 mcm of natural gas which were held in inventory at the beginning of the year and the positive result of the E&P segment of business.

Income statement

Revenues from production increased from $3.5 million in 2020 to $7.0 million in 2021, reflecting a combination of an increase of the production volume from 106,398 boe in 2020 to 127,662 boe in 2021 supported by an increase in average realized prices by 69 %. E&P costs of sales increased from $3.0 million in 2020 to $5.3 million in 2021. These include production royalties and taxes, fees paid for the rented wells, depreciations, depletion of producing wells, direct staff costs and other costs for exploration and development. Overall, in 2021, E&P made a positive contribution of $1.8 million (2020: $0.4 million) to gross profit.

The oil services business in 2021 remained focused on internal activities providing its services, including drilling and workover, to the Group’s subsidiaries.

The gas trading business revenues slightly increased from $1.6 million in 2020 to $1.8 million in 2021, cost of sales decreased, from $1.4 million in 2020 to $1.1 million in 2021, resulting in an overall gross margin of $0.7 million (2020: $0.2 million).

Administrative expenses (“G&A”) remained contained with a slight decrease in 2021, note 7.

Impairment of oil and gas assets totalled $2.5 million representing the recognition of impairment of the Bitlyanska license. Impairment of other assets includes impairment of other inventories of $1.0 million (2020:nil).

The Group recognized interest on the Proger loan of $1.2 million. Refer to note 26 for details.

Net finance income of $25 thousand (2020: $40 thousand) reflects interest income on cash deposits used for trading of $68 thousand (2020: $25 thousand); ii) investment revenue of $8 thousand (2020: $37 thousand); less iii) Unwinding of discount on decommissioning provision of $23 thousand (2020: $22 thousand); iv) $28 thousand of finance expenses recognized on lease (2020: nil).

Balance sheet

Intangible Exploration and Evaluation (“E&E”) assets have been impaired to $nil (2020: $2.4 million) due to the legal dispute on the Bitlyanska license award and the uncertainty on the legal timeframe due to the ongoing war. The Property Plant & Equipment (PP&E) balance was $9.6 million at 31 December 2021 (2020: $9.9 million). It primarily represents the carrying value of the assets invested and engaged in Blazhiv license. The E&E and PP&E are held by Ukrainian subsidiaries with functional currency Ukrainian Hryvna. Ukrainian Hryvna improved its value as at 31 December 2021 compared to 31 December 2020 generating a movement in the E&E and PP&E value presented in the US Dollar.

Trade and other receivables of $0.3 million (2019: $1.6 million) include $0.1 million of recoverable VAT (2020: $1.5 million), which is expected to be recovered through production activities, and $0.2 million (2020: $0.1 million) of other receivables.

Inventories reduced from $2.2 million to $0.2 million principally due to the sale of gas volumes held in storage at 31 December 2020 and additional provision recognized on other inventories.

The Proger loan was held at amortised cost at $16.7 million (2020: $16.8 million). The loan has been reclassified as current based on the maturity in 2021 and anticipated receipt. Refer to the Chief Executives Report for further details together with note 4(d) and 26.

The $1.5 million of trade and other payables as of 31 December 2021 (2020: $1.4 million) consist of $0.6 million (2020: $0.5 million) of accrued expenses and $0.9 million (2019: $0.9 million) of other creditors.

Provisions include $0.3 million (2020: $0.2 million) of long-term provision for decommissioning costs which represents the present value of costs that are expected to be incurred in 2039 for producing assets, when the licenses will expire.

Net cash increased to $15.0 million at 31 December 2021 compared to $13.3 million at 31 December 2020. This was mostly due to the sale of 7.6 mcm of natural gas which has been at stock at the beginning of the year and supported by production result for the year 2021.

Cash flow statement

The Consolidated Cash Flow Statement on page 81 shows operating cash outflow before movements in working capital of $0.4 million (2020: outflow of $2.5 million), which represents mostly cash used by the E&P and Trading business segment net of corporate expenses.

Positive operating cash flow from movements in working capital is represented mostly by movements in inventory and VAT recoverable positions due to the sales of natural gas and oil during 2021.

Cash outflow from investing activities represents investments in Blazhiv field during the year 2021.

Related party transactions

Related party transactions are set out in note 28 to the Consolidated Financial Statements.

Treasury

The Group continually monitors its exposure to currency risk. It maintains a portfolio of cash mainly in US dollars (“USD”) and Euro held primarily in the UK. Production revenues from the sale of hydrocarbons are received in the local currency in Ukraine, however, the hydrocarbon prices are linked to the USD denominated gas and oil prices.

Risks and uncertainties

There are several potential risks and uncertainties that could have a material impact on the Group’s long-term performance and could cause the results to differ materially from expected and historical results. Executive management review the potential risks and then classify them as having a high impact, above $5 million, medium impact, above $1 million but below $5 million, and low impact, below $1 million. They also assess the likelihood of these risks occurring. Risk mitigation factors are reviewed and documented based on the level and likelihood of occurrence. The Audit Committee reviews the risk register and monitors the implementation of risk mitigation procedures via Executive management, who are carrying out a robust assessment of the principal risks facing the Group, including those potentially threatening its business model, future performance, solvency and liquidity.

The Group has analysed the following categories as key risks:

Statement of Reserves and Resources

In 2021, the company conducted routine rig-less production support activities at the Blazhiv-1, Blazhiv-3 and Blazhiv-Monastyrets-3 and Blazhiv-10 wells to maintain sustainable production using sucker rod pumping systems.

Summary ofReserves1

at 31 December 2021

1 The study was conducted in 2016 by Brend Vik.

2 The Bitlyanska license expired on 23 December 2019 and its renewal is in the ***process*** of litigation.

In addition to the tabled reserves, Cadogan has 0.6 million boe of contingent resources associated with the Blazhiv licence.

Corporate Responsibility

Under Section 414C of the Companies Act 2006 (the “Act”), the Board is required to disclose information about environmental matters, employees, human rights and community issues, including information about any policies it has in relation to these matters and the effectiveness of these policies.

Being sustainable in our activities means conducting our business with respect for the environment and for the communities hosting us, with the aim of increasing the benefit and value to our stakeholders. We recognize that this is a key element to be competitive and to maintain our license to operate.

The Board recognizes that the protection of the health and safety of its employees, the communities and the environment in which it operates is not just an obligation but is part of the personal ethics and beliefs of management and staff. These are the key drivers for a sustainable development of the Company’s activity. Cadogan Petroleum, its management and employees are committed to continuously improve Health, Safety and Environment (HSE) performance; follow our Code of Ethics and apply, in conducting our operations, internationally recognized best practices and standards.

Our activities are carried out in accordance with a policy manual, endorsed by the Board, which has been disseminated to all staff. The manual includes a Working with Integrity policy and policies on business conduct and ethics, anti-bribery, the acceptance of gifts and hospitality and whistleblowing. Such policies are subject to regular review.

In August 2018, Cadogan Ukraine LLC obtained ISO 14001 and ISO 45001 certifications for the following scope: “Supervision, coordination, management support, control in the field of oil and gas on-shore exploration and production.” This provides formal recognition of the ***process*** embedded in the Company and demonstrates the commitment and efforts delivered by our employees and management. It is considered a baseline to continue with the efforts to improve the way we conduct the business.

The Board believes that health and safety procedures and training across the Group should be in line with best practice in the oil and gas sector. Accordingly, it has set up a committee to review and agree on the health and safety initiatives for the Company and to report back to the Board on the progress of these initiatives. Management regularly reports to the Board on HSE and key safety and environmental issues, which are discussed at the Executive Management level. The report of the Health, Safety and Environment Committee can be found on page 40 to 41.

The General Director of Cadogan Ukraine is the acting Chairman of the HSE Committee and is supported in his role by Cadogan Ukraine’s HSE Manager. In accordance with the ISO 14001 and ISO 45001, his role is to ensure that the Group continuously develops suitable procedures, that operational management and their teams incorporate them into daily operations and that the HSE management has the necessary level of autonomy and authority to discharge their duties effectively and efficiently.

Health, safety and environment

2021 was still challenging with COVID-19 pandemic. Cadogan applied special ***measures*** to mitigate the risk of personnel infection with the virus. All personnel have been instructed on the situation, remote access to the working environment has been settled for all office personnel to restrict contacts to minimum, field personnel are provided with transfer to the oil field, all personnel are provided with respirators and antiseptics, temperature control is performed before the start of each working day for all personnel who does not work remotely. Besides, the Company is putting maximum efforts to ensure reasonable vaccination level of the staff

The HSE management monitors health status of the personnel daily. Up to now, 15 employees of the company have been infected by Covid-19 during 2021. All of them have fully recovered.

The Group has implemented an integrated HSE management system in accordance with the ISO requirements. The system aims to ensure that a safe and environmentally friendly/protection culture is embedded in the organization with a focus on the local community involvement. The HSE management system ensures that both Ukrainian and international standards are met, with the Ukrainian HSE legislation requirements taken as an absolute minimum. All the Group’s local operating companies actively participate in the ***process***. ISO 14001 and ISO 45001 certification were re-validated by the respective authority in July 2020.

A proactive approach based on a detailed induction ***process*** and near miss reporting has been in place throughout 2021 to prevent incidents. Staff training on HSE matters and discussions on near miss reporting are recognized as the key factors to continuously improve. In-house training is provided to help staff meet international standards and follow best practice. The ***process*** enacted by the certification, enhances attention to training on risk assessments, emergency response, incident prevention, reporting and investigation, as well as emergency drills regularly run-on operations’ sites and offices. This ***process*** is essential to ensure that international best practices and standards are maintained to comply with, or exceed, those required by Ukrainian legislation, and to promote continuous improvement.

The Board monitors the main Key Performance Indicators (lost time incidents, mileage driven, training received, CO2 emissions) as business parameters. The Board has benchmarked safety performance against the HSE performance index ***measured*** and published annually by the International Association of Oil and Gas Producers. In 2021, the Group recorded over 155,000 man-hours worked with no incidents and over 1,400,000 hours have been worked since the last injury in February 2016.

During 2021 the Group continued to monitor its greenhouse gas emissions and collect statistical data relating to the consumption of electricity, industrial water and fuel consumption by cars, plants and other work sites, recording a continuous improvement in the efficient use of resources.

Employees

Wellness and professional development are part of the Company’s sustainable development policy and wherever possible, local staff are recruited. The Group’s activity in Ukraine is entirely managed by local staff. Qualified local contractors are engaged to supplement the required expertise when and to the extent it is necessary.

Procedures are in place to ensure that recruitment is undertaken on an open, transparent and fair basis with no discrimination against applicants. Each operating company has its own Human Resources function to ensure that the Group’s employment policies are properly implemented and followed. The Group’s Human Resources policy covers key areas such as equal opportunities, wages, overtime and non-discrimination. As required by Ukrainian legislation, Collective Agreements are in place with the Group’s Ukrainian subsidiary companies, which outline agreed level of staff benefits and other safeguards for employees.

All staff are aware of the Group’s grievance procedures. All employees have access to health insurance provided by the Group to ensure that all employees have access to adequate medical facilities.

Each employee’s training needs are assessed on an individual basis to ensure that their skills are adequate to support the Group’s operations, and to help them to develop.

Diversity

The Board recognizes the benefits and importance of diversity (gender, ethnic, age, sex, disability, educational and professional backgrounds, etc.) and strives to apply diversity values across the business.  We endeavour to employ a skilled workforce that reflects the demographic of the jurisdictions in which we operate. The board will review the existing policies and intends to develop a diversity policy.

Gender diversity

The Board of Directors of the Company comprised of five Directors as of 31 December 2021. The appointment of any new Director is made based on merit. See pages 23 and 24 for more information on the composition of the Board.

As at 31 December 2021, the Company comprised a total of 78 persons, as follows:

Human rights

Cadogan’s commitment to the fundamental principles of human rights is embedded in our HSE policies and throughout our business ***processes***. We promote the core principles of human rights pronounced in the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights and our support for these principles is embedded throughout our Code of Conduct, our employment practices and our relationships with suppliers and partners wherever we do business.

Community

The Group’s activities are carried out in rural areas of Ukraine and the Board is aware of its responsibilities to the local communities in which it operates and from which some of the employees are recruited. In our operational sites, management work with the local councils to ensure that the impact of operations is as low as practicable by putting in place ***measures*** to mitigate their effect. Projects undertaken include improvement of the road infrastructure in the area, which provides easier access to the operational sites while at the same time minimizing inconvenience for the local population and allowing improved road communications in the local communities, especially during winter season or harsh weather conditions. Specific community activities are undertaken for the direct benefit of local communities. All activities are followed and supervised by managers who are given specific responsibility for such tasks.

The Group’s companies in the Ukraine see themselves as part of the community and are involved and offer practical help and support. All these activities are run in accordance with our “Working with Integrity” policy and procedures. The recruitment of local staff generates additional income for areas that otherwise are predominantly dependent on the ***agricultural*** sector.

The enactment in 2018 of new legislation which introduces Environmental Impact Assessment studies and public hearings as part of the license’s award/renewal ***processes*** was anticipated effectively by the Group. The Group is complying with these requirements, building on the recognized competence of its people and advisors as well as on the good communication and relations established with local communities.

Cadogan is committed to the territory and the communities where it operates and has fully financed social programs commitment for 2021 as per signed Memorandum between the Company, Lviv Regional Administration and local communities in 2019

In 2020, the Group’s operating locations were suffering from levels of COVID-19 infection and normal working patterns have been disrupted. The national and local governments in all regions are recommending and implementing restrictions to manage the situation. The Group is following all the recommendations and provides comprehensive ***measures*** inside the Group to restrict COVID-19 infection and spread.

As part of its commitment to the local communities in which it operates, the Group provided sanitary material to local medical institution to sustain the efforts to contain the Covid-19 pandemic on the territory.

Approval

The Strategic Report was approved by the Board of Directors on 28 April 2022 and signed by order of the Board by:

Ben Harber

Company Secretary

28 April 2022

Board of Directors

Current directors

Michel Mee—s, 69, Belgian

Non-Independent non-executive Chairman

Mr Mee—s was appointed as a Non-executive Director on 23 June 2014. Mr. Mee—s was former Chairman of the Board of Directors of Theolia, an independent international developer and operator of wind energy projects. Since 2007, he has been a director within the Alcogroup SA Company (which gathers the ethanol production units of the Group), as well as within some of its subsidiaries. Before joining Alcogroup, Mr Mee—s carved out a career in the financial sector, at Chase Manhattan Bank in Brussels and London, then at Security Pacific Bank in London, then finally at Electra Kingsway Private Equity in London.

Mr Meeus is currently Chairman of the Remuneration and Nomination Committees.

Fady Khallouf, 61, French

Chief Executive Officer

Fady Khallouf was appointed as Director and CEO on 15 November 2019. He has a 35-year experience in the energy, the environment, the engineering and the infrastructure sectors. He has previously held the position of CEO and CFO of FUTUREN (Renewable Energy, listed on Euronext Paris) where he achieved the restructuring and the turnaround of the group. Prior to that, he was the CEO of Tecnimont group (Petrochemicals and Oil & Gas), the Vice-President Strategy and Development of EDISON group (Electricity and Gas, E&P), the Head of M&A of EDF group (Energy). Fady Khallouf had beforehand held various management positions at ENGIE (Energy), Suez (Environmental Services), and DUMEZ (Construction and Infrastructures).

Lilia Jolibois, 57, American

Independent non-Executive Director

Lilia Jolibois was appointed as Director on 15 November 2019. She is currently a member of three Boards: Cadogan Petroleum Plc, INSEAD Foundation, and CARA (UK and Wales). She is also a Venture and CEO Advisor at Loyal Venture Capital, a global VC fund. Her career spans Merrill Lynch Investment Banking, Sara Lee, and Lafarge in the USA and Europe. At Lafarge Group, Ms. Jolibois served in numerous positions in finance, strategy, business development, CEO and Chair of the Board for Lafarge Cement and Gypsum in Ukraine, and SVP and Chief Marketing-Sales-Supply Chain Officer for Lafarge Aggregates, Asphalt & Paving.

Lilia is currently Chairman of the Company’s Audit Committee and a member of the Remuneration and Nomination Committees.

Jacques Mahaux, 70, Belgian

Non-Executive Director

Jacques Mahaux was appointed as Director on 15 November 2019. He is currently the partner and manager of EKHMA sarl and its permanent representative in the Boards of Directors of OREA CAPITAL SA and AUREUS ARS ET SCIENTIA asbl. He has held various executive and directorship positions in Group Crédit Agricole in Luxembourg, CA Indosuez, Indosuez Bank and various Luxembourg and Swiss Holding companies active in industrial sectors.  Previously he acted as an Attorney at Law at the Brussels Bar. He is a former Supervisory Board member and President of the Audit Committee of ETAM SCA.

Mr Mahaux is currently a member of the Audit, Remuneration and Nomination Committees.

Gilbert Lehmann, 76, French

Senior Independent Non-Executive Director

Mr Lehmann was appointed to the Board on 18 November 2011. He was an adviser to the Executive Board of Areva, the French nuclear energy business, having previously been its Deputy Chief Executive Officer responsible for finance. He is also a former Chief Financial Officer and deputy CEO of Framatone, the predecessor to Areva, and was CFO of Sogee, part of the Rothschild Group. Mr Lehmann was also Deputy Chairman and Chairman of the Audit Committee of Eramet, the French minerals and alloy business. He is Deputy Chairman and Audit Committee Chairman of Assystem SA, the French engineering and innovation consultancy. He was Chairman of ST Microelectronics NV, one of the world’s largest semiconductor companies, from 2007 to 2009, and stepped down as Vice Chairman in 2011.

Mr Lehmann is currently a member of the Remuneration and Nomination Committees.

Report of the Directors

Directors

The Directors in office during the year and to the date of this report are as shown below:

Directors’ re-election

The Board has decided previously that all Directors are subject to annual election by shareholders, in accordance with industry best practice and as such, all Directors will be seeking re-election at the Annual General Meeting to be held on 24 June 2022.

The biographies of the Directors in office at the date of this report are shown on pages 23 and 24.

Appointment and replacement of Directors

The Company’s Articles of Association allow the Board to appoint any individual willing to act as a Director either to fill a vacancy or act as an additional Director. The appointee may hold office only until the next annual general meeting of the Company whereupon his or her election will be proposed to the shareholders.

The Company’s Articles of Association prescribe that there shall be no fewer than three Directors and no more than fifteen.

Directors’ interests in shares

The beneficial interests of the Directors in office at 31 December 2021 and their connected persons in the Ordinary shares of the Company at 31 December 2021 are set out below.

Conflicts of Interest

The Company has procedures in place for managing conflicts of interest. Should a director become aware that they, or any of their connected parties, have an interest in an existing or proposed transaction with the Company, its subsidiaries or any matters to be discussed at meetings, they are required to formally notify the Board in writing or at the next Board meeting. In accordance with the Companies Act 2006 and the Company’s Articles of Association, the Board may authorize any potential or actual conflict of interest that may otherwise involve any of the directors breaching his or her duty to avoid conflicts of interest. All potential and actual conflicts approved by the Board are recorded in register of conflicts, which is reviewed by the Board at each Board meeting.

Directors’ indemnities and insurance

The Company’s Articles of Association provide that, subject to the provisions of the Companies Act 2006, all Directors of the Company are indemnified by the Company in respect of any liability incurred in connection with their duties, powers or office. Save for such indemnity provisions, there are no qualifying third-party indemnity provisions. In addition, the Company continues to maintain Directors’ and Officers’ Liability Insurance for all Directors who served during the year.

Powers of Directors

The Directors are responsible for the management of the business and may exercise all powers of the Company subject to UK legislation and the Company’s Articles of Association, which includes powers to issue or buy back the Company’s shares given by special resolution. The authorities to issue and buy back shares, granted at the 2021 Annual General Meeting, remains unused.

Dividends

The Directors do not recommend payment of a dividend for the year ended 31 December 2021 (2020: nil).

Principal activity and status

The Company is registered as a public limited company (registration number 05718406) in England and Wales. The principal activity and business of the Company is oil and gas exploration, development and production.

Subsequent events

In February 2022, Usenco Nadra received information from a public register that its claim was rejected by the Court of first instance. Despite the restrictions imposed by the martial law in Ukraine, Usenco Nadra exercised its right for appeal. As a result and given the present uncertainty on the ***process*** and decision timing due to the ongoing war, the Group recognized impairment on the full balance sheet value of E&E assets in an amount of $2.5 million.

After several months of military confrontation, Russia invaded Ukraine on 24 February 2022. The war is increasingly affecting the economy of Europe and exacerbating ongoing economic challenges, including issues such as rising inflation and supply-chain disruption. The degree to which the Group will be affected by them largely depends on the nature and duration of uncertain and unpredictable events, such as further military action and reactions to ongoing developments by global financial markets. At the beginning of March 2022, the Company stopped its production operations for 3 weeks and was able to resume them after having secured its employees safety, the transactions with its customers and deliveries. Starting the end of March 2022 and till the date of the report the Group is operating in due course, production operates with a full capacity, product shipments are not interrupted.

Structure of share capital

The authorized share capital of the Company is currently £30,000,000 divided into 1,000,000,000 Ordinary shares of 3 pence each. The number of shares in issue as at 31 December 2021 was 244,128,487 Ordinary shares (each with one vote) with a nominal value of £7,323,854.61. The total number of voting rights in the Company is 244,128,421. The Companies (Acquisition of Own Shares) (Treasury Shares) Regulations 2003 allow companies to hold shares in treasury rather than cancel them. Following the consolidation of the issued capital of the Company on 10 June 2008, there were 66 residual Ordinary shares, which were transferred to treasury. No dividends may be paid on shares whilst held in treasury and no voting rights attached to shares held in treasury.

Rights and obligations of Ordinary shares

In accordance with applicable laws and the Company’s Articles of Association, holders of Ordinary shares are entitled to:

receive shareholder documentation including the notice of any general meeting;attend, speak and exercise voting rights at general meetings, either in person or by proxy; anda dividend where declared and paid out of profits available for such purposes. On a return of capital on a winding up, holders of Ordinary shares are entitled to participate in such a return.

Exercise of rights of shares in employee share schemes

None of the share awards under the Company’s incentive arrangements are held in trust on behalf of the beneficiaries.

Agreements between shareholders

The Board is unaware of any agreements between shareholders, which may restrict the transfer of securities or voting rights.

Restrictions on voting deadlines

The notice of any general meeting of the Company shall specify the deadline for exercising voting rights and appointing a proxy or proxies to vote at a general meeting. To accurately reflect the views of shareholders, where applicable it is the Company’s policy at present to take all resolutions at any general meeting on a poll. Following the meeting, the results of the poll are released to the market via a regulatory news service and published on the Company’s website.

Substantial shareholdings

As at 31 December 2021 and 21 April 2022, being the last practicable date, the Company had been notified of the following interests in voting rights attached to the Company’s shares:

Amendment of the Company’s Articles of Association

The Company’s Articles of Association may only be amended by way of a special resolution of shareholders.

Disclosure of information to auditor

As required by section 418 of the Companies Act 2006, each of the Directors as at 28 April 2022 confirms that:

(a) so far as the Director is aware, there is no relevant audit information of which the Company’s auditor is unaware; and

(b) the Director has taken all the steps that he ought to have taken as a Director in order to make himself aware of any relevant audit information and to establish that the Company’s auditor is aware of that information.

Going concern

The Group’s business activities, together with the factors likely to affect its future development, performance and position, are set out on pages 14 to 17.

Having considered the Company’s financial position and its principal risks and uncertainties, including uncertainties regarding the war in Ukraine and the assessment of potential risks associated with Covid-19 including a) restrictions applied by governments, illness amongst our workforce and disruption to supply chain and sales channels; and b) market volatility in respect of commodity prices associated with Covid-19 in addition to geopolitical factors, the Directors have a reasonable expectation that the Company and the Group have adequate resources to continue in operational existence for the foreseeable future. Accordingly, they continue to adopt the going concern basis in preparing the Consolidated and Company Financial Statements.

Reporting year

The reporting year coincides with the Company's fiscal year, which is 1 January 2021 to 31 December 2021.

Financial risk management objectives and policies

The Company’s financial risk management objectives and policies including its policy for managing its exposure of the Company to price risk, credit risk, liquidity risk and cash flow risk.

Management co-ordinates access to domestic and international financial markets and monitors and manages the financial risks relating to the operations of the Group in Ukraine through internal risks reports, which analyse exposures by degree and magnitude of risks. These risks include commodity price risks, foreign currency risk, credit risk, liquidity risk and cash flow interest rate risk. The Group does not enter into or trade financial instruments, including derivative financial instruments, for speculative purposes.

Outlook

Future developments in the business of the Company are presented on page 9.

Change of control – significant agreements

The Company has no significant agreements containing provisions, which allow a counterparty to alter and amend the terms of the agreement following a change of control of the Company.

Should a change in control occur then certain Executive directors are entitled to a payment of salary and benefits for a period of six months.

Streamlined energy and carbon reporting

This section contains information on greenhouse gas (“GHG”) emissions required by the Companies Act 2006 (Strategic Report and Directors' Report).

 Methodology

The principal methodology used to calculate the emissions is drawn from the ‘Environmental Reporting Guidelines: including mandatory greenhouse gas emissions reporting guidance (June 2013)’, issued by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (“DEFRA”) and DEFRA GHG conversion factors for company reporting were utilised to calculate the CO2 equivalent of emissions from various sources (2018 update). Also, the used methodology was also updated based on methods proposed by DNV GL and in of GHG emissions Inventory referring to the following guidelines and international standards.

The Company has reported on all the emission sources required under the Regulations.

The Company does not have responsibility for any emission sources that are not included in its consolidated statement.

Consolidation approach and organisation boundary

An operational control approach was used to define the Company's organisational boundary and responsibility for GHG emissions. All material emission sources within this boundary have been reported upon, in line with the requirements of the Regulations.

Scope of reported emissions

Emissions data from the sources within Scope 1 and Scope 2 of the Company's operational boundaries is detailed below. This includes direct emissions from assets that fall within the Company’s organisational boundaries (Scope 1 emissions), as well as indirect emissions from energy consumption, such as purchased electricity and heating (Scope 2 emissions).

Scope 1 emissions in 2021 increased compared to the previous year (13,063 tons in 2021 vs 7,720 tons in 2020). This was caused by the increase of production in 2021 and increase of the gas factor in the produced oil.

Conversely, Scope 2 emissions decreased in 2021 (137 tons in 2021 vs 143 tons in 2020), as a result of the ***processes*** started in 2016 to improve the efficiency of the structure, logistic and facilities. Total emissions in 2021 were 13,200 tons versus the 7,863 tons of 2020.

Intensity ratio

In order to express the GHG emissions in relation to a quantifiable factor associated with the Company's activities, wellhead production of crude oil and natural gas has been chosen as the normalisation factor for calculating the intensity ratio. This will allow comparison of the Company’s performance over time, as well as with other companies in the Company’s peer group.

The intensity ratio for E&P operations (same reporting perimeter) increased to 103,4 tons CO2e/Kboe in 2021 vs 73,9 tons CO2e/Kboe in 2020.

Total greenhouse gas emissions data for the year from 1 January to 31 December

Energy consumption

The Company started in 2020 to monitor energy consumption in KwH.

Energy consumption in the UK is immaterial.

2022 Annual General Meeting

The 2022 Annual General Meeting (“AGM”) of the Company provides an opportunity to communicate with shareholders and the Board welcomes their participation. Board members constantly strive to engage with shareholders on strategy, governance and a number of other issues.

The Board looks forward to welcoming shareholders to the AGM.  The AGM notice will be issued to shareholders well in advance of the meeting with notes to provide an explanation of all resolutions to be put to the AGM. In addition, shareholder information will be enclosed as usual with the AGM notice to facilitate voting and feedback in the usual way.

The Chairman of the Board and the members of its committees will be available to answer shareholder questions at the AGM. All relevant shareholder information including the annual report for 2021 and any other announcements will be published on our website –[*http://www.cadoganpetroleum.com*](http://www.cadoganpetroleum.com).

This Report of Directors comprising pages 25 to 30 has been approved by the Board and signed by the order of the Board by:

Ben Harber

Company Secretary

28 April 2022

Corporate Governance Statement

This Corporate Governance Statement forms part of the Directors’ Report

As a Company listed on the standard segment of the London Stock Exchange it is not required to apply a specific corporate governance code and, given its size, has elected not to do so. However, the Board of the Company is committed to the highest standards of corporate governance and believe that the 2018 UK Corporate Governance Code (“the Code”) issued by the Financial Reporting Council (“FRC”) and believes that the Code provides a suitable benchmark for the Company’s corporate governance framework. This Statement outlines how Cadogan Petroleum plc (“Cadogan” or the “Company”) has applied the relevant principles of the Code and complied with its provisions.

This Statement outlines how Cadogan Petroleum plc (“Cadogan” or the “Company”) has applied the relevant principles of the Code and complied with its provisions.

During the year under review, the Company complied with all the provisions of the Code, other than the exceptions noted below or elsewhere in this statement:

Provision 5 (Workforce Engagement): Given the size of the business, the Board does not consider it appropriate to adopt the suggested methods outlined within the UK Corporate Governance Code 2018 to engage with its employees given the size of the Company. Employee engagement continues to be undertaken by senior management and any issues are escalated to the Board through the Chief Executive Officer. The Board believes that the arrangements in place are effective but will continue to keep this under review.Provision 9 (regarding the independence criteria of the Chair on appointment): Under the 2018 Corporate Governance Code, the Company’s Chair, Mr Michel Mee—s, is not considered to be independent given the size of his shareholding in the Company. Despite this, the Board considers Mr Mee—s to be independent in character, mindset and judgement.Provision 21 (Board Evaluation): Given the size of the Board it was felt that a board evaluation would not provide added value however the Board will continue to assess this provision periodically. Provision 24 (Audit Committee Composition): Given the size of the Board, the Audit Committee does not totally consist of independent non-executive directors. Ms Lilia Jolibois, Independent non-executive director, chairs the Audit Committee whilst Mr Jacques Mahaux, non-executive director, is a member of the Audit Committee.Provision 32 (Remuneration Committee Composition): Given the size of the Board, the Audit Committee does not totally consist of independent non-executive directors. The Remuneration Committee consists of Mr Michel Mee—s, Ms. Lilia Jolibois, Mr Jacques Mahaux and Mr Gilbert Lehmann.

Board Leadership and Company Purpose

The Board provides leadership and oversight, and its role is to ensure the long-term success of the Company by implementing the Company’s strategy and business plan, overseeing its affairs, and providing constructive challenge to management as they do this. In addition to this, the Board oversees financial matters, governance, internal controls and risk management. The purpose of the Board is to:

monitor Group activities to see that sustainable value is being created;evaluate business strategies and monitor their implementation;monitor and review the performance of management;provide accountability to shareholders through appropriate reporting and regulatory compliance;understand and ensure the management of operational business and financial risks to which the Group is exposed; andensure that the financial controls and systems of risk management are robust and defensible

The Board comprises a Non-Independent non-executive Chairman, Chief Executive Officer, two Independent Non-Executive Directors and a non-executive Director. The Board has appointed Mr Lehmann as the Senior Independent Director.

The biographical details for each of the Directors and their membership of Committees are incorporated into this report by reference and appear on pages 23 to 24.

The formal schedule of matters reserved for the Board’s decision is available on the Company’s website.

The Board recognises the importance of building strong relationships with stakeholders and understanding their views in order to help the Company deliver its strategy and promote the development of the business over the long-term. The Board is committed to having effective engagement with its stakeholders. Our section 172 statement can be found on pages 35 to 36 which summarises the Board’s engagement with the Company’s main stakeholders and some examples of how their views have been taken into account in the Board’s decision-making.

The Company seeks to ensure that it always acts lawfully, ethically and with integrity. The Company has in place the following policies which the Board reviews periodically:

Code of Business Conduct and EthicsAnti-Bribery PolicyShare Dealing CodeDisclosure PolicyHealth, Safety and Environmental policies.

The Company has procedures in place for managing conflicts of interest. Should a director become aware that they, or any of their connected parties, have an interest in an existing or proposed transaction with the Company, its subsidiaries or any matters to be discussed at meetings, they are required to formally notify the Board in writing or at the next Board meeting. In accordance with the Companies Act 2006 and the Company’s Articles of Association, the Board may authorize any potential or actual conflict of interest that may otherwise involve any of the directors breaching his or her duty to avoid conflicts of interest. All potential and actual conflicts approved by the Board are recorded in register of conflicts, which is reviewed by the Board at each Board meeting.

Directors’ declarations of interests is a regular Board agenda item. A register of directors’ interests (including any actual or potential conflicts of interest) is maintained and reviewed regularly to ensure all details are kept up to date. Authorisation is sought prior to a director taking on a new appointment or if any new conflicts or potential conflicts arise. New Directors are required to declare any conflicts, or potential conflicts, of interest to the Board at the first Board meeting after his or her appointment. The Board believes that the procedures established to deal with conflicts of interest are operating effectively.

Division of Responsibilities

The Directors possess a wide range of skills, knowledge and experience relevant to the strategy of the Company, including financial, legal, governance, regulatory and industry experience as well as the ability to provide constructive challenge to the views and actions of executive management in meeting agreed strategic goals and objectives.

The roles and responsibilities of the Chairman and Chief Executive Officer are separate with a clear and formal division of each individual’s responsibilities, which has been agreed and documented by the Board.

The Non-Executive Directors bring an independent view to the Board’s discussions and the development of its strategy. Their range of experience ensures that management’s performance in achieving the business goals are challenged appropriately. Two Non-Executive Directors, Ms Lilia Jolibois, and Mr Gilbert Lehmann are considered by the Board to be independent. Mr Gilbert Lehmann, Senior Independent non-executive Director, has served on the Board for longer than 9 years since his appointment, the board is of the view that he retains his independent judgement and continues to make a valuable contribution to the board.

Mr Michel Mee—s, who is a significant shareholder and Mr Jacques Mahaux are not considered independent as defined within the UK Corporate Governance Code 2018, however the Board believes they are independent in character and judgement and free from relationships or circumstances that could affect their judgement.

The Board has access to the advice of the company secretary.

Composition, Succession and Evaluation

The Company has established a nomination committee which leads the ***process*** for Board appointments by identifying and nominating candidates for the approval of the Board to fill Board vacancies and making recommendations to the Board on Board’s composition and balance. The Company’s Nomination Committee Report can be found on pages 42 to 43.

Under the Company’s Articles of Association, all Directors must seek re-election by members at least once every three years. However, the Board has agreed that all Directors will be subject to annual election by shareholders in line with Corporate Governance best practice. Accordingly, all members of the Board will be standing for re-election at the 2022 Annual General Meeting due to be held on 24 June 2022.

All Directors continue to be effective and have sufficient time available to perform their duties. The letters of appointment for the Non-Executive Directors are available for review at the Registered Office and prior to the Annual General Meeting. Each of the Non-Executive Directors independently ensures that they update their skills and knowledge sufficiently to enable them to fulfil their duties appropriately.

The Chairman, in conjunction with the Company Secretary, plans the programme for the Board during the year. While no formal structured continuing professional development program has been established for the non-executive Directors, every effort is made to ensure that they are fully briefed before Board meetings on the Company’s business. The agenda for Board and Committee meetings are considered by the relevant Chairman and issued with supporting papers during the week preceding the meeting. For each Board meeting, the Directors receive a Board pack including management accounts, briefing papers on commercial and operational matters and major capital projects including acquisitions. The Board also receives briefings from key management on specific issues.

Audit, Risk and Internal Control

The Board has delegated certain responsibilities to its committees including its audit committee. The Company’s Audit Committee Report can be found on pages 37 to 39.

The role of the Audit Committee is to monitor the integrity of the Company’s financial reporting, to review the Company’s internal control and risk management systems and to oversee the relationship with the Group’s external auditors. The Audit Committee focuses particularly on compliance with legal requirements, accounting standards and the rules of the Financial Services Authority. The Audit Committee will meet at least three times a year with further meetings that are determined by the committee. Any member of the committee or the external auditors may request any additional meetings they consider necessary.

The Directors are responsible for the Group’s system of internal control and for maintaining and reviewing its effectiveness. The Group’s systems and controls are designed to safeguard the Group’s assets and to ensure the reliability of information used both within the business and for publication. The Board has delegated responsibility for the monitoring and review of the Group’s internal controls to the Audit Committee.

Systems are designed to manage, rather than eliminate the risk of failure to achieve business objectives and can provide only reasonable, and not absolute assurance against material misstatement or loss.

The key features of the Group’s internal control and risk management systems that ensure the accuracy and reliability of financial reporting include clearly defined lines of accountability and delegation of authority, policies and procedures that cover financial planning and reporting, preparing consolidated financial statements, capital expenditure, project governance and information security.

The key features of the internal control systems, which operated during 2021 and up to the date of signing the Financial Statements are documented in the Group’s Corporate Governance Policy Manual and Finance Manual. These manuals and policies have been circulated and adopted throughout the Group throughout the period.

Day-to-day responsibility for the management and operations of the business has been delegated to the Chief Executive Officer and senior management. Certain specific administrative functions are controlled centrally. Taxation and treasury functions report to the Group Director of Finance who reports directly to the Chief Executive Officer.

The legal function for Ukraine’s related assets and activities is managed by the General Counsel, who reports to the General Director of Cadogan Ukraine. The Health, Safety and Environment functions report to the Chairman of the HSE Committee, the HSE Committee Report can be found on pages 40 to 41. The Group does not have an internal audit function. Due to the small scale of the Group’s operations at present, the Board does not feel that it is appropriate or economically viable to have an internal audit function in place, however this will be kept under review by the Audit Committee on an annual basis.

The Board has reviewed internal controls and risk management ***processes***, in place from the start of the year to the date of approval of this report. During the course of its review the Board did not identify nor were advised of any failings or weaknesses which it has deemed to be significant.

A summary of the principal risks facing the Company and the mitigating actions in place are contained on pages 14 to 17 of the annual report.

The Company’s going concern is contained on page 28 of the annual report.

Further information on the work undertaken by the Committee during the year can be found on pages 36 to 37 of the annual report.

Remuneration

The Board has established a Remuneration Committee and the Company’s Remuneration Committee Report can be found on pages 45 to 66 of the annual report.

The role of the Remuneration Committee is to determine and agree with the Board the broad policy for the remuneration of executives and Senior Managers as designated, as well as for setting the specific remuneration packages, including pension rights and any compensation payments of all executive Directors and the Chairman. The Company’s remuneration policies and practices are designed to support its long-term strategy and promote the long-term sustainable success of the Company.

Attendance at Meetings

Six Board meetings took place during 2021. The attendance of those Directors in place at the year end at Board and Committee meetings during the year was as follows:

Responsibilities and membership of Board Committees

The Board has agreed written terms of reference for the Nomination Committee, Remuneration Committee, Audit Committee and HSE committee. The terms of reference for the Board Committees are published on the Company’s website,[*http://www.cadoganpetroleum.com*](http://www.cadoganpetroleum.com), and are also available from the Company Secretary at the Registered Office. A review of the Committees including their membership and activities of all Board Committees is provided on pages 37 to 44.

Relations with shareholders

The Chairman and Executive Directors of the Company have a regular dialogue with analysts and substantial shareholders. The outcome of these discussions is reported to the Board at quarterly meetings and discussed in detail. Mr Lehmann, as the Senior Independent Director, is available to meet with shareholders who have questions that they feel would be inappropriate to raise via the Chairman or Executive Directors.

The Annual General Meeting is used as an opportunity to communicate with all shareholders. In addition, financial results are posted on the Company’s website,[*http://www.cadoganpetroleum.com*](http://www.cadoganpetroleum.com), as soon as they are announced. The Notice of the Annual General Meeting is also contained on the Company’s website,[*http://www.cadoganpetroleum.com*](http://www.cadoganpetroleum.com). It is intended that the Chairmen of the Nomination, Audit and Remuneration Committees will be present at the Annual General Meeting. The results of all resolutions will be published on the Company’s website,[*http://www.cadoganpetroleum.com*](http://www.cadoganpetroleum.com).

Directors’ section 172 statement

The disclosure describes how the Directors have regard to the matters set out in section 172(1)(a) to (f) and forms the Directors’ statement required under section 414CZA of The Companies Act 2006. This new reporting requirement is made in accordance with the new corporate governance requirements identified in The Companies (Miscellaneous Reporting) Regulations 2018.

The matters set out in section 172(1) (a) to (f) are that a Director must act in the way they consider, in good faith, would be most likely to promote the success of the Company for the benefit of its members as a whole, and in doing so have regard (amongst other matters) to:

(a) the likely consequences of any decision in the long term;

(b) the interests of the Company’s employees;

(c) the need to foster the Company’s business relationships with suppliers, customers and others;

(d) the impact of the Company’s operations on the community and the environment;

(e) the desirability of the Company maintaining a reputation for high standards of business conduct; and

(f) the need to act fairly between members of the Company.

Being sustainable in our activities means conducting our business with respect for the environment and for the communities hosting us, with the aim of increasing the benefit and value to our stakeholders. We recognize that this is a key element to be competitive and to maintain our licence to operate.

Further details of how the Directors have regard to the issues, factors and stakeholders considered relevant in complying with S 172 (1) (a)-(f), the methods used to engage with stakeholders and the effect on the Group’s decision making can be found throughout the annual report and in particular pages 34 (which outlines how the Company engages with its stakeholders), pages 19 to 22 (which contains Cadogan’s corporate responsibility statement) pages 28 to 29 (which contains the Company’s report on greenhouse gas emissions) and page 34 (which outlines the ways in which the Company engages with its shareholders).

In particular, during 2021 the Directors reviewed the impact of Covid-19 pandemic on the ***processes*** of the Company and specifically its employees and the communities in which it operates. Specific decisions and ***measures*** have been taken to ensure the health and security and to provide assistance where needed (pages 19 to 20).

Also, as a consequence of the continuous Covid-19 and the volatility of the oil and gas prices, and their potential impact on the operational activities and financial situation of the Group, the Directors carefully analysed the going concern and any consequence on the future activities (pages 14 to 17).

The Group has implemented an integrated HSE management system aiming to ensure a safe and environmentally friendly culture in the organization (pages 19 to 20). However, regarding the environmental sustainability of the Group’s activities, the Directors are fully aware of the need to direct future development in new activities with a lower impact on environment (CEO outlook page 9, 28).

When assessing the Proger instrument (Loan and Call Option), the Directors carefully considered the issues and decisions with their impact on the Group and all of its stakeholders (pages 8, 9,14-17).

The Board has a formal schedule of matters specifically reserved for its decision, including approval of acquisitions and disposals, major capital projects, financial results, Board appointments, dividend recommendations, material contracts and Group strategy. For each Board meeting, the Directors receive a Board pack including management accounts, briefing papers on commercial and operational matters and major capital projects including acquisitions. The Board also receives briefings from key management on specific issues.

In particular, as a consequence of the increasing military confrontation between Ukraine and Russia which ended with the ***invasion*** of Ukraine by Russia in February 2022, the Board discussed the current situation prevailing in Ukraine and its consequences on the security of the employees, the organization of the operations in Ukraine and the potential impacts on its human, financial and operational assets. The Group has been able to implement immediately emergency procedures with safety and protection ***measures*** communicated to all employees and put in place for every location. Specific ***measures*** have been put in place for the operations on site to ensure the human, the industrial and the environmental safety. The Group is monitoring the situation daily and taking appropriate action to ensure the safety and essential needs of its employees.

Board Committee Reports

Audit Committee Report

The Audit Committee is appointed by the Board, on the recommendation of the Nomination Committee, from the Non-Executive Directors of the Group. The Audit Committee’s terms of reference are reviewed annually by the Audit Committee and any changes are then referred to the Board for approval. The terms of reference of the Committee are published on the Company’s website,[*http://www.cadoganpetroleum.com*](http://www.cadoganpetroleum.com), and are also available from the Company Secretary at the Registered Office. Two members constitute a quorum.

Responsibilities

To monitor the integrity of the annual and interim financial statements, the accompanying reports to shareholders, and announcements regarding the Group’s results;To review and monitor the effectiveness and integrity of the Group’s financial reporting and internal financial controls;To review the effectiveness of the ***process*** for identifying, assessing and reporting all significant business risks and the management of those risks by the Group;To oversee the Group’s relations with the external auditor and to make recommendations to the Board, for approval by shareholders, on the appointment and removal of the external auditor;To consider whether an internal audit function is appropriate to enable the Audit Committee to meet its objectives; andTo review the Group’s arrangements by which staff of the Group may, in confidence, raise concerns about possible improprieties in matters of financial reporting or other matters.

Governance

Ms Jolibois and Mr Mahaux are both members of the Audit Committee. The Audit Committee is chaired by Ms Jolibois who had relevant financial experience within a major European company as well as holding several non-executive roles in major international entities.

At the invitation of the Audit Committee, the Group Director of Finance and external auditor regularly attend meetings. The Company Secretary attends all meetings of the Audit Committee.

The Audit Committee also meets the external auditor without management being present.

Activities of the Audit Committee

During the year, the Audit Committee discharged its responsibilities as follows:

Assessment of the effectiveness of the external auditor

The Committee has assessed the effectiveness of the external audit ***process***. They did this by:

Reviewing the 2021 external audit plan;Discussing the results of the audit including the auditor’s views on material accounting issues and key judgements and estimates, and their audit report;Considering the robustness of the audit ***process***;Reviewing the quality of the service and people provided to undertake the audit; andConsidering their independence and objectivity.

Financial statements

The Audit Committee examined the Group’s consolidated and Company’s financial statements and, prior to recommending them to the Board, considered:

the appropriateness of the accounting policies adopted;reviewed critical judgements, estimates and underlying assumptions; andassessed whether the financial statements are fair, balanced and understandable.

Going concern

Notwithstanding the Group’s current financial performance and position, the Board are cognisant of the actual impacts on the Group of COVID-19 and specifically the war situation in Ukraine. The Board has considered possible reverse stress case scenarios for the impact on the Group’s operations, financial position and forecasts. Whilst the potential future impacts of Covid-19 and the ***invasion*** of Ukraine by Russia are unknown, the Board has considered operational disruption that may be caused by the factors such as a) restrictions applied by governments, illness amongst our workforce and disruption to supply chain and sales channels; b) market volatility in respect of commodity prices associated with Covid-19 in addition to military and geopolitical factors.

In addition to sensitivities that reflect future expectations regarding country, commodity price and currency risks that the Group may encounter reverse stress tests have been run to reflect possible negative effects of Covid-19 and war in Ukraine. The Group’s forecasts demonstrate that owing to its cash resources the Group is able to meet its operating cash flow requirements and commitments whilst maintaining significant liquidity for a period of at least the next 12 months allowing for sustained reductions in commodity prices and extended and severe disruption to operations should such a scenario occur.

After making enquiries and considering the uncertainties described above, the Committee has a reasonable expectation that the Company and the Group has adequate resources to continue in operational existence for the foreseeable future and consider the going concern basis of accounting to be appropriate.

Internal controls and risk management

The Audit Committee reviews and monitors financial and control issues throughout the Group including the Group’s key risks and the approach for dealing with them. Further information on the risks and uncertainties facing the Group are detailed on pages 14 to 17.

External auditor

The Audit Committee is responsible for recommending to the Board, for approval by the shareholders, the appointment of the external auditor.

The Audit Committee considers the scope and materiality for the audit work, approves the audit fee, and reviews the results of the external auditor’s work. Following the conclusion of each year’s audit, it considers the effectiveness of the external auditor during the ***process***. An assessment of the effectiveness of the audit ***process*** was made, considering reports from the auditor on its internal quality procedures. The Committee reviewed and approved the terms and scope of the audit engagement, the audit plan and the results of the audit with the external auditor, including the scope of services associated with audit-related regulatory reporting services. Additionally, auditor independence and objectivity were assessed, considering the auditor’s confirmation that its independence is not impaired, the overall extent of non-audit services provided by the external auditor and the past service of the auditor. A breakdown of the non-audit fees is disclosed in note 10 to the Consolidated Financial Statements. The Audit Committee has reviewed the nature, level and timing of these services in the course of the year and is confident that the objectivity and independence of the auditor are not impaired by the reason of such non-audit work.

Internal audit

The Audit Committee considers annually the need for an internal audit function and believes that, due to the size of the Group and its current stage of development, an internal audit function will be of little benefit to the Group.

Whistleblowing

The Group’s whistleblowing policy encourages employees to report suspected wrongdoing and sets out the procedures employees must follow when raising concerns. The policy, which was implemented during 2008 is reviewed periodically.  The Group’s policies on anti-bribery, the acceptance of gifts and hospitality, and business conduct and ethics are circulated to staff as part of a combined manual on induction with changes regularly communicated.

Overview

As a result of its work during the year, the Audit Committee has concluded that it has acted in accordance with its terms of reference and has ensured the independence and objectivity of the external auditor.

The Chairman of the Audit Committee will be available at the Annual General Meeting to answer any questions about the work of the Audit Committee.

Lilia Jolibois

Chairman of the Audit Committee

28 April 2022

Health, Safety and Environment Committee Report

The Health, Safety and Environment Committee (the ”HSE Committee”) is appointed by the Board, on the recommendation of the Nomination Committee. The HSE Committee’s terms of reference are reviewed annually by the Committee and any changes are then referred to the Board for approval. The terms of reference of the Committee are published on the Company’s website,[*http://www.cadoganpetroleum.com*](http://www.cadoganpetroleum.com), and are also available from the Company Secretary at the Registered Office. Two members constitute a quorum, one of whom must be a Director.

Governance

The Committee is chaired by Mr Andrey Bilyi (Cadogan Ukraine General Director) as acting Head of the HSE Committee and its other member is Ms Snizhana Buryak (HSE Manager). The CEO attends meetings of the HSE Committee as necessary. During 2021, the HSE Committee held four meetings to monitor the HSE risks and activities across the business, following which actions were identified for the continuous improvement of the various ***processes*** and the mitigation of risk.

Responsibilities

To regularly maintain and implement the continuous improvement of the HSE Management System with the aim of improving the Company’s performances;To manage and mitigate the risks of personnel infection with covid-19 virus. Work-out respective administrative and healthcare ***measures*** to provide safe working conditions for the employees. Prevent the spread of covid-19 as well as ensuring staff reasonable vaccination level.Assessments of the risks to employees, contractors, customers, partners, and any other people who could be affected by the Company’s activities with the aim of reducing the global risk of the Company and increasing its level of acceptability;Evaluate the effectiveness of the Group’s policies and systems for identifying and managing health, safety and environmental risks within the Group’s operation;Assess the policies and systems within the Group for ensuring compliance with health, safety and environmental regulatory requirements;Assess the performance of the Group with regard to the impact of health, safety, environmental and community relations decisions and actions upon employees, communities and other third parties and also assess the impact of such decisions and actions on the reputation of the Group and make recommendations to the Board on areas for improvement;On behalf of the Board, receive reports from management concerning any fatalities and serious accidents within the Group and actions taken by management as a result of such fatalities or serious accidents;Evaluate and oversee, on behalf of the Board, the quality and integrity of any reporting to external stakeholders concerning health, safety, environmental and community relations issues; andWhere it deems it appropriate to do so, appoint an independent auditor to review performance with regard to health, safety, environmental and community relations matters and review any strategies and action plans developed by management in response to issues raised and, where appropriate, make recommendations to the Board concerning the same.

Activities of the Health, Safety and Environment Committee

The HSE Committee in discharging its duties reviewed and considered the following:

Company activities execution and control over contractors services execution in line with company policies and HSE proceduresMonthly statistics and reports on the activity were regularly distributed to the CEO, Management and to the members of the committee;Ensured that the implementation of new legislation and requirements were punctually followed-up and promptly updated;Compliance with HSE regulatory requirements was ensured through discussion of the results of inspections, both internal inspections and those carried out by the Authorities. The results of the inspections and drills were analysed and commented to assess the need for corrective actions and/or training initiatives;A standing item was included on the agenda at every meeting to monitor monthly HSE performance, key indicators and statistics allowing the HSE Committee to assess the Company’s performance by analysing any lost-time incidents, near misses, HSE training and other indicators;Interaction with contractors, Authorities, local communities and other stakeholders were discussed among other HSE activities;Compliance to ISO 14001 and ISO 45001 has been proved by the authorized third party auditor. Also the Company had its entire data calculation ***process*** as well as emissions measurement system re-validated by a different independent third party.Ensuring all the Observation and Actions requested by the Certification Body have been implemented

Overview

The Company’s HSE Management System and the Guidelines and Procedures have been updated to fit with the ISO requirements and are adequate for the proper execution of the Company’s operations.

As a result of its work during the year, the HSE Committee has concluded that it has acted in accordance with its terms of reference.

Nomination Committee Report

The Board delegates some of its duties to the Nomination Committee and appoints the members of the Nomination Committee which are non-executive Directors of the Group. The membership of the Committee is reviewed annually and any changes to its composition are referred to the Board for approval. The terms of reference of the Nomination Committee are published on the Company’s website,[*http://www.cadoganpetroleum.com*](http://www.cadoganpetroleum.com), and are available from the Company Secretary at the Registered Office. Two members constitute a quorum.

Governance

Mr. Michel Mee—s (Remuneration and Nomination Committee Chairman), Ms. Lilia Jolibois, Mr. Jacques Mahaux and Mr. Gilbert Lehmann (Non-Executive Directors) are the members of the Nomination Committee. The Company Secretary attends all meetings of the Nomination Committee.

Responsibilities

To regularly review the structure, size and composition (including the skills, knowledge and experience) required of the Board compared to its current position and make recommendations to the Board with regard to any changes;Be responsible for identifying and nominating candidates to fill Board vacancies as and when they arise, for the Board’s approval;Before appointments are made by the Board, evaluate the balance of skills, knowledge, experience and diversity (gender, ethnic, age, sex, disability, educational and professional backgrounds, etc.) on the Board and, in the light of this evaluation, prepare a description of the role and capabilities required for a particular appointment; andIn identifying suitable candidates, the Nomination Committee shall use open advertising or the services of external advisers to facilitate the search and consider candidates from a wide range of backgrounds on merit, ensuring that appointees have enough time available to devote to the position.

The Nomination Committee shall also make recommendations to the Board concerning:

Formulating plans for succession for both executive and non-executive Directors and in particular for the key roles of Chairman and Chief Executive Officer;Membership of the Audit and Remuneration Committees, in consultation with the Chairmen of those committees;The reappointment of any non-executive Director at the conclusion of their specified term of office, having given due regard to their performance and ability to continue to contribute to the Board in the light of the knowledge, skills and experience required; andThe re-election by shareholders of any Director having due regard to their performance and ability to continue to contribute to the Board in the light of the knowledge, skills and experience required.

Any matters relating to the continuation in office of any Director at any time including the suspension or termination of service of an executive Director as an employee of the Company subject to the provisions of the law and their service contract.

Activities of the Nomination Committee

During the financial year under review, the Committee reviewed and considered the following:

The size, structure and composition of the Board in the light of the current business environment, the Company's anticipated future activities and particularly the independence of the Non-Executive Directors;Its internal governance documents and the Policy;

The Committee recommends the re-election of the five incumbent Directors at the AGM.

Overview

As a result of its work during the year, the Committee has concluded that it has acted in accordance with its terms of reference. The Chairman of the Nomination Committee will be available at the Annual General Meeting to answer any questions about the work of the Committee.

Michel Mee—s

Nomination Committee Chairman

28 April 2022

Remuneration Committee

Statement from the Chairman

I am pleased to present the Annual Report on Remuneration for the year ended 31 December 2021.

Cadogan’s Remuneration Policy was approved as proposed by the shareholders at the Annual General Meeting of June 25, 2021 and is attached at the end of the Annual Report on Remuneration. The Remuneration Committee is not proposing to make any changes to the existing Policy however in line with industry best practice and the three-year Policy cycle the Company will be seeking shareholder approval at this year’s AGM.

The key elements of the Remuneration Policy are:

A better long-term alignment of the executives’ remuneration with the interests of the shareholders;A material reduction in the maximum remuneration level for the Executive Directors, both in terms of annual bonus and of long-term incentive (performance share plan);The payment of at least 50% of the Annual Bonus in shares with the remaining 50% to be paid in cash or shares at the discretion of the Remuneration Committee. Shares will be priced for this award based on their market value at closing on the Business Day prior to the Subscription Date;The introduction of claw-back and malus provisions on both bonuses and share awards; andThe expectation that the Executive Directors build a substantial shareholding position in the company through their mandate.

Michel Mee—s

Chairman of the Remuneration Committee

28 April 2022

ANNUAL REPORT ON REMUNERATION

Remuneration Committee Report

The Remuneration Committee is committed to principles of accountability and transparency to ensure that remuneration arrangements demonstrate a clear link between reward and performance.

Governance

The Remuneration Committee is appointed by the Board from the non-executive Directors of the Company. The Remuneration Committee’s terms of reference are reviewed annually by the Remuneration Committee and any changes are then referred to the Board for approval. The terms of reference of the Remuneration Committee are published on the Company’s website,[*http://www.cadoganpetroleum.com*](http://www.cadoganpetroleum.com), and are also available from the Company Secretary at the Registered Office.

The Remuneration Committee consists of Mr. Michel Mee—s, Ms. Lilia Jolibois, Mr. Jacques Mahaux and Mr. Gilbert Lehmann. At the discretion of the Remuneration Committee, the Chief Executive Officer is invited to attend meetings when appropriate but is not present when his own remuneration is being discussed. None of the directors are involved in deciding their own remuneration. The Company Secretary attends the meetings of the Remuneration Committee.

Responsibilities

In summary, the Remuneration Committee’s responsibilities, as set out in its terms of reference, are as follows:

To determine and agree with the Board the policy for the remuneration of the executive Directors, the Company Secretary and other members of executive management as appropriate;To consider the design, award levels, performance ***measures*** and targets for any annual or long-term incentives and approve any payments made and awards vesting under such schemes;Within the terms of the agreed remuneration policy, to determine the total individual remuneration package of each executive Director and other senior executives including bonuses, incentive payments and share options or other share awards; andTo ensure that contractual terms on termination, and any payments made, are fair to the individual and the Company, that failure is not rewarded and that the duty to mitigate loss is fully recognised.

Overview

The Chairman and Executive Directors of the Company have a regular dialogue with analysts and substantial shareholders, which includes the subject of Directors’ Remuneration. The outcome of these discussions is reported to the Board and discussed in detail both there and during meetings of the Remuneration Committee.

As a result of its work during the year, the Remuneration Committee has concluded that it has acted in accordance with its terms of reference. The chairman of the Remuneration Committee will be available at the Annual General Meeting to answer any questions about the work of the Committee.

Remuneration consultants

The Remuneration Committee did not take any advice from external remuneration consultants, with the exception of the review undertaken of the Remuneration Report.

Single total figure of remuneration for executive and non-executive directors (audited)

Notes to the table

Mr Fady Khallouf

Mr Khallouf was appointed as Chief Executive Officer on 15 November 2019. Mr Khallouf’s salary is €440,000 per annum. As part of Mr Khallouf’s employment agreement, a welcome bonus equivalent in value to 5,500,000 ordinary shares (using the market value of the shares on the business day prior to the date of issue) is payable to Mr Khallouf and a holding period of two years is applicable to the shares acquired. Pursuant to the terms of the bonus, the amount must be subscribed for ordinary shares in the Company at such time as the executive agrees. The welcome bonus was provided to Mr Khallouf in May 2020.

KPIs

In 2020 the CEO was subject to a performance-related, bonus scheme built around a scorecard with a set of challenging KPI’s aligned with the company strategy. The Remuneration Committee, after consultation with the CEO, have decided to postpone any variable performance related bonus for year ended 2020 given the impact of Covid-19 and volatility in oil and gas prices.

Benefits

Benefits may be provided to the executive directors, in the form of private medical insurance and life assurance.

The Chairman and Non-Executive Directors

As mentioned above, fees for non-Executive Directors were reduced by 20 percent on 15th January 2020 with effect from 15th November 2019. The fees are as follows: the Chairman’s fee at $89,000 and the fee for acting as a non-executive Director at $38,000 with an additional $10,000 for acting as Chairman of the Audit Committee and an additional $5,000 for a committee membership.

Scheme interests awarded during the financial year (audited)

There were no scheme interests awarded during the year.

Payments to past directors (audited)

In 2021 there were no payments to past directors.

Payments for loss of office (audited)

No notice period was either worked or paid.

Directors’ interests in shares (audited)

The beneficial interests of the Directors in office as at 31 December 2021 and their connected persons in the Ordinary shares of the Company at 31 December 2021 are set out below.

There were changes in the Directors shareholding at 31 December 2021 compared to 31 December 2020 (Fady Khallouf).

The Company does not currently operate formal shareholding guidelines. Whilst there is no specified level, the Company expects that under the new Remuneration Policy, the Executive Director will continue to build up a significant shareholding position in the Company during his mandate.

The Company’s performance

The graph below highlights the Company’s total shareholder return (“TSR”) performance for the last twelve years compared to the FTSE All Share Oil & Gas Producers index. This index has been selected on the basis that it represents a sector specific group, which is an appropriate group for the Company to compare itself against, and has been retained ever since, primarily for continuity purposes TSR is the return from a share or index based on share price movements and notional reinvestment of declared dividends.

Historic Remuneration of Chief Executive

Under the Company’s Remuneration Policy, the Remuneration Committee has the authority to review and award an annual performance bonus to executive directors.

In 2021, the Remuneration Committee, after consultation with the CEO, have decided to postpone any variable performance related bonus for year ended 2021 given the impact of Covid-19 and volatility in oil and gas prices.

In 2022, given the current situation in Ukraine and any potential future difficulties for the Company, Mr Fady Khallouf has requested that any annual performance related bonus to be considered and paid by the Remuneration Committee in respect of the financial year ended 31st December 2021 be waived.

The annual bonus received by the CEO as a percentage of the maximum opportunity is presented in the following table.

Percentage change in the remuneration of the Chief Executive

The following table shows the percentage change in the remuneration of the Chief Executive in 2021 and 2020 compared to that of all employees within the Group.

[i] All employees mean all employees of the Group, including CEO and other Directors (note 11, page 98).

[ii] Includes taxable benefits for 2019.

In 2021 none of the directors participated in long-term incentives.

In 2021 there was no increase in executive and non-executive directors' salary in base currency. The difference in pay represents the change in exchange rate between the base currency and USD as a reporting currency.

Percentage change in Non-Executive director remuneration

Relative importance of spend on pay

The table below compares shareholder distributions (i.e. dividends and share buybacks) and total employee pay expenditure of the Group for the financial years ended 31 December 2020 and 31 December 2021.

Shareholder voting at the Annual General Meeting

The Directors’ Remuneration Policy was approved by shareholders at the Annual General Meeting held on 25 June 2021 and remains unchanged. The Remuneration Policy can be found on the Group’s website and at pages 53 to 66 of this Annual Report on Remuneration. The votes cast by proxy were as follows:

The Directors’ Annual Report on Remuneration is approved by shareholders at each Annual General Meeting. A summary of the votes cast by proxy in 2019 and 2020 were as follows:

Implementation of Remuneration Policy in 2021

The performance related elements of remuneration remain unchanged and will be built around a scorecard with a set of KPI’s aligned with the Group strategy. The Remuneration Policy can be found on the Group’s website and at pages 53 to 66 of this Annual Report on Remuneration.

Approval

The Directors’ Annual Report on Remuneration was approved by the Board on 28 April 2022 and signed on its behalf by:

Michel Mee—s

Chairman

28 April 2022

Directors’ Remuneration Policy

Introduction

This Directors’ Remuneration Policy (the “Policy”) contains the information required to be set out as the directors’ remuneration policy for the purposes of The Large and Medium-sized Companies and Groups (Accounts and Reports) (Amendment) Regulations 2013.

The Policy was approved by shareholders at the 2021 AGM of the Company. The Remuneration Committee is not proposing to make any changes to the existing Policy however in line with industry best practice and the three-year Policy cycle the Company will be seeking shareholder approval at this year’s AGM. The effective date of this Policy is the date on which the Policy is approved by shareholders.

The Policy applies in respect of all executive officers appointed to the Board of Directors (“executive directors”) and non-executive directors. Other senior executives may be subject to the Policy, including in relation to annual bonus and shares incentive arrangements in particular if and to the extent that the Remuneration Committee determines it is appropriate.

The Remuneration Committee will keep the Policy under review to ensure that it continues to promote the long-term success of the Company by giving the Company its best opportunity of delivering on the business strategy. It is the Remuneration Committee’s intention that the Policy be put to shareholders for approval every three years unless there is a need for the Policy to be approved at an earlier date.

The Company aims to provide sufficient flexibility in the Policy for unanticipated changes in compensation practices and business conditions to ensure the Remuneration Committee has appropriate discretion to retain its top executives who perform. The Remuneration Committee reserves the right to approve any payments that may be outside the terms of this Policy, where the terms of that payment were agreed before the Policy came into effect, or before the individual became a director of the Company.

Maximum caps are provided to comply with the required legislation and should not be taken to indicate an intent to make payments at that level. The maximum caps are valid at the time that the relevant employment agreement or appointment letter is entered into and the caps may be adjusted to take into account fluctuations in exchange rates.

Remuneration policy table: executive directors

Notes to the executive directors' remuneration policy table

The Remuneration Committee's philosophy is that remuneration arrangements should be appropriately positioned to support the Group's business strategy over the longer term and the creation of value for shareholders. In this context the following key principles are considered to be important:

remuneration arrangements should align executive and employee interests with those of shareholders;remuneration arrangements should help retain key executives and employees; andremuneration arrangements should incentivise executives to achieve short, medium and long-term business targets which represent value creation for shareholders. Targets should relate to the Group's performance in terms of overall revenue and profit and the executive's own performance. ***Exceptional*** rewards should only be delivered if there are ***exceptional*** returns.

The Remuneration Committee reserves the right to make any remuneration payments (including satisfying awards of variable remuneration) and payments for loss of office notwithstanding that they are not in line with the Policy set out above, where the terms of that payment were agreed before the Policy came into effect, or before the individual became a director of the Company (provided the payment was not in consideration for the individual becoming a director).

Performance ***measures*** and targets

(a)           Annual Bonus

The performance ***measures*** for executive directors comprise of financial ***measures*** and business goals linked to the Company's strategy, which could include financial and non-financial ***measures***. The business goals are tailored to reflect each executive director's role and responsibilities during the year. The performance ***measures*** are chosen to enable the Remuneration Committee to review the Company's and the individual's performance against the Company's business strategy and appropriately incentivise and reward the executive directors.

Annual bonus targets are set by the Remuneration Committee each year. They are stretching but realistic targets which reflect the most important areas of strategic focus for the Company. The factors taken into consideration when setting targets include the Company's Key Performance Indicators (which are determined annually by the Remuneration Committee), and the extent to which they are under the control or influence of the executive whose remuneration is being determined.

Performance is ***measured*** over the financial year against the ***measures*** and targets set according to the scorecard. The Remuneration Committee retains the right to exercise its judgement to adjust the bonus outcome for an individual to ensure the outcome reflects any other aspects of the Company's performance that become relevant during the financial year.

The Remuneration Committee used Company operational and financial performances and safety as performance ***measures*** for the 2020 scorecard. For years following 2020, the structure of the annual bonus scorecard is reviewed by the Remuneration Committee.

2021Annual bonus scorecard ***measures*** for executive directors

(b)           Share Plans

The Remuneration Committee will make the vesting of a Plan award conditional upon the satisfaction of stretching but realistic performance conditions. These conditions are meant to achieve a long-term alignment of the executives’ remuneration with the interest of the shareholders.

EBITDA growth, increase of P1 reserves (in millions boe), and changes to the free cash-flow are the key KPIs to be used by the Remuneration Committee and will be ***measured*** over time periods of three financial years. The performance ***measures*** are chosen to align the performance of participants with the attainment of financial performance targets over the vesting period of the award. The targets are set by the Remuneration Committee by reference to the Company's strategy and business plan and the results achieved at the time of the vest are determined by the Remuneration Committee.

Under the PSP plan rules, the Board may vary a performance target where it considers that any performance target to which an award is subject is no longer a true or fair ***measure*** of the participant's performance, provided that the Board must act fairly and reasonably and that the new performance target is materially no more difficult and no less difficult to satisfy than the original performance target.

Malus and clawback (applicable to bonuses and share awards)

The Remuneration Committee has the discretion to reduce the bonus before payment or require the executive director to pay back shares or a cash amount in the event of material financial misstatement of the Company or fraud or material misconduct on the part of the executive. The amount that may be clawed back on any such event is limited to the value of the bonus, taking into account the cash paid and the shares delivered to the executive, taking the value of the shares at the time of the clawback, less any income tax or employee social security contributions paid on the bonuses.

Share ownership guidelines for executives

The Remuneration Committee is planning to implement share ownership guidelines for executive directors to further align the interests of the executive directors with those of shareholders. The share ownership guidelines will include an expectation that executive directors build up their shareholding to 200% of base salary over a period of five years from the later of: the date of adoption of this policy and the date of appointment. Once the shareholding guideline is reached, executive directors would be expected to maintain it. The intention would be for the shareholding guideline to be reached through the retention of vested shares from share plans (e.g. the deferred share element of the annual bonus and shares vested under the PSP). As such, the Remuneration Committee's discretion may be used to increase the proportion of an annual bonus to be delivered in shares to assist the executive director in meeting this guideline. The deferred share mechanism in the annual bonus and the design of the PSP will assist executive directors in reaching the guidelines. Executive directors will not be expected to top up their shareholding with personal acquisitions of Company shares outside the usual share plans described in the Policy. The Remuneration Committee will monitor the executive directors' shareholdings and may adjust the guideline in special individual and Company circumstances, for example in the case of a share price fall.

PSP Plan Limits

The PSP may operate over new issue shares, treasury shares or shares purchased in the market. In any ten-calendar year period, the Company may not issue (or grant rights to issue) more than:

(a)           10% of the issued ordinary share capital of the Company under the Plan and any other employee share plan adopted by the Company; and

(b)           5% of the issued ordinary share capital of the Company under the Plan and any other executive share plan adopted by the Company.

Treasury shares will count as new issue shares for the purposes of these limits unless institutional investors decide that they need not count. These limits do not include rights to shares which have been renounced, released, lapsed or otherwise become incapable of vesting, awards that the Remuneration Committee determines after grant to be satisfied by the transfer of existing shares and shares allocated to satisfy bonuses (including pursuant to the Deferred Bonus Plan).

Remuneration throughout the Group

Differences in the Company's pay policy for executive directors from that applying to employees within the Group generally reflect the appropriate market rate for the individual executive roles.

Remuneration policy table: non-executive directors

Notes to the Policy Table

The payment policy for non-executive directors is to pay a rate which will secure persons of a suitable calibre. The remuneration of the non-executive directors is determined by the Board. External benchmarking data and specialist advisers are used when setting fees, which will be reviewed at appropriate intervals. The maximum caps are valid at the time that the relevant appointment letter is entered into and the caps may be adjusted to take into account fluctuations in exchange rates.

Expenses reasonably and wholly incurred in the performance of the role of non-executive director of the Company may be reimbursed or paid for directly by the Company, as appropriate, and may include any tax due on the expense.

The non-executive directors' fees are non-pensionable. The non-executive directors have not to date been eligible to participate in any incentive plans (such as bonuses or share plans); however, the Board considers that it may be appropriate in the future to enable such participation, subject to suitably stretching performance thresholds.

Non-executive directors may receive professional advice in respect of their duties with the Company which will be paid for by the Company. They will be covered by the Company's insurance policy for directors.

Recruitment

The Company's policy on the recruitment of directors is to pay a fair remuneration package for the role being undertaken and the experience of the individual being recruited. The Remuneration Committee will consider all relevant factors, which include the abilities of the individual, their existing remuneration package, market practice, and the existing arrangements for the Company's current directors.

The Remuneration Committee will determine that any arrangements offered are in the best interests of the Company and shareholders and will endeavour to pay no more than is necessary.

The Remuneration Committee intends that the components of remuneration set out in the policy tables, and the approach to the components as set out in the policy tables, will be equally applicable to new recruits, i.e. salary, annual bonus, share plan awards, pension and benefits for executive directors, and fees for non-executive directors. However, the Company acknowledges that additional flexibility may be required to ensure the Company is in the best position to recruit the best candidate for any vacant roles and, as such, a buy-out arrangement may be required.

Flexibility

The salary and compensation package designed for a new recruit may be higher or lower than that applying for existing directors. The Remuneration Committee may decide to appoint a new executive director to the Board at a lower than typical salary, such that larger and more frequent salary increases may then be awarded over a period of time to reflect the individual's growth in experience within the role.

Remuneration will normally not exceed those set out in the policy table above. However, to ensure that the Company can sufficiently compete with its competitors, the Remuneration Committee considers it important that the recruitment policy has sufficient flexibility in order to attract and appropriately remunerate the high-performing individuals that the Company requires to achieve its strategy. As such, the Remuneration Committee reserves discretion to provide a buy-out arrangement and benefits (such as a sign-on bonus and additional share awards) in addition to those set out in the policy table (or mentioned in this section) where the Remuneration Committee considers it reasonable and necessary to do so in order to secure an external appointment (see below for more detail in relation to buy-out arrangements).

Buy-out arrangements

The Remuneration Committee retains the discretion to enter into buy-out arrangements to compensate new hires for incentive awards forfeited in joining the Company. The Remuneration Committee will use its discretion in awarding and setting any such compensation, which will be decided on a case-by-case basis and likely on an estimated like-for-like basis. In deciding the appropriate type and quantum of compensation to replace existing awards, the Remuneration Committee will take into account all relevant factors, including the type of award being forfeited, the likelihood of any performance ***measures*** attached to the forfeited award being met, and the proportion of the vesting period remaining. The Remuneration Committee will appropriately discount the compensation payable to take account of any uncertainties over the likely vesting of the forfeited award to ensure that the Company does not, in the view of the Remuneration Committee, pay in excess of what is reasonable or necessary.

Compensation for awards forfeited may take the form of a bonus payment or a share award. For the avoidance of doubt, the maximum amounts of compensation contained in the policy table will not apply to such buy-out arrangements. The Company has not placed a maximum value on the compensation that can be paid under this section, as it does not believe it would be in shareholders' interests to set any expectations for prospective candidates regarding such awards.

Payments for loss of office

Any compensation payable in the event that the employment of an executive director is terminated will be determined in accordance the terms of the employment contract between the Company and the executive, as well as the relevant rules of any share plan and this Policy, and in accordance with the prevailing best practice.

The Remuneration Committee will consider a variety of factors when considering leaving arrangements for an executive director and exercising any discretions it has in this regard, including (but not limited to) individual and business performance during office, the reason for leaving, and any other relevant circumstances (for example, ill health).

In addition to any payment that the Remuneration Committee may decide to make, the Remuneration Committee reserves discretion as it considers appropriate to:

(a)           pay an annual bonus for the year of departure;

(b)           continue providing any benefits for a period of time; and

(c)           provide outplacement services.

Non-executive directors are subject to one month notice periods prior to termination of service and are not entitled to any compensation on termination save for accrued fees as at the date of termination and reimbursement of any expenses properly incurred prior to that date.

Share plan awards

The treatment of any share award on termination will be governed by the PSP rules.

Under the PSP, outstanding share awards held by an individual who ceases to be a director or employee of the Company will lapse, unless the cessation is due to death, illness, injury or disability, redundancy, retirement, the Company ceasing to be a member of the Group or the transfer of an undertaking or part of an undertaking to a person who is not a member of the Group, or the Board exercises its discretion otherwise.

Under the PSP, the Board has discretion to decide the period of time for which the award will continue, and whether any unvested award shall be treated as vesting on the date of cessation of employment or in accordance with the original vesting schedule, in both cases have regard to the extent to which the performance targets have been satisfied prior to the date of cessation.

For executive directors, the vesting period will be set by the Remuneration Committee with a minimum three-year period.  The Remuneration Committee will (unless the vesting period is set as a period equal to or longer than five years) impose a holding period on shares (or awards) so that the executive is not able to sell the shares that the executive director acquires through the PSP until the fifth anniversary of the date of the award.   The holding period will not apply to the number of shares equivalent in value to the amount required by the Company or the executive director to fund any income tax and employee social security contributions due on the vesting of the awards or otherwise in connection with the awards.

Executive director employment agreements

This section contains the key employment terms and conditions of the executive directors that could impact on their remuneration or loss of office payments.

The Company's policy on employment agreements is that executive directors' agreements should be terminable by either the Company or the director on not more than six months' notice. The employment agreements contain provision for early termination, among other things, in the event of a breach by the executive but make no provision for any termination benefits except in the event of a change of control of the Company, where the executive becomes entitled to a lump sum equal to 24 months' base salary plus benefits plus (if any), bonus received on termination by the Company. The employment agreements contain restrictive covenants for a period of 12 months following termination of the agreement. Details of employment agreements in place as at the date of this report are set out below:

Directors' employment agreements are available for inspection at the Company's registered office in London.

Non-executive directors' letters of appointment

This section contains the key terms of the appointments of non-executive directors that could impact on their remuneration.

Typically, the non-executive directors are appointed by letter of appointment for an initial term of three years which may be extended. All non-executive directors are subject to annual re-election by the Company's shareholders and their appointments may be terminated earlier with one month's prior written notice (or with immediate effect, in the case of specific serious circumstances such as fraud or dishonesty). On termination of appointment, non-executive directors are usually only entitled to accrued fees as at the date of termination together with reimbursement of any expenses properly incurred prior to that date and the company has no obligation to pay further compensation when the appointment terminates. Non-executive directors' letters of appointment are available for inspection at the Company's registered office in London and at Zhylyanska street 48/50, 01033 Kyiv, Ukraine.

Illustration of the Remuneration Policy

The bar charts below show the levels of remuneration that the CEO could earn over the coming year under the Policy.

CEO: minimum and maximum remuneration

The bar chart shows future possible maximum remuneration.

Pension entitlements were provided in 2020.

Consideration of shareholder views

The Chairman and executive directors of the Company have a regular dialogue with analysts and substantial shareholders, which includes the subject of directors' remuneration. The outcome of these discussions is reported to the Board and discussed in detail both there and during meetings of the Remuneration Committee.

The Remuneration Committee will take into account the results of the shareholder vote on remuneration matters when making future remuneration decisions. The Remuneration Committee remains mindful of shareholder views when evaluating and setting ongoing remuneration strategy.

Consideration of employment conditions within the Group

When determining remuneration levels for its executive directors, the Board considers the pay and employment conditions of employees across the Group. The Remuneration Committee will be mindful of average salary increases awarded across the Group when reviewing the remuneration packages of the executive directors.

Minor changes

The Remuneration Committee may make, without the need for shareholder approval, minor amendments to the Policy for regulatory, exchange control, tax or administrative purposes or to take account of changes in legislation.

Statement of Directors’ Responsibilities

Statement of Directors’ Responsibilities in respect of the Annual Report and the Financial Statements

The Directors are responsible for preparing the Annual Report and the financial statements in accordance with applicable law and regulations. Company law requires the Directors to prepare financial statements for each financial year. The Directors are required by law to prepare the Group financial statements in accordance with UK-adopted international accounting standards and in conformity with the requirements of the Companies Act 2006 and Article 4 of the International Accounting Standards (“IAS”) regulation and have also elected to prepare the Parent Company financial statements under UK-adopted international accounting standards in conformity with the requirements of the  Companies Act 2006 and as applied in accordance with the provisions of the Companies Act 2006. Under Company law, the Directors must not approve the financial statements unless they are satisfied that they give a true and fair view of the state of affairs of the Company and Group and of the profit or loss for that period. In preparing the Company and Group’s financial statements, IAS Regulation requires that Directors:

properly select and apply accounting policies;make judgements and accounting estimates that are reasonable and prudent;present information, including accounting policies, in a manner that provides relevant, reliable, comparable and understandable information;state whether they have been prepared in accordance with UK-adopted international accounting standards  in conformity with the requirements of the Companies Act 2006, subject to any material departures disclosed and explained in the financial statements;provide additional disclosures when compliance with the specific requirements in UK-adopted international accounting standards are insufficient to enable users to understand the impact of particular transactions, other events and conditions on the Company’s and Group’s financial position and financial performance; andmake an assessment of the Company’s and Group’s ability to continue as a going concern, prepare the financial statements on the going concern basis unless it is inappropriate to presume that the Company and Group will continue in business.

The Directors are responsible for keeping adequate accounting records that are sufficient to show and explain the Company and Group’s transactions and disclose with reasonable accuracy at any time the financial position of the Company and Group and enable them to ensure that the financial statements comply with the Companies Act 2006 They are also responsible for safeguarding the assets of the Company and hence for taking reasonable steps for the prevention and detection of fraud and other irregularities. Under applicable law and regulations, the Directors are also responsible for preparing a Strategic Report, Directors’ Report, Annual Report on Remuneration, Directors’ Remuneration Policy and Corporate Governance Statement that comply with that law and those regulations. The Directors are responsible for the maintenance and integrity of the corporate and financial information and statements included on the Company’s website,[*http://www.cadoganpetroleum.com*](http://www.cadoganpetroleum.com). Legislation in the United Kingdom governing the preparation and dissemination of the financial statements may differ from legislation in other jurisdictions. The directors' responsibility also extends to the ongoing integrity of the financial statements contained therein.

Responsibility Statement of the Directors in respect of the Annual Report

We confirm to the best of our knowledge:

(1) the financial statements, prepared in accordance with UK-adopted international accounting standards in conformity with the requirements of the Companies Act 2006, give a true and fair view of the assets, liabilities, financial position and profit or loss of the Company and the undertakings included in the consolidation as a whole; and

(2) the Annual Report, includes a fair review of the development and performance of the business and the position of the Company and the undertakings included in the consolidation taken as a whole, together with a description of the principal risks and uncertainties that they face; and

(3) the annual report and the financial statements, taken as a whole, are fair, balanced and understandable, and provide the information necessary for the shareholders to assess the Group’s position, performance, business model and strategy.

On behalf of the Board

Michel Mee—s

Chairman

28 April 2022

Independent auditor’s report to the members of Cadogan Petroleum plc

Report on the audit of the consolidated financial statements

Qualified Opinion

We have audited the financial statements of Cadogan Petroleum Plc (the ‘Parent Company’) and its subsidiaries (the ‘Group’) for the year ended 31 December 2021 which comprise the consolidated income statement, the consolidated statement of comprehensive income, the consolidated balance sheet, the consolidated cash flow statement, the consolidated statement of changes in equity, the company balance sheet, the company cash flow statement, the company statement of changes in equity and notes to the financial statements, including a summary of significant accounting policies. The financial reporting framework that has been applied in their preparation is applicable law and UK adopted international accounting standards.

In our opinion, except for the possible effects of the matter described in the Basis for qualified opinion paragraph below:

the financial statements give a true and fair view of the assets, liabilities and financial position of the Group’s and of the Parent Company as at 31 December 2021 and of the Group’s financial performance and cash flow for the year then ended;the Group and Parent Company financial statements have been properly prepared in accordance with UK-adopted international accounting standards and Companies Act 2006; andthe Group financial statements have been prepared in accordance with, Article 4 of the IAS Regulation.

Basis for Qualified Opinion

In February 2019, the Group advanced a Euro 13,385,000 loan to Proger Managers & Partners Srl (“PMP”), a privately owned Italian company whose only interest is a 72.92% participation in Proger Ingegneria Srl (“Proger Ingegneria”), a privately owned company which held a 75.95% participating interest in Proger S.P.A (“Proger”) at 31 December 2020. The loan carries an entitlement to interest at a rate of 5.5% per year, payable at maturity (which is 24 months after the execution date (February 2019) and assuming that the call option described below is not exercised). The principal of the loan is secured by a pledge over PMP’s current participating interest in Proger Ingegneria Srl, up to a maximum guaranteed amount of Euro 13,385,000.

The Group was granted a call option to acquire, at its sole discretion, 33% of participating interest in Proger Ingegneria; the exercise of the option would have given Cadogan, through Cadogan Petroleum Holdings BV, an indirect 25% interest in Proger at 31 December 2020. The call option was granted at no additional cost and could be exercised at any time between the 6th (sixth) and 24th (twenty-fourth) months following the execution date of the loan agreement.

The call option was not exercised within the timeframe (February 2021) and then in accordance with the loan agreement the principal amount and any accrued interest became repayable in full. At this time the Group reclassified the asset from fair value through profit and loss to amortised cost.

In March 2021, PMP requested arbitration to have the loan agreement recognized as an equity investment contract. The arbitration ***process*** is ongoing however the investigation ***process*** is closed. The decision of the College of Arbitrators is expected in July 2022.

We considered the recoverability of the loan to be a key audit matter, and in respect of this matter we:

made inquiries of management and the Audit Committee regarding the structure of the transaction and reviewed the accounting entries;reviewed the original loan documents including call option agreement;we met with management to obtain an understanding of their assessment as to why they believe no impairment is required against the carrying value of the loan;discussed with management their understanding of the current arbitrations proceedings and any information that they could relay to us from the confidential hearings;had minimal contact with the Cadogan legal advisors due to the deemed confidential nature of the Arbitration ***process***;assessed the ability of the counterparty to repay the amounts due, based on available information, including the potential assessment of the value of the shares pledged as security;reviewed the disclosures in relation to financial instruments including the accounting policy, critical judgments and estimates and financial instrument disclosures.

As noted above, given the ongoing arbitration ***process***, we have not been able to obtain sufficient, appropriate audit evidence regarding the loan, and accordingly are not able to conclude whether the carrying value is materially accurate. In 2020, the predecessor auditor, was not able to obtain sufficient, appropriate audit evidence to conclude whether the fair value of the loan note instrument was materially accurate and as such we do not know what impact this has on the current year results. As a result, the audit opinion for the year ended 31 December 2020 was also qualified in respect of this limitation on the scope of the audit.

We conducted our audit in accordance with International Standards on Auditing (UK) (‘ISAs (UK)’) and applicable law. Our responsibilities under those standards are further described in the ‘Responsibilities of the auditor for the audit of the financial statements’ section of our report. We are independent of the [group and] company in accordance with the ethical requirements that are relevant to our audit of the financial statements in the United Kingdom, including the FRC’s Ethical Standard and the ethical pronouncements established by Chartered Accountants Ireland, applied as determined to be appropriate in the circumstances for the entity. We have fulfilled our other ethical responsibilities in accordance with these requirements. We believe that the audit evidence we have obtained is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for our qualified opinion.

Conclusions relating to going concern

In auditing the financial statements, we have concluded that the Directors’ use of the going concern basis of accounting in the preparation of the financial statements is appropriate. Our evaluation of the Directors’ assessment of the Group and the Parent Company’s ability to continue to adopt the going concern basis of accounting included:

Reviewing management’s assessment of the impact of the ongoing War in Ukraine and its potential impact on production assets, revenue generation, availability of people and resources and various scenario planning in respect of same;Reviewing management’s cash flow forecasts for the period to April 2023 and evaluating the level of headroom available and the assumptions including, potential geopolitical impacts, oil production, oil prices, operating expenditure and capital expenditure. In doing so we compared production forecasts to historical trends and considered the oil price assumptions against consensus market prices and historical discount levels between Brent oil prices and the local market. We compared forecast costs with historical expenditure.Reviewing licences for commitments to check these have been reflected in the cash flow forecasts.Reviewing the disclosures in the financial statements in respect of going concern against the requirements of the standards.

Based on the work we have performed, we have not identified any material uncertainties relating to events or conditions that, individually or collectively, may cast significant doubt on the Group’s and Parent Company’s ability to continue as a going concern for a period of at least twelve months from when the financial statements are authorised for issue. Our responsibilities and the responsibilities of the Directors with respect to going concern are described in the relevant sections of this report.

Emphasis of Matter

We draw attention to the Report of the Directors and Note 29 to the financial statements which describes the ongoing War in Ukraine. The outcome, length, scale and extent of the War is unknown and as such its impact on the group cannot be predicted at the time of issuing the audit opinion.. The Group continue to monitor any impact and have included various scenario planning in relation to the War in its cash flow projections.  In view of the significance of this matter, we consider that it should be drawn to your attention. The ultimate outcome of this matter cannot presently be determined and the financial statements do not include any potential adjustment(s) that may be required arising out of alternative outcomes. Our opinion is not modified in respect of this matter.

Other matter

The financial statements of the Group and Parent Company for the year ended December 31, 2020, were audited by BDO LLP who expressed a qualified opinion on those statements on May 5, 2021. The qualification related to the group advanced loan through a subsidiary which was recorded at fair value through profit loss and the predecessor auditor could not obtain sufficient, appropriate audit evidence to conclude on the fair value of the loan note instrument.

Key audit matters

Key audit matters are those matters that, in our professional judgement, were of most significance in our audit of the financial statements of the current period and include the most significant assessed risks of material misstatement (whether or not due to fraud) that we identified, including those which had the greatest effect on: the overall audit strategy, the allocation of resources in the audit, and directing the efforts of the engagement team. These matters were addressed in the context of our audit of the financial statements as a whole, and in forming our opinion thereon, and we do not provide a separate opinion on these matters.

In addition to the matter described in the ‘’Basis for qualified opinion’’ section, which discusses the valuation of the loan, we have determined the matters described below to be the key audit matters to be communicated in our report:

Valuation of oil and gas exploration and production assets

An overview of the scope of our audit

Our Group audit was scoped by obtaining an understanding of the Group and its environment, including the Group’s system of internal control, and assessing the risks of material misstatement in the financial statements. We also addressed the risk of management override of internal controls, including assessing whether there was evidence of bias by the Directors that may have represented a risk of material misstatement.

Whilst Cadogan Petroleum Plc is a company listed on the Standard Segment of the London Stock Exchange, the Group’s operations principally comprise an exploration & development of oil and gas assets located in Ukraine, together with gas trading and oil services activities. We assessed there to be four significant components within the Ukrainian sub-group, comprising components holding exploration & development assets and gas trading activities which were subject to a full scope audit. Together with the Parent Company, Cadogan Petroleum Holdings Ltd, Cadogan Petroleum Holdings B.V. and the Group consolidation, which was also subject to a full scope audit, these represent the significant components of the Group. The audits of each of the Ukrainian components were principally performed in the Ukraine by a Grant Thornton member firm under the supervision and direction of the Group audit team. The audits of the parent company, Cadogan Petroleum Holdings Ltd, Cadogan Petroleum Holdings B.V. and the Group consolidation were performed in Ireland by the Group audit team. The remaining components of the Group were considered non-significant and these components were principally subject to analytical review procedures by the Group audit team or Grant Thornton member firm in Ukraine.

Our involvement with component auditors

For the work performed by component auditors, we determined the level of involvement needed in order to be able to conclude whether sufficient appropriate audit evidence has been obtained as a basis for our opinion on the Group financial statements as a whole. Our involvement with component auditors included the following:

Detailed Group reporting instructions were sent to the component auditor, which included the significant areas to be covered by the audit (including areas that were considered to be key audit matters as detailed below), and set out the information required to be reported to the Group audit team.As a result of travel restrictions resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic or the ongoing War, the Group audit partner and senior members of the Group audit team were unable to visit the Ukraine to meet with component management and the component auditors during the audit. Accordingly, we performed a remote review of the component audit files in the Ukraine using appropriate technologies, held regular calls and videoconferences with the component audit team and component management during the audit.The Group audit team was actively involved in the direction of the audits performed by the component auditors for Group reporting purposes, along with the consideration of findings and determination of conclusions drawn. We performed our own additional procedures in respect of the significant risk areas that represented Key Audit Matters in addition to the procedures performed by the component auditor.

Our application of materiality

We apply the concept of materiality both in planning and performing our audit, and in evaluating the effect of misstatements. We consider materiality to be the magnitude by which misstatements, including omissions, could influence the economic decisions of reasonable users that are taken on the basis of the financial statements.

In order to reduce to an appropriately low level the probability that any misstatements exceed materiality, we use a lower materiality level, performance materiality, to determine the extent of testing needed. Importantly, misstatements below these levels will not necessarily be evaluated as immaterial as we also take account of the nature of identified misstatements, and the particular circumstances of their occurrence, when evaluating their effect on the financial statements as a whole.

Based on our professional judgement, we determined materiality for the financial statements as a whole and performance materiality as follows:

The reporting threshold is set as the amount below which identified misstatements are considered as being clearly trivial. We agreed with the Board and the Audit Committee that we would report to them misstatements identified during our audit of amounts greater than 5% of materiality as well as misstatements below that amount that, in our view, warranted reporting for qualitative reasons.

Key audit matters identified

The risks of material misstatement that had the greatest effect on our audit, including the allocation of our resources and effort, are set out below as significant matters together with an explanation of how we tailored our audit to address these specific areas in order to provide an opinion on the financial statements as a whole. This is not a complete list of all risks identified by our audit.

Other information

Other information comprises information included in the annual report, other than the financial statements and our auditor’s report therein. Our opinion on the financial statements does not cover the other information and, except to the extent otherwise explicitly stated in our report, we do not express any form of assurance conclusion thereon.

In connection with our audit of the financial statements, our responsibility is to read the other information and, in doing so, consider whether the other information is materially inconsistent with the financial statements or our knowledge obtained in the audit, or otherwise appears to be materially misstated. If we identify such material inconsistencies in the financial statements, we are required to determine whether there is a material misstatement in the financial statements or a material misstatement of the other information. If, based on the work we have performed, we conclude that there is a material misstatement of this other information, we are required to report that fact.

Except for the possible effect of the matter described in the basis for the qualified opinion section we have nothing to report in this regard.

Opinions on other matters prescribed by the Companies Act 2006

In our opinion, based on the work undertaken in the course of the audit:

Except for the possible effect of the matter described in the basis for qualified opinion section of our report, in our opinion, based on the work undertaken in the course of the audit the information given in the Strategic Report and the Directors’ Report for the financial year for which the financial statements are prepared is consistent with the financial statements; andthe Strategic Report and the Directors’ Report have been prepared in accordance with applicable legal requirements.

Except for any amendments that we may have considered necessary had we been able to obtain sufficient appropriate audit evidence in relation to the fair value of the loan receivable as described in the basis for qualified opinion section of our report, in the light of the knowledge and understanding of the Group and Parent Company and its environment obtained in the course of the audit, we have not identified material misstatements in the strategic report or the Directors’ report.

Matters on which we are required to report by exception

Arising solely from the limitation on our work relating to the loan receivable described above, we have not obtained all the information and explanations that we considered necessary for the purpose of our audit. We have nothing to report in respect of the following matters where the Companies Act 2006 requires us to report to you if, in our opinion:

adequate accounting records have not been kept by the Parent Company, or returns adequate for our audit have not been received from branches not visited by us; orthe Parent Company financial statements and the part of the Directors’ remuneration report to be audit are not in agreement with the accounting records and returns; orcertain disclosures of directors’ remuneration specified by law are not made;

Responsibilities of Directors and those charged with governance for the financial statements

As explained more fully in the Directors' responsibilities statement, management is responsible for the preparation of the financial statements which give a true and fair view in accordance UK adopted international accounting standards, and for such internal control as directors determine necessary to enable the preparation of financial statements are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error.

In preparing the financial statements, the Directors are responsible for assessing the group and company’s ability to continue as a going concern, disclosing, as applicable, matters related to going concern and using the going concern basis of accounting unless management either intends to liquidate the group and company or to cease operations, or has no realistic alternative but to do so.

Those charged with governance are responsible for overseeing the group and company’s financial reporting ***process***.

Responsibilities of the auditor for the audit of the financial statements

The objectives of an auditor are to obtain reasonable assurance about whether the financial statements as a whole are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error, and to issue an auditor’s report that includes their opinion. Reasonable assurance is a high level of assurance, but is not a guarantee that an audit conducted in accordance with ISAs (UK) will always detect a material misstatement when it exists. Misstatements can arise from fraud or error and are considered material if, individually or in the aggregate, they could reasonably be expected to influence the economic decisions of users taken on the basis of these financial statements.

A further description of an auditor’s responsibilities for the audit of the financial statements is located on the Financial Reporting Council’s website at:[*http://www.frc.org.uk/auditorsresponsibilities*](http://www.frc.org.uk/auditorsresponsibilities). This description forms part of our auditor’s report.

Explanation as to what extent the audit was considered capable of detecting irregularities, including fraud

Irregularities, including fraud, are instances of non-compliance with laws and regulations. We design procedures in line with our responsibilities, outlined above, to detect material misstatements in respect of irregularities, including fraud. Owing to the inherent limitations of an audit, there is an unavoidable risk that material misstatement in the financial statements may not be detected, even though the audit is properly planned and performed in accordance with the ISAs (UK). The extent to which our procedures are capable of detecting irregularities, including fraud is detailed below.

In response to these principal risks, our audit procedures included but were not limited to:

enquiries of management board, risk and compliance and legal functions and audit committee on the policies and procedures in place regarding compliance with laws and regulations, including consideration of known or suspected instances of non-compliance and whether they have knowledge of any actual, suspected or alleged fraud;inspection of the group’s regulatory and legal correspondence and review of minutes of board, director’s and audit committee meetings during the year to corroborate inquiries made;gaining an understanding of the internal controls established to mitigate risk related to fraud;discussion amongst the engagement team in relation to the identified laws and regulations and regarding the risk of fraud, and remaining alert to any indications of non-compliance or opportunities for fraudulent manipulation of financial statements throughout the audit;identifying and testing journal entries to address the risk of inappropriate journals and management override of controls;designing audit procedures to incorporate unpredictability around the nature, timing or extent of our testing;assessing the susceptibility of the Group’s financial statements to material misstatement, including how fraud might occur;testing the appropriateness of journal entries made through the year by applying specific criteria to detect possible irregularities and fraud;obtaining an understanding of management’s procedures to evaluate the validity of supplier arrangements and identify and assess any unusual items;Performing a review of supplier contract arrangements across the Group, making inquiries regarding the nature and purpose of the arrangement and reviewing contracts for certain supplier arrangements;Performing a detailed review of the Group’s year-end adjusting entries and investigating any that appear unusual as to nature or amount and agreeing to supporting documentation;challenging assumptions and judgements made by management in their significant accounting estimates, including impairment assessment of assets ; andreview of the financial statement disclosures to underlying supporting documentation and inquiries of management.We requested information from component auditors on instances of non-compliance with laws or regulations that could give rise to a material misstatement of the group financial statements.Directing the auditors of the significant components to ensure an assessment is performed on the extent of the components compliance with the relevant local and regulatory framework. Reviewing this work and holding meetings with relevant internal management and external third parties to form our own opinion on the extent of Group wide compliance.ensuring the engagement team collectively had the appropriate competence and capabilities to identify or recognise non-compliance with the laws and regulation and they were appropriately briefed on where the risk areas are;

Our audit procedures were designed to respond to risks of material misstatement in the financial statements, recognising that the risk of not detecting a material misstatement due to fraud is higher than the risk of not detecting one resulting from error, as fraud may involve deliberate concealment by, for example, forgery, misrepresentations or through collusion. There are inherent limitations in the audit procedures performed and the further removed noncompliance with laws and regulations is from the events and transactions reflected in the financial statements, the less likely we are to become aware of it.

The purpose of our audit work and to whom we owe our responsibilities

This report is made solely to the company’s members, as a body, in accordance with chapter 3 of Part 16 of the Companies Act 2006. Our audit work has been undertaken so that we might state to the company’s members those matters we are required to state to them in an auditor’s report and for no other purpose. To the fullest extent permitted by law, we do not accept or assume responsibility to anyone other than the company and the company’s members as a body, for our audit work, for this report, or for the opinions we have formed.

Report on other legal and regulatory requirements

Following the recommendation of the audit committee, we were appointed by the Board of Directors on 7 December 2021 to audit the financial statements for the year ended 31 December 2021 and subsequent financial periods. This is the first year we have been engaged to audit the financial statements of the company. The period of total uninterrupted engagement including renders reappointments of the firm is 1 year.

We have not provided non-audit services prohibited by the FRC’s Ethical Standard and have remained independent of the entity in conducting the audit.

The audit opinion is consistent with the additional report to the audit committee.

Cathal Kelly

(Senior Statutory Auditor)

For and on behalf of

Grant Thornton

Chartered Accountants & Statutory Auditors

12-18 City Quay

Dublin 2,

Ireland

28 April 2022

The consolidated financial statements of Cadogan Petroleum plc, registered in England and Wales no. 05718406, were approved by the Board of Directors and authorised for issue on 28 April 2022. They were signed on its behalf by:

Fady Khallouf

Chief Executive Officer

28 April 2022

The notes on pages 83 to 111 form an integral part of these financial statements.

Notes to the Consolidated Financial Statements for the year ended 31 December 2021

1.        General information

Cadogan Petroleum plc (the “Company”, together with its subsidiaries the “Group”), is registered in England and Wales under the Companies Act 2006. The address of the registered office is 6th Floor, 60 Gracechurch Street, London EC3V 0HR.

The Group principal activity is oil and gas exploration, development and production; the Company also conducts gas trading and provides services.

The Company’s shares have a standard listing on the Official List of the UK Listing Authority and are traded on the Main Market of the London Stock Exchange.

2.        Adoption of new and revised Standards

 New IFRS accounting standards, amendments and interpretations effective from 1 January 2021

The disclosed policies have been applied consistently by the Group for both the current and previous financial year with the exception of the new standards adopted.

The IFRS financial information has been drawn up on the basis of accounting policies consistent with those applied in the financial statements for the year to 31 December 2020, except for the following:

(a)   Interest Rate Benchmark Reform - Amendments to IFRS 7, IFRS 9, IAS 39, IFRS 4 and IFRS 16;

(b)   COVID-19-related Rent Concessions beyond 30 June 2021 - Amendments to IFRS 16.

The application of the above standards has had no impact on the disclosures or the amounts recognised in the Group's consolidated financial statements.

New IFRS accounting standards, amendments and interpretations not yet effective

Below is a list of new and revised IFRSs that are not yet mandatorily effective (but allow early application) for the year ending 31 December 2021 and have not been early adopted by the Group. These standards are not expected to have a material impact on the Group in the future reporting periods and on foreseeable future transactions.

3.      Significant accounting policies

(a)    Basis of accounting

The Group’s financial statements have been prepared and approved by the directors in accordance with UK-adopted international accounting standards (collectively “IFRS”) applied in accordance with the provisions of the Companies Act 2006.

The financial statements have been prepared on the historical cost convention basis.

The principal accounting policies adopted are set out below:

(b)    Going concern

The Group’s cash balance at 31 December 2021 was $15.0 million (2020: $13.3 million). The Directors believe that the funds available at the date of the issue of these financial statements are sufficient for the Group to manage its business risks and planned investments successfully.

The Directors’ have carried out a robust assessment of the principal risks facing the Group.

The Group’s forecasts and projections, taking into account reasonably possible changes in trading activities, operational performance, flow rates for commercial production and the price of hydrocarbons sold to Ukrainian customers, show that there are reasonable expectations that the Group will be able to operate on funds currently held and those generated internally, for the foreseeable future.

Notwithstanding the Group’s current financial performance and position, the Board are cognisant of the actual impacts on the Group of COVID-19 and the war situation in Ukraine. The Board has considered possible reverse stress case scenarios for the impact on the Group’s operations, financial position and forecasts.  Whilst the potential future impacts of Covid-19 and the ***invasion*** of Ukraine by Russia are unknown, the Board has considered operational disruption that may be caused by the factors such as a) restrictions applied by governments, illness amongst our workforce and disruption to supply chain and sales channels; b) market volatility in respect of commodity prices associated with Covid-19 in addition to military and geopolitical factors.

In addition to sensitivities that reflect future expectations regarding country, commodity price and currency risks that the Group may encounter reverse stress tests have been run to reflect possible negative effects of Covid-19 and war in Ukraine. The Group’s forecasts demonstrate that owing to its cash resources the Group is able to meet its operating cash flow requirements and commitments whilst maintaining significant liquidity for a period of at least the next 12 months allowing for sustained reductions in commodity prices and extended and severe disruption to operations should such a scenario occur.

After making enquiries and considering the uncertainties described above, the Directors have a reasonable expectation that the Company and the Group have adequate resources to continue in operational existence for the foreseeable future and consider the going concern basis of accounting to be appropriate and, thus, they continue to adopt the going concern basis of accounting in preparing the annual financial statements.

(c) Basis of consolidation

The consolidated financial statements incorporate the financial statements of the Company and entities controlled by the Company (its subsidiaries) made up to 31 December each year. IFRS 10 defines control to be investor control over an investee when it is exposed, or has rights, to variable returns from its involvement with the investee and has the ability to control those returns through its power over the investee. The results of subsidiaries disposed of during the year are included in the consolidated income statement from the effective date of acquisition or up to the effective date of disposal, as appropriate. Where necessary, adjustments are made to the financial statements of subsidiaries to bring accounting policies used into line with those used by the Group. All intra-group transactions, balances, income and expenses are eliminated on consolidation.

3.    Significant accounting policies (continued)

(c)    Basis of consolidation (continued)

Non-controlling interests in subsidiaries are identified separately from the Group’s equity therein. Those interests of non-controlling shareholders that are present ownership interests entitling their holders to a proportionate share of net assets upon liquidation may be initially ***measured*** at fair value or at the non-controlling interests’ proportionate share of the fair value of the acquiree’s identifiable net assets. The choice of measurement is made on an acquisition-by-acquisition basis. Other non-controlling interests are initially ***measured*** at fair value.

Subsequent to acquisition, the carrying amount of non-controlling interests is the amount of those interests at initial recognition plus the non-controlling interests’ share of subsequent changes in equity. Total comprehensive income is attributed to non-controlling interests even if this results in the non-controlling interests having a deficit balance.

Changes in the Group’s interests in subsidiaries that do not result in a loss of control are accounted for as equity transactions. The carrying amount of the Group’s interests and the non-controlling interests are adjusted to reflect the changes in their relative interests in the subsidiaries. Any difference between the amount by which the non-controlling interests are adjusted and the fair value of the consideration paid or received is recognised directly in equity and attributed to the owners of the Company.

(d)    Revenue recognition

Revenue from contracts with customers is recognized when or as the Group satisfies a performance obligation by transferring a promised good or service to a customer. A good or service is transferred when the customer obtains control of that good or service. Revenue is ***measured*** based on measurement principles of IFRS 15 and represents amounts receivable for hydrocarbon products and services provided in the normal course of business, net of value added tax (‘VAT’) and other sales-related taxes, excluding royalties on production.  Royalties on production are recorded within cost of sales.

E&P and Trading business segments

The transfer of control of hydrocarbons usually coincides with title passing to the customer and the customer taking physical possession as the product passes a physical point such as a designated point in the pipeline for the sale of gas or loading point in the case of oil. The Group principally satisfies its performance obligations at a point in time.

To the extent that revenue arises from test production during an evaluation programme, an amount is credited to evaluation costs and charged to cost of sales, to reflect a zero-net margin.

Services business segment

Revenue from services is recognized in the accounting period in which services are rendered. The main types

of services provided by the Group are drilling and civil works services.  Revenue is recorded as the service is provided over time such as through day rates for supply of drill rigs, civil works and manpower.

Interest income is accrued on a time basis, by reference to the principal outstanding and at the effective interest rate applicable, which is the rate that exactly discounts estimated future cash receipts through the expected life of the financial asset to that asset’s net carrying amount on initial recognition.

3.  Significant accounting policies (continued)

(e)    Foreign currencies

The functional currency of the Group’s Ukrainian operations is Ukrainian Hryvnia.  The functional currency of the Group’s UK subsidiaries and the parent company is US Dollar.

In preparing the financial statements of the individual companies, transactions in currencies other than the functional currency of each Group company (‘foreign currencies’) are recorded in the functional currency at the rates of exchange prevailing on the dates of the transactions. At each balance sheet date, monetary assets and liabilities that are denominated in foreign currencies are retranslated into the functional currency at the rates prevailing on the balance sheet date. Non-monetary assets and liabilities carried at fair value that are denominated in foreign currencies are translated at the rates prevailing at the date when the fair value was determined. Non-monetary items that are ***measured*** in terms of historical cost in a foreign currency are not retranslated. Foreign exchange differences on cash are recognized in operating profit or loss in the period in which they arise.

Exchange differences are recognized in the profit or loss in the period in which they arise except for exchange differences on monetary items receivable from or payable to a foreign operation for which settlement is neither planned nor likely to occur. This forms part of the net investment in a foreign operation, which is recognized in the foreign currency translation reserve and in profit or loss on disposal of the net investment.

For the purpose of presenting consolidated financial statements, the results and financial position of each entity of the Group, where the functional currency is not the US dollar, are translated into US dollars as follows:

i.             assets and liabilities of the Group’s foreign operations are translated at the closing rate on the balance sheet date;

ii.            income and expenses are translated at the average exchange rates for the period, where it approximates to actual rates. In other cases, if exchange rates fluctuate significantly during that period, the exchange rates at the date of the transactions are used; and

iii.           all resulting exchange differences arising, if any, are recognized in other comprehensive income and accumulated equity (attributed to non-controlling interests as appropriate), transferred to the Group’s translation reserve. Such translation differences are recognized as income or as expenses in the period in which the operation is disposed of.

3.    Significant accounting policies (continued)

(g)  Taxation

The tax expense represents the sum of the tax currently payable and deferred tax.

The tax currently payable is based on taxable profit for the year. Taxable profit differs from net profit as reported in the consolidated income statement because it excludes items of income or expense that are taxable or deductible in other years and it further excludes items that are never taxable or deductible. The Group’s liability for current tax is calculated using tax rates that have been enacted or substantively enacted by the balance sheet date.

Deferred tax is the tax expected to be payable or recoverable on differences between the carrying amounts of assets and liabilities in the financial statements and the corresponding tax bases used in the computation of taxable profit. This is accounted for using the balance sheet liability method. Deferred tax liabilities are generally recognized for all taxable temporary differences and deferred tax assets are recognised to the extent that it is probable that taxable profits will be available against which deductible temporary differences can be utilised. Such assets and liabilities are not recognized if the temporary difference arises from the initial recognition of goodwill or from the initial recognition (other than in a business combination) of other assets and liabilities in a transaction that affects neither the taxable profit nor the accounting profit. Deferred tax liabilities are recognized for taxable temporary differences arising on investments in subsidiaries and associates, and interests in joint ventures, except where the Group is able to control the reversal of the temporary difference and it is probable that the temporary difference will not reverse in the foreseeable future.

The carrying amount of deferred tax assets is reviewed at each balance sheet date and reduced to the extent that it is no longer probable that sufficient taxable profits will be available to allow all or part of the asset to be recovered. Deferred tax is calculated at the tax rates that are expected to apply in the period when the liability is settled or the asset is realized. Deferred tax is charged or credited in the income statement, except when it relates to items charged or credited in other comprehensive income, in which case the deferred tax is also dealt with in other comprehensive income.

Deferred tax assets and liabilities are offset when there is a legally enforceable right to set off current tax assets against current tax liabilities and when they relate to income taxes levied by the same taxation authority and the Group intends to settle its current tax assets and liabilities on a net basis.

In case of the uncertainty of the tax treatment, the Group assess, whether it is probable or not, that the tax treatment will be accepted, and to determine the value, the Group use the most likely amount or the expected value in determining taxable profit (tax loss), tax bases, unused tax losses, unused tax credits and tax rates.

(h)    Other property, plant and equipment

Property, plant and equipment (‘PP&E’) are carried at cost less accumulated depreciation and any recognized impairment loss. Depreciation and amortization is charged so as to write-off the cost or valuation of assets, other than land, over their estimated useful lives, using the straight-line method, on the following bases:

Other PP&E                                       10% to 30%

The gain or loss arising on the disposal or retirement of an asset is determined as the difference between the sales proceeds and the carrying amount of the asset and is recognized in income.

(i)    Intangible exploration and evaluation assets

The Group applies the modified full cost method of accounting for intangible exploration and evaluation (‘E&E’) expenditure, which complies with requirements set out in IFRS 6Exploration for and Evaluation of Mineral Resources. Under the modified full cost method of accounting, expenditure made on exploring for and evaluating oil and gas properties is accumulated and initially capitalized as an intangible asset, by reference to

3.    Significant accounting policies (continued)

(i)    Intangible exploration and evaluation assets(continued)

appropriate cost centres being the appropriate oil or gas property. E&E assets are then assessed for impairment on a geographical cost pool basis, which are assessed at the level of individual licences.

E&E assets comprise costs of (i) E&E activities which are in progress at the balance sheet date, but where the existence of commercial reserves has yet to be determined (ii) E&E expenditure which, whilst representing part of the E&E activities associated with adding to the commercial reserves of an established cost pool, did not result in the discovery of commercial reserves.

Costs incurred prior to having obtained the legal rights to explore an area are expensed directly to the income statement as incurred.

Exploration and Evaluation costs

E&E expenditure is initially capitalized as an E&E asset. Payments to acquire the legal right to explore, costs of technical services and studies, seismic acquisition, exploratory drilling and testing are also capitalized as intangible E&E assets.

Tangible assets used in E&E activities (such as the Group’s vehicles, drilling rigs, seismic equipment and other property, plant and equipment) are normally classified as PP&E. However, to the extent that such assets are consumed in developing an intangible E&E asset, the amount reflecting that consumption is recorded as part of the cost of the intangible asset. Such intangible costs include directly attributable overheads, including the depreciation of PP&E items utilised in E&E activities, together with the cost of other materials consumed during the exploration and evaluation phases.

E&E assets are not amortized prior to the conclusion of appraisal activities.

Treatment of E&E assets at conclusion of appraisal activities

Intangible E&E assets related to each exploration property are carried forward, until the existence (or otherwise) of commercial reserves has been determined. If commercial reserves have been discovered, the related E&E assets are assessed for impairment on individual assets basis as set out below and any impairment loss is recognized in the income statement. Upon approval of a development programme, the carrying value, after any impairment loss, of the relevant E&E assets is reclassified to the development and production assets within PP&E.

Intangible E&E assets which relate to E&E activities that are determined not to have resulted in the discovery of commercial reserves remain capitalized as intangible E&E assets at cost less accumulated amortization, subject to meeting a pool-wide impairment test in accordance with the accounting policy for impairment of E&E assets set out below.

Impairment of E&E assets

E&E assets are assessed for impairment when facts and circumstances suggest that the carrying amount may exceed its recoverable amount. Such indicators include, but are not limited to those situations outlined in paragraph 20 of IFRS 6Exploration for and Evaluation of Mineral Resourcessuch as, a) license expiry during year or in the near future and will not likely to be renewed; b) expenditure on E&E activity neither budgeted nor planned; c) commercial quantities of mineral resources have been discovered; and d) sufficient data exist to indicate that carrying amount of E&E asset is unlikely to be recovered in full from successful development or sale.

Where there are indications of impairment, the E&E assets concerned are tested for impairment. Where the E&E assets concerned fall within the scope of an established full cost pool, which are not larger than an operating segment, they are tested for impairment together with all development and production assets associated with that cost pool, as a single cash generating unit.

The aggregate carrying value of the relevant assets is compared against the expected recoverable amount of the pool, generally by reference to the present value of the future net cash flows expected to be derived from production of commercial reserves from that pool. Where the assets fall into an area that does not have an established pool or if there are no producing assets to cover the unsuccessful exploration and evaluation costs, those assets would fail the impairment test and be written off to the income statement in full.

Impairment losses are recognized in the income statement and are separately disclosed.

(j) Development and production assets

Development and production assets are accumulated on a field-by-field basis and represent the cost of developing the commercial Reserves discovered and bringing them into production, together with E&E expenditures incurred in finding commercial Reserves transferred from intangible E&E assets.

The cost of development and production assets comprises the cost of acquisitions and purchases of such assets, directly attributable overheads, finance costs capitalized, and the cost of recognizing provisions for future restoration and decommissioning.

Depreciation of producing assets

Depreciation is calculated on the net book values of producing assets on a field-by-field basis using the unit of production method. The unit of production method refers to the ratio of production in the reporting year as a proportion of the Proved and Probable Reserves of the relevant field based on assessments of internal geologists utilising the most recent Competent Person Report and subsequent drilling and exploration, taking into account future development expenditures necessary to bring those Reserves into production.

Producing assets are generally grouped with other assets that are dedicated to serving the same Reserves for depreciation purposes, but are depreciated separately from producing assets that serve other Reserves.

(k) Impairment of development and production assets and other property, plant and equipment

At each balance sheet date, the Group reviews the carrying amounts of its PP&E to determine whether there is any indication that those assets have suffered an impairment loss. If any such indication exists, the recoverable amount of the asset is estimated in order to determine the extent of the impairment loss (if any). Where the asset does not generate cash flows that are independent from other assets, the Group estimates the recoverable amount of the cash-generating unit to which the asset belongs. The recoverable amount is the higher of fair value less costs to sell and value in use. In assessing value in use, the estimated future cash flows are discounted to their present value using a pre-tax discount rate that reflects current market assessments of the time value of money and the risks specific to the asset for which the estimates of future cash flows have not been adjusted. In determining fair value less cost to sell, the estimated future cash flows are discounted to their present value using a post-tax discount rate that reflects current market assessments of the time value of money and the risks specific to the asset for which the estimates of future cash flows have not been adjusted.  Such cash flows include relevant development expenditure that a market participant would reasonably be expected to undertake.

If the recoverable amount of an asset (or cash-generating unit) is estimated to be less than its carrying amount, the carrying amount of the asset (cash-generating unit) is reduced to its recoverable amount. An impairment loss is recognised as an expense immediately.

Where an impairment loss subsequently reverses, the carrying amount of the asset (cash-generating unit) is increased to the revised estimate of its recoverable amount, but so that the increased carrying amount does not exceed the carrying amount that would have been determined had no impairment loss been recognised for the asset (cash-generating unit) in prior years. A reversal of an impairment loss is recognized as income immediately.

(l)      Inventories

Oil and gas stock and spare parts are stated at the lower of cost and net realisable value. Costs comprise direct materials and, where applicable, direct labour costs and those overheads that have been incurred in bringing the inventories to their present location and condition. Cost is allocated using the weighted average method. Net realisable value represents the estimated selling price less all estimated costs of completion and costs to be incurred in marketing, selling and distribution.

(m)  Financial instruments

Financial assets and financial liabilities are recognized in the consolidated statement of financial position when the Group becomes party to the contractual provisions of the instrument.

Loan classified at fair value through profit and loss (applicable for 2020)

Loan instruments which include options to convert the instrument into equity are classified as fair value through profit and loss instruments because they do not meet the criteria for amortized cost measurement as they are not held for the collection of contractual cash flows representing solely payments of principal and interest. Such loan instruments are initially recorded at fair value which is typically the cash advanced under the instrument and subsequently recorded at fair value with changes in fair value recorded in the income statement. Transaction costs for loans classified at fair value through profit or loss are expensed in the income statement.

Loan classified at amortised cost (applicable for 2021)

Loan is ***measured*** at the amount recognised at initial recognition minus principal repayments, plus or minus the cumulative amortization of any difference between that initial amount and the maturity amount, and any loss allowance. Interest income is calculated using the effective interest method and is recognised in profit and loss. Changes in fair value are recognised in profit and loss when the asset is derecognised or reclassified. In accordance with IFRS 9, the loan is ***measured*** at amortised cost. The Group applies the simplified approach to providing for expected credit losses (ECL) prescribed by IFRS 9, which permits the use of the lifetime expected loss provision for the loan. Expected credit losses are assessed on a forward-looking basis. The loss allowance is ***measured*** at initial recognition and throughout its life at an amount equal to lifetime ECL. Any impairment is recognized in the income statement.

Trade and other payables

Payables are initially ***measured*** at fair value, net of transaction costs and are subsequently ***measured*** at amortized cost using the effective interest method.

Trade and other receivables

Trade and other receivables are recognized initially at their transaction price in accordance with IFRS 9 and are subsequently ***measured*** at amortised cost. The Group applies the simplified approach to providing for expected credit losses (ECL) prescribed by IFRS 9, which permits the use of the lifetime expected loss provision for all trade receivables. Expected credit losses are assessed on a forward-looking basis. The loss allowance is ***measured*** at initial recognition and throughout its life at an amount equal to lifetime ECL. Any impairment is recognized in the income statement.

Cash

Cash comprise cash on hand and on-demand deposits. Deposits are recorded as cash and cash equivalents when they have a maturity of less than 90 days at inception.

(n)    Provisions

Provisions are recognized when the Group has a present obligation (legal or constructive) as a result of a past event, it is probable that the Group will be required to settle that obligation and a reliable estimate can be made of the amount of the obligation. The amount recognized as a provision is the best estimate of the consideration required to settle the present obligation at the balance sheet date, taking into account the risks and uncertainties surrounding the obligation. When a provision is ***measured*** using the cash flows estimated to settle the present obligation, its carrying amount is the present value of those cash flows.

(o)      Decommissioning

A provision for decommissioning is recognized in full when the related facilities are installed. The decommissioning provision is calculated as the net present value of the Group’s share of the expenditure expected to be incurred at the end of the producing life of each field in the removal and decommissioning of the production, storage and transportation facilities currently in place. The cost of recognizing the decommissioning provision is included as part of the cost of the relevant asset and is thus charged to the income statement on a unit of production basis in accordance with the Group’s policy for depletion and depreciation of tangible non-current assets. Period charges for changes in the net present value of the decommissioning provision arising from discounting are included within finance costs.

(p)     Leases

At inception of a contract, the Group assesses whether a contract is, or contains, a lease based on whether the contract conveys the right to control the use of an identified asset for a period of time in exchange for consideration. Service agreements for equipment on the working sites are not considered leases as, based upon an assessment of the terms and nature of their contractual arrangements, the contracts do not convey the right to control the use of an identified asset.

The right-of-use asset is initially ***measured*** based on the initial amount of the lease liability adjusted for any lease payments made at or before the commencement date, plus any initial direct costs incurred and an estimate of costs to dismantle and remove the underlying asset or to restore the underlying asset or the site on which it is located, less any lease incentives received.

The asset is depreciated to the earlier of the end of the useful life of the right-of-use asset or the lease term using the straight-line method as this most closely reflects the expected pattern of consumption of the future economic benefits. The lease term includes periods covered by an option to extend if the Group is reasonably certain to exercise that option. In addition, the right-of-use asset is periodically reduced by impairment losses, if any, and adjusted for certain remeasurements of the lease liability.

The lease liability is initially ***measured*** at the present value of the lease payments that are not paid at the commencement date, discounted using the interest rate implicit in the lease or, if that rate cannot be readily determined, the incremental borrowing rate. The lease liability is ***measured*** at amortized cost using the effective interest method. It is remeasured when there is a change in future lease payments arising from a change in an index or rate, if there is a change in the Group’s estimate of the amount expected to be payable under a residual value guarantee, or if the Group changes its assessment of whether it will exercise a purchase, extension or termination option. When the lease liability is remeasured in this way, a corresponding adjustment is made to the carrying amount of the right-of-use asset, or the effect is recorded in profit or loss if the carrying amount of the right-of-use asset has been reduced to zero.

The Group elected to apply the practical expedient not to recognise right-of-use assets and lease liabilities for short-term leases that have a lease term of 12 months or less and leases of low-value assets. The Group also made use of the practical expedient to not recognize a right-of-use asset or a lease liability for leases for which the lease term ends within 12 months of the date of initial application.

The lease payments associated with these leases are recognized as an expense on a straight-line basis over the lease term.

4.      Critical accounting judgements and key sources of estimation uncertainty

In the application of the Group’s accounting policies, which are described in note 3, the Directors are required to make judgements, estimates and assumptions about the carrying amounts of the assets and liabilities that are not readily apparent from other sources. The estimates and associated assumptions are based on historical experience and other factors that are considered to be relevant. Actual results may differ from these estimates.

The estimates and underlying assumptions are reviewed on an ongoing basis. Revisions to accounting estimates are recognized in the period in which the estimate is revised if the revision affects only that period or in the period of the revision and future periods if the revision affects both the current and future periods.

The following are the critical judgements and estimates that the Directors have made in the ***process*** of applying the Group’s accounting policies and that have the most significant effect on the amounts recognized in the financial statements.

Critical judgements and estimates

(a) Impairment indicator assessment for E&E assets

Cadogan has fully complied with legislative requirements and submitted its application for a 20-year exploration and production license 5 months before its expiry on 23 December 2019. A decision on the award was expected to be provided by State Geological Service of Ukraine before 19 January 2020, since all other intermediary approvals had been secured in line with the applicable legislation requirements. Given the delay to granting of the new license beyond the regular timeline provided by legislation in the Ukraine, Cadogan has launched a claim before the Administrative Court to challenge the non-granting of the 20-year production license by the Licensing Authority.

In February 2022 the company received information from public register that its claim was rejected by the Court.  Despite the restrictions imposed by the martial law in Ukraine, Usenco Nadra exercised its right for appeal.

The current geopolitical and military situation in Ukraine do not allow to make any grounded expectation on the legal ***process*** time frame and the Court of appeal decision. Considering this fact, Cadogan has fully impaired the Bitlyanska license (note 15).

(b)    Impairment of PP&E

Management assesses its development and production assets for impairment indicators and if indicators of impairment are identified performs an impairment test. Management performed an impairment assessment using a discounted cash flow model which required estimates including forecast oil prices, reserves and production, costs and discount rates (note 16).

(c)   Recoverability and measurement of VAT

Judgment is required in assessing the recoverability of VAT assets and the extent to which historical impairment provisions remain appropriate, particularly noting the recent recoveries against historically impaired VAT. In forming this assessment, the Group considers the nature and age of the VAT, the likelihood of eligible future supplies to VAT, the pattern of recoveries and risks and uncertainties associated with the operating environment.

(d)  Classification of the Loan instrument in 2020 and the Loan in 2021

In February 2019, the Group advanced a Euro 13,385,000 loan to Proger Managers & Partners Srl (“PMP”), a privately owned Italian company whose only interest is a 72.92% participation in Proger Ingegneria Srl (“Proger Ingegneria”), a privately owned company which held a 75.95% participating interest in Proger Spa (“Proger”) at 31 December 2020. The loan carries an entitlement to interest at a rate of 5.5% per year, payable at maturity (which is 24 months after the execution date (February 2019) and assuming that the call option described below is not exercised). The principal of the loan is secured by a pledge over PMP’s current participating interest in

Proger Ingegneria Srl, up to a maximum guaranteed amount of Euro 13,385,000.

Through the Call Option Agreement, the Group was granted a call option to acquire, at its sole discretion, 33% of participating interest in Proger Ingegneria; the exercise of the option would have given Cadogan, through CPHBV, an indirect 25% interest in Proger at 31 December 2020. The call option was granted at no additional cost and could be exercised at any time between the 6th (sixth) and 24th (twenty-fourth) months following the execution date of the loan agreement and subject to Cadogan shareholders having approved the exercise of the call option as explained further below. Should CPHBV exercise the call option, the price for the purchase of the 33% participating interest in Proger Ingegneria shall be paid by setting off the corresponding amount due by PMP to CPHBV, by way of reimbursement of the principal, pursuant to the Loan Agreement. If the Call Option is exercised, then the obligation on PMP to pay interest is extinguished.

Management considered the extent to which the Option and rights to representation on the Board of Proger Ingegneria and Proger meant significant influence existed.  The requirement to obtain shareholders’ approval for any exercise of the option was considered to represent a substantive condition such that the option was not ‘currently exercisable’ under IFRS at 31 December 2020. In consequence, the potential voting rights associated with any subsequent exercise of the Option were not considered to contribute to significant influence over the investee.

In 2019 and 2020, under the Group’s accounting policies, the instrument was held at fair value through profit and loss and determination of fair value required assessment of both key investee specific information regarding financial performance and prospects and market information. The determination of fair value was made at 31 December 2020 based on facts and circumstances at that date, notwithstanding that the borrower failed to repay the loan at maturity in 2021.

The Group’s original investment decision involved assessment of Proger Spa business plans and analysis with professional advisers including valuations performed using the income method (discounted cash flows) and market approach using both the precedent transactions and trading multiples methods.

Unfortunately, Proger refused to provide Cadogan information regarding its 2020 financial performance or updated forecasts to undertake a detailed fair value assessment using the income method or market approach at 31 December 2020. As a consequence, management assessed the fair value of the instrument based on the

terms of the agreement, including the pledge over shares, together with financial information in respect of prior periods and determined that $16.8 million represented the best estimate of fair value, being equal to anticipated receipts and timing thereof discounted at an estimated market rate of interest of 7.8%.  In forming its assessment at 31 December 2020, management particularly considered the impact of any claim under the pledge and further litigation options on the underlying investee business and shareholders and resulting incentive that created for the borrower to ultimately meet the contractual payment obligation. Management further considered information relevant to Proger business and PMP’s ability to pay, noting the absence of 2020 financial information. However, the absence of information regarding Proger’s 2020 financial performance and prospects represented a significant limitation on the fair value exercise and, as a result, if received, the fair value could be materially higher or lower than this value.

Since the Call Option was not exercised before the Maturity Date and the asset is held within a business model whose objective is to hold assets in order to collect contractual cash flows, the Loan provided was reclassified from ‘Financial assets at fair value through profit and loss’ to ‘Financial assets at amortised cost’ at the value carried at the Company balance at the date of the Call Option expiry.

(e)  Well services and rental agreements

The Group’s well rental arrangements in Ukraine for oil and gas extraction activities are outside of the scope of IFRS 16. Judgment was required in forming this assessment, based on analysis of the scope of IFRS 16 and the nature of the well rental arrangements. This assessment focused on the extent to which the rental agreements provided access to sub-surface well structures to extract hydrocarbons versus surface level infrastructure for the transport and ***processing*** of extracted hydrocarbons.

(f)  Contingent liabilities

Judgment has been applied in assessing the likelihood of financial loss in respect of the ongoing litigation in respect of VAT and tax losses detailed in note 27. In forming the conclusion no provision is required management considered the findings of the first and second instance courts, although the matter remains subject to appeal.

(g)Deferred tax assets

Deferred tax assets and liabilities require management judgement in determining the amounts to be recognised. In particular, significant judgement is used when assessing the extent to which deferred tax assets should be recognised, with consideration given to the timing and level of future taxable income in the relevant tax jurisdiction.

5. Segment information

Segment information is presented on the basis of management’s perspective and relates to the parts of the Group that are defined as operating segments. Operating segments are identified on the basis of internal reports provided to the Group’s chief operating decision maker (“CODM”). The Group has identified its senior management team as its CODM and the internal reports used by the senior management team to oversee operations and make decisions on allocating resources serve as the basis of information presented. These internal reports are prepared on the same basis as these consolidated financial statements.

Segment information is analysed on the basis of the type of activity, products sold, or services provided. The majority of the Group’s operations and all Group’s revenues are located within Ukraine. Segment information is analysed on the basis of the types of goods supplied by the Group’s operating divisions. The Group’s reportable segments under IFRS 8 are therefore as follows:

Exploration and Production

E&P activities on the exploration and production licences for natural gas, oil and condensate.

Service

Drilling services to exploration and production companies; andCivil works services to exploration and production companies.

Trading

Import of natural gas from European countries; andLocal purchase and sales of natural gas operations with physical delivery of natural gas.

The accounting policies of the reportable segments are the same as the Group’s accounting policies described in note 3. Sales between segments are carried out at rates considered to approximate market prices. The segment result represents operating profit under IFRS before unallocated corporate expenses. Unallocated corporate expenses include management remuneration, representative expenses and expenses incurred in respect of the maintenance of office premises. This is the ***measure*** reported to the CODM for the purposes of resource allocation and assessment of segment performance. The Group does not present information on segment assets and liabilities as the CODM does not review such information for decision-making purposes.

As of 31 December 2021 and for the year then ended the Group’s segmental information was as follows:

Net finance income includes $68 thousand of interest on cash deposits used for trading.The services business segment in 2021 primarily provided well workovers and other works to other Group companies.Includes interest on loan of $1,225 thousand.

As of 31 December 2020 and for the year then ended the Group’s segmental information was as follows:

Net finance income includes $25 thousand of interest on cash deposits used for trading.The services business segment in 2020 primarily provided well workovers and other works to other Group companies.Includes decrease in FVPL of $334 thousand.

6.        Revenue

Revenue is generated in the Ukraine. Refer to note 3 (f) for details of the performance obligations. Service revenue and associated contract assets and liabilities are immaterial.

Information about major customers

Included in revenues arising from the Trading segment for the year ended 31 December 2021 are revenues of $1.8 million, which arose from sales to the Group’s four customers.

65% of exploration and production business segment revenue arose from sales to four largest customers. Each of them contributed for more than 10% of the total revenue of the exploration and production business segment revenue for the year ended 31 December 2021.

In 2020, Trading segment revenue for the year ended 31 December 2020 of $1.6 million arose from sales to the Group’s four customers. Each of them contributed for more than 10% of the total revenue of the exploration and production business segment revenue for the year ended 31 December 2020.

7.        Administrative expenses

8.        Reversal of impairment/(impairment) ofinventory andother assets

In 2020, $0.6 million of provision against VAT has been released in respect of input VAT historically impaired that has been offset against output VAT.

$1.5 million (2020: $1.5 million) of historical VAT receivables remain impaired. Refer to Note 4.

Impairment totalled $1 million (2020: $53 thousand) includes impairment of inventories.

9.   Other operating expenses, net

For the details on disposal of subsidiaries please refer to Note 17.

10.         Auditor’s remuneration

The analysis of auditor’s remuneration is as follows:

Audit fees for 2021 refer to Grant Thornton of $164 thousand for the audit of group accounts and subsidiaries as of and for the year ended 31 December 2021.

11.      Staff costs

The average monthly number of employees (including Executive Directors) was:

12.      Finance income/(costs), net

13.  Tax

The Group’s operations are conducted primarily outside the UK, namely in Ukraine. The most appropriate tax rate for the Group is therefore considered to be 18 % (2020: 18%), the rate of profit tax in Ukraine, which is the primary source of revenue for the Group. Taxation for other jurisdictions is calculated at the rates prevailing in the respective jurisdictions.

The taxation charge for the year can be reconciled to the profit/(loss) per the income statement as follows:

Permanent differences mostly represent items, including provisions, accruals and impairments related to taxation in Ukraine, these are items not deductible in tax computations.

14.      Loss per Ordinary share

Basic loss per Ordinary share is calculated by dividing the net loss for the year attributable to owners of the Company by the weighted average number of Ordinary shares outstanding during the year. The calculation of the basic loss per share is based on the following data:

In 2021 and 2020 the Group generated a loss and therefore there is no difference between basic and diluted EPS.

15.      Intangible exploration and evaluation assets

The carrying amount of E&E assets at 31 December 2021 relates to the Bitlyanska license.

Cadogan has fully complied with legislative requirements and submitted its application for a 20-year exploration and production license 5 months before its expiry on 23 December 2019. A decision on the award was expected to be provided by State Geological Service of Ukraine before 19 January 2020, since all other intermediary approvals had been secured in line with the applicable legislation requirements. Given the delay to granting of the new license beyond the regular timeline provided by legislation in the Ukraine, Cadogan has launched a claim before the Administrative Court to challenge the non-granting of the 20-year production license by the Licensing Authority.

In February 2022 the company received information from public register that its claim was rejected by the Court.  Despite the restrictions imposed by the martial law in Ukraine, Usenco Nadra exercised its right for appeal.

The current geopolitical and military situation in Ukraine do not allow to make any grounded expectation on the legal ***process*** time frame and the Court of appeal decision. Considering this fact, Cadogan has fully impaired the Bitlyanska license.

16.      Property, plant and equipment

Other property, plant and equipment include fixtures and fittings for the development and production activities.

The carrying amount of development and production assets at 31 December 2021 of $9,3 million relates to the Blazhiv license. Depreciation includes $0.7 million for the Blazhiv license.

Management has performed an impairment review of Development and production assets.  As part of the information considered management carried out the assessment of the Blazhivska license’s recoverable amount based on the underlying discounted cash flow forecasts. The impairment review supported the conclusion that no impairment was applicable. Key assumptions used in the impairment assessment were: future oil prices which were assumed at a constant $401 (2020: $297), real per tonne; a production forecast with a natural decline; estimated reserves and a discount rate of 15%, nominal.

 Sensitivity analysis for the Blazhiv license

Any impairment is dependent on judgement used in determining the most appropriate basis for the assumptions and estimates made by management, particularly in relation to the key assumptions described above. Sensitivity analysis to potential changes in key assumptions to reach break-even has been provided below:

17.      Subsidiaries

The Company had investments in the following subsidiary undertakings at 31 December 2021:

During the year ended 31 December 2021, the Group’s structure continued to be rationalised both to reduce the number of legal entities and to replace the structure of multiple jurisdictions with one based on a series of sub-holding companies incorporated in the Netherlands for each licence area. In December 2021, the Group sold Ramet Holding Ltd which holds 79.9% of OJSC AgroNaftoGasTechService for nominal consideration. Investments into Ramet Holdings Ltd had been impaired in the past reporting periods.

18.      Inventories

The impairment provision at 31 December 2021 and 2020 is made so as to reduce the carrying value of the inventories to the net realizable value.

19.      Trade and other receivables

The Group considers that the carrying amount of receivables approximates their fair value.

VAT recoverable is presented net of the cumulative provision of $1.3 million (2020: $1.5 million) against Ukrainian VAT receivable that has been recognized as at 31 December 2021. VAT recoverable relates to the oil production and gas trading operations and is expected to be recovered through the gas and oil sales VAT.

20.      Notes supporting statement of cash flows

Cash at 31 December 2021 of $15.0 million (2020: $13.3 million) comprise cash held by the Group. The Directors consider that the carrying amount of these assets approximates to their fair value. There were no cash transactions from financing activities for the year 2021.

21.      Deferred tax

The following are the major deferred tax liabilities and assets recognised by the Group and movements thereon during the current and prior reporting period:

At 31 December 2021, the Group had the following unused tax losses available for offset against future taxable profits:

21.      Deferred tax (continued)

Deferred tax assets have been recognized in respect of those tax losses where there is sufficient certainty that profit will be available in future periods against which they can be utilized. The Group’s unused tax losses of $19.9 million (2020: $56.4 million) relating to losses incurred in the UK are available to shelter future non-trading profits arising within the Company. These losses are not subject to a time restriction on expiry. No deferred tax asset is recorded.

Unused tax losses incurred by Ukraine subsidiaries amount to $50.8 million (2020: $49.4 million). Under general tax law provisions, these losses may be carried forward indefinitely to be offset against any type of taxable income arising from the same company. Tax losses may not be surrendered from one Ukraine subsidiary to another. The deferred tax asset recorded is expected to be utilized based on forecasts and relates to oil production subsidiaries which are generating taxable profits in the foreseeable future.

22.      Lease liabilities

The Group recognized right-of-use assets and lease liabilities based on rental contract for a rent of Kyiv office with maturity date end of February 2024. The Group initially recognized right-of-use assets of $292 thousand as of 31 December 2020. Right-of-use asset is depreciated over the useful life of the underlying asset. Depreciation of $92 thousand is recognized for the year 2021 and represented as a part of other administrative expenses. Carrying value of right-of-use assets is $200 thousand as of 31 December 2021.

The following table sets out a maturity analysis of lease liability, showing the undiscounted lease payments to be paid after the reporting date.

23.      Trade and other payables

Trade creditors and accruals principally comprise amounts outstanding for ongoing costs. The average credit period taken for trade purchases is 29 days (2020: 30 days). The Group has financial risk management policies to ensure that all payables are paid within the credit timeframe.

Other payables include unused vacation reserve provision of $0.34 million (2020: $0.28 million), subsoil tax payables of $0.35 million (2020: $0.17) and other payables of $0.1 million (2020: $0.12).

The Directors consider that the carrying amount of trade and other payables approximates to their fair value. No interest is generally charged on outstanding balances.

24.      Provisions

The provisions at 31 December 2021 comprise of $0.3 million (2020: $0.2 million) of decommissioning provision.

Decommissioning

In accordance with the Group’s environmental policy and applicable legal requirements as of 31st December 2021, the Group intends to restore the sites it is working on after completing exploration or development activities.

A long-term provision of $0.3 million (2020: $0.2 million) has been made for decommissioning costs, which are expected to be incurred at the end of the licenses period as a result of the demobilization of gas and oil facilities and respective site restoration.

25.      Share capital

Authorised and issued equity share capital

Authorized but unissued share capital of £30 million has been translated into US dollars at the historic exchange rate of the issued share capital. The Company has one class of Ordinary shares, which carry no right to fixed income.

Issued equity share capital

Mr. Khallouf was appointed as Chief Executive Officer on 15 November 2019. As part of Mr. Khallouf’s employment agreement, a welcome bonus equivalent in value to 5,500,000 ordinary shares (using the market value of the shares on the business day prior to the date of issue) is payable to Mr. Khallouf and a holding period of two years is applicable to the shares acquired. Pursuant to the terms of the bonus, the amount must be subscribed for ordinary shares in the Company at such time as the executive agrees. The welcome bonus was provided to Mr. Khallouf in May 2020.

26.      Financial instruments

Capital risk management

The Group manages its capital to ensure that entities in the Group will be able to continue as a going concern, while maximising the return to shareholders.

The capital resources of the Group consist of cash arising from equity attributable to owners of the Company, comprising issued capital, reserves and retained earnings as disclosed in the Consolidated Statement of Changes in Equity.

Externally imposed capital requirement

The Group is not subject to externally imposed capital requirements.

Categories of financial instruments

Refer to note 4(d) for details of the terms of the Proger loan recorded as a financial asset at fair value through profit and loss.  The instrument was recorded at management’s best estimate of fair value as set out in note 4(d) although management had not been able to undertake a valuation exercise under the income method based on Proger’s underlying cash flows or market-based method which would incorporate relevant recent financial information on the investee or its prospects.

The Group has applied a level 3 valuation under IFRS as inputs to the valuation have included assessment of the cash repayments anticipated under the loan terms at maturity, delayed by the arbitration ***process*** requested by PMP (the Borrower), historical financial information for the periods prior to 2020 and assessment of the security provided by the pledge over shares together with the impact of the Covid-19 on the activity of Proger. As a result, $ 16.8 million was determined as the best estimate of fair value as at 31 December 2020, being equal to anticipated receipts and timing thereof discounted at an estimated market rate of interest of 7.8%.

In February 2021, Cadogan notified PMP that according to the Loan Agreement, the Maturity Date occurred on 25 February 2021. As the Call Option was not exercised, PMP must fulfil the payment of EUR 14,857,350, being the reimbursement of the Loan in terms of principal and the accumulated interest. PMP is in default since 25 February 2021. In case of default payment, the terms of the agreement provide for the application of an increased interest rate on the amount of the debt.

Since the Call Option was not exercised before the Maturity Date and the asset is held within a business model whose objective is to hold assets in order to collect contractual cash flows, the Loan provided was reclassified from ‘Financial assets at fair value through profit and loss’ to ‘Financial assets at amortized cost’.

The Group considers that the carrying amount of financial instruments approximates their fair value.

Financial risk management objectives

Management co-ordinates access to domestic and international financial markets and monitors and manages the financial risks relating to the operations of the Group in Ukraine through internal risks reports, which analyse exposures by degree and magnitude of risks. These risks include commodity price risks, foreign currency risk, credit risk, liquidity risk and cash flow interest rate risk. The Group does not enter into or trade financial instruments, including derivative financial instruments, for speculative purposes.

The Audit Committee of the Board reviews and monitors risks faced by the Group at meetings held throughout the year.

Interest rate risk

Interest rate risk arises from the possibility that changes in interest rates will affect the value of the financial instruments. The Group is not exposed to interest rate risk because entities of the Group borrow funds at fixed interest rates.

Commodity price risk

The commodity price risk related to Ukrainian gas and condensate prices and prices for crude oil are the Group’s most significant market risk exposures. World prices for gas and crude oil are characterised by significant fluctuations that are determined by the global balance of supply and demand and worldwide political developments, including actions taken by the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries.

These fluctuations may have a significant effect on the Group’s revenues and operating profits going forward. In 2020 the price for Ukrainian gas significantly decreased and was mainly based on the current price of the European gas imports. Management continues to expect that the Group’s principal market for gas will be the Ukrainian domestic market.

The Group does not hedge market risk resulting from fluctuations in gas, condensate and oil prices, and holds no financial instruments, which are sensitive to commodity price risk.

Foreign exchange risk and foreign currency risk management

The Company holds a large portion of its monetary assets in the US Dollars and Euro, mitigating the exchange risk between the US Dollars and Euro and monetary liability in the US Dollars.

Sensitivity analysis is represented below based on 10% exchange rate deviation:

Inflation risk management

Inflation in Ukraine and in the international market for oil and gas may affect the Group’s cost for equipment and supplies. The Directors will proceed with the Group’s practices of keeping deposits in US dollar accounts until funds are needed and selling its production in the spot market to enable the Group to manage the risk of inflation.

Credit risk management

Credit risk refers to the risk that counterparty will default on its contractual obligations resulting in financial loss to the Group. The Group’s credit management ***process*** includes the assessment, monitoring and reporting of counterparty exposure on a regular basis. Credit risk with respect to receivables and advances is mitigated by active and continuous monitoring the credit quality of its counterparties through internal reviews and assessment. There was no material past due receivables as at year end.

The Group makes allowances for expected credit losses on receivables in accordance with its accounting policy.

The credit risk on liquid funds (cash) is considered to be limited because the counterparties are financial institutions with high and good credit ratings, assigned by international credit-rating agencies in the UK and Ukraine respectively.

The carrying amount of financial assets recorded in the financial statements represents the Group’s maximum exposure to credit risk.

Liquidity risk management

Ultimate responsibility for liquidity risk management rests with the Board of Directors, which has built an appropriate liquidity risk management framework for the management of the Group’s short, medium and long-term funding and liquidity management requirements. The Group manages liquidity risk by maintaining adequate cash reserves and by continuously monitoring forecast and actual cash flows.

The following tables sets out details of the expected contractual maturity of financial liabilities.

27.   Commitments and contingencies

Licence contingent liability

The Group has working interests in Blazhiv licence to conduct its exploration and development activities in Ukraine. The licence is not holding any obligation for carrying  exploration activities within its term.

Tax contingent liabilities

The Group assesses its liabilities and contingencies for all tax years open for audit by UK, Netherlands and Ukraine tax authorities based upon the latest information available. Where management concludes that it is not probable that a particular tax treatment is accepted, a provision is recorded based on the most likely amount or the expected value of the tax treatment when determining taxable profit (tax loss), tax bases, unused tax losses, unused tax credits and tax rates. The decision should be based on which method provides better predictions of the resolution of the uncertainty. Inherent uncertainties exist in estimates of tax contingencies due to complexities of interpretation and changes in tax laws.

Whilst the Group believes it has adequately provided for the outcome of these matters, certain periods are under audit by the UK, Netherlands and Ukraine tax authorities, and therefore future results may include favourable or unfavourable adjustments to these estimated tax liabilities in the period the assessments are made or resolved. The final outcome of tax examinations may result in a materially different outcome than assumed in the tax liabilities.

After an inspection conducted by Ukraine’s tax authorities in September 2019, Astroinvest Energy LLC was notified of a tax claim related to the historic costs for the liquidation of wells on the Zagoryanska license. The tax authorities notified Astroinvest Energy LLC that they consider recoverable VAT ($3.6 million) that has subsequently been used to offset output VAT to be non-deductible and additionally that the subsidiary’s tax losses carry forward should be reduced by $15.3 million (Note 21). Astroinvest Energy LLC has launched a claim against the tax authority’s decision on the basis of the current tax legislation and related court decisions and considers the potential for a liability to be less than probable.

If unsuccessful Astroinvest Energy LLC would offset the amount of notified tax losses with part of the historical accumulated tax losses. The disputed amount of VAT would be partially covered with recoverable VAT not recognized as of 31 December 2020 (note 19) such that the eventual impact would be $2.1 million.

28.   Related party transactions

All transactions between the Company and its subsidiaries, which are related parties, have been eliminated on consolidation and are not disclosed in this note.

In February 2019, the Group entered in a 2-year loan agreement with Proger Management & Partners Srl with an option to convert it into a direct 33% equity interest in Proger Ingegneria. At that time, Mr Michelotti was a non-executive Director of Proger Ingegneria Srl and Proger Spa, and CEO of Cadogan Petroleum PLC. Mr Michelotti did not participate to the voting for the approval of the loan agreement at the Board of Cadogan.Directors’ remuneration

The remuneration of the Directors, who are the key management personnel of the Group, is set out below in aggregate for each of the categories specified in IAS 24Related Party Disclosures. Further information about the remuneration of individual Directors is provided in the audited part of the Annual Report on Remuneration 2020 on page 44.

The total remuneration of the highest paid Director was $0.5 million in the year (2020: $0.6 million).

No guarantees have been given or received and no provisions have been made for doubtful debts in respect of the amounts owed by related parties.

29.    Events after the balance sheet date

In February 2022, Usenco Nadra received information from a public register that its claim was rejected by the Court of first instance. Despite the restrictions imposed by the martial law in Ukraine, Usenco Nadra exercised its right for appeal. As a result and given the present uncertainty with the military situation on the ***process*** and decision timing, the Group recognized impairment on the full balance sheet value of E&E assets in an amount of $2.5 million.

After several months of military confrontation, Russia invaded Ukraine on 24 February 2022. The war is increasingly affecting the economy of Europe and exacerbating ongoing economic challenges, including issues such as rising inflation and supply-chain disruption. The degree to which the Group will be affected by them largely depends on the nature and duration of uncertain and unpredictable events, such as further military action and reactions to ongoing developments by global financial markets. At the beginning of March 2022, the Company stopped its production operations for 3 weeks and was able to resume them after having secured its employees safety, the transactions with its customers and deliveries. Starting the end of March 2022 and till the date of the report the Group is operating in due course, production operates with a full capacity, product shipments are not interrupted.

The financial statements of Cadogan Petroleum plc, registered in England and Wales no. 05718406, were approved by the Board of Directors and authorized for issue on 28 April 2022.

They were signed on its behalf by:

Fady Khallouf

Chief Executive Officer

28 April 2022

The notes on pages 115 to 118 form part of these financial statements.

Notes to the Company Financial Statements for the year ended 31 December 2021

30.    Significant accounting policies

The separate financial statements of the Company are presented as required by the Companies Act 2006 (the “Act”). As permitted by the Act, the separate financial statements have been prepared in accordance with UK-adopted international accounting standards (“IFRSs”).

The financial statements have been prepared on the historical cost basis. The principal accounting policies adopted are the same as those set out in note 3 to the Consolidated Financial Statements except as noted below.

As permitted by section 408 of the Act, the Company has elected not to present its profit and loss account for the year. Cadogan Petroleum plc reports a loss for the financial year ended 31 December 2021 of $3.7 million (2020: profit $0.2 million).

Investments

Investments in subsidiaries are stated at cost less, where appropriate, provisions for impairment.

Receivables from subsidiaries

Loans to subsidiary undertakings are subject to IFRS 9’s new expected credit loss model. As all intercompany loans are repayable on demand, the loan is considered to be in stage 3 of the IFRS 9 ECL model on the basis the subsidiary does not have enough liquid assets in order to repay the loans if demanded. Lifetime ECLs are determined using all relevant, reasonable and supportable historical, current and forward-looking information that provides evidence about the risk that the subsidiaries will default on the loan and the amount of losses that would arise as a result of that default. Analysis indicated that the Company will fully recover the carrying value of the loans (net of historic credit loss provisions) so no additional ECL has been recognised in the current period.

Critical accounting judgements and key sources of estimation uncertainty

The Company’s financial statements, and in particular its investments in and receivables from subsidiaries, are affected by certain of the critical accounting judgements and key sources of estimation uncertainty.

The critical estimates and judgments referred to application of the expected credit loss model to intercompany receivables (note 33). Management determined that the interest free on demand loans were required to be assessed on the lifetime expected credit loss approach and assessed scenarios considering risks of loss events and the amounts which could be realised on the loans.  In doing so, consideration was given to factors such as the cash held by subsidiaries and the underlying forecasts of the Group’s divisions and their incorporation of prospective risks and uncertainties.

31.      Auditor’s remuneration

The auditor’s remuneration for audit and other services is disclosed in note 10 to the Consolidated Financial Statements.

32.      Investments

The Company’s subsidiaries are disclosed in note 17 to the Consolidated Financial Statements. The investments in subsidiaries are all stated at cost less any provision for impairment.

33.      Financial assets

The Company’s principal financial assets are bank balances and cash and receivables from related parties none of which are past due. The Directors consider that the carrying amount of receivables from related parties approximates to their fair value.

Receivables from subsidiaries

At the balance sheet date gross amounts receivable from the fellow Group companies were $350 million (2020: $351 million). The Company recognized additional expected credit loss provisions in relation to receivables from subsidiaries of $0.7 million in 2021 (2020: nil). The accumulated provision on receivables at 31 December 2021 was $313.2 million (2020: $312.4 million). The carrying value of the receivables from the fellow Group companies at 31 December 2021 was $36.8 million (2020: $38.6 million). Receivables from subsidiaries are interest free and repayable on demand. There are no past due receivables. The receivables are classified as non-current based on the expected timing of receipt notwithstanding their terms.

Cash

Cash comprises cash held by the Company and short-term bank deposits with an original maturity of three months or less. The carrying value of these assets approximates to their fair value.

34.    Financial liabilities

Trade and other payables

Trade payables principally comprise amounts outstanding for trade purchases and ongoing costs. The average credit period taken for trade purchases is 29 days (2020: 30 days).

The Directors consider that the carrying amount of trade and other payables approximates to their fair value. No interest is charged on balances outstanding.

35.  Share capital

The Company’s share capital is disclosed in note 25 to the Consolidated Financial Statements.

36.  Cumulative translation reserve

The directors decided to change the functional currency of the Company from sterling to US dollars with effect from 1 January 2016. The effect of a change in functional currency is accounted for prospectively. In other words, the Company translates all items into the US dollar using the exchange rate at the date of the change. The resulting translated amounts for non-monetary items are treated as their historical cost. Exchange differences arising from the translation of an operation previously recognised in other comprehensive income in accordance with paragraphs 32 and 39(c) IAS 21“Foreign Currency”are not reclassified from equity to profit or loss until the disposal of the operation.

37. Financial instruments

The Company manages its capital to ensure that it is able to continue as a going concern while maximising the return to shareholders. Refer to note 26 for the Group’s overall strategy and financial risk management objectives.

The capital resources of the Company consist of cash arising from equity, comprising issued capital, reserves and retained earnings.

Categories of financial instruments

Interest rate risk

All financial liabilities held by the Company are non-interest bearing. As the Company has no committed borrowings, the Company is not exposed to any significant risks associated with fluctuations in interest rates.

Credit risk

Credit risk refers to the risk that counterparty will default on its contractual obligations resulting in financial loss to the Company. For cash, the Company only transacts with entities that are rated equivalent to investment grade and above. Other financial assets consist of amounts receivable from related parties.

The Company’s credit risk on liquid funds is limited because the counterparties are banks with high credit ratings assigned by international credit-rating agencies.

The carrying amount of financial assets recorded in the Company financial statements, which is net of any impairment losses, represents the Company’s maximum exposure to credit risk.

Liquidity risk management

Ultimate responsibility for liquidity risk management rests with the Board of Directors, which has built an appropriate liquidity risk management framework for the management of the Company’s short, medium and long-term funding and liquidity management requirements. The Company maintains adequate reserves, by continuously monitoring forecast and actual cash flows.

The Company’s financial liabilities are not significant and therefore no maturity analysis has been presented.

Foreign exchange risk and foreign currency risk management

The Company holds a large portion of its monetary assets in the US Dollars and Euro, mitigating the exchange risk between the US Dollars and Euro and monetary liability in the US Dollars. More information on the foreign exchange risk and foreign currency risk management is disclosed in note 26 to the Consolidated Financial Statements.

38.  Related parties

Amounts due from subsidiaries

The Company has entered into a number of unsecured related party transactions with its subsidiary undertakings. The most significant transactions carried out between the Company and its subsidiary undertakings are mainly for short and long-term financing. Amounts owed from these entities are detailed below:

Refer to note 32 for details on the Company’s receivables due from subsidiaries.

The remuneration of the Directors, who are the key management personnel of the Group, is set out below in aggregate for each of the categories specified in IAS 24Related Party Disclosures. In 2021 there were no other employees in the Company. Further information about the remuneration of individual Directors is provided in the audited part of the Annual Report on Remuneration 2021 on pages 45 to 52.

The total remuneration of the highest paid Director was $0.6 million in the year (2019: $0.6 million).

39.      Events after the balance sheet date

Events after the balance sheet date are disclosed in note 29 to the Consolidated Financial Statements.

Glossary

Shareholder Information

Enquiries relating to the following administrative matters should be addressed to the Company’s registrars: Link Group, 10th Floor, Central Square, 29 Wellington Street, Leeds LS1 4DL.

Telephone: 0371 664 0300. Calls are charged at the standard geographic rate and will vary by provider. Calls outside the United Kingdom will be charged at the applicable international rate. Lines are open between 09:00 – 17:30, Monday to Friday excluding public holidays in England and Wales.

Loss of share certificates.Notification of change of address.Transfers of shares to another person.Amalgamation of accounts: if you receive more than one copy of the Annual Financial Report, you may wish to amalgamate your accounts on the share register.

You can access your shareholding details and a range of other services at the Shareholder Portal[*http://www.signalshares.com*](http://www.signalshares.com).

Information concerning the day-to-day movement of the share price of the Company can be found on the Group’s website[*http://www.cadoganpetroleum.comor*](http://www.cadoganpetroleum.comor) that of the London Stock exchange[*http://www.prices.londonstockexchange.com*](http://www.prices.londonstockexchange.com).

Unsolicited mail

As the Company’s share register is, by law, open to public inspection, shareholders may receive unsolicited mail from organisations that use it as a mailing list. To reduce the amount of unsolicited mail you receive, contact: The Mailing Preference Service, FREEPOST 22, London W1E 7EZ. Telephone: 0845 703 4599. Website:[*http://www.mpsonline.org.uk*](http://www.mpsonline.org.uk).

Financial calendar 2021/2022

Investor relations

Enquiries [*to:info@cadoganpetroleum.com*](mailto:to:info@cadoganpetroleum.com)

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References to page numbers throughout this announcement relates to the page numbers within the Annual Report of the Company for the year ended 31st December 2021.  In addition all graphs and graphics have been removed for the purposes of the announcement.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

[1] Gross revenues of $8.8 million (2020: $5.1 million) included $1.8 million (2020: $1.6 million) from trading of natural gas, $7.0 million (2020: $3.5 million) from exploration and production

[2] Administrative expenses (“G&A”)

[3] Astroservice LLC used its rig for the workover campaign on the Blazhiv license

[4] LTI: Lost Time Incidents; TRI: Total Recordable Incidents

[5] Taxable benefits include life and medical insurance provided to the executive and leased car.

[6] Amount includes catchup payment for two months 2019.

[7] 2015 CEO’s salary is the sum of Mr. des Pallieres' salary for the period January to June and of Mr. Michelotti's salary for the period July to December.

[8] In relation to performance in 2016 and 2015, the CEO used the entire amount of the bonus to buy at market price newly issued company shares on 22 September 2017.

[9] 2019 Annual bonus is a sum of Mr Michelotti’s bonus of $112,140 and welcome bonus for Mr Khallouf equivalent in value of 5,500,000 ordinary shares based on share’s price of £0.0525. Welcome bonus for Mr Khallouf was provided in May 2020 based on share’s price of £0.03. Respective correction of the bonus reserve equivalent to $185 thousand was recognised through share premium account in 2020.

[10] Includes a welcome bonus for Mr Khallouf equivalent in value of 5,500,000 ordinary shares based on share’s price of £0.0525.

[11] Mr Michelotti undertook to use the entire bonus to buy company’s share at market price in order to leave the Company cash neutral.

[12] Year-end performance-based bonus was an alternative to an up-front sign-on bonus. Mr Michelotti use the entire bonus to buy company’s share at market price on 22 September 2017.

[13] $280,298 paid as fees, pension and loss of office.

[14] From 1 August, 2011.

[15] From 19 March 2009.

[16] All employees mean all employees of the Group, including CEO and other Directors (note 11, page 98).

[17] Includes taxable benefits for 2019.

[18] Please note that the salary of the CEO for 2022 remain at €440,000.

[19] Included in retained earnings, loss for the financial year ended 31 December 2021 was $3.7 million (2020: profit $0.2 million).

**Load-Date:** April 29, 2022

**End of Document**



[***BlackRock Greater Europe Investment Trust Plc - Final Results***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6410-KT61-DXP3-R056-00000-00&context=1516831)

PR Newswire UK Disclose

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PR Newswire

BLACKROCK GREATER EUROPE INVESTMENT TRUST PLC

LEI:  5493003R8FJ6I76ZUW55

Annual Report and Financial Statements 31 August 2021

PERFORMANCE RECORD

Source: BlackRock.

1     The change in net assets reflects new ordinary shares issued, shares reissued from treasury, market movements and dividends paid.

2     Alternative Performance ***Measures***, see Glossary in the Annual Report and Financial Statements.

CHAIRMAN’S STATEMENT

PERFORMANCE OVERVIEW

The past year has been a very successful one for your Company both with regard to excellent absolute returns and also relative to our reference index. This has resulted in significant demand for our shares and, since the end of January this year, we have either reissued shares from treasury or issued new shares at a premium to the net asset value (NAV) per share to the aggregate value of £89,004,000 up to 2 November 2021. This is very pleasing.

After the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak and subsequent ramifications in 2020, the restart of economic activity has gathered pace and 2021 looks set to be one of the best years for growth in decades, albeit from a low base. The success of vaccinations in Europe, together with fiscal stimulus and easy monetary support, have provided a bridge through the pandemic and allowed many economies to recover more quickly than expected.

Against this backdrop, it is very pleasing to report that over the year ended 31 August 2021 the Company’s NAV per share returned 49.4%, outperforming its reference index, the FTSE World Europe ex UK Index, which returned 27.4%. The Company’s share price returned 56.8% over the same period (all percentages calculated in sterling terms with dividends reinvested).

Since the financial year end and up to close of business on 2 November 2021, the Company’s NAV has increased by 2.3% compared with a rise in the FTSE World Europe ex UK Index of 1.3% over the same period.

REVENUE EARNINGS AND DIVIDENDS

The Company’s revenue return per share for the year ended 31 August 2021 amounted to 4.13p per share, which compares with 6.85p per share for the previous year, a decrease of 39.7%. In the previous year the revenue return had been enhanced by taxation recoveries in some of the jurisdictions in which we invest. In April the Board declared an interim dividend of 1.75p per share (2020: 1.75p) and the Board is proposing the payment of a final dividend of 4.55p per share for the year (2020: 4.40p). This, together with the interim dividend, makes a total dividend for the year of 6.30p per share (2020: 6.15p), a rise of 2.4%. The dividend will be funded primarily from dividend income received in the year, supported by a payment from revenue reserves. We are fortunate in having strong revenue reserves with which to fund this.

Subject to shareholder approval, the dividend will be paid on 17 December 2021 to shareholders on the Company’s register on 19 November 2021, the ex-dividend date being 18 November 2021.

DISCOUNT/PREMIUM

Over the year to 31 August 2021, the Company’s shares have traded at an average premium of 0.1% and within a range of a 7.4% discount to a 4.1% premium. The Company did not buy back any shares during the year but has reissued 8,432,310 ordinary shares from treasury at a premium to NAV at an average price of 595.33p per share for a net consideration of £50,200,000. In addition, the Company allotted a total of 3,300,000 new ordinary shares during the year at an average price of 674.61p per share for a net consideration of £22,262,000. Since the year end up to 2 November 2021, a further 2,400,000 ordinary shares have been allotted at an average price of 689.12p per share for a total consideration of £16,542,000. These shares have been issued at an average premium over NAV of 2.1% (excluding costs).

As reported in the Half Yearly Financial Report, the Directors exercised their discretion not to operate the half yearly tender offers in November 2020 and May 2021. It was also announced on 30 September 2021 that the Board had decided not to implement a semi-annual tender offer in November 2021. Over the six-month period to 31 August 2021, the average premium to NAV (cum income) was 1.9%. The Board therefore concluded that it was not in the interests of shareholders, as a whole, to implement the latest semi-annual tender offer.

The Directors recognise the importance to investors that the market price of the Company’s shares should not trade at a significant premium or discount to the underlying NAV. Accordingly, in normal market conditions, the Board may use the Company’s share buy back and share issue powers, or operate six monthly tender offers, to ensure that the share price does not go to an excessive discount or premium to the underlying NAV. Resolutions to renew the Company’s semi-annual tender offers and the authorities to issue and buy back shares will be put to shareholders at the forthcoming Annual General Meeting.

OUTLOOK

The outlook for Europe is positive as vaccination rates rise and retail sales and consumer demand point to a strengthening economic recovery. Valuations of European stocks remain attractive relative to historical earnings multiples and are also significantly lower compared with either US stocks or European bonds. Additionally, investors remain significantly underweight in Europe in their portfolios and investor inflows are only just starting to pick up. All of this leads us to a positive view of the future.

Inflation remains the greatest concern and a key factor is the response by global central banks to inflation numbers. For now, the European Central Bank has not signalled any intention to increase rates, as it continues to preserve favourable financing conditions. We see recent market strength for European equities persisting and a focus on fundamentals and active management will be critical for our Portfolio Managers to identify potential winners as the recovery strengthens.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING (AGM)

The AGM of the Company will be held at 12 Throgmorton Avenue, London EC2N 2DL (the venue) on Thursday, 9 December 2021 at 12 noon. In light of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, shareholders are strongly encouraged to submit a proxy vote in advance of the AGM, either by completing the hard copy Form of Proxy or online by following the instructions set out in the Notice of Annual General Meeting.

At present UK Government restrictions on public gatherings are no longer in force in connection with COVID-19 and the AGM can be held in the normal way with physical attendance by shareholders. However, shareholders should be aware that it is possible that such restrictions could be reimposed prior to the date of the AGM. In such event, these restrictions could mean that the AGM is required to be held as a closed meeting as happened last year with physical attendance limited to only a small number of attendees comprising the required quorum for the meeting and those persons whose attendance is necessary for the conduct of the meeting, and that any other persons will be refused entry. Accordingly, all shareholders are recommended to vote by proxy in advance of the AGM and to appoint the Chairman of the meeting as their proxy. This will ensure that shareholders’ votes will be counted even if they (or any appointed proxy) are not able to attend. All votes will be taken by poll so that all proxy votes are counted.

The Company may impose entry restrictions on persons wishing to attend the AGM (including, if required, refusing entry) in order to secure the orderly conduct of the AGM and the safety of the attendees. All shareholders intending to attend should either be fully vaccinated or obtain a negative COVID test result before entering the venue. Negative test results must be obtained no earlier than one day before entering the venue and fully vaccinated shareholders are also strongly encouraged to get tested. Attendees will also be required to wear a face covering at all times within the venue except when seated in the relevant meeting room. Shareholders are also requested not to attend the AGM if they have tested positive for COVID-19 in the 10 days prior to the AGM, are experiencing new or worsening COVID-19 related symptoms, have been in close contact with anyone who is experiencing symptoms or has contracted COVID-19 during the 14 days prior to the AGM, or are required to self isolate pursuant to UK Government guidance.

Finally, most of our Board meetings during the year were held virtually but happily, during the summer, physical meetings were able to resume. I would like to thank my colleagues and our advisers for the versatility that they have shown throughout the pandemic in adapting to the circumstances and to welcome a return to a more normal modus of operation.

ERIC SANDERSON

Chairman

4 November 2021

INVESTMENT MANAGER’S REPORT

OVERVIEW

The Company enjoyed positive performance over the year with a share price total return of +56.8% and underlying NAV total return of +49.4% in the twelve months to 31 August 2021. By way of comparison, the FTSE World Europe ex UK Index gained +27.4% over the same period. (All percentages are calculated in sterling terms with dividends reinvested.)

Our approach to active investing is predicated on our view that returns are a function of direct actions you take on the portfolio, as much as the actions you actively decline to take. The interconnected, almost hyperactive nature of our modern world means there is always something to worry about and investors are typically faced with a prevailing macro narrative that asks them to change the composition of their portfolio. Markets ultimately like to challenge investors taking the longer term and high conviction view. Success befalls those who clearly understand why the earnings stream in which they are invested offers duration and the potential for long-term value creation.

In last year’s Annual Report, we explained how the COVID-19 pandemic posed a severe test to any investor’s investment philosophy. It required a heightened focus on maintaining a long-term approach to investing, while resisting any distraction from short-term market gyrations. We had to lean heavily on our well-defined investment ***process***: focusing on owning ***exceptional*** businesses with clearly articulated strategies, high returns on capital, strong free cash-flow generation and options to deploy capital into growth projects at attractive returns. This approach served our shareholders well during a turbulent 2020.

While the global economy and European markets have shown impressive progress over the course of 2021, our investment approach was again challenged, this time by a shift in market leadership that saw old economy sectors propelling markets higher. Positive vaccine efficacy data released in November 2020 fuelled a powerful top-down narrative revolving around the reopening of economies, vaccine rollouts, inflationary pressures and rising interest rates. This led to cyclical, operationally levered parts of the market – less represented in this Company – such as banks, airlines, auto manufacturers and energy companies seeing significant share price rallies during the first four months of 2021.

As has now become a common occurrence, we were again presented with an eloquent thesis from a broad range of market strategists suggesting permanent regime change and that companies and sectors that had outperformed in the last ten years could not continue to do so. We had shared the optimism around the global economic recovery and been constructive on the outlook for corporate earnings since May last year but, equally, we had been consistent with our view that the post-COVID-19 world would unlikely look very different from the pre-COVID-19 environment. We felt that many of the effects we were seeing in the early part of the recovery were likely to be transitory in nature, which is a view around which markets have increasingly coalesced.

PORTFOLIO

With this in mind, we are pleased to report that the overall shape of the portfolio has changed very little and shares in our Company have continued to deliver for shareholders despite all these significant events influencing markets over the course of last year. This adds credence to our approach of ignoring macro narratives and instead focusing on long duration growth in earnings and cashflows to drive returns for our shareholders.

One segment of the portfolio that exemplifies long duration value creation are our holdings in the European semiconductor industry includingASML, BE SemiconductorandVAT Group– all amongst our top performers over the period under review. These companies service different parts of the semiconductor value chain and are dominating their respective niches, affording them a healthy degree of pricing power. As is now well documented, the strength in demand for semiconductor components has left many end users in short supply. In fact, one of the reasons we were attracted to these companies in the first place was that the equipment they produce ultimately serve a broad range of end markets that should lend themselves to high, sustainable and value accretive growth. More specifically, demand is coming from areas like high performance computing, artificial intelligence, smartphones, 5G rollouts, gaming and accelerated servers, as well as the continued build-out of data centres and cloud infrastructure.

In addition, the semiconductor content in electric vehicles (EV) is five to six times larger than in traditional combustion engine cars which makes decarbonisation of transport another important driver of demand. In the first instance, semiconductor components are required for the interconnectivity in cars and ensure efficient power management of battery stacks. On top of the electric drivetrain, there is also higher semiconductor content coming from solutions like ADAS (Advanced Driver Assistance Systems – applications such as Lidar, Radar and other safety features) and Infotainment (wireless internet, Bluetooth, touchscreens etc.). Lastly, the semiconductor industry will benefit from continued innovation in the auto industry, like the nascent development of autonomous driving. As a simple rule of thumb, we can say that the more sophisticated and customised the car, the higher the content of semiconductor chips and sensors. Whilst traditional European car manufacturers rarely meet our investment criteria, we can gain exposure to the accelerated adoption of EVs via companies that ultimately act as enablers of one of the largest industrial transformations we are likely to experience in our careers. The good news here is that this ***process*** has only just begun and has a long way to run. In this context, we would note that semiconductor stocks are still only 4% of global market capitalisation whilst energy – a sector disadvantaged by the energy transition – still accounts for more than 5%, again pointing to the potential for long duration value creation.

Long duration value creation also often resides within organisations that are founder led, with an entrepreneurial culture, large addressable markets and a product offering that enables disruption and change. One of the best aspects of our jobs as stock pickers is to find those hidden gems early and to grow with them over long periods of time. An example of such a company is Danish-listed IT service providerNetcompany Group. This business helps both public and private sector clients to digitise their operations across four main markets in Denmark, Norway, the UK and the Netherlands. While digital transformation of our economies was a ***process*** well under way even before the pandemic, developments in 2020 forced many of Netcompany Group’s clients to accelerate investment into information technology (IT) infrastructure that helped connect businesses with employees and clients alike. Its services have applications as diverse as a customs office looking to develop more efficient ways to collect taxes, helping local authorities to manage schools, or making Copenhagen airport one of the most technologically advanced in the world. Private sector clients also provide many different use cases for its services. In the financial services, logistics and utilities industries, Netcompany Group helps clients to modernise their IT stack with data analytics or to move their IT infrastructure into the cloud. Overall, this is a capital light business model generating high margins and attractive returns on invested capital which combined with high growth – even in 2020 this business grew 20% organically – makes for a powerful recipe for value creation.

Another key investment that has been generating value for our shareholders over prolonged periods of time is Swiss listedSika, a global leader in construction and industrial chemicals and one of the Company’s top performers over the past year.

The company provides solutions for sealing, insulating, bonding and protecting load-bearing building structures, which are typically used in large infrastructure projects. We see Sika as an innovation powerhouse with a diversified and innovative product portfolio, as well as a well-invested distribution network across the 100+ countries in which it operates. In other parts of the group, Sika also holds a leading position in the supply of noise dampening material and high strength bonding agents used in the manufacture of EVs. With 50% of group sales coming from refurbishment and modernisation spend, Sika appears well positioned to capture some of the post pandemic global infrastructure spending, including investment initiatives coming out of the European Green Deal and the European Union (EU) Recovery Fund. Sika’s management team has an excellent long-term track record in creating shareholder value and we expect them to continue to deploy capital in a way that allows for further margin expansion and for return on invested capital to move higher over the coming years. Finally, adopting a blue-sky mindset, we are keenly monitoring Sika’s research and development initiatives in developing a ***process*** to recycle concrete – one of the most carbon intensive industrial ***processes*** – which provides further potential upside to an already strong stand-alone investment thesis.

Elsewhere within industrials, the Company enjoyed a strong performance contribution from logistics and transport groupDSV Panalpina(DSV). DSV did an excellent job integrating the Panalpina business acquired in 2019, which helped the company grow volumes and earnings with little net additions in costs. Furthermore, DSV announced its next acquisition, buying Kuwait-based Agility’s logistics business in a US$4.1 billion deal in March this year, becoming the third largest freight forwarder globally. Agility is roughly 25% of the size in volume of DSV and we expect this deal to be highly earnings accretive post synergies.

The Company also benefited from strong stock selection within the health care sector where long-term holdingNovo Nordisk, a global leader in diabetes care, contributed strongly once again. Shares moved higher following US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approval for its weight management drug Wegovy. At present, 80% of Novo Nordisk’s business relates to diabetes drugs and we see the potential for its obesity franchise at only 6% of group sales to deliver high margin and long duration growth for many years to come. In addition to sector leading growth, Novo Nordisk offers high returns and best in class cash flow conversion, with any excess in capital being returned to shareholders. Dental implant manufacturerStraumannalso traded strongly; in this case we see upside to market expectations stemming from their opportunity to take market share in China which remains a largely under-penetrated market.

The largest relative detractor was German software groupSAP. Depressed business spending and delayed decision making by major clients led the company to publish weaker than expected results, as well as a cut to its revenue and profit forecasts. In this context, SAP updated its medium-term targets, essentially pushing out a long-awaited improvement in operating margins by up to two years. We had expected the management team to potentially update its strategic targets in light of COVID-19, however, we were left surprised by the extent of revisions to forecasts. Having reviewed the investment case in detail, we decided to exit the position.

Similar to 2020, some of our travel related holdings includingAmadeus IT GroupandSafranwere amongst the bottom performers for the year. This was the result of weakness in air traffic volumes, with the timing of a more sustained recovery in air travel remaining uncertain. Whilst markets had hoped for travel to recover more quickly, we do not expect a structural change in consumer behaviour over the medium term and believe travel will recover strongly once restrictions are removed.

As mentioned above, overall portfolio changes were limited, with turnover for the period of 20% pointing to an average holding period of five years. Dislocations in markets, whatever form they might take, afford the patient investor opportunities to add to existing holdings, or at times create entry points in ***exceptional*** businesses at sharply reduced valuations. In the early part of 2021, a severe rotation in markets created such an opportunity to add to one of our long-term favourites, Swiss listedLonza Group(Lonza), as its shares lagged the cyclical value rally materialising at the time. We used this share price weakness to top up our position as we remained confident that from an operational perspective the business was firing on all cylinders. As a contract manufacturer of high-end drugs, Lonza operates in a highly attractive market niche, holding the dominant market position globally. If anything, the predictability of this business’ earnings and cashflows materially improved over the course of the first half of the year, as Lonza disposed of its more cyclical specialty ingredients operations. The remaining part of the group enjoys ***exceptionally*** strong demand fundamentals, creating multiple opportunities to redeploy cash at returns on capital close to 30%, a compelling proposition. Lonza’s competitive advantages stem from the complexity of the production ***process***, where few peers can match its offering. This is cemented by high barriers to entry given that all production facilities have to be certified by the FDA. Overall, we expect Lonza’s biologics business to grow in the mid-teens every year for the next ten years, with positive pricing given the shortage of capacity in the market.

Other notable changes included additions to existing holdings inHermès, Kering, Amadeus IT GroupandDSV. Equally, we used the strength in financials during the early part of the year to take profits inSberbank, Alpha BankandKBC, all of which had enjoyed strong share price performances on the back of vaccine induced recovery euphoria. Overall, we remain very selective in financials as the banking industry remains dogged by the persistence of the low rate environment, as well as fierce competition, leading to a generally tough operating environment.

With strong investment performance and significant share issuance, the Company is much bigger than it was a year ago. The additional funds have been invested in existing holdings and in a small number of new holdings. The number of companies in which we now invest is 44 compared to 38 a year ago.

OUTLOOK

As stated earlier, when it comes to the outlook for the region our base case remains largely unchanged and the likely post-COVID-19 world will not look very different from the pre-COVID-19 environment. We expect nominal global gross domestic product growth to remain in a range of 3% to 6% and for interest rates to stay low for a prolonged period of time caused by secular factors like the high level of indebtedness in the developed world, ageing demographics, as well as the deflationary impact of automation and digitalisation on our economies. What makes Europe more appealing near term is the fact that its recovery has lagged regions such as the US and China. Key European economies such as France, Germany and Spain are still in the ***process*** of regaining output lost during 2020. Furthermore, with more fiscal stimulus coming from the EU Recovery Fund as well as spending from individual countries, European equities appear well set to continue recovering into 2022 and beyond.

Beyond 2021, select companies will continue to grow quickly whilst others are likely to struggle with tougher comparatives, mediocre growth and the same structural challenges that plagued old economy industries pre-pandemic. To us, this simply highlights the importance of taking an active approach to investing in European equities. As fundamental stock pickers we will continue to focus all of our research hours on identifying end markets and income streams that lend themselves to value creation on a duration basis. We aim to continue behaving like owners of businesses rather than traders of shares. With these principles rooted in our philosophy, ***process*** and daily activities, we aim to continue delivering on the Company’s investment objective of providing long-term growth in capital to clients.

STEFAN GRIES AND SAM VECHT

BLACKROCK INVESTMENT MANAGEMENT (UK) LIMITED

4 November 2021

TEN LARGEST INVESTMENTS

1 + ASML(2020: 2nd)

Technology companyMarket value: £53,214,000Share of investments: 7.8%

A Dutch company which specialises in the supply of photolithography systems for the semiconductor industry. The company is at the forefront of technological change, investing in leading research and development to capture the structural growth opportunity coming from growth in mobile devices and microchip components. High barriers to entry within the industry give ASML a protected position with strong pricing power allowing growth in margins whilst they continue to innovate. The company is run by an ***exceptional*** management team which aims to create long-term value whilst returning excess cash to shareholders.

2 + Lonza Group(2020: 4th)

Health Care companyMarket value: £39,463,000Share of investments: 5.8%

A Swiss biotechnology and speciality chemicals company. Lonza has established itself as one of the leading contract manufacturers of high-end biological drugs, as well as cell and gene therapy. Lonza’s competitive advantages stem from the complexity of the production ***process*** – where few peers can match its offering. This is cemented by high barriers to entry given that all production facilities are required to be certified by the FDA. Overall, we expect Lonza’s biologics business to grow in the mid-teens every year for the next ten years with positive pricing, as there is generally a shortage of capacity in the market.

3 - Sika(2020: 1st)

Industrial companyMarket value: £34,795,000Share of investments: 5.1%

A speciality chemical company with a leading position in both construction chemicals and bonding agents for the automotive industry. Sika has proprietary technology within adhesives, which has an increasing array of applications as technology advances. The company benefits from structural drivers of urbanisation and has exposure to multiple points in the construction cycle including new infrastructure projects, as well as maintenance or refurbishment of existing buildings. It is also likely to benefit from the EU Recovery Fund and the EU Green Deal, channelling funds towards sustainable infrastructure projects. Sika’s decentralised structure of subsidiaries and strong culture of new product innovation continues to drive pricing power.

4 + Kering(2020: 5th)

Consumer Discretionary companyMarket value: £33,051,000Share of investments: 4.8%

A French luxury group owning brands such as Gucci, Yves Saint Laurent and Bottega Veneta. We believe Kering is one of the winners in a ‘winner takes all’ market given the strength and resilience of its brands. This position is cemented by its best in class e-commerce offering, which in combination with a rejuvenated product portfolio, has enabled Kering to capture the imagination of global millennials. We believe Kering remains an extremely well-positioned company with a strong balance sheet that offers optionality for both increased shareholder returns as well as value accretive deals. In the near term, we think the brand can benefit from new collection launches around its 100th anniversary later this year.

5 + DSV Panalpina(2020: 8th)

Industrial companyMarket value: £31,546,000Share of investments: 4.6%

A Danish freight forwarding and logistics company run by an excellent management team with a strong track record in creating value through acquisitions and by instilling a best in class culture in its organisation. Their success in making acquisitions has been facilitated by a strong technology platform which drives operational efficiencies leading to high conversion margins. In 2019, DSV took over Swiss peer Panalpina in its largest ever acquisition which they have been integrating successfully. More recently, DSV announced the purchase of Kuwait-based Agility’s logistics business in a US$4.1 billion deal, becoming the third largest freight forwarder globally.

6 = Novo Nordisk(2020: 6th)

Health Care companyMarket value: £30,702,000Share of investments: 4.5%

A Danish multinational pharmaceutical company which is a leader in diabetes care. We expect Novo Nordisk to post strong growth in earnings and cashflows driven by demand for ‘Ozempic’ which treats type 2 diabetes, as well as by its weight management drug Wegovy, for which Novo Nordisk recently received FDA approval. Overall, we believe Novo Nordisk offers attractive long-term growth potential at high returns, and sector leading cash flow conversion with any excess in cash being returned to shareholders.

7 + RELX(2020: 9th)

Consumer Discretionary companyMarket value: £27,359,000Share of investments: 4.0%

A multinational information and analytics company which has high barriers to entry in most of its divisions, including scientific publishing. This capital light business model allows for a high rate of cash flow conversion with repeatable revenues built on subscription-based models. The business also benefits from the structurally increasing usage of data globally, which supports their data analytics business.

8 - Royal Unibrew(2020: 7th)

Consumer Staples companyMarket value: £24,605,000Share of investments: 3.6%

A brewing and beverage company based in Denmark. Through a number of well-timed acquisitions, the group has transformed itself into a multi-beverage company offering attractive growth in soft drink niches at high returns, with significant potential to export their brands with strong European heritage into international markets.

9 + Netcompany Group(2020: 13th)

Technology companyMarket value: £22,199,000Share of investments: 3.3%

A Danish IT Services provider with operations in Denmark, Norway, the Netherlands and the UK. Netcompany Group’s services help clients with digital transformation, building IT platforms for both public sector and private clients. Its unique business model and large addressable market allows for attractive growth at sector leading margins. Given the capital light nature of the business, Netcompany Group generates high returns which should allow for significant value creation over time.

10 = Hexagon(2020: 10th)

Technology companyMarket value: £21,751,000Share of investments: 3.2%

An industrial and software conglomerate. The business specialises in the provision of geo-mapping and monitoring software and sensors, as well as plant management and automation systems. Its products have applications in diverse end markets including smart phones, mining automation, construction surveying and ***agriculture*** optimisation.

All percentages reflect the value of the holding as a percentage of total investments.

Together, the ten largest investments represent 46.7% of the Company’s portfolio (31 August 2020: 50.5%).

INVESTMENTS AS AT 31 AUGUST 2021

All investments are in ordinary shares unless otherwise stated. The total number of investments held at 31 August 2021 was 44 (31 August 2020: 38).

Industry classifications in the table above are based on the Industrial Classification Benchmark standard for categorisation of companies by industry and sector.

As at 31 August 2021, the Company did not hold any equity interests comprising more than 3% of any company’s share capital.

INVESTMENT EXPOSUREAS AT 31 AUGUST 2021

MARKET CAPITALISATION

INVESTMENT SIZE

DISTRIBUTION OF INVESTMENTS

Source: BlackRock

STRATEGIC REPORT

The Directors present the Strategic Report of the Company for the year ended 31 August 2021. The aim of the Strategic Report is to provide shareholders with the information to assess how the Directors have performed their duty to promote the success of the Company for the collective benefit of shareholders.

The Chairman’s Statement together with the Investment Manager’s Report form part of this Strategic Report. The Strategic Report was approved by the Board at its meeting on 4 November 2021.

PRINCIPAL ACTIVITY

The Company carries on business as an investment trust and has a premium listing on the London Stock Exchange. Its principal activity is portfolio investment. Investment trusts are pooled investment vehicles which allow exposure to a diversified range of assets through a single investment, thus spreading investment risk.

OBJECTIVE

The Company’s objective is the achievement of capital growth, primarily through investment in a focused portfolio constructed from a combination of the securities of large, mid and small capitalisation European companies, together with some investment in the developing markets of Europe. The Company also has the flexibility to invest in any country included in the FTSE World Europe ex UK Index, as well as the freedom to invest in developing countries not included in the Index but considered by the Manager and the Directors as part of greater Europe.

STRATEGY, BUSINESS MODEL AND INVESTMENT POLICYStrategy

The Company invests in accordance with the objective given above. The Board is collectively responsible to shareholders for the long-term success of the Company and is its governing body. There is a clear division of responsibility between the Board and BlackRock Fund Managers Limited (the Manager). Matters reserved for the Board include setting the Company’s strategy, including its investment objective and policy, setting limits on gearing, capital structure, governance, and appointing and monitoring of performance of service providers, including the Manager.

Business model

The Company’s business model follows that of an externally managed investment trust. Therefore, the Company does not have any employees and outsources its activities to third party service providers including the Manager, who is the principal service provider. In accordance with the Alternative Investment Fund Managers’ Directive (AIFMD) the Company is an Alternative Investment Fund (AIF). BlackRock Fund Managers Limited is the Company’s Alternative Investment Fund Manager.

The management of the investment portfolio and the administration of the Company have been contractually delegated to the Manager who in turn (with the permission of the Company) has delegated certain investment management and other ancillary services to BlackRock Investment Management (UK) Limited (BIM (UK) or the Investment Manager). The Manager, operating under guidelines determined by the Board, has direct responsibility for the decisions relating to the day-to-day running of the Company and is accountable to the Board for the investment, financial and operating performance of the Company.

The Company delegates fund accounting services to BIM (UK), which in turn sub-delegates these services to The Bank of New York Mellon (International) Limited (BNYM). Other service providers include the Depositary (also BNYM) and the Registrar, Computershare Investor Services PLC. Details of the contractual terms with the Manager and the Depositary and more details of arrangements in place governing custody services are set out in the Directors’ Report in the Annual Report and Financial Statements.

Investment policy

The Company’s policy is that the portfolio should consist of approximately 30-70 securities and the majority of the portfolio will be invested in larger capitalisation companies, being companies with a market capitalisation of over €5 billion. Up to 25% of the portfolio may be invested in companies in developing Europe. The Company may also invest up to 5% of the portfolio in unquoted investments. However, overall exposure to developing European companies and unquoted investments will not in aggregate exceed 25% of the Company’s portfolio.

As at 31 August 2021, the Company held 44 investments and 4.2% of the portfolio was invested in developing Europe. The Company had no unquoted investments.

Investment in developing European securities may be either direct or through other funds, including those managed by BlackRock Fund Managers Limited, subject to a maximum of 15% of the portfolio. Direct investment in Russia is limited to 10% of the Company’s assets. Investments may also include depositary receipts or similar instruments representing underlying securities.

The Company also has the flexibility to invest up to 20% of the portfolio in debt securities, such as convertible bonds and corporate bonds. No bonds were held at 31 August 2021. The use of any derivative instruments such as financial futures, options and warrants and the entering into of stock lending arrangements will only be for the purposes of efficient portfolio management.

While the Company may hold shares in other investment companies (including investment trusts), the Board has agreed that the Company will not invest more than 15%, in aggregate, of its gross assets in other listed closed-ended investment funds (save to the extent that such closed-ended investment funds have published investment policies to invest no more than 15% of their total assets in such other listed closed-ended investment funds).

The Company achieves an appropriate spread of risk by investing in a diversified portfolio of securities.

The Investment Manager believes that appropriate use of gearing can add value over time. This gearing typically is in the form of an overdraft facility which can be repaid at any time. The level and benefit of any gearing is discussed and agreed regularly by the Board. The Investment Manager generally aims to be fully invested and it is anticipated that gearing will not exceed 15% of net asset value (NAV) at the time of drawdown of the relevant borrowings. At the balance sheet date, the Company had net gearing of 4.8% (2020: 5.7%).

PERFORMANCE

In the year to 31 August 2021, the Company’s NAV per share returned 49.4% (compared with a return in the FTSE World Europe ex UK Index of 27.4%) and the share price returned 56.8% (all percentages calculated in sterling terms with dividends reinvested). The Investment Manager’s Report above includes a review of the main developments during the year, together with information on investment activity within the Company’s portfolio.

RESULTS AND DIVIDENDS

The results for the Company are set out in the Income Statement in the Financial Statements. The total profit for the year, after taxation, was £196,575,000 (2020: £55,862,000) which is reflected in the increase in the net asset value of the Company. The revenue return amounted to £3,595,000 (2020: £5,776,000) and relates to net revenue earnings from dividends received during the year after adjusting for expenses, as well as the positive outcome on a tax ruling relating to overseas dividends.

As explained in the Company’s Half Yearly Financial Report, the Directors declared an interim dividend of 1.75p per share (2020: 1.75p). The Directors recommend the payment of a final dividend of 4.55p per share, making a total dividend of 6.30p per share (2020: 6.15p). Subject to approval at the forthcoming Annual General Meeting, the dividend will be paid on 17 December 2021 to shareholders on the register of members at the close of business on 19 November 2021.

FUTURE PROSPECTS

The Board’s main focus is to achieve capital growth. The future performance of the Company is dependent upon the success of the investment strategy and, to a large extent, on the performance of financial markets. The outlook for the Company is discussed in both the Chairman’s Statement and Investment Manager’s Report above.

SOCIAL, COMMUNITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES

As an investment trust with no employees, the Company has no direct social or community responsibilities or impact on the environment. However, the Directors believe that it is important and in shareholders’ interests to consider human rights issues and environmental, social and governance factors when selecting and retaining investments. Details of the Company’s policy on socially responsible investment are set out on pages 56 and 57 of the Annual Report and Financial Statements.

MODERN SLAVERY ACT

As an investment vehicle, the Company does not provide goods or services in the normal course of business and does not have customers. The Investment Manager considers modern slavery as part of supply chains and labour management within the investment ***process***. Accordingly, the Directors consider that the Company is not required to make any slavery or human trafficking statement under the Modern Slavery Act 2015. In any event, the Board considers the Company’s supply chains, dealing predominantly with professional advisers and service providers in the financial services industry, to be low risk in relation to this matter.

DIRECTORS, GENDER REPRESENTATION AND EMPLOYEES

The Directors of the Company on 31 August 2021, all of whom held office throughout the year, are set out in the Directors’ Biographies on pages 27 and 28 of the Annual Report and Financial Statements. The Board consists of two male Directors and two female Directors. The Company’s policy on diversity is set out on page 54 of the Annual Report and Financial Statements. The Company does not have any executive employees.

KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

At each Board meeting, the Directors consider a number of performance ***measures*** to assess the Company’s success in achieving its objectives. The key performance indicators (KPIs) used to ***measure*** the progress and performance of the Company over time and which are comparable to other investment trusts are set out below. As indicated in the footnote to the table below, some of these KPIs fall within the definition of ‘Alternative Performance ***Measures***’ under guidance issued by the European Securities and Markets Authority (ESMA) and additional information explaining how these are calculated is set out in the Glossary in the Annual Report and Financial Statements.

Additionally, the Board regularly reviews the performance of the portfolio, as well as the net asset value and share price of the Company and compares this against various companies and indices. The Company does not have a benchmark. However, the Board reviews performance and ongoing charges against a peer group of European investment trusts and open-ended funds, as well as the FTSE World Europe ex UK Index.

1     This ***measures*** the Company’s share price and NAV total return, which assumes dividends paid by the Company have been reinvested.

2     Alternative Performance ***Measures***, see Glossary in the Annual Report and Financial Statements.

3     Ongoing charges represent the management fee and all other operating expenses, excluding finance costs, direct transaction costs, custody transaction charges, VAT recovered, taxation and certain non-recurring items, as a % of average daily net assets.

PRINCIPAL RISKS

The Company is exposed to a variety of risks and uncertainties. As required by the 2018 UK Corporate Governance Code (the UK Code), the Board has put in place a robust ongoing ***process*** to identify, assess and monitor the principal risks and emerging risks facing the Company. A core element of this ***process*** is the Company’s risk register which identifies the risks facing the Company and assesses the likelihood and potential impact of each risk and the quality of controls operating to mitigate it. A residual risk rating is then calculated for each risk based on the outcome of the assessment.

The risk register, its method of preparation and the operation of key controls in BlackRock’s and third-party service providers’ systems of internal control, are reviewed on a regular basis by the Audit and Management Engagement Committee. In order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of BlackRock’s and other third-party service providers’ risk management ***processes*** and how these apply to the Company’s business, BlackRock’s internal audit department provides an annual presentation to the Audit Committee chairmen of the BlackRock investment trusts setting out the results of testing performed in relation to BlackRock’s internal control ***processes***. The Audit and Management Engagement Committee also periodically receives and reviews internal control reports from BlackRock and the Company’s service providers.

The Board has undertaken a robust assessment of both the principal and emerging risks facing the Company, including those that would threaten its business model, future performance, solvency or liquidity. The COVID-19 pandemic has given rise to ***unprecedented*** challenges for businesses across the globe and the Board has taken into consideration the risks posed to the Company by the crisis and incorporated these into the Company’s risk register. The threat of climate change has also reinforced the importance of more sustainable practices and environmental responsibility.

Emerging risks are considered by the Board as they come into view and are incorporated into the existing review of the Company’s risk register. They were also considered as part of the evaluation ***process***. Additionally, the Manager considers emerging risks in numerous forums and the Risk and Quantitative Analysis team produces an annual risk survey. Any material risks of relevance to the Company identified through the annual risk survey will be communicated to the Board.

The Board will continue to assess these risks on an ongoing basis. In relation to the UK Code, the Board is confident that the procedures that the Company has put in place are sufficient to ensure that the necessary monitoring of risks and controls has been carried out throughout the reporting period.

The principal risks and uncertainties faced by the Company during the financial year, together with the potential effects, controls and mitigating factors are set out in the table below.

VIABILITY STATEMENT

In accordance with provision 31 of the 2018 UK Corporate Governance Code, the Directors have assessed the prospects of the Company over a longer period than the twelve months referred to by the ‘Going Concern’ guidelines. The Company is an investment trust with the objective of achieving capital growth. The Directors expect the Company to continue for the foreseeable future and have conducted this review for the period up to the Annual General Meeting in 2026. The Directors believe that five years is an appropriate investment horizon to assess the viability of the Company. This is based on the Company’s long-term mandate, the low turnover in the portfolio and the investment holding period investors generally consider while investing in the European sector.

In making an assessment on the viability of the Company, the Board has considered the following:

·        the impact of a significant fall in European equity markets on the value of the Company’s investment portfolio;

·        the ongoing relevance of the Company’s investment objective, business model and investment policy in the prevailing market;

·        the principal and emerging risks and uncertainties, as set out above, and their potential impact;

·        the level of ongoing demand for the Company’s shares;

·        the Company’s share price discount/premium to NAV;

·        the liquidity of the Company’s portfolio; and

·        the level of income generated by the Company and future income and expenditure forecasts.

The Company’s performance has been strong for the five-year reporting period to 31 August 2021 with an undiluted NAV total return of 155.1% and a share price total return of 175.8%, versus a reference index total return of 71.8%. The Directors have concluded that there is a reasonable expectation that the Company will continue in operation and meet its liabilities as they fall due over the period of their assessment based on the following considerations:

·        the Investment Manager’s compliance with the investment objective and policy, its investment strategy and asset allocation;

·        the portfolio mainly comprises readily realisable assets which can be sold to meet funding requirements if necessary. As at 2 November 2021, 98.2% of the portfolio was estimated as being capable of being liquidated within three days;

·        the operational resilience of the Company and its key service providers and their ability to continue to provide a good level of service for the foreseeable future;

·        the effectiveness of business continuity plans in place for the Company and its key service providers;

·        the ongoing ***processes*** for monitoring operating costs and income which are considered to be reasonable in comparison to the Company’s total assets;

·        the Board’s discount management policy; and

·        the Company is a closed-end investment company and therefore does not suffer from the liquidity issues arising from unexpected redemptions.

In addition, the Board’s assessment of the Company’s ability to operate in the foreseeable future is included in the Going Concern Statement which can be found on page 43 in the Directors’ Report in the Annual Report and Financial Statements.

SECTION 172 STATEMENT: PROMOTING THE SUCCESS OF THE COMPANY

The Companies (Miscellaneous Reporting) Regulations 2018 require directors of large companies to explain more fully how they have discharged their duties under Section 172(1) of the Companies Act 2006 in promoting the success of their companies for the benefit of members as a whole. This includes the likely consequences of their decisions in the longer term and how they have taken wider stakeholders’ needs into account.

The disclosure that follows covers how the Board has engaged with and understands the views of stakeholders and how stakeholders’ needs have been taken into account, the outcome of this engagement and the impact that it has had on the Board’s decisions. The Board considers the main stakeholders in the Company to be the Manager, Investment Manager and the shareholders. In addition to this, the Board considers investee companies and key service providers of the Company to be stakeholders; the latter comprise the Company’s Custodian, Depositary, Registrar and Broker.

STAKEHOLDERS

A summary of the key areas of engagement undertaken by the Board with its key stakeholders in the year under review and how Directors have acted upon this to promote the long-term success of the Company are set out in the table below.

SUSTAINABILITY AND ESG APPROACH

THE BOARD’S APPROACH TO ESG

The Board believes that responsible investment is integral to the longer-term delivery of the Company’s success. The Board works closely with the Investment Manager to regularly review the Company’s performance, investment strategy and underlying policies to ensure that the Company’s investment objective continues to be met in an effective and responsible way in the interests of shareholders and future investors.

SUSTAINABLE INVESTING: BLACKROCK’S APPROACH

Sustainability is BlackRock’s standard for investing. It is our conviction that sustainability risk – including climate risk – is investment risk and that investors can build more resilient portfolios that achieve better long term, risk-adjusted returns by integrating sustainability into their standard for investing. Climate change specifically is viewed as a factor with significant lasting impact on economic growth and prosperity. BlackRock believes that every company’s business model will be profoundly affected by climate change and that how a company manages the associated risks in its business model will be a defining factor in a company’s long-term value proposition. More information about the actions taken by BlackRock in 2020 on making sustainability the new standard for investing can be found at[*http://www.blackrock.com/corporate/literature/publication/our-2020-sustainability-actions.pdf*](http://www.blackrock.com/corporate/literature/publication/our-2020-sustainability-actions.pdf).

ENVIRONMENTAL, SOCIAL AND GOVERNANCE: INTEGRATION INTO BLACKROCK’S INVESTMENT MANAGEMENT ***PROCESS***

Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) investing is often used interchangeably with the term “sustainable investing.” BlackRock has identified sustainable investing as being the overall framework and ESG as a data toolkit for identifying and informing its solutions. BlackRock has defined ESG Integration as the practice of incorporating material ESG information and consideration of sustainability risks into investment decisions in order to enhance risk-adjusted returns. BlackRock recognises the relevance of material ESG information across all asset classes and styles of portfolio management. ESG information and sustainability risks are included as a consideration in investment research, portfolio construction, portfolio review and investment stewardship ***processes***. The Investment Manager considers ESG insights and data, including sustainability risks, within the total set of information in its research ***process*** and makes a determination as to the materiality of such information in its investment ***process***. ESG insights are not the sole consideration when making investment decisions. The Investment Manager’s evaluation of ESG data may be subjective and could change over time in light of emerging sustainability risks or changing market conditions. This approach is consistent with the Investment Manager’s regulatory duty to manage the Company in accordance with its investment objective and policy and in the best interests of the Company’s investors. The Investment Manager’s Risk and Quantitative Analysis group will review portfolios to ensure that sustainability risks are considered regularly alongside traditional financial risks, that investment decisions are taken in light of relevant sustainability risks and that decisions exposing portfolios to sustainability risks are deliberate, and the risks diversified and scaled according to the investment objectives of the Company.

BlackRock’s approach to ESG integration is to broaden the total amount of information the Investment Manager considers with the aim of improving investment analysis and understanding the likely impact of sustainability risks on the Company’s investments. The Investment Manager assesses a variety of economic and financial indicators, which may include ESG data and insights, to make investment decisions appropriate for the Company's objective. This can include relevant third-party insights or data, internal research or engagement commentary and input from BlackRock Investment Stewardship.

ESG integration does not change the Company’s investment objective or constrain the Investment Manager’s investable universe and does not mean that an ESG investment strategy or exclusionary screens has been or will be adopted by the Company. Similarly, ESG integration does not determine the extent to which the Company may be impacted by sustainability risks.

INVESTMENT STEWARDSHIP

BlackRock Investment Stewardship’s (BIS) activities are integral to BlackRock’s fiduciary responsibility to clients as it is how we use our voice as an investor on behalf of clients to promote sound corporate governance and sustainable business models that support long-term value creation. BIS is positioned as an investment function and undertakes all its activities – primarily engaging with companies and proxy voting – with the goal of advancing clients’ long-term economic interests. BIS’ engagement with companies aims to encourage the enhancement of their risk management ***processes*** to better identify and manage material environmental, social, and governance (ESG) risks and opportunities that may impact their operational resilience. For further details on BIS please refer to the website[*https://www.blackrock.com/corporate/about-us/investment-stewardship*](https://www.blackrock.com/corporate/about-us/investment-stewardship).

BY ORDER OF THE BOARDCAROLINE DRISCOLLFOR AND ON BEHALF OFBLACKROCK INVESTMENT MANAGEMENT (UK) LIMITED

CompanySecretary

4 November 2021

RELATED PARTY TRANSACTIONS

BlackRock Fund Managers Limited (BFM, AIFM or the Manager) was appointed as the Company’s AIFM with effect from 2 July 2014. BlackRock Investment Management (UK) Limited (BIM (UK) or Investment Manager) acts as the Company’s Investment Manager under a delegation agreement with BFM. BIM (UK) also acted as the Secretary of the Company throughout the year.

The management contract is terminable by either party on six months’ notice. The Board continues to be independent from the AIFM. The agreement provides the appropriate balance between the Board’s control over the Company, its investment policies and compliance with regulatory obligations.

The Company pays an annual management fee to BFM which is calculated based on 0.85% of net asset value on the last day of each month. Where the Company invests in other investments or cash funds managed by BIM (UK), any underlying fee charged is rebated. Fees are adjusted by adding all dividends declared during the period. No penalty on termination of the investment management contract would be payable by the Company in the event that six months’ written notice is given to the Manager. There are no provisions relating to the payment of fees in lieu of notice.

The Company contributes to a focused investment trust sales and marketing initiative operated by BlackRock on behalf of the investment trusts under its management. The Company’s contribution to the consortium element of the initiative, which enables the trusts to achieve efficiencies by combining certain sales and marketing activities, represents a budget of up to 0.025% per annum of its net assets (£446 million as at 31 December 2020) and this contribution is matched by BIM (UK). In addition, a budget of a further £20,000 has been allocated for Company specific sales and marketing activity. Total fees paid or payable for these services for the year ended 31 August 2021 amounted to £118,000 (excluding VAT) (2020: £111,000). The purpose of the programme overall is to ensure effective communication with existing shareholders and to attract new shareholders to the Company. This has the benefit of improving liquidity in the Company’s shares and helps sustain the stock market rating of the Company.

The Board currently consists of four non-executive Directors, all of whom are considered to be independent of the Company’s Manager. None of the Directors has a service contract with the Company. With effect from 1 September 2021, the Chairman receives an annual fee of £42,500, the Chairman of the Audit and Management Engagement Committee receives an annual fee of £33,500 and each other Director receives an annual fee of £29,000. Three members of the Board hold shares in the Company. Eric Sanderson holds 4,000 ordinary shares, Peter Baxter holds 5,000 ordinary shares and Paola Subacchi holds 5,513 ordinary shares.

As at 31 August 2021, fees of £11,000 (2020: £11,000) were outstanding to Directors in respect of their annual fees.

STATEMENT OF DIRECTORS’ RESPONSIBILITIES IN RESPECT OF THE ANNUAL REPORT AND FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

The Directors are responsible for preparing the Annual Report and the Financial Statements in accordance with applicable law and regulations. Company law requires the Directors to prepare financial statements for each financial year. Under that law they have elected to prepare the financial statements in accordance with applicable law and United Kingdom Accounting Standards (United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practice).

Under company law, the Directors must not approve the financial statements unless they are satisfied that they give a true and fair view of the state of affairs of the Company as at the end of each financial year and of the profit or loss of the Company for that period. In preparing those financial statements, the Directors are required to:

·        present fairly the financial position, financial performance and cash flows of the Company;

·        select suitable accounting policies in accordance with United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practice and then apply them consistently;

·        present information, including accounting policies, in a manner that provides relevant, reliable, comparable and understandable information;

·        make judgements and estimates that are reasonable and prudent;

·        state whether applicable UK Accounting Standards have been followed, subject to any material departures disclosed and explained in the financial statements; and

·        prepare the financial statements on the going concern basis unless it is inappropriate to presume that the Company will continue in business.

The Directors are responsible for keeping adequate accounting records that are sufficient to show and explain the Company’s transactions and disclose with reasonable accuracy at any time the financial position of the Company and enable them to ensure that the financial statements comply with the Companies Act 2006. They are also responsible for safeguarding the assets of the Company and hence for taking reasonable steps for the prevention and detection of fraud and other irregularities.

The Directors are also responsible for preparing the Strategic Report, the Directors’ Report, the Directors’ Remuneration Report, the Corporate Governance Statement and the Report of the Audit and Management Engagement Committee in accordance with the Companies Act 2006 and applicable regulations, including the requirements of the Listing Rules and the Disclosure Guidance and Transparency Rules. The Directors have delegated responsibility to the Manager for the maintenance and integrity of the Company’s corporate and financial information included on the BlackRock website. Legislation in the United Kingdom governing the preparation and dissemination of financial statements may differ from legislation in other jurisdictions.

Each of the Directors at the date of this report, whose names are listed on pages 27 and 28 of the Annual Report and Financial Statements, confirm to the best of their knowledge that:

·        the financial statements, prepared in accordance with applicable accounting standards, give a true and fair view of the assets, liabilities, financial position and profit of the Company; and

·        the Strategic Report contained in the Annual Report and Financial Statements includes a fair review of the development and performance of the business and the position of the Company, together with a description of the principal risks and uncertainties that it faces.

The 2018 UK Corporate Governance Code also requires Directors to ensure that the Annual Report and Financial Statements is fair, balanced and understandable. In order to reach a conclusion on this matter, the Board has requested that the Audit and Management Engagement Committee advise on whether it considers that the Annual Report and Financial Statements fulfils these requirements. The ***process*** by which the Committee has reached these conclusions is set out in the Audit and Management Engagement Committee’s Report on pages 59 to 62 of the Annual Report and Financial Statements. As a result, the Board has concluded that the Annual Report and Financial Statements for the year ended 31 August 2021, taken as a whole, is fair, balanced and understandable and provides the information necessary for shareholders to assess the Company’s position, performance, business model and strategy.

FOR AND ON BEHALF OF THE BOARDERIC SANDERSONChairman

4 November 2021

INCOME STATEMENT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 AUGUST 2021

The total column of this statement represents the Company’s profit and loss account. The supplementary revenue and capital columns are both prepared under guidance published by the Association of Investment Companies (AIC). All items in the above statement derive from continuing operations. No operations were acquired or discontinued during the year. All income is attributable to the equity holders of the Company.

The net profit on ordinary activities for the year disclosed above represents the Company’s total comprehensive income.

STATEMENT OF CHANGES IN EQUITY FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 AUGUST 2021

1     Interim dividend paid in respect of the year ended 31 August 2021 of 1.75p per share was declared on 23 April 2021 and paid on 4 June 2021. Final dividend paid in respect of the year ended 31 August 2020 of 4.40p per share was declared on 22 October 2020 and paid on 9 December 2020.

2     Interim dividend paid in respect of the year ended 31 August 2020 of 1.75p per share was declared on 27 April 2020 and paid on 10 June 2020. Final dividend paid in respect of the year ended 31 August 2019 of 4.10p per share was declared on 22 October 2019 and paid on 10 December 2019.

For information on the Company’s distributable reserves please refer to note 9 below.

BALANCE SHEET AS AT 31 AUGUST 2021

STATEMENT OF CASH FLOWS FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 AUGUST 2021

NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 AUGUST 2021

1. PRINCIPAL ACTIVITY

The Company was incorporated on 1 June 2004 and its principal activity is that of an investment trust company within the meaning of Section 1158 of the Corporation Tax Act 2010.

2. ACCOUNTING POLICIES

The principal accounting policies adopted by the Company are set out below:

(a) Basis of preparation

The financial statements have been prepared in accordance with ‘The Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland’ (FRS 102) and the revised Statement of Recommended Practice – ‘Financial Statements of Investment Trust Companies and Venture Capital Trusts’ (SORP) issued by the Association of Investment Companies (AIC) in October 2019 and the provisions of the Companies Act 2006.

The financial statements have been prepared on a going concern basis. The Directors have considered any potential impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, its potential longer-term effects on the global economy and the mitigation ***measures*** which key service providers, including the Manager, have in place to maintain operational resilience on the going concern of the Company. The Directors have reviewed compliance with the covenants associated with the bank overdraft facility, income and expense projections and the liquidity of the investment portfolio in making their assessment. Accordingly, the Directors believe that the Company has adequate resources to continue in operational existence for the foreseeable future, being a period of at least one year from the date of approval of the financial statements, and therefore consider the going concern assumption to be appropriate.

The principal accounting policies adopted by the Company are set out below. Unless specified otherwise, the policies have been applied consistently throughout the year and are consistent with those applied in the preceding year. All of the Company’s operations are of a continuing nature.

The Company’s financial statements are presented in sterling, which is the currency of the primary economic environment in which the Company operates. All values are rounded to the nearest thousand pounds (£’000) except where otherwise indicated.

(b) Presentation of Income Statement

In order to better reflect the activities of an investment trust company and in accordance with guidance issued by the AIC, supplementary information which analyses the Income Statement between items of a revenue and a capital nature has been presented alongside the Income Statement.

(c) Segmental reporting

The Directors are of the opinion that the Company is engaged in a single segment of business being investment business.

(d) Income

Dividends receivable on equity shares are treated as revenue for the year on an ex-dividend basis. Where no ex-dividend date is available, dividends receivable on or before the year end are treated as revenue for the year. Provisions are made for dividends not expected to be received.

Special dividends are recognised on an ex-dividend basis and treated as capital or revenue depending on the facts or circumstances of each dividend.

Dividends are accounted for in accordance with Section 29 of FRS 102 on the basis of income actually receivable, without adjustment for tax credits attaching to the dividend. Dividends from overseas companies continue to be shown gross of withholding tax.

Deposit interest receivable is accounted for on an accruals basis.

Where the Company has elected to receive its dividends in the form of additional shares rather than in cash, the cash equivalent of the dividend is recognised as revenue. Any excess in the value of the shares received over the amount of the cash dividend is recognised in capital.

(e) Expenses

All expenses, including finance costs, are accounted for on an accruals basis. Expenses have been charged wholly to the revenue column of the Income Statement, except as follows:

·        expenses which are incidental to the acquisition or disposal of an investment are treated as capital. Details of transaction costs on the purchases and sales of investments are disclosed in note 10, on page 84 of the Annual Report and Financial Statements;

·        expenses are treated as capital where a connection with the maintenance or enhancement of the value of the investments can be demonstrated; and

·        the investment management fee and finance costs have been allocated 80% to the capital column and 20% to the revenue column of the Income Statement in line with the Board’s expected long-term split of returns, in the form of capital gains and income respectively, from the investment portfolio.

(f) Taxation

The tax expense represents the sum of the tax currently payable and deferred tax. The tax currently payable is based on the taxable profit for the year. Taxable profit differs from net profit as reported in the Income Statement because it excludes items of income or expenses that are taxable or deductible in other years and it further excludes items that are never taxable or deductible. The Company’s liability for current tax is calculated using tax rates that were applicable at the balance sheet date. The current tax effect of different items of expenditure is allocated between capital and revenue on the marginal basis using the Company’s effective rate of corporation tax for the accounting period.

Deferred taxation is recognised in respect of all timing differences at the financial reporting date, where transactions or events that result in an obligation to pay more taxation in the future or right to less taxation in the future have occurred at the balance sheet date. Deferred tax is ***measured*** on a non-discounted basis, at the average tax rates that are expected to apply in the periods in which the timing differences are expected to reverse based on tax rates and laws that have been enacted or substantively enacted by the balance sheet date. This is subject to deferred taxation assets only being recognised if it is considered more likely than not that there will be suitable profits from which the future reversal of the timing differences can be deducted.

(g) Investments held at fair value through profit or loss

The Company’s investments are classified as held at fair value through profit or loss in accordance with Section 11 and 12 of FRS 102 and are managed and evaluated on a fair value basis in accordance with its investment strategy.

All investments are classified upon initial recognition as held at fair value through profit or loss. Purchases of investments are recognised on a trade date basis. Sales are recognised at the trade date of the disposal and the proceeds are ***measured*** at fair value, which is regarded as the proceeds of the sale less any transaction costs.

The fair value of the financial investments is based on their quoted bid price at the balance sheet date on the exchange on which the investment is quoted, without deduction for the estimated future selling costs.

Changes in the value of investments held at fair value through profit or loss and gains and losses on disposal are recognised in the Income Statement as ‘Gains or losses on investments held at fair value through profit or loss’. Also included within this heading are transaction costs in relation to the purchase or sale of investments.

The fair value hierarchy consists of the following three levels:

Level 1 – Quoted market price for identical instruments in active markets.

Level 2 – Valuation techniques using observable inputs.

Level 3 – Valuation techniques using significant unobservable inputs.

(h) Debtors

Debtors include sales for future settlement, other debtors and pre-payments and accrued income in the ordinary course of business. If collection is expected in one year or less, they are classified as current assets. If not, they are presented as non-current assets.

(i) Creditors

Creditors include purchases for future settlement, interest payable, share buy back costs and accruals in the ordinary course of business. Creditors are classified as creditors – amounts due within one year if payment is due within one year or less. If not, they are presented as creditors – amounts due after more than one year.

(j) Dividends payable

Under Section 32 of FRS 102, final dividends should not be accrued in the financial statements unless an obligation exists at the end of the reporting period. Dividends payable to equity shareholders are recognised in the Statement of Changes in Equity when they have been approved by shareholders and have become a liability of the Company. Interim dividends are only recognised in the financial statements in the period in which they are paid.

(k) Cash and cash equivalents

Cash comprises cash in hand and on demand deposits. Cash equivalents include bank overdrafts repayable on demand and short term, highly liquid investments, that are readily convertible to known amounts of cash and that are subject to an insignificant risk of changes in value.

(l) Foreign currency translation

In accordance with Section 30 of FRS 102, the Company is required to nominate a functional currency being the currency in which the Company predominately operates. The functional and reporting currency is sterling, reflecting the primary economic environment in which the Company operates. Transactions in foreign currencies are translated into sterling at the rates of exchange ruling on the date of the transaction. Foreign currency monetary assets and liabilities and non-monetary assets held at fair value are translated into sterling at the rates of exchange ruling at the balance sheet date. Profits and losses thereon are recognised in the capital column of the Income Statement and taken to the capital reserve.

(m) Share repurchases, share reissues and new share issues

Shares repurchased and subsequently cancelled – share capital is reduced by the nominal value of the shares repurchased and the capital redemption reserve is correspondingly increased in accordance with Section 733 of the Companies Act 2006. The full cost of the repurchase is charged to the special reserve.

Shares repurchased and held in treasury – the full cost of the repurchase is charged to the special reserve. Where treasury shares are subsequently reissued:

·        amounts received to the extent of the repurchase price are credited to the special reserve; and

·        any surplus received in excess of the repurchase price is taken to the share premium account.

Where new shares are issued, amounts received to the extent of any surplus received in excess of the par value are taken to the share premium account.

Share issue costs are charged to the share premium account.

(n) Bank borrowings

Bank overdrafts are recorded as the proceeds received. Finance charges are accounted for on an accruals basis in the Income Statement.

(o) Critical accounting estimates and judgements

The Board makes estimates and assumptions concerning the future. The resulting accounting estimates and assumptions will, by definition, seldom equal the related actual results. Estimates and judgements are regularly evaluated and are based on historical experience and other factors, including expectations of future events that are believed to be reasonable under the circumstances. The Directors do not believe that any accounting judgements or estimates have a significant risk of causing a material adjustment to the carrying amount of assets and liabilities within the next financial year.

3. INCOME

Dividends and interest received in cash during the period amounted to £5,031,000 and £nil respectively (2020: £3,651,000 and £nil).

No special dividends have been recognised in capital during the year (2020: £nil).

4. INVESTMENT MANAGEMENT FEE

The investment management fee is levied quarterly, based on 0.85% per annum of net asset value on the last day of each month. The investment management fee is allocated 80% to capital reserves and 20% to the revenue reserve. There is no additional fee for company secretarial and administration services.

5. OTHER OPERATING EXPENSES

1     No non-audit services are provided by the Company’s auditors.

2     Further information on Directors’ emoluments can be found in the Directors’ Remuneration Report on page 49 of the Annual Report and Financial Statements. The Company has no employees.

3     For the year ended 31 August 2021, expenses of £19,000 (2020: £8,000) were charged to the capital column of the Income Statement. These relate to transaction costs charged by the custodian on sale and purchase trades.

4     Alternative performance ***measure***, see Glossary in the Annual Report and Financial Statements.

6. DIVIDENDS

The Directors have proposed a final dividend of 4.55p per share in respect of the year ended 31 August 2021. The final dividend will be paid on 17 December 2021, subject to shareholders’ approval on 9 December 2021, to shareholders on the Company’s register on 19 November 2021. The proposed final dividend has not been included as a liability in these financial statements, as final dividends are only recognised in the financial statements when they have been approved by shareholders.

The total dividends payable in respect of the year which form the basis of determining retained income for the purpose of Section 1158 of the Corporation Tax Act 2010 and Section 833 of the Companies Act 2006, and the amount proposed for the year ended 31 August 2021, meet the relevant requirements as set out in this legislation.

\*     Based on 98,455,411 ordinary shares (excluding treasury shares) in issue on 2 November 2021.

All dividends paid or payable are distributed from the Company’s current year profit and brought forward revenue reserves.

7. EARNINGS AND NET ASSET VALUE PER ORDINARY SHARE

Revenue, capital earnings and net asset value per ordinary share are shown below and have been calculated using the following:

There were no dilutive securities at the year end.

8. CALLED UP SHARE CAPITAL

During the year no ordinary shares were repurchased and held in treasury (2020: 390,000) for a total consideration, including expenses, of £nil (2020: £1,506,000).

During the year 8,432,310 (2020: nil) shares were reissued from treasury for a net consideration of £50,200,000 (2020: £nil) and 3,300,000 (2020: nil) new shares were issued for a net consideration of £22,262,000 (2020: £nil).

The number of ordinary shares in issue at the year end was 113,628,938 (2020: 110,328,938) of which 17,573,527 (2020: 26,005,837) were held in treasury.

9. RESERVES

1     Relates to amount transferred from the share premium account to a special reserve pursuant to Court approval received on 15 October 2004.

The share premium account and capital redemption reserve are not distributable reserves under the Companies Act 2006. In accordance with ICAEW Technical Release 02/17BL on Guidance on Realised and Distributable Profits under the Companies Act 2006, the special reserve and capital reserve may be used as distributable reserves for all purposes and, in particular, the repurchase by the Company of its ordinary shares and for payments as dividends. In accordance with the Company’s Articles of Association, special reserves, capital reserves and revenue reserves may be distributed by way of dividend. The capital reserve arising on the revaluation of investments of £288,750,000 is subject to fair value movements and may not be readily realisable at short notice, as such it may not be entirely distributable. The investments are subject to financial risks; as such capital reserves (arising on investments sold) and the revenue reserve may not be entirely distributable if a loss occurred during the realisation of these investments.

10. VALUATION OF FINANCIAL INSTRUMENTS

Financial assets and financial liabilities are either carried in the Balance Sheet at their fair value (investments) or at an amount which is a reasonable approximation of fair value (due from brokers, dividends and interest receivable, due to brokers, accruals, cash at bank and bank overdrafts). Section 34 of FRS 102 requires the Company to classify fair value measurements using a fair value hierarchy that reflects the significance of inputs used in making the measurements. The valuation techniques used by the Company are explained in the accounting policies note to the Financial Statements above.

Categorisation within the hierarchy has been determined on the basis of the lowest level input that is significant to the fair value measurement of the relevant asset.

The fair value hierarchy has the following levels:

Level 1 – Quoted market price for identical instruments in active markets

A financial instrument is regarded as quoted in an active market if quoted prices are readily and regularly available from an exchange, dealer, broker, industry group, pricing service or regulatory agency and those prices represent actual and regularly occurring market transactions on an arm’s length basis. The Company does not adjust the quoted price for these instruments.

Level 2 – Valuation techniques using observable inputs

This category includes instruments valued using quoted prices for similar instruments in markets that are considered less active; or other valuation techniques where significant inputs are directly or indirectly observable from market data.

Level 3 – Valuation techniques using significant unobservable inputs

This category includes all instruments where the valuation technique includes inputs not based on market data and these inputs could have a significant impact on the instrument’s valuation.

This category also includes instruments that are valued based on quoted prices for similar instruments where significant entity determined adjustments or assumptions are required to reflect differences between the instruments and instruments for which there is no active market. The Investment Manager considers observable data to be that market data that is readily available, regularly distributed or updated, reliable and verifiable, not proprietary, and provided by independent sources that are actively involved in the relevant market.

The level in the fair value hierarchy within which the fair value measurement is categorised in its entirety is determined on the basis of the lowest level input that is significant to the fair value measurement. If a fair value measurement uses observable inputs that require significant adjustment based on unobservable inputs, that measurement is a Level 3 measurement.

Assessing the significance of a particular input to the fair value measurement in its entirety requires judgement, considering factors specific to the asset or liability. The determination of what constitutes ‘observable’ inputs requires significant judgement by the Investment Manager.

Fair values of financial assets and financial liabilities

The table below is an analysis of the Company’s financial instruments ***measured*** at fair value at the balance sheet date.

There were no transfers between levels for financial assets and financial liabilities during the year recorded at fair value as at 31 August 2021 and 31 August 2020. The Company did not hold any Level 3 securities throughout the financial year or as at 31 August 2021 (2020: nil).

11. TRANSACTIONS WITH THE MANAGER AND INVESTMENT MANAGER

BlackRock Fund Managers Limited (BFM) provides management and administration services to the Company under a contract which is terminable on six months’ notice. BFM has (with the Company’s consent) delegated certain portfolio and risk management services, and other ancillary services, to BlackRock Investment Management (UK) Limited (BIM (UK)). Further details of the investment management contract are disclosed in the Directors’ Report on pages 41 and 42 of the Annual Report and Financial Statements.

The investment management fee is levied quarterly, based on 0.85% per annum of net asset value on the last day of each month. The investment management fee due for the year ended 31 August 2021 amounted to £4,156,000 (2020: £2,925,000). At the year end, £2,376,000 was outstanding in respect of the management fee (2020: £1,484,000).

In addition to the above services, BIM (UK) provided the Company with marketing services. The total fees paid or payable for these services for the period ended 31 August 2021 amounted to £118,000 excluding VAT (2020: £111,000). Marketing fees of £64,000 were outstanding at 31 August 2021 (2020: £181,000).

The ultimate holding company of the Manager and the Investment Manager is BlackRock, Inc., a company incorporated in Delaware USA.

12. RELATED PARTY DISCLOSURE

Disclosures of the Directors’ interests in the ordinary shares of the Company and fees and expenses payable to the Directors are set out in the Directors’ Remuneration Report on page 49 of the Annual Report and Financial Statements. At 31 August 2021, £11,000 (2020: £11,000) was outstanding in respect of Directors’ fees.

Significant Holdings

The following investors are:

a.      funds managed by the BlackRock Group or are affiliates of BlackRock, Inc. (“Related BlackRock Funds”); or

b.      investors (other than those listed in (a) above) who held more than 20% of the voting shares in issue in the Company and are, as a result, considered to be related parties to the Company (“Significant Investors”).

13. CONTINGENT LIABILITIES

There were no contingent liabilities at 31 August 2021 (2020: nil).

14. PUBLICATION OF NON-STATUTORY ACCOUNTS

The financial information contained in this announcement does not constitute statutory accounts as defined in the Companies Act 2006. The Annual Report and Financial Statements for the year ended 31 August 2021 will be filed with the Registrar of Companies after the Annual General Meeting.

The figures set out above have been reported upon by the auditor, whose report for the year ended 31 August 2021 contains no qualification or statement under Section 498(2) or (3) of the Companies Act 2006.

The comparative figures are extracts from the audited financial statements of BlackRock Greater Europe Investment Trust plc for the year ended 31 August 2020, which have been filed with the Registrar of Companies. The report of the auditor on those financial statements contained no qualification or statement under Section 498 of the Companies Act.

15. ANNUAL REPORT

Copies of the Annual Report and Financial Statements will be published shortly and will be available from the registered office, c/o The Company Secretary, BlackRock Greater Europe Investment Trust plc, 12 Throgmorton Avenue, London EC2N 2DL.

16. ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Annual General Meeting of the Company will be held at the offices of BlackRock, 12 Throgmorton Avenue, London EC2N 2DL on Thursday, 9 December 2021 at 12.00 noon.

ENDS

The Annual Report will also be available on the BlackRock website at blackrock.com/uk/brge. Neither the contents of the Manager’s website nor the contents of any website accessible from hyperlinks on the Manager’s website (or any other website) is incorporated into, or forms part of, this announcement.

For further information please contact:

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12 Throgmorton Avenue

London

EC2N 2DL

4 November 2021

**Load-Date:** November 5, 2021

**End of Document**



[***Savannah Resources reports audited financial results for year ended December 31, 2021***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:655P-4SW1-JC0X-H3P7-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Section:** METALS AND MINING

**Length:** 8662 words

**Highlight:** Savannah Resources has posted its audited financial results for the year ended December 31, 2021.

**Body**

2021 Summary Corporate ·     Portfolio streamlined: Savannah has a singular focus as a European lithium "pure play" following the amicable exit from the Consortium Agreement with Rio Tinto on the Mutamba Mineral Sands Project in Mozambique ·    Cash balance: Stood at £13.0m as at 31 December (31 December 2020: £2.0m), driven by the significantly oversubscribed £10.3m (gross) equity financing and the Consortium Agreement Cash Termination Compensation (US$9.5m) ·    ESG: Corporate Environmental and Social Management System ("ESMS") designed to aid implementation of Savannah's ESG goals ·    Decarbonisation commitment: Committed to moving towards Scope 1 and 2 net zero emissions goals during the operating phase of the Barroso Lithium Project, and additionally targeting the reduction of Scope 3 emissions ·     COVID-19: Mitigation ***measures*** continued with staff and stakeholder wellbeing a priority ·     Net loss from continuing operations: Reported at £3.5m (2020: £2.5m). The total attributable loss reduced to £3.3m (2020: £8.2m) as there was no repeat of the non-cash write-down (£5.5m) associated with the Oman project divestment ·    Recruitment: To support the Company's continued growth, key new staff with a range of skills have been added to our project and corporate teams in Portugal and the UK respectively Barroso Lithium Project (the "Project"), Portugal Technical ·    Environmental Impact Assessment ("EIA"): During the year the conformity of the content of the EIA was declared by the environmental regulator ("APA") and the Public Consultation exercise on the EIA was completed.

Savannah believes the calling of a snap general election in Portugal in early November 2021 for 30 January 2022 impacted the decision-making ***processes*** in government agencies such as APA during that period. The Board remains hopeful that the Environmental Impact Declaration ("DIA") for the Project will be made in coming months ·    Definitive Feasibility Study ("DFS"): Metallurgical ***process*** design work continued in Australia throughout the period leading to finalisation of the Project's ***process*** flowsheet in February 2022. Field work in Portugal was limited as a result of COVID-related restrictions and the ongoing EIA review ***process***. The DFS is now expected to be completed within twelve months of approval of the EIA Commercial ·   Offtake and Investment: Received increasing investment and offtake interest in parallel with the major improvement in lithium pricing and growing expectations of future lithium raw material supply shortages ·   Partnerships: Savannah was pleased to become a member of the International Lithium Association, the Portuguese Association for the Battery Cluster; and the Business Council for Sustainable Development Portugal ·     EV sales: European car sales saw strong annual growth again to 2.33m units (+66%) as part of global sales of 6.75m (+108%, source EV-volumes.com) ·    Lithium prices: In 2021 lithium chemical prices rose on average by 410% vs. year-end 2020 and spodumene spot prices rose by over 500% and are currently reported to be trading at $5,000/t (source: S&P Global Platts) Public and Government Relations: ·   Local stakeholder engagement: Savannah continued to engage and inform the local community about the Project through multiple channels; support was also maintained for local ventures and services ·  Wider stakeholder engagement: As travel restrictions eased, interaction with civil society, business and academic leaders, and journalists was stepped up ·   Future community engagement and environment planning: Savannah continued to develop its planned programmes including the Benefit Sharing Programme, Good Neighbour Plan, Community Owned Service Providers, and Land Stewardship Programme Mutamba Mineral Sands Project, Mozambique ·     Strategic review: Following completion of its strategic review the Company amicably exited the Consortium Agreement with Rio Tinto in December 2021 in return for US$9.5m Cash Termination Compensation 2022 Year to Date Summary ·     Decarbonisation: To support its commitments made in 2021, a decarbonisation strategy has been initiated, led by consultants ECOPROGRESSO and in association with leading global technology company ABB ·    Definitive Feasibility Study: Finalisation of environmentally enhanced ***process*** flowsheet to produce high quality spodumene concentrate ·     ESMS: Expanding the overarching Corporate Environmental and Social Management System to specifically cover Barroso Lithium Project ·     Broker appointment: RBC Capital Markets appointed as Joint Corporate Broker ·     Rebrand: Rebrand of the Company and the launch of its new website CHAIRMAN'S STATEMENT The global events of 2021, while difficult and often tragic for many, have conversely served to reinforce my view that your Company owns a vital strategic asset via its Barroso Lithium Project, (the 'Project'). Furthermore, the geopolitical consequences of the ***invasion*** of Ukraine in February seem likely to increase its importance. Following the sale of our interest in the Mutamba project in Mozambique to the Rio Tinto Group ('Rio'), Savannah is now a "pure lithium" company and is well-placed to benefit from the drive to identify alternatives to fossil fuels and increase in electrification. Moreover, the US$9.5m termination compensation from Rio along with the £10.3m gross proceeds from the over-subscribed April placing helped take Savannah's year-end cash position to £13m, putting us in a good financial position for the year ahead. It is therefore particularly frustrating that these matters are not reflected in our share price. In terms of market forces, 2021 saw a continuation of the same market drivers which first triggered the lithium sector's strong recovery in the second half of 2020. Supply again failed to keep up with the demand created by increasing battery manufacturing and electric vehicle sales around the world. As a result, lithium raw material prices moved to new record highs. However, as in 2020, the positive news our sector enjoyed was overshadowed by the spectre of the COVID pandemic. Though COVID's impact ebbed and flowed during the period, the rise of the Omicron variant late in the year acted as a stark reminder that Europe and the rest of the world still has some way to go to be fully free of the impacts of this virus. Savannah must continue to play its part in protecting our staff and those with whom we work and associate by mitigating risk accordingly. Hence, we will continue to manage COVID-related risk as actively as possible and adhere to relevant laws and guidance for as long as is necessary. Responsibility is embedded in our corporate strategy The Board is determined that your Company should develop the Project in a responsible and innovative way. We are pursuing a number of initiatives to reduce the Project's carbon footprint, as described more fully in the CEO's Report, and these will all contribute to our goal of achieving Scope 1 and 2 net zero emissions during the life of the Project. We are also targeting a reduction in Scope 3 emissions. These objectives do not take account of the estimated 100 million tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions Savannah's lithium can help avoid in Europe's transport sector. These initiatives will also be tracked as part of your Company's Environment, Social and Governance ('ESG') programme. An ESG statement was adopted by the Board during the course of the year and a comprehensive Environmental and Social Management System (ESMS) which is in the ***process*** of being rolled out at corporate level will be extended to our Portuguese operations during 2022. Our key focus in Portugal is on the approval of our EIA We at Savannah share our shareholders' frustration at the slow rate of progress in obtaining the necessary approvals required for the Project to progress. Foremost among these is the approval of the EIA report we first submitted in 2020 to the Portuguese regulator, Agência Portuguesa do Ambiente ('APA'). Our report was declared in conformity with APA's requirements in April 2021 and this was followed by a public consultation phase, completed in July 2021, when all interested parties had the opportunity to lodge their comments with APA. We had expectations that APA's decision would be forthcoming in the final quarter of 2021, but in October 2021 an impromptu General Election was called for 30 January 2022, which has evidently impacted on decision-making ***processes*** in the relevant Government departments. Appointments to the relevant cabinet positions were made in March 2022 and we are hopeful that the APA decision could be made in coming months. If APA does approve our EIA, we will re-initiate the fieldwork required for completion of the Definitive Feasibility Study ('DFS') and accelerate the build-out of our in-country team. Given the uncertainty on when a decision from APA will be received, it would be imprudent of me to give precise guidance on timing for completion of the DFS. Furthermore, as our shareholders will understand, given the second phase of the environmental licencing ***process*** also relates to the Project's final design, it will have an important bearing on the DFS. However, I can guide to the time we estimate for the outstanding work required for the DFS' completion as being approximately no more than 12 months following APA's approval of the EIA. The energy transition endorses our strategic move into lithium Despite the delays, I still firmly believe that Savannah's move into the lithium sector in 2017 remains a good, long term, strategic decision for our Company. This can be backed-up by reference to growing electric vehicles sales, the record prices now seen in key lithium raw materials, and the increased corporate activity in the lithium market itself, particularly in Europe. We therefore remain hopeful that the Barroso Lithium Project will receive environmental regulatory approval, and have backed our confidence by continuing the land acquisition programme at the Project throughout the period. In late 2021 we were delighted to see not one, but two in-country lithium chemical refinery projects announced by significant companies in the battery, energy and chemicals sectors. We also saw the Portuguese Government move closer to initiating the long-awaited tender ***process*** for six exploration areas prospective for lithium across the country. Hence, the lithium industry in Portugal is really starting to take shape and Savannah is part of a growing industrial, academic and governmental community which is focused on providing materials and products key to the energy transition in Europe and has the potential to bring very significant economic, environmental and social benefits for a large number of people, while at all times following a responsible approach to the production of this critical raw material. Commercial interest in the Project has increased On a commercial front, 2021 started on a positive note with announcement of the Heads of Agreement ('HoA') with Galp Energia, SGPS, S.A ('Galp'), around a 100,000tpa offtake agreement and project level investment. This provided proof of concept that the Barroso Lithium Project could attract commercial partners for its spodumene concentrate but, as the first and second quarters progressed and sentiment and prices within the lithium sector improved, Savannah received further commercial inquiries. The expiry of the HoA at the end of May not only allowed us to continue negotiations with Galp but also to speak freely with a host of other parties who have approached us during the year. This includes European and non-European groups either looking for a new source of spodumene for existing or new conversion plants, or potential strategic partners looking for exposure to the lithium battery value chain. While we had targeted conclusion of a first offtake agreement by the end of 2021, it is not a concern to the Board that this self-imposed deadline was not met. The developments we have seen in the past eighteen months in the European and global lithium markets, and the growing concern around future supply among consumers of lithium feedstock, lead us to believe that the delay is working out to our benefit and that securing suitable offtakes and/or partnerships remains eminently achievable, and particularly as and when a positive decision on the EIA is received. In addition to these 'direct' commercial relationships and associated financings, Savannah continues to assess its options on other sources of development finance such as government or European Union grants. Divesting non-core mineral sands asset supports our core growth As our shareholders will know, December 2021 marked the end of Savannah's active involvement in the Mozambiquan mineral sands sector after eight years including the last five years spent focused on our role as operator in the unincorporated joint venture with Rio on the Mutamba Project ('Mutamba'). As time working in Mozambique went on it became clear to our team that to progress both the Mutamba and Barroso Lithium Projects under Savannah's leadership simultaneously would likely overstretch our human and financial resources. A thorough technical assessment of Mutamba and a review of the various restructuring and market opportunities available to us was made assisted by Farview Solutions and its principal, Bruce Griffin, and it was amicably agreed that cancelling our unincorporated joint venture was the best option for both parties and the project. Rio has assumed full responsibility for the Mutamba project (Mining Concessions 9228C and 9229C and Mining Concession application 9230C) and Savannah's in-country staff have transferred across to Rio to remain with the project. In return Savannah received a US$9.5m termination compensation from Rio and is now in the ***process*** of divesting its residual Mozambiquan assets (Matilda Minerals Lda and Mining Concession 9735C). As stated, the cash received helped to lift Savannah's year end cash position to £13m. During our tenure we and Rio were able to make some notable progress on the project, publishing a first economic study in 2017, and being awarded the three, 25-year, Mining Concessions in 2019 and 2020 which covered the vast majority of the project's 4.4 billion tonne resource. Savannah leaves the Mutamba Mining Concessions in good order for Rio Tinto with work on securing land use and utilisation agreements and EIAs progressed during 2021. We wish Rio well with their ongoing development of the project. Given Rio's long involvement with Mutamba, I have no doubt they are the most appropriate group to take the project forward. I would also like to thank our former team members for all their hard work over the years and wish them well with their new careers at Rio. Savannah can also be proud of its legacy in Mozambique which it has left through its extensive community engagement programmes, more details of which can be found in the ESG section. Using our market position to promote a responsible future During 2021 we have been consciously attempting to consolidate Savannah's position in Portugal's business environment and the European and global lithium industry. To that end, we became a founder member of Portugal's new Association for the Battery Cluster, as we announced last June, and joined the country's 130-member strong Business Council for Sustainable Development. Within the lithium sector, we became one of the first 12 Associate Members of the newly formed International Lithium Association, a not-for-profit industry association created by major industry participants as a voice for the lithium industry and to promote ESG and sustainability practices within the sector. We also continued to add to our own team across a range of disciplines such as geology and finance, and we look forward to growing our team further during 2022. Financial Overview During the year the Board lifted some of the COVID-related cost control ***measures*** it had put in place in early 2020. The accompanying uptick in corporate activity resulted in a 27% increase in the Group's administrative expenses to £3.3m (2020: £2.6m). Combining this with a £0.2m loss on foreign exchange, resulted in losses from continuing operations increasing by 39% to £3.5m (2020: loss £2.5m). However, without a repeat of the £5.8m non-cash adjustments recorded last year in association with the divestment of our copper projects in Oman, losses before tax of £3.5m (2020: loss £8.3m) and the total comprehensive loss for the year of £3.3m (2020: loss £8.2m) were approximately 60% lower than 2020. The Group's net assets increased by 33% during the year to £27.2m with the 18% reduction in intangible assets to £14.1m (2020: £17.3m) associated with the termination of the unconsolidated joint venture with Rio on the Mutamba project, more than offset by the 550% increase in the Group's year-end cash position to £13.0m (2020: £2.0m). This greatly improved cash position reflected the income received from the combination of the oversubscribed £10.3m (gross) placing, the US$9.5m termination compensation from Rio as part of our exit from the Mutamba project and the £0.7m received from the sale of shares in Force Commodities which Savannah had received as part of the divestment of its assets in Oman. Outlook 2022 is shaping up to be another key year for Savannah. I am sure I speak for all in saying that our current thoughts are with the people of Ukraine at this terrible time and that our sincerest hopes are for the conflict in their country to be brought to an end as soon as possible. Savannah has no direct exposure to Ukraine or Russian markets but given the European location of this conflict and the significance of Russia in global geopolitics and the world's energy, commodity and financial markets, ongoing impact of the ***invasion*** on international markets must be expected. As a result, Savannah will continue to monitor the situation closely and be ready to put plans in place if required. At present it is hard to accurately predict what the long-term outcomes may be, but this rapidly deteriorating situation has again shown the risk inherent in many global supply chains which are based on commodity and energy production in high sovereign risk jurisdictions. In the lithium sector at least, Savannah would like to offer Europe a low-risk alternative. The Company is now solely focused on lithium and has the capital at hand to make meaningful progress towards development and production at the Barroso Lithium Project. Despite the current uncertainty, the market backdrop remains highly supportive with high lithium prices, global EV sales forecast to grow year-on-year, and ever greater emphasis being placed on responsible, low carbon, manufacturing techniques and products. All these factors mean that Savannah has real optionality available to it in regard to future commercial arrangements for the Project. We remain hopeful that APA will approve our EIA in the coming months, and this will then allow us to finalise the Project's design and undertake the remaining work required for the DFS. APA's decision will also dispel much of the uncertainty which has bedevilled our share price and bring clarity for all the Project's stakeholders as to its future status in that it will provide assurance to our potential commercial customers that Savannah is a responsible operator and that the Project can be a future source of low carbon, lithium raw material for their operations and the wider battery value chain. As ever, my thanks go to all our staff who continue to make their very best efforts to move Savannah towards its long-held goals of responsible production, cash flow generation, benefit sharing with stakeholders, and creating greater shareholder value. I would also like to thank all our shareholders for their continued interest and support for Savannah and wish them well as we all try to navigate our way back towards 'normality' through the residual challenges of the pandemic and the fresh uncertainty and alarm caused by the conflict in Ukraine. CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT We have started 2022 in great shape with a strong cash balance, 100% ownership of one of Europe's most strategic lithium projects, no overriding royalties, no offtakes written at low prices and a clear and defined path to production as the pre-eminent, pure lithium play in one of the world's largest lithium consuming regions. For the lithium sector as a whole, it was an ***exceptional*** year with the industry's three major raw materials, lithium hydroxide, lithium carbonate, and spodumene concentrate, seeing spot price rises of over 370%, 450% and 530% respectively. These large and rapid price rises show that raw material supply is a major problem in this market which, in turn, has major implications for the energy transition and the e-mobility revolution required to effectively tackle greenhouse gas emissions from the energy and transport sectors. Simply put, lithium is in great demand and the companies that supply or will supply lithium are in great demand. This is a very supportive backdrop for Savannah and its goal of becoming a major European-based lithium supplier. What Europe needs now is for the same legislators who rightly seek to affect the energy transition and cut emissions, to also facilitate the responsible supply of all the raw materials with the removal of unnecessary red tape, siloed bureaucracies and the application of project management tools to make this target achievable. By this time, I would have liked to have been discussing the exciting phase of project development that Savannah has underway following receipt of the Project's environmental approval and completion of the DFS. However, with market conditions as they now are and with climate change being front and centre of government policy, I believe the context for the Project has never been more promising. In fact, it can be argued that the opportunity presented by the Barroso Lithium Project is greater now than at any time in during our ownership, particularly bearing in mind current spot spodumene lithium prices at US$5,000/t versus the US$685/t assumed in our 2018 Scoping Study. The development of the Barroso Lithium Project is designed to benefit all stakeholders We are determined that all the relevant stakeholders benefit from the Project as it progresses. Within Portugal that means from the National Government, which will benefit from the economic growth created by a new pan-European industry, through to customers and suppliers, and individuals in the towns and villages near the Project. This latter group will see new job opportunities created, greater demand for local goods and services, improvements to local infrastructure, and meaningful and long-term financial support given to community projects and groups. Above all, this brings to light the necessity to support regional energy autonomy. I note that the average share price performance during 2021 amongst a large group of lithium development and production companies principally listed outside of the UK was +218% compared to the flat performance recorded by Savannah. Our shareholders should certainly benefit too as we move through value adding gateways in coming months. Importantly, our team was agile in the face of the EIA delay and maintained and adapted plans wherever possible to ensure that not only was progress made, but that we are prepared to accelerate quickly as and when a decision from the regulator is received. The excellent progress we have seen with our metallurgical test work and our decarbonisation initiatives are key cases in point. Preparation work on key DFS inputs underway On a technical front, our team prepared as much as possible for the next phase of the environmental licencing ***process*** ('Relatório de Conformidade Ambiental do Projeto de Execução', 'RECAPE'). During this phase, our team and our panel of consultants will work on the final detailed design for the Project which adhere to any conditions set by the regulator. Preparation work was also undertaken for the drilling campaigns and fieldwork which is required for input into the Definitive Feasibility Study. We plan to get back into the field with an in-fill resource drilling programme once a positive EIA decision has been received. While we were not able to create as many of the 'fixed points' for the DFS as we may have liked during 2021 because of the need for fieldwork and input from the environmental regulator, the key elements of the ***processing*** route to produce the spodumene concentrate and associated by-products from Barroso ore have now been fixed following a successful metallurgical test work programme in Australia during the year. As announced recently, our expert consultants and in-house team have been able to design a circuit which will produce a high quality, commercial spodumene concentrate based on the use of ***processes*** and reagents which meet or exceed all relevant legislation. We have been able to achieve excellent lithium recoveries in the high 70s per cent range with coarser grind sizes which will help reduce energy requirements and operating costs. Alongside the upcoming pilot testing on the main ***processing*** route, we are also investigating opportunities to recover additional lithium from some of the waste streams. Our test work has also involved trade-off studies where we have examined the trade-off between grade of the product and recovery. While we can produce a nominal 6% product which is the industry standard reference, the trade-off studies show that overall revenues are maximised with a product grade of 5.5%. A 5.5% graded product is well within acceptable marketing tolerances although with an arithmetic adjustment for price from the reference price for 6% material. Rejection limits are for material less than 5.0%. And we should remember that the Barroso lithium product benefits from having one of the lowest levels of iron. The on-going de-carbonisation programme is also a key work-stream for the DFS and we have already made a great start by commissioning ECOPROGRESSO, part of the Quadrante Group, to develop our strategy and with the announcement of a collaboration with the major global group, ABB, around automation and electrification aspects. With the metallurgical work-stream for the DFS largely done and the de-carbonisation work underway we are well placed to move into the design phase of the DFS upon receiving EIA approval. I should hasten to add that the metallurgical work outcomes are an important de-risking achievement as this area has been problematic for many of the earlier spodumene developments in Australia. This will be important from a project financing and commissioning perspective. European EV demand is strong and growing even stronger There is no doubt as to the level of regional demand for the product Savannah hopes to make. European car sales saw strong annual growth again to 2.33m units (+66%) as part of global sales of 6.75m (+108%, source EV-volumes.com), and the latest tally on capacity of existing or planned European battery plants is approximately 800GW. This capacity equates to over 600kt of lithium carbonate equivalent ('LCE'). At present, we estimate total future supply from European based lithium projects to be approximately 130kt of LCE, including the c.25kt provided by the Barroso Lithium Project in the form of spodumene concentrate. Hence, all future supply from Europe, including Savannah's, could easily be consumed domestically in the future. As further proof of this assumption, several of Savannah's European peers have announced offtake agreements in the past year for lithium chemical supply. European industrial development to drive demand for spodumene concentrate Amongst our European peer group, we believe Savannah will be the most significant future supplier of spodumene concentrate, the same material which has made Australia the world's largest supplier of lithium raw material. 2021 was the year that the concept of European 'merchant' lithium conversion plants really gathered pace. These are plants which are not integrated with a specific mine but purchase feedstock, such as spodumene concentrate, under long term offtake agreements or in the spot market from mining companies, such as Savannah. When we originally secured the Project the major source of demand for our product was China. Europe is now looking to build out its ***processing*** capacity to help optimise its strategic autonomy, eliminate potential international bottlenecks and build a decarbonised lithium value chain in Europe. This is a major shift which has only benefited Savannah and means our low carbon spodumene lithium is highly sought after. Looking just at Portugal alone, Galp has already stated its intention of moving into lithium chemical production earlier in 2021 with such a plant, but we welcomed the news in December that it was partnering with Northvolt, the major Swedish battery manufacturer, to create Aurora, a new 50:50 joint venture, which will develop a facility in Portugal targeting 35,000tpa of lithium hydroxide production from 2026. Meanwhile, Portuguese chemical company Bondalti and Australia's Reed Advanced Materials (70% Neometals/30% Mineral Resources) are trialling Reed's Eli® ***processing*** technology at Bondalti's chemical plant in Estarreja. This technology can ***process*** brine or hard rock concentrate feeds, and the groups are targeting a plant capacity of 25,000tpa of lithium hydroxide or carbonate if the initial pilot plant test work goes well. Barroso's concentrate would represent a natural feedstock for these proposed plants with the added benefit that its proximity to the likely site locations would help to minimise the carbon footprint associated with the lithium chemicals produced. Having both raw material and chemical production in country would also maximise the overall economic benefit available to Portugal from its lithium natural resources. As shareholders will be aware, our discussions with Galp around possible spodumene supply continued in the second half of the year, after the expiry of the previous Heads of Agreement between the companies at the end of May. Outside of Portugal, groups in Europe planning to build merchant plants have reached out to Savannah and a number of high quality discussions are ongoing. While transport distances would be longer to these plants than to potential sites in Portugal, any sales partnerships with these groups would still represent a wholly European endeavour, and compared to alternative sources of feed from Africa, the Americas or Australia, these plants would be producing 'low carbon' lithium chemicals if they took Barroso concentrate. Based on our current schedule, we expect to be in production ahead of any of the conversion plants planned in Europe. If this proves to be the case, then we may need to make short-term selling arrangements for our concentrate until the conversion plants are commissioned. Metal and commodity traders may be the best placed groups to assist us with this, being able to both market the Project's concentrate on our behalf and provide financing support and assistance with logistics. Again, Savannah has already attracted significant interest from groups in this sector of the market, many of whom are looking to grow their businesses into the battery metal space. Finally, such is the concern about raw material supply among consumers further downstream in the battery chain that we have also been contacted in recent months by some of these groups, both European and non-European. They are seeking to secure raw material supply which they can then direct through their existing supply chains. Discussions are continuing. In summary, regarding offtake agreements, Savannah has multiple options with national, regional or international avenues remaining open to us whether it be trading directly with a conversion group, or a company from downstream in the value chain. With our strong cash balance, we are in a good position to work patiently at striking the right agreements and not to just accept the deals that are available right now. Responsible Production is core to what we do While continuing to push on the commercial front, we have also been preparing to further enhance the Barroso Lithium Project's environmental credentials as part of our wider formalisation of our ESG framework. Our EIA speaks for itself in terms of the commitments Savannah will put into action around either eliminating or minimising the Project's individual impacts. However, we will be happy to refine our plans as required based on feedback we receive from the environmental regulator. We have an evolving range of programmes to support the community and the environment including: ·    The Benefit Sharing Programme - provides (EURO)500,000 per annum to worthy community programmes ·    Good Neighbour Plan - those things that we bring with us and can have dual use by the community e.g., water from our storages for firefighting ·    Community Owned Service Providers - community owned companies to provide services to the Project e.g., progressive rehabilitation ·    Land Stewardship Programme - reforestation of unused areas of Project with appropriate native species Equally we look to all opportunities for continuous improvement of the Barroso Lithium Project. A prime example is our major de-carbonisation initiative with our commitment made in November to move towards net zero Scope 1 and 2 emissions once the Project is in operation, and to also reduce the Scope 3 (indirect emissions, i.e., road haulage transport) as much as possible. Following these commitments, we were pleased to announce the initiation of a Decarbonisation Strategy in March 2022, led by the Portuguese environmental consultant, ECOPROGRESSO, part of the Quadrante Group. This initiative is only the start of the build out of a strong coalition of European industrial partnerships around the Project. On 30 March 2022 we further strengthened our 'decarbonisation' team with the signature of a MoU with ABB, the global industrial technology business with revenues of US$28.9b, which is providing its expertise in automation and electrification in the mineral production sector to Savannah under MoU. This will help us build out integrated digital applications for operations, maintenance, and other ***processes*** such as environmental performance optimisation. The Project will very much be a showcase of European innovation. We have also been holding discussions with a number of major mining equipment manufacturers which are all planning on developing and commercialising zero or low emission vehicles during the period the Project will be in operation. In regard to the electrical power the Project will use, we continue to evaluate the options available to increase the provision of renewable power above the already impressive c.60% available through the Portuguese grid. Once our suppliers and offtake partners are confirmed, we will work with them to plan reductions of scope 3 emissions associated with offsite haulage to our customers. Finalisation of the Decarbonisation Strategy is expected in Q2 2022 and we look forward to providing more follow-on news later in the year. Following on from our commissioning of a Corporate ESMS in Spring 2021, we have now also commissioned the creation of a project specific system tailored to the Barroso Lithium Project. A tendering ***process*** was initiated in Q1 2022, and the selected consultants will work with our team to enhance and extend our existing stakeholder engagement and environmental programmes and policies to cover the current phase of project development and also the construction and operating phases of the Project. On the ground in the Barroso While the more formalised ESMS system for the Project is being created, we have continued wholeheartedly with a range of ESG initiatives. While the pandemic and the associated vulnerability of the aging local populations tempered our ability to engage directly with many stakeholders in 2020 and 2021 we did maintain regular contact with the communities throughout 2021 via advertising in the local press, radio features and monthly newsletters distributed in local villages. Regular virtual and physical meetings were held with community leaders and stakeholders. We maintained a staffed information centre in the village of Covas do Barroso, supported local firefighters and helped with repairs to deteriorated local housing of villagers. We appointed a village ambassador who has been instrumental in supporting our local activities. An online presentation of the Project was made to stakeholders on 12 May 2021 and major community consultation presentation was held in the Boticas Municipality auditorium on 19 May 2021 to present and review the Environmental Impact Assessment. This was supplemented with a site visit the following day. So far this year we will shortly open a new office and information centre in the main street of Boticas and we have launched the "Litio do Barroso" magazine which will provide local news and information about the Project to local villages in the area of the Project. A comprehensive community mapping and opinion gathering programme was completed in the villages of Covas do Barroso and Dornelas in recent months and the results of the survey are being compiled. We have incorporated the Barroso Lithium Foundation which will be responsible for the investment of up to (EURO)500,000 per annum, once construction has begun, in worthy community programmes and initiatives chosen by local people on the Foundation board. The Foundation will also build a corpus of capital that will be deployed following the conclusion of the Project and so provide a long-term legacy for the region. We continue to receive excellent support from many members of the community who are excited about the opportunity that the Project will bring to their families, their livelihoods and their businesses. Local, regional and interest in the Project is underscored by the hundreds of unsolicited job applications that we are receiving. Unfortunately, much of this has been obscured with push-back from a small group of local activists who have tucked in beneath the umbrella of a number of anti-mining groups, much of which is led from outside Portugal. This in turn has been picked up in some press articles. Despite his early support for the Project, the mayor of Boticas has aligned himself with these groups. Nevertheless, members of the community appreciate what our Project offers. Like many parts of the Iberian Peninsula, the region is suffering from a demographic collapse. The 2011 government census shows that the population of Boticas declined by 13.0% to 5,002 people in the ten years to 2011 while the population of the village of Covas do Barroso declined by 26.7% to a total of 192 people, the vast majority of whom are elderly. The Boticas region is one of the poorest in Portugal and has suffered from the long-term flight of young people to Porto, Lisbon and points beyond. The Project will help to reverse these trends bringing prosperity and opportunity to the region, drawing young people to return or to take up residency and to build quality lives for their families. We see strong support from people in the region whose inevitable question is ''When are you going to start?''. Their eagerness is matched by the hundreds of job applications we have received and the broad support and interest of the Boticas business community in seeing the Project develop. Perhaps our most significant progress 'on the ground' was represented by our land acquisition programme across the C-100 Mining Lease area. This has required significant investigation by our team and consultants into existing land ownership and has needed to be handled and transacted with great sensitivity within the local community setting. To date we have signed 24 purchase and sale contracts and executed 15 deeds involving 67 individual blocks of land. We were joined in litigation filed by the Parish of Covas do Barroso in the Mirandela Fiscal and Administrative Court in Portugal against the Republic of Portugal and the Ministry of Economy as defendants. The litigation seeks to nullify certain administrative actions by the defendants in June 2016 including the addition of lithium to and the expansion in the area of the C-100 Mining Lease. The C-100 Mining Lease which contains the Barroso Lithium Project is fully granted, has a term of 30 years to 2036 and remains in good standing. Savannah's lawyers have confirmed their initial advice that the claim by the Parish is without foundation. The claim has been challenged by Savannah as the counter-interested party alongside and we will be exploring all potential options, including making a claim for damages against the plaintiff and its officers. Both the Republic of Portugal and the Ministry of Economy as defendants have now filed their defences. The litigation neither impacts the Project's activities nor the current Environmental Impact Assessment ***process*** which we believe is moving to a conclusion. The Environment - we care Foremost in our plans is the responsible and innovative development of the Barroso Lithium Project while eliminating or mitigating individual impacts. Integral to this is our policy of using best available techniques (BAT) to be a global example of economy in the management of water, materials, energy and resources. The impact assessment carried out in the EIA study, establishes the control and evolution of the more sensitive environmental aspects, such as water resources quality and potential vulnerability (surface and underground), air and sound environment, vibrations, soils (quality and geochemistry), ecological systems, landscape, social component, and local heritage. Operations will be controlled, managed and reported to via a comprehensive Environmental and Social Management System (ESMS) to help implement and maintain Savannah's Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) commitments for the Project. The ESMS will be aligned with internationally recognised ESG criteria, namely the requirements of the International Finance Corporation (IFC) Performance Standards on Environmental and Social Sustainability, as well as the World Bank Group's Environmental, Mining and General Health and Safety Standards. Some 238 individual mitigation ***measures*** will be implemented and an estimated investment of (EURO)5-6million in road/transport infrastructure investment ensuring that the Project's traffic by-passes local villages. Water trucks will suppress dust in dryer periods while forestation and landscaping will help contain sound and visual impacts. A programme of progressive rehabilitation will be implemented from day one and throughout the life of the Barroso Lithium Project. We will be evaluating the potential for the use of the site for pumped storage of renewable energy generated by wind and/or solar at the end of the mineral lifecycle. Our operating times are tailored to minimise discomfort for local communities and impact on flora and fauna. Detailed computer simulations show that the operation will meet the more demanding legal night-time noise limit of 43db at all times of the day. The only exception to this is blasting, each blast will last between 5-10 seconds and not exceed the legal limit of 55dB. Blasts will only occur between Monday and Friday, between 12pm and 3pm on 3 to 4 days per week. There will be no blasting at weekends. The Barroso Lithium Project is specifically designed to be self-sufficient in and to minimise the amount of water that it would require to support its operations while at the same time having no impact on water available for local communities, villages or towns. Neither will it have any impact on ***agriculture***. In Savannah's preferred model, water will not need to be abstracted from any local rivers. Water for the project will be sourced from surface water collected from part of the project's site footprint. Savannah is obliged by the Portuguese environmental regulator to capture surface water from the site footprint (contact water) in sediment control structures so as to ensure that untreated contact water does not flow into creeks, streams or rivers. Contact water collected in the sediment control structures are of the type commonly seen beside expressways which are designed to capture run off from road surfaces. There will be no impacts on the ecological flow of the Covas River in summer months. The area of the contact water catchments to be developed to collect surface water for the Project represent only 1.7% of the area of the local Covas River watershed, 0.3% of the area of the larger Beça River watershed and an insignificant 0.2% of the main Tâmega watershed. In overall terms these numbers are not material to water volumes in the region and, in any case, potentially overstate the water volumes that will be captured in any year by the Project. 85% of the water supporting operations will be recycled. In our preferred model, contact water will be supplemented by water sourced from the de-watering of the open cuts. Again, this is not expected to impact community water supplies or local ***agriculture***. Questions have been raised concerning the continued status of the Barroso region as a Globally Important ***Agricultural*** Heritage Systems (GIAHS) area. This status was awarded in 2018 and was not intended to impact the integrity of existing economic activities in the area such as mineral production. It is also important to understand that the total Barroso Lithium Project concession area occupies just 0.53% GIAHS area in the region and, depending on the development alternative chosen by APA, the area of actual disturbance on the concession area will be less than 0.25% of the GIAHS area. The Project has no impact on the GIAHS classification. ***Agricultural*** areas represent 10% of the Mining Lease land area. Of the projected area for mining use and associated activities, ***agricultural*** land represents just 3.1% (18.3ha) of the Mining Lease area. This area is not material to ***agriculture*** in the areas around the Barroso Lithium Project development. Today, one of the main threats to this territorial dynamic is the depopulation and abandonment of land, factors that pose a major risk of degradation of the existing natural, cultural and built heritage, and which are decisive for the classification of this region as a GIAHS Site. As part of our plan we will look to implement ***measures*** with local partners to recover agrarian system areas that have deteriorated as a result of demographic changes in the area. Preservation of fauna and flora will be a priority for Savannah. Studies we have supported have shown that the Project area does not intercept the known territory of any Iberian Wolf packs although there are packs in surrounding areas. In the case of local water mole and mussel populations particular care will be taken to eliminate or at least minimise disturbances to riverbanks. The quality of the soil will be monitored, managed, and preserved, since the operation will not use chemical products that might alter it. Topsoil will be removed, stored, safeguarded, and cared for appropriately so that it can be re-laid during rehabilitation as a basis for revegetation of native species. The Barroso Lithium Project will employ local farmers for progressive land rehabilitation during the life cycle of operations and we are evaluating expanding this into a community owned company to provide rehabilitation services to the Project and so build an enduring new benefit for the community. As part of our developing Land Stewardship Programme, land we are acquiring which will not form an immediate part of the Project's developed footprint will be reforested with guidance from local authorities using native species appropriate to the area. We will also work to the recovery of the site at the conclusion of the Project's life with the requalification of these areas for traditional agro-silvan-use e.g., honey, chestnuts, meat, sausages, aromatic herbs, amongst others. Intensive management of land is a major cause of biodiversity loss in Portugal. Creating clear initiatives for removing invasive non-native species and creating new native woodland will demonstrate to stakeholders that we have a responsible stewardship approach and our overall commitment. As part of this programme we are also developing a Stewardship Policies Handbook so it can be used in perpetuity. Finally, as another example of both our commitment and our transparency we will be implementing a sophisticated, sensor network that will ***measure*** key environmental operating parameters that will be made available in real time to stakeholders including regulators via a mobile phone app. EIA Progressing The original 6,000-page EIA and Mine Plan documents were lodged with the regulator in May of 2020. A community consultation ***process*** was undertaken in May of 2021. The completion of APA's evaluation has however has not been possible while it awaits the result of a treaty mandated, cross-border consultation ***process*** with Spain and the formation of a new government in Portugal following the calling of a snap General Election held on 30 January 2022. As our chairman has said, we are hopeful that the environmental regulator in Portugal will approve our Project in coming months. Savannah's team and its large team of subject matter specialists have put in an amazing effort to design a project to international standards and best practices, and we hope that the Barroso Lithium Project will be held up as a positive case study for a new generation of mining projects in Europe which are sourcing minerals critical for European society in a responsible, low carbon, way which brings economic and social benefits for all stakeholders. While we await the outcome of the regulator's review, there is much for us to do. In addition to remaining open to dialogue with APA, we will continue to engage with all stakeholders and elevate our position in Portuguese civil society and be as prepared as we can for when a decision is made, and the next exciting phase can begin. Divesting Mozambique allows us to focus on our core business We achieved our target in 2021 of bringing resolution on the future of our investment in Mozambique with the sale of our interest in the Mutamba Project to Rio Tinto. The long term and sizeable financial and resourcing commitment we would have needed to make to bring Mutamba to a final investment decision would have made it challenging to achieve alongside the imperatives of the Barroso Project's development. Our review looked at various styles of development as well as introducing alternative corporate structures around the project. After deliberation, the option to transfer the project back to Rio, and for Savannah to exit Mozambique with US$9.5m cash termination compensation represented the best outcome. I would like to add my sincere thanks to all our former staff members for their hard work on what has been, at times, a challenging project, and to wish them and Rio Tinto well for the exciting journey towards production. Outlook Now with a singular focus on lithium in Europe, a strong cash balance, strong lithium prices and a myriad of inbound investment and offtake interest makes for an excellent starting position from which we can push hard on all fronts to make the Barroso Lithium Project Europe's first major lithium raw material production centre. It has not been an easy undertaking in the last two years, a pandemic and now deeper tension at the heart of our region, and I thank our staff for their efforts and our shareholders for their support. There remains much to do but I'm sure we are all in agreement that the prize is very much worth pursuing.

**Load-Date:** April 20, 2022

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[***Testimony of Secretary of the Treasury Janet L. Yellen before the Financial Services Committee, U.S House***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:655M-97S1-JDG9-Y36F-00000-00&context=1516831)

Impact News Service

April 6, 2022 Wednesday

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**Length:** 1659 words

**Body**

Washington: US Department of the Treasury has issued the following news release:

Chairwoman Waters, Ranking Member McHenry, and Members of the Committee, thank youfor giving me the opportunity to speak to you today. I am here today in my capacity as Chair ofthe National Advisory Council on International Monetary and Financial Policies (NAC) todiscuss Treasury ’ s oversight of the International Financial Institutions (IFIs) and our role inpromoting inclusive and sustainable growth, global monetary and financial stability, anddevelopment.

The last two years have clearly emphasized that these institutions are essential complements toU.S foreign policy. The IFIs have provided ***unprecedented*** financing in response to COVID-19,and they will play vital roles in responding to food and energy shocks, addressing a growingrefugee crisis in Europe, and rebuilding an independent Ukraine.

U.S leadership and involvement with the IFIs represents a key pillar of sustaining the globalorder and international financial architecture. As a leading founder of these institutions, theUnited States helped establish an international economic system that has supported historicgrowth and prosperity during the second half of the twentieth century. The InternationalMonetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank Group, and the regional development banks are criticalto addressing the challenges we face today, including a durable and inclusive recovery fromCOVID-19, reducing poverty, preparing for future pandemics, mitigating and adapting to climatechange, strengthening food security, bolstering debt sustainability and transparency, fosteringopportunities for private sector job creation, countering corruption and promoting rule of law,and investing in quality infrastructure. The IFIs also offer our international partners assistancethat supports private sector-led, sustainable growth over the long-term and adheres to highstandards, good governance, and transparency. Stronger, more stable growth abroad means astronger economy here at home. As other economies prosper, demand for U.S exports of goodsand service increase, creating jobs. Treasury is committed to working with Congress, IFImanagement, and likeminded shareholders to enhance the IFIs ’ responsiveness to U.S priorities.

Over the last two years, the IFIs have led the way in helping low-income and developingcountries fight the COVID-19 pandemic. Since the beginning of the crisis, the IMF hasapproved nearly $175 billion in emergency lending, concessional financing, debt service relief,and precautionary support to fund pandemic response and economic recovery efforts. Themultilateral development banks (MDBs) approved nearly $130 billion over the same period toaddress the health, economic, and social impacts of the pandemic. Of course, our fight againstCOVID-19 is not over. Treasury has asked the World Bank to continue working closely withCOVAX and international partners to improve vaccine readiness and support increased vaccinedelivery in developing countries. As long as this pandemic is raging anywhere in the world, theAmerican people will still be vulnerable to new variants.

The importance of the IFIs is even more paramount given Russia ’ s brutal and unprovokedinvasion of Ukraine. Russia ’ s actions, including the atrocities committed against innocent Ukrainians in Bucha, are reprehensible, represent an unacceptable affront to the rules-based global order, and will have enormous economic repercussions for the world.

Treasury is committed to holding Russia accountable for its actions so it cannot benefit from theinternational financial system. President Biden has rallied over 30 countries, representing wellover half the world ’ s economy, to impose swift, severe sanctions and export controls on Russia.Treasury is also working collectively with our partners to block Russia from accessing benefitsfrom IFIs. Both the World Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development(EBRD) had ceased approving new financing for Russia since the unlawful annexation ofCrimea in 2014. Since the ***invasion***, these institutions have announced further ***measures*** toprevent Russia ’ s and Belarus ’ access to financial and non-financial assistance.

At the same time, the IFIs are stepping in to provide critical budget financing to help respond tothe economic costs of war. Since the start of the war, the IMF has provided $1.4 billion in rapidfinancing for Ukraine. The World Bank has provided Ukraine $490 million in rapid financing aspart of a $3 billion package of support planned in the coming months. The EBRD approved aninitial €2 billion resilience package for Ukraine and neighboring countries covering the areas ofenergy security, nuclear safety, municipal services, trade finance, and support for small andmedium sized enterprises and refugees. Rapid IMF and World Bank assistance has allowedUkraine fiscal space to pay salaries for civilians, soldiers, doctors, and nurses, while also meetingits external debt obligations. These are admirable acts of credibility by a government undersiege. IFI support is helping keep businesses and banks open in Ukraine and neighboringcountries. IFIs are dedicating technical and surveillance expertise to provide critical insights onthe depths of the economic crisis caused by Russia ’ s reckless actions. The IMF, World Bank,and EBRD will be critical partners in rebuilding Ukraine, alongside bilateral donors, and theyalso will provide vital support to neighboring countries welcoming refugees.

Globally, spillovers from the crisis are heightening economic vulnerabilities in many countriesthat are already facing higher debt burdens and limited policy options as they recover fromCOVID-19. The IFIs will play a critical role in addressing key spillovers from the crisis:

* Food security:Together, Russia and Ukraine account for nearly a third of the world ’ s wheatexports. Russia ’ s ***invasion*** disrupted the flow of food for millions of people around the world and caused prices to spike. The IFIs and food security funds, such as the International Fund for ***Agricultural*** Development and the Global ***Agriculture*** and Food Security Program, are already doing essential work to address both the short-term and long-term effects on global food prices and supplies. The MDBs can provide fast-disbursing budget support, financing to support domestic food production, and social safety nets. Likewise, the IMF has existing emergency and medium-term facilities to provide financial support, including a concessional facility for the poorest countries. The MDBs ’ private sector windows also play a role in providing trade finance to smooth supply chain disruptions. Treasury will press MDBs to provide positive net flows to vulnerable countries and expand ways within their mandates to address impacts to food security, including long-term investments in ***agricultural*** productivity and ***agricultural*** infrastructure.

1. Energy security:The ***invasion*** of Ukraine has also underscored the need for sustainable, affordable, clean, and secure energy for economic growth and security for the United States, as well as for governments that partner with the IFIs. We are witnessing the vulnerability that comes from relying on one fuel source or one trade partner, which is why it is imperative to diversify energy sources and suppliers. The MDBs ’ promotion of energy efficiency and capital investment in diverse energy sources—and away from suppliers such as Russia— toward solar, wind, and other non-fossil fuel-based energy sources strengthens energy security and reduces short-term fossil fuel price risks, all while addressing the long-term threat of climate change. Public finance alone cannot meet this challenge, so Treasury is encouraging the MDBs to undertake reforms and adopt more ambitious targets for mobilizing private capital, particularly through their private sector windows. The IMF is also helping its members design economic policies to respond to energy shocks and transitions underway.
2. Debt sustainability:Many low-income countries are facing growing debt burdens as the pandemic continues into a third year. The IFIs supported the G20 ’ s Debt Service Suspension Initiative from 2020 to 2021, which helped eligible countries free up resources to use toward pandemic relief. The IMF and World Bank are now supporting the Common Framework for Debt Treatments, which seeks to help low-income countries address their longer-term debtrelated vulnerabilities by providing technical analysis, policy advice, and financing tosupport the debt restructuring ***process***. In addition, the IFIs are working to improve debt transparency for both debtor and creditor countries, which is critical for reducing debt vulnerabilities.

The recent record replenishment of the World Bank ’ s concessional window—the InternationalDevelopment Association—will help deliver critical financing to the world ’ s poorest and mostvulnerable to address these impacts at a moment of urgent need.

Finally, the Biden Administration is seeking Congressional authorization to provide financing tobolster two critical IMF lending facilities that will support vulnerable countries through theseexceptional global shocks. First, the Poverty Reduction and Growth Trust, the IMF ’ s existingconcessional facility, will provide emergency relief to the poorest countries. The PRGT has beenstretched by the ***exceptional*** amount of COVID-19 financing provided and needs additionalfunding. Second, the new IMF Resilience and Sustainability Trust will provide targetedfinancing alongside IMF programs to support countries ’ effort to strengthen energy security andpandemic preparedness. I am happy to discuss these proposals in more detail, and I hope I cancount on support from Congress.

Thank you for your time. I look forward to working with you to continue to advance U.S international economic leadership abroad and create opportunities for Americans at home. I amhappy to take your questions.

**Load-Date:** April 7, 2022

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[***TOP NEWS SUMMARY: Russian military enters Kiev as West apply sanctions***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:64VW-XXG1-JBN8-N0MP-00000-00&context=1516831)

Alliance News Global 500

February 25, 2022 Friday 10:42 AM GMT

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**Section:** Top News

**Length:** 2955 words

**Body**

(Alliance News) - The following is a summary of top news stories Friday.

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COMPANIES

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BASF reported a return to profit in 2021 thanks to a significant increase in sales and volumes, but expects sales to slow in 2022. In 2021, the Germany-based chemical company reported net income of EUR5.52 billion, a sharp improvement on the EUR1.06 billion loss in 2020. Earnings before interest and taxes advanced to EUR7.68 billion versus a EUR1.56 billion loss a year prior. Helping the firm returning to profit was a sharp jump in sales - which rose to EUR78.60 billion from EUR59.15 billion. Chemicals sales were up 68%, while Materials were 42% higher, Surface Technologies 36%, Industrial Solutions 16%, Nutrition & Care 7.0% and ***Agricultural*** Solutions 6.6%. BASF noted its 2021 Ebit was up 67% compared with the pre-pandemic level in 2019. The company said it has made a "very strong" start to 2022, with its January sales ahead of the year prior. BASF is guiding for 2022 sales between EUR74 billion and EUR77 billion, and Ebit before special items between EUR6.6 billion and EUR7.2 billion.

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International Consolidated Airlines Group posted a narrowed loss for 2021, saying that after the setback caused by Omicron at the end of the year, bookings have rebounded strongly and it expects to fly 85% of its 2019 capacity in 2022. The British Airways-parent reported a pretax loss of EUR3.51 billion, halved from a EUR7.83 billion loss in 2020, this was on total revenue of EUR8.46 billion, up 8.3% from EUR7.81 billion. IAG posted an operating loss of EUR2.77 billion in 2021, narrowing from EUR7.45 billion in 2020. Its operating loss before ***exceptional*** items narrowed to EUR2.97 billion from a EUR4.39 billion, beating consensus estimates for a loss of EUR3.03 billion. IAG expects a significant quarterly operating loss for the first quarter of 2022, due to normal seasonality, the effect of Omicron on near-term bookings, and the operating costs involved in re-building capacity. However, the airline group, which also include Spain's Iberia and Ireland's Aer Lingus, expects operations to be profitable from the second quarter, leading to a significantly positive year for both operating profit and net cash flows from operating activities.

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Educational materials publisher Pearson launched a share buyback programme, as it said 2021 brought a strong financial performance and it is building growth momentum. Pearson posted pretax profit of GBP157 million, down from GBP354 million in 2020, on total sales that rose marginally to GBP3.43 billion from GBP3.40 billion. Operating profit was GBP183 million in 2021, down sharply from GBP411 million in 2020. Pearson said the decrease in 2021 was mainly due to the gain on sale of its remaining interest in Penguin Random House recognised in 2020 and restructuring costs in 2021. Pearson declared a total dividend of 20.5 pence, up 5.1% from 19.5p in 2020. In addition, the publisher said it intends to start a share buyback of GBP350 million in 2022. CEO Andy Bird said: "Pearson has been reorganised and refocused with a new purpose to 'add life to a lifetime of learning' at the heart of everything we do. Our direct-to-consumer strategy is being driven by Pearson+, which had 2.75 million registered users at the end of 2021, with a strategy in place to engage more consumers and grow beyond Higher Education. Pearson is a digital first business, with consumer grade products, and the momentum across the company underpins our confidence for further growth in 2022 and beyond."

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Russian steelmaker Evraz delivered a robust financial performance in 2021 as demand increased, saying it is "conscious of the current geopolitical circumstances". Evraz said steel prices rose to their highest in years in anticipation of more robust demand from the construction and manufacturing sectors. Evraz posted pretax profit of USD4.18 billion for 2021, more than three times higher than USD1.30 billion in 2020 on total segment revenue of USD14.16 billion, up 45% from USD9.75 billion. Evraz generated free cash flow of USD2.26 billion last year, doubled from USD1.02 billion in 2020. The demerger of Evraz's coal business is expected to complete in late March 2022, the company said. "We are conscious of the current geopolitical circumstances. We continue to monitor the situation and will keep you updated regarding any material developments that can influence our business," Chief Executive Officer Aleksey Ivanov said.

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Property portal Rightmove said pretax profit nearly doubled last year to GBP225.6 million from GBP134.8 million in 2020, as revenue jumped by nearly half to GBP304.9 million from GBP205.7 million. Revenue also beat 2019's total of GBP289.3 million. Rightmove said it expects the number of property transactions in the UK to return to pre-pandemic levels, but it expects the online property advertising market to continue to grow. The company declared a 4.8 pence final dividend, up from 4.5p a year ago, taking its total payout for 2021 to 7.8p.

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Hikma Pharmaceuticals has instructed Citigroup Global Markets to conduct the USD150 million first tranche of the USD300 million share buyback that it announced on Thursday. The initial phase will begin on Friday and end by June 25.

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Tax preparation software provider Intuit on Thursday reported strong second quarter growth, aided by acquisitions. Revenue in the three months to the end of January increased 69% to USD2.67 billion from USD1.58 billion year-on-year. This was in line with recently downgraded guidance, which the firm blamed on a slower forming tax season. The quarterly sales growth lead to a surge in net income to USD100 million from USD20 million. Diluted earnings per share also increased five-fold, to USD0.35 from USD0.07. Intuit noted that acquisitions boosted growth in the period, with revenue excluding its acquisitions of Mailchimp and Credit Karma up 39%. QuickBooks Online Accounting revenue grew 35% in the quarter, while Online Services revenue more than doubled, driven by the addition of Mailchimp.

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Compagnie de Saint-Gobain said on Thursday it had seen record growth, earnings and margins in 2021. For 2021, the Courbevoie, France-based construction material manufacturer reported net income had multiplied to EUR2.61 billion from EUR456 million the previous year. Earnings per share saw a corresponding jump, rising to EUR4.79 from EUR0.85 year-on-year. Sales for the year were up 16% at EUR44.16 billion, an annual record. In 2020, sales totalled EUR38.13 billion. The company noted that this was achieved in a "far more inflationary raw material and energy cost environment". It reported organic growth of 18% on 2020 and 14% on 2019, explaining that the outperformance was due to "dynamic" underlying markets and an acceleration in price, particularly in the fourth quarter.

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MARKETS

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A late rally on Wall Street on Thursday was encouraging European markets to take back some losses, but US stock indices were called to open lower again on Friday. Brent oil slipped back toward USD100 a barrel. "Whereas elevated uncertainty is rattling markets, a genuine financial crisis in which money or credit markets seize up remains very unlikely, in our view," commented Holger Schmieding, chief economist at Berenberg.

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CAC 40: up 1.3% at 6,605.87

DAX 40: up 0.8% at 14,166.25

FTSE 100: up 2.1% at 7,360.71

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Hang Seng: closed down 0.6% at 22,767.18

Nikkei 225: closed up 2.0% at 26,476.50

S&P/ASX 200: closed up 0.1% at 6,997.80

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DJIA: called down 0.6%

S&P 500: called down 0.6%

Nasdaq Composite: called down 0.6%

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EUR: up at USD1.1180 (USD1.1148)

GBP: up at USD1.3380 (USD1.3353)

USD: down at JPY115.32 (JPY115.43)

Gold: down at USD1,910.45 per ounce (USD1,924.11)

Oil (Brent): down at USD100.10 a barrel (USD104.19)

(currency and commodities changes since previous London equities close)

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ECONOMICS AND GENERAL

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The first Russian military units have entered Kiev, the Ukrainian Defence Ministry said, as the second day of Moscow's ***invasion*** brought with it renewed airstrikes and fighting along various battle lines across Ukraine. Russian "saboteurs" were in the Obolon district in the north of the capital, the ministry announced via Facebook. The information could not be independently confirmed initially. The ministry called on locals to prepare petrol bombs for use in combat and to report sightings of Russian military equipment. Residents should not leave their homes, the ministry said. Earlier in the day, the general staff of the Ukrainian armed forces reported that the nation's troops were putting up strong resistance to "Russian occupiers" in Dymer and Ivankiv, settlements north-west of the city. Airborne assault troops had reportedly stopped "overwhelming enemy forces" on the border of the Teteriv River. The bridge across the river was destroyed, according to a statement.

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The finance ministers of Germany and France pushed back against criticism that the EU's latest salvo of sanctions on Russia for invading Ukraine do not go far enough. "All options are on the table," Germany's Christian Lindner told reporters in Paris but emphasized that Russian banks were already "completely blocked" from EU financial markets. France's Bruno Le Maire said the Russian economy was already feeling the impact of the ***measures***. Some EU member states, especially the Baltics, had pushed for the harshest sanctions possible after Russia's ***invasion*** of Ukraine at an emergency summit in Brussels on Thursday. This included the immediate expulsion of Russia from the SWIFT payment system.

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US President Joe Biden announced "severe" economic sanctions that will make Putin a "pariah" for invading Ukraine, but conceded a lack of Western unity for enacting an even tougher ***measure***. In a speech from the White House, Biden said four major banks would be hit with sanctions by Western powers and that export controls on sensitive components would "cut off more than half of Russia's high-tech imports." "This is going to impose severe cost on the Russian economy, both immediately and over time," Biden said. The ***measures***, on top of a raft of other sanctions already announced this week, will make Putin "a pariah on the international stage," Biden said. Biden confirmed that for now there was no attempt to put sanctions directly on Putin, who is widely reported to have amassed a huge, secret fortune during his two decades in power.

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The US has imposed sanctions on Russia's biggest bank. US institutions must close any accounts with Sberbank that have allowed business conducted in US dollars within 30 days, the US Treasury said. The Russian bank, which is majority state-owned, is the biggest creditor of the Russian economy and the biggest holder of savings deposits, the Treasury said. Biden had already announced similar ***measures*** against Russia's second biggest bank VTB. The latest ***measures*** mean about 80% of Russian banking assets are now targeted by sanctions, the Treasury said.

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Australia pilloried China's failure to denounce the Russian ***invasion*** of Ukraine, as well as Beijing's "unacceptable" decision to ease restrictions on a key Russian export in the face of Western sanctions. Prime Minister Scott Morrison said the world must unite to condemn Russia, voicing particular concern "at the lack of a strong response from China". Beijing announced Thursday that it would import more Russian wheat, in stark contrast to Western countries rolling out sanctions on the Kremlin and its allies. "You don't go to throw a lifeline to Russia in the middle of a period when they are invading another country. That is simply unacceptable," Morrison said. Russia produces around a quarter of the world's wheat, according to UN data, a trade worth billions of US dollars a year. Ukraine produces a further 10% of world supply and there are concerns that war and sanctions will strangle production and fuel already high food prices globally. China had previously only allowed wheat imports from a handful of areas in Russia, citing disease concerns.

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Japan will impose sanctions on Russia targeting semiconductor exports and financial institutions, Prime Minister Fumio Kishida said. The world's third-largest economy plans "asset freezes and the suspension of visa issuance for Russian individuals and organisations" as well as asset freezes "targeting Russian financial institutions". "Thirdly, we will sanction exports to Russian military-related organisations, and exports to Russia of general-purpose goods such as semiconductors and items on a restricted list based on international agreements," Kishida told reporters. Kishida did not detail the scale of the sanctions or which individuals and institutions would be targeted.

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US President Biden has made a final decision on who he will pick to be his first Supreme Court nominee, US media reported. The president promised during his 2020 campaign to elevate the first Black woman to America's highest bench, which he reiterated after Justice Stephen Breyer, 83, announced his retirement in late January. CNN first reported that Biden had made his decision, which was later confirmed by CBS News, both citing sources familiar with the ***process***. The cable network added that the decision could come as soon as Friday but no later than Monday, the day before Biden's State of the Union address. Among the favourites are US Circuit Court judge Ketanji Brown Jackson, South Carolina judge Michelle Childs and California Supreme Court judge Leondra Kruger.

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The US economy is healthy enough that interest rates should go from their current zero level to one percent by summer, and the first hike could be twice as big as normal, Federal Reserve Governor Christopher Waller said Thursday. However, with Russia's ***invasion*** of Ukraine threatening to drive up global commodity prices and disrupt the US recovery at a time of high inflation, Waller said the Fed may have to change its plans to end the easy money policies it put in place to support the economy as Covid-19 spread. "I expect inflation to remain elevated and only show modest signs of deceleration over the next several months," Waller said in a speech at the University of California, Santa Barbara. "As a result, I believe appropriate interest rate policy brings the target range up to 1 to 1.25% early in the summer." With consumer prices last year having increased at the highest rate in decades, the central bank's Federal Open Market Committee at its meeting next month is expected to increase interest rates for the first time since slashing them to zero when the pandemic began.

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The German economy declined in the final quarter of 2021, data from the Federal Statistical Office showed, but performed better than expected. Europe's largest economy contracted 0.3% in the final three months of 2021 compared to the previous quarter - coming in ahead of market consensus, according to FXStreet, of a 0.7% drop. In the third quarter, the German economy had advanced 1.7%. GDP improved 1.8% in the fourth quarter of 2021 from the fourth quarter of 2020, but was down 1.1% compared with the fourth quarter of 2019, before the Covid-19 crisis began. Meanwhile, import prices increased by 27% in January, the highest year-on-year change since October 1974. It improved upon December and November's rises of 24% and 25%, respectively.

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France confirmed the economy slowed in the fourth quarter, while consumer inflation accelerated in February, data from official statistics office Insee said. Gross domestic product grew by 0.7% in the three months to December 31 from the quarter before, having grown by 3.1% in the third quarter from the second. The fourth-quarter increase was in line with market consensus, cited by FXStreet. France's economy expanded by 7.0% in all of 2021, rebounding from 2020's steep 8.0% contraction. Turning to inflation, preliminary figures show the consumer price index rose by 0.7% in February compared to the previous month, which builds on January's 0.3% monthly rise. Market consensus had predicted a 0.4% rise. Annually, inflation was 3.6%, picking up from 2.9% in January.

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UK consumer confidence plunged in February amid a "perfect storm" of price rises, increased taxation and interest rate hikes, a long-running survey shows. GfK's Consumer Confidence Index fell seven points to minus 26 this month. The headline score is the lowest since January last year – one of the worst points in the Covid crisis. Worries about the onslaught of pressures on household finances saw every ***measure*** of the survey fall on a month ago. Confidence in personal finances and the wider economic situation over the next 12 months suffered the biggest drops, down 12 points and 11 points respectively.

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Car production in the UK fell to its lowest January total in a decade despite an increase in the manufacture of electric vehicles. Almost 68,800 cars left factories in January, down by 20% on a year ago and the worst figure for that month since 2009, said the Society of Motor Manufacturers & Traders. Production for overseas and domestic markets was down by 18% and 31% respectively. Battery electric vehicle production was up a third, with one in 11 cars rolling off factory lines zero emission. Including plug-in hybrids and hybrids, electrified vehicles accounted for more than a quarter of output. The worldwide shortage of semiconductors was still affecting production as well as the changeover of some popular models, said SMMT.

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[***G7 foreign ministers' meeting in Germany, 2022: communiqué***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:65GK-03J1-F0YC-N0DX-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

London: UK Government has issued the following news release:

Preamble

We, the G7 Foreign Ministers of Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom and the United States of America, and the High Representative of the European Union, have met today in a fundamentally changed strategic and security environment. The Russian war of aggression against Ukraine is a watershed moment for the 21st century and carries dramatic consequences far beyond Europe. We, the G7, want to make abundantly clear that we will not sit by whilst countries flagrantly disregard the international rulebook, on which we all depend for peace, prosperity, security and stability.

We condemn, in the strongest possible terms, Russia ’ s unjustifiable, unprovoked and illegal war of aggression against Ukraine. Russia has blatantly violated the rules-based international order, international law and humanitarian principles and it has breached universally agreed and legally binding fundamental principles such as peaceful cooperation, sovereignty, self-determination and territorial integrity. We remain steadfast in our commitment to defend peace, human rights, the rule of law, human security and gender equality, as recognized by international law including the UN Charter and conventions, and call on our partners to join us in these efforts. Our success will depend on stronger defence, economic security, and deeper global alliances with friends and partners.

Russia ’ s war of aggression has generated one of the most severe food and energy crises in recent history which now threatens those most vulnerable across the globe. Such actions must not stand. Our planet already faces extraordinary challenges and Russia ’ s war of aggression against Ukraine undermines and reverses progress to address these challenges. On the immediate crisis, the G7 is committed to both short-and-long term-support for Ukraine. We are determined to accelerate a coordinated multilateral response to preserve global food security and stand by our most vulnerable partners in this respect.

Democratic governance and its fundamental values underpinning our societies are under attack, undermined by military force, economic coercion, information manipulation and interference, including disinformation and other hybrid means. The G7 remains convinced that democracies remain best placed in the 21st century to ensure peaceful and prosperous societies where their people can freely exercise their human rights and freedoms, and choose leaders who represent their interests. We highly prize the contribution that civil societies all over the world have made and continue to make for much needed and transformative global change.

The climate crisis is accelerating and is threatening the very existence of humanity. Together with the international community, we must act decisively and urgently. We reaffirm our belief in international solidarity and the need to mitigate and overcome this existential, human-made threat.

The fight against COVID-19 and its global consequences is far from over. It is paramount to reaffirm our commitment to increased efforts to respond to the pandemic and to prevent a similar threat from emerging again. Equitable access to and provision of vaccines, therapeutics and diagnostics must go hand in hand with immediate support, especially in critical ‘last mile ’ contexts and with a focus on humanitarian efforts as well as opportunities for a green, inclusive and sustainable recovery from COVID-19.

The present and the future of this planet are at stake. Based on a strong sense of unity, we, the G7, are determined to uphold our values, defend our interests. We commit to preserve strong, vibrant and innovative societies and to uphold the rules-based international order to protect the rights of all, including the most vulnerable. We commit to engage with partners and multilaterally for a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world, and to increase coordination on economic security.

I. Foreign and security policy

1. Russia ’ s war of aggression against Ukraine

We are steadfast in our support for Ukraine in its defence against Russia ’ s unjustifiable, unprovoked and illegal war of aggression and reiterate our constant call on Russia to put an end to the war it started and to end the suffering and loss of life it continues to cause. We reaffirm our position as outlined in our May 14, 2022 G7 Foreign Ministers ’ Statement on Russia ’ s war against Ukraine.

2. Western Balkans

We reaffirm our commitment to the European perspective of the six Western Balkan countries to ensure the security, stability and prosperity of the region. We welcome that the Western Balkans stand united in condemning Russia ’ s war of aggression against Ukraine, especially in the UN General Assembly (UNGA). We commend Albania, Kosovo, Montenegro and North Macedonia for fully aligning their foreign policies with the EU, including sanctions and their implementation. We urge Serbia to do the same. We welcome the alignment of Bosnia and Herzegovina with EU restrictive ***measures*** on Russia and unilateral alignment of Kosovo with those ***measures***. We must continue to help Western Balkans to reduce their dependency on Russian hydrocarbons and vulnerability to economic coercion.

We strongly support the swift opening of EU accession negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia. We call upon the countries in the region to advance internal reforms, in particular on rule of law, to expand domestic political space, to improve the environment for civil society and independent media, to pursue their efforts in the prevention of radicalization to violence, to support reconciliation, and to fight against genocide disinformation, as well as the glorification of war crimes and convicted war criminals.

We are concerned about the deepening political crisis in Bosnia and Herzegovina and condemn any attempt to undermine the unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country. We will not tolerate Republika Srpska ’ s secessionist policies, which endanger Bosnia and Herzegovina ’ s future and the stability in the region. We urge the return to full functionality of governments at all levels to resume their work fully, putting aside divisive and inflammatory rhetoric and avoiding any act that could destabilize Bosnia and Herzegovina. We call upon all parties in the country to ensure that general elections are held as foreseen in October. We fully support the mandates of the High Representative Christian Schmidt. We fully support the executive mandate of the EUFOR ALTHEA operation to maintain a safe and secure environment in the country. We urge Kosovo and Serbia to engage constructively in the EU-facilitated Dialogue, to fully implement all past agreements with no delay, and to normalize their relations through a comprehensive and legally binding agreement, which will allow for the realization of their respective European perspectives, contribute to regional stability and benefit all people in the region. We support progress on inclusive regional cooperation and energy transition especially through the Common Regional Market and the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans within the framework of the Berlin ***Process***.

3. Indo-Pacific

We reiterate the importance of maintaining a free and open Indo-Pacific that is inclusive and based on the rule of law, the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms, democratic principles, transparency, territorial integrity, and the peaceful and inclusive resolution of disputes. We are committed to working toward such a goal including through protecting and promoting the rules-based international order, improving regional connectivity through quality infrastructure investments, strengthening free trade, enhancing national resilience, supporting inclusive economic growth and confronting climate change and the loss of biodiversity. We express our intention to work together with like-minded countries in the region and reaffirm our support for the unity and centrality of ASEAN and commit to explore concrete cooperation in line with the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP)

4. East and South China Seas

We remain seriously concerned about the situation in and around the East and South China Seas. We reiterate our strong opposition to any unilateral actions that could escalate tensions and undermine regional stability and the rules-based international order and express serious concern about reports of militarisation, coercion and intimidation in the region. We emphasize the universal and unified character of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), and reaffirm UNCLOS ’ s important role in setting out the legal framework that governs all activities in the ocean and the seas. We urge all parties to resolve disputes over maritime claims through peaceful means consistent with international law, and support using the dispute settlement mechanisms established by the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea. We reaffirm the importance of provisions laid down by UNCLOS on freedom of navigation, the right of innocent passage in the territorial sea. We stress that there is no legal basis for China ’ s expansive maritime claims in the South China Sea. In this regard, we reiterate that the award rendered by the Arbitral Tribunal under Annex VII to UNCLOS on 12 July 2016 is a significant milestone and a useful basis for peacefully resolving disputes in the South China Sea. We urge China to fully comply with the award and to respect navigational rights and freedoms enshrined in UNCLOS.

5. China

We continue to encourage China to uphold its commitments within the rules-based international order, to contribute to international security and to cooperate in advancing global health security, as well as the provision of global public goods, including on climate change, biodiversity and gender equality. We remind China of the need to uphold the principle of the UN Charter on peaceful settlement of disputes and to abstain from threats, coercion, intimidation ***measures*** or use of force.

On the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine, we encourage China to support, in line with international law, the sovereignty and independence of Ukraine and the integrity of its internationally recognized borders and to resolutely urge Russia to stop its military aggression against Ukraine. We call on China not to assist Russia in its war of aggression against Ukraine, not to undermine sanctions imposed on Russia for its attack against the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine, not to justify Russian action in Ukraine, and to desist from engaging in information manipulation, disinformation and other means to legitimise Russia ’ s war of aggression against Ukraine.

We underscore the importance of peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait and encourage the peaceful resolution of cross-Strait issues. We also support Taiwan ’ s meaningful participation in the World Health Assembly and WHO technical meetings. The international community should be able to benefit from the experience of all partners.

We will work together to foster global economic resilience in the face of pressure through arbitrary and coercive economic policies and practices. We encourage China to uphold its commitments to act responsibly in cyber space, including refraining from conducting or supporting cyber-enabled intellectual property theft for commercial gain.

We remain deeply concerned by the human rights situation in China, particularly in Xinjiang and Tibet. In line with China ’ s obligations under international and national law, we urge China to fully respect human rights. We urge China to complete the ratification of ILO conventions 29 and 105 and call for full implementation and for effective action against forced labour in practice. We intend to tackle instances of forced labour, including through our own available domestic means, including through raising awareness and providing advice and support for our business communities.

We urge the Chinese authorities to allow immediate, meaningful and unfettered access to Xinjiang and Tibet for independent observers, including the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and her potential visit to China. We call on China to abstain from forcibly repatriating refugees to the DPRK.

We deplore the decline of pluralism and the limitation of civil and political rights in Hong Kong and call on the Hong Kong authorities to respect human rights, the rule of law, the independence of the judicial system and democratic principles. We urge China to act in accordance with its international commitments and its legal obligations, including those enshrined in the Sino-British Joint Declaration and the Basic Law, and to respect Hong Kong ’ s high degree of autonomy and the rights and freedoms of its residents.

6. Myanmar

We continue to condemn in the strongest terms the military coup in Myanmar and stress the importance of holding accountable all those responsible for crimes under international law as well as egregious human rights violations and abuses committed by the armed and security forces, including sexual violence and abuses against Rohingya and members of other ethnic and religious minority groups. We call on the military to immediately cease the violence, release all those who have been arbitrarily detained and restore Myanmar to the path toward inclusive democracy. We continue to support the efforts of ASEAN and the Special Envoy of the ASEAN Chair in finding a peaceful solution to the crisis, on the basis of the ASEAN Five-Point-Consensus in all its dimensions, in particular dialogue with all parties concerned. We also support the efforts by the Special Envoy of the UN Secretary-General. We remain deeply concerned by the deteriorating humanitarian situation and call for immediate, safe and unhindered access for humanitarian assistance and COVID-19 vaccines to all people in need, in all parts of the country. We stress the need for the voluntary, safe, dignified, and sustainable return of all displaced persons, including Rohingya refugees when conditions allow. We remain fully committed to stopping the sale or transfer of arms, military equipment, material and dual-use equipment to the Myanmar military, and we call on all states to adopt similar ***measures***.

7. Afghanistan

We are deeply concerned over developments in Afghanistan since the forceful takeover by the Taliban. We are alarmed by the systemic abuse of human rights, especially those of women and girls and members of ethnic and religious minority groups, and of the growing denial of fundamental freedoms. We remain worried about the persistent lack of political inclusivity and representative governance, the dire economic, humanitarian and social situation and the presence of terrorist groups in Afghanistan. We are united in our strong condemnation of the ongoing violence with recurring terrorist attacks targeting, among others, members of ethnic and religious minorities and in particular members of the Shia/Hazara community and of the terrorist threat emanating from Afghan soil for neighbouring countries and beyond.

We reassure the people of Afghanistan of our continued support to address their humanitarian and basic human needs, as demonstrated with our commitments at the High-Level Pledging Conference on 31 March. Unimpeded humanitarian access is indispensable for a swift and full distribution of humanitarian assistance consistent with humanitarian principles. The prevention of aid diversion is key for any assistance. We urgently call upon the Taliban to ensure the essential basis for long-term social, economic and political stability: with meaningful efforts towards inclusive and representative governance, rule of law and civil society; with full respect for political, social, economic, cultural and educational rights, including those of women, girls and members of minority groups; and with adherence to the commitments made in the Doha agreement and to provide safety to the people of Afghanistan.

We reiterate our request to the Taliban to urgently reverse their decision denying Afghan girls equal access to secondary education and call resolutely to revoke the recent announcement on women ’ s appearance in public along with new punishments for family members to enforce compliance with these restrictions, which represent further serious restrictions on fundamental freedoms for women and girls. We await swift and full implementation of their decision to ban opium cultivation, which should lead to concrete efforts addressing illegal drugs trafficking and financing of terrorism. We recall our expectations that the Taliban allow safe passage across the borders of Afghanistan for foreign and Afghan nationals. We emphasise that the type and scope of our non-humanitarian engagement with Afghanistan and of our relations with the Taliban will be determined in large part by their commitments, actions and achievements on these matters and the expectations widely shared by the international community. We call upon international partners and particularly countries neighbouring Afghanistan to define their respective engagement with the Taliban on this basis. Unity of the international community is key to ensure a peaceful, stable and prosperous Afghanistan.

8. Libya

We call on all Libyan stakeholders to ensure the democratic aspirations of the Libyan people are recognized through the swift definition of a legal basis followed by free, fair and inclusive Presidential and Parliamentary elections as soon as possible. We call on all parties to refrain from violence and to preserve the unity of the country and its institutions. We remain concerned about reprisals against women in public and political roles. We recall UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 2571 (2021) and its provision recalling that individuals or entities engaging in, or providing support for, acts that threaten the peace, stability or security of Libya, may be designated for targeted sanctions. We reiterate our support for mediation efforts through the good offices of the UN Secretary-General ’ s Special Advisor Stephanie Williams and encourage all international partners and Libyan stakeholders to cooperate fully. In that regard, we take note of the adoption of UNSCR 2629 (2022) restructuring the United Nations Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) and calling upon the Secretary-General to appoint a Special Representative promptly.

We are deeply concerned by the continued oil shutdowns depriving the Libyans of substantial revenue, burdening them with increasing prices, and risking electricity outages, water supply problems, and fuel shortages. We urge the full resumption of oil production in Libya and call upon all actors to refrain from using it as an instrument of political confrontation. We continue to stress the need for oil revenues to be transparently managed, with public expenditures decided and executed through a clear budgetary ***process*** for the benefit of all Libyan people. The unity, integrity, and apolitical nature of the National Oil Corporation must be preserved. We continue to call for full implementation of the 23 October 2020 ceasefire, freedom of movement for all Libyans, compliance with the arms embargo and the full withdrawal from Libya without delay of all foreign forces and mercenaries, as set out in UNSCRs 2570 (2021) and 2571 (2021). We call on all Libyan authorities to ensure the delivery of basic services to the Libyan people, to protect civil society from persecution and defend the right to civic dialogue, to respect human rights, to promote accountability for human rights violations and abuses, and to ensure protection of refugees and migrants. We support the renewal of the authorisations set out in UNSCR 2292 (2016) to ensure an effective implementation of the UN arms embargo on Libya. In this regard, we welcome the EU ’ s continued efforts through Operation IRINI.

9. Syria

We reaffirm that there is no alternative to an inclusive political solution on the basis of UNSCR 2254. We call on all parties, especially the Syrian Arab Republic, to engage meaningfully in the UN-facilitated political ***process***. We do not support efforts to normalize relations with the Assad regime and will not normalize relations ourselves, nor lift sanctions or fund reconstruction until there is irreversible progress towards a political solution. We condemn the Assad regime and its backers for, among other things, its ongoing systematic atrocities against the Syrian people as well as the regime ’ s attempts to divert humanitarian assistance and disrupt regular and sustained humanitarian access into and within Syria, and take strong exception to the politicisation of aid access and delivery. We condemn the widespread perpetration of sexual violence and we strongly support the continued authorisation of cross-border humanitarian assistance later this year.

We welcome the sixth Brussels Conference on the Future of Syria and the Region as a strong expression of continued engagement and support for the people of Syria, the Syrian civil society, and an inclusive political solution to the Syria conflict in accordance with UNSCR 2254. We stress the importance of ensuring any future political solution includes the meaningful participation of women. We urge the regime to comply with its obligations under UNSCR 2118, including its obligation to cooperate fully with the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), and continue to fully support the decision of the States Parties to suspend some of Syria ’ s rights and privileges under the Chemical Weapons Convention, until it completes the steps set out in the OPCW Executive Council Decision of 9 July 2020. We are firmly committed to accountability for the use of chemical weapons and violations of international law, including international humanitarian law and international human rights law. There can be no impunity for the use of chemical weapons. As participating States of the International Partnership against Impunity for the Use of Chemical Weapons, we welcome the work of the OPCW ’ s Investigation and Identification Team, and its continuing efforts to attribute responsibility for chemical weapons attacks in Syria. We continue to support efforts of the Global Coalition against Daesh to stabilize liberated areas.

We underscore the urgent need for progress on the fate and whereabouts of tens of thousands forcibly disappeared or arbitrarily detained Syrians. We welcome ongoing efforts by national courts to prosecute international crimes that were committed in Syria over which they are able to exercise jurisdiction, and pledge to support these efforts as well as the work of appropriate international criminal justice and investigative mechanisms and transitional justice mechanisms, such as the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism and the Commission of Inquiry.

10. Iraq

We reiterate our commitment to Iraq ’ s stability, sovereignty, and democracy. Following successful elections in October 2021, we call on Iraq to urgently form a new government; one which meets the needs and is accountable to all Iraqi people, including through much needed economic reform, regional cooperation and stabilization. We continue to support efforts, led by the Government of Iraq and backed by the Global Coalition against Daesh, to combat Daesh, and consolidate and strengthen Iraq ’ s stability and security while commending Iraq ’ s initiatives for the repatriation of its citizens from the camps in the North East of Syria. We also welcome the activities carried out, at the request of the Government of Iraq, by the European Union Advisory Mission in Iraq, supporting the reform of the civilian security sector, and by the NATO Mission Iraq, helping to strengthen security forces and institutions. We continue to be concerned about the humanitarian situation and protracted displacement of 1.2 million Iraqis and encourage Iraq to deliver on commitments made to facilitate durable solutions. We urge Iraq to live up to its ambitions of a green economic transition and stand ready to assist in this transformation.

11. Israeli-Palestinian conflict

We also addressed the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and reaffirmed our commitment to a negotiated Two-State solution, which envisions both Israel and a viable Palestinian State, living side by side in peace and security and mutual recognition. In light of recent events, we strongly condemn terrorism, indiscriminate violence against civilians and incitements to acts of violence. We also condemn the firing of rockets by militants in Gaza into Israel. We welcome the positive steps taken recently by both sides and encourage further engagement between the parties, including on deepening economic cooperation, to renew confidence, improve the Palestinian economy and lay the path towards relaunching a political ***process*** as soon as possible. We reiterate our support for the historic Status Quo in Jerusalem, and Jordan ’ s special role. We urge all parties to refrain from any and all unilateral actions that exacerbate tensions or threaten the Two-State Solution including incitement to violence or the expansion of settlements. We underline the importance of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) for the stability of the region and call on the international community to broaden and sustain support for the agency so that services can be reliably provided.

12. Yemen

We welcome the two-month truce and the associated confidence-building ***measures***, including the import of fuel through the ports of Hodeidah and the opening of Sana ’ a airport, brokered by the United Nations Secretary-General ’ s Special Envoy Hans Grundberg. We highly appreciate the government reform in Yemen, including the formation of a Presidential Leadership Council, as an important step towards peace and stability in Yemen. We call on all parties to the conflict to respect the truce, implement the confidence-building ***measures*** in the interest of the Yemeni people and engage constructively in talks to open the Taiz-Hawban road. We call on the parties to the conflict to engage in constructive talks under the leadership of the United Nations, to convert this truce into a lasting ceasefire and to ultimately reach a durable peace that includes meaningful input from women and civil society leaders and members from marginalized communities. We call for accountability for human rights violations and abuses and violations of international humanitarian law. All parties to the conflict must allow and facilitate rapid and unimpeded passage of humanitarian access. All parties to the conflict should provide access for human rights advocates, journalists, and civil society staff working to document human rights abuses and violations in order to ensure the protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure. Humanitarian aid and commodities, especially fuel, must flow unimpeded into and throughout the country. We call on the international community, especially countries from the region, to provide substantial financial support for the humanitarian response, which is currently $3bn in deficit, and for a resolution to the ailing tanker FSO Safer to thus help prevent an environmental and humanitarian catastrophe for the region.

13. G7-Africa Partnership

We are determined to deepen our partnerships with African countries, regional organisations, and the African Union in the spirit of multilateralism and the rules-based international system, building more inclusive, sustainable and resilient economies, advancing global health and food security, confronting climate change and the loss of biodiversity, and empowering women and girls. Our cooperation is guided by the objectives of the AU Agenda 2063, the 2030 Agenda the Paris Agreement. We welcome further efforts to advance this cooperation, such as the EU-AU Joint Vision for 2030.

In addition to the significant impact of climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic, Africa ’ s economies have been substantially impacted by Russia ’ s war of aggression against Ukraine, through rising energy, food and fertilizer prices, and increased cost of borrowing. We will further strengthen our economic cooperation with our African partners in different ways such as via the G7 Partnership for Infrastructure and Investment, the EU-Africa Global Gateway Investment Package and the G20 Compact with Africa. We will also work towards a successful COP27 hosted by Egypt and welcome related African initiatives such as the AU ’ s Green Recovery Action Plan.

We commend the ***exceptional*** work of the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC) and the AU ’ s African Vaccine Acquisition Trust (AVAT) in coordinating a strong African response to the COVID-19 pandemic and we are determined to continue our support towards the achievement of Africa ’ s goals in combatting COVID-19 and other diseases. We furthermore recognise the important contributions of Africa CDC and other African partners to the Signature Initiative to Mitigate Biological Threats in Africa, which is spearheaded by G7-led Global Partnership (GP) Against the Spread of Weapons and Materials of Mass Destruction.

We remain determined to fight terrorism and its spread across Africa, developing a global approach, based on the respect of international law and on the political will of affected countries. Premised on the principle of African solutions for African problems, we underscore our support for continental responses to peace, security and governance challenges.

14. Horn of Africa

The G7 remains concerned about peace, security, and humanitarian challenges in the Horn of Africa. Political instability, weak governance, armed conflicts, militias and terrorist groups as well as growing militarization of the Horn of Africa and the Red Sea threaten democratic achievements and economic reforms of the recent years. As a result, humanitarian pressures are mounting throughout the region – exacerbated by the effects of climate change, an ***unprecedented*** drought, and natural disasters and by the impacts of Russia ’ s war of aggression against Ukraine, including on food insecurity. The emergence of famine-like conditions in Ethiopia and Somalia impacting nearly 500,000 people is highly concerning Insecurity and politicized access preclude humanitarian agencies from delivering life-saving aid to millions. The poorest and most vulnerable populations in the Horn of Africa are bearing the brunt of such pressures. We are deeply concerned about the increasing numbers of displaced persons and the worsening human rights situation, in particular widespread sexual and gender based violence. We emphasize our commitment to work with countries and institutions in the region to foster peace and security, democratic and inclusive governance, economic development and a sustainable and equitable use of resources in the Horn of Africa and its wider neighborhood as well as to strengthen resilience of people and economies.

15. Somalia

We urge Somalia ’ s leaders to conclude the ongoing electoral ***process*** in an inclusive and transparent manner that lends legitimacy and credibility to the new Somali president and government. Although we welcome the significant progress that has been made in completing the parliamentary election ***process***, we are discouraged that the 30 percent quota for female representation has not been met. We are deeply concerned by the worsening drought and ongoing humanitarian crisis. Reports of persistent sexual and gender-based violence are deplorable. We recognize the need for urgent, concerted action from the international community to prevent a catastrophic deterioration of these crises and build resilience. We underline the need for continued efforts to counter violent extremism in Somalia and urge effective implementation to build capacity and enable Somalia to assume responsibility over its national security. We therefore welcome the UN Security Council ’ s (UNSC) mandate for the AU Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS).

16. Sudan

We continue to call for a return to a civilian-led transition towards an inclusive democracy and peace after the military takeover on 25 October 2021. Restoration of a credible civilian-led government is vital to allow for the resumption of economic support and international debt relief to help Sudan resolve its economic crisis. We urge an end to the violence, including sexual and gender based violence, against protesters, the immediate release of all those unjustly detained and an end to any practice of arbitrary arrests and detentions. We condemn these acts in the strongest terms, and insist on the importance of justice for victims and survivors in order to achieve reconciliation. We also call for the immediate lifting of the State of Emergency. The military needs to show through its actions that it is indeed committed to a peaceful and democratic Sudan. Civilian actors also need to find common ground about key negotiation issues to take back the reins of a civilian-led government. We welcome the cooperation of the UN, AU and IGAD in co-facilitating a Sudanese-led political ***process*** and encourage all actors to continue engaging in the next phase of the ***process*** towards a resolution of the crisis and a peaceful, democratic, and civilian-led Sudan.

17. Ethiopia

We welcome the announcement of an indefinite humanitarian truce and urge all parties to the conflict to ensure full, safe, unhindered and sustained delivery of humanitarian assistance to all conflict areas. We call on all conflict parties to negotiate a lasting ceasefire and move towards a political solution to the crisis that will lay the foundations for durable peace and will create the conditions for a genuinely inclusive national dialogue. We urge the Eritrean government to withdraw its forces from Northern Ethiopia.

Human rights violations and abuses, including sexual and gender-based violence, and a lack of accountability remain major concerns. We welcome the engagement of the Government of Ethiopia with the recommendations of the Joint Investigation report and the establishment of the Inter-Ministerial Taskforce and urge all parties to the conflict to cooperate with the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia to avoid impunity, prevent further atrocities and pave the way towards justice and reconciliation. We encourage the conflict parties to ensure the voices of survivors of sexual and gender-based violence are present in any political solution.

We are deeply concerned about the worsening drought in the southern and eastern regions which is affecting more than 8 million people. We commit to support humanitarian efforts and urge other international partners to do the same.

18. Sahel

We are concerned about the series of coup d ’ Etats and military take-overs in Western Africa. We underline the need for free and fair elections and return to constitutional order in Mali, Chad, Guinea, and Burkina Faso. We support the efforts of ECOWAS, the AU and the UN to mediate and assist the political transitions in the region. We are concerned by the deteriorating humanitarian situation and commit to continue working with humanitarian actors to address growing humanitarian needs. Humanitarian access must be maintained and international law respected by all security forces operating in the region. We take note of the decision of some partners to withdraw their military capacities from Mali due to multiple obstructions by the Malian transitional authorities as well as the presence of Russian affiliated forces.

We regret that the Malian transitional authorities have not fulfilled yet their commitment to ECOWAS, supported by the African Union, to organize presidential and legislative elections. We commend MINUSMA ’ s role in the stabilization of Mali. We express our deep concern over the growing presence of Russia-backed Wagner group Forces in Mali and their potentially destabilizing impact on the entire region as well as our grave concern over credible allegations of serious human rights abuses and violations committed in Mali by elements of the Malian armed forces accompanied by Russian affiliated forces which allegedly caused the death of hundreds of civilians. These abuses and violations, committed under the pretext of combatting terrorism, contribute to exacerbate inter-ethnic tensions and benefit terrorist organizations in the long run. They must be investigated impartially and those responsible held to account. MINUSMA must be granted access to the sites of the alleged violations and abuses to investigate per its UNSC mandate.

We will continue to support the Sahel countries in their efforts to achieve self-reliance and sustainable peace, stability and development. We note the need to address the root causes of conflict and in parallel to fight terrorist threats in the Sahel region. International assistance coordination mechanisms, such as the Coalition for the Sahel, P3S, and the Sahel Alliance, have an important role to play. We reaffirm our commitment to support the civilian and political surge in the Sahel, which countries called for at the Ndjamena summit. We are concerned about the evolution of the terrorist threat from the Sahel towards the Gulf of Guinea coastal states. We emphasize the need to strengthen their resilience in a comprehensive way and call for improved collaboration between the Sahel and coastal countries, including via ECOWAS and the Accra Initiative.

19. Gulf of Guinea/ Maritime security and safety, combatting illicit activities at sea

We reiterate our commitment to promoting a cooperative system of international governance for the ocean and seas and to maintaining the rules-based maritime order based on international law, in particular UNCLOS. We welcome the progress achieved by the states bordering the Gulf of Guinea in the implementation of the Yaoundé Maritime Security Architecture, in particular in preventing and combating piracy and other illicit activities at sea, and the continuation of the European Union support through the Coordinated Maritime Presences (CMP) in the Gulf of Guinea. We encourage the states of the region and other states and international organizations concerned to further address the root causes, prevention, and prosecution of piracy, including within the coordination framework of the G7++ Friends of the Gulf of Guinea (FOGG). It is in this framework we will pursue the strengthening of maritime security, the protection of marine resources and biodiversity as well as regional ownership and the enhancement of the work of the Yaoundé Maritime Security Architecture.

20. Venezuela

We are very concerned about the ongoing deterioration of the humanitarian situation in Venezuela, as well as by the increasing number of displaced persons, causing the biggest migration crisis in the region. We strongly condemn human rights abuses committed by the Maduro regime, and continue to call for an end of human rights abuses. We support the work of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and the UN Independent Fact Finding Mission with a view to holding those responsible accountable and improve the human rights situation in Venezuela. Important structural deficiencies were observed in local elections held in November 2021. We urge the Maduro regime to respect basic democratic principles and act consistently with the recommendations formulated by the EU Electoral Observation Mission. We reiterate our call for the respect of all political and civil rights and the release of all political prisoners. The only way out of the crisis lies in Venezuelan-led negotiations leading to free and fair presidential and parliamentary elections. We call on all parties to resume these negotiations promptly and act in good faith for the benefit of the Venezuelan people.

21. Haiti

We remain deeply concerned by the dire humanitarian and economic situation in Haiti and by the severe consequences of the grip of violent criminal groups on the security and political situation. We call on the international community to support Haiti and we underline the essential role and action of international organizations on the ground. Our priority is to help strengthen the Haitian National Police ’ s capacities in order to bring back security and civil peace. We stress the importance of restoring the efficiency of the judiciary and the fight against impunity. We call on all political and civil society actors to overcome their differences and to engage in a meaningful dialogue in order to restore the functioning of democratic institutions and allow for the holding of free and fair elections when conditions permit.

22. Conflict prevention and management, support for UN efforts and reform, peacekeeping missions, gender parity strategy

We reaffirm our strong support for conflict analysis, early warning, crisis prevention, peacebuilding and strategic foresight as key instruments to prevent conflict and sustain peace and commit to examine synergies between them. We are eager to find ways to secure a financial basis for peacebuilding, including for the UN Peacebuilding Fund, by exploring all funding options for peacebuilding, including innovative financing mechanisms and aim to develop a G7-***process*** on peace finance, in continuation of the United Nations General Assembly High-Level Meeting on peacebuilding financing this April. It is our firm conviction that United Nations Peacekeeping remains a core component of the UN mission of maintaining international peace and security. We continue to support the Secretary-General ’ s ongoing “Action for Peacekeeping/Action for Peacekeeping plus” reform initiatives. In our view, UN Peacekeeping is one component of a comprehensive approach to achieve lasting conflict resolution that similarly builds on prevention, mediation and peacebuilding. We pursue a multidimensional approach to account for the various challenges, inter alia threats from armed actors and disinformation campaigns, which some peace operation face.

We reaffirm our support to the UN and Secretary-General Guterres ’ path for UN reform for a more agile, integrated and cohesive UN. We welcome the Secretary General ’ s initiatives on his report “Our Common Agenda”, particularly those regarding the full equal effective and meaningful participation of women and the inclusion of youth and civil society organizations, and will jointly contribute to achieving its goals. We recommit to the reform of the UN Security Council. We are deeply concerned by Russia ’ s abuse of its position as a permanent member of the UNSC, particularly in the context of its aggression against Ukraine.

We remain committed to the full implementation of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda as enshrined in the UNSC Resolution 1325 and its follow-up resolutions, as well as the UN ’ s Gender Parity Strategy and its Uniformed Gender Parity Strategy. Gender equality and the full, equal and meaningful participation of women, women peacebuilders, women peacekeepers, women human rights defenders and women-led organizations in all their diversity, at all stages and at all levels of conflict prevention, peacebuilding, and peacekeeping is critical to ensure sustainable and inclusive peace ***processes***.

We condemn sexual and gender-based violence, including when related to conflict, and underscore that such acts may constitute crimes against humanity or war crimes. We recognize the need to strengthen the implementation of the international architecture to tackle conflict-related sexual violence and commit to setting out a shared position in response to G7 Leaders ’ request to Foreign and Development Ministers on this issue at Carbis Bay in 2021. We reaffirm the importance of a gender-transformative mainstreaming approach. A survivor-centered approach should be adopted when dealing with sexual and gender-based violence, including when related to conflict. Survivors ’ access to justice, redress and support services is crucial for them to have a chance at a life in dignity. In this respect, we encourage efforts such as those of the Global Survivors Fund and the UN Team of Experts on Rule of Law and Sexual Violence in Conflict. We are exploring ideas for how to improve accountability for human rights violations and abuses, such as sexual and gender-based violence, including through a study on the merits of a possible standing independent investigative mechanism.

23. Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT)

We are committed to strengthening non-proliferation and disarmament efforts for a more secure, more stable, and safer world. We endorse the Statement of the G7 Non-Proliferation Directors ’ Group as published on 9 May 2022, which outlines our commitment on non-proliferation and disarmament.

We are resolved to comprehensively strengthen the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, promote its universalization, re-inforce the importance of commitments made in past NPT Review Conferences and advance the NPT ’ s implementation across all three of its mutually reinforcing pillars. We underline the authority and primacy of the NPT as the irreplaceable cornerstone of the nuclear non-proliferation regime and the foundation for the pursuit of nuclear disarmament and peaceful uses of nuclear technology.

We reiterate that a meaningful outcome at the NPT Review Conference later this year is our priority and we reaffirm our commitment to the ultimate goal of a world without nuclear weapons with undiminished security for all, achieved through concrete practical steps. More than fifty years of progress on nuclear arms control and strategic risk reduction must be continued, and the overall decline in global nuclear arsenals must be sustained and not reversed. We are resolved to promote the goals and objectives of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT). We underline the urgent need to bring this treaty into force. Pending the entry into force of the Treaty, we call on all states that have not yet done so to declare new or maintain existing moratoriums on nuclear weapon test explosions or any other nuclear explosions.

We deplore Russia ’ s war of aggression against Ukraine, which has led to the suspension of the US-Russian Strategic Stability Dialogue that aimed at laying the foundation for future arms control arrangements. We condemn Russia ’ s unjustified use of nuclear rhetoric and signalling. We urge Russia to behave responsibly and exercise restraint. The G7 supports and encourages wider efforts towards an active arms control dialogue involving China. We welcome efforts by the G7 Nuclear Weapons States to promote effective ***measures*** that are critical towards progress on disarmament under the NPT and we underline that all Nuclear Weapons States have the responsibility to engage positively and in good faith in this regard. We commit to enhancing export controls, including through international export control regimes, on materials, technology and research that could be used to develop weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery. We also intend to share our expertise to help other states counter such proliferation.

24. Biosecurity and 20 years of the G7 Global Partnership against the Spread of Weapons of Mass Destruction

We reaffirm the unique and valuable contribution of the G7-led Global Partnership (GP) against the Spread of Weapons and Materials of Mass Destruction. We will dedicate further efforts to address biological threats in the framework of the GP. We will step up efforts to counter the weaponisation of disease, notably within the 31-member GP which supports vulnerable partner countries around the globe as well as at the upcoming Review Conference of the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention. At the Conference, we will work to strengthen implementation of the Convention by promoting progress toward more effective implementation, increased transparency, and enhanced compliance and confidence-building ***measures***. We will continue to back the United Nations Secretary-General ’ s Mechanism for investigating alleged uses of chemical or biological weapons. We intend to further deepen our cooperation with African biosecurity partners to develop and implement the GP ’ s Signature Initiative to mitigate Biological Threats in Africa.

We commend the 20th anniversary of the GP. The G7 is committed to ensuring that the GP remains a key contributor to countering persisting and newly emerging threats posed by weapons and materials of mass destruction.

25. Iran

We are committed to ensuring that Iran will never develop a nuclear weapon. We reaffirm our support for a restoration and full implementation of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPoA). A diplomatic solution remains the best way to restrict Iran ’ s nuclear programme. We support continued efforts to achieve the full restoration of the JCPoA. It is high time for Iran to seize this opportunity to bring negotiations which started in Vienna more than eleven months ago to a successful conclusion. We urge Iran to refrain from further escalations of its nuclear activities. Escalations carried out over the last eighteen months are very serious developments and a matter of deep concern. They have no credible civilian requirement and have particularly grave implications.

The G7 expresses strong support for the crucial verification and monitoring mandate of the IAEA. We urge Iran to uphold and fully implement all obligations and commitments, in particular under its NPT-required safeguards agreement with the IAEA, and to provide without further delay all required information to enable the IAEA to clarify and resolve outstanding safeguards issues.

We reassert our serious concerns about Iran ’ s destabilizing activities in and around the Middle East. This includes activities related to ballistic and cruise missiles, including transfer of missile and missile technology, and transfer of unmanned aerial vehicles and conventional arms to state and non-state actors. Such weapons proliferation is destabilising for the region and escalates already high tensions. We urge Iran to cease its political and military support to proxy groups and fully abide by all relevant UNSCRs, in particular UNSCR 2231 (2015).

We are deeply concerned by the continued human rights violations and abuses in Iran, including those affecting the exercise of the right to freedom of peaceful assembly, freedom of association, freedom of religion or belief, and freedom of expression. Foreign and dual nationals and human rights defenders have faced arbitrary arrest, detention and lengthy prison sentences and should be released.

26. DPRK

We strongly condemn the continued testing of ballistic missiles by the Democratic People ’ s Republic of Korea (DPRK), including the Intercontinental Ballistic Missile (ICBM) launch conducted on March 24 2022, which confirms yet again the DPRK ’ s intention to further develop its nuclear and missiles capabilities. We deeply regret that the DPRK, with the most recent launches, has also abandoned its self-declared moratorium on ICBM launches. These reckless actions demand a united and decisive response by the international community, including further significant ***measures*** to be taken by the UNSC.

We reiterate our demand that the DPRK abandon its nuclear weapons and existing nuclear programs, and any other weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missile programs in a complete, verifiable and irreversible manner, in accordance with all relevant UNSCRs. We urge the DPRK to abide by these UNSCRs and return at an early date to and fully comply with the NPT and IAEA safeguards. We reiterate that the DPRK cannot have the status of a nuclear weapon State in accordance with the NPT. We call on the DPRK to accept the repeated offers of dialogue put forward by all parties concerned including the United States, the Republic of Korea and Japan. We remain committed to working with all relevant partners towards the goal of peace on the Korean Peninsula.

We deem critical that sanctions which target the DPRK ’ s unlawful weapons development and related activities remain in place while its programs exist. We call on all States to fully and effectively implement all relevant UNSCRs and vigilantly monitor for sanctions evading activities. We note with concern the report by the Panel of Experts established pursuant to resolution 1874(2009) that illicit ship-to-ship transfers continue to take place and welcome efforts to address these transfers. We remain ready to assist in and strengthen capacities for effective sanctions implementation. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, we commend the work of the 1718 Committee, which has swiftly approved all COVID-19 related sanctions exemption requests for humanitarian assistance for the DPRK.

We continue to condemn the DPRK ’ s systematic, widespread and gross human rights violations and abuses and urge the DPRK to respect the human rights of its entire people, to cooperate with all relevant UN bodies and to resolve the abductions issue immediately. We remain gravely concerned regarding the humanitarian situation in the DPRK which is the result of the DPRK ’ s choice to prioritize its unlawful WMD and ballistic missile programs over the welfare of its own people. We urge the DPRK to facilitate access for international humanitarian organizations for the delivery of urgently required humanitarian goods such as food and medicines and for independent assessment of humanitarian needs as soon as possible. Humanitarian aid should be delivered in a manner consistent with UNSCRs and humanitarian principles.

27. Preventing an Arms Race in Outer Space: responsible space behaviours

State threats to the secure, safe, sustainable, and peaceful uses of outer space are of serious concern. Given that our societies are increasingly reliant on space systems for their security and prosperity, we are determined to reduce the risk of misperception and miscalculation and reduce space threats. We reaffirm a shared understanding that international law applies to activities in the exploration and use of outer space. As all nations are increasingly reliant on space systems and services, the security and sustainability of the space environment is a common concern. Establishing norms, rules and principles for responsible space behaviours is a pragmatic way forward to enhance security, mitigate threats against space systems and reduce the risks of misperception, miscalculation, and escalation. We encourage all states to positively engage in the UN Open Ended Working Group that aims to build a common understanding of responsible space behaviours and consider first proposals for norms, rules, and principles in that regard. We welcome the US commitment not to conduct destructive direct-ascent anti-satellite missile testing.

28. Sustainable space environment

We promote the maintenance of a peaceful, safe, secure and sustainable space environment. We underscore the importance of the Long Term Sustainability Guidelines and Space Debris Mitigation Guidelines of the UN Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space. We call on others to join us in implementing these guidelines. We recognize the importance of developing common standards, best practices and guidelines related to sustainable space operations alongside the need for a collaborative approach for space traffic management and co-ordination. We call on all nations to work together, to preserve a peaceful and sustainable space environment for future generations

29. International terrorism

We reiterate our strong and unequivocal condemnation of terrorism in all its forms and manifestations. We reaffirm our commitment to contribute to the international efforts aimed at preventing and fighting terrorism, in particular our collective efforts against Daesh, Al-Qaeda and their affiliated groups, which continue to pose a threat on a global scale. We stress that all counter-terrorism ***measures*** must be conducted in full compliance with international law, including international human rights law, international humanitarian law and international refugee law, as applicable. We remain committed to address the factors that can contribute to terrorism, including political and socio-economic instability, and to adopt a whole-of-government, whole-of-society and gender-responsive approach in our counter-terrorism efforts. We are committed to fostering international action and cooperation to fight terrorist financing and money laundering and call for the full implementation of the FATF standards and relevant UNSC resolutions. We recognize the need to keep investing in the prevention of radicalization to violence and countering the spread of terrorist propaganda online, including by maintaining our collective efforts within multi-stakeholder efforts such as the framework of the Christchurch Call and the Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism. We are committed to strengthening the implementation of UNSCR 1540 by all UN member states. The upcoming comprehensive review and resolution renewal provide a unique opportunity to reiterate that 1540 remains the most important multilateral tool to prevent non-state actors from acquiring nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons, their means of delivery, and related materials.

We note with concern the rising threat posed by violent extremism or terrorism, referred to by some governments as extreme rightwing terrorism and by others as a form of racially, ethnically or other ideologically motivated violent extremism or terrorism. We call for increased engagement with relevant partners and institutions, enhanced international information sharing, and welcome efforts initiated to tackle this growing threat and its transnational dimensions.

30. Transnational organized crime

Transnational organized crime remains a significant threat to both our national and international security, whose destabilizing influence has been amplified by the impact of the COVID pandemic and the recent Ukraine crisis. We call for more targeted, coordinated and sustained action against criminal networks, cybercrime, and illicit financial flows, including in conflict areas, also by further coordinating our capacity building efforts and strengthening international cooperation. We underscore that the world drug problem is one of the major challenges facing the international community. Trafficking in drugs and precursors chemicals bolsters organized crime, has a destabilizing effect on our citizens and societies, endangers public health and can be used, in some instances, as a major source of funding terrorist activities. Against these challenges, we reaffirm our determination to reinforce our cooperation with other regions of the world in order to reduce illegal drug production and trafficking.

We remain committed to safe, orderly, and regular migration around the world, and will continue to engage in preventing and countering migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings. Our approach will continue to be human rights oriented, survivor-centered, gender-responsive and will focus on identifying and protecting the most at-risk as well as on prosecuting the perpetrators. We recognize that illicit trafficking and crimes that affect the environment, including crimes against wildlife, pose a significant and growing threat, also for its linkages with transnational organized crime networks. We are committed to working together to strengthen cross-border law enforcement and tackle corruption associated with these forms of crime. We recall that the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons is a major threat to peace, security, stability and development. Preventing and fighting such traffics is also part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. We underscore the important role that the G7 Roma-Lyon Group plays in fostering international cooperation to counter terrorism and combat transnational organized crime.

II. Prevention and transformation

A. Tackling the global climate and biodiversity crises and promoting a sustainable and just energy transition

Recognizing science including the latest IPCC findings, we emphasize the urgency for enhanced climate action to stay within a limit of 1.5°C temperature rise, to protect people, livelihoods and ecosystems and to maintain peace and stability. We reaffirm our unwavering commitment to strengthening the implementation of the Paris Agreement. To this end, we commit to urgent, ambitious and inclusive action in this decade to reduce emissions leading to net-zero greenhouse gas emissions as soon as possible and by 2050 at the latest, enhance resilience and adaptation to the impacts of climate change and align financial flows with the goals of the Paris Agreement. We call on all countries and financial institutions, in particular Multilateral Development Banks, to do the same. We remain steadfast in our commitments to provide support for developing countries, including climate finance. We will fully play our part in urgently implementing the Glasgow Climate Pact, and further commitments made at COP26, including sectoral initiatives. We engage with non-state actors to support sectoral implementation of their COP26 commitments and note the need for inclusive and transparent tracking of progress in climate initiatives in both adaptation and mitigation.

The conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity is essential to sustain human life and is closely interlinked with climate. One of the key drivers contributing to the loss of biodiversity is climate change; on the other hand, biodiversity offers solutions to address climate change. Loss of biodiversity threatens political, economic and health and food security. We reaffirm the urgent need to halt and reverse biodiversity loss, including loss of forests by 2030. We call for an ambitious and effective post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework with strong accountability and implementation mechanisms to be adopted at CBD-COP15 and swiftly implemented by all parties.

We commit to aligning all financial flows with biodiversity objectives, including identifying, redirecting or eliminating subsidies harmful to biodiversity and call on all countries and financial institutions, in particular Multilateral Development Banks, to do the same. We are committed to mobilizing resources, from all sources, to substantially increase our funding in support of biodiversity finance by 2025, including increased funding for Nature-based Solutions with strong environmental and social safeguards, and ensure our economic and financial decision-making is aligned with sustainability objectives.

31. Creating new climate partnerships

We recognize the need for global action and the role of the G7 working together with all countries especially the major emitters to reach the objectives above. We also recognize that leaders decided to explore establishing an open, cooperative international Climate Club, consistent with international rules, and with participation beyond the G7. We are committed to achieving a true paradigm shift, by demonstrating that ambitious climate action is conducive to strong and sustainable growth for all economies.

We commit to support developing countries and emerging markets in their endeavor to transition on net-zero pathways, in line with keeping 1.5°C within reach and the goals of the Paris Agreement. We engage in just energy-transition partnerships, on a case by case basis, jointly with developing countries and emerging markets that seek to raise their climate ambition in order to reach the above-mentioned objectives based on the leadership of each developing country, by matching high ambition with the necessary means to accelerate this transition such as financing, access to green technologies, technical assistance and exchange of experience based on just transition ***processes*** in our respective domestic markets.

32. Climate, peace and security

We recognize the complex nexus between climate change and environmental degradation, and human, regional and international security, including gender equality, the growing evidence on adverse effects on peace, stability and security. We adopt a declaration on Climate, Environment, Peace and Security, as a first step towards a global inclusive initiative with concrete proposals for cooperation towards better risk-informed planning, better capacity for action, to improve our operational responses in order to prevent further climate and environment-induced risks where possible and effectively cope with them where unavoidable. We invite those countries and actors with comparably ambitious goals to join us in these efforts.

We recognize that exceeding tipping points could trigger abrupt or irreversible changes in ecosystems or physical components of the climate system in addition to other severe impacts of climate change beyond those already visible today. Exceeding such tipping points could lead to disturbances and the destabilization of different regions particularly affected by such events and eventually of the global ecosystem in its entirety. At the same time we recognize the need for further scientific study into “tipping points” to better understand their implications. We underscore the urgency for immediate and comprehensive scenario planning as a crucial element of a preventive and climate-sensitive foreign and security policy, as well as for building the capacity to respond to the outcomes of such events should they occur, and building on the work of the UN Security Mechanism as well as other UN and regional institutions.

33. Conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction

We reaffirm that the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) sets out the legal framework within which all activities in the ocean and seas must be carried out, including the obligation to protect and preserve the marine environment. We will work to expeditiously conclude by the end of 2022 the negotiation of an ambitious international legally binding instrument under UNCLOS on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction. We will enhance our efforts and continue to work in good faith together to ensure an ambitious, effective, inclusive, fair and future-proofed treaty.

34. Marine Protected Areas in Antarctica

As an important contribution to the protection by 2030 of at least 30% of the Ocean and seas through an ecologically representative, well connected network of marine protected areas (MPAs) and other effective area-based conservation ***measures*** (OECMs), we fully support the commitment by the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR) to develop a representative system of MPAs in the Convention Area, based on the best available scientific evidence and the proposals to establish new MPAs in East Antarctica, in the Weddell Sea and in the Antarctic Peninsula.

35. Role of businesses and investors

Responsible business conduct including human rights and environmental due diligence in global value chains can mitigate the risks of adverse corporate human rights or environmental impacts and contribute to resilient supply chains. We encourage States to step up efforts for the implementation of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises as well as the ILO tripartite declaration concerning Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy (MNE declaration).

36. International cooperation and clean, secure and just energy transition for sustainable growth

Russia ’ s war of aggression against Ukraine has reminded us of the importance of ensuring energy security while accelerating energy transition. In this context, we recognize the importance of accelerating investment in upstream developments, including in liquefied natural gas (LNG) projects, and promoting usage of clean energy with a view to decreasing our dependency on Russia ’ s energy.

We are convinced that the 2020s must become a decade of action to speed the decarbonization of global energy systems. To this end, we commit to reduce energy consumption, promote energy efficiency, to fast-track clean, safe and sustainable energy deployment while at the same time accelerating the reduction of our overall reliance on fossil fuels. We will ensure that the transitions are just and inclusive and will strengthen international cooperation to achieve a just and inclusive transition globally. An accelerated clean energy transition that is aligned with the goals of the Agenda 2030 and the Paris Agreement is also one of the most important contributions towards energy security. Avoiding a carbon-lock-and diversifying our energy sources and energy mix supply chains will enhance our energy security and decrease undue dependencies on certain exporters and fossil fuel imports, in accordance with our climate objectives. Such energy transition will also require a greater focus and cooperation on the development of secure and sustainable sources of critical minerals - including rare earth elements – essential for green technologies. Close international cooperation has a central role to play in these efforts. Innovation offers the potential to combine effective climate change mitigation with sustainable growth and secure energy supplies.

37. Sustainable infrastructure and connectivity

We share the aim of urgently closing the infrastructure investment gap in low- and middle-income countries, in particular in Africa and in the Indo-Pacific. We are committed to a step change in our approach to infrastructure financing, including by building strategic partnerships and by promoting and calling on all actors to adhere to existing international standards for sustainable, quality and transparent infrastructure investment in line with the G7 Ise-Shima principles and the G20 Principles for Quality Infrastructure Investment. We underscore the importance of a geostrategic and global approach to connectivity that contributes to the diversification of value chains, reduces strategic dependencies, including on critical raw materials and energy, avoids carbon lock-in, improves climate resilience, ensures a secure, resilient and human-centric digital ecosystem, advances our joint long-term economic, foreign, development and security interests, ensures high environmental, social, financial, labour, governance, open, economically efficient and transparency standards including debt sustainability and promotes our values globally. We stress that the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine has a far-reaching impact on global connectivity and has further highlighted the benefits of diversified and resilient supply chains.

We welcome that G7 Development Ministers will prepare concrete proposals to operationalize the G7 Partnership for Infrastructure and Investment (G7 PII) and present them to G7 Leaders ahead of the Elmau Summit, in particular with a view to improve conditions for mobilising private capital and expertise for sustainable infrastructure investments, to promote the development of a pipeline of bankable projects and by preparing the ground for Country Partnerships with selected partner countries. We will closely align the G7 PII with G7 member initiatives, incl. EU Global Gateway, the US global infrastructure investment, the Japanese Partnership for Quality Infrastructure and the British international investment initiative.

38. Crises foresight and data supported early identification of risks

We are convinced that crisis foresight and early warning supported by data analytics can significantly contribute to more effective prevention, as well as preparedness and responses, and better anticipatory action along the Humanitarian-Development-Peace plus climate nexus. Building capacities in gender-responsive crisis analytics, scaling financing for high-quality data and data analytics and enabling crosscutting collaboration across disciplines, organizations and regions will strengthen our joint efforts for sustaining peace. We acknowledge the role of the Complex Risk Analytics Fund (CRAF ’ d) as one significant multilateral effort to advance these objectives and to facilitate an ecosystem of partners that uses the potential of data and technology.

39. Anticipatory humanitarian action, famine prevention, humanitarian crises and food insecurity

Alarmed by ever-growing humanitarian needs worldwide we note with deep concern that conflicts and an increase of climate-change-induced disasters, exacerbated by the impacts of COVID-19 and Russia ’ s war of aggression against of Ukraine, are threatening the lives and livelihoods of millions of people and severely aggravate human suffering. We fully support the multilateral action initiated by the United Nations Secretary-General (Global Crisis Response Group on Food, Energy and Finance), commend the work of the G7 Prevention and Humanitarian Crises Working Group and endorse the G7 Statement on Strengthening Anticipatory Action in Humanitarian Assistance, which leads the way to a paradigm shift towards a proactive, forward-looking humanitarian assistance, in order to act before crises strike. We reaffirm our commitment to advocate for, enable and systematically embed anticipatory action in the humanitarian system and strive to significantly increase our related financial support.

We express deep concern for the worsening state of food insecurity and malnutrition across the world, already exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and deteriorated by the unprovoked and unjustifiable Russian war of aggression against Ukraine, both in Ukraine and across the globe. Food prices and costs for humanitarian agencies to deliver assistance to those in greatest need are both rising, at a time when 45 million people are already one-step away from famine. This is why we have to increase humanitarian funding to humanitarian actors who are able to respond most effectively to needs. We will endeavor to provide such funding with as much flexibility as possible.

But investing in resilient and sustainably growing economies requires even more financial resources. Together with G7 Ministers of ***Agriculture*** and of Development, we will continue our close cooperation within the G7, with our partners and with relevant international organizations, especially WTO, FAO, WFP and IFAD, as well as multilateral development banks and international financial institutions such as the World Bank and the African Development Bank.

We do this to respond to the impacts of the war on food security and nutrition in Ukraine and worldwide. We will continue co-operation through a G7 Action Plan building on elements of other proposals. We support the launch of a like-minded “Global Alliance on Food Security” developed in the G7 Development Track. We subscribe to the G7 Foreign Ministers ’ Commitments on the Global Food Security Consequences of Russia ’ s War of Aggression against Ukraine agreed on May 14, 2022.

We will closely cooperate with international partners and organisations beyond the G7, with the aim of transforming political commitments into concrete actions as planned by various international initiatives such as the Food and ***Agriculture*** Resilience Mission (FARM) and key regional outreach initiatives, including towards African and Mediterranean countries with the upcoming Mediterranean Ministerial Dialogue on the Food Security Crisis. We will actively support the United Nations Crisis Response Group on Food, Energy and Finance proposed by the UN Secretary-General. We stand ready to work with partners beyond G7 as well as civil society and the private sector to this end and welcome the Global Food Security Call to Action Ministerial in New York on 18 May. While we need to cope with the crisis on a multilateral basis and increase production capacities, we also recognize the importance of transforming our ***agriculture*** and food systems to become sustainable in alignment with the SDGs. We want to build on international ***processes*** such as the UN Food Systems Summit and the Tokyo Nutrition for Growth Summit and reaffirm our intent to fight malnutrition in all its forms.

B. Addressing the challenges of the pandemic

40. Vaccine equity from vaccine supply to vaccination

In acknowledging that global health security is inextricably linked to national security, development and economic goals, we recognize that the pandemic is not over until it is over for all. We reaffirm our commitment to enabling equitable global access to safe, effective, quality-assured and affordable vaccines, therapeutics and diagnostics, including for displaced people or people in humanitarian contexts, noting the role of extensive immunization against COVID-19 as a global public good. We underline our support for all four pillars of the Access to COVID-19 Tools Accelerator (ACT-A), including its COVAX facility and recognize that supporting ACT-A by all means, including with adequate funding, is central to end the acute pandemic, as laid out in the G7 Foreign Ministers Action Plan. G7 members have so far pledged 18.3 billion USD to ACT-A.

Ending the acute phase of the pandemic in 2022 requires accelerating vaccination efforts further by implementing an agile and flexible approach and continued support for WHO ’ s global vaccination strategy and target, while taking into account countries ’ needs and capacities. We deem critical to work with all countries to address any remaining gaps in vaccination efforts and to enable the scaling-up of sustainable regional production capacity, as detailed in the G7 Foreign Ministers Action Plan. We commit to help address logistical challenges especially on the “last mile” to ensure that vaccines translate into actual vaccinations. In this regard, we commit to accelerating bilateral efforts in coordination with multilateral efforts including through ACT-A and others.

41. Strengthening of the global health security architecture and improving pandemic prevention, preparedness and response

We are determined to ensure that lessons are learned and applied from the pandemic and welcome the work of G7 Health Ministers as well as G7 Development Ministers in this regard. We reiterate our strong commitment to strengthen WHO ’ s directing and coordinating role in international health work as well as our support to the Intergovernmental Negotiating Body (INB) to draft and negotiate a WHO convention, agreement or other international instrument on pandemic prevention, preparedness and response with a view to adoption under Article 19, or under other provisions of the WHO Constitution as may be deemed appropriate by the INB. We also support the discussions on strengthening the International Health Regulations, including through improved implementation, compliance and potential targeted amendments, as well as the elaboration of a new Universal Health and Preparedness Review (UHPR).

We encourage the work of the Quadripartite organizations (OIE, FAO, WHO and UNEP), as well as the “One Health High Level Expert Panel” and other relevant initiatives to strengthen the implementation of the One Health approach. We continue to support an expert-driven, transparent, and independent ***process*** for the next phase of the WHO-convened COVID-19 origins study and welcome the work of the Scientific Advisory Group for the Origins of Novel Pathogens (SAGO). Based on the work of various evaluation panels, we recognize the need for sustained political leadership and sustainable financing to bolster the World Health Organization and more broadly the global health security architecture for pandemic and health emergencies prevention, preparedness and response, which will contribute to achieving universal health coverage (UHC), working together towards UN High Level Meeting on UHC in 2023. We will continue to support and advance efforts to accelerate building core capacities, including through the Global Health Security Agenda (GHSA), WHO Hub for Pandemic and Epidemic Intelligence and its innovation and the WHO Academy. Recognizing that antimicrobial resistance (AMR) represents a major global threat, we reiterate our commitment to fight against AMR in a “One Health” approach.

C. Making democracies more resilient

As a community based on shared values, we believe that inclusive democracy, respect for human rights, effective and accountable governance, and the rule of law are the cornerstones of a peaceful and rules-based international order in which all people can thrive and every individual can enjoy equal rights. As democracies around the world are facing increased pressure from within and outside, we are committed - together with our partners - to protect and defend open, democratic societies worldwide and send out a strong signal of democratic resilience and unity. We reaffirm our efforts to strengthen respect for human rights, democratic institutions, economic security, and cyber governance, to protect civic space and to fight against hybrid threats and disinformation. We are particularly committed to addressing pressing human rights issues - climate and human rights, artificial intelligence and human rights, accountability for human rights violations and abuses, gender equality and arbitrary detention in state-to-state relations.

42. Strengthening of democratic institutions

In the face of mounting authoritarian threats to democracies worldwide, we commit to work collectively to strengthen inclusive democratic institutions that protect the rights and freedoms of all persons. We support the Summit for Democracy Year of Action initiated by the United States and the ongoing work of the OECD on strengthening democratic resilience with the OECD ministerial meeting on reinforcing democracy due on the 17-18 November: we are working individually and collectively to implement initiatives towards this end. We commend the efforts of non-governmental stakeholders, including civil society, academia, the private sector, and media organizations, to work to address malign behavior and foreign hostile interference in democratic systems. We commit to continue working together through the Media Freedom Coalition to defend media freedom and support independent media around the world, as part of our response to the increasing threat of disinformation. We will continue to work with stakeholders to strengthen democratic institutions, ***processes*** and principles, both at home and abroad, and particularly in vulnerable democracies. To uphold the rule of law and counter corruption, we will work to deny corrupt actors and their illicit proceeds access to our respective territories and financial systems. We recognize the corrosive impact of corruption in undermining public confidence in democracy and remain committed to convening a stronger, more unified voice in our action against corruption. We support and promote the effective implementation of our international anticorruption obligations and commitments, including those made within the G7.

43. Hybrid threats

We are concerned by the increasing threats to our nations, economies and societies posed by hybrid tactics and strategies, including foreign information manipulation and disinformation, which aim to interfere with our democratic ***processes***, destabilize our societies and undermine our shared values. By working together, and with partners, we will continue to enhance our capacities to recognize, assess and counter hybrid threats. We will work across the whole of government, with the private sector and our societies. In coordination with work in other relevant organizations and fora including NATO and the EU, we will continue to share best practices and develop common approaches to tackling hybrid threats.

44. Geo-economic challenges and geopolitics of technology

The global economy and with it the rules-based international order is increasingly challenged by coercive policies. These include exploiting economic ties to third countries such as through trade, investment, development finance, technology and energy to pressure, induce or influence in an arbitrary, abusive or pretextual manner a foreign government ’ s exercise of its legitimate sovereign rights or choice. This substantial rise of geo-economic challenges to our economic security requires comprehensive and holistic responses. We remain committed to work within the multilateral system as well as with like-minded international partners to address these economic security concerns including through strengthening the global economic system by setting new standards, rules or norms in related areas in support of our shared values, particularly where critical and emerging technologies are concerned. As a driver of geopolitical competition, they represent both a source of opportunities and challenges for democracies.

We underline our dedication to harness the disruptive potential of new and emerging technologies to foster human rights and democratic values, inclusive economic growth and our common security as well as to protect an open, free, global, interoperable, reliable and secure Internet. We recognize the need to shape advances in technology responsibly through effective governance and will continue to strengthen international collaboration to promote and protect responsible, inclusive, transparent and sustainable design, development, and use of technology that respects privacy and enables safety and security of users, in line with human rights and our common democratic values. Technology should remain neutral and not be misused or exploited for malicious activities such as unlawful surveillance and oppression. We recognize the importance of cooperation also to build resilient supply chains and strengthen the protection of critical infrastructure. We reiterate our strong support for international cooperation for the development of open, private sector-led, voluntary and consensus-based standards based on inclusive, multi-stakeholder approaches underpinning emerging technologies that reflect our shared values and keep pace with innovations.

45. Cyber governance, fight against cybercrime, cyber capacity building, internet shutdowns

We strongly support an open, stable, interoperable, peaceful, and secure cyberspace as an essential condition for economic growth and prosperity. We commit to promote the strategic framework of international cyber stability based on the applicability of existing international law, including the Charter of the United Nations in its entirety, in and with regard to cyberspace; the implementation of regional and global confidence building ***measures***, as well as the promotion of internationally established, voluntary, non-legally binding norms of responsible State behavior in cyberspace. We condemn malicious cyber activity and reaffirm our commitment to continue to develop ***measures*** aimed at preventing, discouraging, countering and contesting such activities. This will strengthen our collective resolve to deter malicious cyber actors.

We reaffirm our commitment to promote full respect for human rights and the protections of fundamental freedoms online and commit to continue working together through the Freedom Online Coalition. The same rights that people enjoy offline apply online and must therefore be equally protected. We also reaffirm our commitment to a multi-stakeholder approach to Internet governance and urge all jurisdictions, in accordance with their international legal obligations and commitments, to refrain from intentional disruptions that render Internet and mobile network services inaccessible or unusable, thereby undermining the exercise of individual rights and freedoms. Recent events have also reasserted the need to strengthen global action against cyber criminals in the field of investigation, prosecution and international cooperation. We will continue our work to strengthen the foundations of open societies, also in the context of the Counter Ransomware Initiative.

We welcome the Declaration for the Future of the Internet and reaffirm our strong support for an open, free, global, interoperable, reliable, and secure Internet, which enables economic growth and prosperity and promotes human rights and secure connectivity. As capacities to prevent and mitigate the impact of malicious cyber activities vary widely among countries worldwide, we recognize the need to continue to prioritize cyber capacity building cooperation and information sharing, including through the UNIDIR Cyber Policy Portal and by considering the establishment of a UN Program of Action to Advance Responsible State Behavior in cyberspace. We commit to working with multi-stakeholder partners to advance standards with respect to information integrity and disinformation including in the context of the Summit for Democracy.

46. G7 engagement against foreign disinformation

We are committed to protecting our information environment against foreign information manipulation and interference including disinformation designed to deceive and mislead audiences for political or financial gain, threatening to destabilize the fabric of our rules-based international system. We condemn the widespread use of disinformation, by the Russian Government, its affiliated media and proxies to support its military aggression against Ukraine. We have observed an ***unprecedented*** amount of disinformation to prepare and accompany Russia ’ s war of aggression against Ukraine. We are deeply concerned about the proliferation of disinformation regarding the COVID-19 pandemic, human-induced climate change. We are concerned thatonline campaigns are increasingly being used to undermine democratic ***processes*** and to deter women from participating in the public sphere. We commit to championing free and independent media at home and around the world and that online technologies are used to promote pluralism and freedom of expression.

We reaffirm our commitment to the Rapid Response Mechanism (RRM) as part of our ongoing, shared efforts to collectively safeguard our democracies from foreign threats, including protecting our free and open information environment, our democratic systems and open societies from the damaging effects of disinformation. We will counter attempts to interfere in our information environment and apply costs for actors engaging in such activity. In light of Russia ’ s war of aggression against Ukraine and its use of massive disinformation and information manipulation, we commit to strengthening the G7 RRM ’ s capacity for a coordinated response to foreign threats in the information domain. We welcome the first G7 RRM Annual Report with its focus on disinformation. It provides a useful overview of the threat landscape and emerging trends, with implications for G7 response options, promoting awareness among our publics.

**Load-Date:** May 19, 2022

**End of Document**



[***Ukraine war detonates EU food security debate, but will sustainability be collateral damage?***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:64Y3-FHY1-DYNP-M3B5-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Section:** POLICY

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**Body**

The Russian ***invasion*** of Ukraine has prompted calls for more heed to be paid to EU food security. But, as ***agriculture*** ministers discuss the possibility of putting more land to the plough, environmental experts warn that the debate is being 'hijacked' by vested interests. Should we be talking about food versus feed and fuel?

After an informal meeting of European ***agricultural*** ministers last week, it was announced that the bloc will consider actions designed to boost food security, including 'securing and freeing up Europe's production capacity in 2022'. ***Measures*** called out included sowing fallow land with protein crops, with the implication being that these would plug the gap that Black Sea imports will leave in feed supplies. Already there is talk in Ireland of compulsory tillage - with farming organisations being called to an emergency meeting later this week.

"The terrible events taking place in Ukraine cast a tragic light on the need for us to strengthen our food sovereignty so as to ensure food security in times of crisis, both within the European Union and around the world,"​ Julien Denormandie, French Minister for ***Agriculture*** and Food, said after the call.

Russia's military assault on Ukraine is expected to have significant implications for food supply chains. As leading producers and exporters of cereals, Russia and Ukraine together make up nearly a third of global wheat exports, 19% of exported corn and 80% of exports of sunflower oil - the third-most traded vegetable oil internationally. At a time when fallout from COVID-19 and other factors are already driving up commodity prices, the onset of war has accelerated the trend with wheat prices doubling in the space of a month.

Farm to Fork under fire

European farming organisations Copa and Cogeca seized on the moment to call for a stronger European ***agriculture*** policy that will protect producers and consumers in the bloc from such shocks.

Proclaiming solidarity with Ukrainian farmers - and announcing the news that the Ukrainian ***agricultural*** organisation UNAF (Ukrainian National Agrarian Forum) become a Copa and Cogeca partner - the organisations said that the crisis would affect 'most productions' either directly or indirectly. '***Exceptional*** situations call for ***exceptional*** ***measures***' Copa and Cogeca said, arguing that the conflict will have short and medium term implications for European ***agriculture***.

"Since the Russian government is using food security as a weapon, we must counter it with a food shield,"​ Christiane Lambert, Copa President, argued.

European Feed Manufacturers' Federation FEFAC also wants to see a re-assessment of European policy that places food security at its heart. Alexander Döring, FEFAC Secretary General, told FoodNavigator: "The current crisis is severe and will have lasting impacts. Our immediate priority is to ensure the access to sufficient feed materials for the coming 6 months, and likely longer. The EU must prioritise food and feed use of grains in the short-term to prevent disruption of supply chains. We stress the urgent need to set up EU wide contingency plans that will help mitigate the loss of the Black Sea origin for these commodities."​

But there is also the suggestion that this policy shift draws into question some of the fundamental assumptions enshrined in the Farm to Fork Strategy, the European Commission's policy that aims to transition towards a sustainable food system in line with the targets of the Green Deal.

"Since the ***process*** development of the Farm to Fork Strategy started we have always reminded the need to assess fully the food security dimension,"​ Döring argued. "The EU should proceed with a complete cumulative impact assessment of the Farm to Fork Strategy. The current crisis is a strong reminder for the EU to safeguard and strengthen the resilience of its agri-food sector. We will need effective targeted support from the EU to cope with the current crisis. As the EU feed sector we remain committed to fostering sustainable food supply chains while taking advantage of the lessons learned of the COVID crisis to increase the EU's food and feed autonomy."​

Copa's Lambert insisted that there isn't a conflict between the twin objectives of delivering food policy that promotes both security and sustainability. "As with energy, in ***agriculture*** we strongly believe that it is possible to strengthen our strategic autonomy while continuing to make progress on sustainability. Pitting these two dimensions against each other, as we have heard in Brussels in recent days, is unproductive. We need to rearm our ***agriculture*** today to face these two major crises at the same time: the war in Ukraine and climate change."​

Like FEFAC, Copa and Cogeca want to see a 'paradigm shift' in the way Brussels thinks about ***agriculture***, starting with the objectives set out in the Farm to Fork.

"Copa and Cogeca are asking to be able to cultivate all available land in 2022 to compensate for the blockage of Russian and Ukrainian production. Everything must be done to prevent disruptions in supply chains, which will inevitably lead to shortages in certain parts of the world. This is an essential question of food sovereignty and democratic stability,"​ the organisations argued.

Playing on 'our most fundamental fears'?

Dr. Jeroen Candel, an assistant professor in food and ***agricultural*** policy at Wageningen University, echoed the idea that a 'false dichotomy between sustainability and food security' is developing. But that's where agreement ends.

The policy expert suggested that the crisis in Ukraine has given the existing coalitions objecting to the Farm to Fork Strategy fresh 'momentum to restate their objections'.

"Food security is a very appealing argument that plays on our most fundamental fears,"​ Dr. Candel told FoodNavigator. However, he continued, 'the food security discourse is not entirely genuine'.

"Within the EU it is a very cynical argument to undermine sustainability ambitions and does not do justice to the real food security concerns that relate to access rather than supply."​

The disruption to Ukraine supplies is a 'big concern' for people in Ukraine and large export markets like Egypt. "There are real concerns about global food security. The EU should do everything it can to keep trade flows moving," ​he insisted. But impact in EU will be different - it is about access rather than supply. "Those now making food security arguments are often the same as those who oppose more generous social programmes that would address food security in the EU."​

Dr. Guy Pe'er, a researcher at the German Centre for Integrative Biodiversity Research (iDiv) Halle-Jena-Leipzig and UFZ, also stressed that the crisis will impact shoppers in the EU very differently than those in other parts of the world.

"The war on Ukraine does have an impact on food security, but not in the way most people understand. Namely, it affects poorer countries such as in Africa and the Middle East, whereas in Europe the impact is mostly on feed."​

To Dr. Pe'er, this is an important distinction. Perceived food security concerns are the result of overconsumption and production, particularly of animal products, the production of which is subsidised by the EU. "If the issue is food security why are they talking about feed?"​ he asked, noting that over 70% of ***agricultural*** land is used for feed and fuel. "We should therefore better use the resources we have for more food and less feed and fuel. We can do this, for instance, by cancelling the support for biofuels."​

Climate change and land depletion bringing farming to 'crisis point'

At the heart of food security are the issues of climate change and the over-exploitation of the land, the ecosystems expert continued. "We are not talking about food security, we are talking about constant pressure on land that leads to soil erosion, enhanced sensitivity to droughts and pests, and more frequent crop failures This does have an effect on food security and the economic stability of farmers... We are reaching a point of crisis."​

Dr. Pe'er told this publication that acting on climate change is therefore in the interests of farmers, the very people that farming organisations like Copa and Cogeca claim to represent. He is unconvinced, however, that powerful lobby groups reflect the true interests of most farming communities in Europe.

Pointing to the fact that the direct payment system through the Common ***Agricultural*** Policy sees 1.5% of farmers receive 32% of payments, Dr. Pe'er claimed that lobbyists are protecting the status quo by calling for a re-evaluation of Farm to Fork. "The biggest problem I see is the misrepresentation of farmers by farm lobbies... They represent the 1% that really gain from CAP and corporate interests,​" he asserted.

Farm-to-fork is 'science based and curative' and must be a 'win-win for farmers and climate', Dr. Pe'er suggested. "The majority of farmers are in favour of nature and biodiversity... they make a very simple and legitimate demand: To be environmentally sustainable they need to be economically sustainable. We should support farmers who need support and want to do good, and the CAP has the mechanisms to do so. But it doesn't. Not enough, at least."​

Dr. Candel agrees that war in Ukraine cannot overshadow the importance of tackling climate change and undermine the objectives set out in Farm to Fork. "It is clear that if we are serious about climate and emissions targets we need to steer the food system in a different direction. Farm to Fork is a first step," ​he said. Pointing to the need for social support and food systems transition to tackle inefficiencies like food waste - as well as echoing the need to shift towards plant consumption - Dr. Candel concluded: "Farm to Fork should not be dismantled but complemented."​

For Dr. Pe'er there are two likely scenarios moving forward, best and worst case.

"The 'best case' scenario is that we rethink our consumption of resources, and start reducing our demands on land and resources as means to reduce the potential for conflicts. The 'worst case scenario' is that the war enhances the speed in which we dwindle resources, leading to enhanced conflicts to which we react by dwindling the resources even faster. This is the direction that farm lobbies and the ***agricultural*** ministries seem to have chosen. It is a very slippery slope."​

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**End of Document**



[***Discrimination against mobile European Union citizens before and during the first COVID-19 lockdown: Evidence from a conjoint experiment in Germany***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:63X0-16M1-JBMY-H2JC-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**ABSTRACT**

One of the greatest achievements of the EU is the freedom of movement between member states offering citizens equal rights in EU member states. EU enlargement and the COVID-19 pandemic allow for a critical test of whether EU citizens are indeed treated equally in practice. We test preferential treatment of EU citizens in two hypothetical choice experiments in Germany at two different time points: in the period before and during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown. Theories of responses to threat suggest that the COVID-19 crisis should increase discrimination against mobile EU citizens. While our findings reveal sizeable discrimination based on nationality and language proficiency of mobile EU citizens, the findings also suggest that, contrary to expectations, discrimination did not increase in the initial COVID-19 crisis period.

**FULL TEXT**

**Introduction**

The unconstrained free movement of citizens between the European Union (EU) member states provides rights to mobile EU citizens and has sparked political polarisation.1 The rights are both celebrated as an extraordinary achievement and derided. Brexit, heated debates about welfare tourism, and referenda like the Swiss initiative to restrict free movement (Begrenzungsinitiative) from September 2020 stand witness to this. In formal terms, EU citizens enjoy access to welfare benefits and, if they reside in an EU member state, the right to vote in local elections. However, the extent to which mobile EU citizens can exercise their rights effectively and efficiently often depends on how they are treated by the population, in general, and frontline bureaucrats in particular.

We put the idea of the freedom of movement and equal treatment to a twofold test. In a first step, we analyse preferential treatment of EU citizens, i.e., discriminatory attitudes, by asking general population survey respondents to act as bureaucrats. In our bureaucratic work tasks that take the shape of a hypothetical choice experiment, respondents have to decide about mobile EU citizens’ applications to exercise their right to vote in local elections and receive welfare benefits. In the experiments, respondents choose between several pairs of EU citizens applying for welfare benefits and information on local voter registration. Mobile EU citizens are thereby characterised by nationality, language skills, gender, age and profession.2

In a second step, we seize the opportunity of analysing the potential effect the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic had on the differential treatment of mobile EU citizens, based on an identical follow-up survey conducted during the German lockdown in April 2020. Since the outbreak of COVID-19 in Europe, right-wing populist movements in Europe have actively tried to exploit the COVID-19 pandemic to activate nationalist sentiments and push for border and migration control. In Germany and Austria, the *Alternative for Germany* (AfD) and the *Freedom Party for Austria* (FPÖ), both known for their anti-immigrant rhetoric, were the leading critiques of government action during the pandemic. These efforts were spurred by several instances in which COVID-19 outbreaks among migrant workers in ***agriculture*** and the meatpacking industry in Germany attracted media attention and politicised working conditions and cross-border mobility. The question is whether these features of the COVID-19 crisis exacerbate differential treatment of mobile EU citizens among the general population. We address this question by analysing the short-term effects of the COVID-19 outbreak on discrimination against EU citizens who are mobile between countries, using the example of Germany.

From a psychological perspective, the crisis may have created a fertile ground for xenophobia and nationalist tendencies due to increased feelings of fear, threat and anxiety, possibly resulting in discriminating behaviour. Pandemics create fear and realistic threats towards society and individuals (Kachanoff et al., 2020). Fears of infection or overburdened healthcare systems are accompanied by existential concerns due to economic losses. Such sociotropic, i.e., society related, and egocentric threats are among the key predictors of racial and ethnic prejudice, as well as discrimination (Gorodzeisky and Semyonov, 2015; Stephan and Stephan, 2000). Perceived and realistic threats trigger intergroup bias leading to preferential treatment of one's in-group, for instance, fellow citizens or culturally similar groups (Allport, 1954; Pereira et al., 2010), which may ultimately lead to more discriminatory behaviour. In our context, we expect that preferred treatment of culturally and linguistically similar over culturally and linguistically dissimilar EU citizens increases during the COVID-19 crisis.

In line with our expectations, we find that mobile EU citizens from a more culturally distant country, namely Romania, are less likely to receive preferential treatment than EU citizens from a culturally closer country, here the Netherlands. On the same note, EU citizens with good language skills are more likely to receive preferential treatment than EU citizens with bad language skills. However, this discrimination was true both for the onset and the peak of the crisis, meaning that we did not find that the COVID-19 crisis increased existing levels of preferential treatment. Greater exposure to the crisis does not or only marginally affect discrimination patterns against mobile EU citizens, at least in the short term. We also examined individual-level variation: we expected greater economic and medical vulnerability to COVID-19 to fuel discrimination through heightened threat. However, we did not find evidence to confirm this hypothesis during the crisis.

**Discrimination against mobile EU citizens: theoretical expectations**

Mobile EU citizens enjoy extraordinary rights in moving between member state countries. They can move to other European countries to work and study without a visa and are granted rights to access certain welfare benefits and vote in local elections. This is true for all EU citizens, whether they are, for example, from France, Denmark, the Netherlands or Romania. However, for different EU citizens having the same rights on paper does not correspond to being treated equally in practice. Biased behaviour is mostly known as discrimination and may flow, for example, from appearance, nationality, level of integration or socio-economic status. We define discrimination as the preferential treatment of persons or groups based on their specific characteristics and group belonging (Dovidio et al., 2010). In line with Allport (1954: 51), discrimination denies ‘individuals or groups of people equality of treatment which they may wish’, or in our case, which they have the right to receive. Discriminatory behaviour (Correll et al., 2010) often originates in attitudes, such as prejudice and anti-immigrant sentiments, and is driven by in-group favouritism.

We expect that nationality drives discrimination (Baumgartner et al., 2018; Thomann and Rapp, 2018). There are two basic theoretical ***processes*** giving rise to this expectation. First, factors triggering discrimination relate to the perceived integration of particular groups, their conformity or assimilation with the prevailing culture (e.g. their language proficiency), as well as their general phenotypical ‘otherness’. In this sense, the (perceived) degree of similarity or difference of a particular group may be a source of discrimination or preferential treatment (Helbling and Kriesi, 2014). Second, these differences or similarities may become particularly salient in periods of competition, for instance, when individuals perceive resources, such as welfare benefits or jobs, to be scarce or threatened (Pettigrew, 2016). Competition between nationals and EU immigrants over public services and rights can trigger anti-immigrant attitudes, such as welfare chauvinism (Garand et al., 2017; Helbling and Kriesi, 2014). This can translate into discriminating behaviour. Discrimination can also be a consequence of political competition, given that franchise extensions are more likely in settings where the policy priorities of non-citizens differ the least from to those of natives (Vernby, 2013). Adopting the concept of ethnic hierarchies (Hagendoorn, 1995) to the context of EU citizens and following findings from a prior study testing this relationship (Adam et al., 2021) we formulate the following hypothesis: **Hypothesis 1:** Culturally more similar and linguistically better integrated EU migrants will encounter a more preferential treatment than more dissimilar EU citizens *(discrimination hypothesis)*.

**Discrimination in times of crisis**

There are good reasons for thinking that the COVID-19 crisis should increase discrimination against mobile EU citizens. Considerable prior research shows that crises in general, and pandemics specifically, influence individual attitudes and behaviour (e.g. Green et al., 2010; Legewie, 2013). Extant research highlights a historical link between the outbreak of a pandemic and the adverse treatment of outgroups (White, 2020). Green et al. (2010) show that perceived disease threat fosters anti-immigrant sentiments. Yet, they cannot show an effect for the real-life disease threat of avian influenza. They argue that this null-finding is due to the absence of a real disease threat as infection risks were low at the time of their study and because the avian flu was transmitted by birds and not humans.

In contrast, the context of the COVID-19 pandemic provides an ***unprecedented*** extreme case of realistic disease threat as the whole world was affected by it. Infection rates were notably high at the time of our study, while the rush development of a treatment was uncertain. Moreover, the pandemic originated in a foreign country, namely China, which may have resulted in an uneasiness towards everyone outside one's national in-group (Devakumar et al., 2020). Therefore, taking traditional explanations of prejudice and discrimination into account, such as social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1979), threat and inter-ethnic competition theories (Hagendoorn, 1995; Pereira et al., 2010; Stephan and Stephan, 2000), the pandemic should trigger increased preferential treatment of individuals and groups that are similar. In the following, we discuss three theoretical contributions that support this claim.

First, a crisis, particularly a pandemic, increases perceptions of threat and real threats. Threat is one of the most important predictors of anti-immigrant attitudes and discriminatory behaviour (Hainmueller and Hopkins, 2014). The group-threat model (among others Blalock, 1967; Blumer, 1958) assumes that the mere presence of an outgroup can trigger feelings of competition over resources (for example jobs, welfare policies or political rights). The perceived threat of competition is particularly pronounced when resources are scarce, for example, during economic crisis general threat perceptions and anti-immigrant sentiments increase (Kuntz et al., 2017). The COVID-19 crisis combines several threats to resources such as health care and welfare benefits (due to the increased economic hardship). At the same time, the crisis combines perceptions of threat on the group-level (*sociotropic threat*, e.g. fear of overburdened healthcare system) and the individual level (*egocentric threat*, e.g. fear to get infected) as well as realistic and symbolic threats. Increased threat should result in a higher likelihood of discrimination against dissimilar EU citizens, such as individuals speaking another language or having different cultural backgrounds.

Second, the COVID-19 crisis is also different from prior crises. Despite its global impact, proposed solutions to the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic were primarily within each national state’s border. National mobility restriction compound inequality with vulnerable members of society, e.g., people with a precarious migration status or undocumented migrants, suffering the most (Devakumar et al., 2020; Piccoli, 2020). Closed borders, decreased international trade, and exclusionary political speeches boost national identity and, thus, trigger nationalistic chauvinism (Hartman et al., 2020). The latter itself is an important driver of anti-immigrant sentiments and discriminatory behaviour (Blank and Schmidt, 2003) and stronger in-group solidarity may increase outgroup demarcation (Rao et al., 2011) making preferential treatment of more similar groups more likely.

Third, research in evolutionary psychology underlines the influence of the behavioural immune system on negative sentiments towards outgroups and biased behaviour towards them in times of pathogenic threat (Aarøe et al., 2017; Faulkner et al., 2004; Huang et al., 2011). According to Aarøe et al. (2017: 279) ‘pathogen threats are distinct form other evolutionary recurrent threats […] in that one cannot see pathogens nor confront them effectively through brute force’. The outbreak of COVID-19 signifies a ‘high disease-salience condition’ (Faulkner et al., 2004: 346) associated with increased realistic threats for both individual and societal health. The behavioural immune system tries to protect individuals from the threat of infectious diseases by triggering emotions of disgust Affective Intelligence Theory (Marcus et al., 2000) shows that emotions activate certain behaviours and actions by stimulating the disposition or the surveillance system. Disgust is associated with a general avoidance of out-groups and biased behaviour towards them (Aarøe et al., 2017; Huang et al., 2011) due to the association of ‘otherness’ with infectious diseases. Superficial cues of otherness, such as nationality or language proficiency, thereby trigger behavioural avoidance (Faulkner et al., 2004). The behavioural reaction to pathogenic threat, such as the outbreak of COVID-19, thereby occurs mostly unconsciously.

From these three theoretical arguments, we expect an increase in discrimination due to the crisis: **Hypothesis 2:** Discrimination – meaning preferential treatment based on cultural similarity as captured via nationality and language skills – should be more pronounced in times of COVID-19 *(crisis hypothesis)*.

This should result from increased economic threats, more in-group solidarity and unconscious reactions to the sanitary threat emanating from an infectious disease.3 Thus, the expected increase in differential treatment should be restricted to identity-based characteristics expressing group similarity, as ***measured*** via nationality and language skills. Conversely, we do not expect discrimination based on mere individual characteristics, such as profession, gender or age, to change because of the COVID-19 health crisis.

**Exposure to COVID-19**

Individuals vary in exposure to the threat of COVID-19 infection based on their location and degree of vulnerability. COVID-19 incidences vary geographically, including COVID-19 hotspots making the threat to one's health a variable. Geographical exposure is particularly important in the German case with profound differences between the 16 subnational regions (*Länder*). The first case of COVID-19 occurred on 27 January 2020 in Bavaria when the German government assessed the risk of a severe outbreak as very low risk (Wieler et al., 2020). Individual federal states most affected started closing schools and prohibiting large gatherings around 10 March 2020. At the beginning of the crisis, and largely throughout the crisis, the most affected areas were Bavaria, Baden-Wurttemberg and Nordrhine-Westfalia, which are all highly populated. Following the subnational governance structure, the *Länder* implemented contact bans and closing of businesses at different time points depending on the reported number of COVID-19 cases in the respective area. A federal contact ban was implemented on 22 March 2020. While this was not an official lockdown, it limited gatherings to not more than two persons and closing many businesses, among others, restaurants, shopping centres and all non-food stores, as well as hotels (Wieler et al., 2020). The results of this quasi-lockdown became visible when the cases started declining a month later. Overall, we expect that individuals in the more affected areas should have a higher likelihood to prioritise more similar individuals than those who lived in less affected areas: **Hypothesis 3:** Respondents will show higher prioritisation of individuals that are more similar to them in terms of nationality and language the more they were exposed to the outbreak of COVID-19 (*exposure hypothesis*).

**Individual vulnerability**

Individuals vary in their risk of severe COVID-19 infection. Those with cardiovascular diseases, other chronic illnesses (Jordan et al., 2020) or obesity (Kassir, 2020) are most likely to be severely affected or die from a COVID-19 infection. However, older people, especially those aged above 60 years, are particularly more likely to suffer severe outcomes from COVID-19 (Bonanad et al., 2020; Jordan et al., 2020). We thus expect that the above-proposed threat mechanism is even stronger for individuals over 60 as they are more vulnerable than the younger population.

As argued earlier, the economic consequences of COVID-19 are substantial and, despite government assistance, lower income groups fear the most about their economic survival. In situations where survival is more prevalent than self-expression, individuals tend to focus on the needs of themselves and their in-groups (Inglehart and Baker, 2000). For these reasons we formulate the following hypothesis: **Hypothesis 4:** Individuals most likely to be affected by the COVID-19 crisis, that is, individuals above 60 and those in low-income groups, will show more discriminatory behaviour as the crisis gains in salience (*vulnerability hypothesis*).

**Data and methods**

The data collection of our original study coincided with the outbreak of COVID-19 in Germany. It took place between 27 February and 16 March 2020, whereby most responses (more than 80%) were collected before 5 March 2020 (Adam et al., 2021). While during this time the COVID-19 awareness increased, it was before the official nationwide contact-ban (22 March 2020).4 The pre-COVID-19 ‘lockdown’ sample includes 2999 respondents. The second survey was fielded between 9 April and 15 April and included 1063 respondents. YouGov Germany conducted both surveys. The recruitment was based on their web-panel and included a stratification based on gender, age and geographical location (*Länder*).

The core of both surveys was a conjoint experiment that allowed us to assess the multidimensional nature of preferential treatment using a hypothetical bureaucratic work task. In doing so, we capture implicit discrimination (Correll et al., 2010). In detail, respondents received six pairs of profiles of hypothetical applicants for a welfare benefit (*Hartz IV*) and another six pairs of profiles of hypothetical requests concerning voting documents (see Figure 1). Thus, respondents had to make 12 forced choices. We selected these two policy areas as mobile EU citizens are eligible for both of them. The order of the two tasks was randomised to avoid order effects.

**Figure 1.**

Exemplary conjoint design.

*Source*: Adam et al., 2021.

We simultaneously randomised five characteristics of the applicant to investigate their causal effect on the response. These characteristics could plausibly be part of an application procedure in the two policy contexts for the situation of a resident newly arriving in a local area in Germany. As discussed above, identity-based characteristics expressing group similarity are ***measured*** via two factors: (a) nationality – Dutch or Romanian, with the latter being more culturally distant and potentially subject to more discrimination compared to the former, and (b) language proficiency – broken or fluent German. Besides, we included the following individual characteristics of the applicants which may trigger discriminatory behaviour: (c) gender – male or female (d) profession – nurse or medical doctor (to capture the difference in the professional status of the applicant) and (e) age – 25, 40 or 55 years. Overall, this renders 48 possible combinations. Figure 1 displays the five characteristics of an exemplary design. Following the recommendation by Abramson et al. (2019: 22), we restrict the number of attributes and levels to receive an adequate ***measure*** of the majority preference.5

**Exposure to COVID-19**

We ***measure*** exposure to COVID-19 as the infection rate at the regional level when the respondent administered the survey. We employ the log scale and standardise it for each sample (pre-lockdown vs post-lockdown). Therefore, the variable ***measures*** the relative exposure of each region/day compared to the rest of the regions/days of the same sample (pre- and post-lockdown). We use contextual exposure (comparing regions *within* sample) instead of absolute exposure (comparing regions *between* samples) because infection rates are, in absolute numbers, very different between the two samples. For example, we see that the region with the highest infection rate among the most exposed ones during the main sample still has a lower infection rate than the lowest exposed region in the crisis sample. Without contextualising the exposure (i.e. acknowledging differences between the two samples), we would assume that the exposure is always higher in each region in the crisis sample. However, our ***measure*** aims to capture *relative exposure* in a specific moment in the development of the crisis and not infection rates *per se*. We provide a robustness check with the exposure levels in absolute terms in the Online appendix, which shows no substantial differences. Figure 2 depicts the exposure in different German regions over time, with the fieldwork periods highlighted in grey.

**Figure 2.**

Exposure to coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) crisis in Germany.

*Notes:* The grey bands indicate the periods where the survey was fielded. (a) Temporal evolution of infection rate in the different regions in Germany and (b) infection rate in each region for the last day of the administration of the survey.

**Method**

Our research design involves comparing the answers given to six pairs of hypothetical profiles (binary response; see Figure 1) in two different scenarios, namely sample (pre- and post-lockdown) and outcomes (welfare and electoral rights). We have a total of 4816 individuals that have prioritised 12 pairs of profiles (six for each outcome), resulting in 115,584 binary responses (4816 individuals \* 12 decisions \* 2 profiles). We employ a hierarchical Bayes (HB) logit model approach (Allenby et al., 2017; Allenby and Ginter, 1995; Lenk et al., 1996; Rossy et al., 2015).6 HB models in conjoint analyses are composed of two parts: The first estimates the utilities (also called part ‘worths’) of each individual for each of the characteristics of the profiles (‘features’). The utilities can be understood as the relative probabilities of picking a specific profile feature compared to the baseline profile; for instance, the probability of prioritising a Dutch citizen over a Romanian citizen. They are, indeed, analogous to the predicted probabilities in a binary logistic regression setting. With this first level, we can estimate the degree of prioritisation of each respondent in the survey for each profile characteristic.

The second part estimates the effects of individual-level covariates on the values of these estimated utilities, partially pooling the effects by sample and outcome. This part explains how some individual characteristics of the respondent (exposure, vulnerability etc.) affect the individual's degree of prioritisation of each profile.7 While we could have used pre-canned packages (e.g. the R package choicemodelR) by Ryan et al. (2012), our main research aim is to estimate whether there are differences between the two samples (main and crisis) without having to assume that either of these are samples of the same population (e.g. by using interactions) or that they are two unrelated populations (e.g. by running two separate models). We, therefore, tailor the model to the specific experiment that we have designed. By partially pooling the effects, we acknowledge that the data generation ***process*** that governs why some individuals prefer some profile features over others is the same; no matter whether one prioritises rights or welfare, and no matter whether we look at a respondent in the ‘regular’ period or the ‘under crisis’ (after lockdown started) period. Technically, this also implies that any difference between the pre- and post-lockdown effects or the specific policy context (voting rights or welfare benefits) should respond to systematic differences and not probabilistic chance. It is, indeed, a very conservative approach to find differences in the pre- and post-lockdown scenario. However, it also prevents us from overestimating the potential lockdown effect.

We employ Bayesian inference to get the posterior distributions of the parameters of interest.8 Our strategy allows us to estimate effects without relying on a specific decision-making ***process*** and functional form assumptions. In other words, we do not have to assume that the individuals use a particular behavioural model (for example, the commonly used models of maximising utility or a form of bounded rationality). We make the assumption of stability and no carryover effects, as the profiles are randomised. We do not assume, however, the lack of profile-order effects. Instead, we control for them, and we find that, on average, by outcome and sample, profiles presented first in the pair are 36% more likely to be prioritised. After an adaptation period of 500 iterations and a burnin of 1000, we sample three chains for 10,000 iterations thinning by five, to base our results on a total of 6000 iterations for 64,953 parameters. Convergence analysis using *ggmcmc* does not show any traces of non-convergence (Fernández-i-Marín, 2016). We employ weakly informative priors for all parameters, including the pooling factors, to allow all groups to borrow strength from the main effects. More detailed information about the model specification, software implementation and convergence can be found in the Online appendix. We standardise to half a standard deviation for the continuous variables at the individual level (age, exposure and income) to compare their relative importance directly to binary variables (Gelman, 2008). Moreover, by employing Bayesian inference, we can integrate our missing data strategy into the analysis comprehensively. We use a conservative approach that allows us to move the uncertainty of the unknown characteristics of the respondents to the parameters of the model by simulating missing data cases from the observed distribution of cases.9

**Results**

Can we detect preferential treatment in hypothetical bureaucratic tasks based on cultural and linguistic similarity? Has the acceleration of the COVID-19 crisis affected the extent and patterns of discrimination against different kinds of mobile EU citizens? To answer these questions, we compare the treatment of EU citizens within multiple different characteristics across our two samples (pre- or post-lockdown) and two policy fields (voting rights or welfare benefits). To show our findings intuitively despite the complexity of the design, we present the main results graphically.10

In the first step, our focus is on whether we can detect preferential treatment of mobile EU citizens and whether it differs between the pre-lockdown and the post-lockdown samples. This addresses Hypothesis 1 and Hypothesis 2 about the preferential treatment of more similar EU citizens and that this preferential treatment is even more pronounced during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, primarily for nationality and language skills. While we find evidence for preferential treatment supporting Hypothesis 1, we have to reject Hypothesis 2 based on our results. At the aggregate level, the same proportion of individuals that was more likely to prefer profiles with full language before the COVID-19 crisis (first row, with utilities above 50% for the preference for such a characteristic) stays constant later on. The same applies to the other five characteristics.

Figure 3 shows the estimated utilities of every individual regarding each profile preference. Utilities are interpreted as the probability that the surveyed individual prefers one feature over the other(s) (e.g. preferring full German language proficiency over no German language proficiency). In Figure 3, the left column shows the estimated utilities for the policy field of electoral rights, whereas the right column presents the estimates for the field of welfare benefits. The histograms represent the distribution of our original pre-lockdown sample. The lines represent the smoothed densities of the sample surveyed after the national lockdown (second sample). Rows are sorted by features most likely to be prioritised to less likely (see also the exemplary design set-up in Figure 1). Individual utilities shown here are summarised as the median of the parameter estimating them.

**Figure 3.**

Distribution of the median estimated utilities for each of the individuals analysed and each feature.

*Notes*: The histogram and the density curve show the same information, but the histogram refers to the pre-crisis sample and the smoothed density to the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) crisis sample. The figure shows the distribution of the median estimated utilities: The results of the first part of the hierarchical model where we estimate up to which point each individual prioritises each of the profiles. Most individuals are to the right of the 50% utility for Language. The distribution of utilities can also be read as the *societal* distribution of preferences on discrimination for several characteristics: some individuals have very strong preferences – as the ones in the tails – and some have average preferences. The average – societal – preferences sometimes are equally split at 50%, implying that overall there is not much discrimination, and sometimes they are close to 1% or 99%, implying a great deal of average – societal – discrimination. The second stage of the model is to assess what explains the distribution of such *societal* preferences.

First, we assess whether there is preferential treatment based on specific characteristics of mobile EU citizens. The displayed utilities in Figure 3 show the proportion of respondents that would, for example, prefer a person with full language skills over a person without these language skills. A clear preference would mean that the distribution of the utility peaks on the right towards a preference. Looking at the results in Figure 3 we can see that, on average, the most substantial part of the respondents (more than 50%) tend to prioritise applicants/request with high language proficiency – in particular, when we look at the electoral rights policy field. We notice the same pattern for the preference of Dutch citizens over Romanian citizens, whereby we see a less right-peaked distribution. From these results, we may also conclude that the most preferred profiles are characterised by full language proficiency, Dutch nationality, and being female. Preferences over age and profession are overall relatively equally.

While we find evidence of preferential treatment, Figure 3 also reveals an almost perfect correspondence between the sample of individuals surveyed before the lockdown (the histogram bars) and individuals surveyed after the lockdown (the density line). Based on these aggregate results, we may conclude that the salience of the COVID-19 and the consequences due to the lockdown in Germany did not change the way individuals make preferential decisions. The COVID-19 crisis has not implied a general move in preferences in the short run, even though the theoretical expectations suggested this direction. The degree of the preferential of Dutch over Romanian nationals does not vary (see the Online appendix).

However, it may be that individuals react differently to the crisis due to their degree of exposure and vulnerability. Thus, the following results show how individual-level characteristics of the respondent explain individual utilities and prioritisation choices. We analyse how far individual vulnerability – in terms of having low income and/or being above 60 – affects the likelihood of preferring a profile based on our six different characteristics. Given that we estimate these effects in the pre- and post-lockdown period, we can compare which individual-level characteristics are more or less affecting the likelihood of prioritising individual features.

We compare the parameters pre- and post-lockdown to test our hypotheses (Hypothesis 3 and Hypothesis 4). Tables 1 and 2 show the estimated parameters pre- and post-lockdown sample (see also the Online appendix). Our model is conservative following our decision to derive the pre/post effects from the same underlying distribution. This makes the two samples not entirely independent from each other, meaning that evidence of a difference is very unlikely to be due to randomness in the sampling ***process***.

**Table 1.**

Probability of higher prioritisation after lockdown (crisis sample).

| **Outcome** | **Feature** | **Prob Hypothesis 1 (%)** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Welfare | Language full | 96.9 |
| Rights | Language full | 57.2 |
| Welfare | Nationality Netherlands | 19.0 |
| Rights | Nationality Netherlands | 15.2 |

*Notes*: The numbers report the amount of evidence for the effect of language and nationality discrimination being higher during the COVID-19 crisis than before. Further information about how the results were calculated and notes on the replication are given in the Online appendix.

**Table 2.**

Probability of the effect of higher exposure to coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) (due to living in a different region) being higher after the lockdown than before for the two features regarding identity.

| **Outcome** | **Feature** | **Prob Hypothesis 2 (%)** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Welfare | Language full | 56.0 |
| Rights | Language full | 53.0 |
| Rights | Nationality Netherlands | 38.7 |
| Welfare | Nationality Netherlands | 38.5 |

As an additional test of Hypothesis 2, Table 1 shows the probability that profiles with full German language proficiency or Dutch nationality are more prioritised under the COVID-19 crisis. Compared to the estimates in Figure 3, these results take respondents’ characteristics into account, allowing for more distinct variations between them. Here, larger values indicate a higher probability of support for our assumption. Concerning the characteristics of full German language proficiency in the case of welfare policy, the estimates reveal that there is a 97.56 probability that the effect of this characteristic increased in the post-lockdown sample; thus, supporting our assumption that prioritisation should increase as the crisis becomes more salient and bears severe consequences for the population (due to the lockdown). However, this is the only clear difference we find in the pre- and post-lockdown samples. When looking at the policy field of electoral rights and the prioritisation based on language proficiency, there is only a 57.08 probability that this is higher in the post-lockdown sample. The probabilities even decrease further when nationality is the base of prioritisation: the probabilities that the two samples differ drop to 19.22 and 14.68. All in all, we find little support for a different prioritisation of applicants based on language proficiency and nationality, meaning that the prevalence of the COVID-19 crisis did not relevantly increase (or decrease) potential acts of discrimination.

Table 2 reports the evidence for Hypothesis 3 which claimed that exposure to the crisis may increase one's likelihood to prioritise applicants based on their language proficiency and more similar nationality, namely Dutch. As previously explained, Table 2 presents the probability that we find higher effects of exposure to COVID-19 after the lockdown than before. Overall, we can conclude that there is no support for this exposure hypothesis: the probabilities of prioritisation are all relatively low (less than 57%), and, thus, do not support that the magnitude of the effect of exposure to the crisis increased significantly between the main period and the crisis period. The evidence points towards a null effect, which means that the influence of individual exposure does not differ in the two samples. As reported in the Online appendix, the exposure also neither affects the tendencies to prioritise applicants based on their language proficiency nor on more similar nationality.

Lastly, Table 3 reveals the results for Hypothesis 4 which hypothesised that individuals most vulnerable to the crisis (low income, high age) will show more discriminatory behaviour. As in Hypothesis 3, there is no evidence of such effect being higher after the lockdown during regular times. Thus, we do not find support that more vulnerability implies more discrimination.

**Table 3.**

Probability of higher effect of age and income (vulnerability) on prioritisation (identity) during the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) crisis than during regular time.

| **Outcome** | **Feature** | **Covariate** | **Prob Hypothesis 3 (%)** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Welfare | Language full | Age (≥60 years) | 54.5 |
| Rights | Language full | Age (≥60 years) | 50.0 |
| Rights | Language full | Income (low) | 41.5 |
| Welfare | Nationality Netherlands | Income (low) | 38.7 |
| Rights | Nationality Netherlands | Income (low) | 32.7 |
| Welfare | Language full | Income (low) | 29.6 |
| Rights | Nationality Netherlands | Age (≥60 years) | 27.4 |
| Welfare | Nationality Netherlands | Age (≥60 years) | 21.5 |

To sum up, the findings show that Hypothesis 2 only holds in one of the four situations. There is no evidence for Hypothesis 3 or Hypothesis 4. From our results, we conclude that the increased salience of the COVID-19 crisis in Germany due to the lockdown has not altered the differential treatment of mobile EU citizens, at least not in the short run. We observe the same degree and patterns of discrimination as before the crisis unfolded. However, we can confirm that there is a significant and sizeable amount of discrimination against mobile EU citizens based on their nationality and their degree of integration.

**Discussion and conclusion**

The EU has faced multiple challenges and crises in the past years, among others, the financial crisis in 2008 as well as the more recent humanitarian migration crisis starting in 2015. Each crisis posed a considerable threat to solidarity across EU member states, often resulting in heightened Euroscepticism (Baute et al., 2019). At the same time, the enlargement and the consequential increased diversity within the EU in connection with the freedom of movement continuously puts the unity among nation-states to a test. Our results revealed a sizeable degree of discrimination against mobile EU citizens based on their nationality and language skills, challenging the highly praised equality of rights among EU citizens. The current COVID-19 crisis has a strong international component related to the movement of people, which makes it even more salient for studies addressing the movements across national borders. While COVID-19 challenges inter-European solidarity, this crisis is different from the previous ones: politicians cannot solve this pandemic crisis alone – in contrast to the financial crisis – because its solution depends on the collaboration and commitment of the whole population. Besides, this pandemic crisis puts individual health at risk and increases the pressure on both the economy and the solidarity within and among nations.

Thus, we had strong expectations about how the crisis and, in particular, the consequences of lockdown ***measures*** could influence individuals’ tendency to discriminate against mobile EU citizens. The severity of this crisis for all citizens as well as the expectations from theories about different aspects of threat (health, economic and cultural threat), suggested that preferential treatment should increase as the COVID-19 crisis expanded. Nevertheless, we could not find convincing support for these expectations, not even when we test for individual degrees of exposure and vulnerability to the crisis. In sum, the crisis did not affect discriminatory behaviour towards mobile EU citizens in Germany. However, this raises the question: why could we not find support for our hypotheses?

First, our findings rely on a snapshot of data collected in the accelerating phase of the COVID-19 pandemic in Germany and in the period after the lockdown. We thus test for the short-term effects of the crisis. Despite the importance of our findings, we suggest that future research should also examine the emerging long-term effects. As aforementioned, there are reasons to believe that this pandemic posed a severe threat to solidarity within the EU which could reasonably provoke short-term effects. However, we can consider the reasons behind the lack of an increase in discrimination to inform future studies. Devakumar et al. (2020: 1194) argue that ‘health protection relies not only on a well-functioning health system with universal coverage, but also on social inclusion, justice, and solidarity’, indicating that solidarity is a central piece of the puzzle to overcome this health threat. Accordingly, this pandemic might have decreased and simultaneously increased solidarity within and among nations, explaining the null finding. Immediate reactions to the pandemic, such as voluntary civil society engagements in hospitals or the storms on supermarkets to stockpile food and sanitary supplies, suggest indeed that this ***exceptional*** situation triggered behaviour on both extremes, resulting in an uptick of solidarity as well as egocentric and protectionist behaviour. Moreover, our findings may be driven by how we ***measure*** discrimination as well as by our exclusive focus on mobile EU migrants. A study concentrating on a different group of immigrants might have come to a different conclusion. However, this paper aimed to assess the effect of the pandemic on existing patterns of discrimination within the EU context.

From a theoretical perspective, the idea that some individuals react differently to the crisis than others can be expanded beyond the scope of exposure and vulnerability: existing patterns may increase or decrease in times of crisis. That is, we may observe either a re-enforcement or a de-enforcement of well-known explanatory factors of anti-immigrant sentiments that drive discriminatory tendencies. For example, we know from previous research (for example, Hibbing et al., 2014) that more conservative individuals react more pronounced to threats than others. Concerning this, we might expect that those leaning more to the right on the political ideology scale may show a stronger differential treatment of outgroups than they did before the COVID-19 crisis (Dovidio et al., 2010). However, the assumption that ideologically right- and left-leaning individuals differ in their reactions to threat is also highly debated in the literature (Bakker et al., 2020). Moreover, given that the crisis affects the whole population, the differences between these two groups may be less pronounced. Nevertheless, these suggestions are explorative as previous research on the reactions to a global pandemic is very rare.

Apart from this critical assessment of our findings, our study rendered an essential test of well-established theories that may help in developing them further. While the expectation that severe realistic threats increase anti-immigrant sentiments may still be true in the longer term, our findings challenge the idea that threat perceptions, increased nationalism, as well as reactions of the behavioural immune system directly translate into increased discriminatory behaviour. Yet, at this point, we cannot tell whether our results question classical explanations, meaning whether other factors such as prior experiences with distinct outgroups as well as underlying anti-immigrant sentiments are more substantial explanatory factors of discrimination, or whether it is simply too early to fully assess the impact of this ***unprecedented*** and ***exceptional*** health and economic crisis on prejudicial attitudes, nationalism and discrimination.

Our findings that solidary with EU citizens did not immediately collapse with the outbreak of COVID-19 aligns with emerging research about other aspects of the crisis. As an immediate reaction to the current pandemic, there is growing evidence showing that citizens tended to rally around incumbent political leaders and institutions as well as to adhere to the political status quo instead of responding to the right-populist challengers who attacked the expertise of dominant parties (De Vries and Hobolt, 2020). In the end, at least in the case of Germany, the unexpected crisis gave dominant parties a way to showcase their competence and long-term experience in governance by reacting quickly and decisively, which fostered their popularity, at least in the short-run (De Vries and Hobolt, 2020). Whether adherence to the status quo will be found in the longer-term societal and political impacts of COVID-19 remains to be seen.

While we reveal that the pandemic does not threaten solidarity – at least in the short-run – we find evidence that solidarity in distributing fundamental rights to mobile EU citizens is bounded. Compared to prior research, we contributed by demonstrating that discrimination occurs even when looking at a proxy for cultural dissimilarity, namely nationality. This finding, which jeopardises the ideal of equal EU citizenship, underlines the current tensions within the EU, especially those connected to discussions around its enlargement.

**Supplemental Material**

**sj-pdf-1-eup-10.1177\_14651165211037208 - Supplemental material for Discrimination against mobile European Union citizens before and during the first COVID-19 lockdown: Evidence from a conjoint experiment in Germany**

Supplemental material, sj-pdf-1-eup-10.1177\_14651165211037208 for Discrimination against mobile European Union citizens before and during the first COVID-19 lockdown: Evidence from a conjoint experiment in Germany by Xavier Fernández-i-Marín, Carolin H Rapp, Christian Adam, Oliver James and Anita Manatschal in European Union Politics

**Supplemental Material**

**sj-R-2-eup-10.1177\_14651165211037208 - Supplemental material for Discrimination against mobile European Union citizens before and during the first COVID-19 lockdown: Evidence from a conjoint experiment in Germany**

Supplemental material, sj-R-2-eup-10.1177\_14651165211037208 for Discrimination against mobile European Union citizens before and during the first COVID-19 lockdown: Evidence from a conjoint experiment in Germany by Xavier Fernández-i-Marín, Carolin H Rapp, Christian Adam, Oliver James and Anita Manatschal in European Union Politics

**Supplemental Material**

**sj-R-3-eup-10.1177\_14651165211037208 - Supplemental material for Discrimination against mobile European Union citizens before and during the first COVID-19 lockdown: Evidence from a conjoint experiment in Germany**

Supplemental material, sj-R-3-eup-10.1177\_14651165211037208 for Discrimination against mobile European Union citizens before and during the first COVID-19 lockdown: Evidence from a conjoint experiment in Germany by Xavier Fernández-i-Marín, Carolin H Rapp, Christian Adam, Oliver James and Anita Manatschal in European Union Politics

**Notes**

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The study is pre-registered under [*https://osf.io/md8tw*](https://osf.io/md8tw)/ and is an extension of a prior study by Adam et al. (2021). The original project focused on differences between public administrators and the general population (Adam et al., 2021) and included an oversample of individuals working in the Public Administration (700 respondents). In the current study, we collected new data and re-analyse the data from our first survey *without* the oversample (only the general population). The focus now lies in exploring discriminatory behaviour within the general population over time during the COVID-19 crisis. Another key difference is the literature used in the two studies. Adam et al. (2021) mainly include literature from public administration research, whereas this article refers more to attitudinal literature and literature from (political) psychology. Accordingly, the two contributions also explore different hypotheses. Lastly, the present study uses a different estimation method, as the data structure is different from Adam et al. (2021). All replication material is available at: [*https://osf.io/aycwt/*](https://osf.io/aycwt/).; 3. In our pre-registration, we formulated four explicit hypotheses following our pre-COVID-19 registration. We slightly deviate from this plan by formulating a more general and overarching hypothesis instead of several smaller ones. The deviation follows comments we received when presenting the study.; 4. While the contact ban did not represent a real lockdown like in other countries, such as Italy or Spain, it nevertheless severely limited the freedom of movement of the individuals living and residing in Germany. In the following, we will refer to the contact ban as ‘lockdown’.; 5. Abramson et al. (2019) show that making inferences from conjoint experiments to the majority are quite problematic. As a solution, they suggest to implement a more conservative design with less attributes and a small number of levels for each attribute. Our design meets these requirements. Moreover, Hainmueller et al. (2015) present evidence that conjoint experiments are a good approximation of real world behaviour in settings which are closely comparable to our study.; 6. Allenby and Ginter (1995) show that HB is able to estimate individual part worths for choice data. Further, Lenk et al. (1996) underline that HB can do this effectively even when each individual provides fewer answers than the number of parameters being estimated.; 7. While some may argue that there are simpler approaches, e.g., without estimating individual's utilities (like estimating AMCEs), we refrained from doing this as such an approach would have increased the chance of finding false positives, i.e., more differences between the main sample and the crisis one than what there really are. Our HB predicts around 80% (PCP, percent correctly predicted) of the decisions, whereas a simpler model without the intermediate estimation of individual part worth utilities predicts around 20 points less (60% PCP) – see the Online appendix for more detailed information.; 8. Detailed specifications are provided in the Online appendix. As robustness checks, we also report Hainmueller et al.’s (2015) AMCEs for a simpler model without individual part-worths, as well as a binary logit model (McFadden 1973). Overall the robustness checks underline that our results are robust, even when implementing alternative modelling approaches.; 9. The original observational data (the rates of infection in different German regions) comes from a database that is being daily updated, backwards, to account for cases that were labelled as a COVID infection much later. This implies that the replication of the concrete numbers in the tables depends on the date where the data has been gathered. In our case, we present the results with the RKI dataset as of 3 July 2021. There are more detailed notes on the replication of the presented results in the Online appendix.; 10. Leeper et al. (2020) raise the concern that comparisons between groups are mostly descriptive. We address this problem of conjoint experiment research, first, by using a hierarchical approach that allows us to estimate parameters without having interactions, and second, by reporting results based on differential discriminations and probabilities of the difference in the effects.

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HINA Digest

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**Body**

Zagreb,Hrvatska17 January 2022 (Hina) - Croatia to display prices both in kuna and in euro as of 5 September ZAGREB, 17 Jan (Hina) - Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic on Monday announced a dual display of prices in Croatia, both in kuna and in euro, from 5 September through the whole of 2023. Plenkovic made the announcement at a press conference where he unveiled the bill proposing the adoption of the euro as legal tender in Croatia. He was accompanied by Finance Minister Zdravko Maric, Economy and Sustainable Development Minister Tomislav Coric and Croatian National Bank (HNB) Governor Boris Vujcic. The bill was put to public consultation today and the final proposal is expected to be sent to Parliament for a second reading in the second half of April. The bill regulates the legal framework, the cash exchange, supplying all legal entities with euro, the loan and deposit conversion, and consumer protection from undue price increases. Prices will be displayed in both kuna and euro as of 5 September to raise awareness of the euro even before its adoption, for which the target date has been set at 1 January 2023. The dual display of prices will continue throughout 2023. Plenkovic said that citizens will be able to exchange kuna for euro at no cost to them at banks, the Croatian Post and the Financial Agency (Fina) throughout next year, after which they will be able to do so at the Croatian National Bank free of charge too.

He called on citizens to deposit any cash they have in banks so that the conversion can be done automatically. The PM said that the aim is to ensure a smooth switch to the euro and the effective functioning of the economy. He noted that this year the government would send to Parliament more than 70 proposals concerning the adoption of the euro, including the physical replacement of the national currency with the euro. Plenkovic said that Croatia aspired to integrate with the European Union more deeply by joining the Schengen passport-free travel area and the euro area, and in that regard relevant decisions would be made in the coming months. He spoke of the steps that had been taken so far regarding the euro adoption and the reasons why Croatia wanted to join the euro area. He said that the Croatian economy is highly euroised, that 70 per cent of tourism revenues come from citizens of euro-area countries, 60 per cent of trade is generated with those countries, 70 per cent of time savings deposits and nearly 60 per cent of household and corporate loans are in euro or indexed to the euro. Plenkovic said that the goal of euro area membership was included in government activities 20 years ago. "What will be happening this year will be the culmination of the ***processes*** that have been systematically worked on in the last two decades," the prime minister said, announcing that the Council for Euro Adoption would meet before a cabinet meeting on Thursday. FinMin: All efforts should be taken to prevent unfair and excessive prices ZAGREB, 17 Jan (Hina) - Finance Minister Zdravko Maric on Monday called on all stakeholders in the society, including media and major actors in the euro changeover in Croatia, to do their utmost to prevent anyone from using this ***process*** to "fish in troubled waters" and charge unfair and excessive prices. Addressing a news conference at which he, together with Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic and Croatian National Bank (HNB) governor Boris Vujcic, outlined a draft act on the introduction of the euro as legal tender in Croatia, Maric underscored the obligation to display prices both in kuna and euro from 5 September through the whole of 2023. The draft act also envisages some exemptions from this obligation when there are physical limits for such displays or excessive costs. Thus, stands in farmers' markets, newsstands, electronic displays at filling stations, or taximeters will be exempted from this obligation. Also, commodities with prices already printed on them will be sold until stocks last. However, they are not exempted from issuing invoices and bills both in the kuna and the euro, Maric said. The authorities today published guidelines for the adjustment of the enterprise sector during the ***process*** of switching to the euro. The guidelines have been prepared by the coordinating committee for the adjustment of the economy and consumer protection, with the economy ministry at its helm. Undue price rises forbidden The document highlights the major principle that undue price rises in the euro changeover are forbidden. Maric admitted that the whole matter had not been regulated by law and called on all actors to join in the fight against any undue price rises. Fulfilling Maastricht criteria The minister recalled that Croatia could enter the euro area on 1 January 2023, provided that it fulfilled the convergence criteria, and a final decision on the assessment of Croatia's performance is expected in July 2022. One of the Maastricht criteria refers to sound and sustainable public finances, which includes trends in the public debt and deficit. Maric said that this was under control and that their reduction was being conducted at an adequate rate. Also, concerning price stability as a criterion, the inflation rate cannot be more than 1.5 percentage points above the rate of the three best-performing member states. Maric said that inflation trends should not undermine the entire ***process***. HNB Governor Vujcic also believes that the convergence criterion about price stability would be met. The reference value for the inflation rate has never been under the average rate of the inflation in the euro zone, Vujcic explained. Prices of consumer goods and services in Croatia, as ***measured*** by the consumer price index, increased by 5.5% in December 2021 compared with December 2020, while in the whole of 2021 they rose by 2.6% year on year, the State Bureau of Statistics (DZS) said today. Regardless of the acceleration of inflation in recent months, Maric said that Croatia's inflation rate was still roughly around the average of the euro area or slightly below this average. Last Thursday, Maric said that the government had revised its inflation growth projection for this year up to 3.5%, adding that VAT cuts were being considered as part of a set of ***measures*** aimed at buffering energy price hikes. Speaking to the press, Maric said then that the government was following developments with price hikes. He said inflation accelerated in recent months and that its growth in December might exceed 5%, which would be visible at the start of this year. That prompted the government to revise its projection to 3.5%, up from the 2.5% increase forecast earlier, he added. The minister said that according to available data and expectations, higher inflation rates were expected in the first months of this year, "after which there should be a convergence to an average 3.5%." Besides food, the main focus is on energy prices given the price trends of raw materials at European level, he said, adding that the price of gas for households would be corrected as of 1 April. He said the government would come up with a package or individual ***measures*** aimed at buffering the increase so that living standards were not affected in a major way. Central bank governor: Citizens hold cash amounting to (EURO)4.8 bn ZAGREB, 17 Jan (Hina) - Croatian National Bank (HNB) Governor Boris Vujcic said on Monday that inflation might be the most serious potential "cost" of introducing the euro, however, this year, that influence on the total inflation rate could be less than 10%, so he believes this isn't something to be overly bothered about. Vujcic added that the rest of inflation will be generated from entirely different sources, primarily the prices of energy. He expects that the first half of this year will see strong inflationary pressure whereas "deflating" is expected in the second half. Vujcic said that the best prevention against prices increasing is competition, adding that state intervention is only justifiable where monopolies exist. In the months prior to and after introducing the euro, consumers have to avoid those who increase their prices and buy from those who don't, he said, believing that the best protection against price increases is showing prices in both kuna and euro. With regard to losing monetary sovereignty once Croatia enters the euro area, Vujcic recalled that the central bank has been maintaining a fixed exchange rate since the 1990s. Hence, it is not using it actively as a monetary policy instrument, considering that a 10 percent depreciation of the kuna against the euro, due to the high level of eurosation of the economy and households, the debt for all sectors in Croatia would increase by more than HRK 50 billion whereas appreciation of the kuna would disrupt the Croatian economy's competitiveness, that is exports, said Vujcic. He revealed that fairly reliable data indicate that citizens are holding as much as HRK 36 billion ((EURO)4.8 billion) in cash. He called on citizens to deposit cash in banks which would facilitate conversion once Croatia enters the euro area. Croatia's annual inflation rate in Dec reaches 5.5%, highest since Oct 2008 ZAGREB, 17 Jan (Hina) - Prices of consumer goods and services in Croatia, as ***measured*** by the consumer price index, increased by 5.5% in December 2021 compared with December 2020, while in the whole of 2021 they rose by 2.6% year on year, the State Bureau of Statistics (DZS) said on Monday. The annual inflation rate in December was the highest since October 2008, when it was 5.9%. Compared with November 2021, consumer prices on average stayed the same. The highest year-on-year price increase was observed in transport, of 11.4%, which was largely generated by fuel price increases, of 22.5% on an annual level. All other categories also recorded annual price increases, except the health sector which registered a decrease of 0.3%. Food prices, which account for a significant portion of the goods basket, continued their rise that began in July, increasing by an average of 8.1% in December. Prices of alcoholic drinks and tobacco increased by 5.9%, clothing and footwear by 3.7%, housing by 3.2% and household furniture by 4%. Compared with November, the highest increase in prices was registered for food and non-alcoholic beverages (+1.4%). Prices of clothing and footwear decreased by 8.2% and those of housing, water, electricity, gas and other fuels by 0.2%. The average annual inflation rate for the entire year was 2.6%. 2022 inflation could be 3.5-4%, central bank says ZAGREB, 17 Jan (Hina) - The Croatian National Bank (HNB) said on Monday the average annual inflation rate this year could rise to 3.5-4%, basing its projection on higher-than-forecast inflation rates in November and December 2021 and the assumption that gas and electricity prices will rise considerably as of 1 April. The Croatian Bureau of Statistics said today that last December consumer prices were 5.5% higher on the year and 2.6% higher on average for the entire year. December's 5.5% inflation was the highest since October 2008, when it was 5.9%. In December, consumer prices were about the same as in November. The HNB said the gradual acceleration of inflation since last July continued in December and that in November it was 4.8% higher year on year. The increases in November and December were mainly due to food prices, whose contribution was up by 0.6 percentage points thanks to ***processed*** and unprocessed food products, the HNB said. The higher contribution of unprocessed food products, the HNB added, reflects the higher fruit, vegetable and meat prices, while the higher contribution of ***processed*** food products is a result of a higher annual rate of price rises of nearly all components, which is related to the spillover of higher food raw materials on the global market and the positive effect of the base period, i.e. the reduction of those prices at the end of 2020. The 0.3 pp higher contribution of industrial products was due to a higher annual rate of changes in clothes and footwear prices, mainly because seasonal decreases were less pronounced than in December 2020. In the previous nine months, energy made the biggest contribution to inflation, but in December the biggest contribution came from food at 2.4 pp. Core inflation rate 4.6% The annual rate of core inflation, which does not include prices of ***agricultural*** products, energy and administratively regulated products, went up from 3.6% in November to 4.6% in December, mainly due to higher annual growth rates of the prices of some foodstuffs, clothes and footwear. The average inflation rate in 2021 was 2.6%, while core inflation was 1.6%. HICP continues to keep up with euro area inflation Inflation according to the Harmonised Index of Consumer Prices (HICP) continues to closely follow euro area trends and was 5.2% in December, up 0.2 pp from the first inflation estimate in the euro area. Croatia's HICP inflation without energy, food, drinks and tobacco was 2.6% in December, the same as in the euro area. Croatia's HICP inflation in 2021 was 2.7%, up from 2.6% in the euro area, while without energy, food, drinks and tobacco it was 1.3%, down from 1.5% in the euro area. Enough negative risks, inflation might exceed new projection In December, the HNB Council projected that the average annual inflation this year could stay the same as in 2021, but the 2021 inflation forecast made then was 2.4%, with the assumption that electricity and gas prices did not change, or 3% if those prices increased by 10%, the data on inflation for November and December somewhat exceeded those forecasts, the HNB said. The first quantifications of the expected gas and electricity price rises have appeared in public, as have announcements of ***measures*** to cushion them, and they have considerable implications for inflation forecasts, the HNB said. However, it added, the uncertainty is still pronounced as structural changes in the economy reduce the reliability of available economic models. The latest forecasts indicate that the average annual inflation growth this year could be 3.5-4%, assuming that gas prices go up by 10-30% and electricity prices by 5-15%, and it is still expected that the annual inflation rate will gradually decrease towards the end of the year, the HNB said. A higher-than-forecast inflation projection for this year is a result of higher-than-forecast results in November and December and the assumption of a somewhat stronger increase in gas and electricity prices as of 1 April, the HNB added. Plenkovic: No one can be happy with decrease in population ZAGREB, 17 Jan (Hina) - Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic said on Monday that no one can be pleased with the population decrease but it was not unexpected, stressing that the government will do everything to mitigate the negative trends and improve the positive ones and noting that demographic issues go beyond the framework of one government. After presenting the bill to adopt the euro as legal tender in Croatia, the prime minister was asked by the press to comment on the 2021 population census, which shows that Croatia has 396,000 fewer residents than ten years ago. "Naturally, these results are not good, no one can be pleased with them, but at the same time when observing broader trends, they were not unexpected and can be explained quite easily," said Plenkovic. He first warned of the structure of the 396,000 fewer people, saying that the difference between births and deaths is 165,000 while the remaining 230,000 refers to 110,000 registered and 120,000 unregistered emigrants. Referring to the negative natural increase, Plenkovic noted that this ***process*** has been ongoing for 70 years, recalling that in 1948, 95,000 children were born annually, while their number declined by 60,000 to 35,000 in 2021. In reference to the number of emigrants, he recalled the fact that this has resulted from Croatia's accession to the EU as one of the fundamental freedoms in the EU is free movement of workers. "Prior to 2013 you could emigrate to an EU country only if you met one of two criteria - obtaining a work permit or being part of some sort of quota," Plenkovic recalled. "Now in 2022, in the ninth year of EU membership and ahead of entering the Schengen area and euro area, we are lifting our economy in terms of the average level of development within the EU and in terms of economic growth. We have the best credit rating ever, wages are increasing and by investing and using EU membership we are taking Croatia forward," he added. The prime minister recalled that, unlike Hungary, Slovakia and Poland, which started ten years earlier, it was only in 2000 that Croatia started using EU funds and "catching up" will still take this entire decade, in which Croatia has (EURO)25 billion at its disposal. He noted several government ***measures*** directed at improving the framework to help young families have more children but warned that is not "just an economic, financial or political issue," but also a matter of culture. "That relates to the way of life we have today and it is not the same as in the 1950s or in the third decade of this century. Simply, the culture of life is different," he claimed. The government will do all it can to relieve the negative trends and improve the positive ones. "However, that is an issue that is much broader than the framework of one government or one policy," he assessed. Unfortunately, the data are as they are but many countries in Western Europe have negative natural increases and are compensating them with immigration, he added. "We still are not in a situation where Croatia would need to compensate these trends with immigration. When you look at the largest number of people being born in many Western countries, when you observe children's origin, then you will see that many of them are the children of immigrant. These are all the facts that need to be put on the cards before any justification is made," the prime minister said. President says PM not to blame for population decline ZAGREB, 17 Jan (Hina) - President Zoran Milanovic on Monday commented on the drastic decline in Croatia's population, saying it wasn't the end of Croatia and Croathood but "simply a situation" and that Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic was not to be blamed for those developments. "The same people who accused me of high treason six or seven years ago, now face twice as bad results and act innocent. They aren't innocent because they don't behave fairly. That's one part of the story. I'll never... reproach anyone for something they aren't responsible for. This what happened was in ***process***, it happened to most new EU members, they saw a significant drop in population and started recovering after that. That probably awaits us as well. Plenkovic has no effect on that, I didn't either," said Milanovic. People go, gain new experience, many of them return, he said, convinced the same will happen to us. "There are about four million of us," he said, noting that immigration was a way to improve the situation. "Is Croatia ready for that? It isn't. And it won't be ready because it's a small nation, more delicate than some others," he added. "For two years now I've been using the term moral panic, especially when addressing those who accused me, and that was primarily Plenkovic, expecting such a result, preparing all of us for what we'll get. That's not the end of Croatia, our country, that's not the end of Croatianness. That's simply a situation, I won't even call it a crisis. Croatian people will not die out," Milanovic said. "Plenkovic is not to blame for this," the president said. I don't see anything in what Vujcic did Milanovic also commented on the scandal about which the Index news website wrote concerning Croatian Central Bank (HNB) Governor Boris Vujcic and trading in securities of commercial banks based on inside information. "I've seen that Index got information it shouldn't have. That is a crime. I'm in favour of providing the media with as much as information as possible, including secret information, but this is really something that one doesn't do," said Milanovic, adding that he didn't see anything in what Vujcic had done. "What did Vujcic do? He bought stock 30 years ago, while he was still wearing shorts and sold them before he had to according to the law. What kind of offence is that?" Milanovic wondered. "We can ask the question whether HNB employees, those working in directorates, have the right to have bank accounts...? According to that logic, some working at the HNB will always have some inside information and shouldn't have anything to do with banks", Milanovic said. President Zoran Milanovic spoke to the press after he had decorated Sarajevo Archbishop, Cardinal Vinko Puljic, for his ***exceptional*** contribution to preserving the Croatian identity. HNB governor says not thinking of resigning ZAGREB, 17 Jan (Hina) - Croatian National Bank (HNB) Governor Boris Vujcic said on Sunday he was not thinking of resigning and called on the financial regulator HANFA to look into the veracity of media reports of financial wrongdoing at the central bank. "We certainly didn't do anything wrong," Vujcic told RTL television in a comment on the article by the Index news website saying that 40 HNB staff had been involved in insider trading in securities. Vujcic urged HANFA to look into the allegations, stressing that the HNB wanted the matter clarified as soon as possible. He said that the regulator had access to all the data, both at the HNB and the Central Depositary Agency. He said it was not the HNB staff that had caused damage to the central bank but the media fuss that was made without any evidence. Vujcic said that he always adhered to the law in his work. In 2001, when he joined the HNB leadership, he had sold his shares in two banks to avoid a potential conflict of interest, he added. He said that the HNB had adopted a code of ethics in 2016, which requires all staff to report to their superiors if they trade in banks' securities. "If anyone is found to have traded in insider information from the HNB, they will immediately lose their job and that will not be the end of problems for that person. At this point we do not have any indications that something like that happened," the central bank governor said. Vujcic said he was not thinking of resigning. He noted that in his opinion this whole affair was aimed at undermining the ***process*** of adopting the euro, adding that this attempt would not succeed. "These unsubstantiated accusations in the public sphere and partly in the political sphere are certainly undermining the credibility of the institution," he said. Some can't appreciate Croatia's success, PM says ZAGREB, 17 Jan (Hina) - Croatia's EU entry was difficult because it was necessary to make up for the lost war years, Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic said on Monday, adding that some could not appreciate that today. Speaking at the Zagreb Faculty of Law on the topic "Croatia's international position: from independence to new challenges and opportunities," he recalled Croatia's difficult path to the recognition of its independence during the Greater Serbia military aggression and later on to EU membership. "Entering the Union was a ***process*** that was anything but simple... In the 90s, unlike other Central and Eastern European countries, we were left completely on the margin." As we were dealing with occupied territories, refugees and the war damage, he said, Central and Eastern European countries were becoming financial investment centres. That fact, Plenkovic added, created a distance between those countries, which were making fast progress towards the Union, and Croatia, which was trying to catch up. Trust between old and new Europe He said the key element for EU enlargement was trust between "old" and "new" Europe. "The key element is trust between Europe's East and West. It isn't written anywhere, yet it's the key to everything." Plenkovic recounted an exchange with a British diplomat who said, "You leaders of Eastern and Central Europe pretend you are ready, we in the West pretend we want you." Croatia's EU accession in 2013 "was very demanding, very difficult. When I look at some political actors today, even the public, I almost have the impression that some people don't appreciate that," he said. Plenkovic went on to say that the Schengen and euro areas were the only "deeper" structures Croatia should join and that decisions on that would be made soon. "We are entering Schengen at a time when Schengen is not what we would like it to be, to freely cross borders... Today, because of three elements - the migration crisis, terrorism, and COVID - it's the opposite. Internal controls are everywhere and the goal is to protect the EU's external border, prevent terrorism and put the pandemic under control so that we can go back to free movement as it used to be." Croatia FM: Good relations with Ukraine don't rule out good relations with Russia ZAGREB, 17 Jan (Hina) - Croatian Foreign Minister Gordan Grlic Radman thanked his Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov on Monday for Moscow's support when Croatia was gaining independence in the early 1990s, and said that Croatia's "good relations with Ukraine do not rule out good relations with Russia." Grlic Radman was on a return visit to Lavrov and the first EU minister in Moscow this year. Croatia and Russia will mark 30 years of diplomatic relations on 25 May. Russia recognised Croatia on 17 February 1992, a month after EU member states did. Speaking at a press conference, Lavrov said Russia saw Croatia as "a respected European partner" with which it has historical and cultural ties. Grlic Radman spoke of the "brave resistance to the Slobodan Milosevic regime's Greater Serbia aggression whereby Croatia succeeded in defending its own territory," thanking Lavrov for the "constructive role, recognition and assistance" in the 1990s. "In the last 30 years, Croatia managed to achieve great things and Russia was always there when it was necessary, so thank you once again for that", Grlic Radman said. He added that Russia's president, prime minister, interior and justice ministers have an open invitation to visit Croatia. The two ministers talked about intensifying business ties, cooperation in tourism, culture, science and sports, and the signing of an agreement on a Russian cultural centre in Croatia. Croatia's experience in Ukraine Grlic Radman said when this visit was being arranged, international circumstances were much more different, but that this provided an opportunity to talk "quite openly" about the current geopolitical situation. His visit to Moscow coincides with high tensions between Russia and the West over Ukraine. Western capitals are concerned about the buildup of Russian troops on the Ukrainian border, claiming Russia is preparing an ***invasion***, while Moscow seeks legal guarantees from the West that NATO will not spread eastwards. Grlic Radman told the press he conveyed to Lavrov some messages from an informal meeting of European ministers held in Brest, France last week. Croatia and Russia believe a solution should be found as part of the Minsk agreements from 2014 and 2015. They envisage the full withdrawal of the army from eastern Ukraine, greater autonomy for Donetsk and Luhansk or restoring full Ukrainian control over the eastern border. Recently in Kiev, Croatian Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic, who used to chair the European Parliament's delegation for Ukraine, and Croatian diplomats openly supported Ukraine's territorial integrity, offering to share Croatia's experience in the peaceful reintegration of its Danube River Region in the 1990s. Grlic Radman said that offer was not against Moscow and that "good relations with Ukraine do not rule out good relations with Russia." He said the peaceful reintegration of Croatia's Danube River Region was one of the most successful operations approved by all UN Security Council member states, including Russia as a significant participant in that ***process***. "Of course, the Croatian model is not the same as the Ukrainian, but some experiences related to the civilian sector could help," he said, adding that Croatia, "in the bilateral relations with Ukraine, has no intention of doing anything that is not in line with the Minsk agreement." Lavrov said Croatia and Ukraine had different interpretations of "the transfer of the experience in peaceful integration," with Croatia "thinking about the humanitarian aspects, solving language problems, creating cultural autonomies" and Ukraine wanting to use "the military part of the ***process*** that went on." "Such intentions, which I hope won't occur, are dangerous," he said, adding that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky had said that "Ukrainians who consider themselves Russian can leave for Russia." "During our talks we realised that Zagreb understands our rhetoric and remarks" about Kiev's aspiration to use the military elements of Croatia's experience, Lavrov said, adding that for the Ukrainian issue "there is no plan B, only the Minsk agreement, which must be complied with to the last point." Former ambassador Azimov says Croatia bridge between Russia and EU ZAGREB, 17 Jan (Hina) - Russia is absolutely sure that it would renew its strategic cooperation with the European Union sooner or later, and Croatia is playing an important role of a bridge between Moscow and Brussels, former Russian ambassador to Croatia, Anvar Azimov, said on Monday. Relations between Russia and Croatia prove that any country's membership of NATO and the EU is not an obstacle to improving relations, Azimov told Hina ahead of a meeting at the Russian-Croatian Friendship Association, which was also attended by Croatian Minister of Foreign and European Affairs, Gordan Grlic Radman, at the end of his first meeting to Moscow. We are very interested in improving our relations with EU members and we are absolutely sure that we will manage to renew our bilateral strategic cooperation with that alliance sooner or later because Russia and the EU are meant to be together, said the ambassador who left Zagreb in 2020 after five years. In this regard, Croatia and some other European countries play an important role as a bridge between the EU and Russia, he underscored. He said that the meeting between Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and Gordan Grlic Radman was very open, friendly and constructive and that the relations between Moscow and Zagreb were based on mutual trust and understanding of concerns. We understand clearly that Croatia's foreign policy priorities are linked to Euro-Atlantic solidarity, but at the same time that is not an obstacle to Croatia's expansion of relations with countries like Russia, China and India, Azimov said. He said that Grlic Radman was one of the most successful European ministers, adding that he had cooperated with five Croatian foreign ministers, but that he had developed special relations with the current one. I miss Croatia a lot, said Azimov. Croatia expects 200,000 Russian tourists this year ZAGREB, 17 Jan (Hina) - Croatia expects a record number of Russian tourists this year, and last year saw a record volume of commodity trade in the past few years, it was said on Monday at the start of an official visit to Russia by Croatia's Minister of Foreign and European Affairs Gordan Grlic Radman. Grlic Radman was on a reciprocal visit to Moscow where he met with his Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov after Lavrov visited Zagreb in December 2020. In the morning, Grlic Radman met with representatives of Croatian companies which are members of the Croatian-Russian Business Club. "The fact that the visit has begun with this segment clearly shows what Croatian-Russian relations mean for the economy," Croatia's Ambassador to Russia, Tomislav Car, said at the meeting attended by representatives of the Croatian Chamber of Commerce, Croatian Tourist Board and about a dozen Croatian and Russian companies. Grlic Radman said that Croatia's exports to Russia had increased by 16.2% in 2020 compared with 2019, amounting to US$201.7 million. Additional growth of about 25% is expected for 2021. "Our data and statistics regarding the first ten months of 2021 indicate that that will be a year with the greatest commodity trade in the past few years," said Grlic Radman, announcing a Croatian economic forum in several Russian cities this year. Croatia has a trade deficit with Russia, "which is inevitable with a country rich in energy resources like Russia, not just for us but for almost all the countries in the world," said Grlic Radman. He expressed his satisfaction that 145,000 Russian tourists had visited Croatia last year and generated 800,000 bed nights. The director of the Croatian Tourist Board Office in Russia, Rajko Ruzicka, said that this was because Croatia had opened up to Russian tourists and started issuing visas as early as April "which is something none of the competitors in the European Union did." The key also lies in the fact that Croatia was one of the first to recognise Russia's Sputnik V vaccine, he added. "This year we expect further growth and I hope that it will be a record year with about 200,000 Russian visitors," said Ruzicka. Later in the day Grlic Radman met with Lavrov and the Metropolitan Bishop of the Russian Orthodox Church Hilarion. After that, he is due to attend an informal meeting of the Russian-Croatian Friendship Association. Russia sees discrimination against Bosnia Croats, Lavrov says ZAGREB, 17 Jan (Hina) - Russia sees the evident discrimination against Croats in Bosnia and Herzegovina and insists on honouring the Dayton peace agreement and implementing an electoral reform, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said in Moscow on Monday. "We, too, see the evident discrimination against Bosnia and Herzgovina Croats, about which the Croatian minister talked about," he said at press conference after a bilateral meeting with his Croatian counterpart Gordan Grlic Radman. Lavrov underlined the need to implement an electoral reform in order to end the discrimination in line with the Dayton agreement. "I can confirm that we, too, like our Croatian colleagues, stand for strict compliance with the Dayton agreement," he said, adding that there are plans to turn BiH, a state of two entities and three constituent peoples, into a unitary state, which "also demonises Republika Srpska," BiH's Serb entity. Lavrov called the US approach to the Western Balkan colourful because it appointed a special envoy for the electoral reform, while at the same time calling for not interfering in other countries' internal affairs. Lavrov said all issues, including the electoral reform, should be dealt with within BiH. Grlic Radman said Russia was "traditionally well-versed in the Western Balkans", thanking Lavrov for exchanging views on the need to honour the Dayton agreement. He said that during their meeting, Lavrov agreed to the need for Croats to have legitimate representation in BiH's "collective bodies, the Presidency and the House of Peoples." Croatian president: Dodik is our partner, we won't solve problem without Bosnia Serbs ZAGREB, 17 Jan (Hina) - Croatian President Zoran Milanovic said on Monday the Serb member of the Bosnia and Herzegovina Presidency, Milorad Dodik, was a Croatian partner in BiH and that the problem of the Bosniaks outvoting the Croats could not be solved without the Serbs. "Republika Srpska, i.e. Dodik, is our partner in this turmoil. Who doesn't understand that either doesn't understand or is rotten," Milanovic told the press about the fact that Milorad Pupovac, a member of the parliamentary majority in Croatia and president of the Serb National Council, attended a ceremony marking Republika Srpska Day, which the BiH Constitutional Court ruled is an unconstitutional holiday. Milanovic said that was "irrelevant" because Pupovac "doesn't represent anyone (but) a handful of his pals." Dodik "didn't get his hands bloody in the war" and is "a legitimate representative of the Serb People and Republika Srpska in the state of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which we respect and will always respect," he added. "We don't see that the Serb policy is causing problems for the Croats. Without the Serbs in Bosnia and Herzegovina, we won't solve this problem if we care about solving it, and I do care. Some evidently don't care enough," Milanovic said, alluding to the demand of BiH Croats and Croatia that the BiH electoral law be changed to prevent the more numerous Bosniaks from outvoting the Croats in elections for the Croat member of the BiH Presidency and House of Peoples' members. Milanovic said BiH Serbs "could not have chosen a worse" day to celebrate the day of their entity, adding that it was "chosen wrongly and insults some people." "The problem is that thousands of Croats and many more Muslims were killed in Republika Srpska. One simply has to reconcile with that." However, he added, the Bosnian Serb entity is "a fact" which was "in some way verified in Dayton." He said former Croatian president Franjo Tudman was one of the signatories of the peace agreement signed there in 1995. "There is no going back, unless another war breaks out." Milanovic said that although "wrong, bad and silly songs" were sung during the Republika Srpska Day ceremony in Banja Luka on 9 January, he was more interested in the status of BiH Croats. "While we are talking about which songs were sung in Banja Luka, Croats are being deprived of two things, the House of Peoples and the Presidency." The issue of the House of Peoples, which might make it possible to form a government without Croat representatives, is more important than the Presidency, he said. That is an attempt to "completely disenfranchise" the Croats because they need control over the House of Peoples "to protect fundamental national interests." Commenting on a recent meeting between Bakir Izetbegovic, president of the biggest Bosniak party in BiH, and Croatian Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic in Dubrovnik, Milanovic said Izetbegovic's policy was dishonest and that he did the same thing when he was received by Milanovic in September. "The same story as before. We and the Croats. The Serbs are a foreign factor." He reiterated that Croatia's diplomacy should have stopped the adoption of Council of the EU conclusions on BiH which make no explicit mention of the constituent peoples' rights. "The Croatian government must be categorical. They should have stopped it, drawn attention, not a scandal." Dodik announces return to Bosnia institutions after U.S.sanctions, Vucic's plea ZAGREB, 17 Jan (Hina) - Bosnia and Herzegovina tripartite presidency's Serb member, Milorad Dodik, said on Monday that Serb office-holders could resume doing their job in BiH state institutions after Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic's request and additional U.S. sanctions against Dodik's secessionist moves. It is not a small thing when Serbia's president requests us to think about that, Dodik told a news conference at which he announced the return of Serb representatives to BiH's state institutions. Earlier this month, Washington extended the sanctions against the Bosnian Serb leader and his aides. Last Friday, Serbia's President Vucic called on Dodik and the authorities in the Republika Srpska (RS) entity to participate in the work of joint state institutions in BiH and protect the interests of the Serbs in that entity. Dodik held a meeting with Vucic in Belgrade that day. Vucic said that any decision depends on the RS leadership, appealing to Dodik and all political stakeholders in the entity to consider his proposal "because it is obvious that some political stakeholders are jeopardising the stability of the entire region with untruths and insinuations, and are trying to shift the blame on to the Serb people and RS." Croatian president decorates Cardinal Puljic ZAGREB, 17 Jan (Hina) - Croatian President Zoran Milanovic on Monday decorated Sarajevo Archbishop, Cardinal Vinko Puljic, for his contribution to the preservation of the Croatian identity, underscoring that Puljic had done a lot for Croats in Bosnia and Herzegovina. "You have also done a lot for Croats in Bosnia and Herzegovina. They live there in a friendly neighbouring country whose survival we will never bring into question," Milanovic said. The president decorated Cardinal Puljic with the Grand Order of King Dmitar Zvonimir with Sash and the Croatian Morning Star for his ***exceptional*** contribution to the preservation of the Croatian identity and for his ***exceptional*** achievements in inter-religious, cultural and humanitarian activities. "You've done what you could, on your side, to keep relations between nations and religions harmonious, human, in accordance with the fundamental principles and postulates of what you preach, and that is brotherhood, harmony, peace and love between people," he said. "We appreciate everything you've done and you'll do," Milanovic added. Puljic underscored that Milanovic "encouraged" him with the decoration. "We in Bosnia and Herzegovina are different in religion, culture and national identity. That's why I have persistently advocated a path of dialogue based on the principle of loving one's own and respecting others'," underscored Puljic. Pope receives Komsic, Vatican underscores equality of all constituent peoples ZAGREB, 17 Jan (Hina) - Pope Francis received in audience Bosnia and Herzegovina's Presidency chair Zeljko Komsic on Monday for the talks on the situation in that country, and Vatican State-Secretary, Archbishop Paul Gallagher said that it was necessary to promote the equality of the constituent peoples and citizens. A press release from the BiH's presidency said that after this year's first audience in the Vatican, Komsic met privately with Pope Francis for talks. During the meeting, Komisic informed the Pope of the latest developments in Bosnia and Herzegovina. After the audience with the pontiff, Komsic was received by the Vatican Secretary for Relations with the States, Archbishop Paul Gallagher, who underscored the Vatican's role in recognising Bosnia and Herzegovina as an independent country and the Holy See's great support to an independent and sovereign BiH, the press release notes. The Holy See also underlined that it is necessary to ensure the equality of the country's citizens and its constituent peoples. "The interlocutors focused on the situation in the country, reiterating the need to promote legal and social equality for all citizens who belong to all the constituent peoples," a press release from the Vatican notes. Archbishop Gallagher and Komsic discussed some regional issues including the situation in Western Balkan countries and the ***process*** of EU enlargement. The Holy Father presented Komsic with pontifical documents, including his Message for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace this year, while Komsic presented the Pope with a copy of the book "Bosansko Kraljevstvo (the Bosnian kingdom)" by historian Emir Filipovic and a replica of a seal used by a Bosnian ruler in the Middle Ages. Obuljen Korzinek calls on Serbia to stop laying claim to Croatian cultural heritage ZAGREB, 17 Jan (Hina) - Croatian Culture and Media Minister Nina Obuljen Korzinek said on Sunday that the recent adoption of the Cultural Heritage Act by Serbia, which lays claim to old literature from Dubrovnik, was scandalous, calling on Serbia to refrain from usurping Croatia's territory and cultural heritage. "We will react through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Our embassy has already been contacted in this regard," Obuljen Korzinek said in an interview with public television HTV. The Cultural Heritage Act, passed by Serbia two weeks ago, says that old literature from Dubrovnik belongs to both Serbian and Croatian culture. "This is mythomania, this need to usurp Croatian cultural heritage, notably literature from Dubrovnik. That is unacceptable and professionally unfounded. They included in their law provisions according to which the Dubrovnik literature predating 1867 has some sort of dual affiliation, both Croatian and Serbian, which of course is complete nonsense," Obuljen Korzinek said. She said she expected Serbia to do away with such legal provisions and to "stop once and for all laying claim to our territory and our cultural heritage." Prefect, institute slam Serbia's attempt to claim Dubrovnik's literature ZAGREB, 17 Jan (Hina) - Dubrovnik-Neretva County head Nikola Dobroslavic said on Monday that Serbia's new cultural heritage law, whereby Serbia lays claim to Dubrovnik's literature, was a new insult to the city and the county. The law confirms the Greater Serbia project, which has not died out in Serbia, he said. "That project lays claim to Croatian territory, in this case Dubrovnik. Three decades ago that Greater Serbia project was destroying Dubrovnik's historical centre, pillaged and set fire to Konavle, Zupa Dubrovacka and the Dubrovnik littoral, and caused a lot of evil to the entire territory of the former (Yugoslavia). It caused huge damage to their own people in Croatia and Kosovo, and now they are doing it to their compatriots in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro," Dobroslavic said. He added that Croatia defeated the Greater Serbia project in the 1990s. "We won't allow it to be realised. Dubrovnik and its cultural heritage has always been Croatian. The Serbian authorities should forget about laying claim to others' territory and cultural heritage. The citizens of Dubrovnik can relax. We and our government will preserve the cultural heritage of the Croatian Dubrovnik, which will remain so forever." The airport project in Trebinje, BiH fits into the Greater Serbia plan as there is no other rational explanation, Dobroslavic said. Serbia laid claim to Croatian cultural assets before The Croatian Language Institute today condemned in the strongest terms the passing of Serbia's Cultural Heritage Act on 23 December, specifically the part on "old and rare library material" which consists of "Dubrovnik's literary editions which belong to both the Serbian and the Croatian culture up to the year 1867." "Although the Serbian cultural and political public has often expressed the wish and need to lay claim to Croatian cultural assets," the institute said, making this stand official by law is "an additional aggressive step in laying claim to the Croatian cultural heritage." It is a continuation of administrative, legal and political procedures aimed at diminishing and laying claim to the Croatian linguistic and cultural heritage as part of common cultural assets, the institute said. Regardless of the motives, the institute said, which are most likely political, even the "admission" that Dubrovnik's literature is also Croatian, not just Serbian, as claimed in Serbian cultural circles until recently, the institute finds "such a perfidious act transparent and extremely inappropriate, because Dubrovnik's literature and Dubrovnik's culture were and will remain solely Croatian, as one of the pearls of the Croatian millenary cultural heritage." The institute recalled that Serbian politics recently declared as the Bunjevci language the Croatian neo-Shtokavian Ikavian dialect which Bunjevci Croats in the northern Serbian province of Vojvodina have been speaking for centuries. ECHR awards convicted war criminal compensation for unfair trial ZAGREB, 17 Jan (Hina) - The European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) has awarded Marinko Pozder, convicted in absentia for war crimes committed in Skabrnja, a compensation of (EURO)4,000 for non-pecuniary damage and (EURO)2,000 for the costs of the proceedings due to the violation of his right to a fair trial, ECHR has reported. ECHR notes that the court's decision is final. Pozder was convicted in absentia in 1998 and sentenced to 20 years in prison for war crimes against civilians in the village of Skabrnja in the Zadar hitnerland, after which he called for a retrial in 2012 which was rejected by the Supreme Court. The ECHR determined that Pozder participated personally in the early stages of the investigation against him prior to being released from prison and exchanged as part of a prisoner exchange agreement. Hence he had some knowledge about the proceedings against him,however, he was never subsequently called to trial nor did the Croatian authorities inform him that the proceedings were continuing against him, the court said and added that it could not conclude whether Pozder attempted to avoid the trial or whether he waived the right to appear before a domestic court. Vucic declares referendum on constitutional amendments successful ZAGREB, 17 Jan (Hina) - Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic declared Sunday's referendum successful after 97 per cent of ballots were counted, saying that 60.48 per cent of citizens had voted in favour of constitutional amendments to enable judicial reform in the country's EU integration ***process***. The Electoral Commission said that 25.25 per cent of of about 6.5 million eligible voters had cast their ballots by 6pm. Polling stations closed at 8pm, and turnout was not expected to exceed 33 per cent. "Today Serbia sent a positive message to the world. I am confident that in the time ahead we will manage to do more for our country with regard to democratisation, judicial independence and prosecutorial autonomy," Vucic said. The question on the ballot was: "Are you in favour of ratifying the Act amending the Serbian Constitution?" A voter turnout of 50 per cent plus one was not mandatory for the referendum to be valid. The amended Constitution should strengthen judicial independence and efficiency. The international community and the European Commission see it as a critical step on Serbia's EU path. The non-parliamentary opposition has called on voters to reject the proposal arguing that it would increase political influence on the judiciary. Voting was also to have taken place in Serb communities in Kosovo, but the authorities in Pristina had passed a resolution banning the referendum in Kosovo's territory. The official result of the vote is expected to be announced by no later than 8pm on Friday. Dokovic arrives in Belgrade, avoids press and fans at airport ZAGREB, 17 Jan (Hina) - Novak Dokovic, the top men's tennis player, landed at Belgrade's airport on Monday afternoon after his deportation from Australia when his visa was cancelled due to the fact that he received no vaccination against coronavirus. Before his plane landed at Nikola Tesla Airport, a lot of reporters and TV crews as well as many supporters gathered there, however, Dokovic avoided them, leaving the airport accompanied by the police, local electronic media outlets reported. There is speculation that Dokovic could be soon received by President Aleksandar Vucic, who said that Australia's decision to revoke Dokovic's visa was a political decision and a witch hunt. The Serbian tennis player was forced to leave Australia after judges upheld a decision by Immigration Minister Alex Hawke to cancel his visa on public health grounds. The decision marked the end of a days-long legal battle during which the Serb fought to stay and defend his Australian Open title. Dokovic's attempt to enter the country without being vaccinated stoked public anger. His mother Dijana told the Tanjug news agency that her son would stay in Belgrade in the next few days and that he would make no public statements. It remains to be seen if Dokovic will be allowed to participate in the French Open, the next Grand Slam tournament on this year's calendar, after France's parliament gave its final approval to a law requiring people over the age of 16 to have a certificate of vaccination to enter public places, including sports venues. France's sports ministry said today it would not grant exemptions to its latest rules on vaccine passes, which it noted apply to professional players as well as spectators. Croatia logs 1,397 new COVID cases, 39 deaths ZAGREB, 17 Jan (Hina) - Croatia detected 1,397 new COVID cases in the past 24 hours while another 39 people died as a consequence of the virus, the national COVID response team reported on Monday. There are 48,441 active cases, including 1,763 hospitalised patients, 221 of whom are on ventilators. Since the outbreak of the epidemic in Croatia, a total of 818,832 cases of the novel coronavirus have been registered, 13,157 people have died while a total of 757,234 have recovered, including 8,416 in the past 24 hours. Currently there are 24,211 people self-isolating. To date, a total of 3,994,122 tests have been conducted, including 3,662 in the past 24 hours. As of 16 January, a total of 4,963,468 doses of a vaccine had been administered, which is 56.20% of the total population or 66.91% of the adult population. A total of 2,280,700 people have received at least one dose of a vaccine while 2,184,484 are fully vaccinated, which is 64.24% of the adult population. Medical chamber head: 1 in 4 hospital admissions in Split is COVID patient ZAGREB, 17 Jan (Hina) - The Croatian Medical Chamber's (HLK) president, Kresimir Luetic, who visited the Split University Hospital Centre (KBC) on Monday, said that every fourth hospitalised patient in Split was a COVID-19 patient. Over the last five months, this hospital has been under a lot of strain due to high COVID hospitalisation numbers, and no other hospital in Croatia has been faced with such a burden, Luetic said after touring the KBC Split. The current functioning of the KBC Split cannot be described as usual and this cannot be tenable in the long run, he said. The HLK chief called on the authorities to send nurses from other parts of Croatia to Split to support the functioning of the hospital. Commenting on the current epidemiological situation in the rest of Croatia, Luetic said that the COVID hospitalisation numbers were falling everywhere but Split. There are many reasons for such developments in Split, and one of them is definitely the lowest coronavirus vaccination rate in Split-Dalmatia County, he added, commending the KBC Split personnel for an excellent performance despite the difficult state of affairs. The KBC Split head, Julije Mestrovic, said that currently 226 COVID patients were cared for in this institution. Mestrovic said that 24% of the hospitalisations were COVID patients and "this is a great challenge for our hospital and our healthcare system in general." Slovenia reports about 5,000 new coronavirus cases ZAGREB, 17 Jan (Hina) - Slovenia has confirmed about 5,000 new coronavirus cases in the last 24 hours as the epidemiological situation continued to deteriorate. According to unofficial data, 4,965 new infections were reported in the last 24 hours, up from 2,529 recorded a week ago, Siol.net, the news website close to the government, said on Monday morning, adding that the official number might be slightly higher. The government is trying to mitigate the situation by intensifying the vaccination campaign. Between Thursday and Saturday, 41,200 people got vaccinated, which is 68 per cent more than the previous average for these days. People mostly requested second and booster doses, while 2,102 persons applied for the first shot. According to the country's Health Ministry, 57.1 per cent of the total population have so far received the necessary basic doses of a COVID-19 vaccine. New quarantine rules came into force on Monday for people who have not been vaccinated nor have recovered from COVID-19. Persons ordered by border police to quarantine at home will not be able to end the quarantine after a negative PCR test but will have to stay in isolation for a full seven days. Croatia sees highest increase in concern for environment in central Europe ZAGREB, 17 Jan (Hina) - Croatia has seen the highest increase in concern for environmental protection among six central European countries, according to a study recently published in the Croatian Sociological Review. The study by sociologists Bruno Simac, Tijana Trako Poljak and Vladimir Ivanovic from the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences of the University of Zagreb analysed the data from the European Social Survey from 2008 to 2018 and compared the trends in concerns about the environment in those ten years. They selected six EU countries - Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia - because they share the geopolitical position, historical heritage and social and cultural links. They noted that post-communist countries are perceived as being less supportive of environmental protection than advanced democracies. The highest increase in support for environmental concerns during the reported period was observed in Croatia, and Croatia and Slovenia scored highest in showing concern about nature in 2018, the authors said. The Czech Republic, Poland and Slovakia stagnated in their results, while Hungary saw a significant decline in support for environmental protection between 2008 and 2018. In 2008, Croatia had one of the lowest scores, and while the Czech Republic, Poland and Slovakia had not made much progress by 2018, Croatia moved up to second place among the central European countries and was overtaken only by Slovenia, which edged up from second to the top position. The most surprising were the results for Hungary, which dropped from the highest score in the perception of care for the environment in 2008 to the lowest in 2018. The study showed that despite the differences there were many similarities in environmental views and values among the selected countries. The survey used the Schwartz values approach emphasising the importance of society over individual interests. Some other surveys have found a low level of interest in the environment in all six countries, although Croatia and Slovenia ranked better than the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia in them too. The study noted that expressing concerns about the environment does not guarantee active involvement in protecting it. 40,089 earthquake-damaged facilities reported in Banovina, 95% inspected ZAGREB, 17 Jan (Hina) - A total of 40,089 facilities damaged in the earthquakes that struck the Banovina region of central Croatia in late 2020 have been reported to date and 38,094 of them, or 95 per cent, have been inspected, the regional civil protection service said in a statement on Monday. It said that 423 facilities were unusable because of external influences and 4,285 because of damage. A total of 3,785 temporarily unusable facilities require a new detailed inspection and 4,557 need an emergency intervention. Among the facilities declared usable, 704 are not damaged, 7,305 can be used without any restrictions and 17,062 can be used subject to compliance with the recommendation, the statement said. Milanovic: Reconstruction money deadline short, but more should have been used ZAGREB, 17 Jan (Hina) - President Zoran Milanovic said on Monday the amount from the EU Solidarity Fund for post-quake reconstruction was very high and the deadline for using it short, but that more should have been drawn and that someone should answer for that. "We will use a smaller amount of that money. It's not realistic to expect that we will use all of it. The deadline is too short, but more could have been drawn in that time. In the end, we will embarrass ourselves. We'll draw very little because there is no more time and someone should answer for that... because that's a serious withholding, that's not helping those afflicted, that's punishable," Milanovic told the press. He also said he was still waiting for a report on an inspection aimed at establishing if the orders issued by the military chief-of-staff, Admiral Robert Hranj, had been legal, adding that Defence Minister Mario Banozic had started "a street campaign" against Hranj. "I'm waiting for Banozic and (Prime Minister) Plenkovic to publish that report," Milanovic said, adding that "Hranj doesn't answer to them" and that a commander must follow the orders of the commander-in-chief. The president said he would give "the gentlemen two more days". "They started a public campaign over something that should have been the job of an... independent body... Why is it taking three months? Maybe because those people wouldn't write what Banozic wanted them to." He also said he was still waiting for the prime minister to send over the contracts on the purchase of the Rafale fighter jets. PM: Sassoli was great politician, great man ZAGREB, 17 Jan (Hina) - David Sassoli was a great politician, a great man, Italian, European, a friend of Croatia, Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic said on Monday ahead of paying tribute to the late president of the European Parliament. David Sassoli was a great politician, a great man, Italian, European, a friend of Croatian, a man I worked with at the EP a few years ago, the EP president during Croatia's first presidency of the Council of the EU and of course a colleague I often saw at the beginning of every European Council, Plenkovic told the press in Strasbourg. David Maria Sassoli, born in Florence on 30 May 1956, was a journalist for many years before being elected to the EP in 2009, and a decade later he became president of that institution. He passed away on 11 January in a hospital in Aviano in northern Italy, where he had been hospitalised since 26 December "because of a severe complication due to a dysfunction of the immune system". Plenkovic added that Sassoli was a man who had known us well, supported Croatia's path both to the Schengen Area and the euro area. Since he was a man who truly gave his all and built bridges in this house of European democracy, and that is the EP, I am also personally sorry that he left us too soon, the Croatian prime minister said. Before paying his respects to the late EP president, Plenkovic met with acting EP President Roberta Metsola, who could succeed Sassoli. We believe that the EP would adopt a positive opinion on Croatia's accession to the euro area under her presidency in the first half of 2022, the prime minister wrote on Twitter. In other news: Carnival festivities start in Rijeka with handover of city key ZAGREB, 17 Jan (Hina) - The 39th edition of the Rijeka carnival started on Monday on the feast day of St Anthony the Abbot with the traditional ceremony of handing over the key to the city to carnival revellers, who even during the pandemic temporarily took over this seaport. At the formal ceremony, which due to the pandemic and epidemiological ***measures*** this year took place in the city administration building, present were Mayor Marko Filipovic, director of the Rijeka Tourist Board, Petar Skarpa, the Carnival' longtime master Toni, his successor Sandi Pribanic and the Carnival Queen Dora Pilepic. Director of the Rijeka Tourist Board, Petar Skarpa, recalled that the international and children's carnival parades were shifted to take place in Rijeka this summer because holding those central events of the Rijeka Carnival would now pose a health risk. News about those carnival parades will be released as soon as their new dates are set, depending on the epidemiological situation. Mayor Filipovic thanked the master of the Carnival Toni for his invaluable contribution to the Rijeka Carnival, and he wished the new master luck. Master Toni said that it was time for him to retire and that it was time for the Carnival revellers to choose his successor and their representative. Therefore, according to his decision, "the acting master of the Carnival" will be Sandi Pribanic of the Draske Maskare carnival group. Also, master Toni decided that Dora Pilepic, who was selected last year, would again carry the title of the Rijeka Carnival Queen. According to the city administration, carnival events will be held with a minimum number of participants and with adherence to COVID-19 protocols. Fina: 504 foreclosed properties sold at e-auctions in Q4 2021 ZAGREB, 17 Jan (Hina) - Croatia's Financial Agency (Fina) sold 504 foreclosed immovable and movable properties at e-auctions in the last quarter of 2021 and 7,219 since 2015, the agency said. On 1 January 2015, Fina began e-auctions of immovable and movable properties foreclosed in debt enforcement, insurance and bankruptcy proceedings in line with the Debt Enforcement Act. According to Fina's statistics, 1,222 public electronic auctions were held in the fourth quarter of last year, with 1,195 immovable and movable assets on sale. The majority of the immovable and movable properties (cars, trucks, machines, etc.) did not attract interest from potential buyers while 504 were sold. In the last three months of 2021, 333 immovable and movable properties were sold in debt enforcement proceedings, 170 in bankruptcy proceedings and one in insurance proceedings. In the reported period, 1,049 lots were entered in the register of immovable and movable properties for sale as part of debt enforcement proceedings. Between the beginning of 2015 and the end of 2021, 20,186 immovable and movable assets were entered in the register. A total of 24,801 e-auctions took place with 13,278 lots on sale, of which 7,219 were sold. ZSE indices continue winning streak ZAGREB, 17 Jan (Hina) - The main Zagreb Stock Exchange (ZSE) indices continued to rise on Monday, with the Crobex growing for the 17th consecutive day, and as many as five stock crossed the million kuna mark in turnover. The Crobex increased by 0.75% to 2,187 points, reaching its highest level since March 2017, and the Crobex10 rose for the 6th consecutive day, by 0.89% to 1,331 points, reaching its highest level since 2009, when it was introduced. Regular turnover was HRK 14.3 million, or HRK 3.6 million more than on Friday. The highest turnover, of HRK 3.95 million, was generated by the stock of the HT telecommunications company. Its price went up by 0.27% to HRK 185.5 per share. The Podravka food company stock turned over HRK 3.64 million, closing at HRK 706, up 2.32%. The stock of the Turisthotel company generated a turnover of HRK 1.65 million. Its price remained unchanged at HRK 3,800 per share. The preferred share of the Adris insurance and tourism group turned over HRK 1.17 million, closing at HRK 434, up 1.64%. The Zagrebacka Banka stock also crossed the million kuna mark in turnover. Its price increased by 1.49% to HRK 68 per share. A total of 44 stocks traded today, with 19 of them recording price increases, 11 registering price decreases and 14 remaining stable in price. ((EURO)1 = HRK 7.521603) THIS BULLETIN INCLUDES NEWS ITEMS RELEASED BY 2100 HRS MONDAY. 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[***Live updates: Putin approves 'volunteer fighters' to Ukraine***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:64YY-BCY1-JDJN-62V1-00000-00&context=1516831)

The Malta Independent

March 11, 2022

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**Length:** 6256 words

**Body**

NEW YORK — Russian President Vladimir Putin has ordered that so-called volunteer fighters should be brought into Ukraine.

Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu said Russia knew of "more than 16,000 applications" from countries in the Middle East, many of them from people who he said helped Russia against the Islamic State group, according to a Kremlin transcript.

They want "to take part in what they consider a liberation movement," Shoigu said, on the side of Russia-backed separatist regions in eastern Ukraine.

Since 2015, Russian forces have backed Syrian President Bashar al-Assad against various groups opposed to his rule, including Islamic State.

Putin told Shoigu that Russia should help would-be volunteers to "move to the combat zone" and contrasted them with what he called foreign "mercenaries" fighting for Ukraine.

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ISTANBUL – Pegasus Airlines, a Turkey-based budget carrier, has suspended flights to and from Russia following sanctions on Moscow over its ***invasion*** of Ukraine, the airline announced late Thursday.

The company's operations "related to insurance/reinsurance, leasing, operations and maintenance services on flights" would be halted from Sunday to March 27, it said.

The airline said the suspension was linked to "operational risks" due to European Union sanctions. The EU, Britain, Canada and the U.S. have suspended flights to Russia and closed their airspace to Russian aircraft as part of sanctions.

Pegasus flies to six destinations in Russia, which still has air links to countries such as Turkey, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates. Turkish Airlines maintains its flights to 36 cities in Russia.

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LONDON — British defense officials say Russia is rearranging its forces on the ground in Ukraine in an attempt to push forward its struggling ***invasion*** plan.

The Ministry of Defence says that "Russia is likely seeking to reset and re-posture its forces for renewed offensive activity in the coming days. This will probably include operations against the capital Kyiv."

In an update on social media Friday, the ministry said Russian ground forces continued to make "limited progress," hampered by logistical problems and strong Ukrainian resistance.

It said it "remains highly unlikely that Russia has successfully achieved the objectives outlined in its pre-***invasion*** plan."

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LVIV, Ukraine — Two Ukrainian servicemen were killed and six people wounded in Russian airstrikes Friday on the Lutsk military airfield, according to the head of the surrounding Volyn region, Yuriy Pohulyayko.

The mayor of Ivano-Frankiivsk, Ruslan Martsinkiv, had ordered residents in the neighboring areas to head to shelters after an air raid alert. The mayor of Lutsk had also announced an airstrike near the airport.

The strikes were far to the west from the main Russian offensive and could indicate new direction of the war.

The western cities hit Friday are between 130 and 150 kilometers (80-90 miles) from Lviv, the city that has become a refuge for Ukrainians from across the rest of the country and a hub for global humanitarian aid and other support for Ukraine.

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LVIV, Ukraine — Local authorities say Russian strikes hit near airports in the western Ukrainian cities of Ivano-Frankiivsk and Lutsk, far from Russia's main attack targets elsewhere in Ukraine.

The mayor of Ivano-Frankiivsk Ruslan Martsinkiv ordered residents in the neighboring areas to head to shelters after an air raid alert. The mayor of Lutsk also announced an airstrike near the airport. No casualties were immediately reported.

The strikes were far to the west from the main Russian offensive and could indicate new direction of the war.

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LVIV, Ukraine — Russian forces are continuing their offensive toward Kyiv on Friday from the northwest and east, notably trying to break through Ukrainian defenses from Kukhari, 90 kilometers (56 miles) to the northwest through to Demidov, 40 kilometers (25 miles) north of Kyiv, the general staff of Ukraine's armed forces said in a statement.

The general staff said Russian troops had been halted in efforts to take the northern city of Chernihiv, notably by Ukraine's re-taking of the town of Baklanova Muraviika, which Russian troops could use to move toward Kyiv.

Russian forces are blockading Kharkiv and pushing their offensive in the south around Mykolaiv, Zaporizhzhia and Kryvyi Rih, Volodymyr Zelenskyy's hometown.

Rough weather on the Azov and Black Seas has stalled Russian ships' efforts to come ashore, the general staff said.

Three Russian airstrikes hit the important industrial city of Dnipro in eastern Ukraine on Friday, killing at least one person in strikes that hit near a kindergarten and apartment buildings, according to Interior Ministry adviser Anton Herashchenko.

One strike hit a shoe factory, sparking a fire, he said. He released video showing flashes over residential areas of the city, home to nearly 1 million people.

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WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden will announce Friday that, along with the European Union and the Group of Seven countries, the U.S. will move to revoke "most favored nation" trade status for Russia over its ***invasion*** of Ukraine.

That's according to a source familiar with the matter who spoke on the condition of anonymity to preview the announcement.

Biden's move comes as bipartisan pressure has been building in Washington to revoke what is formally known as "permanent normal trade relations" with Russia.

The move would allow the U.S. and allies to impose tariffs on Russian imports.

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WASHINGTON — The U.S. Senate has given final congressional approval to a $13.6 billion emergency package of military and humanitarian aid for besieged Ukraine and its European allies.

The ***measure*** passed with a 68-31 bipartisan margin.

The House easily passed the compromise bill on Wednesday. President Joe Biden is expected to sign it.

Around half the $13.6 billion ***measure*** was for arming and equipping Ukraine and the Pentagon's costs for sending U.S. troops to other Eastern European nations skittish about the warfare next door. Much of the rest included humanitarian and economic assistance, strengthening regional allies' defenses and protecting their energy supplies and cybersecurity needs.

Democrats and Republicans have battled this election year over rising inflation, energy policy and lingering pandemic restrictions. But they've rallied behind sending aid to Ukraine, whose stubborn resilience against Russia has been inspirational for many voters.

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BEIJING — China's Premier Li Keqiang on Friday called the situation in Ukraine "grave" and offered Beijing's help in playing a "positive role" for peace while continuing to refuse to criticize Russia.

China has largely sided with Russia, refusing to refer to its actions in Ukraine as a war or ***invasion***. Chinese officials and state media have parroted Russian claims while Beijing calls itself neutral and defending national sovereignty above all else.

"We support and encourage all efforts that are conducive to a peaceful settlement of the crisis," Li told reporters at an annual news conference.

"The pressing task now is to prevent tension from escalating or even getting out of control," Li said. "China calls for exercising utmost restraint and preventing a massive humanitarian crisis."

Li spoke following the close of the annual session of China's rubber-stamp legislature.

Russia's war in Ukraine was not openly discussed at the meeting, although it echoes in Beijing's approach to Taiwan — the self-governing island democracy China claims as its own territory, to be annexed by force if necessary.

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TOKYO — Japan said it will spend $100 million in previously announced humanitarian aid for Ukraine on shelter, medical care and clean water.

The money will go to Ukraine and neighboring countries Poland, Hungary, Moldova, Slovakia, and Romania through six international and Japanese groups, such as UNICEF, the World Food Program and refugee assistance programs, the Foreign Ministry said Friday.

Japan has joined the U.S. and European nations in slapping sanctions on Russia after its ***invasion*** of Ukraine. In the business sector, major companies, including Sony, Uniqlo and Nissan, have decided to suspend operations in or shipments to Russia.

Friday's aid carries out a pledge made by Prime Minister Fumio Kishida last month to stand with the people of Ukraine, the ministry said.

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WASHINGTON — The White House is warning Russia against taking steps to seize the assets of U.S. and international companies that have announced plans to suspend operations in Russia or to withdraw from the Russian market in response to Vladimir Putin's decision to invade Ukraine.

Jen Psaki, the press secretary, was responding to reports in Russian and other news media about a proposal to nationalize the property of major foreign companies that are leaving Russia.

Psaki says Thursday on Twitter that such a step would be a throwback to 1917 and that Russia will have to live for decades with investor distrust. She says Russia also could face legal claims from companies whose property is seized.

Psaki says the White House stands with American companies that are making what she called "tough decisions" about the future of their Russian operations.

The Russian newspaper Izvestia reported Thursday that the government and the general prosecutor's office were considering a proposal to nationalize foreign companies that have announced they are pulling out of Russia because of the war in Ukraine. The newspaper said it had a list of nearly 60 companies, including IKEA, McDonald's, Apple, Microsoft, IBM and Porsche, among others.

The article said some were urging caution. One expert quoted warned against hasty actions, saying some of the businesses were acting under pressure from their governments and that it would be wrong to conclude that they have closed their doors on the Russian market forever.

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LVIV, Ukraine — Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said 100,000 people have been evacuated during the past two days from seven cities under Russian blockade in the north and center of the country, including the Kyiv suburbs.

But he said the Russian refusal to allow evacuations from Mariupol, a port city in the south, was "outright terror."

"They have a clear order to hold Mariupol hostage, to mock it, to constantly bomb and shell it," Zelenskyy said in his nightly video address to the nation. He said the Russians began a tank attack right where there was supposed to be a humanitarian corridor.

The city of 430,000 has been without food supplies, running water and electricity for 10 days. Ukrainian officials say about 1,300 people have died, including three in the bombing of a maternity and children's hospital on Wednesday.

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KYIV — Satellite photos show that a massive Russian convoy that had been mired outside the Ukrainian capital since last week appeared to have dispersed.

Satellite imagery from Maxar Technologies showed the 40-mile (64-kilometer) line of vehicles, tanks and artillery has broken up and been redeployed, with armored units seen in towns near the Antonov Airport north of the city. Some of the vehicles have moved into forests, Maxar reported.

The convoy had massed outside the city early last week, but its advance appeared to have stalled amid reports of food and fuel shortages. U.S. officials said Ukrainian troops also targeted the convoy with anti-tank missiles.

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LVIV, Ukraine — Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy denied Russia's accusation that Ukraine is preparing to attack with chemical or biological weapons, and he said the accusation itself was a bad sign.

"That worries me very much because we have often been convinced that if you want to know Russia's plans, they are what Russia accuses others of," he said in his nightly address to the nation.

Russia said it uncovered plans to create secret laboratories in Ukraine to produce biological weapons.

"I am a reasonable person. The president of a reasonable country and reasonable people. I am the father of two children," he said. "And no chemical or any other weapon of mass destruction has been developed on my land. The whole world knows this."

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UNITED NATIONS — The U.N. Security Council will meet on Friday to discuss what Russia claims are "the military biological activities of the U.S. on the territory of Ukraine."

Council diplomats confirmed the meeting scheduled for 10 a.m. EST, speaking on condition of anonymity ahead of an official announcement.

Russia requested the meeting in a tweet Thursday afternoon from its first deputy U.N. ambassador, Dmitry Polyansky.

The request came after the Biden administration rejected the accusation, made without evidence by Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova, that Ukraine was running chemical and biological labs with U.S. support.

White House press secretary Jen Psaki Psaki called Russia's claim "preposterous." On Wednesday, warned that Russia might seek to use chemical or biological weapons against Ukraine, the neighbor it has invaded.

"This is all an obvious ploy by Russia to try to justify its further premeditated, unprovoked, and unjustified attack on Ukraine," Psaki tweeted.

But Dmitry Chumakov, another Russian deputy U.N. ambassador, repeated the accusation Wednesday, urging Western media to cover "the news about secret biological laboratories in Ukraine."

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UNITED NATIONS — Russia has called for a U.N. Security Council meeting to discuss what it claims are "the military biological activities of the U.S. on the territory of Ukraine."

The Russian request, announced in a tweet Thursday afternoon from its deputy U.N. ambassador, Dmitry Polyansky, follows the Biden administration's rejection of Russian accusations that Ukraine is running chemical and biological labs with U.S. support.

In response to this week's accusations by Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova — without evidence — White House press secretary Jen Psaki issued a public warning Wednesday that Russia might seek to use chemical or biological weapons against Ukraine, the neighbor it has invaded.

Polyansky said Russia has asked for the Security Council to meet on Friday. It was not immediately clear when or whether a council meeting would take place.

Psaki called Russia's claim "preposterous" and tweeted: "This is all an obvious ploy by Russia to try to justify its further premeditated, unprovoked, and unjustified attack on Ukraine."

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BETHESDA, Md. — Marriott will close its corporate offices in Moscow in response to Russia's ***invasion*** of Ukraine, the company announced Thursday.

The company said it is also pausing new hotel openings and all future hotel development and investment in Russia. Marriott's 28 hotels in Russia, which are owned and operated by franchisees, remain open, the company said.

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LVIV, Ukraine — Russian forces shelled a nuclear research institute in Kharkiv, Ukraine's second-largest city on Thursday, setting buildings on fire, said Anton Gerashchenko, an adviser to Ukraine's Interior Ministry.

A shell hit a building where there is equipment that could release radiation if it were damaged, Gerashchenko said. According to the president's office, there has been no change in the background radiation.

The shelling caused a fire, but firefighters were able to put it out.

Russian forces have already taken over two nuclear power plants in Ukraine, raising concerns about the security of the nuclear facilities.

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LVIV, Ukraine — The Ukrainian military said it has successfully held back Russian troops, preventing them from making any new gains.

The Ukrainian military's General Staff said that Russian forces were trying to encircle Kyiv moving from the north and west, but their advance has slowed down or even stopped.

It said that Ukrainian forces on Thursday drove Russians out of the village of Baklanova Muraviika near Chernihiv, which sits on a road leading to Kyiv.

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WASHINGTON — The costs of economic recovery and reconstruction for war-torn Ukraine are "already massive" and will require swift aid as Russia's ***invasion*** of Ukraine continues, the head of the International Monetary Fund said Thursday.

IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva spoke a day after the 190-country organization approved $1.4 billion in emergency lending for Ukraine to meet urgent needs and help blunt the economic impact of the ***invasion***.

The emergency IMF aid comes atop $700 million disbursed to Ukraine in December and $2.7 billion in emergency reserves Ukraine received in August as part of its normal IMF allocation. The organization provides loans and other financial support to countries in crisis to help restore economic and financial stability.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's top economic adviser on Thursday put the cost of recovery and reconstruction at $100 billion at least. Georgieva said it's too early to accurately assess costs, but acknowledged they could be close to that.

For Russia, Georgieva said the ***unprecedented*** economic and financial sanctions leveled by the U.S. and European allies have brought severe economic disruption, staggering inflation and damage to the Russian people's standard of living. A deep recession is certain, she said.

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UNITED NATIONS — In addition to the more than 2.3 million people who have fled the war in Ukraine, an estimated 1.9 million people are displaced within the country, according to U.N. officials.

U.N. spokesman Stephane Dujarric said Thursday that most of the internally displaced people are moving away from the front lines and heading west toward Lviv. The humanitarian situation "continues to deteriorate at an alarming pace," he said.

"Humanitarian organizations are deploying additional staff across the country and are working to move supplies to warehouses in different hubs within Ukraine and outside," Dujarric said. "So far, we — along with our partners — have reached more than 500,000 people with some form of humanitarian assistance in Ukraine, including life-saving food, shelter, blankets, and medical supplies."

By Wednesday, he said, the U.N. refugee agency UNHCR had delivered 85 metric tonnes of humanitarian assistance to reception and transit centers in Vinnytsia in central Ukraine, which is hosting people who have fled hostilities further east.

The U.N. World Food Program plans to assist up to 3.1 million people, giving priority to pre-positioning bulk food, bread, and other rations in cities and areas where fighting is expected to flare, Dujarric said.

The U.N. Food and ***Agriculture*** Organization is warning that between February and May, farmers need to start preparing land for planting wheat, barley, maize and sunflowers and they need to prepare land for sowing vegetables in the middle of March, he said. FAO is also stressing that all efforts should be made to protect harvests and livestock, he said.

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NEW YORK — The Walt Disney Co. said Thursday that in addition to pausing film releases in Russia, as previously announced, it is also "taking steps to pause all other businesses" there. That includes its cruise ships, National Geographic magazine issues and tours, local productions, product licensing and its TV networks.

Some activities can be paused immediately; others, like the TV networks and some licensing arrangements, "take time given contractual complexities," the company said in a statement.

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UNITED NATIONS — The United Nations has received official notification from Ukraine that it intends to withdraw all 308 military and police personnel serving in six U.N. peacekeeping missions, along with eight Russian-built Mi-8 helicopters currently in Congo.

U.N. spokesman Stephane Dujarric made the announcement Thursday, saying this includes about 250 troops from Congo whose withdrawal was announced Wednesday as well as 36 staff officers and experts, and 22 police officers.

In addition to Congo, the Ukrainians are serving in five other peacekeeping operations in Mali, Cyprus, Abyei and South Sudan and Kosovo.

The Ukrainian request appears to be aimed at beefing up its military and helicopters in the war against Russia.

Dujarric again stressed that every country has a right to withdraw military forces contributed to peacekeeping operations and thanked Ukrainian personnel "for their longstanding contribution to peace operations."

He said the U.N. is in the ***process*** of taking action on the Ukrainian request and will be contacting other countries to replace the troops, police and equipment.

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NEW YORK — JPMorgan Chase said Thursday that it is "unwinding" its Russian banking business and plans not to take any additional work, making it the latest bank to pull out of Russia.

Like Goldman Sachs, JPMorgan said it has a "limited" presence in Russia, a spokeswoman said, and will only be using the coming weeks to close out pre-existing business relationships. The bank will also donate $5 million to humanitarian relief efforts.

Banks have been the latest industry to come under pressure to cut ties from Russia entirely due to the war. Goldman Sachs announced Thursday it would close its Russian offices and Citigroup has said it would try to sell its retail banking business and close its investment banking operations.

Unlike companies who make goods that ship to Russia, banks have loans, deposits and existing customer relationships that take time to wind down or sell off.

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BERLIN \_\_ While the situation regarding Ukraine's nuclear facilities is "complex and difficult," the head of the U.N. nuclear agency said Thursday that he is in contact with all sides to ascertain how to help ensure the safety of the country's nuclear facilities.

Rafael Grossi, the director-general of the International Atomic Energy Agency, told reporters Thursday evening in Vienna that the nuclear watchdog has "scheduled physical inspections" of nuclear facilities in Ukraine. He would not give any details on when or how those inspections would take place citing the sensitivity of the situation.

Grossi added that the IAEA also has "a number of remote monitoring devices" in operation.

When it comes to nuclear facilities based in conflict zones, the director-general said "we are trying to make sure that we will not have again added suffering because of any radioactive release or anything having to do with nuclear facilities."

Grossi said he does not expect any side to intentionally target nuclear reactors, but there was the risk of unintentional shelling. He also stressed that at facilities taken by the Russian military, but operated by Ukrainian staff, it was paramount that employees get enough rest to be focused while working.

Grossi told reporters that there was not immediate danger of power cuts at the decommissioned Chernobyl plant, which Russian forces seized last week, and that even in the case of power cuts there would be "ample time" to restore it before anything dangerous could happen.

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BRASILIA, Brazil — A Brazilian Air Force plane from Warsaw landed in Brazil's capital on Thursday with 68 passengers who left Ukraine amid the country's conflict with Russia.

President Jair Bolsonaro welcomed 42 of his countrymen, 20 Ukrainians, five Argentines and one Colombian, according to the Brazilian Foreign Ministry. Eight dogs and two cats were also aboard.

The same plane took more than 11 tons of humanitarian aid to the European nation.

Bolsonaro has had an ambivalent position about the conflict, siding with the U.S. and the European Union at the United Nations without condemning Russian President Vladimir Putin for the ***invasion***.

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MILAN — The world's fourth-largest car manufacturer, Stellantis, announced Thursday that it was suspending all imports and exports of cars to Russia.

The company did not provide further details but noted that it has employees in Russia "and we consider we should not mix 'regime' and people." Stellantis operates a plant in Kaluga, Russia.

"Our CEO has made clear public statements against any more of violence,″ the statement said.

It added: "At Stellantis we condemn violence and aggression and, in this time of ***unprecedented*** pain, our priority is the health and safety of our Ukrainian employees and families."

The company said it has dedicated a task force to helping the 71 Ukrainian colleagues in Ukraine and their families, including an ***exceptional*** supplement and support in moving out of the country.

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The Russian Defense Ministry denied responsibility Thursday for striking a maternity hospital in the Ukrainian city of Mariupol and claimed that the explosions that hit the building were staged to smear Russia.

Ukrainian officials said that Wednesday's Russian air strike on the hospital killed three people, including a child, and wounded 17 others. The attack has caused global outrage.

Russia's Defense Ministry spokesman Maj. Gen. Igor Konashenkov denied that the Russian military struck the hospital. He claimed that the two explosions that ravaged the building were caused by explosive devices planted nearby in what he described as a "staged provocation to incite anti-Russian agitation in the West."

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KYIV, Ukraine — Constant shelling has thwarted attempts to evacuate civilians from the besieged Ukrainian city of Mariupol, a senior Ukrainian official said Thursday.

Deputy Prime Minister Iryna Vereshchuk said 1,300 civilians have been killed in Mariupol, a strategic port on the Azov Sea during the nine days of siege. The city has been left without power, food and water.

Vereshchuk said in televised remarks that the Russian forces start shelling the city each time a humanitarian convoy makes an attempt to depart for Mariupol to evacuate its residents.

"They want to destroy the people of Mariupol, they want to make them starve," she said. "It's a war crime."

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LONDON — British Prime Minister Boris Johnson joined other Western officials Thursday in warning that Russia could use chemical weapons in Ukraine, and accused the Kremlin of a "cynical, barbaric" attempt to justify such a move.

Johnson said the Kremlin is preparing a "fake story" that chemical weapons are being stored by their opponents or by the Americans as a pretext for deploying the weapons themselves.

"The stuff which you are hearing about chemical weapons is straight out of their playbook," he told Sky News on Thursday. "You have seen it in Syria, you saw it even in the U.K. I just note that that is what they are already doing. It is a cynical, barbaric government I'm afraid."

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GENEVA — Shops and pharmacies scoured out of desperation. Hospitals functioning only partially. People fighting for food or swiping fuel from idle cars. A black market breaking out for vegetables, and no meat available at all.

A top official with the International Committee for the Red Cross in the besieged Ukrainian city of Mariupol has described the harrowing conditions faced by civilians trapped inside.

"All the shops and pharmacies were looted four to five days ago. Some people still have food, but (I) am not sure how long it will last," said Sacha Volkov, the ICRC's deputy head of sub-delegation in Mariupol, in an audio file provided Thursday by the ICRC. The comments were recorded Wednesday by satellite phone from a city with which communications with the outside world have been patchy at best.

People are getting sick because of the cold and humidity, Volkov said. Many people have no drinking water. Basements — offering greater safety — are reserved for mothers with small children.

"People started to attack each other for food," he said. "People started to ruin someone's car to take the gasoline out."

The Geneva-based ICRC has been trying to arrange evacuations for days for an estimated 200,000 people in Mariupol after Russian forces have all but surrounded the Ukrainian port city.

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PARIS — French President Emmanuel Macron condemned "a shameful and amoral act of war" after a Russian airstrike on a Mariupol maternity hospital.

Macron said Thursday he was deeply upset by images showing "lethal weapons have been used in an indiscriminate manner in the city center." He spoke ahead of a summit of EU heads of state and government at the Versailles Palace, west of Paris.

Macron said "nothing justifies" what happened in Mariupol.

"I am very worried and pessimistic," about the war in Ukraine, Macron said. "I don't see a ceasefire (being) realistic in the coming hours."

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ISTANBUL — Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan stressed the importance of Turkey's role in ending the war in Ukraine in a phone call with U.S. President Joe Biden on Thursday, state-run Anadolu Agency said.

In a 45-minute call, Erdogan said it was important for Turkey to be a "facilitator in the search for a solution in case the crisis deepens," Anadolu reported. He described a meeting between Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and Ukraine's Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba held earlier near the Turkish city of Antalya as "a victory for diplomacy."

The meeting was chaired by the Turkish foreign minister after Turkey lobbied to act as a mediator between the warring countries. It failed to produce any concrete results.

Erdogan also asked Biden to lift "unfair" sanctions on Turkey, Anadolu said. Sanctions on leading defense industry figures were imposed after Ankara acquired a Russian-made air defense system in 2019. Turkey was also kicked off the F-35 fighter program.

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TEL AVIV, Israel — Israel's Holocaust memorial museum has suspended its "strategic partnership" with Russian-Israeli billionaire Roman Abramovich, the museum announced Thursday.

The decision came shortly after the British government sanctioned Abramovich over his close relationship with Russian President Vladimir Putin. Yad Vashem said its own decision came "in light of recent developments" but gave no further details.

It's a reversal from a Feb. 6 Yad Vashem letter to U.S. ambassador Tom Nides urging the U.S. not to sanction Abramovich because of "potentially negative consequences." Just days before Russia's ***invasion*** of Ukraine, the memorial announced a multi-million dollar donation that would have made Abramovich the museum's second-largest private donor. That donation is now on hold, a spokesman said.

Yad Vashem has condemned the ***invasion*** and Putin's comparison of Ukraine's government to Nazi Germany, calling it a "trivialization and distortion of the historical facts of the Holocaust."

Western governments have shunned Putin. Israel has stopped short of condemning it and Prime Minister Naftali Bennett has kept up talks with both the Russian leader and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

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WARSAW, Poland — Polish police arrested a man accused of raping a 19-year-old Ukrainian woman he had offered refuge, officials announced Thursday.

The crime comes amid Europe's worst humanitarian crisis in decades, with Russia's brutal ***invasion*** of Ukraine causing more than 2.3 million people to flee the country so far. Poland is the country that is taking the most, with Poles exhibiting a huge outpouring of compassion and help, and some even taking strangers into their own homes.

Police said the perpetrator offered to help the 19-year-old Ukrainian citizen "and turned out to be a ruthless criminal." If he is convicted, he could face up to 12 years in prison.

The incident comes as the International Organization for Migration warns that the refugees, who are largely women, children and the elderly, are particularly particularly vulnerable to gender-based violence, sexual exploitation and to trafficking.

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LONDON — The exiled opposition leader of Belarus urged western democracies Thursday to slap tougher sanctions on Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko over his backing of Russia's ***invasion*** of Ukraine.

"Lukashenko has full responsibility for this attack on Ukraine," Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya said at an event at London's Chatham House thinktank. "I believe that it's time for democracy to show its teeth, and it's crucial to put diplomatic, economic and political pressure on the Belarus regime."

Tsikhanouskaya has said that Belarus' military is effectively under Russian control. She called for Lukashenko to be suspended from all international organizations, Belarus state banks to be cut from the international SWIFT payment network and for imports from state enterprises to be banned.

Many countries have already announced sanctions on the Belarus government, but Tsikhanouskaya said this is not enough.

"Half ***measures*** don't work. They only make things worse," she said.

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DOHA, Qatar — Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani met Thursday with Bektum Rostam, special envoy of the Ukrainian president.

Qatar's ruler and Rostam discussed the developments in Ukraine and diplomatic ways to solve the conflict, as well as regional and international matters, The Emir's Diwan said in a statement.

The tiny nation of Qatar, which lies on the eastern side of the Arabian Peninsula and has only one land border to Saudi Arabia, is among the world's largest suppliers of liquefied natural gas, and is among countries that the U.S. is hoping could aid Europe. Despite its small size, it also plays a strategic role as a back channel, mediator and facilitator of negotiations among countries and groups.

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PARIS — Beyond any eventual EU decision to embargo Russia's oil and gas, former Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk said Thursday that Europe must end its dependence on Russian energy supplies.

"It is a matter of our security," Tusk said at a news conference attended by some EU leaders ahead of a summit in Versailles. He noted that some European leaders are hesitant about an embargo "for practical reasons," a reference to some countries' dependence on Russian energy. But, Tusk said, in the long-term, "this is a must for Europe."

Tusk heads the European People's Party, a center-right group in the European Parliament, which met in Paris ahead of the summit hosted by President Emmanuel Macron. Russia's war in Ukraine and the wider repercussions were to dominate summit talks.

Latvian Prime Minister Krisjanis Karins argued ahead of the summit for targeting Russia's energy sector, "the Kremlin's main source of income," as the best way to force Russian President Vladimir Putin to end his war in Ukraine.

The United States this week ordered a ban on Russian oil imports.

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NEW YORK — Goldman Sachs says it is closing its operations in Russia entirely, making it the first major Wall Street bank to do so since Russia invaded Ukraine.

Goldman's announcement comes after Citigroup said it would start winding down its Russia operations. But that ***process*** will likely take longer because Citi operates a consumer banking and business banking division in the country.

Like other Wall Street banks, Goldman operated a small investment banking business in the country for the past few years. The bank said in a statement Thursday it has roughly $650 million in exposure to Russian debt.

Banking is the latest industry to come under pressure to cut its Russian ties due to the war. But unlike companies who make goods that ship to Russia, banks have loans, deposits and existing customer relationships that take time to wind down or sell off.

**Load-Date:** March 11, 2022

**End of Document**



[***[ANALYSIS] Post-pandemic strategy: Change in direction or just some lipstick?***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:633D-CMG1-F11P-X3MP-00000-00&context=1516831)

Malta Today

July 8, 2021 Thursday

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**Length:** 1666 words

**Byline:** James Debono

**Body**

The disruption in daily life, accompanied by a decrease in traffic and a rediscovery of urban and natural landscapes ushered a period of reflection on where to go from here and which pandemic 'takeaways' we will be taking with us in the post-COVID age.

The strategy unveiled last week by Minister Owen Bonnici captures this spirit of national introspection referring to the need to foster the social solidarity brought about by the pandemic, recalling how "how volunteers stepped in to deliver food and other essentials to those who were vulnerable, how young neighbours taught the elderly to use digital communication tools, and how restaurants teamed up to prepare meals for essential workers and those in need".

The strategy lists a number of national challenges, most of which predating the pandemic and which are linked to an economic model which brought ***unprecedented*** economic growth but also exacerbated social and environmental problems.

And while the strategy is aimed at identifying national priorities for which policies still have to be devised by different actors, the vagueness of some of the recommendations raise the question whether this will really result in any change in direction, especially in view of pressures to press the accelerator in sectors like construction and tourism which contribute to many of the problems identified in the strategy.

Ensuring that the strategy is implemented across the board, will be the real leadership test for the Ministry entrusted with this role.

Yet another green wish-list?

Everyone would probably agree with the recommendation to "bolster" the Heritage Authority and Environment and Resource Authority's remit in planning decisions or the need to "enhance enforcement to curb illegal development and safeguard outside development zones. " The fact that the strategy restated the obvious when recommending that when granting permits, the PA should "make sure the interpretation of policies respects environmental principles and sustainable practices" , stands out as a reminder of the dismal state of Malta's planning regulator.

When it comes to transport the strategy speaks about "focusing on reducing private car use", mandating open public spaces, green recreational areas and pedestrian zones. It also calls for alternative car-free pathways which connect localities to make cycling and walking safe and enjoyable, while maximising "maritime transport options".

But does this not contrast with plans for the development of a tunnel linking Malta to Gozo especially when the strategy itself states that the use of fast ferry services around the Maltese islands "may in part alleviate the demand on the road network and contribute towards modal transport shifts in line with national transport objectives". It is difficult to reconcile this with embarking on one of the largest car focused infrastructural project in recent Maltese history.

Food security

The document spells out what environmentalists and farming organisation have been saying for some time: Malta is not only too dependent on food imports but that future population growth "will place additional pressure on an already strained system".

It also states that food security needs to be improved, and identifies the potential of investing in local produce as a possible source of economic diversification.

It also warns that recent rent-regulation reforms may further threaten the financial sustainability of farming, a sector already under threat by limited ***agricultural*** land, a lack of natural resources and a shrinking number of young farmers.

The document also outlines a number of specific ***measures*** aimed at supporting farmers to maintain tenure over privately owned land; introduce pest-resistant and climate-adapted breeds and varieties, digitalisation, and ***agricultural*** technologies; and access new markets, distribution channels and online sales platforms.

It also refers to the shift towards sustainable forms of farming with special emphasis on organic production, animal welfare, and food that is free from pesticides and antimicrobials.

But the question is how can these be reconciled with other overriding pressures like road building, which is gobbling more tracts of countryside and planning policies, which effectively encourage land speculation in the countryside by facilitating the development of ruins and the building a recreational rooms disguised as stores?

Dealing with population growth

The document suggests that government is rethinking its laissez-faire economic model with regards to population growth, which has seen an influx of migrant workers in the absence of a concerted integration strategy.

It describes the importation of labour as a "pragmatic approach to plug skills shortages" through fast-track visa schemes for third-country nationals, and the creation of special income-tax schemes for highly qualified professionals in certain industries. While effective, these schemes have also had certain "unwanted consequences", such as "downwards pressure on wages in certain professions" and "pressure on housing, education, health, waste and infrastructure".

But it remains unclear how these problems will be addressed with solutions being expected in the drafting a new Employment Policy that will be launched later in 2021.

To address skills shortages in the labour market the strategy hints at a " more cohesive planning to align the supply and demand for labour with economic policy" and an education system refocused towards creating a critical mass of skilled workers through "deep reforms" to address early school leaving.

While outlining the problems linked to the importation of foreign labour, the strategy also builds on "the community spirit that came to the fore during the pandemic" and commits government to foster social cohesion and equity across Maltese society by "strengthening integration programmes, given the critical role of migrant workers within our healthcare system and wider economy".

Yet there is little concrete in the strategy beyond strengthening integration programmes for foreign nationals. This consists in "pilot projects at a community level to sensitise communities to the needs and concerns of both Maltese society and migrants", based on a "two-way ***process*** that fosters dialogue and deepens understanding and empathy". But it shies away from a more concrete inclusion of third country nationals through a revision of citizenship laws.

Remote working and digital nomads

The shift to remote working during the pandemic is welcomed in the strategy as this "may help people to juggle family responsibilities as well as reducing the amount of time they have to spend on commuting and travel", while bringing about "reduced traffic and pollution". Virtual working is also seen as a way to attract remote workers and digital nomads to Malta's shores.

When it comes to fostering this change through policy changes the strategy hints at a reform of employment legislation to attract and support new forms of work, including remote and hybrid models.

Significantly it commits government to ensure that freelance and agency workers are "appropriately protected under labour legislation," in a sector where presently a number of workers are deprived of leave and sick leave excuse of being hired as self employed. with the

But in order to enhance Malta's appeal to digital nomads the policy departs from the commitment towards inclusive education by referring to the need for an "attractive home-schooling framework" and "marketing Malta for such purposes" once these are in place.

Good governance

Even when it comes to governance the post-3333COVID strategy seems to hinge on good intentions shattered by recent episodes like the panama papers and the lack of a firewall separating big business from the political class.

Once again the strategy is stating the obvious by saying that "more can be done to ensure that all businesses and citizens abide by tax regulations, respect and follow the laws of the country, and pursue what is right and in the public interest". This is considered as fundamental in various aspects of our life – ranging from "fiscal compliance, the way we interact with each other, civic responsibility, protecting the vulnerable in our society, and the type of business ventures that are pursued."

Valuing the Maltese language

The strategy also comes with a welcome recognition of the Maltese language in a post-COVID digital strategy in a country where 88% of citizens speak Maltese as their first language. Further investment is needed in digital Maltese-language tools and resources to enable computers to ***process*** and generate Maltese text and speech. Moreover, speech-driven devices can be particularly helpful "in enabling the elderly to use digital technology, allowing users to perform tasks simply by talking".

Future-proofing Malta

One of the most concrete proposals included in the strategy is the setting-up and financing of a disaster recovery fund which can be tapped when ***exceptional*** and critical events like pandemics occur. The next step will be to quantify the amount of financing needed and determine the most effective financing mechanisms, including a "potential mix of mandatory and voluntary sources of funding". This also has to be accompanied by "transparent principles" governing how the fund can be accessed, the prioritization of beneficiaries, and the thresholds and triggers to release funding.

Evidence-based policies

In line with the greater reliance on scientific risk assessments during the pandemic, the strategy does recommend a new approach to the way policy decisions are taken across the board recommending that social impact assessments (SIAs) are to be conducted more widely "across policy making, legislation, investment and development projects" to ensure that "the intended and unintended social consequences, both positive and negative, of planned intervention" are monitored and managed. Clear national guidelines on how and when SIAs should be carried out are recommended.

**Load-Date:** July 8, 2021

**End of Document**



[***Targeted Investments to Promote Gender Equality Key for Ensuring Climate Resilience Plans Result in Female Empowerment, Protection, Speakers Tell Women’s Commission***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6514-SRG1-JDG9-Y1KP-00000-00&context=1516831)

Impact News Service

March 16, 2022 Wednesday

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**Length:** 12137 words

**Body**

New York: The United Nation has issued the following press release:

Targeted investments to promote gender equality — from global to local levels — must ensure that promises made are kept as the world forges an inclusive, sustainable path to tackle climate change consequences, delegates told the Commission on the Status of Women on the second day of its annual session.

The session, which runs from 14 to 25 March, is focused on the theme “Achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls in the context of climate change, environmental and disaster risk reduction policies and programmes”.

Some speakers highlighted challenges and innovative achievements during two ministerial round tables held in the morning. Many agreed that, like the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change consequences are disproportionately affecting women and girls. Round‑table discussions continued from the session ’ s opening day on 14 March on the same themes: climate change, environmental and disaster risk reduction policies and programmes — advancing gender equality through holistic and integrated actions from global to local; and on women ’ s voice and agency — good practices towards achieving women ’ s full, equal and meaningful participation and decision-making in the context of climate change, environmental and disaster risk reduction policies and programmes. (For details, see Press Release WOM/2213.)

During the general discussion in the afternoon, Rosy Akbar, Fiji ’ s Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation, speaking on behalf of the Pacific Islands Forum, said climate finance often fails to take account of gender equality and women ’ s empowerment. To remedy this, she called on the international community to increase gender-responsive climate, environmental and disaster‑risk finance. She also called for efforts to promote women ’ s full participation and leadership in climate, environment, ocean, biodiversity and disaster-risk-reduction action, and to strengthen their capacities through accessible training and gender-responsive policies and programmes.

In the same vein, Vindhya Persaud, Guyana ’ s Minister for Human Services and Social Security of the Co-operative Republic, speaking on behalf of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), reiterated disappointment that the developed countries ’ pledge to provide $100 billion by 2020 for developing nations to address climate change was not met. Stressing that climate change poses an existential threat to small island developing States, she said its impact represents a “code red for humanity”. Moving forward, a gender perspective must be part of building climate resilience and designing and implementing disaster-risk-reduction strategies and recovery plans. In addition, climate finance for both adaptation and mitigation activities must include ***measures*** that support women-owned enterprises in the green and blue economies, she said, also calling for investment in gathering gender‑specific statistics and data on the relationship between gender and climate.

On behalf of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), Patricia Kaliati, Malawi ’ s Minister for Gender, Community Development and Social Welfare, agreed that the current situation calls for action, as women make up the poorest and most vulnerable groups in her region. Reasons stem from their general subordinate legal status and limited access to such critical resources as land, technology, credit, education and housing, she said, pointing to several ongoing efforts to help to address these challenges. For its part, SADC integrated gender and climate change into its Protocol on Gender and Development in 2016. This means State parties should, by 2030, develop policies, strategies, and programmes to address the gender issues in climate change, conduct research to assess the differential gendered impacts of climate change and adopt effective mitigation and adaptation ***measures***.

Youth representative Antonette Ncube, from the European Union delegation, in its capacity as an observer, spoke on behalf of the Group of Friends for the Elimination of Violence Against Women and Girls when she presented several recommendations. Underscoring a need to improve data and strengthen capacity‑building, she encouraged stakeholders to pursue the ethical collection and dissemination of high-quality, timely, reliable and disaggregated data and gender statistics on all dimensions of environmental, disaster risk reduction and climate change issues, and sexual and gender-based violence. She also recommended that stakeholders ensure the gender-responsive implementation of international commitments made in such instruments as the Paris Agreement and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction. Calling for concerted efforts to address gender-based violence and the disproportionate impact of climate crises and disasters on women and girls, she expected the Commission to adopt strong and action-oriented conclusions.

Some speakers shone a spotlight on the importance of remembering the most vulnerable groups of women when aiming at inclusive responses. The representative of Chile, speaking on behalf of the Group of Friends of Older Persons, said those often overlooked must urgently be considered. Older persons — and even more so older women — remain largely invisible and disregarded in the development of policies and programmes. To change this, he urged United Nations agencies, and particularly the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), to systematically collect and disaggregate data by age and gender, particularly of women beyond their reproductive years.

Marta Lucía Ramírez, Vice‑President of Colombia, declared that, when women arrive in positions of power, they must remember to open more spaces for others “just as those who came before did for us”. Half the world ’ s population has historically been excluded from power, but gender equality is essential for generating sustainable economic growth, she said, highlighting Colombia ’ s five‑point national policy to support women ’ s inclusion — from the business sector to peace and security. Colombia also launched the world ’ s first sovereign gender bond to help women-owned businesses recover from the widespread economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Drawing attention to the situation of women in conflict‑affected zones in Afghanistan to Ukraine, she said the international community must always call for the dignity and rights of women and must remember that these and other conflicts are a result of wars “always declared by men”.

Also delivering statements during the general discussion were Iran, Iceland, Uzbekistan, Serbia, Netherlands, Turkey, Egypt, Morocco, Republic of Korea, Austria, Sweden, Liechtenstein, Finland, New Zealand, France, Kazakhstan, Germany, Jordan, Ireland, Oman, Portugal, Israel, Trinidad and Tobago, and Luxembourg.

The representative of the Russian Federation spoke in exercise of the right of reply.

The Commission on the Status of Women will reconvene at 10 a.m on Wednesday, 16 March, to continue its work.

Ministerial Round Table III

In the morning, the Commission held a ministerial round‑table discussion on the theme “Climate change, environmental and disaster risk reduction policies and programmes: advancing gender equality through holistic and integrated actions from global to local”.

Ministers and senior officials of Member States exchanged views on how Governments are working towards advancing gender perspectives into national policies and programmes. Discussing concerns about such pressing challenges as drought and gender inclusion in related mitigation efforts, delegates presented a broad range of national examples, from cash grants to training for women in the information and communications technology (ICT) sector. They also highlighted gender-responsive policies and needs for improvement in such areas as financing.

HYE RYOUNG SONG (Republic of Korea), Vice-Chair‑designate (Asia and Pacific States Group), opened the round table, sharing some of her country ’ s actions. Among them are targeted initiatives that led various ministries to draft recommendations related to the gender aspects of climate change. Emphasizing the importance for partners to respond to the climate crisis in a sustainable, inclusive manner, she encouraged delegates to have a fruitful round table.

VINDHYA PERSAUD, Minister for Human Services and Social Security of Guyana, cited several national achievements, including the Low Carbon Development Strategy. Launched in 2009, the Strategy seeks to transform the economy while combating climate change and promoting the inclusion of women and vulnerable groups in key economic sectors through micro-, small enterprise and entrepreneurial projects and job opportunities. Women were awarded 62 per cent of low-carbon cash grants and were trained in climate-smart ***agriculture***, sustainable forestry and business development. With the second highest percentage of forest cover in the world, Guyana secured climate financing for the Amerindian Development Fund, which benefitted 180 communities and strengthened village economies, providing hundreds of jobs for indigenous women. Climate financing is currently bridging the ICT divide for hinterland women and girls with the provision of laptops and the creation of hubs powered by solar-energy systems, transforming the way in which they access Government and social services. In addition, Guyanese women are leading in climate action and advocacy and have pioneered solutions to protect the country ’ s valuable ecosystem.

ROSY AKBAR, Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation of Fiji, highlighted significant strides in developing coherent legislative and policy frameworks in the context of gender, environment and disaster risk reduction. The National Climate Change Policy (2018 – 2030) and the 2021 Climate Change Act endorse the principles of gender equality and women ’ s empowerment while recognizing women as agents of change. Gender mainstreaming mandates extend to all programmes of the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (2020-2024) while the Green Growth Framework identifies gender equality as key indicators of social development. The National Disaster Risk Reduction Policy establishes “human rights and gender-based approaches” as one of its eight guiding principles, in line with Fiji ’ s commitment to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and the gender action plan of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. Initiatives related to combating gender‑based violence in times of disaster responses are among other ongoing efforts to ensure that the needs of the most vulnerable groups, including women and girls in all diversity, are met, she said.

NAREK MKRTCHYAN, Minister for Labour and Social Affairs of Armenia, presented several ongoing initiatives in line with his country ’ s commitments to such global efforts as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Armenia ’ s disaster management strategy outlines a series of sector-targeted actions for preparedness, response and risk reduction from national to local levels while also recognizing the need to increase women ’ s representation in such activities. The Government prioritizes mainstreaming gender equality in all its projects dedicated to environmental sustainability, resilience-building, climate change adaptation and crisis mitigation. The Gender Policy Implementation Strategy sets the Government ’ s priorities for women ’ s equal participation in all spheres of public life, including: preventing the feminization of poverty in the context of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda; involving rural women in combating climate change problems; strengthening cooperation with civil society and non-governmental organizations in the field of environmental and disaster risk management; and reducing of the impact of pandemics, in particular COVID-19.

NDEYE SALY DIOP DIENG, Minister for Women, Family and Gender of Senegal, said climate change is the biggest challenge, leading to land degradation, drought and other major problems. Indeed, decreases in soil fertility and other side‑effects have a negative impact on women while also triggering an estimated economic loss of 3 per cent of the gross domestic product (GDP) in the ***agriculture*** sector. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change estimates that more than 3 million people live in areas that are extremely vulnerable to climate change, alongside expert projections that envision 1 billion people facing climate change threats by 2050. The Food and ***Agriculture*** Organization (FAO) projects that Africa will lose two thirds of its arable land by 2025. These challenges have a human cost, she said, emphasizing that women in rural communities are being affected. Local production, from fishing to forestry, has also felt the impact. Senegal ’ s analysis and assessments demonstrate the scope of these climate consequences, which could possibly limit women ’ s access to arable land. Efforts include strengthening initiatives from the global to local levels, including promoting a green economy transition, which Senegal supports, she said, adding that funding must be increased for such endeavours.

MATEJA RIBIČ, State Secretary at the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities of Slovenia, said her “green” country has a wealth of natural resources and rich biodiversity, yet recognizes the immediate need to address paramount climate change and sustainable development challenges. Slovenia ’ s new climate change strategy aims at fostering a society adapted and resilient to climate change impacts and is characterized by a high quality of life and a high degree of safety. Fully aware of strong links among biodiversity, climate change, food security and water, she also noted the well-established interlinkages among human rights, environmental degradation and climate change, which affect millions of people, especially women and girls across the world. Welcoming the Human Rights Council ’ s recognition of the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, she said Slovenia strongly supports women ’ s empowerment in the context of foreign policy priorities, with gender equality and environmental protection being a cross-cutting issue for development cooperation and humanitarian aid, including ongoing support for projects in sub-Saharan Africa. Women and girls must be at the centre of building back a better, greener, more resilient and more equal world, she said, highlighting the need for strong commitments to achieving gender equality at the highest political level.

ANALIZA REBUELTA-TEH, Under-Secretary of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources of the Philippines, said her country — located in the tropical cyclone belt — ranks fourth among nations most affected by extreme weather events in the 2021 long-term Global Climate Risk Index. It experienced 317 ***exceptionally*** devastating events from 2000 to 2019. In December 2021, Super Typhoon Rai ravaged more than 2 million families and left $650 million in damages to housing, ***agriculture*** and infrastructure. Citing projections from the Philippine Climate Extremes 2020 Report, she said warming temperatures and decreasing rainfall are expected to threaten many communities. Coastlines and coastal resources are also highly vulnerable to climate change and disasters, with low-lying islands facing permanent inundation. The National Framework Strategy on Climate Change — among other gender-responsive adaption and mitigation efforts — addresses the different impacts that individual catastrophes and the slow-onset effects of climate change have across gender, age, socioeconomic class, indigenous status, migration status and disability. Women are ensured equal benefits and participation in Government programmes and policies, she said, adding that, in 2021, over $50 million was allocated to advance women ’ s technical knowledge and overall capacity to implement mitigation ***measures*** in resource-based communities. The Government ’ s gender mainstreaming efforts are institutionalized in focal point systems, annual appropriation for related budgets and a planning and reporting system monitored by the Philippine Commission on Women. Organized and systematic gender mainstreaming has produced national benefits for over two decades, she said, noting the Philippines ’ commitment to continue this holistic, integrated effort through sex‑aggregated data, social inclusion and ***measuring*** long-term strategic impacts.

HALA MAZYAD ALTUWAIGRI, Secretary-General of the Family Affairs Council of Saudi Arabia, said climate change impacts women and girls disproportionately and is an added stressor that will set back their advancement. Noting that 43 per cent of the global ***agricultural*** labour force is in developing countries, she said United Nations research shows that women make up 80 per cent of those displaced by climate change, which requires a serious effort from Governments and the active participation of all community members. Citing several national achievements, she pointed to the launch of a set of environmental protection policies and initiatives that address local to global climate change effects and also consider women ’ s inclusion in decision-making and policymaking. The national environment strategy includes 64 initiatives aimed at restructuring the sector alongside such emission‑reduction programmes and policies as the adoption of an e‑Government project and renewable energy efforts. Contributions were allocated to the non-profit sector for providing solutions and innovation through advanced programmes and mechanisms, with women supervising the implementation of most of these efforts. The launch in 2021 of the Saudi Green Initiative aims to reduce the impact of climate change, achieve sustainability and create job opportunities for women and youth.

MOHAMMED SAHIB MARZOOQ, Head of Human Rights at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Iraq, delivering a statement on behalf of Yossra Mohsen, Director‑General and Head of Women ’ s Empowerment in his country, said climate change consequences — from the reduction of arable land to the loss of waterways — has led to displacement and a loss of revenue, disproportionately affecting women and girls. As such, a historic role must be played to mitigate climate change effects. This shared responsibility should be based on circumstances and national capabilities, as solidarity and international cooperation have proven to be the only way forward. Highlighting several key achievements, he said Iraq has developed a series of projects and action programmes to tackle these and related challenges and has adopted laws and policies aimed at protecting women and increasing their participation at various levels. Noting that 95 women were elected in recent elections, he pointed to other gains, including the Government ’ s launch of its second National Plan for Women ’ s Economic Empowerment (2021-2022). Efforts included opening centres to protect women from domestic violence, creating a high-level committee to assist rural women, and a Ministry of ***Agriculture*** initiative to implement several targeted projects. In addition, 1 million trees have been planted as part of a mitigation project. Going forward, Iraq is working on revising its laws related to women ’ s rights and on implementing a national strategy for Iraqi women that also focuses on climate change.

In closing remarks, MAMI MIZUTORI, Special Representative of the Secretary‑General for Disaster Risk Reduction, said that, while disasters affect everyone, they disproportionately affect women and girls. Summarizing several threads of the discussion, she said structural inequality is a driver of risk, noting also that women must be involved in efforts to address this. Policies must also be embedded with gender perspectives. At the same time, investing in all these policies and efforts is also critical, she said. Highlighting several other issues, she said more science and knowledge must be shared with women and girls. Attention must also be paid to the issue of increased violence against women amid disasters and the vulnerable situation of women in rural areas, she said, commending the participants for sharing their encouraging efforts at national to local levels.

Also participating were ministers and other high-level representatives from Kenya, France, Indonesia, United Republic of Tanzania, Saint Lucia, Spain, Bangladesh, Angola, United Kingdom, Maldives, El Salvador, Azerbaijan and Chad.

Ministerial Round Table IV

The Commission then held a ministerial roundtable discussion on the theme “Women ’ s voice and agency: good practices towards achieving women ’ s full, equal and meaningful participation and decision-making in the context of climate-change, environmental and disaster-risk-reduction policies and programmes”.

Ministers and senior officials of Member States detailed national strategies to increase women ’ s participation in decision-making and address the disproportionate effects of climate change and natural disaster on women and girls. Stressing that such effects, along with widening inequality, necessitates including these individuals in policymaking, they also pointed out that women and girls possess unique knowledge and experience that can be harnessed to inform risk-reduction and resilience strategies. Further, they pointed to the link between climate change and gender-based violence, stressing the need to mainstream gender perspectives in national policy to ensure that women and girls have both voice and agency in addressing a phenomenon that affects them in specific ways.

ELIZABETH GOMEZ ALCORTA, Minister for Women, Genders and Diversity of Argentina, chairing the round table, said that women and girls — who hold deep knowledge of the needs and priorities of their communities — are key to combating climate change and environmental degradation. However, women are far from achieving full gender parity and lack the critical mass necessary to influence policy, decisions and strategies. Further, women ’ s civil‑society organizations face barriers to participation and leadership due to diminishing funds and threats to physical security. Pointing out that, while climate change is a global challenge, not all countries share the same responsibility, she said that the richest countries produce the most greenhouse gases while those with the fewest emissions are most exposed to the negative effects of the same. This reflects the hegemonic model of development, which is harmful to the environment and increases inequality. For its part, she said that Argentina works towards gender mainstreaming by training public officials and providing more resources to community organizations, especially those affected by climate change.

SILVERIA ELFRIEDA JACOBS, Prime Minister of Sint Maarten, speaking on behalf of the Netherlands and its constituent countries of Sint Maarten, Curaçao and Aruba, said that the latter three small island developing States are particularly vulnerable to the consequences of climate change. The climate crisis magnifies inequalities and vulnerabilities — especially for women and girls — which are further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Yet, in the global discussion regarding climate action, the voices of women and girls are underrepresented, and the international community cannot expect to solve this crisis by leaving these individuals behind. Member States must work towards achieving Sustainable Development Goal 5 on gender equality by ensuring women ’ s full access to equal opportunities, knowledge and pay. Emphasizing that “women must be part of the solution”, she said that, by working together to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 5, the world can progress towards achieving all 17 Sustainable Development Goals.

ARIUNZAYA AYUSH, Minister for Labour and Social Protection of Mongolia, noted that her country has ratified 12 United Nations conventions relating to climate change, and to ensure implementation of these international treaties at the national level, has adopted several laws and policies to protect the environment. Further, the Government has implemented a number of projects to combat desertification and reduce air pollution, as the negative effects of climate change continue to pose a risk to both women and the national economy. Air pollution — caused by densely populated urban areas — has particularly negative effects on the health of the population. She emphasized that this problem especially affects infants and pregnant women, and has also led to respiratory diseases, premature birth and developmental disorders.

AYANNA WEBSTER-ROY, Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, outlined Government efforts to ensure that women have voice and agency by incorporating gender considerations in strategies and projects to enhance environmental and climate resilience. Socially constructed roles and inequality disproportionately affect women — especially in rural areas – and she highlighted the need to incorporate the United Nations principle of “leaving no one behind” in developing disaster-risk-reduction policies and programmes. Gender issues and priorities specific to women must be integrated into the same, and the Government has worked to include women in stakeholder groups such as environmentally focused cabinets. She went on to stress the need to ensure that no barriers prevent the participation of women and girls in efforts to address climate change.

NASSÉNÉBA TOURE, Minister for Women, Family and Children of Côte d ’ Ivoire, pointed out that women comprise 70 per cent of ***agricultural*** workers in her country, producing 90 per cent of foodstuffs. As such, they suffer disproportionately from the consequences of drought, high precipitation and natural disaster. Against that backdrop, the Government has implemented a national programme to fight climate change by empowering women and girls. Institutional and legislative support ***measures*** have been passed, multiple support funds for women working in ***agriculture*** have been established and women ’ s participation in elected assemblies has increased. She also said that the Government is committed to implementing three projects for producing solar energy in the country ’ s north — 12 solar plants and 1 biomass project using residue from cotton and cocoa will create thousands of jobs for women and girls.

HELENA DALLI, European Commissioner for Equality of the European Union, in its capacity as observer, stressed the need to address the lack of women ’ s participation in decision-making as “no crisis is gender-neutral”. Climate change and environmental degradation take a disproportionate toll on women due to such individuals ’ reduced access to resources, and therefore, the European Union ’ s climate-adaptation strategy aims to increase women ’ s leadership and gender balance. Further, the bloc supports programmes worldwide that promote women ’ s participation in climate governance — once such instance is its partnership with Bhutan to help local governments include women in the ***process*** to improve disaster resilience. Spotlighting the link between climate change and gender-based violence, she said that the European Union works to prevent such violence through targeted action, such as strengthening institutional capacities to address violence against women and girls following natural disaster.

NINO TANDILASHVILI, Deputy Minister for Environmental Protection and ***Agricultural*** Affairs of Georgia, joined other speakers in expressing solidarity with Ukraine and its people, condemning the Russian Federation ’ s ***invasion*** and use of force against Ukraine ’ s sovereignty and territorial integrity in contravention of international law. Turning to climate change, she said the phenomenon has had — and will continue to have — severe, lasting impact on the environment and social development. The resilience and adaptive capacity of women and girls must be supported, and for its part, the Government is working to mainstream gender perspectives in its environmental and climate change policy. These efforts include enhancing women ’ s role as agents of change and reducing the impact of natural disaster on population and infrastructure by providing early warning systems and locally informed risk management. “Without gender equality today, a sustainable, equitable future remains beyond our reach,” she added.

ANNA MARIA MOKGETHI, Minister for Nationality, Immigration and Gender Affairs of Botswana, highlighted the lessons learned from the COVID-19, HIV/AIDS and Ebola pandemics, in which women were not only affected, but also at the forefront of the response. As countries hold national and international dialogues on climate-change mitigation, women and girls must be at the negotiating table to ensure their voices are heard. Noting that women and girls in her country are negatively affected by aridity, persistent drought and erratic rainfall, she said that the Government pursues inclusive development policies that focus on the particular needs of women and children. Further, it engages women and girls in rural areas in the management of rural community resources, as their wealth of indigenous knowledge is essential for resilience. She went on to stress that these indigenous practices must be preserved, and that the women employing them must be empowered to fully participate in the supply chain.

In closing remarks, PREETI SINHA, Executive Secretary of the United Nations Capital Development Fund, highlighted the link between women ’ s economic empowerment and the climate agenda. Offering an example of the Fund ’ s work in Uganda, she said that the informal settlements of Mbali suffer from frequent water-supply outages, flooding and contamination. As such, only 20 per cent of households have access to clean, piped water, and this lack of access forces women and youth to travel long distances to collect water, which renders them susceptible to gender-based violence. The Fund is working to improve this water‑access situation, and this scenario demonstrates the effects that climate‑adaptation ***measures*** can have on women ’ s security. The relationship between climate finance and women ’ s economic empowerment has the potential to be one of the most powerful, virtuous cycles in development finance for least‑developed countries and beyond. “Let us unite to have capital serve humanity, and not the other way around,” she added.

Also participating were ministers and other high-level representatives from Estonia, Sierra Leone, Liechtenstein, Denmark, Gambia, Portugal, Ethiopia, Croatia, Greece, Mexico, Paraguay, Romania, Czech Republic, Cuba, Switzerland and Mali.

General Discussion

MILENKO ESTEBAN SKOKNIC TAPIA (Chile), speaking on behalf of the Group of Friends of Older Persons, said that it is undeniable that all older women make a significant contribution, as agents of change, to the social, economic and sustainable development of societies. Not only do women account for the majority of older persons, but the proportion of older women in the global female population will also increase in the coming years. Therefore, policies and programmes must address women ’ s needs throughout their lives, particularly when they are older. Calling for a change in the way of thinking about ageing, he said there is a need to challenge narratives regarding the role older women can play in the economy, society and households.

It is hard to conceive that considering that older populations will outgrow younger populations by 2020, older persons — and even more so older women — remain largely invisible and disregarded in the development of policies and programmes. Such invisibility is evident in this year ’ s Secretary-General ’ s report on the priority theme, which hardly addressed the complex realities of older women facing climate change and natural disasters, despite the compounded vulnerabilities they are more likely to experience. Such lack of visibility can and must be addressed urgently. The Group therefore urges the United Nations agencies, and particularly United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) to systematically collect and disaggregate data by age and gender, particularly of women beyond their reproductive years.

Ms. AKBAR, Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation of Fiji, speaking on behalf of the Pacific Islands Forum, said that the science is non-negotiable and urgent action to reduce greenhouse‑gas emissions is critical. Equal and full participation of all women and girls must be central to global action. The recent volcanic eruption in Tonga caused tephra ash to fall, a tsunami and severe damage to submarine telecommunications cables. Pacific women and girls, in all their diversity, continue to play a critical role in building resilient communities. Recognizing women ’ s and girls ’ knowledge, capabilities and skills, and empowering them, is vital to the safety and security of all Pacific families. The Pacific has one of the highest rates of violence globally; on average, two out of every three women experience some form of violence throughout their lifetime. Global evidence indicates a link between disasters, climate change and gender-based violence, she said, noting that in the Pacific, reports of domestic violence cases have increased. During disasters, women are subject to increased workloads and care responsibilities and must travel further to look for water and food. This is exacerbated by the increasing levels of non-communicable diseases in rural and remote areas.

A lack of adequate sexual reproductive health and outreach services are worsened by climate change and related disasters, she said. Climate finance also often fails to take account of gender equality and women ’ s empowerment. She called on the international community to increase gender-responsive climate, environmental and disaster‑risk finance, promote women ’ s full participation and leadership in climate, environment, ocean, biodiversity and disaster risk reduction action, and strengthen the capacities of women through accessible training and gender-responsive policies and programmes. It is also vital to ensure women have access to essential services during crisis situations. She also called for increased investment in national gender statistics which ensures gender-disability-geographical disaggregated data in the gender-environment nexus. “COVID-19 recovery and recovery from recurring natural disasters is an opportunity to reset our global development agenda to one that is climate-resilient, gender-inclusive and leaves no one behind,” she said.

VINDHYA PERSAUD, Minister for Human Services and Social Security of the Co‑operative Republic of Guyana, speaking on behalf of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), noted that climate change poses an existential threat to small island developing States and that its impacts represent a “code red for humanity”. Reiterating disappointment that the developed countries ’ pledge to provide $100 billion by 2020 for developing nations to address climate change was not met, he noted that women and girls are often disproportionately affected by the impacts of climate change. There must be a gender perspective when building climate resilience, as well as in the design and implementation of disaster-risk-reduction strategies and recovery plans, he said, calling also for investment to enable the production of gender-specific statistics and data on the relationship between gender and climate. Poverty eradication is central to reducing women ’ s vulnerability to climate change, he added, stressing that climate finance for both adaptation and mitigation activities should include ***measures*** supporting women‑owned micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises in the green and blue economies.

Turning to action to address sexual and gender-based violence and domestic violence, he noted that CARICOM nations are encouraging the equal sharing of responsibilities in parenting and household work; engaging community leaders to address discriminatory social norms and gender stereotypes; and adopting robust legislative regimes. Women in the region are also leaders advocating for protection of the environment and implementing home-grown solutions. Highlighting progress in Guyana, he pointed to its low-carbon development strategy, noting that 62 per cent of the jobs it has created are held by women. While women and girls are disproportionately impacted by climate events, they have also been creating innovative solutions to protect the country ’ s valuable ecosystem, including by using drones to monitor environmental activities to ascertain what threats have emerged to the mangroves ecosystem and how responses should be tailored. To promote women ’ s economic empowerment, free, non-traditional technical vocational programmes, with no pre-admission requirements, have been created to provide the necessary training and skills for thousands of women across Guyana.

PATRICIA KALIATI, Minister for Gender, Community Development and Social Welfare of Malawi, speaking on behalf of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), said that at a meeting in February, African Union ministers responsible for gender and promotion of women resolved that the current situation — marked by a regression of the gains made to advance women ’ s rights and gender equality due to the devastating effects of climate change and environmental disasters coupled with the COVID-19 pandemic — necessitates taking action. ***Agriculture*** plays an important role in the economy of all SADC member States. Environmental degradation threatens economic development and directly affects peoples ’ livelihoods. SADC has established three main environmental policy goals: protect and improve the health, environment and livelihoods of the people of Southern Africa with priority for poor; preserve the region ’ s natural heritage, biodiversity and life‑supporting ecosystems; and support regional economic development on an equitable, sustainable basis for the benefit of present and future generations.

When unexpectedly heavy floods displaced more than a million people in Southern Africa in 2007, SADC began to meet annually to prepare for future occurrences, she said. It established a Disaster Risk Reduction Unit responsible for coordinating regional preparedness and response programmes for trans-boundary hazards and disaster. The SADC Regional Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction was inaugurated in 2011. The newly developed SADC Regional Resilience Framework 2020‑2030 will guide SADC member States and other stakeholders in the design and implementation of a broad range of resilience programmes. Women in the region account for most of the poorest and most vulnerable due to their general subordinate legal status; limited access to productive resources such as land, technology, credit, education and training, formal employment; as well as their susceptibility to HIV and AIDS. The SADC Protocol on Gender and Development was revised in 2016 to include gender and climate change. She stressed that State parties should, by 2030, develop policies, strategies and programmes to address the gender aspects of climate change, conduct research to assess its differential gendered impacts and put in place effective mitigation and adaptation ***measures***.

ANTONETTE NCUBE, a youth representative from the European Union delegation, in its capacity as an observer, also spoke on behalf of the Group of Friends for the Elimination of Violence Against Women and Girls. Stressing that climate change, disasters, environmental degradation and biodiversity loss disproportionately affect women and girls, and that crises and disasters exacerbate pre-existing gender inequalities and discrimination, she said women and girls frequently face increased sexual and gender-based violence. They are subjected to harmful practices such as early and forced marriage due to the impact of climate change, disproportionate burden of care work, and restricted access to essential health services. The Group calls for concerted efforts to address these issues and expects the Commission to adopt strong and action-oriented conclusions.

More specifically, she said, the Group recommends that all stakeholders ensure the gender-responsive implementation of international obligations and commitments, including the Paris Agreement, Lima Work Programme on Gender, Convention on Biological Diversity and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction. In that regard, the Group stresses the importance of enhancing women ’ s full, equal, effective and meaningful participation and leadership, she said, underscoring a concrete need to improve data and resources and strengthen coordination and capacity-building. The Group encourages all stakeholders to use comprehensive indicators and pursue the ethical collection and dissemination of high-quality, timely, reliable and disaggregated data and gender statistics on all dimensions of environmental, disaster risk reduction and climate change issues and sexual and gender-based violence.

MARTA LUCÍA RAMÍREZ, Vice‑President of Colombia, spotlighting the threats to global peace and stability seen over the last two weeks, said that the future will depend on including women ’ s voices. Fifty per cent of the world ’ s population has historically been excluded from power, but gender equality is essential for generating sustainable economic growth. For its part, Colombia has implemented a national policy with five objectives: to provide economic empowerment for women entrepreneurs; to include more women in politics; to involve women in peace and security; to ensure that women can live free from violence; and to establish more gender-based institutions. Noting her status as her country ’ s first female Vice‑President, she stressed that, when women arrive in positions of power, they must remember to open more spaces for other women “just as those who came before did for us”.

She went on to detail Colombia ’ s establishment of a sovereign gender bond to help women-owned businesses recover from COVID-19 — the first of its type in the world — and stressed that economic autonomy is essential for women to decide their own futures and live free from violence. The international community must also remember the situation of women living in Ukraine, Afghanistan and other conflict zones as a result of wars “always declared by men”. It must recall the voices of Afghan women, “no longer heard in the halls of the United Nations”, which reflects the current multilateral system. And it must always call for the dignity and rights of all women, she urged, highlighting the legal and moral obligation to allow women around the world to rise up with all their creative and transformative might.

ENSIEH KHAZALI, Vice‑President for Women and Family Affairs of Iran, said that, during the pandemic, some 12,000 women-headed households have been trained and introduced to the traditional and cybermarkets. Also, more than 1 million women-headed households are covered by the Imam Khomeini Relief Committee. They have benefited from special social protection services including funding and insurance services. Ten million rials in cash subsidies were allocated to 17 million households to reduce economic constraints on families. Supported by the Vice-Presidency for Women and Family Affairs, the women-headed households were prioritized for receiving aid packages, and with the approval of the Cabinet, the amount of loans granted to those households were doubled. Also to protect the environment, 6,000 rural and nomadic women have become members of 2,000 rural and nomadic cooperatives, some of whom have been granted plots of land over the past five years. Iranian women are fighting the effects of unilateral coercive ***measures***, she said, adding that their heroic achievements in various areas have proven that they can withstand various unjust and unilateral sanctions.

KATRIN JAKOBSDÓTTIR, Prime Minister of Iceland, said that climate change has not spared her island country, with sea levels rising and glaciers melting. “No country is an island when it comes to climate change,” she said, stressing that similarly gender inequality plagues all parts of the world. Climate change causes poverty, disproportionally affecting women economically and socially. Climate change also causes instability and creates conditions for gender-based violence. Citing the Russian Federation ’ s ***invasion*** of Ukraine, she expressed concern that the conflict will produce mass displacement, which, in turn, creates more cases of gender-based violence. This “shadow pandemic” had occurred during the COVID-19 outbreak, she said, calling for attention to gender-based violence caused by the Russian Federation ’ s aggression. There is a need to include young people in social justice and health, as they are the best advocate for their own future. There are many remarkable women activists and human rights defenders in the forefront. “The world will be a better place with women in the lead,” she said.

TANZILA NARBAEVA, Chairperson and Speaker of the Senate of Parliament of Uzbekistan, said the Commission is a catalyst for incorporating gender into all aspects of United Nations work. Expanding the rights of women and girls is a key priority of Uzbekistan State policy, she noted, with a new development plan for 2022-2026 and a national programme to bolster the role of women and girls in the country ’ s future. Addressing climate change, she noted Uzbekistan is particularly vulnerable to natural disasters, including the drying of the Aral Sea, which threatens the sustainable development of Central Asia. Reports have further suggested that, between 2030 and 2050, the average air temperature in the region may increase by 1.5°C to 3°C. Uzbekistan has adopted the broad use of renewable energy, and is working to develop the Aral Sea region, including through women-focused training courses to manage resources and regenerate salinated areas. During the third Central Asian Summit, Uzbekistan advanced the regional programme “Green Agenda for Central Asia”, and is planting 200 million saplings.

ZORANA MIHAJLOVIC, Deputy Prime Minister and the President of the Coordination Body of the Government of the Republic of Serbia for Gender Equality of Serbia, said that UN-Women has been a partner of the Coordination Body for Gender Equality for years. They have worked together on gender mainstreaming of climate policies and practices in Serbia, and on ensuring that the normative framework related to energy is gender-sensitive and that climate change finance always includes women ’ s perspective. A new national energy strategy, as well as the National Energy and Climate Action Plan are under way, both of which will be gender-sensitive, because without gender mainstreaming of public policies, the existing gender gap cannot be closed. The Government established the National Coalition on Energy Poverty whose goal is to underline gender gaps in energy poverty. “The gender-just transition is our chance not only to change our energy sources and to have a cleaner environment, but also to change the perception of the energy sector as a men-dominated sector,” she said.

EVELYN WEVER-CROES, Prime Minister of Aruba, speaking on behalf of the Netherlands and its constituent countries of Aruba, Curaçao and Sint Maarten, said that these four countries have been battling the elements for centuries — “from North Sea floods to Caribbean hurricanes” — and are united in tackling the climate crisis, which is “the greatest challenge of our time”. The world is unequal, and this crisis is amplifying that inequality. In the Caribbean, the greatest burden of care falls on women and girls when communities are in crisis; however, these individuals remain underrepresented in decision-making at all levels, including at the United Nations. Against that backdrop, she urged full, equal, meaningful and effective participation and leadership for women in adaptation and mitigation ***processes***, along with granting the same equal access to the knowledge and resources necessary to respond to climate change.

ROBBERT DIJKGRAAF, Minister for Education, Culture and Science of the Netherlands, underscored the importance of knowledge in combating climate change, as it is “the only resource that grows as you use it”. However, the voices, knowledge and experience of women and girls are unheard, as these individuals are underrepresented at all levels, including technical areas crucial to making the necessary energy transition. The world needs the contribution of women and girls, in all their diversity, to ensure a liveable future for humanity. Noting that today ’ s meeting occurs in extraordinary times, he expressed full solidarity with all women and girls living in conflict — including those in Ukraine — and condemned the Russian Federation ’ s illegal ***invasion*** of that country.

DERYA YANIK, Minister for Family and Social Services of Turkey, said that a civilization teaches: “Plant a tree, even if it is your last deed. ” Her country puts great emphasis on environmental protection. Since 2002, it has witnessed remarkable progress as a result. Thanks to the “Zero Waste” project, a new era has begun in terms of environmental protection. Women play a major role in the success of this project. In adapting to the Paris Agreement on climate change, Turkey has committed to achieving net-zero emissions by 2053. An effective fight against climate change requires a political and social atmosphere in which women are resilient, empowered and their rights are ensured. Her country has made significant progress in eliminating all forms of violence and discrimination against women, adopted priority goals to increase the education level of women and girls, and taken crucial steps in terms of empowering and increasing the participation of women in the labour market. With the “Gender-Responsive Planning and Budgeting in Turkey” project, the Government is determined to ensure that women are not ignored and their needs and problems are always visible in budget programmes.

MAYA MORSY, Minister for Women and President of the National Council for Women of Egypt, said that her country is among those most affected by climate change, despite its very limited contribution to the phenomenon ’ s existence, as Egypt accounts for only 0.6 per cent of global greenhouse‑gas emissions. In light of the impact of climate change on women — particularly on their health, food security and living standards — the Government works to implement a sustainable development model and has adopted many initiatives, programmes and projects to promote adaptation and mitigate the effects of climate change, while also promoting women ’ s empowerment. These efforts include: raising women ’ s awareness of rural initiatives and eco-friendly ***agricultural*** methods; organizing environmental camps to train women in eco-friendly industries; and raising awareness of sustainable flood-management. She also detailed Egypt ’ s perspective for women, the environment and climate change, affirming the Government ’ s commitment to address climate change and empower Egyptian women in various fields.

AAWATIF HAYAR, Minister for Solidarity, Social Integration and Family of Morocco, outlining her country ’ s efforts on the priority theme, said that national priority focuses on integrating women into environmental policy. This session coincides with the COVID-19 pandemic, which had a huge impact on women. Her country is including women in all areas of policy implementation. The 2011 Constitution bases itself on the principle of equality of men and women. Morocco is also working to implement all its international commitments in eliminating discrimination, advancing gender equality and addressing climate change. It has established the 2020-2030 Strategy for Climate Change Adaptation, with a view to archiving gender equality. The Government is undertaking projects with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) in the field of green technology. The Government has set a goal of increasing women ’ s economic activity by 2026, she said, also noting that more women candidates won during the 2021 elections than in past elections.

CHUNG YOUNG-AI, Minister for Gender Equality and Family of the Republic of Korea, voiced concern about the impact of violence on women and girls, many of whom have been displaced or forced to seek refuge in neighbouring countries. She affirmed that only when the perspectives of women — who account for half the world ’ s population — are incorporated into policies and programmes will the world be able to prudently respond to the crisis facing the international community. Her Government formulates a Basic Plan for Gender Equality Policies every five years, and has enforced gender-responsive budgeting since fiscal year 2010. It is aiming for carbon neutrality by 2050. In addition, a designated officer system has been established to support women in science, technology, engineering and mathematics. The country is also responding to deepening gender inequality in the labour market brought on by the pandemic with a COVID-19 Women ’ s Job Recovery Plan launched in 2021, expanding jobs for women in the public and private sectors. With the help of her ministry, UN-Women has established the United Nations Women Centre of Excellence for Gender Equality in Seoul.

SUSANNE RAAB, Federal Minister for Women, Family, Integration and Media in the Federal Chancellery of Austria, aligning herself with the European Union, noted that women and men are affected differently by climate and environmental crises and States have to think differently and come up with new solutions. Highlighting ***measures*** taken by her country in that regard, she stressed a special focus on the empowerment of women and girls in technology and innovation, to ensure that they equally benefit from job opportunities and increase diversity in those sectors, including through “Lets Empower Austria”, an initiative which aims to increase the participation of women and girls in science, technology, engineering and mathematics. Turning to the Russian ’ s Federation ’ s ***invasion*** of Ukraine, she noted that war leads to an unbelievable suffering for civilians, in particular women and girls. In that regard, she expressed her country ’ s full solidarity with women and girls in Ukraine and those who fled.

EVA NORDMARK, Minister for Gender Equality, Ministry of Employment of Sweden, associating herself with the European Union, expressed solidarity with those living in conflict situations and other emergencies, including Afghanistan, Yemen, Ethiopia and Ukraine. The unprovoked, illegal and indefensible Russian Federation ***invasion*** of Ukraine is having an immense impact on the civilian population there, with a huge number of people, including women and children, forced to flee their homes. “We all have an obligation to strongly condemn this ***invasion***,” she said. As a member of the Swedish feminist Government, she noted women ’ s economic empowerment is key to achieving gender equality. “When you make your own money, you can choose your own life,” she said, citing political reforms such as parental leave for both mothers and fathers, affordable childcare and individual taxation to help close the gender pay gap. Addressing the urgency of stopping fossil‑fuel emissions to accelerate a just climate transition, she noted Sweden is producing batteries and the world ’ s first fossil-free steel, creating thousands of new green jobs. As the COVID-19 pandemic has globally increased the risk of women being subjected to men ’ s violence, prostitution and trafficking, the Government has adopted a 99-point Action Programme for preventing and combating violence against women. The blame must be put where it belongs: on the perpetrators. Stressing the importance of sexual and reproductive rights, she said: “We must continue promoting access to safe and legal abortions, contraceptives and comprehensive sexuality education. ”

DOMINIQUE HASLER, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Education and Sport of Liechtenstein, noted the meeting unfortunately falls under the shadow of a terrible war, condemning the Russian Federation ’ s ***invasion*** of Ukraine. She stressed that all armed conflicts have devastating consequences for civilians, and are a setback for the rights of women and girls, who disproportionately suffer violence, marginalization and exclusion, but show amazing resilience. Their role is key in supporting the international rules-based order; it is not a question of political correctness but a prerequisite for successful and peaceful political ***processes***. Climate change also disproportionately burdens women and girls, and generations to come will note the action — or inaction — of the international community on the issue. Addressing the interlinkage between climate change and rights, she noted women lack access to land ownership. Modern slavery and human trafficking increase during and after natural disasters, she stressed, pointing to a blueprint the Government has developed for financial institutions to prevent such crimes through financial inclusion. Liechtenstein has also partnered with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) on the Climate and Environment Transition Fund. Quoting the Secretary-General, she noted that humanitarian emergencies move the clock backwards on women ’ s rights.

THOMAS BLOMQVIST, Minister for Nordic Cooperation and Equality of Finland, aligning himself with the European Union, condemned Moscow ’ s aggression against Ukraine in the strongest terms, stressing that the war is also a violation of women ’ s rights. “We must hear the voices of Ukrainian women. As in every conflict, women are critical to achieving sustainable peace,” he said. Noting the severe impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on women and girls, he stressed that climate change is also a gender issue, calling for increased efforts to ensure a gender perspective in all climate, environment and disaster‑management policies. Highlighting the intersection between climate issues and sexual and reproductive health and rights, he spotlighted the essential importance of universal access to quality comprehensive sexuality education, bodily autonomy, access to clean water and sanitation, and women ’ s economic empowerment, in order to achieve gender equality. To that end, his Government has introduced family leave reform and is also introducing national legislation on pay transparency, he noted. Expressing concern about the increasing sexual and gender-based violence, harassment and hate speech, both offline and online, he emphasized the need to bridge the gender digital divide and eliminate harmful gender stereotypes, including gender bias in artificial intelligence.

HO JAN TINETTI, Minister for Women of New Zealand, emphasized that women who experience multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, including indigenous women, are among those most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change and disasters, but also powerful agents of action, change and resilience. As such, the Government of New Zealand is increasingly applying gender and intersectional analysis to all its actions and decision-making, including by promoting the use of an online tool, she said. Noting the data-collection gaps and shortcomings exposed in that ***process***, she stressed the vital importance of gender-disaggregated data to ensuring visibility for the gendered impacts of climate change and natural hazards, and of tailoring responses accordingly. She went on to state that New Zealand is also focusing on enabling an equitable climate transition to a low‑carbon economy, which entails consideration of the outcomes for different groups in the way climate change policies and programmes are funded and financed.

ÉLISABETH MORENO, Minister Delegate for Gender Equality, Diversity and Equal Opportunities of France, expressed concern over the fate of women and girls in Ukraine following the Russian Federation ’ s military aggression and underscored the need to preserve the rights and dignity of Ukrainians. Turning to climate change, she pointed out that women are the primary victims of it, and quite often, they are not heard despite “having something to say”. Gender equality is at the forefront of France ’ s efforts in the European Union, and the Government also works to combat sexual and gender-based violence. National legislation addresses domestic abuse, street harassment and new forms of violence on the Internet, and an ombudsman for public enterprises was established to combat harassment in the workplace. She also emphasized the importance of women ’ s economic independence, noting that the pandemic has revealed the inequality women face in the public and professional spaces. Despite women playing a key role, their contributions are often not seen or valued, and she expressed hope that, post-pandemic, “parity will be the rule, not the exception”.

LYAZZAT RAMAZANOVA, Minister for the National Commission for Women, Family and Demographic Policy under the President of Kazakhstan, said her country is committed to all issues on gender equality as women are the main beneficiaries of a clean environment. Kazakhstan is addressing climate change challenges head-on. A transition to the green economy requires significant investment in line with commitments made under the Paris Agreement and the subsequent agreement in Glasgow. Kazakhstan seeks to achieve carbon neutrality by 2060. The Government does not represent the whole picture in this effort, she said, stressing that civil society and businesses are doing their parts. Noting that her landlocked country is far from the ocean and two thirds of its land is desert, she said Central Asian economies like hers must adapt to climate change. Kazakhstan will plant 2 billion trees, with civil society participating in that endeavour. About 80 per cent of civil-society organizations are headed by women. She noted the establishment of a green technology centre in Kazakhstan.

ANNALENA BAERBOCK, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Germany, said an estimated 800,000 women will give birth in Ukraine in the next few months, many without shelter or access to proper care. “This illustrates clearly that conflicts and crises are not gender-blind,” she said, stressing that conflicts disproportionately impact women from Afghanistan to the Sahel. The same is true for the climate crisis, she said, urging the Commission to compel States to put women ’ s rights at the heart of climate action. She noted that, during droughts, it is girls who are sent to school less frequently because gender norms dictate that fetching water falls to them. For such reasons, Germany supported the Human Rights Council in recognizing a clean, healthy and sustainable environment as a human right, and it supports efforts to give women and other marginalized groups an equal say in decision-making ***processes***.

MUSA MAAYTAH, Minister for Political and Parliamentary Affairs and Chairman of the Ministerial Committee for the Empowerment of Women, and Minister of Political and Parliamentary Affairs of Jordan, said the international community must take into account the most vulnerable people to ensure civil society features the participation of women in decision-making ***processes***. Jordan has pioneered mainstreaming gender into State policy on climate change, stressing the importance of ***measures*** addressing the root causes of inequality and discrimination and acknowledging the different circumstances of men and women. He also affirmed the Government will work to provide better services to women in humanitarian crises, either through prevention or recovery, and is further taking into account lessons learned from the pandemic, involving women in decision-making related to economic empowerment. He noted that the labour law was amended to provide nursery care for female staff, equal pay and paternity leave, as well as equal pay for equal work.

RODERIC O ’ GORMAN, Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth of Ireland, aligning himself with the European Union, expressed solidarity with women and girls in situations of conflict or other emergencies and pointed out that these individuals are particularly impacted by the same, including in Ukraine. Ireland prioritizes women ’ s empowerment, demonstrated by its international development programming that focuses on social protection, food systems, climate action and the women, peace and security agenda. Spotlighting the link between climate and security, he said that instability and fragility have a disproportionate impact on women. Women ’ s role in addressing the climate crisis is too often overlooked and undervalued, and States must ensure that women ’ s voices are heard at all levels. He went on to say that Ireland, for its part, has pioneered citizens ’ assemblies as exercises in participatory democracy, and the assembly for gender equality recently submitted its report containing 45 recommendations in this area to the Government for implementation.

LAILA AL NAJAR, Minister for Social Development of Oman, emphasized the importance of a prominent role for women in national development, noting that they instil the value of tolerance. Noting that his country ’ s Constitution guarantees the rights of women, he said their economic participation is an important goal for Oman. A high percentage of women are now joining the labour market, he added. Pointing out that more women occupy leadership positions in political and public life, he said they are holding decision-making positions in private companies, as well. Oman provides assistance to women entrepreneurs and small business owners engaged in e-commerce, he said, adding that the Government also supports victims of domestic violence. Women volunteer to help those affected in crisis situations, he noted, stressing that their participation is crucial both during normal times and in emergencies.

MARIANA VIEIRA DA SILVA, Minister of State for the Presidency of Portugal, said that it is fundamental to invest in the production of data disaggregated by sex, on the impacts of phenomena and policies. Environment and energy, ***agriculture***, mobility or urban planning are important sectors in this approach. Since 2021, Portugal has monitored gender equality indicators in its State budget report, including in the field of climate change, with all data produced by the Central Administration to be disaggregated by sex. In the labour market, the Government is integrating more women in key areas of climate transition, whether through training activities in maritime economy, in the management of rural fires, or through the training of women working in the ***agricultural*** sector. In the fight against energy poverty, it is reducing the costs of energy and other consumptions, supporting the more vulnerable households, namely single‑parent families. Legislative ***measures*** set minimum thresholds for participation in decision-making positions. Since 2017, the average proportion of women on the boards of publicly listed companies increased from 12 to 29 per cent. In public administration, since 2015, the rate of women senior managers jumped from 32 to 43 per cent. In the Portuguese Parliament, women account for more than a third of representation.

MEIRAV COHEN, Minister for Social Equality of Israel, spotlighted all the young girls, mothers, sick or wounded women, pregnant women and senior citizens in Ukraine who thought they would never have to experience war atrocities again. Those women must be kept in mind when discussing policy. The gap between the privilege of discussing gender issues and the need to stay alive and protect one's children must be pondered by all. On a national level, she pointed to the presence of many different communities, which presents challenges to promoting women's rights in a “complex sphere” where every group lives according to its traditions and customs. Nearly 56 per cent of Israeli women are employed, most of them working mothers. Together with a high birth rate in Israel, Israeli women are burdened by their households much more than their Western counterparts. As a result, her Government ’ s attempt to reduce environmental hazards by restricting the use of disposable housewares was met with strong opposition from Orthodox communities that consist of multi-child families. An attempt to limit disposables with extensive taxing was considered an attack on women in the more traditional household. The women, as sole housekeepers, had to choose between spending more money or having to do more housework. To that end, her country has the complex task of finding the right balances between promoting women ’ s rights while preserving the environment and addressing climate change.

AYANNA WEBSTER-ROY, Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister responsible for Gender and Child Affairs of Trinidad and Tobago, said the country ’ s National Vision 2030 Development Plan and the National Policy on Gender and Development recognize the importance of holistic, interdisciplinary and cross-sectoral approaches to conserving, developing and safeguarding natural resources. The Policy aims to encourage women and men to play diverse and complementary roles in approaches to climate change and environmental protection. She noted that Trinidad and Tobago ratified the Paris Agreement, aiming to reduce greenhouse‑gas emissions by 15 per cent in the energy, transportation, and industrial sectors by 2030 — a 103 million-ton reduction in carbon‑dioxide emissions. On gender, she cited the Ministry of Planning and Development, the political head of which is a woman, and the Multilateral Environmental Agreements Network, with women accounting for 58 per cent of the groups and playing a lead role in decision‑making. The country ’ s Comprehensive Disaster Management Policy further recognizes that disasters and hazards affect women, girls, men and boys differently. Because of their reproductive responsibilities, women are particularly valuable “change agents” in the transition to a sustainable economy, and should be trained and supported in adopting new environmentally friendly practices and technologies.

TAINA BOFFERDING, Minister for Equality between Women and Men of Luxembourg, said that crises — whatever their nature — affect each individual differently. In the conflict situation in Ukraine, women and girls must demonstrate resilience and courage while facing unprovoked Russian aggression. In a three-week period, millions have been forced to flee their homes, the majority of whom are women and girls. Also expressing shock over reports of sexual and gender-based violence perpetrated by Russian armed forces, she demanded that the Russian Federation “cease this stupid war”. Turning to women and climate change, she stressed the need to improve the collection of reliable, disaggregated gender data; to place gender equality at the centre of resilience policies and disaster-risk-reduction programmes; and to increase the number of women in decision-making and leadership roles. She added that, for its part, the Government has adopted a feminist foreign policy and its development-cooperation efforts — to which 1 per cent of Luxembourg ’ s GDP is allocated — are focusing on new gender strategies, such as increasing financing for projects bolstering women ’ s empowerment throughout the world.

Right of Reply

Speaking in the exercise of the right of reply, the representative of the Russian Federation said that many delegates made baseless allegations against his country in their statements today. They ignore the fact that the Ukrainian army has stricken the heart of Donetsk, killing civilians. Since the coup d'état in 2014, the Ukrainian regime has taken a decision to destroy the Russian-speaking populations in the country ’ s east, where they are being shelled and killed. He wondered why Western countries ignore this situation created by the criminal regime in Kyiv, and instead provide lethal weapons to Kyiv. He reminded the Commission that the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) used inhumane weapons in the former Yugoslavia, killing civilians, including women and children, also citing similar actions by the so-called “peacekeeping” forces in Afghanistan and Libya.

**Load-Date:** March 17, 2022

**End of Document**



[***Shelby: Senate Passes FY22 Package, Important Domestic Funding***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6508-NSC1-JDG9-Y0K0-00000-00&context=1516831)

Impact News Service

March 12, 2022 Saturday

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**Body**

Washington: Office of the MP Richard Shelby has issued the following news release:

U.S Senator Richard Shelby (R-Ala.), vice chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee and its subcommittee on defense, today voted to pass the Fiscal Year 2022 (FY22) omnibus appropriations package, which contains all 12 spending bills and roughly $14 billion in emergency aid to support humanitarian, security, and economic assistance for Ukraine and our Central European partners following the Russian ***invasion***. The package was passed in the Senate by a vote of 68-31. The package was passed by the House of Representatives Wednesday and will now be sent to the President ’ s desk for his signature.

“This bill importantly invests in a host of domestic priorities, including medical research, ***agriculture***, local infrastructure, and rural communities. These resources will bolster needed advancements, promote economic development, and encourage job creation. I am pleased that we have succeeded in securing this funding for Alabama, and I look forward to the impact it will have on our state and the nation. Alabama has always played a major role on the national stage. This funding will only accelerate the pace of that success,” said Senator Shelby.

Domestic funding in the FY22 package received an increase of $42 billion, equal to the rise in defense funding. The legislation supports biomedical research with nearly $45 billion in NIH funding, which has increased 51 percent over the past seven years, and provides $1 billion to establish the Advanced Research Projects Agency for Health (ARPA-H) to identify breakthroughs in diseases like Alzheimer's or cancer. Further, the spending bills support our highways, airports, ports, and other critical infrastructure investments and secure funding to promote economic and community development.

The package contains the following domestic funding provisions impacting Alabama:

Impacting North Alabama:

$25 million for the Fish and Wildlife Service to combat Asian Carp and enhance efforts in sub-basins of the Mississippi River, which includes key areas of Alabama in the Tennessee and Cumberland basins.

$500,000 for the Invasive Species Mitigation Plan to begin the planning, design, initial engineering and project management for construction of carp barriers in the Mississippi River Basin and the Tennessee-Tombigbee Waterway. $1.15 million to assist the National Park Service in acquiring land for the Little River Canyon National Preserve near Lookout Mountain, Alabama.

Impacting Tuscaloosa:

$50 million for the University of Alabama for a permanent endowment fund to support the recruitment and retention of ***exceptional*** faculty in science and engineering. $37 million to support staffing and operations at the National Water Center, which is located in Tuscaloosa, Alabama. $20 million for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Cooperative Institute that will assist NOAA and the NWC in addressing the nation ’ s growing water-related challenges. $12 million for the Coastal Inlet Research Program, which supports collaboration with the Army Corps of Engineers and the National Water Center in Tuscaloosa to address coastal resilience needs, ***measure*** coastal forces, and improve terrestrial and coastal modeling. Provides funding to the U.S Geological Survey to support the new USGS Hydrological Instrumentation facility, which will be located at the University of Alabama: $13.5 million to support integrated water prediction operations; $4 million to assist in future hydrological research and operational efforts; $4.5 million for university partnerships for innovative water resource technologies.

Impacting the Birmingham Area:

$76 million for the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB) School of Medicine to build a new biomedical research building. $44.9 billion for the National Institutes of Health (NIH), an increase of $2.25 billion above FY21 funding level. $6.86 billion for the National Cancer Institute (NCI), an increase of $353.7 million from FY21. $45 million to the National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities (NIMHD) for chronic disease centers, which supports research at UAB. $882 million for the National Center for Advancing Translational Sciences (NCATS). $606.65 million for Clinical and Translational Science Awards (CTSAs), which continues funding for a $50 million CTSA award at UAB. $18 million in grant funding for Regional Pediatric Pandemic Network for Children ’ s Hospitals, which benefits UAB and Children ’ s of Alabama. $52 million in targeted funds for Regional Biocontainment Laboratories to test FDA-approved drugs at research institutions across the country, including UAB. $25.8 million in Poison Control Centers, which supports Alabama ’ s Poison Control Center located in Birmingham and is affiliated with Children ’ s of Alabama. $30 million in funding for Alabama ’ s Northern Beltline of the Appalachian Development Highway System. Funding to support the Department of Energy ’ s National Carbon Capture Center in Wilsonville, Alabama.

Impacting Auburn:

Provides funding to the ***Agricultural*** Research Service (ARS), which supports current research initiatives at Auburn University: $3 million, $1.5 million above the FY21 enacted level, for the Animal Health and Agro Bio Defense Center of Excellence; $6 million, $1 million above the FY21 enacted level, to address cotton blue disease; $3 million for sustainable and advanced technologies for poultry ***processing***; $2 million to reduce mixed infections in warm water aquaculture; $2 million for biomass conversion technologies at the National Soil Dynamics Laboratory located at Auburn University; $4 million for aquaponics system development; $3 million for advanced poultry production technology development; $1.5 million for alternative technologies for poultry waste utilization; $1.2 million to study harmful algal bloom impact on aquaculture; $1 million for dietary manipulation to improve gut health in broiler production; Maintains funding for foodborne pathogens and shrimp production research. $5 million for research on forest carbon sequestration and pine needle blight, which supports work conducted at Auburn University. $5 million to support disease diagnostics efforts at Fish and Wildlife Service ’ s Warm Springs Fish Health Center, which collaborates with Auburn University ’ s Southeast Cooperative Fish Parasite & Disease Laboratory.

Impacting the Mobile Area:

$100 million for improvements to the Mobile Downtown Airport, including funding to purchase land, conduct surveys, and renovate and relocate on-site facilities. $132 million for improvements to the Port of Mobile, including for the design and construction of docks, wharves, and piers, as well as for land acquisition and site development. $67 million for freight and intermodal rail infrastructure improvements at the Port of Mobile and the Montgomery inland intermodal transfer facility. $60 million for the construction of a medical science building at the University of South Alabama College of Medicine. $5 million to ensure successful implementation of NOAA ’ s “Reef Fish Amendment 50,” which delegates the federal management of red snapper to the Gulf Coast states, including language delaying state specific recalibration until 2023. $3 million to support implementation of electronic logbooks for federally permitted Gulf Coast charter-fishermen. $65 million to support dredging of the Port of Mobile and multiple inland and intercostal waterways throughout the State of Alabama. $50 million for the operations and maintenance of Donor and Energy Transfer Ports, which benefits the Port of Mobile.

State-wide funding:

$198 million for Watershed and Flood Prevention Operations; including language to exempt watershed projects that impact areas greater than 250,000 acres, which helps expand irrigation ***agriculture*** projects in Alabama. $3 million to continue the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) pilot program to assist statewide departments of ***agriculture*** and forestry commissions, including the Alabama Forestry Commission, in controlling the spread of cogongrass. $775 million for the RAISE grant program, which provides federal investment to support road, rail, and transit projects. $1 billion for the INFRA grant program, which provides federal funding for highway and freight projects of national and regional significance. $18 billion for the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), which provides assistance for Alabama airports, including: Grants-in-aid for airports; Contract towers; Research for advanced materials and structural safety; Research on airfield pavement; and Aviation workforce grants. $600,000 for the Army Corps of Engineers to continue a feasibility study on riverine fish passages at Claiborne and Millers Ferry Locks and Dams on the lower Alabama River. $25 million for the EPSCoR program, which provides federal support for sustainable and competitive energy research in eligible states and territories. $30 million for the Delta Regional Authority, including $15 million for flood control, basic public infrastructure development, and transportation improvements. $45 million in continued funding for Department of Labor Workforce Opportunities in the Delta Regional Authority and Appalachian Regional Commission regions, which funds workforce development initiatives throughout the state. $4.2 million for renovations to the federal courthouse in Selma. $1.75 billion in funding for Community Health Centers, which will help fund 126 community health centers in rural areas across Alabama. $375 million in grant funding for Children ’ s Hospitals Graduate Medical Education, which will increase Pediatric residencies at Children ’ s & Women ’ s Hospital in Mobile and Children ’ s of Alabama in Birmingham. $4.4 million for State Aquatic Nuisance Species Management Plans, which will support the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources ’ efforts to prevent and control the spread of aquatic nuisance species throughout the State of Alabama. $180 million for the Appalachian Regional Commission, including $50 million for the POWER initiative that provides federal funding to help communities and regions affected by job losses in coal mining and coal power plant operations. $440 million for charter schools.

**Load-Date:** March 13, 2022

**End of Document**



[***BlackRock Grtr Eur Half-year Report -2-***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:65DP-N8G1-JCXB-20PR-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

During these market moves, only the energy sector delivered strong absolute

returns while all remaining sectors fell in absolute terms. Consumer staples,

utilities and financials fared slightly better, while technology, industrials

and real estate sold off.

In our previous reports we highlighted how market volatility and a health

crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic posed a real test to our investment

philosophy. This was also the case over the past, highly volatile six months.

These times require adherence to our core investment beliefs: owning growing

businesses which can maintain a spread between their returns on capital and

their cost of capital. If company fundamentals remain unimpaired, volatility

creates opportunities to selectively add to high conviction holdings that

suffered in indiscriminate market sell-offs.

Besides our exposure to Russian companies, which we address in more detail

below, it is important to highlight that negative share price performance was

driven by factor moves (one style significantly outperforming or

underperforming another) in the market rather than earnings disappointments or

weaker business fundamentals. In fact, the full year 2021 earnings season has

so far been positive with many of the Company's investee companies delivering

very strong results. When markets are driven by macroeconomic narratives and

factor moves, earnings season can serve as a welcome 'reality check' that helps

us remove ourselves from the market noise and instead concentrate on the

operating environment for our companies.

Following the ***invasion*** of Ukraine, countries around the world and international

organisations introduced economic sanctions against Russian individuals and

entities. At the time of writing, the Central Bank of Russia has been

sanctioned by the United States of America, the European Union and Japan. As a

result, roughly half of Russia's US$620 billion foreign currency reserves are

now frozen - this pivotal ***measure*** has generated a dollar liquidity squeeze in

Russia impacting external payments, as well as creating risks around Russia's

banking system's ability to meet dollar deposit withdrawals. To stabilise the

domestic market, Russia's Central Bank has hiked interest rates to 20% (from

9.5%) and is enforcing mandatory conversion of export revenues into US dollars.

This was only done three times before, in Iran, North Korea and Cuba,

explaining the collapse in the Rouble exchange rates, as well as share prices

of key Russian banks. Russian stock markets have been closed since 25 February

2022 and secondary listings of Russian companies trading on international

exchanges have been suspended since 3 March 2022.

BlackRock suspended the purchase of all Russian securities in our active and

index portfolios on 28 February 2022 and, following that, BlackRock's Pricing

Committee wrote down the value of Russian securities across all portfolios to a

nominal value. A significant part of negative performance during the period

resulted from our exposure to these Russian companies. As of 31 January 2022,

the Company held 5.7% in Russian stocks. Post-***invasion***, and at the time of

writing in early March 2022, Russian securities held by the Company are valued

at a nominal value. Therefore, main detractors during the period included our

holdings in Russian companies which all fell between 75% to 95% over the

period. One of the Russian stocks, Sberbank, held by the Company is subject to

sanctions and we are addressing how to deal with this.

Outside of the first order effects described above, it is important to consider

second and third order effects. Following the ***invasion***, markets were quick to

price higher energy and ***agricultural*** commodity goods, given that Russia is the

source of significant European oil and gas imports, while Russia and Ukraine

together also account for 29% of global wheat exports (Source: The Economist,

12 March 2022). This may lead to a deterioration in spending power for

consumers in the lower quartiles of the income distribution and will likely

cause margin compression and/or demand destruction for energy intensive

industries. The Company has little exposure to energy intensive industries and

our consumer facing companies generally sell to higher-end consumers whose

discretionary expenditure is relatively well insulated against higher prices.

PORTFOLIO

Coming to portfolio detractors and contributors, Lonza Group's shares sold off

despite the business demonstrating an ***exceptional*** operating performance. The

health care company is adding about 30% new contract developers and

manufacturers (customers) per year and its management team remains very

confident in the outlook for the business given its impressive customer

pipeline. The company now gives guidance up to 2025, giving very strong

visibility of future earnings and cashflows.

Similarly, shares in DiaSorin struggled, although it remains one of the best

positioned life sciences firms in Europe. The largely family owned, Italian

diagnostics company is a well-run, high returning business, that can benefit

from an increased public awareness of the role of diagnostic testing and

continued decentralisation of specialties, such as providing smaller hospitals

with lab equipment.

On top of the de-rating suffered by longer duration businesses (typically

higher quality stocks), our position in Netcompany Group experienced stock

specific weakness following the announcement of the Intrasoft acquisition and

disappointing organic growth and margin guidance which has complicated the

investment case. We took action to reduce the position size in December 2021.

In more positive news, our off-benchmark position RELX was the top performer

over the period, as we have seen increased evidence of an acceleration of

organic growth in its academic publishing and legal divisions. RELX can also

benefit from structural growth in their data analytics business and generally

boasts strong earnings visibility.

Novo Nordisk aided returns, showing great strength in its franchises for

glucagon like peptides, as well as in the obesity market. More recently, the

company delivered improved guidance on capacity for their Wegovy weight loss

drug which came to the market in June 2021, expecting to be able to fill 100%

of scripts through the first six months of 2022.

The Company's position in LVMH, which we added to the portfolio in September

2021 following a volatile summer for the company's shares, outperformed the

falling market after reporting stellar results. The luxury group delivered

***exceptional*** numbers for full year 2021, with positive sentiment across almost

all divisions and regions. The turnaround of the acquired Tiffany brand

continues to be on track and sales in China accelerated despite continued local

lockdowns. Having met with management several times over the period, we remain

convinced that this is one of the best companies in Europe over the long term.

National Bank of Greece and Israeli ICL Group, both part of the Company's

Emerging European portfolio, also contributed positively to returns. The latter

develops, produces and markets fertilizers, metals and other special-purpose

chemical products and strongly benefited from a rise in fertilizer prices on

the back of higher gas prices. We subsequently took profit in the shares and

exited the stock.

Elsewhere, shares in travel related companies including Amadeus IT Group and

Safran also performed well, rebounding as fears around Omicron abated which led

to a more positive outlook for the travel and leisure industry.

As highlighted above, we have remained focused on our investment philosophy.

Over the period we worked intensely on our well-established fundamental

research ***process*** to confirm our investment cases, through meeting company

management teams, forensically examining estimates of earnings and cashflows

and having rigorous internal discussions about where we could be wrong. This is

an ongoing ***process***, but at present we have not seen any fundamental reasons to

materially change the general composition of the portfolio. This is reflected

in a portfolio turnover number of just under 13%.

Rather than selling our favourite companies based on other investors' fears, we

have taken advantage of weakness in share prices and topped up position sizes

in companies whose business and operational performance are intact, or if

anything growing stronger. This includes Lonza Group, ChemoMetec, Hermès and

Ferrari.

As mentioned above, we also bought shares in LVMH, one of the global leaders in

luxury goods, and Rational - a German manufacturer and retailer of combi-ovens,

steamers and cooking appliances for commercial kitchens. Rational is one of

Europe's highly profitable businesses. The company has delivered return on

capital of circa 35% over the past years, coupled with high-single-digit to

low-double-digit organic growth rates.

OUTLOOK

The macro-economic and geopolitical environment remains highly uncertain. As

bottom-up investors, we do not seek to forecast these outcomes, but it is

likely that economic growth will slow and global fiscal support will fade. The

damaging impacts of the Russia-Ukraine war may cause monetary policy makers to

more closely weigh high spot inflation against a deteriorating growth outlook,

which could ease some of the rate induced market volatility seen in January.

Moving from macro to micro, we are of the view that we are only in the early

stages of transformational shifts in many industries in Europe. Our portfolio

is fundamentally set up to benefit from high-quality, long lasting investment

spend to electrify the European economy, to reduce emissions from the existing

building stock, and to accelerate the shift to decarbonise transport, to name

but a few. Here, we focus our research hours on finding structural drivers and

increased spending that can help companies deliver superior returns over the

long term.

All in all, we expect greater dispersion between sector and stock outcomes and

**Load-Date:** May 10, 2022

**End of Document**



[***Groups call for protests against Libya's poll cancellation***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:64CV-82F1-JDJN-64F5-00000-00&context=1516831)

The Malta Independent

December 25, 2021

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**Length:** 38518 words

**Body**

Hundreds took to the streets in several Libyan cities to protest the cancellation of Friday's long-awaited presidential election, a blow to hopes of ending a decade of chaos in the oil-rich North African country.

Several parliamentary candidates and political groups have called for the protests, which underline risks to a fragile stability in the oil-rich nation that's a haven for militias and still riven by an east-west divide.

Libya's election commission has proposed Jan. 24 as a new date for the presidential poll, which was to be followed by parliamentary elections on Feb. 15. But no dates have been officially set or agreed upon by the country's rival factions.

At a Benghazi rally, protesters raised banners reading "yes for elections, no for postponement."

"All of Libya must have elections on time. We reject any postponement or manipulation of the Libyan will," Mohamed Alorfy, an activist told the crowd.

Earlier, many parliamentary hopefuls have circulated a poster calling for rallies on what they dubbed "Salvation Friday." The poster listed the demands of protesters, namely to set Jan. 24 as a final deadline for the poll.

"Do not be passive. Take to the streets and express your opinion. Force them to respect your will," AlSalhen AlNihoom, a parliamentary candidate from the eastern city of Benghazi, wrote on his Facebook page.

Protesters have also rallied for the same purpose in other cities and towns of eastern Libya including Tobruk and Derna. Small groups also took to the streets in the western city of Misrata, the southern village of Gatroun and the town of Hun in central Libya.

Earlier this week, some 50 parliamentary hopefuls denounced the cancellation of the vote, insisting in a joint statement that the commission should set another final date for holding it. The statement called on Libyans to take to the streets to defend their "right to a safe, stable and sovereign" country.

For nearly a year, the planned election was the lynchpin of international efforts to bring peace to Libya. But with several well-known figures — including the son of ousted dictator Moammar Gadhafi — declaring candidacy despite officials bans, the election commission never published a list of accepted candidates.

Many observers had warned that either scenario — holding the vote on time or postponing it — would be a destabilizing setback.

The U.S, U.K., France, Germany and Italy on Friday jointly called on Libyan authorities to swiftly determine a date for the polling and to issue the final list of presidential candidates.

"We recall that free, fair and credible elections will allow the Libyan people to elect a representative and unified government, and reinforce the independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity and national unity of Libya," the Western nations said in their statement.

They also warned that that local or foreign individuals or entities who obstruct or undermine the electoral ***process*** in Libya might face UN-imposed sanctions.

On Thursday, U.N. Secretary General Antonio Guterres said that elections should be held "in the appropriate conditions," according to a statement issued by his spokesperson. The U.N. top diplomat vowed that his organization will continue to support Libyan efforts to overcome challenges and hold both presidential and parliamentary elections as soon as possible.

Libya plunged into turmoil after the 2011 uprising that culminated in the overthrow and killing of longtime strongman Gadhafi. Eventually, the country split between rival governments — one in the east, backed by military commander Khalifa Hifter, and another U.N.-supported administration in the capital of Tripoli, in the west. Each side is supported by a variety of militias and foreign powers.

In April 2019, Hifter and his forces, backed by Egypt and the United Arab Emirates, launched an offensive to try and capture Tripoli. His campaign collapsed after Turkey stepped up its military support of the Tripoli government with hundreds of troops and thousands of Syrian mercenaries.

Mediated by the United Nations, an October 2020 cease-fire led to the formation of a transitional government with elections scheduled for Dec. 24. But with the vote now cancelled, the fate of that government is now unclear. The parliamentary committee said the government's mandate ends on Friday.

On Friday, the interim president of the east-based parliament called on members to convene in a general session on Monday in the city of Tobruk. The call came two days after the parliament's presidency announced that it had tasked a 10-lawmaker committee to propose within a week a new roadmap. It said then that lawmakers would discuss the proposal in the next general session.

The poll cancellation coincided with the 70th anniversary of the independence of Libya. In Tripoli, the mood was festive but more subdued than previous years, with folk music and people waving flags in Martyrs' Square.

Libya was occupied for decades by various nations, and it was not until 1947 that both Italy and France relinquished claims to parts of the country. The United Libyan Kingdom was announced with U.N. backing in late 1951 under King Idris. In 1969, Gadhafi led a military coup that deposed King Idris and subsequently forced him into exile until he died in Cairo in 1983.

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Malta's Foreign Ministry reaction

The postponement of the elections that were to be held in Libya today should serve as a pause for reflection of what can be learned from the past 15 months to ensure that when elections are held, they will be part of the solution and not part of the problem, the ForeignMinistry said.

The election ***process*** must form part of a broader ***process*** that helps bring about the acceptance of the result and the formation of a government accepted in all the territory of Libya.

The electoral ***process*** must not be an illusory short cut and a substitute for the difficult and gradual work that still needs to be done to reunify the institutions and push for economic and governance reform, security sector reform, reconciliation, transitional justice and recovery of full sovereignty and territorial integrity.

The international community including those countries that have been involved overtly or covertly in the Libyan conflict must assist Libya address these divisive challenges. If this does not happen, the crisis in Libya, with or without elections will go on as has happened in similar post conflict states like Lebanon and Iraq.

Sat, 25 Dec 2021 05:43:00 +0000 6736239336 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-25/world-news/Groups-call-for-protests-against-Libya-s-poll-cancellation-6736239336

Gorbachev's resignation 30 years ago marked the end of USSR

People strolling across Moscow's snowy Red Square on the evening of Dec. 25, 1991 were surprised to witness one of the 20th century's most pivotal moments — the Soviet red flag over the Kremlin pulled down and replaced with the Russian Federation's tricolor.

Just minutes earlier, Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev announced his resignation in a live televised address to the nation, concluding 74 years of Soviet history.

In his memoirs, Gorbachev, now 90, bitterly lamented his failure to prevent the USSR's demise, an event that upset the world's balance of power and sowed the seeds of an ongoing tug-of-war between Russia and neighboring Ukraine.

"I still regret that I failed to bring the ship under my command to calm waters, failed to complete reforming the country," Gorbachev wrote.

Political experts argue to this day whether he could have held onto his position and saved the USSR. Some charge that Gorbachev, who came to power in 1985, could have prevented the Soviet breakup if he had moved more resolutely to modernize the anemic state-controlled economy while keeping tighter controls on the political system.

"The collapse of the Soviet Union was one of those occasions in history that are believed to be unthinkable until they become inevitable," Dmitri Trenin, the director of the Moscow Carnegie Center, told The Associated Press. "The Soviet Union, whatever its long-term chances were, was not destined to go down when it did."

By the fall of 1991, however, deepening economic woes and secessionist bids by Soviet republics had made the collapse all but certain. A failed August 1991 coup by the Communist old guard provided a major catalyst, dramatically eroding Gorbachev's authority and encouraging more Soviet republics to seek independence.

While Gorbachev desperately tried to negotiate a new "union treaty" between the republics to preserve the USSR, he faced stiff resistance from his arch-rival, Russian Federation leader Boris Yeltsin, who was eager to take over the Kremlin and had backing from other independent-minded heads of Soviet republics.

On Dec. 8, the leaders of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus met in a hunting lodge, declaring the USSR dead and announcing the creation of the Commonwealth of Independent States. Two weeks later, eight other Soviet republics joined the newly formed alliance, handing Gorbachev a stark choice: step down or try to avert the country's breakup by force.

The Soviet leader analyzed the tough dilemma in his memoirs, noting that an attempt to order the arrest of the republics' leaders could have resulted in a bloodbath amid split loyalties in the military and law enforcement agencies.

"If I had decided to rely on some part of the armed structures, it would have inevitably triggered an acute political conflict fraught with blood and far-reaching negative consequences," Gorbachev wrote. "I couldn't do that: I would have stopped being myself."

What would have happened had Gorbachev resorted to force is hard to imagine in retrospect, the Carnegie Center's Trenin observed..

"It might have unleashed bloody events in Moscow and across Russia, maybe across the Soviet Union, or it might have consolidated some things," he said. "Had he decided to go down that route...there would have been blood on his hands. He would have had to turn into a sort of a dictator, because that would have...done away with his most important element of legacy; that is, not using force in a massive way."

When the leaders of Russia, Belarus and Ukraine declared the Soviet Union defunct, they didn't pay much attention to what would happen to the 4-million-strong Soviet military and its massive nuclear arsenals.

After the Soviet collapse, it took years of U.S.-led diplomatic efforts to persuade Ukraine, Belarus and Kazakhstan to hand over to Russia the Soviet nuclear weapons left on their territories — a ***process*** finally completed in 1996.

"The leaders of the republics that announced the end of the Soviet Union in December 1991 did not think through all the consequences of what they were doing," Gorbachev's aide, Pavel Palazhchenko, told the AP.

Russian President Vladimir Putin, whose two decades at the helm is longer than Gorbachev and Yeltsin's tenures combined, has famously described the Soviet collapse as "the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century."

"The breakup of the Soviet Union was the collapse of a historic Russia," Putin said in a documentary that aired this month on Russian state television. "We lost 40% of the territory, production capacities and population. We became a different country. What had been built over a millennium was lost to a large extent."

The Kremlin moved to redraw the post-Soviet borders in 2014, responding to the ouster of Ukraine's former Moscow-friendly leader by annexing the Ukrainian Crimean Peninsula and throwing its weight behind separatist rebels in its neighbor's east.

More than seven years of fighting in Ukraine's eastern industrial heartland has killed over 14,000 people. Tensions flared up in recent weeks over a Russian troop buildup near Ukraine that fueled Western fears of an ***invasion***.

Moscow has denied plans for an offensive and sternly urged the U.S. and its allies to provide a binding pledge that NATO wouldn't expand to Ukraine or deploy weapons there — a demand rejected by the West.

Putin and his officials countered the Western argument that Russia doesn't have a say in the alliance's expansion by emphasizing the country's right to protect its core security interests.

"Russia has never pretended to have the right of vote to make decisions for other countries," Konstantin Kosachev, a deputy speaker of the upper house of Russian parliament, told the AP. "But we have an absolute right of vote to ensure our own interests and security, and to offer our vision of a security environment in the nearby regions."

While Putin has repeatedly denied intentions to rebuild the USSR, he has described Russians and Ukrainians as "one people" over angry protests from Kyiv and charged that Ukraine unfairly inherited historic parts of Russia in the Soviet demise.

The Russian leader further toughened his rhetoric Thursday amid spiraling tensions with the West, blaming Soviet founder Vladimir Lenin for handing Russian lands to Ukraine to "create a country that had never existed before."

Sat, 25 Dec 2021 11:41:00 +0000 6736239344 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-25/world-news/Gorbachev-s-resignation-30-years-ago-marked-the-end-of-USSR-6736239344

TMID Editorial: Another blow to Malta's almost shredded reputation

In what was a quite frankly ***unprecedented*** – and wholly out of the blue – development in the latest chapter of the Konrad Mizzi and Keith Schembri saga, the US State Department announced a travel ban against the duo and their families on Wednesday.

It is news which came totally out of left field, and which was explained to be as a result of Mizzi and Schembri's "involvement in significant corruption".

"In their official capacities as Minister of Energy and Conservation of Water and Chief of Staff to the Prime Minister, Mizzi and Schembri were involved in corrupt acts that included using their political influence and official power for their personal benefit," the US State Department's statement read.

"Specifically, there is credible information that Mizzi and Schembri were involved in a corrupt scheme that entailed the award of a government contract for the construction of a power plant and related services in exchange for kickbacks and bribes," the statement continued.

"Their actions undermined rule of law and the Maltese public's faith in their government's democratic institutions and public ***processes***," it concluded.

The statement itself is a scathing and damning assessment – probably the most scathing and damning yet – of the Muscat administration and the Electrogas power station deal which it presumably refers to.

It is ***unprecedented*** certainly in Maltese history for another country – the United States of America no less – to black-ban two people who were amongst the highest politicians in the government because of their involvement in a corruption scandal.

It is also something which brings shame onto our country's name and our country's reputation.  Besides that, however, it should also bring shame onto the people in our police force.

Imagine a scenario where a sovereign nation halfway across the globe decides to ban people from entering their country over their alleged involvement in corruption (something which they did not allege, incidentally, but referred to as a matter of fact), but the local police force have yet to lift a finger to prosecute either of them in relation to this same case.

The evidence is there for all to see.  The ties to Azerbaijan, to the company 17 Black which was to send the equivalent of €5,000 every day to Mizzi and Schembri – who listed the company as their target clients, are known.  This was found by the FIAU, but exposed thanks to the work of journalists who ensured that the report would not continue to rot on the shelves of the police depot, with no action taken on it.

The Electrogas power station deal remains one which is mired in corruption.  It will remain associated with Yorgen Fenech – who is charged with masterminding the murder of Daphne Caruana Galizia, the first person to mention 17 Black – and with Konrad Mizzi and Keith Schembri.

The fact that neither Schembri nor Mizzi have ever faced charges for the above is a scandal in itself.

We can only live in hope that someday the arm of Maltese justice catches up with the long arm of American justice.

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UK data suggests hospitalization is less likely with omicron

Preliminary data suggests that people with the omicron variant of the coronavirus are 50% to 70% less likely to be hospitalized than those with the delta strain, Britain's public health agency announced Thursday in a finding that one researcher called "a small ray of sunlight."

The findings from the U.K. Health Security Agency add to emerging evidence that omicron produces milder illness than other variants. But scientists caution that any reductions in severity must be weighed against the fact that omicron spreads much faster than delta and is better at evading vaccines.

Based on cases in the U.K., a person with omicron is estimated to be 31% to 45% less likely to go to a hospital emergency department compared to someone with delta, "and 50 to 70% less likely to be admitted to hospital," the agency said.

It cautioned that the analysis is "preliminary and highly uncertain" because of the small number of omicron patients in hospitals and the fact that most were in younger age groups. As of Dec. 20, 132 people had been admitted to U.K. hospitals with confirmed omicron. Fourteen of them died, all between the ages of 52 and 96.

Countries around the world are looking closely at Britain, where omicron is now dominant and where COVID-19 cases have surged by more than 50% in a week.

Experts not involved with the analysis called it encouraging.

"To me, it's a small ray of sunlight among all the dark clouds," said Dr. Jonathan Li, director of the Harvard/Brigham Virology Specialty Laboratory.

The signs that omicron may cause less severe disease than delta also align with lab data suggesting omicron does not grow as well in cells derived from lungs, Li said.

The findings add to similar data from South Africa, added Dr. Bruce Walker, director of the Ragon Institute of Massachusetts General Hospital, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Harvard.

Walker said there are still unknowns, such as the relative severity of omicron in someone who's been vaccinated compared with someone who's had COVID-19 before or someone who is unvaccinated and has not had the disease.

Vaccination remains crucial, he said.

"The bottom line is the best way that somebody can prepare for this new wave is to get immunized, and if somebody is already immunized, to get a booster," said Walker, who is an investigator with the Howard Hughes Medical Institute, which also supports The Associated Press' Health and Science Department.

The British agency's research said the protection a vaccine booster shot gives against symptomatic omicron infection appears to wane after about 10 weeks, though protection against hospitalization and severe disease is likely to hold up for longer.

The analysis "shows an encouraging early signal that people who contract the omicron variant may be at a relatively lower risk of hospitalization than those who contract other variants," said the chief executive of the U.K. HSA, Jenny Harries.

But she added that "cases are currently very high in the U.K., and even a relatively low proportion requiring hospitalization could result in a significant number of people becoming seriously ill."

The analysis follows two studies, from Imperial College London and Scottish researchers, that found patients with omicron were 20% to 68% less likely to require hospital treatment than those with delta.

Even if the early studies are borne out, the new variant could still overwhelm health systems because of the sheer number of infections. The British health agency said omicron appeared able to re-infect people more easily than previous variants, with 9.5% of omicron cases found in people who had already had COVID-19 — a figure it said was likely an underestimate.

Britain reported nearly 120,000 lab-confirmed COVID-19 cases on Thursday, the highest yet during the pandemic and the second day the number has topped 100,000.

Britain's Office for National Statistics estimated that about 1 in 45 people in private households in England — 1.2 million individuals — had COVID-19 in the week to Dec. 16, the highest level seen in the pandemic.

Britain's Conservative government this month reinstated rules requiring face masks in shops and ordered people to show proof of vaccination or a negative coronavirus test before entering nightclubs and other crowded venues in an attempt to slow omicron's spread.

The government said Thursday that it would not impose any new restrictions before Christmas, but might do so soon after.

Officials also urged people to get tested regularly and to cut back on socializing. Many in Britain have heeded that advice, leaving entertainment and hospitality businesses reeling at what should be their busiest time of the year.

Experts pointed out that staying out of the hospital should not be the only goal; people should also try to avoid long COVID-19, which can result from mild infections.

"We're all excited to hear that this is immediately less severe in terms of disease," Walker said. "But do we know what the possibility of long COVID is? No, we don't. There hasn't been enough time (that has) passed to have any sense of whether omicron is associated with long COVID."

Louis Mansky, director of the Institute for Molecular Virology at the University of Minnesota, said there's not enough data to know how omicron will play out in the U.S.

"It gets back to the health status of the average American," Mansky said. "We have other epidemics going on in terms of obesity, cardiovascular disease," he said, explaining that "the general health of the individual" will be an important factor in how sick they might get from omicron.

Fri, 24 Dec 2021 06:48:00 +0000 6736239321 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-24/world-news/UK-data-suggests-hospitalization-is-less-likely-with-omicron-6736239321

Christmas in the Park event latest casualty as Covid numbers climb up

The planned activities known as Christmas in the Park at Marsascala have been called off because of the sharp increase in the number of Covid-19 cases.

Energy Minister Miriam Dalli said on Facebook on Friday that the activity was to have offered a different way to celebrate the Christmas season.

"But today reluctantly we took the decision to close the event," the minister wrote.

She said she believed this was the best way forward given the restrictions imposed by the health authorities after the sharp spike in the number of cases.

The New Year's Eve event in Valletta and the Bethlehem f'Ghajnsielem event have also been cancelled.

Fri, 24 Dec 2021 15:27:00 +0000 6736239332 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-24/local-news/Christmas-in-the-Park-event-latest-casualty-as-Covid-numbers-climb-up-6736239332

Christmas Eve travel chaos as airlines cancel more than 2,000 flights

Major airlines said they have cancelled hundreds of flights because illnesses largely tied to the omicron variant of COVID-19 have taken a toll on flight crew numbers during the busy holiday travel season.

Germany-based Lufthansa said Friday that it was canceling a dozen long-haul transatlantic flights over the Christmas holiday period because of a "massive rise" in sick leave among pilots. The cancellations on flights to Houston, Boston and Washington come despite a "large buffer" of additional staff for the period.

The airline says it couldn't speculate on whether COVID-19 infections or quarantines were responsible because it was not informed about the sort of illness. Passengers were booked on other flights.

Lufthansa said in a statement that "we planned a very large buffer for the vacation period. But this was not sufficient due to the high rate of people calling in sick."

U.S.-based Delta Air Lines and United Airlines said they had to cancel dozens of Christmas Eve flights because of staff shortages tied to omicron. United canceled 170 flights, and Delta called off 133, according to FlightAware.

The bulk of the cancellations came from five firms, with China Eastern cancelling 474 journeys, while Air China scrapped 188 and Air India 160 .

The flight tracking firm FlightAware said 2,031 Christmas Eve flights had been cancelled globally, including 448 in the US.

"The nationwide spike in omicron cases this week has had a direct impact on our flight crews and the people who run our operation," United said in a statement. "As a result, we've unfortunately had to cancel some flights and are notifying impacted customers in advance of them coming to the airport."

The airline said it was working to rebook as many people as possible.

Delta said it canceled flights Friday because of the impact of omicron and possibility of bad weather after it had "exhausted all options and resources — including rerouting and substitutions of aircraft and crews to cover scheduled flying."

It said in a statement that it was trying to get passengers to their destinations quickly.

The cancellations come as coronavirus infections fueled by the new variant further squeeze staffing at hospitals, police departments, supermarkets and other critical operations struggling to maintain a full contingent of front-line workers.

To ease staffing shortages, countries including Spain and the U.K. have reduced the length of COVID-19 quarantines by letting people return to work sooner after testing positive or being exposed to the virus.

Delta CEO Ed Bastian was among those who have called on the Biden administration to take similar steps or risk further disruptions in air travel. On Thursday, the U.S. shortened COVID-19 isolation rules for health care workers only.

Fri, 24 Dec 2021 17:25:00 +0000 6736239334 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-24/world-news/Christmas-Eve-travel-chaos-as-airlines-cancel-more-than-2-000-flights-6736239334

Covid-19: Third consecutive day of record cases - 955, as number of people in hospital rises to 70

The number of new Covid-19 cases recorded daily reached another record Friday when 955 were identified, health authorities said.

It was the third consecutive day in which a record of new cases was reached, after the 582 registered on Wednesday and the 733 on Thursday.

It is likely that we will be topping 1,000 on Christmas Day.

The health authorities did not say how many of the cases were of the omicron variant, but given its highly contagious nature, it is probable that more cases were added to the two mentioned by Minister Chris Fearne on Thursday.

The number of people in hospital has also risen sharply, going up to 70 from the 53 there were on Thursday.

Five of the patients are in intensive care, up from three on Thursday.

With only 118 recoveries recorded, the number of active cases has inevitably shot up, reaching a record of 4,469. The previous high was 3,632 registered on Thursday.

No deaths were recorded, with the tally so far being 473.

The authorities said that 1,027,903 vaccination doses were administered, of which 184,929 were booster shots.

Malta has had 44,669 cases of Covid-19 so far. 39,408 of those have recovered.

Fri, 24 Dec 2021 12:30:00 +0000 6736239330 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-24/local-news/Covid-19-Third-consecutive-day-of-record-cases-955-as-number-of-people-in-hospital-rises-to-70-6736239330

Christmas Week brings record 3,190 Covid cases, and it's not over yet; 7-day average close to 500

Christmas Week has so far brought with it a record number of new Covid-19 cases, with the possibility of doubling what is so far the worst week in Malta when statistics are published on Christmas Day.

Until now, the worst week in terms of new cases was that between Sunday 7 March 2021 and Saturday 13 March 2021, when 2,051 cases were registered. The peak day that week was 10 March, with 510 cases.

Between last Sunday and today Friday, Malta has seen 3,190 cases and, given the sharp rise in the numbers from the 282 registered on Sunday to Friday's 955, it is possible – not to say probable – that the number of cases that will be announced Saturday will push the number of cases in one single week to beyond 4,000 (double the till-now record week in March).

A number similar to today's figures will be enough to break the weekly record.

Also for the first time since the Covid-19 pandemic started, the seven-day moving average has surpassed 400 – and is actually close to 500.

Until Thursday, the seven-day moving average was 392. On Friday, it is 497.

Fri, 24 Dec 2021 12:56:00 +0000 6736239331 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-24/local-news/Christmas-Week-brings-record-3-190-Covid-cases-and-it-s-not-over-yet-7-day-average-close-to-500-6736239331

Travelling? This is what passengers are to expect at MIA

Holiday travel has taken off at Malta International Airport, and as people return home from near and far to reunite with their loved ones over the next two weeks, the airport team is all set to give departing guests a festive send-off and arriving guests a warm welcome to the Maltese islands.

The busiest day of the month is expected to be Monday 27th December, when the highest volume of passenger traffic will be travelling through the airport, the MIA said in a statement.

In the days leading up to their departure, passengers are advised to familiarise themselves with the travel restrictions at their destination by visiting [*www.maltairport.com/covid19/departure*](http://www.maltairport.com/covid19/departure) and to prepare any health documentation which is required for entry into the country. Given that all documents must be vetted at the check-in counters before proceeding to the security screening area, it is recommended that passengers arrive at the airport at least 2.5 hours prior to their flight's scheduled time of departure.

Festive surprises await inside the Departures Hall, so passengers looking to breeze through the airport's security checkpoint are reminded to avoid carrying any liquids exceeding 100ml carried inside their hand luggage, as these may be confiscated, as well as to avoid gift wrapping goodies which may be opened and screened by security officials.

Instead, passengers may get their Christmas gifts, and any other last-minute purchases made at the airport's outlets, wrapped for free at the gift-wrapping station just outside the DUFRY outlet. Local artists will also be performing at Hard Rock Café and Relish every day of the week excluding Tuesdays and Thursdays until the 31 December, while a polaroid photographer will be roaming the area to capture special airport moments.

Once travellers arrive safely at their destination, they are invited to participate in Malta International Airport's Secret Passenger Programme, which offers travelling guests a platform where they can rate their airport experience and provide feedback or suggestions for further improvement.

The airport is also looking forward to welcoming visitors to its newly re-opened Observation Deck on Level 3, where a Christmas crib hand-crafted by a member of the airport team has also been put on display, and is offering all visitors two hours of free parking at the main car park.

Whilst urging all visiting and travelling guests to comply with the COVID-19 guidelines throughout their airport journey, Malta International Airport would like to wish one and all a safe festive season filled with cheer and delight.

Fri, 24 Dec 2021 11:02:00 +0000 6736239327 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-24/local-news/Travelling-This-is-what-passengers-are-to-expect-at-MIA-6736239327

Partygoers in desperate attempt to sell tickets for Christmas, New Year's parties

Even before the government yesterday announced new ***measures*** to curb the spread of Covid-19, several partygoers had already started to attempt to sell their tickets for Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve parties.

These attempts multiplied after it became known that parties will only be allowed if there are seating arrangements in place. Those where revellers were to remain standing are prohibited, given the rise in the number of cases registered in the past few days.

Many were those who anticipated the government's move, trying to get rid of their costly tickets before the new ***measures*** were announced. Others are probably in quarantine and, as such, prohibited from leaving their home, or terrified with the latest statistics.

With the number of daily Covid-19 cases sharply on the rise in the last few days, there had been calls for the government to impose added restrictions apart from the wearing of a mask in public places.

Both employer bodies and unions expressed concern that the present ***measures*** do not reflect the present circumstances, and called on the government to take action.

This action was taken yesterday, with the government announcing fresh ***measures***.

The number of active cases has also risen sharply in the past week, and this has inevitably meant that the number of people forced into quarantine because they share a household with an infected person is also very much on the rise.

This situation spurred many individuals who bought tickets for Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve events across Malta are now trying to sell them, at least trying to recoup the money they have already paid.

This is mostly because in many instances no refunds from the party organisers are possible.

When originally buying their ticket online, customers were made aware that they might not receive a refund if there is a cancellation. In light of such a claim, many young adults are now faced with either not showing up for the party and losing money or trying to sell their tickets last minute.

Fri, 24 Dec 2021 07:47:00 +0000 6736239323 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-24/local-news/Partygoers-in-desperate-attempt-to-sell-tickets-for-Christmas-New-Year-s-parties-6736239323

Updated: Coronavirus dampens Christmas joy in biblical Bethlehem

Musicians banging drums and playing bagpipes marched through the biblical town of Bethlehem on Friday to the delight of smaller than usual crowds — a mix of conviviality and restraint reflected in celebrations around the world on a Christmas Eve dampened once again by the coronavirus.

A ban on nearly all incoming air traffic by Israel — the main entry point for foreign visitors heading to the occupied West Bank, home to the traditional birthplace of Jesus — kept international tourists away for a second year. The ban is meant to slow the spread of the highly contagious omicron variant.

Instead, local authorities were counting on the Holy Land's small Christian community to lift spirits.

It was a theme seen around the world as revelers, weary from nearly two years of lockdowns and safety restrictions, searched for ways to return to rituals that were called off last year, while still celebrating safely.

"We can't let the virus take our lives from us when when we're healthy," said Rosalia Lopes, a retired Portuguese government worker who was doing some last-minute shopping in the coastal town of Cascais.

She said she and her family were fed up with the pandemic and determined to go ahead with their celebrations with the help of safety ***measures*** like vaccines and booster shots, rapid home tests and wearing masks in public. She planned a traditional Portuguese Christmas Eve dinner of baked cod.

"We have to take precautions, of course, but we're really looking forward to it," she said.

In Germany, church services were scaled back and one cathedral held a special Christmas vaccination campaign. Spain ordered people to wear masks, even outdoors, and in France, hospital workers decorated a Christmas tree in a crowded intensive-care unit.

Bethlehem's mayor, Anton Salman, said the town was optimistic that 2021 would be better than last year's Christmas, when even local residents stayed home due to lockdown restrictions, and marching bands paraded through empty streets.

"Last year, our festival was virtual, but this year it will be face to face with popular participation," Salman said.

In the afternoon, hundreds of people gathered in the town's central Manger Square as a line of bagpipe-and-drum-playing bands streamed through the area ahead of the arrival from Jerusalem of Latin Patriarch Pierbattista Pizzaballa, the top Roman Catholic clergyman in the Holy Land.

"I hope that this COVID will finish," Pizzaballa said before departing Jerusalem and crossing through an Israeli checkpoint into Bethlehem.

Pizzaballa waved to well-wishers as his motorcade made its way through town. He said spirits were much better than last year.

"Last year was very sad. This year we see a lot of people, very crowded, and a lot of joy. So even if we are not 100%, we are 90% there. Merry Christmas," he said, before entering the Church of the Nativity to prepare for Midnight Mass. The church is built on the grotto where Christians believe Jesus was born.

Before the pandemic, Bethlehem would host thousands of Christian pilgrims from around the world, bringing a strong dose of holiday spirit to the town and a huge jolt to the local economy.

In early November, Israel lifted a year and a half ban that had kept most foreign tourists out of the area. But weeks later, it was forced to re-impose the restrictions as the omicron variant began to spread worldwide, dashing the hopes of the local tourism sector.

Tourism is the lifeblood of Bethlehem's economy, and the lack of visitors has hit hotels, restaurants and gift shops especially hard.

"Under normal conditions for this time of year, I usually have a 20-meter (yard) queue outside," said Adil Abu Nayaf, owner of an empty food stall in Manger Square.

Those who attended tried to make the best of a difficult situation. The Holy Land is home to over 200,000 Christians, a small but tight-knit community that makes up an estimated 1% to 2% of the population in Israel and the occupied West Bank. There are also thousands of foreign laborers and African migrants, as well as diplomats, aid workers and journalists who celebrate Christmas.

Billy Stuart, an employee at the British Consulate in Jerusalem, said his experience in Bethlehem was uplifting, despite the smaller-than-hoped-for crowds.

"The parade is amazing and I did not realize there were so many Palestinian bagpipers," he said.

Celebrations in Europe, where infections are surging in many countries, were also more subdued — but forging ahead.

As Spain returned Friday to mandatory face-covering outdoors, 19-year-old student Andrés Pérez and a group of volunteers headed out to offer people without homes masks and a warm breakfast.

"It's hard to do it (wear the mask), but it's better for all of us," said Pérez, whose group brought a guitar to serenade homeless people with Christmas carols.

Spanish authorities ruled out more controversial ***measures***, such as bar and restuarant closures or caps on gatherings. But some regions have taken a more drastic approach. The northeastern Catalonia region has reinstated curfews and limited to a maximum of 10 the number of people allowed to meet indoors.

In Germany, churchgoers faced a thicket of health restrictions and limits on attendance.

Frankfurt's cathedral, which can hold 1,200 people, offered only 137 distanced spaces, which were booked up days in advance. Singing was allowed only through masks.

In some regions, churches required proof of vaccination or testing on top of strict capacity limits and masking.

A line wound halfway around Cologne's massive cathedral, not for midnight Mass but for vaccinations in an adjacent church hall, the DPA news agency reported. The offer of shots was a sign of "care for one's neighbor" that was consistent with the message of Christmas, cathedral provost Guido Assmann said.

In the French Mediterranean city of Marseille, the intensive care unit at La Timone Hospital has been taking in more and more COVID-19 patients as the holidays approach.

Amelie Khayat has been paying daily visits to her husband Ludo, 41, who is recovering from spending 24 days in a coma and on a breathing machine. They touched their heads together as she sat on his bed, and now that he's strong enough to stand, he got up to give her a farewell hug.

In a nearby room, another patient lay unconscious, her son's winter hat placed on her belly. In yet another, a Christian icon lay propped on the virus patient's tray, left by his family.

Outside, a medical worker put final decorations on the ICU Christmas tree.

Fri, 24 Dec 2021 10:42:00 +0000 6736239326 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-24/world-news/Coronavirus-dampens-Christmas-joy-in-biblical-Bethlehem-6736239326

Italy tightens rules on unvaccinated, New Year's festivities

Italy on Thursday again tightened COVID-19 restrictions, focusing on the unvaccinated and on New Year's Eve celebrations as the new omicron variant pushed recorded infections to the country's highest one-day total ever.

Under the new rules, people who have not been vaccinated will be barred from entering museums, exhibitions, amusement parks, bingo parlors and betting halls — places that until now they could access with a negative test. Already forbidden seating in restaurants, their dining options have now been completely shut down as they can no longer be served standing at a bar.

"It is important that we present a series of ***measures*** to respond to the growth of cases that we see in the last days, due to the arrival in our country in a significant way of the omicron variant,'' Health Minister Roberto Speranza told a press conference.

The ***measures*** come as Italians prepare to celebrate the Christmas holiday weekend, with many planning family gatherings that were barred last year during the surge of the delta variant. The government has not mandated any rules for private gatherings, but it has set its sights on New Year's Eve, banning outdoor events and closing discotheques until the end of January.

The new regulations will be gradually implemented starting Friday.

Long lines formed at testing sites in Milan on Thursday, as people worried about suspected cases sought to be tested alongside those who continue to get tested every 48 hours to access workplaces. And in neighboring Veneto, some testing sites for PCR swabs posted notices that they had exhausted their available appointments for the next 60 days.

In the last 24 hours, Italy recorded nearly 44,600 new infections, its highest ever, and 168 deaths. The omicron variant of the coronavirus represents nearly one-third of the new cases. The head of Italy's national health institute, Silvio Brusaferro, said that omicron would be dominant by next week with "slow but continuous growth."

Italy was the first major economy to adopt a health pass to access workplaces, but has allowed a negative test every 48 hours to stand in for a full vaccination or proof of recovery from COVID. Mask mandates have remained in place in public indoor settings and public transport. Now, that has been upgraded and only more-protective FFP2 masks may be worn on all public transport, as well as in cinemas, theaters and stadiums.

Fri, 24 Dec 2021 06:46:00 +0000 6736239320 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-24/world-news/Italy-tightens-rules-on-unvaccinated-New-Year-s-festivities-6736239320

Yorgen Fenech lawyers claim fundamental rights breach over lack of disclosure

Lawyers for Yorgen Fenech have filed a constitutional case against the State Advocate and the Commissioner of Police, arguing that an alleged lack of disclosure of the evidence against their client, on the part of the police, is breaching his fundamental rights.

Fenech is indicted and awaiting trial on charges of having commissioned the murder of journalist Daphne Caruana Galizia in 2017.

In an application to the First Hall of the Civil Court, in its Constitutional jurisdiction, Fenech's lawyers Marion Camilleri, Gianluca Caruana Curran and Charles Mercieca say that Fenech had made several requests for disclosure of the evidence against him, as is the right of every person accused under the Criminal Code.

The Constitutional application states that Fenech has made a total of ten requests for disclosure, starting during his initial interrogation. The application goes on to quote a decree handed down on 24 December 2020 by the court of Magistrates, which unambiguously stated that the police were obliged to grant him "timely access" to material evidence relevant to his defence.

"Despite all this and despite the duties of the competent authorities, amongst them the Executive Police…to this day [Fenech] has still not been given access to the material and all the evidence in the possession of the competent authorities…" said his lawyers. Fenech had only been granted limited disclosure of the evidence against him, the lawyers say, adding that this had been selected by the prosecuting officer.

As it is the police who lead and manage investigations, it was presumed that the police were in the best position to know exactly evidence emerged from the investigations, the application goes on to say, protesting that Fenech had no way of knowing what evidence the police had in their possession.

Fenech's legal team argue that the refusal and "manifest reluctance" of the police to grant him access to all the evidence was leading to "actual prejudice…to the extreme that the undersigned is unable to prepare his defence." Quoting the law, they said the access to the prosecution's evidence had to be given to the defence before the start of Fenech's trial by jury.

The lawyers also highlighted that section 534AF of the Criminal Code, which regulates the ***process*** of disclosure in criminal cases, does not provide the method and neither does it give any power to the affected person to contest a refusal by the authorities to a disclosure request.

This, Fenech's defence argue, led him to "believe that he is suffering a breach of his fundamental right to a fair hearing " as protected by the European Convention on Human Rights and the Constitution.

Fenech requested the court to declare that his rights had been breached and order the authorities to supply him and his lawyers with a complete list of the evidence obtained through the investigations, relevant to the case against him.

He asked the court for permission to exhibit this evidence during his trial by jury.

The court was also asked to declare that section 534AF of the Criminal Code did not offer persons accused with an ordinary remedy to contest a refusal to grant disclosure by the authorities, resulting in a breach of his right to a fair hearing.

Fri, 24 Dec 2021 11:45:00 +0000 6736239329 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-24/local-news/Yorgen-Fenech-lawyers-claim-fundamental-rights-breach-over-lack-of-disclosure-6736239329

Customs Canine Charlie intercepts €38,585 in undeclared cash at the MIA

Nearly €40,000 in undeclared cash were intercepted by Customs Canine Charlie, the Customs Department said Friday

€15,000 in undeclared cash were sezied when the dog giving a positive indication on a checked-in luggage at the MIA loading tunnel, .

At the Departures Lounge, Charlie also made a positive indication on a Maltese passenger who was travelling with his wife and daughter.

A thorough search of the passengers resulted in the find of €22,000 in the male passenger's jacket, €1,230 in his wallet and another €355 in the female passenger's purse.

The Maltese woman and daughter were given an allowance of €10,000 each whilst the male passenger was offered an out-of-court settlement which he agreed to and signed for the rest of the money (€18,585) and was administered a fine, the department said.

Fri, 24 Dec 2021 09:28:00 +0000 6736239325 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-24/local-news/Customs-Canine-Charlie-intercepts-38-585-in-undeclared-cash-at-the-MIA-6736239325

Girl, 14, killed by LA police in clothing store shooting

Los Angeles police fatally shot a 14-year-old girl who was in a clothing store dressing room Thursday when officers fired on an assault suspect and a bullet went through the wall and struck the girl, authorities said.

Police also fatally shot the suspect Thursday morning at a Burlington store in the North Hollywood area of the San Fernando Valley, police said.

Witnesses told KCBS-TV that a man began acting erratically, threatening to throw items from the upper floor, and attacked a woman with a bicycle lock shortly before noon as the store was crowded with holiday shoppers.

Officers answered a report of an assault and others of shots being fired, police said. Investigators have not found a gun at the scene.

The suspect was shot and died at the store but one of the bullets went through drywall behind the man and killed the girl, who was in a changing room with her mother, police said.

Officers found the teenager dead after seeing a hole in "a solid wall that you can't see behind," LAPD Assistant Chief Dominic Choi said.

Investigators didn't immediately know whether she was in the dressing room before the violence began or ran in there to hide, he said.

"This chaotic incident resulting in the death of an innocent child is tragic and devastating for everyone involved," Police Chief Michel Moore said in a statement late Thursday night. "I am profoundly sorry for the loss of this young girl's life and I know there are no words that can relieve the unimaginable pain for the family."

Moore promised a "thorough, complete and transparent investigation" into the shooting and said a critical incident video that will include 911 calls, body camera and other video will be released by Monday.

The names of the girl and the suspect weren't immediately released, and the woman who was attacked is not being identified.

Investigators were trying to determine whether the assault was random or targeted. Choi said they don't believe the teenager was related to the person who was attacked.

Police found a heavy metal cable lock near the suspect, Choi said.

The California Department of Justice was investigating the shooting, Attorney General Rob Bonta said.

News reports showed a woman with a bloodied face, who appeared to be the assault victim, being placed in an ambulance.

The victim was taken to the hospital with moderate to serious injuries, Fire Department spokesperson Nicholas Prange said. Choi said she had wounds to her head, arms and face.

The shooting recalled a July 21, 2018, confrontation in which LAPD officers accidentally shot and killed a woman at a Trader Joe's market. Officers got into a gunfight with a man who authorities say shot his grandmother and girlfriend before leading police on a chase that ended when he crashed his car outside the market.

A police bullet killed Melyda Corado, 27, the assistant store manager, as she ran toward the store's entrance after hearing the car crash.

The suspect, Gene Evin Atkins, took employees and shoppers hostage for three hours before surrendering, authorities said.

Atkins has pleaded not guilty to the killing.

Prosecutors found two police officers acted lawfully when they returned Atkins' gunfire.

Fri, 24 Dec 2021 11:09:00 +0000 6736239328 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-24/world-news/Girl-14-killed-by-LA-police-in-clothing-store-shooting-6736239328

Two Omicron cases found, standing events prohibited as from Monday, only seated events allowed

Two cases of the Omicron variant of Covid-19 have been found by Mater Dei Hospital's genetics lab in the past hours, Health Minister Chris Fearne announced on Thursday.

He said that these are people who tested positive some days ago, which suggests therefore that the bulk of community transmission being seen in recent days is down to the presence of this variant in the community.

Fearne said that while case numbers are high, the number of people in hospital remains stable: 53 people are now receiving treatment in Mater Dei Hospital, while 3 of those - one less than Wednesday - are in intensive care.

Fearne said that the evidence suggests that while Omicron is a lot more transmissable than other variants, it is not more severe, and people are protected against it by taking the booster vaccine dose.

41% of Maltese adults have taken their booster dose, Fearne said, with the absolutel majority of those who are elderly and therefore most vulnerable are vaccinated with their booster.

Fearne announced that as from Monday 27 December, all those over the age of 18 can register to receive their third dose as well.

As from 17 January, the vaccine certificate for those who have received two doses of the jab will only be valid for three months.  Those who have received their third dose will have their vaccine certificate valid for nine months from the date of the said third dose.

Fearne announced that as from 17 January, the following establishments will only be open to those who have a valid vaccine certificate, as per the new regulations for validity explained above: bars, snack bars, restaurants, band clubs, gyms, pools, spas, casinos, games halls, cinemas, theatres, sporting events, and all organised events.

For those who are under 18 years of age, the situation will not change for now, Fearne said.

The Health Minister announced a raft of ***measures*** which will come into force for the period between 27 December and 17 January next year.

From Monday, all organised events will be allowed to continue, but will have to be seated.  This means that standing events will not be permissible.

The only exceptions are weddings and funerals, which can continue under the protocols which are currently in place.

From Monday, all establishments must shut their doors by 1am if their licence allows them to remain open for that long.  Sporting events can continue to take place, but must be held behind closed doors.

Visitng hours at Mater Dei Hospital will also be reduced, but the visiting hours at elderly homes will remain unchanged owing to the fact that the vast majority of residents have received their booster shot.

Superintendent of Public Health Charmaine Gauci said that "in recent days, we have seen a significant rise in Coronavirus cases suggesting that the bulk of transmission within the community has been a result of the presence of the Omicron variant."

Gauci explained that when looking at the seven-day moving average of new Covid-19 cases, this stands at 392, whilst the positivity rate has increased to a total of 7.6%. A total of 7,000 swab tests were carried out on Wednesday alone, including both rapid and PCR testing as more people are turning up for tests.

Gauci highlighted that from the registered cases, the health authorities are identifying that the majority of cases are those age groups who have not yet received the booster against Covid-19.

"Currently, there is an array of reasons as to why people are getting tested for the virus, primarily because people are travelling more during the Christmas period but also because people are experiencing a number of symptoms related to the virus such as coughing and nasal congestion," Gauci said.

She added that "the majority of positive cases are of people who contracted the virus from certain events, with 23% related to social activities as well as a high number from gatherings within households. Workplaces were mask-wearing and social distancing are not being enforced are also experiencing a rise in positive cases."

An increase of re-infections has also been identified as people who had already contracted the virus are getting re-infected due to the new variants, Gauci said.

6,500 people currently in quarantine

Answering questions posed by the media, Gauci revealed that 6,500 people are currently in quarantine, including people who tested positive, contacts and people who came to Malta from a red zone country.

Asked by the Malta Independent regarding the situation at Mater Dei Hospital based on the statement published by the Malta Union of Midwives and Nurses, Fearne reassured that a plan is in place and if hospital admissions increased, 100 beds could be made available at Boffa hospital and arrangements are in place for the use of private hospitals.

Speaking about the home testing kits, Fearne urged the public to be cautious of what home testing kits one makes use of. He warned against testing for Covid-19 at home, saying that they are not reliable and people risk ending up receiving a positive result despite not having Covid-19.

Those people who tested positive for the Covid-19 virus but would like to receive the booster, should wait four weeks before taking the booster dose, Gauci said.

Thu, 23 Dec 2021 10:31:00 +0000 6736239306 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-23/local-news/Chris-Fearne-Charmaine-Gauci-to-address-press-conference-this-morning-6736239306

Bethlehem f'Ghajnsielem event cancelled as actors 'in quarantine'

The remaining opening days of the Bethlehem f'Ghajnsielem animation show have been cancelled, the organisers said.

In view of the current circumstances in connection with the high increase of new Covid-19 cases, and in view of the new restrictions which were announced by the Health authorities, "sadly we are announcing that the remaining animation days of Bethlehem f'Ghajnsielem 2021 will be cancelled."

We are doing so with a heavy heart especially when considering the great efforts and the endless time of preparations to make this event happen. However we put the actors (a number of whom are in quarantine) and visitors' health as a priority, the organisers said.

The show was officially opened on 18 December and was to last till 2 January. Fri, 24 Dec 2021 06:42:00 +0000 6736239319 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-24/local-news/Bethlehem-f-Ghanjsielem-event-cancelled-as-actors-in-quarantine-6736239319

214 migrants on NGO ship get port of safety for Christmas in Pozzallo

214 migrants on board the NGO ship Sea-Eye 4 have found a port of safety in the form of Pozzallo in Sicily, the NGO said in a statement.

The ship was assigned the port of safety on December 23rd and is scheduled to arrive on the morning of Christmas Eve.

"We hope that people will be able to go ashore soon and not have to spend the Christmas days on board," says Gorden Isler, chairman of Sea-Eye e. V.

Many of the rescued people had to receive medical treatment aboard and they are going to continue to need medical care on land.

The crew of Sea-Eye 4 had rescued 223 people in the Maltese search, rescue and coordination zone in a total of four rescue operations on December 16 and 17, but the NGO said that Malta had refused to take over the coordination of these cases.

"While the SEA-EYE 4 waited for a whole week for the assignment a port of safety, 9 people had to be evacuated by the Italian coast guard for medical reasons in 4 medical evacuations," the NGO said.

"We are infinitely relieved that people are finally allowed to go ashore. It is significant that even on Christmas Eve people are brought to safety by sea rescuers. The humanitarian crisis does not make Christmas vacation. We are particularly grateful to the civil society sea rescue alliance United4Rescue, who made this additional rescue mission possible. It saved the lives of another 223 people," says Isler.

In total, the Sea-Eye 4 has rescued over 1,400 people from distress at sea during four rescue missions in 2021.

Thu, 23 Dec 2021 17:32:00 +0000 6736239315 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-23/local-news/214-migrants-on-NGO-ship-get-port-of-safety-for-Christmas-in-Pozzallo-6736239315

733 cases of Covid-19 reported as Malta continues to battle record numbers

733 new cases of Covid-19 were reported by health authorities on Thursday – the second record day of cases in a row.

It eclipses the previous record number of cases of 582, reported on Wednesday.

92 people meanwhile have recovered from the virus, meaning that Malta currently has 3,632 active cases of Covid-19.

It is a record high in active cases as well – the previous record was 3,403 on 6 March earlier this year.

Health Minister Chris Fearne announced earlier today that Malta had found its first two cases of the Omicron variant, but noted that these are from people who tested positive some five or six days ago - meaning that the current numbers of cases being reported are likely substantially down to the said variant.

Fearne also announced a host of new ***measures*** pertaining to the pandemic and the uptake of booster vaccines.

53 patients are currently being treated at Mater Dei Hospital – up by 6 since Wednesday – with three of those – down by one since yesterday – in intensive care.

Health Superintendent Charmaine Gauci said in a press conference earlier today that some 7,000 swab tests had been carried out on Wednesday alone.

1,023,476 doses of the vaccine had been administered up until Wednesday, with 181,278 of those being booster shots.

Malta has had 43,714 cases of Covid-19 so far. 39,290 of those have recovered, while 473 have died.

Thu, 23 Dec 2021 12:37:00 +0000 6736239310 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-23/local-news/733-cases-of-Covid-19-reported-as-Malta-continues-to-battle-record-numbers-6736239310

Wage supplement will be extended if necessary, PM says

Prime Minister Robert Abela said Thursday that that the Covid-19 wage supplement being given to businesses will be revised nearing the end of January, and, if necessary, will be extended further.

Speaking on ONE Radio, Abela said that the country is doing well economically, and so will not be pressed against the wall on limited funds should there be a need to extend the wage supplement.

The Covid-19 wage supplement has thus far been extended till the end of January.

Abela said that "decisions (that were later) announced by the Deputy Prime Minister and the Superintendent for Health to further insist and encourage people to take the booster dose so that we live in a more normal way".

He maintained that health authorities have advised on looking at the increase in infections at the hospital and in the ITU, stating that the numbers are still stable.

The focus will continuously be on taking the booster dose, Abela said. He added that the booster is crucial as it is proven to be effective and safe, enabling the public to live a life closer to normality. The main tools to fight the pandemic are the vaccines and a few restrictions.

"We have saved last summer due to the actions we took with restrictions, now we have to save our winter as well, by taking the booster jab," he repeated.

In the next few days, registration for the booster dose will open for those under the age of 35, Abela said.

Abela reminded that Malta was a catalyst in the procurement of the vaccine last December, and by being at the forefront, the country got a head start to the vaccinations and has one of the best vaccination programs in Europe.

Speaking about the Opposition, Abela said that the PN has not continuously appealed for the public to take the booster, but rather it is taking advantage of the public by capitalising the pandemic situation.

The country made the decision to take stricter ***measures*** back in summer than the one enforced by the European Commission regarding travel into the country, whereby the government accepted only the one criterion that travellers must present a vaccine certificate, Abela said.

A sharp drop was seen immediately and a large number of cancellation of tourists was seen at the time, however the ***measure*** worked in the long run, despite being criticised for it, noted Abela.

On questions about the recent resignations of ministers within the Labour party, Abela replied that those who resigned have taken on a responsibility, adding that he was personally hurt by what had to happen, but that it was necessary.

Abela noted that the PN is divided, and it is them that are in a collapse as the Opposition leader has more negative results than the one before him. He added that the PL has a strong, competent and united cabinet who take easy as well as difficult decisions together.

Thu, 23 Dec 2021 11:40:00 +0000 6736239307 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-23/local-news/Wage-supplement-will-be-extended-if-necessary-PM-says-6736239307

UK, Italy again break daily Covid infections tally

The United Kingdom detected 119,789 new Covid infections in the past 24 hours, a 139% rise on the 50,023 new cases recorded on Thursday two weeks ago.

A further 147 people died from Covid-related causes, compared to 146 deaths recorded on Thursday last week.

The NHS England national medical director, Stephen Powis, said the NHS was "on a war footing and staff are taking the fight to Omicron".

The UK health secretary, Sajid Javid, said ministers would not be imposing any fresh restrictions in England before Christmas, despite new cases on Wednesday rising above 100,000 for the first time in the pandemic.

Italy reported that the daily tally of new infections rose to 44,595 from 36,293, hitting a record high.

Healthy ministry data also showed that 168 coronavirus-related deaths against 146 the day before.

Thu, 23 Dec 2021 18:46:00 +0000 6736239317 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-23/world-news/UK-Italy-again-break-daily-Covid-infections-tally-6736239317

New Covid-19 ***measures*** cause 'uncertainty', MHRA says

The Malta Hotels and Restaurants Association (MHRA) said that the festive season was the one chance businesses had to recoup some of the losses suffered earlier in the year but they are now in a situation of great uncertainty.

Indeed, the loss of income over this period is about more than just the festive season, it is about surviving the winter months, the MHRA said.

The association said that the hospitality sector over the past two years ended up as the main target and victim of the pandemic related control ***measures***, and now once again is being caught amid a pattern of waiting to see how virulent the Omicron variant is.

MHRA President Tony Zahra stated that, "the industry is trying to keep its head above water now we are kind of in limbo at the minute." Zahra added MHRA members understand the importance to adhere to public health advice but are concerned of the impact on the industry of ***measures*** that are announced at the last minute.

"We are allowed to be open, but the authorities are telling people to cut back on going out. Significantly, it is important that we avoid a situation of ongoing, rolling closures of hospitality for as long as the pandemic persists. This is soul destroying for businesses and for our teams and the many communities across the country that rely so heavily on tourism at a time when they are already struggling, with events cancelled and occupancy levels at near all-time lows."

MHRA therefore is not only calling upon Government to intervene with an emergency hospitality support package which reflects the current extraordinary situation but also asserts that as a sector and as a country we need better engagement on what the plan for living with this virus will be going forward.

MHRA said that as many hospitality businesses have been working to reconfigure and establish their operations into very safe environments in line with existing protocols, any additional restrictive ***measures*** need to be taken into consideration of their impact on the going concern of the business. Once safety protocols are in place what needs to be done is rigorous enforcement by the relevant authorities and accordingly allow these businesses to continue to trade.

MHRA said it recognized that there are no easy solutions but stands as always, ready able and willing to engage with Government on a plan for the economic survival of many thousands engaged in the hospitality industry.

Thu, 23 Dec 2021 14:31:00 +0000 6736239313 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-23/local-news/New-Covid-19-***measures***-cause-uncertainty-MHRA-says-6736239313

Church offers to accommodate some of the migrants stranded at sea

The Church has offered to accommodate a number of migrants who are stranded at sea, while calling on the authorities to let them disembark in a safe port.

Over 220 children, women and men rescued by the Sea Eye a week ago in Malta's search and rescue area are still stranded at sea, in worsening weather conditions, after Malta refused to provide them with a port of safety. Alarm Phone yesterday reported that a further 70 people are reportedly in distress and requesting rescue in Malta's search and rescue area.

The Church in Malta through the Migrants Commission, Justice and Peace Commission and JRS, strongly urged the national authorities to take immediate action and ensure that the asylum seekers currently stranded at sea are rescued and disembarked at a safe port.

"The Church in Malta strongly believes that leaving people stranded at sea is inhumane and unlawful, and experience shows us that this strategy does not serve as a deterrent to forced migration but imperils life unnecessarily. As it has been doing over the past years, the Church in Malta is willing to offer its support and services, and to accommodate a number of asylum seekers in its properties, in which it currently hosts around 250 persons."

The Church said it was making a wholehearted appeal to the Maltese Government and to the responsible authorities not to put people's lives at risk by leaving them out at sea.

At the same time, the EU Commission is urged to step up its solidarity efforts amongst member states, to save lives and alleviate pressure from border countries.

Thu, 23 Dec 2021 14:22:00 +0000 6736239312 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-23/local-news/Church-offers-to-accommodate-some-of-the-migrants-stranded-at-sea-6736239312

Weather watch: Christmas Day expected to be dry and partly cloudy

The most wonderful time of the year is set to bring with it rather wonderful weather, as mostly clear skies with dry conditions will enable incoming travellers and locals alike to soak up the festive atmosphere around the Maltese islands without any inclement weather threatening to dampen the Christmas spirit, Malta International Airport said.

Settled and stable weather is forecast from Christmas Eve through to Boxing Day, as an area of high-pressure hovers over the Mediterranean. The 24th of December will start off the weekend with mainly cloudy skies, and force 2 to 3 winds blowing from a Southeast direction becoming South later in the day.

While partly cloudy skies will linger through the 25th of December before they clear the following day, winds will strengthen across the islands on Christmas morning, as South-Southwest winds are forecast to reach force 4 to 5 throughout the day. Boxing Day will see the wind decrease gradually to force 4 by the end of the day.

Boxing Day will bring a predicted maximum temperature of 19°C, while temperatures are not expected to exceed 17°C and 18°C on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day, respectively. With a low of 14°C, Friday is expected to be the coolest day, as a minimum temperature of 15°C is forecast for both Saturday and Sunday.

For the latest weather updates, you are invited to follow  [*www.maltairport.com/weather*](http://www.maltairport.com/weather).

Thu, 23 Dec 2021 12:14:00 +0000 6736239308 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-23/local-news/Weather-watch-Christmas-Day-expected-to-be-dry-and-partly-cloudy-6736239308

Educators, students and parents left in the dark - PN

The Nationalist Party said today that Prime Minister Robert Abela has left educators, students and parents in the dark of what will now happen to the ministry for educationfollowing the resignation of the minister responsible.

In his interview on the Labour Party media station, Abela did not mention what steps would be taken against public officials who were also involved in the abuse which led to the minister's resignation.

Minister Justyne Caruana resigned after the Standards Commissioner ruled that she had breached ethics when she had given a €15,000 contract to her "friend" Daniel Bogdanovic.

In its statement, the PN said that Abela is treating people poorly when he says that he has a strong team behind him.

The PN reminded the Prime Minister that he still has a Minister for Justice who was acquainted with Yorgen Fenech, who is accused of being a mastermind in the assassination of journalist Daphne Caruana Galizia.

The PN added that the United States is taking steps against Keith Schembri and Konrad Mizzi, by banning them from entering the United States because of 'significant corruption'. Malta is not taking such ***measures***, the PN said.

Thu, 23 Dec 2021 12:27:00 +0000 6736239309 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-23/local-news/Educators-students-and-parents-left-in-the-dark-PN-6736239309

Booster dose safe for pregnant women - Malta College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists

The Covid-19 booster remains the best way to protect against the known risks of COVID-19 in pregnancy for both mother and baby, the Malta College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (MCOG) said.

In a statement, it said that, in line with the European Board & College of Obstetrics and Gynaecology (EBCOG), the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RCOG) and the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG), it recommends COVID-19 vaccination in women who are trying to conceive or are pregnant or breast feeding.

One out of three pregnant women who have Covid develop symptoms including cough and fever. Global figures show that pregnant women are at increased risk of severe illness from COVID-19 compared with non-pregnant women.

Data has shown that over 95% of Covid positive women who need hospital admission and admission to intensive care are not vaccinated.

At the beginning of this pandemic, pregnant women were being shielded due to national restrictions, however this may not be the case today. The unvaccinated pregnant woman is therefore at greater risk.

Data gathered since the start of the pandemic has not raised any safety concerns regarding the administration of COVID-19 vaccines to pregnant women, it said.

"Similar to other non-live vaccines, Covid vaccines and boosters cannot cause infection to the baby. Evidence from other non-live vaccines has been gathered over many years and has not raised any safety concerns. We understand that this is an anxious time. Making a decision on vaccination is not easy but taking the vaccine and the booster is safer for the mother and the baby. Reliable evidence-based information is available in 'sites' of the above International Colleges, but if you are still worried, please discuss with your doctor."

Thu, 23 Dec 2021 17:49:00 +0000 6736239316 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-23/local-news/Booster-dose-safe-for-pregnant-women-Malta-College-of-Obstetricians-and-Gynaecologists-6736239316

Man grievously injured after falling into shaft in Marsa

A man was grievously injured on Thursday after he fell three storeys into a shaft.

The accident took place inside a building in Xatt il-Mollijiet, Marsa, at around 1pm, the police said.

The casualty is a 52-year-old man from Pembroke. He was assisted by members of the Civil Protection Department and a medical team.

He was later taken to Mater Dei Hospital by ambulance.

Police investigations are ongoing.

Thu, 23 Dec 2021 16:49:00 +0000 6736239314 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-23/local-news/Man-grievously-injured-after-falling-into-shaft-in-Marsa-6736239314

FIAU fine to BOV 'justified', bank implemented ***processes*** to overcome shortcomings – chairman

Bank of Valletta Chairman Gordon Cordina admitted that the €2.6 million fine imposed on the bank last week by FIAU was justified, and ***processes*** have been implemented immediately to overcome the shortcomings in the identified breach.

Speaking to The Malta Independent, Cordina said that "The bank was transparent throughout the ***process*** and worked closely with the FIAU on this matter. The fine was issued as an administrative penalty for failing to report Beneficial Ownership information for 2,442 corporate customers in the Central Bank Account Register (CBAR) reporting to the FIAU. There was no suggestion that this resulted or has facilitated money laundering or the financing of terrorism."

About public concern over the hefty fine the bank had to pay, Cordina stated, "The size of the fine reflects the size of the bank in the economy – as is normal practice when regulator determine fines: the figure per se is concerning but even more important is our responsibility towards regulators.

There can be no excuse for shortfalls in CBAR reporting and this fine is a harsh but important reminder of the need for our systems to be flawless. The issue has now been addressed and further work is ongoing to eliminate future similar incidents. The bank continues to invest heavily in a transformation program and today can combat financial crime much more effectively and sustainably over the long term. As a bank we are not a finished product, our transformation began at the end of 2017, and we will keep striving to improve. We remain on course to modernise all ***processes*** and procedures and strengthen training requirements for staff.  This of course applies to our handling of issues which may potentially arise from the country's grey-listing by FATF. Our focus is on continuing to improve our transactions management systems, maintaining close relationships and discussions with correspondent banks, within an imperative for the country to get off the grey-list as soon as possible."

Asked if shareholders were disappointed, Cordina emphasised, "Naturally they are, at the fact that share prices of BOV have dropped by around 40% of their net worth over recent years, and that dividends have been effectively suspended for two years, primarily due to ECB's direction to banks not to pay dividends with the aim of boosting their capacity to absorb losses and to support lending to households, small businesses and corporates during the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic, prior to our announcement of an interim dividend a couple of weeks ago. However, we must consider the long term value of the entity, and the fact the bank is in a solid position, our capital and liquidity serve as a massive strength for us."

Cordina added, "Right now, however, the ongoing negative interest rates we must pay to hold excess liquidity arising from deposits is a significant cost to the bank. We must address this within the opportunities that exist for our depositors to make a more effective and regarding use of their savings funds."

Thu, 23 Dec 2021 08:32:00 +0000 6736239301 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-23/local-news/FIAU-fine-to-BOV-justified-bank-implemented-***processes***-to-overcome-shortcomings-chairman-6736239301

Justyne Caruana contesting law which she had described as 'monumental' – NGO

Former Minister Justyne Caruana is contesting a law which she had described as being monumental when she was addressing Parliament before its implementation, NGO Repubblika said.

Caruana resigned from Education Minister after the Standards Commissioner ruled a breach had been committed when she had given a €15,000 contract to "friend" Daniel Bogdanovic. She has since opened a court case challenging the constitutional validity of the law.

In a statement on Thursday, Repubblika said that on 11 July 2016 she had described the law as being a monument, saying that in its drawing up the Labour government "had been careful to observe the principles of natural justice, which are basic and fundamental in all judicial procedures." The law also saw that "no rights of anyone potentially involved in the procedures are prejudiced".

She had boasted of being part of a small group that worked on the drawing up of the law. "We adopted high standards of democratic principles and established rules of checks and balances that honour this Parliament. The commissioner will have comprehensive power to investigate allegations made," she had said at the time.

It is clear that Caruana is now against the law she had voted in favour of. She had then boasted that Labour had been courageous enough to demand responsibility and integrity, Repubblika said.

It is easy to talk, the NGO said.

Thu, 23 Dec 2021 08:51:00 +0000 6736239302 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-23/local-news/Justyne-Caruana-contesting-law-which-she-had-described-as-monumental-NGO-6736239302

Valletta Cultural Agency cancels New Year's Eve event

The New Year's Eve event due to be held in Valletta has been cancelled, the Valletta Cultural Agency said.

The decision was taken following discussions on the recent developments regarding the situation of the Covid-19 pandemic in Malta.

A television production will now replace the New Year's Eve event, which will now be televised from Fort St Elmo and will follow all the relevant protocols. The televised production will be broadcast live on TVM, ONE and NET TV, for it to be enjoyed by the Maltese and Gozitan public.

On Thursday, Deputy Prime Minister Chris Fearne announced that, as from Monday 27 December, all events have to be seated.

Thu, 23 Dec 2021 12:38:00 +0000 6736239311 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-23/local-news/Valletta-Cultural-Agency-Cancels-New-Year-s-Eve-Event-6736239311

Woman who fell in shaft in Nadur residence two weeks ago dies in hospital

A woman who fell one storey in a shaft in a residence in Nadur on 8 December died in hospital today, the police said.

The woman, aged 66, had suffered serious injuries in the fall, which took place in a residence in Ramla Street at 11.15am.

A magisterial inquiry led by Magistrate Bridget Scicluna had been launched.

Thu, 23 Dec 2021 09:45:00 +0000 6736239304 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-23/local-news/Woman-who-fell-in-shaft-in-Nadur-residence-two-weeks-ago-dies-in-hospital-6736239304

Omicron less likely to put you in the hospital, studies say

Two new British studies provide some early hints that the omicron variant of the coronavirus may be milder than the delta version.

Scientists stress that even if the findings of these early studies hold up, any reductions in severity need to be weighed against the fact omicron spreads much faster than delta and is more able to evade vaccines. Sheer numbers of infections could still overwhelm hospitals.

Still, the new studies released Wednesday seem to bolster earlier research that suggests omicron may not be as harmful as the delta variant, said Manuel Ascano Jr., a Vanderbilt University biochemist who studies viruses.

"Cautious optimism is perhaps the best way to look at this," he said.

An analysis from the Imperial College London COVID-19 response team estimated hospitalization risks for omicron cases in England, finding people infected with the variant are around 20% less likely to go to the hospital at all than those infected with the delta variant, and 40% less likely to be hospitalized for a night or more.

That analysis included all cases of COVID-19 confirmed by PCR tests in England in the first half of December in which the variant could be identified: 56,000 cases of omicron and 269,000 cases of delta.

A separate study out of Scotland, by scientists at the University of Edinburgh and other experts, suggested the risk of hospitalization was two-thirds less with omicron than delta. But that study pointed out that the nearly 24,000 omicron cases in Scotland were predominantly among younger adults ages 20 to 39. Younger people are much less likely to develop severe cases of COVID-19.

"This national investigation is one of the first to show that omicron is less likely to result in COVID-19 hospitalization than delta," researchers wrote. While the findings are early observations, "they are encouraging," the authors wrote.

The findings have not yet been reviewed by other experts, the gold standard in scientific research.

Ascano noted the studies have limitations. For example, the findings are specific to a certain point in time during a quickly changing situation in the United Kingdom and other countries may not fare the same way.

Matthew Binnicker, director of clinical virology at Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota, said that in the Scottish study, the percentage of younger people was almost twice as high for the omicron group compared with the delta group, and that "could have biased the conclusions to less severe outcomes caused by omicron."

He nonetheless said the data were interesting and suggest omicron might lead to less severe disease. But he added: "It's important to emphasize that if omicron has a much higher transmission rate compared to delta, the absolute number of people requiring hospitalization might still increase, despite less severe disease in most cases."

Data out of South Africa, where the variant was first detected, have also suggested omicron might be milder there. Salim Abdool Karim, a clinical infectious disease epidemiologist in South Africa, said earlier this week that the rate of admissions to hospitals was far lower for omicron than it was for delta.

"Our overall admission rate is in the region of around 2% to 4% compared to previously, where it was closer to 20%," he said. "So even though we're seeing a lot of cases, very few are being admitted."

Thu, 23 Dec 2021 07:31:00 +0000 6736239298 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-23/world-news/Omicron-less-likely-to-put-you-in-the-hospital-studies-say-6736239298

Three in hospital after Mosta traffic accident

Two teenagers and a woman are in hospital after a traffic accident which took place in Mosta on Wednesday evening, the police said.

The accident involved a Toyota Corolla, driven by a 19-year-old man of Mosta, who had another 19-year-old from St Paul's Bay with him in the car, and a Smart driven by a woman aged 38, of Attard.

The police said the Toyota driver lost control of the vehicle and crashed into the Smart.

The three were given first assistance on site before being taken to hospital.

The teenager from St Paul's Bay suffered serious injuries while the other two were grievously hurt.

The accident took place in Valletta Road at 9pm.

Magistrate Leonard Caruana is leading an inquiry.

Thu, 23 Dec 2021 07:38:00 +0000 6736239299 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-23/local-news/Three-in-hospital-after-Mosta-traffic-accident-6736239299

TMID Editorial: Caruana, Castaldi Paris, Grixti: Coal in PL stocking

From Justyne Caruana, to Silvio Grixti, to Ian Castaldi Paris.

Robert Abela and the Labour government are facing three different crises, all three treated differently, but with a common thread.

Once again, Labour exponents were involved in situations that are embarrassing for them on a personal and political level, and for the party they represent.

Caruana was found to be in the wrong, by the Standards Commissioner, when a €15,000 contract was awarded to her "friend" Daniel Bogdanovic to carry out a job for which he was "neither qualified nor competent enough".

For a week, there was procrastination. Caruana resisted calls for resignation, with Prime Minister Robert Abela, while saying that ministers must shoulder responsibilities, keeping her in her place as Education Minister. He said he wanted to wait out the ***process***, one which was to see Caruana's position being discussed by the Standards Committee. She stayed on defending her position, until she finally announced her resignation yesterday. She should have called it a day when the story broke in March.

Castaldi Paris has said that he will not contest the next election after it was reported that he owes €300,000 in tax dues, a sum he denies. But the story was enough to push him to say that he "needs to spend more time with his family" and will not put his name on the ballot sheet. He should have immediately resigned as an MP too.

Of the three, Grixti was the one who did the right thing immediately, announcing he was quitting from Parliament the moment news broke that he was questioned by the police over an investigation into the issuing of irregular sick leave certificates. He was man enough to understand the intricate situation he found himself in, and moved on. It is understood that neither he will contest the coming election.

These three latest upsets add up to the tens of others that Labour exponents have been involved in over the past years, since 2013. Some situations were more serious than others, but in different ways they exposed individuals who behaved badly, and by so doing put themselves, the Prime Minister, and the Labour government and party they form part of in an awkward situation.

It is Caruana's second resignation in two years. She has eclipsed the unenviable record held by Konrad Mizzi, who lost his portfolio twice, but in two separate legislatures.

Caruana resigned days after she was first appointed by Robert Abela as Gozo Minister in January 2020, when it was revealed that her then husband had travelled abroad with the man accused of being a mastermind in the assassination of Daphne Caruana Galizia.

At the time, Caruana had been described as having sacrificed herself because of something that was not her own doing.

The circumstances of yesterday's resignation are somewhat different, as she was behind the contract that was given to a "friend", who was close enough for the relationship to be deemed as being a violation of the code of ethics by the Standards Commissioner, even though the two deny they are romantically involved.

Caruana, Castaldi Paris and Grixti are three huge lumps of coal in Labour's stocking this Christmas.

Thu, 23 Dec 2021 09:26:00 +0000 6736239303 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-23/newspaper-leader/TMID-Editorial-Caruana-Castaldi-Paris-Grixti-Coal-in-PL-stocking-6736239303

Minister for Gozo inaugurates restoration of two niches in Cittadella

Minister for Gozo Clint Camilleri has inaugurated restoration works done on two old niches at the entrance to Cittadella, while also announcing an investment which will see the installation of benches in the Cathedral Square.

Camilleri stated that this is evidence of a government which truly works and invests in order to preserve the unique heritage of our country, particularly of Gozo.

"The niches, one of St. Anne and the other of Our Lady of Solitude, are among the oldest in Gozo. They needed restoration works to not only serve as protection from further deterioration, but also for their surroundings to look better," he said.

Director of Cultural Heritage John Xuereb said that continuous consultation was done with the Superintendence of Cultural Heritage during the restoration and was carried out by workers of the Restoration Unit and of the Citadel.

The minister also announced that benches will soon be placed near the fountain of the main square of the Citadel after receiving much feedback on the need for benches both by tourists and locals.

The benches will be manufactured uniquely to the Citadel square, Camilleri said, adding that they will give a richer look to the same square while following the common practice in European cities. The benches will be made of marble and wood, with a back made of iron with the coat of arms of the city of Victoria.

Thu, 23 Dec 2021 09:56:00 +0000 6736239305 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-23/local-news/Minister-for-Gozo-inaugurates-restoration-of-two-niches-in-Cittadella-6736239305

Austria tamps down New Year's Eve parties, Belgium tightens rules, Spain orders mask wearing

Austria announced a slate of new restrictions Wednesday aimed at slowing the spread of the omicron variant, including closing restaurants earlier and imposing stricter entry requirements for people from countries where the variant is already dominant.

"Omicron presents us with the next epidemiological challenge," Katharina Reich, co-leader of the country's new coronavirus crisis team, said after a meeting between national leaders and state governors. "What we do know is that omicron is fast and we need to react quickly."

Austria is in a better position than many other European countries when it comes to confronting the new variant. Facing a massive surge of infections in November, the country imposed a three-week lockdown to bring its daily case numbers down.

As a result of those restrictions, which ended for vaccinated people on Dec. 12 but remain for those who have not been vaccinated, case numbers are still dropping.

On Wednesday, the country's 7-day rate of new infections stood at 188.1 per 100,000 inhabitants, down from a high of 1,100 per 100,000 in late November.

Despite the country's current "good position," Reich said new restrictions are necessary because omicron "will bring drastic changes to us as well."

Starting on Dec. 27, restaurants must close at 10 p.m., including on New Year's Eve. Reich also urged people to rethink their New Year's celebrations: "Celebrate New Year's Eve in small groups," she said.

In addition, officials said they would impose new limits and requirements for large gatherings, which will require proof that attendees are vaccinated or recently recovered.

Indoor and outdoor gatherings without assigned seating will be capped at 25 people. With assigned seating and masks, that number rises to 500; with an additional PCR test, to 1,000. Events at which all attendees have received a vaccine booster dose can handle up to 2,000 people.

Austria also added four European countries — the U.K., Denmark, the Netherlands and Norway — to its list of "virus variant areas," which comes with stricter entry requirements.

Those who have received a booster vaccine and come with a recent negative PCR test will be allowed entry from those countries without quarantining. Austrian and EU citizens who do not meet those requirements will still be allowed to enter, but will face a mandatory 10-day quarantine.

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Belgium will further tighten coronavirus restrictions because of the surging omicron variant, authorities announced Wednesday, but the country shied away from a full lockdown like in the neighboring Netherlands.

Cinemas, theaters and concert halls will be closed and indoor activities banned in Belgium. Sports fans won't be allowed into stadiums and indoor venues. Shopping will be curtailed with visitors spread out and groups entering a shop limited to two adults, possibly accompanied by children.

Bars and restaurants will be allowed to remain open until 11 p.m. but under limits. And families were advised to keep visitors to a minimum for Christmas but did not face exact limits.

The ***measures*** will take effect Sunday. Prime Minister Alexander De Croo said "there is reason for concern. We are facing omicron."

He added that "what we know about it is bad news," referring to omicron's high transmissibility.

"It is a tough package," virologist Marc Van Ranst said.

But much about the omicron variant remains unknown, including whether it causes more or less severe illness.

The Belgian ***measures*** came despite a strong and steady decline in new COVID-19 cases and hospital admissions. The government said, however, that the lightning fast transmission of omicron made it necessary to take action earlier rather than later.

"It will be dominant soon," said De Croo. "We have to be more careful that ever."

Emmanuel Andre, who heads Belgium's COVID-19 reference lab, said omicron represented 27% of new cases, doubling in as many days.

Since last weekend, Belgium's northern neighbor, The Netherlands, has closed all nonessential stores, bars and restaurants until Jan. 14 and shut schools and universities until Jan. 9.

Belgium's major carnival, in Aalst, was canceled even if the festival drawing tens of thousands of visitors each year was slated for late February.

Belgium's daily new COVID-19 cases have declined 36% over the week ending Sunday, to reach about 8,300 in the nation of 11 million. Hospital admissions have declined 34% to reach 173 a day.

The number of COVID-19 dead has surpassed 28,000.

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Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez is convening a special Cabinet meeting Thursday to pass a law by decree that makes it mandatory to wear masks outdoors, amid a record surge in COVID-19 cases.

Sánchez announced at a meeting with the leaders of regional governments Wednesday that he was consenting to their appeals to extend mask-wearing rules, his office said. A decree-law does not require a debate and vote in parliament before taking effect.

He also announced a raft of other ***measures***, including an offer to deploy the armed forces to help the regions step up their vaccination rollout and put military hospital beds at their disposal if they are needed.

Sánchez said he is targeting 80% of the 60-69 age group to have received booster shots by the end of next week, among other goals.

Also, COVID-19 tests for professional use will temporarily be placed on sale at pharmacies, amid a reported shortage of tests, and medical teams will be reinforced with retired staff and specialists who earned their qualifications outside the European Union.

Furthermore, fully vaccinated people won't need to quarantine if they have been in contact with an infected person - a ***measure*** that seemed to be aimed at avoiding the shortages of essential personnel.

Spain on Tuesday officially recorded almost 50,000 new cases of coronavirus. That's higher than last January, when a surge placed the national health system under severe strain.

Spain is reporting almost 700 cases per 100,000 inhabitants over 14 days, more than double the accumulated cases before last year's Christmas holidays. The omicron strain has soared from 5% of new cases in Spain to 47% within one week.

Still, vaccinations are credited with sparing many people from the virus's worst effects. While last January some 30,000 COVID-19 patients were in the hospital in Spain, now it's fewer than 8,000.

Sánchez told the Spanish parliament Wednesday that 90% of the target population 12 and over is fully vaccinated.

He told lawmakers: "Don't worry, families will be able to celebrate Christmas. Spain has prevailed."

Thu, 23 Dec 2021 05:53:00 +0000 6736239297 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-23/world-news/Austria-tamps-down-New-Year-s-Eve-parties-Belgium-tightens-rules-Spain-orders-mask-wearing-6736239297

UPDATED: Justyne Caruana resigns as Education Minister, will not contest general election

Justyne Caruana has resigned from her post as Education Minister, the government announced on Wednesday, and will not contest the next general election.

Caruana tendered her resignation to the Prime Minister earlier today, which resignation was accepted.

In its statement, the government did not say whether Caruana had resigned from her post as government MP as well.

Caruana said in a statement on her Facebook page that she had entered politics to serve and that she was never tied to the seat of power, which is why she felt that her resignation was the best decision for the government and the Labour Party.

Despite this however, she contested the report by Standards Commissioner George Hyzler, particularly based on the procedure used, and said that she had filed a case in the civil courts over the report.

Caruana said that despite the fact that she would not be contesting the next general election - something which had not been known previously - this is an important step to defending her reputation and that of her family, and also to see that every institution in the country respects the "basic principles of justice."

Commissioner for Standards in Public Life George Hyzler had found that the awarding of a €15,000 contract to Daniel Bogdanovic by Caruana amounted to an "abuse of power."

In his report, published after a unanimous decision by the Standards Committee last week, said that Caruana had breached ethics by "giving preferential treatment" to Bogdanovic by giving him a direct order contract which he was "neither qualified nor competent enough to carry out."

Hyzler also noted that a concerted effort was made for Bogdanovic's incompetence for the role to be hidden because the work related to the contract was carried out by someone else – Paul Debattista, one of Caruana's ministry consultants.

This fact, Hyzler said, was purposely hidden in testimony given to him.

Within the report, both Caruana and Bogdanovic denied that they were romantically involved, instead using the term "friendship", but Hyzler deemed the relationship close enough to constitute a violation of the code of ethics.

Pressure has since mounted on Caruana to resign from her post, and on Prime Minister Robert Abela to remove her if she fails to comply.

It's the second ministerial portfolio which Caruana has lost in less than two years.  She was removed from her position of Gozo Minister in early 2020 - only days after her appointment - after her then-husband Silvio Valletta was found to have had a close relationship with alleged Daphne Caruana Galizia murder mastermind Yorgen Fenech while he was still working with the police as an Assistant Commissioner.

Caruana can still face sanctions for her ethics breach, as the report which found her to have breached these ethics is still being discussed by Parliament's committee on Standards in Public Life.

Government in a state of collapse - PN

In a statement published in reaction to the news, the PN said that the government has continued to collapse.

The party said that Caruana had not resigned because Abela told her to, but that she had only left her position because of the pressure by the Opposition and because of the good work of journalists.

The PN said that this was another case where Robert Abela had decided not to decide, as if it were up to him he would let the parliamentary procedures happen after the holidays.

"Robert Abela did not take action, he did not remove her himself, not as a minister and not from the parliamentary group," the party said.

The party said that the case is not closed and that they are expecting the police to follow the standards commissioner's recommendation for an investigation into this case.

The PN said that the Abela should also take action against the public officials, including the permanent secretary, who approved "this scandal which happened with the theft of people's money."

The party said that the indecisiveness of the Prime Minister had resulted in a sector ending up without a minister in the worst time possible. In the middle of a pandemic, the education sector is without direction and educators and students do not know whether they will return to school after the holidays, the PN said.

"Instead of a strong pair of hands leading the country, we have a Prime Minister facing resignation after resignation in a government which is collapsing under the weight of scandals and abuses," the party said.

MUT welcomes resignation

Reacting to the resignation, the Malta Union of Teachers said it was clear from the start that Caruana's decision to give a contract to a person who is close to her was "wrong."

George Hyzler's report confirms that Caruana broke the code of ethics for MPs and, as a result, she did not have the moral authority or the integrity required to lead the Education Ministry. The union welcomed the resignation which, it said, was required for the education sector to move forward after the hiccups caused by appointment of three different ministers over the past two years. It said it is ready to work with Caruana's successor for the good of the sector.

Wed, 22 Dec 2021 14:10:00 +0000 6736239285 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-22/local-news/Justyne-Caruana-resigns-as-Education-Minister-6736239285

Government is prepared for Omicron variant, booster jab for under 35s will open soon – Chris Fearne

Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Health Chris Fearne said that the government has a plan for when the Omicron variant arrives in the island.

"During the summer and autumn, Malta managed to control the spread of the virus because of the vaccine against the Delta variant as well as the original virus; for Omicron, we have the booster," Fearne said on the Kalamita programme on ONE TV on Wednesday.

The booster jab will make a difference in the number of cases within the community as well as in hospitals, he said.

Fearne added that the booster will give individuals protection against the virus for months as well as possibly a year. The booster will protect people from all the variants, including the highly transmissible Omicron, he said.

Fearne said that in a few days they will announce the opening of booster jabs for those under the age of 35.

He rebutted rumours of the resignation of the Superintendent of Public Health Charmaine Gauci, confirming that she will still fulfil her roles and discussions of the pandemic.

Fearne reminded the public that there cannot be more than four households gathering in a personal home, as well as the quarantine period for those who are not positive with the virus but have had contact with a positive individual is reduced to seven days rather than 14.

He said that the majority of cases being found have mild or no symptoms at all, usually discovered after individuals take a swab test before travel. Fearne highlighted the importance of the booster which will reduce the spread of the virus.

Fearne's TV interview came after Malta reported a record 582 cases in a single day, with two people also dying while positive for the virus.

Wed, 22 Dec 2021 15:32:00 +0000 6736239289 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-22/local-news/Government-is-prepared-for-Omicron-variant-booster-jab-for-under-35s-will-open-soon-Chris-Fearne-6736239289

Caruana fights back, challenges validity of Standards Commissioner law in court

In a legal case filed on Wednesday afternoon, Caruana challenged the constitutional validity of the law whereby she was targeted for investigation by the Standards Commissioner.

Caruana resigned as Education Minister on Wednesday, following a report by Standards Commissioner George Hyzler finding her in breach of ethics over a €15,000 contract given to her friend Daniel Bogdanovic.

Her lawyers claimed that the Standards in Public Life Act, which granted the Commissioner an "unfettered discretion from beginning to end" effectively breached her fundamental right to a fair hearing.

Caruana said that the law lacks the safeguards necessary to ensure that an investigated person is ensured a fair hearing. She also said she was seriously preoccupied by the way in which the ***process*** was applied in her regard.

Caruana said she had been summoned to testify via a letter dated 9 August. She was told that she would be in breach of the law if she did not comply.

She testified later that month but was not shown the contents of the complaints that had triggered the investigation.

She said that she was not fully aware what the allegations were when answering the Commissioner's questions.

Caruana also said she was given four files of evidence but was not allowed to make copies, having to make do with handwritten notes instead.

While she was allowed to produce new witnesses, she was not allowed to cross-examine witnesses who had already testified.

She also claims she was advised that it would be in her own interest if the ***process*** was not drawn out.

Caruana also complained that Hyzler's report was published in the media before a copy was made available to her.

If the committee were to adopt the report, she could face criminal consequences.

Caruana's lawyers said they were challenging the validity of the ***process*** on several aspects.

These include the fact that the law regulating the Standards Commissioner's office do not make a distinction between the Commissioner's investigative and decision-making role, granting him "unfettered discretion", and this in breach of the investigated person's right to a fair hearing.

The law also does not provide for any kind of review or appeal. Caruana said she was also not given access to all evidence. The law also does not safeguard the investigated person's right to silence.

The lawyers are calling on the court to declare that Chapter 570 of the Laws of Malta is unconstitutional and to annul the commissioner's report. Furthermore, evidence gathered during the ***process*** should not be used in any possible future criminal investigation.

The lawyers also called on the court to liquidate moral damages, payable by the State Advocate and the Standards Commissioner.

The application was filed by lawyers Michael Sciriha, Franco Galea and Joseph Camilleri.

Wed, 22 Dec 2021 18:25:00 +0000 6736239294 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-22/local-news/Caruana-fights-back-challenges-validity-of-Standards-Commissioner-law-in-court-6736239294

Keith Schembri, Konrad Mizzi banned from US travel over role in 'significant corruption'

Keith Schembri and Konrad Mizzi have been banned from travelling to the United States over their "involvement in significant corruption," the State Department said.

Their immediate families are also ineligible for entry into the US.

"Today, the U.S. Department of State announces the public designation of former Maltese public officials Konrad Mizzi and Keith Schembri due to their involvement in significant corruption. In their official capacities as Minister of Energy and Conservation of Water and Chief of Staff to the Prime Minister, Mizzi and Schembri were involved in corrupt acts that included using their political influence and official power for their personal benefit. Specifically, there is credible information that Mizzi and Schembri were involved in a corrupt scheme that entailed the award of a government contract for the construction of a power plant and related services in exchange for kickbacks and bribes. Their actions undermined rule of law and the Maltese public's faith in their government's democratic institutions and public ***processes***," the US Department of State said in a statement.

In addition to Mizzi and Schembri, the Department of State is designating Mizzi and Schembri's immediate family members: Mizzi's wife, Sai Mizzi Liang, and his two minor children; Schembri's wife, Josette Schembri Vella, his daughter Juliana Schembri Vella, and his minor child.  This action renders Mizzi and Schembri, and each of these members of their immediate families, ineligible for entry into the United States.

"This designation reaffirms the U.S. commitment to supporting the rule of law and strengthening democratic institutions in Malta.  The Department will continue to use authorities like this to promote accountability for corrupt actors in this region and globally," the State Department said.

PN reaction

Reacting, the PN said this "***unprecedented***" development confirms that it had to be a country thousands of miles away to take action. It said Robert Abela wanted to continue defending the "corrupt" Electrogas deal and those involved in it.

The PN said there are no words hard enough to condemn Robert Abela, who prefers seeing the country suffer by trying to cover up for leading figures in the Labour government.

"Today we saw how right the PN and civil society groups were when they warned that Abela would not let the authorities function and take action against the impunity he created. Today we saw that corruption comes with a price – a price that will have to be paid by the people."

It said that decision by the US government "shames" the Police Commissioner and the Attorney General, who are failing in their duties. This confirms why our country has been greylisted.

Wed, 22 Dec 2021 14:49:00 +0000 6736239287 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-22/local-news/Keith-Schembri-Konrad-MIzzi-banned-from-US-travel-over-role-in-significant-corruption-6736239287

Avoid travel and isolate at first sign of symptoms, public health official warns

A public health consultant has urged people to avoid travelling and to self-isolate at the very first sign of symptoms.

Speaking to Newsbook, Tanya Melillo from the Infectious Diseases Unit also warned that Mater Dei Hospital is "close to breaking point."

Melillo said the increasing Covid-19 hospitalisations are putting great strain on the hospital which, at this time of the year is already very busy with influenza patients and people suffering from other conditions.

She urged people to follow covid protocols and "avoid travelling as much as possible."

Anyone experiencing a simple sore throat or runny nose should isolate as they would likely have Covid, she said.

The Omicron variant is likely the reason behind the skyrocketing numbers, although more testing needs to be done to confirm this.

Melillo warned that numbers will keep increasing and will definitely not go down until the end of the year.

She said that people are gathering in large numbers. Instead, they should go out with immediate family in open spaces.

Melillo also said the booster is working, given that older patients are not getting sick as much.

582 new cases were found on Wednesday, the highest daily tally since the pandemic began.

Wed, 22 Dec 2021 18:03:00 +0000 6736239292 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-22/local-news/Avoid-travel-and-isolate-at-first-sign-of-symptoms-public-health-official-warns-6736239292

Record 582 Covid-19 cases reported, as two virus patients pass away

A record number of 582 Covid-19 cases were reported by health authorities on Wednesday, as two virus patients have passed away.

The daily number of cases is the highest that Malta has reported since the pandemic arrived on its shores – with the previous highest being 510 cases on 10 March this year.

94 people meanwhile have recovered, but the number of active cases currently stands at 2,991.

Health authorities said that two men – aged 52 and 53 – also passed away while positive for Covid-19.

47 patients of the virus are currently being treated at Mater Dei Hospital, up by 7 since Tuesday, with four of those in intensive care.

1,019,517 doses of the vaccine have been administered thus far, with 177,989 of those being booster doses.

Malta has had 42,981 cases of the virus. 39,198 of those have recovered, while 473 have died.

Wed, 22 Dec 2021 12:37:00 +0000 6736239283 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-22/local-news/Record-582-Covid-19-cases-reported-as-two-virus-patients-pass-away-6736239283

UK daily cases exceed 100,000 for the first time, cases up in Italy too

The UK recorded 106,122 new Covid cases on Wednesday, the highest daily figure since the beginning of the pandemic and the first time cases have passed 100,000, the Guardian reports..

Government figures showed a further 140 deaths were also reported, bringing the total to 147,573.

The new daily total is 106,122, which is more than 13,000 higher than the previous record - 93,045 on Friday last week.

The total number of new cases over the past week is up 58.9% on the total for the previous week.

Compared with the previous week, the number of daily deaths has decreased by 2.7% in the last seven days.

As of yesterday, a total of 8,008 people were in hospital with Covid. This is the highest number since 22 November and up 4% on a week earlier – but still a long way off the 39,254 hospitalisations recorded on 18 January.

Italy also recorded a jump in new cases, 36,293 compared with 30,798 the previous day, the health ministry said. A further 146 deaths were also reported, taking the total to 136,077. It is the second-highest death toll in Europe after Britain and ninth-highest in the world.

The number of patients in hospital with Covid – not including those in intensive care – stood at 8,544 on Wednesday, up from 8,381 a day earlier. The total number of intensive care patients fell to 1,010 from a previous 1,012.

Wed, 22 Dec 2021 18:21:00 +0000 6736239293 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-22/world-news/UK-daily-cases-exceed-100-000-for-the-first-time-cases-up-in-Italy-too-6736239293

President and First Lady in quarantine after contact with Covid-19 case

President George Vella and his wife have found themselves in quarantine after a person they had contact with in recent days tested positive for Covid-19.

The President's office said in a statement on Wednesday that they had had contact with somebody on Monday who today tested positive for the virus.

Vella's office said that both the President and his wife had tested negative for the virus, will still be in isolation as a precautionary ***measure***.

The office said that arrangements had been made so that the President's engagements are either shifted to different dates, or will go ahead without him.

Wed, 22 Dec 2021 16:57:00 +0000 6736239291 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-22/local-news/President-and-First-Lady-in-quarantine-after-contact-with-Covid-19-case-6736239291

Labour government sits idly by while the country suffers – Bernard Grech

Opposition leader Bernard Grech said that the Robert Abela's government is in total collapse, condemning the PL for its huge irresponsibility as it "stands idly by while the island suffers."

"Instead of being honest with the Maltese public, the Prime Minister is portraying a false illusion about the current Covid-19 numbers," Grech said in an interview with NET TV on Wednesday. He added that the rising cases is a delicate situation, yet it is not being treated as such.

"The government is giving off the impression that it is business as usual," he said.

Grech condemned allowing mass events to continue to happen when the country's Covid-19 situation has become alarming, with almost 600 cases reported only today.

"Instead of protecting the people, the Prime Minister protects the corrupt individuals within the government who are still allowed to enter Parliament," he said, naming Konrad Mizzi as an example.

By refusing to confront the problem, there is continuity in the corruption, resulting in damage to the government, and consequently damage to the country, Grech said.

Abela has continued to defend Konrad Mizzi, Edward Zammit Lewis and Rosianne Cutajar despite their scandals, which has brought upon the country a declining reputation, he said.

"Those who have small problems with falling behind in their taxes are treated as criminals, they bring them to court and make a show out of them just so that they can prove that action is being taken and the institutions are doing their jobs," Grech said. "Meanwhile, Ian Castaldi Paris is given only a slap on the wrist," he added.

It seems as if there are different laws applying to these corrupt individuals, and those applying to the public, said Grech.

Keith Schembri and Konrad Mizzi have been banned from travelling to the United States over their "involvement in significant corruption," the U.S State Department revealed in a statement today. The document, of which Grech read from today, stated that the two individuals were involved in a corrupt scheme in the contract for the construction of the Electrogas powerplant.

Grech said that it is inevitable that the government has become weak when even the U.S is saying to stop trusting these individuals. Meanwhile, in Malta, an entire Labour Party votes with Konrad Mizzi in Parliament, defending the corrupt deal with Vitals Global Healthcare, he said.

The PN leader said that schools and educators are uncertain and lost on what to do after the festive holidays due to Covid-19 – do they go back to school or not? He pointed out that MUMN have said that the hospital is full and frontliners are exhausted. Grech also said that the situation is worrying employers, who are having to figure out how to pay their employees when there is little income to begin with. People have resorted to selling their party tickets on social media, he said.

Grech insisted that the public need guidance, and a PN government would allow for the country to gain back its reputation, whilst a PL one sits idly by.

Wed, 22 Dec 2021 19:28:00 +0000 6736239295 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-22/local-news/Labour-government-sits-idly-by-while-the-country-suffers-Bernard-Grech-6736239295

Government inaction can lead to serious economic slowdown in first quarter of 2022 - MEA

The current surge in COVID cases is worrying many employers, and inaction on the part of government might lead to a serious economic slowdown during the first quarter of 2022, the Malta Employers Association said on Wednesday.

The association said that that public health should never be subject to popular opinion.

"In such emergencies, all necessary actions need to be taken to ascertain that the negative effects of the pandemic are not prolonged. Contrary to what some may believe, there is no trade-off between public health and economic imperatives, and any attempt to enforce such a trade-off may only yield short term gains which will certainly be paid for with interest in the medium to long term."

The current spike in cases is a worrying trend which, if sustained, might lead to strong disruptions in business activity in all economic sectors in 2022, MEA said.

"These disruptions will be caused due to absences caused by illness, more people under quarantine, possible school closures and stricter ***measures*** to compensate for the postponement of decisive actions which are currently needed."

MEA added that queries which have been repeatedly sent to the Ministry for social Dialogue and the Ministry for health about COVID and employment related issues have remained unanswered, and meetings at the Employment Relations Board remain inconclusive.

The association appealed for leadership to prevail over populism through ***measures*** that prevent dense public gatherings, strict enforcement of such ***measures*** and setting the right example.

"There have been too many reports of lax enforcement in public gatherings, even those organised by politicians themselves which are giving the wrong impression that COVID is not to be taken seriously because many people have taken the vaccine. People have to be made conscious of the reality of the situation, and that 2022 cannot be another year where government will have to retain the wage supplement with all the fiscal consequences it entails, and where enterprises will continue to struggle against the difficulties brought by COVID, especially if such situations are self-inflicted."

Wed, 22 Dec 2021 15:52:00 +0000 6736239290 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-22/local-news/Government-inaction-can-lead-to-serious-economic-slowdown-in-first-quarter-of-2022-MEA-6736239290

Inter end year with 7th straight win and control of Serie A

Seven straight wins. Six straight without conceding. Eleven straight unbeaten.

Inter Milan concluded the year with a 1-0 win over Torino on Wednesday to confirm its control of Serie A and intention of securing consecutive Italian league titles.

While Inter had already secured the lead for the season's halfway point entering the holiday break, it was a welcome victory a day after the club's offices were raided by finance police amid an ongoing investigation into false accounting.

Denzel Dumfries scored from the edge of area to conclude a counterattack after taking a backheel pass from Edin Dzeko during the first half at the San Siro. It was the third goal in four matches for the Netherlands right back.

"We're happy with how we've ended the year. It's easy for everyone to say that Inter is the favorite but that wasn't the case in the summer," first-year Inter coach Simone Inzaghi said, recalling the doubts surrounding the club following the departures of previous coach Antonio Conte and standout players Romelu Lukaku and Achraf Hakimi.

"The club did well to get players useful for my style of play," Inzaghi added.

Inter remained four points ahead of city rival AC Milan, which won 4-2 at Empoli with a brace from Franck Kessie and a goal each from Alessandro Florenzi and Theo Hernandez.

Third-place Napoli dropped seven points behind Inter after losing 1-0 at home to relegation-threatened Spezia, which benefited from an own-goal from Napoli defender Juan Jesus.

Spezia did not produce a single shot on goal.

Napoli was missing captain Lorenzo Insigne, who tested positive for COVID-19.

ROMA HELD

Manolo Gabbiadini scored 10 minutes from time to secure a 1-1 draw for Sampdoria at Roma.

Eldor Shomurodov had put Roma ahead eight minutes earlier on his third attempt after his first two shots were blocked.

Gabbiadini then scored from close range following a corner.

Roma is sixth, six points behind Atalanta and the final Champions League berth in Jose Mourinho's first season with the Giallorossi.

Roma is level on points with seventh-place Fiorentina, which drew 1-1 at Hellas Verona. Gaetano Castrovilli equalized for the Viola with a diving header following an opener from Kevin Lasagna.

IMMOBILE POSITIVE

Lazio won 3-1 at Venezia despite missing striker Ciro Immobile, who has the coronavirus. Pedro, Francesco Acerbi and Luis Alberto scored for the Roman club.

Also, Bologna won 3-0 at Sassuolo with goals from Riccardo Orsolini, Aaron Hickey and Federico Santander. It was the fourth goal this season for Hickey, a Scotland midfielder in his second season in Italy.

Serie A resumes Jan. 6.

Thu, 23 Dec 2021 05:49:00 +0000 6736239296 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-23/football/Inter-end-year-with-7th-straight-win-and-control-of-Serie-A-6736239296

Remember when President Vella expressed concern on cannabis law? But then he goes on to sign it

Last week President George Vella signed a law legalising cannabis for recreational use, in spite of protestations by a number of NGOs and the medical professionals who expressed their concern, the same concern that Vella himself had spoken about just two years ago.

It was in June 2019 that President Vella made public his serious doubts about legalising cannabis for recreational use, but despite these reservations, the President last week signed the law making recreational use of cannabis legal.

President Vella's signing, which was held a day after he said he had his hands tied, was the last hurdle in a ***process*** that saw the government ploughing on to enact the law in spite of protests from nearly 60 NGOs and the Opposition.

As some criticised Vella's signing in legalising the cannabis law, the President argued that in no way can he, under Malta's system, impose his decision on those representing the people in parliament, whether he agrees with it or not. Vella publicly said that the president does not have the power to ignore a law passed democratically by parliament, unless a moral obligation forced him to quit.

The concern expressed by the President two years ago was apparently not enough to stop him from signing the law.

In a conference organised by the Oasi Foundation which was held in June 2019 (see footage below, screen recorded from MaltaToday), the President gave his closing speech about drugs and mental health, highlighting his reservations about the extent to which the legal use of cannabis should be extended beyond the grounds of treatment.

"Both as a doctor and father I have major reservations on how wise it is to extend the legalisation of cannabis that goes beyond its medical usage," President Vella had said.

Vella had also stressed that discussions on any possible legalisation of recreational cannabis should be relied on the advice of experts in the field. Many experts, including organisations who have worked with addicts for years, spoke about the harm caused by cannabis, but the President still chose to sign the law.

Medical experts and unions including psychiatrists, the Malta Union of Midwives and Nurses (MUMN) as well as the Medical Association of Malta spoke out against the new cannabis law, arguing that there is no such thing as responsible cannabis, only a drug that causes harm to people's health.

Prior to Vella's signing, the MUMN had also urged the President not to endorse the new cannabis law until safeguards for patients and elderly people are included, saying that complications arise in the form of doctors or nurses who could be under the influence of cannabis at work.

The legalisation of cannabis for recreational and personal use allows citizens to carry up to 7 grams of cannabis without any risk of being prosecuted. Anyone that previously had a criminal offense related to cannabis can now also apply to have their criminal records erased.

Wed, 22 Dec 2021 10:41:00 +0000 6736239282 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-22/local-news/Remember-when-President-Vella-expressed-concern-on-cannabis-law-But-then-he-goes-on-to-sign-it-6736239282

Catering association warns of consequences of more restrictions

The Association of Catering Establishment (ACE) has backed statements by Health Minister Chris Fearne on focusing on promoting and administering Covid-19 booster shots rather than reintroducing more restrictions such as the closure of restaurants.

The association which represents restaurateurs warned on Wednesday that there would be consequences should the catering industry be forced to shut down due to the rise in Covid-19 cases. It said that a lot is at stake for workers in the catering industry.

It said that while the increase in positive cases is worrying, statements made on the media about more restrictions was also concerning.

According to a recent survey, 18.7% of outlets had to be shut down permanently, it said. The association also pointed out the financial unsustainability of the Covid-19 wage supplement for the government.

The Malta Union of Nurses said on Wednesday that the hospital is full, pointing out that this was a consequence of the government failing to impose more restrictions.

The ACE also encouraged its employees to take the COVID vaccine and booster in their interest and that of the community.

Wed, 22 Dec 2021 15:07:00 +0000 6736239288 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-22/local-news/Catering-association-warns-of-consequences-of-more-restrictions-6736239288

Mater Dei Hospital 'in crisis' – MUMN says government choosing economy over health

The Malta Union of Midwives and Nurses has called for more drastic ***measures*** to curb the spread of Covid-19, saying that Mater Dei Hospital is facing a "crisis".

Wearing a mask in public is just a political ***measure*** with no scientific significance as to reduce the ever increasing numbers of Covid, the MUMN said in a strongly-worded statement. This is proven by the fact that such a ***measure*** made no impact in reducing the ever increasing number of Covid cases, the union said.

The situation in Malta is going from bad to worse. Having the Superintendent of Public Health consoling the public by saying that Covid cases are to increase further, without introducing effective ***measures*** shows clearly that Prof. Charmaine Gauci "abdicated from her duties to safeguard the public", the MUMN added.

"The situation in MDH is very serious indeed. The Covid situation is not only the problem MDH is facing. Influenza and other medical conditions are leaving their toll. MDH has reached its full capacity," the MUMN said.

"Not only are all beds in MDH filled but the time has come to consider stopping all non-urgent (elective) surgery which is the high price all Maltese have to pay for allowing bars and other entertainment establishments to remain open. By stopping all non-urgent surgery, beds will be more available for the huge intake of medical cases."

There is no respect to the nurses and to other health professionals who are striving to cope with the huge influx of patients, the MUMN said. Allowing the country to run with no effective Covid ***measures*** demonstrates that the government is more inclined to appease the entertainment industry than the health professionals such as the nurses who are working under huge pressures, the union said.

Nurses and other health professionals are paying a high price for allowing the huge numbers of Covid to raise since no effective ***measures*** were introduced in this country in these last few weeks. Allowing tourists from high risks countries such as Britain to come to Malta shows clearly that the Government is totally in denial of the consequences which the Maltese are about to face, the MUMN said.

The numerous nurses on sick leave or on quarantine compounded by the shortage of nurses which the Health Division failed to address, not to mention that there are no available beds in MDH, are just a few grave issues taking place right now in MDH. Nurses are utterly tired, exhausted and burned out, the union continued.

"The government failed drastically to prevent that MDH from becoming overwhelmed with patients by allowing bars to remain open and no restrains such as curfews were made as other EU countries. This cannot be allowed to continue since MDH is at a breaking point."

MUMN appealed to the public to refrain from going to any bars and discos and to take all necessary precautions for their own safety. MUMN also appealed to MDH management to stop all elective surgery since the nurses cannot keep up with the heavy workload at the hospital.

The public has to understand that the numbers will never go down "on their own" or with the current ***measures***, and MUMN appealed to the Government to urgently introduce more drastic ***measures*** in the interest of the health of the population.

Wed, 22 Dec 2021 08:32:00 +0000 6736239278 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-22/local-news/Mater-Dei-Hospital-in-crisis-MUMN-says-government-choosing-economy-over-health-6736239278

Air Malta settles 88% of all Covid-related refund requests

Air Malta has successfully settled 88% of all its Covid-related refund requests to date, the airline told The Malta Independent.

In answering questions sent by this newsroom, an Air Malta spokesperson said: "The pandemic has created an ever-changing scenario where tourism markets are opening and closing depending on alert levels. Since March 2020, flight cancellations have become more common with demand fluctuating daily. During this period, Air Malta has cancelled up to 9,000 flights because of lower demand due to the pandemic."

To date, Air Malta has already paid €32 million in refunds to individual customers and business partners from the 250,000 ticket refund requests.

Apart from the option of a full refund for cancelled flights, Air Malta had also introduced the chance to redeem their booked flights later with a travel voucher during the pandemic. Customers could redeem such options through the airline's official website or call centre.

Air Malta has received a total of 81,000 travel voucher requests valued at around €12 million.

In June, Malta had opened for tourism, where both unvaccinated and fully vaccinated people were allowed to enter the country. However, there was a surge of cases in July, which led the Deputy Prime Minister to announce that people would need to have a recognised vaccination certificate to enter the country without quarantine.

Last July, Air Malta had confirmed with The Malta Independent that it had received a total of 15,000 booking cancellations for travel during that same month. The airline's spokesperson had said at the time that despite the significant negative change experienced when these ***measures*** were announced; it had not had the same disastrous effect on bookings for travel during August. During the said month, only 3,000 seats were cancelled.

In July, Air Malta had also shown concern as it experienced an increase in passenger no shows.

"2021 has been a difficult year for the airline. The year was characterised by depressed and fluctuating market demand across all the airline's main markets, with varying degree," a spokesperson said earlier this month. He added that when comparing this year to 2020, the airline fared better with a 10% increase in passenger figures.

Wed, 22 Dec 2021 08:03:00 +0000 6736239273 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-22/local-news/Air-Malta-settles-88-of-all-refund-requests-6736239273

Accommodation bookings 'dried up', but local market still booming – MHRA

Christmas and New Year's bookings in restaurants within the local community remain in full swing for the holiday season despite the rise in Covid-19 cases and the pending arrival of the Omicron variant in Malta.

President of the Malta Hotels and Restaurants Association (MHRA) Tony Zahra told The Malta Independent on Tuesday that he has seen no cancellations of restaurant bookings in the local market which were out of the ordinary, however, since the situation is fleeting, this could change easily.

"We do not have any visibility that there have been unusual cancellations, just a cancellation here and there, which is normal," Zahra said. "However, the situation is a moving target," he said, adding that things can shift relatively quickly.

On the other hand, the situation is completely different when it comes to accommodation bookings from tourists arriving to Malta, he said.

"Since other countries have been reintroducing and enforcing their own restrictions, accommodation bookings in Malta from abroad have dried up completely," Zahra said.

386 Covid-19 cases were reported by health authorities on Tuesday, it being the second highest tally since the start of the pandemic back in March 2020.

Numbers of Covid-19 cases have been skyrocketing around Europe, particularly with the Omicron variant being more transmissible than the original variant, as well as the Delta variant.

The Nationalist Party has consistently been calling for the enforcement of safety ***measures*** against Covid-19, such as more airport ***measures*** set in place to avoid the threat to the vaccination program and herd immunity.

Other nations across Europe have reimposed heavy restrictions in attempt to curb infections, with some reintroducing curfews, tightening travel restrictions, cancellation of upcoming holiday events, the closing of all schools and universities, with the Netherlands even going as far as another lockdown. Meanwhile, Malta has not done the same.

The only restriction Malta has reintroduced is the wearing of masks in all public spaces while continuing to administer and promoting booster jabs. Health Minister Chris Fearne said that it is to be expected that the Omicron variant arrives to Malta in the coming weeks. Fearne noted that the safety ***measures*** are calibrated in real-time, as the focus is to look at infected individuals being admitted to hospital, adding that the numbers are still low.

Answering the Malta Independent's questions a few weeks ago, the island's national airline Air Malta said that 2021 has been a difficult year for the airline, with it being characterised by depressed and fluctuating market demand across all the airline's main markets. The entity said that there was an increase in the market of 2021 compared to the one of 2020, however it is still behind compared to that of 2019.

Several e-mails from airlines have been sent out over the past few months promoting cheap flights in attempt to increase outbound travel from Malta, scrambling to recuperate from the pandemic.

The Malta Tourism Authority has recently announced a strategy plan up until the year 2030 in effort to recover Malta's tourism industry from the blow it took due to the pandemic. The strategy plan may as well remain in shambles if the pandemic brings on wave after wave.

Malta's only restriction, in an effort not to "disrupt" the economy, remains the enforcing of wearing face masks outside, whilst putting a great emphasis on the booster vaccine, which Fearne maintained that it is the solution for Omicron.

Wed, 22 Dec 2021 09:47:00 +0000 6736239280 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-22/local-news/Accommodation-bookings-dried-up-but-local-market-still-booming-MHRA-6736239280

Worker in critical condition after falling while installing solar panels

A worker is in a critical condition in hospital after a fall while he was installing solar panels, the Occupational Health and Safety Authority said.

In a separate statement, the police said that the worker, whose identity is still unknown, fell one and a half storeys while working in a factory at the Marsa industrial estate.

The OHSA said it is "investigating an accident at work which happened today in Marsa", which resulted in a worker falling from a height while installing solar panels.

"The victim is in danger of loss of life," the OHSA said.

It added that has started its investigations into the cause of the accident, while a magisterial inquiry has been appointed.

The police said the accident took place at around noon.

The injured worker was taken to hospital with serious injuries.

Magistrate Leonard Caruana is leading the inquiry.

Wed, 22 Dec 2021 14:49:00 +0000 6736239286 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-22/local-news/Worker-in-critical-condition-after-fall-while-installing-solar-panels-6736239286

PN writes to Speaker asking to discuss Justyne Caruana standards case this week

PN spokesperson for Justice Karol Aquilina and PN spokesperson for Human Rights and Good Governance Therese Comodini Cachia have condemned the delay in affronting Minister Justyne Caruana's case of breach of ethics for giving preferential treatment to a close friend with the use of public funds.

The PN has therefore written to the Speaker of Parliament so that a meeting with the Standards in Public Life Committee is held this week, insisting that this situation should not be delayed till next year.

The fight against the culture of impunity that has gripped our country must continue under any circumstance and it cannot stop for the holidays, it said.

The PN said that every individual in Parliament has a duty to ensure good and appropriate behaviour. Additionally, the Constitution obliges the government to answer the Parliament, and obliges the Parliament to serve as a watchman over the government.

The party said that it believes that the Speaker will take necessary actions to ensure that the Standards in Public Life Committee holds an urgent meeting. The gravity of the situation obliges immediate action, it said.

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TMID Editorial: Hotel stays and squandering of public funds

That staff from the Malta Tourism Authority offer 'logistical support' to foreign artists holding events in Malta is totally understandable.

The MTA must ensure that guests are well taken care of and have everything they need when they need it. Malta, after all, is largely dependent on tourism and high-profile events certainly raise the country's cultural profile.

That MTA staff stay at lavish Valletta hotels with the excuse that they need to be close to these events, costing the taxpayer tens of thousands of euro is, however, less understandable.

A couple of weeks ago it emerged that the MTA had booked a number of rooms at the five-star Phoenicia Hotel so as to be able to provide logistical support to the nearby Christmas Fantasyland attraction. Times of Malta said that, after it sent questions to Tourism Minister Clayton Bartolo, the MTA changed its plans and scrapped the hotel stay.

But in reply to questions sent by The Malta Independent, the ministry actually confirmed that the MTA currently has a €140-a night room booked at the Phoenicia. The ministry did not say how many people are staying there, and how many nights they are spending at the hotel. Although the Fairyland event is two weeks long, so the math is easy to do.

The ministry It also failed to elaborate on the need for these officials to stay at a Valletta hotel, especially in a country so small that you can reach the capital within minutes.

Furthermore, it confirmed that this was not the first time that MTA staff stayed at hotels. There were two other occasions this summer when this happened, and the information we have is that this practice took place in previous years too.

The MTA explained that, as part of the contracts it enters into with artists and entertainment companies, it pays for the hotel rooms used by the performers and accompanying staff.

While this is partly justifiable, since foreigners need a place to stay, one cannot but question the numbers quoted. In fact, the MTA said that it had paid for 180 rooms at the Excelsior and the Phoenicia for the Peter Tong and BBC concerts.

But the real question is about the money the MTA paid to have its own staff stay at the hotels. We are not talking here about people needing to commute 500km but, rather, Maltese citizens who have a myriad of options to get to Valletta.

In our opinion, this is yet another case of squandering of public funds – money spent for no justifiable reason. It comes as no real surprise because the tradition of wasting taxpayer money is, sadly, common practice in this country, and the monthly National Audit Office reports confirm.

Perhaps the biggest blunder of them all is the controversial €100m exit fee that Konrad Mizzi included in the hospitals privatisation deal.

It is about time that people started being held accountable for these shortcomings. Perhaps the Finance Minister, who is currently stepping up efforts against tax evasion and excessive spending will issue a policy against such needless expenditures which, after all, are being paid for by us and you.

Wed, 22 Dec 2021 10:29:00 +0000 6736239281 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-22/newspaper-leader/TMID-Editorial-Hotel-says-and-squandering-of-public-funds-6736239281

'Another storm coming': WHO warns of omicron surge in Europe

The World Health Organization's top official in Europe urged governments on Tuesday to prepare for a "significant surge" in coronavirus cases across the continent due to the omicron variant, which is already dominant in several countries.

"We can see another storm coming," WHO Europe regional director Dr. Hans Kluge said at a press conference in Vienna. "Within weeks, omicron will dominate in more countries of the region, pushing already stretched health systems further to the brink."

Omicron has been detected in at least 38 of the WHO European region's 53 members, Kluge added, noting that it is already the dominant variant in the United Kingdom, Denmark and Portugal.

Last week, 27,000 people died from coronavirus in the region and an additional 2.6 million cases were reported, Kluge said. Although these cases include all variants, not just omicron, he noted this figure is 40% higher than during the same period last year.

"The sheer volume of new COVID-19 infections could lead to more hospitalizations and widespread disruption to health systems and other critical services," he said.

Thus far, Kluge said 89% of those with confirmed omicron infections in Europe reported symptoms common with other coronavirus variants, including cough, sore throat, fever. The variant has mostly been spread by young people in their 20s and 30s in the region, he added.

Although much remains unknown about omicron, Kluge said it appears to be more infectious than previous variants, leading to "previously unseen transmission rates" in countries with a significant number of omicron cases. In those countries, cases of the variant are doubling every 1.5 to 3 days.

European governments should keep ramping up their vaccination campaigns, introduce additional ***measures*** to slow the spread of the variant, and prepare critical infrastructure like health care systems for the coming surge, Kluge said.

Wed, 22 Dec 2021 07:05:00 +0000 6736239271 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-22/world-news/Another-storm-coming-WHO-warns-of-omicron-surge-in-Europe-6736239271

Omicron: Germany clamps down on New Year's parties, France imposes tougher vaccine rules

Germany announced new restrictions Tuesday that will begin after Christmas to slow the spread of the new omicron variant, rules that will fall short of a full lockdown but will include contact restrictions even for vaccinated people.

"I can understand anyone who doesn't want to hear about the coronavirus, mutations and new virus variants," Chancellor Olaf Scholz said at a press conference Tuesday evening. "But we cannot and must not turn a blind eye to this next wave."

Among the new rules are limiting private gatherings to 10 people, closing nightclubs nationwide and having large events like soccer matches held without an in-person audience. The restrictions will go into effect nationwide on Dec. 28, although states can implement the ***measures*** sooner.

Scholz said the government decided to wait until after Christmas to implement new national restrictions because family-focused holidays such as Christmas and Easter "have not proven to be major drivers of the pandemic." But he said restrictions on New Year's celebrations are necessary to keep Germany's health system from being overwhelmed by COVID-19 cases.

"This is no longer the time for parties and social evenings in big groups," Scholz said.

Scholz and Germany's 16 state governors agreed on the new restrictions at a meeting Tuesday, after the government's new panel of experts called for action to be taken within days nationwide because the omicron variant is racing across Europe.

Scholz and the state governors will meet again on Jan. 7 to discuss whether the ***measures*** should be continued or even tightened.

Hours before the meeting, the national disease control center called on Twitter for "maximum contact restrictions" starting immediately and lasting until mid-January, and for Germans to reduce their holiday travel "to the absolutely necessary."

One state, Hamburg, already moved Tuesday to impose restrictions starting on Christmas Eve. There will be a 10-person limit on private meetings and dance events will be banned, effectively closing nightclubs. Restaurants and bars in the state will have to close at 11 p.m. — except on New Year's Eve, when they can stay open until 1 a.m.

Restrictions already in place in Germany target mainly the unvaccinated, with proof of vaccination or recovery required to enter nonessential stores. Also, the sale of New Year fireworks has been banned nationwide.

Scholz said the German government is also trying to speed up its booster vaccine campaign, aiming to give out an additional 30 million shots by the end of January by keeping some vaccination centers open over the holidays.

"Vaccinate, vaccinate, vaccinate remains our goal," Scholz said. "The coronavirus doesn't take a Christmas break."

But authorities remain dissatisfied that only 70.4% of Germany's population has been fully vaccinated and 32.6% have received boosters.

Germany's infection rate is, for now, drifting downward slowly. On Tuesday, the disease control center recorded 306.4 new cases per 100,000 residents over the past seven days, down from 375 a week earlier, with 23,428 new daily cases.

However, Health Minister Karl Lauterbach has warned that Germany faces "a massive fifth wave" of infections because of omicron, which he says can't realistically be prevented.

The disease control center said Monday that people who have recovered or have been fully vaccinated now face a "high" risk of infection, while it is "moderate" for those who have received a booster. It said the risk of getting COVID-19 is "very high" for the unvaccinated

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France seeks to avoid a lockdown with tougher vaccine rules

Facing a jump in COVID-19 hospitalizations, France's government is trying to push through a law requiring vaccination to enter any restaurant and many other public places, and warning of tougher ***measures*** if the current surge of infections doesn't recede.

The government on Tuesday dropped efforts to require a health pass for all workplaces, however, amid opposition from unions and employers..

French Prime Minister Jean Castex spent the day Tuesday meeting with French mayors and lawmakers to persuade them to support tougher vaccine rules.

French travelers and families, meanwhile, were flocking to virus testing tents ahead of the holidays.

France's virus hospitalization numbers have shot up in recent weeks, with some 16,000 people currently hospitalized with COVID-19 and 60% of the country's ICU beds occupied by virus patients, according to the state health agency. Confirmed weekly virus infections are at the highest level in France since the pandemic began.

Most are infected with the delta variant, but more than one in three new cases in the Paris region is the fast-spreading omicron variant, French government spokesman Gabriel Attal said.

"We don't have a second to lose," he told reporters. "The situation in the hospitals is tense."

The French government wants a law passed by Jan. 15 requiring vaccination to enter restaurants and many public venues, he said. Currently a "health pass" is required to enter all such spaces in France, but people can get the pass with either a vaccination certificate, a negative virus test or proof of recent recovery from COVID-19.

France also is ramping up vaccination and booster efforts, with doses made available to all children 5-11 starting Wednesday. More than 89% of French people 12 and over have had at least two vaccine shots, and about 40% of adults have had three doses, Attal said.

Wed, 22 Dec 2021 07:09:00 +0000 6736239272 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-22/world-news/Omicron-Germany-clamps-down-on-New-Year-s-parties-France-imposes-tougher-vaccine-rules-6736239272

Landmark judgement as court dismisses dissolution of rural lease

A judge has dismissed a case for the dissolution of a rural lease filed by the owner of a field in Qrendi in a landmark ruling protecting farmers from eviction.

Judge Lawrence Mintoff, presiding over the First Hall of the Civil Court in its Constitutional Jurisdiction, ruled that the law created the right balance between the rights of owners and tenants.

He dismissed the case filed by Vincenza Magro, who argued the law protecting rural leases (qbiela) breached her rights as land owner.

Magro had filed a court case over the 2,910sq.m. field in the area known as il-Bur ta' Ħallew which had been leased to Annalisa Schembri and Liberata Schembri, who were paying just €24 in rent every two years.

Magro had refused to accept the last rent payment, which the tenants had then deposited in court.

Rural leases enjoy strong protection at law and are inherited from one generation to the next, such that Magro argued that it was near-impossible for her to ever take back possession of her field.

She also submitted that the law also did not provide an adequate mechanism for the revision of the value of the lease, leading to an enormous discrepancy between the rent paid and the free market value.

Magro argued that jurisprudence showed that having recourse to the Rural Lease Regulation Board would not provide her with an effective remedy.

All this amounted to a breach of her fundamental right to the enjoyment of personal property, she said.

The State Advocate had opposed the case, denying any breach of constitutional or conventional rights, arguing amongst other things that there were other legal options available to the plaintiff.

Also, replying to the initial application, the defendants, Annalisa and Liberata Schembri argued that the plaintiff had not indicated which articles of the law were causing the breach of her rights, that there were ordinary remedies available to her and that they had always based their occupation on the dispositions of the law, which had an element of public policy in that they ensured the continued operation of the ***agricultural*** sector in Malta.

Magro had told the court that she had never engaged an architect to value the land, but added that she had recently sold another, uncultivated, field for over €100,000 and exhibited the contract as evidence.

The plaintiff's son, Paul had testified in January 2020, explaining that he had mooted increasing the rural lease to €600 per year with Annalisa Schembri, but she had not replied and had instead started depositing the rent in court.

Schembri had also testified, but claimed that Magro had initially requested €2,000, which was impossible for her to pay and that the €600 he later asked for was also too much.

In his decision on the matter, Mr Justice Lawrence Mintoff began by pointing out that the plaintiff could not have made this request to a lower court as it was unequivocally asking for a declaration of a breach of human rights and liquidation of resulting damages.

He dismissed the argument that the applicant had not precisely indicated which dispositions of the law were breaching her fundamental rights, observing that it was sufficiently clear from the application that she was complaining about a breach of her right to derive a fitting income from her fields and that she was being denied possession of the same.

The judge noted that there was no contestation of the fact that the law, enacted in 1967, had been intended to control the use of ***agricultural*** land and had therefore been introduced with a legitimate intention.

It was the State's responsibility to ensure sufficient ***agricultural*** produce for the country, said the judge, noting that at the time of its introduction, the duty of the State had been more onerous and reflected the economic and financial situation of the country at the time.

Despite the liberalisation of the market and the importation of foodstuffs from abroad, the State still had a strong responsibility to ensure the country does not rely on imports alone, said the court, justifying the State's wide discretion to ensure that the ***agricultural*** sector does not go under. This discretion was tempered by the citizen's fundamental rights, however, added Mintoff.

Here the court said it disagreed with the State Advocate's argument in that although it was in a position to recognise the needs of society, he had no absolute right to disturb a landowner's right to enjoyment of his property.

The court had to consider whether there was a lack of proportionality in the two legislative ***measures*** promulgated by the State. It recognised that these had been introduced to protect the ***agricultural*** sector by ensuring that a farmer cannot be easily deprived of the land he had been working for decades by the imposition of an increase in his rent, which would, in turn, affect his income and standard of living.

Judge disagrees with technical expert's valuation

The court turned its attention to the amount of rent, having appointed a technical expert to draw up a report on the rental value of the land at market rates. But the judge disagreed with the expert's findings, saying they were unrealistic in the context of ***agricultural*** land and more fitting for land sold for other reasons.

"The court cannot recognise circumstances where it would find a farmer ready to pay €130,950 to buy the fields in question… or against an ***agricultural*** lease of €1,964 annually," ruled the judge, adding that the sale of a similar field for €116,468 could not be compared as there was no indication as to whether it was being sold for cultivation or development.

Mr Justice Mintoff also observed that the technical expert's replies, under cross-examination, as to how he had reached the supposed value were "rather vague and not at all convincing." The expert had also failed to examine other contracts for ***agricultural*** land, saying he had relied on estate agent prices, whilst applying reduction factors.

The court ruled that this exercise could not return realistic values which were applicable to the context at hand, and the expert witness' vague answers led the court to say that "it was not at all convinced that the values expressed by the Judicial Technical Expert can be taken as applicable to the case at hand," also noting that there was an "enormous discrepancy" between the rent payable to her and that estimated by the court expert.

Neither was there a cap on the value of rural leases in the law, as opposed to that argued by the plaintiff, said that judge, also noting that she had never made a claim before the appropriate Board to change the amount due and therefore could not complain that she had been deprived of an effective remedy by the law.

Law intended to protect ***agricultural*** activities

There were many situations envisaged at law where the owner of the land could be given back possession by the holder of an ***agricultural*** lease, said the judge, once again noting that no request to this effect had been made before the Rural Leases Board. Judge Mintoff repeated that the law in question was built upon the principal aim of first and foremost protecting ***agricultural*** activities.

"All this considered, however, the State certainly cannot put to one side the principle of proportionality through which it must find a balance between the general interest and that of the owner. The court considers that through the dispositions of Chapter 199 this balance should be reached, as whilst the owner cannot easily take back possession of the land from the tenant… he has the means to ensure he receives adequate compensation for this."

The court found for the defendant, ruling that there was no breach of fundamental human rights as protected by the Constitution or the European Convention on Human Rights.

Lawyers Errol Cutajar and James D'Agostino appeared for the defendant, whilst lawyers David Camilleri and Joseph Gatt represented the plaintiffs.

Tue, 21 Dec 2021 18:14:00 +0000 6736239270 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-21/local-news/Landmark-judgement-as-court-dismisses-dissolution-of-rural-lease-6736239270

Updated: Man dies during maintenance work in underground tank

A man has died while working in an underground fuel storage tank, the Occupational Health and Safety Authority said.

The police later said that the victim is a man from Gambia, aged 46.

OHSA said it was informed of an accident at work which took place today at Has Saptan, limits of Ghaxaq. The accident took place at around 12.15pm.

"A person who lost his life while carrying out maintenance work in an underground tank," the statement said.

OHSA has started its investigations into the cause of the fatal accident.

As the investigation is still ongoing, OHSA is not in a position to make other comments at this time, it said.

No further details were provided.

TVM said the man was crushed between the tank roof and the cabin of the cherry picker he was working on. The man was employed by a private contractor.

Medical teams and units from the Civil Protection Department rushed to the scene and tried to rescue the man, but the casualty was pronounced dead on site.

Magistratre Claire Stafrace Zammit is leading an inquiry.

Tue, 21 Dec 2021 14:36:00 +0000 6736239266 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-21/local-news/Man-dies-during-maintenance-work-in-underground-tank-6736239266

Health authorities issue reminder on what to do if you test positive for Covid-19

The Superintendent for Public Health has issued a reminder on what one should do if they test positive for Covid-19 through either a PCR test or a rapid test.

In a statement, the health authorities said that if a person receives a positive Covid-19 test – be it a swab test or a rapid test – then they must isolate for 14 days immediately from the moment they receive the test result.

The same 14-day mandatory quarantine period applies to any person living in the same residence.

People who test positive, the authorities said, should prepare a list of close contacts which they had in the two days prior to the positive test or since they developed symptoms – depending which came first.

The authorities also took the opportunity to encourage everyone to take up the invitation for the Covid-19 vaccine and appealed to everyone to keep on following the current Covid-19 regulations.

Tue, 21 Dec 2021 17:45:00 +0000 6736239268 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-21/local-news/Health-authorities-issue-reminder-on-what-to-do-if-you-test-positive-for-Covid-19-6736239268

386 Covid-19 cases reported; second highest during pandemic

386 Covid-19 cases were reported by health authorities on Tuesday – the second highest tally since the start of the pandemic back in March 2020.

The highest number of cases reported during the pandemic was on 10 March 2021 when 510 cases were reported.

71 people have recovered, meaning that there are currently 2,505 active cases of the virus - the highest since 23 July.

This is the highest number since 23 July, when we had 2,497.

40 patients are currently being treated at Mater Dei Hospital, with five of those being in ITU.

Meanwhile, 1,016,374 doses of the vaccine have been administered thus far, with 175,395 of those being booster doses.

Malta has had 42,399 cases of the virus. 39,104 of those have recovered, while 471 have died.

Tue, 21 Dec 2021 12:37:00 +0000 6736239262 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-21/local-news/386-Covid-19-cases-reported-second-highest-during-pandemic-6736239262

Judgement delivered by ECJ in relation to rights of passengers travelling by sea and inland waterway

In September 2021, the European Court of Justice ("ECJ") delivered a preliminary ruling in relation to the interpretation of the provisions of Regulation (EU) 1177/2010 concerning the rights of passengers when travelling by sea and inland waterway (the "Regulation").

The request for a preliminary ruling was made during litigious proceeding before the High Court in Ireland (the "Irish Court") between Irish Ferries Ltd ("Irish Ferries") and the National Transport Authority of Ireland ("NTA"). These proceedings concerned the cancellation of a season of voyages scheduled by Irish Ferries between Dublin, Ireland and Cherbourg, France.

Background to the proceedings before the Irish Court

Irish Ferries provides passenger services from ports in Ireland to the United Kingdom and France. To operate a new itinerary between Dublin and Cherbourg, Irish Ferries ordered a new vessel which was to be delivered between May and June 2018. Irish Ferries began marketing pre-sale tickets for the 2018 summer season from October 2017 onwards. Following a delay by the shipyard's accommodation outfitters, Irish Ferries had to cancel, as a first step, the voyages for July and consequently, the entire season of voyages. The vessel in question was not delivered until December 2018 and Irish Ferries was unable to find any other replacement vessel capable of providing the same service. All the passengers were informed of the cancellation of their tickets at least seven weeks before the originally scheduled departure date.

Irish Ferries offered either to re-route the passengers to and/or from other ports, including by a sea-crossing from a port in Ireland (or France) to a port in the United Kingdom, followed by a transfer overland to another port in the United Kingdom from where the passengers continued their journey by a second sea-crossing to a port in France (or Ireland), or the option of a full reimbursement for their tickets.

Irish Ferries, however, did not (i) cover all additional costs of rerouting; and (ii) pay compensation for the delay in arrival to the destination to passengers in line with Article 19 of the Regulation. Irish Ferries claimed that Articles 18 and 19 of the Regulation, being the articles in the Regulation relating to re-imbursement and compensation, did not apply cumulatively.

However, the NTA was of the view that Articles 18 and 19 of Regulation applied to the cancellations, and claimed Irish Ferries infringed the mentioned Articles. Consequently, Irish Ferries were ordered by the NTA to reimburse any additional costs incurred by passengers who decided to reroute their journey, as well as to pay compensation for delay. The NTA had ordered Irish Ferries to pay compensation to up to 20,000 passengers who had to change their travel plans. Irish Ferries contested this, arguing that the Regulation did not apply if several weeks' notice was given with regards to the cancellation. Irish Ferriesalso claimed that the delay in delivery of the ferry was an extraordinary circumstance as defined under Article 20 of the Regulation.

The rights of passengers travelling by sea in relation to cancelled and/or delayed voyages

Introduced in 2010, the objectives of the Regulation are namely twofold, the high level of protection and assistance to passengers of Member States, and to ensure that economic agents function under harmonized conditions in the internal market.

Similarly to air passengers, travellers by sea are also entitled to various rights for cancelled and/or delayed voyages. Two ways through which the Regulation seeks to offer passengers protection are Articles 18 and 19 of the Regulation. These deal with the obligations of carriers, and, consequently, the rights of passengers in case of delay or cancellation of departure or arrival and are the subject-matter of the preliminary reference in this case.

Article 18 of the Regulation regulates the rerouting and reimbursement in the event of cancelled or delayed departures. Where a passenger service is cancelled or delayed for more than 90 minutes, the carrier must offer to the passenger the choice –

(i)

to reroute to the destination under comparable conditions, at the earliest opportunity at no additional cost; or

(ii)

to have the ticket price reimbursed and, where relevant, have a return service free of charge to the first point of departure.

It is further stipulated that the reimbursement should be made within 7 days. Such reimbursement shall be of the full cost of the ticket price, for the part of the journey not made and for the parts already made where the journey no longer serves any purpose in relation to the passenger's travel plan.

On the other hand, Article 19 of the Regulation deals with compensation of the ticket price in the event of delay in arrival. The first sub-article notes that without losing the right to transport, passengers may request compensation from the carrier if they are facing a delay in arrival at the destination as set out in the transport contract. Compensation shall be at least 25% of the ticket price. The following thresholds must be met for a passenger to receive compensation:

(i)

where a journey lasts up to 4 hours, the delay must be of at least 1 hour;

(ii)

where a journey lasts more than 4 hours, the delay must be of at least 2 hours;

(iii)

where the journey lasts more than 8 hours, the delay must be of at least 3 hours; or

(iv)

and where the journey lasts more than 24 hours, the delay must exceed 6 hours.

If the delay exceeds double the time set out in these thresholds, the compensation shall be of 50% of the ticket price. The compensation must be paid within a month after the submission of the request for compensation is made.

The above-mentioned Articles are, however, subject to several qualifications and exemptions. Of particular importance in this case is that the right of compensation in case of delay, as stipulated in Article 19 of the Regulation, shall not apply where the carrier proves that cancellation or delay is caused by unsafe weather conditions or by extraordinary circumstances hindering the performance of the passenger service which could not have been avoided even if all reasonable ***measures*** had been taken.

Article 24 of the Regulation further provides that where a passenger wants to make a complaint to the carrier or terminal operator, such passenger shall submit it within 2 months from the date on which the service was performed or when a service should have been performed. Within 1 month of receiving the complaint, the carrier or terminal operator shall give notice to the passenger that the complaint has been substantiated, rejected or is still being considered. The time taken to provide the final reply shall not be longer than 2 months from the receipt of a complaint.

The Preliminary Ruling and the Findings of the ECJ

As a result of the preliminary ruling request, the ECJ confirmed that the Regulation does apply where a carrier cancels a passenger service giving several weeks' notice prior to the originally scheduled departure due to delivery of vessel required for service being delayed.

Secondly, the ECJ noted that 'rerouting' implies that a passenger is transported to the destination contractually provided for, without it being necessary that the itinerary followed, and the means of transport, are the same to that originally agreed upon. The carrier must bear the additional costs of fuel or road tolls that the passengers may have incurred to travel to another port, or costs incurred when travelling by road or rail in connection with a land bridge. Moreover, it was also noted that, 'comparable conditions' entails comparing the conditions of rerouting with those original agreed in the transport contract. Furthermore, the ECJ clarified the concept of 'ticket-price' also includes costs relating to additional optional services used by the passenger.

The ECJ further stipulated that the simultaneous application of Article 18 and Article 19 is possible and this depending on whether the passenger has chosen to reimburse the ticket-price or reroute the journey according to Article 18 of the Regulation. The ECJ confirmed that,

"Where a carrier cancels a passenger service giving several weeks' notice before the originally scheduled departure, a passenger has a right to compensation where he or she decides to be re-routed at the earliest opportunity or to postpone the journey to a later date and that passenger arrives at the originally scheduled destination with a delay that exceeds the thresholds laid down in Article 19 of that regulation. By contrast, where a passenger decides to be reimbursed for the ticket price, he or she does not have such a right to compensation under that article."

It was also noted that the late delivery of a passenger transport vessel which led to the cancellation of all sailings to be operated by that vessel in the context of a new maritime route does not fall within the concept of 'extraordinary circumstances'.

Reporting of complaints in Malta

Regulation 1177/2010 was transposed into Maltese law by means of Legal Notice 360 of 2013, entitled 'Rights of Passengers when travelling by Sea and Inland Waterway Regulations', as a supplement to the Consumer Affairs Act, Chapter 378 of the Laws of Malta.

The Director General (Consumer Affairs), Office for Consumer Affairs within the Malta Competition and Consumer Affairs Authority (the "MCCAA") is responsible for the monitoring and investigations regarding compliance with the Regulation and is further responsible for receiving complaints from passengers regarding infringements under the Regulation. Passengers are to submit a complaint to the carrier and if such is not satisfied, the complaint can be brought forward to the MCCAA.

Concluding remarks

This is the first time that the ECJ has been requested to interpret the provisions of this Regulation. This is particularly interesting as Regulation (EC) 261/2004 establishing common rules on compensation and assistance to passengers in the event of denied boarding and of cancellation or long delay of flights has been the subject of numerous preliminary ruling requests before the ECJ. Both laws allow, by means of different legal mechanisms, for the different forms of compensation in relation to the delayed or cancelled travel for passengers.

The ECJ has for the first time, amongst other matters, confirmed that that the legal mechanisms pertaining to compensation as stipulated in the Regulation can be utilised cumulatively. Furthermore, the ECJ has provided for the first limitation to the interpretation of 'extraordinary circumstances' relating to the delay and/or cancellation of voyages.

Nigel Micallef is an Associate at Ganado Advocates.

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PN cancels exchange of Christmas greetings with Bernard Grech due to increase in Covid-19 cases

The Nationalist Party has cancelled a planned exchange of Christmas greetings with party leader Bernard Grech and his wife due to the recent increase in Covid-19 cases.

The activity was set to take place on Thursday 23 December between 11am and 1pm at the PN's Pieta headquarters.

Malta reported 386 cases of Covid-19 on Tuesday – the second highest single-day figure since the pandemic first arrived on the country's shores.

The PN announced the cancellation of the event on the same day, saying that it wanted to be responsible given the significant increase in cases.

Health restrictions have not changed in recent weeks as the number of Covid-19 cases increase.

The government hosted a similar event at Castille with Prime Minister Robert Abela and his wife Lydia on Saturday.

Tue, 21 Dec 2021 18:03:00 +0000 6736239269 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-21/local-news/PN-cancels-exchange-of-Christmas-greetings-with-Bernard-Grech-due-to-increase-in-Covid-19-cases-6736239269

John Dalli case postponed again as lead prosecutor is abroad

The case against former European Commissioner John Dalli has been postponed again after, this time because the lead prosecutor is abroad.

Dalli is facing charges related to a €60 million bribery scandal involving his former aide Silvio Zammit.

The case has already been postponed a number of times. The last sitting had been postponed after the Attorney General's office told the court that it was unsure whether the case could proceed given that Dalli was protected by EU immunity.

The EU later said Dalli's immunity had been lifted.

But when the sitting started on Tuesday morning, the prosecution asked for the case to be adjourned since the lead prosecutor is abroad on holiday.

Dalli, a former Nationalist minister, served as EU health commissioner between 2010 and 2012.

Zammit, one of Dalli's associates at the time had allegedly asked for a €60 million bribe from a tobacco company to help overturn a ban in the EU on snus – a form of smokeless tobacco.

Dalli was forced to quit from the European Commission in 2012 as a result of this, after an investigation by OLAF - the EU's anti-fraud office, had uncovered the bribery attempt.

He later served as health consultant to the Joseph Muscat administration.

Dalli has continuously insisted that the case is part of an orchestrated against him, with his reasoning ranging from the case being an excuse to get Malta off the grey-list to it being a creation by the supposedly corrupt media.

Tue, 21 Dec 2021 13:27:00 +0000 6736239263 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-21/local-news/John-Dalli-case-postponed-again-as-lead-prosecutor-is-abroad-6736239263

Robert Abela has lost control of his government – PN

Prime Minister Rober Abela has lost control of the government, the Nationalist Party said on Tuesday.

Addressing a press conference, election candidate Justin Schembri referred to recent scandals involving Labour MP Ian Castaldi Paris, who owes €300,000 in taxes, Silvio Grixti, who resigned from Parliament after he was interrogated by the police over fraudulent medical certificates, and Education Minister Justyne Caruana, who is under fire after she gave a €15,000 contract to an unqualified friend.

Referring to the 380 Covid-19 cases discovered on Tuesday, Schembri said this continues to show that Abela has also lost control of the nation.

Mentioning the Standards Commissioner report, he said that despite it being evident that Justyne Caruana has been found acting unethically in giving a contract to Daniel Bogdanovic, the Prime Minister's actions do not reflect this. Mentioning some parts from the case, he reminded that Caruana, Bogdanovic and ministry official Paul Debattista have all lied in their witness statements, with Bogdanovic not even knowing what was in the report compiled by Debattista.

PN candidate Charles Azzopardi said that this government is continuing to make fun of the whole nation as its actions are continuing to classify Malta in the lowest standard possible. He added that evidence to this are the scandalous events that have happened throughout these past eight years, resulting in Malta becoming greylisted.

He said that the government has also shown that it has different leverage in penalty depending on the person, as in the case of Roseanne Cutajar, who was made to resign from Parliamentary Secretary immediately.

PN candidate Rebekah Cilia said that the government led by Robert Abela is set for disaster as its roadmap is based on theft, corruption and impunity. Mentioning the Justine Caruana case, she added that it reflects negatively on the Ministry for Education.

Answering questions by the media, Justin Schembri said that although the survey results show that the Labour Party is favoured to win the next general election, many people are disgusted by ministers abusing their powers and public funds.

Speaking on behalf of the Nationalist Party, Schembri called on the government to be more transparent in revealing the actual number of Covid cases. Adding that there should also be an extension in the wage supplement until the end of March or else refer to the ***measure*** they suggested and lower VAT for restaurants to 7%.

Tue, 21 Dec 2021 16:27:00 +0000 6736239267 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-21/local-news/Robert-Abela-has-lost-control-of-his-government-PN-6736239267

Juve beat Cagliari to close gap on top 4 as Atalanta draw

Juventus ended the year on a positive note by beating relegation-threatened Cagliari 2-0 on Tuesday to close the gap to the top four in Serie A.

Moise Kean and Federico Bernardeschi scored as Juventus moved to within four points of Atalanta, which was surprisingly held to a 0-0 draw at struggling Genoa.

Atalanta was in fourth place and the final Champions League qualifying berth.

Juventus had struggled at the start of the season but things were starting to click under returning coach Massimiliano Allegri and the Bianconeri came into the match having won five of its past six matches, drawing the other.

It almost took an early lead but Kean headed Juan Cuadrado's cross off the far post.

He did better five minutes from halftime when he headed in Bernardeschi's cross following a superb run from the winger.

And Bernardeschi got on the scoresheet himself seven minutes from time when he turned in a pass from Dejan Kulusevski for his first goal since July 2020. He received a standing ovation from the crowd in Turin for ending his 43-match drought.

ONE-WAY TRAFFIC

Atalanta tried everything but could not find a way past a resilient Genoa team and missed the chance to move into second place in Serie A.

It was one-way traffic but when Atalanta did find a way through the defense it was denied by good saves from Genoa goalkeeper Salvatore Sirigu.

Atalanta could have moved a point above Napoli and AC Milan before their games on Wednesday.

Genoa remained in the drop zone but inched to within two points of safety. It is one point above Cagliari.

COVID OUTBREAK

Salernitana's match at Udinese was not officially postponed but it could not take place because of a coronavirus outbreak at the visiting club.

Salernitana was blocked by local health authorities from traveling to Udine after at least two members of the team tested positive for COVID-19.

The league's governing body said on Twitter : "The match #UdineseSalernitana was not held due to Salernitana failing to show up."

A similar incident happened last year when Napoli couldn't travel to Juventus. Napoli was initially handed a 3-0 loss and docked a point but it won on appeal and the sentence was revoked and the match rescheduled.

Wed, 22 Dec 2021 08:17:00 +0000 6736239276 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-22/football/Juve-beat-Cagliari-to-close-gap-on-top-4-as-Atalanta-draw-6736239276

Psychiatrists 'cheated' by new cannabis law, says mental health issues not addressed

Psychiatrists today said they feel cheated by lawmakers who disregarded any consultation on mental health issues before enacting the cannabis law.

Suggestions made in the run up to the passing of the cannabis bill "fell on deaf ears", the Malta Association of Psychiatrists said.

"In effect, the law does and will decriminalize cannabis use - a change we welcome. However multiple and varied calls to address mental health consequences of cannabis legalization for some were blatantly ignored," the association said.

The MAP feels cheated and disenfranchised with the way lawmakers disregarded any consultation by the experts in the field and went ahead with passing a law, lock stock and barrel with no thought or consideration of the mental health of the nation. Also, the lack of planning and commitment to tackling the consequences is frankly frightening and irresponsible, MAP said.

While we recognize that for the majority of people, smoking cannabis is inconsequential, for a few it can have devastating consequences, such as anxiety, depression and psychotic disorders. We implore that lawmakers, policy makers and ministers are fully prepared to assist those that do.

Therefore MAP insists that:

1.

A budget is ringfenced for health education and prevention and accurate regularization of use.

2.

A well-funded campaign is started to focus on the health of the nation, with a big push towards the promotion of regular sports, arts and music in schools and government funded facilities. The effect of these campaigns have been seen to yield results in reducing substance use in countries where this has been previously tried such as Iceland.

3.

Evidence based ***measures*** are put into place capping the limit of THC in cannabis as well as the THC/CBD ratios, to reduce the risks of cannabis induced psychosis in users.

4.

The law is amended to increased minimum age from 18years to 25 years. This, considering the risks cannabis poses to the developing brain. Further strategic thought is to be placed into the risks of younger adolescents still resorting to using the black market to source their cannabis.

5.

A budget is allocated to mental health to address the increase in cannabis induced mental disorders or consequences.

6.

A hypothetical tax is introduced whereby every X% profit earned from cannabis is reinvested in mental health services or physical health facilities to promote a healthy lifestyle.

The advice from MAP is to choose healthier coping strategies to manage your stress, and most importantly to avoid using cannabis if suffering from mental health problems, the association said.

Tue, 21 Dec 2021 12:27:00 +0000 6736239261 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-21/local-news/Psychiatrists-cheated-by-new-cannabis-law-says-mental-health-issues-not-addressed-6736239261

Girl, 3, grievously injured in traffic accident

A three-year-old girl was grievously injured when the car she was in was involved in a crash on Monday night, the police said.

The accident took place in Rinella Street, Kalkara, at 9pm.

It involved a Toyota Corsa driven by a 33-year-old man of Kalkara and a Volkswagen Polo driven by a 22-year-old woman of Zabbar.

Another woman, aged 21 from Zabbar, and two children aged three and four were in the Polo.

The three-year-old was taken to hospital with grievous injuries.

Tue, 21 Dec 2021 11:29:00 +0000 6736239259 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-21/local-news/Girl-3-grievously-injured-in-traffic-accident-6736239259

Updated: Controversial road-safety videos withdrawn after NCPE request

Video-clips issued by MAPFRE Middlesea and Malta Public Transport serving as education on road-safety have fallen under scrutiny over its implications of racial and gender stereotypes and have subsequently been 'paused' by the company.

The National Commission for Promotion of Equality (NCPE) has officially asked for the withdrawal of these video-clips from the two entities due to their problematic portrayal of race and gender.

Though the NCPE recognised the fact that these portrayals might have been unintentional, the videos still show racialised characters through specific skin-colours and hair-textures, with black characters being portrayed negatively. Women and men were also given stereotypical gender roles within and outside the household.

The NCPE said that published material is to be free from racist and sexist stereotypes to prevent prejudice and equality in society. The withdrawal of these video-clips is to be expected, said the body.

Organisations can contact the NCPE for assistance and training regarding equality, discrimination and harassment.

In a reactionary statement, Malta Public Transport said that it "would like to ensure that its educational content clearly communicates its values of inclusivity and equal opportunities, therefore the campaign will be paused until it has been discussed with all stakeholders and a consensus is reached as to the best method to raise awareness on road safety."

The company said that it has reached out to the National Commission for the Promotion of Equality, Black Lives Matter Malta and the African Media Association to discuss the educational videos being produced to promote Road Safety in Malta.

Tue, 21 Dec 2021 11:37:00 +0000 6736239260 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-21/local-news/NCPE-calls-for-withdrawal-of-controversial-road-safety-videos-6736239260

'No such thing as responsible cannabis, only dangerous addictive drug' - MAM

There is no such thing as responsible cannabis, only a drug that causes harm to people's health, the Medical Association of Malta said.

In a statement, MAM condemned without reservation the promotion and blatant advertising of "responsible cannabis use" by government ministers who should hold the good health of our younger generation at heart.

There is no such thing as responsible cannabis use, simply a drug which produces some very short term completely artificial "highs" with very serious and long-term pains, in the form of major forms of mental illness.

With serious bans on tobacco and alcohol advertising in place, both considered "less evils", it is completely unacceptable for any "political figure" to promote such a "scourge of modern society" known to scar the lives of many young people for life.

MAM has also provided a recent review from the international medical literature of 124 studies on the effects of cannabis on previously healthy youths free from any form of "Mental health issues"

The study concludes that

"The preponderance of the evidence suggests that frequency of cannabis use, THC (but not CBD) content, age of onset, and cumulative cannabis exposure can all contribute to these adverse outcomes in individuals without a pre-existing medical condition or psychiatric disorder. The strongest evidence for the negative effects of cannabis are for psychosis\* and psychosocial functioning\*\*."

\*(Psychosis is the condition which needs treatment with medicines and often a period of inpatient admission to a unit specialized in mental health"

\*\*(Psychosocial functioning i.e., thinking, personality, coping style and social factors (i.e., family, relationships, employment, life events).

The study in full may be found here

Tue, 21 Dec 2021 07:34:00 +0000 6736239241 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-21/local-news/No-such-thing-as-responsible-cannabis-only-dangerous-addictive-drug-MAM-6736239241

Omicron sweeps across US, now 73% of new Covid cases

Omicron has raced ahead of other variants and is now the dominant version of the coronavirus in the U.S., accounting for 73% of new infections last week, federal health officials said Monday.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention numbers showed nearly a six-fold increase in omicron's share of infections in only one week.

In much of the country, it's even higher. Omicron is responsible for an estimated 90% or more of new infections in the New York area, the Southeast, the industrial Midwest and the Pacific Northwest. The national rate suggests that more than 650,000 omicron infections occurred in the U.S. last week.

Since the end of June, the delta variant had been the main version causing U.S. infections. As recently as the end of November, more than 99.5% of coronaviruses were delta, according to CDC data.

CDC Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky said the new numbers reflect the kind of growth seen in other countries.

"These numbers are stark, but they're not surprising," she said.

Scientists in Africa first sounded the alarm about omicron less than a month ago and on Nov. 26 the World Health Organization designated it as a "variant of concern." The mutant has since shown up in about 90 countries.

Much about the omicron variant remains unknown, including whether it causes more or less severe illness. Early studies suggest the vaccinated will need a booster shot for the best chance at preventing omicron infection but even without the extra dose, vaccination still should offer strong protection against severe illness and death.

"All of us have a date with omicron," said Dr. Amesh Adalja, a senior scholar at the Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security. "If you're going to interact with society, if you're going to have any type of life, omicron will be something you encounter, and the best way you can encounter this is to be fully vaccinated."

Adalja said he was not surprised by the CDC data showing omicron overtaking delta in the U.S., given what was seen in South Africa, the U.K. and Denmark. He predicted spread over the holidays, including breakthrough infections among the vaccinated and serious complications among the unvaccinated that could stress hospitals already burdened by delta.

Dr. Eric Topol, head of the Scripps Research Translational Institute, said other countries had seen omicron's fast growth, but the U.S. data showed "a remarkable jump in such a short time."

Topol also said it's unclear how much milder omicron really is compared with other variants. "That's the big uncertainty now."

CDC's estimates are based on thousands of coronavirus specimens collected each week through university and commercial laboratories and state and local health departments. Scientists analyze their genetic sequences to determine which versions of the COVID-19 viruses are most abundant.

On Monday, the CDC revised its estimate for omicron cases for the week that ended Dec. 11, after analyzing more samples. About 13% of the cases that week were from omicron, not the 3% previously reported. The week before, omicron accounted for just 0.4% of cases.

CDC officials said they do not yet have estimates of how many hospitalizations or deaths are due to omicron.

Though there remain a lot of new infections caused by the delta variant, "I anticipate that over time that delta will be crowded out by omicron," Walensky said.

Tue, 21 Dec 2021 07:43:00 +0000 6736239242 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-21/world-news/Omicron-sweeps-across-US-now-73-of-new-Covid-cases-6736239242

Dubai ruler must pay ex-wife $700M in divorce settlement

A British court on Tuesday ordered the ruler of Dubai to pay his ex-wife and their children close to 550 million pounds ($730 million), in one of the most expensive divorce settlements in British history.

The High Court said Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum must pay 251.5 million pounds to his sixth wife, Princess Haya Bint Al Hussein, and make ongoing payments for their children Al Jalila, 14, and Zayed, 9, underpinned by a bank guarantee of 290 million pounds.

The total amount the children receive could be more or less than 290 million pounds, depending on factors including how long they live and whether they reconcile with their father.

The settlement includes 11 million pounds a year to cover security costs for Princess Haya and the children while they are underage.

Judge Philip Moor said the family needed "water-tight security," and that "absolutely uniquely," the main threat to them came from Sheikh Mohammed, rather than outside sources.

Haya, 47, fled to the U.K. in 2019 and sought custody of her two children through the British courts. The princess, who is the daughter of the late King Hussein of Jordan, said she was "terrified" of her husband, who is alleged to have ordered the forced return to the Gulf emirate of two of his daughters.

Sheikh Mohammed, 72, is also the prime minister of the United Arab Emirates and a major horse breeder. The founder of the successful Godolphin horse-racing stable, he is on friendly terms with Queen Elizabeth II.

A British family court judge ruled in October that Sheikh Mohammed had authorized the hacking of Princess Haya's phone during their legal battle. He denied knowledge of the hacking.

The judge also ruled that Sheikh Mohammed had conducted a campaign of fear and intimidation against his estranged wife and "ordered and orchestrated" the abduction and forced return to Dubai of two of his adult daughters: Sheikha Shamsa in August 2000 and her sister Sheikha Latifa, in 2002 and again in 2018.

Tue, 21 Dec 2021 14:07:00 +0000 6736239265 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-21/world-news/Dubai-ruler-must-pay-ex-wife-700M-in-divorce-settlement-6736239265

Updated: PL MP Silvio Grixti resigns from Parliament after police interrogation

Labour MP Silvio Grixti has resigned from parliament after being interrogated by the police, MaltaToday reports.

Speaker Anglu Farrugia told The Malta Independent that Grixti had communicated his wish to resign but must now do so officially, in writing. The letter must be handwritten and delivered personally.

MaltaToday reported that Grixti, a medical doctor, has been released on police bail.

The nature of the police investigation is unknown although it could be linked to the fraudulent signing of sick certificates according to reports. The Police Force would not confirm however, and when asked a police spokesperson said: "In view of Art 38 of S.L 586.08 and Art 87 of Chap 164 of the Laws of Malta, the Police are not in a position to confirm or otherwise such information."

Grixti told MaltaToday that he was indisposed when the newsroom contacted him for comment.

His lawyers, Franco Debono and Arthur Azzopardi, said their client did not wish to comment.

In a short post on Facebook, Grixti said that his priorities in the coming future go beyond political life, "which is why I informed the Prime Minister that I will be resigning as an MP."

"I don't want to occupy a Parliamentary seat during a period when I cannot be 100% focused on representing my constituents and patients who are so close to my heart, who I respect so much and who also respect me back."

"I helped and will continue to help through my profession, people and patients from every locality who would be in need. There is no doubt that the country needs the Labour Party and Prime Minister Robert Abela to continue to lead it forward," he said.

Grixti was elected to Parliament for the first time in 2017 on the third district. He was also the Chairman of the Health Committee in Parliament.

Mon, 20 Dec 2021 15:04:00 +0000 6736239235 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-20/local-news/PL-MP-Silvio-Grixti-resigns-from-Parliament-after-police-interrogation-6736239235

EU approves 5th COVID-19 vaccine for bloc, one by Novavax

The European Union's drugs regulator gave the green light Monday to a fifth COVID-19 vaccine for use in the 27-nation bloc, granting conditional marketing authorization to the two-dose vaccine made by U.S. biotech company Novavax.

The European Medicines Agency decision to grant conditional marketing authorization for the vaccine for people aged 18 and over, which must be confirmed by the EU's executive commission, comes as many European nations are battling surges in infections and amid concerns about the spread of the new omicron variant.

Novavax says it currently is testing how its shots will hold up against the omicron variant, and like other manufacturers has begun formulating an updated version to better match that variant in case in case it's eventually needed.

The Novavax shot joins those from Pfizer-BioNTech, Moderna, Johnson & Johnson and AstraZeneca in the EU's vaccine armory. The EU has ordered up to 100 million doses of the Novavax vaccine with an option for 100 million more.

Last week, the World Health Organization gave emergency approval to the Novavax vaccine, paving the way for its inclusion in the U.N.-backed program to get such vaccines to poorer countries around the world.

The EMA said that it's human medicines committee concluded by consensus "that the data on the vaccine were robust and met the EU criteria for efficacy, safety and quality."

COVID-19 vaccines train the body to recognize the coronavirus by spotting the spike protein that coats it, but the Novavax option is made very differently than the most widely used shots.

It is a protein vaccine, made with an older technology that's been used for years to produce other kinds of vaccines. The Maryland-based Novavax uses genetic engineering to grow harmless copies of the coronavirus spike protein in insect cells. Scientists extract and purify the protein and then mix in an immune-boosting chemical.

Last summer, Novavax reported a study of 30,000 people in the U.S. and Mexico found the vaccine was safe and 90% effective against symptomatic infection from earlier variants, similar to findings from a trial of 15,000 people in Britain. A follow-up study found a booster dose six months after the last shot could rev up virus-fighting antibodies enough to tackle the extra-contagious delta variant, which at the time was the biggest threat.

It was not immediately clear how much supply Novavax will be able to ship, and when. Its vaccine was long anticipated to help increase global vaccine supplies, as the shots require only refrigerated storage. But Novavax was delayed for months because of problems lining up large-scale manufacturing.

Dr. Gregory Glenn, Novavax's research and development chief, recently told The Associated Press the problem wasn't producing the spike protein itself, which is straightforward, but capacity to make and bottle large quantities. Glenn said the company now has enough manufacturing capability. It partnered with the huge Serum Institute of India, and two companies recently received emergency authorization of the shots in Indonesia and the Philippines. In addition, Novavax has lined up production facilities in the Czech Republic, South Korea and elsewhere.

Novavax has been given emergency use authorization in Indonesia and the Philippines, has applications pending with the World Health Organization and Britain, and plans to file with the U.S. Food and Drug Administration by year's end.

Mon, 20 Dec 2021 15:07:00 +0000 6736239236 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-20/local-news/EU-approves-5th-COVID-19-vaccine-for-bloc-one-by-Novavax-6736239236

Man seriously injured after falling off ladder

A man was seriously injured after he fell off a ladder on Monday afternoon, the police said Tuesday.

The accident took place at the Hal Far industrial estate at 4pm.

The man, a Rumanian aged 36, was working on a construction site.

He was taken to hospital with serious injuries.

Tue, 21 Dec 2021 10:32:00 +0000 6736239248 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-21/local-news/Man-seriously-injured-after-falling-off-ladder-6736239248

Suspension of Gozo Channel services on Christmas Day, New Year's Day

On Christmas and New Year's Day Gozo Channel will be suspending its ferry service between noon and 3pm. The ferry service will be suspended in order to allow Gozo Channel employees, who will be on duty on these two days, to lunch with their respective families, a company statement said.

On both feasts, the 12noon, 12.45,1pm, 1.30pm, 1.45pm, 2pm and 2.30pm trips from Mgarr to Cirkewwa and the 12.15pm, 12.45pm, 1.30pm, 1.45pm, 2.15pm, 2.30pm and 2.45pm trips from Cirkewwa will not be operated.

This means that the last trip from Mgarr will be at 11.30am, while the last trip from Cirkewwa is scheduled for 12 noon. In the afternoon, the service will resume at 3pm from Mgarr to Cirkewwa, while the first trip from Cirkewwa to Mgarr will be conducted at 3.15pm.

Tue, 21 Dec 2021 10:07:00 +0000 6736239247 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-21/local-news/Suspension-of-Gozo-Channel-services-on-Christmas-Day-New-Year-s-Day-6736239247

Castaldi Paris will not contest election after tax investigation

Labour MP Ian Castaldi Paris said he will not contest the next election.

The announcement comes a day after it was reported that the MP must pay €300,000 in tax dues.

After months of talks with tax authorities, it seems that the MP must pay €300,000 in overdue taxes and fines, MaltaToday reports.

In a post on Facebook, Castaldi Paris said that "beyond sensational stories", he had already taken the decision not to contest the next election.

He said the time has come to give priority to his family. Castaldi Paris has been in Parliament for a mere 18 months, having replaced Chris Cardona.

He said he will continue to represent his constituents until the end of the legislature.

His withdrawal from the election list will not stop him from continuing to work for the Labour Party, he said.

Mon, 20 Dec 2021 15:20:00 +0000 6736239239 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-20/local-news/Castaldi-Paris-will-not-contest-election-after-tax-investigation-6736239239

Man in hospital after being hit by car

A man was taken to hospital with grievous injuries after he was hit by a car on Monday afternoon, the police said Tuesday.

The man, aged 68, of Cospicua, was hit by a Mazda 2 driven by a 31-year-old man of Zabbar.

The accident happened in San Nikola Street, Cospicua, at 3.15pm.

Tue, 21 Dec 2021 07:57:00 +0000 6736239243 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-21/local-news/Man-in-hospital-after-being-hit-by-car-6736239243

TMID Editorial: Christmas a time of cheer, but also challenging

Many of us associate Christmas with cheer, family, friends. Others look at it as a time where many appointments have to be made to meet relatives who perhaps some don't completely get along with, or get overwhelmed by the stress of it all.

But then there are others who do not fall into either category, people who suffer during Christmas more than others do. We are referring to those who do not have family members to meet with, who do not have those to share time with at Christmas, or even to complain about having to meet at this time of year. Christmas can be an extremely lonely period, watching others go shopping for their loved ones, watching people having a coffee with friends, seeing all the cheesy yet emotional Christmas films on TV. It can be overwhelming.

Over the years we have commercialised Christmas. We talk about sales numbers, about what toys or gifts to buy. But what Christmas actually is, is an opportunity to spend time with others.

As said, there are people who have nobody to spend time with. This, coupled with the pandemic, has made their lives that much harder. We should all do our bit to try and help make them feel more a part of the community. Caritas, pre-pandemic, used to host a Christmas Day lunch for such persons at the Curia. This is not possible due to Covid, and so it is now distributing the meals to people's homes instead. But for those alone at Christmas, the sadness would still persist. It is still a great initiative by Caritas who are doing what they can, but in these trying times we also need to do our part.

If you know of a relative who perhaps does not have anyone willing to spend time with them, do something about it. Meet with them, or call them, send them a card with a thoughtful message. If there is an elderly neighbour who doesn't have any close family, or whose family don't talk to them, and there are many, call them. Go through with a small gesture which could brighten up their day- if its an elderly person living on their own, go to the supermarket and do their shopping. Such a gesture goes a long way. It takes just a little effort, a little time to make a change.

Living as someone on the outside looking in, feeling as though you don't belong is not a nice feeling, is not something you would want to go through. The Maltese have always had kind hearts when it comes to making donations during the festive period. We should try and also give some time to making the period that much more enjoyable to those who need joy the most.

Tue, 21 Dec 2021 08:40:00 +0000 6736239246 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-21/newspaper-leader/TMID-Editorial-Christmas-a-time-of-cheer-but-also-challenging-6736239246

Covid 19: Number of people in hospital rises to 42, with 5 in intensive care; 252 cases recorded

Extra strain is being put on the health services as the number of people in hospital with Covid-19 has shot up to 42, with five of them in intensive care, the health authorities said Monday.

There were 30 people in hospital with Covid on Sunday, with 4 in intensive care.

The number of daily cases registered is again high, with 252 recorded, while only 80 have recovered.

This has pushed the number of active cases up again, to 2,190, nearly as high as they were on 28 July, when there were 2,194 active cases.

There were no new victims, as the total number of people who died with Covid-19 remains at 471.

The authorities said that 1,012,731 vaccination doses have been administered, including 172,357 booster jabs.

Malta has had 42,013 cases of the virus since the pandemic first reached the islands. 39,033 of those have recovered.

Mon, 20 Dec 2021 12:32:00 +0000 6736239224 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-20/local-news/Covid-19-Number-of-people-in-hospital-rises-to-42-with-5-in-intensive-care-252-cases-recorded-6736239224

Abela's government in total collapse – Bernard Grech

Robert Abela's government is in "total collapse," Opposition Leader Bernard Grech said on Monday.

The web of criminality is crumbling piece by piece and is no longer tenable, he said in a statement.

"In just one day we saw an MP's resignation over a police interrogation, another who cannot contest the election because he is being investigated over tax evasion and a minister who is still there because the PM is too afraid to sack her."

Grech said these actions are leading to irreparable harm to the country's reputation.

The Maltese, he said, have the right to have a serious and wise government. The PN wants to be the government that hardworking honest people deserve. "The Maltese deserve better. We will be better."

Grech called on people to join the PN in removing this "untenable" government and give Malta the government it deserves.

Mon, 20 Dec 2021 16:15:00 +0000 6736239240 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-20/local-news/Abela-s-government-in-total-collapse-Bernard-Grech-6736239240

We will soon know if current Covid spike is caused by Omicron variant - Gauci

The health authorities will know in the coming days whether the recent increase in Covid-19 cases was caused by the Omicron variant, Health Superintendent Charmaine Gauci said.

Speaking to Times of Malta, Gauci explained that the genome sequencing – a ***process*** that determines which strain of Covid a positive case is infected with – takes up to five days.

She said that Omicron was not detected in results obtained Sunday, from samples taken five days previous.

"However, as we have been seeing all over Europe and outside, the expectation is that Omicron will be detected very soon. Also according to the World Health Organisation, Omicron will start replacing Delta as the dominant variant because of the high transmission rate."

Omicron has so far been detected in 89 countries.

Asked if the recent spike could be caused by an as-of-yet undetected Omicron variant, Gauci said this will be confirmed in the coming days, when the results from samples taken from the past few days are out.

"The increase has happened over the past few days. The reason for the increase could be that we could have Omicron and we would know better and confirm by further sequencing."

Gauci said the increase could also be the result of social gatherings, something which has already been experienced in the past.

The most common source of infection now is related to households, she said. Several other cases are related to social and work gatherings, as well as to worlplaces, particularly places where social distancing is not followed and people do not wear masks.

Asked if people should be prepared for more restrictions, Gauci said the authorities are closely monitoring the situation, particularly at the hospitals, but noted that several mitigation ***measures*** remain in place.

She said the majority of new cases are in the 24-49 age group. "What is positive is that the rollout of the booster is moving very fast, and we have now started giving the vaccine to people aged over 35. We expect the rollout in for this cohort to move fast."

The health authorities reported 252 new cases on Monday, with hospitalisations now rising to 42.

Mon, 20 Dec 2021 13:42:00 +0000 6736239226 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-20/local-news/We-will-soon-know-if-current-Covid-spike-is-caused-by-Omicron-variant-Gauci-6736239226

Justyne Caruana saga: 'All ministers know what their responsibilities are' – Robert Abela

All government members must shoulder the responsibility for their actions, Prime Minister Robert Abela said on Monday, when asked about a damning report on Education Minister Justyne Caruana.

Last week, Standards Commissioner George Hyzler found that Caruana abused her power when her ministry gave her close friend Daniel Bogdanovic a €15,000 contract to draw up a report in ways to improve the National Sports School.

Hzyzler said the former footballer was not qualified to draw up the report which was, in fact, not authored by Bogdanovic. He also spoke about efforts to cover up the fact that Bogdanovic did not write the report himself, and suggested that the police should investigate the case.

Caruana has so far refused to resign and the Prime Minister has said he will wait for the outcome of Parliament's ethics committee debate before acting.

In comments to MaltaToday, Abela said his refusal to sack Caruana does not weaken the government on matters of good governance.

"I have not said that is the final decision. There is an ongoing ***process*** and one must wait for it to finish. At the same time, every MP, particularly those in the executive, have to shoulder their responsibilities. I have said this from day one and the message has always been consistent."

Asked if he is expecting Caruana to resign, Abela said: "That is not what I said. What I said is that everyone knows what their responsibilities are and, naturally, everyone has to ensure that they honour the post they occupy through their behaviour."

Pressed to say what he thought about Caruana refusing to resign, Abela said "This is why I spoke about the ***process*** not being concluded yet. There is the ethics committee part. But if you ask me if I am happy with the situation, I reiterate that everyone should shoulder their responsibility."

Mon, 20 Dec 2021 14:35:00 +0000 6736239234 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-20/local-news/Justyne-Caruana-saga-All-ministers-know-what-their-responsibilities-are-Robert-Abela-6736239234

Five migrants jailed on charges of taking part in riot at Safi centre

Five migrants were sentenced to 84 months in jail between them after they were found guilty of taking part in a riot at the Safi detention centre.

Seven migrants had been charged with the offences, which took place on 18 September, 2020. Two of them, both minors, were found not guilty.

The five men who were found guilty were Ali Abdul Razak, a Sudanese aged 23, Abrihema Gitmay Mengisteab, aged 22 from Eritrea, Abdulrahman Abdulla Hamja, aged 20 from Somalia, Giddu Mahiok, aged 20 from Somalia and Abraham Hinstab, aged 37 of Eritrea.

Razak and Mengisteab were also charged with causing grievous injuries to a police sergeant and inspector, and slight injuries to two other constables.

Evidence provided in court showed that the men dug a hole in the wall of a dormitory and escaped.

Pepper spray was used by police and rubber bullets were also used in an attempt to curb the escape. Some migrants threw heavy objects in the direction of the police and also set fire to some mattresses.

Magistrate Marseann Farrugia sentenced Razak to 30 months in jail, Megiesteab to 18 months, while the other three will serve 12 months in prison.

Mengisteab was also fined €4,000.

Inspector Janetta Grixti led the prosecution.

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With Christmas at stake, nations watch omicron strain UK

Britain's main nurses' union warned Monday that exhaustion and surging coronavirus cases among medical staff are pushing them to breaking point, adding to pressure on the government for new restrictions to bring down record-high infection numbers driven by the omicron variant.

The warning throws into stark relief the unpalatable choice Prime Minister Boris Johnson faces: wreck holiday plans for millions for a second year running, or face a potential tidal wave of cases and disruption.

Many governments in Europe and the U.S. are confronting similar dilemmas over how hard to come down on omicron, which appears more transmissible than the previous delta variant that itself led to surges in many parts of the world. Early evidence suggests omicron may also produce less serious illness — though scientists caution it is too soon to say — and that it could better evade vaccine protection.

Even if it is milder, the new variant could still overwhelm health systems because of the sheer number of infections. Confirmed coronavirus cases in the U.K. have surged by 50% in a week as omicron overtook delta as the dominant variant.

Patricia Marquis, England director for the Royal College of Nursing union, said the situation over the next few weeks looks "very bleak," as growing absences from sickness and self-isolation hit hospitals struggling to clear a backlog of postponed procedures and treat normal winter sicknesses alongside coronavirus cases.

"In many places they're already under immense stress and pressure, and so they are starting to go off sick themselves with COVID, but also mental and physical exhaustion," she told the BBC. "So, staff are looking forward now thinking, 'Oh my goodness, what is coming?'"

The British Medical Association has warned that almost 50,000 doctors, nurses and other National Health Service staff in England could be off sick with COVID-19 by Christmas Day unless additional restrictions are introduced.

But many political leaders are reluctant to impose the stiff ***measures*** they resorted to earlier in the pandemic — often because they promised their people that vaccines would offer a way out of such restrictions and it may be politically untenable to impose them again.

In the U.S., the prospect of a winter chilled by a wave of coronavirus infections is a severe reversal from the optimism projected by President Joe Biden some 10 months ago, when he suggested that the country would essentially be back to normal by this Christmas. France is desperately trying to avoid a new lockdown that would hurt the economy and cloud President Emmanuel Macron's expected re-election campaign.

Britain's Johnson, whose authority has been hammered by weeks of political scandals, is caught between calls from scientific advisers for new limits on social interaction now, and vociferous opposition within his Conservative Party to any such restrictions.

Earlier this month, Johnson's government reinstated rules requiring face masks in shops and ordered people to show proof of vaccination or a negative coronavirus test before entering nightclubs and other crowded venues.

The government is hoping vaccine boosters will offer more protection against omicron, as the data suggests, and has set a goal of offering everyone 18 and up an extra shot by the end of December. More than 900,000 booster shots were delivered on Sunday, as soccer stadiums, shopping centers and cathedrals were turned into temporary inoculation clinics.

But many scientists say tougher action is needed.

U.K. Deputy Prime Minister Dominic Raab said Monday he could not "make hard and fast guarantees" that new restrictions would not be announced this week.

Government ministers are discussing several options, ranging from non-binding guidance for people to limit festive gatherings to mandatory social distancing and curfews for bars and restaurants.

The speed of omicron's spread in the U.K., where cases of the variant are doubling about every two days, is decimating the economy in the busy pre-Christmas period.

Usually teeming theaters and restaurants are being hit by cancellations. Some eateries and pubs have closed until after the holidays because so many staff are off sick or self-isolating. The Natural History Museum, one of London's leading attractions, said Monday it was closing for a week because of "front-of-house staff shortages."

The hospitality industry is urging the government to offer financial support, as it did earlier in the pandemic when many businesses were forced to shut or severely curtail their activity. Those programs, including grants, loans and a scheme that paid the salaries of millions of furloughed workers, were wound down after Britain lifted restrictions in the summer.

Other countries are warily watching the U.K., which on Sunday reported 82,886 more lab-confirmed COVID-19 cases in a day, close to a record high.

The Dutch government began a tough nationwide lockdown on Sunday to rein in sharply rising infections. But other European countries have opted for something less.

France and Germany have barred most British travelers from entering, and the government in Paris has also banned public concerts and fireworks displays at New Year's celebrations. Ireland imposed an 8 p.m. curfew on pubs and bars and limited attendance at indoor and outdoor events.

In Spain, the national average of new cases is double what it was a year ago. But authorities in the country with one of Europe's highest vaccination rates are betting primarily on mandatory mask-wearing indoors and the rollout of booster shots, with no further restrictions in the pipeline.

Miguel Hernán, an epidemiologist at Harvard University who advised the Spanish government earlier in the pandemic, said the reluctance to impose new curbs was understandable, but warned it was better to act early rather than late.

"The earlier they are applied, the shorter the time they are needed," he said.

German Health Minister Karl Lauterbach said Sunday that there won't be a lockdown before Christmas but cautioned: "We will have a fifth wave."

Hendrik Wuest, governor of North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany's most populous state, said more restrictions could be on the horizon shortly after Christmas.

"I don't think big New Year parties can happen this year — unfortunately, again," he added. "Omicron won't forgive us any carelessness if we aren't cautious."

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MTA 'logistical support' staff stayed at hotels on other occasions, ministry confirms

Malta Tourism Authority staff stayed at Valletta hotels on more than one occasion when events were being held in the capital, the Tourism Ministry has confirmed.

Times of Malta reported earlier this month that MTA staff had booked rooms at the five-star Phoenicia Hotel so that they would be close to the Fairyland Christmas attraction. The newspaper said that plans were changed after questions were sent to Tourism Minister Clayton Bartolo.

The Malta Independent was later informed that this was not an isolated case. In fact, MTA staff had booked hotels when 'offering logistical support' during other events, including the BBC and Pete Tong concerts that took place on the Granaries this summer.

Replying to questions by this newsroom, a spokesperson for minister Bartolo said that, "the contractual agreements signed for these events by the MTA stipulate that a number of rooms have to be booked for the international staff and performers in hotels near to the event. Various hotels were used after a call for quotes. In this regard, the bookings being queried about are in line with these agreements."

The spokesperson said that 170 rooms were booked at the Grand Hotel Excelsior, at a rate of €160-€180 per night, for foreign performers and staff. Another ten rooms were booked at the Phoenicia for €290.50/night.

MTA staff offering logistical support booked four rooms at Gomerino Hotel and two rooms at 66 St Paul's for both events. The rooms cost €165 a night, but the ministry did not say how long the stays were.

The ministry also said that MTA staff are currently using one room at the Phoenicia, costing €140 a night, for logistical purposes. Another 43 rooms have been booked for foreign technical staff at the Hotel Falconeria, at €60 a night.

Fifty-eight rooms were booked for foreign performers at ST Hotels and Apartments for Cirque Du Soleil. For this event, no rooms were booked for MTA staff, the ministry said.

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Suspected bomb supplier in Daphne Caruana Galizia murder denied bail

The Criminal Court has denied a bail request made by Jamie Vella, one of the men indicted over charges of procuring the bomb which killed journalist Daphne Caruana Galizia.

Vella, who stands accused together with Tal-Maksar brothers Adrian and Robert Agius, as well as George Degiorgio, had filed an application to the Criminal Court, requesting bail on 14 December.

The court had already denied a previous request for bail that he had filed in November.

In her decree, Madame Justice Edwina Grima pointed out that Vella is accused of one of the most serious crimes in the Criminal code -murder.

Whilst the accused had a right to be presumed innocent until proven guilty, the right to bail is not automatic and was subject to the guarantees laid down in the Criminal Code, noted the court.

The judge rested her decision on jurisprudence from the European Court of Human Rights, which had developed a number of criteria that could justify the denial of bail.

The court had to be "firmly satisfied that none of the risks mentioned in section 575 of the Criminal Code existed," explained the judge. "Above all, there must be protection from prejudice to the correct administration of justice. This is being said especially because of the wide ramifications which this crime carries with it, where there are several people not only already accused of commissioning the same but also where the investigation is still open before the inquiring Magistrate."

Repeating the Constitutional Court's opinion on the circumstances of the case, in which it had concluded, without hesitation, that the scale of the criminal activity involved led to a "real and high" risk of pressure being brought to bear on parties and others if bail is granted.

The judge quoted the ECHR judgment in Lisovskij v. Lithuania as saying, "the court reiterates in particular that the question of whether or not a period of detention is reasonable cannot be assessed in the abstract but must be assessed in each case according to its special features. Accordingly, there is no fixed time-frame applicable to each case…"

"In cases of this kind, continuous control and limitation of the defendants' ability to contact each other and other individuals may be essential to avoid their absconding, tampering with evidence and influencing or threatening witnesses. Accordingly, longer periods of detention than in other cases may be reasonable."

The judge also noted that there had been no changes in the applicant's circumstances since his last bail application, which had previously also been refused.

Lawyers Alfred Abela and Rene Darmanin are representing Vella in the proceedings.

Lawyer George Camilleri is appearing on behalf of the Office of the Attorney General.

Mon, 20 Dec 2021 13:13:00 +0000 6736239225 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-20/local-news/Suspected-bomb-supplier-in-Daphne-Caruana-Galizia-murder-denied-bail-6736239225

TBWA\ named Adweek's 2021 Global Agency of the Year

The Disruption® Company was recognised for its business growth, creative product, innovation focus and strength around the world. TBWA\ was awarded the prestigious title of 2021 Global Agency of the Year by Adweek, the leading source of news and insights covering the brand marketing ecosystem. The creative collective was recognised for an ***exceptionally*** strong business year across many global markets and its ability to drive Disruptive, transformative growth for its clients. Adweek also highlighted its body of creative work for clients including Apple, Nissan and PepsiCo, among others, its focus on innovation and the progressive evolution of the company's Disruption® methodology.

TBWA\ANG is an award-winning integrated strategic marketing communications and creative agency servicing clients in Malta. Firmly established in the market for over 50 years, TBWA\ANG is the leading Maltese strategic creative agency delivering a comprehensive service representing clients such as McDonald's, Bank of Valletta and the Brown's Pharmacy chain amongst many others.

"In one of the most competitive years Adweek's selection committee has ever seen, TBWA\Worldwide was unanimously selected as 2021's Global Agency of the Year," said David Griner, International Editor, Adweek. "Our editors were impressed not only with the network's business growth and consistently high bar for creative but also by its clear focus on developing strong talent and elevating a new generation of innovative leadership for the industry."

"Being named Global Agency of the Year—again—is a tremendous honour and a testament to the 10,000+ creative minds in our collective whose talent, perseverance and ingenuity made this recognition a reality," says Troy Ruhanen, CEO, TBWA\Worldwide. "It validates our 'Always in Beta' mindset and our commitment to continuous innovation." Ruhanen added, "We are also grateful to our clients for entrusting us with their brands. Without their continued partnership and their belief in Disruption, none of this is possible."

Earlier this year, the TBWA\ collective earned the #3 spot on Fast Company's list of Most Innovative Companies in the Advertising category, appearing on the list for the third year in a row. Adweek last selected TBWA as its Global Agency of the Year in 2018.

Desiree Zerafa, Managing Director of TBWA\ANG added, "This global recognition is an incredible testament to the power of the collective. We use the term 'collective' over 'network' as we have deliberately chosen to pursue a future that is open source, connected, not burdened by geography, and driven by a restlessness to innovate. I am incredibly proud of the TBWA\ANG team, whose stellar work has played a part in receiving this prestigious award. We are incredibly grateful to our clients for entrusting us with their brands, without their continued partnership and their belief in 'Disruption', none of the work we do would be possible. We head into 2022 championing the TBWA\ flag in Malta and beyond".

Tue, 21 Dec 2021 14:05:00 +0000 6736239264 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-21/business-news/TBWA-named-Adweek-s-2021-Global-Agency-of-the-Year-6736239264

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[***Pensana Plc - Interim results for the 6 months ended 31 Dec 2021***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:653X-6Y91-JB72-154D-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

PR Newswire

Pensana Plc

(“Pensana”, “the Company” or “the Group”)

Interim results for the six months ended 31 December 2021

Pensana Plc, building the world’s first independent, sustainable rare earth magnet metal supply chain, announces its unaudited results for the six months ended 31 December 2021.

Half Year Highlights

Initiation of geotechnical drilling and trenching at both the Saltend and Longonjo sites ahead of main construction activityAppointment of highly experienced natural resources financier Steven Sharpe as Non-Executive Director of the CompanyTotal comprehensive loss for the period of $4,235,572 (31 December 2020: $1,717,491)

Post period end

Front-End Engineering Design (“FEED”) for both Saltend and Longonjo completed and value engineering ongoingApproaches received from major European and US electric vehicle and wind turbine OEMS to secure magnet metal supply chainMemorandum of Understanding executed with key Asian trading house for 50% of Saltend’s productionFinancing well advanced, including potential support from the UK government’s UK Export Finance and the Automotive Transformation FundSuccessful institutional equity placing of £10 million with M&G, one of the UK's largest and long-standing fund managersIncreasing engagement with UK and US generalist institutional investors following M&G’s 5% direct investment and the appointment of Head of Investor Relations and Communications

Comment from Paul Atherley, Chairman:

"We have seen six months of considerable progress for the Company as we look to establish an independent and sustainable magnet metal rare earth production facility at Saltend in the UK to meet the burgeoning demand from the electric vehicle and offshore wind sectors. Both the Saltend and Longonjo projects have been brought to FEED status, with financing and offtake discussions being well advanced."

CEO’s Review

COVID-19

Whilst Covid-19’s grip on the world continued to be felt over this six-month review period to 31 December 2021 (the “Period”) the team, alongside our key technical advisors progressed unabated on the key workstreams of FEED, geotechnical drilling and pilot plant test work on the Saltend and Longonjo projects. Operational readiness programmes saw the work packages for Saltend and Longonjo delineated to high levels of accuracy and the Group’s management team strengthened with key appointments to the Board and our business development team in Japan and Europe. M&G’s £10 million equity investment which completed post period end  was a further significant institutional endorsement towards the Company’s strategy of becoming the world’s first major new rare earth mine in over a decade and the critical rare earth ***processing*** hub for the UK.  The strategic relevance of these projects has been highlighted by ongoing engagement with several EV makers, OEMs, large industrials and potential downstream partners.

Rare earth supply continues to take centre stage

Pensana's Saltend Chemical ***processing*** facility is at the forefront of efforts to break the UK's dependence on China for supplies of rare earths, critical elements used in the manufacture of permanent magnets, which are used in green technologies such as EVs and wind turbines. China produces more than 98% of the world’s magnets and is preparing to tighten its grip on the market by combining three of its huge state enterprises to form China Rare Earth Group that will control 70% of China's output. Following recent comments by MP Alexander Stafford, Chair of the APPG on ESG, vice-chair of the APPG on Hydrogen, and vice-chair of the APPG for Critical Minerals that "China's dominance of rare earth metals has left Britain strategically vulnerable", politicians in Europe and the US are supporting efforts to diversify supply chains. Recent events in Europe have further highlighted the significance of ensuring diversification away from the world’s traditional reliance on fossil fuels, and we believe Pensana will directly benefit from supportive UK Government policies by building the facility within the Humber Freeport.

Saltend rare earth ***processing*** hub (“Saltend”)

Pensana is establishing Saltend in the Humber Freeport zone and alongside the Wood Group, have designed the facility to be easily adapted to cater for a range of rare earth feedstocks. This is an attractive alternative to mining houses who may otherwise be limited to selling their products to China. In addition to our plans to ***process*** Longonjo’s feedstock material, discussions have advanced with third parties over the Period for the additional supply of sustainably sourced rare earth carbonates.

Importantly for many miners around the world who are looking to access the European and US supply chains, it is becoming increasingly clear that the planned EU and potential UK carbon border taxation means that it is no longer acceptable for manufacturers to source material extracted or ***processed*** unsustainably. Once in production, Pensana will look to expand production capacity when additional feedstock becomes available.

Project delivery

FEED for each of Saltend and Longonjo completed post-Period end. A comprehensive value engineering and optimisation programme is well advanced and is expected to be reported next month and is expected to result in further reduction in capital costs.

Working alongside Wood Group’s Perth, Reading and Johannesburg offices, Paradigm Project Management (PPM), a specialist Africa centric project management and engineering company, and Professional Cost Consultants (PCC), with offices in South Africa and the UK, the estimated capex has been reduced from US$525 million to US$494 million (Saltend: US$195 million and Longonjo: US$299 million).

Worldwide supply chain constraints and inflationary pressures brought about by Covid-19 and the recent Ukraine-Russia conflict, which could have impacted both Saltend and Longonjo projects, have been largely mitigated by this detailed optimisation and value engineering ***processes***.

Specific workstreams involving capital and operation cost savings currently underway include:

Spent acid regeneration to maximise the recycling efficiency of the sulphuric acid plant integrated with off-gas from the calcining of concentrate at Longonjo, which is an important aspect of the ***process*** and constitutes a significant reduction of the carbon footprint through reduced reagent consumptionPiloting on a more cost-effective flotation concentrate calcining ***process*** offered as a vendor alternative post FEED, which would enable a significantly shorter lead time for fabrication and ease of installation at LongonjoOptimisation of Saltend’s civil & earthworks for load bearing structures undertaken alongside the completion of detailed geotechnical investigation, which will shorten the construction period and allow for future affordable expansion into downstream activities associated with magnet metal production, magnet recycling and ***processing*** of HREOPiloting of ***process*** simplification opportunities discovered in the MRES precipitation circuit in Longonjo

Corporate

Board and key company appointments

As previously announced in September 2021, highly experienced natural resources financier Steven Sharpe was appointed as Non-Executive Director of the Company. Steve’s experience in the finance space alongside his intimate knowledge of the rare earth industry has proven invaluable to date. As we move towards main financing, Steve’s experience and guidance will be a key component in the team progressing this workstream.

The Company has also appointed experienced ESG professional Danny McNeice as Sustainability Manager. He will provide technical and strategic guidance to the business to embed ESG throughout because of his local Yorkshire experiences in the Drax fold and their carbon footprint mitigation activities.

A key market for the Company is Japan, and Pensana is pleased to announce the appointment of experienced marketing executive Junji Kitaguchi as the Company’s marketing representative. Junji has extensive experience of business development and directed power, environmental and infrastructure-related businesses as General Manager of Mitsubishi Corporation Europe & Africa. He most recently operated as a senior advisor within Mitsubishi corporation creating a joint venture with a major European utility company.

Angola

At a macroeconomic level, Angola’s economy continues to de-risk. Their handling of the Covid pandemic has been commendable and with a Fiscal Surplus on the back of oil prices and a Debt to GDP ratio falling from 135% to 95% in 2021, it was not surprising to see Moody’s upgrade Angola’s credit rating to B3 with a stable outlook.  Anglo American, De Beers, Rio Tinto and others are now re-investing in the country.

Pensana will host a UK Department of International Trade trip to Angola at the end of this month. The visit includes delegates from several major mining houses and UK Export Finance. As part of the trade summit, the delegation will be visiting the Longonjo site, traveling via the recently upgraded US$2 billion Benguela railway line, which provides a direct link from Longonjo to the Port of Lobito.

These are extremely positive developments for Angola and a true reflection of their ongoing ambitions to place the country on a strong growth trajectory with specific focus on critical technology minerals, ***agriculture*** and tourism sectors.

Exploration

Good progress was made in advancing exploration activities on Longonjo’s neighbouring Coola License despite Covid 19 travel restrictions preventing international geological consultants from entering Angola during a large part of 2021.

Soil samples collected over the Coola carbonatite complex in 2020 were re-assayed for scandium (Sc) and fluorine (F). Scandium in the soils is highly anomalous with most values >80 ppm. This is significant as, although scandium is not an uncommon element, ***exceptional*** values of over 200 ppm occur at Coola. Late-stage hydrothermal fluorite veining occurs in fenite to the southwest of the ring dyke over an area of roughly 30 000 m2. The fluorite occurs in breccias as discrete coarse purple grains and irregular veins varying from a few mm to over 20 cm of pure purple fluorite. Fluorine in re-assayed soils over the known fluorite occurrence reached values as high as 21% F. An outcrop sample of a fluorite vein proved to be of very high-grade material (> 97% CaF2).

The primary focus of exploration during the second half of 2021 was on the Coola carbonatite following up the rare earth element, scandium and fluorite mineralisation. The carbonatite complex at Coola was mapped in detail and soil and rock chip sampling completed over the ring dyke to ascertain the nature, degree, and extent of rare earth element and scandium mineralisation. In addition, infill soil sampling and rock chip sampling was completed over the area of fluorite mineralisation and an augering programme of the soil covered central diatreme was successful in sampling the underlying saprolite. Detailed mineralogical work has also commenced on a selection of Coola rock types.

A total of 750 individual samples were taken and dispatched to Nagrom in Australia for analysis. Seven selected rock samples were sent for mineralogical studies. Analytical results and mineralogical studies are expected to be completed by late Q1 2022. Assay results received from the soil sampling programme at Monte Verde alkaline complex identified an area of roughly 5 km2 of > 0.5% TREO (max 2.0%) corresponding with mapped outcrops of carbonatite breccia in which up to 1% TREO was encountered. The REE mineralisation is accompanied by highly elevated levels of phosphorous, barium, iron, tantalum, manganese, niobium and strontium.

At the Sulima alkaline complex, extensive trenching was identified from satellite imagery corresponding with a well-defined radiometric anomaly. Fieldwork confirmed the presence of five one to seven metre deep, NE-SW trenches of roughly 90 m length and 500 m apart, excavated over a strike of 2200 m. Material in and around the trenches comprises predominantly secondary iron and manganese oxides and hydroxides. Handheld XRF analysis of material from the trenches indicated elevated iron, manganese, titanium, chromium, zinc and barite. Rock chip samples from various trenches and outcrops in the area were taken and have been submitted for whole rock geochemistry. Various other geophysical anomalies identified within the Coola License remain to be followed up with stream sediment sampling, mapping and rock chip sampling.

Environmental, Social and Governance

Progress continues to be made towards ensuring Pensana upholds the highest standards of ESG throughout. The ESG Committee, under the Chair of non-executive director, Baroness Northover, continued to refine the Committee’s terms of reference to oversee effectiveness of our framework, policies and systems for ESG management and integration across the Group. To demonstrate this, Pensana became a signatory to the United National Global Compact, a partner of the Taskforce for Climate-related Financial Disclosure (TCFD) and a launch partner of theOh Yes! Net Zerocampaign to promote net zero and climate action across the Humber region. These actions underline the Company’s commitment to transparency and further efforts have included testing the robustness of the Group’s strategy under future climate scenarios.

Pensana remains focused on climate risk. In addition to becoming a partner of the TCFD, a comprehensive transitional climate risk and opportunity assessment was completed over the period, including testing the business strategy against external climate models. HCV Africa have been instructed to carry out a physical climate risk assessment for Longonjo and have included a specialist climate hydrologist in their team to ensure any future climate impacts on water supply are assessed.

At the Longonjo site, the Environment and Social Impact Assessment (ESIA) has almost completed under the leadership of independent experts HCV Africa and Groupo Simples. These independent organisations have ensured adherence to the International Finance Corporation (IFC) Environmental and Social Performance Standards has been achieved. The ESIA will provide a framework against which Pensana will manage and monitor its ESG performance at Longonjo.  Once completed, this document will be submitted to the Angolan government for mutual agreement.

As part of the resettlement action plan (RAP), mapping of all land in the affected area has been completed. As a result, minor changes have been made to the project boundary to minimise impact on the local communities. This has been a key area of focus for the team, and we are pleased to report, there will be zero displacement of the local community from their physical residences.

Agreement with Equinor to recycle end-of-life wind turbine nacelles using innovative Hydrogen ***process***

In January, it was announced that Pensana had signed a cooperation agreement with leading energy provider, Equinor, to form a working group to share technical and commercial information to develop a low energy method for recycling of end-of-life magnets at Saltend. The partnership with Equinor supports Pensana’s commitment to the circular economy as it looks to recycle an addressable annual market of 4,000 tonnes of end-of-life permanent magnets.

Recycling permanent magnets utilising hydrogen not as fuel, but as a reductant, whilst benefitting from the decarbonised power supply within Saltend, offers a clean alternative using 88% less energy than virgin magnet manufacture and aligns with Pensana's continued efforts to produce a sustainable supply chain for these critical materials. Equinor has submitted plans for its ‘Hydrogen to Humber (H2H) Saltend’ hydrogen production facility into phase two of the Government’s Cluster Sequencing ***Process***. The facility will be supported by the potential supply of hydrogen to Pensana and other regional hydrogen users, which could be a world first and a catalyst for the Humber to achieve net zero.

Conflict in Ukraine

Russia’s ***invasion*** of Ukraine has added increased concerns to an already constrained global supply chain and rising inflationary pressures. The Group has no direct exposure to the region, nor do we anticipate sourcing any equipment or materials from the area, however we continue to monitor the situation in the context of the contagion effect it is having on Europe and the global economy.  The Board has agreed to incorporate specific ***measures*** around procurement, the awarding of contracts and any associated workstreams involving external third-party service providers so as to ensure the Group is in no way exposed to countries on the sanctions list.

Operating and Financial Review

During the period the consolidated entity incurred a comprehensive loss for the period of $4,235,572 (31 December 2020: $1,717,491).

Administration expenses increased to $3,670,738 (31 December 2020: $2,010,316) as a result of increases in PR fees, consultancy fees and increased employee costs due to an increase in staff members driven by a ramp-up to construction at Longonjo and Saltend.

The foreign currency exchange loss decreased from $621,652 to $410, 204 for the six months ended 31 December 2021. These losses arise from the settlement of invoices in currencies other than the functional currencies (USD, GBP, AUD), as well as the translation of balances denominated in currencies such as the pound, Australian dollar, etc. to the US dollar rate where the balances are held in currencies other than the functional currency of the relevant company and reflect the movements in these currencies during the respective periods.

Group net assets decreased in the period to $31,968,192 from $36,168,634. This was primarily driven by a decrease in cash and cash equivalents of $12,251,234, as well as a decrease in trade and other receivables of $3,449,092.  These decreases were partially offset by an increase in property, plant and equipment of $11,216,164.  The loss of $4,080,914 incurred during the period further contributed to the decrease in net assets.

The decrease in cash was due to cash spent on the Longonjo and Saltend projects of $11,407,614. Similarly, the increase in property, plant and equipment was the result of the capitalisation to the Longonjo Project development asset of $7,677,072, as well as the capitalization of assets under construction at the Saltend facility of $3,555,777.

The decrease in trade and other receivables was due to the receipt of funds following the equity raise in FY21.

The Group experienced net cash outflows from operating activities of $4,204,325 (31 December 2020: $1,971,930).

Net cash outflows from operating activities increased due to an increase in operating losses.  Net cash outflows from investing activities of $11,407,586 increased from cash outflows of $3,172,186 at 31 December 2020 due to cash spent on the additions to the Longonjo and Saltend projects as noted above.  The decrease in the cash inflows from financing activities from $8,576,685 for the six months ended 31 December 2020 to $3,360,677 for the six months ended31 December 2021 was due to the decrease in the proceeds from the issuance of equity.

The Directors have prepared a cash flow forecast for the period ended 30 June 2023. The forecast indicates that whilst the Group has sufficient funding to meet its corporate and general operating costs, the Group will require additional funding over the next twelve months to meet its committed and planned exploration and development expenditure related to the Saltend and Longonjo Projects. Please refer note 3 to the financial statements for more detail on the going concern statement.

Accordingly, the Directors have resolved to undertake certain mitigating actions including actively engaging with institutional investors and financing institutions in the United Kingdom and Europe to discuss opportunities around potential future financing in anticipation of key project investment milestones as part of the business plan being reached and the associated funding requirements attached thereto. Such additional funding will be required to meet the Group’s committed and planned development expenditure across the forthcoming year.

The ability of the Group to continue as a going concern is dependent on securing such additional funding given its forecast expenditure above. These conditions indicate a material uncertainty which may cast significant doubt as to the Group’s ability to continue as a going concern and therefore it may be unable to realise its assets and discharge its liabilities in the normal course of business.

Principal Business Risks

The Group is exposed to a number of risks and uncertainties which could have a material impact on its long-term development, and performance and management of these risks is an integral part of the management of the Group. An overview of the key risks which could affect the Group’s operational and financial performance was included in the Company’s 2021 Annual Report, which can be accessed at[*http://www.pensana.co.uk*](http://www.pensana.co.uk). These may impact the Group over the medium to long term; however, the following key risks have been identified which may impact the Group over the short term.

Financing and liquidity

The Company is of the opinion that the Group has sufficient cash to meet its day to day corporate and operational working capital requirements and currently committed exploration and development expenditure, however post announcement of FEED and final investment decision expected by Q3 FY 2022, the Group will furthermore need to raise additional capital based on the forecasted exploration and development expenditures costs related to rollout of the Longonjo and Saltend projects and the Coola exploration. The Group has no history of NdPr oxide production at its planned Saltend facility nor mineral production at the Longonjo Project and accordingly has no revenues from operations and negative cash flows and will require additional future capital in the short term to continue its exploration activities and to commence development of the Saltend and Longonjo Project.

COVID-19 pandemic and Ukraine-Russia conflict

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has had an impact on the Group’s businesses. The government lockdown in Angola led to a temporary suspension of work at the Longonjo Project albeit that work has now resumed. Further escalation of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the implementation of any additional government-regulated restrictions which delays the Group in carrying out its business activities at the Longonjo and Saltend Projects (such as preparatory works) ultimately delays the Group’s ability to reach production and start to generate cash and so could have a material adverse impact on the Group’s operations and financial results. Additionally, the recent Ukraine-Russia conflict has created increased uncertainty and volatility in debt and equity markets alongside increased inflationary pressures, supply chain constraints and increased FX volatility which may make the requisite funding for the Longonjo and Saltend Projects more difficult to secure or affect the terms available.

Mr. Tim George

Chief Executive Officer

29 March 2022

INDEPENDENT REVIEW REPORT TOPENSANA PLC

Conclusion

Based on our review, nothing has come to our attention that causes us to believe that the condensed set of financial statements in the half-yearly financial report for the six months ended 31 December 2021 is not prepared, in all material respects, in accordance with UK adopted International Accounting Standard 34 and the Disclosure Guidance and Transparency Rules of the United Kingdom’s Financial Conduct Authority.

We have been engaged by the company to review the condensed set of financial statements in the half-yearly financial report for the six months ended 31 December 2021 which comprises the condensed consolidated statement of comprehensive income, condensed consolidated statement of financial position, condensed consolidated statement of changes in equity, the condensed consolidated statement of cash flows and the related notes.

Basis for conclusion

We conducted our review in accordance with International Standard on Review Engagements (UK) 2410, “Review of Interim Financial Information Performed by the Independent Auditor of the Entity” (“ISRE (UK) 2410”). A review of interim financial information consists of making enquiries, primarily of persons responsible for financial and accounting matters, and applying analytical and other review procedures. A review is substantially less in scope than an audit conducted in accordance with International Standards on Auditing (UK) and consequently does not enable us to obtain assurance that we would become aware of all significant matters that might be identified in an audit. Accordingly, we do not express an audit opinion.

As disclosed in note 3, the annual financial statements of the group are prepared in accordance with UK adopted International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRSs). The condensed set of financial statements included in this half-yearly financial report has been prepared in accordance with UK adopted International Accounting Standard 34, “Interim Financial Reporting”.

Material uncertainty related to Going Concern

We draw attention to note 3 to the half-yearly financial report concerning the Group’s ability to continue as a going concern. The matters explained in note 3 indicate that the Group will require additional funding to meet its planned expenditures, that the required capital has not been secured at the date of this report and the availability of such funding is not guaranteed. As stated in note 3, these conditions indicate the existence of a material uncertainty which may cast significant doubt over the Group’s ability to continue as a going concern. Our opinion is not modified in respect of this matter.

Based on our review procedures, which are less extensive than those performed in an audit as described in the Basis for conclusion section of this report, nothing has come to our attention to suggest that the directors have inappropriately adopted the going concern basis of accounting.

This conclusion is based on the review procedures performed in accordance with ISRE (UK) 2410, however future events or conditions may cause the group to cease to continue as a going concern.

Responsibilities of directors

The directors are responsible for preparing the half-yearly financial report in accordance with the Disclosure Guidance and Transparency Rules of the United Kingdom’s Financial Conduct Authority.

In preparing the half-yearly financial report, the directors are responsible for assessing the company’s ability to continue as a going concern, disclosing, as applicable, matters related to going concern and using the going concern basis of accounting unless the directors either intend to liquidate the company or to cease operations, or have no realistic alternative but to do so.

Auditor’s responsibilities for the review of the financial information

In reviewing the half-yearly report, we are responsible for expressing to the Company a conclusion on the condensed set of financial statement in the half-yearly financial report. Our conclusions, including our conclusions in the Material Uncertainty related to Going Concern section, are based on procedures that are less extensive than audit procedures, as described in the Basis for Conclusion paragraph of this report.

Use of our report

Our report has been prepared in accordance with the terms of our engagement to assist the Company in meeting the requirements of the Disclosure Guidance and Transparency Rules of the United Kingdom’s Financial Conduct Authority and for no other purpose.  No person is entitled to rely on this report unless such a person is a person entitled to rely upon this report by virtue of and for the purpose of our terms of engagement or has been expressly authorised to do so by our prior written consent.  Save as above, we do not accept responsibility for this report to any other person or for any other purpose and we hereby expressly disclaim any and all such liability.

BDO LLP

Chartered Accountants

London, UK

29 March 2022

BDO LLP is a limited liability partnership registered in England and Wales (with registered number OC305127).

Condensed consolidated Statement of Comprehensive Income

for the six months ended 31 December 2021

Notes to the interim financial statements are included on pages 13 to 23.

Condensed consolidated Statement of Financial Position

as at 31 December 2021

Notes to the interim financial statements are included on pages 13 to 23.

Condensed consolidated Statement of Changes in Equity for the six months ended 31 December 2021

Notes to the interim financial statements are included on pages 13 to 23.

Condensed consolidated Statement of Cash Flows

for the six months ended 31 December 2021

Notes to the interim financial statements are included on pages 13 to 23.

Notes to the financial statements

1.  General information

The consolidated financial statements present the financial information of Pensana Plc and its subsidiary (collectively, the Group) for the six months ended 31 December 2021 in United States dollars (USD or $). Pensana Plc (the Company or the parent) is a public company limited by shares listed on the Main Market of the London Stock Exchange and incorporated in England & Wales on 13 September 2019. The registered office is located at 100 Pall Mall, St James, London, United Kingdom, SW1Y 5NQ.

The Company is focussed on the establishment of an integrated rare earth ***processing*** facility in the UK with a view to creating the world’s first sustainable magnet metal supply chain.

In early 2020, Pensana Metals Ltd re-domiciled the group to the United Kingdom pursuant to a scheme of arrangement in which Pensana Metals Ltd became a wholly owned subsidiary of Pensana Plc. Prior to the transaction the Company was incorporated on 13 September 2019 and was a wholly owned subsidiary of Pensana Metals Ltd.

The Board of Pensana Plc resolved to restructure the group to remove redundant holding companies and streamline the group structure. As part of this restructuring ***process*** the shares in the wholly owned subsidiaries, Sable Minerals GmbH and Sable Rare Earths GmbH were acquired directly by Pensana Rare Earths Plc and it is anticipated that additional dormant entities in Tanzania and Australia will be liquidated during the next 6 months.

2.  New accounting standards and interpretations

(a)  Changes in accounting policies and disclosures

From 1 July 2021, the Group has adopted the following Standards and Interpretations, mandatory for annual periods beginning on 1 July 2021.

The application of these standards have not had a material impact on the financial statements.

(b)  Accounting standards and interpretations issued but not yet effective:

The Group has elected not to early adopt the following revised and amended standards.

Management has reviewed and considered these new standards and interpretations and none of these are expected to have a material effect on the reported results or financial position of the Group.

3.  Significant accounting policies and Going Concern

Basis of preparation

The interim results, which are unaudited, have been prepared in accordance with the requirements of International Accounting Standard 34. This condensed interim report does not include all the notes of the type normally included in an annual financial report. This condensed report is to be read in conjunction with the Annual Report for the year ended 30 June 2021, and any public announcements made by the Group during the interim reporting period. The comparative financial information for the year ended 30 June 2021 in this interim report does not constitute statutory accounts for that year. The statutory accounts for 30 June 2021 have been delivered to the Registrar of Companies.

The auditors' report on those accounts was unqualified but drew attention to a material uncertainty in relation to going concern. It did not contain a statement under 498(2) or 498(3) of the Companies Act 2006.  The financial report for the six months ended 31 December 2021 was prepared in accordance with the annual financial statements of the group are prepared in accordance with UK adopted International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRSs).

The accounting policies applied in this condensed interim report are consistent with the polices applied in the annual financial report for the year ended 30 June 2021 unless otherwise noted.

As disclosed in the 30 June 2021 Annual Report the Company was incorporated on 13 September 2019 as a wholly owned subsidiary of Pensana Metals Ltd. The Company subsequently acquired 100% of the share capital of Pensana Metals and its subsidiary companies for the effective issuance of 152,973,315 shares to the shareholders of Pensana Metals Ltd further to the scheme of arrangement approved on 22 January 2020 and completed on 5 February 2020.

The shares issued to the former shareholders of Pensana Metals Ltd comprised the 50,000,000 shares with a nominal value of £0.001 per share subscribed on incorporation of the Company by Pensana Metals Ltd which were transferred to CHESS Depositary Nominees Pty Ltd (a subsidiary of the ASX) for use in the scheme of arrangement and 102,973,314 shares with a nominal value of £0.001 per share additionally issued by the Company to CHESS Depositary Nominees Pty Ltd for use in the scheme of arrangement. CHESS Depositary Nominees Ltd subsequently issued CHESS Depositary Instruments in proportion to the interests the former shareholders of Pensana Metals held in that company for trading on the ASX with 152,973,315 CHESS Depositary Instruments issued for trading. The transaction represented a group reconstruction and common control transaction.

The accounting for common control transactions is scoped out of IFRS 3 and, accordingly the Group has developed an accounting policy with reference to methods applied in alternative GAAPs (Generally Accepted Accounting Principles). Consequently, the consolidated financial statements are presented as if the Company has always been the holding Company for the Group and the Group has elected to apply merger accounting principles. Under this policy, the Company and its subsidiaries are treated as if they had always been a Group.

The results are included from the date the subsidiaries joined the Group and the comparatives reflect the results of the Company and its subsidiaries. No fair value adjustments occur as a result of the transaction and the assets and liabilities are incorporated at their predecessor carrying values.

The consolidated financial statements are presented in United States Dollars (US$) rounded to the nearest dollar.

The policies have been consistently applied to all the years presented, unless otherwise stated.

Going Concern

The consolidated financial statements have been prepared on a going concern basis with the Directors of the opinion that the Group can meet its obligations as and when they fall due.

At 31 December 2021 the Group has a net asset position of $31,968,192 (30 June 2021: $36,168,634) including cash and cash equivalents of $4,552,862 (30 June 2021: $16,787,591), had incurred a loss after income tax of $4,080,914 (Six months ended 31 December 2021: $2,631,745) and experienced cumulative net cash outflows from operating and investing activities of $15,440,748 (Six months ended 31 December 2020: $5,144,116).

The Directors have prepared a cashflow forecast for a period of at least twelve months from the date of this report. In assessing the going concern basis of preparation, the Directors have given consideration to the principal risks and uncertainties facing the business, including specific consideration of the impact of COVID-19 in terms of the availability of funding and progression of the Longonjo NdPr Project in Angola and the Saltend Project in the UK.

Similarly, the Directors have also considered the impact of the Russia-Ukraine war as it relates to costs and the potential volatility in debt and equity markets.  Conversely, the demand for clean energy rises at such times, sparking increases in prices of rare earth metals.

The forecasts demonstrate that the Group has sufficient cash to meet its day to day corporate and operational working capital requirements and currently committed exploration and development expenditure, however post announcement of FEED and final investment decision expected by Q3 FY 2022, the Group will furthermore need to raise additional capital based on the forecasted exploration and development expenditures costs related to rollout of the Longonjo and Saltend projects and the Coola exploration.

The Directors have therefore considered mitigating actions and are confident of being able to raise the required capital through either debt or equity financing (or combination thereof) during the 12-month period and have engaged ABG Sundal Collier (ABGSC), a leading Nordic investment bank headquartered in Oslo, Norway, to progress the debt financing. Furthermore, the Company’s expression of interest in the UK Government’s up to £1bn Automotive Transformation Fund (“ATF”) has been received positively by the programme board. The application for grant or other forms of financial support is currently under Government review, however the Company does not have any indication on the timing of any potential award.

Despite the ongoing engagements, the directors note that the required capital has not been secured at the date of this report and the availability of such funding is not guaranteed. These circumstances indicate the existence of a material uncertainty which may cast significant doubt about the Group’s ability to continue as a going concern and therefore it may be unable to realise its assets and discharge its liabilities in the normal course of business.  The financial statements do not include the adjustments that would result if the Group was unable to continue as a going concern.

Critical accounting judgements and key sources of estimation uncertainty

In applying the Group’s accounting policies management continually evaluates judgements, estimates and assumptions based on experience and other factors, including expectations of future events that may have an impact on the Group. All judgments, estimates and assumptions made are believed to be reasonable based on the most current set of circumstances available to management. Actual results may differ from the judgements, estimates and assumptions.

Significant judgements, estimates and assumptions made by management in the preparation of these financial statements are outlined below:

(i)     Significant accounting judgements

Impairment of assessment of development assets (note 9), the impairment of assessment of exploration and evaluation expenditure (note 9), as well as the impairment of assessment of assets under construction (note 9)

The ultimate recovery of the value of the Group’s development assets and assets under construction as at 31 December 2021, as well as the ultimate recovery of the value of the Group’s exploration and evaluation assets as at 31 December 2021 and 31 December 2020, are dependent on the successful development and commercial exploitation, or alternatively, sale, of the Longonjo Project, as well as the successful development and commercial exploitation of the Saltend facility.

31 December 2021

Judgment was exercised in assessing the extent to which impairment indicators existed at 31 December 2021 in respect of the Longonjo Project and associated balances, as well as the Saltend project.  In forming this assessment, internal and external factors were evaluated.  Management determined that no impairment indicators existed having considered the Company’s market capitalisation relative to the Group’s net asset value, the progression of the Longonjo Project and associated Competent Person’s Report, financial Life of Mine Plan, studies and Bankable Feasibility Study equivalent assessments.  The underlying financial Life of Mine Plan involves estimates regarding commodity prices, production and reserves, operating costs and capital development together with discount rates.

31 December 2020

Management considered whether there are indicators as to whether the asset carrying values for exploration and evaluation assets exceed their recoverable amounts. This consideration included assessment of the following:

expiration of the period for which the entity has the right to explore in the specific area of interest with no plans for renewal;whether substantive expenditure on further exploration for and evaluation of mineral resources in the specific area is neither budgeted nor planned;exploration for and evaluation activities have not led to the discovery of commercially viable quantities of mineral resources and the entity has decided to discontinue such activities in the specific area; andwhether sufficient data exists to indicate that, although a development in the specific area is likely to proceed, the carrying amount of the exploration and evaluation asset is unlikely to be recovered in full from successful development or by sale.

Management judgement is required to determine whether the expenditures which are capitalised as exploration and evaluation assets will be recovered by future exploitation or sale or whether they should be impaired. In assessing this, management determines the possibility of finding recoverable ore reserves related to a particular area of interest, which is a subject to significant uncertainties. Many of the factors, judgements and variables involved in ***measuring*** resources are beyond the Group’s control and may prove to be incorrect over time. Subsequent changes in resources could impact the carrying value of exploration and evaluation assets.

Based on the information the Company has on the above, it was concluded by management that no impairment indicator existed at 31 December 2020 for the exploration and evaluation assets.  In forming this assessment, the Directors exercised judgement and considered the results of ongoing exploration work, the significant increase in demand for NdPr and associated pricing, the implied valuations provided by the equity placings in the period, the progression in the Business Plan towards project start up and the resource statement.

Recoverability of equity receivable (note 8)

Management’s judgement is required to determine whether the outstanding equity receivable at period end is recoverable. Management is comfortable that the structured repayment plan, that includes secured collateralisation in excess of the outstanding receivable adequately covers the outstanding receivable and that no further provision thereon is required.  Refer to note 8 for further details.

(ii)    Significant accounting estimates and assumptions

Share-based payment transactions (note 15).

The Group ***measures*** the cost of equity-settled transactions with directors and others by reference to the fair value of the equity instruments at the date at which they are granted. The fair value is determined using a Binomial model and requires estimates for inputs such as share price volatility. The share-based payments arrangements are expensed on a straight-line basis over the vesting period, based on the Group’s estimate of shares that will eventually vest. At each reporting date, vesting assumptions are reviewed to ensure they reflect current expectations and immediately recognises any impact of the revision to original estimates. Judgment is required as to the likelihood of the vesting conditions being met, such as project milestones being achieved if fully vested share options are not exercised and expire then the accumulated expense in respect of these is reclassified to accumulated losses.

4.  Operating Segments

Description of segments

The Group has identified its operating segments based on the internal reports that are used by the chief operating decision makers in assessing performance and determining the allocation of resources.

The Group has identified that it has two operating segments being related to the activities in Angola and Saltend (UK), on the basis that the assets in Tanzania were fully impaired at 30 June 2021.  The unallocated relates to operations in Australia and Portugal.

2021

2020

Non-current assets consist mainly of development assets and assets under construction.  Additions and depreciation to non-current assets are disclosed in note 9.

5.  Other Expenses

Foreign currency exchange gains/losses:

Foreign exchange loss of $410,204 (2020: $621,652 loss) comprises realised foreign exchange movements on retranslation of monetary balances and unrealised foreign exchange movements on intercompany loans which are considered repayable in the foreseeable future.

6.  Income Taxes

No Liability to corporation tax arose in ordinary activities for the half year ending 31 December 2021 or 31 December 2020.

The tax assessed for the year the standard rate of tax in the UK of 19% (2020: 19%).

Tax rate reconciliation:

7.  Cash and Cash Equivalents

8.  Trade and Other Receivables

Of the other debtors as at 31 December 2021, $1,350,834 related to payment pending as part of the equity raise completed on 25 June 2021. Management are comfortable that the structured repayment plan, that includes secured collateralisation in excess of the outstanding receivable adequately covers the outstanding receivable and that no further provision thereon is required.

9.  Property, plant and equipment

Assets under construction relate to Saltend

10. Exploration and Evaluation Expenditure

The above amounts represent capitalised costs of exploration carried forward as an asset in accordance with the accounting policies set out in the annual report. The ultimate recoupment of the exploration and evaluation expenditure in respect to the areas of interest carried forward is dependent upon the discovery of commercially viable reserves and the successful development and exploitation of the respective areas or alternatively the sale of the underlying areas of interest for at least their carrying value.

11.  Trade and Other Payables

12.  Issued Capital

Placements during 2021 and 2020:

On 1 July 2020 the Company issued 16,508,633 fully paid ordinary shares to the Angolan Sovereign Wealth fund (“ASF”). This was the balance of the shares to be allotted out of a total of 25,808,633 fully paid ordinary shares that formed part of their second equity placing in the Company of $ 5million as announced on 11 June 2020.

On 11 August 2020, the Company announced the conversion of 500,000 zero cost performance rights into fully paid ordinary shares on Listing on the London Stock Exchange.

On 11 August 2020, the Company issued 821,157 fully paid ordinary shares to third party service providers at a price of A$0.33 per share, for a total of $0.2 million.

On 25 September 2020 the Group raised an additional $8.6 million (net of share issuance costs) via the placing of 13,500,000 fully paid ordinary shares with the ASF.

On 4 January 2021, the Company issued 550,000 fully paid ordinary shares (of which 250,000 were related to share options, and 300,000 to third party service providers at a price of £0.50 per share, for a total of $0.2 million.

On 25 June 2021, the Group raised circa $21.1 million (net of share issuance costs) via the placing of 12,500,000 fully paid ordinary shares to long term shareholders, the ASF and Chairman Paul Atherley.

On 6 July 2021 7,108,037 shares related to share awards were issued to executive management.

Share options on issue

During the period, 500,000 options expired. As at 31 December 2021, there are 1,500,000 shares under option.

Performance rights on issue

There are no performance rights outstanding as at period end.

13.  Commitments for Expenditure

The Group has certain obligations to perform exploration work and expend minimum amounts of money on mineral exploration tenements.

No provision has been made in the accounts for minimum expenditure requirements in respect of tenements.

Exploration Commitments

Commitments for payments under exploration permits and mineral leases in existence at the reporting date but not recognised as liabilities payable are as follows:

14.  Contingent Liabilities and Contingent Assets

The Directors are not aware of any other contingent liabilities or contingent assets that are likely to have a material effect on the results of the Group as disclosed in these financial statements.

15.  Share-based Payments

Half year ended 31 December 2021

During the period, 7,108,037 shares were issued.  These related to the vesting of executive share awards. In addition 750,000, of the outstanding 2,250,000 legacy awards vested during the Period and amount of $16,179 was charged to the statement of comprehensive income.

Half year ended 31 December 2020

During the prior period, no performance rights were issued. $350,797 was charged to the statement of comprehensive income in respect of existing performance rights. As at 31 December 2020 there were 10,358,037 performance rights on issue.  During the prior period, 500,000 performance rights were converted to ordinary shares on the successful listing on the London Stock Exchange.

During the prior period, no options were issued. No amount was charged to the statement of comprehensive income in respect of existing options. As at 31 December 2020 there are were no options on issue.

Reconciliation of options outstanding

The following reconciles outstanding share options provided as share-based payments at the beginning and end of the financial period:

16.  Loss per share

Basic loss per share

The net loss and weighted average number of ordinary shares used in the calculation of basic loss per share are as follows:

1,500,000 options (31 December 2020: nil) and nil performance rights (31 December 2020: 10,358,037) have not been included in the diluted earnings per share, as they were anti-dilutive in the current and prior period.

17.  Related party transactions

Transactions with Key Management Personnel and Related Parties

No reportable related party transactions occurred during the period under review.

18.  Notes to the Consolidated Statement of Cashflows

Reconciliation of loss for the period to net cash flows from operating activities

19.  Subsequent events

Post period end the Group completed a £10 million Placement to M&G Investment Management (“M&G) by way of a placement of 12,345,680 new ordinary shares of £0.001 each in the capital of the Company at a price of 81 pence per share.  Following the admission of the ordinary shares to trading M&G had an interest in approximately 5% of the Company’s enlarged issued share capital.

No other matters or circumstances have arisen since 31 December 2021 that have significantly affected, or may significantly affect:

 The Group’s operations in future financial years; or The results of those operations in future financial years; or The Group’s state of affairs in future financial years.

RESPONSIBILITY STATEMENT

We confirm that to the best of our knowledge: a. the Condensed Financial Statements have been prepared in accordance with IAS 34 Interim Financial Reporting and give a true and fair view of the assets, liabilities, financial position and profit of the Group; and a. the Interim Management Report includes a fair review of the information required by FCA’s Disclosure and Transparency Rules (DTR 4.2.7 R and 4.2.8 R).

By order of the Board

Mr Paul Atherley

29 March 2022

**Load-Date:** March 30, 2022

**End of Document**



[***Wage supplement will be extended if necessary, PM says***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:64CV-82F1-JDJN-64FV-00000-00&context=1516831)

The Malta Independent

December 23, 2021

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**Length:** 28318 words

**Body**

Prime Minister Robert Abela said Thursday that that the Covid-19 wage supplement being given to businesses will be revised nearing the end of January, and, if necessary, will be extended further.

Speaking on ONE Radio, Abela said that the country is doing well economically, and so will not be pressed against the wall on limited funds should there be a need to extend the wage supplement.

The Covid-19 wage supplement has thus far been extended till the end of January.

Abela said that "decisions (that were later) announced by the Deputy Prime Minister and the Superintendent for Health to further insist and encourage people to take the booster dose so that we live in a more normal way".

He maintained that health authorities have advised on looking at the increase in infections at the hospital and in the ITU, stating that the numbers are still stable.

The focus will continuously be on taking the booster dose, Abela said. He added that the booster is crucial as it is proven to be effective and safe, enabling the public to live a life closer to normality. The main tools to fight the pandemic are the vaccines and a few restrictions.

"We have saved last summer due to the actions we took with restrictions, now we have to save our winter as well, by taking the booster jab," he repeated.

In the next few days, registration for the booster dose will open for those under the age of 35, Abela said.

Abela reminded that Malta was a catalyst in the procurement of the vaccine last December, and by being at the forefront, the country got a head start to the vaccinations and has one of the best vaccination programs in Europe.

Speaking about the Opposition, Abela said that the PN has not continuously appealed for the public to take the booster, but rather it is taking advantage of the public by capitalising the pandemic situation.

The country made the decision to take stricter ***measures*** back in summer than the one enforced by the European Commission regarding travel into the country, whereby the government accepted only the one criterion that travellers must present a vaccine certificate, Abela said.

A sharp drop was seen immediately and a large number of cancellation of tourists was seen at the time, however the ***measure*** worked in the long run, despite being criticised for it, noted Abela.

On questions about the recent resignations of ministers within the Labour party, Abela replied that those who resigned have taken on a responsibility, adding that he was personally hurt by what had to happen, but that it was necessary.

Abela noted that the PN is divided, and it is them that are in a collapse as the Opposition leader has more negative results than the one before him. He added that the PL has a strong, competent and united cabinet who take easy as well as difficult decisions together.

Thu, 23 Dec 2021 11:40:00 +0000 6736239307 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-23/local-news/Wage-supplement-will-be-extended-if-necessary-PM-says-6736239307

UK, Italy again break daily Covid infections tally

The United Kingdom detected 119,789 new Covid infections in the past 24 hours, a 139% rise on the 50,023 new cases recorded on Thursday two weeks ago.

A further 147 people died from Covid-related causes, compared to 146 deaths recorded on Thursday last week.

The NHS England national medical director, Stephen Powis, said the NHS was "on a war footing and staff are taking the fight to Omicron".

The UK health secretary, Sajid Javid, said ministers would not be imposing any fresh restrictions in England before Christmas, despite new cases on Wednesday rising above 100,000 for the first time in the pandemic.

Italy reported that the daily tally of new infections rose to 44,595 from 36,293, hitting a record high.

Healthy ministry data also showed that 168 coronavirus-related deaths against 146 the day before.

Thu, 23 Dec 2021 18:46:00 +0000 6736239317 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-23/world-news/UK-Italy-again-break-daily-Covid-infections-tally-6736239317

New Covid-19 ***measures*** cause 'uncertainty', MHRA says

The Malta Hotels and Restaurants Association (MHRA) said that the festive season was the one chance businesses had to recoup some of the losses suffered earlier in the year but they are now in a situation of great uncertainty.

Indeed, the loss of income over this period is about more than just the festive season, it is about surviving the winter months, the MHRA said.

The association said that the hospitality sector over the past two years ended up as the main target and victim of the pandemic related control ***measures***, and now once again is being caught amid a pattern of waiting to see how virulent the Omicron variant is.

MHRA President Tony Zahra stated that, "the industry is trying to keep its head above water now we are kind of in limbo at the minute." Zahra added MHRA members understand the importance to adhere to public health advice but are concerned of the impact on the industry of ***measures*** that are announced at the last minute.

"We are allowed to be open, but the authorities are telling people to cut back on going out. Significantly, it is important that we avoid a situation of ongoing, rolling closures of hospitality for as long as the pandemic persists. This is soul destroying for businesses and for our teams and the many communities across the country that rely so heavily on tourism at a time when they are already struggling, with events cancelled and occupancy levels at near all-time lows."

MHRA therefore is not only calling upon Government to intervene with an emergency hospitality support package which reflects the current extraordinary situation but also asserts that as a sector and as a country we need better engagement on what the plan for living with this virus will be going forward.

MHRA said that as many hospitality businesses have been working to reconfigure and establish their operations into very safe environments in line with existing protocols, any additional restrictive ***measures*** need to be taken into consideration of their impact on the going concern of the business. Once safety protocols are in place what needs to be done is rigorous enforcement by the relevant authorities and accordingly allow these businesses to continue to trade.

MHRA said it recognized that there are no easy solutions but stands as always, ready able and willing to engage with Government on a plan for the economic survival of many thousands engaged in the hospitality industry.

Thu, 23 Dec 2021 14:31:00 +0000 6736239313 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-23/local-news/New-Covid-19-***measures***-cause-uncertainty-MHRA-says-6736239313

Church offers to accommodate some of the migrants stranded at sea

The Church has offered to accommodate a number of migrants who are stranded at sea, while calling on the authorities to let them disembark in a safe port.

Over 220 children, women and men rescued by the Sea Eye a week ago in Malta's search and rescue area are still stranded at sea, in worsening weather conditions, after Malta refused to provide them with a port of safety. Alarm Phone yesterday reported that a further 70 people are reportedly in distress and requesting rescue in Malta's search and rescue area.

The Church in Malta through the Migrants Commission, Justice and Peace Commission and JRS, strongly urged the national authorities to take immediate action and ensure that the asylum seekers currently stranded at sea are rescued and disembarked at a safe port.

"The Church in Malta strongly believes that leaving people stranded at sea is inhumane and unlawful, and experience shows us that this strategy does not serve as a deterrent to forced migration but imperils life unnecessarily. As it has been doing over the past years, the Church in Malta is willing to offer its support and services, and to accommodate a number of asylum seekers in its properties, in which it currently hosts around 250 persons."

The Church said it was making a wholehearted appeal to the Maltese Government and to the responsible authorities not to put people's lives at risk by leaving them out at sea.

At the same time, the EU Commission is urged to step up its solidarity efforts amongst member states, to save lives and alleviate pressure from border countries.

Thu, 23 Dec 2021 14:22:00 +0000 6736239312 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-23/local-news/Church-offers-to-accommodate-some-of-the-migrants-stranded-at-sea-6736239312

Weather watch: Christmas Day expected to be dry and partly cloudy

The most wonderful time of the year is set to bring with it rather wonderful weather, as mostly clear skies with dry conditions will enable incoming travellers and locals alike to soak up the festive atmosphere around the Maltese islands without any inclement weather threatening to dampen the Christmas spirit, Malta International Airport said.

Settled and stable weather is forecast from Christmas Eve through to Boxing Day, as an area of high-pressure hovers over the Mediterranean. The 24th of December will start off the weekend with mainly cloudy skies, and force 2 to 3 winds blowing from a Southeast direction becoming South later in the day.

While partly cloudy skies will linger through the 25th of December before they clear the following day, winds will strengthen across the islands on Christmas morning, as South-Southwest winds are forecast to reach force 4 to 5 throughout the day. Boxing Day will see the wind decrease gradually to force 4 by the end of the day.

Boxing Day will bring a predicted maximum temperature of 19°C, while temperatures are not expected to exceed 17°C and 18°C on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day, respectively. With a low of 14°C, Friday is expected to be the coolest day, as a minimum temperature of 15°C is forecast for both Saturday and Sunday.

For the latest weather updates, you are invited to follow  [*www.maltairport.com/weather*](http://www.maltairport.com/weather).

Thu, 23 Dec 2021 12:14:00 +0000 6736239308 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-23/local-news/Weather-watch-Christmas-Day-expected-to-be-dry-and-partly-cloudy-6736239308

Educators, students and parents left in the dark - PN

The Nationalist Party said today that Prime Minister Robert Abela has left educators, students and parents in the dark of what will now happen to the ministry for educationfollowing the resignation of the minister responsible.

In his interview on the Labour Party media station, Abela did not mention what steps would be taken against public officials who were also involved in the abuse which led to the minister's resignation.

Minister Justyne Caruana resigned after the Standards Commissioner ruled that she had breached ethics when she had given a €15,000 contract to her "friend" Daniel Bogdanovic.

In its statement, the PN said that Abela is treating people poorly when he says that he has a strong team behind him.

The PN reminded the Prime Minister that he still has a Minister for Justice who was acquainted with Yorgen Fenech, who is accused of being a mastermind in the assassination of journalist Daphne Caruana Galizia.

The PN added that the United States is taking steps against Keith Schembri and Konrad Mizzi, by banning them from entering the United States because of 'significant corruption'. Malta is not taking such ***measures***, the PN said.

Thu, 23 Dec 2021 12:27:00 +0000 6736239309 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-23/local-news/Educators-students-and-parents-left-in-the-dark-PN-6736239309

Booster dose safe for pregnant women - Malta College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists

The Covid-19 booster remains the best way to protect against the known risks of COVID-19 in pregnancy for both mother and baby, the Malta College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (MCOG) said.

In a statement, it said that, in line with the European Board & College of Obstetrics and Gynaecology (EBCOG), the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RCOG) and the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG), it recommends COVID-19 vaccination in women who are trying to conceive or are pregnant or breast feeding.

One out of three pregnant women who have Covid develop symptoms including cough and fever. Global figures show that pregnant women are at increased risk of severe illness from COVID-19 compared with non-pregnant women.

Data has shown that over 95% of Covid positive women who need hospital admission and admission to intensive care are not vaccinated.

At the beginning of this pandemic, pregnant women were being shielded due to national restrictions, however this may not be the case today. The unvaccinated pregnant woman is therefore at greater risk.

Data gathered since the start of the pandemic has not raised any safety concerns regarding the administration of COVID-19 vaccines to pregnant women, it said.

"Similar to other non-live vaccines, Covid vaccines and boosters cannot cause infection to the baby. Evidence from other non-live vaccines has been gathered over many years and has not raised any safety concerns. We understand that this is an anxious time. Making a decision on vaccination is not easy but taking the vaccine and the booster is safer for the mother and the baby. Reliable evidence-based information is available in 'sites' of the above International Colleges, but if you are still worried, please discuss with your doctor."

Thu, 23 Dec 2021 17:49:00 +0000 6736239316 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-23/local-news/Booster-dose-safe-for-pregnant-women-Malta-College-of-Obstetricians-and-Gynaecologists-6736239316

Man grievously injured after falling into shaft in Marsa

A man was grievously injured on Thursday after he fell three storeys into a shaft.

The accident took place inside a building in Xatt il-Mollijiet, Marsa, at around 1pm, the police said.

The casualty is a 52-year-old man from Pembroke. He was assisted by members of the Civil Protection Department and a medical team.

He was later taken to Mater Dei Hospital by ambulance.

Police investigations are ongoing.

Thu, 23 Dec 2021 16:49:00 +0000 6736239314 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-23/local-news/Man-grievously-injured-after-falling-into-shaft-in-Marsa-6736239314

FIAU fine to BOV 'justified', bank implemented ***processes*** to overcome shortcomings – chairman

Bank of Valletta Chairman Gordon Cordina admitted that the €2.6 million fine imposed on the bank last week by FIAU was justified, and ***processes*** have been implemented immediately to overcome the shortcomings in the identified breach.

Speaking to The Malta Independent, Cordina said that "The bank was transparent throughout the ***process*** and worked closely with the FIAU on this matter. The fine was issued as an administrative penalty for failing to report Beneficial Ownership information for 2,442 corporate customers in the Central Bank Account Register (CBAR) reporting to the FIAU. There was no suggestion that this resulted or has facilitated money laundering or the financing of terrorism."

About public concern over the hefty fine the bank had to pay, Cordina stated, "The size of the fine reflects the size of the bank in the economy – as is normal practice when regulator determine fines: the figure per se is concerning but even more important is our responsibility towards regulators.

There can be no excuse for shortfalls in CBAR reporting and this fine is a harsh but important reminder of the need for our systems to be flawless. The issue has now been addressed and further work is ongoing to eliminate future similar incidents. The bank continues to invest heavily in a transformation program and today can combat financial crime much more effectively and sustainably over the long term. As a bank we are not a finished product, our transformation began at the end of 2017, and we will keep striving to improve. We remain on course to modernise all ***processes*** and procedures and strengthen training requirements for staff.  This of course applies to our handling of issues which may potentially arise from the country's grey-listing by FATF. Our focus is on continuing to improve our transactions management systems, maintaining close relationships and discussions with correspondent banks, within an imperative for the country to get off the grey-list as soon as possible."

Asked if shareholders were disappointed, Cordina emphasised, "Naturally they are, at the fact that share prices of BOV have dropped by around 40% of their net worth over recent years, and that dividends have been effectively suspended for two years, primarily due to ECB's direction to banks not to pay dividends with the aim of boosting their capacity to absorb losses and to support lending to households, small businesses and corporates during the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic, prior to our announcement of an interim dividend a couple of weeks ago. However, we must consider the long term value of the entity, and the fact the bank is in a solid position, our capital and liquidity serve as a massive strength for us."

Cordina added, "Right now, however, the ongoing negative interest rates we must pay to hold excess liquidity arising from deposits is a significant cost to the bank. We must address this within the opportunities that exist for our depositors to make a more effective and regarding use of their savings funds."

Thu, 23 Dec 2021 08:32:00 +0000 6736239301 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-23/local-news/FIAU-fine-to-BOV-justified-bank-implemented-***processes***-to-overcome-shortcomings-chairman-6736239301

Justyne Caruana contesting law which she had described as 'monumental' – NGO

Former Minister Justyne Caruana is contesting a law which she had described as being monumental when she was addressing Parliament before its implementation, NGO Repubblika said.

Caruana resigned from Education Minister after the Standards Commissioner ruled a breach had been committed when she had given a €15,000 contract to "friend" Daniel Bogdanovic. She has since opened a court case challenging the constitutional validity of the law.

In a statement on Thursday, Repubblika said that on 11 July 2016 she had described the law as being a monument, saying that in its drawing up the Labour government "had been careful to observe the principles of natural justice, which are basic and fundamental in all judicial procedures." The law also saw that "no rights of anyone potentially involved in the procedures are prejudiced".

She had boasted of being part of a small group that worked on the drawing up of the law. "We adopted high standards of democratic principles and established rules of checks and balances that honour this Parliament. The commissioner will have comprehensive power to investigate allegations made," she had said at the time.

It is clear that Caruana is now against the law she had voted in favour of. She had then boasted that Labour had been courageous enough to demand responsibility and integrity, Repubblika said.

It is easy to talk, the NGO said.

Thu, 23 Dec 2021 08:51:00 +0000 6736239302 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-23/local-news/Justyne-Caruana-contesting-law-which-she-had-described-as-monumental-NGO-6736239302

Valletta Cultural Agency cancels New Year's Eve event

The New Year's Eve event due to be held in Valletta has been cancelled, the Valletta Cultural Agency said.

The decision was taken following discussions on the recent developments regarding the situation of the Covid-19 pandemic in Malta.

A television production will now replace the New Year's Eve event, which will now be televised from Fort St Elmo and will follow all the relevant protocols. The televised production will be broadcast live on TVM, ONE and NET TV, for it to be enjoyed by the Maltese and Gozitan public.

On Thursday, Deputy Prime Minister Chris Fearne announced that, as from Monday 27 December, all events have to be seated.

Thu, 23 Dec 2021 12:38:00 +0000 6736239311 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-23/local-news/Valletta-Cultural-Agency-Cancels-New-Year-s-Eve-Event-6736239311

Woman who fell in shaft in Nadur residence two weeks ago dies in hospital

A woman who fell one storey in a shaft in a residence in Nadur on 8 December died in hospital today, the police said.

The woman, aged 66, had suffered serious injuries in the fall, which took place in a residence in Ramla Street at 11.15am.

A magisterial inquiry led by Magistrate Bridget Scicluna had been launched.

Thu, 23 Dec 2021 09:45:00 +0000 6736239304 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-23/local-news/Woman-who-fell-in-shaft-in-Nadur-residence-two-weeks-ago-dies-in-hospital-6736239304

Omicron less likely to put you in the hospital, studies say

Two new British studies provide some early hints that the omicron variant of the coronavirus may be milder than the delta version.

Scientists stress that even if the findings of these early studies hold up, any reductions in severity need to be weighed against the fact omicron spreads much faster than delta and is more able to evade vaccines. Sheer numbers of infections could still overwhelm hospitals.

Still, the new studies released Wednesday seem to bolster earlier research that suggests omicron may not be as harmful as the delta variant, said Manuel Ascano Jr., a Vanderbilt University biochemist who studies viruses.

"Cautious optimism is perhaps the best way to look at this," he said.

An analysis from the Imperial College London COVID-19 response team estimated hospitalization risks for omicron cases in England, finding people infected with the variant are around 20% less likely to go to the hospital at all than those infected with the delta variant, and 40% less likely to be hospitalized for a night or more.

That analysis included all cases of COVID-19 confirmed by PCR tests in England in the first half of December in which the variant could be identified: 56,000 cases of omicron and 269,000 cases of delta.

A separate study out of Scotland, by scientists at the University of Edinburgh and other experts, suggested the risk of hospitalization was two-thirds less with omicron than delta. But that study pointed out that the nearly 24,000 omicron cases in Scotland were predominantly among younger adults ages 20 to 39. Younger people are much less likely to develop severe cases of COVID-19.

"This national investigation is one of the first to show that omicron is less likely to result in COVID-19 hospitalization than delta," researchers wrote. While the findings are early observations, "they are encouraging," the authors wrote.

The findings have not yet been reviewed by other experts, the gold standard in scientific research.

Ascano noted the studies have limitations. For example, the findings are specific to a certain point in time during a quickly changing situation in the United Kingdom and other countries may not fare the same way.

Matthew Binnicker, director of clinical virology at Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota, said that in the Scottish study, the percentage of younger people was almost twice as high for the omicron group compared with the delta group, and that "could have biased the conclusions to less severe outcomes caused by omicron."

He nonetheless said the data were interesting and suggest omicron might lead to less severe disease. But he added: "It's important to emphasize that if omicron has a much higher transmission rate compared to delta, the absolute number of people requiring hospitalization might still increase, despite less severe disease in most cases."

Data out of South Africa, where the variant was first detected, have also suggested omicron might be milder there. Salim Abdool Karim, a clinical infectious disease epidemiologist in South Africa, said earlier this week that the rate of admissions to hospitals was far lower for omicron than it was for delta.

"Our overall admission rate is in the region of around 2% to 4% compared to previously, where it was closer to 20%," he said. "So even though we're seeing a lot of cases, very few are being admitted."

Thu, 23 Dec 2021 07:31:00 +0000 6736239298 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-23/world-news/Omicron-less-likely-to-put-you-in-the-hospital-studies-say-6736239298

Three in hospital after Mosta traffic accident

Two teenagers and a woman are in hospital after a traffic accident which took place in Mosta on Wednesday evening, the police said.

The accident involved a Toyota Corolla, driven by a 19-year-old man of Mosta, who had another 19-year-old from St Paul's Bay with him in the car, and a Smart driven by a woman aged 38, of Attard.

The police said the Toyota driver lost control of the vehicle and crashed into the Smart.

The three were given first assistance on site before being taken to hospital.

The teenager from St Paul's Bay suffered serious injuries while the other two were grievously hurt.

The accident took place in Valletta Road at 9pm.

Magistrate Leonard Caruana is leading an inquiry.

Thu, 23 Dec 2021 07:38:00 +0000 6736239299 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-23/local-news/Three-in-hospital-after-Mosta-traffic-accident-6736239299

TMID Editorial: Caruana, Castaldi Paris, Grixti: Coal in PL stocking

From Justyne Caruana, to Silvio Grixti, to Ian Castaldi Paris.

Robert Abela and the Labour government are facing three different crises, all three treated differently, but with a common thread.

Once again, Labour exponents were involved in situations that are embarrassing for them on a personal and political level, and for the party they represent.

Caruana was found to be in the wrong, by the Standards Commissioner, when a €15,000 contract was awarded to her "friend" Daniel Bogdanovic to carry out a job for which he was "neither qualified nor competent enough".

For a week, there was procrastination. Caruana resisted calls for resignation, with Prime Minister Robert Abela, while saying that ministers must shoulder responsibilities, keeping her in her place as Education Minister. He said he wanted to wait out the ***process***, one which was to see Caruana's position being discussed by the Standards Committee. She stayed on defending her position, until she finally announced her resignation yesterday. She should have called it a day when the story broke in March.

Castaldi Paris has said that he will not contest the next election after it was reported that he owes €300,000 in tax dues, a sum he denies. But the story was enough to push him to say that he "needs to spend more time with his family" and will not put his name on the ballot sheet. He should have immediately resigned as an MP too.

Of the three, Grixti was the one who did the right thing immediately, announcing he was quitting from Parliament the moment news broke that he was questioned by the police over an investigation into the issuing of irregular sick leave certificates. He was man enough to understand the intricate situation he found himself in, and moved on. It is understood that neither he will contest the coming election.

These three latest upsets add up to the tens of others that Labour exponents have been involved in over the past years, since 2013. Some situations were more serious than others, but in different ways they exposed individuals who behaved badly, and by so doing put themselves, the Prime Minister, and the Labour government and party they form part of in an awkward situation.

It is Caruana's second resignation in two years. She has eclipsed the unenviable record held by Konrad Mizzi, who lost his portfolio twice, but in two separate legislatures.

Caruana resigned days after she was first appointed by Robert Abela as Gozo Minister in January 2020, when it was revealed that her then husband had travelled abroad with the man accused of being a mastermind in the assassination of Daphne Caruana Galizia.

At the time, Caruana had been described as having sacrificed herself because of something that was not her own doing.

The circumstances of yesterday's resignation are somewhat different, as she was behind the contract that was given to a "friend", who was close enough for the relationship to be deemed as being a violation of the code of ethics by the Standards Commissioner, even though the two deny they are romantically involved.

Caruana, Castaldi Paris and Grixti are three huge lumps of coal in Labour's stocking this Christmas.

Thu, 23 Dec 2021 09:26:00 +0000 6736239303 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-23/newspaper-leader/TMID-Editorial-Caruana-Castaldi-Paris-Grixti-Coal-in-PL-stocking-6736239303

Minister for Gozo inaugurates restoration of two niches in Cittadella

Minister for Gozo Clint Camilleri has inaugurated restoration works done on two old niches at the entrance to Cittadella, while also announcing an investment which will see the installation of benches in the Cathedral Square.

Camilleri stated that this is evidence of a government which truly works and invests in order to preserve the unique heritage of our country, particularly of Gozo.

"The niches, one of St. Anne and the other of Our Lady of Solitude, are among the oldest in Gozo. They needed restoration works to not only serve as protection from further deterioration, but also for their surroundings to look better," he said.

Director of Cultural Heritage John Xuereb said that continuous consultation was done with the Superintendence of Cultural Heritage during the restoration and was carried out by workers of the Restoration Unit and of the Citadel.

The minister also announced that benches will soon be placed near the fountain of the main square of the Citadel after receiving much feedback on the need for benches both by tourists and locals.

The benches will be manufactured uniquely to the Citadel square, Camilleri said, adding that they will give a richer look to the same square while following the common practice in European cities. The benches will be made of marble and wood, with a back made of iron with the coat of arms of the city of Victoria.

Thu, 23 Dec 2021 09:56:00 +0000 6736239305 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-23/local-news/Minister-for-Gozo-inaugurates-restoration-of-two-niches-in-Cittadella-6736239305

Austria tamps down New Year's Eve parties, Belgium tightens rules, Spain orders mask wearing

Austria announced a slate of new restrictions Wednesday aimed at slowing the spread of the omicron variant, including closing restaurants earlier and imposing stricter entry requirements for people from countries where the variant is already dominant.

"Omicron presents us with the next epidemiological challenge," Katharina Reich, co-leader of the country's new coronavirus crisis team, said after a meeting between national leaders and state governors. "What we do know is that omicron is fast and we need to react quickly."

Austria is in a better position than many other European countries when it comes to confronting the new variant. Facing a massive surge of infections in November, the country imposed a three-week lockdown to bring its daily case numbers down.

As a result of those restrictions, which ended for vaccinated people on Dec. 12 but remain for those who have not been vaccinated, case numbers are still dropping.

On Wednesday, the country's 7-day rate of new infections stood at 188.1 per 100,000 inhabitants, down from a high of 1,100 per 100,000 in late November.

Despite the country's current "good position," Reich said new restrictions are necessary because omicron "will bring drastic changes to us as well."

Starting on Dec. 27, restaurants must close at 10 p.m., including on New Year's Eve. Reich also urged people to rethink their New Year's celebrations: "Celebrate New Year's Eve in small groups," she said.

In addition, officials said they would impose new limits and requirements for large gatherings, which will require proof that attendees are vaccinated or recently recovered.

Indoor and outdoor gatherings without assigned seating will be capped at 25 people. With assigned seating and masks, that number rises to 500; with an additional PCR test, to 1,000. Events at which all attendees have received a vaccine booster dose can handle up to 2,000 people.

Austria also added four European countries — the U.K., Denmark, the Netherlands and Norway — to its list of "virus variant areas," which comes with stricter entry requirements.

Those who have received a booster vaccine and come with a recent negative PCR test will be allowed entry from those countries without quarantining. Austrian and EU citizens who do not meet those requirements will still be allowed to enter, but will face a mandatory 10-day quarantine.

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Belgium will further tighten coronavirus restrictions because of the surging omicron variant, authorities announced Wednesday, but the country shied away from a full lockdown like in the neighboring Netherlands.

Cinemas, theaters and concert halls will be closed and indoor activities banned in Belgium. Sports fans won't be allowed into stadiums and indoor venues. Shopping will be curtailed with visitors spread out and groups entering a shop limited to two adults, possibly accompanied by children.

Bars and restaurants will be allowed to remain open until 11 p.m. but under limits. And families were advised to keep visitors to a minimum for Christmas but did not face exact limits.

The ***measures*** will take effect Sunday. Prime Minister Alexander De Croo said "there is reason for concern. We are facing omicron."

He added that "what we know about it is bad news," referring to omicron's high transmissibility.

"It is a tough package," virologist Marc Van Ranst said.

But much about the omicron variant remains unknown, including whether it causes more or less severe illness.

The Belgian ***measures*** came despite a strong and steady decline in new COVID-19 cases and hospital admissions. The government said, however, that the lightning fast transmission of omicron made it necessary to take action earlier rather than later.

"It will be dominant soon," said De Croo. "We have to be more careful that ever."

Emmanuel Andre, who heads Belgium's COVID-19 reference lab, said omicron represented 27% of new cases, doubling in as many days.

Since last weekend, Belgium's northern neighbor, The Netherlands, has closed all nonessential stores, bars and restaurants until Jan. 14 and shut schools and universities until Jan. 9.

Belgium's major carnival, in Aalst, was canceled even if the festival drawing tens of thousands of visitors each year was slated for late February.

Belgium's daily new COVID-19 cases have declined 36% over the week ending Sunday, to reach about 8,300 in the nation of 11 million. Hospital admissions have declined 34% to reach 173 a day.

The number of COVID-19 dead has surpassed 28,000.

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Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez is convening a special Cabinet meeting Thursday to pass a law by decree that makes it mandatory to wear masks outdoors, amid a record surge in COVID-19 cases.

Sánchez announced at a meeting with the leaders of regional governments Wednesday that he was consenting to their appeals to extend mask-wearing rules, his office said. A decree-law does not require a debate and vote in parliament before taking effect.

He also announced a raft of other ***measures***, including an offer to deploy the armed forces to help the regions step up their vaccination rollout and put military hospital beds at their disposal if they are needed.

Sánchez said he is targeting 80% of the 60-69 age group to have received booster shots by the end of next week, among other goals.

Also, COVID-19 tests for professional use will temporarily be placed on sale at pharmacies, amid a reported shortage of tests, and medical teams will be reinforced with retired staff and specialists who earned their qualifications outside the European Union.

Furthermore, fully vaccinated people won't need to quarantine if they have been in contact with an infected person - a ***measure*** that seemed to be aimed at avoiding the shortages of essential personnel.

Spain on Tuesday officially recorded almost 50,000 new cases of coronavirus. That's higher than last January, when a surge placed the national health system under severe strain.

Spain is reporting almost 700 cases per 100,000 inhabitants over 14 days, more than double the accumulated cases before last year's Christmas holidays. The omicron strain has soared from 5% of new cases in Spain to 47% within one week.

Still, vaccinations are credited with sparing many people from the virus's worst effects. While last January some 30,000 COVID-19 patients were in the hospital in Spain, now it's fewer than 8,000.

Sánchez told the Spanish parliament Wednesday that 90% of the target population 12 and over is fully vaccinated.

He told lawmakers: "Don't worry, families will be able to celebrate Christmas. Spain has prevailed."

Thu, 23 Dec 2021 05:53:00 +0000 6736239297 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-23/world-news/Austria-tamps-down-New-Year-s-Eve-parties-Belgium-tightens-rules-Spain-orders-mask-wearing-6736239297

UPDATED: Justyne Caruana resigns as Education Minister, will not contest general election

Justyne Caruana has resigned from her post as Education Minister, the government announced on Wednesday, and will not contest the next general election.

Caruana tendered her resignation to the Prime Minister earlier today, which resignation was accepted.

In its statement, the government did not say whether Caruana had resigned from her post as government MP as well.

Caruana said in a statement on her Facebook page that she had entered politics to serve and that she was never tied to the seat of power, which is why she felt that her resignation was the best decision for the government and the Labour Party.

Despite this however, she contested the report by Standards Commissioner George Hyzler, particularly based on the procedure used, and said that she had filed a case in the civil courts over the report.

Caruana said that despite the fact that she would not be contesting the next general election - something which had not been known previously - this is an important step to defending her reputation and that of her family, and also to see that every institution in the country respects the "basic principles of justice."

Commissioner for Standards in Public Life George Hyzler had found that the awarding of a €15,000 contract to Daniel Bogdanovic by Caruana amounted to an "abuse of power."

In his report, published after a unanimous decision by the Standards Committee last week, said that Caruana had breached ethics by "giving preferential treatment" to Bogdanovic by giving him a direct order contract which he was "neither qualified nor competent enough to carry out."

Hyzler also noted that a concerted effort was made for Bogdanovic's incompetence for the role to be hidden because the work related to the contract was carried out by someone else – Paul Debattista, one of Caruana's ministry consultants.

This fact, Hyzler said, was purposely hidden in testimony given to him.

Within the report, both Caruana and Bogdanovic denied that they were romantically involved, instead using the term "friendship", but Hyzler deemed the relationship close enough to constitute a violation of the code of ethics.

Pressure has since mounted on Caruana to resign from her post, and on Prime Minister Robert Abela to remove her if she fails to comply.

It's the second ministerial portfolio which Caruana has lost in less than two years.  She was removed from her position of Gozo Minister in early 2020 - only days after her appointment - after her then-husband Silvio Valletta was found to have had a close relationship with alleged Daphne Caruana Galizia murder mastermind Yorgen Fenech while he was still working with the police as an Assistant Commissioner.

Caruana can still face sanctions for her ethics breach, as the report which found her to have breached these ethics is still being discussed by Parliament's committee on Standards in Public Life.

Government in a state of collapse - PN

In a statement published in reaction to the news, the PN said that the government has continued to collapse.

The party said that Caruana had not resigned because Abela told her to, but that she had only left her position because of the pressure by the Opposition and because of the good work of journalists.

The PN said that this was another case where Robert Abela had decided not to decide, as if it were up to him he would let the parliamentary procedures happen after the holidays.

"Robert Abela did not take action, he did not remove her himself, not as a minister and not from the parliamentary group," the party said.

The party said that the case is not closed and that they are expecting the police to follow the standards commissioner's recommendation for an investigation into this case.

The PN said that the Abela should also take action against the public officials, including the permanent secretary, who approved "this scandal which happened with the theft of people's money."

The party said that the indecisiveness of the Prime Minister had resulted in a sector ending up without a minister in the worst time possible. In the middle of a pandemic, the education sector is without direction and educators and students do not know whether they will return to school after the holidays, the PN said.

"Instead of a strong pair of hands leading the country, we have a Prime Minister facing resignation after resignation in a government which is collapsing under the weight of scandals and abuses," the party said.

MUT welcomes resignation

Reacting to the resignation, the Malta Union of Teachers said it was clear from the start that Caruana's decision to give a contract to a person who is close to her was "wrong."

George Hyzler's report confirms that Caruana broke the code of ethics for MPs and, as a result, she did not have the moral authority or the integrity required to lead the Education Ministry. The union welcomed the resignation which, it said, was required for the education sector to move forward after the hiccups caused by appointment of three different ministers over the past two years. It said it is ready to work with Caruana's successor for the good of the sector.

Wed, 22 Dec 2021 14:10:00 +0000 6736239285 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-22/local-news/Justyne-Caruana-resigns-as-Education-Minister-6736239285

Government is prepared for Omicron variant, booster jab for under 35s will open soon – Chris Fearne

Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Health Chris Fearne said that the government has a plan for when the Omicron variant arrives in the island.

"During the summer and autumn, Malta managed to control the spread of the virus because of the vaccine against the Delta variant as well as the original virus; for Omicron, we have the booster," Fearne said on the Kalamita programme on ONE TV on Wednesday.

The booster jab will make a difference in the number of cases within the community as well as in hospitals, he said.

Fearne added that the booster will give individuals protection against the virus for months as well as possibly a year. The booster will protect people from all the variants, including the highly transmissible Omicron, he said.

Fearne said that in a few days they will announce the opening of booster jabs for those under the age of 35.

He rebutted rumours of the resignation of the Superintendent of Public Health Charmaine Gauci, confirming that she will still fulfil her roles and discussions of the pandemic.

Fearne reminded the public that there cannot be more than four households gathering in a personal home, as well as the quarantine period for those who are not positive with the virus but have had contact with a positive individual is reduced to seven days rather than 14.

He said that the majority of cases being found have mild or no symptoms at all, usually discovered after individuals take a swab test before travel. Fearne highlighted the importance of the booster which will reduce the spread of the virus.

Fearne's TV interview came after Malta reported a record 582 cases in a single day, with two people also dying while positive for the virus.

Wed, 22 Dec 2021 15:32:00 +0000 6736239289 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-22/local-news/Government-is-prepared-for-Omicron-variant-booster-jab-for-under-35s-will-open-soon-Chris-Fearne-6736239289

Caruana fights back, challenges validity of Standards Commissioner law in court

In a legal case filed on Wednesday afternoon, Caruana challenged the constitutional validity of the law whereby she was targeted for investigation by the Standards Commissioner.

Caruana resigned as Education Minister on Wednesday, following a report by Standards Commissioner George Hyzler finding her in breach of ethics over a €15,000 contract given to her friend Daniel Bogdanovic.

Her lawyers claimed that the Standards in Public Life Act, which granted the Commissioner an "unfettered discretion from beginning to end" effectively breached her fundamental right to a fair hearing.

Caruana said that the law lacks the safeguards necessary to ensure that an investigated person is ensured a fair hearing. She also said she was seriously preoccupied by the way in which the ***process*** was applied in her regard.

Caruana said she had been summoned to testify via a letter dated 9 August. She was told that she would be in breach of the law if she did not comply.

She testified later that month but was not shown the contents of the complaints that had triggered the investigation.

She said that she was not fully aware what the allegations were when answering the Commissioner's questions.

Caruana also said she was given four files of evidence but was not allowed to make copies, having to make do with handwritten notes instead.

While she was allowed to produce new witnesses, she was not allowed to cross-examine witnesses who had already testified.

She also claims she was advised that it would be in her own interest if the ***process*** was not drawn out.

Caruana also complained that Hyzler's report was published in the media before a copy was made available to her.

If the committee were to adopt the report, she could face criminal consequences.

Caruana's lawyers said they were challenging the validity of the ***process*** on several aspects.

These include the fact that the law regulating the Standards Commissioner's office do not make a distinction between the Commissioner's investigative and decision-making role, granting him "unfettered discretion", and this in breach of the investigated person's right to a fair hearing.

The law also does not provide for any kind of review or appeal. Caruana said she was also not given access to all evidence. The law also does not safeguard the investigated person's right to silence.

The lawyers are calling on the court to declare that Chapter 570 of the Laws of Malta is unconstitutional and to annul the commissioner's report. Furthermore, evidence gathered during the ***process*** should not be used in any possible future criminal investigation.

The lawyers also called on the court to liquidate moral damages, payable by the State Advocate and the Standards Commissioner.

The application was filed by lawyers Michael Sciriha, Franco Galea and Joseph Camilleri.

Wed, 22 Dec 2021 18:25:00 +0000 6736239294 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-22/local-news/Caruana-fights-back-challenges-validity-of-Standards-Commissioner-law-in-court-6736239294

Keith Schembri, Konrad Mizzi banned from US travel over role in 'significant corruption'

Keith Schembri and Konrad Mizzi have been banned from travelling to the United States over their "involvement in significant corruption," the State Department said.

Their immediate families are also ineligible for entry into the US.

"Today, the U.S. Department of State announces the public designation of former Maltese public officials Konrad Mizzi and Keith Schembri due to their involvement in significant corruption. In their official capacities as Minister of Energy and Conservation of Water and Chief of Staff to the Prime Minister, Mizzi and Schembri were involved in corrupt acts that included using their political influence and official power for their personal benefit. Specifically, there is credible information that Mizzi and Schembri were involved in a corrupt scheme that entailed the award of a government contract for the construction of a power plant and related services in exchange for kickbacks and bribes. Their actions undermined rule of law and the Maltese public's faith in their government's democratic institutions and public ***processes***," the US Department of State said in a statement.

In addition to Mizzi and Schembri, the Department of State is designating Mizzi and Schembri's immediate family members: Mizzi's wife, Sai Mizzi Liang, and his two minor children; Schembri's wife, Josette Schembri Vella, his daughter Juliana Schembri Vella, and his minor child.  This action renders Mizzi and Schembri, and each of these members of their immediate families, ineligible for entry into the United States.

"This designation reaffirms the U.S. commitment to supporting the rule of law and strengthening democratic institutions in Malta.  The Department will continue to use authorities like this to promote accountability for corrupt actors in this region and globally," the State Department said.

PN reaction

Reacting, the PN said this "***unprecedented***" development confirms that it had to be a country thousands of miles away to take action. It said Robert Abela wanted to continue defending the "corrupt" Electrogas deal and those involved in it.

The PN said there are no words hard enough to condemn Robert Abela, who prefers seeing the country suffer by trying to cover up for leading figures in the Labour government.

"Today we saw how right the PN and civil society groups were when they warned that Abela would not let the authorities function and take action against the impunity he created. Today we saw that corruption comes with a price – a price that will have to be paid by the people."

It said that decision by the US government "shames" the Police Commissioner and the Attorney General, who are failing in their duties. This confirms why our country has been greylisted.

Wed, 22 Dec 2021 14:49:00 +0000 6736239287 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-22/local-news/Keith-Schembri-Konrad-MIzzi-banned-from-US-travel-over-role-in-significant-corruption-6736239287

Avoid travel and isolate at first sign of symptoms, public health official warns

A public health consultant has urged people to avoid travelling and to self-isolate at the very first sign of symptoms.

Speaking to Newsbook, Tanya Melillo from the Infectious Diseases Unit also warned that Mater Dei Hospital is "close to breaking point."

Melillo said the increasing Covid-19 hospitalisations are putting great strain on the hospital which, at this time of the year is already very busy with influenza patients and people suffering from other conditions.

She urged people to follow covid protocols and "avoid travelling as much as possible."

Anyone experiencing a simple sore throat or runny nose should isolate as they would likely have Covid, she said.

The Omicron variant is likely the reason behind the skyrocketing numbers, although more testing needs to be done to confirm this.

Melillo warned that numbers will keep increasing and will definitely not go down until the end of the year.

She said that people are gathering in large numbers. Instead, they should go out with immediate family in open spaces.

Melillo also said the booster is working, given that older patients are not getting sick as much.

582 new cases were found on Wednesday, the highest daily tally since the pandemic began.

Wed, 22 Dec 2021 18:03:00 +0000 6736239292 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-22/local-news/Avoid-travel-and-isolate-at-first-sign-of-symptoms-public-health-official-warns-6736239292

Record 582 Covid-19 cases reported, as two virus patients pass away

A record number of 582 Covid-19 cases were reported by health authorities on Wednesday, as two virus patients have passed away.

The daily number of cases is the highest that Malta has reported since the pandemic arrived on its shores – with the previous highest being 510 cases on 10 March this year.

94 people meanwhile have recovered, but the number of active cases currently stands at 2,991.

Health authorities said that two men – aged 52 and 53 – also passed away while positive for Covid-19.

47 patients of the virus are currently being treated at Mater Dei Hospital, up by 7 since Tuesday, with four of those in intensive care.

1,019,517 doses of the vaccine have been administered thus far, with 177,989 of those being booster doses.

Malta has had 42,981 cases of the virus. 39,198 of those have recovered, while 473 have died.

Wed, 22 Dec 2021 12:37:00 +0000 6736239283 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-22/local-news/Record-582-Covid-19-cases-reported-as-two-virus-patients-pass-away-6736239283

UK daily cases exceed 100,000 for the first time, cases up in Italy too

The UK recorded 106,122 new Covid cases on Wednesday, the highest daily figure since the beginning of the pandemic and the first time cases have passed 100,000, the Guardian reports..

Government figures showed a further 140 deaths were also reported, bringing the total to 147,573.

The new daily total is 106,122, which is more than 13,000 higher than the previous record - 93,045 on Friday last week.

The total number of new cases over the past week is up 58.9% on the total for the previous week.

Compared with the previous week, the number of daily deaths has decreased by 2.7% in the last seven days.

As of yesterday, a total of 8,008 people were in hospital with Covid. This is the highest number since 22 November and up 4% on a week earlier – but still a long way off the 39,254 hospitalisations recorded on 18 January.

Italy also recorded a jump in new cases, 36,293 compared with 30,798 the previous day, the health ministry said. A further 146 deaths were also reported, taking the total to 136,077. It is the second-highest death toll in Europe after Britain and ninth-highest in the world.

The number of patients in hospital with Covid – not including those in intensive care – stood at 8,544 on Wednesday, up from 8,381 a day earlier. The total number of intensive care patients fell to 1,010 from a previous 1,012.

Wed, 22 Dec 2021 18:21:00 +0000 6736239293 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-22/world-news/UK-daily-cases-exceed-100-000-for-the-first-time-cases-up-in-Italy-too-6736239293

President and First Lady in quarantine after contact with Covid-19 case

President George Vella and his wife have found themselves in quarantine after a person they had contact with in recent days tested positive for Covid-19.

The President's office said in a statement on Wednesday that they had had contact with somebody on Monday who today tested positive for the virus.

Vella's office said that both the President and his wife had tested negative for the virus, will still be in isolation as a precautionary ***measure***.

The office said that arrangements had been made so that the President's engagements are either shifted to different dates, or will go ahead without him.

Wed, 22 Dec 2021 16:57:00 +0000 6736239291 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-22/local-news/President-and-First-Lady-in-quarantine-after-contact-with-Covid-19-case-6736239291

Labour government sits idly by while the country suffers – Bernard Grech

Opposition leader Bernard Grech said that the Robert Abela's government is in total collapse, condemning the PL for its huge irresponsibility as it "stands idly by while the island suffers."

"Instead of being honest with the Maltese public, the Prime Minister is portraying a false illusion about the current Covid-19 numbers," Grech said in an interview with NET TV on Wednesday. He added that the rising cases is a delicate situation, yet it is not being treated as such.

"The government is giving off the impression that it is business as usual," he said.

Grech condemned allowing mass events to continue to happen when the country's Covid-19 situation has become alarming, with almost 600 cases reported only today.

"Instead of protecting the people, the Prime Minister protects the corrupt individuals within the government who are still allowed to enter Parliament," he said, naming Konrad Mizzi as an example.

By refusing to confront the problem, there is continuity in the corruption, resulting in damage to the government, and consequently damage to the country, Grech said.

Abela has continued to defend Konrad Mizzi, Edward Zammit Lewis and Rosianne Cutajar despite their scandals, which has brought upon the country a declining reputation, he said.

"Those who have small problems with falling behind in their taxes are treated as criminals, they bring them to court and make a show out of them just so that they can prove that action is being taken and the institutions are doing their jobs," Grech said. "Meanwhile, Ian Castaldi Paris is given only a slap on the wrist," he added.

It seems as if there are different laws applying to these corrupt individuals, and those applying to the public, said Grech.

Keith Schembri and Konrad Mizzi have been banned from travelling to the United States over their "involvement in significant corruption," the U.S State Department revealed in a statement today. The document, of which Grech read from today, stated that the two individuals were involved in a corrupt scheme in the contract for the construction of the Electrogas powerplant.

Grech said that it is inevitable that the government has become weak when even the U.S is saying to stop trusting these individuals. Meanwhile, in Malta, an entire Labour Party votes with Konrad Mizzi in Parliament, defending the corrupt deal with Vitals Global Healthcare, he said.

The PN leader said that schools and educators are uncertain and lost on what to do after the festive holidays due to Covid-19 – do they go back to school or not? He pointed out that MUMN have said that the hospital is full and frontliners are exhausted. Grech also said that the situation is worrying employers, who are having to figure out how to pay their employees when there is little income to begin with. People have resorted to selling their party tickets on social media, he said.

Grech insisted that the public need guidance, and a PN government would allow for the country to gain back its reputation, whilst a PL one sits idly by.

Wed, 22 Dec 2021 19:28:00 +0000 6736239295 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-22/local-news/Labour-government-sits-idly-by-while-the-country-suffers-Bernard-Grech-6736239295

Government inaction can lead to serious economic slowdown in first quarter of 2022 - MEA

The current surge in COVID cases is worrying many employers, and inaction on the part of government might lead to a serious economic slowdown during the first quarter of 2022, the Malta Employers Association said on Wednesday.

The association said that that public health should never be subject to popular opinion.

"In such emergencies, all necessary actions need to be taken to ascertain that the negative effects of the pandemic are not prolonged. Contrary to what some may believe, there is no trade-off between public health and economic imperatives, and any attempt to enforce such a trade-off may only yield short term gains which will certainly be paid for with interest in the medium to long term."

The current spike in cases is a worrying trend which, if sustained, might lead to strong disruptions in business activity in all economic sectors in 2022, MEA said.

"These disruptions will be caused due to absences caused by illness, more people under quarantine, possible school closures and stricter ***measures*** to compensate for the postponement of decisive actions which are currently needed."

MEA added that queries which have been repeatedly sent to the Ministry for social Dialogue and the Ministry for health about COVID and employment related issues have remained unanswered, and meetings at the Employment Relations Board remain inconclusive.

The association appealed for leadership to prevail over populism through ***measures*** that prevent dense public gatherings, strict enforcement of such ***measures*** and setting the right example.

"There have been too many reports of lax enforcement in public gatherings, even those organised by politicians themselves which are giving the wrong impression that COVID is not to be taken seriously because many people have taken the vaccine. People have to be made conscious of the reality of the situation, and that 2022 cannot be another year where government will have to retain the wage supplement with all the fiscal consequences it entails, and where enterprises will continue to struggle against the difficulties brought by COVID, especially if such situations are self-inflicted."

Wed, 22 Dec 2021 15:52:00 +0000 6736239290 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-22/local-news/Government-inaction-can-lead-to-serious-economic-slowdown-in-first-quarter-of-2022-MEA-6736239290

Inter end year with 7th straight win and control of Serie A

Seven straight wins. Six straight without conceding. Eleven straight unbeaten.

Inter Milan concluded the year with a 1-0 win over Torino on Wednesday to confirm its control of Serie A and intention of securing consecutive Italian league titles.

While Inter had already secured the lead for the season's halfway point entering the holiday break, it was a welcome victory a day after the club's offices were raided by finance police amid an ongoing investigation into false accounting.

Denzel Dumfries scored from the edge of area to conclude a counterattack after taking a backheel pass from Edin Dzeko during the first half at the San Siro. It was the third goal in four matches for the Netherlands right back.

"We're happy with how we've ended the year. It's easy for everyone to say that Inter is the favorite but that wasn't the case in the summer," first-year Inter coach Simone Inzaghi said, recalling the doubts surrounding the club following the departures of previous coach Antonio Conte and standout players Romelu Lukaku and Achraf Hakimi.

"The club did well to get players useful for my style of play," Inzaghi added.

Inter remained four points ahead of city rival AC Milan, which won 4-2 at Empoli with a brace from Franck Kessie and a goal each from Alessandro Florenzi and Theo Hernandez.

Third-place Napoli dropped seven points behind Inter after losing 1-0 at home to relegation-threatened Spezia, which benefited from an own-goal from Napoli defender Juan Jesus.

Spezia did not produce a single shot on goal.

Napoli was missing captain Lorenzo Insigne, who tested positive for COVID-19.

ROMA HELD

Manolo Gabbiadini scored 10 minutes from time to secure a 1-1 draw for Sampdoria at Roma.

Eldor Shomurodov had put Roma ahead eight minutes earlier on his third attempt after his first two shots were blocked.

Gabbiadini then scored from close range following a corner.

Roma is sixth, six points behind Atalanta and the final Champions League berth in Jose Mourinho's first season with the Giallorossi.

Roma is level on points with seventh-place Fiorentina, which drew 1-1 at Hellas Verona. Gaetano Castrovilli equalized for the Viola with a diving header following an opener from Kevin Lasagna.

IMMOBILE POSITIVE

Lazio won 3-1 at Venezia despite missing striker Ciro Immobile, who has the coronavirus. Pedro, Francesco Acerbi and Luis Alberto scored for the Roman club.

Also, Bologna won 3-0 at Sassuolo with goals from Riccardo Orsolini, Aaron Hickey and Federico Santander. It was the fourth goal this season for Hickey, a Scotland midfielder in his second season in Italy.

Serie A resumes Jan. 6.

Thu, 23 Dec 2021 05:49:00 +0000 6736239296 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-23/football/Inter-end-year-with-7th-straight-win-and-control-of-Serie-A-6736239296

Remember when President Vella expressed concern on cannabis law? But then he goes on to sign it

Last week President George Vella signed a law legalising cannabis for recreational use, in spite of protestations by a number of NGOs and the medical professionals who expressed their concern, the same concern that Vella himself had spoken about just two years ago.

It was in June 2019 that President Vella made public his serious doubts about legalising cannabis for recreational use, but despite these reservations, the President last week signed the law making recreational use of cannabis legal.

President Vella's signing, which was held a day after he said he had his hands tied, was the last hurdle in a ***process*** that saw the government ploughing on to enact the law in spite of protests from nearly 60 NGOs and the Opposition.

As some criticised Vella's signing in legalising the cannabis law, the President argued that in no way can he, under Malta's system, impose his decision on those representing the people in parliament, whether he agrees with it or not. Vella publicly said that the president does not have the power to ignore a law passed democratically by parliament, unless a moral obligation forced him to quit.

The concern expressed by the President two years ago was apparently not enough to stop him from signing the law.

In a conference organised by the Oasi Foundation which was held in June 2019 (see footage below, screen recorded from MaltaToday), the President gave his closing speech about drugs and mental health, highlighting his reservations about the extent to which the legal use of cannabis should be extended beyond the grounds of treatment.

"Both as a doctor and father I have major reservations on how wise it is to extend the legalisation of cannabis that goes beyond its medical usage," President Vella had said.

Vella had also stressed that discussions on any possible legalisation of recreational cannabis should be relied on the advice of experts in the field. Many experts, including organisations who have worked with addicts for years, spoke about the harm caused by cannabis, but the President still chose to sign the law.

Medical experts and unions including psychiatrists, the Malta Union of Midwives and Nurses (MUMN) as well as the Medical Association of Malta spoke out against the new cannabis law, arguing that there is no such thing as responsible cannabis, only a drug that causes harm to people's health.

Prior to Vella's signing, the MUMN had also urged the President not to endorse the new cannabis law until safeguards for patients and elderly people are included, saying that complications arise in the form of doctors or nurses who could be under the influence of cannabis at work.

The legalisation of cannabis for recreational and personal use allows citizens to carry up to 7 grams of cannabis without any risk of being prosecuted. Anyone that previously had a criminal offense related to cannabis can now also apply to have their criminal records erased.

Wed, 22 Dec 2021 10:41:00 +0000 6736239282 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-22/local-news/Remember-when-President-Vella-expressed-concern-on-cannabis-law-But-then-he-goes-on-to-sign-it-6736239282

Catering association warns of consequences of more restrictions

The Association of Catering Establishment (ACE) has backed statements by Health Minister Chris Fearne on focusing on promoting and administering Covid-19 booster shots rather than reintroducing more restrictions such as the closure of restaurants.

The association which represents restaurateurs warned on Wednesday that there would be consequences should the catering industry be forced to shut down due to the rise in Covid-19 cases. It said that a lot is at stake for workers in the catering industry.

It said that while the increase in positive cases is worrying, statements made on the media about more restrictions was also concerning.

According to a recent survey, 18.7% of outlets had to be shut down permanently, it said. The association also pointed out the financial unsustainability of the Covid-19 wage supplement for the government.

The Malta Union of Nurses said on Wednesday that the hospital is full, pointing out that this was a consequence of the government failing to impose more restrictions.

The ACE also encouraged its employees to take the COVID vaccine and booster in their interest and that of the community.

Wed, 22 Dec 2021 15:07:00 +0000 6736239288 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-22/local-news/Catering-association-warns-of-consequences-of-more-restrictions-6736239288

Mater Dei Hospital 'in crisis' – MUMN says government choosing economy over health

The Malta Union of Midwives and Nurses has called for more drastic ***measures*** to curb the spread of Covid-19, saying that Mater Dei Hospital is facing a "crisis".

Wearing a mask in public is just a political ***measure*** with no scientific significance as to reduce the ever increasing numbers of Covid, the MUMN said in a strongly-worded statement. This is proven by the fact that such a ***measure*** made no impact in reducing the ever increasing number of Covid cases, the union said.

The situation in Malta is going from bad to worse. Having the Superintendent of Public Health consoling the public by saying that Covid cases are to increase further, without introducing effective ***measures*** shows clearly that Prof. Charmaine Gauci "abdicated from her duties to safeguard the public", the MUMN added.

"The situation in MDH is very serious indeed. The Covid situation is not only the problem MDH is facing. Influenza and other medical conditions are leaving their toll. MDH has reached its full capacity," the MUMN said.

"Not only are all beds in MDH filled but the time has come to consider stopping all non-urgent (elective) surgery which is the high price all Maltese have to pay for allowing bars and other entertainment establishments to remain open. By stopping all non-urgent surgery, beds will be more available for the huge intake of medical cases."

There is no respect to the nurses and to other health professionals who are striving to cope with the huge influx of patients, the MUMN said. Allowing the country to run with no effective Covid ***measures*** demonstrates that the government is more inclined to appease the entertainment industry than the health professionals such as the nurses who are working under huge pressures, the union said.

Nurses and other health professionals are paying a high price for allowing the huge numbers of Covid to raise since no effective ***measures*** were introduced in this country in these last few weeks. Allowing tourists from high risks countries such as Britain to come to Malta shows clearly that the Government is totally in denial of the consequences which the Maltese are about to face, the MUMN said.

The numerous nurses on sick leave or on quarantine compounded by the shortage of nurses which the Health Division failed to address, not to mention that there are no available beds in MDH, are just a few grave issues taking place right now in MDH. Nurses are utterly tired, exhausted and burned out, the union continued.

"The government failed drastically to prevent that MDH from becoming overwhelmed with patients by allowing bars to remain open and no restrains such as curfews were made as other EU countries. This cannot be allowed to continue since MDH is at a breaking point."

MUMN appealed to the public to refrain from going to any bars and discos and to take all necessary precautions for their own safety. MUMN also appealed to MDH management to stop all elective surgery since the nurses cannot keep up with the heavy workload at the hospital.

The public has to understand that the numbers will never go down "on their own" or with the current ***measures***, and MUMN appealed to the Government to urgently introduce more drastic ***measures*** in the interest of the health of the population.

Wed, 22 Dec 2021 08:32:00 +0000 6736239278 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-22/local-news/Mater-Dei-Hospital-in-crisis-MUMN-says-government-choosing-economy-over-health-6736239278

Air Malta settles 88% of all Covid-related refund requests

Air Malta has successfully settled 88% of all its Covid-related refund requests to date, the airline told The Malta Independent.

In answering questions sent by this newsroom, an Air Malta spokesperson said: "The pandemic has created an ever-changing scenario where tourism markets are opening and closing depending on alert levels. Since March 2020, flight cancellations have become more common with demand fluctuating daily. During this period, Air Malta has cancelled up to 9,000 flights because of lower demand due to the pandemic."

To date, Air Malta has already paid €32 million in refunds to individual customers and business partners from the 250,000 ticket refund requests.

Apart from the option of a full refund for cancelled flights, Air Malta had also introduced the chance to redeem their booked flights later with a travel voucher during the pandemic. Customers could redeem such options through the airline's official website or call centre.

Air Malta has received a total of 81,000 travel voucher requests valued at around €12 million.

In June, Malta had opened for tourism, where both unvaccinated and fully vaccinated people were allowed to enter the country. However, there was a surge of cases in July, which led the Deputy Prime Minister to announce that people would need to have a recognised vaccination certificate to enter the country without quarantine.

Last July, Air Malta had confirmed with The Malta Independent that it had received a total of 15,000 booking cancellations for travel during that same month. The airline's spokesperson had said at the time that despite the significant negative change experienced when these ***measures*** were announced; it had not had the same disastrous effect on bookings for travel during August. During the said month, only 3,000 seats were cancelled.

In July, Air Malta had also shown concern as it experienced an increase in passenger no shows.

"2021 has been a difficult year for the airline. The year was characterised by depressed and fluctuating market demand across all the airline's main markets, with varying degree," a spokesperson said earlier this month. He added that when comparing this year to 2020, the airline fared better with a 10% increase in passenger figures.

Wed, 22 Dec 2021 08:03:00 +0000 6736239273 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-22/local-news/Air-Malta-settles-88-of-all-refund-requests-6736239273

Accommodation bookings 'dried up', but local market still booming – MHRA

Christmas and New Year's bookings in restaurants within the local community remain in full swing for the holiday season despite the rise in Covid-19 cases and the pending arrival of the Omicron variant in Malta.

President of the Malta Hotels and Restaurants Association (MHRA) Tony Zahra told The Malta Independent on Tuesday that he has seen no cancellations of restaurant bookings in the local market which were out of the ordinary, however, since the situation is fleeting, this could change easily.

"We do not have any visibility that there have been unusual cancellations, just a cancellation here and there, which is normal," Zahra said. "However, the situation is a moving target," he said, adding that things can shift relatively quickly.

On the other hand, the situation is completely different when it comes to accommodation bookings from tourists arriving to Malta, he said.

"Since other countries have been reintroducing and enforcing their own restrictions, accommodation bookings in Malta from abroad have dried up completely," Zahra said.

386 Covid-19 cases were reported by health authorities on Tuesday, it being the second highest tally since the start of the pandemic back in March 2020.

Numbers of Covid-19 cases have been skyrocketing around Europe, particularly with the Omicron variant being more transmissible than the original variant, as well as the Delta variant.

The Nationalist Party has consistently been calling for the enforcement of safety ***measures*** against Covid-19, such as more airport ***measures*** set in place to avoid the threat to the vaccination program and herd immunity.

Other nations across Europe have reimposed heavy restrictions in attempt to curb infections, with some reintroducing curfews, tightening travel restrictions, cancellation of upcoming holiday events, the closing of all schools and universities, with the Netherlands even going as far as another lockdown. Meanwhile, Malta has not done the same.

The only restriction Malta has reintroduced is the wearing of masks in all public spaces while continuing to administer and promoting booster jabs. Health Minister Chris Fearne said that it is to be expected that the Omicron variant arrives to Malta in the coming weeks. Fearne noted that the safety ***measures*** are calibrated in real-time, as the focus is to look at infected individuals being admitted to hospital, adding that the numbers are still low.

Answering the Malta Independent's questions a few weeks ago, the island's national airline Air Malta said that 2021 has been a difficult year for the airline, with it being characterised by depressed and fluctuating market demand across all the airline's main markets. The entity said that there was an increase in the market of 2021 compared to the one of 2020, however it is still behind compared to that of 2019.

Several e-mails from airlines have been sent out over the past few months promoting cheap flights in attempt to increase outbound travel from Malta, scrambling to recuperate from the pandemic.

The Malta Tourism Authority has recently announced a strategy plan up until the year 2030 in effort to recover Malta's tourism industry from the blow it took due to the pandemic. The strategy plan may as well remain in shambles if the pandemic brings on wave after wave.

Malta's only restriction, in an effort not to "disrupt" the economy, remains the enforcing of wearing face masks outside, whilst putting a great emphasis on the booster vaccine, which Fearne maintained that it is the solution for Omicron.

Wed, 22 Dec 2021 09:47:00 +0000 6736239280 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-22/local-news/Accommodation-bookings-dried-up-but-local-market-still-booming-MHRA-6736239280

Worker in critical condition after falling while installing solar panels

A worker is in a critical condition in hospital after a fall while he was installing solar panels, the Occupational Health and Safety Authority said.

In a separate statement, the police said that the worker, whose identity is still unknown, fell one and a half storeys while working in a factory at the Marsa industrial estate.

The OHSA said it is "investigating an accident at work which happened today in Marsa", which resulted in a worker falling from a height while installing solar panels.

"The victim is in danger of loss of life," the OHSA said.

It added that has started its investigations into the cause of the accident, while a magisterial inquiry has been appointed.

The police said the accident took place at around noon.

The injured worker was taken to hospital with serious injuries.

Magistrate Leonard Caruana is leading the inquiry.

Wed, 22 Dec 2021 14:49:00 +0000 6736239286 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-22/local-news/Worker-in-critical-condition-after-fall-while-installing-solar-panels-6736239286

PN writes to Speaker asking to discuss Justyne Caruana standards case this week

PN spokesperson for Justice Karol Aquilina and PN spokesperson for Human Rights and Good Governance Therese Comodini Cachia have condemned the delay in affronting Minister Justyne Caruana's case of breach of ethics for giving preferential treatment to a close friend with the use of public funds.

The PN has therefore written to the Speaker of Parliament so that a meeting with the Standards in Public Life Committee is held this week, insisting that this situation should not be delayed till next year.

The fight against the culture of impunity that has gripped our country must continue under any circumstance and it cannot stop for the holidays, it said.

The PN said that every individual in Parliament has a duty to ensure good and appropriate behaviour. Additionally, the Constitution obliges the government to answer the Parliament, and obliges the Parliament to serve as a watchman over the government.

The party said that it believes that the Speaker will take necessary actions to ensure that the Standards in Public Life Committee holds an urgent meeting. The gravity of the situation obliges immediate action, it said.

Wed, 22 Dec 2021 13:23:00 +0000 6736239284 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-22/local-news/PN-writes-to-Speaker-asking-to-discuss-Justyne-Caruana-standards-case-this-week-6736239284

TMID Editorial: Hotel stays and squandering of public funds

That staff from the Malta Tourism Authority offer 'logistical support' to foreign artists holding events in Malta is totally understandable.

The MTA must ensure that guests are well taken care of and have everything they need when they need it. Malta, after all, is largely dependent on tourism and high-profile events certainly raise the country's cultural profile.

That MTA staff stay at lavish Valletta hotels with the excuse that they need to be close to these events, costing the taxpayer tens of thousands of euro is, however, less understandable.

A couple of weeks ago it emerged that the MTA had booked a number of rooms at the five-star Phoenicia Hotel so as to be able to provide logistical support to the nearby Christmas Fantasyland attraction. Times of Malta said that, after it sent questions to Tourism Minister Clayton Bartolo, the MTA changed its plans and scrapped the hotel stay.

But in reply to questions sent by The Malta Independent, the ministry actually confirmed that the MTA currently has a €140-a night room booked at the Phoenicia. The ministry did not say how many people are staying there, and how many nights they are spending at the hotel. Although the Fairyland event is two weeks long, so the math is easy to do.

The ministry It also failed to elaborate on the need for these officials to stay at a Valletta hotel, especially in a country so small that you can reach the capital within minutes.

Furthermore, it confirmed that this was not the first time that MTA staff stayed at hotels. There were two other occasions this summer when this happened, and the information we have is that this practice took place in previous years too.

The MTA explained that, as part of the contracts it enters into with artists and entertainment companies, it pays for the hotel rooms used by the performers and accompanying staff.

While this is partly justifiable, since foreigners need a place to stay, one cannot but question the numbers quoted. In fact, the MTA said that it had paid for 180 rooms at the Excelsior and the Phoenicia for the Peter Tong and BBC concerts.

But the real question is about the money the MTA paid to have its own staff stay at the hotels. We are not talking here about people needing to commute 500km but, rather, Maltese citizens who have a myriad of options to get to Valletta.

In our opinion, this is yet another case of squandering of public funds – money spent for no justifiable reason. It comes as no real surprise because the tradition of wasting taxpayer money is, sadly, common practice in this country, and the monthly National Audit Office reports confirm.

Perhaps the biggest blunder of them all is the controversial €100m exit fee that Konrad Mizzi included in the hospitals privatisation deal.

It is about time that people started being held accountable for these shortcomings. Perhaps the Finance Minister, who is currently stepping up efforts against tax evasion and excessive spending will issue a policy against such needless expenditures which, after all, are being paid for by us and you.

Wed, 22 Dec 2021 10:29:00 +0000 6736239281 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-22/newspaper-leader/TMID-Editorial-Hotel-says-and-squandering-of-public-funds-6736239281

'Another storm coming': WHO warns of omicron surge in Europe

The World Health Organization's top official in Europe urged governments on Tuesday to prepare for a "significant surge" in coronavirus cases across the continent due to the omicron variant, which is already dominant in several countries.

"We can see another storm coming," WHO Europe regional director Dr. Hans Kluge said at a press conference in Vienna. "Within weeks, omicron will dominate in more countries of the region, pushing already stretched health systems further to the brink."

Omicron has been detected in at least 38 of the WHO European region's 53 members, Kluge added, noting that it is already the dominant variant in the United Kingdom, Denmark and Portugal.

Last week, 27,000 people died from coronavirus in the region and an additional 2.6 million cases were reported, Kluge said. Although these cases include all variants, not just omicron, he noted this figure is 40% higher than during the same period last year.

"The sheer volume of new COVID-19 infections could lead to more hospitalizations and widespread disruption to health systems and other critical services," he said.

Thus far, Kluge said 89% of those with confirmed omicron infections in Europe reported symptoms common with other coronavirus variants, including cough, sore throat, fever. The variant has mostly been spread by young people in their 20s and 30s in the region, he added.

Although much remains unknown about omicron, Kluge said it appears to be more infectious than previous variants, leading to "previously unseen transmission rates" in countries with a significant number of omicron cases. In those countries, cases of the variant are doubling every 1.5 to 3 days.

European governments should keep ramping up their vaccination campaigns, introduce additional ***measures*** to slow the spread of the variant, and prepare critical infrastructure like health care systems for the coming surge, Kluge said.

Wed, 22 Dec 2021 07:05:00 +0000 6736239271 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-22/world-news/Another-storm-coming-WHO-warns-of-omicron-surge-in-Europe-6736239271

Omicron: Germany clamps down on New Year's parties, France imposes tougher vaccine rules

Germany announced new restrictions Tuesday that will begin after Christmas to slow the spread of the new omicron variant, rules that will fall short of a full lockdown but will include contact restrictions even for vaccinated people.

"I can understand anyone who doesn't want to hear about the coronavirus, mutations and new virus variants," Chancellor Olaf Scholz said at a press conference Tuesday evening. "But we cannot and must not turn a blind eye to this next wave."

Among the new rules are limiting private gatherings to 10 people, closing nightclubs nationwide and having large events like soccer matches held without an in-person audience. The restrictions will go into effect nationwide on Dec. 28, although states can implement the ***measures*** sooner.

Scholz said the government decided to wait until after Christmas to implement new national restrictions because family-focused holidays such as Christmas and Easter "have not proven to be major drivers of the pandemic." But he said restrictions on New Year's celebrations are necessary to keep Germany's health system from being overwhelmed by COVID-19 cases.

"This is no longer the time for parties and social evenings in big groups," Scholz said.

Scholz and Germany's 16 state governors agreed on the new restrictions at a meeting Tuesday, after the government's new panel of experts called for action to be taken within days nationwide because the omicron variant is racing across Europe.

Scholz and the state governors will meet again on Jan. 7 to discuss whether the ***measures*** should be continued or even tightened.

Hours before the meeting, the national disease control center called on Twitter for "maximum contact restrictions" starting immediately and lasting until mid-January, and for Germans to reduce their holiday travel "to the absolutely necessary."

One state, Hamburg, already moved Tuesday to impose restrictions starting on Christmas Eve. There will be a 10-person limit on private meetings and dance events will be banned, effectively closing nightclubs. Restaurants and bars in the state will have to close at 11 p.m. — except on New Year's Eve, when they can stay open until 1 a.m.

Restrictions already in place in Germany target mainly the unvaccinated, with proof of vaccination or recovery required to enter nonessential stores. Also, the sale of New Year fireworks has been banned nationwide.

Scholz said the German government is also trying to speed up its booster vaccine campaign, aiming to give out an additional 30 million shots by the end of January by keeping some vaccination centers open over the holidays.

"Vaccinate, vaccinate, vaccinate remains our goal," Scholz said. "The coronavirus doesn't take a Christmas break."

But authorities remain dissatisfied that only 70.4% of Germany's population has been fully vaccinated and 32.6% have received boosters.

Germany's infection rate is, for now, drifting downward slowly. On Tuesday, the disease control center recorded 306.4 new cases per 100,000 residents over the past seven days, down from 375 a week earlier, with 23,428 new daily cases.

However, Health Minister Karl Lauterbach has warned that Germany faces "a massive fifth wave" of infections because of omicron, which he says can't realistically be prevented.

The disease control center said Monday that people who have recovered or have been fully vaccinated now face a "high" risk of infection, while it is "moderate" for those who have received a booster. It said the risk of getting COVID-19 is "very high" for the unvaccinated

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France seeks to avoid a lockdown with tougher vaccine rules

Facing a jump in COVID-19 hospitalizations, France's government is trying to push through a law requiring vaccination to enter any restaurant and many other public places, and warning of tougher ***measures*** if the current surge of infections doesn't recede.

The government on Tuesday dropped efforts to require a health pass for all workplaces, however, amid opposition from unions and employers..

French Prime Minister Jean Castex spent the day Tuesday meeting with French mayors and lawmakers to persuade them to support tougher vaccine rules.

French travelers and families, meanwhile, were flocking to virus testing tents ahead of the holidays.

France's virus hospitalization numbers have shot up in recent weeks, with some 16,000 people currently hospitalized with COVID-19 and 60% of the country's ICU beds occupied by virus patients, according to the state health agency. Confirmed weekly virus infections are at the highest level in France since the pandemic began.

Most are infected with the delta variant, but more than one in three new cases in the Paris region is the fast-spreading omicron variant, French government spokesman Gabriel Attal said.

"We don't have a second to lose," he told reporters. "The situation in the hospitals is tense."

The French government wants a law passed by Jan. 15 requiring vaccination to enter restaurants and many public venues, he said. Currently a "health pass" is required to enter all such spaces in France, but people can get the pass with either a vaccination certificate, a negative virus test or proof of recent recovery from COVID-19.

France also is ramping up vaccination and booster efforts, with doses made available to all children 5-11 starting Wednesday. More than 89% of French people 12 and over have had at least two vaccine shots, and about 40% of adults have had three doses, Attal said.

Wed, 22 Dec 2021 07:09:00 +0000 6736239272 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-22/world-news/Omicron-Germany-clamps-down-on-New-Year-s-parties-France-imposes-tougher-vaccine-rules-6736239272

Landmark judgement as court dismisses dissolution of rural lease

A judge has dismissed a case for the dissolution of a rural lease filed by the owner of a field in Qrendi in a landmark ruling protecting farmers from eviction.

Judge Lawrence Mintoff, presiding over the First Hall of the Civil Court in its Constitutional Jurisdiction, ruled that the law created the right balance between the rights of owners and tenants.

He dismissed the case filed by Vincenza Magro, who argued the law protecting rural leases (qbiela) breached her rights as land owner.

Magro had filed a court case over the 2,910sq.m. field in the area known as il-Bur ta' Ħallew which had been leased to Annalisa Schembri and Liberata Schembri, who were paying just €24 in rent every two years.

Magro had refused to accept the last rent payment, which the tenants had then deposited in court.

Rural leases enjoy strong protection at law and are inherited from one generation to the next, such that Magro argued that it was near-impossible for her to ever take back possession of her field.

She also submitted that the law also did not provide an adequate mechanism for the revision of the value of the lease, leading to an enormous discrepancy between the rent paid and the free market value.

Magro argued that jurisprudence showed that having recourse to the Rural Lease Regulation Board would not provide her with an effective remedy.

All this amounted to a breach of her fundamental right to the enjoyment of personal property, she said.

The State Advocate had opposed the case, denying any breach of constitutional or conventional rights, arguing amongst other things that there were other legal options available to the plaintiff.

Also, replying to the initial application, the defendants, Annalisa and Liberata Schembri argued that the plaintiff had not indicated which articles of the law were causing the breach of her rights, that there were ordinary remedies available to her and that they had always based their occupation on the dispositions of the law, which had an element of public policy in that they ensured the continued operation of the ***agricultural*** sector in Malta.

Magro had told the court that she had never engaged an architect to value the land, but added that she had recently sold another, uncultivated, field for over €100,000 and exhibited the contract as evidence.

The plaintiff's son, Paul had testified in January 2020, explaining that he had mooted increasing the rural lease to €600 per year with Annalisa Schembri, but she had not replied and had instead started depositing the rent in court.

Schembri had also testified, but claimed that Magro had initially requested €2,000, which was impossible for her to pay and that the €600 he later asked for was also too much.

In his decision on the matter, Mr Justice Lawrence Mintoff began by pointing out that the plaintiff could not have made this request to a lower court as it was unequivocally asking for a declaration of a breach of human rights and liquidation of resulting damages.

He dismissed the argument that the applicant had not precisely indicated which dispositions of the law were breaching her fundamental rights, observing that it was sufficiently clear from the application that she was complaining about a breach of her right to derive a fitting income from her fields and that she was being denied possession of the same.

The judge noted that there was no contestation of the fact that the law, enacted in 1967, had been intended to control the use of ***agricultural*** land and had therefore been introduced with a legitimate intention.

It was the State's responsibility to ensure sufficient ***agricultural*** produce for the country, said the judge, noting that at the time of its introduction, the duty of the State had been more onerous and reflected the economic and financial situation of the country at the time.

Despite the liberalisation of the market and the importation of foodstuffs from abroad, the State still had a strong responsibility to ensure the country does not rely on imports alone, said the court, justifying the State's wide discretion to ensure that the ***agricultural*** sector does not go under. This discretion was tempered by the citizen's fundamental rights, however, added Mintoff.

Here the court said it disagreed with the State Advocate's argument in that although it was in a position to recognise the needs of society, he had no absolute right to disturb a landowner's right to enjoyment of his property.

The court had to consider whether there was a lack of proportionality in the two legislative ***measures*** promulgated by the State. It recognised that these had been introduced to protect the ***agricultural*** sector by ensuring that a farmer cannot be easily deprived of the land he had been working for decades by the imposition of an increase in his rent, which would, in turn, affect his income and standard of living.

Judge disagrees with technical expert's valuation

The court turned its attention to the amount of rent, having appointed a technical expert to draw up a report on the rental value of the land at market rates. But the judge disagreed with the expert's findings, saying they were unrealistic in the context of ***agricultural*** land and more fitting for land sold for other reasons.

"The court cannot recognise circumstances where it would find a farmer ready to pay €130,950 to buy the fields in question… or against an ***agricultural*** lease of €1,964 annually," ruled the judge, adding that the sale of a similar field for €116,468 could not be compared as there was no indication as to whether it was being sold for cultivation or development.

Mr Justice Mintoff also observed that the technical expert's replies, under cross-examination, as to how he had reached the supposed value were "rather vague and not at all convincing." The expert had also failed to examine other contracts for ***agricultural*** land, saying he had relied on estate agent prices, whilst applying reduction factors.

The court ruled that this exercise could not return realistic values which were applicable to the context at hand, and the expert witness' vague answers led the court to say that "it was not at all convinced that the values expressed by the Judicial Technical Expert can be taken as applicable to the case at hand," also noting that there was an "enormous discrepancy" between the rent payable to her and that estimated by the court expert.

Neither was there a cap on the value of rural leases in the law, as opposed to that argued by the plaintiff, said that judge, also noting that she had never made a claim before the appropriate Board to change the amount due and therefore could not complain that she had been deprived of an effective remedy by the law.

Law intended to protect ***agricultural*** activities

There were many situations envisaged at law where the owner of the land could be given back possession by the holder of an ***agricultural*** lease, said the judge, once again noting that no request to this effect had been made before the Rural Leases Board. Judge Mintoff repeated that the law in question was built upon the principal aim of first and foremost protecting ***agricultural*** activities.

"All this considered, however, the State certainly cannot put to one side the principle of proportionality through which it must find a balance between the general interest and that of the owner. The court considers that through the dispositions of Chapter 199 this balance should be reached, as whilst the owner cannot easily take back possession of the land from the tenant… he has the means to ensure he receives adequate compensation for this."

The court found for the defendant, ruling that there was no breach of fundamental human rights as protected by the Constitution or the European Convention on Human Rights.

Lawyers Errol Cutajar and James D'Agostino appeared for the defendant, whilst lawyers David Camilleri and Joseph Gatt represented the plaintiffs.

Tue, 21 Dec 2021 18:14:00 +0000 6736239270 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-21/local-news/Landmark-judgement-as-court-dismisses-dissolution-of-rural-lease-6736239270

Updated: Man dies during maintenance work in underground tank

A man has died while working in an underground fuel storage tank, the Occupational Health and Safety Authority said.

The police later said that the victim is a man from Gambia, aged 46.

OHSA said it was informed of an accident at work which took place today at Has Saptan, limits of Ghaxaq. The accident took place at around 12.15pm.

"A person who lost his life while carrying out maintenance work in an underground tank," the statement said.

OHSA has started its investigations into the cause of the fatal accident.

As the investigation is still ongoing, OHSA is not in a position to make other comments at this time, it said.

No further details were provided.

TVM said the man was crushed between the tank roof and the cabin of the cherry picker he was working on. The man was employed by a private contractor.

Medical teams and units from the Civil Protection Department rushed to the scene and tried to rescue the man, but the casualty was pronounced dead on site.

Magistratre Claire Stafrace Zammit is leading an inquiry.

Tue, 21 Dec 2021 14:36:00 +0000 6736239266 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-21/local-news/Man-dies-during-maintenance-work-in-underground-tank-6736239266

Health authorities issue reminder on what to do if you test positive for Covid-19

The Superintendent for Public Health has issued a reminder on what one should do if they test positive for Covid-19 through either a PCR test or a rapid test.

In a statement, the health authorities said that if a person receives a positive Covid-19 test – be it a swab test or a rapid test – then they must isolate for 14 days immediately from the moment they receive the test result.

The same 14-day mandatory quarantine period applies to any person living in the same residence.

People who test positive, the authorities said, should prepare a list of close contacts which they had in the two days prior to the positive test or since they developed symptoms – depending which came first.

The authorities also took the opportunity to encourage everyone to take up the invitation for the Covid-19 vaccine and appealed to everyone to keep on following the current Covid-19 regulations.

Tue, 21 Dec 2021 17:45:00 +0000 6736239268 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-21/local-news/Health-authorities-issue-reminder-on-what-to-do-if-you-test-positive-for-Covid-19-6736239268

386 Covid-19 cases reported; second highest during pandemic

386 Covid-19 cases were reported by health authorities on Tuesday – the second highest tally since the start of the pandemic back in March 2020.

The highest number of cases reported during the pandemic was on 10 March 2021 when 510 cases were reported.

71 people have recovered, meaning that there are currently 2,505 active cases of the virus - the highest since 23 July.

This is the highest number since 23 July, when we had 2,497.

40 patients are currently being treated at Mater Dei Hospital, with five of those being in ITU.

Meanwhile, 1,016,374 doses of the vaccine have been administered thus far, with 175,395 of those being booster doses.

Malta has had 42,399 cases of the virus. 39,104 of those have recovered, while 471 have died.

Tue, 21 Dec 2021 12:37:00 +0000 6736239262 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-21/local-news/386-Covid-19-cases-reported-second-highest-during-pandemic-6736239262

Judgement delivered by ECJ in relation to rights of passengers travelling by sea and inland waterway

In September 2021, the European Court of Justice ("ECJ") delivered a preliminary ruling in relation to the interpretation of the provisions of Regulation (EU) 1177/2010 concerning the rights of passengers when travelling by sea and inland waterway (the "Regulation").

The request for a preliminary ruling was made during litigious proceeding before the High Court in Ireland (the "Irish Court") between Irish Ferries Ltd ("Irish Ferries") and the National Transport Authority of Ireland ("NTA"). These proceedings concerned the cancellation of a season of voyages scheduled by Irish Ferries between Dublin, Ireland and Cherbourg, France.

Background to the proceedings before the Irish Court

Irish Ferries provides passenger services from ports in Ireland to the United Kingdom and France. To operate a new itinerary between Dublin and Cherbourg, Irish Ferries ordered a new vessel which was to be delivered between May and June 2018. Irish Ferries began marketing pre-sale tickets for the 2018 summer season from October 2017 onwards. Following a delay by the shipyard's accommodation outfitters, Irish Ferries had to cancel, as a first step, the voyages for July and consequently, the entire season of voyages. The vessel in question was not delivered until December 2018 and Irish Ferries was unable to find any other replacement vessel capable of providing the same service. All the passengers were informed of the cancellation of their tickets at least seven weeks before the originally scheduled departure date.

Irish Ferries offered either to re-route the passengers to and/or from other ports, including by a sea-crossing from a port in Ireland (or France) to a port in the United Kingdom, followed by a transfer overland to another port in the United Kingdom from where the passengers continued their journey by a second sea-crossing to a port in France (or Ireland), or the option of a full reimbursement for their tickets.

Irish Ferries, however, did not (i) cover all additional costs of rerouting; and (ii) pay compensation for the delay in arrival to the destination to passengers in line with Article 19 of the Regulation. Irish Ferries claimed that Articles 18 and 19 of the Regulation, being the articles in the Regulation relating to re-imbursement and compensation, did not apply cumulatively.

However, the NTA was of the view that Articles 18 and 19 of Regulation applied to the cancellations, and claimed Irish Ferries infringed the mentioned Articles. Consequently, Irish Ferries were ordered by the NTA to reimburse any additional costs incurred by passengers who decided to reroute their journey, as well as to pay compensation for delay. The NTA had ordered Irish Ferries to pay compensation to up to 20,000 passengers who had to change their travel plans. Irish Ferries contested this, arguing that the Regulation did not apply if several weeks' notice was given with regards to the cancellation. Irish Ferriesalso claimed that the delay in delivery of the ferry was an extraordinary circumstance as defined under Article 20 of the Regulation.

The rights of passengers travelling by sea in relation to cancelled and/or delayed voyages

Introduced in 2010, the objectives of the Regulation are namely twofold, the high level of protection and assistance to passengers of Member States, and to ensure that economic agents function under harmonized conditions in the internal market.

Similarly to air passengers, travellers by sea are also entitled to various rights for cancelled and/or delayed voyages. Two ways through which the Regulation seeks to offer passengers protection are Articles 18 and 19 of the Regulation. These deal with the obligations of carriers, and, consequently, the rights of passengers in case of delay or cancellation of departure or arrival and are the subject-matter of the preliminary reference in this case.

Article 18 of the Regulation regulates the rerouting and reimbursement in the event of cancelled or delayed departures. Where a passenger service is cancelled or delayed for more than 90 minutes, the carrier must offer to the passenger the choice –

(i)

to reroute to the destination under comparable conditions, at the earliest opportunity at no additional cost; or

(ii)

to have the ticket price reimbursed and, where relevant, have a return service free of charge to the first point of departure.

It is further stipulated that the reimbursement should be made within 7 days. Such reimbursement shall be of the full cost of the ticket price, for the part of the journey not made and for the parts already made where the journey no longer serves any purpose in relation to the passenger's travel plan.

On the other hand, Article 19 of the Regulation deals with compensation of the ticket price in the event of delay in arrival. The first sub-article notes that without losing the right to transport, passengers may request compensation from the carrier if they are facing a delay in arrival at the destination as set out in the transport contract. Compensation shall be at least 25% of the ticket price. The following thresholds must be met for a passenger to receive compensation:

(i)

where a journey lasts up to 4 hours, the delay must be of at least 1 hour;

(ii)

where a journey lasts more than 4 hours, the delay must be of at least 2 hours;

(iii)

where the journey lasts more than 8 hours, the delay must be of at least 3 hours; or

(iv)

and where the journey lasts more than 24 hours, the delay must exceed 6 hours.

If the delay exceeds double the time set out in these thresholds, the compensation shall be of 50% of the ticket price. The compensation must be paid within a month after the submission of the request for compensation is made.

The above-mentioned Articles are, however, subject to several qualifications and exemptions. Of particular importance in this case is that the right of compensation in case of delay, as stipulated in Article 19 of the Regulation, shall not apply where the carrier proves that cancellation or delay is caused by unsafe weather conditions or by extraordinary circumstances hindering the performance of the passenger service which could not have been avoided even if all reasonable ***measures*** had been taken.

Article 24 of the Regulation further provides that where a passenger wants to make a complaint to the carrier or terminal operator, such passenger shall submit it within 2 months from the date on which the service was performed or when a service should have been performed. Within 1 month of receiving the complaint, the carrier or terminal operator shall give notice to the passenger that the complaint has been substantiated, rejected or is still being considered. The time taken to provide the final reply shall not be longer than 2 months from the receipt of a complaint.

The Preliminary Ruling and the Findings of the ECJ

As a result of the preliminary ruling request, the ECJ confirmed that the Regulation does apply where a carrier cancels a passenger service giving several weeks' notice prior to the originally scheduled departure due to delivery of vessel required for service being delayed.

Secondly, the ECJ noted that 'rerouting' implies that a passenger is transported to the destination contractually provided for, without it being necessary that the itinerary followed, and the means of transport, are the same to that originally agreed upon. The carrier must bear the additional costs of fuel or road tolls that the passengers may have incurred to travel to another port, or costs incurred when travelling by road or rail in connection with a land bridge. Moreover, it was also noted that, 'comparable conditions' entails comparing the conditions of rerouting with those original agreed in the transport contract. Furthermore, the ECJ clarified the concept of 'ticket-price' also includes costs relating to additional optional services used by the passenger.

The ECJ further stipulated that the simultaneous application of Article 18 and Article 19 is possible and this depending on whether the passenger has chosen to reimburse the ticket-price or reroute the journey according to Article 18 of the Regulation. The ECJ confirmed that,

"Where a carrier cancels a passenger service giving several weeks' notice before the originally scheduled departure, a passenger has a right to compensation where he or she decides to be re-routed at the earliest opportunity or to postpone the journey to a later date and that passenger arrives at the originally scheduled destination with a delay that exceeds the thresholds laid down in Article 19 of that regulation. By contrast, where a passenger decides to be reimbursed for the ticket price, he or she does not have such a right to compensation under that article."

It was also noted that the late delivery of a passenger transport vessel which led to the cancellation of all sailings to be operated by that vessel in the context of a new maritime route does not fall within the concept of 'extraordinary circumstances'.

Reporting of complaints in Malta

Regulation 1177/2010 was transposed into Maltese law by means of Legal Notice 360 of 2013, entitled 'Rights of Passengers when travelling by Sea and Inland Waterway Regulations', as a supplement to the Consumer Affairs Act, Chapter 378 of the Laws of Malta.

The Director General (Consumer Affairs), Office for Consumer Affairs within the Malta Competition and Consumer Affairs Authority (the "MCCAA") is responsible for the monitoring and investigations regarding compliance with the Regulation and is further responsible for receiving complaints from passengers regarding infringements under the Regulation. Passengers are to submit a complaint to the carrier and if such is not satisfied, the complaint can be brought forward to the MCCAA.

Concluding remarks

This is the first time that the ECJ has been requested to interpret the provisions of this Regulation. This is particularly interesting as Regulation (EC) 261/2004 establishing common rules on compensation and assistance to passengers in the event of denied boarding and of cancellation or long delay of flights has been the subject of numerous preliminary ruling requests before the ECJ. Both laws allow, by means of different legal mechanisms, for the different forms of compensation in relation to the delayed or cancelled travel for passengers.

The ECJ has for the first time, amongst other matters, confirmed that that the legal mechanisms pertaining to compensation as stipulated in the Regulation can be utilised cumulatively. Furthermore, the ECJ has provided for the first limitation to the interpretation of 'extraordinary circumstances' relating to the delay and/or cancellation of voyages.

Nigel Micallef is an Associate at Ganado Advocates.

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PN cancels exchange of Christmas greetings with Bernard Grech due to increase in Covid-19 cases

The Nationalist Party has cancelled a planned exchange of Christmas greetings with party leader Bernard Grech and his wife due to the recent increase in Covid-19 cases.

The activity was set to take place on Thursday 23 December between 11am and 1pm at the PN's Pieta headquarters.

Malta reported 386 cases of Covid-19 on Tuesday – the second highest single-day figure since the pandemic first arrived on the country's shores.

The PN announced the cancellation of the event on the same day, saying that it wanted to be responsible given the significant increase in cases.

Health restrictions have not changed in recent weeks as the number of Covid-19 cases increase.

The government hosted a similar event at Castille with Prime Minister Robert Abela and his wife Lydia on Saturday.

Tue, 21 Dec 2021 18:03:00 +0000 6736239269 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-21/local-news/PN-cancels-exchange-of-Christmas-greetings-with-Bernard-Grech-due-to-increase-in-Covid-19-cases-6736239269

John Dalli case postponed again as lead prosecutor is abroad

The case against former European Commissioner John Dalli has been postponed again after, this time because the lead prosecutor is abroad.

Dalli is facing charges related to a €60 million bribery scandal involving his former aide Silvio Zammit.

The case has already been postponed a number of times. The last sitting had been postponed after the Attorney General's office told the court that it was unsure whether the case could proceed given that Dalli was protected by EU immunity.

The EU later said Dalli's immunity had been lifted.

But when the sitting started on Tuesday morning, the prosecution asked for the case to be adjourned since the lead prosecutor is abroad on holiday.

Dalli, a former Nationalist minister, served as EU health commissioner between 2010 and 2012.

Zammit, one of Dalli's associates at the time had allegedly asked for a €60 million bribe from a tobacco company to help overturn a ban in the EU on snus – a form of smokeless tobacco.

Dalli was forced to quit from the European Commission in 2012 as a result of this, after an investigation by OLAF - the EU's anti-fraud office, had uncovered the bribery attempt.

He later served as health consultant to the Joseph Muscat administration.

Dalli has continuously insisted that the case is part of an orchestrated against him, with his reasoning ranging from the case being an excuse to get Malta off the grey-list to it being a creation by the supposedly corrupt media.

Tue, 21 Dec 2021 13:27:00 +0000 6736239263 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-21/local-news/John-Dalli-case-postponed-again-as-lead-prosecutor-is-abroad-6736239263

Robert Abela has lost control of his government – PN

Prime Minister Rober Abela has lost control of the government, the Nationalist Party said on Tuesday.

Addressing a press conference, election candidate Justin Schembri referred to recent scandals involving Labour MP Ian Castaldi Paris, who owes €300,000 in taxes, Silvio Grixti, who resigned from Parliament after he was interrogated by the police over fraudulent medical certificates, and Education Minister Justyne Caruana, who is under fire after she gave a €15,000 contract to an unqualified friend.

Referring to the 380 Covid-19 cases discovered on Tuesday, Schembri said this continues to show that Abela has also lost control of the nation.

Mentioning the Standards Commissioner report, he said that despite it being evident that Justyne Caruana has been found acting unethically in giving a contract to Daniel Bogdanovic, the Prime Minister's actions do not reflect this. Mentioning some parts from the case, he reminded that Caruana, Bogdanovic and ministry official Paul Debattista have all lied in their witness statements, with Bogdanovic not even knowing what was in the report compiled by Debattista.

PN candidate Charles Azzopardi said that this government is continuing to make fun of the whole nation as its actions are continuing to classify Malta in the lowest standard possible. He added that evidence to this are the scandalous events that have happened throughout these past eight years, resulting in Malta becoming greylisted.

He said that the government has also shown that it has different leverage in penalty depending on the person, as in the case of Roseanne Cutajar, who was made to resign from Parliamentary Secretary immediately.

PN candidate Rebekah Cilia said that the government led by Robert Abela is set for disaster as its roadmap is based on theft, corruption and impunity. Mentioning the Justine Caruana case, she added that it reflects negatively on the Ministry for Education.

Answering questions by the media, Justin Schembri said that although the survey results show that the Labour Party is favoured to win the next general election, many people are disgusted by ministers abusing their powers and public funds.

Speaking on behalf of the Nationalist Party, Schembri called on the government to be more transparent in revealing the actual number of Covid cases. Adding that there should also be an extension in the wage supplement until the end of March or else refer to the ***measure*** they suggested and lower VAT for restaurants to 7%.

Tue, 21 Dec 2021 16:27:00 +0000 6736239267 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-21/local-news/Robert-Abela-has-lost-control-of-his-government-PN-6736239267

Juve beat Cagliari to close gap on top 4 as Atalanta draw

Juventus ended the year on a positive note by beating relegation-threatened Cagliari 2-0 on Tuesday to close the gap to the top four in Serie A.

Moise Kean and Federico Bernardeschi scored as Juventus moved to within four points of Atalanta, which was surprisingly held to a 0-0 draw at struggling Genoa.

Atalanta was in fourth place and the final Champions League qualifying berth.

Juventus had struggled at the start of the season but things were starting to click under returning coach Massimiliano Allegri and the Bianconeri came into the match having won five of its past six matches, drawing the other.

It almost took an early lead but Kean headed Juan Cuadrado's cross off the far post.

He did better five minutes from halftime when he headed in Bernardeschi's cross following a superb run from the winger.

And Bernardeschi got on the scoresheet himself seven minutes from time when he turned in a pass from Dejan Kulusevski for his first goal since July 2020. He received a standing ovation from the crowd in Turin for ending his 43-match drought.

ONE-WAY TRAFFIC

Atalanta tried everything but could not find a way past a resilient Genoa team and missed the chance to move into second place in Serie A.

It was one-way traffic but when Atalanta did find a way through the defense it was denied by good saves from Genoa goalkeeper Salvatore Sirigu.

Atalanta could have moved a point above Napoli and AC Milan before their games on Wednesday.

Genoa remained in the drop zone but inched to within two points of safety. It is one point above Cagliari.

COVID OUTBREAK

Salernitana's match at Udinese was not officially postponed but it could not take place because of a coronavirus outbreak at the visiting club.

Salernitana was blocked by local health authorities from traveling to Udine after at least two members of the team tested positive for COVID-19.

The league's governing body said on Twitter : "The match #UdineseSalernitana was not held due to Salernitana failing to show up."

A similar incident happened last year when Napoli couldn't travel to Juventus. Napoli was initially handed a 3-0 loss and docked a point but it won on appeal and the sentence was revoked and the match rescheduled.

Wed, 22 Dec 2021 08:17:00 +0000 6736239276 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-22/football/Juve-beat-Cagliari-to-close-gap-on-top-4-as-Atalanta-draw-6736239276

Psychiatrists 'cheated' by new cannabis law, says mental health issues not addressed

Psychiatrists today said they feel cheated by lawmakers who disregarded any consultation on mental health issues before enacting the cannabis law.

Suggestions made in the run up to the passing of the cannabis bill "fell on deaf ears", the Malta Association of Psychiatrists said.

"In effect, the law does and will decriminalize cannabis use - a change we welcome. However multiple and varied calls to address mental health consequences of cannabis legalization for some were blatantly ignored," the association said.

The MAP feels cheated and disenfranchised with the way lawmakers disregarded any consultation by the experts in the field and went ahead with passing a law, lock stock and barrel with no thought or consideration of the mental health of the nation. Also, the lack of planning and commitment to tackling the consequences is frankly frightening and irresponsible, MAP said.

While we recognize that for the majority of people, smoking cannabis is inconsequential, for a few it can have devastating consequences, such as anxiety, depression and psychotic disorders. We implore that lawmakers, policy makers and ministers are fully prepared to assist those that do.

Therefore MAP insists that:

1.

A budget is ringfenced for health education and prevention and accurate regularization of use.

2.

A well-funded campaign is started to focus on the health of the nation, with a big push towards the promotion of regular sports, arts and music in schools and government funded facilities. The effect of these campaigns have been seen to yield results in reducing substance use in countries where this has been previously tried such as Iceland.

3.

Evidence based ***measures*** are put into place capping the limit of THC in cannabis as well as the THC/CBD ratios, to reduce the risks of cannabis induced psychosis in users.

4.

The law is amended to increased minimum age from 18years to 25 years. This, considering the risks cannabis poses to the developing brain. Further strategic thought is to be placed into the risks of younger adolescents still resorting to using the black market to source their cannabis.

5.

A budget is allocated to mental health to address the increase in cannabis induced mental disorders or consequences.

6.

A hypothetical tax is introduced whereby every X% profit earned from cannabis is reinvested in mental health services or physical health facilities to promote a healthy lifestyle.

The advice from MAP is to choose healthier coping strategies to manage your stress, and most importantly to avoid using cannabis if suffering from mental health problems, the association said.

Tue, 21 Dec 2021 12:27:00 +0000 6736239261 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-21/local-news/Psychiatrists-cheated-by-new-cannabis-law-says-mental-health-issues-not-addressed-6736239261

Girl, 3, grievously injured in traffic accident

A three-year-old girl was grievously injured when the car she was in was involved in a crash on Monday night, the police said.

The accident took place in Rinella Street, Kalkara, at 9pm.

It involved a Toyota Corsa driven by a 33-year-old man of Kalkara and a Volkswagen Polo driven by a 22-year-old woman of Zabbar.

Another woman, aged 21 from Zabbar, and two children aged three and four were in the Polo.

The three-year-old was taken to hospital with grievous injuries.

Tue, 21 Dec 2021 11:29:00 +0000 6736239259 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-21/local-news/Girl-3-grievously-injured-in-traffic-accident-6736239259

Updated: Controversial road-safety videos withdrawn after NCPE request

Video-clips issued by MAPFRE Middlesea and Malta Public Transport serving as education on road-safety have fallen under scrutiny over its implications of racial and gender stereotypes and have subsequently been 'paused' by the company.

The National Commission for Promotion of Equality (NCPE) has officially asked for the withdrawal of these video-clips from the two entities due to their problematic portrayal of race and gender.

Though the NCPE recognised the fact that these portrayals might have been unintentional, the videos still show racialised characters through specific skin-colours and hair-textures, with black characters being portrayed negatively. Women and men were also given stereotypical gender roles within and outside the household.

The NCPE said that published material is to be free from racist and sexist stereotypes to prevent prejudice and equality in society. The withdrawal of these video-clips is to be expected, said the body.

Organisations can contact the NCPE for assistance and training regarding equality, discrimination and harassment.

In a reactionary statement, Malta Public Transport said that it "would like to ensure that its educational content clearly communicates its values of inclusivity and equal opportunities, therefore the campaign will be paused until it has been discussed with all stakeholders and a consensus is reached as to the best method to raise awareness on road safety."

The company said that it has reached out to the National Commission for the Promotion of Equality, Black Lives Matter Malta and the African Media Association to discuss the educational videos being produced to promote Road Safety in Malta.

Tue, 21 Dec 2021 11:37:00 +0000 6736239260 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-21/local-news/NCPE-calls-for-withdrawal-of-controversial-road-safety-videos-6736239260

'No such thing as responsible cannabis, only dangerous addictive drug' - MAM

There is no such thing as responsible cannabis, only a drug that causes harm to people's health, the Medical Association of Malta said.

In a statement, MAM condemned without reservation the promotion and blatant advertising of "responsible cannabis use" by government ministers who should hold the good health of our younger generation at heart.

There is no such thing as responsible cannabis use, simply a drug which produces some very short term completely artificial "highs" with very serious and long-term pains, in the form of major forms of mental illness.

With serious bans on tobacco and alcohol advertising in place, both considered "less evils", it is completely unacceptable for any "political figure" to promote such a "scourge of modern society" known to scar the lives of many young people for life.

MAM has also provided a recent review from the international medical literature of 124 studies on the effects of cannabis on previously healthy youths free from any form of "Mental health issues"

The study concludes that

"The preponderance of the evidence suggests that frequency of cannabis use, THC (but not CBD) content, age of onset, and cumulative cannabis exposure can all contribute to these adverse outcomes in individuals without a pre-existing medical condition or psychiatric disorder. The strongest evidence for the negative effects of cannabis are for psychosis\* and psychosocial functioning\*\*."

\*(Psychosis is the condition which needs treatment with medicines and often a period of inpatient admission to a unit specialized in mental health"

\*\*(Psychosocial functioning i.e., thinking, personality, coping style and social factors (i.e., family, relationships, employment, life events).

The study in full may be found here

Tue, 21 Dec 2021 07:34:00 +0000 6736239241 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-21/local-news/No-such-thing-as-responsible-cannabis-only-dangerous-addictive-drug-MAM-6736239241

Omicron sweeps across US, now 73% of new Covid cases

Omicron has raced ahead of other variants and is now the dominant version of the coronavirus in the U.S., accounting for 73% of new infections last week, federal health officials said Monday.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention numbers showed nearly a six-fold increase in omicron's share of infections in only one week.

In much of the country, it's even higher. Omicron is responsible for an estimated 90% or more of new infections in the New York area, the Southeast, the industrial Midwest and the Pacific Northwest. The national rate suggests that more than 650,000 omicron infections occurred in the U.S. last week.

Since the end of June, the delta variant had been the main version causing U.S. infections. As recently as the end of November, more than 99.5% of coronaviruses were delta, according to CDC data.

CDC Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky said the new numbers reflect the kind of growth seen in other countries.

"These numbers are stark, but they're not surprising," she said.

Scientists in Africa first sounded the alarm about omicron less than a month ago and on Nov. 26 the World Health Organization designated it as a "variant of concern." The mutant has since shown up in about 90 countries.

Much about the omicron variant remains unknown, including whether it causes more or less severe illness. Early studies suggest the vaccinated will need a booster shot for the best chance at preventing omicron infection but even without the extra dose, vaccination still should offer strong protection against severe illness and death.

"All of us have a date with omicron," said Dr. Amesh Adalja, a senior scholar at the Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security. "If you're going to interact with society, if you're going to have any type of life, omicron will be something you encounter, and the best way you can encounter this is to be fully vaccinated."

Adalja said he was not surprised by the CDC data showing omicron overtaking delta in the U.S., given what was seen in South Africa, the U.K. and Denmark. He predicted spread over the holidays, including breakthrough infections among the vaccinated and serious complications among the unvaccinated that could stress hospitals already burdened by delta.

Dr. Eric Topol, head of the Scripps Research Translational Institute, said other countries had seen omicron's fast growth, but the U.S. data showed "a remarkable jump in such a short time."

Topol also said it's unclear how much milder omicron really is compared with other variants. "That's the big uncertainty now."

CDC's estimates are based on thousands of coronavirus specimens collected each week through university and commercial laboratories and state and local health departments. Scientists analyze their genetic sequences to determine which versions of the COVID-19 viruses are most abundant.

On Monday, the CDC revised its estimate for omicron cases for the week that ended Dec. 11, after analyzing more samples. About 13% of the cases that week were from omicron, not the 3% previously reported. The week before, omicron accounted for just 0.4% of cases.

CDC officials said they do not yet have estimates of how many hospitalizations or deaths are due to omicron.

Though there remain a lot of new infections caused by the delta variant, "I anticipate that over time that delta will be crowded out by omicron," Walensky said.

Tue, 21 Dec 2021 07:43:00 +0000 6736239242 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-21/world-news/Omicron-sweeps-across-US-now-73-of-new-Covid-cases-6736239242

Dubai ruler must pay ex-wife $700M in divorce settlement

A British court on Tuesday ordered the ruler of Dubai to pay his ex-wife and their children close to 550 million pounds ($730 million), in one of the most expensive divorce settlements in British history.

The High Court said Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum must pay 251.5 million pounds to his sixth wife, Princess Haya Bint Al Hussein, and make ongoing payments for their children Al Jalila, 14, and Zayed, 9, underpinned by a bank guarantee of 290 million pounds.

The total amount the children receive could be more or less than 290 million pounds, depending on factors including how long they live and whether they reconcile with their father.

The settlement includes 11 million pounds a year to cover security costs for Princess Haya and the children while they are underage.

Judge Philip Moor said the family needed "water-tight security," and that "absolutely uniquely," the main threat to them came from Sheikh Mohammed, rather than outside sources.

Haya, 47, fled to the U.K. in 2019 and sought custody of her two children through the British courts. The princess, who is the daughter of the late King Hussein of Jordan, said she was "terrified" of her husband, who is alleged to have ordered the forced return to the Gulf emirate of two of his daughters.

Sheikh Mohammed, 72, is also the prime minister of the United Arab Emirates and a major horse breeder. The founder of the successful Godolphin horse-racing stable, he is on friendly terms with Queen Elizabeth II.

A British family court judge ruled in October that Sheikh Mohammed had authorized the hacking of Princess Haya's phone during their legal battle. He denied knowledge of the hacking.

The judge also ruled that Sheikh Mohammed had conducted a campaign of fear and intimidation against his estranged wife and "ordered and orchestrated" the abduction and forced return to Dubai of two of his adult daughters: Sheikha Shamsa in August 2000 and her sister Sheikha Latifa, in 2002 and again in 2018.

Tue, 21 Dec 2021 14:07:00 +0000 6736239265 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-21/world-news/Dubai-ruler-must-pay-ex-wife-700M-in-divorce-settlement-6736239265

Updated: PL MP Silvio Grixti resigns from Parliament after police interrogation

Labour MP Silvio Grixti has resigned from parliament after being interrogated by the police, MaltaToday reports.

Speaker Anglu Farrugia told The Malta Independent that Grixti had communicated his wish to resign but must now do so officially, in writing. The letter must be handwritten and delivered personally.

MaltaToday reported that Grixti, a medical doctor, has been released on police bail.

The nature of the police investigation is unknown although it could be linked to the fraudulent signing of sick certificates according to reports. The Police Force would not confirm however, and when asked a police spokesperson said: "In view of Art 38 of S.L 586.08 and Art 87 of Chap 164 of the Laws of Malta, the Police are not in a position to confirm or otherwise such information."

Grixti told MaltaToday that he was indisposed when the newsroom contacted him for comment.

His lawyers, Franco Debono and Arthur Azzopardi, said their client did not wish to comment.

In a short post on Facebook, Grixti said that his priorities in the coming future go beyond political life, "which is why I informed the Prime Minister that I will be resigning as an MP."

"I don't want to occupy a Parliamentary seat during a period when I cannot be 100% focused on representing my constituents and patients who are so close to my heart, who I respect so much and who also respect me back."

"I helped and will continue to help through my profession, people and patients from every locality who would be in need. There is no doubt that the country needs the Labour Party and Prime Minister Robert Abela to continue to lead it forward," he said.

Grixti was elected to Parliament for the first time in 2017 on the third district. He was also the Chairman of the Health Committee in Parliament.

Mon, 20 Dec 2021 15:04:00 +0000 6736239235 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-20/local-news/PL-MP-Silvio-Grixti-resigns-from-Parliament-after-police-interrogation-6736239235

EU approves 5th COVID-19 vaccine for bloc, one by Novavax

The European Union's drugs regulator gave the green light Monday to a fifth COVID-19 vaccine for use in the 27-nation bloc, granting conditional marketing authorization to the two-dose vaccine made by U.S. biotech company Novavax.

The European Medicines Agency decision to grant conditional marketing authorization for the vaccine for people aged 18 and over, which must be confirmed by the EU's executive commission, comes as many European nations are battling surges in infections and amid concerns about the spread of the new omicron variant.

Novavax says it currently is testing how its shots will hold up against the omicron variant, and like other manufacturers has begun formulating an updated version to better match that variant in case in case it's eventually needed.

The Novavax shot joins those from Pfizer-BioNTech, Moderna, Johnson & Johnson and AstraZeneca in the EU's vaccine armory. The EU has ordered up to 100 million doses of the Novavax vaccine with an option for 100 million more.

Last week, the World Health Organization gave emergency approval to the Novavax vaccine, paving the way for its inclusion in the U.N.-backed program to get such vaccines to poorer countries around the world.

The EMA said that it's human medicines committee concluded by consensus "that the data on the vaccine were robust and met the EU criteria for efficacy, safety and quality."

COVID-19 vaccines train the body to recognize the coronavirus by spotting the spike protein that coats it, but the Novavax option is made very differently than the most widely used shots.

It is a protein vaccine, made with an older technology that's been used for years to produce other kinds of vaccines. The Maryland-based Novavax uses genetic engineering to grow harmless copies of the coronavirus spike protein in insect cells. Scientists extract and purify the protein and then mix in an immune-boosting chemical.

Last summer, Novavax reported a study of 30,000 people in the U.S. and Mexico found the vaccine was safe and 90% effective against symptomatic infection from earlier variants, similar to findings from a trial of 15,000 people in Britain. A follow-up study found a booster dose six months after the last shot could rev up virus-fighting antibodies enough to tackle the extra-contagious delta variant, which at the time was the biggest threat.

It was not immediately clear how much supply Novavax will be able to ship, and when. Its vaccine was long anticipated to help increase global vaccine supplies, as the shots require only refrigerated storage. But Novavax was delayed for months because of problems lining up large-scale manufacturing.

Dr. Gregory Glenn, Novavax's research and development chief, recently told The Associated Press the problem wasn't producing the spike protein itself, which is straightforward, but capacity to make and bottle large quantities. Glenn said the company now has enough manufacturing capability. It partnered with the huge Serum Institute of India, and two companies recently received emergency authorization of the shots in Indonesia and the Philippines. In addition, Novavax has lined up production facilities in the Czech Republic, South Korea and elsewhere.

Novavax has been given emergency use authorization in Indonesia and the Philippines, has applications pending with the World Health Organization and Britain, and plans to file with the U.S. Food and Drug Administration by year's end.

Mon, 20 Dec 2021 15:07:00 +0000 6736239236 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-20/local-news/EU-approves-5th-COVID-19-vaccine-for-bloc-one-by-Novavax-6736239236

Man seriously injured after falling off ladder

A man was seriously injured after he fell off a ladder on Monday afternoon, the police said Tuesday.

The accident took place at the Hal Far industrial estate at 4pm.

The man, a Rumanian aged 36, was working on a construction site.

He was taken to hospital with serious injuries.

Tue, 21 Dec 2021 10:32:00 +0000 6736239248 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-21/local-news/Man-seriously-injured-after-falling-off-ladder-6736239248

Suspension of Gozo Channel services on Christmas Day, New Year's Day

On Christmas and New Year's Day Gozo Channel will be suspending its ferry service between noon and 3pm. The ferry service will be suspended in order to allow Gozo Channel employees, who will be on duty on these two days, to lunch with their respective families, a company statement said.

On both feasts, the 12noon, 12.45,1pm, 1.30pm, 1.45pm, 2pm and 2.30pm trips from Mgarr to Cirkewwa and the 12.15pm, 12.45pm, 1.30pm, 1.45pm, 2.15pm, 2.30pm and 2.45pm trips from Cirkewwa will not be operated.

This means that the last trip from Mgarr will be at 11.30am, while the last trip from Cirkewwa is scheduled for 12 noon. In the afternoon, the service will resume at 3pm from Mgarr to Cirkewwa, while the first trip from Cirkewwa to Mgarr will be conducted at 3.15pm.

Tue, 21 Dec 2021 10:07:00 +0000 6736239247 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-21/local-news/Suspension-of-Gozo-Channel-services-on-Christmas-Day-New-Year-s-Day-6736239247

Castaldi Paris will not contest election after tax investigation

Labour MP Ian Castaldi Paris said he will not contest the next election.

The announcement comes a day after it was reported that the MP must pay €300,000 in tax dues.

After months of talks with tax authorities, it seems that the MP must pay €300,000 in overdue taxes and fines, MaltaToday reports.

In a post on Facebook, Castaldi Paris said that "beyond sensational stories", he had already taken the decision not to contest the next election.

He said the time has come to give priority to his family. Castaldi Paris has been in Parliament for a mere 18 months, having replaced Chris Cardona.

He said he will continue to represent his constituents until the end of the legislature.

His withdrawal from the election list will not stop him from continuing to work for the Labour Party, he said.

Mon, 20 Dec 2021 15:20:00 +0000 6736239239 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-20/local-news/Castaldi-Paris-will-not-contest-election-after-tax-investigation-6736239239

Man in hospital after being hit by car

A man was taken to hospital with grievous injuries after he was hit by a car on Monday afternoon, the police said Tuesday.

The man, aged 68, of Cospicua, was hit by a Mazda 2 driven by a 31-year-old man of Zabbar.

The accident happened in San Nikola Street, Cospicua, at 3.15pm.

Tue, 21 Dec 2021 07:57:00 +0000 6736239243 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-21/local-news/Man-in-hospital-after-being-hit-by-car-6736239243

TMID Editorial: Christmas a time of cheer, but also challenging

Many of us associate Christmas with cheer, family, friends. Others look at it as a time where many appointments have to be made to meet relatives who perhaps some don't completely get along with, or get overwhelmed by the stress of it all.

But then there are others who do not fall into either category, people who suffer during Christmas more than others do. We are referring to those who do not have family members to meet with, who do not have those to share time with at Christmas, or even to complain about having to meet at this time of year. Christmas can be an extremely lonely period, watching others go shopping for their loved ones, watching people having a coffee with friends, seeing all the cheesy yet emotional Christmas films on TV. It can be overwhelming.

Over the years we have commercialised Christmas. We talk about sales numbers, about what toys or gifts to buy. But what Christmas actually is, is an opportunity to spend time with others.

As said, there are people who have nobody to spend time with. This, coupled with the pandemic, has made their lives that much harder. We should all do our bit to try and help make them feel more a part of the community. Caritas, pre-pandemic, used to host a Christmas Day lunch for such persons at the Curia. This is not possible due to Covid, and so it is now distributing the meals to people's homes instead. But for those alone at Christmas, the sadness would still persist. It is still a great initiative by Caritas who are doing what they can, but in these trying times we also need to do our part.

If you know of a relative who perhaps does not have anyone willing to spend time with them, do something about it. Meet with them, or call them, send them a card with a thoughtful message. If there is an elderly neighbour who doesn't have any close family, or whose family don't talk to them, and there are many, call them. Go through with a small gesture which could brighten up their day- if its an elderly person living on their own, go to the supermarket and do their shopping. Such a gesture goes a long way. It takes just a little effort, a little time to make a change.

Living as someone on the outside looking in, feeling as though you don't belong is not a nice feeling, is not something you would want to go through. The Maltese have always had kind hearts when it comes to making donations during the festive period. We should try and also give some time to making the period that much more enjoyable to those who need joy the most.

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Covid 19: Number of people in hospital rises to 42, with 5 in intensive care; 252 cases recorded

Extra strain is being put on the health services as the number of people in hospital with Covid-19 has shot up to 42, with five of them in intensive care, the health authorities said Monday.

There were 30 people in hospital with Covid on Sunday, with 4 in intensive care.

The number of daily cases registered is again high, with 252 recorded, while only 80 have recovered.

This has pushed the number of active cases up again, to 2,190, nearly as high as they were on 28 July, when there were 2,194 active cases.

There were no new victims, as the total number of people who died with Covid-19 remains at 471.

The authorities said that 1,012,731 vaccination doses have been administered, including 172,357 booster jabs.

Malta has had 42,013 cases of the virus since the pandemic first reached the islands. 39,033 of those have recovered.

Mon, 20 Dec 2021 12:32:00 +0000 6736239224 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-20/local-news/Covid-19-Number-of-people-in-hospital-rises-to-42-with-5-in-intensive-care-252-cases-recorded-6736239224

Abela's government in total collapse – Bernard Grech

Robert Abela's government is in "total collapse," Opposition Leader Bernard Grech said on Monday.

The web of criminality is crumbling piece by piece and is no longer tenable, he said in a statement.

"In just one day we saw an MP's resignation over a police interrogation, another who cannot contest the election because he is being investigated over tax evasion and a minister who is still there because the PM is too afraid to sack her."

Grech said these actions are leading to irreparable harm to the country's reputation.

The Maltese, he said, have the right to have a serious and wise government. The PN wants to be the government that hardworking honest people deserve. "The Maltese deserve better. We will be better."

Grech called on people to join the PN in removing this "untenable" government and give Malta the government it deserves.

Mon, 20 Dec 2021 16:15:00 +0000 6736239240 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-20/local-news/Abela-s-government-in-total-collapse-Bernard-Grech-6736239240

We will soon know if current Covid spike is caused by Omicron variant - Gauci

The health authorities will know in the coming days whether the recent increase in Covid-19 cases was caused by the Omicron variant, Health Superintendent Charmaine Gauci said.

Speaking to Times of Malta, Gauci explained that the genome sequencing – a ***process*** that determines which strain of Covid a positive case is infected with – takes up to five days.

She said that Omicron was not detected in results obtained Sunday, from samples taken five days previous.

"However, as we have been seeing all over Europe and outside, the expectation is that Omicron will be detected very soon. Also according to the World Health Organisation, Omicron will start replacing Delta as the dominant variant because of the high transmission rate."

Omicron has so far been detected in 89 countries.

Asked if the recent spike could be caused by an as-of-yet undetected Omicron variant, Gauci said this will be confirmed in the coming days, when the results from samples taken from the past few days are out.

"The increase has happened over the past few days. The reason for the increase could be that we could have Omicron and we would know better and confirm by further sequencing."

Gauci said the increase could also be the result of social gatherings, something which has already been experienced in the past.

The most common source of infection now is related to households, she said. Several other cases are related to social and work gatherings, as well as to worlplaces, particularly places where social distancing is not followed and people do not wear masks.

Asked if people should be prepared for more restrictions, Gauci said the authorities are closely monitoring the situation, particularly at the hospitals, but noted that several mitigation ***measures*** remain in place.

She said the majority of new cases are in the 24-49 age group. "What is positive is that the rollout of the booster is moving very fast, and we have now started giving the vaccine to people aged over 35. We expect the rollout in for this cohort to move fast."

The health authorities reported 252 new cases on Monday, with hospitalisations now rising to 42.

Mon, 20 Dec 2021 13:42:00 +0000 6736239226 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-20/local-news/We-will-soon-know-if-current-Covid-spike-is-caused-by-Omicron-variant-Gauci-6736239226

Justyne Caruana saga: 'All ministers know what their responsibilities are' – Robert Abela

All government members must shoulder the responsibility for their actions, Prime Minister Robert Abela said on Monday, when asked about a damning report on Education Minister Justyne Caruana.

Last week, Standards Commissioner George Hyzler found that Caruana abused her power when her ministry gave her close friend Daniel Bogdanovic a €15,000 contract to draw up a report in ways to improve the National Sports School.

Hzyzler said the former footballer was not qualified to draw up the report which was, in fact, not authored by Bogdanovic. He also spoke about efforts to cover up the fact that Bogdanovic did not write the report himself, and suggested that the police should investigate the case.

Caruana has so far refused to resign and the Prime Minister has said he will wait for the outcome of Parliament's ethics committee debate before acting.

In comments to MaltaToday, Abela said his refusal to sack Caruana does not weaken the government on matters of good governance.

"I have not said that is the final decision. There is an ongoing ***process*** and one must wait for it to finish. At the same time, every MP, particularly those in the executive, have to shoulder their responsibilities. I have said this from day one and the message has always been consistent."

Asked if he is expecting Caruana to resign, Abela said: "That is not what I said. What I said is that everyone knows what their responsibilities are and, naturally, everyone has to ensure that they honour the post they occupy through their behaviour."

Pressed to say what he thought about Caruana refusing to resign, Abela said "This is why I spoke about the ***process*** not being concluded yet. There is the ethics committee part. But if you ask me if I am happy with the situation, I reiterate that everyone should shoulder their responsibility."

Mon, 20 Dec 2021 14:35:00 +0000 6736239234 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-20/local-news/Justyne-Caruana-saga-All-ministers-know-what-their-responsibilities-are-Robert-Abela-6736239234

Five migrants jailed on charges of taking part in riot at Safi centre

Five migrants were sentenced to 84 months in jail between them after they were found guilty of taking part in a riot at the Safi detention centre.

Seven migrants had been charged with the offences, which took place on 18 September, 2020. Two of them, both minors, were found not guilty.

The five men who were found guilty were Ali Abdul Razak, a Sudanese aged 23, Abrihema Gitmay Mengisteab, aged 22 from Eritrea, Abdulrahman Abdulla Hamja, aged 20 from Somalia, Giddu Mahiok, aged 20 from Somalia and Abraham Hinstab, aged 37 of Eritrea.

Razak and Mengisteab were also charged with causing grievous injuries to a police sergeant and inspector, and slight injuries to two other constables.

Evidence provided in court showed that the men dug a hole in the wall of a dormitory and escaped.

Pepper spray was used by police and rubber bullets were also used in an attempt to curb the escape. Some migrants threw heavy objects in the direction of the police and also set fire to some mattresses.

Magistrate Marseann Farrugia sentenced Razak to 30 months in jail, Megiesteab to 18 months, while the other three will serve 12 months in prison.

Mengisteab was also fined €4,000.

Inspector Janetta Grixti led the prosecution.

Mon, 20 Dec 2021 13:45:00 +0000 6736239227 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-20/local-news/Five-migrants-jailed-on-charges-of-taking-part-in-riot-at-Safi-centre-6736239227

With Christmas at stake, nations watch omicron strain UK

Britain's main nurses' union warned Monday that exhaustion and surging coronavirus cases among medical staff are pushing them to breaking point, adding to pressure on the government for new restrictions to bring down record-high infection numbers driven by the omicron variant.

The warning throws into stark relief the unpalatable choice Prime Minister Boris Johnson faces: wreck holiday plans for millions for a second year running, or face a potential tidal wave of cases and disruption.

Many governments in Europe and the U.S. are confronting similar dilemmas over how hard to come down on omicron, which appears more transmissible than the previous delta variant that itself led to surges in many parts of the world. Early evidence suggests omicron may also produce less serious illness — though scientists caution it is too soon to say — and that it could better evade vaccine protection.

Even if it is milder, the new variant could still overwhelm health systems because of the sheer number of infections. Confirmed coronavirus cases in the U.K. have surged by 50% in a week as omicron overtook delta as the dominant variant.

Patricia Marquis, England director for the Royal College of Nursing union, said the situation over the next few weeks looks "very bleak," as growing absences from sickness and self-isolation hit hospitals struggling to clear a backlog of postponed procedures and treat normal winter sicknesses alongside coronavirus cases.

"In many places they're already under immense stress and pressure, and so they are starting to go off sick themselves with COVID, but also mental and physical exhaustion," she told the BBC. "So, staff are looking forward now thinking, 'Oh my goodness, what is coming?'"

The British Medical Association has warned that almost 50,000 doctors, nurses and other National Health Service staff in England could be off sick with COVID-19 by Christmas Day unless additional restrictions are introduced.

But many political leaders are reluctant to impose the stiff ***measures*** they resorted to earlier in the pandemic — often because they promised their people that vaccines would offer a way out of such restrictions and it may be politically untenable to impose them again.

In the U.S., the prospect of a winter chilled by a wave of coronavirus infections is a severe reversal from the optimism projected by President Joe Biden some 10 months ago, when he suggested that the country would essentially be back to normal by this Christmas. France is desperately trying to avoid a new lockdown that would hurt the economy and cloud President Emmanuel Macron's expected re-election campaign.

Britain's Johnson, whose authority has been hammered by weeks of political scandals, is caught between calls from scientific advisers for new limits on social interaction now, and vociferous opposition within his Conservative Party to any such restrictions.

Earlier this month, Johnson's government reinstated rules requiring face masks in shops and ordered people to show proof of vaccination or a negative coronavirus test before entering nightclubs and other crowded venues.

The government is hoping vaccine boosters will offer more protection against omicron, as the data suggests, and has set a goal of offering everyone 18 and up an extra shot by the end of December. More than 900,000 booster shots were delivered on Sunday, as soccer stadiums, shopping centers and cathedrals were turned into temporary inoculation clinics.

But many scientists say tougher action is needed.

U.K. Deputy Prime Minister Dominic Raab said Monday he could not "make hard and fast guarantees" that new restrictions would not be announced this week.

Government ministers are discussing several options, ranging from non-binding guidance for people to limit festive gatherings to mandatory social distancing and curfews for bars and restaurants.

The speed of omicron's spread in the U.K., where cases of the variant are doubling about every two days, is decimating the economy in the busy pre-Christmas period.

Usually teeming theaters and restaurants are being hit by cancellations. Some eateries and pubs have closed until after the holidays because so many staff are off sick or self-isolating. The Natural History Museum, one of London's leading attractions, said Monday it was closing for a week because of "front-of-house staff shortages."

The hospitality industry is urging the government to offer financial support, as it did earlier in the pandemic when many businesses were forced to shut or severely curtail their activity. Those programs, including grants, loans and a scheme that paid the salaries of millions of furloughed workers, were wound down after Britain lifted restrictions in the summer.

Other countries are warily watching the U.K., which on Sunday reported 82,886 more lab-confirmed COVID-19 cases in a day, close to a record high.

The Dutch government began a tough nationwide lockdown on Sunday to rein in sharply rising infections. But other European countries have opted for something less.

France and Germany have barred most British travelers from entering, and the government in Paris has also banned public concerts and fireworks displays at New Year's celebrations. Ireland imposed an 8 p.m. curfew on pubs and bars and limited attendance at indoor and outdoor events.

In Spain, the national average of new cases is double what it was a year ago. But authorities in the country with one of Europe's highest vaccination rates are betting primarily on mandatory mask-wearing indoors and the rollout of booster shots, with no further restrictions in the pipeline.

Miguel Hernán, an epidemiologist at Harvard University who advised the Spanish government earlier in the pandemic, said the reluctance to impose new curbs was understandable, but warned it was better to act early rather than late.

"The earlier they are applied, the shorter the time they are needed," he said.

German Health Minister Karl Lauterbach said Sunday that there won't be a lockdown before Christmas but cautioned: "We will have a fifth wave."

Hendrik Wuest, governor of North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany's most populous state, said more restrictions could be on the horizon shortly after Christmas.

"I don't think big New Year parties can happen this year — unfortunately, again," he added. "Omicron won't forgive us any carelessness if we aren't cautious."

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MTA 'logistical support' staff stayed at hotels on other occasions, ministry confirms

Malta Tourism Authority staff stayed at Valletta hotels on more than one occasion when events were being held in the capital, the Tourism Ministry has confirmed.

Times of Malta reported earlier this month that MTA staff had booked rooms at the five-star Phoenicia Hotel so that they would be close to the Fairyland Christmas attraction. The newspaper said that plans were changed after questions were sent to Tourism Minister Clayton Bartolo.

The Malta Independent was later informed that this was not an isolated case. In fact, MTA staff had booked hotels when 'offering logistical support' during other events, including the BBC and Pete Tong concerts that took place on the Granaries this summer.

Replying to questions by this newsroom, a spokesperson for minister Bartolo said that, "the contractual agreements signed for these events by the MTA stipulate that a number of rooms have to be booked for the international staff and performers in hotels near to the event. Various hotels were used after a call for quotes. In this regard, the bookings being queried about are in line with these agreements."

The spokesperson said that 170 rooms were booked at the Grand Hotel Excelsior, at a rate of €160-€180 per night, for foreign performers and staff. Another ten rooms were booked at the Phoenicia for €290.50/night.

MTA staff offering logistical support booked four rooms at Gomerino Hotel and two rooms at 66 St Paul's for both events. The rooms cost €165 a night, but the ministry did not say how long the stays were.

The ministry also said that MTA staff are currently using one room at the Phoenicia, costing €140 a night, for logistical purposes. Another 43 rooms have been booked for foreign technical staff at the Hotel Falconeria, at €60 a night.

Fifty-eight rooms were booked for foreign performers at ST Hotels and Apartments for Cirque Du Soleil. For this event, no rooms were booked for MTA staff, the ministry said.

Mon, 20 Dec 2021 11:53:00 +0000 6736239223 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-20/local-news/MTA-logistical-support-staff-stayed-at-hotels-on-other-occasions-ministry-confirms-6736239223

Suspected bomb supplier in Daphne Caruana Galizia murder denied bail

The Criminal Court has denied a bail request made by Jamie Vella, one of the men indicted over charges of procuring the bomb which killed journalist Daphne Caruana Galizia.

Vella, who stands accused together with Tal-Maksar brothers Adrian and Robert Agius, as well as George Degiorgio, had filed an application to the Criminal Court, requesting bail on 14 December.

The court had already denied a previous request for bail that he had filed in November.

In her decree, Madame Justice Edwina Grima pointed out that Vella is accused of one of the most serious crimes in the Criminal code -murder.

Whilst the accused had a right to be presumed innocent until proven guilty, the right to bail is not automatic and was subject to the guarantees laid down in the Criminal Code, noted the court.

The judge rested her decision on jurisprudence from the European Court of Human Rights, which had developed a number of criteria that could justify the denial of bail.

The court had to be "firmly satisfied that none of the risks mentioned in section 575 of the Criminal Code existed," explained the judge. "Above all, there must be protection from prejudice to the correct administration of justice. This is being said especially because of the wide ramifications which this crime carries with it, where there are several people not only already accused of commissioning the same but also where the investigation is still open before the inquiring Magistrate."

Repeating the Constitutional Court's opinion on the circumstances of the case, in which it had concluded, without hesitation, that the scale of the criminal activity involved led to a "real and high" risk of pressure being brought to bear on parties and others if bail is granted.

The judge quoted the ECHR judgment in Lisovskij v. Lithuania as saying, "the court reiterates in particular that the question of whether or not a period of detention is reasonable cannot be assessed in the abstract but must be assessed in each case according to its special features. Accordingly, there is no fixed time-frame applicable to each case…"

"In cases of this kind, continuous control and limitation of the defendants' ability to contact each other and other individuals may be essential to avoid their absconding, tampering with evidence and influencing or threatening witnesses. Accordingly, longer periods of detention than in other cases may be reasonable."

The judge also noted that there had been no changes in the applicant's circumstances since his last bail application, which had previously also been refused.

Lawyers Alfred Abela and Rene Darmanin are representing Vella in the proceedings.

Lawyer George Camilleri is appearing on behalf of the Office of the Attorney General.

Mon, 20 Dec 2021 13:13:00 +0000 6736239225 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-20/local-news/Suspected-bomb-supplier-in-Daphne-Caruana-Galizia-murder-denied-bail-6736239225

TBWA\ named Adweek's 2021 Global Agency of the Year

The Disruption® Company was recognised for its business growth, creative product, innovation focus and strength around the world. TBWA\ was awarded the prestigious title of 2021 Global Agency of the Year by Adweek, the leading source of news and insights covering the brand marketing ecosystem. The creative collective was recognised for an ***exceptionally*** strong business year across many global markets and its ability to drive Disruptive, transformative growth for its clients. Adweek also highlighted its body of creative work for clients including Apple, Nissan and PepsiCo, among others, its focus on innovation and the progressive evolution of the company's Disruption® methodology.

TBWA\ANG is an award-winning integrated strategic marketing communications and creative agency servicing clients in Malta. Firmly established in the market for over 50 years, TBWA\ANG is the leading Maltese strategic creative agency delivering a comprehensive service representing clients such as McDonald's, Bank of Valletta and the Brown's Pharmacy chain amongst many others.

"In one of the most competitive years Adweek's selection committee has ever seen, TBWA\Worldwide was unanimously selected as 2021's Global Agency of the Year," said David Griner, International Editor, Adweek. "Our editors were impressed not only with the network's business growth and consistently high bar for creative but also by its clear focus on developing strong talent and elevating a new generation of innovative leadership for the industry."

"Being named Global Agency of the Year—again—is a tremendous honour and a testament to the 10,000+ creative minds in our collective whose talent, perseverance and ingenuity made this recognition a reality," says Troy Ruhanen, CEO, TBWA\Worldwide. "It validates our 'Always in Beta' mindset and our commitment to continuous innovation." Ruhanen added, "We are also grateful to our clients for entrusting us with their brands. Without their continued partnership and their belief in Disruption, none of this is possible."

Earlier this year, the TBWA\ collective earned the #3 spot on Fast Company's list of Most Innovative Companies in the Advertising category, appearing on the list for the third year in a row. Adweek last selected TBWA as its Global Agency of the Year in 2018.

Desiree Zerafa, Managing Director of TBWA\ANG added, "This global recognition is an incredible testament to the power of the collective. We use the term 'collective' over 'network' as we have deliberately chosen to pursue a future that is open source, connected, not burdened by geography, and driven by a restlessness to innovate. I am incredibly proud of the TBWA\ANG team, whose stellar work has played a part in receiving this prestigious award. We are incredibly grateful to our clients for entrusting us with their brands, without their continued partnership and their belief in 'Disruption', none of the work we do would be possible. We head into 2022 championing the TBWA\ flag in Malta and beyond".

Tue, 21 Dec 2021 14:05:00 +0000 6736239264 [*https://www.independent.com*](https://www.independent.com) .mt/articles/2021-12-21/business-news/TBWA-named-Adweek-s-2021-Global-Agency-of-the-Year-6736239264

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[***The European Green Deal and the role of the 2023-2027 CAP***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:62SF-MYC1-JCF9-44W9-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Length:** 619 words

**Byline:** Spilios Livanos

**Highlight:** The reform of the Common ***Agricultural*** Policy (CAP) will affect the lives and have direct impact on European farmers, consumers and our societies, in general, writes Spilios Livanos. Spilios Livanos is Greece's Minister of Rural Development and Food. This is a...

**Body**

*Spilios Livanos is Greece's Minister of Rural Development and Food.*

This is a crucial period for the Ministers of ***Agriculture*** of the 27 EU member states who are meeting in Brussels this week to work toward completing a very long, demanding and challenging procedure.

Optimistically, I am confident that we will successfully cross the finish line and bridge the gap of pending issues regarding the inter-institutional negotiations of the new CAP 2023-2027 reform.

At the European level, we have decided to set an ambitious target to become climate neutral by 2050. The European Green Deal is our pathway to a better, sustainable future for our planet and our continent. Our mission, here and now, is to create a healthier life in all aspects for the generations to come.

In this context, the CAP 2023-2027 and the respective 27 Strategic Plans are the key in achieving the common goals of the Green Deal for Europe. These plans set out and clearly present the strategy and specific interventions of each member state to achieve the CAP objectives according to the Green Deal. The so-called Green Architecture, and especially the specific requirements and actions set in Pillar I under the title Eco-schemes, are key in this respect.

However, although we all share the importance of environmental care and the consequences of climate change on the ***agricultural*** sector, for the strategic plans and their interventions to work in practice, they have to be implemented. The responsibility of every member state to adapt will ensure the prosperity of our farmers facilitating their everyday working routine.

Furthermore, while I and my colleagues in the Council are dedicated to achieving this European goal, clearly, there is no room for institutional power games and political opportunism in this ***process***.

The protection of the environment, tackling climate change and ensuring the well-being of our farmers and consumers is no one person's back yard or exclusive stage. There is no place for political 'shades' of  blue, green or red. All of us, in serving our citizens, regardless of our political and ideological beliefs, have to rise to the occasion and perform our best.

This also the case when dealing with ***exceptional*** weather events such as the frosts occurred in France, Greece and Italy, after some weeks of mild weather, during the last week of March and the first of April. While the evaluations are not yet finalised, the preliminary estimations show ***unprecedented*** damages in the viticultural, fruit and vegetable sectors.

Together with my French and Italian colleagues, we have taken the initiative to officially notify the European Commission and raise the issue in this Council meeting. We believe that now is the time for the European Union to show tangible solidarity, provide substantial financial assistance, activate all available ***measures*** and stand with the ***agricultural*** sector and farmers. The primary producers have already taken a heavy toll during the COVID-19 pandemic to ensure the food supply of European citizens through these tough times.

While these and other similar events which are directly linked to climate change are expected to challenge the ***agricultural*** sector more often and more intensively in the near future, we urgently need to take action.

On a European level we need to develop viable and future-proof mechanisms to better protect and support our farmers and producers.

We must never forget that our ultimate mission and mandate is to serve European citizens, the people of our countries, our farmers, and more importantly in our case, encourage the development of more nutrient and environmentally friendly food products, aligned with the evolving expectations of the global community.

**Load-Date:** May 27, 2021

**End of Document**



[***BlackRock Latin American Investment Trust Plc - Final Results***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:654B-56K1-JB72-12R4-00000-00&context=1516831)

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Annual Results Announcement for the year ended 31 December 2021

PERFORMANCE RECORD

Source: BlackRock.

1    The change in net assets reflects the market movements during the year and dividends paid.

2    Based on an exchange rate of US$1.35445 to £1 at 31 December 2021 and US$1.3669 to £1 at 31 December 2020.

3    Alternative Performance ***Measures***, see the Glossary contained within the Annual Report and Financial Statements.

4    The Company’s performance benchmark (the MSCI EM Latin America Index) may be calculated on either a gross or a net return basis. Net return (NR) indices calculate the reinvestment of dividends net of withholding taxes using the tax rates applicable to non-resident institutional investors, and hence give a lower total return than indices where calculations are on a gross basis (which assumes that no withholding tax is suffered). As the Company is subject to withholding tax rates for the majority of countries in which it invests, the NR basis is felt to be the most accurate, appropriate, consistent and fair comparison for the Company.

CHAIRMAN’S STATEMENT

Dear Shareholder

I am pleased to present the Annual Report to shareholders for the year ended 31 December 2021.

Review of 2021

The MSCI Developed Markets Index rose strongly over 2021 producing a net total return of 21.8% as extreme fiscal and monetary stimulus drove stock market prices upwards. However, this additional government stimulus has been far smaller outside the developed economies and the net total return on the MSCI Latin America Index was minus 8.1% and MSCI Emerging Markets Index minus 2.5%. Whilst 2021 was a challenging year for Latin American equity markets the poor overall return hides a story of a very diverse tale of the two countries that make up nearly 94% of the portfolio.

Mexico, the second largest constituent of the benchmark index (the MSCI EM Latin America Index), produced a net total return of 22.5%. The portfolio was overweight Mexico throughout 2021, focusing on companies like cement manufacturers that benefited from the pick-up in large scale US infrastructure projects and strong locally focused consumer names. As a major supplier to the US, the Mexican economy benefited from the rapid economic recovery in the US and by the increasing move to bring supply chains closer to their end markets in the US.

The big disappointment was Brazil, where the net total return (on a US Dollar basis) was minus 17.4%. The weakness of the Brazilian Real was a significant factor in this poor performance; in local currency terms the MSCI Brazil Index fell by just 11.2%, which was also the first annual drop since 2015 on a local currency basis.

The portfolio’s overweight positioning in Brazil (which is the largest constituent in the benchmark) was a significant contributor to the disappointing Net Asset Value (NAV) per share performance. The market was specifically hit in Brazil by the poorly handled COVID-19 pandemic, the rapid rise in interest rates (with locals abandoning the market for fixed income funds) and a volatile President who lost popularity as the year went on.

Additional information on the main contributors to and detractors from performance for the period under review is given in the Investment Manager’s Report below.

Throughout the COVID-19 outbreak, the Board has had to adjust its mode of operation to minimise the risk the virus has posed to the health and wellbeing of those working on the management and administration of the Company. The Board has continued to meet regularly (by video conference when required) and the Board has been pleased by the continuing high standard of support it is receiving from its Investment Manager and its other third-party suppliers as the pandemic evolves and working conditions remain difficult. The Board has worked closely with its Investment Manager to ensure that the Company’s operations have not been adversely impacted, that BlackRock and key service providers have established business continuity plans and a good level of service has continued to be maintained.

Performance

Over the year ended 31 December 2021, the Company’s NAV fell by 12.5% in US Dollar terms and on a net total return basis compared to a fall in the benchmark index of 8.1%. In British Pound Sterling (Sterling) terms, the NAV fell by 11.7% over the same period and the benchmark index in Sterling terms fell by 7.3% (all calculations on a net total return basis). The share price fell by 11.8% in US Dollar terms (11.0% in Sterling terms) (both on a total return basis). Details of the factors affecting performance are set out in the Investment Manager’s Report.

Gearing

The Board’s view is that 105% of NAV is the neutral level of gearing over the longer term and that gearing should be used actively in an approximate range of plus or minus 10% around this as ***measured*** at the time that gearing is instigated. These current parameters sit within the Company’s gearing policy, as set out in the investment policy in the Annual Report and Financial Statements, which states that net borrowings are not expected to exceed 25% of net assets under normal circumstances, and the Company’s Articles of Association which limit net borrowings to 100% of capital and reserves. The Board is pleased to note that, despite the high level of uncertainty over the year, the Portfolio Managers have been bold, ambitious and used gearing actively with a low of 105.7% in September 2021 and a high of 116.3% in July 2021. Average gearing for the year to 31 December 2021 was 110.5%.

Revenue return and dividends

Total revenue return for the year was 26.10 cents per share (2020: 14.86 cents per share). The increase of 75% was largely due to the ***exceptionally*** low level of dividends received in 2020 as the COVID-19 pandemic hit portfolio companies’ revenue streams. Notwithstanding this fact, current year revenues are still significantly higher than the more comparable earnings per share of 18.10 cents for the year to 31 December 2019.

Under the Company’s dividend policy, dividends are calculated and paid quarterly based on 1.25% of the US Dollar NAV at close of business on the last working day of March, June, September and December respectively; additional information in respect of the payment timetable is set out on page 106 of the Annual Report and Financial Statements. Dividends will be financed through a combination of available net income in each financial year and revenue and capital reserves. The Company has declared interim dividends totalling 27.56 cents per share in respect of the year ended 31 December 2021 (2020: 23.06 cents per share) as detailed in the table below; this represented a yield of 6.0% based on the Company’s share price at 31 December 2021.

Dividends declared in respect of the year ended 31 December 2021

The dividends paid and declared by the Company in 2021 have been funded from current year revenue, brought forward revenue and capital reserves. As at 31 December 2021, a balance of US$3,829,000 remained in revenue reserves, which is sufficient to cover approximately one and a half quarterly dividend payments at the most recently declared dividend rate of 6.21 cents per share.

Dividends will be funded out of capital reserves to the extent that current year revenue and revenue reserves are insufficient. The Board believes that this removes pressure from the Portfolio Managers to seek a higher income yield from the underlying portfolio itself which could detract from total returns. The Board also believes the Company’s dividend policy will enhance demand for the Company’s shares and help to narrow the Company’s discount, whilst maintaining the portfolio’s ability to generate attractive total returns. It is promising to note that since the dividend policy was introduced in 2018, the Company’s discount has narrowed from 14.9% as at 1 July 2018 to 7.1% as at 31 December 2021.

Performance triggered tender offer

As part of its discount control policy, in 2018 the Board undertook to make a tender offer to shareholders for 24.99% of the issued share capital (excluding treasury shares) of the Company at a tender price reflecting the latest cum-income NAV less 2% and related portfolio realisation costs if, over the four year period from 1 January 2018 to 31 December 2021 (the ‘Calculation Period’), either of the following conditions were met:

the annualised total NAV return of the Company does not exceed the annualised benchmark index (being the MSCI EM Latin America Index) US Dollar total return by more than 100 basis points over the Calculation Period; orthe average daily discount to the cum-income NAV exceeds 12% as calculated with reference to the trading of the ordinary shares over the Calculation Period.

As at 31 December 2021, and over the Calculation Period, the Company had underperformed the Benchmark by 94 basis points on an annualised basis and the Company’s ordinary shares had traded at an average discount to NAV of 11.65%.

As a result, the Board announced on 4 January 2022 that it would make a tender offer to shareholders for 24.99% of the issued share capital of the Company (excluding treasury shares). A copy of the circular setting out the timetable and detailed structure of the tender offer will be posted out to eligible shareholders along with this report, and will also be made available on the Company’s website at[*http://www.blackrock.com/uk/brla*](http://www.blackrock.com/uk/brla). A resolution to implement the tender offer will be put to shareholders for approval at a General Meeting to be held immediately following the conclusion of the Company’s next Annual General Meeting (AGM) to be held on 19 May 2022. All Directors hold shares in the Company, and no Director will exercise his or her option to tender their shareholding.

The making and implementation of the tender offer will be conditional, amongst other things, upon the Company having the required shareholder authority or such shareholder authority being obtained, the Company having sufficient distributable reserves to effect the repurchase of any successfully tendered shares and, having regard to its continuing financial requirements, sufficient cash reserves to settle the relevant transactions with shareholders, the Company’s continuation vote being approved at the Annual General Meeting of shareholders in May 2022, and the Company’s continuing compliance with the Listing Rules and all other applicable laws and regulations.

Discount management and new discount control mechanism

The Directors recognise that it is in the long-term interests of shareholders that shares do not trade at a significant discount to their prevailing NAV and they continue to monitor the discount at which the ordinary shares trade to their prevailing NAV. In the year to 31 December 2021, the cum-income discount on the ordinary shares in Sterling terms has averaged 10.1% and ranged between 5.4% and 14.4%. Investor sentiment towards regional stock markets tends to be quite cyclical as a result of most Latin American economies being more cyclical than those of the broader global economy even though long-term economic growth expectations are strong. Therefore shares of Latin American investment trusts often experience quite volatile levels of discount. Previously, the Board has tried to reduce this volatility by the tender mechanism described above. The Board also offers shareholders the right to vote on whether the Company should continue in existence every two years.

The Board is proposing to adopt a new discount control policy for the four year period from 1 January 2022 to 31 December 2025 as set out in detail in the Strategic Report below. The new discount control mechanism will be a tender for 24.99 per cent of the shares in issue excluding treasury shares (at a tender price reflecting the latest cum-income NAV less 2 per cent and related portfolio realisation costs) subject to the Company not meeting either a performance target or an average discount target over the period. The tender will also be conditional on the passing of the biennial continuation votes at the AGMs in 2024 and 2026. The Board believes that a four year performance target will enable the Investment Manager to take a sufficiently long-term approach to investing in quality companies in the region, and it believes that it is in shareholders’ interests as a whole that this time period for assessing performance be adopted.

In addition, the Board will also seek to renew its existing authority to make market purchases of up to 14.99% of the Company’s ordinary shares to be held, sold, transferred or otherwise dealt with as treasury shares or cancelled upon completion of the purchase at the AGM in May 2022.

ESG and Socially Responsible Investment

As a Board we believe that good Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) behaviour by the companies we invest in is important to the long-term financial success of our Company and are very encouraged that ESG issues are also increasingly at the forefront of investors’ minds. The Latin American economies are large producers to the world of vital food, timber, minerals and oil. These are all areas that are at the forefront of modern concerns about climate change, biodiversity and proportionate and sustainable use of land and ocean resources. The Board is aware that there is significant room for improvement in terms of disclosure and adherence to global best practices for many corporates throughout the Emerging Markets1 area and the Latin American region is no exception to this. The Board is also aware that as a whole the region lags global peers when it comes to ESG best practices.

The Board receives regular reporting from the Portfolio Managers on ESG matters and extensive analysis of our portfolio’s ESG footprint and actively engages with the Portfolio Managers to discuss when significant engagement is required with the management teams of our Company’s portfolio holdings. The Portfolio Managers are supported by the extensive ESG resources within BlackRock and devote a considerable amount of time to understanding the ESG risks and opportunities facing companies and industries in the portfolio. ESG analytics are integrated into the investment ***process*** when weighing up the risk and reward benefits of investment decisions.

The Board believes that communication and engagement with portfolio companies can lead to better outcomes for shareholders and the environment than merely excluding investment in certain areas. It is encouraged by the progress made through BlackRock’s company engagement to encourage sound corporate governance frameworks that promote strong leadership by boards of directors and good management practices contributing to a better outcome for all stakeholders. More information in respect of our approach to ESG can be found on pages 25 to 29 contained within the Annual Report and Financial Statements.

Annual General Meeting

The Company’s Annual General Meeting will be held at the offices of BlackRock at 12 Throgmorton Avenue, London EC2N 2DL on Thursday, 19 May 2022 at 12.00 noon.

Details of the business of the meeting are set out in the Notice of Annual General Meeting on pages 122 to 123 of the Annual Report and Financial Statements.

The Board is delighted to return to in person AGMs and as at present UK Government restrictions on public gatherings are no longer in force in connection with COVID-19, the AGM can be held in the normal way with physical attendance by shareholders. However, shareholders should be aware that it is possible that such restrictions could be reimposed prior to the date of the AGM.

Shareholders who intend to attend the AGM should ensure that they have read and understood the venue requirements for entry to the AGM. These requirements, along with further information on the arrangements for the AGM, can be found in the Directors’ Report on page 54 contained within the Annual Report and Financial Statements. Given the ongoing health issues posed by the COVID-19 virus, there will be no shareholder lunch provided at the AGM although light refreshments will be available. The Board hopes to reinstate the lunch arrangements in future years subject to health and safety considerations permitting.

In the absence of any reimposition of restrictions, the Board very much looks forward to meeting with shareholders at the AGM.

Outlook

After a challenging year in 2021 - particularly for Brazil - the region has had a very strong start to 2022. As global economies have reopened post the COVID-19 pandemic, the significant amounts of fiscal stimulus awash in the economy (particularly in the US) have driven commodity prices ever higher. This has subsequently been compounded by the recent devastating events in the Ukraine which have constricted the supply of key commodities dramatically and pushed prices up even further. Latin America has in abundance many key resources such as lithium, oil, iron ore, copper and important foodstuffs like wheat and soybeans. Some of the longest-life and low-cost reserves are in Brazil, Chile and Peru. Nearly 75% of exports in Latin America are linked to commodities (compared, for example, to 25% for Asia).

Aggressive interest rate hikes in several Latin American countries to bring inflation under control in 2021 have dramatically increased the interest rate differential with the US and this should benefit Latin American currencies (which are already amongst the best performing in the world in the first quarter of 2022). Currencies and equity markets should also benefit from the fact that the region is physically and politically removed from the epicentre of the conflict in Europe. The region has low exposure to Russia and overall positive correlations with higher commodity prices. The one caveat is Brazil imports 85% of its fertilizer needs and a fifth of that comes from Russia. The Brazilian government is already busy with a long-term plan to produce more local fertiliser.

All of these factors together mean that our Portfolio Managers are optimistic about the outlook for the region - especially Brazil which is the largest determinant of the Company’s overall performance. Food and energy prices are rising rapidly. Brazil will benefit from the overall increase in these prices because it has a much more diversified commodity export base compared to other countries in Latin America (although an important caveat here is that these higher prices could drive local food insecurity or food protectionism).

The other key area to watch in 2022 is politics. The presidential election in Brazil will be monitored carefully given the possible return of former left wing President Lula who is currently leading in the polls. He appears at the moment to be presenting himself as a ‘moderate’ alternative. The market could respond dramatically to all of this political volatility if Lula appears to move away from any pragmatic stances.

Higher commodity prices, solid earnings momentum, historically cheap currencies and equity markets especially in Brazil create the potential for attractive returns for the region as a whole.

Carolan Dobson

Chairman

31 March 2022

1    Emerging Markets in this respect defined as the MSCI Emerging Markets Index.

INVESTMENT MANAGER’S REPORT

Market Overview

In contrast to a very strong start to 2022, with Brazil one of the top performing markets in the world, 2021 was a challenging year for Latin American markets. The region was down over the year by 8.1%1 underperforming Emerging Markets which fell by 2.5%1 and Developed Markets which rose by 21.8%1. Throughout the region rising inflation forced central banks to hike interest rates, creating headwinds for local equity markets and a heavy election calendar and polarised presidential elections created additional uncertainties for investors at a time when economies were still recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Against this backdrop, the performance narrative was dominated by two countries: Brazil and Mexico. Brazil, the largest constituent in the Company’s benchmark, detracted the most from performance, falling by 17.4%1. The Brazilian market was weighed down by successive COVID-19 waves followed by higher inflation and the need for steep hikes in interest rates. Higher fiscal spending to offset economic disruption from COVID-19 put an additional burden on the already stretched debt dynamics in the country. Mexico in contrast was the standout star performer of the year, with markets rising by 22.5%1. Mexico’s ability to outshine in 2021 was a function of the reopening of the economy, which continued apace as the pandemic figures (cases and mortality rates) remained under relative control combined with the benefits from a strong US recovery partially helped by the continued trend of near-shoring supply chains.

Following a challenging 2021, Latin American equities have delivered a strong start to 2022, proving to be a bright star in turbulent times for global markets. We are confident that there are an abundance of reasons to be optimistic towards Latin American equities which we believe are underpinned by an attractive combination of higher commodity prices, geopolitical risk diversification, rapidly improving earnings momentum, and favourable valuations. As the world rebuilds after the pandemic, Latin America is a prime beneficiary of recovery in the global economy. Vast stimulus in the US and economic recovery across the world has pushed up demand for commodities at a time when supply shortages are being turbocharged by geopolitical conflict. Latin America is one of the most abundant regions in the world for key inputs such as lithium, iron ore, oil & gas and copper and features some of the longest-life reserves at a low cost in Brazil, Chile and Peru. There is no doubt that Latin America will be depended on heavily to fill a void being left by resource rich countries in conflict. Furthermore, aggressive rate hikes in several Latin American economies have sharply increased the interest rate differential with the US, supporting the case for local currencies to appreciate. In the short-term, the interest rate differential looks set to widen, further underpinning Latin American currencies which are among the best performing early on in 2022. Additionally, with the region’s relatively high commodity exposure, Latin American equities have seen a major improvement in earnings momentum, by far the largest gain among Emerging Market regions. As earnings momentum remains positive and accelerating, we view valuations as attractive, with the region trading on 8.6x 12-month forward Price to Earnings ratios, more than a 25% discount to its long-term history.

While we are optimistic about the outlook, we remain cognisant of the risks which could weigh on regional economic growth in the near term. Across Latin America, a growing middle class is seeing domestic consumption pressured from rising inflation and increasing domestic interest rates. Latin American economies were boosted throughout the pandemic, for the most part, by expansionary monetary and fiscal policies. Food and energy absorb a significant amount of disposable income and it is these areas where prices are rising fastest. This has led to a rapid near-term rebound in demand given the reopening of economies at a time where rising energy costs, low inventories and supply chain issues have led to inflation exceeding expectations across the region. Central banks have reacted aggressively by hiking domestic interest rates to tame intensifying inflation pressures. The impact of rising domestic rates will weigh on growth prospects, at the margin, but could be offset by continued loose fiscal policy.

Politics remains an area that presents several opportunities and challenges for Latin American markets. There have been key elections across the region, with some transformational candidates coming into power on the back of aggressive campaign promises. While history in past elections has shown that political fears based on radical reform initiatives tend to be overblown, it nonetheless creates volatility, which can result in attractive valuations for stocks within our opportunity set. We actively seek-out and look to take advantage of these short-term dislocations in valuations relative to underlying bottom-up fundamentals of the companies we invest in given our long-term perspective on markets. Over the course of 2022, we will see presidential elections in Colombia and Brazil and one of the biggest debates is the amount of government spending needed to continue to support development. The outcome of these debates will have profound impact on growth going forward.

In conclusion, rising commodity prices have underpinned a major improvement in earnings momentum for Latin American equities. As the region has experienced disappointing returns in recent years, the asset class enters the year as undervalued, under-owned and under-appreciated. The benefits of higher commodity prices, solid earnings momentum and cheap currencies have the potential to lead to attractive returns for the region going forward.

Portfolio positioning

Performance review

Our positioning in the portfolio in 2021 evolved throughout the year as we looked to take advantage of attractive valuations in the region. We started the year underweight Peru while maintaining an overweight to Mexico and Brazil. As the year went on, our country positioning favoured countries with superior fundamentals determined by a strong sovereign credit profile and those economies which benefit most from the rebound in trade with US and China markets. We identified Chile and Mexico as meeting these criteria and added accordingly, while more indebted and less open economies, such as Argentina, Brazil and Colombia struggled to sustain above-trend growth we saw from the post COVID-19 recovery.

We saw Mexico as a notable beneficiary of a growing emphasis on near-shoring and a strong economic recovery in the US. Given Mexico’s abundance of productive and relatively low-cost labour combined with a strong auto-manufacturing pedigree, we believe the country should be a beneficiary of additional investments from multinational companies who are looking to diversify their supply chains. Long overdue, large-scale infrastructure programmes in the US have increased the outlook for demand for cement production and we hold positions in one of the large Mexican cement companies which supply these needs. Over the year, we added to Mexican cement company, Cemex, and the company outperformed due to increased volumes and prices in Mexico and the United States. We also added to Mexican companies such as telecommunications company América Movil and convenience store retail company Fomento Economico, to gain exposure to Mexico’s reopening trade.

We have also been favourable toward Chile. It has had one of the highest vaccination rates in the world, with over 90% of the population receiving at least one jab by year end 2021\*. This has allowed a strong economic recovery, that the Company accessed through exposure to banks and department stores in the region. As the December 2021 presidential election created some volatility in the short term, we took the opportunity to add to the Chilean department store chain, Falabella, given the company’s position to benefit from this gradual economic reopening and improving consumption trends.

Over the year we also added to Copa Holdings, a Panamanian airline, as we believe pricing power has increased. The company is navigating through the COVID-19 crisis well and we believe it will end up in a better competitive position given that multiple regional competitors are going through financial restructuring. The company is well positioned for return of demand to underserved markets with limited substitutions for air travel.

\*    Source: Our World in Data, 2 January 2022.

Current portfolio positioning

As in 2020, the portfolio ended 2021 with its largest country overweight in Mexico.

Looking forward after outperforming for much of the year, valuations are not as discounted in Mexico today as they are in other countries. While Argentina shows as a regional overweight, the Company holds a single holding in the country through IT consulting company, Globant. We like the company for its rapid revenue growth with expanding margins and a strong set of accelerators that leverage Artificial Intelligence and other technologies to reinvent key aspects of organisations.

The portfolio started off and also ended, the year with a slight overweight to Brazil. There is considerable uncertainty ahead of the November 2022 election and some strains are appearing in the public finances. That being said, we are finding plenty of opportunity at the individual stock level. We are looking at traditional banks and insurance companies that should be beneficiaries of rising interest rates. We also see opportunities in healthcare, as countries aim to rectify the weaknesses in their health infrastructure exposed by COVID-19. Over the year we added to Rede D’Or São Luiz, a Brazilian healthcare company. The company’s earnings momentum remains strong as it accelerates its leadership position through both organic expansion and acquisitions in a market with attractive long term growth opportunities. We also initiated a position in XP Inc, a Brazilian investment management company, as we continue to see the company taking share of wallet from incumbent banks. The company has an attractive mix of profitable growth and continues to display operational momentum from scale gains. Similarly, we added to B3, the Brazilian stock exchange, on the back of resilient growth in cash flows which will benefit from continued maturation of the domestic equity market as the country remains on the path of a broadening and deepening of financial markets.

Throughout 2021, and up to the date of this report, the Company did not have any exposure to Colombia. Colombia is highly dependent on oil (exports, fiscal revenues, index exposure) and has a fiscal deficit that is very likely to worsen from here if structural reforms are not enacted. As we get closer to the presidential election in the second quarter of 2022, we expect the equity markets and the currency to face volatility where we may see an opportunity to reexamine our exposure at more attractive valuations.

At the sector level, we are overweight financials and real estate, and underweight consumer staples and energy.

Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) issues

It is 2022, and almost 40% of firms in Latin America still do not have any female representation in their senior management teams. It is equally disturbing that there are no female CEOs amongst the close to 200 firms in our investible universe. These figures are in noticeable contrast to global levels, where only 10% of firms are headed by all-male management teams and 5.5% have female CEOs. Female executives make up 13.4% of senior management teams in Latin America, compared to just under 20% globally. Whilst diversity in Latin America has long trailed global levels, the wide acceptance of the benefits of diversity, and the growth of ESG-focused investing, has resulted in a stark gap in representation between Latin American and global firms. With just 13.3% gender diversity at junior management level (where these figures are disclosed), the talent pipeline in the region also underlines that more concrete efforts need to be made by Latin American firms. While there are considerable differences between countries and sectors, the overriding conclusion is that gender diversity remains very low.

Furthermore, as society grows increasingly aware of climate risks, the need for biodiversity and the proportionate use of natural resources, the global emphasis on ESG continues to intensify and sustainability is increasingly at the forefront of decision making for governments and regulators. As Portfolio Managers, we devote a considerable amount of time to understanding the ESG risks and opportunities facing companies and industries in the portfolio. ESG analytics are integrated into the investment ***process*** and it should be noted that we believe there is a great deal of improvement that needs to be made in terms of disclosure and adherence to global best practices for corporates throughout the region. In our opinion, the Latin American region lags global peers when it comes to ESG best practices and we believe BlackRock’s communication and engagement with companies can lead to better outcomes for all stakeholders. As Portfolio Managers, we work very closely with, and are supported by, the extensive ESG resources at BlackRock which include BlackRock’s Investment Stewardship Team, Sustainable Investing Team and the Risk & Quantitative Analysis Team. We aim to engage with the directors and management of the companies that we invest in to advocate for sound corporate governance and sustainable business practices that result in long–term value creation for shareholders. More information in respect of BlackRock’s approach as a firm to ESG and shareholder engagement is given on pages 25 to 29 of the Annual Report and Financial Statements.

Outlook

A void in critical materials, both hard and soft commodities, has emerged in the wake of the Russia/Ukraine conflict, turbocharging an already supply-constrained global commodity backdrop. The quest for alternative suppliers and modified value chains has been kicked into high gear. Latin America is well situated to fill this gap given its abundance of natural resources. History has shown that strong raw material prices shine a favourable light on Latin American equity markets considering that in the last three commodity booms (since 1999), Latin American equities rose by an average of +203% (Brazil +287%). Additionally, when looking at 2002 (when China entered the World Trade Organisation) to the global financial crash in 2008, Brazilian stocks returned +672%. Despite the surge in commodity prices since March 2020, Latin American stocks have lagged due to subpar growth, political uncertainty, fiscal challenges and devastating COVID-19 waves. Conversely, the region trades at the widest discounts to historical multiples (Price to Earnings ratios, Price to Book Valuation, Enterprise Value to Sales ratios, EV/EBITDA (Earnings before interest, tax, depreciation and amortisation)) relative to Emerging Market peers (–1.4 standard deviations on average vs –0.1 for Asia-X, –0.6 for CEEMEA (Central and Eastern Europe, Middle East and Africa)). We would argue given current natural resource prices, commodity economies in the region are no longer ‘fragile’ given competitive currency exchange rates, current account surpluses, manageable deficits and large foreign currency reserves. We see scope for a growth and equity performance catch-up, especially if China reflates and/or signals for monetary ease.

Brazil is by far the largest, deepest and most liquid Emerging Market exposed to a new commodity supercycle. We acknowledge risks of soaring inflation in an election year, but we believe these concerns are largely offset by:

a major positive shock to terms of trade;Brazil indices are packed with big and liquid commodity stocks (44% of MSCI Brazil);the Brazilian central bank is ahead of the curve in its tightening cycle (liftoff was in March 2021), which saw rates moving from a historical low of 2% to 11.75% as of end of the first quarter of 2022;Brazil has historically rallied during periods of tighter US monetary policy (+57% IBOV average US Dollar returns in the first year of Federal Reserve hikes, dating back to 1998); andthe Brazilian Real ended 2021 as undervalued and can boost hard currency-denominated returns (historical appreciation of +18% in first year post the Federal Reserve initial hike). Brazilian stocks are also benefiting from a surge in commodity prices and Russia’s exclusion in benchmark Emerging Market indices, as well as hopes that the winner of October’s presidential election will not derail the nation’s economic policy.

While there remain a number of economic and political challenges for Latin America in 2022, we believe many of its troubles should be behind it. The interest rate cycle may start to turn as inflationary pressures ease in the back half of 2022 following spikes early this year. The global economic recovery should create continued demand for natural resources, which Latin America has in abundance. Vaccination rates across the region are also high, and companies have grown more adept at dealing with mobility restrictions. We believe all these factors should allow for stronger economic growth in the years ahead. At the same time, we believe valuations are attractive. By global investment standards, Latin America is highly under-owned and rising interest rates have done little to improve its popularity. Higher rates have also taken some domestic equity investors out of the market as yields in fixed income have risen. However, we see the opportunity for this trend starting to reverse in 2022. Entering the year, expectations are low for Latin American equities, but there are many great companies benefiting from rapidly changing factors which can positively impact the region. We believe the future may be more positive than many expect.

Sam Vecht and Ed Kuczma

BlackRock Investment Management (UK) Limited

31 March 2022

1     All calculations in US Dollars on a net total return basis.

TEN LARGEST INVESTMENTS

as at 31 December 2021

1+ Vale(2020: 3rd)

Materials

Market value – American depositary share (ADS): US$16,147,000

Share of investments: 7.6% (2020: 8.1%)

is one of the world’s largest mining companies, with other business in logistics, energy and steelmaking. Vale is the world’s largest producer of iron ore and nickel but also operates in the coal, copper, and manganese and ferro-alloys sectors.

2- Petrobrás(2020: 1st)

Energy

Market value – American depositary receipt (ADR): US$9,804,000

Market value – Preference shares ADR: US$6,180,000

Share of investments: 7.5% (2020: 9.2%)

is a Brazilian integrated oil and gas company, operating in the exploration and production, refining, marketing, transportation, petrochemicals, oil product distribution, natural gas, electricity, chemical-gas and biofuel segments of the industry. The company controls significant assets across Africa, North and South America, Europe and Asia, with a majority of production based in Brazil.

3+ América Movil(2020: 5th)

Communication Services

Market value - ADR: US$15,125,000

Share of investments: 7.1% (2020: 4.2%)

is the leading provider of integrated telecommunications services in Latin America, with wireless and fixed-line presence in Latin America, the US, and Central and Eastern Europe. The company has the largest wireless subscriber base in the world outside of China and India.

4- Banco Bradesco(2020: 2nd)

Financials

Market value - ADR: US$11,319,000

Share of investments: 5.3% (2020: 8.5%)

is one of Brazil’s largest private sector banks. The company divides its operations in two main areas – banking services and insurance services, management of complementary private pension plans and savings bonds.

5- B3(2020: 4th)

Financials

Market value – Ordinary shares: US$9,749,000

Share of investments: 4.6% (2020: 4.9%)

is a stock exchange located in Brazil, providing trading services in an exchange and OTC environment. B3’s scope of activities include the creation and management of trading systems, clearing, settlement, deposit and registration for the main classes of securities, from equities and corporate fixed income securities to currency derivatives, structured transactions and interest rates, and ***agricultural*** commodities. B3 also acts as a central counterparty for most of the trades carried out in its markets and offers central depository and registration services.

6+ Walmart de México y Centroamérica(2020: 7th)

Consumer Staples

Market value – Ordinary shares: US$9,637,000

Share of investments: 4.5% (2020: 3.5%)

is the Mexican and Central American division of Walmart Stores Inc, with operations in Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua and Costa Rica. The company operates eight brands in the region, covering the discount, winery, supermarket and supercenter segments.

7+ Grupo Financiero Banorte(2020: 13th)

Financials

Market value – Ordinary shares: US$9,451,000

Share of investments: 4.5% (2020: 2.5%)

is a Mexican banking and financial services holding company and is one of the largest financial groups in the country. It operates as a universal bank and provides a wide array of products and services through its broker dealer, annuities & insurance companies, retirements savings funds (Afore), mutual funds, leasing & factoring company and warehousing.

8+ Cemex(2020: 10th)

Materials

Market value - ADR: US$7,674,000

Share of investments: 3.6% (2020: 3.1%)

is a Mexican multinational building materials company and is one of the world’s largest global building materials companies. It manufactures and distributes cement, ready-mix concrete and aggregates in more than 50 countries.

9+ Credicorp(2020: n/a)

Financials

Market value – Ordinary shares: US$7,475,000

Share of investments: 3.5% (2020: n/a)

is a Peruvian financial company that was a top contributor as the stock continues to perform well following a period of volatility in the first half of 2021 surrounding the Peruvian presidential elections.

10+ Grupo Aeroportuario del Pacífico(2020: 16th)

Industrials

Market value – ADS: US$4,565,000

Market value – Ordinary shares – US$1,797,000

Share of investments: 3.1% (2020: 2.3%)

is a Mexican airport operator and it benefited the Company as the stock has outperformed following air traffic recovery.

All percentages reflect the value of the holding as a percentage of total investments. For this purpose, where more than one class of securities is held, these have been aggregated.

Together, the ten largest investments represent 51.3% of the total investments (ten largest investments as at 31 December 2020: 51.8%).

PORTFOLIO OF INVESTMENTS

as at 31 December 2021

1    Composite units include 1 ordinary share and 4 preference shares.

2    Unlisted securities.

All investments are in equity shares unless otherwise stated.

The total number of investments held at 31 December 2021 was 40 (31 December 2020: 43). At 31 December 2021, the Company did not hold any equity interests comprising more than 3% of any company’s share capital (31 December 2020: nil).

PORTFOLIO ANALYSIS

as at 31 December 2021

Geographical Weighting (gross market exposure) vs MSCI EM Latin America Index

Sources: BlackRock and MSCI.

Sector and geographical allocations

Source: BlackRock.

ENVIRONMENTAL, SOCIAL AND GOVERNANCE ISSUES AND APPROACH

The Board’s approach

Environmental, social and governance (ESG) issues can present both opportunities and threats to long-term investment performance. The securities within the Company’s investment remit are typically large producers of vital food, timber, minerals and oil supplies, and consequently face many ESG challenges and headwinds as they grapple with the impact of their operations on the environment and resources. The Board is also aware that there is significant room for improvement in terms of disclosure and adherence to global best practices for corporates throughout the Latin American region, which lags global peers when it comes to ESG best practice. These ESG issues faced by companies in the Latin American investment universe are a key focus of the Board, and it is committed to a diligent oversight of the activities of the Manager in these areas. Whilst the Company does not exclude investment in stocks on ESG criteria, ESG analytics are integrated into the investment ***process*** when weighing up the risk and reward benefits of investment decisions and the Board believes that communication and engagement with portfolio companies is important and can lead to better outcomes for shareholders and the environment than merely excluding investment in certain areas.

More information on BlackRock’s global approach to ESG integration, as well as activity specific to the BlackRock Latin American Investment Trust plc portfolio, is set out below. BlackRock has defined ESG integration as the practice of incorporating material ESG information and consideration of sustainability risks into investment decisions in order to enhance risk-adjusted returns. ESG integration does not change the Company’s investment objective. More information on sustainability risks may be found in the AIFMD Fund Disclosures document of the Company available on the Company’s website at[*https://www.blackrock.com/uk/individual/literature/policies/itc-disclosureblackrock-latin-america-trust-plc.pdf*](https://www.blackrock.com/uk/individual/literature/policies/itc-disclosureblackrock-latin-america-trust-plc.pdf) .

BlackRock Latin American Investment Trust plc - engagement with portfolio companies in 2021

Given the Board’s belief in the importance of engagement and communication with portfolio companies, it receives regular reports from the Manager in respect of activity undertaken for the year under review. The Board reviews these closely and asks for further updates and progress reports from the Portfolio Managers in respect of evolving ESG issues and the action being taken where appropriate. The Board notes that over the year to 31 December 2021, 61 total company engagements were held with the management teams of 23 portfolio companies representing 76% of the portfolio by value at 31 December 2021. Additional information is set out in the tables that follow.

1    Source: BlackRock and Institutional Shareholder Services as at 31 December 2021.

2    Source: BlackRock. Company valuation as included in the portfolio at 31 December 2021 as a percentage of the total portfolio value.

Engagement Themes \*1

\*Engagements include multiple company meetings during the year with the same company. Most engagement conversations cover multiple topics and are based on BlackRock vote guidelines and BlackRock’s engagement priorities can be found at: [*https://www.blackrock.com/corporate/aboutus/investment-stewardship#engagement-priorities*](https://www.blackrock.com/corporate/aboutus/investment-stewardship#engagement-priorities). The numbers in the tables above reflect the number of meetings at which a particular topic is discussed.

1 Sources: ISS Proxy Exchange and BlackRock Investment Stewardship.

The importance and challenges of considering ESG when investing in the Latin American Sector and BlackRock’s approach to ESG Integration

1    Source: BlackRock’s 2021 voting spotlight report which can be found at[*https://www.blackrock.com/corporate/literature/publication/2021-voting-spotlight-full-report.pdf*](https://www.blackrock.com/corporate/literature/publication/2021-voting-spotlight-full-report.pdf).

2    The data in this table applies to the BlackRock’s Investment Stewardship Team’s engagements globally across all BlackRock-managed portfolios.

BlackRock’s approach to ESG integration

BlackRock believes that sustainability risk – and climate risk in particular - now equates to investment risk, and this will drive a profound reassessment of risk and asset values as investors seek to react to the impact of climate policy changes. This in turn, in BlackRock's view, is likely to drive a significant reallocation of capital away from traditional carbon intensive industries over the next decade. BlackRock believes that carbon-intensive companies will play an integral role in unlocking the full potential of the energy transition, and to do this, they must be prepared to adapt, innovate and pivot their strategies towards to a low carbon economy.

As part of BlackRock’s structured investment ***process***, ESG risks and opportunities (including sustainability/climate risk) are considered within the portfolio management team’s fundamental analysis of companies and industries and the Company’s portfolio managers work closely with BlackRock's Investment Stewardship Team to assess the governance quality of companies and investigate any potential issues, risks or opportunities.

As part of their approach to ESG integration, the portfolio managers use ESG information when conducting research and due diligence on new investments and again when monitoring investments in the portfolio. In particular, portfolio managers at BlackRock now have access to 1,200 key ESG performance indicators in Aladdin (BlackRock's proprietary trading system) from third-party data providers. BlackRock’s internal sustainability research framework scoring is also available alongside third-party ESG scores in core portfolio management tools.  BlackRock’s access to company management allows it to engage on issues that are identified through questioning management teams and conducting site visits. In conjunction with the portfolio management team, BlackRock Investment Stewardship Team meets with boards of companies frequently to evaluate how they are strategically managing their longer-term issues, including those surrounding ESG and the potential impact these may have on company financials. BlackRock's and the portfolio management team’s understanding of ESG issues is further supported by BlackRock’s Sustainable Investment Team (BSI). BSI look to advance ESG research and integration, active engagement and the development of sustainable investment solutions across the firm. ESG integration does not change the Company's investment objective, or constrain the Investment Manager’s investable universe, and does not mean that an ESG or impact focused investment strategy or any exclusionary screens have been or will be adopted by the Company. Similarly, ESG integration does not determine the extent to which the Company may be impacted by sustainability risks.

Investment Stewardship

As a fiduciary to its clients, BlackRock has built its business to protect and grow the value of clients’ assets. As part of this fiduciary duty to its clients, BlackRock is committed to promoting sound corporate governance through engagement with investee companies, development of proxy voting policies that support best governance practices and also through wider engagement on public policy issues.

Global Principles

BlackRock’s approach to corporate governance and stewardship is explained in its Global Principles. These high-level Principles are the framework for BlackRock’s more detailed, market-specific voting guidelines, all of which are published on the BlackRock website. The Principles describe BlackRock’s philosophy on stewardship (including how it monitors and engages with companies), its policy on voting, its integrated approach to stewardship matters and how it deals with conflicts of interest. These apply across relevant asset classes and products as permitted by investment strategies. BlackRock reviews its Global Principles annually and updates them as necessary to reflect in market standards, evolving governance practice and insights gained from engagement over the prior year. BlackRock’s Global Principles are available on its website at[*https://www.blackrock.com/corporate/literature/fact-sheet/blk-responsible-investment-engprinciples-global.pdf*](https://www.blackrock.com/corporate/literature/fact-sheet/blk-responsible-investment-engprinciples-global.pdf).

Market-specific proxy voting guidelines

BlackRock’s voting guidelines are intended to help clients and companies understand its thinking on key governance matters. They are the benchmark against which it assesses a company’s approach to corporate governance and the items on the agenda to be voted on at the shareholder meeting. BlackRock applies its guidelines pragmatically, taking into account a company’s unique circumstances where relevant. BlackRock informs voting decisions through research and engage as necessary. BlackRock reviews its voting guidelines annually and updates them as necessary to reflect changes in market standards, evolving governance practice and insights gained from engagement over the prior year.

BlackRock’s market-specific voting guidelines are available on its website at [*https://www.blackrock.com/corporate/about-us/investment-stewardship#principles-and-guidelines*](https://www.blackrock.com/corporate/about-us/investment-stewardship#principles-and-guidelines).

In 2021, BlackRock explicitly asked that all companies disclose a business plan aligned with the goal of limiting global warming to well below 2ºC, consistent with achieving net zero global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 2050. BlackRock viewed these disclosures as essential to helping investors assess a company’s ability to transition its business to a low carbon world and to capture value-creation opportunities created by the climate transition.  BlackRock also asked that companies align their disclosures to the Task Force on Climate-related Financial Disclosures (TCFD) framework and the SASB standards. For 2022, BlackRock is evolving its perspective on sustainability reporting to recognise that companies may use standards other than that of the SASB and reiterates its ask for metrics that are industry - or company - specific. BlackRock is also encouraging companies to demonstrate that their plans are resilient under likely decarbonisation pathways, and the global aspiration to limit warming to 1.5°C. BlackRock is also asking companies to disclose how considerations related to having a reliable energy supply and just transition affect their plans.  More information in respect of BlackRock’s investment stewardship approach to sustainable investing can be found at[*https://www.blackrock.com/corporate/literature/publication/blk-commentary-climate-risk-and-energy-transition.pdf*](https://www.blackrock.com/corporate/literature/publication/blk-commentary-climate-risk-and-energy-transition.pdf).

BlackRock has been a member of Climate Action 100+ since 2020 and has aligned its engagement and stewardship priorities to UN Sustainable Development Goals (including Gender Equality and Affordable and Clean Energy).  A map of how BlackRock Investment Stewardship Team's engagement priorities align to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) can be found at[*https://www.blackrock.com/corporate/literature/publication/blk-engagement-priorities-aligned-to-sdgs.pdf*](https://www.blackrock.com/corporate/literature/publication/blk-engagement-priorities-aligned-to-sdgs.pdf).

BlackRock is committed to transparency in terms of disclosure on its engagement with companies and voting rationales and is committed to voting against management to the extent that they have not demonstrated sufficient progress on ESG issues.  This year, BlackRock voted against or withheld votes from 6,560 directors globally at 3,400 different companies driven by concerns regarding director independence, executive compensation, insufficient progress on board diversity, and overcommitted directors, reflecting our intensified focus on sustainability risks. In the 2020-21 proxy year, BlackRock voted against 255 directors and against 319 companies for climate-related concerns that could negatively affect long-term shareholder value. More detail in respect of BlackRock's engagement and voting history can be found at[*https://www.blackrock.com/corporate/literature/publication/2021-voting-spotlight-full-report.pdf*](https://www.blackrock.com/corporate/literature/publication/2021-voting-spotlight-full-report.pdf).

BlackRock also publishes voting bulletins explaining its vote decision, and the engagement and analysis underpinning it, on certain high-profile proposals at company shareholder meetings. Vote bulletins for 2021 can be found at [*https://www.blackrock.com/corporate/about-us/investment-stewardship#vote-bulletins*](https://www.blackrock.com/corporate/about-us/investment-stewardship#vote-bulletins).

BlackRock's reporting and disclosures

In terms of its own reporting, BlackRock believes that the SASB provides a clear set of standards for reporting sustainability information across a wide range of issues, from labour practices to data privacy to business ethics. For evaluating and reporting climate-related risks, as well as the related governance issues that are essential to managing them, the TCFD provides a valuable framework. BlackRock recognises that reporting to these standards requires significant time, analysis, and effort. BlackRock's 2021 TCFD report can be found at[*https://www.blackrock.com/corporate/literature/continuous-disclosure-and-important-information/tcfd-report-2021-blkinc.pdf*](https://www.blackrock.com/corporate/literature/continuous-disclosure-and-important-information/tcfd-report-2021-blkinc.pdf).

STRATEGIC REPORT

The Directors present the Strategic Report of the Company for the year ended 31 December 2021.

Objective

The Company’s objective is to secure long-term capital growth and an attractive total return primarily through investing in quoted securities in Latin America.

Strategy, business model and investment policy

The Company invests in accordance with the objective given above. The Board is collectively responsible to shareholders for the long-term success of the Company and is its governing body. There is a clear division of responsibility between the Board and the Manager. Matters for the Board include setting the Company’s strategy, including its investment objective and policy, setting limits on gearing (both bank borrowings and the effect of derivatives), capital structure, governance, and appointing and monitoring of performance of service providers, including the Manager.

The Company’s business model follows that of an externally managed investment trust; therefore the Company does not have any employees and outsources its activities to third party service providers including the Manager who is the principal service provider.

In accordance with the Alternative Investment Fund Managers’ Directive (AIFMD), as implemented, retained and onshored in the UK, the Company is an Alternative Investment Fund (AIF). BlackRock Fund Managers Limited (the Manager) is the Company’s Alternative Investment Fund Manager.

The management of the investment portfolio and the administration of the Company have been contractually delegated to the Manager who in turn (with the permission of the Company) has delegated certain investment management and other ancillary services to BlackRock Investment Management (UK) Limited (BIM (UK) or the Investment Manager). The Manager, operating under guidelines determined by the Board, has direct responsibility for the decisions relating to the day-to-day running of the Company and is accountable to the Board for the investment, financial and operating performance of the Company.

The Company delegates fund accounting services to the Manager, which in turn sub-delegates these services to The Bank of New York Mellon (International) Limited. Other service providers include the Depositary, The Bank of New York Mellon (International) Limited and the Registrar, Computershare Investor Services PLC.

Details of the contractual terms with these service providers are set out in the Directors’ Report contained within the Annual Report and Financial Statements.

Our strategy is that the portfolio will be chosen from a spread of companies which are listed in, or whose main activities are in, Latin America.

As an actively managed fund our primary aims over the medium term are significant outperformance of our benchmark index (the MSCI EM Latin America Index – net total return basis) and most of our competitors on a risk adjusted basis. Our portfolio and performance will diverge from the returns obtained simply by investing in the index.

Investment policy

As a closed end company we are able to adopt a longer-term investment horizon, and therefore may, when appropriate, have a higher proportion of less liquid mid and smaller capitalisation companies than comparable open ended funds.

The portfolio is subject to a number of geographical restrictions relative to the benchmark index but the Investment Manager is not constrained from investing outside the index. For Brazil, Mexico, Chile, Argentina, Peru, Colombia and Venezuela, the portfolio weighting is limited to plus or minus 20% of the index weighting for each of those countries. For all other Latin American countries the limit is plus or minus 10% of the index weighting. Additionally, the Company may invest in the securities of quoted companies whose main activities are in Latin America but which are not established or incorporated in the region or quoted on a local exchange.

The Company’s policy is that up to 10% of the gross assets of the portfolio may be invested in unquoted securities.

The Company will not hold more than 15% of the market capitalisation of any one company and no more than 15% of the Company’s investments will be held in any one company as at the date any such investment is made.

No more than 15% of the gross assets of the portfolio shall be invested in other UK listed investment companies (including other investment trusts).

The Company may deal in derivatives (including options, futures and forward currency transactions) for the purposes of efficient portfolio management (i.e. for the purpose of reducing, transferring or eliminating investment risk in the underlying investments of a collective investment undertaking, including any technique or instrument used to provide protection against exchange and credit risks). No more than 20% of the Company’s portfolio by value may be under option at any given time.

The Company may underwrite or sub-underwrite any issue or offer for the sale of investments. No such commitment will be entered into if, at that time, the aggregate of such investments would exceed 10% of the net asset value of the Company or any such individual investment would exceed 3% of the net asset value of the Company.

The Company may, from time to time, use borrowings to gear its investment portfolio or in order to fund the market purchase of its own ordinary shares. Under the Company’s Articles of Association, the net borrowings of the Company may not exceed 100% of the Company’s adjusted capital and reserves (as defined in the Glossary contained within the Annual Report and Financial Statements). However, net borrowings are not expected to exceed 25% of net assets under normal circumstances. The Investment Manager may also hold cash or cash-equivalent securities when it considers it to be advantageous to do so.

The Company’s financial statements are maintained in US Dollars. Although many investments are likely to be denominated and quoted in currencies other than in US Dollars, the Company does not currently employ a hedging policy against fluctuations in exchange rates.

No material change will be made to the Company’s investment policy without shareholder approval.

Investment ***process***

An overview of the investment ***process*** is set out below.

The Investment Manager’s main focus is to invest in securities that provide opportunities for strong capital appreciation relative to our benchmark. We aim to maintain a concentrated portfolio of high conviction investment ideas that typically consists of companies with a combination of mispriced growth potential and/or display attributes of sustained value creation that are underappreciated by the financial markets.

The Manager’s experienced research analyst team conducts on the ground research, meeting with target companies, competitors, suppliers and others in the region in order to generate investment ideas for portfolio construction. In addition, the investment team meets regularly with government officials, central bankers, industry regulators and consultants.

Final investment decisions result from a combination of bottom-up, company specific research with top-down, macro analysis.

Discount management and implementation of tender

As part of its discount control policy, in 2018 the Board put in place a discount control mechanism whereby it undertook to make a tender offer to shareholders for 24.99 per cent of the issued share capital (excluding treasury shares) of the Company at a tender price reflecting the latest cum-income Net Asset Value (NAV) less 2 per cent and related portfolio realisation costs if, over the four year period from 1 January 2018 to 31 December 2021 (the ‘Calculation Period’), either of the following conditions were met:

the annualised total NAV return of the Company did not exceed the annualised benchmark index (being the MSCI EM Latin America Index) US Dollar total return by more than 100 basis points over the Calculation Period; orthe average daily discount to the cum-income NAV exceeded 12 per cent as calculated with reference to the trading of the ordinary shares over the Calculation Period.

As at 31 December 2021, and over the Calculation Period, the Company had underperformed the Benchmark by 94 basis points on an annualised basis and the Company’s ordinary shares had traded at an average discount to NAV of 11.65 per cent.

As a result, the Board announced on 4 January 2022 that it would make a tender offer to shareholders for 24.99 per cent of the issued share capital of the Company (excluding treasury shares). Full details of the tender ***process*** and the terms and conditions of the tender offer and the timetable for implementation can be found in the tender circular which will be posted to shareholders along with this annual report; a copy will also be made available on the Company's website at[*http://www.blackrock.com/uk/brla*](http://www.blackrock.com/uk/brla). A resolution to implement the tender offer will be put to shareholders for their approval at a General Meeting to be held immediately following the conclusion of the Company’s next Annual General Meeting in May 2022.

The making and implementation of the tender offer will be conditional, amongst other things, upon the Company having the required shareholder authority or such shareholder authority being obtained, the Company having sufficient distributable reserves to effect the repurchase of any successfully tendered shares and, having regard to its continuing financial requirements, sufficient cash reserves to settle the relevant transactions with shareholders, the Company’s continuation vote being approved at the Annual General Meeting of shareholders in May 2022, and the Company’s continuing compliance with the Listing Rules and all other applicable laws and regulations.

Share rating and discount control

The Directors recognise that it is in the long term interests of shareholders that shares do not trade at a significant discount to their prevailing NAV. The Board monitors the level of the Company’s discount to NAV on an ongoing basis.

Over the year under review, the Company's discount ranged from a high of 14.4% to a low of 5.4% and at the year end stood at 7.1%. Further details setting out how the discount or premium at which the Company’s shares trade is calculated are included in the Glossary contained within the Annual Report and Financial Statements.

A special resolution was passed at the AGM of the Company held on 19 May 2021, granting the Directors’ authority to make market purchases of the Company’s ordinary shares to be held, sold, transferred or otherwise dealt with as treasury shares or cancelled upon completion of the purchase. The Board intends to renew this authority at the AGM to be held in May 2022.

In addition, the Board is proposing to adopt a new discount control policy, for the four year period from 1 January 2022 to 31 December 2025. Under this new mechanism the Board undertakes to make a tender offer to shareholders for 24.99 per cent of the issued share capital (excluding treasury shares) of the Company at a tender price reflecting the latest cum-income Net Asset Value (NAV) less 2 per cent and related portfolio realisation costs if, over the four year period from 1 January 2022 to 31 December 2025 (the ‘Calculation Period’), either of the following conditions are met:

the annualised total NAV return of the Company does not exceed the annualised benchmark index (being the MSCI EM Latin America Index) US Dollar net total return by more than 50 basis points over the Calculation Period; orthe average daily discount to the cum-income NAV exceeds 12 per cent as calculated with reference to the trading of the ordinary shares over the Calculation Period.

The making and implementation of this tender offer will be conditional, amongst other things, upon the Company having the required shareholder authority or such shareholder authority being obtained, the Company having sufficient distributable reserves to effect the repurchase of any successfully tendered shares and, having regard to its continuing financial requirements, sufficient cash reserves to settle the relevant transactions with shareholders, the Company’s biennial continuation votes being approved at the Annual General Meetings in 2024 and 2026. The Board believes that a four year performance target will enable the Manager to take a sufficiently long term approach to investing in quality companies in the region, and it believes that it is in shareholders’ interests as a whole that this time period for assessing performance be adopted.

Section 172 Statement: promoting the success of BlackRock Latin American Investment Trust plc

The Companies (Miscellaneous Reporting) Regulations 2018 require directors to explain more fully how they have discharged their duties under Section 172(1) of the Companies Act 2006 in promoting the success of their companies for the benefit of members as a whole. This enhanced disclosure covers how the Board has engaged with and understands the views of stakeholders and how stakeholders’ needs have been taken into account, the outcome of this engagement and the impact that it has had on the Board’s decisions.

As the Company is an externally managed investment company and does not have any employees or customers, the Board considers the main stakeholders in the Company to be the shareholders, key service providers (being the Manager and Investment Manager, the Custodian, Depositary, Registrar and Broker) and investee companies. The reasons for this determination, and the Board’s overarching approach to engagement, are set out in the table below.

A summary of the key areas of engagement undertaken by the Board with its key stakeholders in the year under review and how Directors have acted upon this to promote the long-term success of the Company are set out in the table below.

1    Alternative Performance ***Measure***, see the Glossary contained within the Annual Report and Financial Statements.

Performance

Details of the Company’s performance are set out in the Chairman’s Statement above.

The Investment Manager’s Report above forms part of this Strategic Report and includes a review of the main developments during the year, together with information on investment activity within the Company’s portfolio.

Portfolio analysis

A detailed analysis of the investments and the sector and geographical allocations is provided above.

Results and dividends

The results for the Company are set out in the Income Statement below. The total loss for the year on ordinary activities, after taxation, was US$28,006,000 (2020: loss of US$43,572,000) of which the revenue profit amounted to US$10,247,000 (2020: US$5,834,000), and the capital loss amounted to US$38,253,000 (2020: capital loss of US$49,406,000).

Under the Company’s dividend policy, dividends are calculated based on 1.25% of the US Dollar NAV at close of business on the last working day of March, June, September and December and are paid in May, August, November and February respectively. Dividends will be financed through a combination of available net income in each financial year and revenue and capital reserves. The Company has declared interim dividends totaling 27.56 cents per share under this policy in respect of the year ended 31 December 2021 as detailed in the table below.

Details of this policy are also set out in the Chairman’s Statement above.

NAV, share price and index performance

At each meeting the Board reviews the detail of the performance of the portfolio as well as the net asset value and share price (total return) for the Company and compares this to the performance of other companies in the peer group of Latin American open and closed end funds and to our benchmark.

The Board also regularly reviews a number of indices and ratios to understand the impact on the Company’s relative performance of the various components such as asset allocation and stock selection.

Information on the Company’s performance is given in the performance record contained within the Annual Report and Financial Statements and in the Chairman’s Statement and Investment Manager’s Report above.

Tender Offer

As part of its discount control policy, the Board has stated previously that it would make a tender offer to shareholders for 24.99 per cent of the issued share capital (excluding treasury shares) of the Company at a tender price reflecting the latest cum-income Net Asset Value (NAV) less 2 per cent and related portfolio realisation costs if, over the four-year period from 1 January 2018 to 31 December 2021 (the ‘Calculation Period’), either of the following conditions have been met:

(i)    the annualised total NAV return of the Company does not exceed the annualised benchmark index (being the MSCI EM Latin America Index) US Dollar total return by more than 100 basis points over the Calculation Period; or

(ii)   the average daily discount to the cum-income NAV exceeds 12 per cent as calculated with reference to the trading of the ordinary shares over the Calculation Period.

As at 31 December 2021, and over the Calculation Period, the Company had underperformed the Benchmark by 94 basis points on an annualised basis and the Company’s ordinary shares had traded at an average discount to NAV of 11.65 per cent.

As a result, the Board intends to make a tender offer to shareholders for 24.99 per cent of the issued share capital of the Company (excluding treasury shares). The structure of the tender offer will be decided by the Board and a circular setting out further details of the exact timings and confirmation of the relevant dates, along with full details of the tender ***process*** and the terms and conditions of the tender offer, will be posted out to shareholders and will be made available on the Company’s website at[*http://www.blackrock.com/uk/brla*](http://www.blackrock.com/uk/brla). The requisite resolution to implement the tender offer will be put to shareholders for their approval at a General Meeting to be held immediately following the conclusion of the Company’s Annual General Meeting, scheduled to be held on 19 May 2022.

The making and implementation of the tender offer will be conditional, inter alia, upon the Company having the required shareholder authority or such shareholder authority being obtained, the Company having sufficient distributable reserves to effect the repurchase of any successfully tendered shares and, having regard to its continuing financial requirements, sufficient cash reserves to settle the relevant transactions with shareholders, the Company’s continuation vote being approved at the Annual General Meeting on 19 May 2022, and the Company’s continuing compliance with the Listing Rules and all other applicable laws and regulations.

Details of the Company’s discount control

The Board recognises that it is in the long-term interests of shareholders that shares do not trade at a significant discount to their prevailing NAV. The Board monitors the level of the Company’s discount to NAV on an ongoing basis and considers strategies for managing any discount. In the year to 31 December 2021, the Company’s share price to NAV traded in the range of a discount of 14.4% to 5.4% on a cum-income basis. The Board is also putting in place a new discount control mechanism whereby it will offer shareholders the ability to tender up to 24.99% of the Company’s issued share capital at the AGM in 2026 if certain performance and discount targets are not met. More details are given in the Strategic Report above.

Further details setting out how the discount or premium at which the Company’s shares trade is calculated are included in the Glossary contained within the Annual Report and Financial Statements.

Ongoing charges

The ongoing charges represent the Company’s management fee and all other operating expenses, excluding finance costs, direct transaction costs, custody transaction charges, VAT recovered, taxation and certain non-recurring items expressed as a percentage of average daily net assets.

The ongoing charges are based on actual costs incurred in the year as being the best estimate of future costs. The Board reviews the ongoing charges and monitors the expenses incurred by the Company on an ongoing basis against a peer group of Latin American open and closed end funds. A definition setting out in detail how the ongoing charges ratio is calculated is included in the Glossary contained within the Annual Report and Financial Statements.

Composition of shareholder register

The Board is mindful of the importance of a diversified shareholder register and the need to make the Company’s shares attractive to long-term investors; it is therefore the Board’s aim to increase the diversity of the shareholder register over time. The Board monitors the retail element of the register, which is defined for these purposes as wealth managers, Independent Financial Advisors (IFAs) and direct private investors. As at 31 December 2021, the Company’s share register comprised 38.6% retail investors; the Board will monitor this with the aim of growing the retail element of the register over time.

Key performance indicators

At each Board meeting, the Directors consider a number of performance ***measures*** to assess the Company’s success in achieving its objectives. The key performance indicators (KPIs) used to ***measure*** the progress and performance of the Company over time are comparable to those reported by other investment trusts and are set out in the Annual Report and Financial Statements.

The table below sets out the key KPIs for the Company. As indicated in footnote 2 to the table, some of these KPIs fall within the definition of ‘Alternative Performance ***Measures***’ (APMs) under guidance issued by the European Securities and Markets Authority (ESMA) and additional information explaining how these are calculated is set out in the Glossary contained within the Annual Report and Financial Statements.

1  Calculated in US Dollar terms with dividends reinvested.

2  Alternative Performance ***Measures***, see Glossary contained within the Annual Report and Financial Statements.

3 Ongoing charges represent the management fee and all other operating expenses excluding finance costs, direct transaction costs, custody transaction charges, VAT recovered and taxation as a % of average daily net assets.

4 Source: Richard Davis Investor Relations

PRINCIPAL RISKS

The Company is exposed to a variety of risks and uncertainties and the key risks are set out below. The Board has put in place a robust ***process*** to identify, assess and monitor the principal and emerging risks. A core element of this ***process*** is the Company’s risk register. This identifies the risks facing the Company and assesses the likelihood and potential impact of each risk and the quality of controls operating to mitigate it. A residual risk rating is then calculated for each risk based on the outcome of the assessment. This approach allows the effect of any mitigating procedures to be reflected in the final assessment.

The risk register is regularly reviewed and the risks reassessed. The risk environment in which the Company operates is also monitored and regularly appraised. New risks are also added to the register as they are identified which ensures that the document continues to be an effective risk management tool. The COVID-19 pandemic has given rise to ***unprecedented*** challenges for businesses across the globe and the Board has taken into consideration the risks posed to the Company by the crisis and incorporated these into the Company’s risk register.

The risk register, its method of preparation and the operation of key controls in the Manager’s and third party service providers’ systems of internal control are reviewed on a regular basis by the Audit Committee in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the Manager’s and other third party service providers’ risk management ***processes*** and how these apply to the Company’s business. BlackRock’s internal audit department provides an annual presentation to the Audit Committee chairmen of the BlackRock investment trusts setting out the results of testing performed in relation to BlackRock’s internal control ***processes***. Where produced, the Audit Committee also reviews Service Organisation Control (SOC 1) reports from the Company’s service providers.

As required by the UK Corporate Governance Code, the Board has undertaken a robust assessment of both the principal and emerging risks facing the Company, including those that would threaten its business model, future performance, solvency or liquidity. Those principal risks have been described in the table that follows, together with an explanation of how they are managed and mitigated. The Board will continue to assess these risks on an ongoing basis. Emerging risks are considered by the Board as they come into view and are incorporated into the existing review of the Company’s risk register. They were also considered as part of the annual evaluation ***process***. Additionally, the Manager considers emerging risks in numerous forums and the Risk and Quantitative Analysis team produces an annual risk survey. Any material risks of relevance to the Company identified through the annual risk survey will be communicated to the Board.

The Board will continue to assess these risks on an ongoing basis. In relation to the 2018 UK Corporate Governance Code, the Board is confident that the procedures that the Company has put in place are sufficient to ensure that the necessary monitoring of risks and controls has been carried out throughout the reporting period.

The current risk register includes a number of risks which have been categorised as follows:

Counterparty;Investment performance;Income/dividend;Legal and regulatory compliance;Operational;Market;Financial; andMarketing

The principal risks and uncertainties faced by the Company during the financial year, together with the potential effects, controls and mitigating factors, are set out in the following table.

Viability statement

In accordance with provision 31 of the 2018 UK Corporate Governance Code, the Directors have assessed the prospects of the Company over a longer period than the 12 months referred to by the ‘Going Concern’ guidelines. The Board recognises that it is obliged to propose a biennial continuation vote, with the next vote at the AGM to be held in May 2022. In addition, the Company will offer a tender (subject to shareholder approval at a general meeting to be held shortly after the AGM in May 2022) which, if fully subscribed, will see the Company reduce in size by 24.99%. The outcome of these events is unknown at the present time. In addition, the Board is cognisant of the uncertainty surrounding the potential duration of the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on the global economy and the prospects for many of the Company’s portfolio holdings. Notwithstanding these uncertainties, given the factors stated below, the Board expects the Company to continue for the foreseeable future and has therefore conducted this review for the period up to the AGM in 2026, being a period of four years from the date of approval of this report. The Board considers four years to be an appropriate time horizon, being a reasonable time horizon to assess potential investments and the period being used to assess performance for the Company’s Discount Control mechanism (as set out in more detail in the Strategic Report above).

In choosing this period for its assessment of the viability of the Company the Directors have considered the following matters:

the Company’s business model should remain attractive for much longer than the period up to the AGM in 2026, unless there is a significant economic or regulatory change;the ongoing relevance of the Company’s investment objective, business model and investment policy in the current environment (in particular the Company’s closed end structure which provides intraday liquidity to investors and the ability for the portfolio managers to invest over a longer-term time horizon than many open ended peers). This longer-term investment horizon is well-suited to Latin America as the volatility of this region can make short term investing more challenging. The Company is also one of only two investment trusts with exposure to the Latin American region and is substantially larger than its competitor in the peer group at more than three times the size;the Board keeps the Company’s principal risks and uncertainties as set out above under review, and is confident that the Company has appropriate controls and ***processes*** in place to manage these and to maintain its operating model, even given the global economic challenges posed by COVID-19, the impact of climate change on portfolio companies and the current climate of heightened geo-political risk;if the tender offer to be implemented in 2022 is fully subscribed, the Directors consider that the Company will still retain sufficient assets and liquidity to remain viable and to continue to operate in accordance with its business model and investment mandate;the Company has a relatively liquid portfolio (as at 31 December 2021, 100% of the portfolio was estimated as being capable of being liquidated within 3 days);the Board has reviewed the Company’s revenue and expense forecasts and is comfortable that the Company’s business model remains viable and that the Company has sufficient resources to meet all liabilities as they fall due for the period up to 31 December 2023 (being a period of at least 12 months from the date of approval of these financial statements);the Company has a US$40 million bank overdraft facility in place to meet liquidity requirements, subject to a maximum restriction of 30% of net asset value. As at 31 December 2021, US$17.0 million of this facility had been utilised, leaving an unutilised liquidity margin of US$23.0 million; andthe Board has reviewed the operational resilience of the Company and its key service providers (the Manager, Depositary, Custodian, Fund Accountant, Registrar and Broker) and have concluded that all service providers are able to provide a good level of service for the foreseeable future.

The Directors have also reviewed the assumptions and considerations underpinning the Company’s existing going concern assertion which are based on:

***processes*** for monitoring costs;key financial ratios;evaluation of risk management and controls;portfolio risk profile;share price discount to NAV;gearing; andcounterparty exposure and liquidity risk.

Based on the results of their analysis, the Directors have a reasonable expectation that the Company will be able to continue in operation and meet its liabilities as they fall due over the period of their assessment.

Future prospects

The Board’s main focus is the achievement of capital growth and an attractive total return. The future of the Company is dependent upon the success of the investment strategy. The outlook for the Company is discussed in both the Chairman’s Statement and the Investment Manager’s Report.

Social, community and human rights issues

As an investment trust with no employees, the Company has no direct social or community responsibilities or impact on the environment. However, the Company believes that it is in shareholders’ interests to consider human rights issues, environmental, social and governance factors when selecting and retaining investments. Details of the Company’s policy on socially responsible investment are set out within the Annual Report and Financial Statements.

Modern Slavery Act

As an investment vehicle the Company does not provide goods or services in the normal course of business, and does not have customers. Accordingly, the Directors consider that the Company is not required to make any slavery or human trafficking statement under the Modern Slavery Act 2015. In any event, the Board considers the Company’s supply chains, dealing predominantly with professional advisers and service providers in the financial services industry, to be low risk in relation to this matter.

Directors, gender representation and employees

The Directors of the Company on 31 December 2021, all of whom held office throughout the year, are set out in the governance structure and Directors’ biographies contained within the Annual Report and Financial Statements.

As at the date of this report, the Board consists of two men and three women, and also is inclusive of other protected characteristics covered in legislation. The Board recognises the importance of diverse backgrounds and skill sets, and in particular having a range of experienced Directors who, both individually and collectively, possess a suitable balance of skills, knowledge, and independence to enable it to fulfil its obligations. The Board believes that the current composition of the Board meets these objectives, and equality, diversity and inclusion are at the forefront of Directors’ minds when undertaking succession planning The Company does not have any employees, therefore there are no disclosures to be made in that respect.

The Chairman’s Statement, the Investment Manager’s Report and portfolio analysis above form part of the Strategic Report.

The Strategic Report was approved by the Board at its meeting on 31 March 2022.

By order of the Board

SARAH BEYNSBERGER

For and on behalf of BlackRock Investment Management (UK) Limited

Company Secretary

31 March 2022

Transactions with the AIFM and the Investment Manager

BlackRock Fund Managers Limited (BFM) provides management and administration services to the Company under a contract which is terminable on six months’ notice. BFM has (with the Company’s consent) delegated certain portfolio and risk management services, and other ancillary services, to BlackRock Investment Management (UK) Limited (BIM (UK)). Further details of the investment management contract are disclosed in the Directors’ Report contained within the Annual Report and Financial Statements.

The investment management fee is levied quarterly, based on 0.80% per annum of the Company's net asset value. The investment management fee due for the year ended 31 December 2021 amounted to US$1,726,000 (2020: US$1,452,000), as disclosed in note 4 below. At the year end, an amount of US$815,000 was outstanding in respect of these fees (2020: US$480,000).

In addition to the above services, BlackRock has provided the Company with marketing services. The total fees paid or payable for these services for the year ended 31 December 2021 amounted to US$101,000 excluding VAT (2020: US$122,000 excluding VAT). Marketing fees of US$108,000 (2020: US$127,000) were outstanding at 31 December 2021.

During the year the Manager pays the amounts due to the Directors. These fees are then reimbursed by the Company for the amounts paid on its behalf. As at 31 December 2021, an amount of US$124,000 (2020: US$124,000) was payable to the Manager in respect of Directors’ fees.

The ultimate holding company of the Manager and the Investment Manager is BlackRock, Inc., a company incorporated in Delaware, USA.

Related party transactions

Disclosures of the Directors’ interests in the ordinary shares of the Company and fees and expenses payable to the Directors are set out in the Directors’ Remuneration Report contained within the Annual Report and Financial Statements. At 31 December 2021, an amount of US$15,000 (2020: US$15,000) was outstanding in respect of Directors‘ fees.

The Board currently consists of five non-executive Directors, all of whom are considered to be independent by the Board. None of the Directors has a service contract with the Company. For the year ended 31 December 2021, the Chairman received an annual fee of £47,800, the Chairman of the Audit Committee received an annual fee of £36,700, the Chairman of the Remuneration Committee and Senior Independent Director received an annual fee of £34,600 and each other Director received an annual fee of £32,600. This excludes expenses paid to each of the Directors which are set out in the Directors' Remuneration Report contained within the Annual Report and Financial Statements. No change will be made to the level of Directors’ fees for the year ending 31 December 2022.

All current members of the Board hold ordinary shares in the Company. Carolan Dobson holds 4,792 ordinary shares, Mahrukh Doctor holds 686 ordinary shares, Nigel Webber holds 5,000 ordinary shares, Craig Cleland holds 10,000 ordinary shares and Laurie Meister holds 2,915 ordinary shares.

STATEMENT OF DIRECTORS’ RESPONSIBILITIES IN RESPECT OF THE ANNUAL REPORT AND FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

The Directors are responsible for preparing the Annual Report and Financial Statements in accordance with applicable United Kingdom law and regulations. Company law requires the Directors to prepare financial statements for each financial year. Under that law they have elected to prepare the financial statements in accordance with applicable law and United Kingdom Accounting Standards (United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practice).

Under company law the Directors must not approve the financial statements unless they are satisfied that they give a true and fair view of the state of affairs of the Company as at the end of each financial year and of the profit or loss of the Company for that year.

In preparing those financial statements, the Directors are required to:

present fairly the financial position, financial performance and cash flows of the Company;select suitable accounting policies and then apply them consistently;present information, including accounting policies, in a manner that provides relevant, reliable, comparable and understandable information;make judgements and estimates that are reasonable and prudent;state whether applicable UK Accounting Standards have been followed, subject to any material departures disclosed and explained in the financial statements; andprepare the financial statements on the going concern basis unless it is inappropriate to presume that the Company will continue in business.

The Directors are responsible for keeping adequate accounting records that are sufficient to show and explain the Company’s transactions and disclose with reasonable accuracy at any time the financial position of the Company and enable them to ensure that the financial statements comply with the Companies Act 2006. They are also responsible for safeguarding the assets of the Company and hence for taking reasonable steps for the prevention and detection of fraud and other irregularities.

The Directors are also responsible for preparing the Strategic Report, Directors’ Report, the Directors’ Remuneration Report, the Corporate Governance Statement and the Report of the Audit Committee in accordance with the Companies Act 2006 and applicable regulations, including the requirements of the Listing Rules and the Disclosure Guidance and Transparency Rules.

The Directors have delegated responsibility to the Manager for the maintenance and integrity of the Company’s corporate and financial information included on the Investment Manager’s website.

Legislation in the United Kingdom governing the preparation and dissemination of financial statements may differ from legislation in other jurisdictions.

Each of the Directors, whose names are listed in the Annual Report and Financial Statements, confirm to the best of their knowledge that:

the Financial Statements, prepared in accordance with applicable accounting standards, give a true and fair view of the assets, liabilities, financial position and profit or loss of the Company; andthe Annual Report and Financial Statements include a fair review of the development and performance of the business and the position of the Company, together with a description of the principal risks and uncertainties that it faces.

The 2018 UK Corporate Governance Code also requires Directors to ensure that the Annual Report and Financial Statements are fair, balanced and understandable. In order to reach a conclusion on this matter, the Board has requested that the Audit Committee advise on whether it considers that the Annual Report and Financial Statements fulfil these requirements. The ***process*** by which the Committee has reached these conclusions is set out in the Audit Committee’s report in the Annual Report and Financial Statements. As a result, the Board has concluded that the Annual Report and Financial Statements for the year ended 31 December 2021, taken as a whole, are fair, balanced and understandable and provide the information necessary for shareholders to assess the Company’s position, performance, business model and strategy.

For and on behalf of the Board

CAROLAN DOBSON

Chairman

31 March 2022

INCOME STATEMENT

for the year ended 31 December 2021

The total column of this statement represents the Company’s profit and loss account. The supplementary revenue and capital accounts are both prepared under guidance published by the Association of Investment Companies (AIC). All items in the above statement derive from continuing operations. No operations were acquired or discontinued during the year. All income is attributable to the equity holders of the Company.

The net profit/(loss) for the year disclosed above represents the Company’s total comprehensive income/(loss).

STATEMENT OF CHANGES IN EQUITY

for the year ended 31 December 2021

1    Quarterly dividend of 7.45 cents per share for the year ended 31 December 2020, declared on 4 January 2021 and paid on 8 February 2021; quarterly dividend of 6.97 cents per share for the year ended 31 December 2021, declared on 1 April 2021 and paid on 10 May 2021; quarterly dividend of 7.82 cents per share for the year ended 31 December 2021, declared on 1 July 2021 and paid on 6 August 2021; quarterly dividend of 6.56 cents per share for the year ended 31 December 2021, declared on 1 October 2021 and paid on 8 November 2021.

2    Quarterly dividend of 9.15 cents per share for the year ended 31 December 2019, declared on 2 January 2020 and paid on 6 February 2020; quarterly dividend of 4.59 cents per share for the year ended 31 December 2020, declared on 1 April 2020 and paid on 20 May 2020; quarterly dividend of 5.57 cents per share for the year ended 31 December 2020, declared on 1 July 2020 and paid on 11 August 2020; quarterly dividend of 5.45 cents per share for the year ended 31 December 2020, declared on 1 October 2020 and paid on 9 November 2020.

For information on the Company’s distributable reserves, please refer to note 10 below and note 15 (contained within the Annual Report and Financial Statements).

BALANCE SHEET

as at 31 December 2021

STATEMENT OF CASH FLOWS

for the year ended 31 December 2021

NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

for the year ended 31 December 2021

1. Principal activity

The Company was incorporated on 12 March 1990 and its principal activity is that of an investment trust company within the meaning of Section 1158 of the Corporation Tax Act 2010.

2. Accounting policies

The principal accounting policies adopted by the Company are set out below.

(a) Basis of preparation

The financial statements have been prepared on a going concern basis in accordance with ‘The Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland’ (FRS 102) and the revised Statement of Recommended Practice – ‘Financial Statements of Investment Trust Companies and Venture Capital Trusts’ (SORP), issued by the Association of Investment Companies (AIC) in October 2019 and updated in April 2021, and the provisions of the Companies Act 2006.

The Company’s Articles of Association require that an ordinary resolution be put to the Company’s shareholders to approve the continuation of the Company on a biennial basis. The last resolution was put to shareholders at the 2020 AGM and the next such resolution will be put to shareholders at the AGM in May 2022 (see the Annual Report and Financial Statements for further details). The Directors have no reason to believe that this resolution will not be passed.

Substantially, all of the assets of the Company consist of securities that are readily realisable and, accordingly, the Directors are satisfied that the Company has adequate resources to continue in operational existence for the period to 31 December 2023, being a period of at least 12 months from the date of approval of these financial statements, and therefore consider the going concern assumption to be appropriate. The Directors have considered any potential impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, its potential longer-term effects on the global economy and the mitigation ***measures*** which key service providers, including the Manager, have in place to maintain operational resilience on the going concern of the Company. The Directors have reviewed compliance with the covenants associated with the bank overdraft, income and expense projections and the liquidity of the investment portfolio in making their assessment.

The principal accounting policies adopted by the Company are set out below. Unless specified otherwise, the policies have been applied consistently throughout the year and are consistent with those applied in the preceding year. All of the Company’s operations are of a continuing nature.

The Company’s financial statements are presented in US Dollars, which is the functional and presentation currency of the Company. The US Dollar is the functional currency because it is the currency in which the bulk of the Company’s assets (notably portfolio investments, cash at bank, bank overdrafts and amounts due to and from brokers) are denominated. All values are rounded to the nearest thousand US Dollars (US$’000) except where otherwise indicated.

(b) Presentation of Income Statement

In order to reflect the activities of an investment trust company and in accordance with guidance issued by the AIC, supplementary information which analyses the Income Statement between items of a revenue and a capital nature has been presented alongside the Income Statement.

(c) Segmental reporting

The Directors are of the opinion that the Company is engaged in a single segment of business being investment business.

(d) Income

Dividends receivable on equity shares are treated as revenue for the year on an ex-dividend basis. Where no ex-dividend date is available, dividends receivable on or before the year end are treated as revenue for the year. Provisions are made for dividends not expected to be received.

Special dividends are recognised on an ex-dividend basis and treated as capital or revenue depending on the facts or circumstances of each particular dividend.

Dividends are accounted for in accordance with Section 29 of FRS 102 on the basis of income actually receivable, without adjustment for tax credits attaching to the dividend. Dividends from overseas companies continue to be shown gross of withholding tax.

Deposit interest receivable is accounted for on an accruals basis.

Where the Company has elected to receive its dividends in the form of additional shares rather than in cash, the cash equivalent of the dividend is recognised as revenue. Any excess in the value of the shares received over the amount of the cash dividend is recognised in capital.

Fixed returns on non-equity securities are recognised on a time apportionment basis. The return on a fixed interest security is recognised on a time apportionment basis so as to reflect the effective yield on the debt security. Amounts amortised during the year are recognised in the Income Statement. Interest income is accounted for on an accruals basis.

(e) Expenses

All expenses, including finance costs, are accounted for on an accruals basis. Expenses have been charged wholly to the revenue account of the Income Statement, except as follows:

expenses which are incidental to the acquisition or disposal of an investment are treated as capital. Details of transaction costs on the purchases and sales of investments are disclosed in note 8 below;expenses are treated as capital where a connection with the maintenance or enhancement of the value of the investments can be demonstrated; andthe investment management fee and finance costs have been allocated 75% to the capital account and 25% to the revenue account of the Income Statement in line with the Board’s expected long-term split of returns, in the form of capital gains and income respectively, from the investment portfolio.

(f) Taxation

The tax expense represents the sum of the tax currently payable and deferred tax. The tax currently payable is based on the taxable profit for the year. Taxable profit differs from net profit as reported in the Income Statement because it excludes items of income or expenses that are taxable or deductible in other years and it further excludes items that are never taxable or deductible. The Company’s liability for current tax is calculated using tax rates that were applicable at the balance sheet date.

The current tax effect of different items of expenditure is allocated between capital and revenue on the marginal basis using the Company’s effective rate of corporation tax for the accounting period.

Deferred taxation is recognised in respect of all timing differences at the financial reporting date, where transactions or events that result in an obligation to pay more taxation in the future or right to less taxation in the future have occurred at the balance sheet date. Deferred tax is ***measured*** on a non-discounted basis, at the average tax rates that are expected to apply in the periods in which the timing differences are expected to reverse based on tax rates and laws that have been enacted or substantively enacted by the balance sheet date. This is subject to deferred taxation assets only being recognised if it is considered more likely than not that there will be suitable profits from which the future reversal of the timing differences can be deducted.

(g) Investments held at fair value through profit or loss

The Company’s investments are classified as held at fair value through profit or loss in accordance with Sections 11 and 12 of FRS 102 and are managed and evaluated on a fair value basis in accordance with its investment strategy.

All investments are classified upon initial recognition as held at fair value through profit or loss. Purchases of investments are recognised on a trade date basis. Sales are recognised at the trade date of the disposal and the proceeds are ***measured*** at fair value, which is regarded as the proceeds of the sale less any transaction costs.

The fair value of the financial investments is based on their quoted bid price at the balance sheet date on the exchange on which the investment is quoted, without deduction for the estimated future selling costs.

Changes in the value of investments held at fair value through profit or loss and gains and losses on disposal are recognised in the Income Statement as ‘Gains or losses on investments held at fair value through profit or loss’. Also included within this heading are transaction costs in relation to the purchase or sale of investments.

The fair value hierarchy consists of the following three levels:

Level 1 – Quoted market prices for identical instruments in active markets.

Level 2 – Valuation techniques using observable inputs.

Level 3 – Valuation techniques using significant unobservable inputs.

Unquoted investments are valued by the Directors at fair value using International Private Equity and Venture Capital Valuation Guidelines, endorsed by the British Private Equity & Venture Capital Association. This policy applies to unquoted fixed asset investments held by the Company.

(h) Debtors

Debtors include sales for future settlement, other debtors and prepayments and accrued income in the ordinary course of business. If collection is expected in one year or less, they are classified as current assets. If not, they are presented as non-current assets.

(i) Creditors

Creditors include purchases for future settlement, interest payable, share buy back costs and accruals in the ordinary course of business. Creditors are classified as creditors – amounts falling due within one year if payment is due within one year or less. If not, they are presented as creditors – amounts falling due after more than one year.

(j) Dividends payable

Under Section 32 of FRS 102, final dividends should not be accrued in the financial statements unless they have been approved by shareholders before the balance sheet date. Dividends payable to equity shareholders are recognised in the Statement of Changes in Equity when they have been approved by shareholders and have become a liability of the Company. Interim dividends are only recognised in the financial statements in the period in which they are paid. Dividends are financed through a combination of available net income in each financial year and revenue and capital reserves.

(k) Cash and cash equivalents

Cash comprises cash in hand and demand deposits. Cash equivalents include bank overdrafts repayable on demand and short-term, highly liquid investments, that are readily convertible to known amounts of cash and that are subject to an insignificant risk of changes in value.

(l) Foreign currency translation

In accordance with Section 30 of FRS 102, the Company is required to nominate a functional currency being the currency in which the Company predominately operates. The functional and reporting currency is US Dollars, reflecting the primary economic environment in which the Company operates. Transactions in foreign currencies are translated into US Dollars at the rates of exchange ruling on the date of the transaction. Foreign currency monetary assets and liabilities, and non-monetary assets held at fair value are translated into US Dollars at the rates of exchange ruling at the balance sheet date. Profits and losses thereon are recognised in the capital account of the Income Statement and taken to the capital reserve.

(m) Share repurchases

Shares repurchased and subsequently cancelled – share capital is reduced by the nominal value of the shares repurchased and capital redemption reserve is correspondingly increased in accordance with Section 733 of the Companies Act 2006. The full cost of the repurchase is charged to the capital reserve.

Shares repurchased and held in treasury – the full cost of the repurchase is charged to the capital reserve.

(n) Bank borrowings

Bank overdrafts are recorded as the proceeds received. Finance charges are accounted for on an accruals basis in the Income Statement using the effective interest rate method and are added to the carrying amount of the instruments to the extent that they are not settled in the period in which they arise.

(o) Critical accounting estimates and judgements

The Company makes estimates and assumptions concerning the future. The resulting accounting estimates and assumptions will, by definition, seldom equal the related actual results. Estimates and judgements are regularly evaluated and are based on historical experience and other factors, including expectations of future events that are believed to be reasonable under the circumstances. The Directors do not believe that any accounting judgements or estimates have a significant risk of causing a material adjustment to the carrying amount of assets and liabilities within the next financial year.

3. Income

Dividends and interest received in cash during the year amounted to US$12,285,000 and US$12,000 (2020: US$6,688,000 and US$206,000).

Special dividends of US$nil have been recognised in capital in 2021 (2020: US$nil).

4. Investment management fee

Under the terms of the investment management agreement, BFM is entitled to a fee of 0.80% per annum based on the Company’s daily Net Asset Value (NAV). The fee is levied quarterly.

The investment management fee is allocated 25% to the revenue account and 75% to the capital account of the Income Statement. There is no additional fee for company secretarial and administration services.

5. Other operating expenses

1    All expenses other than depositary fees are paid in Sterling and are therefore subject to exchange rate fluctuations.

2    No non-audit services were provided by the Company’s Auditor.

3    Further information on Directors’ emoluments can be found in the Directors’ Remuneration Report contained within the Annual Report and Financial Statements. The Company has no employees.

4    Relates to prior year accrual for AIC fees and Director search fees written back during the year.

5    For the year ended 31 December 2021, expenses of US$10,000 (2020: US$58,000) were charged to the capital account of the Income Statement. These relate to transaction costs charged by the Custodian on sale and purchase trades.

6    Alternative Performance ***Measures***, see the Glossary contained within the Annual Report and Financial Statements.

6. Dividends

On 30 May 2018, shareholders approved a resolution to amend the Company’s dividend policy to pay regular quarterly dividends equivalent to 1.25% of the Company’s US Dollar NAV on the last working day of March, June, September and December each year, with the dividends being paid in May, August, November and February each year, respectively. Therefore for the year ended 31 December 2021, the quarterly dividends were calculated based on the Company’s cum-income US Dollar NAV at the last working day of the quarter.

The Company’s cum-income US Dollar NAV at 31 December 2021 as issued to the market was 496.39 cents per share, and the Directors have declared a fourth quarterly interim dividend of 6.21 cents per share. The dividend was paid on 8 February 2022 to holders of ordinary shares on the register at the close of business on 14 January 2022.

The total dividends payable in respect of the year which form the basis of determining retained income for the purpose of Section 1158 of the Corporation Tax Act 2010 and Section 833 of the Companies Act 2006, and the amount proposed for the year ended 31 December 2021, meet the relevant requirements as set out in this legislation.

1    Based on 39,259,620 ordinary shares in issue at 13 January 2022.

All dividends paid or payable are distributed from the Company’s distributable reserves.

7. Earnings and net asset value per ordinary share

Revenue, capital loss and net asset value per ordinary share are shown below and have been calculated using the following:

1    Based on an exchange rate of US$1.35445 to £1 at 31 December 2021 and US$1.3699 to £1 at 31 December 2020.

There are no dilutive securities at the year end.

8. Investments held at fair value through profit or loss

The Company received US$144,427,000 (2020: US$239,128,000) from investments sold in the year. The book cost of these investments when they were purchased was US$146,803,000 (2020: US$282,375,000). These investments have been revalued over time and until they were sold any unrealised gains/losses were included in the fair value of investments.

Transaction costs of US$136,000 were incurred on the acquisition of investments (2020: US$366,000). Costs relating to the disposal of investments during the year amounted to US$178,000 (2020: US$375,000). All transaction costs have been included within capital reserves.

9. Share capital

During the period to 31 December 2021, no ordinary shares were purchased and transferred to treasury (2020: nil).

The ordinary shares give shareholders voting rights, the entitlement to all of the capital growth in the Company’s assets, and to all income from the Company that is resolved to be distributed.

10. Reserves

The share premium account and capital redemption reserve are not distributable reserves under the Companies Act 2006. In accordance with ICAEW Technical Release 02/17BL on Guidance on Realised and Distributable Profits under the Companies Act 2006, the capital reserve may be used as distributable reserves for all purposes and, in particular, the repurchase by the Company of its ordinary shares and for payments as dividends. In accordance with the Company’s Articles of Association, capital reserves and the revenue reserve may be distributed by way of dividend. The capital reserve arising on the revaluation of investments of US$7,247,000 (2020: gain of US$41,604,000) is subject to fair value movements and may not be readily realisable at short notice, as such it may not be entirely distributable. The investments are subject to financial risks; as such capital reserves (arising on investments sold) and the revenue reserve may not be entirely distributable if a loss occurred during the realisation of these investments.

11. Valuation of financial instruments

Financial assets and financial liabilities are either carried in the Balance Sheet at their fair value (investments) or at an amount which is a reasonable approximation of fair value (due from brokers, dividends and interest receivable, due to brokers, accruals, cash at bank and bank overdrafts). Section 34 of FRS 102 requires the Company to classify fair value measurements using a fair value hierarchy that reflects the significance of inputs used in making the measurements. The valuation techniques used by the Company are explained in the accounting policies note to the Financial Statements above.

Categorisation within the hierarchy has been determined on the basis of the lowest level input that is significant to the fair value measurement of the relevant asset.

The fair value hierarchy has the following levels:

Level 1 – Quoted market price for identical instruments in active markets

A financial instrument is regarded as quoted in an active market if quoted prices are readily and regularly available from an exchange, dealer, broker, industry group, pricing service or regulatory agency and those prices represent actual and regularly occurring market transactions on an arm’s length basis. These include exchange traded derivatives. The Company does not adjust the quoted price for these instruments.

Level 2 – Valuation techniques using observable inputs

This category includes instruments valued using quoted prices for similar instruments in markets that are considered less active, or other valuation techniques where significant inputs are directly or indirectly observable from market data.

Valuation techniques used for non-standardised financial instruments such as over-the-counter derivatives, include the use of comparable recent arm’s length transactions, reference to other instruments that are substantially the same, discounted cash flow analysis, option pricing models and other valuation techniques commonly used by market participants making the maximum use of market inputs and relying as little as possible on entity specific inputs.

Level 3 – Valuation techniques using significant unobservable inputs

This category includes all instruments where the valuation technique includes inputs not based on market data and these inputs could have a significant impact on the instrument’s valuation.

This category also includes instruments that are valued based on quoted prices for similar instruments where significant entity determined adjustments or assumptions are required to reflect differences between the instruments and instruments for which there is no active market. The Investment Manager considers observable data to be that market data that is readily available, regularly distributed or updated, reliable and verifiable, not proprietary, and provided by independent sources that are actively involved in the relevant market.

The level in the fair value hierarchy within which the fair value measurement is categorised in its entirety is determined on the basis of the lowest level input that is significant to the fair value measurement. If a fair value measurement uses observable inputs that require significant adjustment based on unobservable inputs, that measurement is a Level 3 measurement.

Assessing the significance of a particular input to the fair value measurement in its entirety requires judgement, considering factors specific to the asset or liability. The determination of what constitutes ‘observable’ inputs requires significant judgement by the Investment Manager.

Fair values of financial assets and financial liabilities

The table below is an analysis of the Company’s financial instruments ***measured*** at fair value at the balance sheet date.

For exchange listed equity investments the quoted price is the bid price. Substantially all investments are valued based on unadjusted quoted market prices. Where such quoted prices are readily available in an active market, such prices are not required to be assessed or adjusted for any price related risks, including climate risk, in accordance with the fair value related requirements of the Company’s Financial Reporting Framework.

12. Capital management policies and procedures

The Company’s capital management objectives are:

to ensure it will be able to continue as a going concern; andto secure long-term capital growth and an attractive total return primarily through investing in quoted securities in Latin America.

Gearing will be selectively employed with the aim of enhancing returns. The Board’s view is that 105% of the net asset value is the neutral level of gearing over the longer term and that gearing should be used actively in an approximate range of plus or minus 10% around this as ***measured*** at the time that gearing is instigated. These current parameters sit within the Company’s gearing policy as set out in the investment policy contained within the Annual Report and Financial Statements which states that net borrowings are not expected to exceed 25% of net assets under normal circumstances, and the Company’s Articles of Association which limit net borrowings to 100% of capital and reserves.

The Company’s total capital as at 31 December 2021 was US$194,838,000 (2020: US$234,151,000) comprised of equity, capital and reserves.

Under the terms of the overdraft facility agreement, the Company's total indebtedness shall at no time exceed US$40 million or 30% of the Company's net asset value (whichever is the lowest) (2020: US$40 million or 30% of the Company's net asset value (whichever is the lowest)).

The Board with the assistance of the Investment Manager monitors and reviews the broad structure of the Company’s capital on an ongoing basis. This review includes:

the planned level of gearing, which takes into account the Investment Manager’s view on the market; andthe need to buy back equity shares, either for cancellation or to be held in treasury, which takes account of the difference between the NAV per share and the share price (i.e. the level of share price discount or premium).

The Company is subject to externally imposed capital requirements:

as a public company, the Company has a minimum share capital of £50,000; andin order to be able to pay dividends out of profits available for distribution, the Company has to be able to meet one of the two capital restrictions tests imposed on investment companies by law.

During the year, the Company complied with the externally imposed capital requirements to which it was subject.

13. Transactions with the Investment Manager and AIFM

BlackRock Fund Managers Limited (BFM) provides management and administration services to the Company under a contract which is terminable on six months’ notice. BFM has (with the Company’s consent) delegated certain portfolio and risk management services, and other ancillary services, to BlackRock Investment Management (UK) Limited (BIM (UK)). Further details of the investment management contract are disclosed in the Directors’ Report contained within the Annual Report and Financial Statements.

The investment management fee is levied quarterly, based on 0.80% per annum of the Company's net asset value. The investment management fee due for the year ended 31 December 2021 amounted to US$1,726,000 (2020: US$1,452,000), as disclosed in note 4 above. At the year end, an amount of US$815,000 was outstanding in respect of these fees (2020: US$480,000).

In addition to the above services, BlackRock has provided the Company with marketing services. The total fees paid or payable for these services for the year ended 31 December 2021 amounted to US$101,000 excluding VAT (2020: US$122,000). Marketing fees of US$108,000 (2020: US$127,000) were outstanding at 31 December 2021.

During the year the Manager pays the amounts due to the Directors. These fees are then reimbursed by the Company for the amounts paid on its behalf. As at 31 December 2021, an amount of US$124,000 (2020: US$124,000) was payable to the Manager in respect of Directors’ fees.

The ultimate holding company of the Manager and the Investment Manager is BlackRock, Inc., a company incorporated in Delaware, USA.

14. Related party disclosure

Disclosures of the Directors’ interests in the ordinary shares of the Company and fees and expenses payable to the Directors are set out in the Directors’ Remuneration Report contained within the Annual Report and Financial Statements. At 31 December 2021, an amount of US$15,000 (2020: US$15,000) was outstanding in respect of Directors‘ fees.

Significant holdings

The following investors are:

funds managed by the BlackRock Group or are affiliates of BlackRock, Inc. (‘Related BlackRock Funds’); orinvestors (other than those listed in (a) above) who held more than 20% of the voting shares in issue in the Company and are as a result, considered to be related parties to the Company (‘Significant Investors’).

As at 31 December 2021

As at 31 December 2020

15. Contingent liabilities

There were no contingent liabilities at 31 December 2021 (2020: none).

16. Publication of Non-Statutory Accounts

The financial information contained in this announcement does not constitute statutory accounts as defined in the Companies Act 2006. The 2021 Annual Report and Financial Statements will be filed with the Registrar of Companies shortly.

The Report of the Auditors for the year ended 31 December 2021 contains no qualification or statement under Section 498(2) or (3) of the Companies Act 2006.

The comparative figures are extracts from the audited financial statements of BlackRock Latin American Investment Trust plc for the year ended 31 December 2020, which have been filed with the Registrar of Companies, unless otherwise stated. The Report of the Auditor on those financial statements contained no qualification or statement under Section 498 of the Companies Act.

This announcement was approved by the Board of Directors on 31 March 2022.

17. Annual Report

Copies of the Annual Report will be sent to members shortly and will also be available from the registered office, c/o The Company Secretary, BlackRock Latin American Investment Trust plc, 12 Throgmorton Avenue, London EC2N 2DL.

18. Annual General Meeting

The Annual General Meeting of the Company will be held at 12 Throgmorton Avenue, London EC2N 2DL on Thursday, 19 May 2022 at 12:00 noon.

ENDS

The Annual Report will also be available on the BlackRock Investment Management website at[*http://www.blackrock.com/uk/brla*](http://www.blackrock.com/uk/brla). Neither the contents of the Investment Manager’s website nor the contents of any website accessible from hyperlinks on the Investment Manager’s website (or any other website) is incorporated into, or forms part of, this announcement.

For further information, please contact:

Melissa Gallagher, Managing Director, Investment Trusts, BlackRock Investment Management (UK) Limited

Tel: 020 7743 3893

Press Enquiries:

Ed Hooper, Lansons Communications – Tel: 020 7294 3620

[*E-mail:BlackRockInvestmentTrusts@lansons.comorEdH@lansons.com*](mailto:E-mail:BlackRockInvestmentTrusts@lansons.comorEdH@lansons.com)

31 March 2022

12 Throgmorton Avenue

London EC2N 2DL

**Load-Date:** April 1, 2022

**End of Document**



[***Final Results and Accounts***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:64VM-NB51-F0NJ-D08R-00000-00&context=1516831)

Cision Nordic Companies Press Releases (Scandinavia)

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**Length:** 26043 words

**Body**

23 February 2022

International Personal Finance plc

Full-year Financial Report for the period ended 31 December 2021

Principal activity

International Personal Finance plc specialises in providing unsecured consumer credit to 1.7 million customers through the world's largest home credit business and a leading fintech operator, IPF Digital.

STRONG REBOUND IN GROWTH AND FULL YEAR PROFITABILITY

Key 2021 highlights

Ø  Strong

financial

performance

o  Delivered £67.7 million profit before tax, a year on year

increase of £108 million

o  All business divisions were profitable

o  Final dividend of 5.8 pence bringing full-year dividend to

8.0 pence. New progressive dividend policy approved

Ø Excellent

operational

execution

supporting

strong growth

in credit

issued

o  33% increase in credit issued year on year (at CER)

o  Closing customer receivables of £717 million, up 13% year on

year (at CER)

o  Return to customer growth

o  Revenue growth returned from Q2 and was 10% higher in H2

compared with H1

o  Consistently strong collections performance driving

excellent credit quality - impairment as a percentage of

revenue at 10.2%

o  Costs maintained in line with 2020 despite investment in

growth

Ø Strengthened

customer

proposition

and creation

of

sustainable

value for all

stakeholders

o  Supported

the health

and wellbeing

of our

workforce

through the

pandemic

o  Extended

forbearance

across the

Group over

and above our

normal

practices for

customers

facing

difficulty

meeting their

repayments

due to Covid

-19o  Obtained

an e-money

licence in

our Baltic

markets to

support the

roll out of

our mobile

wallet across

IPF Digital

o  Developed

profitable

digital and

hybrid

customer

journeys in

our Polish

business to

be replicated

across the

rest of the

European home

credit

business

Ø Strong

funding

position and

well

capitalised

balance sheet

o  Bond and bank facilities total £575 million to support

future growth

o  Undrawn facilities and non-operational cash balances of £108

million

o  Successful issue of SEK 450 million bond at 7% coupon,

maturing October 2024

o  Equity to receivables ratio 51.2% at 31 December 2021

o  Fitch Ratings improved IPF outlook to Stable and reaffirmed

long-term credit rating of BB-

Group key statistics FY 2020 FY 2021 YOY change at CER

Customer numbers (000s) 1,682 1,727 2.7%

Credit issued (£m) 772.2 982.1 32.8%

Closing receivables (£m) 669.1 716.8 13.4%

Revenue (£m) 661.3 548.7 (15.0%)

Impairment % revenue\* 37.4% 10.2% 27.2 ppts

Cost-income ratio\* 47.7% 55.7% (8.0 ppts)

Statutory (LBT) / PBT (£m) (40.7) 67.7

Statutory (LPS) / EPS (pence) (28.9) 18.8

Full-year dividend per share (pence) - 8.0

\*2020 pre-***exceptional***

Gerard Ryan, Chief Executive Officer at IPF commented:

"We delivered an extremely strong full year performance and I am delighted to report excellent growth in credit issued, profit before tax of £67.7 million and the resumption of dividends to our shareholders. We are firmly in growth mode and our customers are benefitting from new products and improved customer journeys.  We also attracted new bond investors and extended relationships with a number of international banking partners, which supported an improved credit outlook from Fitch Ratings.

This rebound was a strong team effort and I would like to thank my colleagues who are delivering on the essential role we play in society by providing credit responsibly and sustainably to people who are underbanked or underserved.

Looking ahead, we intend to meet increasing customer demand and accelerate customer receivables growth by further investing in our technology, and product and channel development so consumers can access our credit offerings in a way that suits them, whether that be through our customer representative service or digitally."

Group performance

We delivered an extremely strong full-year performance. We are delighted to report that the successful execution of our rebuild strategy, focused on serving our customers to an ***exceptionally*** high standard, has generated excellent growth and a strong financial result.  Group profit before tax increased by £108.4 million to £67.7 million.

Each of our business divisions adapted well to the constantly changing environment, becoming more agile and cost effective whilst enhancing their customer product offerings. As a result of this excellent operational execution, all business divisions made a strong contribution to our overall Group profit before tax.

FY 2020£m FY 2021£m

European home credit (9.2) 54.5

Mexico home credit 0.8 18.4

IPF Digital (19.2) 8.7

Central costs (13.1) (13.9)

(Loss) / profit before taxation (40.7) 67.7

FY FY 2021£m Change£m Change% Change at CER%

2020£m

Customer numbers (000s) 1,682 1,727 45 2.7 2.7

Closing receivables 669.1 716.8 47.7 7.1 13.4

Credit issued 772.2 982.1 209.9 27.2 32.8

Average net receivables 777.6 677.0 (100.6) (12.9) (9.4)

Revenue 661.3 548.7 (112.6) (17.0) (15.0)

Impairment (247.6) (56.2) 191.4 77.3 77.6

Net revenue 413.7 492.5 78.8 19.0 24.7

Finance costs (55.0) (54.0) 1.0 1.8 (2.5)

Agents' commission (72.0) (65.3) 6.7 9.3 5.4

Other costs (315.5) (305.5) 10.0 3.2 0.1

Pre-***exceptional*** (loss) (28.8) 67.7 96.5

/ profit before

taxation

***Exceptional*** items (11.9) - 11.9

(Loss) / profit before (40.7) 67.7 108.4

taxation

We saw a steady increase in levels of customer demand for credit from Q2, driven by the easing of freedom of movement rules in most of our markets, the opening up of retail and hospitality sectors and the progression of government vaccination programmes.  Returning to growth mode, we delivered a 33% increase in credit issued, with robust contributions from all business divisions.  Our strong collections performance throughout the year underpinned our strategy to selectively relax credit settings and  take advantage of sales opportunities when demand for credit increased.

We are also pleased to report that our closing receivables portfolio is growing once again, with a £48 million increase (13% at CER) to £717 million at the year end, which contributed to improved revenue growth in the second half of the year. We expect to continue to grow both credit issued and customer receivables in 2022, building further on current revenue momentum. Average net receivables reduced by 9% year on year due to the lower levels of credit issued in 2020 and, together with the impact of temporary Covid-related rate caps in Hungary and Poland which have since expired, this resulted in a 15% contraction in revenue year on year.  However, as we successfully rebuilt the portfolio over the course of the year, revenue growth returned from Q2 2021 and was 10% higher in the second half of the year compared with H1.

The credit quality of our lending portfolio is excellent across all business divisions, particularly the performance of the receivables portfolio written since June 2020, which was granted largely under tighter than normal credit settings, has been better than predicted by our impairment models. This, together with the combination of selectively relaxed credit settings tailored to local market conditions and consistently strong collections execution, has contributed to an ***exceptionally*** low impairment charge of £56 million in 2021. This includes the positive impact of Covid-19 discounting and expected credit loss provisions releases totalling around £32 million. Impairment as a percentage of revenue year-on-year improved by 27.2 ppt to 10.2%. We expect impairment as a percentage of revenue to increase in 2022 as we continue to grow the business, but to remain below our target range of 25% to 30%.

We have continued to maintain tight control on costs while investing more in marketing to drive our successful growth strategy and, as a result, other costs remained flat year on year. As we look ahead, we expect inflationary pressures to feed through to costs in 2022, but at a lower rate than the anticipated growth in receivables.

Strong strategic progress

IPF creates long-term value beyond profit and returns by striving to have a positive effect on all our stakeholders.  Our strategy, anchored by the essential role our business performs in society by promoting financial inclusion, centres on meeting the financial needs of our customers and delivering a positive customer experience, and in so doing, recapturing longer-term growth as consumer demand increases in our markets.

During the pandemic period, we have extended forbearance across the Group over and above our normal practices, ensuring that where customers face difficulty meeting their repayments, we provide revised schedules to suit their current circumstances, with payment holidays and deferred payments. Protecting our people and customers remains our top priority.  We provide PPE for customer representatives visiting their customers and a range of remote repayment options are available if customer visits are not possible.  We also have in place appropriate protocols to address any adverse impact from future lockdowns, should they occur.

Our core strategic goals have driven the successful return to full-year profitability, created the foundation for longer-term growth and enabled the resumption of dividends to our shareholders.  In addition to the significant progress made in financial performance, we also delivered a number of strategic milestones in 2021 including;

o  Obtained an e-money institution licence which will enable the roll out of our mobile wallet product in Europe.

o  Developed profitable digital and hybrid customer journeys in our Polish business to be replicated across the rest of the European home credit businesses.

o  Defined a credit card proposition in our Polish business for testing in 2022.

o  Introduced innovative technologies in our Romanian contact centres putting the business on the path to offering omnichannel touch points for customers.  This innovation will be rolled out across our European home credit businesses.

o  Completed the roll out of MyProvi mobile app in Mexico.  All 17,000 customer representatives across the Group are now using the app in their day-to-day work and this digital transformation has reduced paper consumption significantly.

o  Identified synergies between our home credit and digital businesses in Mexico to improve referrals and create a hybrid sales channel to serve customers who fall between a full home credit service and a digital credit offering.

o  Expanded our agency network in Mexico by around 750 agencies as part of our territory expansion plans.

o  Established our first retail point of sale partnerships in Romania and Mexico.

Environmental, social and governance (ESG)

Our purpose, Building a better world through financial inclusion, encompasses all aspects of ESG and drives our actions to ensure that our business is responsibly run and sustainable.  We have an important role to play in helping people who have limited borrowing options to access credit in a responsible way and provide an opportunity for them to develop their credit profile.  As a business with a strong social purpose, we focus our ESG agenda on the very positive impact our business has on society through our commitment to responsibly providing credit to our customers and ensuring that our loans are affordable and transparent.  During 2021, we also embarked upon a ***process*** to develop our climate-related strategy and identify the key opportunities and risks posed by climate change that relate to IPF.  It is also our intention to align our strategy with a number of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals to highlight how our business contributes to these important objectives.

Business division performance review

European home credit

The strong operational performance delivered by our European home credit businesses resulted in a £63.7 million swing in profit before tax year on year to £54.5 million.  This significantly improved financial result was driven primarily by continued strong collections flowing through to lower impairment charges in each market.

FY FY 2021£m Change£m Change% Change at CER%

2020£m

Customer numbers (000s) 827 810 (17) (2.1) (2.1)

Closing receivables 389.5 425.9 36.4 9.3 16.6

Credit issued 453.8 599.2 145.4 32.0 39.4

Average net receivables 443.0 403.3 (39.7) (9.0) (4.5)

Revenue 351.1 284.7 (66.4) (18.9) (16.4)

Impairment (125.1) 1.6 126.7 101.3 101.3

Net revenue 226.0 286.3 60.3 26.7 33.8

Finance costs (32.3) (34.0) (1.7) (5.3) (10.0)

Agents' commission (50.7) (42.9) 7.8 15.4 10.8

Other costs (154.7) (154.9) (0.2) (0.1) (4.2)

Pre-***exceptional*** (loss) (11.7) 54.5 66.2

/ profit before

taxation

***Exceptional*** items 2.5 - (2.5)

(Loss) / profit before (9.2) 54.5 63.7

taxation

Our business responded well to growing consumer demand, and we increased credit issued year on year by 39%.  Although customer numbers contracted year on year by 2% to 810,000, our successfully executed rebuild strategy delivered an increase of 2,000 in the second half of the year.  Average net receivables reduced by 5% year on year, but credit issued growth momentum delivered a 17% (at CER) increase in closing receivables since December 2020 to £426 million, up 8% (at CER) from £406 million at 30 June 2021.

Our strong collections performance together with the unwinding of Covid-19 impairment provisions booked in 2020 and higher-quality lending, resulted in impairment as a percentage of revenue improving by 36.2 ppts since the 2020 year end to (0.6)% (an impairment credit). Other costs increased by just 4% (£6.2 million at CER) year on year as a result of a much lower 2020 comparative together with a modest increase in costs to fund higher credit issuance.

The strong execution of our strategy in 2021 delivered good sales momentum, receivables growth and a significantly improved financial performance.  Looking ahead to 2022, our focus is to increase the scale of our European home credit operations, which will continue to be the engine of the Group. We plan to deliver credit issued growth of around 8% to 10% to rebuild the receivables portfolio while maintaining robust collections, credit quality and strong cost control.  We will also continue to enhance the customer experience through improved technology, expand our digital and hybrid credit options for quality customers and test a credit card proposition.

Mexico home credit

Mexico home credit reported another significantly improved financial performance with profit before tax increasing by £17.6 million year on year to £18.4 million.  This robust outcome, driven primarily by a reduction in impairment and a lower cost base, was delivered against a challenging further wave of the Covid-19 pandemic in Mexico during Q3 2021.

FY 2020£m FY 2021£m Change£m Change% Change at CER%

Customer numbers 599 654 55 9.2 9.2

(000s)

Closing receivables 92.8 117.6 24.8 26.7 29.5

Credit issued 143.6 194.2 50.6 35.2 40.2

Average net 102.5 102.8 0.3 0.3 2.9

receivables

Revenue 157.1 146.0 (11.1) (7.1) (6.5)

Impairment (53.0) (33.8) 19.2 36.2 40.0

Net revenue 104.1 112.2 8.1 7.8 12.4

Finance costs (7.7) (6.6) 1.1 14.3 12.0

Agents' commission (21.3) (22.4) (1.1) (5.2) (7.2)

Other costs (71.6) (64.8) 6.8 9.5 7.7

Pre-***exceptional*** 3.5 18.4 14.9

profit before

taxation

***Exceptional*** items (2.7) - 2.7

Profit before 0.8 18.4 17.6

taxation

Consumer appetite for credit is recovering and despite rising Covid-19 cases in Q3, exacerbated by relatively low vaccination rates in Mexico, we delivered a 9% increase in customer numbers to 654,000, an increase of 55,000 customers. This, in turn, supported a 40% increase in credit issued year on year.   Average net receivables increased by a lower amount at 3% year on year due to lower credit issued in 2020. Revenue decreased by 6% year on year, driven primarily by our strategic decision to extend loan terms and offer more attractive pricing to higher-quality customers. However, it is pleasing to report that H2 revenue was 23% higher than the first half. This growth also supported the delivery of a 30% (at CER) increase in closing receivables since December 2020 to £118 million.

Our operational rigour around collections and credit quality over the past two years, together with the unwinding of Covid-19 impairment provisions booked in 2020, resulted in annualised impairment as a percentage of revenue improving by 10.5 ppts since the 2020 year end to 23.2%.  We continued to manage costs tightly, maintaining the benefits of savings achieved in 2020, and delivered an 8% reduction in Other costs year on year.

Our Mexico home credit business delivered good growth in 2021 and offers very exciting and significant long-term prospects.  Our strategy in 2022 is to build on this momentum through strong operational execution to deliver sustainable, 15% to 20% credit issued growth in 2022, and increase the size of the receivables portfolio.  We will enhance territory management to maximise customer reach within the current geographic footprint, selectively digitise the customer journey, expand the functionality of our MyProvi agent app to further improve cost efficiency and rebuild our receivables portfolio.

IPF Digital

IPF Digital delivered a record profit before tax of £8.7 million, a significant year on year improvement of £27.9 million. Reinvesting in growth together with continuing good credit quality and tight cost control supported the delivery of very strong financial performances by both our established and new markets.

The profitability of IPF Digital is segmented as follows:

FY 2020£m FY 2021£m Change£m Change%

Established markets 8.7 21.2 12.5 143.7

New markets (16.3) (0.3) 16.0 98.2

Head office costs (11.6) (12.2) (0.6) (5.2)

IPF Digital (19.2) 8.7 27.9 145.3

FY FY 2021£m Change£m Change% Change at CER%

2020£m

Customer numbers (000s) 256 263 7 2.7 2.7

Closing receivables 186.8 173.3 (13.5) (7.2) (1.6)

Credit issued 174.8 188.7 13.9 8.0 10.2

Average net receivables 232.1 170.9 (61.2) (26.4) (24.1)

Revenue 153.1 118.0 (35.1) (22.9) (20.6)

Impairment (69.5) (24.0) 45.5 65.5 64.5

Net revenue 83.6 94.0 10.4 12.4 15.9

Finance costs (14.9) (13.3) 1.6 10.7 6.3

Other costs (76.6) (72.0) 4.6 6.0 3.1

Pre-***exceptional*** (loss) (7.9) 8.7 16.6

/ profit before

taxation

***Exceptional*** items (11.3) - 11.3

(Loss) / profit before (19.2) 8.7 27.9

taxation

While our digital business made strong financial progress overall, we made the difficult decision in December 2021 to stop new lending to customers in Spain.  Although our team had worked diligently to build a viable business with a new product construct, the regulatory environment meant it was no longer possible to make an acceptable return for our shareholders. In line with our disciplined use of capital, we have decided to redeploy our resources elsewhere.

Returning demand for consumer credit driven by the relaxation of Covid-19 lockdown restrictions, together with our successful strategy to relax credit settings to near pre-pandemic levels, is creating a good foundation on which to rebuild the digital business and deliver sustainable growth.  Customer numbers increased by 3% year on year to 263,000 and we delivered an increase of 16,000 new customers in the second half of the year driven by an excellent performance in Mexico. Excluding the impact of the portfolio collect-out in Finland, customer growth increased by 8%.  Credit issued was 10% higher year on year, with H2 credit issued 27% higher than H1.  Average net receivables reduced by 24% year on year, driving a 21% reduction in revenue. Closing receivables contracted by just 2% year on year to £173 million, and acceleration in growth momentum in the second half of the year resulted in closing receivables being £5 million (5% at CER) higher at the end of December compared with June 2021.

Continued high-quality lending and strong collections performance resulted in a 25.1 ppt improvement in annualised impairment as a percentage of revenue to 20.3% since the 2020 year end.  Costs reduced by 3% year on year, driven mainly by the benefits of our rightsizing exercise in 2020, partially offset by increased investment in growth and a £3 million one-off cost impact of the decision to run off the Spanish business.

Established markets

The established markets delivered a very strong £12.5 million increase in profit before tax to £21.2 million, driven by low impairment and a significant reduction in costs, partially offset by lower revenue arising from a contraction in our portfolio.

FY 2020£m FY 2021£m Change£m Change% Change at CER%

Customer numbers 116 95 (21) (18.1) (18.1)

(000s)

Closing receivables 98.8 78.5 (20.3) (20.5) (15.6)

Credit issued 85.0 66.6 (18.4) (21.6) (20.2)

Average net 117.9 83.6 (34.3) (29.1) (27.0)

receivables

Revenue 71.6 48.3 (23.3) (32.5) (30.4)

Impairment (20.5) (1.9) 18.6 90.7 90.5

Net revenue 51.1 46.4 (4.7) (9.2) (6.3)

Finance costs (7.8) (6.5) 1.3 16.7 12.2

Other costs (24.9) (18.7) 6.2 24.9 23.0

Pre-***exceptional*** 18.4 21.2 2.8

profit before

taxation

***Exceptional*** items (9.7) - 9.7

Profit before 8.7 21.2 12.5

taxation

Customers and credit issued contracted year on year by 18% and 20% respectively, as a result of tighter credit settings introduced in response to Covid-19, softer demand during ongoing periods of people movement restrictions, and our decision to cease lending in Finland and collect out the portfolio. Our focus on building growth momentum through easing credit settings to meet increasing demand resulted in credit issued being 21% higher in H2 compared with H1. Average net receivables contracted year on year by 27% due to the lower credit issued and this resulted in a reduction in revenue of 30% in the same period.  Excluding Finland, where the portfolio collect-out is progressing well, the contraction in average net receivables and revenue year on year was significantly lower at 13% and 19% respectively.

Good collections and lower levels of credit issued resulted in a lower impairment charge in the period and a 24.7 ppt improvement in annualised impairment as a percentage of revenue to 3.9% since the year end.  We continued to manage costs tightly, and together with the benefit of the 2020 rightsizing programme, costs reduced by 23% year on year.

New markets

The new markets generated a small loss before tax of £0.3 million, a significant improvement of £16.0 million year on year. This near-breakeven result was driven by a reduction in the cost base and improved credit quality, partly offset by a £6 million charge arising from the decision to collect out our business in Spain.

FY 2020£m FY 2021£m Change£m Change% Change at CER%

Customer numbers 140 168 28 20.0 20.0

(000s)

Closing 88.0 94.8 6.8 7.7 13.9

receivables

Credit issued 89.8 122.1 32.3 36.0 39.2

Average net 114.2 87.3 (26.9) (23.6) (21.2)

receivables

Revenue 81.5 69.7 (11.8) (14.5) (12.1)

Impairment (49.0) (22.1) 26.9 54.9 53.7

Net revenue 32.5 47.6 15.1 46.5 50.6

Finance costs (7.1) (6.8) 0.3 4.2 -

Other costs (40.1) (41.1) (1.0) (2.5) (5.9)

Pre-***exceptional*** (14.7) (0.3) 14.4

loss before

taxation

***Exceptional*** items (1.6) - 1.6

Loss before (16.3) (0.3) 16.0

taxation

As lockdown restrictions eased during the second half of the year and consumer demand improved, we continued to relax credit settings and increase our investment in growth related activities in our new markets.  This delivered further sales momentum, resulting in a 28,000 (20%) increase in customer numbers year on year to 168,000, with significantly faster growth in H2 of 23,000. This was also reflected in credit issued growth which increased significantly by 39% year on year, with H2 credit issued 30% higher than H1.  Average net receivables and revenue reduced by 21% and 12% respectively year on year, however, we delivered revenue growth of 18% in the second half of the year.

Credit quality continued to improve resulting in a 28.4 ppt reduction in impairment as a percentage of revenue since the 2020 year end to 31.7%.   Other costs increased by £1 million (6% at CER) year on year driven by the benefits of the rightsizing exercise in 2020, partially offset by costs of £3 million incurred as a result of our decision to collect out the portfolio in Spain.

IPF Digital offers significant, long-term growth prospects and is expected to deliver 15% to 20% credit issued growth in 2022 and 2023 while maintaining credit quality and costs. The e-money licence obtained in 2021 will enable the further roll out of our mobile wallet product offering, and our digital and home credit businesses in Mexico will partner to explore new hybrid lending opportunities.

Regulatory update

Of the temporary Covid-19 related regulations introduced in 2020, only the debt repayment moratorium in Hungary remains in place and this is due to expire on 30 June 2022.

The European Union commenced a review of the Consumer Credit Directive, which we expect will conclude by the end of 2022. Our Group and European Union market teams are closely engaged in the ***process*** with a view to contributing to an acceptable outcome for both customers and market participants.

In Poland, the proposal to reduce the non-interest cost of credit cap, which was first raised in 2016, has been relaunched by the same political party. The proposal, which relates to non-interest costs of a consumer loan, would see the maximum cap reduced from 100% of the loan value to 45% (excluding interest). The proposals have been referred to the EU Commission for consideration with a deadline of 28 March 2022 for response by the Commission to the Polish Parliament, during which time the proposals cannot be finalised.  There is a likelihood that there will be a range of views on the merits of the proposals and, as they are scrutinised in detail, they could be changed, abandoned or agreed. We will continue to review the draft proposals to assess any potential implications for our Polish business, should they be implemented, and update the market as appropriate.

In December 2021, a revised draft law imposing a total cost of credit cap of 100% for loans with issue values below 15,000 RON (c.(EURO)3,000) and 15% for loans above 15,000 RON passed the Upper Chamber of the Romanian Parliament and moved to the Second Chamber in February this year. Approximately one year ago, a similar proposal had been sent back to the Parliament by the Constitutional Court citing procedural errors. Most loans in our Romanian portfolio are below 15,000 RON in value.

Taxation

The taxation charge on the profit for 2021 is £25.8 million, which represents an expected effective tax rate for the year of approximately 38%. The tax charge is affected by a combination of factors but is largely driven by the lack of tax deductibility in some countries for impairment charges, liability to certain taxes that are computed with reference to profits for prior periods rather than current year, and the write-off of deferred tax assets.

With regard to the European Commission's State Aid challenge to the UK's Group Financing Exemption regime, following the enactment of new legislation in December 2020, HMRC issued a Charging Notice seeking payment of £14.2 million in respect of the alleged State Aid for the affected years. The payment of this amount is a procedural matter, and the new law does not allow for postponement. Accordingly, this amount was paid in February 2021 and we appealed the Charging Notice on the grounds of the quantum assessed. A further amount of interest of £1.1 million was subsequently paid during August 2021. Whether the UK's Group Financing Exemption regime constitutes State Aid is ultimately to be decided and we continue to await a decision of the General Court of the European Union on this matter. The £15.3 million paid is held on the balance sheet as a non-current tax asset reflecting the Directors' judgement that it is more likely than not that the amount will ultimately be repaid. This judgement is based on legal advice received on the strength of the technical position included in IPF's annulment application. Further details of the risks associated with the Group's finance company are set out at note 23.

Funding and balance sheet

We continue to maintain a very conservatively capitalised balance sheet, a strong funding position and robust financial risk management. At 31 December 2021, the equity to receivables ratio was 51.2% (2020: 55.4%) and the gearing ratio was 1.3x (2020: 1.4x).

As at 31 December 2021, the Group had total debt facilities of £575 million (£402 million of bonds and £173 million of bank facilities) and borrowings of £478 million, with undrawn facilities and non-operational cash balances of £108 million. Total cash balances at 31 December 2021 were £42 million and include £11 million that was not required for operational purposes.

In October, we successfully issued a 3-year SEK 450 million bond priced at 7%, the proceeds of which were used to refinance the SEK bond due to mature in 2022.  The new notes, due in October 2024, were issued under the Group's euro medium-term note programme and extend the maturity profile of IPF's sources of debt funding.  During 2021 we also extended £148 million of bank facilities and, together with the new SEK bond, extended the maturity profile of the Groups' sources of funding to 2.9 years.

We were also pleased to see Fitch Ratings improve the outlook for IPF to Stable and reaffirm its long-term credit rating of BB-.

Dividend

With the Group's strong recovery in 2021, our confidence in the growth potential of the business and our current strong capital base, the Board is pleased to declare a final dividend of 5.8 pence per share, bringing the full-year dividend to 8.0 pence per share (2020: nil). Subject to shareholder approval, the final dividend will be paid on 6 May 2022 to shareholders on the register at the close of business on 8 April 2022. The shares will be marked ex-dividend on 7 April 2022.  The Board also reviewed the future capital requirements of the Group and agreed to introduce a progressive dividend policy aimed at reducing, at an appropriate pace, the equity to receivables ratio to bring it closer to our broad target of 40%. In addition, it was agreed that future interim dividend payments would be set at 33% of the prior year's full dividend payments. The Board may also consider returning surplus capital to shareholders periodically, subject to prevailing market conditions.

Outlook

The pandemic has illustrated the essential role our business plays in helping underbanked and underserved communities around the world. Throughout this difficult period, we were able to continue to serve our customers and help them with extended forbearance and payment holidays.  There is significant long-term demand for affordable credit from the group of consumers we serve in all our markets and we intend to build on the excellent momentum achieved in 2021 by continuing to execute our growth strategy to rescale the business.

We expect to be able to generate double-digit credit issued growth in both Mexico home credit and IPF Digital in 2022, supported by a strategic focus on strengthening customer choice by increasing the digital and mobile wallet options available. We expect to be able to grow credit issued in European home credit - the engine of the Group - by single-digit percentage supported by extending our digital /hybrid offerings as 2022 progresses.  As always, we will continue to serve our customers safely and responsibly, while maintaining a clear focus on portfolio quality and costs.

Alternative performance ***measures***

This Full-year Financial Report provides alternative performance ***measures*** (APMs) which are not defined or specified under the requirements of International Financial Reporting Standards. We believe these APMs provide stakeholders with important additional information on our business. To support this we have included an accounting policy note on APMs in the notes to this Full-year Financial Report, a glossary indicating the APMs that we use, an explanation of how they are calculated and how we use them, and a reconciliation of the APMs we use to a statutory ***measure***, where relevant.

International Personal Finance plc

Consolidated income statement for the year ended 31 December

2021 2020Pre 2020Exceptional 2020

-***exceptional*** items(note 9)

items

Notes £m £m £m £m

Revenue 4 548.7 661.3 - 661.3

Impairment 4 (56.2) (247.6) (2.5) (250.1)

Revenue less 492.5 413.7 (2.5) 411.2

impairment

Finance costs 5 (54.0) (55.0) 8.2 (46.8)

Other (111.4) (108.7) - (108.7)

operating

costs

Administrative (259.4) (278.8) (17.6) (296.4)

expenses

Total costs (424.8) (442.5) (9.4) (451.9)

Profit/(loss) 4 67.7 (28.8) (11.9) (40.7)

before

taxation

Tax 6.6 2.3 0.1 2.4

income/(expense

)  - UK

              (32.4) (26.8) 0.9 (25.9)

 - Overseas

Tax 6 (25.8) (24.5) 1.0 (23.5)

(expense)/incom

e

Profit/(loss) 41.9 (53.3) (10.9) (64.2)

after taxation

attributable

to owners of

the

Company

Earnings/(loss) per share - statutory

2021 2020

Notes pence pence

Basic  7 18.8 (28.9)

Diluted 7 17.8 (27.4)

Earnings/(loss) per share - pre-***exceptional*** items

2021 2020

Notes pence pence

Basic  7 18.8 (24.0)

Diluted 7 17.8 (22.8)

The notes to the financial information are an integral part of this consolidated financial information.

Consolidated statement of comprehensive income for the year ended 31 December

2021 2020

£m £m

Profit/(loss) after taxation attributable 41.9 (64.2)

to owners of the Company

Other comprehensive (expense)/income

Items that may subsequently be reclassified

to income statement:

Exchange losses on foreign currency (37.6) (4.1)

translations

Net fair value gains - cash flow hedges 1.4 1.3

Tax charge on items that may be (0.7) (0.3)

reclassified

Items that will not subsequently be

reclassified to income statement:

Actuarial gains/(losses) on retirement 0.5 (1.4)

benefit obligation

Tax credit on items that will not be 0.1 0.3

reclassified

Other comprehensive expense net of taxation (36.3) (4.2)

Total comprehensive income/(expense) for 5.6 (68.4)

the year attributable to owners of

the Company

The notes to the financial information are an integral part of this consolidated financial information.

Balance sheet as at 31 December

2021 2020

Notes £m £m

Assets

Non-current assets

Goodwill 10 22.9 24.4

Intangible assets 11 25.2 30.2

Property, plant and equipment 12 13.8 15.4

Right-of-use assets 13 17.7 17.5

Amounts receivable from customers 15 150.2 136.5

Deferred tax assets 14 124.7 135.7

Non-current tax assetRetirement benefit asset 18 15.34.9 -3.4

374.7 363.1

Current assets

Amounts receivable from customers 15 566.6 532.6

Derivative financial instruments 17 0.7 0.5

Cash and cash equivalents 41.7 116.3

Other receivables 14.0 9.9

Current tax assets 1.6 1.5

624.6 660.8

Total assets 999.3 1,023.9

Liabilities

Current liabilities

Borrowings 16 (3.1) (0.2)

Derivative financial instruments 17 (7.6) (6.7)

Trade and other payables (112.8) (89.1)

Provisions for liabilities & charges 19 (5.4) (19.2)

Lease Liabilities 13 (6.4) (7.4)

Current tax liabilities (8.2) (13.4)

(143.5) (136.0)

Non-current liabilities

Deferred tax liabilities 14 (7.9) (13.8)

Lease Liabilities 13 (12.3) (11.8)

Borrowings 16 (468.5) (491.8)

(488.7) (517.4)

Total liabilities (632.2) (653.4)

Net assets 367.1 370.5

Equity attributable to owners of the Company

Called-up share capital 23.4 23.4

Other reserve (22.5) (22.5)

Foreign exchange reserve (32.6) 5.0

Hedging reserve 1.6 0.9

Own shares (46.6) (45.2)

Capital redemption reserve 2.3 2.3

Retained earnings 441.5 406.6

Total equity 367.1 370.5

The notes to the financial information are an integral part of this consolidated financial information.

Statement of changes in equity

Called-up Other Other Retainedearnings£m Total

share reserve£m reserves\*£m equity£m

capital£m

At 1 January 23.4 (22.5) (34.8) 470.3 436.4

2020

Comprehensive

expense:

Loss after - - - (64.2) (64.2)

taxation for

the year

Other

comprehensive

(expense)/inco

me:

Exchange - - (4.1) - (4.1)

losses on

foreign

currency

translation

Net fair - - 1.3 - 1.3

value gains -

cash flow

hedges

Actuarial - - - (1.4) (1.4)

loss on

retirement

benefit

obligation

Tax - - (0.3) 0.3 -

(charge)/credi

t on

other

comprehensive

income

Total other - - (3.1) (1.1) (4.2)

comprehensive

expense

Total - - (3.1) (65.3) (68.4)

comprehensive

expense for

the year

Transactions

with

owners:

Share-based - - - 2.5 2.5

payment

adjustment to

reserves

Shares - - 0.9 (0.9) -

granted from

treasury and

employee

trust

At 31 23.4 (22.5) (37.0) 406.6 370.5

December 2020

At 1 January 23.4 (22.5) (37.0) 406.6 370.5

2021

Comprehensive

expense:

Profit after - - - 41.9 41.9

taxation

for the year

Other

comprehensive

(expense)/inco

me:

Exchange - - (37.6) - (37.6)

losses on

foreign

currency

translation

Net fair - - 1.4 - 1.4

value gains -

cash flow

hedges

Actuarial - - 0.5 0.5

gain on

retirement

benefit

obligation

Tax - - (0.7) 0.1 (0.6)

(charge)/credi

t on

other

comprehensive

income

Total other - - (36.9) 0.6 (36.3)

comprehensive

(expense)/inco

me

Total - - (36.9) 42.5 5.6

comprehensive

(expense)/inco

me for the

year

Transactions

with

owners:

Share-based - - - (0.2) (0.2)

payment

adjustment to

reserves

Shares - - (3.9) - (3.9)

acquired by

employee

trust

Shares - - 2.5 (2.5) -

granted from

treasury and

employee

trust

Dividends - - - (4.9) (4.9)

paid to

Company

Shareholder

At 31 23.4 (22.5) (75.3) 441.5 367.1

December 2021

\* Includes foreign exchange reserve, hedging reserve, capital redemption reserve and amounts paid to acquire shares held in treasury and by employee trust.

Cash flow statement for the year 2021 2020

ended 31 December

£m £m

Cash flows from operating

activities

Cash generated from operating 74.3 329.8

activities

Finance costs paid (52.7) (54.7)

Finance income received - 9.9

Income tax paid (46.4) (1.4)

Net cash (used in)/generated from (24.8) 283.6

operating activities

Cash flows from investing

activities

    (10.3) (11.7)

Purchases

of

intangible

assets

    (5.1) (3.8)

Purchases

of

property,

plant and

equipment

    0.2 0.4

Proceeds

from sale

of

property,

plant and

equipment

Net cash used in investing (15.2) (15.1)

activities

Net cash (used in)/generated from (40.0) 268.5

operating and investing activities

Cash flows from financing

activities

Proceeds from borrowings 49.4 311.3

Repayment of borrowings (62.9) (490.0)

Principal elements of lease (9.9) (10.9)

payments

Shares acquired by employee trust (3.9) -

Dividends paid to Company (4.9) -

shareholders

Net cash used in financing (32.2) (189.6)

activities

Net (decrease)/increase in cash (72.2) 78.9

and cash equivalents

Cash and cash equivalents at 116.3 37.4

beginning of year

Exchange losses on cash and cash (2.4) -

equivalents

Cash and cash equivalents at end 41.7 116.3

of year

1.  Basis of preparation

The financial information, which comprises the consolidated income statement, statement of comprehensive income, balance sheet, statement of changes in equity, cash flow statement and related notes, is derived from the full Group Financial Statements for the year ended 31 December 2021, which have been prepared in accordance with International Financial Reporting Standards ('IFRSs') and those parts of the Companies Act 2006 applicable to companies reporting under IFRS. It does not constitute full Financial Statements within the meaning of section 434 of the Companies Act 2006.

Statutory Financial Statements for the year ended 31 December 2020 have been delivered to the Registrar of Companies and those for 2021 will be delivered following the Company's annual general meeting. The auditor has reported on those Financial Statements: its reports were unqualified, did not draw attention to any matters by way of emphasis and did not contain statements under s498 (2) or (3) of the Companies Act 2006.

The directors are satisfied that the Group has sufficient resources to continue in operation for the foreseeable future, a period of not less than 12 months from the date of this report. Accordingly they continue to adopt the going concern basis in preparing this financial information (see note 24 for further details).

The accounting policies used in completing this financial information have been consistently applied in all periods shown. These accounting policies are detailed in the Group's Financial Statements for the year ended 31 December 2021 which can be found on the Group's website ([*www.ipfin.co.uk*](http://www.ipfin.co.uk)).

The following amendments to standards are mandatory for the first time for the financial year beginning 1 January 2021 but do not have any material impact on the Group:

·Impact of the initial application of Interest Rate Benchmark Reform amendments, Phase 2, to IFRS 9, IFRS 7, IFRS 4 and IFRS 16;

·Impact of the initial application of Covid-19-Related Rent Concessions beyond 30 June 2021 (Amendment to IFRS 16).

The following standards, interpretations and amendments to existing standards are not yet effective and have not been early adopted by the Group:

·IFRS 17 'Insurance contracts';

·Amendments to IFRS 10 and IAS 28 'Sale or Contribution of Assets between an Investor and its Associate or Joint Venture';

·Amendments to IFRS 3 'Reference to the Conceptual Framework';

·Amendments to IAS 16 'Property, Plant and Equipment - Proceeds before Intended Use';

·Amendments to IAS 1 'Classification of Liabilities as Current or Non-current';

·Amendments to IAS 37 'Onerous Contracts - Cost of Fulfilling a Contract';

·Annual Improvements to IFRS Standards 2018-2020 - Amendments to IFRS 1 First-time Adoption of International Financial Reporting Standards, IFRS 9 Financial Instruments, IFRS 16 Leases, and IAS 41 ***Agriculture***;

·Amendments to IAS 1 and IFRS Practice Statement 2 'Disclosure of Accounting Policies';

·Amendments to IAS 8 'Definitions of Accounting Estimates';

·Amendments to IAS 12 'Deferred Tax related to Assets and Liabilities arising from a Single Transaction'.

***Exceptional*** items

***Exceptional*** items are items that are unusual because of their size, nature or incidence and which the directors consider should be disclosed separately to enable a full understanding of the Group's underlying results.

Critical accounting judgements and key sources of estimation uncertainty

The preparation of Consolidated Financial Statements requires the Group to make estimates and judgements that affect the application of policies and reported accounts.

Critical judgements represent key decisions made by management in the application of the Group accounting policies. Where a significant risk of materially different outcomes exists due to management assumptions or sources of estimation uncertainty, this will represent a critical accounting estimate. Estimates and judgements are continually evaluated and are based on historical experience and other factors, including expectations of future events that are believed to be reasonable under the circumstances. Actual results may differ from these estimates.

The estimates and judgements which have a significant risk of causing a material adjustment to the carrying amounts of assets and liabilities are discussed below.

Key sources of estimation uncertainty

In the application of the Group's accounting policies, the directors are required to make estimations that have a significant impact on the amounts recognised and to make estimates and assumptions about the carrying amounts of assets and liabilities that are not readily apparent from other sources. The estimates and associated assumptions are based on historical experience and other factors that are considered to be relevant. Actual results may differ from these estimates.

The estimates and underlying assumptions are reviewed on an ongoing basis. Revisions to accounting estimates are recognised in the period in which the estimate is revised if the revision affects only that period, or in the period of the revision and future periods if the revision affects both current and future periods.

The following are the critical estimations, that the directors have made in the ***process*** of applying the Group's accounting policies and that have the most significant effect on the amounts recognised in the Financial Statements.

Revenue recognition

The estimate used in respect of revenue recognition is the methodology used to calculate the EIR. In order to determine the EIR applicable to loans an estimate must be made of the expected life of each loan and hence the cash flows relating thereto. These estimates are based on historical data and are reviewed regularly. During the year, the regulations relating to payment of rebates in Poland changed, which is expected to impact the cashflows relating to loans in that market. Based on a 3% variation in the EIR, it is estimated that the amounts receivable from customers would be higher/lower by £7.7 million (2020: £7.7 million). This sensitivity is based on historic fluctuations in EIRs.

Amounts receivable from customers

The Group reviews its portfolio of customer loans and receivables for impairment on a weekly or monthly basis. The Group reviews the most recent collections performance to determine whether there is objective evidence which indicates that there has been an adverse effect on expected future cash flows. For the purposes of assessing the impairment of customer loans and receivables, customers are categorised into stages based on days past due as this is considered to be the most reliable predictor of future payment performance. The level of impairment is calculated using historical payment performance to generate both the estimated expected loss and also the timing of future cash flows for each agreement. The expected loss is calculated using probability of default ('PD') and loss given default ('LGD') parameters.

Impairment models are monitored regularly to test their continued capability to predict the timing and quantum of customer repayments in the context of the recent customer payment performance. The models used typically have a strong predictive capability reflecting the relatively stable nature of the business and therefore the actual performance does not usually vary significantly from the estimated performance. The models are ordinarily updated at least twice per year. Where we expect the models to show an increase in the expected loss or a slowing of the future cashflows in the following 12 months, we apply an adjustment to the models. At 31 December 2021, this adjustment was a reduction in receivables of £13.6 million (2020: reduction of £7.7 million). Where expected loss parameters have shown significant improvements through the pandemic this is due to the tighter credit settings that were put in place as part of the Group's pandemic response. This data is not considered to be representative of the expected future performance and therefore we have excluded it from our periodic update.

Covid-19 post model overlay (PMO) on amounts receivable from customers

2021 CV19 PMO£m Disposable income PMO£m Total PMOs£m

Home credit 15.6 5.3 20.9

IPF Digital - 1.5 1.5

Total 15.6 6.8 22.4

2020 CV19 PMO£m Disposable income PMO£m Total PMOs£m

Home credit 33.5 - 33.5

IPF Digital 5.2 - 5.2

Total 38.7 - 38.7

Government imposed restrictions on the freedom of movement and debt repayment moratoria introduced in 2020 had a significant adverse impact on 2021 collection cash flows for home credit lending issued before June 2020 (back book portfolio). In 2021, the Hungarian debt repayment moratorium was extended into 2022, further impacting expected collection cash flows. There remains a small but significant proportion of this pre-June 2020 issue within the home credit portfolio and, given the age of these loans, we have prepared post model overlays (PMOs) to our impairment models in order to calculate the continued risks that are not fully reflected in our standard impairment models. Based on management's current expectations, the impact of these PMOs was to increase impairment provisions at 31 December 2021 by £15.6 million of which £7.8 million relates to the risks associated with the loans impacted by the Hungary debt moratorium and £7.8 million relates to the remaining home credit lending issued before June 2020. In order to calculate the PMO, we segmented the portfolio by analysis of the most recent payment performance and, using this information, made assumptions around expected credit losses, which resulted in a range of outcomes being calculated from £12.9 million to £18.3 million. £15.6 million was selected as most appropriate. This represents management's current assessment of a reasonable range of outcomes from the actual collections performance on the back book portfolio.

In addition, we have noted the ***unprecedented*** high inflation forecasts and the ongoing disruption caused by new Covid-19 variants and have identified a risk associated with reductions in our customers' disposable incomes, which we believe will negatively impact their ability to make repayments. We have performed a full assessment of the impact of reduced disposable income in our customer base and have concluded that it would result in increased risks across our home credit and IPF Digital businesses that are also not reflected in our standard impairment models. We have prepared PMOs and based on management's current expectations, the impact of these PMOs was to increase impairment provisions at 31 December 2021 by a further £6.8 million. In order to calculate this PMO, we have made assumptions around the level of inflation and wage growth in each of our markets. An increase/decrease in inflation by 10 ppts would result in an increase/decrease in the PMO of £3.9 million. This represents management's current assessment of a reasonable range in our assumptions.

Polish early settlement rebates

As previously reported, a comprehensive review has been conducted by UOKiK, the Polish competition and consumer protection authority, of rebating practices by banks and other consumer credit providers on early loan settlement, including those of the Group's Polish businesses. We assessed the impact of the resolution of this matter resulting in higher early settlement rebates being payable to customers that settled their agreements early before the balance sheet date. A number of risks and uncertainties remain, in particular with respect to future claims volumes relating to historic rebates paid and the nature of any customer contact exercise required. The total amount provided of £3.3 million (31 December 2020: £17.6 million) represents the Group's best estimate of the likely future cost of increasing historic customer rebates, based on its current strategy to achieve resolution. Whilst the volume of claims could differ from the estimates, the Group's expectation at this stage is that claims rates are unlikely to be more than 25% higher than the assumed rate.

Claims management charges in Spain

The Group holds provisions in respect of claims management charges in Spain following an increase in incidence of these claims in 2020. We reviewed the charges by reference to the claims incidence experience and average cost of resolution in the Spanish business. The provision recorded of £7.1 million, split £5.0 million against receivables and £2.1 million in provisions, (2020: £8.0 million, split £6.4 million against receivables and £1.6 million in provisions) represent the Group's best estimate of future claims volumes and the cost of their management, based on current claims management methodology, together with current and future product plans. Whilst the future claims incidence and cost of management could differ from estimates, the Group's expectation at this stage is that overall costs are unlikely to be more than 25% higher than those assumed in the charges.

Tax

Estimations must be exercised in the calculation of the Group's tax provision, in particular with regard to the existence and extent of tax risks. This exercise of estimation with regards to the EU State Aid investigation, which is disclosed in note 23, could have a significant effect on the Financial Statements, as there are significant uncertainties in relation to the amount and timing of associated cash flows.

Deferred tax assets arise from timing differences between the accounting and tax treatment of revenue and impairment transactions and tax losses.  Estimations must be made regarding the extent to which timing differences reverse and an assessment must be made of the extent to which future profits will be generated to absorb tax losses.  A shortfall in profitability compared to current expectations may result in future adjustments to deferred tax asset balances.

Critical accounting judgements

Accounting judgements have been made over whether the EU State Aid investigation requires a provision or disclosure as a contingent liability, see note 23 for further details.

Alternative performance ***measures***

In reporting financial information, the Group presents alternative performance ***measures***, 'APMs' which are not defined or specified under the requirements of IFRS.

The Group believes that these APMs, which are not considered to be a substitute for or superior to IFRS ***measures***, provide stakeholders with additional helpful information on the performance of the business. The APMs are consistent with how the business performance is planned and reported within the internal management reporting to the Board. Some of these ***measures*** are also used for the purpose of setting remuneration targets.

Each of the APMs, used by the Group are set out below including explanations of how they are calculated and how they can be reconciled to a statutory ***measure*** where relevant.

The Group reports percentage change figures for all performance ***measures***, other than profit or loss before taxation and earnings per share, after restating prior year figures at a constant exchange rate. The constant exchange rate, which is an APM, retranslates the previous year ***measures*** at the average actual periodic exchange rates used in the current financial year. These ***measures*** are presented as a means of eliminating the effects of exchange rate fluctuations on the year-on-year reported results.

The Group makes certain adjustments to the statutory ***measures*** in order to derive APMs where relevant. The Group's policy is to exclude items that are considered to be significant in both nature and/or quantum and where treatment as an adjusted item provides stakeholders with additional useful information to assess the year-on-year trading performance of the Group.

2. Principal risks and uncertainties

In accordance with the Companies Act 2006, a description of the principal risks and uncertainties (and the mitigating factors in place in respect of these) is included below.  Effective management of risks, uncertainties and opportunities is critical to our business in order to deliver long-term shareholder value and protect our people, assets and reputation. In 2021, we continued to face a challenging external environment, particularly from changing regulation, and the impact of issues arising from the Covid-19 pandemic. Internally, our operational governance framework and risk management ***processes*** are continually reviewed to ensure that where areas of improvement are identified, a plan of action is put in place and can become a key focus for the Board.  The effectiveness of operating these ***processes*** is monitored by the Audit and Risk Committee on behalf of the Board.

Risk key

Risk environment Risk appetite

↑  Risk environment improving ↑      Risk appetite increasing

↔Risk environment remains stable ↔     Risk appetite stable

↓Risk environment worsening ↓        Risk appetite decreasing

The risks facing the business by risk category are:

Risk Exposures Measurement, Commentary

mitigation

and

monitoring

1 Regulatory↔ ↔

Lead responsibility:  Changes in Highly skilled and All temporary

Chief Executive OfficerWe regulation, experienced legal, legislation introduced

suffer losses or fail to differences in public affairs, in response to the

optimise profitable interpretation or compliance and data pandemic in 2020

growth due to a failure clarification of privacy teams at Group expired, except the

to operate in compliance regulation, or and market repayment moratorium in

with, or effectively changes in the level.Monitoring Hungary.New early

anticipate changes in, enforcement of political, legislative -settlement rebate

all applicable laws and laws by and regulatory standards in Poland

regulations (including regulators, developments and resulted in higher

data protection and courts or other risks.Expert third-party payments to customers

privacy laws), or due to  bodies can lead advisors used where settling their

a regulator interpreting to challenge of necessary.Engagement agreements early.The

these  in a different our products with regulators, European Commission

way.ObjectiveWe aim to and/or practices. legislators, politicians commenced a review of

ensure that effective We monitor legal and other stakeholders. the Consumer Credit

arrangements are in place and regulatory Active participation in Directive.Draft

to enable us to comply developments to relevant sector consumer credit

with legal and regulatory ensure we associations.Compliance proposals including

obligations and take maintain programme focused on key potential changes to

fully assessed and compliance, consumer legislation and rate caps were

informed commercial remain data privacy.Oversight published in Poland and

risks. competitive and of regulatory risks by Romania.

provide value for the legal leadership

our customers.The team.Regular reporting

likelihood of to the Audit and Risk

legal and Committee on key

regulatory change regulatory and

and the impact of compliance risks.

challenge vary by

market and the

area of

regulation, but

the majority have

already

introduced price

legislation and

strengthened

consumer

protection

regulation,

although there

remains a

likelihood that

further changes

may be made.

2 Competition and product

proposition↓ ↔

Lead responsibility:  In an environment Regular monitoring of Following a lull in

Chief Executive OfficerWe where customer competitors and their competitor activity in

suffer losses or fail to choice offerings, advertising 2020 as a result of the

optimise profitable is growing, and share of voice in pandemic, levels of

growth through failure to ensuring our our markets.Strategic competition increased

be aware of and respond products meet planning and tactical in 2021.We continue to

to the competitive customers' needs responses develop our

environment or failing to is critical to on competition propositions to improve

ensure our proposition delivering  threats.Product financial inclusion,

meets customer needs a sustainable development committees enhance customer value,

while we maintain product business.We and ***processes*** in place improve the customer

profitability.ObjectiveWe continue to to review the product experience, and extend

aim to ensure we operate in highly development roadmap, our digital and mobile

understand competitive competitive manage product risks and propositions to meet

threats and promote markets with develop new products. consumers' changing

financial inclusion by regular new needs.We will seek to

delivering customer products and offer point of sale

-focused products that services being finance at retailers

drive profitable growth. made available to popular with our

our customer customer segment.

segment.  The

nature of

competition

varies by market.

3 Taxation↔ ↔

Lead responsibility:  Against a Tax strategy and policy We are awaiting a

Chief Financial OfficerWe backdrop of in place.Qualified and decision of the General

suffer financial loss increasing fiscal experienced tax teams at Court of the European

arising from a failure to challenges for Group level and in Union regarding

comply with tax most economies market.External advisors applications for the

legislation or adoption many authorities used for all material annulment of the

of an interpretation of are turning to tax transactions in line European Commission's

the law which cannot be corporate with tax Decision on State Aid

sustained together with taxpayers to strategy.Binding rulings announced in April

the risk of a higher increase or clearances obtained 2019.During the year

future tax revenues, either from authorities where international tax

burden.ObjectiveWe aim to via taxation appropriate.Appropriate developments have been

generate shareholder reforms or oversight at executive monitored, including

value through effective through changes committee-level over with regard to the

management of tax while to taxation matters OECD's minimum

acting as a good interpretations corporate income tax

corporate citizen.  We of existing initiative ("Pillar 1

are committed to ensuring legislation.The and 2"). To date, no

compliance with tax law likelihood of adverse financial

and practice in all of changes or impact on the Group is

the territories in which challenges to tax expected.

we operate. positions varies

by market. This

may increase due

to Covid-19

budget deficits.

Globally, OECD

and EU-led

developments may

lead to further

changes in tax

law and practice

and an increase

in audits and

enquiries into

cross-border

arrangements.

4 Technology and change

management↔ ↔

Lead responsibility:  Technology risks Change management The key focus in 2021

Chief Executive OfficerWe can arise from framework and monitoring was to deliver

suffer losses or fail to speed of ***process*** in solutions for "customer

optimise profitable technology place.Appropriate -facing" activities,

growth due to a failure advancements that methods and resources and reduce the risk of

to develop and maintain could make used in the delivery of technology

effective technology current programmes.Continuous obsolescence. This

solutions or manage key technology review of programmes, included e-licensing in

business projects in an obsolete or with strong governance IPF Digital, product

effective require of all major delivery development, territory

manner.ObjectiveWe aim to significant activity.Ongoing reviews extension and

effectively manage the effort to align of services and commercial

design, delivery and it to strategic relationships with partnerships.

benefits realisation of requirements. partners to ensure

major technology and Another effective service

strategic business significant operations.Annual review

projects. We look to factor is the to prioritise investment

maintain systems that are availability of in technology and ensure

adequate to support the technical skills appropriateness of the

ongoing operations in the internally or technology

business and deploy new with partners.The estate.Technology

technology that supports Group executes a Committee oversees

future business strategy. significant technology and change

change agenda and risks.

risks can arise

if the number of

changes becomes

too great, if the

benefits

realisation

***process*** is not

adequate or we

fail in

adequately

managing the

risks in

projects,

programmes and

portfolios.

5 People↓ ↔

Lead responsibility:  The Group's Our HR control The pandemic has

Chief Executive largest people environment identifies resulted in companies

OfficerOur strategy is -related risk key people risks and competing for a limited

impacted by not having relates to controls to mitigate talent pool due to

sufficient depth and turnover in our them increased longer-term

quality of people or customer covering:·Monitoring and sickness, and career

being unable to retain representative action with regards to shifts for certain

key people and treat them population.Other key people risks and employee

in accordance with our key risks issues·Appropriate segments.Actions to

values and ethical include:·Critical distribution of strategy retain, develop and

standards.ObjectiveWe aim skills -aligned objectives·Key engage customer

to have sufficient shortage·Lack of people processesOur representatives were

breadth of capabilities succession to people, organisation and undertaken to

and depth of personnel to critical planning ***processes*** understand how we can

ensure that we can meet roles·Recruitment ensure that we develop make their experience

our strategic objectives. risksAppropriate appropriate and more rewarding. We will

use of reward and significant strength and re-engineer the

compliance with depth of talent across customer representative

delegated the Group and we have value propositionOur

authority from the ability to move continued Care Plan,

the Remuneration people between designed to ensure the

Committee countries, which reduces health, safety and

our exposure to critical wellbeing of our

roles being under people, supported

-resourced. engagement and

retention of talent

during the pandemic.We

developed a number of

capabilities including

internal personal

development and

external talent

acquisition. We also

focused on retaining

and developing our most

talented employees

through tailored

leadership and

engagement programmes.

6 Business continuity and

information security↔ ↔

Lead responsibility:  Unable to perform Robust business In 2021, we revisited

Chief Executive OfficerWe the necessary day continuity and the Group business

suffer losses or fail to -to-day information security continuity framework

optimise profitable activities in our policies.Annual review focusing on operational

growth due to a failure business, leading of critical ***processes***, resilience, including

of our systems, suppliers to loss of business impact analysis the transfer of data to

or ***processes*** or due to income, increased risks and cloud-based

the unavailability, loss, impairment, mitigations.Periodic facilities.We developed

unauthorised disclosure regulatory testing and ongoing a three-year roadmap to

or corruption of failings, monitoring of security improve cyber and

information.ObjectiveWe reputational and recovery capability information security

aim to maintain adequate impact and staff, for technology and defence in light of

arrangements and controls agent and business increased risks of

that reduce the threat of customer ***processes***.Skilled team hybrid home-office

service and business attrition.While with relevant specialist practices. No security

disruption and the risk the external qualifications.Dedicated incidents resulted in

of data loss to as low a threat to our committees (including significant impact to

level as reasonably systems is Board-level) oversee the business during

practicable. increasing in the business continuity, 2021.

digital age, the information security,

tools in place and technology and

reduce the change risks.

likelihood of a

significant

failure or

information loss.

7 Reputation↓ ↔

Lead responsibility:  Our reputation Clearly defined The impact of the

Chief Executive OfficerWe and that of the corporate values and pandemic increased

suffer financial or consumer lending ethical standards are negative sentiment

reputational damage due sector can impact communicated throughout against the financial

to our methods of customer the sector. We proactively

operation, ill-informed sentiment and the organisation.Employees maintain dialogue with

comment, malpractice, engagement of key and customer customers to enable

fines or activities of stakeholders, and representatives continued access to

some of our as such our undertake annual ethics credit, and offer

competition.ObjectiveWe ability to serve e-learning repayment support where

aim to promote a positive our customers. training.Regular appropriate.We received

reputation based on our Some elements of monitoring of key awards recognising our

purpose, ethical this risk relate reputation drivers both business as a top

standards, our commitment to external internally and employer, our high

to responsible lending factors that are externally.Media and key standards of customer

via proactive engagement beyond our stakeholder strategy to experience and for

with all our influence. support the key drivers being a socially

stakeholders, including Controls in place of our business responsible business.We

media. have reduced reputation and that of maintain strong

residual risk. the non-banking relationships with key

financial institution stakeholders to develop

sector.Strong oversight their understanding of

by the senior leadership our business model, our

team on reputation purpose and role in

challenges. society and how we

deliver services to our

customers.  This helps

protect the business

from unforeseen events

that could damage our

reputation.

8 Safety↔ ↔

Lead responsibility:  A significant Safety management Covid-19 presented the

Chief Executive element of our systems based on most significant health

OfficerThe risk of business model internationally and safety risk.

personal injury or harm involves our recognised Vaccines offer the

to our customer customer standards.Market safety greatest protection and

representatives or representatives committees.Annual safety we encourage

employees.ObjectiveWe aim and employees survey.Biannual Safety vaccination for all

to maintain adequate interacting with Campaigns including colleagues. This is

arrangements and controls our customers in refresher training for supported by extensive

that reduce the risks to their homes or all employees and Covid-19 prevention

as low as is reasonably travelling to customer training and PPE

practicable. numerous representatives.Annual provision to keep

locations self-certification of colleagues safe and

daily.Their safety compliance by minimise the risk of

safety while managers.Regular branch workplace

performing their safety meetings and transmission.Safety

role is paramount safety performance committees met

to us.Safety reviews.Role-specific frequently across the

risks typically training and competence. Group providing

arise from the assurance and oversight

behaviour of of health and safety

individuals both risk management.We hold

internal and the ISO 45001

external to the Occupational Health and

business and, Safety Management

therefore, it is Standard in all

not possible to European home credit

remove the risk businesses. Mexico home

entirely with the credit has now entered

current business the ISO 45001

model involving accreditation ***process***

17,000 customer with a plan to gain

representatives. certification in 2022.

Improvements,

however, are

constantly sought

to reduce the

risk where

possible.

9 Funding, market and

counterparty↑ ↔

Lead responsibility:  Debt investors Board-approved policies Strong debt funding

Chief Financial risk appetite and require us to maintain a position.SEK 450

OfficerThe risk of strategy may resilient funding million Swedish Krona

insufficient availability change over time position with good bonds refinanced at a

of funding, unfavourable and this could headroom on undrawn bank reduced cost of funding

pricing, or that lead to adverse facilities, appropriate and extended £148

performance is funding terms or hedging of market risk, million of bank

significantly impacted by limited and appropriate limits facilities.Fitch

interest rate or currency availability of to counterparty risk. revised the Group's

movements, or failure of credit.  In outlook from Negative

a banking addition, the to Stable and

counterparty.ObjectiveTo interest and reaffirmed its BB-

maintain a robust funding foreign currency credit rating while

position, and to limit rate changes may Moody's reaffirmed the

the impact of interest lead to adverse Group's credit ratings

rate and currency changes in the at Ba3.

movements and exposure to cost of funding.

financial counterparties.

10 Credit↔ ↔

Lead responsibility:  Increased A comprehensive credit At the start of the

Chief Financial impairment due to control framework pandemic in March 2020,

OfficerThe risk of the aggressive growth developed using data and we took the decision to

Group suffering financial plansReduced experience from years of tighten credit rules

loss if its customers profit due to operating in our significantly to

fail to meet their unexpected levels specific customer protect liquidity. This

contracted obligations or of credit or segment and prudent approach

the Group failing to fraud lossesNot markets.Weekly cycle of resulted in a reduction

optimise profitable achieving growth credit reporting and in credit issued but

business opportunities potential because performance calls provided a solid

because of its credit, credit controls between each business foundation on which to

collection or fraud are too and the Credit Risk rebuild the business in

strategies and restrictive Director.Monthly cycle 2021.Credit issued and

***processes***.ObjectiveTo of portfolio quality and collections in 2021

maintain robust credit scorecard monitoring were better than

and collections policies  feeding market and Group anticipated. In most

and regularly monitor  credit cases, credit losses

credit performance. committees.Controlled were lower than pre

introduction of credit -pandemic levels, and

changes using a 'test impairment as a

and learn' approach.A percentage of revenue

comprehensive control at the year end of

framework covering 10.2% is well within

internal and external our risk appetite.Our

fraud risks and anti credit-control action

-money laundering. plan executed in Mexico

Specific roles for since 2019 has proven

monitoring and reporting successful and the

of frontline controls business is now

and audit of the control performing well.During

framework.Specific 2021, we performed

controls  to cover anti various scenarios and

-bribery. analyses in the Home

Credit markets in order

to respond to

operational disruptions

caused by the

pandemic.IPF Digital

performed in line with

expectations,

delivering improved

credit quality.

3.  Related parties

The Group has not entered into any material transactions with related parties during the year ended 31 December 2021.

4.  Segmental analysis

Geographical segments

2021 2020

£m £m

Revenue

European home credit 284.7 351.1

Mexico home credit 146.0 157.1

Digital 118.0 153.1

Revenue 548.7 661.3

Impairment

European home credit (1.6) 125.1

Mexico home credit 33.8 53.0

Digital 24.0 69.5

Impairment - pre-***exceptional*** item 56.2 247.6

***Exceptional*** item - 2.5

Impairment 56.2 250.1

Profit/(loss)

before

taxation

European home 54.5 (11.7)

credit

Mexico home 18.4 3.5

credit

Digital 8.7 (7.9)

Central costs\* (13.9) (12.7)

Profit/(loss) 67.7 (28.8)

before

taxation

***Exceptional*** - (11.9)

items

Profit/(loss) 67.7 (40.7)

before

taxation

\*Although

central costs

are not

classified as

a separate

segment in

accordance

with IFRS 8

'Operating

segments',

they are shown

separately

above in order

to provide

reconciliation

to profit

before

taxation.

2021 2020

£m £m

Segment assets

European home 511.5 485.1

credit

Mexico home 192.8 170.2

credit

Digital 211.6 224.4

UK 83.4 144.2

Total 999.3 1,023.9

Segment liabilities

European home credit 305.5 275.7

Mexico home credit 86.9 76.2

Digital 91.3 138.4

UK 148.5 163.1

Total 632.2 653.4

2021 2020

£m £m

Capital Expenditure (note 12)

European home credit 2.2 3.0

Mexico home credit 1.1 0.5

Digital 0.3 0.3

UK 1.5 -

Total 5.1 3.8

2021 2020

£m £m

Depreciation (note 12)

European home credit 4.0 5.0

Mexico home credit 1.1 1.4

Digital 0.5 0.6

UK - 0.2

Total 5.6 7.2

2021 2020

£m £m

Expenditure on intangible assets (note 11)

European home credit - -

Mexico home credit - -

Digital 3.8 4.8

UK 6.5 6.9

Total 10.3 11.7

2021 2020

£m £m

Amortisation (note 11)

European home credit - -

Mexico home credit - -

Digital 5.6 15.9

UK 9.1 10.0

Total 14.7 25.9

5. Finance Costs

2021 2020

£m £m

Interest payable on borrowings 52.6 55.2

Interest payable on lease liabilities 1.4 1.5

Interest income - (9.9)

Total 54.0 46.8

In 2020, interest income was received in respect of the successful appeal against the 2008 and 2009 tax decisions, £8.2 million of this income, which relates to the period from January 2017 to December 2019 was treated as an ***exceptional*** item (see note 9 for further details).

6.  Tax expense

The taxation charge for the year on statutory profit before taxation was £25.8 million based on an effective tax rate for the full year of approximately 38%. The tax charge arises from a combination of factors, but is largely driven by the lack of tax deductibility in some countries for impairment charges, liability to certain taxes that are computed with reference to profits for prior periods rather than current year, and the write-off of deferred tax assets.

Tax paid in the 2020 cashflow statement is net of £35.1 million repaid in respect of the successful appeal against the 2008 and 2009 tax decisions. The Group is subject to a tax audit in Mexico (regarding 2017).

7.  Earnings/(loss) per share

2021 2020

pence pence

Basic E/(L)PS 18.8 (28.9)

Dilutive effect of awards (1.0) 1.5

Diluted E/(L)PS 17.8 (27.4)

Basic earnings/(loss) per share ('E/(L)PS') is calculated by dividing the profit attributable to shareholders of £41.9 million (31 December 2020: loss of £64.2 million) by the weighted average number of shares in issue during the period of 223.2 million which has been adjusted to exclude the weighted average number of shares held in treasury and by the employee trust (31 December 2020: 222.4 million).

For diluted EPS the weighted average number of shares has been adjusted to 235.3 million (31 December 2020: 234.1 million) to assume conversion of all dilutive potential ordinary share options relating to employees of the Group.

8.  Dividends

Dividend per share

2021 2020

pence pence

Interim dividend 2.2 -

Final proposed dividend 5.8 -

Total dividend 8.0 -

Dividends paid

2021 2020

£m £m

Interim dividend of 2.2 pence per share (2020: 4.9 -

interim dividend of nil pence per share)

Final 2020 dividend of nil pence per share - -

(2020: final 2019 dividend of nil pence per

share)

Total dividends paid 4.9 -

With the Group's strong recovery in 2021, our confidence in the growth potential of the business and our current strong capital base, the Board is pleased to declare a final dividend of 5.8 pence per share, bringing the full-year dividend to 8.0 pence per share (2020: nil). Subject to shareholder approval, the final dividend will be paid on 6 May 2022 to shareholders on the register at the close of business on 8 April 2022. The shares will be marked ex-dividend on 7 April 2022.  The Board also reviewed the future capital requirements of the Group and agreed to introduce a progressive dividend policy aimed at reducing, at an appropriate pace, the equity to receivables ratio to bring it closer to our broad target of 40%. In addition, it was agreed that future interim dividend payments would be set at 33% of the prior year's full dividend payments. The Board may also consider returning surplus capital to shareholders periodically, subject to prevailing market conditions.

9. ***Exceptional*** Items

The 2020 income statement includes an ***exceptional*** loss of £10.9 million which comprised a pre-tax ***exceptional*** loss of £11.9 million and an ***exceptional*** tax credit of £1.0 million.

Pre-tax Tax Post-tax

£m £m £m

Finland closure (10.6) (1.1) (11.7)

Restructuring costs (9.5) 2.1 (7.4)

Interest income 8.2 - 8.2

***Exceptional*** items (11.9) 1.0 (10.9)

The decision to close our business in Finland and to collect out the portfolio following a tightening of the rate cap resulted in a loss of £11.7 million. It comprised a £10.6 million charge against loss before tax and the write-off of a deferred tax asset of £1.1 million that we no longer expected to be realised. The pre-tax loss comprised a provision taken against the carrying value of the receivables book based on our best estimate of the value of collections of £2.5 million and £8.1 million from accelerated amortisation of intangible assets. The restructuring charge of £9.5 million arose in connection with rightsizing exercises that were conducted in 2020 and there was an associated tax credit of £2.1 million relating to this item. In addition, the profit and loss account included ***exceptional*** non-taxable interest income of £8.2 million, relating to the interest accrued for the period up to 31 December 2019 on the payments to the Polish tax authority made in January 2017 in respect of the 2008 and 2009 cases which were refunded in 2020.

10.  Goodwill

2021 2020

£m £m

Net book value at 1 January 24.4 23.1

Exchange adjustments (1.5) 1.3

Net book value at 31 December 22.9 24.4

Goodwill is tested annually for impairment or more frequently if there are indications that goodwill might be impaired. The recoverable amount is determined from a value in use calculation. The key assumptions used in the value in use calculation relate to the discount rates and growth rates adopted. We adopt discount rates which reflect the time value of money and the risks specific to the legacy MCB business. The cash flow forecasts are based on the most recent financial budgets approved by the Board. The rate used to discount the forecast cash flows is 10% (2020: 10%). The discount rate would need to increase to 17% before indicating that part of the goodwill may be impaired.

11.  Intangible assets

2021 2020

£m £m

Net book value at 1 January 30.2 43.2

Additions 10.3 11.7

Amortisation                                                                                                        (14.7) (25.9)

Exchange adjustments (0.6) 1.2

Net book value at 31 December 25.2 30.2

Intangible assets comprise computer software and are a mixture of self-developed and purchased assets. All purchased assets have had further capitalised development on them, meaning it is not possible to disaggregate fully between the relevant intangible categories.

In 2020, £8.1 million of amortisation of intangible assets was accelerated amortisation relating to the decision to close our business in Finland, this was treated as an ***exceptional*** item (see note 9).

12.  Property, plant and equipment

2021 2020

£m £m

Net book value at 1 January 15.4 20.0

Exchange adjustments (0.5) (0.6)

Additions 5.1 3.8

Disposals (0.6) (0.6)

Depreciation (5.6) (7.2)

Net book value at 31 December 13.8 15.4

As at 31 December 2021 the Group had £8.6 million of capital expenditure commitments contracted with third parties that were not provided for (2020: £2.6 million).

13. Right-of-use assets and lease liabilities

The movement in the right-of-use assets in the period is as follows:

Right-of-use assets

2021 2020

£m £m

Net book value at 1 January 17.5 18.8

Exchange adjustments (0.7) (0.5)

Additions 8.3 6.0

Modifications 1.0 3.6

Depreciation (8.4) (9.9)

Impairment - (0.5)

Net book value at 31 December 17.7 17.5

The recognised right-of-use assets relate to the following types of assets:

2021 2020

£m £m

Properties 11.9 10.5

Motor Vehicles 5.7 6.9

Equipment 0.1 0.1

Total right-of-use assets 17.7 17.5

The movement in the lease liability in the period is as follows:

Lease Liability

2021 2020

£m £m

Lease liability at 1 January 19.2 19.5

Exchange adjustments (0.8) (0.5)

Additions 8.8 9.6

Interest 1.4 1.5

Lease payments (9.9) (10.9)

Lease liability at 31 December 18.7 19.2

Analysed as:

Current 6.4 7.4

Non-current:-     between one and 10.61.7 11.1

five years-     greater than five

years 12.3 0.7

11.8

Lease liability at 31 December 18.7 19.2

Lease liabilities are ***measured*** at the present value of the remaining lease payments, discounted using the rate implicit in the lease, or if that rate cannot be readily determined, at the lessee's incremental borrowing rate. The weighted average lessee's incremental borrowing rate applied to the lease liabilities at 31 December 2021 was 7.2% (2020: 7.4%).

The amounts recognised in profit and loss are as follows:

2021 2020

£m £m

Depreciation on right-of-use assets 8.4 9.9

Interest expense on lease liabilities 1.4 1.5

Expense relating to leases of short-term leases 1.2 1.6

Expense relating to leases of low value assets - 0.1

Amounts recognised in profit and loss 11.0 13.1

The total cash outflow in the year in respect of lease contracts is £10.3m (2020: £11.4m).

14.  Deferred tax assets

Deferred tax assets have been recognised in respect of tax losses and other temporary timing differences (principally relating to recognition of revenue and impairment) to the extent that it is probable that these assets will be utilised against future taxable profits. No deferred tax liability is recognised on remaining temporary differences of circa £19 million (2020: £15.4 million) as the Group is able to control the timings of the reversal of these temporary differences and it is probable that they will not reverse in the foreseeable future.

15.  Amounts receivable from customers

All lending is in the local currency of the country in which the loan is issued.

2021 2020

£m £m

Polish zloty 247.6 225.3

Czech crown 48.7 50.9

Euro 87.8 117.0

Hungarian forint 101.7 89.9

Mexican peso 133.3 100.8

Romanian leu 69.8 62.1

Australian Dollar 27.9 23.1

Total receivables 716.8 669.1

Amounts receivable from customers are held at amortised cost and are equal to the expected future cash flows receivable discounted at the average effective interest rate of 93% (2020: 96%). All amounts receivable from customers are at fixed interest rates. The average period to maturity of the amounts receivable from customers is 12.3 months (2020: 11.1 months).

Determining an increase in credit risk since initial recognition

IFRS 9 requires the recognition of 12 month expected credit losses (the expected credit losses from default events that are expected within 12 months of the reporting date) if credit risk has not significantly increased since initial recognition (stage 1) and lifetime expected credit losses for financial instruments for which the credit risk has increased significantly since initial recognition (stage 2) or which are credit impaired (stage 3).

When determining whether the risk of default has increased significantly since initial recognition the Group considers both quantitative and qualitative information based on the Group's historical experience.

The approach to identifying significant increases in credit risk is consistent across the Group's products. In addition, as a backstop, the Group considers that a significant increase in credit risk occurs when an asset is more than 30 days past due.

Financial instruments are moved back to stage 1 once they no longer meet the criteria for a significant increase in credit risk.

Definition of default and credit impaired assets

The Group defines a financial instrument as in default, which is fully-aligned with the definition of credit-impaired, when it meets one or more of the following criteria:

·Quantitative criteria: the customer is more than 90 days past due on their contractual payments in home credit and 60 days past due on their contractual payments in IPF Digital;

·Qualitative criteria: indication that there is a measurable movement in the estimated future cash flows from a group of financial assets. For example, if prospective legislative changes are considered to impact the collections performance of customers.

The default definition has been applied consistently to model the probability of default (PD), exposure at default (EAD) and loss given default (LGD) throughout the Group's expected credit loss calculations.

An instrument is considered to no longer be in default (i.e. to have cured) when it no longer meets any of the default criteria.

The breakdown of receivables by stage is as follows:

2021 Stage 1£m Stage 2£m Stage 3£m Total net receivables£m

Home credit 360.3 57.9 125.3 543.5

IPF Digital 159.8 8.6 4.9 173.3

Group 520.1 66.5 130.2 716.8

2020 Stage 1£m Stage 2£m Stage 3£m Total net receivables£m

Home credit 288.7 51.0 142.6 482.3

IPF Digital 177.8 7.1 1.9 186.8

Group 466.5 58.1 144.5 669.1

The Group has one class of loan receivable and no collateral is held in respect of any customer receivables.

16.  Borrowing facilities and borrowings

The maturity of the Group's external bond and external bank borrowings and facilities is as follows:

2021 2020

Borrowings Facilities Borrowings Facilities

£m £m £m £m

Repayable:

- in less than one year 3.1 57.9 0.2 85.8

- between one and two years 87.4 124.1 74.3 104.4

- between two and five years 381.1 392.8 417.5 433.8

468.5 516.9 491.8 538.2

Total borrowings 471.6 574.8 492.0 624.0

Total undrawn facilities as at 31 December 2021 were £96.8 million (2020: £124.6 million), excluding £6.4 million unamortised arrangement fees and issue discount (2020: £7.4 million).

17.  Derivative financial instruments

At 31 December 2021 the Group had an asset of £0.7 million and a liability of £7.6 million (2020: £0.5 million asset and £6.7 million liability) in respect of foreign currency contracts. Foreign currency contracts are in place to hedge foreign currency cash flows. Where these cash flow hedges are effective, in accordance with IFRS, movements in their fair value are taken directly to reserves.

18.  Retirement benefit asset

The amounts recognised in the balance sheet in respect of the retirement benefit obligation are as follows:

2021 2020

£m £m

Diversified growth funds 7.9 8.4

Corporate bonds 20.2 20.4

Liability driven investments 23.1 23.0

Other 0.1 0.4

Total fair value of scheme assets 51.3 52.2

Present value of funded defined benefit obligations (46.4) (48.8)

Net asset recognised in the balance sheet 4.9 3.4

The credit recognised in the income statement in respect of defined benefit pension costs is £0.1 million (2020: £0.5 million). This credit includes a past service credit of £nil million (2020: £0.4 million) due to a Pension Increase Exchange exercise.

19. Provisions for liabilities and charges

The Group receives claims brought by or on behalf of current and former customers in connection with its past conduct. Where significant, provisions are held against the costs expected to be incurred in relation to these matters. Customer redress provisions of £5.4 million (2020: £19.2 million) represent the Group's best estimate of the costs that are expected to be incurred in relation to early settlement rebates in Poland (2021: £3.3 million; 2020: £17.6 million) and claims management charges incurred in Spain (2021: £2.1 million; 2020: £1.6 million). All claims are expected to be settled within 12 months of the balance sheet date.

20.  Fair values of financial assets and liabilities

IFRS 13 requires disclosure of fair value measurements of derivative financial instruments by level of the following fair value measurement hierarchy:

·quoted prices (unadjusted) in active markets for identical assets or liabilities (level 1);

·inputs other than quoted prices included within level 1 that are observable for the asset or liability, either directly (that is, as prices) or indirectly (that is, derived from prices) (level 2); and

·inputs for the asset or liability that are not based on observable market data (that is, unobservable inputs) (level 3).

With the exception of derivatives, which are held at fair value, amounts receivable from customers, and bonds, the carrying value of all other financial assets and liabilities (which are short-term in nature) is considered to be a reasonable approximation of their fair value. Details of the significant assumptions made in determining the fair value of amounts receivable from customers and bonds are included below, along with the fair value of other Group assets and liabilities.

Except as detailed in the following table, the carrying value of financial assets and liabilities recorded at amortised cost, which are all short-term in nature, are a reasonable approximation of their fair value:

2021 2020

Fair value Carrying value Fair value Carryingvalue

£m £m £m £m

Financial assets

Amounts 938.4 716.8 908.8 669.1

receivable from

customers

938.4 716.8 908.8 669.1

Financial

liabilities

Bonds 419.9 395.8 405.4 415.9

Bank borrowings 75.8 75.8 76.1 76.1

495.7 471.6 481.5 492.0

The fair value of amounts receivable from customers has been derived by discounting expected future cash flows (as used to calculate the carrying value of amounts due from customers), net of collection costs, at the Group's weighted average cost of capital which we estimate to be 10% (2020: 10%) which is assumed to be a proxy for the discount rate that a market participant would use to price the asset.

Under IFRS 13 'Fair value measurement', receivables are classed as level 3 as their fair value is calculated using future cash flows that are unobservable inputs.

The fair value of the bonds has been calculated by reference to their market value where market prices are available.

The carrying value of bank borrowings is deemed to be a good approximation of their fair value. Bank borrowings can be repaid within six months if the Group decides not to roll over for further periods up to the contractual repayment date. The impact of discounting would therefore be negligible.

Derivative financial instruments are held at fair value which is equal to the expected future cash flows arising as a result of the derivative transaction.

For other financial assets and liabilities, which are all short-term in nature, the carrying value is a reasonable approximation of their fair value.

21. Reconciliation of profit/(loss) after taxation to cash generated from operating activities

2021 2020

£m £m

Profit/(loss) after taxation from 41.9 (64.2)

operations

Adjusted for:

Tax charge 25.8 23.5

Finance costs 54.0 56.7

Finance income - (9.9)

Share-based payment (0.2) 1.1

(credit)/charge

Depreciation of property, plant 5.6 7.2

and equipment (note 12)

Loss on disposal of property, 0.4 0.2

plant and equipment (note 12)

Depreciation of right-of-use 8.4 9.9

assets (note 13)

Impairment of right-of-use assets - 0.5

(note 13)

Amortisation of intangible assets 14.7 25.9

(note 11)

Short term and low value lease 1.2 1.7

costs (note 13)

Changes in operating assets and

liabilities:

(Increase)/decrease in amounts (88.4) 294.9

receivable from customers

(Increase)/decrease in other (3.7) 4.1

receivables

Increase/(decrease) in trade and 26.7 (31.2)

other payables

Change in provisions (13.2) 19.2

Change in retirement benefit (1.0) (1.4)

asset

Increase/(decrease) in derivative 2.1 (8.4)

financial instrument liabilities

Cash generated from operating 74.3 329.8

activities

22.  Average and closing foreign exchange rates

The table below shows the average exchange rates for the relevant reporting periods and closing exchange rates at the relevant period ends.

Average Closing Average Closing

2021 2021 2020 2020

Polish zloty 5.3 5.4 5.0 5.1

Czech crown 29.7 29.5 30.1 29.3

Euro 1.2 1.2 1.1 1.1

Hungarian forint 415.3 438.7 399.0 405.7

Mexican peso 27.9 27.7 28.3 27.1

Romanian leu 5.7 5.9 5.5 5.4

Australian dollar 1.8 1.9 1.8 1.8

The £37.6 million exchange loss (2020: loss of £4.1 million) on foreign currency translations shown within the statement of comprehensive income arises on retranslation of net assets denominated in currencies other than sterling, due to the change in foreign exchange rates against sterling between December 2020 and December 2021 shown in the table above.

23. Contingent Liability Note

State Aid investigation

In late 2017 the European Commission (EC) opened a State Aid investigation into the Group Financing Exemption contained in the UK's controlled foreign company rules, which were introduced in 2013. In April 2019 the EC announced its finding that the Group Financing Exemption is partially incompatible with EU State Aid rules. In common with other UK-based international companies whose intra-group finance arrangements are in line with the UK's controlled foreign company rules, the Group is affected by this decision. On 12 February 2021 HMRC issued a Charging Notice, following the introduction of new legislation in December 2020 empowering HMRC to issue such Notices in order to collect alleged unlawful State Aid. The Charging Notice required a payment of £14.2 million with respect to accounting periods ended 2013 to 2018, which was paid in February 2021, with a further amount in respect of interest of £1.1 million, which was paid in August 2021. The payment of this amount is a procedural matter, and the new law does not allow for postponement. The company has appealed the Charging Notice on the grounds of the quantum assessed.

The UK government has filed an annulment application before the General Court of the European Union. In common with a number of other affected taxpayers, IPF has also filed its own annulment application. Based on legal advice received regarding the strength of the technical position set out in the annulment applications, it is expected to be more likely than not that the payment of alleged State Aid that the Group has made under the Charging Notice will ultimately be repaid, and therefore no provision has been recorded in the Financial Statements. The £15.3 million paid is held on the balance sheet as a non-current tax asset.

As a separate issue, HMRC has initiated a review of the Group's finance company's compliance with certain conditions under the UK domestic tax rules to confirm whether the company is eligible for the benefits of the Group Financing Exemption which it has claimed in its historic tax returns. IPF believes that all conditions have been complied with and have sought legal advice with regard to the interpretation of the relevant legislative condition. The legal advice has confirmed IPF's view and assessed that, in the event that HMRC were to take the matter to Tribunal, it is more likely than not that the company would succeed in defending its position. In the unexpected event that HMRC were to conclude that the company is not in compliance with the conditions and to pursue the matter in Tribunal, and won, the amount at stake for open years up to and including 2018 is £7.3 million. This domestic tax issue with respect to years up to and including 2018 and the State Aid issue are mutually exclusive, and the UK legislation implemented in December 2020 and referred to above includes provisions to ensure no double charge to tax arises. It is of note that currently HMRC have simply asked for information and no challenge has been made to the company's filing position. In the unlikely event that the Group's position were not to be sustained with respect to the domestic condition, a further amount of up to £1.5 million would be payable with respect to 2019.

24. Going concern

In considering whether the Group is a going concern, the Board has taken into account the Group's 2022 business plan, its principal risks (with particular reference to regulatory risks), and the expected trajectory of recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic. The forecasts have been prepared for the five years to 31 December 2026 and include projected profit and loss, balance sheet, cashflows, borrowings, headroom against debt facilities and funding requirements. These forecasts represent the best estimate of the expected recovery from the impact that Covid-19 had on the Group's businesses, and in particular the evolution of credit issuance and collection cash flows.

The financial forecasts have been stress tested in a range of downside scenarios to assess the impact on future profitability, funding requirements and covenant compliance. The scenarios reflect the crystallisation of the Group's principal risks (with particular reference to regulatory risks) and evaluate the impact of a more challenging recovery from the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic than assumed in the business plan. Consideration has also been given to multiple risks crystallising concurrently and the availability of mitigating actions that could be taken to reduce the impact of the identified risks. In addition, we examined a reverse stress test on the financial forecasts to assess the extent to which a recession would need to impact our operational performance in order to breach a covenant. This showed that net revenue would need to deteriorate significantly from the financial forecast and the Directors have a reasonable expectation that it is unlikely to deteriorate to this extent.

At 31 December 2021, the Group had £108 million of non-operational cash and headroom against its debt facilities (comprising a range of bonds and bank facilities), which have a weighted average maturity of 2.9 years. The total debt facilities as at 31 December 2021 amounted to £575 million of which £54 million (including £29 million which is uncommitted) is due for renewal over the following 12 months. A combination of these debt facilities, the embedded business flexibility in respect of cash generation and a successful track record of accessing funding from debt capital markets over a long period (including periods with challenging macroeconomic conditions and a changing regulatory environment), are expected to meet the Group's funding requirements for the foreseeable future (12 months from the date of approval of this report).Taking these factors into account, together with regulatory risks set out in note 2, the Board has a reasonable expectation that the Group has adequate resources to continue in operation for the foreseeable future. For this reason, the Board has adopted the going concern basis in preparing the Full-year Financial Report.

Responsibility statement

This statement is given pursuant to Rule 4 of the Disclosure Guidance and Transparency Rules.

It is given by each of the directors as at the date of this report, namely: Stuart Sinclair, Chair; Gerard Ryan, Chief Executive Officer; Richard Holmes, Senior independent non-executive director; Deborah Davis, non-executive director; John Mangelaars, non-executive director, and Bronwyn Syiek, non-executive director.

To the best of each director's knowledge:

a)        the financial information, prepared in accordance with the IFRSs, give a true and fair view of the assets, liabilities, financial position and profit of the Company and the undertakings included in the consolidation taken as a whole; and

b)        the management report contained in this report includes a fair review of the development and performance of the business and the position of the Company and the undertakings included in the consolidation taken as a whole, together with a description of the principal risks and uncertainties that they face.

Alternative performance ***measures***

This financial report provides alternative performance ***measures*** (APMs) which are not defined or specified under the requirements of International Financial Reporting Standards. We believe these APMs provide readers with important additional information on our business. To support this we have included a reconciliation of the APMs we use, where relevant, and a glossary indicating the APMs that we use, an explanation of how they are calculated and why we use them.

APM Closest Reconciling items Definition

equivalentstatutory tostatutory and purpose

***measure*** ***measure***

Income statement ***measures***

Credit issued growth (%) None Not applicable Credit issued

is the

principal

value of

loans

advanced to

customers and

is an

important

***measure*** of

the level of

lending in

the business.

Credit issued

growth is the

period-on

-period

change in

this metric

which is

calculated by

retranslating

the previous

year's credit

issued at the

average

actual

exchange

rates used in

the current

financial

year. This

ensures that

the ***measure***

is presented

having

eliminated

the effects

of exchange

rate

fluctuations

on the period

-on-period

reported

results

(constant

exchange

rates).

Average netreceivables (£m) None Not applicable Average net

receivables

are the

average

amounts

receivable

from

customers

translated at

the average

monthly

actual

exchange rate

(constant

exchange

rates). This

***measure*** is

presented to

illustrate

the change in

amounts

receivable

from

customers on

a consistent

basis with

revenue

growth.

Average netreceivables growth None Not applicable Average net

at constant exchange rates (%) receivables

growth is the

period-on

-period

change in

average net

receivables

which is

calculated by

retranslating

the previous

year's

average net

receivables

at the

average

actual

exchange

rates used in

the current

financial

year. This

ensures that

the ***measure***

is presented

having

eliminated

the effects

of exchange

rate

fluctuations

on the period

-on-period

reported

results

(constant

exchange

rates).

Closing net receivables growth None Notapplicable Closing net

at constant exchange rates (%) receivables

growth is the

period-on

-period

change in

closing net

receivables

which is

calculated by

retranslating

the previous

year's

closing net

receivables

at the

closing

actual

exchange rate

used in the

current

financial

year. This

ensures that

the ***measure***

is presented

having

eliminated

the effects

of exchange

rate

fluctuations

on the period

-on-period

reported

results.

Revenue growth atconstant None Not applicable The period-on

exchangerates (%) -period

change in

revenue which

is calculated

by

retranslating

the previous

year's

revenue at

the average

actual

exchange

rates used in

the current

financial

year. This

***measure*** is

presented as

a means of

eliminating

the effects

of exchange

rate

fluctuations

on the period

-on-period

reported

results

(constant

exchange

rates).

Impairment as apercentage None Not applicable Impairment as a

ofrevenue (%) percentage of

revenue is

reported

impairment divided

by reported

revenue and

represents a

***measure*** of credit

quality that is

used across the

business. This

***measure*** is

reported on a

rolling annual

basis

(annualised).

Cost-income ratio (%) None Not applicable The cost-income

ratio is other

costs divided by

reported revenue.

Other costs

represent all

operating costs

with the exception

of amounts paid to

agents as

collecting

commission. This

***measure*** is

reported on a

rolling annual

basis(annualised).

This is useful for

comparing

performance across

markets.

Pre-***exceptional*** profit/(loss) Profit/(loss) ***Exceptional*** items Profit/(loss)

before tax (£m) before tax before tax and

***exceptional*** items.

This is considered

to be an important

***measure*** where

***exceptional*** items

distort the

operating

performance of the

business.

Pre-***exceptional*** Earnings/(loss) per ***Exceptional*** items Earnings/(loss)

earnings/(loss) per share share per share before

(pence) the impact of

***exceptional*** items.

This is considered

to be an important

***measure*** where

***exceptional*** items

distort the

operating

performance of the

business.

Balance sheet and returns

***measures***

Equity to receivables ratio(%) None Not applicable Total equity

divided by amounts

receivable from

customers. This is

a ***measure*** of

balance sheet

strength and the

Group targets a

ratio of around

40%.

Headroom (£m) Undrawnexternal None Headroom is an

bankfacilities alternative term

for undrawn

external bank

facilities.

Net debt None Notapplicable Borrowings

less cash

Other ***measures***

Customers None Not applicable Customers

that are

being

served by

our agents

or through

our money

transfer

product in

the home

credit

business

and

customers

that are

not in

default in

our

digital

business.

Constant exchange rate reconciliations

2021

£m European Mexicohome IPF Digital Central costs Group

home credit

credit

Customers 810 654 263 - 1,727

(000)

Closing net 425.9 117.6 173.3 - 716.8

receivables

Credit 599.2 194.2 188.7 - 982.1

issued

Average net 403.3 102.8 170.9 - 677.0

receivables

Revenue 284.7 146.0 118.0 - 548.7

Impairment 1.6 (33.8) (24.0) - (56.2)

Net revenue 286.3 112.2 94.0 - 492.5

Finance (34.0) (6.6) (13.3) (0.1) (54.0)

costs

Agents' (42.9) (22.4) - - (65.3)

commission

Other costs (154.9) (64.8) (72.0) (13.8) (305.5)

Profit/(loss) 54.5 18.4 8.7 (13.9) 67.7

before tax

2020 performance, at

2020 average foreign

exchange rates

£m European Mexico IPF Central costs Group

home home Digital

credit credit

Customers (000) 827 599 256 - 1,682

Closing net 389.5 92.8 186.8 - 669.1

receivables

Credit issued 453.8 143.6 174.8 - 772.2

Average net 443.0 102.5 232.1 - 777.6

receivables

Revenue 351.1 157.1 153.1 - 661.3

Impairment (125.1) (53.0) (69.5) - (247.6)

Net revenue 226.0 104.1 83.6 - 413.7

Finance costs (32.3) (7.7) (14.9) (0.1) (55.0)

Agents' commission (50.7) (21.3) - - (72.0)

Other costs (154.7) (71.6) (76.6) (12.6) (315.5)

Pre-***exceptional*** (11.7) 3.5 (7.9) (12.7) (28.8)

(loss)/profit before

tax

Foreign

exchange

movements

£m European Mexico IPF Digital Central costs Group

home home

credit credit

Closing net (24.2) (2.0) (10.6) - (36.8)

receivables

Credit (24.1) (5.1) (3.6) - (32.8)

issued

Average net (20.7) (2.6) (6.8) - (30.1)

receivables

Revenue (10.4) (1.0) (4.4) - (15.8)

Impairment (1.7) (3.3) 1.9 - (3.1)

Net revenue (12.1) (4.3) (2.5) - (18.9)

Finance 1.4 0.2 0.7 - 2.3

costs

Agents' 2.6 0.4 - - 3.0

commission

Other costs 6.0 1.4 2.3 - 9.7

Profit/(loss) (2.1) (2.3) 0.5 - (3.9)

before tax

2020

performance,

restated at

2021 average

foreign

exchange

rates

£m European Mexicohome IPF Digital Central costs Group

home credit

credit

Closing net 365.3 90.8 176.2 - 632.3

receivables

Credit 429.7 138.5 171.2 - 739.4

issued

Average net 422.3 99.9 225.3 - 747.5

receivables

Revenue 340.7 156.1 148.7 - 645.5

Impairment (126.8) (56.3) (67.6) - (250.7)

Net revenue 213.9 99.8 81.1 - 394.8

Finance (30.9) (7.5) (14.2) (0.1) (52.7)

costs

Agents' (48.1) (20.9) - - (69.0)

commission

Other costs (148.7) (70.2) (74.3) (12.6) (305.8)

Year-on-year

movement at

constant

exchange

rates

European Mexicohome IPF Digital Central costs Group

home credit

credit

Closing net 16.6% 29.5% (1.6%) - 13.4%

receivables

Credit 39.4% 40.2% 10.2% - 32.8%

issued

Average net (4.5%) 2.9% (24.1%) - (9.4%)

receivables

Revenue (16.4%) (6.5%) (20.6%) - (15.0%)

Impairment 101.3% 40.0% 64.5% - 77.6%

Net revenue 33.8% 12.4% 15.9% - 24.7%

Finance (10.0%) 12.0% 6.3% - (2.5%)

costs

Agents' 10.8% (7.2%) - - 5.4%

commission

Other costs (4.2%) 7.7% 3.1% (9.5%) 0.1%

Information for shareholders

1.    The Annual Report and Financial Statements 2021 and the notice of the Annual General Meeting will be posted on 24 March 2022 to shareholders who have elected to continue receiving documents from the Company in hard copy form. All other shareholders will be sent a letter explaining how to access the documents on the Company's website from 25 March 2022 or an email with the equivalent information. Paper proxy forms can be requested from the Registrar by calling the shareholder helpline on 0371 664 0300.

2.    The Annual General Meeting will be held at 10.30am on 28 April 2022 at the Company's registered office, 26 Whitehall Road, Leeds, LS12 1BE.  Provided that there are no restrictions that preclude attendance in person on the day, we welcome the maximum number of shareholders that we are able to accommodate, within safety constraints and in accordance with any governmental guidelines, to attend and vote at the AGM in person.

This report has been prepared solely to provide additional information to shareholders to assess the Group's strategies and the potential for those strategies to succeed.  The report should not be relied on by any other party or for any other purpose. The report contains certain forward-looking statements. These statements are made by the directors in good faith based on the information available to them up to the time of their approval of this report but such statements should be treated with caution due to the inherent uncertainties, including both economic and business risk factors, underlying any such forward-looking information. Percentage change figures for all performance ***measures***, other than profit before taxation and earnings per share, unless otherwise stated, are quoted after restating prior year figures at a constant exchange rate (CER) for 2021 in order to present the underlying performance variance.

Investor relations and media contact

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International Personal Finance will host a webcast of its 2021 full-year results presentation at 09.00hrs (GMT) today - Wednesday 23 February 2022, which can be accessed via our website at [*www.ipfin.co.uk*](http://www.ipfin.co.uk).

A copy of this statement can be found on our website at [*www.ipfin.co.uk*](http://www.ipfin.co.uk).

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**Graphic**

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**Load-Date:** February 23, 2022

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[***Darius McDermott: Investing through the uncertainty in Europe***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:64XC-X3F1-JD7R-N1HG-00000-00&context=1516831)

Professional Adviser

March 1, 2022 Tuesday

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**Length:** 971 words

**Byline:** [*jenna.brown@incisivemedia.com*](mailto:jenna.brown@incisivemedia.com), (Jenna Brown)

**Body**

These are challenging days for Europe. Russia's hostilities towards Ukraine have turned into an ***invasion*** and the spectre of rising inflation looms large.

European stock markets have also had a troubled start to the year. The Euro Stoxx 50 and Germany's Dax have fallen 8% year to date, while France's CAC 40 has slipped 6%.

However, fund managers believe there are still plenty of opportunities due to the region's size, the fact it's home to many exciting companies, and other encouraging factors including the relaxation of covid rules in many countries.

It's a point acknowledged by Lewis Grant, senior portfolio manager, global equities, at the international business of Federated Hermes. "European governments continue to relax restrictions, with Italy and Spain scrapping their outdoor mask mandates and Sweden abandoning mass testing," he said.

**Growth improving**

Eurozone business activity growth actually accelerated sharply in February, as Covid-19 containment ***measures*** were relaxed, according to new figures. The flash purchasing managers' composite index for the eurozone also showed that future expectations, new orders and jobs growth improved. "Growth picked up, especially in the service sector, though manufacturers also reported improved production gains as a result of rising demand and fewer supply bottlenecks," it added.

While supply delays easing helped reduce raw material input cost inflation, cost pressures caused by rising wages and energy bills led to the sharpest rise in average prices in the survey's history.

So, where are the managers of European funds finding their opportunities? Which sectors and stocks currently look the most appealing for investors? I asked three European equity managers their thoughts.

**European Opportunities Trust**

Alexander Darwall, the Trust's highly experienced manager, invests in companies that offer good prospects for capital growth. While the portfolio was affected by the market rotation out of technology and healthcare during January, he insisted the fund's holdings were trading well.

"The market hiccough in January was due to building evidence of inflation and, as a consequence, expectations of higher interest rates," he said. He also has high hopes for some stocks that have endured a challenging start to the year. A prime example is Novo Nordisk, the Danish pharmaceutical company.

"Novo Nordisk shares have been severely marked down on the back of what we believe is a temporary manufacturing glitch affecting about 1% of sales," he said. "We can look through this minor inconvenience although others cannot."

He also highlighted Salmon giant Mowi as having been a strong performer. "Salmon prices are likely to remain high yet, we think, cost pressures are probably less severe than land-based protein providers," he said. "Put another way, with fertilizer, energy and other input costs driving inflation in ***agriculture***, aquaculture appears to be less impacted."

Alexander has also bought more shares in Darktrace, the British information technology company that specialises in cyber-defence. This followed a recent visit to its offices in Cambridge. "A new product launch expected later this year will, we expect, add further momentum to their strong growth," he explained.

**Jupiter European**

In their most recent fund update, managers Mark Nichols and Mark Heslop said the main European indices were routed last month, posting their worst monthly loss since March 2020. They also pointed out how energy and bank stocks outperformed, while technology and industrials were underperformers. In addition, value stocks generally outperformed growth. Travel technology firm Amadeus, information provider RELX and tyre manufacturer Michelin, however, were positive contributors to performance.

The fund also opened a new position in Air Liquide, a leading name in the field of industrial gases, which has a track record of earnings growth. "We believe the company's long-term contracts and diversified exposure should help it to benefit from growth trends, including the energy transition towards hydrogen, as the company is a large hydrogen producer," they stated.

Looking ahead, the managers continue to focus on businesses with the potential to consistently create significant value for shareholders over the long-term - regardless of short-term headwinds. ***Exceptional*** franchises with "sustainable competitive advantages" are among their top priorities. "We continue to be attracted to companies with long-term structural growth drivers and predictable cashflows and will apply our ***process*** to analyse and invest behind these opportunities," they added.

**Janus Henderson European Focus**

This fund invests in companies of all sizes in any industry. They just need to be incorporated, headquartered, or generate a significant chunk of their revenue from Europe, excluding the UK.

The managers, John Bennett and Tom O'Hara, have been helped of late by overweight positions in contrarian sectors such as materials and energy, as well as being underweight IT.

They also recently added to their positions in companies likely to benefit from increased international travel.

These included air-travel technology company Amadeus, Gucci-owner Kering, and the budget airline Ryanair. "The reopening of air travel and leisure is only just getting going and will likely be less affected than mass-market physical retail by inflation shrinking disposable incomes," they said.

The fund also bought into BESI, the semiconductor stock. "We are increasingly excited by the firm's innovative product development," they said. The move comes as chip scaling becomes more difficult and expensive. "BESI's core competencies in 3D stacking and multi-chip architecture offer new solutions to these problems," they added.

***Darius McDermott is managing director at Chelsea Financial Services and FundCalibre***

**Load-Date:** March 4, 2022

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[***FOOD PRICES UNDER UOKOK SUPERVISION; More expensive on a plate***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:64NH-VW91-JBK9-203D-00000-00&context=1516831)

Newsweek Polska (English)

January 31, 2022

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**Section:** Newsweek BUSINESS; Pg. 62; No. 5

**Length:** 1749 words

**Byline:** Miłosz Węglewski

**Highlight:** The government hopes that the six-month VAT reduction on food will be a breakthrough in the fight against inflation. But this will only slow down the increase of prices, which will shoot up again in the summer.

**Body**

TEXT PHOTO BY MAREK SZCZEPAŃSKI

Prime Minister Morawiecki explicitly calls on traders to lower food prices. The government assures that the average Polish family is expected to save about 45 zlotys a month on the VAT cut from 5 percent to zero, which will apply to roughly two-thirds of basic products by the end of July.

INCENTIVE TO DENOUNCE

Traders who delay with price reductions will face serious consequences. The Office of Competition and Consumer Protection is to play a supervisory role. Its president Tomasz Chróstny is already threatening traders. "Starting next week, we will begin constant monitoring of product prices in retail chains," we read in the UOKiK communiqué.

The inspectors are to analyze the prices of a basket of products including butter, milk, bread, oil, sugar, flour, eggs, meat, dairy products and fruits and vegetables. Traders who do not comply with the authorities' requirements may be fined up to 10% of their turnover.

But UOKiK is also counting on customers' help in pointing out stores, in which prices have not fallen after the VAT reduction. Such reports can be sent to a specially launched e-mail address.

What do traders think about it? Nobody will decide on an open confrontation with the government. Although the industry is well aware that the zero VAT is a government arbitrary act, because the EU directive prohibits its application in the case of food. At least for now, because work on a project to "liberalize" this issue is ongoing. But Morawiecki's government did not consult its intentions with the European Commission. Hoping that in the face of record expensive food in most EU countries, Brussels will turn a blind eye. And so it may be.

For now, declarations of loyalty and cooperation are coming from the big chains. Lidl has announced that the price cuts will apply not only to basic foodstuffs, but also to other products on which VAT will fall, such as plant protection products or fertilizers. In total, the price cuts in this chain will apply to over 2 thousand products. Another discount chain goes even further.

- In connection with the amendment of the VAT act, from 1 February we will reduce prices of over 15 thousand articles, declares Maja Szewczyk, corporate communication director in Kaufland chain.

These announcements of the tycoons irritate small shopkeepers. Especially those trading on 100-150 sq m, often with the whole family, sourcing goods through wholesale suppliers or at the stock exchange. And this is almost one third of our grocery market. - I have no choice but to reduce prices of basic products, at least for some time. But I will probably raise them again gradually in the spring, because I pay more and more for energy and fuel, and goods are getting more expensive every month. If I don't make up for the February price cuts, I'll have to close my store after 18 years,' complains Wojciech Stec, a shopkeeper from Kalisz.

The trade potentates have prepared themselves well for the government's price-cutting action. They started preventive price increases as early as at the end of December, right after the Finance Minister disclosed the government's intention to reduce VAT on food to zero. This is confirmed by the analyses of "shopping baskets" in individual chains, as well as statistics of the Central Statistical Office. At the end of November the aggregate food and beverage price index, thanks to the post-holiday slowdown in prices, was lower than the general inflation index (6.4% vs. 7.8%). In December, however, it overtook it with an almost 9 percent annual increase, a third of which came in the last month of the year. This was mainly due to a jump in the prices of fat products, dairy products, meat, fruit, sweets and beverages.

It didn't stop there. As late as the end of January, many retail chains made a kind of a tape throw, raising prices before the zero VAT came in. Did they raise prices, only to lower them a bit in a few days?

- Regular weekly price changes are a normal practice in trade, especially at the beginning of the year. Unfortunately, market realities make price changes of some products inevitable - explained Grzegorz Pytko, sales director in Biedronka chain.

The moment for strong increases was unfortunate. But in the past months, the increase in the cost of purchasing ***agricultural*** products and foodstuffs was ***unprecedented***. The costs of trade operations have also increased by drastic increases in the prices of electricity, gas and motor fuels, i.e. the transportation of goods. In addition, the salaries of workers increased rapidly, in trade linked to the minimum wage, which from 2019 increased from 2250 PLN to 3010 PLN today.

Anyway, the reasons for the explosion of food prices in stores must be sought already in the producers of ***agricultural*** products. The data published by the Central Statistical Office (CSO) on their purchase prices are surprising. On an annual basis, they increased by almost 29 per cent, which has not happened for over a quarter of a century! For example milk went up by one fifth, beef by almost one third and poultry by even more (about 36 per cent).

The increase in farm gate prices continues to accelerate. In December they were about 6 per cent higher than in November. For example, the price of milk increased by this much. Many other products increased considerably more - pigs by about 8 per cent, wheat by almost 10 per cent and rye by almost 13 per cent.

The same applies to ***processed*** products - cheese, cold cuts, jams or bread. Producer inflation (the so-called PPI), which ***measures*** the level of prices of so-called factory output and business-to-business trade, exceeded 14 percent in December, the highest since 1997.

Rising prices for ***agricultural*** and food products are rarely purely domestic in origin and are the result of global conditions. In the case of vegetable oils, which were one of the most expensive commodities last year (ca. 40 per cent), the key factor was the increase in global demand for biofuels as one of the substitutes for more expensive oil. As a consequence, the demand for cereals and oilseeds for their production has increased.

The increase in demand for biofuels, especially bioethanol - which is largely derived from sugar cane - was also one of the reasons for the global surge in sugar prices. Added to this were weather anomalies, particularly the prolonged frost in Brazil. The price of sugar in Europe and in Poland, where it is produced from sugar beets, is also driven by weaker crops, as well as nightmarishly expensive gas and fuel. The result? In 2021, sugar prices in Poland rose by over 30 percent.

It was an ***exceptionally*** difficult year for the entire global food sector. Frosts in Brazil, ***unprecedented*** floods in China and many European countries, limiting the production of cereals and raising their price, which in turn hit livestock farms. Then there are the record prices for fertilizers, where gas is a major cost factor in production. Not to forget the labor shortages and rising wage costs.

All of this has caused food to rise sharply around the world. Its index, published monthly by the UN agency FAO and covering five main products - meat, dairy products, sugar, cereals and vegetable oil - has risen by more than 20 percent in 2021 (to almost 134 points) and is on track to become the most expensive in the world. (to almost 134 points) and is already close to the historical record of more than a decade ago. And in our stores, it has long been beaten.

STOP AND CONTINUE GROWTH?

GLOBAL CONDITIONS CANNOT ONLY CHANGE THE FACT that the economic policy pursued by the PiS government is conducive to price increases. This is especially true of the huge scale of social transfers and strong increases of minimum wages flooding the market with masses of money. Consumption becomes the main driving force of the economy and pushes prices and salaries upwards.

The effects? Just compare the prices of basic food products today with those in 2015, before PiS came to power. A loaf of wheat-rye bread used to cost on average 2.20 zlotys, now it costs about 3.40 zlotys. An increase of more than half. A cube of butter has become even more expensive: from less than 4 zł to over 6 zł. Also potatoes, rapeseed oil, chocolate and smoked sausage have risen in price by more than 50 percent. Such price increases as in the last six years have not been observed since the mid-1990s.

Will the six-month VAT cut to zero for most food products slow down this trend? Some economists believe that it will dampen inflation in this market segment for a few months, as stores will cut prices on most products. Others are skeptical even on this issue. Dr. Urszula Klosiewicz-Górecka, expert of the Polish Economic Institute, does not exclude that part of the reduction may be taken by trade companies as their profits. Dr Andrzej Maria Falinski, vice-president of the Social Dialogue Forum association, is almost sure: - Trade companies will treat it as an opportunity to make up for the margin they lose by incurring various fixed costs and additional obligations to the state. Small businesses will certainly do so, because they are barely breathing.

In the long run, none of the experts are under any illusions. - After the government's anti-inflationary shield expires, the price dynamics will increase," believes Grzegorz Rykaczewski, agri-food sector analyst at Santander bank. - The shield package may mitigate the effects, but it will not suppress price growth. Inflationary pressure in the food sector is still high - claims Mariusz Dziwulski, expert from PKO BP. And Paweł Wyrzykowski, an analyst at BNP Paribas bank, forecasts: - We can expect that in 2022. we may expect that in 2022 the average annual growth of food prices will be significantly higher than the one observed in 2021.

Jakub Olipra, expert from Crédit Agricole bank, briefly sums up the government's action with VAT reduction: - This procedure is like buying lower inflation in 2022 at the expense of higher inflation in 2023.

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Polish purchase prices of basic ***agricultural*** products increased by nearly 29 per cent annually, which has not happened for over a quarter of a century

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[***Climate change extreme and seasonal toxic metal occurrence in Romanian freshwaters in the last two decades—case study and critical review***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:671W-P2B1-JCWX-C1TG-00000-00&context=1516831)

npj Clean Water

January 2022

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**Length:** 5594 words

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**Body**

Introduction

The IPCC Working Group II Fourth Assessment Report found that many natural systems are already affected by regional climate warming. Europe experienced its warmest air temperature on record in May‒October 2018. This resulted in increasing mean and maximum lake surface temperatures (increases between 1.5 and 2.4 °C for over 46,557 lakes across the continent). In June‒July 2019, two record-breaking heatwaves that exceeded more than 1 °C (especially in Western Europe) were purported to be one of the deadliest climate warming-related disasters in the world. The challenges of climate warming-induced increases in the frequency and intensity of hydroclimatic extremes (e.g., droughts and floods) have promoted a new framework for the consideration of environmental stressors. Given the critical importance of freshwater ecosystems under a growing global population, long-term water quality monitoring assessment is imperative to understand regional hotspots of water scarcity.

The global contamination of freshwater systems is one of the critical environment-related issues associated with increased industrialization, natural and mineral resource exploitation, and social practices (e.g., tourism and local population growth). Heavy metals (HMs) released into river ecosystems are unequally distributed between aqueous and riverbed sediments. Metals transfer at the sediment-water interface depends on the chemical forms and physicochemical characteristics of water and sediment. HMs, which are nonbiodegradable and nonthermodegradable elements, gradually become enriched in river environments and reach toxicity levels that are transferable to the biota. The dynamic balance between HMs in sediment deposits and water flow can be observed due to their significant remobilization and transfer under hydroclimatic extremes. Under climate change, river discharges become more frequent, and riverbed elements accumulate in the overlying waters. Therefore, deeply buried pollutant deposits can considerably change the water composition and quality over time.

This study evaluated the extreme climate indices that explicitly linked environmental conditions with metal levels in water and sediments in 2018 and 2019. Our main objective was to create a holistic representation of the drivers with outcomes that will become common in the following years (e.g., heatwaves, water discharges, and floods). We determined if air temperature and rainfall are responsible for changing the temporal-spatial distribution of elemental levels in the sediments and water in Olt River lakes. Additionally, we reviewed the most relevant literature from Romania to reveal all hotspots polluted with HMs in the last two decades. Furthermore, we quantified the natural and anthropogenic sources linked to their seasonality to highlight the future risks that can occur once with increasing climate extremes, especially in a hot season. Finally, we identified aspects of these dynamics that can support policymakers and future research in the area subjected to such hazards.

Results and discussion

Climatic framework

The daily climate parameters investigated emphasized atypical weather conditions for the two extreme sites, #1, Cornetu Lake (316 m altitude), and #12, the Danube River upstream of the Olt River (27 m altitude), in 2018‒2019 (Fig. ). Contrary to the pattern in 2018, the combined effect of summer days (SD) > 25 intervals and increased TX mean value shifted in 2019 (Fig. ), which increased the variability of temperature and the occurrence of extreme events. The historical perspective of climate reconstruction for more than two centuries demonstrated significant changes in precipitation anomalies for many years, but the 2018‒2019 period was not found to be extreme (Fig. ). The summer of 2018 was the third-warmest summer recorded for the studied areas (Fig. ) and belonged to the fourth warmest global record since 1880,. In 2018‒2019, ***unprecedented*** dry conditions from spring/summer were reported all over Europe, where positive anomalies characterized northern and western Europe, while south-eastern Europe was marked by negative anomalies. We observed significant differences (p < 0.001, two-tailed hypothesis) between mean extreme site values for daily mean temperature (TM), daily minimum temperature (TN), daily maximum temperature (TX), and total daily precipitation (RR) (t-values = −14.50, −15.19, −14.89, and 6.34, respectively) in the time interval between 1960 and 2019. Consecutive dry days (CDDs) have decreased in Cornetu Lake since the 1980s, but no trend was observed for the Danube River upstream of the Olt River. This indicated that climate change effects at intramountain sites are stronger than those at lower altitudes (Fig. ). Since 1980, the extreme temperature intensity indices (TXx, TNx, TXn, and TNn) have shown a significant positive trend, similar to those in other geographical regions.

Climate data for the extreme sites Cornetu Lake (#1) and Danube River—upstream of the Olt River (#12).

a digital daily minimum (TN) and maximum (TX) temperature; b the sum of daily precipitation (RR) for sites #1 and #12 in 2018, and c the sum of daily precipitation (RR) for sites #1 and #12 in 2019; dark bars indicate the sampling periods; SD summer days. The climate data were extracted from European Climate Assessment and Dataset (ECA&D) database ([*https://www.ecad.eu/download/ensembles/download.php*](https://www.ecad.eu/download/ensembles/download.php)).

Normalized values for extreme climate indices in extreme sites Cornetu Lake (#1—blue line) and Danube River—upstream the Olt River (#12—red line).

a TN10p—the annual percentage of days when TN < 10th percentile; bTX10p—the annual percentage of days when TX < 10th percentile; c TN90p—the annual percentage of days when TN > 90th percentile; d TX90p—the annual percentage of days when TN > 90th percentile; e WSDI—the annual number of days contributing to events where six or more consecutive days experience TX > 90th percentile; f CDD—the maximum annual number of consecutive dry days (when precipitation < 1.0 mm); g RRX5day—maximum 5-day precipitation total; h RR20mm—annual number of days when precipitation ≥ 20 mm, and j RR90p—the annual percentage of days when TX > 90th percentile. The climate data were extracted from European Climate Assessment and Dataset (ECA&D) database ([*https://www.ecad.eu/download/ensembles/download.php*](https://www.ecad.eu/download/ensembles/download.php)).

The ETCCDI indices indicate changes in frequency, intensity, and duration of extreme events responsible for flash floods in the last two centuries. Thus, the percentile-based indices TN10p (cold nights) and TX10p (cold days) significantly decreased after 2000, while the frequency of warm nights (TN90p) and warm days (TX90p) increased since 1984 (Fig. ). Further climate projections indicated fewer days of below-freezing temperatures by the mid-21st century. Our study area exhibited a significant increasing trend for extreme temperatures in the past, but only in summer and winter. Substantial changes were found during nights rather than daytime, comparable with research observations from other geographical areas. The warm spell duration index (WSDI) showed a sharp increase starting at the beginning of the 1990s, with a maximum for the Cornetu Lake (2018 indices ranked third) and Danube River upstream of the Olt River (2019 ranked fifth) sites (Fig. ). The intensity of heavy precipitation events in the former five-day events (Rx5day) has been positive since 1960, with a divergent tendency for southern Europe. The highly wet days (Rx5day) index increased only at intramountain sites. However, it did not exhibit a consistent statistically significant trend (within the 1 SD range), instead of showing a positive anomaly for #1 in 2018 and a negative anomaly for #1 in 2019 and negative values for #12 in both years (Fig. ). The incremental tendency of extreme precipitation indices is less spatially consistent and strongly correlated with elevation, indicating future risk for intramountain sites. The intensification of short-duration heavy rain is responsible for severe flash discharges, and the Rx5day increase is associated with greenhouse gas forcing regulating hydrological cycles.

Compared with average, few extreme values were found for precipitation in both sites in 2018‒2019. In recent decades, severe positive anomalies (RR99p) (2014, 2008, 2005, and 1998) and extreme adverse events (2011‒2012, 2019, 2006, 2002, and 1999) were observed for Cornetu Lake, but only partially and with lower intensity for the Danube River upstream of the Olt River (Fig. ). A differential change in the annual cycle shows increased summer extreme temperatures coupled with an increased winter temperature at plain sites, consistent with what has been reported in the Mediterranean Basin. Based on climate parameters quantifying spring-summer conditions, in 2018, the record drought in 2019 was exceeded, especially at sites in the intramountain area (#1‒9). Several models and observations on the 2018 heatwave drought indicated only a 12% probability of occurrence under our current climate and an overhead 50% chance in the future during the mid-21st century. Similar drought conditions are expected to become common according to future projections. Overall, the 2018 event will be the first with synchronal spring and summer anomalies.

Temporal-spatial distribution of heavy metals in sediments and water

The national sediment background values, namely, 150, 100, 40, 35, 85, 29, 0.8, and 0.3 mg/kg for Zn, Cr, Cu, Ni, Pb, As, Cd, and Hg, were included for this survey due to the lack of consistent data in the study area. Extreme concentrations for analyzed elements that exceeded the national standards varied between sites and investigated periods. The river section water was alkaline with mean pH values of 8.1 ± 0.37 (2018) and 8.6 ± 0.77 (2019) and maximum pH values of 9.1 (2018) and 11.99 (2019). A faster HM release rate from sediments is expected at lower pH values. The temporal-spatial distribution of Cd, Hg, As, and Pb in the water and sediments of the mainstream Olt River lakes showed variability linked to water volume and the rate of evapotranspiration during summer days (Fig. ). The mean contents of Zn, Cr, Cu, Ni, Pb, As, Cd and Hg were (in mg/kg) 69 ± 5.1, 23 ± 1.8, 21 ± 2.0, 37 ± 2.1, 26 ± 2.1, 94 ± 8.5, 0.36 ± 0.02, and 0.12 ± 0.01, respectively (Supplementary Table ). Representative studies performed in various Romanian environments indicated that Olt River lakes are highly polluted with HMs–. The measurements performed in the present study corroborate this view.

Distribution of heavy metal sediment content collected during seven periods in 2018−2019 and 19 sites along middle and lower Olt River riches.

a Zn, b Cr, c Cu, d Ni, e Pb, f As, g Cd, h Hg.

Except for the two extreme values ***measured***, the 2019 average contents of Zn and Ni in the sediments were 2.8 ± 1.9 and 2.12 ± 1.7 mg/kg (Fig. ). The extreme metal contents of Cr, Cu, Pb, As, Cd, and Hg were significantly higher in 2018 (100, 176, 94, 240, 1.23, and 0.23 mg/kg, respectively) than in 2019 (4.4, 17, 12, 7.7, 0.38, and 0.02 mg/kg, respectively). Temporal assessment could be accomplished only for sediments from site #8 (Băbeni Lake), which represents the area highly contaminated with Hg (44 mg/kg). The two-sample test for variance demonstrated that the differences in Zn, Cu, As, Cd, and Hg contents for all sampling sites in 2018 and 2019 were statistically significant (F = 0.28, 3.7, 18, 1095, 4.8, and 73; p < 0.001). The two-sample t-test for the mean (p < 0.001) showed a significant difference between yearly concentration levels only for Pb, As, Cd, and Hg (t = 8.3, 15, 7.2, and 4.3) when equal variance was assumed. Even so, the lowest amounts of As, Cd, Pb, and Hg were located downstream of river and lakes sediments; they were highest in the intramountain area. Except for sites #3, #8, #12, and #19, the soluble metal concentration was over eight times higher in 2018 than in the 2019 seasonal profile.

In lake water, the concentrations of HMs and trace elements usually do not exceed the national threshold values. In 2018‒2019, the maximum HM concentrations in water were in the range of 6.9‒94 µg/L As, 0.84‒15.75 µg/L Pb, 1.3‒6.5 µg/L Cd, and 3.3‒1.56 µg/L Hg. In the case of Hg, a very high level up to 47 µg/L was found for site #8 (Băbeni Lake) in 2014‒2016, indicating large metal deposits downstream of the Râmnicu Vâlcea Chemical Industrial Platform. The two-sample test for variance showed significant differences (p < 0.001) between samples collected in 2018 and 2019 for As, Pb, Cd, and Hg (F = 98, 544, 0.01, and 2.86, respectively). The two-sample t-test (with equal variances assumed) demonstrated a significant difference between the means only for As and Pb (t = 3.6 and 4.0; p < 0.001). ***Exceptional*** concentrations were ***measured*** for As in March 2018, when they reached nine times the national threshold for surface water (94 µg/L). For Pb, Cd, and Hg, the results indicated enriched levels in both investigated years exceeding the first degree of pollution. The mean concentration (µg/L) and the standard deviation were 12 ± 1 (As), 2.6 ± 4 (Pb), 0.48 ± 0.1 (Cd), and 0.97 ± 0.9 (Hg) in 2018 and 2.6 ± 1.9 (As), 0.18 ± 0.1 (Pb), 0.8 ± 1.4 (Cd), and 0.94 ± 0.5 (Hg) in 2019. The combined analysis of Fig. indicates that for Cd, Hg, Pb, and As, the seasonal and interannual variability in trace element contents was significant.

Climate-trace element relationships

Until the mid-century, projected variability in south-eastern Europe revealed a sustained warming ***process*** with decreasing precipitation amounts and increasing evapotranspiration in the investigated study area. Climate change interacts with the hydrological cycle on global and regional scales. Low river discharge (limited dilution of the chemical load from point sources) and high temperature during summer/autumn increased metal levels. In March/June 2018 and July/September 2019, the highest correlation between trace elements and daily climate data were calculated (Supplementary Table ). The correlation was negative with temperature and positive with rainfall in spring (March). In June 2018 and July/September 2019, the correlation indices were positive with temperature and negative with precipitation. In water, temperature represents the main factor that controls multiple chemical reactions. Significant differences appear during the daily and diurnal conditions and, associated factors, such as thermal mass, restrict the seasonal oscillation in spreading temperature heatwaves in water. The exchanges in water (vertical, lateral, and longitudinal flow) are fundamental in the interaction between various chemical elements in the river body, such as the intake and reduction of physicochemical compounds in water and vertical redox gradients in sediments. Dammed reservoir traps are responsible for the sedimentation of HMs and concordance with water fluxes. The most polluted deposits materialize in the bottom layers, reaching up to 90% in the case of Pb, Cd, and Cu. Differences in sediment texture, pH, redox potential, salinity, moisture, organic matter and electrical conductivity in 2018‒2019 compared to 2014‒2015 in the Viridi Channel (Côte d’Ivoire, West Africa) were also found. Thus, the scale of climate change effects on water ecosystems has been evident worldwide since the recent 2018‒2019 heatwaves.

The correlation matrix emphasized a weak but significant relationship between trace elements in 2018 (narrow in June and October) and a robust correlation in 2019, especially in May (Fig. ). The relationships between Zn‒Cu‒Ni‒Pb in 2018 indicated similar effects of anthropogenic activities. At p < 0.01, Hg (sediments) had a positive relationship with RR (r = 0.58) in May 2018, whereas Hg (water) was correlated with TN (r = 0.68), RR (r = 0.71), TM (r = −0.84), TX (r = −0.79), and TN (r = −0.88) in July 2019. (Supplementary Table ). Our results demonstrated strong relationships of As with Cr, Cu, Ni, and Pb (r = 0.94, 0.89, 0.71, and 0.99, respectively) and of Cd with Cr, Cu, Pb, and As (r = 0.91, 0.85, 0.97, and 0.99) in May 2019. Fewer associations were noted in July (Pb vs. As and Cd; r = 0.97) and September (As vs. Cd, r = 0.99 and Hg vs. Cu, Ni, and Cd, r = 0.76, 0.88, and 0.80). The metals originated from anthropogenic activities, including mining, waste plant discharge, and industrial plants; these sources explain the strong-significant correlations revealed in the data analysis.

Significant Pearson’s correlation diagram (p < 0.001) of heavy metal concentration from the Olt River basin in the 19 sites investigated.

a 2018 March, b 2018 May, c 2018 June, d 2018 October, e 2019 May, f 2019 July, and g 2019 September.

The Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients indicated that in March, there were negative, robust relationships (p < 0.001) of lead in sediments with the mean and maximum air temperatures (Supplementary Table ). The positive correlation between lead in water and precipitation (r = 0.91) found only in May 2018 can explain the significant differences in elemental trends during 2018‒2019. Furthermore, arsenic in May 2018 for p < 0.001 correlated negatively with maximum temperature (r = −0.70) and positive with precipitation (r = 0.72). A divergent relationship was noted in June 2018 and July 2019 for TX (r = 0.71/0.72) and RR (r = −0.72/−0.79). The influence of extreme temperature on Pb and As (from water and sediments) was strongly negative in spring (Supplementary Table ). Lead reductive oxide dissolution could be increased 36 times at 20 °C relative to a lower temperature of 4 °C. A significant increase in the As level at 25 °C was observed compared to a reference of 11 °C. The postdepositional As mobility in lacustrine environments were found to be correlated with the dissolution of iron-(oxy) hydroxides and coprecipitation with sulfides. Labile organic C is expected to increase under projected climate warming via a redox-mediated mechanism and organic loading, which interacts with As instability in the river system.

Intermetal relationships and factor loadings

Various multivariate techniques were used to identify and explore HM sources and the ecological status of the Olt River ecosystem. The hierarchical dendrogram resulting from the HCA approach shows that trace elements were categorized into two distinct clusters. The first homogeneous group consisted of As, Cd, Pb, and Hg in sediments and Hg in water. The second formed a single branch consisting of As, Pb, and Cd in water, indicating anthropogenic drivers of the HM and trace elements analyzed. In the plot, the y-axis shows similarity with a circular orientation (Fig. ). PCA was applied, and the high Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin value (0.68) (p < 0.001) from Bartlett’s test indicated that the results were representative. Two eigenvectors were superior to one, and their components explained 60% of the total variance. Thus, the trace elements formed three groups, with the first containing those from sediments and Hg in water, the second containing Pb, and the third containing the Cd in water, indicating different origins of these elements (Fig. ).

The multivariate statistical results for heavy metals and climate data.

a Dendrogram of hierarchical cluster analysis (HCA) based on similarities; b principal component analysis (PCA) to provide a grouping of variables; c canonical correspondence analysis (CCA) for 2018 datasets; d CCA analysis for 2019 datasets; e non-symmetrical correspondence analysis (NSCA) demonstrated high variability of data in 2018; f NSCA indicated insignificant variability of data for (p < 0.001) in 2019.

NSCA revealed a linear dependence between trace elements related to site and period data in 2018 (p < 0.001) compared to 2019 when the results were nonsignificant for the same statistical significance test. The Goodman‒Kruskal tau index is a ***measure*** of asymmetry for two-way contingency tables. In our case, one-way correspondence between variables had a value of 0.004 (2018) and 0.01 (2019). The cumulative percentage of inertia presented by the first two factorial axes explained 94% of the variance in 2018 (Fig. ) and 81% in 2019 (Fig. ). Trace elements with a significant contribution to the orientation of the two primary factorial axes were Pb in sediments and As in water in 2018 (Fig. ). The contribution of those elements explained the trend in both years. The organic forms of As typically occur in waters highly affected by industrial activities at a pH of 6.5–8.5. The overall conclusion is that human-derived sources are dominant in trace element origins. The first two axes of the CCA analysis explained 98‒95% of the trace element variance based on climate (TM, TN, TX, and RR daily data) in 2018‒2019, corresponding to 55‒75% of the inertia. According to the permutation test (1000 random permutations), the significant (p < 0.001) effects of the four climate parameters on the observed frequency of trace element concentrations were assessed, and it was concluded that the data were linearly related to site variables for both years.

Climate-induced elemental increasing trend in the last two decades

Impressive HMs concentration in lake sediments (quasi-static environments with a low flow velocity that progressively accumulated deposits and pollution) were noted in the last two decades. Investigations in eastern Romania (Prut River) revealed concentrations of Cu (67 mg/kg), Cd (0.7 mg/kg), Pb (30 mg/kg), and Zn (98 mg/kg) in 2001‒2010 and indicated that this water body was without pollution risk,. In contrast, most studies on western and southern Romanian rivers have shown increased metal levels in recent decades–. Extreme HM concentrations were noted in 2000–, 2006, 2008, 2012–, 2014, 2015, 2017, and 2019,.

In 2000, a dam containing toxic waste was damaged and released into the Lăpuș and Someș Rivers (a tributary of the Tisza River) more than 120 tons of cyanide and 20,000 tons of sediments containing HMs, representing over 100,000 cubic meters of waste. The investigations revealed unusual meteorological conditions induced by heating never recorded before during the last century, which caused an abundance of precipitation in December 1999. The abruptly reduced temperatures and snowfall from the beginning until mid-January was followed by increasing the temperature and abrupt snowmelt, causing braking dam. The contaminated waves affected the Tisza and Szamos Rivers, and sediments collected in June 2000 and February 2001 showed very high pollution, with Cu, Cd, Pb, Cr, Ni, and Zn in sediments reaching 664, 23, 374, 159, 85, and 3095 mg/kg, respectively. Furthermore, the summer of 2006 was ***exceptionally*** hot, with the maximum temperature at the end of June causing it to be recorded as the warmest month since official instrumental measurements began. In January 2008, a freezing snap occurred, and during July, dry climatic conditions were affected by floods and drought in northern Europe.

In lake sediments, during 2008‒2016 as much as 593 mg/kg Pb, 82 mg/kg Cd, 1784 mg/kg Zn, 143 mg/kg Ni, 725 mg/kg Cr, and 277 mg/kg Cu were found,, (Supplementary Table ). In south-eastern Romania (near the Black Sea, Tasaul Lake), sediments were investigated for HMs from 2011 to 2013, showing values of 34, 133, 57, 103, 0.14, 17, and 83 mg/kg for Pb, Zn, Ni, Cr, Hg, As, and Cu, respectively. In central Transylvania, the Gilău dam on the Someș River was reported during 2008‒2011 to be sediment enriched with Pb, Cd, Zn, Cr, Hg, As, and Cu (40, 2.97, 193, 192, 0.28, 172, and 85 mg/kg, respectively). In river sediment from Baiaga stream (also Transylvania) located near two sterile mining dumps in Hunedoara County, extensive contents of Cu, Cd, Pb, Cr, Ni, As, and Hg (298, 106, 467, 274, 386, 1197, and 1.21 mg/kg, respectively) were noted in April 2014, the year characterized by the warmest yearly average temperature in Europe.

Various accidental discharges or constant HM contamination from distinct sources have reached water bodies, where they have been deposited in sediments or transported by floods downstream into the Danube River. Therefore, severe pollution of the Danube River and the Black Sea has been recently reported. The HM contents ***measured*** in Danube River sediments were comparable in 2011‒2013 for Cu, Zn, Cr, Ni, Cd, and Pb (86, 206, 68, 93, 1.33, and 77 mg/kg, respectively) with those in 2012‒2014 (42, 106, 46, and 38 mg/kg, with Cd and Pb not included in this study). Climatic records described the year 2012 as the hottest and driest summer in south-eastern Europe. In 2017, called the “Lucifer” plague year in Europe, showed the most sustained extreme heat event from January to October worldwide, and the contamination levels of the Danube River increased to 1570, 1049, 488, 61, 2.9, and 1315 mg/kg, respectively. Consistent with these reports, the Olt River is not Romania’s most polluted water body, but it has contributed significantly to maximizing HM pollution in Danube River sediments,,,.

Water pollution in Romanian lakes appears to be less impressive than that in sediments. The maximum metal concentration in the Danube River water in 2011‒2014 fluctuated significantly for Cu (9.1‒147 µg/L), Zn (79‒15 772 µg/L), Cd (0.19‒32 µg/L), and Pb (3.18‒15.5 µg/L),,. Industrial activity and mining decreased significantly after 1990 in Romania. Even so, various studies have indicated considerable ecological disaster-level contamination by metals and trace elements that have affected water ecosystems in recent years. The mentioned reports portray the increasing vulnerability of freshwater environments to HM contamination due to extreme weather conditions that have advanced over the past 20 years. Additionally, the results highlight the predisposition of the western and southern regions of the country to the occurrence of ***exceptional*** HM pollution events; these regions are also expected to be exposed to increasing climate extremes according to future projections.

Policy themes for water conservation

National long-term policy themes for clean freshwater require the commitment of society and decision-makers to strengthen and apply strategies. They need to promote water recovery and reduce the factors that deteriorate the quantity and quality of water resources. Romania is poor in freshwater resources (ranked 13th in Europe) and is dependent on precipitation. Climate warming leads to decreased river runoff due to increasing air temperature, which, in turn, accelerates evapotranspiration. Changing maximum monthly mean discharges from spring to winter have already been demonstrated in the studied area, which will affect the insufficient water supply and increase the need for ***agricultural*** practices. In addition, the stress on the water will increase pollution frequency, reduce dissolved oxygen, and lead to eutrophication. Far from the end, floods and flash floods will shift from spring and summer to winter (e.g., the dam break in Maramureș County in January 2000).

With all examples presented in this analysis, critical thematic areas for transboundary policymakers, environmentalists, and decision-makers are highlighted for possible discussion concerning future management practices and endorsement strategies. The modern society acts through various engines to disrupt natural ecosystems. The most evident are sediment exploitation from the riverbed, sometimes until bedrock, or river regularization constructions. Also, population pressure is a paramount driver of society’s needs for wood exploitation and ***processing*** facilities and the production of industrial waste. Organic pollution resulting from untreated domestic waste discharges, composites from sawdust and recycled plastics, environmental pollution, and fertilizer runoff accentuate the river ecosystem’s stress. Population pressure (a complex of socioeconomic dimensions), corruption, and poverty negatively impact the sustainable use of water resources. Therefore, mitigating these drivers’ effects will be an alternative for complex policy regulations with long-term positive impacts. The government needs to cooperate through financial support development programs with water and forest management institutions to motivate and involve skill transfer at the national level. In addition, the policies can implement long-term monitoring programs that can offer support in understanding future implications of climate change on aquatic ecosystems and facilitate transparency.

Methods

Field sampling and climate

The sampled sites were distributed along the middle and lower courses of the Olt River. They were selected to correspond to different hydrostratigraphic units with varying typologies of the water drainage system. Our model of HMs pollution in the area was based on 16 representative lakes with different environments and geomorphologic-hydrodynamic regimes in which HMs accumulate. The other three sampled sites were along the riverbed, one in the Olt River before the point at which it discharges into the Danube River and two in the Danube River upstream and downstream of the Olt River discharge point (Supplementary Table ). Samples were collected during four periods in 2018 (March, May, June, and October) and three periods in 2019 (May, July, and September) to cover the various thermal and hydrological conditions that occur in the Olt River. Climate data derived from the European Climate Assessment and Dataset (ECA&D) archive were extracted for each sample site from 1950‒2019. Four parameters, including the daily mean temperature (TM), daily minimum temperature (TN), daily maximum temperature (TX), and total daily precipitation (RR), were used to investigate differences in 2018–2019 climate extremes. The Expert Team on Climate Change Detection and Indices (ETCCDI) defined a set of indices for evaluating multidecadal changes in the extreme climate of the mid-20th century and the beginning of the 21st century. The indices included a definition for heatwaves; they are defined as the number of days in a year exceeding a specific threshold with a fixed value or relative to a base period or day-count index. The selected subset of extreme climate event indices was calculated to describe the frequency, intensity, and duration of such events. The higher precipitation over 5 days (Rx5day) index can indicate significant floods, and the maximum length of a dry spell (CDD) highlights intense drought seasons. The warm spell duration index (WSDI) calculated using a percentile-based threshold was used to investigate the impact of heatwaves. The closed vessel microwave acid digestion, atomic absorption spectroscopy, and inductively coupled plasma mass spectrometry instruments were used to determine total levels of HMs in environmental samples (details are summarized in ).

Data analysis

The differences between climate data from the two extreme sites (#1 and #12) were assessed using two-sample t-tests for the difference of means. The Shapiro-Wilk normality test was used to check the normality of the data. The two-sample t-test and two-sample test for a variance were applied to compare the central values of the underlying distributions of the concentration levels between 2018 and 2019, respectively. HMs were visualized using boxplots to identify outliers, and extreme values were plotted as individual points. The values are presented as the mean ± standard deviation (SD). The relationships between HMs from sediments were investigated using Pearson correlation coefficients at a significance of p < 0.001. Hierarchical clustering analysis (HCA) and principal component analysis (PCA) were used to analyze the possible contamination sources of HMs in sediments and water. The HCA approach used the squared Euclidian distance, following the Wards method, to approximate the distance between pollutant clusters. Principal components (PCs) were extracted using Varimax with the Kaiser normalization and rotation method. The accuracy of the PCA was assessed prior to using Bartlett’s sphericity test and the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) adequacy test. Canonical correspondence analysis (CCA) was applied to analyze the interaction between the trace element distribution and daily climate data. The nonsymmetrical correspondence analysis (NSCA) unconstrained ordination method was used to explore variability in a dataset associated with metal concentration using the Goodman-Kruskal tau index for two-way tables to decompose associations. We reviewed systematic literature following the PRISMA protocol to compare our results with those from similar studies in Romania conducted in the last twenty years. The literature search was performed on Web of Science, Google Scholar, and Scopus using keywords containing “Olt River” or “Romania heavy metal pollution” or “heavy metal”, or “trace elements”, or “freshwater metal contamination” or “water and sediments heavy metal pollution.” Initially, no constraint was placed on the year of the publication. The first search returned 17,700 documents; thus, we restricted the analysis to 2000‒2021. We excluded references marked as duplicates, erroneous records from studies with other geographical regions, and conference abstracts and books without quantitative data, resulting in a database with 65 studies selected for detailed review (Supplementary Table ).

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**Notes**

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[***Live updates: Germany to send anti-tank weapons to Ukraine; France intercepts Russian cargo ship***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:64WB-7MH1-F11P-X39J-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

BERLIN — In a significant shift, the German government confirmed Saturday that it has approved the shipment of anti-tank weapons to Ukraine and supports some restrictions of the SWIFT global banking system for Russia.

The German economy and climate ministry said in a Saturday evening statement that Germany is allowing the Netherlands to ship 400 German-made anti-tank weapons to Ukraine.

"The Russian ***invasion*** of Ukraine marks a turning point. It threatens our entire post-war order," German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said. "In this situation, it is our duty to do our best to help Ukraine defend itself against Vladimir Putin's invading army."

Germany had long stuck to a policy of not exporting deadly weapons to conflict zones, including Ukraine. As recently as Friday, government officials said they would abide by that policy.

The country has faced criticism from Ukrainian officials and other allies that it has not acted decisively enough to help Ukraine fend off the Russian ***invasion***. Previously, Germany contributed 5,000 helmets to Ukraine's defense.

In addition, Germany said it will send 14 armored vehicles and up to 10,000 tons of fuel to Ukraine.

"After Russia's shameless attack, Ukraine must be able to defend itself," Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock and Economy Minister Robert Habeck said. "The federal government is therefore supporting Ukraine in providing urgently needed material."

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HELSINKI — The Baltic nations of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania have decided to close their airspace to Russian airlines, transport officials in the three countries say.

The legal formulation for the ***measure*** is underway and it wasn't immediately clear when precisely the ban would take effect.

Lithuanian Transport Marius Skuodis told media outlets that the goal of the Baltic countries is to issue the ban at the same time.

Estonian Prime Minister Kaja Kallas tweeted on Saturday that Western nations should isolate Russia both economically and politically after its ***invasion*** on Ukraine, saying "there is no place for planes of the aggressor state in democratic skies."

Latvian Transport Minister Talis Linkaits told local news agency LETA that the country's decision to close its airspace to Russian airlines will be made in coordination with Estonia, Lithuania and the EU.

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MEDYKA, POLAND — Lines of vehicles miles long are clogging border crossings out of Ukraine, as tens of thousands rush to neighboring countries to escape danger from invading Russian troops.

Nearly 120,000 people have so far fled Ukraine into Poland and other neighboring countries in the wake of Russian ***invasion***, the U.N. refugee agency said Saturday. The largest numbers were arriving in Poland, where 2 million Ukrainians have already settled to work in recent years. Poland's government said Saturday that more than 100,000 Ukrainians had crossed the Polish-Ukrainian border in the past 48 hours alone.

One family from Chernivtsi in western Ukraine waited 20 hours before being able to cross the border into Siret in northern Romania.

At the border town of Medyka, the line of vehicles waiting to enter Poland stretched many miles into Ukraine. A woman from Lviv, who was bringing her four children to safety in Poland, described toys and bags along the way that were so heavy that people abandoned them.

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WASHINGTON, D.C. — A senior U.S. defense official says the United States estimates that more than 50 percent of Russian combat power arrayed along Ukraine's borders has entered Ukraine. That is up from a U.S. estimate Friday that one-third of the Russian force had been committed to the fight.

The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss internal U.S. assessments, would not say how many Russian troops that amounts to inside Ukraine, but the U.S. had estimated the total Russian force arrayed near Ukraine at more than 150,000.

The official said advancing Russian forces were roughly 30 kilometers outside Kyiv as of Saturday, and that an unspecified number of Russian military "reconnaissance elements" had entered the capital.

Meanwhile, Britain's Defense Ministry said Saturday that "the speed of the Russian advance has temporarily slowed likely as a result of acute logistical difficulties and strong Ukrainian resistance."

"Russian forces are bypassing major Ukrainian population centres while leaving forces to encircle and isolate them," the ministry said.

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BEREGSURANY, Hungary — Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban has told a news conference in the border town of Beregsurany that Hungary is accepting all citizens and legal residents of Ukraine, regardless of whether they are subject to military conscription into the Ukrainian armed forces.

"We're letting everyone in," Orban said. "I've seen people who have no travel documents, but we're providing them too with travel documents. And we're also allowing in those who have arrived from third countries after the proper screening."

Several thousand refugees fleeing Ukraine have crossed into Hungary in recent days, entering through five border crossings along Hungary's 137-kilometer (85-mile) border with Ukraine.

Hungary under Orban has in recent years firmly opposed all forms of immigration.

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Regarded as Russian President Vladimir Putin's closest ally in the European Union, Orban has pursued close economic and diplomatic ties with the Kremlin. But he said that Russia's ***invasion*** of Hungary's neighbor would likely cause changes in his relationship with Putin, and that Hungary was supporting all proposed sanctions against Moscow at the European level.

VIENNA -- Ahead of a meeting with German Chancellor Olaf Scholz and Lithuanian President Gitanas Nauseda in Berlin Saturday afternoon, Poland's prime minister has urged Germany to put aside "selfishness" and "egoism" and offer substantive support to the people of Ukraine.

"Nothing is going to stop Putin if we are not decisive enough," Mateusz Morawiecki said in Berlin. "This is a very historic moment… we have no time to lose."

Morawiecki said Germany's aid thus far — of military helmets, not weapons -- is a far cry from what's necessary to help Ukraine defend itself.

"What kind of help was delivered to Ukraine? Five thousand helmets? This must be a joke," Morawiecki said.

He added that the sanctions on Russia need to be "crushing," calling for the exclusion of Russia from the SWIFT global financial system and for ***measures*** targeting Putin himself, oligarchs who back him, and Russian business more broadly.

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BRATISLAVA, Slovakia — Slovakia's defense minister says up to 1,200 foreign troops from other NATO members could be deployed in his country in response to Russia's ***invasion*** of Ukraine.

The plan is part of the NATO initiative to reassure member countries on the alliance's eastern flank by sending forces to help protect them. Slovakia borders Ukraine.

Defense Minister Jaroslav Nad said forces from the Netherlands and Germany are among those expected to come. Germany will also provide the Patriot system to boost Slovakia's air defense.

The country's government and Parliament have not yet approved the plan.

Nad also sadi his country's government has approved sending arms and fuel worth 11 million euros ($12.4 million) requested by Ukraine. The aid will include 10 million liters (2.6 million gallons) of fuel, 2.4 million liters (630,000 gallons) of aviation fuel and 12,000 pieces of ammunition.

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TOKYO — From Tokyo to London to Taipei, Ukrainians living abroad and hundreds of protesters have turned out on the streets to join anti-war rallies spreading around the world as Russia's troops pressed toward Ukraine's capital.

Several hundred Ukrainians living in Japan gathered outside of Tokyo's main train stations Saturday, chanting "Stop war!" and "Peace for Ukraine." They held up signs including "No war," "Stop Putin, Stop Russia," while others waved Ukrainian flags. At a separate rally reportedly organized by Russian residents in Japan, several dozen people chanted "Hands off Ukraine!"

In Taiwan, more than 100 demonstrators chanting "Stand with Ukraine" and "Glory to Ukraine" protested outside the Russian representative office in Taiwan on Saturday.

"My family, my friends are now sheltered in their basements because of the air attacks," said Yulia Kolorova, a 49-year-old Ukrainian living in Taiwan. "I just want them to be strong. I just can't imagine how scary it is to see the missiles over your head. It's surreal."

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KYIV, UKRAINE — The mayor of the Ukrainian capital is imposing an intensified curfew as Russian troops press on the city.

Mayor Vitaly Klitschko said on Telegram that the curfew will extend from 5 p.m. until 8 a.m. and "all civilians on the street during the curfew will be considered members of the enemy's sabotage and reconnaissance groups."

The previous curfew imposed two days ago was from 10 p.m. until 7 a.m.

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ROME — Italian Premier Mario Draghi has called Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to make clear the Italian government supports any moves to cut Russia off from the SWIFT international payment system.

A day earlier, Draghi's finance minister raised doubts Italy would go along with such a move because that would complicate payments to the Russians for natural gas. Italy gets some 45% of its gas from Russia.

Draghi's office said the premier told Zelenskyy that Italy "will supply Ukraine with assistance to defend itself." There were no immediate details on such assistance

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PARIS — French officials say marines patrolling the English Channel area have intercepted a cargo ship sailing under the Russian flag and escorted it to the port of Boulogne-Sur-Mer for an investigation.

The interception of the ship, carrying cars, early Saturday was triggered by financial sanctions levied days ago against Russia for its ***invasion*** of the Ukraine. Maritime spokesperson Veronique Magnin said it appeared to be the first such action in the English Channel.

The approximately 130-meter-(427-foot) ship was headed from Rouen, in Normandy, to Saint Petersburg, and was stopped near Honfleur, Magnin said.

Customs officials carrying out the investigation were verifying if the vessel is indeed linked to Russian financial interests, the spokesperson said. The ***process*** could take up to 48 hours.

The French government has given maritime officials the power to intercept vessels suspected of contravening the sanctions, she said.

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KYIV, Ukraine — Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy says his country's armed forces are successfully fighting back against Russian troops.

Zelenskyy said in a video released Saturday that Russian attempts to forge into Kyiv have been repelled and Moscow's plan to quickly seize the capital and install a puppet government has been thwarted. In an emotional speech, he accused the Russian forces of hitting civilian areas and infrastructure.

Zelenskyy pushed for Ukraine's urgent ascension to the European Union, saying he discussed the issue with the EU leaders. He also urged cutting Russia from the SWIFT international electronic bank payment system, noting that Germany and Hungary should show "courage" and agree to the move.

Briefly switching to Russian, Zelenskyy hailed Russia's cultural figures who denounced the ***invasion*** and urged them to redouble efforts to force the Kremlin to halt the attack. He claimed that thousands of Russian troops were killed and hundreds of those who were taken prisoner "can't understand why they were sent into Ukraine to kill and get killed." "The sooner you say to your government that this war should be immediately stopped, the more of your people will stay alive," he said.

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MOSCOW — A senior Russian official has warned that Moscow could react to Western sanctions over its attack on Ukraine by opting out of the last remaining nuclear arms pact and freezing Western assets.

Dmitry Medvedev, the deputy head of Russia's Security Council chaired by President Vladimir Putin, shrugged off a set of crippling sanctions that the U.S., the European Union and other allies slapped on Russia as a reflection of Western "political impotence."

In comments posted on his page on Russian social media VKontakte, Medvedev said the sanctions could offer Moscow a pretext for a complete review of its ties with the West, suggesting that Russia could opt out of the New START nuclear arms control treaty that limits the U.S. and Russian nuclear arsenals.

Medvedev also raised the prospect of cutting diplomatic ties with Western countries, saying "there is no particular need in maintaining diplomatic relations" and adding that "we may look at each other in binoculars and gunsights." He pointed at the possibility of freezing Western assets in the country if the West proceeds with threats to freeze Russian assets.

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PRAGUE — The Czech Republic's government has approved a plan to send more arms to Ukraine.

The Defense Ministry said it is immediately sending machine guns, submachine guns, assault rifles and pistols together with ammunition worth 188 million Czech crowns ($8.6 million).

The ministry said the Czechs will transport the weapons and deliver them to a place determined by the Ukrainian side.

The Czech Republic has already agreed to donate some 4,000 pieces of artillery shells worth 36.6 million Czech crowns ($1.7 million) to Ukraine.

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WARSAW, Poland -- The Polish Football Association says it will not play its World Cup qualifying match against Russia due to Russia's ***invasion*** of Ukraine.

"No more words, time to act!" said association president Cezary Kulesza on Twitter, saying the move was prompted by the "escalation of the aggression."

The match had been scheduled for March 24.

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KYIV, Ukraine — A rescue worker says at least six civilians were injured by a rocket that hit a high-rise apartment building on the outskirts of the Ukrainian capital.

Petro Prokopov, a firefighter who was taking part in rescue efforts, said the building on the southwestern edge of Kyiv near Zhuliany airport was hit between 16 and 21 floors on Saturday. He said at least six people were injured and apartments on two floors were gutted by fire. Emergency responders have evacuated 80 people.

Kyiv's Mayor Vitali Klitschko posted an image showing a gaping hole on one side of the apartment building.

Separately, Ukraine's Infrastructure Ministry said a Russian missile was shot down before dawn Saturday as it headed for the dam of the sprawling water reservoir that serves Kyiv. "If the dam is destroyed, the flooding will cause catastrophic casualties and losses - including flooding of residential areas of Kyiv and its suburbs," the ministry said.

Russian troops were pressing their attack on the Ukrainian capital, trying to advance on the city from several directions. Russia has repeatedly claimed its assault on Ukraine is aimed only at military targets.

"Let me stress once again that only infrastructure sites of the Ukrainian Armed Forces are being targeted, ruling out damage to residential and social infrastructure," Defense Ministry spokesman Igor Konashenkov told a briefing Saturday.

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KYIV, Ukraine — The Ukrainian health minister says that 198 people have been killed and more than 1,000 others have been wounded in the Russian offensive.

Health Minister Viktor Lyashko said Saturday that there were three children among those killed. His statement made it unclear whether the casualties included both military and civilians.

He said another 1,115 people, including 33 children, were wounded in the Russian ***invasion*** that began Thursday with massive air and missile strikes and troops forging into Ukraine from the north, east and south.

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WARSAW, Poland -- The UN refugee agency says that over 120,000 Ukrainian refugees have left the country since Russia began its attack on its neighboring country this week.

Speaking as Russian troops were engaging in battle with Ukrainian forces in the capital Kyiv on Saturday, the UN Deputy High Commissioner for Refugees, Kelly Clements, said in an interview on CNN the situation was expected to get worse.

"We now see over 120,000 people that have gone to all of the neighboring countries," she said. "The reception that they are receiving from local communities, from local authorities, is tremendous. But it's a dynamic situation. We are really quite devastated, obviously, with what's to come."

Most are heading to Poland and Moldova, but also to Romania, Slovakia and Hungary.

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PARIS — French President Emmanuel Macron says he is convinced that "this war will last" and warned that Russia's ***invasion*** of Ukraine will have tough consequences for Europeans.

Macron told farmers at France's ***Agricultural*** Fair in Paris on Saturday that sectors from wine to cereals to exports and energy prices will be affected by the Russian ***invasion*** of Ukraine.

"War has returned to Europe. This war was unilaterally chosen by Putin," he said of the Russian leader, Vladimir Putin. "This war will last and all the crises that go with it will have durable consequences," Macron said. "We must prepare ourselves with lots of determination and also lots of solidarity."

He said a "plan of resilience" was being put in place, but did not elaborate.

The European Union, along with the U.S. and numerous other countries, has announced sanctions against Russia.

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THE HAGUE, Netherlands — The Dutch government has shifted its embassy staff out of Ukraine amid Russia's military onslaught on its neighbor.

The foreign ministry announced early Saturday that ambassador Jennes de Mol and his staff, who had already moved from Kyiv to Lviv before Russia's ***invasion***, will relocate to Jaroslaw, Poland.

The ministry said the diplomatic post that is helping Dutch citizens who want to leave Ukraine has been moved out of the country because of the deteriorating security situation in Lviv.

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ISTANBUL — About a hundred protestors have gathered in Turkey's capital Ankara to demonstrate against the Russian ***invasion***. Ukrainians living in Turkey, including children, as well as Turks joined the protest, holding up Ukrainian flags and banners that read "Putin get out of Ukraine." The Ukrainian Ambassador to Turkey, Vasyl Bodnar, was also at the protest and said the war was a "genocide against the Ukrainian people," according to Turkish news agencies.

Separately, Turkey began evacuating its citizens from Ukraine by land. Turkey's foreign minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said about 20,000 Turks live in Ukraine and 5,000 had already returned.

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LONDON — Britain says Russia's ***invasion*** of Ukraine has been slowed by strong Ukrainian resistance.

Armed Forces Minister James Heappey said fighting in the capital, Kyiv, was so far confined to "very isolated pockets of Russian special forces and paratroopers."

He said that "the main armored columns approaching Kyiv are still some way off."

He said: "It looks like the Russian plan is nowhere near running to schedule. I think that will be a great cause of concern for President Putin and rather points to the fact that there was a lot of hubris in the Russian plan and that he may be awfully advised."

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MOSCOW — The Russian military says it has launched a barrage of cruise missiles at Ukrainian military facilities.

Russian Defense Ministry spokesman Maj. Gen. Igor Konashenkov said Saturday that the military struck a range of Ukrainian military installations with long-range Kalibr cruise missiles.

He said that since the start of Russia's attack Thursday, the military has hit 821 Ukrainian military facilities, including 14 air bases and 19 command facilities, and destroyed 24 air defense missile systems, 48 radars, seven warplanes, seven helicopters, nine drones, 87 tanks and eight military vessels.

Konashenkov didn't say how many Ukrainian troops were killed and didn't mention any casualties on the Russian side. His claims and Ukraine's allegations that its forces have killed thousands of Russian troops couldn't be independently verified.

Konashenkov claimed that the Russian military has taken full control of the southern city of Melitopol, about 35 kilometers inland from the Azov Sea coast, and said Russia-backed separatists have made significant gains in the eastern region of Donbas.

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KYIV, Ukraine — The mayor of the Ukrainian capital says a missile hit an apartment building but no casualties were immediately reported.

Kyiv Mayor Vitali Klitschko said the missile slammed into a high-rise building on the southwestern outskirts of Kyiv near Zhuliany airport on Saturday. He said rescue workers were heading there.

He posted an image on a messaging app, showing a gaping hole on one side of the building that ravaged apartment units and several stores.

Russian troops were pressing their attack on the Ukrainian capital, trying to advance on the city from several directions. The Russian ***invasion*** of Ukraine began Thursday with massive air and missile strikes and ground troops moving in from the north, east and south.

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KYIV, Ukraine — The mayor of a city south of the Ukrainian capital says that the country's military has fended off a Russian attempt to take control of a military air base.

Natalia Balansynovych, the mayor of Vasylkiv, about 25 miles (40 kilometers) south of Kyiv, said Saturday that Russian airborne forces landed near the city overnight and tried to seize the base. She said fierce fighting also raged on Vasylkiv's central street.

She said that Ukrainian forces repelled the Russian attacks, and that the situation is now calm. Balansynovych said there were heavy casualties, but didn't give any numbers.

KYIV, Ukraine — An adviser to Ukraine's president says that fighting is raging in the capital and in the country's south, and that the Ukrainian military is successfully fending off Russian assaults.

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's adviser Mykhailo Podolyak said Saturday that small groups of Russian forces tried to infiltrate Kyiv and engaged in fighting with Ukrainian troops. He said that Russia wants to seize control of the Ukrainian capital and destroy the country's leadership, but said the Russian military has failed to make any gains and that the Ukrainian forces control the situation in Kyiv.

He said Russian forces were also focusing on the country's south, where intense fighting is underway in Kherson just north of Crimea, and in the Black Sea ports of Mykolaiv, Odesa and around Mariupol.

He said that Russia considers it a priority to seize the south, but it has failed to make any significant gains.

"Ukraine hasn't simply withstood it. Ukraine is winning," Podolyak said at a briefing.

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KYIV, Ukraine — Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has made a renewed assurance that the country's military will stand up to the Russian ***invasion***.

In a video recorded on the street in downtown Kyiv, Zelenskyy said that he hasn't left the city and dispelled claims that Ukraine's military would lay down its weapons.

"We will protect the country," he said. "Our weapon is our truth, and our truth is that it's our land, our country, our children. And we will defend all of that."

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KYIV, Ukraine — Kyiv officials are warning residents that street fighting is underway against Russian forces, and they are urging people to seek shelter.

The warning issued Saturday advised residents to remain in shelters, to avoid going near windows or on balconies, and to take precautions against being hit by debris or bullets.

The Ukrainian military said a battle was underway near a military unit to the west of the city center.

Kyiv Mayor Vitaly Klitschko said new explosions shook the area near a major power plant that the Russians were trying to attack.

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TOKYO — A Panamanian-registered cargo ship owned by a Japanese company was hit by a shell off Ukraine's southern coast and one of its 20 crew members suffered a non-life-threatening injury, according to its owner and media reports.

The ship's owner, Nikko Kisen K.K., based in Imabari in western Japan, confirmed media reports Saturday that its bulk carrier Namura Queen suffered damage and that one of its 20 Filipino crew members was injured.

The company gave no further details.

The 47,167-ton ship, which was just off the coast of Ukraine in the Black Sea at the time of the incident, remains operable and has headed to Turkey to assess the extent of its damage, Kyodo News agency said.

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SEOUL, South Korea – South Korean Foreign Minister Chung Eui-yong spoke with U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Saturday to discuss the two allies' cooperation over the Russia-Ukraine crisis, including Seoul's participation in a U.S.-led economic pressure campaign against Moscow.

Seoul's Foreign Ministry said Chung and Blinken reaffirmed the allies' "strong condemnation" of Russia's ***invasion*** of Ukraine and they urged Russia to immediately cease its takeover attempt.

Blinken thanked South Korea for its support of Ukraine and its willingness to participate in international sanctions against Russia, the ministry said.

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KYIV, Ukraine — Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy was asked to evacuate Kyiv at the behest of the U.S. government but turned down the offer.

Zelenskyy said in response: "The fight is here; I need ammunition, not a ride," according to a senior American intelligence official with direct knowledge of the conversation, who described Zelenskyy as upbeat.

Invading Russian forces closed in on Ukraine's capital on Saturday, in an apparent encircling movement after a barrage of airstrikes on cities and military bases around the country.

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KYIV, Ukraine — A second Russian Ilyushin Il-76 military transport plane was shot down near Bila Tserkva, 50 miles (85 kilometers) south of Kyiv, according to two American officials with direct knowledge of conditions on the ground in Ukraine.

On Friday, Ukraine's military said it had shot down a Russian military transport plane with paratroopers on board.

According to a statement from the military's General Staff, the first Il-76 heavy transport plane was shot down near Vasylkiv, a city 25 miles south of Kyiv. The Russian military has not commented on either incident so far, and the reports could not be immediately verified.

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TOKYO — Japanese Foreign Minister Yoshimasa Hayashi says he spoke with his U.S. counterpart, Secretary of State Antony Blinken, on the phone Saturday and they agreed they must respond to Russia's ***invasion*** of Ukraine properly to prevent it from becoming "a wrong lesson" because of its potential influence in Asia and the Indo-Pacific region.

Hayashi declined to comment if Japan plans to join the United States, Britain and the European Union in imposing sanctions on Russian President Vladimir Putin and Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov. Hayashi said Japan will stay in close touch with other Group of Seven members and other international leaders while watching the developments.

Hayashi told reporters that he and Blinken reaffirmed their commitment to work closely with the rest of international society and they agreed it is necessary to reject Russia's unilateral act to change the status quo.

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UNITED NATIONS—Russia has vetoed a U.N. Security Council resolution demanding that Moscow stop its attack on Ukraine and withdraw all troops.

Friday's vote was 11-1, with China, India and the United Arab Emirates abstaining. It showed significant but not total opposition to Russia's ***invasion*** of its smaller, militarily weaker neighbor.

The United States and other supporters knew the resolution wouldn't pass but argued it would highlight Russia's international isolation. The resolution's failure paves the way for backers to call for a swift vote on a similar ***measure*** in the U.N. General Assembly. There are no vetoes in the 193-member assembly. There's no timetable as yet for a potential Assembly vote.

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SOFIA, Bulgaria — Bulgaria on Friday introduced a ban on the entry of Russian aircraft into the country's airspace.

All aircraft licensed by the Russian Federation may not enter the sovereign airspace of the Republic of Bulgaria, including the airspace over its territorial waters, the government announced. The ban is effective starting Saturday.

The government said it took the action in connection with the escalation of the military conflict and in solidarity with Ukraine.

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SYDNEY—Australia is imposing sanctions against all 339 members of the Russian parliament and is considering sanctions against Russian President Vladimir Putin as well as his Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov over Russia's ***invasion*** of Ukraine.

Australian Foreign Minister Marise Payne also announced on Saturday sanctions against eight Russian oligarchs close to Putin. Australia was also taking steps to imposed sanctions on key figures in the Belarusian government who had aided the Ukraine ***invasion***.

Payne said she was seeking advice from her department on following western allies' example in sanctioning Putin.

"It is an ***exceptional*** step to sanction leaders, but this is an ***exceptional*** situation," Payne said.

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WASHINGTON—Ukraine's top diplomatic envoy in the U.S. is urging countries to sever diplomatic relations with Russia over its ***invasion*** of their country.

Ambassador Oksana Markarova's request came in an emergency meeting Friday at the Washington-based Organization of American States, whose members were debating a resolution condemning the military attack ordered by President Vladimir Putin.

"It's hard to imagine that something like this happens in the center of Europe in the 21st Century," an emotional Markarova said during the meeting. She urged delegates to supply Ukraine with defensive weapons and follow the lead of the Federated States of Micronesia, a Pacific island nation that earlier Friday broke all ties with Russia.

Alexander Kim, a senior diplomat at Russia's embassy in Washington, towed closely to the Kremlin's unsubstantiated claim that the military incursion was an attempt to "de-Nazify" a government that had committed scores of atrocities against civilians.

"We are open to diplomacy," Kim told representatives of more than 30 Latin American governments, many of whom have pursued closer relations with Moscow in recent years. "However, diplomacy presumes an ability to negotiate. It is not a tool for blackmailing and imposing the decision of Washington and its satellite states."

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LONDON—British Prime Minister Boris Johnson says he is in "close contact" with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, as he hailed "the fierce bravery and patriotism" of Ukraine's government and people.

In a recorded message, Johnson said "the scenes unfolding in the streets and fields of Ukraine are nothing short of a tragedy," calling it bloodshed Europe has not seen in a generation or more.

He said "the people of the United Kingdom stand with our Ukrainian brothers and sisters in the face of this unjustifiable assault on your homeland."

Johnson also urged Russians to oppose the ***invasion***, which he called "a tragedy for Russia" as well as for Ukraine.

Speaking in Russian, he said: "I do not believe this war is in your name."

Britain has imposed asset freezes and other sanctions on scores of Russian companies and several oligarchs, and has joined the U.S., Canada and the European Union in slapping sanctions on President Vladimir Putin and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov.

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BUDAPEST, Hungary—Hungary's foreign minister has offered Budapest as a possible location for negotiations between the leaders of Russia and Ukraine as Russia's ***invasion*** intensifies.

"Budapest can serve as a safe venue for both the Russian and Ukrainian negotiation delegations," Peter Szijjarto said in a video on Facebook late Friday, adding that he had made the proposal to both Russia's and Ukraine's governments, neither of which dismissed it.

"I sincerely hope that an agreement can be reached within a few hours or days to start discussions; the sooner the talks begin, the sooner there will be peace and the fewer people will have to die in the war," Szijjarto said.

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BRUSSELS—With a military intervention in Ukraine off the table, countries around the world are looking to heap more financial punishment on Moscow.

The United States, Britain and European Union said Friday they will move to sanction Russian President Vladimir Putin and Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov.

The EU's unanimous decision, part of a broader sanctions package, indicated that Western powers are moving toward ***unprecedented*** ***measures*** to try to force Putin to stop the brutal ***invasion*** of Russia's neighbor and from unleashing a major war in Europe.

White House press secretary Jen Psaki indicated the U.S. sanctions will include a travel ban.

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TORONTO—Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau is announcing sanctions on Russian Vladimir Putin, his chief of staff and foreign minister Sergey Lavrov.

Trudeau also says Canada supports the removal of Russia from the SWIFT banking system.

The prime minister is also announcing sanctions against Belarus.

Meanwhile, Canada's largest province is pulling Russian products from shelves from government owned liquor stores.

Ontario Finance Minister Peter Bethlenfalvy says the province joins Canada's allies in condemning the Russian government's act of aggression against the Ukrainian people, and will direct the Liquor Control Board of Ontario to withdraw all products produced in Russia from store shelves.

The French-speaking province of Quebec is also considering banning Russian liquor.

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UNITED NATIONS—The U.N. plans to seek over $1 billion in donations for humanitarian relief in Ukraine over the next three months, the world body's humanitarian chief said Friday.

Martin Griffiths said at a news briefing that the exact amount of the appeal is still being decided but will be "well north of $1 billion."

The U.N. announced Thursday that it was immediately allocating $20 million to expand its humanitarian operations in Ukraine. Even before Russia's attack this week, the world body estimated about 3 million people were in need of aid after years of fighting between Russian-backed separatists and the Ukrainian government in the country's east.

Now, "the scale of need in these very, very extraordinary circumstances is going to be of the highest," Griffiths said.

The U.N. issues multiple appeals each year for international donors, mainly governments, to finance humanitarian efforts in trouble spots around the world. Last month, it requested more than $5 billion for Afghanistan, the largest-ever appeal tied to a single country.

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RICHMOND, Va.—Criminal ransomware operators are posting messages on the dark web pledging to launch retaliatory cyberattacks if Russia is attacked.

The ransomware group Conti, which experts say has ties to Russia, said in a note on its dark web site Friday that it would "use all our possible resources to strike back at the critical infrastructures of an enemy."

Ransomware gangs are mostly Russian-speaking and operate with near impunity out of Russia and allied countries.

In a follow up note, the Conti group stressed it was not an ally of any government and said: "we condemn the ongoing war."

Major ransomware attacks in the last year, including against the biggest U.S. fuel pipeline, have underscored how gangs of extortionist hackers can disrupt the economy and put lives and livelihoods at risk. The U.S. government has been warning critical infrastructure entities to prepare for possible attacks and to make sure their defenses are up to date.

Non-state hackers have promised to be active in both sides of the Russia-Ukraine conflict. The online collective Anonymous recently pledged to conduct cyberattacks to support Ukraine.

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BERLIN—The German government says it plans to deploy troops and the Patriot anti-missile system to Slovakia as part of NATO plans to strengthen the alliance's eastern flank.

The Defense Ministry said Friday that it plans to send an infantry company as part of a combat troop battalion. And it said that Germany also will contribute the Patriot system.

The ministry stressed that the so-called "enhanced vigilance activity battlegroup" has a purely defensive function.

Slovakia is a NATO and European Union member that borders Ukraine. Germany already is beefing up its troop contingent in Lithuania, another nation on NATO's eastern flank.

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**Body**

Zagreb,Hrvatska26 January 2022 (Hina) - Plenkovic: Croatia to procure 89 Bradleys for US$ 145.3 million ZAGREB, 26 Jan (Hina) - Croatia and the USA have agreed on the procurement of Bradley fighting vehicles, for which Croatia will pay US$ 145.3 million, Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic said on Wednesday. "Agreement has been reached with the US side regarding the army fighting vehicles that have been discussed over the past few years," Plenkovic said in a comment on the M2A2 ODS fighting vehicle. The total value of the deal is $196.4 million, the US donation will amount to $51.1 million, which means that Croatia will pay $145.3 million. Croatia will obtain 62 fighting vehicles, 22 vehicles for spare parts and five for training, and their upgrading will be performed at the Duro Dakovic company in Slavonski Brod. The equipment includes a 25 mm automatic cannon, a 7.62 mm machine gun, and anti-tank missiles.

Plenkovic said that with the deal, which had been discussed since 2017, Croatia had achieved several strategic objectives - strengthening its alliance with the USA, lowering the price of the vehicles in relation to earlier talks, and securing a job for Duro Dakovic, which, he said, could become a "broader" service centre. By joining NATO Croatia has assumed the obligation to form by 2026 a medium infantry brigade, which requires appropriate equipment for the army, the PM said. President says PM's negligence could have cost army dearly ZAGREB, 26 Jan (Hina) - President Zoran Milanovic said on Wednesday it was good Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic had finally made a decision on the US-made Bradley fighting vehicles because "his negligence could have cost the Croatian Army dearly." In a statement issued by his office, President Milanovic says that PM Plenkovic's agreement with the US on the procurement of fighting vehicles for the Croatian land forces is a last-minute deal and that the prime minister underestimates the intelligence of everyone involved in the procurement of the vehicles. "Only naive people can buy his story that everything he did was a manoeuver instead of gross negligence that could have cost the Croatian Army dearly, leaving it in the long run without fighting vehicles." "It is good for the Croatian Army that he has finally made the decision. But the state and the army are not run on an ad hoc basis and depending on whether the defence minister cares more for home furnishings or army fighting vehicles. In conclusion, the Croatian Army will obtain quality fighting vehicles and most importantly, the President of the Republic is grateful to the US partners for patience because they had waited for the government's response since 2017." "We truly believe Plenkovic's decision has nothing to do with the pressure and involvement by the President of the Republic who back in early November was the first to warn the public that the minister, busy furnishing his flat, had forgotten about equipment for the army and crossed the Bradleys off," the office said in an ironic comment. Not even after the military leadership told him that the army needs Bradleys and after President Milanovic publicly presented arguments why the vehicles are necessary did Plenkovic know what to do because he was not in the least interested in equipping the Army, says the Office of the President. "After a few months ago he crossed out of the budget money for the procurement of the Bradley fighting vehicles and after he had to remove his incompetent defence minister from negotiations on the vehicles... Plenkovic is now trying to tell us that he did a great negotiating job," the president said. Earlier in the day, PM Plenkovic said that agreement had been reached with the USA on the procurement of Bradley fighting vehicles, for which Croatia will pay US$ 145.3 million. OECD opens membership negotiations with Croatia ZAGREB, 26 Jan (Hina) - The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development said on Tuesday it had opened accession discussions with Croatia, Brazil, Argentina, Peru, Romania, and Bulgaria. "There is no deadline for completion of the accession ***processes***. The outcome and timeline depend on each candidate country's capacity to adapt and adjust to align with the Organisation's standards and best practices," the OECD said. The ***process*** will include an in-depth evaluation by more than 20 technical committees of the candidates' alignment with OECD standards, policies and practices. "Croatia is ready to start OECD membership negotiations. Besides the Schengen Area and eurozone, our priority is OECD membership whereby we will strengthen our economy and Croatia's international standing and influence," Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic said on Twitter. The OECD's main values are individual liberty, democracy, the rule of law, the protection of human rights, and open, trading, competitive, sustainable and transparent market economies. The OECD also promotes sustainable and inclusive economic growth and climate change. OECD Secretary-General Mathias Cormann pointed out that "candidate countries will be able to use the accession ***process*** to promote further reforms for the benefit of their people, while also strengthening the OECD as a like-minded community committed to a rules-based international order." The technical reviews will focus on open trade and investment, public governance, anti-corruption efforts and the effective protection of the environment and climate. Once all the technical committees have completed their reviews, a final decision will be taken by unanimity of all OECD member countries. Ukraine summons Croatian ambassador over Milanovic's statements ZAGREB, 26 Jan (Hina) - The Ukrainian Foreign Ministry summoned Croatian Ambassador Anica Dzamic following Croatian President Zoran Milanovic's statement that Ukraine does not belong in NATO. Milanovic said on Tuesday that Croatia would not have a military presence in Ukraine in the event of a Russian ***invasion***, that the events in Ukraine of 2014, known as the Revolution of Dignity, were a military coup, that Europe had not done enough to assist Kyiv, and that the tensions on the Ukraine-Russia border were a consequence of the US home policy. In a statement on Tuesday evening, the Ukrainian ministry said Milanovic's statements on 2014 insulted the feelings of Ukrainians and foreign nationals who gave their lives for a European future. Deep disappointment was expressed with the Croatian president's statement on Ukraine's NATO membership and the inappropriateness of assisting our country during the Russian aggression, the ministry said. It was underlined that the statement was especially contradictory to human values given the bitter war experience of the Croatian people, it added. The ministry finds that Milanovic expressed contempt and ingratitude for the assistance Ukraine provided during Croatia's struggle for independence and in the fight against devastating wildfires last year. At the same time, we are confident that this ingratitude is his personal trait and that it does not extend to the Croatian people, with whom we are linked by friendship and mutual respect, the ministry said. It added that Milanovic's statements suited Russian propaganda narratives, that they were not in line with Croatia's official position, that they harmed bilateral relations and undermined EU and NATO unity. The ministry demands a public denial of the insulting statements and that they not be repeated in future, and said that the Ukrainian ambassador would react in Zagreb. PM: Croatia continues to foster friendly ties with Ukraine, normal ties with Russia ZAGREB, 26 Jan (Hina) - Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic said on Wednesday that the Croatian government continues fostering friendly relations and partnership with Ukraine and normal relations with Russia. "Croatia's basic position is respect for the territorial integrity of Ukraine," Plenkovic said in reference to the Ukraine crisis. Following all our experience, we give priority to diplomacy and peaceful conflict resolution, de-escalation and cooperation with our partners within the European Union and NATO, the PM said. The four-way Normandy format peace talks are taking place today in Paris. The entire international community, from the USA to NATO and the European Union, and all the leaders, want peace. No one wants conflicts, the premier told a news conference. Last December, Plenkovic paid a visit to Ukraine and offered Kyiv Croatia's experience of peaceful reintegration of occupied areas, and Croatian Foreign Minister Gordan Grlic Radman visited Russia last week. Plenkovic said today that his cabinet's policy is to continue fostering friendly relations and partnership with Ukraine and to develop normal relations with Russia. "Croatia's role is constructive, it wants to share its experience that can prevent further conflicts, lessen the tension and share experience, which from our point of view, should lead to solutions." On Tuesday, President Zoran Milanovic said that Ukraine did not belong in NATO, which prompted Kyiv to summon Croatia's Ambassador Anica Dzamic. Milanovic said, among other things, that there would be no Croatian soldiers in Ukraine in the event of Russia's ***invasion*** and that the events in Ukraine of 2014, known as the Revolution of Dignity, were a military coup, that Europe had not done enough to assist Kyiv, and that the tensions on the Ukraine-Russia border were a consequence of the US home policy. In a statement on Tuesday evening, the Ukrainian authorities said Milanovic's statements on 2014 insulted the feelings of Ukrainians and foreign nationals who gave their lives for a European future. Plenkovic today described Milanovic's statement as "surreal in every aspect" and recalled that this was not the first time that Croatian ambassadors were being summoned over Milanovic's comments. Plenkovic recalled Milanovic's statements on Bulgaria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, and his statements on Hungary and Austria. This seems to be a consistent track record of upgrading good bilateral relations with a number of countries important for Croatia, the PM said ironically. Plenkovic told the press that he had talked with the Ukrainian ambassador in Zagreb and that logically, the ambassador was disappointed by Milanovic's statement. Austrian minister says Croatia's admission to Schengen Area important for EU ZAGREB, 26 Jan (Hina) - Austrian Minister for the EU Karoline Edtstadler said in Vienna on Wednesday that Croatia's joining the Schengen Area was an important security issue for the EU which Vienna supported, the Croatian parliament stated in a press release. Minister Edtstadler met with Parliament Deputy Speaker Zeljko Reiner, who is visiting Austria. At the meeting, Reiner thanked Austria for its support in the aftermath of the earthquakes that struck Croatia in 2020. He also thanked Austria for its continued support for Croatia's foreign policy priorities -- joining the Schengen Area, the euro area and the OECD. The parliament's press release also said that Reiner explained to the Austrian minister the problem of the current election law in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the status of Croats in that country. President urges gov't to act in unison with him in care for BiH Croats ZAGREB, 26 Jan (Hina) - President Zoran Milanovic has said that taking care of Bosnia and Herzegovina Croats is Croatia's constitutional commitment and permanent national interest, and has called for their guaranteed legitimate representation in BiH authorities, urging the government to act in unison with him. "The existence, constituent status and welfare of the Croat people in Bosnia and Herzegovina is in the strategic interest of the Republic of Croatia," Milanovic says in a statement released on Wednesday. The statement was released on the occasion of the resumption of negotiations on changing Bosnia and Herzegovina's constitution and election legislation. Taking care of the Croats in Bosnia and Herzegovina, most of whom are also European Union citizens, is not only Croatia's constitutional obligation but also a permanent national interest of the Croatian state, Milanovic says. He underscores that both to Croatia and the Croatians it is important to have, along the country's longest, eastern state border, a whole, stable and friendly Bosnia and Herzegovina that will function as a law-based democratic country of the three constituent peoples: the Croats, the Bosniaks and the Serbs. Earlier in the day, the United States special envoy for the BiH electoral reform, Matthew Palmer, and a managing director at the European External Action Service, Angelina Eichhorst, began a new round of negotiations in Sarajevo with representatives of BiH's authorities and political parties aimed at reaching agreement on electoral law and constitutional changes. They called the local politicians to reach an agreement as soon as possible and achieve a compromise on electoral reform, saying that time is running out as the next election is due in October. Milanovic points out that the Croat people in Bosnia and Herzegovina is faced with the permanent loss of its equality and status of a constituent people. He dismissed as unacceptable and against the law the long-standing practice which has so far made it possible for members of other peoples to elect office-holders who are supposed to represent the Croat people. Therefore, he called for guaranteeing the Croats legitimate representation in Bosnia and Herzegovina's authorities. The legitimate representation of the Croats must be ensured not only in the election of a member of Bosnia's tripartite Presidency but also in the election of legitimate representatives of the Croats in the House of Peoples in the Croat-Bosniak Federation, he underscored. Bosnia and Herzegovina can't survive without Croats The Croatian head of state warns that "without clear constitutional and legislative guarantees, including the guarantee for legitimate representation in the House of Peoples in the BiH Federation, the Croats in that country will be permanently exposed to election manipulation, and would be reduced to an ethnic minority, and thus forced to leave Bosnia and Herzegovina." "The Republic of Croatia must not and will not let it happen. Bosnia and Herzegovina without the Croats cannot exist," said Milanovic. He called on the Croatian government to act in unison with him in providing support to the Croat people in the neighbouring country. "I again urge the government to act together with me and use all the political and diplomatic mechanisms at our disposal and to provide pivotal support to the Croats in Bosnia and Herzegovina." Only concerted action, firm advocacy and uncompromising implementation of such a position can result in permanent and efficient protection of the rights of the Croats as an equal people in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and thus provide for the national interest of the Republic of Croatia, Milanovic said. The president expects international partners to recognise the importance of restricted changes of the Constitution and the election legislation to enable the Croats to exercise their rights as a constituent people, noting that this is the only right path towards achieving permanent stability for Bosnia and Herzegovina. US, EU mediators say time running out for agreement in Bosnia ZAGREB, 26 Jan (Hina) - US and EU mediators in negotiations on changes to Bosnia and Herzegovina's electoral law called on BiH politicians on Wednesday to reach an agreement as soon as possible and achieve a compromise on electoral reform, saying that time is running out as the next election is due in October. The United States special envoy for the BiH electoral reform, Matthew Palmer, and a managing director at the European External Action Service, Angelina Eichhorst, began a new round of negotiations in Sarajevo with representatives of BiH's authorities and political parties aimed at reaching agreement on electoral law and constitutional changes. Their first meeting was with members of the state parliament, including Croat leader Dragan Covic and Bosniak leader Bakir Izetbegovic. Speaking to the press afterwards, Covic said he was grateful to the US and the EU for investing additional effort so that a final agreement could be reached. "The goal is to ensure legitimate representation for the constituent peoples, but also to implement restricted constitutional changes and ensure the integrity of the election ***process***," he added. According to Eichhorst, the EU and the US resolutely support BiH's territorial integrity and sovereignty as a single state and want the problems in the country to be resolved as soon as possible, including removing the blockade of the central authorities by Serb entity officials. The current political crisis is unacceptable for all people in BiH, it should be unacceptable for the BiH parliament, and it's totally unacceptable for the EU, she said. The EU calls for an immediate and unconditional end to the blockade of the state authorities, and it expects prompt agreement on electoral reform because the time for agreeing is running out, Eichhorst added. We have still not reached that agreement, and we are here to support talks that would lead to changes to the electoral law and the constitution in order to eliminate discriminatory stipulations, advance technical solutions and prevent electoral fraud, she said. That would be a new step on BiH's journey to EU membership, Eichhorst added. Palmer said electoral reform was key for the establishment of strong and efficient authorities. He hopes a final agreement that would ensure the integrity of the election ***process*** can be reached in the days ahead. That means that each voice is heard and counted and that anyone can run for office, he said. There is very little time left to reach an agreement, he said, adding that it's extremely important for the election to be held in the autumn and that the electoral system must be changed five months before the vote. Palmer and Eichhorst are staying in BiH until the end of the week. The final closed-door round of negotiations with political party leaders is scheduled for this weekend in Neum. BiH is due to hold a general election in October. The Central Electoral Commission is expected to call it in early May at the latest, by which time the BiH parliament is expected to adopt all changes to the electoral law and the constitution. Dodik won't give up on blockade, leaves election reform up to Federation entity ZAGREB, 26 Jan (Hina) - The Serb member of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Milorad Dodik, on Wednesday responded to EU and US mediators calling for an end to the blockade of state institutions, saying he will not agree to an election law that would lead to the indirect election of members of the state leadership. Dodik and other party leaders that constitute the ruling majority in the Republika Srpska entity met in Sarajevo with United States special envoy for the BiH electoral reform, Matthew Palmer, and a managing director at the European External Action Service, Angelina Eichhorst, who should help BiH resolve the current stalemate. Earlier in the day, the two officials said that Bosnian Serb officials should end their blockade of state institutions for the political crisis in the country to de-escalate. That blockade has been ongoing since August, when former High Representative to BiH Valentin Inzko imposed a law banning the denial of war crimes. The Serb entity then voted to block state institutions until the law is repealed. Dodik reiterated on Wednesday that he will not back down from that condition despite calls by Palmer and Eichhorst. He expressed readiness for a compromise in the form of adoption of a new law that would punish anyone attributing collective responsibility to a group for war crimes, including genocide. Palmer and Eichhorst are staying in BiH until the end of the week and will meet with party leaders in Neum for a final closed-door round of negotiations on changes to the election law, however, Dodik has said he won't attend. He explained that there was no need for his presence at the meeting as the main problem was related to the election model in the Croat-Bosniak Federation entity, on which Croats and Bosniaks need to come to an agreement. Bosnian Serb authorities will consent to any agreement on the condition they are not asked to accept indirect election of the Serb member of the state presidency, he said. HDZ BiH leader Dragan Covic and Bakir Izetbegovic of the Party for Democratic Action have confirmed they will go to Neum, however, the leaders of the Social Democratic Party BiH (SDP BiH) and Democratic Front (DF), led by Zeljko Komsic, who is the incumbent Croat member of the BiH Presidency, have said they will not go to Neum. "As long as the coup by Milorad Dodik continues, the DF cannot participate in negotiations that are geared to appease Dragan Covic," DF secretary-general Dzenan Donlagic said on Wednesday. Plenkovic: Three segments to mitigate energy price hike ZAGREB, 26 Jan (Hina) - Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic announced on Wednesday that the government would act in three segments in an effort to alleviate the energy price hike - social transfers, allowances for gas and electricity, and elements related to the taxation system, VAT. "The government is carefully analysing trends in energy prices and the ***measures*** other European Union member states are taking. Currently, we are considering all the options that will protect the standard of citizens," Plenkovic said at the conference "Energy Security in an Era of Fast Decarbonisation," organised by the Jutranji List daily. Recalling that last autumn, the government capped the price of oil products, when it was necessary, Plenkovic reiterated that the situation is being monitored with regard to the growing prices of electricity and gas. He said that the government's activities would be conducted in three segments with the basic aim of relieving the impact on households and citizens. The first segment is a ***measure*** of social transfers with the Prime Minister announcing increased allowances for socially vulnerable citizens. Today that is a maximum allowance of HRK 200 and 64,000 socially vulnerable households will receive vouchers. "Our plan is to adopt a new regulatory framework to increase the scope of those allowances and expand their implementation to gas besides electricity. We will expand the circle of beneficiaries entitled to those allowances. We will act through all three elements to protect the most vulnerable in society," said Plenkovic. The second part of the package refers to reviewing all elements in the final calculation of the price of gas and electricity. Here we will lean on the important role HEP has as the national energy company which in these circumstances, has the strength to take on some of the burden, he underscored. The third segment is to review all the elements we have through the taxation system and VAT, he said, recalling that currently, VAT on electricity is 13% and 25% for gas. "We are preparing a substantial fiscal analysis of impact, we are considering a reduction to buffer the impact on citizens and the economy," said Plenkovic. In his address, he recalled the reasons for the significant energy price hike, adding that Croatian citizens did not experience any significant growth in the past period. In the EU the price of energy increased by an average of 30%. In the context of the global energy crisis, speculation is increasing about the problem of energy supplies while Plenkovic said that Croatia still has significant domestic production of hydrocarbons and satisfies 20% of its consumption whereas with gas it satisfied 30% of domestic consumption last year. He underscored the role of the LNG terminal on Krk island saying that Croatia has secured gas supplies from all parts of the world. "We recognised the strategic significance of this project for Croatia's energy independence and to diversify supplies," he said, adding that the terminal gives Croatia a different dimension on Europe's energy map. Last year 21 ships with LNG arrived at the terminal and unloaded about 3 million cubic metres, which provided 1.7 billion cubic metres of gas that was handed over to Croatia's transport system. This year 24 ships are planned. Croatia has to be ambitious in energy transition Plenkovic believes that Croatia has to be ambitious with regard to energy transition and he announced public consultation regarding Croatia's hydrogen strategy to 2050. He recalled planned investments in solar power plants, new technology, geothermal water, nuclear energy and the Krsko nuclear power plant. He recalled that 37% of the funds from the Recovery and Resilience mechanism is earmarked for green transition and funds will be available from other sources too. He added that a new EU legislative package foresees the establishment of a social fund for climate policies that would ensure additional funds to relieve the impact of reducing greenhouse emissions. Croatia would have (EURO)1.4 billion available, which will help citizens finance investments in energy efficiency, new heating and cooling systems and cleaner mobility. Timmermans: Key principle - justice ZAGREB, 26 Jan (Hina) - The Executive Vice President of the European Commission for the European Green Deal, Frans Timmermans, said on Wednesday that the EU is working on reducing emissions by at least 55% by 2030 in an effort to achieve climate neutrality by 2050. Meeting these goals is not just a political obligation. Since the adoption of the European law on climate, it has been a legal condition, Timmermans said, adding that it was also a moral obligation. We owe it to the younger generations to act for their future, Timmermans said addressing the conference "Energy Security in an Era of Fast Decarbonisation", organised by the Jutarnji List daily in Zagreb. The "FitFor55" proposals will help implement the necessary changes, he said, underscoring that the key principle in all the proposals is justice. Because, if the transition is not just, there won't be any transition, he underscored. The EC official said that according to calculations by the International Renewable Energy Agency, almost 5 million jobs were created from 2012 to 2020 in the renewable energy sector. Renewable energy creates more jobs than fossil fuels, he underscored. The Management Board chair of Croatia's national electricity provider Hrvatska Elektroprivreda (HEP), Frane Barbaric, warned that Europe was currently faced with huge energy price rises and that all of HEP's input costs had increased last year. According to the data he presented, on the reference Hungarian Power Exchange, the price of electricity per megawatt-hour in 2020 was (EURO)32 while in 2021 it amounted to (EURO)121. This year it is more than (EURO)150. Also, the supply cost of gas last year was 60% higher than in 2020, he said. Barbaric underscored that the price of electricity Croatian households pay is below the EU average. In the first half of last year only Malta, Bulgaria and Hungary had a lower price of electricity, he said. Barbaric added that it is necessary to take account of socially vulnerable categories, adding that HEP had written off electricity bills for households in the earthquake-struck Banovina region in the amount of more than HRK 60 million and would continue doing so this year. He announced investments in renewables such as solar power plants, wind farms and hydroelectric power plants, as well as in nuclear energy. In the current three-year period we have planned investments valued at more than HRK 12 billion, which is more than HRK 4 billion a year in investments, underlined Barbaric. Energy prices will not return to their previous level - panel discussion ZAGREB, 26 Jan (Hina) - Energy prices will never return to their previous level, it was said in a panel discussion "Energy Security and Markets", during which Economy and Sustainable Development Minister Tomislav Coric said that Croatia was doing very well in terms of energy supply. The panel discussion was held in Zagreb on Wednesday as part of a conference on ensuring energy security in the era of rapid decarbonisation, organised by Jutarnji List daily, and, as Coric underscored, this year brought challenges in terms of a price rise on the global oil and gas market, and ultimately on the electricity market, as well as challenges in terms of procuring sufficient supplies of all those energy sources. However, he said Croatia was doing very well in terms of energy supply. He noted that we would have an uninterrupted gas supply regardless of the developments in Eastern Europe and that he thought there would be no significant problems with other energy sources either. In terms of energy security, he said that Croatia's internal position had not changed significantly, except in the fact that it had been a year since the LNG terminal on the island of Krk had started operating, which had definitely contributed to that safety. "Unlike a good part of European economies, we have at this moment, given the capacity of the terminal, which is compatible with the current consumption at the level of the Croatian economy, of 2.6-2.7 billion cubic metres of gas, enough to satisfy all needs of the Croatian economy at an annual level," said Coric. He underscored that Croatia was in the middle of energy transition, the state was ready for all challenges and would play its good role, and he was also pleased that the largest energy companies, such as INA, HEP, E.ON and Energia Naturalis, were taking steps in that direction. "Our logic is very clear. We will participate in the transition as much as possible with state-owned companies, and through a regulatory framework we have already changed the picture and the perspective compared to the period five, six or seven years ago. Such crises just make us aware that we need to change as fast as possible, but that changes happen in Croatia every day," said Coric, who also added that, according to him, geothermal energy had the biggest potential for development in the coming period. Electricity "will never be cheap again" Mario Valcic of the Siemens Hrvatska company said that the price of electricity "will never be cheap again", but on the other hand, he thinks that technology and digitalisation are affordable and are no longer something to be afraid of. He underscored that using technology in industry could reduce electricity consumption by 10 to 15% even today, by automating some ***processes*** or optimising the use of some resources. Valcic also said that at a global level 45% of electricity from renewables was lost because there was no technology, or large enough transport routes, to transfer energy to end-users. The E.ON Hrvatska Management Board Chair, Andreas Rörig, said that we should not be surprised by the energy price rise, but due to the situation with the pandemic and geopolitical turmoil, prices had slightly gone out of control, so caring for citizens and societies posed a challenge. 64 new COVID fatalities, 11,812 new cases in Croatia ZAGREB, 26 Jan (Hina) - In the past 24 hours, 64 people have died in Croatia as a consequence of coronavirus and 11,812 new cases have been identified, which means that there are currently 66,027 active cases in the country, the national COVID response team said on Wednesday. There are currently 1,976 hospitalised COVID patients and 192 of them are on ventilators while 42,446 people are self-isolating. By Wednesday 26 January, a total of 4,155,056 tests have been conducted, including 22,524 in the past 24 hours. As of 25 January 2022, a total of 5,061,724 doses of a vaccine had been administered, with 56.44% of the total population or 67.18% of the adult population having been vaccinated. A total of 2,290,566 people have received at least one dose of a vaccine while 2,199,638 people have been fully vaccinated, which is 64.67% of the adult population. MP: Rules for vaccinated and non-vaccinated children discriminatory ZAGREB, 26 Jan (Hina) - MP Nino Raspudic (Bridge) said in the Sabor on Wednesday that the dirty campaign to vaccinate children had reached its climax this week with the introduction of new rules that differentiate between vaccinated and unvaccinated children and that they were discriminatory and unconstitutional. "The dirty, senseless and unscientific campaign of pushing vaccination on children has reached its climax this week with the introduction of unconstitutional discrimination against unvaccinated children who would be compelled to self-isolate if they were in contact with an infected person as against children who have been vaccinated and who do not have to go into house arrest and can go to school," Raspudic said in the Sabor. He reiterated that vaccinated people also pass on the infection and that such rules would not prevent the spread of the infection or protect the health and lives of children. This is about "dealing vaccines, even to children," he said. Speaking ahead of the International Holocaust Remembrance Day, January 27, MP Veljko Kajtazi (National minorities) called on lawmakers to adopt a proposal by the Jewish community to have all Ustasha symbols and salutes banned by law, based on the German model. Marijan Pavlicek (Croatian Sovereignists) commented on a proposal to reduce the number of constituencies after the 2021 Population Census indicated that Croatia's population had decreased by almost 400,000. Counties in Slavonia have lost the most people, said Pavlicek and blamed the HDZ and SDP for the "demographic cataclysm." He believes the proposal to make changes to constituencies in fact means that those areas that have lost the most people will have fewer representatives in the Sabor. Slovenia's COVID numbers hit a new high, gov't rules out relaxation of protocols ZAGREB, 26 Jan (Hina) - In the last 24 hours, there have been 17,491 new cases of the infection with coronavirus in Slovenia, with the share of positive tests reaching 76.3%, the country's authorities reported on Wednesday. Currently, 670 COVID patients are receiving hospital treatment, including 127 in intensive care wards. Health Minister Janez Poklukar said today that there would be no relaxation of rules until the peak of the current wave was over, which he expected to be in the second half of February. SDP proposes downsizing constituencies to six ZAGREB, 26 Jan (Hina) - Social Democratic Party president Peda Grbin on Wednesday presented a proposal for reorganising constituencies, which he said would retain proportionality and equal representation, and eliminate vote inequality and disregard for Croatia's territorial organisation. The 2021 census has shown the need to change constituencies because of "the huge difference in the value of votes," Grbin told the press, adding that the Constitutional Court has warned about this, too. Constituencies do not follow Croatia's territorial organisation, which is most evident in Constituency VII, which stretches from Zagreb to the Adriatic, he said. The fact that Croatia's population is down by 400,000 compared with ten years ago indicates that it's necessary to amend the electoral law and downsize the number of counties and other local government units, he added. Croatia currently has ten constituencies, with 14 MPs elected per each, plus one for expats (three MPs) and one for national minorities (eight MPs). Under the SDP proposal, Croatia would have six constituencies in line with its territorial organisation and they would not elect the same number of MPs. The number of MPs elected per constituency should be based on their population and not the electoral register because at the moment the census is far more accurate than the register, according to the party. We have almost the same number of voters and inhabitants, which is unrealistic, Grbin said. The SDP proposes lowering the preferential vote threshold from 10 to 5% and increasing preferential votes to two, which would increase voters' influence on the election of MPs, he explained. Also, the threshold for being elected to parliament would remain at 5%, although not at national level but in each constituency, and parliament would continue to have 151 members, he said. The SDP invites all parliamentary parties to support its proposal to ensure that each vote count the same. SDP MP Arsen Bauk said Constituency I would be the City of Zagreb, where 28 MPs would be elected. Constituency II would be Northwestern Croatia, comprising Medimurje, Varazdin, Krapina-Zagorje, Koprivnica-Krizevci and Bjelovar-Bilogora counties, and it would elect 21 MPs. Constituency III would be Slavonia (Virovitica-Podravina, Pozega-Slavonia, Brod-Posavina, Osijek-Baranja and Vukovar-Srijem counties) and elect 24 MPs. Constituency IV would be Central Croatia (Zagreb, Sisak-Moslavina and Karlovac counties) and elect 20 MPs. Constituency V would comprise Istria, Primorje-Gorski Kotar and Lika-Senj counties and elect 18 MPs. And Constituency VI would be Dalmatia, comprising Zadar, Sibenik-Knin, Split-Dalmatia and Dubrovnik-Neretva counties, and it would elect 29 MPs. HDZ whip: SDP trying to introduce regionalisation through the back door ZAGREB, 26 Jan (Hina) - HDZ party whip Branko Bacic said on Wednesday that the Social Democratic Party's proposal for the reorganisation of constituencies was an attempt to introduce regionalisation through the back door, announcing that the ruling majority would soon launch changes to the election law. "The Constitutional Court warned 12 years ago about the inequality of votes in individual constituencies considering differences in the number of voters in them of more than 5%. After the 2021 census, those differences have proven to be even bigger and the HDZ has decided that it is necessary to amend the election legislation," Bacic said. He added that changes would be made either to the Act on the Election of Members of Parliament, which envisages the election of 14 deputies in ten constituencies each or to the Act on Constituencies, which defines the borders of constituencies. The HDZ official said the ruling majority wanted to make sure every vote counted the same, meaning that changes would be made either to the borders of constituencies or the number of deputies elected in existing constituencies. The final deadline for these changes is one year before the parliamentary elections, but I believe that we will have changes to one of the two laws in the first reading before the summer recess, Bacic said. "As for the SDP's proposal advocating six constituencies instead of ten, it seems to be reintroducing the topic of regionalisation," Bacic said, adding that the SDP had on many occasions advocated the abolishment of counties and the establishment of several regions. "It is our view that the existing territorial structure in Croatia, based on the model of counties defined by Franjo Tudman, is the best regional structure enabling Croatia's regional development, and we will insist on it," he said. He added that the SDP's proposal would lead to a loss of communication between voters and deputies as there is no direct communication between individual MPs and their voters in large constituencies with 700,000 to 800,000 voters. Bacic did not agree with a reporter's remark that current constituencies are illogical, saying that the ten constituencies had a reasonable territorial distribution, except for departures in two Zagreb constituencies, No. 7 and No. 6. He also said that the SDP's proposal would make access to the parliament more difficult for small, regional parties which have more difficulty being elected to the parliament in a big constituency. Bacic added that the current election system with ten constituencies contributes to the stability of the political system and represents voters well, which, he said, is why there is no reason for a more dramatic change of the law or significant increase in the number of voters per constituency. The HDZ whip also believes that it is necessary to continue to elect 140 deputies in the ten constituencies as that number is realistic and appropriate for Croatia's size. MPs support bill on coastal maritime transport ZAGREB, 26 Jan (Hina) - MPs, both of the ruling majority and of the opposition, on Wednesday supported the final bill on regular and occasional coastal maritime transport, underscoring the importance of transport links between islands and the mainland for improving living conditions and economic development. Presenting the draft bill in the parliament, the State Secretary at the Ministry of the Sea, Transport and Infrastructure, Josip Bilaver, said that the aim of the law was to permanently connect islands with the mainland, and inhabited islands with one another, as well as to increase the existing and introduce new routes for better mobility, faster transport, balanced development of counties and better living conditions on islands. He said that the new law, among other things, regulated the issue of privilege and free transport and provided free transport for firefighters and their vehicles, including professional firefighters and members of volunteer fire departments. "I believe that the law will contribute to more frequent lines and a better service, especially for islanders," Bilaver said. Marijana Puljak announced that she would support the bill on behalf of the parliamentary group of the Centre and GLAS parties, saying that transport was of vital importance for the inhabitants for economic development, improving living conditions and work on islands. Marina Opacak Bilic (Social Democrats Group) agreed with that, stressing that without good connectivity, which had to exist throughout the year, island populations would decline. She also asked whether the inhabitants of Peljesac would lose their existing boat lines due to construction of the bridge. Ursa Raukar Gamulin (Green-Left Bloc) thinks the law maybe even more important to island inhabitants than the Islands Act because, she said, it is crucial to preventing people from leaving and facilitating island life. Noting that the law was another step forward in better island transport connectivity, Branko Bacic (HDZ) said that there were 51 state lines (ferry, boat and fast boat lines) and that maritime transport involved about 14 million passengers and 3.5 million vehicles. He also said that the state allocated about HRK 315 million per year for maritime transport from the budget. Recalling that the national passenger shipping company Jadrolinija this year celebrated its 70th anniversary, Bacic said that it had taken a big step forward over the past 15 years in the procurement of better and faster ships and fleet rejuvenation. Also, in addition to Jadrolinija, private shipowners have turned to fast boat transport and the purchase of catamarans, which has led to even better island connectivity, he said. Bacic said that although it was getting a bridge, Peljesac should stay an island because if Pag, Krk, Murter and Ciovo were islands, he saw no reason why Peljesac wouldn't be one. Civil Procedure Act to be amended to streamline procedures before court ZAGREB, 26 Jan (Hina) - The Ministry of Justice and Public Administration on Wednesday reported that it had prepared a new bill of amendments to the Civil Procedure Act to accelerate and update proceedings regulated by this Act. The draft amendments introduce precise deadlines in civil procedure cases. First-instance proceedings need to be completed within three years while second-instance (appeals) proceedings need to be completed within one year. De minimis litigation claims cases need to be completed within a year in the first instance while appeals should last up to a maximum of six months. Audio recording becomes mandatory With the aim of improving the efficiency of the judiciary and speeding up procedures before the courts, audio recording of hearings will be mandatory. Transcripts of hearing will no longer be mandatory and minutes will be kept for the most important actions taken during a hearing because the contents of the actions will be contained in audio recordings. The number of Supreme Court judges for decision making in model procedures will rise from five to 13 in order to ensure greater legal strength of rulings. Opposition politician accuses PM of worrying only about his own ego and rating ZAGREB, 26 Jan (Hina) - Homeland Movement leader Ivan Penava on Wednesday condemned the arrest of two men in Zadar for comments they made about Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic on their Facebook profiles, claiming that dark times have come upon Croatia and that the Prime Minister is only interested in his ego and rating. Something like this has never happened in a free Croatia, for people to be arrested because of something they said, Penava told a press conference in the Sabor. "This isn't liberal, pro-democratic, progressive, pro-European or Western and has nothing to do with democracy," he added. Penava claimed that the 'snowball in Petrinja' and attack (with a firearm in October 2020) on Government House - which he described as "an unfortunate circumstance" and "spontaneous attack" - have not occurred to anyone else except Prime Minister Plenkovic. Penava said that "Plenkovic had said that the findings by DORH, SOA and MUP regarding the attack on Government House were not good" and so he sent them back to be "corrected." Penava claimed that the police reacted in Zadar so they would not be reprimanded and recalled that the two men did not threaten anyone but just expressed their opinion which was not to the Prime Minister's liking and so they were arrested. Penava recalled that Croatia has lost 400,000 people according to the latest Population Census but "that doesn't interest Plenkovic." "All he is interested in is his ego and rating," said Penava. Citizens have right to call for throwing rotten eggs at politicians, MP says ZAGREB, 26 Jan (Hina) - Citizens have the right to call for throwing rotten eggs at politicians, independent MP Karolina Vidovic Kristo said on Wednesday, labelling the recent arrest of two men for allegedly threatening Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic on Facebook as shameful acting out by those in power. Last week's arrest of a 72-year-old who said Plenkovic "should be welcomed with rotten eggs" when he came to Zadar and a 49-year-old for calling Plenkovic a "baboon" was a shameful acting out by "corrupt ruling structures alienated from the people" and an antidemocratic act, the MP said in a statement. "Croatian citizens have the legitimate right, in their helplessness and because they are exposed to arrogant powerful structures, to call for throwing rotten eggs at politicians." The ruling structures are openly breaking the law, getting rich illegally, corrupting the media, and running the judiciary, Vidovic Kristo said. She added that Plenkovic was "personally involved" in a "long list of corruption scandals," that he "has HRK 5 billion in the account, yet the government has not rebuilt even one house either in Banovina or in Zagreb" after the 2020 earthquakes, and that he "is a symbol of incompetence and the anti-democratic state of affairs." The key political stakeholders, the key media and the judiciary are insulting citizens on a daily basis by breaking the law, through tax plunder, and by destroying the health system, the MP said, asking "who will send Plenkovic and his supporters for police questioning for impoverishing Croatian citizens, destroying the legal system, and systematically emptying" Croatia. ((EURO)1 = HRK 7.5) Ministry dismisses claims about PM chief-of-staff's fictitious residence ZAGREB, 26 Jan (Hina) - The Ministry of the Interior on Wednesday refuted public allegations that the registered place of residence of the Prime Minister's chief-of-staff, Zvonimir Frka Petesic, was fictitious. Asked to publish a record of Frka Petesic's places of residence and temporary stay, the ministry said that data on one's place of residence and temporary stay are in its information system and are classified, but that it could confirm that Frka Petesic's place of residence and temporary stay are regulated in line with the law. When someone has both their place of residence and temporary stay regulated, their place of residence cannot be deemed fictitious, the ministry added. The ministry also refuted claims that the permit for someone's temporary abode could be extended only twice. It explained that legislation regulating residence provides for an exemption - when the person concerned does a job that is not of a permanent nature in their registered abode, the registered temporary stay can last as long as their temporary employment. The issue of Frka Petesic's residence and temporary stay was first raised by some media outlets. Commenting on the case, President Zoran Milanovic said on Tuesday that Frka Petesic having registered permanent residence on the island of Dugi Otok and using a state-owned flat in Zagreb "is an offence". Milanovic insisted that Frka is a resident of Zagreb and was therefore not eligible for the flat he was currently using. PM Andrej Plenkovic responded that Frka Petesic was entitled to the state-owned flat in which he has been living during his registered temporary stay in Zagreb. "If you know about a criminal offence and don't report it, then you, too, are committing an offence, so I'm inviting him to file a criminal complaint to the State Attorney's Office against Zvonimir Frka Petesic or me as prime minister so we can see if there is a criminal offence there or if it's an ill-intentioned, petty-political, arrogant, rude, unfounded political game," Plenkovic said. Explaining why Frka Petesic registered as a permanent resident of Sali on Dugi Otok island, Plenkovic said that Frka Petesic was born in Paris and did not own property either in France or Croatia, except his father's family house in Sali, and that when he was appointed his chief-of-staff, he became a state secretary of the highest rank entitled to a state-owned flat in the capital city. An office-holder's term is temporary and so is Frka Petesic's stay in Zagreb, Plenkovic said. Parliament Speaker's office receives 1,000 complaints in past 4 years ZAGREB, 26 Jan (Hina) - The office of the Parliament Speaker has received more than a thousand letters or petitions from citizens and office staff read each one individually and depending on their content, act accordingly. "Admittedly, some letters do not require any action because they might just be a comment but we react by reading each one," the Parliament Speaker's office told Hina on Wednesday. The statistics, however, indicate that in 2018 there were 403 petitions, in 2019 there were 293, in 2020 there were 247 and last year 176. We assume the number decreased due to the coronavirus pandemic, the office said. Citizens complain about various matters, mostly about the conduct of state and local government, health, welfare, judiciary and many are not informed of the competencies of certain state institutions so they write to the Sabor. In any case, the correspondence is forwarded to the competent bodies and we ask that they reply to the sender. The office added that they also have some people who write regularly and not only to the Sabor but other institutions too. Parliament Speaker Gordan Jandrokovic confirmed on Tuesday that the Sabor receives petitions from citizens and added that he had investigated claims about an acquaintance of his concerning the state property rented to that acquaintance. Jandrokovic added that he did not overstep his duties because he personally reacted to a complaint by a citizen, which is something his office receives every day. Travel agencies waiting for decision on extension of COVID support ***measures*** ZAGREB, 26 Jan (Hina) - Travel agencies in Croatia are still waiting for a decision by the competent authorities regarding the extension of jobkeeping ***measures*** for the first few months of 2022, which was announced as a possibility at the end of 2021, UHPA said on Wednesday. President of the Association of Croatian Travel Agencies (UHPA) Tomislav Fain said that their business is still jeopardised, their activities are still doubtful due to the pandemic, and turnover last year was only at 65% of that in 2019. "We still do not have precise information about whether the ***measures*** will be extended for agencies or not. We hope they will because Labour Minister (Josip) Aladrovic announced their extension at the end of 2021 for the most vulnerable activities and agencies certainly are. The new wave of the pandemic spreading at the start of 2022 is additionally hampering our business, there is hardly any or no work at all," Fain told Hina. UHPA appealed for jobkeeping ***measures*** to be extended for travel agencies which until now had encompassed about 3,000 travel agents. Travel agencies have registered huge losses and decreased revenue. Their business is constantly uncertain which is evident in the results of a survey in which UHPA members said their revenue in 2021 was 65% of that in 2019. This has also been confirmed by Croatian Bureau of Statistics figures showing that in the first nine months of 2021, revenue decreased by 65% compared with the same period of 2019, and if 2020 is compared with 2019, the decrease in revenue was even higher, more than 80%, said Fain. "Due to the poor situation, we appeal to the government, the Ministry of Tourism and Sports and the Ministry of Labour, Pension System, Family and Social Policy to extend jobkeeping ***measures*** for travel agencies in the coming months, starting from January 2022. That is the only way agencies will manage to keep their workers and somehow prepare for the coming spring-summer season," said Fain. Last year's good results in tourism occurred primarily due to the better epidemiological situation and by no means as a sign of recovery of organised tourism trends, and the continuation of jobkeeping ***measures*** for travel agencies continues to be a key condition for their recovery and survival, concluded Fain. Union collective of precarious workers and activists registered ZAGREB, 26 Jan (Hina) - The SKUPA union collective has been registered, comprising precarious workers and activists and bringing civil society workers together for the first time at the national level to fight for workers' rights in associations, cooperatives, foundations, trade unions and political parties. SKUPA said on Wednesday it was established on 7 December and registered at the labour ministry on 5 January. SKUPA empowers civil society workers and provides them with organised support in the fight for labour rights, dignified working conditions, and a better civil society, a press release said. SKUPA will also fight for changing financing rules so that organisations financed via public calls can honour workers' rights. It warns that since associations are non-profit organisations, they often can't pay severance in case of dismissal or pay for overtime work because these costs are not envisaged by any project. Credit institutions' indicators of profitability improve ZAGREB, 26 Jan (Hina) - In the first nine months of 2021, all the credit institutions registered a HRK 4 billion profit on the aggregate, or HRK 1.5 billion, that is, 59.3% more than in the corresponding period of 2020, the Croatian National Bank (HNB) said after the HNB Council on Wednesday. The HNB says that indicators of profitability rose: thus, Return on Assets (RoA) grew from 0.8% to 1.1%, and Return on Equity (RoE) jumped from 5.5 to 8.3%. All the credit institutions ran at a profit in the January-September 2021 period. Their total assets rose by 6.6% or by 30.5 billion kuna from the end of 2020 to reach HRK 493 billion at the end of the third quarter of 2021. Broken down by type of assets, credits and advances rose the most, while the liquidity assets also increased considerably. The share of non-performing loans in total loans fell from 5.4% to 4.7%. Bad loans in the segment of household lending rose, however, this increase was offset by new credit activities, and the share of non-performing loans in that segment remained at 7.1%. The share of loans whose risk of default has risen considerably has gone up, but those loans still do not amount to non-performing loans. ((EURO)1 = HRK 7.525776) Parl. committee: Climate change affects food security ZAGREB, 26 Jan (Hina) - The parliamentary committee on ***agriculture*** convened in Osijek on Wednesday to discuss the impact of climate change on food provision and cooperation with the scientific community to adapt the farm sector to that change. The committee's chairwoman, Marijana Petir, said that in the last 15 years drought had been a major cause of a decrease in crop yields. For instance, from 2013 to 2016, damage done to the ***agriculture*** was estimated at three billion kuna, which is equivalent to 43% of aid granted to the sector in the said period. Petir also said that Croatia, alongside Greece and Lithuania, had considerably reduced greenhouse gas emissions, but she noted that the reason for that is that Croatia's livestock had been downsized by 30%. ***Agriculture*** Ministry State Secretary Tugomir Majdak said that one of ***measures*** to help the farm sector to weather climate change is the construction of irrigation systems. President, association discuss problems in post-earthquake reconstruction ZAGREB, 26 Jan (Hina) - President Zoran Milanovic on Wednesday met with representatives of SOS Zagreb, an association of citizens founded a year ago with the aim of ensuring a faster and better reconstruction of properties in Zagreb damaged by the March 2020 earthquake. Members of the association informed the president of the obstacles and problems encountered by citizens in efforts to have their properties reconstructed. They warned of the danger that time would run out to apply for funds under the EU Solidarity Fund to be used for post-earthquake reconstruction and that the cost of reconstruction of many Zagreb hospitals, schools and kindergartens would eventually have to be covered by taxpayers, the Office of the President said in a statement. The meeting pointed to the lack of a central body in charge of post-earthquake reconstruction as the key reason why reconstruction was slow and ineffective. This has resulted in only 75 properties in Zagreb undergoing reconstruction two years since the earthquake, the association's members said. Private reconstruction is encouraged, however, numerous buildings are not creditworthy, which is a problem that requires the state's help in the form of faster compensation for private funds invested, while reconstruction should be compulsory, it was said at the meeting. Israeli ambassador lays wreath at Jewish cemetery in Varazdin ZAGREB, 26 Jan (Hina) - Ahead of the International Holocaust Remembrance Day, Israeli Ambassador Ilan Mor on Wednesday laid a wreath at the Jewish cemetery in the northern city of Varazdin, noting that everyone had to fight against antisemitism that was on the rise globally again. Ambassador Mor, Varazdin Mayor Neven Bosilj and Varazdin County deputy head Silvija Zagorec laid wreaths at the local Jewish cemetery in memory of Jews killed in World War II. The Israeli ambassador said that on 27 January the world would stop for a moment to remember the systematic killing of six million Jews. Antisemitism is a chronic disease each one of us has to fight. Both Jews and non-Jews have to fight together against conspiracy theories that are grist to the mill of antisemitism. Unfortunately, antisemitism has been growing stronger globally, he said. Deputy county head Zagorec said that in the early 1940s almost all Varazdin Jews were taken away in just a few days. "That is an ***exceptionally*** tragic event that must serve as a reminder that we have to fight discrimination and exclusiveness because freedom, tolerance and equality must never have an alternative," she said. The city synagogue, which is being reconstructed, is a lasting reminder of Varazdin's Jewish community. "We have a synagogue but unfortunately we no longer have the Jewish community. The synagogue will not be a place of worship but a kind of cultural centre," Mayor Bosilj said, adding that the city would pay tribute to the Holocaust victims also by staging an exhibition in tribute to its honorary citizens Eva Akerman, to be opened on Wednesday evening. The Israeli ambassador visited the exhibition and before visiting the Jewish cemetery, he held a lecture at a local high school. In other news: Algebra signs partnership agreement with Goldsmiths, University of London ZAGREB, 26 Jan (Hina) - The Zagreb-based Algebra University has signed a partnership agreement with Goldsmiths, part of the University of London, which will make it possible for Algebra's students to obtain both a Croatian and a British diploma. This private educational institution said that as of the academic year 2022/2023 its students will be able to study design, 3D modelling, multimedia, digital marketing, data science, computing or gaming, according to curricula evaluated by one of the world's 500 best universities. Students will attend courses that will be held in English and enrolment terms will be the same as for students who enroll in courses that are held in Croatian, with candidates having to take a test in English. "Students who complete one of these validated programmes will receive a dual degree from Algebra University College and Goldsmiths, University of London," Algebra says on its website. Goldsmiths, University of London is a public university founded in 1891 and is today attended by more than 10,000 students. The University of London is a federal public research university founded in 1836. In addition to Goldsmiths, its other bigger components are UCL, King's College London, Queen Mary, Birkbeck, the London School of Economics, Royal Holloway and City. Pupils at Saint Petersburg school can learn Croatian ZAGREB, 26 Jan (Hina) - Pupils at School No691 in Saint Petersburg's Nevsky District can learn six foreign languages, including Croatian. Since last year, the school with more than 1,500 pupils has been home to the Croatian Club and wants to be an exclusive place in the city when it comes to Croatia and its language and culture. Zagreb and Saint Petersburg have been friends since 1968 and their cooperation has covered various areas, including culture and education. The cooperation gained new momentum in 2015 thanks to the Zagreb Russian Language and Culture Association and the enthusiasm of No691's headmistress Irina Leonidovna Karpicka, a big lover of Croatia. Her students can learn Croatian three times a week for a month or two throughout the school year. The groups have numbered 15 to 20 students to date and they have been taught by volunteer Russianists and Croatists. One of them is Mato Spekuljak, a Russian language and literature professor and president of the Russian Language and Culture Association, who has described School No691 as "one of the most beautiful and technically most equipped I have seen in my life." The school is new and has a big library, a swimming pool, a toy museum, and computerised classrooms. It has a Croatian library with some 300 books and multimedia content donated to the Croatian Club by the Zagreb Russian Language and Culture Association. Other Russianists and Croatists from Zagreb have also guested in the school, including Russian language teachers at Zagreb's Trnjanska Primary School, which cooperates with School No691, as well as in Zagreb's Tin Ujevic Primary School, which cooperates with School No351 in Saint Petersburg's Moskovsky District. Besides the language, the students in the two Zagreb schools are also taught about Russia and its culture and the students in the two Saint Petersburg schools about "Croatia as a friendly Slavic country," Spekuljak said. The schools sometimes hold video conferences. "In Petersburg, that proved to be especially interesting to Russian students who spent summers in Croatia with their parents and those who are interested in football and admire the Croatian national football team and its successes," he added. The Croatian-Russian school cooperation has been disrupted by COVID-19, but both sides hope it will resume and expand once the pandemic is over. Headmistress Karpicka said one of the post-pandemic plans was to bring together the Croats living in Saint Petersburg and their families. Speaking to Hina, she invited all Russianists and Croatists from Croatia interested in volunteering in her school and make guest appearances in the Croatian Club to write at [*kil-1203@mail.ru*](mailto:kil-1203@mail.ru) . The Russian Language and Culture Association hopes the cooperation will expand between schools in Zagreb's Donji Grad and Tresnjevka districts and Saint Petersburg's Moskovsky and Novsky districts. Split-based institution DES first producer of paper bags for dog waste in Croatia ZAGREB, 26 Jan (Hina) - A Split-based institution that employs persons with disabilities, DES, on Wednesday presented its new product, a paper bag with a cardboard pad for cleaning up dog waste, and DES is the first manufacturer of paper bags of that kind in Croatia. Director Edita Maretic Dimlic said that they had opted for that product because they wanted to develop their own products and actively take part in raising awareness among citizens, especially dog owners, that dog waste should be cleaned up, and thus contribute to the image of a healthy and clean Split. She noted that this was the first product they produced on their own and that had not been commissioned. There is an image of a dog on the paper bag, as well as writing, which says "Respect your city, be a conscientious citizen, and clean up instead of me, please". The paper bag was designed by the institution's Mia Percic, and DES director Maretic Dimlic said that it was made of recycled paper and that DES was the first producer of such a paper bag for cleaning up dog waste. Prague has such paper bags, which, she said, they saw as a means of encouraging citizens to pick up dog waste. The City of Split has ordered 26,667 paper bags from DES and so supported the institution's new product and its use. DES has donated 2,000 paper bags to city districts, local committees, the Sporting Dogs Club and the County Association of the Blind, said Maretic Dimlic. She recalled that during the pandemic DES started producing cotton masks and announced they would soon start producing souvenirs. ZSE indices increase ZAGREB, 26 Jan (Hina) - The main Zagreb Stock Exchange (ZSE) indices rose on Wednesday, the Crobex by 1.15% to 2,147.32 points and the Crobex10 by 1.01% to 1,306.91 points. Regular turnover was HRK 7.4 million, or about HRK 2.8 million less than on Tuesday. The highest turnover was generated by the Valamar Riviera stock, HRK 1.6 million. Its price went up by 2.99% to HRK 34.50 per share. The stock of the HT telecommunications company turned over HRK 1.2 million, closing at HRK 184, up 0.27%. The stock of the Atlantska Plovidba shipping company generated a turnover of HRK 1.19 million. Its price rose by 3.64% to HRK 370. Forty-two stocks traded today, with 25 increasing in price and seven decreasing, while 10 were stable. ((EURO)1 = HRK 7.525776) THIS BULLETIN INCLUDES ITEMS RELEASED BY 2100 HRS WEDNESDAY. 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[***Morocco: 'I refuse to be drawn into territorial disputes,' says OCP CEO Mostafa Terrab***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:62VV-KDJ1-JCH9-G138-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

In this second part of our interview with Mostafa Terrab, the CEO of the Moroccan fertiliser giant OCP looks back at 2020, from the upheavals caused by the Covid-19 pandemic to the complaint filed against his group by the US company Mosaic.

65-year-old Mostafa Terrab is internationally recognised. He was endorsed by Hassan II in the early 1990s when he joined the royal cabinet. Terrab remains a great state representative and is passionate about contributing to his country's position on the world stage.

The Moroccan fertiliser giant OCP, which has been under his leadership since 2006, has been totally transformed ($6.1bn in turnover in 2020). It is now diversifying its activities, modernising its infrastructure and governance and investing in research and development.

READ MORE 'The future of OCP is green development,' says CEO Mostafa Terrab

In this second part of our interview with the Terrab, the CEO looks back to 2020, a year that was marked by his group's expansion to the Indian and South American markets and renewed tension in the Sahara with the Polisario.

How is OCP doing after a year marked by an ***unprecedented*** pandemic, the end of which is not yet in sight? Your turnover, which was up by 4% in 2020, seems to indicate that your group has managed to cope with this period of uncertainty.

Mostafa Terrab: Indeed, the world is facing an ***unprecedented*** pandemic within a global context that is marked by openness and the almost unfettered movement of people and goods. At a time when national authorities have declared a health emergency and taken preventive ***measures*** to deal with the effects of the pandemic, the group has organised itself to ensure resilience of our operations.

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Staff who were not essential to production were allowed to work from home and a Business Resilience Center (BRC) was created. The exemplary mobilisation and commitment demonstrated by all of our employees and subcontractors ensured that production and the supply chain ran smoothly.

The growth in our turnover within the context of a low cycle, which was also marked by a complaint filed by our US competitor, is remarkable. We quickly adapted to a global market, where our activities are naturally linked to the food sector. In addition, we have worked hard to reduce our production costs. I would like to take this opportunity to thank OCP's employees for their commitment.

Yet the price of fertiliser was not particularly high. You compensated by winning new markets.

We are a global player with customers on five continents and one that is also fully integrated within the entire phosphate value chain. I'll give two examples. The first is India, which is our traditional customer for rock and acid. This large country, just like everywhere, experienced lockdowns that affected its fertiliser production.

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We reacted quickly by supplying our Indian customers with fertiliser, which in turn benefited ***agriculture*** and farmers as the country was experiencing an ***exceptionally*** favourable monsoon season.

The second example, Ethiopia, is a key partner in Africa. We are working to meet the country's demand for fertilisers, which is growing steadily, to ensure food security and support its ***agricultural*** exports.

Regarding the low prices that you mentioned, 2020 was also the year in which our initial investment plan, which consisted of tripling our production capacity, came into full effect and enabled us to achieve record levels of production, thus validating our counter-cyclical investments.

What are your objectives for this year? Is increasing fertiliser sales in Asia and South America one of your priorities? Do you want to further increase fertiliser sales (and decrease rock sales)?

First of all, the OCP Group is an integrated player across the entire fertiliser chain, from phosphate rock to fertiliser, including phosphoric acid, which is an intermediate product used in the manufacture of fertilisers and other food or technical uses. Integration makes it possible to be flexible and adapt to the variety of global demand.

Moreover, our sales are balanced across the four continents, with Oceania integrated into our Asia sales network. Under the guidance of His Majesty the King, we are working to develop phosphorus, which is a strategic resource for life, in a responsible manner and for the benefit of all humanity. Our strategy is adapted to meet our customers' demands and is part of the global food security chain.

In mid-2020, your American competitor Mosaic filed a complaint in the US accusing your group of selling subsidised fertiliser. After an investigation, the authorities ruled in favour of the complainant and decided in March to impose customs duties of 19.97% on your exports. Pending this decision, you suspended your sales to the US. Will you resume your exports?

Let me first correct you: this was not a complaint about selling subsidised fertiliser, a practice that consists of selling products for below the cost of production and that can be penalised! This reproach did not concern commercial practices.

READ MORE Morocco - US: Fertiliser giant OCP faces challenges in North America

I will not give my opinion on the US authorities' decision. However, as soon as the decision to impose tariffs on our products was announced, we reaffirmed our intention to continue to serve US farmers. We are evaluating all possible options so that we can decide on how best to continue to serve the entire North American market.

This surcharge was motivated by the fact that OCP has free access to Moroccan subsoil, which greatly reduces your production costs. Do you understand where this argument is coming from?

I told you that I would refrain from commenting on the US administrative authorities' decisions. To answer your question and clarify matters for you, I would like to point out that we are a public company, which is largely state-owned.

READ MORE Moroccan phosphate company OCP Group loses out to Mosaic in US legal battle

We have replaced the monopoly tax - which was in place when OCP was established as a public establishment - with a dividend policy that allows public companies to remunerate their shareholders. OCP is also subject to the common regime of taxation and levying of taxes. In the current circumstances, OCP's status in regards to shareholders and as a taxpayer has changed.

2020 has been marked internally by additional savings efforts and you have announced that you want to continue along this path. Was OCP not strict enough in managing its expenses until now?

For more than 12 years, we have been working constantly on what is called cost leadership. It is a continuous effort. Our actions are constantly aimed at adapting our resources to the goals we set ourselves. Product and environmental quality, customer satisfaction and operational excellence are objectives at the heart of our strategies - which are themselves constantly being adapted. Consequently, we wage a constant battle to ensure competitiveness through innovation and cost control.

Although OCP is 95% state-owned, it has acquired the status of an autonomous company. Yet, in a number of cases, there is a feeling that your group is involved in public policies. This year, your donations to fight against Covid-19 were very generous ($339m). Is it OCP's role to support the state?

First of all, as I mentioned earlier, OCP has gone from being a public establishment to a limited company, which includes all the usual standards of governance including a board of directors and committees.

As for the Covid donation, let me tell you how proud we were, like many companies - including private ones - and other individuals, to participate in this national drive. You can't possibly think that private companies, which are major contributors to the national solidarity effort, were ordered to do so! Our action was not dictated to us by anyone. I would also like to add that many of our employees spontaneously and freely contributed as well.

OCP operates the Boukraa mine in the Sahara. Are you concerned about the renewed tensions with the Polisario that have been going on since November 2020?

As a business leader, I refuse to be drawn into territorial disputes. What I can tell you is that we exploit Boukraa's phosphate resources, just like a good father would. We have regularly provided our own funds to ensure the continuity of the mine's operations, ***processing*** infrastructure and logistics.

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We have supported the growth in numbers and skills of our employees from our southern provinces and, when Phosboucraa is profitable, we never pay a single dirham in dividends. All profits are reinvested locally. We are engaged in a colossal investment programme worth more than $2bn - one that involves port, phosphate ***processing***, transformation into fertiliser and accompanying investments in production capacity and human capital.

We have created a technology park that also houses the Université Mohamed-VI-Polytechnique [UM6P], with research and development capacities in renewable energy and ***agriculture*** in arid and saline environments.

The Polisario has often used the fact that the Sahara appears on the UN list of non-self-governing territories to have ships seized. Is this still the case?

The Moroccan political authorities are in charge of defending the legitimate and superior interests of the nation that is under His Majesty the King's supreme authority. The whole nation is behind the sovereign. As for abducting ships, the South African experience has proven how futile this type of piracy is.

The US has just officially recognised Morocco's claims over Western Sahara. Is this development noticeable elsewhere?

A large number of countries have expressed their support for Morocco's autonomy plan as the most viable way of solving the Sahara conflict.

READ MORE The US opens a consulate in Western Sahara

Obviously, US recognition is a decisive step, and, as you have certainly noted, many countries have opened consular offices in our southern provinces.

In November, OCP welcomed Nadia Fassi Fehri as head of digital transformation and a member of your board of directors. Does your group need to have more women in positions of power?

Our group is proud to have welcomed Nadia Fassi Fehri, whose skills are widely recognised in the Moroccan talent market. She and a number of other talented people have joined the group, both at the corporate and UM6P levels, to strengthen our managerial and transformation capabilities.

Fehri is our chief transformation officer but is not a member of our board of directors. We feel that gender parity is an important performance indicator and many of our female employees are in top management.

READ MORE Morocco - US: Protectionism rising, as US company accuses OCP of unfair competition

Did you know that many women work in production, which has long been a male-dominated sector, as production managers, both in mining and in industrial ***processing***, and even drive large machines? It should also be noted that women now make up half of our engineering positions. All of Morocco is committed to this path, which involves including women in making our country wealthy.

In the last few months, your staff has undergone a major reshuffle, which is not the first time. What is the purpose of these changes? Are regular reshuffles necessary in a group like OCP?

As in other large companies, we adapt our organisation to the strategic imperatives of the moment and we give young talent a chance by making sure that we constantly mobilise the collective intelligence of the entire group.

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[***Plastic pollution in the Arctic***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:693W-H851-F129-P049-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

Introduction

Industrial plastic production has grown rapidly since the 1950s, reaching 368 million tonnes globally per year by 2019 (ref.). Because of its low price, plastic has become one of the most widely used materials, especially in the packaging industry, and now forms an integral part of municipal waste. Every year, 19–23 million metric tonnes of mismanaged plastic waste are transferred from land-based sources to water globally.

As plastics are designed to be durable, they persist in the environment for long periods of time and become widely dispersed,. Therefore, plastic is a planetary boundary threat,, especially once it fragments into microplastic and nanoplastic (size ≤5 mm and ≤1 μm (ref.), respectively) due to sunlight, mechanical abrasion, biotic interaction, wave action and temperature fluctuations. Plastic is also extensively used in maritime operations such as fishing, aquaculture, shipping and offshore operations, leading to substantial additional leakage into marine environments. Although millions of tonnes of plastics enter the oceans annually, it is currently unknown where in the ocean 99% of the small plastic debris ends up, pointing to yet unaccounted for accumulation areas.

Polar regions are still perceived as pristine. However, in the past five years, high levels of plastic pollution have been found in the Arctic (Fig. ). The formation of a sixth accumulation area in the Nordic Seas has been suggested by model projections and is corroborated by an increase in marine debris over time, and comparatively high microplastic concentrations in the Arctic,. This evidence has prompted a Protection of the Arctic Marine Environment (PAME, Arctic Council) working group desktop study on marine litter and microplastics in the Arctic to gauge the need for a Regional Action Plan, which, in turn, led to a mandate to assess the status and trends by the Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Programme.

Overview of the pathways of plastic pollutants into the Arctic Ocean from local and distant sources.

Plastic pollution can be generated by households, traffic, ***agriculture***, wastewater treatment, landfills, illegal dumping, industry, shipyards, tourism, ships, fisheries and offshore industry, and be transported to and/or within the Arctic via the atmosphere, rivers, ocean currents, sea ice and eroding permafrost. The seafloor and sea ice are areas of plastic accumulation. The numbers in boxes refer to the abundance of plastic debris (green) or microplastics (MP, purple) in different ecosystem compartments. The ranges are based on data from 36 peer-reviewed studies reporting from 727 locations that were compiled in the database Litterbase (more details on the data extraction ***process*** are provided in the ). The data in each compartment were converted to common units here, but the sampling and analytical methods used in different studies varied widely, as there are currently few standardized or harmonized procedures. For example, varying size detection limits in different studies likely introduced considerable variability in the ranges shown. Figure is adapted from AWI-Infographic, CC BY 4.0 ([*https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/*](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)).

In this Review, we describe the sources of Arctic plastic debris, its distribution and its effects on Arctic biota, as well as knowledge gaps and mitigation with a broad, pan-Arctic view, complementing previous reviews focused on plastic pollution effects on Arctic biota, such as seabirds, or with differential geographic focuses–. We also discuss interactions between climate change and plastic pollution, as plastic pollution likely adds to the impacts of climate change, which has caused a three times faster increase in Arctic temperatures compared with the global average.

Sources of Arctic plastic debris

As much of the Arctic is sparsely inhabited, relatively low local plastic pollution inputs would be expected. Yet, there are widespread observations of plastics in the region. Most model simulations and data suggest that a substantial proportion originates from the North Atlantic, and the North Pacific, (Fig. ). Rivers were also suggested as a pathway of microplastic pollution in the Arctic. Although the Arctic Ocean contains only ~1% of the global ocean volume, it receives >10% of the global river discharge. Transport of plastic pollutants to and in the Arctic is governed by ***processes*** from large-scale ocean currents to small-scale phenomena, such as windrows and sea ice drift, (Fig. ). Model simulations and data from global studies on microfibres suggest that some regions of the Arctic are accumulation areas for plastic pollutants,,. In order to support the design of efficient regulatory schemes to mitigate plastic pollution, it is common to distinguish between land-based and sea-based sources from both local and distant origins, as discussed here.

The main pathways of pollution transport to the Arctic.

Plastic pollution is transported to the Arctic via atmospheric and aquatic circulation systems, which could promote their accumulation in certain areas. The main ocean currents that move pollution to and within the Arctic are shown as thin red, blue and green arrows, and the ten largest rivers that release 10% of the global river discharge into the Arctic Ocean are illustrated by thick blue arrows. Numbers in parentheses refer to average annual discharge in km3 (ref.). The prevailing atmospheric circulation pattern is shown as translucent arrows. The solid and dashed blue lines indicate the main Arctic river basin and watershed, respectively. Figure adapted with permission from ref., Elsevier.

Local sources of plastic include the key sectors of maritime activity in the Arctic, such as hydrocarbon exploration, aquaculture and ship traffic, including cruise tourism and fisheries (Fig. ). For example, abandoned, lost or otherwise discarded fishing gear is a major source of plastic debris, especially in the Greenland, Norwegian and Barents Seas,, Kara Sea and subarctic North Atlantic, and North Pacific oceans,. On the beaches of Svalbard, plastic debris from fisheries accounted for 27–100% of beach litter–. Fisheries are also an important source at Novaya Zemlya, especially in terms of strapping bands, and at Franz Josef Land, Barents Sea, where they accounted for 51% of the debris, although they do not appear to be major sources in the Canadian Arctic. Recognizable items from the Eurasian Arctic originated mostly from Russian and Scandinavian trawlers but also from the UK, Iceland, Faroe Islands, the Netherlands, Germany, Italy, Spain, Canada, Argentina, Brazil and the USA,,,. Fibres or threads from fishing nets were the most important source of microplastics in the Barents Sea and the second most abundant type of microplastics in southwest Greenland. Notably, 80–90% of the fishing nets found on Svalbard had been discarded deliberately by fishers after mending nets. Much of the material used is positively buoyant, such that it drifts and washes ashore. Some of the items could also come from the intensifying aquaculture, but it is difficult to differentiate between fishing and aquaculture sources. Fisheries regulations such as conservation zones and fishing permits reduce the number of fishers operating in an area and can help to reduce fisheries-related debris, as shown in the 1980s in Alaska,.

Another source is plastic debris from domestic sources, as evidenced by reports of bottles, containers, plastic bags and fabrics. However, because such items are also used on ships, it is difficult to attribute such plastics to land-based versus sea-based sources, and input from sea-based sources was rated more important than land-based sources in the Arctic. For example, large food containers amongst the household plastics found on northwest Svalbard point to the disposal of galley waste, which is of sea-based origin. Litter quantities on the seafloor of the Fram Strait have been correlated with increasing activities in both the fisheries and the tourism sectors west of Svalbard. The prevalence of fast-sinking glass debris on the deep Arctic seafloor also corroborates the importance of local sea-based sources. Arctic ship traffic is due to increase as new and faster trans‐Arctic routes open, and the shipping season extends as sea ice declines, potentially leading to increased local plastic inputs.

A major challenge to minimizing the input of waste from land into the ocean globally is the lack of adequate waste management facilities in coastal regions. As Arctic population densities are low, waste collection and disposal is very basic. Recycling and baling facilities are rare and limited to large Arctic communities. Waste collection in larger communities often relies on community haul systems, whereas in small communities, it is typically by self-haul, which can be less efficient in preventing waste leakage into the environment. In some communities, traditional waste management solutions are landfills and uncontrolled dumpsites, sometimes next to the sea, and simple incinerators with no or limited flue gas treatment, as seen in Greenland and Iqaluit, Canada,. Beach litter assessments report input from inadequate waste facilities on the western shores of Greenland, where 90% of the Greenlandic population lives. In the Canadian Arctic, plastic litter densities were seven times higher near communities compared with more remote locations. Open dumpsites and winter travel activities were identified as potential sources. Numerous open waste disposal sites and abandoned landfills were also identified as an important source of plastic pollution distributed over the flat tundra by high winds of the Archangelsk region of Russia.

Microplastics are also widely distributed in the Arctic, transported by ocean and atmospheric currents and biota from both distant and local sources. Microplastics are either manufactured directly, for example, as pre-production pellets and microbeads, or formed through weathering and breakdown of larger plastic items. Data from the east Canadian Arctic suggest primarily distal sources of microplastic, or a combination of distant and local sources. Substantial quantities of microfibres are found in sediments from the Canadian Arctic (1,930 fibres per kg dry weight), 51% and 20% of which were acetate cellulose and indigo denim, respectively, indicating long-range transport from southern wastewater source regions.

In other regions, local sources play a prominent role. High concentrations of microplastic in surface waters off west Greenland likely originate from the capital Nuuk, which harbours 18,000 inhabitants. One local source could be effluent from sewage and wastewater treatment, which is often only mechanically treated or not treated at all in Nuuk or Svalbard–. Indeed, large quantities of microplastic fibres are shed during washing of synthetic textiles, which are disproportionately much worn in cold polar regions and can leak into the ocean through inadequately treated wastewater. Local wastewater could also be one of the sources of microplastic in the White Sea basin. Six million microlitter particles per hour were emitted into the ocean (≥100 µm, ~1,500 particles m−3) by a wastewater treatment plant in Reykjavik, Iceland, that only used mechanical treatment. ***Exceptionally*** high levels of microplastic were also recorded from a sandy beach near Reykjavik, Iceland, which is located near a harbour and waste management facility. Therefore, even adequate waste management systems can act as sources if located close to the shore. Still, the introduction of mechanical and biological treatment at a wastewater treatment plant in Ny-Ålesund, Svalbard, has cut anthropogenic microparticle emissions by 99%, highlighting that systems are available to reduce further emissions from Arctic communities.

Other potential but poorly constrained local sources of microplastic include particles shed from ship paint, skidoos and other vehicles used on ice, as well as grey water released by rising numbers of ships operating in the area. Paint-derived fragments were found in southwest Greenland and dominated microplastic in water samples from a National Wildlife Area on Baffin Island, hundreds of kilometres away from any major settlement, highlighting both local and distant sources in these coastal areas. The expanding hydrocarbon industry could be another source of litter and microplastic — tube-dwelling worms and sediments taken near oil and gas platforms in the North Sea bore significantly higher microplastic burdens than those collected further away, especially the viscosity-enhancer polyacrylamide. However, quantitative information on microplastic inputs from shipping and the hydrocarbon industry is lacking for the Arctic region.

Distribution and transport

Buoyant plastic can float with ocean surface currents to higher latitudes,–, with most plastic transport into the Arctic from the Atlantic and modest transport of microplastic through the Bering Strait (Fig. ). Surface transport is accelerated by storms through wave-driven Stokes drift or direct windage. Mesoscale eddies also affect the transport of debris or other materials–, as can subsurface transport of less buoyant plastic at depths below 50 m (refs,). Biota can disperse plastic debris through ingestion, migration and egestion. Some of the floating macroplastic becomes intercepted by uninhabited Arctic beaches of Svalbard–, the Novaya Zemlya archipelago, the Russian Far East, Alaska, Arctic Canada and west Greenland at quantities ranging from 200 to 498,000 items km−2 or from 8,830 to 523,680 kg km−2 in terms of mass.

Much less is known about the transport ***processes*** of plastics within the Arctic because of scarce measurements. The available data show that plastic debris (0–7.97 items km−2), and microplastics (0–1,287 particles m−3),, are widely distributed in Arctic surface waters (Fig. ). Because of pollution transport from both the south (North Atlantic Current) and the north (Transpolar Drift), plastic quantities are likely higher in the Eurasian basin, which is corroborated by less weathered plastic microfibres and three times higher microfibre concentrations in the western Arctic. However, more field data are needed to verify the lower concentrations on the Amerasian side. There, Pacific water does not spread over the whole Arctic Basin, as it circulates primarily around the Beaufort Gyre before leaving with the Atlantic water via the Canadian Arctic and past west Greenland (Fig. ). Still, it has been suggested that, during this transport, microplastic from the North Pacific enters the western Arctic, concentrates in the Beaufort Gyre and is carried to the central Arctic and Eurasian basins.

Plastic pollution recorded in different Arctic ecosystem compartments.

Plastic pollution is widely spread in different ecosystem compartments of the Arctic Ocean. All yellow symbols refer to locations at the sea surface, water column, sea ice, seafloor and beaches where plastic pollution was recorded in 62 peer-reviewed studies compiled in the database Litterbase (more details on the data extraction ***process*** are provided in the ). White symbols refer to locations where no litter was observed. Grey symbols refer to locations where other types of litter (but no plastic items) were observed.

High microplastic loads in Arctic sea ice (31.75–12,000,000 particles m−3), and models both suggest that sea ice drift supports basin-scale transport of ice-rafted plastic,,,. For example, during the formation of sea ice in the Kara and Laptev Seas, microplastic from the sea surface becomes entrained in the ice matrix. In spring and summer, the sea ice breaks up and microplastics travel with ice floes to the Fram Strait via the Transpolar Drift, (Fig. ), where the ice melts and releases its legacy to the water. The presence of ice algae and sticky extracellular polymeric substances in sea ice could enable heteroaggregation of particles and, thus, promote their sinking to the seafloor, as could ballasting via sea-ice-derived cryogenic gypsum from under-ice Phaeocystis blooms. These mechanisms could be one reason for the high quantities of microplastics (6,595 and 13,331 particles kg−1 sediment) observed in the Fram Strait near the marginal ice zone,. Backward drift trajectories of ice cores taken in the central Arctic indicate that they originated from the Siberian shelves, western and central Arctic, or circulate in the Beaufort Gyre. Much of the sea ice is formed in regions that receive water from Siberian rivers (Fig. ).

Siberian rivers have huge catchment areas and cross big cities, industrial and ***agricultural*** areas, and receive wastewater effluents of unknown treatment level. Even further upstream, the Ob’ and Tom rivers already contain high microplastic concentrations (44.2–51.2 particles m−3). The Severnaya Dvina river plays a major role in the transfer of microplastics to the White Sea and river discharge was identified as the second largest source of the microplastic pollution in the Eurasian basin. Yet, low levels were reported from three rivers feeding into the White Sea basin (0–6 particles m−3). Furthermore, litter quantities from the Russian Arctic indicate low riverine contributions in autumn. Still, during late spring, when river ice is melting and the greatest discharge into the ocean occurs, pollution levels could be higher.

Half of the plastic from municipal waste is denser than seawater and sinks directly to the seafloor. However, even positively buoyant plastic is recorded in the water column and on the seafloor,. Mean quantities of 0.011 mg plastic debris m−3 prevailed in the upper 60 m of the Barents Sea. Waters above the deep Arctic seafloor harboured microplastic concentrations of 0–375 particles m−3 (refs,,). Although no vertical trend was found in the Arctic Central Basin (0–375 particles m−3), in the Fram Strait, the mean MP concentration decreased sixfold towards 1,000 m depth with profiles similar to those of particulate organic carbon. Hence, biological ***processes*** such as incorporation in marine snow, fast-sinking aggregates of ice algae or phytoplankton and faecal pellets likely enhance the vertical flux of microplastic,, along with vertical advection and diffusion in the water column. Three-dimensional modelling of particles from the deep Fram Strait emphasized the importance of lateral advection and settling velocities in the vertical dispersal, with trajectories as long as 653 km (ref.). Most of the modelled particles likely come from the North Atlantic, but sea ice appears to be a source of microplastic tracked back from the east Greenland slope. Deep-water cascading events such as the Storfjorden overflow in Svalbard could also enhance downward particle flux.

Plastic pollution has been recorded from various regions of the Arctic seafloor, including the Norwegian Sea–, Fram Strait,,,, east Greenland slope, Barents Sea, central Arctic Basin, Bering and Chukchi seas and east Canadian Arctic (Fig. ). However, unlike bottom trawls from the Chukchi and Kara Seas, trawls from the East Siberian and Laptev Seas returned no litter. The former was attributed to fishing activities in the Barents Sea. Quantities of plastic debris on the seafloor range between 0 and 24,500 items km−2 (refs,,,) and have increased from 813 to 5,970 items km−2 between 2004 and 2017 in the Fram Strait. The absence of light, low temperatures and stable conditions lead to degradation rates that are particularly low in the deep sea, as indicated by 30-year-old plastic recovered from the Sea of Japan without any signs of deterioration. Bottom currents can carry microplastics on the seafloor to accumulation areas that also happen to be biodiversity hotspots. In the Arctic deep sea, microplastic concentrations range between 0 and 16,041 particles kg−1 sediment, and rank amongst the highest ***measured*** concentrations globally.

Atmospheric transport is also an important transport pathway, as indicated by the presence of microplastic in snow samples from ice floes in the east Canadian Arctic, western Arctic, Svalbard, Fram Strait and Icelandic ice cap ranging from 0 to 14,400,000 particles m−3 (refs,). Atmospheric transport could also be a pathway to lakes, although early evidence from four lakes in the Archangelsk region of Russia suggests low pollution levels (0–2 particles m−3). As with mercury pollution, atmospheric circulation patterns including the Icelandic Low, North American High, Aleutian Low and Siberian High could carry air masses with microplastic and nanoplastic from urban eastern and western Europe, North America, East Asia and Siberia to the Arctic, where they can fall out by wet and dry deposition and accumulate in the ocean, cryosphere and permafrost (Fig. ). Airborne microplastic emissions from car tyres and brakes could be as high as riverine or direct inputs of these sources to the ocean. Models suggest that tyre-wear particle concentrations in Arctic snow range between 6 and 150 ng kg−1 for particles ≤10 µm and that Greenland and the Arctic Ocean are important receptor regions. The ocean itself also appears to be a conduit of atmospheric transport, as indicated by microplastic in sea spray mist and onshore winds from the open Atlantic.

Interactions with Arctic wildlife

Pervasive contamination of plastic pollution in the Arctic has led to wildlife exposure to both macroplastic and microplastic pollution (Fig. ). Wildfire and plastics interact through colonization or rafting on marine debris, ingestion, entanglement and smothering, affecting a total of currently 131 species in the Arctic (based on available information as of November 2021). Interactions can occur both at sea and on land, either with beached debris or with waste from open dumpsites,,.

Interactions between marine debris and Arctic biota.

Most interaction records refer to the ingestion of plastic and come from studies in the European and Canadian Arctic, with much of the Arctic region underrepresented in sampling efforts. All symbols refer to locations where interactions such as entanglement (nine species), ingestion (31 species), coverage of biota (five species), rafting on marine debris (72 species) and colonization (96 species) affecting a total of currently 131 species in the Arctic (as of November 2021) were recorded in 46 peer-reviewed studies compiled in the database Litterbase (more details on the data extraction ***process*** are provided in the ).

Ingestion of plastics among Arctic species

Ingestion of plastic debris by organisms does not always lead to direct harm, but it creates the potential for malnutrition, internal injury, obstruction of the intestinal tract causing starvation or rupture, and potentially death. Plastic ingestion has been reported across various regions of the Arctic (Fig. ) across several levels of the food web, including in zooplankton from the east Canadian Arctic and the Fram Strait. A range of other marine invertebrates also ingest microplastic such as sea anemones, starfish, brittlestars, shrimps, crabs, whelks, bivalves–, amphipods and tube worms. Plastic has been found in Arctic fish such as sculpin (Triglops nybelini), saithe (Pollachius virens), polar cod (Boreogadus saida),, Atlantic cod (Gadus morhua),, and Greenland shark (Somniosus microcephalus),. Because fish are indicators of ecosystem health, important links in Arctic food webs and part of the human diet, further research on plastic contamination in Arctic fish is warranted.

Seabirds are amongst the most studied biota in terms of plastic pollution, both globally and in the Arctic. Early reports of plastic ingestion by herring gulls (Larus smithsonianus) and parakeet auklet (Aethia psittacula) date back to the 1970s. A total of 51 species of seabirds breed in the Arctic region and the ingestion of plastic is widespread among them. It was common among 12 seabird species from the Russian Arctic, for instance, ~60% of Chaun Bay gull nests containing boluses with plastic likely from a nearby dumpsite. The northern fulmar (Fulmarus glacialis) is the most widely studied species for plastic ingestion in the Arctic and globally, and has been sampled in a handful of Arctic regions repeatedly since 2001. Plastic ingestion levels vary with latitude, with fulmars sampled closer to the pole having lower levels (87% of the birds examined) then their counterparts from other regions, which could reflect lower pollution levels in their feeding grounds.

There are only a few records of plastic ingestion by Arctic mammals, most of which are from whales, including sperm whales (Physeter macrocephalus), belugas (Delphinapterus leucas), fin whales (Balaenoptera physalus), bowhead whales (Balaena mysticetus) and Stejneger’s beaked whales (Mesoplodon stejnegeri). Only a handful of pinnipeds (seals, sea lions, walrus) have been examined in the Arctic region. No plastic pieces above 425 µm were detected in the stomachs of ringed seals (Phoca hispida), bearded seals (Erignathus barbatus) and harbour seals (Phoca vitulina). Similarly, no plastic pieces larger than 5 mm were found in harp seals (Pagophilus groenlandicus) in Greenland, but two plastic sheets were reported in a 20-day-old hooded seal pup (Cystophora cristata) from the Greenland Sea. Seventy percent of walrus faeces in Svalbard contained microfibres larger than 1 μm (ref.). Although current knowledge suggests relatively low plastic ingestion levels of mammals overall, no firm conclusion can yet be drawn from the current data.

Plastics as a vector of chemicals

Plastic ingestion can expose organisms to harmful legacy pollutants from the environment or chemicals added during manufacturing (Fig. ). Consequently, there is a large body of work on plastics as a vector for chemicals to wildlife. In the Arctic, biota have been monitored for decades for environmental contaminants, including metals such as mercury and persistent organic pollutants (POPs). Although there are some indications that metals and POPs typically found in the environment are positively correlated with plastic ingestion in seabirds in non-Arctic regions, POP levels have, so far, not been linked with plastic levels in Arctic species,. However, research on northern fulmars suggests that ingested plastic can be a route for a congener of polybrominated diphenyl ethers. More work is needed on the transport and fate of these contaminants to determine whether plastics are an important vector.

Arctic food web and biotic interactions with plastic pollution.

Invertebrates, fish, birds and mammals in the Arctic have been examined for plastic ingestion (indicated by coloured symbols) and have been reported to become entangled in plastic litter. Although ingested microplastics have been found across several taxa, seabird species that feed at the sea surface are potentially the most vulnerable to accumulating plastic pollution. Adapted from an image courtesy of Julia Baak.

An area of emerging concern in the Arctic is the effect of plastic additives, chemicals directly linked to plastic pollution. For example, ultraviolet (UV) stabilizers and substituted diphenylamine antioxidants — both plastic additives — were detected in ringed seals, northern fulmars and black-legged kittiwakes (Rissa tridactyla) from the Canadian Arctic. These additives were also detected in seabird eggs from Alaska and northern Canada, indicating transfer to the next generation,. Although the effect of the small concentrations on seabirds is unknown, given that phthalates, UV stabilizers and substituted diphenylamine antioxidants are endocrine disruptors, more work is needed to understand how even small amounts affect the developmental stages of Arctic biota. Important to consider in the Arctic region is that many wild species are harvested. Future work should focus on examining plastic additives in consumed species to inform links to human health as well as the health of Arctic biota.

Effects of plastic debris on Arctic wildlife

Entanglement in plastic debris can have deleterious effects, such as injury, restrained movement, starvation, strangulation and suffocation if air-breathing animals cannot return to the sea surface. Entanglement has been reported for Arctic terns on Svalbard (Sterna paradisaea) and seven other seabird species in the Russian Arctic,. Thirteen seabird species have also been found to incorporate plastic debris in their nests, which can cause entanglement. Notably, almost all nests of two of the existing northern gannet (Morus bassanus) colonies at the Murman coast and 10% of an ivory gull (Pagophila eburnea) colony from the Kara Sea contained plastic. Polar bears (Ursus maritimus), Arctic foxes (Alopex lagopus), bowhead whales, reindeer (Rangifer tarandus), bearded seals, harbour seals, Greenland halibut (Reinhardtius hippoglossoides), Atlantic cod and snow crabs (Chionoecetes opilio),,– also experience entanglement.

Plastic debris can also act as a raft to transport animals from one location to another. Six percent of the plastic items stranded on Svalbard were colonized by bryozoans (Membranipora membranacea) and barnacles (Semibalanus balanoides). Macroalgae, bryozoans, barnacles (Semibalanus sp., Lepas anatifera) and blue mussels (Mytilus sp.) also inhabited beach debris on Svalbard. Rafting of adult groups could favour dispersal over larval transport and be one of the drivers behind the reappearance of Mytilus after 1,000 years of absence. The ***invasion*** of xenobionts via rafting can have population-level or community-level effects, posing a potential threat to Arctic ecosystems.

Ecological effects of plastic

Because of the widespread contamination of plastic pollution in wildlife, there is urgency to answer questions related to ecological impact,. In non-Arctic systems, there is overwhelming evidence of detrimental effects from macroplastics to individuals and compelling evidence for effects to populations, communities and ecosystems. For microplastics, impacts have been demonstrated across several levels of biological organization,, including oxidative stress, changes in gene expression,, inflammation and reduced growth and reproduction rates. Although these effects could apply to closely related Arctic species, too, there has been little research on the ecological effects of plastic debris in Arctic ecosystems, which are already under stress due to climate change.

One of the few studies available on the effects of plastic on benthic species is in the deep Fram Strait, where 45% of the plastic debris observed showed interactions with epibenthic megafauna, such as entanglement in up to 31% of the sponge colonies. Although data on effects are lacking in this case, entangled fishing gear caused tissue abrasion and (partial) mortality in sponges from Florida, rendering the organisms more susceptible to pathogens, predation and overgrowth. As with cold-water coral, coverage of the sponge’s feeding apparatus could impair water-exchange ***processes***, prey capture and growth. Another frequent observation was the colonization of plastic debris by sessile biota such as sea anemones,, which affects diversity. In general, the presence of plastic debris in benthic sediments can alter community structure. Plastic items covering sediments can also affect biogeochemical ***processes***, which could alter bottom-dwelling communities, as shown in an intertidal zone in Ireland with anoxic conditions, reduced organic matter and lower densities of sediment-inhabiting invertebrates nine weeks after coverage with plastic bags. Although sediments from the Fram Strait and Canada contain up to 13,000 and 16,000 small-sized microplastics kg−1 sediment, and are, thus, amongst the most polluted in the world, the effects on deposit-feeding organisms such as sea cucumbers, nematodes or other worms are currently largely unknown.

Sea ice also harbours high concentrations of microplastics, which likely affect this ecosystem. Experimental evidence suggests that the presence of microplastic reduces the colonization of already formed sea ice by ice algae, a ***process*** that is important to transfer sea ice species from multi-year to first-year ice. If added during the ***process*** of ice formation, however, microplastic did not affect algal concentrations in sea ice.

Data on contamination are often collected before digging deeper into effects. Here, we suggest that it is time for a new research priority: understanding the effects of plastics in the Arctic across organismal and ecosystem scales. These efforts are especially important, as the Arctic is vulnerable to a combination of many stressors (for instance, fast warming and a sink for organic pollutants), and the addition of microplastics raises concern about multi-stressor effects to wildlife.

Plastic pollution and climate change

Although they are often thought of separately, climate change and plastic pollution are directly and indirectly linked, and both are amongst the biggest ecological challenges faced today globally and in the Arctic (Fig. ), not least they share the same fossil origin, oil and gas. Global heating is three times faster in the Arctic compared with the rest of the planet, such that Arctic ecosystems are already under severe stress. One of the most prominent effects of climate change is the melting of the cryosphere. Sea ice entrains microplastic during its formation, and releases it during melting,,. Changes in ice properties and its distribution will, therefore, affect the levels and spatial distribution of microplastics in the environment. Increasing quantities of released plastic particles in the water column, along with extracellular polymeric substances from ice algae, could promote the formation of heteroaggregates, affecting the nutrient availability and turbidity in habitats of cyanobacteria and phytoplankton communities. A decline in their populations could reduce the sequestration of carbon from the atmosphere and, thereby, fuel climate change instead,. On a smaller scale, a positive correlation has been found between salinity and microplastic concentrations in sea ice brine,. The microplastic levels reported in Arctic sea ice could increase the albedo effect by 11% and alter both the permeability of sea ice and the absorption of solar radiation, with a feedback on sea ice melting,. However, it is also conceivable that high concentrations of particles darker than the cryosphere promote solar absorption and, thus, melting.

The interaction between climate change and plastic pollution.

Climate change and plastic pollution are interconnected. Several meteorological or physical impacts of climate change are known to influence the concentrations and distribution of plastic in the world, at different scales. All of these lead to an increase in plastic concentration, at least locally. Blue boxes refer to ***processes*** specific to polar regions. This figure highlights the complexity of those interconnections and how two major anthropogenic challenges are influencing each other. Figure adapted with permission from ref., Society of Environmental Toxicology and Chemistry (Wiley). © 2017 SETAC.

In the atmosphere, airborne microplastic and nanoplastic can also enhance ice nucleation and, thereby, cloud formation and climate change if they contribute to atmospheric trapping of infrared radiation from the Earth surface, instead of enhancing the reflection of sunlight. This ***process*** is important for the hydrological cycle, as more than 50% of the Earth’s precipitation is induced in the ice phase. Through atmospheric fallout and glacial meltwater, microplastics could also penetrate and affect permafrost, and be released to rivers and the Arctic Ocean with accelerating permafrost thaw. Airborne microplastics have also infiltrated snow on glaciers, potentially affecting their light absorbance, structural and general rheological properties, and could, thereby, promote the ongoing fast melting of glaciers, the greatest cause of rising sea levels.

Growing inputs of freshwater to the Arctic Ocean lead to a decrease in the relative buoyancy of plastics debris and a weakening thermohaline circulation, which could eventually slow down the poleward transport of plastic pollution (Fig. ). Global warming also amplifies poleward winds, which define convergence zones and surface currents and, thus, influence plastic transport, as convergence zones are accumulation areas for plastic debris. Furthermore, higher wind speeds promote the vertical mixing of small plastics into deeper waters. In addition, warming surface waters result in a higher frequency of storms, which break up the sea ice and enhance melting. Sea level rise and storm events bring about higher inputs of plastic debris from land to the ocean via water runoff and wind transport. Over time, these ***processes*** could also lead to higher pollution levels in the Arctic Ocean,,. In addition to direct effects, there are many indirect links between plastic pollution and climate change. For example, climate change causes a decrease in the sea ice thickness and extent. As a result, maritime traffic in the Arctic is on the rise, leading to higher levels of plastic pollution, for example, from fishing vessels, merchant shipping or tourist activities.

Plastic production also fuels climate change, as it accounts for 6% of the global oil consumption and could reach 20% by 2050 (ref.). Fossil-based plastics produced in 2015 emitted 1.8 gigatons of equivalent CO2 over their life cycle. Under the current trajectory, plastic-related CO2 emissions could rise to 6.5 gigatons by 2050, which will accelerate climate change and could use up 10–13% of the remaining SR15 carbon budget of 570 gigatons to limit warming to a 66% chance of staying below 1.5 °C (ref.). Furthermore, greenhouse gases such as methane, ethylene, ethane and propylene are released during degradation of some common plastic polymers throughout their lifetime. Polyethylene, the most produced plastic polymer, releases the highest levels of methane and ethylene. Once initiated by solar radiation, such as in the surface ocean, this ***process*** continues in the dark. The scale of greenhouse gas emissions from these ***processes*** are currently unknown.

Mitigation

Plastic pollution is a transboundary problem, especially in the Arctic, where it stems from both distant and local sources. The problem, thus, needs to be tackled both regionally and internationally. Plastic pollution is a function of increasing plastic production coupled with inadequate waste management. Therefore, an effective upstream reduction in the global production of plastic waste via binding targets set in international treaties similar to the Paris Agreement or Montreal Protocol, is warranted. In addition, a circular use of plastic and of sustainable and truly biodegradable alternatives are needed alongside improved municipal waste collection and management to help reduce leakage to the environment,. Manual clean-ups on shorelines, harbours and riverbanks can help to mitigate pollution if impact assessments show that benefits outweigh environmental cost, such as disturbance and increased mortality of biota due to incidental by-catch caused by non-selective removal technologies or operational greenhouse gas emissions.

Emissions from sea-based sources lead directly to marine pollution because of the direct input pathways. As much of the plastic debris in the Arctic region stems from local and distant commercial fisheries, mitigation in this sector would reduce plastic pollution particularly efficiently. Gear-marking schemes can prevent fishing gear loss and discarding, along with incentives for adequate waste disposal. Programmes for reporting and recovery of lost fishing gear are already in place in Norway and should be extended to other regions, as should be schemes to recycle fishing gear, which are currently practiced in Iceland. In the long run, the use of fully biodegradable material for nets,, along with bans on particularly short-lived components, such as dolly ropes, that become abraded during a trawl’s passage on the seafloor, could help to reduce leakage to the environment. Education awareness campaigns designed for fishers, for example, during mandatory sea survival courses, help to shift perception in the industry but must be accompanied by institutionalized and well-organized waste facilities at fish landings and harbours to foster behavioural change. The disposal of plastic in the Arctic Ocean and adjacent areas could be reduced through improved port reception facilities following a regional reception facilities plan, as is currently underway under the International Maritime Organization in the Pacific region. Lower harbour fees for ships with better waste facilities on board, a ‘No Special Fee’ system similar to HELCOM and on-port recycling hubs could help to alleviate illegal dumping of waste at sea. Given that ship traffic has already increased and will further increase in the Arctic due to vanishing sea ice, this sector deserves particular attention, including improved surveillance schemes.

In many locations throughout the Arctic, open landfills are still in use, and it is clear that investments in local waste management solutions will reduce the leakage of plastic pollution to the environment. Rural Arctic communities that desire efficient waste collection and management schemes need financial and logistical support, for instance, through extended producer responsibility schemes or governments to establish or improve waste management and treatment. Importantly, coupled with community-based monitoring programmes, sources and effectiveness of policy changes can be detected at the local scale relatively quickly. Waste management studies and investments must be a priority to stem the tide of plastics from sources within the Arctic.

Reducing emissions from diffuse sources is necessary but challenging. Improved material design could reduce emissions from automotive vehicle tyres and brakes, which is one of the most important sources of microplastics globally, as well as from ship paint from (ice-breaking) vessels. Collection schemes of road runoff could mitigate some of the pollution as well. New regulation aimed at improvements of wastewater treatment on land, offshore and on ships could help reduce inputs of plastic microfibres.

Finally, communication and community action are needed. Global audiences must be taught about plastic pollution in the Arctic, as distant sources contribute to the plastics burden in the Arctic. It is important to include local voices in both research and actions aimed at reducing plastic pollution. Listening to indigenous voices has been recognized as a critical part of communication strategies under the Arctic Council. For many, plastic pollution is affecting their way of life. In northern Canada, the community focus on understanding plastic pollution in the Arctic is illustrated by the variety of community-based research programmes on litter and microplastics funded under the Northern Contaminants Program. For this reason, a course including plastic pollution as a contaminant in the Arctic has been taught at Nunavut Arctic College in Iqaluit, Canada, each year since 2009. The students learn, share stories and knowledge, and participate in local research on plastic pollution. As stated by Aggeuq Ashoona, a college student who participated in this course from Kinngait, Nunavut, “This is affecting Inuit very much […]. To find plastic in their [wildlife] stomach is heart-breaking, because these are our food”.

Summary and future perspectives

Regardless of its remoteness, plastic pollution has infiltrated the Arctic from the atmosphere to the deep ocean floor, with pollution levels sufficiently high for some regions to be considered accumulation areas,,. Despite recent advances in research, there is still a lack of understanding of the importance of different transport ***processes*** within the Arctic and the role of local sources, rivers and the atmosphere. It is clear, however, that plastic pollution exacerbates the impacts of climate change. These effects seem particularly clear in the Arctic, where not only are climate change effects occurring faster than elsewhere but where these changes likely strongly influence the sources and transport of plastic debris, perhaps more so than in other regions. Still, we have barely scratched the surface when it comes to impacts on Arctic life, including human communities in the Arctic, requiring further and urgent research.

Plastic pollution research is particularly challenging in the Arctic because of its remoteness, lack of infrastructure and harsh environmental conditions. Conventional scientific sampling is often restricted to summer months and requires the use of aircraft, research bases and/or ice-class ships. Even then, fieldwork can be jeopardized by low visibility, polar bears, ice and low temperatures defying technology. Arctic landscapes are often characterized by coarse sediments, permafrost, snow and/or ice, which lack coherent survey guidelines, and, overall, these environments are currently undersampled. Another common approach to quantify plastic pollution, which is to count litter floating at the sea surface by ship-based observers, is often difficult or impossible due to fog or sea ice, which can also impede sampling by surface trawls. These examples highlight that we currently lack the basic methodology to determine pollution levels in certain areas of the Arctic and during significant periods of time. In some areas, these challenges can be overcome by the use of year-round moored sampling devices, drones or collaborative research with citizen scientists,,, or local communities. For example, many scientists work directly with local Inuit communities in the Canadian Arctic to design sampling schemes, sample and interpret results,,. During the COVID-19 pandemic, many researchers in Canada could not access field sites in the Arctic, and, in some cases, local communities were compensated to undertake annual sampling. In Russia, a programme was developed to enable monitoring by local school children and students. Such schemes complement professional science and should be expanded to fill knowledge gaps.

In addition to difficulties that arise while conducting fieldwork in the Arctic, there is currently a lack of standardized sampling and analytical methodologies or even harmonized procedures, especially in terms of microplastics. This lack of standardization is concerning, as different analytical approaches can cause several orders of magnitude differences in the results obtained,. Therefore, despite a surge in plastic research in the Arctic, the results are often not comparable between studies, hampering efforts to describe the sources, sinks and large-scale distribution patterns of Arctic plastic pollution. However, the research and monitoring recommendations recently set out by the Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Programme (AMAP) could inform a more harmonized research approach, which would also benefit from a common database for the upload of recorded pollution data.

Nanoplastics in the Arctic have largely not been investigated, including their distribution amongst different ecosystem compartments and how they interact with microplastics as the sea ice forms and melts. It is conceivable, for example, that nanoplastic interacts with sea ice in a similar way as, for example, salt and is rejected from the ice matrix as sea ice forms. Data on nanoplastic are particularly important, as particles of this size fraction can pass biological membranes and, thus, translocate to organs, where they could elicit a strong biologic response. Progress in the development of sampling and analytical methods have not only demonstrated the presence of nanoplastic in glacial ice from Greenland but will also help us to fill this knowledge gap.

Currently, there are no plastic budget data on relative contributions of various sources of plastic to the Arctic, such as local versus long-distance sources. Current understanding suggests that, along with local emissions, inputs of Atlantic origin could be most important, but data from the Amerasian Arctic have only begun to emerge, so no firm conclusions can yet be drawn. Information on the sources of pollution is needed to assess pan-Arctic exchange — how much plastic debris leaks from North America to Europe and vice versa. As outlined in this Review, such assessments are currently hampered by the lack of harmonized data. Another major knowledge gap pertains to atmospheric transport, which allows microplastic and nanoplastic to infiltrate even the most remote ecosystems on our planet via precipitation. Although this pathway is important for other pollutants such as mercury, its contribution to the Arctic’s overall plastic burden is unknown. Integrating microplastic sampling into research cruises and ongoing air pollution observation programmes could improve our understanding of the role of airborne microplastics.

The amount of plastic debris entering the Arctic Ocean through rivers is unclear, but could be important, owing to their enormous catchment areas that lie beyond the Arctic borders, some of which pass through big cities. Arctic rivers are a conduit of land-based plastic pollution into the ocean, and their massive discharge every spring or summer makes the impact potentially substantial. With over 37 million people living along these waterways, understanding plastic pollution in rivers that drain into the Arctic Ocean is crucial. It also increases our knowledge of terrestrial sources, which can help mitigate its input in the long run. Especially as local people depend on freshwater and land for subsistence and culture, understanding the effects of plastic pollution in these systems is a priority. Given the interest in litter and microplastics in northern and indigenous communities, and the breadth of community-based research and monitoring projects across the Arctic, locally designed and implemented projects should be prioritized within research planning strategies,. This strategy will ensure that local and regional research needs are included, and local communities are engaged in result discussions throughout the ***process*** and can relay this information as directly into policy solutions as needed.

The propagation and impact of microplastic within the Arctic food web (Fig. ), which is already under pressure from fast climate forcing, is another source of major uncertainty. Targeted work that examines plastic pollution throughout the food web is needed in order to understand where plastic pollution accumulates and the actual effects on biota. Although studies have focused hitherto on single species, future studies should take an ecosystem approach, with sampling of biota across trophic levels, and in relation to environmental compartments where they feed. This knowledge will help tease apart questions relating to bioaccumulation, biomagnification, excretion and, thus, cycling of both plastic pollution and contaminants that are both sorbed and derived from plastic pollution.

We are also only beginning to investigate the effects of microplastic and nanoplastic on important physical ***processes***, such as soil functions, biogeochemistry, ice properties (melting, UV reflectance and attenuation), weather (condensation, precipitation) and particle flux through the water column (biological pump), all of which have repercussions for the functioning of our Earth system, especially in a changing Arctic. However, it is already clear that effective mitigation is urgently needed to prevent further deterioration of Arctic ecosystems and communities.

**Acknowledgements**

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**Notes**

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[***Federal Rgister: Wagner-Peyser Act Staffing Pages 23700 - 23744 [FR DOC #2022-07628]***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:658K-P5J1-F0YC-N2MV-00000-00&context=1516831)

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Washington: Office of the Federal Register has issued the following notice:Department of Labor-----------------------------------------------------------------------Employment and Training Administration-----------------------------------------------------------------------20 CFR Parts 651, 652, 653, et al.Wagner-Peyser Act Staffing; Proposed RuleFederal Register / Vol. 87 , No. 76 / Wednesday, April 20, 2022 / Proposed Rules[[Page 23700]]-----------------------------------------------------------------------DEPARTMENT OF LABOREmployment and Training Administration20 CFR Parts 651, 652, 653, and 658[Docket No. ETA-2022-0003]RIN 1205-AC02Wagner-Peyser Act StaffingAGENCY: Employment and Training Administration, Labor.ACTION: Proposed rule; request for comment.-----------------------------------------------------------------------SUMMARY: The U.S Department of Labor (Department or DOL) is issuing a notice of proposed rulemaking (NPRM) that, if finalized, would require States to use State merit staff to provide Wagner-Peyser Act Employment Service (ES) services. If finalized, this proposal would extend the merit-staffing requirement to those States that previously had been operating different staffing models. The proposed changes would create a uniform standard of ES services provision for all States and align the use of State merit staff for ES services with the requirement that States administer the Unemployment Insurance (UI) programs with State merit staff. The Department is additionally proposing revisions to the ES regulations to strengthen the provision of services to migrant and seasonal farmworkers (MSFWs) and to enhance the protections afforded by the Monitor Advocate System and the Employment Service and Employment-Related Law Complaint System (Complaint System).DATES: To be ensured consideration, comments must be received on or before June 21, 2022.ADDRESSES: You may submit written comments electronically via the Federal eRulemaking portal ([*https://www.regulations.gov*](https://www.regulations.gov)). Follow the instructions on the website for submitting comments (under ``FAQ'' > ``Commenting''). Label all submissions with docket number ETA-2022-0003 and RIN 1205-AC02. Please be advised that the Department will post all comments received that relate to this proposed rule on [*https://www.regulations.gov*](https://www.regulations.gov) without making any change to the comments or redacting any information. The website is the Federal eRulemaking portal, and all comments posted there are available and accessible to the public. Therefore, the Department recommends that commenters remove personal information, such as Social Security numbers, personal addresses, telephone numbers, and email addresses, included in their comments. It is the responsibility of the commenter to safeguard personal information. Comments under the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 (PRA): In addition to filing comments on any aspect of this proposed rule with the Department, interested parties may submit comments that concern the information collection (IC) aspects of this proposed rule to the Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs at [*https://www.reginfo.gov/public/do/PRAMain*](https://www.reginfo.gov/public/do/PRAMain). Find relevant information collections by selecting ``Currently under Review--Open for Public Comments'' or by using the search function.FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Heidi Casta, Acting Administrator, Office of Policy Development and Research, Employment and Training Administration, U.S Department of Labor, 200 Constitution Avenue NW, Room N-5641, Washington, DC 20210, Telephone: (202) 693-3700 (voice) (this is not a toll-free number) or 1-800-326-2577 (TDD).SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:Preamble Table of ContentsI. Acronyms and AbbreviationsII. Statutory and Legal Background A. Required Use of State Merit Staff for Delivery of ES Services B. Legal BasisIII. Section-by-Section Discussion of Proposed Rule A. Technical Amendments and Global Edits B. Part 651--General Provisions Governing the Wagner-Peyser Act Employment Service C. Part 652--Establishment and Functioning of State Employment Service D. Part 653--Services of the Wagner-Peyser Act Employment Service System E. Part 658--Administrative Provisions Governing the Wagner-Peyser Act Employment ServiceIV. Rulemaking Analyses and Notices A. Executive Orders 12866 (Regulatory Planning and Review) and 13563 (Improving Regulation and Regulatory Review) B. Regulatory Flexibility Act, Small Business Regulatory Enforcement Fairness Act of 1996, and Executive Order 13272 (Proper Consideration of Small Entities in Agency Rulemaking) C. Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 D. Executive Order 13132 (Federalism) E. Unfunded Mandates Reform Act of 1995 F. Executive Order 13175 (Indian Tribal Governments) G. Plain LanguageI. Acronyms and Abbreviations2020 Final Rule Wagner-Peyser Act Staffing Flexibility; Final Rule, 85 FR 592 (Jan. 6, 2020)AOP ***Agricultural*** Outreach PlanARS ***Agricultural*** Recruitment SystemBFOQ bona fide occupational qualificationBLS U.S Bureau of Labor StatisticsCFR Code of Federal RegulationsCNPC Chicago National ***Processing*** CenterCOVID-19 coronavirus disease 2019Complaint System Employment Service and Employment-Related Law Complaint SystemCRC DOL Civil Rights CenterDepartment or DOL U.S Department of LaborEEOC Equal Employment Opportunity CommissionE.O Executive OrderEO Equal OpportunityES Wagner-Peyser Act Employment ServiceETA Employment and Training AdministrationFR Federal RegisterFTE(s) full-time equivalent(s)FUTA Federal Unemployment Tax ActIC(s) information collectionICR(s) information collection requestIPA Intergovernmental Personnel Act of 1970LEP limited English proficientMOU(s) memorandum/a of understandingMSFW(s) migrant and seasonal farmworker(s)NAICS North American Industry Classification SystemNFJP National Farmworker Jobs ProgramNMA National Monitor AdvocateNPRM or proposed rule notifice of proposed rulemakingO\*NET Occupational Information NetworkOEWS Occupational Employment and Wage StatisticsOFLC Office of Foreign Labor CertificationOIRA Office of Information and Regulatory AffairsOMB Office of Management and BudgetOPM Office of Personnel ManagementOSHA Occupational Safety and Health AdministrationPIRL Participant Individual Record LayoutPRA Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995Pub. L. Public LawPY Program YearRA(s) Regional Administrator(s)RFA Regulatory Flexibility ActRIN Regulation Identifier NumberRMA(s) Regional Monitor AdvocateSecretary Secretary of LaborSMA(s) State Monitor Advocate(s)SOC Standard Occupational ClassificationSSA Social Security ActStat. United States Statutes at LargeSWA(s) State Workforce Agency/iesTEGL Training and Employment Guidance LetterUI Unemployment InsuranceUMRA Unfunded Mandates Reform Act of 1995U.S.C United States CodeWHD Wage and Hour DivisionWIA Workforce Investment ActWIOA Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act[[Page 23701]]II. Statutory and Legal BackgroundA. Required Use of State Merit Staff for Delivery of ES Services The Wagner-Peyser Act of 1933 established the ES program, which is a nationwide system of public employment offices that provide public labor-exchange services. The ES program seeks to improve the functioning of the nation's labor markets by bringing together individuals seeking employment with employers seeking workers. Section 3(a) of the Wagner-Peyser Act directs the Secretary of Labor (Secretary) to assist States by developing and prescribing minimum standards of efficiency and promoting uniformity in the operation of the system of public employment-services offices. This NPRM would amend regulations in 20 CFR parts 651, 652, 653, and 658, and provide States with a uniform standard of ES services provision. States would be required to use State merit staff to provide ES services. The Department also is proposing targeted revisions to the regulations at parts 651, 653, and 658. These proposed revisions are intended to ensure that State Workforce Agencies (SWAs) provide MSFWs with adequate access to ES services and that the role of the State Monitor Advocate (SMA) is effective. In addition, this NPRM would amend parts 651, 652, 653, and 658 to further integrate gender-inclusive language. Finally, the Department is proposing technical corrections to these CFR parts to improve consistency across the parts and to make them easier to understand. Historically, the Department relied on its authority in secs. 3(a) and 5(b) of the Wagner-Peyser Act to require that ES services, including Monitor Advocate System activities for MSFWs and Complaint System intake, be provided by State merit-staff employees.\1\ The Department consistently applied this requirement, with minor exceptions, until 2020. Specifically, beginning in the early 1990s, the Department authorized demonstration projects in which it allowed Colorado and Massachusetts limited flexibility to set their own staffing requirements. Thereafter, in 1998, the Department permitted Michigan to use State and local merit-staff employees to deliver ES services, pursuant to a settlement agreement arising out of Michigan v. Herman, 81 F. Supp. 2d 840 (W.D Mich. 1998). All three States continued to operate as demonstration States with approved staffing flexibility through an exemption in their approved State plans.\2\ Through rulemaking effective February 5, 2020, the Department removed the requirement that ES services be provided only through the use of State merit staff. See Wagner-Peyser Act Staffing Flexibility; Final Rule, 85 FR 592 (Jan. 6, 2020) (2020 Final Rule). In the preamble to this rule, the Department explained that it sought to allow States maximum flexibility in staffing arrangements. Id. Accordingly, under current regulations, States may use a variety of staffing models to provide ES services.--------------------------------------------------------------------------- \1\ Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act; Department of Labor; Final Rule, 81 FR 56072 (Aug. 19, 2016) (WIOA DOL-only Rule) (see 20 CFR 652.215, 653.108, 653.111, 658.602). \2\ See WIOA DOL-only Rule, 81 FR at 56267 and 56341 (2016).--------------------------------------------------------------------------- The Department has reassessed the approach adopted in the 2020 Final Rule and has determined that alignment of ES and UI staffing, which would allow ES staff to respond to surges of demand in UI, is more important than the efficiencies that flexibility may promote. Accordingly, as discussed below, the Department is proposing to require, with no exceptions, that States use State merit-staff employees to provide ES services. This NPRM proposes to require that all States, including the prior ``demonstration States,'' use State merit-staff employees to deliver ES services. This proposed staffing requirement would apply to all ES services, including services provided to MSFWs. This proposal would once again align the provision of ES services with the requirement that States administer the UI programs with State merit staff. The ES system is designed to ``promote the establishment and maintenance of a national system of public employment service offices,'' \3\ and the UI and ES systems together provide a basic level of employment support for more than 4 million job seekers per year to enter and reenter the workforce. The Department thinks that it is vital that the ES be administered so that services are delivered effectively and equitably to UI beneficiaries and other ES customers.--------------------------------------------------------------------------- \3\ 29 U.S.C 49.--------------------------------------------------------------------------- ES supports the work-test for UI, whereby UI recipients must demonstrate as a condition of continued UI receipt that they are workforce attached.\4\ This is includes various State-specific requirements including being able to work, available to work, and actively seeking work. Further, State merit ES staff are best positioned to and often do provide surge capacity for UI administration and adjudication.\5\ The proposed rule ensures States are universally equipped to use cross-trained ES staff to assist in ***processing*** UI claims, assist UI claimants, and promote reemployment in times of high demand for such services. For example, the recent stress placed upon State UI systems in response to the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic served to highlight the necessity of States to be able to rely on eligible State merit staff who are already cross-trained or able to be quickly cross-trained to assist UI claimants during times of high demand placed on State UI systems. States have experienced the benefits of cross-training staff to assist during recessions, the onset of natural disasters, and mass regional layoffs, in which State merit staff are needed to assist with State-level decisions and functions. Emergencies such as natural disasters are occurring across States with increased frequency such that this need for surge capacity and cross-trained staff is becoming increasingly necessary. States can assist one another when one is impacted by a natural disaster, where non-impacted State merit staff, including cross-trained ES staff, provide claims adjudication assistance, such as fact finding/document analysis and claims ***processing*** of UI and Disaster Unemployment Assistance claims. Although the COVID-19 pandemic is an historically ***unprecedented*** event, in addition to disaster response, the UI system has been a key economic stabilizer in times of need such as the Great Recession, whereby State UI systems benefitted from cross-trained ES staff to provide extra capacity for UI administration and adjudication. Historical data from 1971 through 2021 indicates regular and periodic increases in the number of UI initial claims and first payments in which having ES staff who are already cross-trained or able to be quickly cross-trained to assist UI claimants would be beneficial. The adjudication of UI claims is work that must be performed by State merit staff.\6\ Therefore, staff to assist with claims ***processing*** and adjudication must be merit staff directly employed by the State and available for States to redirect[[Page 23702]]their work. Requiring that ES staff be State merit staff would allow the States to use ES staff to carry out both ES services and necessary UI functions.--------------------------------------------------------------------------- \4\ Federal Unemployment Tax Act (FUTA) sec. 3304(a)(1); Social Security Act (SSA) sec. 303(a)(2). \5\ SSA sec. 303(a)(1) provides that the Secretary shall make no certification for payment to any State unless they find that the law of such State, approved by the Secretary under FUTA, includes provision for ``[s]uch methods of administration (including after January 1, 1940, methods relating to the establishment and maintenance of personnel standards on a merit basis, except that the Secretary . . . shall exercise no authority with respect to the selection, tenure of office, and compensation of any individual employed in accordance with such methods) as are found by the Secretary . . . to be reasonably calculated to insure full payment of unemployment compensation when due.'' \6\ See 42 U.S.C 503(a)(1).--------------------------------------------------------------------------- In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, emergency legislation related to COVID-19 provided States the ability on a limited and temporary emergency basis to recruit staff on a non-merit basis to quickly ***process*** UI applications and claims.\7\ However, relying on such time-limited legislative action is not a viable, long-term solution, particularly as providing adequate training for UI adjudicators takes several months to a year. Furthermore, emergency legislation related to COVID-19 does not provide flexibility in future emergencies. Requiring ES labor exchange services to be provided by State merit staff will help ensure that States have the ability to shift staff resources during future exigencies affecting State-level functions and UI claims where time-limited legislative solutions are not available and there is a pressing need to have cross-trained staff who are legally permitted to assist with UI services.--------------------------------------------------------------------------- \7\ See sec. 4102(b) of the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (Pub. L. 116-127), including Division D Emergency Unemployment Insurance Stabilization and Access Act of 2020 (EUISAA); sec. 2106 of the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act of 2020 (CARES Act) (Pub. L. 116-136); sec. 205 of the Continued Assistance Act (Pub. L. 116-260); and sec. 9015 of the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (Pub. L. 117-2). This flexibility only applied for responding to workload and increased demand resulting from the spread of COVID-19 and was limited to engaging temporary staff, rehiring retirees or former employees on a non-competitive basis, and other temporary actions to quickly ***process*** applications and claims.--------------------------------------------------------------------------- In addition, in the Intergovernmental Personnel Act (IPA), 42 U.S.C 4701, et seq., Congress found that the quality of public service could be improved if government personnel systems are administered consistent with certain merit-based principles. 42 U.S.C 4701. Requiring States to employ the professionals who deliver ES services in accordance with these principals would help ensure that ES services are delivered by qualified, non-partisan personnel who are directly accountable to the State. Among other things, such professionals would be required to meet objective professional qualifications, be trained to assure high-quality performance, and maintain certain standards of performance. Id. They would also be prohibited from using their official authority for purposes of political interference, and States would be required to assure that they are treated fairly and protected against partisan political coercion. Id. By contrast, contract staff and subrecipient staff are employed by and accountable to non-State entities, and their individual adherence to State-issued policies and procedures is not directly observable. And, as noted previously, it is important that the States use State merit staff to deliver ES services because of the critical alignment between the ES and UI programs. In proposing this State merit-staffing requirement, the Department relies on its authority under secs. 3(a) and 5(b)(2) of the Wagner-Peyser Act, as well as authority under sec. 208 of the IPA, 42 U.S.C 4728, as amended. Each of these provisions, standing alone, provides the Department with the discretion to require States to use State merit staff to provide ES services. Specifically, sec. 3(a) of the Wagner-Peyser Act requires the Secretary to assist in coordinating the ES offices by ``developing and prescribing minimum standards of efficiency.'' As the court in Michigan v. Herman, 81 F. Supp. 2d 840 (W.D Mich. 1998), concluded, ``the language in [sec. 3(a)] authorizing the Secretary to develop and prescribe `minimum standards of efficiency' is broad enough to permit the Secretary . . . to require merit staffing.'' Id. at 848. In addition, sec. 5(b)(2) of the Wagner-Peyser Act provides that the Secretary shall from time to time certify to the Secretary of the Treasury for payment to each State that, among other things, ``is found to have coordinated the public employment services with the provision of unemployment insurance claimant services.'' As explained previously, the proposed merit-staffing requirement would align the staffing of ES services with the staffing that States are required to use in the administration of UI programs. This would allow cross-trained ES staff to assist States in ***processing*** and adjudicating UI claims, and assisting claimants with work search and reemployment services, particularly in times of high need, such as during the pandemic. It would, therefore, be reasonable for the Department to base the finding required by sec. 5(b)(2) of the Wagner-Peyser Act, in part, on a State's agreement to use State merit staff to administer and provide ES services. Additionally, sec. 208 of the IPA authorizes Federal agencies to require, as a condition of participation in Federal assistance programs, systems of personnel administration consistent with personnel standards prescribed by the Office of Personnel Management (OPM).\8\ In accordance with 5 CFR 900.605, the Department has submitted this proposed rule to OPM for review and has received prior approval.--------------------------------------------------------------------------- \8\ 42 U.S.C 4728(b); see also 5 CFR 900.605 (authorizing Federal agencies to adopt regulations that require the establishment of a merit personnel system as a condition for receiving Federal assistance or otherwise participating in an intergovernmental program with the prior approval of OPM).--------------------------------------------------------------------------- The Department acknowledges that this proposal constitutes a change in its existing position and would require certain States to adjust how they deliver ES services. The Department notes that Federal agencies are permitted to change their existing policies if they acknowledge the change and provide a reasoned explanation for the change. See, e.g , Encino Motorcars, LLC v. Navarro, 579 U.S 211, 221-22 (2016). As explained previously, the Department is proposing this change to ensure that more workers will be available in the States if needed to back up the UI system. In the section-by-section discussion that follows, the Department further explains why it is proposing to require that States use State merit-staff employees to provide ES services, acknowledges the reliance interests of States that would need time to come into compliance with this requirement, and addresses those interests by proposing an 18-month transition period.B. Strengthening the Provision of Services to Migrant and Seasonal Farmworkers In addition to a merit-staffing requirement, the Department is proposing targeted revisions to the regulations at parts 651, 653, and 658. The proposed revisions are intended to ensure that SWAs provide adequate outreach services to MSFWs and that SMAs, Regional Monitor Advocates (RMAs) and the National Monitor Advocate (NMA) have the authority, tools, and resources that they need to monitor SWA compliance with the ES regulations. As described in detail in the section-by-section discussion that follows, the proposed revisions would strengthen the Monitor Advocate System established in the wake of NAACP, Western Region et al. v. Brennan, 360 F.Supp 1006 (D.D.C 1973), and ensure that SWAs offer and provide ES services to MSFWs in a manner that is qualitatively equivalent and quantitatively proportionate to the ES services that they offer and provide to other job seekers. Additional proposed revisions include technical edits to improve clarity, such as adding commas or cross-references.[[Page 23703]]III. Section-by-Section Discussion of Proposed RuleA. Technical Amendments and Global Edits To conform with the proposed changes to the definition of Wagner-Peyser Act Employment Service (ES) also known as Employment Service (ES) in Sec. 651.10, the Department proposes making technical changes to replace the phrases ``employment services,'' ``Wagner-Peyser Act services,'' and ``services provided under the Wagner-Peyser Act'' with ``ES services.'' Changes also have been made to replace the phrase ``employment office'' with ``ES office,'' and ``Wagner-Peyser Act participants'' with ``ES participants.'' These changes will simplify and standardize the use of terminology. The proposed language is also intended to improve usage of plain language within the regulations. Technical changes to articles, specifically changing ``a'' to ``an'' where necessary, have been made as well when preceding ``ES office.'' These changes have been made in Sec. 651.10 within the definitions for applicant holding office, Employment Service (ES) office, field visits, outreach staff, placement, and reportable individual, in addition to the changes in the definition of Wagner-Peyser Act Employment Service (ES) also known as Employment Service (ES). Conforming changes have also been made to the subpart heading at part 652, subpart C, and within the regulatory text at Sec. Sec. 652.205, 652.207, 652.215, 653.107, 653.108, 658.411, 658.502, 658.602, and 658.603 The Department is proposing several technical edits to refine gender-inclusive language within the regulatory text while maintaining plain language principles. Throughout parts 651, 653, and 658, the term ``he/she'' was used to denote an individual of unknown gender. Using terms with a slash may not be in keeping with plain language principles and may also exclude people who are nonbinary. The Department is proposing three technical edits to replace ``he/she'' with more inclusive language employing plain language principles. First, where ``he/she'' refers to an individual in their professional capacity, the Department proposes using their job title instead of a pronoun. These edits largely affect regulations impacting the NMA or the RMA. In these cases, ``he/she'' has been replaced with ``the NMA'' or ``the RMA'' as appropriate and ``his/her'' with the possessive pronoun ``their.'' These edits are made at Sec. Sec. 658.602 and 658.603 Second, where ``he/she'' refers to an employer that is not an individual person, the Department proposes using the pronoun ``it.'' Where the possessive pronouns ``his/her'' were used, the Department proposes using ``its.'' This is appropriate because employers are entities, not individuals, and the proper pronoun is ``it.'' This edit is made at Sec. Sec. 658.502 and 658.504 In all other cases where ``he/she'' was used, the Department proposes using the pronoun ``they'' in its capacity as a gender-inclusive third-person singular pronoun but conjugated with third-person plural verbs. Where the possessive pronouns ``his/her'' were used, the Department proposes using ``their.'' These changes are designed to remove binary gender language so that the full regulatory text is gender inclusive. The Department makes these changes in Sec. 651.10 in the definition of seasonal farmworker. Edits are also made to Sec. Sec. 653.107, 653.108, 653.111, 653.501, 653.502, 658.400, 658.410, 658.411, 658.421, 658.422, 658.602, 658.603, 658.702, 658.705, 658.706, and 658.707 In addition, the Department proposes to replace the words ``handle'' and ``handled'' with ``***process***'' and ``***processed***,'' as appropriate, to clarify that actions by ES staff and Federal staff must follow the ***processing*** requirements listed throughout part 658, subparts E and H, which use the word ``***process***.'' The word ``handle'' does not have a specific meaning in the regulatory text and may be unclear to SWAs. In some instances, the Department also proposes conforming technical amendments to correct grammar in the regulations, as needed, because of these changes. In addition to such conforming technical amendments, the Department proposes adding and removing commas throughout the regulatory text to improve clarity and readability. These global changes and technical amendments described in this section are not explicitly identified later in the section-by-section discussion.B. Part 651--General Provisions Governing the Wagner-Peyser Act Employment Service Part 651 (Sec. 651.10) sets forth definitions for parts 652, 653, 654, and 658. The Department proposes to revise the following definitions to better align them across the regulatory text, as well as practice in the field, and to make them conform with other revisions the Department proposes to make in this NPRM, including changes to staffing requirements. The Department proposes to revise the first sentence of Sec. 651.10 by providing the full title of the statute for the existing WIOA reference and identifying where WIOA is codified. These additions will help ensure the definitions in this section apply to WIOA, as published at 29 U.S.C 3101 et seq. The Department proposes to add a definition for apparent violation to clarify that the term means a suspected violation of employment-related laws or ES regulations, as set forth in Sec. 658.419 The Department has observed that SWAs have used inconsistent descriptions of the term in their policies and procedures, which are not always consistent with Sec. 658.419 The proposed definition is derived from existing regulatory language at Sec. 658.419, which describes that an apparent violation is a suspected violation of employment-related laws or ES regulations. The Department proposes to amend the definition of applicant holding office to replace ``a Wagner-Peyser Employment Service Office'' with ``an ES office.'' The definition of Wagner-Peyser Act Employment Service (ES) also known as Employment Service (ES) explains that ES offices refers to ES offices described under the Wagner-Peyser Act. Additionally, the definition of ES office explains that ES offices provide ES services as a one-stop partner program. Therefore, the reference to ``a Wagner-Peyser Employment Service office'' is redundant and unnecessary. The Department proposes to amend the definition of career services to refer to WIOA by its acronym rather than its full title because the full title is previously spelled out at the beginning of this section. The Department proposes to amend the definition of clearance order to add a citation to the ***Agricultural*** Recruitment System (ARS) regulations at part 653, subpart F. The purpose of this addition is to clearly identify the ARS regulations to which the term refers. The Department proposes to amend the definition of Complaint System Representative to specify that the Complaint System Representative must be trained. The addition of the word ``trained'' makes the definition consistent with the requirement in Sec. 658.410(g) and (h) that complaints are ***processed*** by a trained Complaint System Representative. The Department also proposes to remove the words ``individual at the local or State level'' due to proposed changes to the definition of ES staff.[[Page 23704]] The Department proposes to amend the definition of Employment and Training Administration (ETA) to remove the words ``of Labor'' after ``Department'' because Department is previously defined in this section as ``the United States Department of Labor.'' The Department proposes to amend the definition of Employment Service (ES) office to replace ``Wagner-Peyser Act'' with ``ES.'' This change would align the definition with proposed changes to the definition of Wagner-Peyser Employment Service (ES) also known as the Employment Service (ES) and make the reference to ES consistent across all parts of the ES regulations. The Department proposes to amend the definition of Employment Service (ES) Office Manager to replace the phrase ``all ES activities in a one-stop center'' with the phrase ``ES services provided in a one-stop center.'' This change would align the definition with other proposed changes to the regulatory text and definitions, which refer to ``ES services,'' instead of ``ES activities.'' The Department also proposes to replace ``individual'' with ``ES staff person'' to clarify that the ES Office Manager must be ES staff, as defined in this section. The Department proposes to amend the definition of Employment Service (ES) staff in two ways. First, the Department proposes to replace the phrase ``individuals, including but not limited to State employees and staff of a subrecipient,'' with ``State government personnel who are employed according to the merit system principles described in 5 CFR part 900, subpart F--Standards for a Merit System of Personnel Administration, and'' to conform with the imposition of the merit-staffing requirement proposed in Sec. 652.215 Second, the Department proposes to delete the phrase ``to carry out activities authorized under the Wagner-Peyser Act,'' because this language is unnecessary. The ES regulations in parts 652, 653, and 658 describe the activities and services that ES staff are authorized or required to carry out. The proposed changes are intended to define a term that, when referenced, will clearly identify services or tasks that must be performed by State merit staff, and to simplify terminology throughout all parts. The revised definition also makes clear that ES staff includes a SWA official. The Department proposes to amend the definition of field checks in several ways. First, the Department proposes to replace the term ``job order'' with ``clearance order,'' which is more accurate because field checks must be conducted on clearance orders as defined in Sec. 651.10 Second, the Department proposes to clarify in the definition that field checks may also be conducted by non-ES State staff, in addition to ES or Federal staff, if the SWA has entered into an arrangement with a State enforcement agency (or agencies) to conduct field checks. This proposed revision aligns the definition with existing practice permitted by the regulation at Sec. 653.503, which allows SWA officials to enter into formal or informal arrangements with appropriate State and Federal enforcement agencies where the enforcement agency staff may conduct field checks instead of and on behalf of ES personnel. Additionally, the Department proposes to remove from the definition that field checks are ``random'' appearances. The proposed revision would clarify that the selection of the clearance orders on which the SWA will conduct field checks does not need to be random, though random field checks may still occur. The revision clarifies that field checks may be targeted, where necessary, to respond to known or suspected compliance issues, thereby improving MSFW worker protection. In addition, if a SWA makes placements on 9 or fewer clearance orders, the SWA must conduct field checks on 100 percent of those clearance orders. See Sec. 653.503(b). Therefore, in those cases, field checks could not be conducted on a random basis. These proposed revisions would clarify the definition and make it consistent with Sec. 653.503(b). The Department proposes to amend the definition of field visits in several respects. First, the Department proposes to clarify that field visits are announced appearances by SMAs, RMAs, the NMA, or NMA team members. This term is currently defined to include appearances by Monitor Advocates or outreach staff, and the proposed revision would clarify which Monitor Advocates may conduct field visits and that the appearances are announced, and not unannounced, as with field checks. Second, the Department proposes to replace the reference to ``employment services'' with ``ES services'' to conform with the use of the ``ES'' abbreviation throughout the regulatory text. Third, the Department proposes to amend the definition to specify that field visits include discussions on farmworker rights and protections. The Department has observed through monitoring that outreach staff and SMAs do not always discuss farmworker rights and protections during field visits as part of broader discussions about ``other employment-related programs,'' and instead only cover information on ES services. An explicit reference to discussions on farmworker rights and protections in the definition will help ensure that these issues are consistently addressed. The Department proposes to amend the definition of Hearing Officer to remove the words ``of Labor'' because Sec. 651.10 previously defines ``Department'' as ``the United States Department of Labor.'' The Department proposes to amend the definitions of interstate clearance order to indicate that it is an ***agricultural*** ``clearance'' order for temporary employment instead of a ``job'' order. This change aligns the definitions of job order and clearance order in this part. The Department also proposes to amend the definition of intrastate clearance order in two ways. First, the Department proposes to amend the definition to indicate that it is an ***agricultural*** ``clearance'' order for temporary employment instead of a ``job'' order. This change aligns the definition with the definitions of job order and clearance order in this part. Second, the proposed revision clarifies that the term means an ***agricultural*** clearance order for temporary employment describing one or more hard-to-fill job openings, which an ES office uses to request recruitment assistance from all other ES offices within the State. The current definition does not include the word ``all.'' Therefore, it was not clear that such a request must go to all other offices in the State, and some ES offices were not distributing the clearance order to all offices. This clarification will help SWAs understand that an intrastate clearance order must be circulated to all ES offices within the State. The Department proposes to amend the definition of migrant farmworker by removing the exclusion of full-time students who are traveling in organized groups. The Department proposes considering anyone who meets the definition of migrant farmworker to be considered as such, including full-time students performing farmwork. This change will make the benefits and protections of the Monitor Advocate System, including safeguards built into the Complaint System, ES service requirements, and equity and minimum service levels, available to full-time students traveling in organized groups. The exclusion of full-time students from existing regulatory text was premised on the fact that full-time students did not need to meet minimum farmwork or income requirements, which no longer exist in the ES regulations. Therefore,[[Page 23705]]the reference is no longer relevant to the migrant farmworker definition. The Department proposes to remove the definition of migrant food ***processing*** worker because migrant food ***processing*** worker status has not been a separately tracked part of the MSFW definition since the ES regulations were updated in 2016. See 81 FR 56071 (Oct. 18, 2016). Current ETA reporting does not require States to document migrant food ***processing*** workers as a particular type of MSFW and this definition is unnecessary because the existing MSFW definitions are inclusive of individuals who perform work as migrant food processors. The Department proposes to amend the definition of Occupational Information Network (O\*NET) to remove the word ``system'' from the definition, as it is not needed to describe O\*NET. The Department proposes to amend the definition of O\*NET-SOC to remove the words ``of Labor'' after ``Department'' because Department is previously defined in this section as ``the United States Department of Labor.'' The Department proposes to amend the definition of outreach staff to clarify that SMAs are not considered outreach staff. The SMA's role includes monitoring and providing guidance related to outreach staff but does not include acting as outreach staff. Outreach staff are a separate set of staff described in Sec. 653.107(b). As noted in Sec. 653.108, no State may dedicate less than full-time staffing for the SMA position, unless the Regional Administrator (RA), with input from the RMA, provides written approval. The SMA must also be able to review outreach efforts as required in Sec. 653.108(o) and have adequate time to complete the extensive duties described in Sec. 653.108 While an SMA may join ongoing outreach efforts, Sec. 653.107 requires SWAs to employ an adequate number of outreach staff. The Department proposes to revise the definition of respondent by removing the parenthetical language ``including a State agency official'' because the term ``State agency'' is assumed to include ``State agency officials'' and it is therefore unnecessary to distinguish ``State agency officials'' in addition to the State agency. The Department is proposing to remove the exclusion of non-migrant full-time students from the definition of seasonal farmworker. This change would allow full-time students who work in seasonal farmwork to be considered seasonal farmworkers and would make the definition of seasonal farmworker consistent with the definition of migrant farmworker. The Department proposes to revise the definition for significant MSFW one-stop centers in several ways. First, by removing the requirement that the designation be made annually, the Department can better rely on multiple data sources that are published in intervals up to every 5 years, including the Census of ***Agriculture*** and the Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages. This will help ensure the designation more accurately aligns with supporting data on the number of MSFWs in the service area. Based on the Department's analysis of census and other SWA data, the data do not change significantly on an annual basis and, therefore, it is often unnecessary to change the designations. If annual adjustments are warranted by the data, the Department will make adjustments in annual designations. This change would allow the list of significant MSFW one-stop centers to remain the same if there is no compelling reason to make a change. The Department also proposes to add that significant MSFW one-stop centers will also include ES offices where MSFWs account for 10 percent or more of reportable individuals in the ES annually, not just 10 percent or more of participants. This corresponds to the proposed change in Sec. Sec. 653.103(a) and 653.109(b)(10), which would require ES offices to determine and collect data on the number of reportable individuals who are MSFWs. This proposal is intended to more closely correlate the designation of significant MSFW one-stop centers to the total number of MSFWs--and, therefore, potential participants--in the area, as opposed to just the number of existing participants in the area. Relying solely on the number of existing MSFW participants in the area fails to account for all other MSFWs in the area who could potentially become participants and does not account for situations where the number of participants in the area is low due to failure to perform adequate outreach or to make services available to MSFWs so that MSFWs who are reportable individuals may receive participant level services. In those cases, the number of participants is not an accurate indicator of the need for MSFW-specific ES services in the area. These proposed changes provide a more accurate representation of the number of MSFWs in the area who could benefit from access to ES services. The Department also is proposing to retain language permitting the Department to consider special circumstances beyond the estimated number of MSFWs in the area in designating significant MSFW one-stop centers. The Department proposes to amend the definition of significant MSFW States. Similar to the proposed changes to the definition of significant MSFW one-stop centers, the Department proposes to remove the annual designation requirement from the definition of significant MSFW States. The Department proposes to rely on information from the Census of ***Agriculture***, which is published every 5 years, and the Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages, which publishes a quarterly count of employment and wages. These data sources provide the most reliable farmworker estimates available. Additionally, the Department proposes to add ``estimated'' before ``number of MSFW'' and remove the word ``participants'' because the Department intends to use the estimated number of MSFWs in each State, instead of exclusively the number of MSFW participants in the State to more accurately determine which States have the most MSFW activity and should therefore be designated as significant MSFW States. Relying on the estimated number of MSFWs in a State means the Department will account for those MSFWs who may eventually become participants instead of only focusing on States with the highest existing number of participants. The Department proposes to delete the definition of significant multilingual MSFW one-stop centers in its entirety because the Department is proposing changes to Sec. 653.102 to remove specific requirements for offices that would meet the definition. The Department proposes to remove these specific requirements for significant multilingual MSFW one-stop centers because all one-stop centers must comply with the language access requirements in 29 CFR 38.9, which prohibit discrimination on the basis of national origin, including limited English proficiency (LEP). The Department created the significant multilingual MSFW one-stop center definition and language access requirements at Sec. 653.102 before comprehensive language access requirements implementing section 188 of WIOA were codified in 29 CFR part 38. The regulations at 29 CFR 38.9 establish that language access requirements apply to services provided to all LEP individuals at all one-stop centers and are broader than the existing requirements for significant multilingual MSFW one-stop centers. For these reasons, the designation of significant multilingual MSFW one-stop centers is no longer necessary. Additionally,[[Page 23706]]having separate requirements for significant multilingual MSFW one-stop centers may inaccurately create the appearance that there are two sets of language access standards, or that requirements for significant multilingual MSFW one-stop centers are narrower. Removing the significant multilingual MSFW one-stop center definition therefore clarifies that the comprehensive language access requirements at 29 CFR 38.9 apply to all one-stop centers. The Department proposes to remove the definition of State Workforce Agency (SWA) official, because SWA officials would be considered ES staff based on the Department's proposed revisions to the definition of ES staff in this rulemaking. The Department is proposing to amend the definition of Wagner-Peyser Act Employment Service (ES) also known as Employment Service (ES) to replace the phrase ``employment services'' with ``ES services.'' This change would simplify the use of terminology throughout all parts. The Department also proposes to remove the words ``and are'' from the definition for greater clarity.C. Part 652--Establishment and Functioning of State Employment Service Subpart C--Employment Service Services in a One-Stop Delivery System Environment1. Subpart A--Employment Service Operations This subpart includes: An explanation of the scope and purpose of the ES; the rules governing allotments and grant agreements; authorized services; administrative provisions; and rules governing labor disputes. The Department's proposed amendments to subpart A focus solely on administrative provisions governing nondiscrimination requirements.Section 652.8 Administrative Provisions Section 652.8 covers administrative matters, including: Financial and program management information systems; recordkeeping and retention of records; required reports; monitoring and audits; costs; disclosure of information; sanctions; and nondiscrimination requirements. The Department proposes to correct the statutory reference in Sec. 652.8(j)(2) regarding the bona fide occupational qualification (BFOQ) exception currently listed in the regulation as 42 U.S.C 2000(e)-2(e) to 42 U.S.C 2000e-2(e). The Department proposes to amend Sec. 652.8(j)(3) to remove an outdated reference to affirmative action requests to make the Department's regulation consistent with U.S Supreme Court jurisprudence on race-based affirmative action.\9\ The proposed revision clarifies that the States' obligation is to comply with 41 CFR 60-300.84 The regulation at 41 CFR 60-300.84 requires ES offices to refer qualified protected veterans to fill employment openings required to be listed with ES offices by certain Federal contractors; give priority to qualified protected veterans in making such referrals; and, upon request, provide the Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs with information as to whether certain Federal contractors are in compliance with the mandatory job listing requirements of the equal opportunity clause (41 CFR 60-300.5). Consistent with this proposed amendment, the Department also proposes to remove the phrase ``and affirmative action'' from the paragraph heading for Sec. 652.8(j). The Department reminds SWAs that they have an affirmative outreach obligation under 29 CFR 38.40 that requires them to take appropriate steps to ensure they are providing equal access to services and activities authorized under the Wagner-Peyser Act, as well as any other WIOA title I-financially assisted programs and activities. As outlined in that regulation, these steps should involve reasonable efforts to include members of the various groups protected by the WIOA sec. 188 regulations, including but not limited to persons of different sexes, various racial and ethnic/national origin groups, members of various religions, individuals with limited English proficiency, individuals with disabilities, and individuals in different age groups.--------------------------------------------------------------------------- \9\ See, e.g , Ricci v. DeStefano, 557 U.S 557, 585 (2009); Adarand Constructors, Inc. v. Pena, 515 U.S 200, 238 (1995); Richmond v. J.A Croson Co., 488 U.S 469, 507 (1989).---------------------------------------------------------------------------2. Subpart C--Employment Service Services in a One-Stop Delivery System Environment This subpart discusses State agency roles and responsibilities; rules governing ES offices; the relationship between the ES and the one-stop delivery system; required and allowable ES services; universal service access requirements; provision of services for UI claimants; and State planning. Among other changes, the NPRM's proposed changes to regulations under subpart C are tailored to require all States to use State merit staff to provide ES services, reinstating a longstanding requirement that existed prior to the 2020 Final Rule, and extending the requirement to those States using different staffing arrangements under the rule as it existed prior to the 2020 Final Rule. As was true when the regulations were changed in 2020, none of the changes proposed at this time will impact the personnel requirements of the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program, one of the six core programs in the workforce development system that is authorized under title I of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Rehabilitation Act), as amended by title IV of WIOA. The Rehabilitation Act has specific requirements governing the use of State VR agency personnel for performing certain critical functions of the VR program.Section 652.204 Must funds authorized under the Governor's Reserve flow through the one-stop delivery system? This section explains that the Governor's Reserve funds may, but are not required to, flow through the one-stop delivery system and provides a list of allowable uses for those funds. The Department proposes to simplify the section heading to remove reference to the Wagner-Peyser Act because reference to the Governor's Reserve is adequate. The Department also proposes to amend this section to reference professional development and career advancement of ES staff instead of SWA officials. Under the proposed revisions to the definitions found in part 651, ES staff would exclusively refer to State merit staff. This NPRM proposes to remove the term SWA official as a defined term in Sec. 651.10, as the term is made redundant under the proposed changes.Section 652.215 Can Wagner-Peyser Act-funded activities be provided through a variety of staffing models? This section currently provides States the option to provide ES services through a variety of staffing models. For the reasons set forth in this NPRM, the Department proposes to amend Sec. 652.215 to require all States, including the historically exempted ``demonstration States,'' to provide labor exchange services described in Sec. 652.3 of this part through State merit staff. The staffing requirement applies to ES services provided to MSFWs. Specifically, the proposed regulatory text states that labor exchange services must be provided by ES staff. Under proposed revisions to the definitions (Sec. 651.10), ES staff will exclusively refer to State merit staff. Historically, the Department relied on authority under sec. 3(a) of the Wagner-Peyser Act, which requires the[[Page 23707]]Department to assist in coordinating State ES offices and improve their usefulness by setting minimum standards of efficiency and promoting their uniform administration, as well as authority in sec. 5(b) of the Wagner-Peyser Act, to promulgate regulations prescribing the use of State merit staff. Prior to 2020, in support of its longstanding State merit staff requirement for ES services, the Department explained that the benefits of merit-staffing in promoting greater consistency, efficiency, accountability, and transparency are well established.\10\ The Department's discretion to require the use of State merit staff to provide ES services was affirmed in Michigan v. Herman, 81 F. Supp. 2d 840 (W.D Mich. 1998). As explained earlier in this preamble, in the 1990s, the Department approved limited exemptions from the merit-staffing requirement for three States (Colorado, Massachusetts, and Michigan) during the establishment of the one-stop delivery system to test alternative service-delivery models, but subsequently noted that no additional exemptions would be authorized.--------------------------------------------------------------------------- \10\ See 64 FR 18662, 18691 (April 15, 1999) (Workforce Investment Act (WIA) Interim Final Rule); 65 FR 49294, 49385 (Aug. 11, 2000) (WIA Final Rule); 80 FR 20690, 20805 (April 16, 2015) (WIOA NPRM); 81 FR 56072, 56267 (Aug. 19, 2016) (WIOA Final Rule).--------------------------------------------------------------------------- In the 2020 Final Rule, the Department changed its longstanding policy and determined that granting States flexibility in staffing potentially would give States flexibility to meet the unique needs of ES customers, free up resources to serve employers and job seekers, and better integrate ES services with other WIOA programs. The Department also stated that similar programs operated successfully with flexible staffing arrangements and, therefore, staffing flexibility should be provided under the Wagner-Peyser Act. However, the recent stress placed upon State UI systems in response to the COVID-19 pandemic served to highlight the necessity of States to be able to rely on State merit staff who are already cross-trained or able to be quickly cross-trained and legally permitted to assist UI claimants during times of high demand placed on State UI systems. As discussed above, the Department has reassessed the factors it weighed in the 2020 Final Rule and has determined that the alignment of ES and UI staffing is more important than the efficiencies that flexibility may promote, and that it is vital that the ES be administered so that quality services are delivered effectively and equitably to UI beneficiaries and other ES customers. Accordingly, the Department is now proposing to require, with no exceptions, that States use State merit-staff employees to provide ES services. This proposed rule ensures States are universally equipped to use cross-trained ES staff to assist in ***processing*** and adjudicating UI claims, and assisting claimants with work search and reemployment services. As described previously, the Department relies on authority under secs. 3(a) and 5(b) of the Wagner-Peyser Act, as well as sec. 208 of the IPA, to exercise discretion to require the use of State merit staff to deliver ES services. To improve clarity, the Department proposes revising the section heading from ``Can Wagner-Peyser Act funded activities be provided through a variety of staffing models?'' to ``What staffing model must be used to deliver services in the Employment Service?'' In addition, the Department proposes revising the regulatory text by adding a new paragraph (a), which specifies that the Secretary requires that the labor exchange services described in Sec. 652.3 be provided by ES staff. This revision is proposed to reinstate the State merit-staffing requirement and align with the proposed definitions of ES and ES staff in Sec. 651.10 The Department further proposes to add a new paragraph (b), which provides that the staffing requirement in this section would have the same effective date as other proposed changes in this NPRM and would become effective 60 days after publication of the final rule in the Federal Register. The Department also proposes to add a new paragraph (c), which specifies a compliance date for proposed Sec. 652.215 (i.e , the date on which the requirements of this section would become enforceable) of 18 months after the effective date of the final rule. The Department acknowledges that for States currently using different staffing models for the provision of ES services, both those that have been using different models for many years and those that changed or have begun to change their staffing models due to the 2020 Final Rule, the use of State merit staff may take time to implement. In the short period of time that staffing flexibility has been available to all States, the Department is aware that a few States expressed an interest in using that flexibility. Some States may have taken steps to use the staffing flexibility without modifying their approved State plans, under which they indicate that they are using State merit staff to deliver ES services. At least one State has submitted a State plan modification indicating that the State intends to use non-State merit staff to provide ES services. Reinstating the State merit-staffing requirement will impact these States, but the Department thinks that the impact will be minimal, as described in the regulatory impact analysis section of this proposal (sec. III.A of the preamble). The Department recognizes that this proposed change will have the most impact on the three demonstration States, Colorado, Massachusetts, and Michigan. Since the 1990s, these three States have relied on an exemption in their approved State plans to use some limited form of non-State-merit staffing. Any burden imposed on these three States by the proposal to require their use of only State merit staff may be mitigated by the States' currently approved staffing models. Colorado and Michigan both use only merit-staffing to deliver ES services, but they employ merit staff at both the State and local level to deliver services. For these States, the proposed regulation would require that they discontinue their use of local merit staff and use only State merit staff. Massachusetts uses some non-merit staff, but that use of non-merit staff is only approved in 4 out of 16 local areas in the State. In the remaining local areas, Massachusetts uses State merit staff to deliver ES services. Accordingly, while disruption in service delivery may occur due to this change, the Department anticipates that disruption to these States' ES service delivery will be minimal. As noted in the regulatory impact analysis, prior to publication of this NPRM, the Department surveyed the demonstration States on any transition costs that may be incurred by the proposed State merit-staffing requirement. While the Department acknowledges that there may be some cost to these three States due to this change, the Department believes that the rationale for requiring the use of State merit staff applies equally to the demonstration States, and that the long-term benefits of having cross-trained ES staff outweigh the cost to these States of transitioning to the use of State merit staff. The Department seeks comment on the benefits and costs of transitioning to a State merit-staffing requirement in instances where States are using staff other than State merit staff to deliver services. In addition, the Department seeks comment on any positive or negative impact this change would have in terms of the quality of services provided within the American Job Centers--including those funded by WIOA. However, acknowledging that these three States, and any State that had taken action under the 2020 Final Rule, will be unable to immediately comply[[Page 23708]]with this proposed requirement, the Department proposes to provide 18 months for States to implement the State merit-staffing requirement in order to provide States with adequate time to consider and implement any necessary changes to come into compliance, including time to resolve outstanding contractual obligations and align changes with the timed financial allotments. The Department is open to adjusting this time period and, accordingly, it seeks comments from States regarding whether 18 months is sufficient time to comply with this requirement. The Department also seeks comments from States describing other regulatory changes States believe are necessary to effectuate compliance with the proposed changes.D. Part 653--Services of the Wagner-Peyser Act Employment Service System Part 653 sets forth the principal regulations of the ES concerning the provision of services for MSFWs consistent with the requirement that all services of the workforce development system be available to all job seekers in an equitable fashion. The regulations in this part establish special services to ensure MSFWs receive the full range of career services, as defined in WIOA sec. 134(c)(2), 29 U.S.C 3174(c)(2), and contain requirements that SWAs establish a system to monitor their own compliance with ES regulations governing services to MSFWs. As noted elsewhere in this preamble, the proposed State merit-staffing requirement discussed in part 652 would also apply to delivery of all ES services to MSFWs, including outreach services and the Monitor Advocate System discussed in the following section. References to staffing throughout this part of the proposed rule, even where the Department has not proposed changes, refer to State merit staff.1. Subpart B--Services for Migrant and Seasonal Farmworkers (MSFWs)Section 653.100 Purpose and Scope of Subpart The Department proposes to amend Sec. 653.100(a) to clarify that the provision of services for MSFWs must be available in an equitable and nondiscriminatory fashion. The addition of the phrase ``and nondiscriminatory'' is intended to clarify that SWAs must not discriminate against farmworkers either because they are farmworkers or because of any characteristics protected under the nondiscrimination and equal opportunity provisions of WIOA, which are contained in sec. 188 of WIOA, 29 U.S.C 3248, and the implementing regulations at 29 CFR part 38. The requirements of section 188 of WIOA apply to ES services because the Wagner-Peyser Act Employment Service is a required one-stop partner, and the requirements of section 188 of WIOA apply to all one-stop partners. 29 CFR 38.4(zz).Section 653.101 Provision of Services to Migrant and Seasonal Farmworkers The Department proposes to amend Sec. 653.101 by revising the first sentence to clarify that the SWA is the primary recipient of Wagner-Peyser Act funds and, therefore, is the entity responsible for ensuring that ES staff offer MSFWs the full range of career and supportive services. This clarification is proposed because it is ultimately incumbent upon the SWA to ensure ES staff at one-stop centers are carrying out the appropriate duties with their Wagner-Peyser Act funds. The Department also proposes to replace the requirement to consider and be sensitive to the preferences, needs, and skills of individual MSFWs and the availability of job and training opportunities with a requirement that SWAs ensure the one-stop centers tailor ES services in a way that accounts for individual MSFW preferences, needs, skills, and the availability of job and training opportunities, so that MSFWs are reasonably able to participate in the ES. This proposed change strengthens the requirement to tailor services to the individualized needs of MSFWs. The change also would make the requirement applicable to the SWA to ensure the one-stop centers comply, to align with the SWA's position as the direct recipient of ES funds.Section 653.102 Job Information The Department proposes to revise the second sentence of Sec. 653.102 to clarify that the SWA is the entity responsible for assisting MSFWs to access job order information, for the same rationale as described in the same proposed change for Sec. 653.101 The Department's proposed language also clarifies that the requirement applies to ES staff at one-stop centers because the scope of part 653 relates to the ES services program, not all one-stop partner programs. The Department also proposes to remove the word ``adequate'' as a modifier to the phrase ``assistance to MSFWs.'' The Department has observed that States' interpretation of what it means to provide adequate assistance varies. Removing the word ``adequate'' will remove subjectivity and clarify that a SWA meets its obligation to assist MSFWs by complying with the requirements in parts 653 and 658. The Department also proposes to remove the final sentence of Sec. 653.102, which stated that in designated significant MSFW multilingual offices, assistance with accessing job order information must be provided to MSFWs in their native language whenever requested or necessary. The Department proposes to remove this sentence to align language access requirements in the ES regulations with those required by WIOA sec. 188 and its implementing regulations at 29 CFR part 38. Language access requirements are not limited to designated multilingual MSFW one-stop centers, but rather, they apply to LEP individuals regardless of through which office they seek ES services. The existing requirement was written into the regulations in the early 1980s, well before the language access requirements were codified at 29 CFR part 38. Removing the existing requirement, which specifically applies to designated multilingual MSFW one-stop centers, and adding a reference to the broader language access requirements at Sec. 653.103(b) (described in the following section) is intended to strengthen language access for all LEP individuals. This change also aligns with the proposal to remove the definition for multilingual MSFW one-stop centers from Sec. 651.10 Accordingly, the Department proposes to add a broader language access requirement to Sec. 653.103, as described in the following section.Section 653.103 ***Process*** for Migrant and Seasonal Farmworkers To Participate in Workforce Development The Department proposes to make several revisions to Sec. 653.103 In paragraph (a), the Department proposes to change ``one-stop center'' to ``ES office.'' This change clarifies that the requirement applies to ES staff because part 653 applies to the ES services program, not all one-stop partner programs. In addition to the existing requirement to determine whether participants, as defined at Sec. 651.10, are MSFWs, the Department proposes to require that ES offices must determine whether reportable individuals, also defined at that section, are MSFWs. This proposed change will help ES staff identify all individuals who engage in ES services who are MSFWs, and not limit that assessment to participants only. With this information, SWAs will be able to better understand the number of MSFWs who engage in the ES and the degree of their engagement. This information is important for SWAs and SMAs to have so that they may[[Page 23709]]understand the full scope of who accesses particular services for the purposes of determining whether services are being provided to MSFWs on an equitable basis. For example, by having the number of MSFW reportable individuals, the SWAs and SMA can analyze situations where there may be large numbers of MSFW reportable individuals but very few or no MSFW participants, in proportions far different than other populations. Such scenarios may indicate that ES services are not being provided to MSFWs in a way that is tailored to individual MSFW preferences, needs, skills, and the availability of job and training opportunities, so that MSFWs are reasonably able to participate in the ES, as required by the proposed Sec. 653.101 In Sec. 653.103(b), the Department proposes to replace the existing provision requiring all SWAs to ensure that MSFWs who are English-language learners receive, free of charge, the language assistance necessary to afford them meaningful access to the programs, services, and information offered by the one-stop centers with a new provision requiring all SWAs to comply with the language access and assistance requirements at 29 CFR 38.9 with regard to all LEP individuals, including MSFWs who are LEP individuals, as defined at 29 CFR 38.4(hh). This compliance includes ensuring ES staff comply with these language access and assistance requirements. This proposed change aligns the language access requirements for MSFWs with those requirements identified for all LEP individuals pursuant to 29 CFR 38.9 and helps ensure LEP individuals have meaningful access to the ES. Due to this proposed change, the Department proposes corresponding edits throughout the ES regulations to ensure that all language access requirements align with 29 CFR 38.9 This is important for several reasons. First, 29 CFR 38.9 is part of WIOA sec. 188's prohibition on discrimination on the basis of national origin, including limited English proficiency. Maintaining separate language access requirements could create confusion about which standard should apply. Second, the proposed change reduces duplication because the standards at 29 CFR 38.9 already cover the language access requirements provided in the ES regulations. Third, aligning the ES regulations with 29 CFR 38.9 ensures broader language access protections for LEP farmworkers than those in the existing ES regulations. Lastly, in Sec. 653.103(c), the Department proposes to remove the requirement that one-stop centers must provide MSFWs a list of available career and supportive services ``in their native language.'' This proposed change would make the provision consistent with the broader proposed revisions to language access requirements throughout all parts to ensure they align with 29 CFR 38.9 Section 653.107 Outreach Responsibilities and ***Agricultural*** Outreach Plan The Department proposes to revise the section heading in Sec. 653.107 to read ``Outreach responsibilities and ***Agricultural*** Outreach Plan'' to provide greater clarity. The Department proposes to revise Sec. 653.107(a)(1) in several ways. First, the Department proposes to move to Sec. 653.107(a)(4) the sentence that explains each SWA must provide an adequate number of outreach staff to conduct MSFW outreach in their service areas. The regulation at paragraph (a)(4) details how many outreach staff a SWA must provide and explains what it means to provide an adequate number of outreach staff. Therefore, the previously quoted language from Sec. 653.107(a)(1) more logically fits in Sec. 653.107(a)(4), where it provides clarity regarding what adequate means. The result of this change is that the first sentence of this section now requires that the SWA ensure that outreach staff fulfill the outreach responsibilities described in paragraph (b) of this section on an ongoing basis. The Department proposes to add that outreach staff must conduct outreach on an ongoing basis to clarify that outreach activities in all States must occur year-round. As described at 20 CFR 653.107(a)(4), in significant MSFW States, there must be full-time, year-round outreach staff and in the remainder of the States there must be year-round part-time outreach staff. This change is proposed to clarify that all States must have some degree of outreach at all times. Second, the Department proposes to revise the sentence that provides SWA Administrators must ensure SMAs and outreach staff coordinate their outreach efforts with WIOA title I sec. 167 grantees by replacing ``their outreach efforts'' with the word ``activities.'' This change is proposed to correct frequent misunderstandings by SWAs, where SWAs believe coordinating their outreach efforts means that other organizations such as National Farmworker Jobs Program (NFJP) grantees may conduct outreach on behalf of the SWA and that the NFJP grantees' outreach is sufficient to satisfy the SWA's outreach obligations. Using the word ``activities'' helps clarify that SWAs must coordinate their activities with NFJP grantees (i.e , work together to strengthen their respective services) but that NFJP grantee outreach is not a substitute for SWA outreach obligations. To further clarify this point, the Department proposes to add to Sec. 653.107(a)(1) a sentence explaining that WIOA title I sec. 167 grantees' activities involving MSFWs does not substitute for SWA outreach responsibilities. This clarification is important because NFJP staff are not obligated to provide the same information or services to MSFWs as SWA outreach staff must provide, nor are they monitored by the SMA to ensure services are compliant with ES regulations. At Sec. 653.107(a)(2)(i), the Department proposes a technical edit to change the period after ``MSFWs'' to a semicolon and adding the word ``and'' to clarify that as part of their outreach, SWAs must ensure outreach staff satisfy both paragraphs (i) and (ii), which follow. In Sec. 653.107(a)(2)(ii), the Department proposes to revise the requirement that SWAs must ensure outreach staff conduct thorough outreach efforts with extensive follow-up activities in supply States by replacing ``in supply States'' with ``identified at Sec. 653.107(b)(5).'' This change is proposed because SWAs must ensure outreach staff are conducting thorough outreach efforts with extensive follow-up activities in all States--not only in supply States. This proposed revision does not increase the outreach burden on non-supply States because all States must already comply with all applicable outreach provisions identified at Sec. 653.107 The Department proposes several revisions to Sec. 653.107(a)(3). First, the Department proposes to revise the language and structure of the paragraph. The Department proposes to replace ``For purposes of providing and assigning outreach staff to conduct outreach duties, and to facilitate the delivery of employment services tailored to the special needs of MSFWs. . .'' with ``When hiring or assigning outreach staff.'' This change would operationalize the proposed State merit-staffing requirement for outreach workers. The existing regulatory text permits SWAs the flexibility to provide outreach staff in several ways, including by subcontracting staff. With this proposed change, the Department is making clear that the SWA is responsible for directly hiring outreach staff who must be State merit staff because the definition of outreach staff refers to ES staff, who must be State merit staff.[[Page 23710]] The Department has observed that SWAs commonly assign existing staff to fill outreach staff vacancies, without seeking qualified candidates who speak the language of a significant proportion of the State MSFW population, are from MSFW backgrounds, or have substantial work experience in farmworker activities. The proposed revision is also intended to clarify that SWAs must seek to hire for or assign to outreach staff positions, and put a strong emphasis on hiring or assigning, individuals who speak the language of a significant proportion of the State MSFW population and who either are from MSFW backgrounds or have substantial work experience in farmworker activities. Several revisions impact how a State staffs outreach responsibilities. Changes at 653.107(a) require outreach to be ongoing, changes at 653.107(a)(3) strengthen hiring requirements, and changes at 653.107(a)(4) clarify that full-time outreach work means devoting 100% of their time to outreach. Together, States will be unlikely to be able to fulfill these responsibilities unless they hire staff specifically for outreach. While States can assign outreach responsibilities to existing qualified staff, such staff in significant MSFW States must then devote 100% of their time to outreach, not merely add outreach to other responsibilities. For non-significant MSFW States, outreach staff must devote full time in peak season and part time in non-peak season to outreach. The Department proposes to maintain the language in Sec. 653.107(a)(3)(i) that SWAs must seek qualified candidates who speak the language of a significant proportion of the State MSFW population. But to strengthen the existing requirement, the Department proposes to add that the SWA must not only seek but also put a strong emphasis on hiring qualified candidates. This language is proposed to increase the likelihood that SWAs will hire candidates with the criteria described in Sec. 653.107(a)(3)(i), instead of simply seeking candidates whom they never hire. To further increase the likelihood that SWAs hire candidates who meet the required criteria, the Department proposes to add a new paragraph at Sec. 653.107(a)(3)(ii) requiring the SWA to inform farmworker organizations and other organizations with expertise concerning MSFWs of outreach staff job openings and encourage them to refer qualified applicants to apply. These additions are proposed to expand the applicant pool for outreach staff positions to include individuals who have the knowledge, skills, and abilities to meet the unique needs of farmworkers. The proposed paragraph also makes requirements for hiring outreach staff consistent with the requirements for appointing an SMA under Sec. 653.108(b). For the SMA position, the SWA is required to inform farmworker organizations and other organizations with expertise concerning MSFWs of the opening and encourage them to refer qualified applicants to apply. As discussed in this section, this requirement helps SWAs expand the applicant pool for SMAs to help the SWA choose from a larger selection of qualified applicants, and the same reasoning applies to outreach staff. The Department proposes to amend Sec. 653.107(a)(4) by adding the sentence that the Department proposes to remove from Sec. 653.107(a)(1), which provides that each SWA must provide an adequate number of outreach staff to conduct MSFW outreach in their service areas. However, the Department proposes to replace ``in their service areas'' with ``in each area of the State.'' This change will clarify that SWAs must provide outreach in all areas of the State where there are farmworkers, not only in certain service areas. This change would make the expectation to cover the full State clear. The Department also proposes to replace ``provide'' with ``employ'' and add to the end of the sentence language making clear that an adequate number of outreach staff are needed to contact a majority of MSFWs in all of the SWA's service areas annually. These additions are proposed to clarify what it means to employ an ``adequate number of outreach staff,'' all of whom must be State merit staff. Making this determination on an annual basis helps align the assessment of staffing levels with the reporting required in the SMA's Annual Summary. The Department further proposes to revise the sentence requiring that in the 20 States with the highest estimated year-round MSFW activity, as identified in guidance issued by the Secretary, there must be full-time, year-round outreach staff to conduct outreach duties. Specifically, the Department proposes to replace ``in guidance issued by the Secretary'' with ``as identified by the Department.'' This revision is necessary to conform to guidance issued by the Department. The Department also proposes to amend Sec. 653.107(a)(4) to add a sentence clarifying what it means to have full-time outreach staff. The proposed sentence explains that full-time means each individual outreach staff person must spend 100 percent of their time on the outreach responsibilities described at Sec. 653.107(b). This requirement is important because having each outreach staff person engage in outreach on a full-time basis gives that person more time to establish a positive working relationship with MSFWs and ***agricultural*** employers in their service area. This can be helpful for building trust and engaging in informal resolution of complaints and apparent violations. It is also necessary so that outreach staff are fully available to provide the level of ES and follow-up activities that these regulations describe. The Department proposes to keep the existing requirements that, in the 20 States with the highest estimated year-round MSFW activity, as identified by the Department and defined as significant MSFW States at Sec. 651.10, there must be full-time, year-round outreach staff to conduct outreach duties. In the remainder of the States, there must be year-round part-time outreach staff, and during periods of the highest MSFW activity, there must be full-time outreach staff. This means that States that are not significant MSFW States may allow outreach staff to conduct other activities that promote farmworker safety, including housing inspections, when they are not in peak harvest season. If outreach staff in States that are not significant MSFW States have additional time available after fulfilling their required outreach responsibilities, those States may leverage outreach staff members, required to be State merit staff under this proposal, to help support other critical functions, such as UI. Finally, the Department proposes to further clarify outreach staffing requirements by adding a new sentence in Sec. 653.107(a)(4) stating that staffing levels must align with and be supported by information about the estimated number of farmworkers in the State and the farmworker activity in the State as demonstrated in the State's ***Agricultural*** Outreach Plan (AOP) pursuant to Sec. 653.107(d). This language will help SWAs understand that the number of full-time or part-time outreach staff must be determined by information provided in the State's AOP. These revisions will give the State a clear method to identify what staffing levels are appropriate. The Department also proposes to revise Sec. 653.107(b) by adding that outreach staff responsibilities include the activities identified in Sec. 653.107(b)(1) through (11). This addition clarifies the specific activities included in outreach staff responsibilities. The proposed regulatory text also replaces a colon with a period, which helps the[[Page 23711]]construction of the sentence and its relationship to the following paragraphs. The Department proposes two revisions to Sec. 653.107(b)(1). First, the Department proposes to replace ``Explaining'' with ``Outreach staff must explain'' to align with the updated construction of the sentence whereby paragraph (b) is proposed to be a sentence ending in a period and not a colon, making the following paragraphs full sentences. Second, the Department proposes to remove the explicit requirement for the information that outreach staff must convey to be in a language readily understood by them, because proposed Sec. 653.103(b) would already require this information to be in languages other than English for LEP individuals as provided under 29 CFR 38.9 This proposed change conforms with other proposed changes to language access requirements throughout parts 651, 652, 653, and 658 where the Department seeks to align these requirements with those identified at 29 CFR 38.9 The Department proposes to revise Sec. 653.107(b)(3) to replace ``outreach workers'' with ``outreach staff'' to align with the proposed definition of outreach staff at Sec. 651.10 The Department proposes the same revision to paragraph (b)(4) and to remove the word ``the'' before ``outreach staff'' for clarity. These changes are necessary to align with the proposed State merit-staffing requirements for ES staff. Because Sec. 651.10 defines outreach staff as ES staff with responsibilities described at Sec. 653.107(b), the proposed State merit-staffing requirement applies to outreach staff. The Department proposes several revisions to Sec. 653.107(b)(7). First, the Department proposes to replace the reference to outreach staff being trained in ``local office'' procedures with ``one-stop center'' procedures to align with the ES office definition at proposed Sec. 651.10 Second, the Department proposes to require SWAs to provide outreach staff with training on sexual coercion, assault, and human trafficking, alongside the existing requirement to provide sexual harassment training. The current regulation gives SWAs the option of providing training on sexual coercion, assault, and human trafficking. The proposed regulation would require training in these areas due to an increased need to combat these issues in the field. These additional topics are of importance to the Department, and this proposal is driven by the increased frequency of complaints and apparent violations SWAs have ***processed*** and information from organizations the Department has partnered with regarding these issues. The focus remains for outreach staff to be able to identify and refer cases to the appropriate enforcement agencies. Third, the Department proposes to replace the requirement for outreach staff to be trained in the procedure for informal resolution of complaints with a requirement for them to be trained in the Complaint System procedures (at part 658, subpart E) and be aware of the local, State, regional, and national enforcement agencies that would be appropriate to receive referrals. This change is necessary so that outreach staff are trained in the full Complaint System procedures, which include informal resolution. The Department proposes to revise Sec. 653.107(b)(8) by changing the record retention requirement from 2 years to 3 years to align with the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal awards to non-Federal Entities (Uniform Guidance) record retention requirements at 2 CFR 200.334 The Uniform Guidance applies to all grants funded by ETA. It is important to ensure record retention requirements are consistent across all ETA grantee activities, including for the Monitor Advocate System which is funded by the Wagner-Peyser Act grant. The Department proposes to make a technical edit to Sec. 653.107(b)(11) by replacing the reference to significant MSFW ``local offices'' with ``significant MSFW one-stop centers'' to align with the defined term in Sec. 651.10 The Department also proposes to add a requirement that the outreach activities must align with and be supported by information provided in the State's AOP pursuant to Sec. 653.107(d). The Department proposes to replace the requirement in Sec. 653.107(d)(2)(ii) for SWAs in the AOP to provide an assessment of available outreach resources with a requirement that SWAs explain the materials, tools, and resources the State will use for outreach. The proposed revision clarifies the requirement to assist SWAs to better understand what information must be reported and that SWAs should provide more detailed and better explanations of how the SWA intends to use those resources. The Department proposes to amend Sec. 653.107(d)(2)(iii) to require SWAs to describe their activities to contact MSFWs who are not being reached by the normal intake activities conducted by the one-stop centers. The proposed regulation also would require the SWA to include the number of full-time and part-time outreach staff in the State and to demonstrate that there is sufficient outreach staff to contact a majority of MSFWs in all the State's service areas annually. The Department is proposing these changes to strengthen the description in the AOP of how the SWA will contact MSFWs adequately, consistent with the proposed revision to Sec. 653.107(a)(4) for States to employ sufficient outreach staff to contact a majority of MSFWs in all the State's service areas annually. It is also helpful for RMAs to understand staffing levels to assess whether the State can meet the SWAs outreach requirements. The Department proposes to clarify that Sec. 653.107(d)(2)(iv) requires the AOP to describe activities planned for providing the full range of ES services to the ***agricultural*** community, instead of ``employment and training services.'' This change is necessary to explain which specific services the AOP must describe, which is specific to ES services and do not include all workforce development system activities. The Department proposes to replace the requirement at Sec. 653.107(d)(2)(v) that the AOP must provide an assurance that the SWA is complying with the requirements under Sec. 653.111 if the State has significant MSFW one-stop centers with a requirement that the AOP must include a description of how the SWA intends to provide ES staff in significant MSFW one-stop centers in accordance with Sec. 653.111 This proposed change is intended to help the SMAs, RMAs, and the NMA assess whether SWAs will have the appropriate staffing structure to meet the unique needs of farmworkers. The Department proposes to amend Sec. 653.107(d)(4) to clarify that the AOP must be submitted in accordance with Sec. 653.107(d)(1) instead of (d), as currently written. Paragraph (d)(1) is the accurate reference that explains the SWA's responsibility to develop the AOP as a part of the Unified or Combined State Plan. The Department proposes two revisions at Sec. 653.107(d)(5). First, the Department proposes a technical edit to change the reference from Sec. 653.108(s) to Sec. 653.108(u) due to restructuring paragraphs at Sec. 653.108 Second, the Department proposes to replace ``its goals'' with ``the objectives.'' Referring to ``the objectives'' is more accurate because the Department does not ask SWAs to provide specific goals in the AOP, rather SWAs identify various objectives.[[Page 23712]]Section 653.108 State Workforce Agency and State Monitor Advocate Responsibilities Section 653.108 governs what a SWA and SMA must do to monitor a State's provision of ES services to MSFWs. As explained subsequently, the Department proposes several revisions to this section to strengthen the role of the SMA and to enhance the monitoring activities that SMAs perform. The Department proposes to revise Sec. 653.108(a) to explicitly prohibit the State Administrator or ES staff from retaliating against an SMA for performing the monitoring activities that are required by this section. Specifically, the Department proposes to add at the end of Sec. 653.108(a) a requirement that the State Administrator and ES staff must not retaliate against staff, including the SMA, for self-monitoring or raising any issues or concerns regarding non-compliance with the ES regulations. The addition of this sentence will emphasize the Department's intolerance for retaliation against SMAs for conducting their duties and encourage and protect internal disclosures and discussions about noncompliance. The Department proposes to revise Sec. 653.108(b), which prescribes criteria that States must consider when appointing an SMA, to require that SWAs not only seek but also put a strong emphasis on hiring qualified candidates for the SMA position who meet one or more of the criteria listed in paragraphs (b)(1) through (3). While the current regulations already require SWAs to ``seek'' qualified candidates who meet these criteria, the Department proposes to require that SWAs ``put a strong emphasis on hiring'' such candidates to increase the likelihood that SWAs hire SMAs who meet one or more of these criteria, and not simply seek such individuals. In the Department's view, it is important for SMAs to meet one or more of these existing criteria, so that SMAs understand and have appropriate skills to assess whether the SWA is providing adequate services to MSFWs. The Department also proposes to remove the requirement in Sec. 653.108(b) that the SMA be a SWA official because the proposed edits to Sec. 651.10 remove SWA official as a defined term. The Department proposes to revise Sec. 653.108(c) to require that the SMA be an ES staff employee. As explained previously in this document, the Department is proposing to reinstate the longstanding State merit-staffing requirement that was in effect prior to the 2020 Final Rule. One of the ways in which the Department proposes to effectuate this proposal is to remove the definition of SWA official in Sec. 651.10 and to revise the definition of ES staff in Sec. 651.10 to mean State government personnel who are employed according to the merit-system principles described in 5 CFR part 900, subpart F (Standards for a Merit System of Personnel Administration) and who are funded, in whole or in part, by Wagner-Peyser Act funds. As relevant here, the Department proposes to remove the requirement in Sec. 653.108(b) for the SMA to be a SWA Official and to revise Sec. 653.108(c) to require that the SMA be a senior level ES staff employee. While the specifics of this proposal are discussed in detail subsequently, the Department notes here that the term ES staff is intended to clarify that the proposed regulation would require the SMA to be not only a State employee, but a State merit-staff employee. This proposal, if finalized, will lead to more consistent delivery of services to ES customers. As a universal access system, it is vital that the ES be administered consistently across all States and that services are delivered effectively and equitably. Returning to the requirement that ES services be provided by State merit staff would help ensure that ES services are delivered by knowledgeable personnel in a manner consistent from State to State and allow for accountability that other staffing models cannot duplicate. The Department additionally proposes several revisions to Sec. 653.108(c) to strengthen the status of the SMA, as many SMAs have reported difficulty in their ability to fully carry out their duties due to insufficient status within the SWA. With these proposed changes, the Department seeks to align the status of the SMA with that of the Equal Opportunity (E.O ) Officer because the SMA's role is similar to the E.O Officer's role. Both are charged with ensuring compliance with regulations put in place to ensure individuals have meaningful access to services and equal employment opportunities. In 2016, the DOL Civil Rights Center (CRC) expanded on previous requirements specifying the authority and status that E.O Officers must have to ensure they can most efficiently and effectively carry out the recipients' nondiscrimination obligations. See generally, 29 CFR 38.28 through 38.33 \11\ According to CRC's NPRM,\12\ the changes were intended to address feedback from E.O Officers that they lacked sufficient authority to carry out their responsibilities. Similarly, in returning to merit-staffing in this rulemaking, the Department proposes to more specifically describe the required status of the SMA. Prior to the 2020 Final Rule, Sec. 653.108(c) required the SMA to have direct, personal access, when necessary, to the State Administrator, and status and compensation comparable to other State positions assigned similar levels of tasks, complexity, and responsibility. By requiring the SMA to be a senior-level ES staff employee who reports directly to the State Administrator or their designee, this proposed rule would provide concrete ways to ensure that the SMA has status equivalent to what Sec. 653.108(c) required prior to the 2020 Final Rule. This specification will also address feedback from many SMAs, who have reported that they lack sufficient authority to carry out their duties identified in the ES regulations. This change would allow SMAs to more efficiently and effectively carry out the SMA's obligation to monitor whether the SWA is serving farmworkers in a way that is qualitatively equivalent and quantitatively proportionate to all other job seekers.--------------------------------------------------------------------------- \11\ Implementation of the Nondiscrimination and Equal Opportunity Provisions of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act; Final Rule, 81 FR 87130, 87176-87179 (Dec. 2, 2016). \12\ Implementation of the Nondiscrimination and Equal Opportunity Provisions of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act; Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, 81 FR 4494, 4516-4517 (Jan. 26, 2016).--------------------------------------------------------------------------- To achieve these results, the Department proposes to strengthen the status of the SMA in several ways. First, the Department proposes at Sec. 653.108(c) to create new paragraphs (c)(1) through (3). In paragraph (c)(1), the Department proposes to require that the SMA be a senior-level ES staff employee. As previously explained, enhancing the status of the SMA by making the SMA a senior-level official will allow the SMA to have the authority necessary to more effectively carry out their duties. Second, proposed paragraph (c)(2) requires the SMA to report directly to the State Administrator or their designee such as a director or other appropriately titled official in the State Administrator's office, who has the authority to act on behalf of the State Administrator. While current regulations require the SMA to have direct access to the State Administrator, in practice this requirement has been insufficient for the SMA to have the authority necessary to carry out their duties and to communicate with the State Administrator, when the SMA finds it necessary. Reporting directly to the State Administrator will provide more direct access to and interaction with State leadership for the SMAs to[[Page 23713]]carry out their duties. The Department proposes to make clear that if the State Administrator chooses to have the SMA report to a designee with the authority of the State Administrator, that person cannot be the individual who has direct program oversight of the ES. Though the State Administrator has overall responsibility for operation and compliance of the ES, the State Administrator is removed from the daily management of program operations. The proposed change would help the SMA avoid challenges that may exist if they were to report to an individual who has direct ES program oversight, for example the ES director, because in that case the SMA would be responsible to monitor compliance with decisions their direct supervisor made or was otherwise directly responsible for. Third, proposed paragraph (c)(3) would require that the SMA have the knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary to fulfill the responsibilities as described in this subpart. This proposed revision is intended to clarify the qualifications that SMAs must have to effectively perform all required SMA functions. The Department does not anticipate that these revisions to Sec. 653.108(c) will cause undue burden on the SWA. The State Administrator may restructure the current SMA position to meet the requirements of part 653. Moreover, the requirement that State Administrators appoint an SMA is longstanding, and several States already staff their SMA position as described in the proposed revisions (i.e , where the SMA is a senior-level ES staff member who reports directly to the State Administrator or their designee). The proposed revisions will ensure all SWAs meet these same standards. The Department recognizes it may take States with SMA positions that do not already meet these standards some time to implement the standards. Accordingly, the Department seeks comments on whether it should provide a transition period to allow States additional time to come into compliance with the revised standards, and if so, the appropriate duration of such a period. The Department additionally proposes to enhance the authority of the SMA through several revisions to Sec. 653.108(d) and the addition of paragraph (e). Specifically, the Department proposes to revise Sec. 653.108(d) to require that the SMA have sufficient authority, staff, resources, and access to top management to monitor compliance with the ES regulations. While requiring that the SMA have sufficient staff necessary to fulfill effectively all the duties set forth in the subpart is not a new requirement, the Department seeks to clarify that the SMA must also have sufficient authority, resources, and access to top management to carry out their duties. The Department also proposes to specify that the number of ES staff positions required by this section must be assigned to the SMA The Department proposes to clarify that these positions specifically relate to ES staff assigned to the SMA to help the SMA carry out the duties set forth in Sec. 653.108, and that they may not be assigned conflicting roles to perform any of outreach responsibilities, ARS ***processing***, or complaint ***processing***. The Department proposes a new paragraph (e) to specify that no State may dedicate less than full-time staffing for the SMA position unless the RA, with input from the RMA, provides written approval. The proposed paragraph would maintain the requirement currently in paragraph (d) for any State proposing less than full-time staffing to demonstrate that all SMA functions can be effectively performed with part-time staffing, but would require the State to make this demonstration to the RMA in addition to the RA. This proposed revision clarifies that the RA must approve the exception to the requirement for a full-time SMA and that the SWA must demonstrate that part-time staffing will not affect the needs of and service delivery to MSFWs in the State and that the SMA will be able to effectively fulfill their duties while working on a part-time basis. The Department anticipates that a SWA would provide both qualitative and quantitative data and information in making its request, and it plans to provide States guidance on the factors that the RA and RMA will consider when States request part-time staffing for the SMA position. The Department proposes to revise Sec. 653.108(e) (now proposed Sec. 653.108(f)) by removing the requirement for the SMA to attend, within the first 3 months of their tenure, a training session conducted by the RMA. Instead, the Department proposes to require all SMAs and their staff to attend training session(s) offered by the RMAs, the NMA, and their team, and those necessary to maintain competency and enhance SMA's understanding of the unique needs of farmworkers. The Department proposes that such trainings must include those identified by the applicable RMA and may include those offered by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), WHD, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), the Immigrant and Employee Rights Section of the Department of Justice's Civil Rights Division, CRC, and other organizations offering farmworker-related information. These revisions are proposed to clarify the SMA's responsibility to attend necessary training and keep apprised of issues affecting MSFWs to effectively carry out their duties as the SMA. Historically, there have been numerous cases where SMAs did not or could not attend trainings offered by the RMAs or NMA. This provision seeks to clarify the SMA's responsibility to attend the trainings and increase SMA training opportunities and attendance. The Department proposes to redesignate Sec. 653.108(f) and (g) due to updated sequencing. The Department proposes to revise Sec. 653.108(g)(1) (now proposed to be Sec. 653.108(h)(1)) to specify important elements of the ongoing review that the SMA must conduct under this paragraph. In particular, new proposed subordinate paragraphs (h)(1)(i) through (iii) would require the SMA to conduct an ongoing review of the delivery of services and protections afforded by the ES regulations to MSFWs by the SWA and ES offices, including: (i) Monitoring compliance with Sec. 653.111; (ii) monitoring the ES services that the SWA and one-stop center provide to MSFWs to assess whether they are qualitatively equivalent and quantitatively proportionate to the services the SWA and one-stop centers provide to non-MSFWs; and (iii) reviewing the appropriateness of informal resolution of complaints and apparent violations as documented in the complaint logs. The requirements in proposed paragraphs (h)(1)(i) and (iii) currently exist at Sec. 653.108(g)(1) and the minor proposed revisions to these requirements are intended only to clarify the existing requirements. Specifically, in paragraph (h)(1)(i), the Department proposes to add a requirement that ongoing reviews include monitoring compliance with Sec. 653.111 to highlight the importance of significant MSFW one-stop centers in staffing appropriately to meet the unique needs of farmworkers. The Department proposes to add Sec. 653.108(h)(1)(ii) to clarify that SMAs are required to monitor whether the ES services provided to MSFWs are qualitatively equivalent and quantitatively proportionate to the services provided to non-MSFWs. Finally, the Department proposes to clarify in paragraph (h)(1)(iii) that SMAs must review informal resolution of complaints and apparent violations to ensure that resolution of matters is occurring consistent with the requirements in part 658, subpart E.[[Page 23714]] The Department proposes to redesignate Sec. 653.108(g)(1) as Sec. 653.108(h)(2) and revise the regulatory text by replacing ``local offices'' with ``ES offices'' to align with the defined term for ES office in Sec. 651.10 The Department further proposes to revise the paragraph by clarifying that the SMA, if warranted, can notify the SWA of the corrective action(s) necessary to address the deficiencies described earlier in the paragraph, and that the corrective action plan must comply with the requirements at proposed paragraph (h)(3)(v). This revision is intended to clarify that the corrective action plan is the method by which a SWA or ES office achieves compliance with the SMA's compliance findings. The existing regulatory text provides that the SMA may request a corrective action plan, which does not appear to require the SWA or ES office to take corrective action. The proposed revision clarifies that SMAs assure compliance by documenting noncompliance, describing the corrective actions necessary for the SWA to come into compliance, reviewing the corrective action plan that the SWA or ES office develops to implement the identified corrective action(s), documenting compliance or lack of compliance with the corrective action plan, and reporting to ETA any noncompliance. Once noncompliance is identified, SWAs have a responsibility to address it, as described in part 653, subpart D. The Department proposes to redesignate Sec. 653.108(g)(2) to be Sec. 653.108(h)(3) and to clarify that SMAs must conduct onsite reviews of one-stop centers regardless of whether or not the one-stop center is designated as a significant MSFW one-stop center. This is an important clarification because SMAs often mistakenly think they only need to review significant MSFW one-stop centers. The Department also proposes a clarifying edit to this paragraph by adding that the reviews must follow procedures set forth in paragraphs (h)(3)(i) through (vii) of this section. This is proposed to help the structure of paragraph (h)(3) and its subordinate paragraphs. Correspondingly, current paragraph (g)(2)(ii), which is proposed to be new paragraph (h)(3)(ii), contains proposed clarifying edits, which state ``The SMA must ensure. . .'' instead of the existing ``Ensure. . . .'' Finally, the Department proposes to specify that the complaint logs that the SMA must review pursuant to Sec. 653.108(g)(2)(i)(D) (proposed Sec. 653.108(h)(3)(i)(D)) are the complaint logs required by the regulations under part 658 of this chapter. At Sec. 653.108(g)(2)(iv), which is proposed Sec. 653.108(h)(3)(iv), the Department proposes a few revisions. First, the Department proposes to add a comma after ``After each review,'' for technical clarity and readability. Next, the Department proposes to specify that the SMA's conclusions include findings and areas of concern by adding ``including findings and areas of concern,'' after ``The conclusions.'' The Department proposes this revision to make the SMA's monitoring align with the ETA monitoring format, which Sec. 653.108(g)(3)(ii) requires the SMA use as a guideline. The Department also proposes to add a requirement that the SMA's report be sent directly to the State Administrator. The Department also proposes to revise current Sec. 653.108(g)(2)(v) (proposed 653.108(h)(3)(v)) in several ways. First, the Department proposes to add that the SMA's report must include the corrective action(s) required. Second, the Department proposes to specify that, to resolve the findings, the ES Office Manager or other appropriate ES staff must develop and propose a written corrective action plan. These changes conform the SMA's monitoring ***process*** with the ETA monitoring format, which requires the monitor to identify the corrective actions required. The Department proposes to add ``the'' before ``actions,'' as a technical edit. The Department also proposes to revise the third sentence to clarify that the corrective action plan should be designed to bring the ES office into compliance within 30 days, and to specify that where a plan is not designed to bring the ES office into compliance within 30 days, the length of and reasons for the expended period must be specifically stated and the plan must specify the major interim steps that the ES office will take to correct the compliance steps identified by the SMA. In other words, only if there is a documented justification for compliance to take longer than 30 days can such efforts be ``steps'' rather than full compliance. This revision is designed to help ensure SWAs resolve identified compliance issues. At current Sec. 653.108(g)(2)(vii), which is proposed to be paragraph (h)(3)(vii), the Department proposes to allow the SMA to delegate reviews to their staff instead of ``a SWA official'' because SMA staff may conduct such reviews under the authority of the SMA. This change will clarify that other persons who conduct reviews on behalf of the SMA must be the SMA's staff, who should share the same objectives of the SMA, helping ensure that the role of the monitor advocate is effectively carried out. The Department also proposes that the SMA may delegate the reviews whenever the SMA finds such delegation necessary, as opposed to when the State Administrator finds such delegation necessary. This proposed change aligns with the proposal for the SMA to be a senior-level official with greater authority within the SWA. The SMA, therefore, should be empowered to make the determination about whether such delegation is necessary. The Department also proposes to remove the words ``and when'' from the phrase ``if and when'' in this paragraph. As such, the proposed paragraph now states that the SMA may delegate the review described in Sec. 653.108(h)(1) to the SMA's staff, if the SMA finds such delegation necessary, and in such event, the SMA is responsible for and must approve the written report of the review. The Department proposes to revise Sec. 653.108(g)(3) (proposed paragraph (h)(4)) to ensure all significant MSFW one-stop centers not reviewed onsite by Federal staff are reviewed at least once per year by the SMA or their staff, instead of ``a SWA official.'' This change is proposed because it is important for these reviews to be conducted by staff who share the SMA's objectives. As previously noted, the SMA's staff are responsible to assist the SMA in carrying out the SMA's duties described at Sec. 653.108 Paragraph (g)(5), proposed Sec. 653.108(h)(6), currently requires SMAs to review outreach workers' daily logs and other reports including those showing or reflecting the workers' activities ``on a random basis.'' The Department proposes to replace ``random'' with ``regular.'' SMAs were confused, at times, about what ``random'' means and, therefore, how frequently they should be reviewing outreach staff's logs. Replacing ``random'' with ``regular'' is intended to help clarify the SMA's responsibility that these reviews occur on a regular basis. The frequency of these reviews may vary based on how many outreach staff each SWA has; however, there should be some standard of frequency in each SWA to ensure regular review occurs. For example, in SWAs with one or two outreach staff, it may be possible for the SMA to review outreach logs every month, but in SWAs with many outreach staff, it may be more appropriate to review outreach logs quarterly. The Department also proposes to replace ``outreach workers'' with ``outreach staff'' throughout this paragraph to use the defined term at Sec. 651.10 The Department proposes to revise Sec. 653.108(g)(6), proposed paragraph[[Page 23715]](h)(7), which currently requires the SMA to write and submit Annual Summaries to the State Administrator with a copy to the RA by adding that a copy of the summary must also be sent to the NMA. This aligns the requirement with paragraph (s) (proposed paragraph (u)) whereby the Annual Summary must also be sent to the NMA. The Department also proposes to remove the last part of the sentence, ``as described in paragraph (s) of this section,'' as it is no longer necessary with the addition of the NMA to this provision. At Sec. 653.108(h), proposed paragraph (i), the Department proposes to add ``as requested by the Regional or National Monitor Advocate,'' after ``The SMA must participate in Federal reviews conducted pursuant to part 658, subpart G, of this chapter.'' This is proposed to be added to ensure the SMA participates in a way that is helpful and productive for the RMA or NMA. In the past, there have been cases where the SMA either was not permitted or chose not to participate in reviews with the Federal staff. This proposed addition helps ensure the SMA will participate when requested. The Department proposes to redesignate Sec. 653.108(i) as Sec. 653.108(j). The Department proposes to remove the provision permitting the State Administrator to assign the SMA the responsibility as the Complaint System Representative, and the requirement that the SMA participate in the Complaint System set forth in part 658, subpart E. As explained later in the section of the preamble addressing part 658, subpart E, the Department is proposing to prohibit SWAs from assigning SMAs responsibility for ***processing*** complaints. The Department is proposing to remove SMAs from Complaint System ***processing*** because this section tasks SMAs with monitoring the Complaint System, and the Department anticipates that SMAs will be more objective in monitoring the Complaint System if they are not tasked with monitoring work that they themselves perform. This change would result in greater safeguards for MSFWs within the Complaint System. The Department proposes to make corresponding edits to part 658, subpart E. The Department proposes to redesignate Sec. 653.108(j) and (k), as a technical edit. The Department proposes a new provision at proposed Sec. 653.108(m). This provision is proposed to state how the SMA must establish an ongoing liaison with the State-level E.O Officer. The Department proposes this addition to enhance equity and inclusion for farmworkers. When SMAs work closely with the State-level E.O Officer, the SMA will have a better sense of steps the State is taking to meet its equity requirements pursuant to WIOA sec. 188, and how the SMA can better ensure services are provided equitably for MSFWs. The SMA can also provide information to the State-level E.O Officer on patterns in service provision. The Department proposes to redesignate Sec. 653.108(l) as Sec. 653.108(n), and to make a conforming revision to the cross reference in this paragraph so that the organizations with which the SMA must meet are updated to reflect the organizations described in proposed paragraph (l) and the State-level E.O Officer referred to in proposed paragraph (m). This will mean that Sec. 653.108(n) would refer to the paragraphs requiring the SMA to establish an ongoing liaison with NFJP grantees, other organizations serving farmworkers, employers, and employer organizations in the State, and the State-level E.O Officer. The Department also proposes to add a requirement that SMAs must communicate freely with these individuals and organizations to enable the SMA to communicate efficiently, so that important information is not delayed due to the SMA needing to get approval to speak with these individuals and groups. This proposed change also conforms with the proposed revisions to the SMA's position as a senior-level staff member, who should have the discretion to communicate, as they find appropriate. In addition, the Department proposes to remove the requirement that the SMA receive complaints and assist in referrals of alleged violations to enforcement agencies to conform with the proposal to remove the SMA from Complaint System ***processing***, as explained previously. The Department proposes to redesignate Sec. 653.108(m) as 653.108(o), as a technical edit. The Department also proposes to revise this paragraph to clarify that when the SMA conducts field visits, they must discuss the SWA's provision of ES services and obtain input on the adequacy of those services from MSFWs, crew leaders, and employers, rather than explaining and providing direct employment services and access to other employment-related programs. The purpose of the SMA's field visits is distinct from the direct ES services that outreach staff provide to MSFWs in the field, because the SMA is tasked with assessing how the ES is functioning and whether the SWA can make improvements, as opposed to the direct provision of ES services. This proposed revision helps clarify that SMA field visits are for a different purpose than outreach staff field visits. The Department proposes to redesignate Sec. 653.108(n) through (p) as Sec. 653.108(o) through (q), as a technical edit. The Department proposes to redesignate Sec. 653.108(q) as Sec. 653.108(s), as a technical edit. The Department also proposes a technical edit to remove the reference to SWA staff and keep only ``ES staff'' to align with the proposed definition for ES staff at Sec. 651.10 Because SWA staff are included in the proposed definition of ES staff, this will not change the substance of the paragraph. The Department further proposes to simplify the wording of the paragraph by replacing the phrase ``Subsequent to'' with the word ``After.'' The Department proposes to redesignate Sec. 653.108(r) and (s) as Sec. 653.108(t) and (u), respectively, as a technical edit. The Department proposes to redesignate Sec. 653.108(s) as Sec. 653.108(u). Proposed paragraph (u) requires the SMA to prepare an Annual Summary describing how the State provided ES services to MSFWs within the State based on statistical data, reviews, and other activities. It includes subordinate paragraphs (1) through (11), which identify the various required components of the Annual Summary. The Department proposes to revise Sec. 653.108(s)(2), proposed Sec. 653.108(u)(2), to conform with proposed edits at Sec. 653.108(c). Specifically, Sec. 653.108(s)(2) currently requires an assurance that the SMA has direct, personal access, whenever they find it necessary, to the State Administrator. Proposed paragraph (u)(2) would require an assurance that the SMA is a senior-level official who reports directly to the State Administrator or the State Administrator's designee as described at Sec. 653.108(c). The Department proposes to amend Sec. 653.108(s)(3)(i) and (ii), proposed 20 CFR 653.108(u)(3)(i) and (ii), to revise the assurance requested in the SMA's Annual Summary regarding SMA staffing levels. Currently, the Annual Summary requires an assurance that the SMA devotes all of their time to Monitor Advocate functions, or, if the SMA conducts their functions on a part-time basis, an explanation of how the SMA functions are effectively performed with part-time staffing. This paragraph is proposed to be revised in several ways. First, proposed paragraph (u)(3) would begin with a requirement to provide an evaluation of SMA staffing levels, and it would be followed by Sec. 653.108(u)(3)(i) and (ii), which would outline the[[Page 23716]]contents of this evaluation. Specifically, paragraph (u)(3)(i) would require the SMA to assure that they devote all their time to Monitor Advocate functions, or if the SMA has approval under Sec. 653.108(e) to conduct their functions on a part-time basis, an assessment of whether they can perform all their functions effectively on a part-time basis. Paragraph (u)(3)(ii) would additionally require the SMA to assess whether the performance of SMA functions requires increased time by the SMA (if part time) or an increase in the number of ES staff assigned to assist the SMA in the performance of SMA functions, or both. This information will help the RMA and NMA better understand whether the SMA's status as full- or part-time is sufficient for them to carry out their duties, and whether the SMA requires additional staff to perform all the functions required by this section. The previous requirement for an assurance did not provide the depth, context, or explanation necessary for the State Administrator or the Department to assess whether the SMA has adequate staffing. The Department proposes to revise Sec. 653.108(s)(4) (iii), proposed Sec. 653.108(u)(4)(iii), to clarify that the summary of any technical assistance the SMA provided must include any technical assistance provided to outreach staff, in addition to technical assistance provided to the SWA and ES offices. While outreach staff are considered part of the SWA, the Department proposes to clarify that the summary must specifically identify the technical assistance that the SMA provided to outreach staff, so that the State Administrator and the Department may better assess whether outreach staff are obtaining the knowledge and resources necessary to fulfill their duties. The Department proposes to revise Sec. 653.108(s)(5), proposed Sec. 653.108(u)(5), to specify that when the SMA summarizes the outreach efforts undertaken by all significant and non-significant MSFW ES offices in the State, the SMA must include the results of those efforts and analyze whether the outreach levels and results were adequate. Through this analysis, the Department would like to understand whether the SMA believes the SWA has allocated sufficient outreach staff and resources to complete the outreach duties identified at Sec. 653.107, including whether outreach staff are able to reach the majority of MSFWs in the State. The Department proposes to revise Sec. 653.108(s)(7), proposed Sec. 653.108(u)(7), by adding that in addition to providing a summary of how the SMA is working with WIOA sec. 167 NFJP grantees, the SMA must provide a summary of how they are working with the State-level E.O Officer. This revision aligns with the proposed requirement at proposed Sec. 653.108(m) for the SMA to establish an ongoing liaison with the State-level E.O Officer. The inclusion of this information in the Annual Summary will allow State Administrators, RMAs, and the NMA to review what the SMA is doing to fulfill the new liaison requirement (e.g , how frequently are they meeting with the State-level E.O Officer, the type of information that is shared, any best practices or lessons learned). The Department proposes to revise Sec. 653.108(s)(10), proposed Sec. 653.108(u)(10), which currently requires the SMA to provide a summary of activities related to the AOP and an explanation of how those activities helped the State reach the goals and objectives described in the AOP. At the end of the 4-year AOP cycle, the summary must include a synopsis of the SWA's achievements over the previous 4 years to accomplish the goals set forth in the AOP, and a description of the goals which were not achieved and the steps the SWA will take to address those deficiencies. The Department proposes to replace the requirement to explain ``how'' the activities helped the State reach the goals and objectives described in the AOP with a requirement to explain ``whether'' the activities helped the State reach the objectives described in the AOP. This revision better reflects the information that the Department seeks (i.e , whether these activities helped the State meet its objectives). The Department also proposes to remove ``goals'' from the first sentence and to replace ``goals'' with ``objectives'' in the second sentence, because the Department does not ask States to identify specific goals in the AOP. Rather, the SWA provides objectives in its AOP, and the SMA's Annual Summary should explain whether the activities that the SWA performed that year are meeting the identified objectives. The Department proposes two clarifying edits to Sec. 653.108(s)(11), proposed Sec. 653.108(u)(11). First, the Department proposes to replace significant MSFW ``ES offices'' with significant MSFW ``one-stop centers'' to align with the defined term at Sec. 651.10 Second, the Department proposes to revise the requirement for the SMA to summarize the State's efforts to provide ES staff in accordance with Sec. 653.111, to require the SMA to summarize the State's efforts to comply with Sec. 653.111 The Department anticipates that this change will put greater emphasis on compliance with the requirements of Sec. 653.111 Section 653.109 Data Collection and Performance Accountability ***Measures*** Section 653.109 specifies data collection and performance accountability ***measures*** specific to MSFWs. The Department proposes to make several revisions to this section. First, the Department proposes to add a new data collection requirement in paragraph (b) of this section. Specifically, the Department proposes to add Sec. 653.109(b)(10), which would require SWAs to collect the number of reportable individuals and participants who are MSFWs. The Department anticipates that access to this information will help the SWAs and the Department to better understand how many MSFWs are engaging with the ES, either as reportable individuals or participants, and to identify potential issues surrounding MSFW access to ES services. Specifically, Monitor Advocates will be able to compare the number of MSFW reportable individuals and the number of MSFW participants and use this data to identify potential areas where MSFWs are not being offered participant-level services. The collection of this data is consistent with the Monitor Advocate System's purpose to monitor whether MSFWs have meaningful access to services in a way that is appropriate to their particular needs. SWAs commonly report few or no MSFW ES participants, which creates the concern that MSFWs do not have access to ES services. This piece of information will enable Monitor Advocates to identify cases where there may be larger numbers of MSFW reportable individuals, but few or no MSFW participants. Without this information, Monitor Advocates and the Department lack data necessary to identify whether that problem exists, and cannot work to correct the problem, if it is present. Second, the Department proposes to redesignate Sec. 653.109(b)(10) as Sec. 653.109(b)(11), as a technical edit to account for the insertion of proposed Sec. 653.109(b)(10). Third, the Department proposes several revisions to Sec. 653.109(h), which sets forth the minimum levels of service that significant MSFW States must meet. First, the Department proposes to replace the requirement that a significant MSFW State ***measure*** the number of outreach contacts per ``week'' with the number of outreach contacts per ``quarter'' to align with the SWA's quarterly data submissions to the Department. SMAs have provided[[Page 23717]]feedback to the Department that ***measuring*** contacts per week is difficult and not an effective measurement of outreach, and they believe it would be a better ***measure*** to report contacts per quarter. Second, the Department proposes to clarify that it will not update minimum service level indicators on an annual basis, by removing ``for each year'' from the last sentence in Sec. 653.109(h). The Department's practice has been that minimum service level indicators have not been updated each year because the Department has not identified such a need. This revision would align the regulation with what is happening in practice.Section 653.110 Disclosure of Data The Department proposes to revise Sec. 653.110(b) by removing the word ``the'' before ``ETA,'' as a technical edit.Section 653.111 State Workforce Agency Staffing Requirements for Significant MSFW One-Stop Centers The Department proposes several revisions to Sec. 653.111, which outlines SWA staffing requirements for significant MSFW one-stop centers. First, the Department proposes to revise the heading of this section to clarify that the staffing requirements in this section apply only to significant MSFW one-stop centers. Second, the Department proposes to revise paragraph (a)--which currently requires SWAs to implement and maintain a program for staffing significant MSFW one-stop centers by providing ES staff in a manner facilitating the delivery of employment services tailored to the special needs of MSFWs, including by seeking ES staff that meet the criteria in Sec. 653.107(a)(3)--and divide it into two sentences. The first sentence would provide that a SWA must staff significant MSFW one-stop centers in a manner that facilitates the delivery of ES services tailored to the unique needs of MSFWs, and the second sentence would clarify that such staffing includes recruiting qualified candidates who meet the criteria for outreach worker positions in Sec. 653.107(a)(3). The Department proposes this change to specify that SWAs must recruit qualified candidates who meet the criteria for outreach workers in Sec. 653.107(a)(3). SWAs have some discretion to create a plan to meet the standard, but the ultimate requirement is for SWAs to recruit qualified candidates who meet these criteria. Third, for purposes of consistency, the Department proposes a technical edit to replace ``special needs of MSFWs'' with ``unique needs of MSFWs,'' to conform to the terminology that the Department uses elsewhere in the ES regulations.2. Subpart F--***Agricultural*** Recruitment System for U.S Workers (ARS) Subpart F sets forth the regulations governing the ARS.Section 653.501 Requirements for ***Processing*** Clearance Orders Section 653.501 describes the requirements that ES staff must follow when ***processing*** clearance orders for the ARS. As explained subsequently, the Department proposes to make several substantive and technical revisions to this section. The Department proposes to make a minor clarifying edit to Sec. 653.501(a) by replacing the terms ``ES office'' or ``SWA official'' with ``ES staff'' to conform with the proposed revision to the definition of ES staff at Sec. 651.10 The Department proposes to add a fourth paragraph to Sec. 653.501(b), at Sec. 653.501(b)(4), which would require ES staff to consult the Department's Office of Foreign Labor Certification (OFLC) and Wage and Hour Division (WHD) debarment lists before placing a job order into intrastate or interstate clearance and initiate discontinuation of ES services if the employer is debarred or disqualified from participating in one or all of the Department's foreign labor certification programs. The Department's mission is to promote the welfare of workers. This addition is intended to further that mission by ensuring that ES offices do not place U.S workers with employers who are presently barred from employing immigrant and nonimmigrant workers via the employment-based visa programs. This requirement protects workers who may be using the ARS by ensuring that the ARS is not used to place a worker with an employer that has failed to comply with its obligation(s) as an employer of foreign workers. ETA's regulations at 20 CFR 655.73, 655.182, 655.473, 656.31(f), and the Wage and Hour Division's regulations at 29 CFR 503.24 describe the violations that may result in an employer's debarment from receiving future labor certifications for a specified time period. The potential reasons for debarment include serious violations that could affect worker safety, for example ``[a] single heinous act showing such flagrant disregard for the law'' that future compliance with program requirements cannot reasonably be expected (Sec. 655.182(d)(1)(x)). Such reasons also include an employer's substantial failure to comply with regulatory requirements, including an employer's failure to pay or provide the required wages or working conditions, an employer's failure to comply with its obligations to recruit U.S workers, or an employer's failure to cooperate with required audits or investigations. Additionally, an employer's failure to pay a necessary certification fee in a timely manner may result in debarment. In the Department's view, whether the reason an employer is debarred from an OFLC program (or programs) is directly related to worker safety, failure to provide required wages or working conditions, failure to comply with recruitment requirements or participate in required investigations or audits, or failure to pay required fees, the employer subject to debarment should be excluded from participation in the ARS. The Department does not want to facilitate placement of workers with employers whose actions have risen to a level that warrants debarment. The Department proposes minor edits to Sec. 653.501(c)(3) to clarify that paragraph (c) sets forth a list of the assurances that an employer must make before the SWA may place a job order into intrastate or interstate clearance. In addition, the Department proposes to make several technical and conforming edits in Sec. 653.501(d). First, the Department proposes to revise Sec. 653.501(d)(1) by clarifying that the provision refers to the ``order-holding ES office,'' instead of ``order-holding office,'' as it is currently written. This proposed change aligns with Sec. 651.10 by using the defined term, ES office. Second, the Department proposes to revise Sec. 653.501(d)(3) by referring to ``this paragraph'' instead of ``paragraph (d)(3) of this section'' for clarity. Third, the Department proposes to revise Sec. 653.501(d)(6) to remove the explicit instruction for ES staff to assist all farmworkers ``upon request in their native language.'' This revision is intended to align with the broader proposed revisions regarding language access in this NPRM. Because the Department proposes in this NPRM to clarify that SWAs must already comply with the language access and assistance requirements at 29 CFR 38.9, the language access requirement here is redundant, unnecessary, and potentially confusing, because it may appear to set a different standard. Fourth, the Department proposes to revise Sec. 653.501(d)(10) to remove the sentence requiring checklists under this paragraph to be in the workers' native language because, as previously mentioned, language access requirements are already provided at 29 CFR 38.9 and retaining this language[[Page 23718]]would be redundant and unnecessary. The Department also proposes to remove the requirement that SWAs must use a standard format provided by the Department (such as Form WH516 or a successor form) to provide workers referred to clearance orders a checklist summarizing wages, working conditions, and other material specifications in the clearance order. Removing this requirement would provide SWAs with greater flexibility to develop and use their own forms that meet their needs. Under the proposed revision, SWAs may still use standard forms, including the WH516, but they would not be required to use a standard form. Regardless, the checklist that the SWA provides workers must include the material terms and conditions of employment that are required to be included in clearance orders pursuant to Sec. 653.501(c)(1)(iv). Finally, the Department proposes to revise Sec. 653.501(d)(11) to replace the reference to the Department's ``ARS Handbook'' with a reference to ``Departmental guidance.'' As proposed, Sec. 653.501(d)(11) would require the applicant-holding office to give each referred worker a copy of the list of worker's rights described in Departmental guidance. This revision is intended to reflect the fact that this list of worker's rights may be available in different documents and formats in the future.Section 653.503 Field Checks The Department proposes to make two conforming and clarifying edits to the regulations governing field checks in Sec. 653.503 First, the Department proposes to revise Sec. 653.503(a) to add ``transportation'' to the list of conditions that SWAs must assess and document when performing a field check. This change would increase health and safety of MSFWs by adding an additional safeguard against dangerous transportation tied to their employment. Second, the Department also proposes to remove that the field checks are ``random.'' The proposed revision would clarify that the selection of the clearance orders on which the SWA will conduct field checks does not need to be random, and may respond to known or suspected compliance issues, thereby improving MSFW worker protection. In addition, if a SWA makes placements on 9 or fewer clearance orders, the SWA must conduct field checks on 100 percent of those clearance orders. See Sec. 653.503(b). Therefore, in those cases, field checks could not be conducted on a random basis.E. Part 658--Administrative Provisions Governing the Wagner-Peyser Act Employment Service This part sets forth the regulations governing the Complaint System for the Wagner-Peyser Act Employment Service (ES) at the State and Federal levels. Specifically, the Complaint System ***processes*** complaints against an employer about the specific job to which the applicant was referred through the ES, and complaints involving the failure to comply with ES regulations under 20 CFR parts 651, 652, 653, and 654. The Complaint System also accepts, refers, and, under certain circumstances, tracks complaints involving employment-related laws as defined in Sec. 651.10 While the Complaint system is available to MSFWs and non-MSFWs, the Complaint System includes additional shorter ***processing*** timelines and additional follow-up on MSFW-related complaints, which are designed to provide increased protection for MSFWs. The Department proposes to revise several regulations within this part to conform with proposed revisions to definitions listed at Sec. 651.10, remove redundancies and make other non-substantive technical edits, clarify or modify certain requirements, and improve equity and inclusion for MSFWs in the ES system. The Department also proposes to remove the requirement that the SMA serve as a Complaint System Representative and eliminate the requirement that SMAs must ***process*** MSFW complaints. The Department is proposing these revisions because Sec. 653.108 requires the SMA to monitor the Complaint System, and the proposed revisions would remove the challenge that exists when the SMA is required to monitor their own actions in ***processing*** MSFW complaints. The Department anticipates that an SMA will be more objective in monitoring the Complaint System if they are not tasked with monitoring their own actions. The proposed revisions would maintain the integrity of the Monitor Advocate System as it provides safeguards to MSFWs who participate in the Complaint System, and they would allow SMAs to focus their attention on monitoring the ES services that are provided to MSFWs in their State. The Department has observed through analysis of SWA quarterly Labor Exchange ***Agricultural*** Reporting System 5148 Reports, meetings with SMAs and RMAs, and other communications with SWAs, that SWAs misunderstand several of the requirements currently in part 658. These misunderstandings have caused inaccurate recordkeeping and reporting, which impede the ability of SMAs and the Department to monitor MSFW complaints to determine whether the Complaint System is ***processing*** MSFW complaints consistently with the governing regulations. The Department also has received information, through 5148 Reports and Monitor Advocate Annual Summaries, that Complaint System activity is low in many States. Through Wage and Hour Division (WHD) investigations, news reports, SMA Annual Summaries, conversations with farmworkers and farmworker advocacy organizations, and anecdotal information SMAs share with the Department, the Department concludes that violations of employment-related laws against MSFWs may be prevalent across the country--therefore, it is concerning that Complaint System activity is low. In Program Year 2019 (July 2019-June 2020), which is the most recent complete set of data available, at least eight States did not report any MSFW complaints. RMAs and the NMA have communicated concerns to the Department that one of the reasons complaint numbers may be low is because MSFWs are unaware of the Complaint System, or SWAs are not ***processing*** or recording complaints correctly. Through SWA 5148 Reports and RMA monitoring, the Department has identified several common requirements in the regulatory text that SWAs may misunderstand. These misunderstandings have a direct impact on the availability and correct ***processing*** of complaints. To address these issues, several of the proposed revisions are more prescriptive than the existing regulatory text and specifically clarify terms and other requirements.1. Subpart E--Employment Service and Employment-Related Law Complaint System (Complaint System)Section 658.410 Establishment of Local and State Complaint Systems The Department proposes to amend Sec. 658.410(c) to replace the word ``SWA'' with ``State'' so that it clearly points to the defined term ``State Administrator.'' This change will clarify which specific individual is responsible to ensure a central complaint log is maintained. The Department proposes to remove language in Sec. 658.410(c)(6) that the complaint log must include actions taken on apparent violations and, instead, add several specific references in Sec. 658.410(c)(1) through (6) that explain that each requirement also applies to apparent violations. These proposed changes are intended to clarify[[Page 23719]]that the complaint log must document all the same components for apparent violations, except for the complainant's name because there is no complainant for an apparent violation. The Department commonly identifies issues through RMA monitoring of SWAs where complaint logs do not document apparent violations. These proposed revisions would clarify the requirement to document apparent violations and specify the information that SWAs must include on the complaint log. The Department also proposes to amend Sec. 658.410(c)(6) to make all uses of the word ``action'' plural because there may be several actions taken to appropriately ***process*** a complaint or apparent violation. This change is necessary to clarify to SWAs that they must document all actions. The Department also proposes to describe the type of information SWAs must include in their complaint logs by noting that it includes any documents the SWA sent or received and the date the SWA took such action(s). This change will mean the SWA must specifically record documents the SWA sent or received, and the dates of those actions, on the complaint log. Through monitoring SWAs, the Department has observed that SWAs often do not keep records of all actions taken. Instead, SWAs often have minimal information listed on their complaint logs. The proposed changes are purposefully prescriptive because it is critical that the Department has records of all documents sent and received related to complaints and apparent violations. This allows the Department to have sufficient information to monitor SWA complaint and apparent violation ***processing***. These records are also critical when RAs receive appeals from SWA determinations and must review whether a SWA's actions are compliant. The Department proposes to amend Sec. 658.410(g) to remove the word ``local,'' which comes before ``ES office'' in the existing regulatory text. This proposed change is appropriate because ES office is a defined term at Sec. 651.10 and, therefore, the word ``local'' is not necessary. Removal of the word ``local'' will also clarify that the regulatory text is not referring to a different type of office. The Department proposes to remove the requirement in Sec. 658.410(h) that the SMA must be the Complaint System Representative designated to handle MSFW complaints and replace it with a provision prohibiting the State Administrator from assigning the SMA responsibility for ***processing*** MSFW complaints. The Department is proposing this change because SMAs are also tasked with monitoring the Complaint System, and the Department anticipates that SMAs will be more objective in monitoring the Complaint System if they are not tasked with monitoring work that they themselves perform. Removing this responsibility would also allow SMAs to focus their attention on monitoring the ES services provided to MSFWs in their State. For similar reasons, the Department proposes to revise Sec. 658.410(m) to replace ``SMA'' with ``Complaint System Representative.'' This proposal is consistent with other changes throughout part 658 that remove the SMA's direct involvement in the Complaint System, including the proposed removal of the SMA being designated to ***process*** MSFW complaints. The Department proposes to remove Sec. 658.410(n), which currently addresses correspondence to complainants who are English-language learners. The Department has determined that it is no longer necessary to include explicit requirements regarding language access in various sections of the ES regulations, because all one-stop centers and ES staff must comply with the language access and assistance requirements in 29 CFR 38.9 with regard to all LEP individuals, including those LEP individuals who file complaints under the Complaint System set forth in this subpart. This proposed revision is consistent with the Department's proposed addition in Sec. 653.103(b), which would require SWAs to comply with the language access and assistance requirements at 29 CFR 38.9 with regard to all LEP individuals, including MSFWs who are LEP individuals, as defined at 29 CFR 38.4(hh). The proposed revision would specify that this requirement includes ensuring ES staff in one-stop centers comply with these language access requirements. The regulations at 29 CFR 38.9 establish that language access requirements apply to services provided to all LEP individuals at all one-stop centers and are broader than the existing requirement at Sec. 658.410(n). For these reasons, the reference in Sec. 658.410(n) is no longer necessary. Like the reasons laid out previously in the preamble concerning proposed changes to Sec. 653.103(b), having a specific reference to LEP translations for complaint correspondence may inaccurately create the appearance that there are two sets of language access standards or that requirements for the Complaint System are narrower. Removing the reference clarifies that the full scope of 29 CFR 38.9 also applies to LEP individuals participating in the Complaint System. Due to the proposed removal of current regulatory text in Sec. 658.410(n), the Department proposes to redesignate the existing regulatory text at Sec. 658.410(o) as Sec. 658.410(n).Section 658.411 Action on Complaints The Department proposes to amend Sec. 658.411(a)(2)(ii) to remove the word ``and'' before ``telephone numbers'' in the listed methods to contact a complainant, and to add ``and any other helpful means by'' to broaden the scope of contact methods requested from complainants. In addition, the Department proposes to indicate that there may be multiple physical addresses and email addresses through which a complainant could be contacted. The Department has received information from SWAs and other grantee organizations, including NFJP grantees, that MSFWs often do not have or respond to traditional methods of communication, including mail, email, and telephone. Specifically, migrant farmworkers move from one location to another for work, so it is not always reliable or efficient to send communications through mail to their last known or permanent addresses. Additionally, SWAs and NFJP grantees indicate that MSFW youth often are more responsive to communication sent through social media and other applications. In the ***process*** of advising SWAs regarding complaints, the Department has encountered several cases where SWAs closed complaints because the complainant failed to respond to the SWA. It is possible that a portion of these failures to respond are due to lack of current contact information, instead of the complainant's desire to close the complaint. The Department's proposed revision addresses this issue by directing SWAs to request from complainants any other helpful means by which they might be contacted, which would broaden the potential methods by which SWAs may contact complainants and account for the fact that complainants may receive information through various platforms other than physical mail, email, or telephone, including technological applications. This would also increase the likelihood that SWAs will be able to communicate with complainants to ***process*** complaints to resolution. This change should improve MSFW access to the Complaint System and increase the SWA's ability to resolve complaints. Paragraph (b) of Sec. 658.411 covers complaints regarding an employment-related law. The Department proposes to amend Sec. 658.411(b)(1) to replace ``a'' with ``an'' before ``ES office'' as a[[Page 23720]]technical grammar edit. The Department also proposes to clarify the appropriate steps for ***processing*** employment-related law complaints involving alleged violations of nondiscrimination laws or reprisal for protected activity by revising Sec. 658.411(b)(1), to add a reference to Sec. 658.411(c). This revision would clarify that the procedures in Sec. 658.411(c) apply to any employment-related law complaint alleging unlawful discrimination or reprisal for protected activity in violation of nondiscrimination laws, such as those enforced by the EEOC or the DOL's CRC, or in violation of the Immigration and Nationality Act's anti-discrimination provision found at 8 U.S.C 1324b. The Department proposes three changes to Sec. 658.411(b)(1)(ii)(B). First, the Department proposes to remove both references to the SMA making determinations and taking actions on employment-related law complaints and replace the first with a reference to the ``Complaint System Representative.'' This proposal is consistent with other changes throughout part 658 that remove the SMA's direct involvement in the Complaint System, including the proposed removal of the SMA being designated to ***process*** MSFW complaints. As explained earlier, the Department is proposing to remove the SMA from Complaint System ***processing*** because the SMA duties outlined at Sec. 653.108 include monitoring the Complaint System, and the Department anticipates that SMAs will be more objective in performing this monitoring if they are not tasked with monitoring their own actions for compliance. Second, the Department proposes to replace the word ``employment'' with ``ES'' before ``services'' in the last sentence to conform with the defined term Wagner-Peyser Act Employment Service (ES) also known as Employment Service (ES). The Department also proposes to change ``and except'' to ``or'' to clarify that immediate action must be taken in cases where either the Complaint System Representative determines that it is necessary or where informal resolution would be detrimental to the complainant. Consistent with the proposed removal of the SMA from Sec. 658.411(b)(1)(ii)(B), the Department proposes to amend Sec. 658.411(b)(1)(ii)(D) to remove the requirement for the ES office or SWA Complaint System Representative to refer the complaint to the SMA who must immediately refer the complaint. Instead, under the proposed regulatory text, the ES office or SWA Complaint System Representative would themselves refer the complaint immediately to the appropriate enforcement agency for prompt action. This change would remove the SMA from Complaint System ***processing*** for the same reasons that the Department proposes to remove the SMA from other aspects of Complaint System ***processing***. This proposed change is consistent with the SWA's requirements in ***processing*** non-MSFW complaints, where staff other than the SMA refer complaints to enforcement agencies. Additionally, this proposed change would decrease the amount of administrative time for complaints to be referred for prompt action by enforcement agencies. It is important to note that this regulation specifically deals with complaints that ES offices or SWA staff have determined need to be referred to a State or Federal agency. Requiring staff to refer the complaint first to the SMA, who then refers to the applicable agency, adds unnecessary time, which may cause avoidable harm to complainants in sensitive or otherwise serious, time-sensitive situations. The Department proposes to remove all references to the ``SMA'' in 20 CFR 658.411(b)(1)(ii)(D) and (E) to conform with the Department's proposal to remove the SMA from playing a direct role in Complaint System ***processing***. Under the proposed changes, the complaint will not be referred to the SMA. Instead, the Complaint System Representative must notify the complainant of the enforcement agency to which the complaint was referred, rather than for the SMA to notify the complainant. The Department proposes to add Sec. 658.411(b)(1)(ii)(F) to provide steps ES offices and SWAs must take when they receive complaints alleging an employer in a different State has violated an employment-related law, when such complaints are filed by or on behalf of MSFWs. The proposed changes would require SWAs and ES offices to use the same ***process*** for ***processing*** employment-related law complaints as Sec. 658.411(d)(ii) currently requires for ES complaints involving an employer in another State. This situation comes up periodically, and the Department has advised SWAs to follow the same procedures for when an ES complaint is filed in a different State, which includes sending the complaint to the SWA in the other State. This addition is intended to make the employment-related law complaint regulations consistent with current SWA practices. Because the regulations currently do not address this scenario, the regulations currently are unclear as to whether ES offices and SWAs must immediately refer employment-related law complaints against out-of-State employers to enforcement agencies or if they should attempt to resolve MSFW-related complaints involving employers in other States. The Department believes that the most beneficial option is for these complaints to be referred to the SWA in the other State, consistent with how SWAs ***process*** complaints involving employers in other States. Additionally, the entity best situated to ***process*** a complaint is the SWA for the State where the employer is located, because that SWA has greater knowledge of applicable employment-related laws and may have other records for the employer that impact appropriate decision making. The proposed changes also specifically require the ES office or SWA receiving the complaint to ensure the Complaint/Referral Form is adequately completed before sending the Complaint/Referral Form and copies of any relevant documents to the SWA in the other State. This language is designed to correct issues the Department has observed, where SWAs have informed SWAs in other States of complaint information but have not completed the Complaint/Referral Form or provided copies of any relevant documents. As a result, the other State SWAs were not able to contact the complainant or identify other critical information to act on the complaint, including material facts and allegations and the identity of the employer respondent. The proposed changes explicitly require the referring SWA to provide this necessary documentation so that the SWA receiving the complaint can address it appropriately. The Department proposes to revise the heading and text of Sec. 658.411(c) to clarify that all complaints under this subpart alleging unlawful discrimination or reprisal for protected activity should be handled in accordance with the procedures in this paragraph. In addition, the Department proposes to modify the procedures in this paragraph to require an ES office or SWA in receipt of such a complaint to log and immediately refer it to the State-level E.O Officer. The ***process*** set forth in the existing regulations has proven to be confusing, because it identifies multiple officials to which nondiscrimination complaints should be referred and requires ES staff to determine which nondiscrimination laws are at issue. The revisions that the Department proposes here would simplify the ***process*** by requiring ES offices and SWAs to treat all nondiscrimination complaints that they receive under this subpart in the same manner. Specifically, under the[[Page 23721]]proposed revision, when an ES office or SWA receives such a complaint, they will log it and immediately refer it to the State-level E.O Officer, regardless of the nondiscrimination law(s) at issue, and notify the complainant of the referral in writing. The State-level E.O Officer will then either ***process*** the complaint if it is within their jurisdiction or immediately refer the complaint to the appropriate enforcement agency if it is not. This simplified referral ***process*** will reduce confusion for ES staff and ensure that someone with appropriate nondiscrimination expertise--the State-level E.O Officer--will determine how the complaint should be handled and by whom. The Department proposes to amend Sec. 658.411(d) throughout to replace ``a'' with ``an'' as a technical edit when it comes before ``ES office.'' In addition, the Department proposes to revise Sec. 658.411(d)(1) to clarify that the procedures in Sec. 658.411(c) apply to all ES complaints alleging violations of nondiscrimination laws, including violations of EEOC regulations, the Immigration and Nationality Act's anti-discrimination provision, or laws enforced by CRC. The Department proposes to rephrase Sec. 658.411(d)(2)(ii)(A), which addresses how an ES office should ***process*** an ES complaint filed against an employer that is not located within its service area, to clarify the order of steps such an office must take, without substantively changing the steps. Specifically, the proposed regulatory text changes the phrasing from ``must send, after ensuring that the Complaint/Referral Form is adequately completed, a copy . . .'' to ``must ensure the Complaint/Referral Form is adequately completed, and then immediately send a copy . . . .'' This proposed change is consistent with the proposed change at Sec. 658.411(b)(3), so that ***processes*** for both ES complaints and employment-related law complaints (other than alleged violations of rights under the EEOC regulations or laws enforced by CRC, as described at Sec. 658.411(c)) are the same when the complaint involves an employer in a different State. The changes are, therefore, necessary for clarity and consistency. At Sec. 658.411(d)(1)(iv), the Department proposes a technical edit to add a comma after ``alleged agency-wide violation.'' The Department proposes to amend Sec. 658.411(d)(4)(i) and (5)(i) to replace references to the SMA investigating, attempting informal resolution, and making written determinations with references to the ``Complaint System Representative'' taking such actions. This proposed change is necessary to conform to the proposed change, discussed previously, to remove the SMA from playing a direct role in Complaint System ***processing***. This will strengthen the SMA's role to monitor the Complaint System. The Department proposes to amend Sec. 658.411(d)(5)(i) to change ``ES or SWA officials'' to ``the SWA'' because the proposed changes to Sec. 651.10 remove the definition of SWA official. The Department proposes to amend Sec. 658.411(d)(5)(ii) in three ways. First, the Department proposes to change ``SWA officials'' to ``the SWA'' because the proposed changes to Sec. 651.10 remove the definition of SWA official. Because of this proposed term change, it is also necessary to make the word ``determine'' plural for subject-verb agreement. Second, the Department proposes to insert ``, in writing,'' between ``request'' and ``hearing'' to clarify that the complainant must request a hearing in writing. This change will make the procedures consistent with Sec. 658.411(d)(5)(i)(D). Lastly, the Department proposes to change ``working days'' to ``business days.'' Under Sec. 651.10, working days and business days have the same meaning and can be used interchangeably. However, because this reference is located immediately after a use of ``business days'' in Sec. 658.411(d)(5)(i)(D), it may give the appearance that there are different meanings between the terms. To correct this issue, the Department proposes to use the same term--``business days''--in both places. The Department proposes to amend Sec. 658.411(d)(5)(iii)(G) to change ``SWA official'' to ``SWA'' because the proposed changes to Sec. 651.10 remove the definition of SWA official. This change would make the provision agree with the proposed definitions.Section 658.419 Apparent Violations The Department proposes several clarifying revisions to Sec. 658.419(a). First, the Department proposes to update Sec. 658.419(a) to replace the words ``a SWA, an ES office employee, or outreach staff'' with ``an ES staff member'' to conform with proposed revisions to ES staff at Sec. 651.10 It is not necessary to specifically refer to ``outreach staff'' in this section, because the definition of outreach staff means ES staff with the responsibilities described in Sec. 653.107(b). This change will make Sec. 658.419 more clear because the proposed regulatory text will use the term ES staff uniformly. The Department also proposes to change the second reference to a ``suspected violation'' in Sec. 658.419(a) to ``apparent violation'' for clarity. In addition, the Department proposes to add a sentence to Sec. 658.419(a) to clarify that the apparent violation must be documented in the Complaint System log as described at Sec. 658.410 Finally, the Department proposes to add a sentence at the end of Sec. 658.419(a) to clarify that when an apparent violation involves alleged violations of nondiscrimination laws, it must be ***processed*** according to the procedures described in Sec. 658.411(c)--that is, it must be logged and immediately referred to the State-level E.O Officer.Section 658.420 Responsibilities of the Employment and Training Administration Regional Office The Department proposes several revisions to Sec. 658.420 First, the Department proposes to revise Sec. 658.420(b) to conform with the simplified ***process*** for referring nondiscrimination complaints in proposed Sec. 658.411(c). In particular, the Department proposes to revise Sec. 658.420(b)(1) to provide that if an ETA regional office receives a complaint alleging violations of nondiscrimination laws, then the complaint must be logged and immediately referred to the appropriate State-level E.O Officer(s). As explained previously under the section addressing revisions to Sec. 658.411(c), this simplified referral ***process*** would provide clear instruction to ETA regional staff and task State-level E.O Officers, who have appropriate nondiscrimination expertise, with determining how nondiscrimination complaints should be handled and by whom. Second, the Department proposes to remove existing Sec. 658.420(b)(2), which addresses complaints alleging discrimination on the basis of genetic information, because such complaints would fall under the simplified procedures set forth in proposed Sec. 658.420(b)(1). Third, the Department proposes to make several revisions to conform with this deletion--namely, to move the text in existing Sec. 658.420(c) to Sec. 658.420(b) and remove all references to paragraph (b)(2) in this section. Finally, the Department proposes to revise Sec. 658.420(c) to clarify that when an ETA regional office receives an employment-related law complaint under this subsection, it should ***process*** the complaint in accordance with Sec. 658.422 The existing regulation incorrectly references Sec. 658.411, which provides complaint ***processing***[[Page 23722]]procedures for ES offices and SWAs (and not ETA regional offices).Section 658.422 ***Processing*** of Employment-Related Law Complaints by the Regional Administrator The Department proposes several revisions to Sec. 658.422 First, the Department proposes to revise paragraph (a) to clarify that this section applies to all ``employment-related law'' complaints submitted directly to the ETA Regional Administrator or their representative. Second, the Department proposes to add a sentence to the end of paragraphs (b) and (c) to conform with the proposed revisions to Sec. 658.420(b)(1). In particular, proposed paragraphs (b) and (c) each include an additional sentence to specify that when a complaint described in the paragraph alleges a violation of nondiscrimination laws or reprisal for protected activity, then it must be referred to the appropriate State-level E.O Officer in accordance with Sec. 658.420(b)(1).2. Subpart F--Discontinuation of Services to Employers by the Wagner-Peyser Act Employment ServiceSection 658.501 Basis for Discontinuation of Services The Department proposes to amend Sec. 658.501(a)(4) to add that SWA officials must initiate procedures for discontinuation of services to employers who are currently debarred or disqualified from participating in one of the Department's foreign labor certification programs. This revision corresponds to the proposed addition in Sec. 653.501(a)(4), which would require ES staff to consult the Department's OFLC and Wage and Hour Division debarment lists prior to placing a job order into intrastate or interstate clearance, and to initiate discontinuation of services pursuant to this subpart if the employer requesting access to the clearance system is currently debarred or disqualified from participating in one of the Department's foreign labor certification programs. As explained in the section of this preamble addressing the proposed addition in Sec. 653.501(a)(4), the Department is proposing this requirement to protect workers that are referred to employers through the ARS by ensuring that the ARS is not used to place a worker with an employer that has failed to comply with its obligation(s) as an employer of foreign workers. The Department proposes to amend Sec. 658.501(b) to correct an error in the existing regulatory text, which improperly references Sec. 658.501, instead of Sec. 658.502 Specifically, the regulatory text currently provides that SWA officials may discontinue services immediately if, in the judgment of the State Administrator, exhaustion of the administrative procedures set forth in Sec. 658.501(a)(1) through (7) would cause substantial harm to a significant number of workers. The reference to paragraphs (a)(1) through (7) of Sec. 685.501 appears to have been made in error, because Sec. 658.501 does not set forth administrative procedures but rather the bases for discontinuation of services. Section 658.502, by contrast, sets forth the ***process*** by which SWAs must generally follow when discontinuing the provision of ES services. Accordingly, the Department proposes to replace the cross reference in 658.501(b) to 658.501(a)(1) through (7) with a cross reference to Sec. 658.502, which will clarify that the administrative procedures that must otherwise be exhausted are set forth in Sec. 658.502 This revision is necessary to clarify when a SWA official may discontinue services immediately. The Department proposes to amend Sec. 658.501(c) to correct an error in the regulatory text like the cross-referencing error in Sec. 658.501(b). This section incorrectly references the bases on which a SWA may discontinue services to an employer in Sec. 658.501(a)(1) through (8), instead of the procedures to discontinue such services set forth in Sec. 658.502 Accordingly, the Department proposes to replace the reference to Sec. 658.501(a)(1) through (8) with a cross reference to Sec. 658.502 The Department proposes to amend Sec. 658.502(a)(4) to add that where a SWA's decision to discontinue services is based on the fact that the employer is currently debarred or disqualified from participating in one of the Department's foreign labor certification programs, the SWA must specify the time period for which the employer is debarred or disqualified. The proposed revision would further specify that the employer must be notified that all ES services will be terminated in 20 working days unless, within that time, the employer provides adequate evidence that the Department's disbarment or disqualification is no longer in effect or will terminate before the employer's anticipated date of need. Similar to the proposed revision to Sec. 658.501(a)(4) discussed previously, the revisions proposed here correspond to the proposed addition in Sec. 653.501(a)(4), which would require ES staff to consult the Department's OFLC and Wage and Hour Division debarment lists prior to placing a job order into intrastate or interstate clearance, and to initiate discontinuation of services pursuant to this subpart if the employer requesting access to the clearance system is currently debarred or disqualified from participating in one of the Department's foreign labor certification programs.3. Subpart G--Review and Assessment of State Workforce Agency Compliance With Employment Service RegulationsSection 658.602 Employment and Training Administration National Office Responsibility The Department proposes to amend Sec. 658.602(g) to refer to Sec. 653.108(a) instead of Sec. 653.108(b). This is necessary to correct the inaccurate citation to Sec. 653.108(b), which does not contain self-monitoring requirements. This proposed revision will clarify the location of self-monitoring requirements for readers. The Department proposes to amend the introductory text of Sec. 658.602(n) to replace the phrase ``in the course of'' with the word ``during'' for purposes of clarity. The Department proposes to amend Sec. 658.602(n)(1) to replace the phrase ``outreach workers'' with ``outreach staff'' because outreach staff is a defined term in Sec. 651.10 Using the defined term will make the regulatory text more clear regarding which staff it references. The Department proposes to amend Sec. 658.602(n)(2) to remove the word ``random'' from the requirement for the NMA to participate in field check(s) of migrant camps or work site(s) where MSFWs have been placed. The proposed revision would clarify that the selection of migrant camps or work sites for which the NMA will participate in field checks does not need to be random, and may be targeted, where necessary, to respond to known or suspected compliance issues, thereby improving MSFW worker protection. The Department proposes to amend Sec. 658.602(o) to remove ``(8)'' from the reference to paragraph (f)(8) as a technical edit. Paragraph (f) of Sec. 658.602 does not have a subordinate paragraph (8).Section 658.603 Employment and Training Administration Regional Office Responsibility The Department proposes to amend Sec. 658.603(d)(7) to replace uses of ``job order'' with ``clearance order.'' This change will make the provision conform with the proposed changes to the definition of clearance order in Sec. 651.10 The change will also clarify that field checks should only be conducted on orders that have been cleared for intrastate and/or interstate recruitment, not including local job[[Page 23723]]orders. The Department also proposes to remove the word ``random'' from the requirement for the RA to conduct field checks. Under the proposed revision, the selection of ***agricultural*** work sites does not need to be random, and may be targeted, where necessary, to respond to known or suspected compliance issues, thereby improving MSFW worker protection. Finally, the Department proposes to add the word ``and'' before ``working and housing conditions'' to make clear that this is a single term that follows wages and hours in the list of items that must be specified on a clearance order. Paragraph (i) of Sec. 658.603 addresses RMA training. The Department proposes to amend Sec. 658.603(i) to remove the requirement that the RMA participate in training sessions approved by the National Office within the first 3 months of their tenure and replace it with a requirement that would require the RMA to participate in training sessions offered by the National Office and additional training sessions necessary to maintain competency and enhance their understanding of issues farmworkers face (including trainings offered by OSHA, WHD, EEOC, CRC, and other organizations offering farmworker-related information). The proposed regulatory text removes the requirement for training within the first 3 months of an RMA's tenure because RMAs must participate in all trainings necessary to learn and maintain competencies for the role. The proposed regulatory text clarifies that training attendance is required beyond the first 3 months of an RMA's tenure. The proposed regulatory text regarding maintaining competencies specifically aligns with the Department's training requirements for SMAs as well as E.O staff training requirements, which provide a positive example for RMA training. The Department proposes to amend Sec. 658.603(p)(1) to replace ``workers'' with ``staff.'' This change would implement the defined term of outreach staff to clarify the type of staff to which the provision refers. The Department proposes to amend Sec. 658.603(p)(2) to remove the word ``random'' so that the RMA understands that clearance orders selected for a field check do not need to be selected at random. This change will clarify that RMAs may conduct targeted field checks where necessary, allowing the Department to respond to known or suspected compliance issues, in addition to random field checks.4. Subpart H--Federal Application of Remedial Action to State Workforce AgenciesSection 658.702 Assessment and Evaluation of Program Performance Data The Department proposes to amend Sec. 658.702(f)(2) to add references to the ``RMA'' in two places to clarify that the RA must notify both the RMA and the NMA when findings and noncompliance involve services to MSFWs or the Complaint System. Additionally, this proposed change would require the Final Notification to be sent to the RMA, as well as the NMA. These changes are necessary for the RMA to be aware of all ES issues involving MSFWs and the Complaint System, which the RMA is responsible to monitor. The notification required by these revisions would improve the RMA's ability to effectively perform all required duties.Section 658.704 Remedial Actions The Department proposes to amend Sec. 658.704(f)(2) to require that copies of the RA's notification to the SWA of decertification proceedings must be sent to the RMA and the NMA. The existing regulatory text only requires that one copy be sent to the NMA. This revision is necessary because the RMA needs to be aware of all issues that relate to MSFWs in the regional office. The Department proposes to amend Sec. 658.707(a), which addresses the circumstances in which a SWA may request a hearing, to specify that any SWA that has received a Notice of Remedial Action under Sec. 658.707(a) of this subpart may also request a hearing, and that the SWA may do so by filing a written request with the RA within 20 business days of the SWA's receipt of the notice. This is a clarifying edit, as Sec. 658.704(c) already provides a SWA the opportunity to request a hearing under these circumstances. The Department additionally proposes to add a reference to the RA in Sec. 658.707(b), because Sec. 658.704(c) directs the SWA to send its written request to the RA.IV. Rulemaking Analyses and NoticesA. Executive Orders 12866 (Regulatory Planning and Review) and 13563 (Improving Regulation and Regulatory Review) Under Executive Order (E.O ) 12866, OMB's Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs (OIRA) determines whether a regulatory action is significant and, therefore, subject to the requirements of the E.O and review by OMB. See 58 FR 51735 (Oct. 4, 1993). Section 3(f) of E.O 12866 defines a ``significant regulatory action'' as an action that is likely to result in a rule that: (1) Has an annual effect on the economy of $100 million or more, or adversely affects in a material way a sector of the economy, productivity, competition, jobs, the environment, public health or safety, or State, local, or tribal governments or communities (also referred to as economically significant); (2) creates serious inconsistency or otherwise interferes with an action taken or planned by another agency; (3) materially alters the budgetary impacts of entitlement grants, user fees, or loan programs, or the rights and obligations of recipients thereof; or (4) raises novel legal or policy issues arising out of legal mandates, the President's priorities, or the principles set forth in the E.O Id. This proposed rule is a significant regulatory action, although not an economically significant regulatory action, under sec. 3(f) of E.O 12866. Accordingly, OMB has reviewed this proposed rule. E.O 13563 directs agencies to propose or adopt a regulation only upon a reasoned determination that its benefits justify its costs; the regulation is tailored to impose the least burden on society, consistent with achieving the regulatory objectives; and, in choosing among alternative regulatory approaches, the agency has selected those approaches that maximize net benefits. E.O 13563 recognizes that some benefits are difficult to quantify and provides that, where appropriate and permitted by law, agencies may consider and discuss qualitatively values that are difficult or impossible to quantify, including equity, human dignity, fairness, and distributive impacts. The Department anticipates that the proposed rule would result in costs, transfer payments, and benefits for State governments and ***agricultural*** employers. The costs of the proposed rule would include rule familiarization and additional information collection for State governments, as well as transition costs such as recruitment, training, and technology expenses for the four States (i.e , Colorado, Delaware, Massachusetts, and Michigan) that currently have non-State-merit staff providing some labor exchange services and would need to transition to State merit staff for the provision of all labor exchange services.\13\--------------------------------------------------------------------------- \13\ Since the 2020 Final Rule, some States expressed an interest in using non-merit staff. Delaware began using this flexibility and currently uses two contract staff for ES services. Missouri has an approved WIOA State Plan modification to utilize non-State-merit staff.--------------------------------------------------------------------------- The transfer payments would include the changes in wages and fringe benefits for staff providing Wagner-Peyser Act[[Page 23724]]ES labor exchange services in the four States that currently have non-State-merit staff providing ES labor exchange services: Colorado, Delaware, Massachusetts, and Michigan. The benefits of the merit-staffing provisions in the proposed rule would include the ability for States to shift staff resources during future surges in UI claims when time-limited legislative flexibilities in the delivery of UI services are not available. The Department also is proposing amendments to the regulations that govern labor exchange services provided to MSFWs, the Monitor Advocate System, and the Complaint System. These amendments would remove redundancies, clarify requirements, and improve equity and inclusion for MSFWs in the ES system.1. Costs The Department anticipates that the proposed rule would result in costs related to rule familiarization, staff transition, and information collection.a. Rule Familiarization Costs Regulatory familiarization costs represent direct costs to States associated with reviewing the new regulation. The Department's analysis \14\ assumes that the changes introduced by the rule would be reviewed by Human Resources Managers (SOC code 11-3121) employed by SWAs. The Department anticipates that it would take a Human Resources Manager an average of 1 hour to review the rule.--------------------------------------------------------------------------- \14\ This analysis uses codes from the Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) system and the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS).--------------------------------------------------------------------------- The U.S Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics (OEWS) data show that the median hourly wage of State government Human Resources Managers is $43.75 \15\ The Department used a 61 percent benefits rate \16\ and a 17 percent overhead rate,\17\ so the fully loaded hourly wage is $77.88 [= $43.75 + ($43.75 x 61%) + ($43.75 x 17%)]. Therefore, the one-time rule familiarization cost for all 57 jurisdictions (the 50 States, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, American Samoa, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, Guam, the Republic of Palau, and the U.S Virgin Islands) is estimated to be $4,439 (= $77.88 x 1 hour x 57 jurisdictions).--------------------------------------------------------------------------- \15\ BLS, ``Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics, National Industry-Specific Occupational Employment and Wage Estimates, NAICS 999200,'' SOC Code 11-3121, May 2020, [*https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/naics4\_999200.htm*](https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/naics4_999200.htm) (last visited Aug. 2, 2021). \16\ BLS, ``National Compensation Survey, Employer Costs for Employee Compensation,'' [*https://www.bls.gov/ncs/data.htm*](https://www.bls.gov/ncs/data.htm) (last visited Aug. 2, 2021). For State and local government workers, wages and salaries averaged $32.72 per hour worked in 2020, while benefit costs averaged $20.09, which is a benefits rate of 61 percent. \17\ Cody Rice, U.S Environmental Protection Agency, ``Wage Rates for Economic Analyses of the Toxics Release Inventory Program,'' June 10, 2002, [*https://www.regulations.gov/document/EPA-HQ-OPPT-2014-0650-0005*](https://www.regulations.gov/document/EPA-HQ-OPPT-2014-0650-0005) (last visited Aug. 2, 2021).---------------------------------------------------------------------------b. Transition Costs Four States would potentially incur one-time costs associated with the proposal to require all ES labor exchanges services to be provided by State merit staff. Colorado, Delaware, Massachusetts, and Michigan currently have some non-State-merit staff who provide labor exchange services, and these States may incur transition expenses, such as recruitment, training, or technology costs, as well as costs related to the State budgeting ***process***. Moreover, job seekers and employers may experience nonquantifiable transition costs associated with service interruptions during the time period in which the State is making staff changes to comply with the provisions of this proposed rule. The Department used a survey to ask the four States to estimate these potential expenses. One State anticipates that transition expenses would be minimal unless one of the local one-stop centers goes through an ``upheaval'' due to the proposed change. The State explained that the SWA provides employee training, and this would not change under the provisions in the proposed rule. Moreover, technology costs have always been shared costs, and recruitment is conducted by local management teams on an on-going basis. The State noted, however, that there would be significant disruptions in the workforce areas that use non-State merit-staffed employees to provide ES labor exchange services; those areas constitute 25 percent of the State's workforce areas. Hiring State merit-staffed employees in those areas would take months; moreover, the State would need to add State supervision and engage in union negotiations. A second State estimated that the transition costs related to training and technology would be minimal. However, obtaining additional FTE State merit-staffed employees would generate nonquantifiable costs. The State explained that the ***process*** would entail requesting and justifying new positions, preparing and submitting a budget request, posting the positions, interviewing candidates, checking references, and onboarding new hires. The State estimated that the ***process*** would take at least 12 to 18 months. The Department is not able to quantify the transition costs to the four States due to the lack of data. The Department is seeking additional input from the four States on their potential transition expenses such as recruitment, training, or technology costs, as well as costs related to the State budgeting ***process***. The Department is also seeking input on the potential costs associated with service interruptions during the time period in which the State is making staff changes to comply with the provisions of this proposed rule.c. Information Collection Costs IC costs represent direct costs to States associated with the proposed information collection requests (ICRs) under this proposed rule. The first ICR pertains to the proposed requirement that SWA Wagner-Peyser programs document Participant Individual Record Layout (PIRL) data element 413 for all reportable individuals. The Department assumes that this provision would entail three costs: (1) Computer programming; (2) additional time for ES staff to help individuals register for services, and (3) additional time for SMAs to check the accuracy of the MSFW coding. SWAs would need to reprogram their ES registration systems to ask MSFW status (PIRL 413) questions earlier in the registration ***process***. The Department assumes reprogramming would cost an average of $4,000 per jurisdiction,\18\ so the total one-time cost for reprogramming is estimated at $228,000 (= $4,000 x 57 jurisdictions). For the additional annual burden on ES staff, the Department anticipates that it would take an ES staff member an average of 2 minutes per reportable individual to ask the additional MSFW questions and record the answers. To estimate this cost, the Department used the median hourly wage of $26.85 for educational, guidance, and career counselors and advisors (SOC code 21-1012) employed by State governments (NAICS 999200).\19\ The Department used a 61-percent benefits rate and a 17-percent overhead rate, so the fully loaded hourly wage is $47.79 [= $26.85 + ($26.85 x 61%) + ($26.85 x 17%)]. Assuming ES staff assist in registering half of the 10.2 million reportable individuals (based on the average for Program Years 2018, 2019, and 2020), the annual cost is[[Page 23725]]estimated at $8,129,913 (= 10,207,047 reportable individuals x 50% x 2 minutes x $47.79 per hour). For the annual burden on SMAs, the Department anticipates that it would take an SMA 1 hour per quarter to check the accuracy of the MSFW coding. To estimate this cost, the Department used the median hourly wage of $36.25 for social and community service managers (SOC code 11-9151) employed by State governments (NAICS 999200).\20\ The Department used a 61-percent benefits rate and a 17-percent overhead rate, so the fully loaded hourly wage is $64.53 [= $36.25 + ($36.25 x 61%) + ($36.25 x 17%)]. Therefore, the annual cost is estimated at $14,713 (= 57 SMAs x 4 hours per year x $64.53 per hour).--------------------------------------------------------------------------- \18\ Anecdotal evidence from States indicates a range of $2,000 to $6,000 to add one yes/no question to an existing data collection. \19\ BLS, ``Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics, National Industry-Specific Occupational Employment and Wage Estimates, NAICS 999200, SOC 21-1012.'' [*https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/naics4\_999200.htm*](https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/naics4_999200.htm). \20\ BLS, ``Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics, National Industry-Specific Occupational Employment and Wage Estimates, NAICS 999200, SOC 11-9151.'' [*https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/naics4\_999200.htm.---------------------------------------------------------------------------*](https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/naics4_999200.htm.---------------------------------------------------------------------------) The second ICR pertains to the proposed requirement that SWA applicant-holding offices provide workers referred on clearance orders with a checklist summarizing wages, working conditions, and other material specifications in the clearance order. The Department anticipates that it would take an ES staff member an average of 35 minutes to read the clearance order, create a checklist, and provide the checklist to applicants. To estimate this cost, the Department used a fully loaded hourly wage of $47.79 for educational, guidance, and career counselors and advisors (SOC code 21-1012) employed by State governments (NAICS 999200). Assuming 14,580 clearance orders per year (based on the number of clearance orders reported by SWAs in Program Year 2019), the annual cost is estimated at $406,454 (= 14,580 clearance orders x 35 minutes x $47.79 per hour). The third ICR pertains to the proposed changes associated with the Migrant and Seasonal Farmworker Monitoring Report and Complaint/Apparent Violation Form. The Department assumes that this provision would entail two costs: (1) Time for ES Managers to update a central complaint log, and (2) additional time for SMAs to complete the Annual Summary due to content changes. For the annual burden on ES Managers, the Department anticipates that it would take an ES Manager 8 hours per year to update the central complaint log. To estimate this cost, the Department used a fully loaded median hourly wage of $64.53 for social and community service managers (SOC code 11-9151) employed by State governments (NAICS 999200). Assuming that there are approximately 2,400 ES Managers (based on the approximate number of one-stop centers), the annual cost is estimated at $1,238,976 (= 2,400 ES Managers x 8 hours per year x $64.53 per hour). For the annual burden on SMAs, the Department anticipates that it would take an SMA an additional 3 hours per year to complete the Annual Summary due to content changes. To estimate this cost, the Department used a fully loaded median hourly wage of $64.53 for social and community service managers (SOC code 11-9151) employed by State governments (NAICS 999200). Therefore, the annual cost is estimated at $11,035 (= 57 SMAs x 3 hours per year x $64.53 per hour). The fourth ICR pertains to the proposal to require the delivery of all ES labor exchanges services by State merit staff. The Department proposes to create a new ICR that would require Unified or Combined State Plans to describe how the State will staff labor exchange services under the Wagner-Peyser Act using State merit staff. The Department does not anticipate additional costs related to this requirement given that States must already describe in their Unified or Combined State Plans how ES labor exchange services will be delivered. In total, the proposed rule is expected to have first-year IC costs of $10.0 million in 2020 dollars. Over the 10-year analysis period, the annualized costs are estimated at $9.8 million at a discount rate of 7 percent in 2020 dollars.2. Transfer Payments According to OMB Circular A-4, transfer payments are monetary payments from one group to another that do not affect total resources available to society. The transfer payments for this proposed rule are the transfer payments associated with employee wages and fringe benefits. The 2020 Final Rule gave all States and territories more staffing options for delivering labor exchange services. Four States (Colorado, Delaware, Massachusetts, and Michigan) currently have non-State-merit staff providing labor exchange services, and others have expressed interest in such an arrangement. This proposed rule would require all ES labor exchange services to be provided by State merit-staffed employees; therefore, these four States would need to restaff (along with other States that could implement non-State-merit staffing before this NPRM is finalized) and may incur additional wage costs. For purposes of E.O 12866, these additional wage costs are categorized as transfer payments from States to employees. To estimate the transfer payments, the Department surveyed the four States and asked them to provide the total number of full-time equivalent (FTE) hours provided by State merit staff and non-State-merit staff dedicated to delivering ES services, as well as the occupation (or position title) and annual salary for all employees included in the FTE calculations. Delaware, Massachusetts, and Michigan provided data via email, while Colorado responded via telephone. Delaware reported that it currently has two FTE non-State, merit-staffed employees delivering ES services: one FTE management analyst with an annual salary of $59,000 and one FTE migrant farm outreach worker with an annual salary of $48,000. The Department assumes that Delaware would replace the two FTE non-State, merit-staffed employees with one State merit-staffed management analyst (SOC code 13-1111) and one State merit-staffed community and social service specialist (SOC code 21-1099). To calculate the change in wage costs for Delaware, the Department used OEWS data to estimate the median annual wages for management analysts and community and social service specialists employed by the State of Delaware. The median annual wage for management analysts is $61,840, while the median annual wage for community and social service specialists is $43,910.\21\--------------------------------------------------------------------------- \21\ BLS, OEWS data for government workers by State, May 2020, [*https://www.bls.gov/oes/special.requests/oes\_research\_2020\_sec\_99.xlsx*](https://www.bls.gov/oes/special.requests/oes_research_2020_sec_99.xlsx) (last visited Aug. 2, 2021).--------------------------------------------------------------------------- The Department adjusted the annual wages to account for fringe benefits (61 percent) and overhead costs (17 percent). Then, the Department calculated the difference between the fully loaded wage rates of the two current non-State-merit staff and two potential State merit staff. The decrease in wage costs for Delaware is estimated at $2,225 per year.\22\--------------------------------------------------------------------------- \22\ ($61,840-$59,000) x 1.78 + ($43,910-$48,000) x 1.78 = -$2,225.--------------------------------------------------------------------------- Massachusetts reported that currently it has approximately 30 FTE non-State, merit-staffed employees providing ES services, but did not provide their job titles or annual salaries. Based on the occupational distribution of the State merit staff reported by Massachusetts, the Department assumes that 80 percent (or 24 FTEs) of the 30 FTE non-State-merit staff are educational, guidance, and career counselors and advisors (SOC code 21-1012), 10 percent (or 3 FTEs) are social and community service[[Page 23726]]managers (SOC code 11-9151), and 10 percent (or 3 FTEs) are office and administrative support workers (SOC code 43-0000). To calculate the change in wage costs for Massachusetts, the Department used OEWS data on median annual wages in Massachusetts for the three occupations identified previously. The median wage rates for private sector workers are not available by State and occupation; therefore, the Department used the median wage rates for all sectors in Massachusetts as a proxy because private sector jobs constitute 85 percent of total employment.\23\ The median annual wage for educational, guidance, and career counselors and advisors in Massachusetts is $69,722, the median for social and community service managers is $67,309, and the median for office and administrative support workers is $46,342.\24\--------------------------------------------------------------------------- \23\ In May 2020, total employment was 139,099,570 ([*https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes\_nat.htm*](https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes_nat.htm)), with 117,718,070 jobs (85 percent) in the private sector ([*https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/000001.htm*](https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/000001.htm)) and 21,381,500 jobs (15 percent) in the government sector ([*https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/999001.htm*](https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/999001.htm)). \24\ BLS, ``OEWS, May 2020 State Occupational Employment and Wage Estimates: Massachusetts,'' [*https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes\_ma.htm*](https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes_ma.htm) (last visited Aug. 2, 2021).--------------------------------------------------------------------------- Massachusetts reported that the median annual salary for State merit-staffed ES services representatives and State merit-staffed job specialists is $59,689, the median for State merit-staffed program managers is $75,880, and the median for State merit-staffed office support specialists is $47,176.\25\ The Department adjusted the annual wages to account for fringe benefits (61 percent) and overhead costs (17 percent). Then, the Department calculated the difference between the fully loaded wage rates of the 30 current non-State-merit staff and 30 potential State merit staff. The decrease in wage costs for Massachusetts is estimated at $378,387 per year.\26\--------------------------------------------------------------------------- \25\ The Department assumes that Massachusetts would replace non-State, merit-staffed educational, guidance, and career counselors and advisors with State merit-staffed ES services representatives or job specialists; non-State, merit-staffed social and community service managers with State merit-staffed program managers; and non-State, merit-staffed office and administrative support workers with State merit-staffed office support specialists. \26\ ($59,689-$69,722) x 24 x 1.78 + ($75,880-$67,309) x 3 x 1.78 + ($47,176-$46,342) x 3 x 1.78 = -$378,387.--------------------------------------------------------------------------- Michigan reported that it currently has approximately 192 FTE non-State-merit staff. A wide range of occupational titles for non-State-merit staff providing ES services was reported; however, most of the staff members are program managers, employment and job specialists (or other professional occupations), or office and administrative support workers. Based on the occupational distribution of the State merit staff reported by Michigan, the Department assumes that 7 percent (or 14.3 FTEs) of the 192 FTE non-State-merit staff are program managers, 83 percent (or 159.3 FTEs) are employment and job specialists, and 9 percent (or 18.1 FTEs) are office and administrative support workers. Michigan reported that the median annual salary plus benefits and other associated employment costs for non-State, merit-staffed program managers is $86,494, the median for employment and job specialists (or other professional occupations) is $50,955, and the median for non-State, merit-staffed office support specialists is $43,602. Michigan also reported that the median annual salary plus benefits and other associated employment costs for State merit-staffed State administrative managers is $189,639, the median for State merit-staffed migrant service workers is $100,894, and the median for State merit-staffed office secretaries is $102,135.\27\--------------------------------------------------------------------------- \27\ The Department assumes that Michigan will replace non-State merit-staffed program managers with State merit-staffed employees paid at a rate similar to State administrative managers; non-State merit-staffed employment and job specialists (and other professional occupations) with State merit-staffed employees paid at a rate similar to migrant service workers; and non-State merit-staffed office and office support specialists with State merit-staffed employees paid at a rate similar to office secretaries. In categorizing each non-State employee, the Department used the job title and compensation rate provided by the State.--------------------------------------------------------------------------- The Department did not adjust the annual wages to account for fringe benefits or overhead costs because the wages reported by Michigan already included benefits and other employment costs. The Department calculated the difference between the fully loaded wage rates of the 192 current non-State-merit staff and 192 potential State merit staff. The wage cost increase for Michigan is estimated at $10,489,704 per year.\28\--------------------------------------------------------------------------- \28\ ($189,639-$86,494) x 14.3 + ($100,894-$50,955) x 159.3 + ($102,135-$43,602) x 18.1 = $10,489,704.--------------------------------------------------------------------------- In total, the proposed rule is expected to have annual transfer payments of $10,109,091 for Delaware, Massachusetts, and Michigan (=-$2,225-$378,387 + $10,489,704). The Department continues to seek data from Colorado and intends to include in the final rule an analysis of any pertinent data received. This proposed rule may impact the demographic composition of the staff delivering ES labor exchange services. State government employees are more likely than private sector employees to be women or black. Current Population Survey data show that 60 percent of State government employees in 2020 were women compared to 46 percent of private sector employees. With respect to race, 75 percent of State government employees in 2020 were white compared to 78 percent of employees in the private sector, 15 percent of State government employees were black compared to 12 percent of employees in the private sector, and 6 percent of State government employees were Asian compared to 7 percent of employees in the private sector. As far as the ethnic composition of these two labor forces, 12 percent of State government employees in 2020 were Hispanic compared to 18 percent of employees in the private sector.\29\--------------------------------------------------------------------------- \29\ BLS, Current Population Survey, unpublished tables.---------------------------------------------------------------------------3. Nonquantifiable Benefits The Department is proposing to reinstate the longstanding requirement that States use only State merit staff to deliver ES labor exchange services, with no exceptions. The COVID-19 pandemic placed an enormous burden on State UI programs due to the significant increase in UI claims from the massive number of unemployed workers. The number of continued claims rose from fewer than 2 million before the pandemic to more than 20 million in the week ended May 9, 2020. It became evident to the Department that, during a crisis that displaces a large number of workers in a short time, it could become imperative for States to shift staff resources from ES services to support urgent UI services. Being able to do so, however, would require that ES labor exchange services be provided only by State merit staff because UI services are required to be delivered solely by State merit staff pursuant to sec. 303(a)(1) of the Social Security Act. Requiring labor exchange services to be provided by State merit staff will help ensure that States have the flexibility to shift staff resources during future surges in UI claims where time-limited legislative flexibilities to UI services are not available. The benefits of requiring States to use only State merit staff to deliver ES labor exchange services are not entirely quantifiable. Yet, in addition to States benefiting from the availability of State merit staff to assist with a surge in UI services, benefits also accrue to individuals accessing labor exchange services delivered by State merit personnel. State merit-staffed employees are accountable only to their State government, are hired through objective, transparent standards, and must deliver[[Page 23727]]services to all customers of the ES system according to established standards. In exercising its discretion under sec. 3(a) of the Wagner-Peyser Act to establish minimum levels of efficiency and promote the uniform administration of labor exchange services by requiring the use of State merit staff to deliver labor exchange services, the Department has determined that alignment of ES and UI staffing is needed to ensure that quality services are delivered effectively and equitably to UI beneficiaries and other ES customers. The Department is also proposing amendments to the regulations governing ES labor exchange services provided to MSFWs, the Monitor Advocate System, and the Complaint System. These amendments would remove redundancies, clarify requirements, and enhance equity and inclusion for farmworkers in the ES system.4. Summary Exhibit 1 shows the annualized rule familiarization costs, IC costs, and transfer payments at discount rates of 3 percent and 7 percent. The proposed rule is expected to have first-year rule familiarization costs of $4,439 in 2020 dollars, first-year IC costs of $10.0 million in 2020 dollars, and first-year transfer payments of $10.1 million in 2020 dollars. Over the 10-year analysis period, the annualized rule familiarization costs are estimated at $591 at a discount rate of 7 percent in 2020 dollars, the annualized IC costs are estimated at $9.8 million at a discount rate of 7 percent in 2020 dollars, and annualized transfer payments are estimated at $10.1 million at a discount rate of 7 percent in 2020 dollars.[GRAPHIC] [TIFF OMITTED] TP20AP22.000 Due to data limitations, the Department is unable to quantify transition costs such as recruitment, training, and technology expenses that would be incurred by the four States (i.e , Colorado, Delaware, Massachusetts, and Michigan) that currently have non-State-merit staff providing some ES labor exchange services.5. Regulatory Alternatives OMB Circular A-4 directs agencies to analyze alternatives if such alternatives best satisfy the philosophy and principles of E.O 12866. Accordingly, the Department considered the following regulatory alternatives.a. Alternative 1 Under this alternative, the Department would return to the pre-2020 Wagner-Peyser Act regulations, reinstituting the State merit-staffing requirement for all States except for the three States previously operating as exceptions: Colorado, Massachusetts, and Michigan. After careful consideration, the Department is not pursuing this alternative. These States operate ES by devolving it to the local level where it can be managed alongside WIOA title I services. While such alignment with WIOA title I has some value, it is outweighed by the benefits of aligning ES staffing with UI administration and adjudication, which would allow ES staff to provide surge capacity for UI administration and adjudication during times of high need. Therefore, the Department is proposing that all States, including those that previously operated as demonstration States, come into compliance with the merit-staffing requirement.b. Alternative 2 Under this alternative, the Department would require States to come into compliance with the requirement to use State merit staff within 30 or 60 days of issuance of the final rule. The Department is not pursuing this alternative because it could result in significant interruption to ES labor exchange services in the four States not already operating in compliance with the proposed rule. Colorado, Delaware, Massachusetts, and Michigan would need to rapidly shift existing staff or hire new staff and may find themselves in violation of contracts for services negotiated after the 2020 Final Rule. The Department recognizes that this alternative would be a substantial change for those States that have relied on other staffing arrangements and they may need time to make adjustments to personnel, contractual arrangements, and service provision. Accordingly, the Department is proposing to allow those States 18 months from the effective date of the final rule to come into compliance with the merit-staffing requirement rather than stipulating that the States comply immediately.B. Regulatory Flexibility Act, Small Business Regulatory Enforcement Fairness Act of 1996, and Executive Order 13272 (Proper Consideration of Small Entities in Agency Rulemaking) The Regulatory Flexibility Act (RFA), 5 U.S.C chapter 6, requires the[[Page 23728]]Department to evaluate the economic impact of this proposed rule on small entities. The RFA defines small entities to include small businesses, small organizations, including not-for-profit organizations, and small governmental jurisdictions. The Department must determine whether the proposed rule would impose a significant economic impact on a substantial number of such small entities. The Department concludes that this proposed rule does not regulate any small entities directly, so any regulatory effect on small entities will be indirect. Accordingly, the Department has determined this proposed rule would not have a significant economic impact on a substantial number of small entities within the meaning of the RFA.C. Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 The purposes of the PRA, 44 U.S.C 3501 et seq., include minimizing the paperwork burden on affected entities. The PRA requires certain actions before an agency can adopt or revise a collection of information, including publishing for public comment a summary of the collection of information and a brief description of the need for and proposed use of the information. As part of its continuing effort to reduce paperwork and respondent burden, the Department conducts a preclearance consultation program to provide the public and Federal agencies with an opportunity to comment on proposed and continuing collections of information in accordance with the PRA. See 44 U.S.C 3506(c)(2)(A). This activity helps to ensure that the public understands the Department's collection instructions, respondents can provide the requested data in the desired format, reporting burden (time and financial resources) is minimized, collection instruments are clearly understood, and the Department can properly assess the impact of collection requirements on respondents. A Federal agency may not conduct or sponsor a collection of information unless approved by OMB under the PRA and displays a currently valid OMB control number. The public is also not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number. In addition, notwithstanding any other provisions of law, no person will be subject to penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if the collection of information does not display a currently valid OMB control number (44 U.S.C 3512). In accordance with the PRA, the Department has submitted four ICRs to OMB in concert with the publishing of this proposed rule. This provides the public the opportunity to submit comments on the ICs, either directly to the Department or to OMB. The 60-day period for the public to submit comments begins with the submission of the ICRs to OMB. Comments may be submitted electronically through [*https://www.regulations.gov*](https://www.regulations.gov). See the ADDRESSES section of this proposed rule for more information about submitting comments. The ICs in this proposed rule are summarized as follows. Agency: DOL-ETA. Title of Collection: DOL-Only Performance Accountability, Information, and Reporting System for Reportable Individuals. Type of Review: New Collection. OMB Control Number: 1205-0NEW. Description: The Department is requesting a new OMB control number for this collection. The request for a new control number is for administrative reasons only. The proposed changes to Sec. Sec. 653.103(a) and 653.109(a)(10) in this rulemaking described subsequently will eventually be included in OMB Control Number 1205-0521. The Department is anticipating that a few different upcoming rulemakings will impact the ICs contained in OMB Control Number 1205-0521. Once all outstanding actions are final and complete, the Department intends to submit a nonmaterial change request to transfer the burden from the new ICR to the existing OMB control number for the DOL-Only Performance Accountability, Information, and Reporting System (1205-0521) and proceed to discontinue the use of the new control number. This NPRM proposes to add a requirement that SWA Wagner-Peyser programs must document PIRL data element 413 for reportable individuals. The DOL-only PIRL ETA 9172 already requires Wagner-Peyser programs to document data element 413 for participants. This proposed change will help ES staff identify all individuals who engage in ES services who are MSFWs and the degree of their engagement, so that SWAs, SMAs, and the Department may better assess whether all Wagner-Peyser services are provided to MSFWs on an equitable basis. The NPRM also proposes changes to the definitions of migrant farmworker and seasonal farmworker. The Department plans to submit a new ICR that will update ETA 9172 to indicate that Wagner-Peyser programs must document and keep records of PIRL data element 413 for reportable individuals and align the definitions of migrant farmworker and seasonal farmworker with proposed revisions at Sec. 651.10 Affected Public: State Governments. Obligation to Respond: Required to Obtain or Retain Benefits. Estimated Total Annual Respondents: 22,687,331. Estimated Total Annual Responses: 46,167,618. Estimated Total Annual Burden Hours: 10,610,629,971. Estimated Total Annual Other Burden Costs: $9,719,287. Regulations Sections: Sec. Sec. 653.103(a), 653.109(a)(10). Agency: DOL-ETA. Title of Collection: ***Agricultural*** Recruitment System Forms Affecting Migrant and Seasonal Farmworkers. Type of Review: New Collection. OMB Control Number: 1205-0NEW. Description: This NPRM proposes to add a new IC to address the requirement for SWAs to provide certain workers with checklists summarizing wages, working conditions, and other material specifications. Specifically, pursuant to proposed 20 CFR 653.501(d)(6), ES staff would be required to provide farmworkers with ``checklists showing wage payment schedules, working conditions, and other material specifications of the clearance order.'' In addition, pursuant to proposed 20 CFR 653.501(d)(10), SWA applicant-holding offices must provide workers referred on clearance orders with a checklist summarizing wages, working conditions and other material specifications in the clearance order. The Department also proposes that this ICR include a new ***Agricultural*** Clearance Order Form, ETA Form 790B, which will be attached to the ***Agricultural*** Clearance Order Form, ETA Form 790 (see OMB Control Number 1205-0466). The Department previously proposed the ETA Form 790B through OMB Control Number 1205-0134, which is an expired ICR for which a submission requesting reinstatement is currently pending at OMB. The Department proposes to withdraw OMB Control Number 1205-0134 and to instead attach ETA Form 790B to this ICR because the subjects are related. ETA Form 790B is only used for employers who submit clearance orders requesting U.S workers for temporary ***agricultural*** jobs, which are not attached to requests for foreign workers through the H-2A visa program. ETA is including the estimated burden to the public for the completion of ETA Form 790 in addition to the estimated burden for the ETA Form 790B, because employers would fill out both forms. Affected Public: State Governments, Private Sector: Business or other for-[[Page 23729]]profits, not-for-profit institutions, and farms. Obligation to Respond: Required to Obtain or Retain Benefits. Estimated Total Annual Respondents: 18,180. Estimated Total Annual Responses: 18,180. Estimated Total Annual Burden Hours: 11,606. Estimated Total Annual Other Burden Costs: $0. Regulations Sections: Sec. 653.501(d)(6) and (10). Agency: DOL-ETA. Title of Collection: Migrant and Seasonal Farmworker Monitoring Report and Complaint/Apparent Violation Form. Type of Review: Revision. OMB Control Number: 1205-0039. Description: The proposed rule would require four areas to be changed in this ICR. First, there would be several changes to the required content of the SMA's Annual Summary, described at Sec. 653.108, including a summary of how the SMA is working with the State-level E.O Officer, an assurance that the SMA is a senior-level official who reports directly to the State Administrator or their designee, an evaluation of SMA staffing levels, a summary and analysis of outreach efforts, and other minor edits to language used to describe content in the summary. To implement these proposed changes, the Department also proposes to revise the ETA Form 5148 to include the proposed content. Second, the Department proposes to make two non-substantive corrections to the ETA Form 5148: (1) Adding transportation to the types of apparent violations reported in part 1, section E, item 3; and (2) revising part 3, items 2 and 3 so that the field check requirements conform to the existing regulation at Sec. 653.501 The Department is adding transportation to the types of apparent violations because the types of apparent violations listed on the form are intended to exactly mirror the types of complaints reported in section D, item 2. Transportation was inadvertently omitted from the prior ICR revision. Third, the Department proposes to add a new IC to conform with the proposed change to Sec. 653.107(b)(8), which is proposed to require that ES Office Managers maintain MSFW outreach logs on file for at least 3 years, to comply with 2 CFR 200.334 Fourth, the Department proposes to add an IC to this ICR to explain the recordkeeping requirements established at Sec. 658.410(c) regarding maintaining a central complaint log. The Department does not propose to establish a required form, but rather to describe the minimum contents that must be included in any complaint logs SWAs create. In addition, the Department proposes to revise the ETA Form 5148 to conform with proposed revisions to the minimum level of service indicators to request information regarding outreach contacts per quarter as opposed to per week as currently required under Sec. 653.109(h). Affected Public: State Governments. Obligation to Respond: Required to Obtain or Retain Benefits. Estimated Total Annual Respondents: 5,536. Estimated Total Annual Responses: 9,050. Estimated Total Annual Burden Hours: 28,240. Estimated Total Annual Other Burden Costs: $0. Regulations Sections: 2 CFR 200.334; 20 CFR 653.107(b)(8), 653.108, 653.109(h), and 658.410(c). Agency: DOL-ETA. Title of Collection: Wagner-Peyser Employment Service Required Elements for the Unified or Combined State Plan. Type of Review: New Collection. OMB Control Number: 1205-0NEW. Description: The Department is requesting a new OMB control number for this collection. The request for a new control number is for administrative reasons only. The proposed changes in this rulemaking described subsequently will eventually be included in OMB Control Number 1205-0522 (Expires 01/31/2023). As a result of the upcoming expiration date for 1205-0522, the Department will soon begin the ***process*** to request an extension for use of the ICR as required under the PRA. Once all outstanding actions are final and complete, the Department intends to submit a nonmaterial change request to transfer the burden from the new ICR to the existing OMB control number for the Required Elements for Submission of the Unified or Combined State Plan and Plan Modifications under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (1205-0522) and proceed to discontinue the use of the new control number. The proposed rule would require all States to provide Wagner-Peyser Act ES services through State merit staff. The Department proposes to create a new ICR to require Unified or Combined State Plans to describe how the State will staff labor exchange services under the Wagner-Peyser Act using State merit staff. Similarly, the Department proposes to reinstitute the SWA's requirement to provide assurances that it will use State merit staff to deliver ES services. The NPRM also proposes several clarifications regarding outreach and significant MSFW one-stop center staffing, including changes to the content of the AOP. The proposed changes will require revision to the AOP instructions. Affected Public: State Governments. Obligation to Respond: Required to Obtain or Retain Benefits. Estimated Total Annual Respondents: 57 (every 2 years). Estimated Total Annual Responses: 38 (every 2 years). Estimated Total Annual Burden Hours: 8,136 (every 2 years). Estimated Total Annual Other Burden Costs: $0 (every 2 years). Regulations Sections: Sec. Sec. 652.215; 653.107(a)(1), (a)(4), (b)(11), and (d)(2)(ii) through (v). Interested parties may obtain a copy free of charge of one or more of the ICRs submitted to OMB on the OIRA website at [*https://www.reginfo.gov/public/do/PRAMain*](https://www.reginfo.gov/public/do/PRAMain). From that page, select Department of Labor from the ``Currently under Review'' dropdown menu, click the ``Submit'' button, and find the applicable control number among the ICRs displayed. As noted in the ADDRESSES section of this proposed rule, interested parties may send comments about the ICs to the Department, OMB, or both throughout the 60-day comment period. To help ensure appropriate consideration, such comments should mention the applicable OMB control number(s). The Department and OMB are particularly interested in comments that: Evaluate whether the proposed collection of information is necessary for the proper performance of the functions of the agency, including whether the information will have practical utility; Evaluate the accuracy of the agency's estimate of the burden of the proposed collection of information, including the validity of the methodology and assumptions used; Enhance the quality, utility, and clarity of the information to be collected; and Minimize the burden of the collection of information on those who are to respond, including through appropriate automated, electronic, mechanical, or other technological collection techniques or other forms of information technology (e.g , permitting electronic submission of responses).D. Executive Order 13132 (Federalism) E.O 13132 requires Federal agencies to ensure that the principles of Federalism animating our Constitution guide the executive departments and agencies in the formulation and implementation of policies and to[[Page 23730]]further the policies of the Unfunded Mandates Reform Act of 1995 (UMRA). Further, agencies must strictly adhere to constitutional principles. Agencies must closely examine the constitutional and statutory authority supporting any action that would limit the policymaking discretion of the States and they must carefully assess the necessity for any such action. To the extent practicable, State and local officials must be consulted before any such action is implemented. The Department has reviewed the proposed rule in light of these requirements and has concluded that it is properly premised on the statutory authority given to the Secretary to set standards under the Wagner-Peyser Act. Accordingly, the Department has reviewed this proposed rule and has concluded that the rulemaking has no substantial direct effects on States, the relationship between the National Government and the States, or the distribution of power and responsibilities among the various levels of government as described by E.O 13132. Therefore, the Department has concluded that this proposed rule does not have a sufficient Federalism implication to require further agency action or analysis.E. Unfunded Mandates Reform Act of 1995 Title II of UMRA, Public Law 104-4, requires each Federal agency to prepare a written statement assessing the effects of any Federal mandate in a final agency rule that may result in an expenditure of $100 million or more (adjusted annually for inflation with the base year 1995) in any one year by State, local, and tribal governments, in the aggregate, or by the private sector. This proposed rule, if finalized, does not exceed the $100 million expenditure in any one year when adjusted for inflation. Therefore, the requirements of title II of UMRA do not apply, and the Department has not prepared a statement under UMRA.F. Executive Order 13175 (Indian Tribal Governments) The Department has reviewed this proposed rule under the terms of E.O 13175 and DOL's Tribal Consultation Policy and has concluded that the changes to regulatory text would not have tribal implications. These changes do not have substantial direct effects on one or more Indian tribes, the relationship between the Federal government and Indian tribes, nor the distribution of power and responsibilities between the Federal government and Tribal Governments.G. Plain Language E.O 12866, E.O 13563, and the Presidential Memorandum of June 1, 1998 (Plain Language in Government Writing), direct executive departments and agencies to use plain language in all rulemaking documents published in the Federal Register. The goal is to make the government more responsive, accessible, and understandable in its communications with the public. Accordingly, the Department drafted this NPRM in plain language.List of Subjects20 CFR Part 651 Employment, Grant programs--labor.20 CFR Part 652 Employment, Grant programs--labor, Reporting and recordkeeping requirements.20 CFR Part 653 ***Agriculture***, Employment, Equal employment opportunity, Grant programs--labor, Migrant labor, Reporting and recordkeeping requirements.20 CFR Part 658 Administrative practice and procedure, Employment, Grant programs--labor, Reporting and recordkeeping requirements. For the reasons discussed in the preamble, the Department of Labor proposes to amend 20 CFR parts 651, 652, 653, and 658, as follows:PART 651--GENERAL PROVISIONS GOVERNING THE WAGNER-PEYSER ACT EMPLOYMENT SERVICE01. The authority citation for part 651 continues to read as follows: Authority: 29 U.S.C 49a; 38 U.S.C part III, 4101, 4211; Secs. 503, 3, 189, Pub. L. 113-128, 128 Stat. 1425 (Jul. 22, 2014).02. Amend Sec. 651.10 by:0a. Revising the introductory text;0b. Adding in alphabetical order a definition for ``Apparent violation'';0c. Revising the definitions of ``Applicant holding office,'' ``Bona fide occupational qualification (BFOQ),'' ``Career services,'' ``Clearance order,'' ``Complaint System Representative,'' ``Decertification,'' ``Employment and Training Administration (ETA),'' ``Employment Service (ES) office,'' ``Employment Service (ES) Office Manager,'' ``Employment Service (ES) staff,'' ``Field checks,'' ``Field visits,'' ``Hearing Officer,'' ``Interstate clearance order,'' ``Intrastate clearance order,'' and ``Migrant farmworker'';0d. Removing the definition of ``Migrant food ***processing*** worker'';0e. Revising the definitions of ``Occupational Information Network (O\*NET),'' ``O\*NET-SOC,'' ``Outreach staff,'' ``Participant,'' ``Placement,'' ``Reportable individual,'' ``Respondent,'' ``Seasonal farmworker,'' ``Significant MSFW one-stop centers,'' and ``Significant MSFW States'';0f. Removing the definitions of ``Significant multilingual MSFW one-stop centers'' and ``State Workforce Agency (SWA) official''; and0g. Revising the definition of ``Wagner-Peyser Act Employment Service (ES) also known as Employment Service (ES).'' The addition and revisions read as follows:Sec. 651.10 Definitions of terms used in this part and parts 652, 653, 654, and 658 of this chapter. In addition to the definitions set forth in sec. 3 of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), codified at 29 U.S.C 3101 et seq., the following definitions apply to the regulations in parts 652, 653, 654, and 658 of this chapter:\* \* \* \* \* Apparent violation means a suspected violation of employment-related laws or employment service (ES) regulations, as set forth in Sec. 658.419 of this chapter. Applicant holding office means an ES office that is in receipt of a clearance order and has access to U.S workers who may be willing and available to perform farmwork on less than year-round basis.\* \* \* \* \* Bona fide occupational qualification (BFOQ) means that an employment decision or request based on age, sex, national origin, or religion is based on a finding that such characteristic is necessary to the individual's ability to perform the job in question. Since a BFOQ is an exception to the general prohibition against discrimination on the basis of age, sex, national origin, or religion, it must be interpreted narrowly in accordance with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission regulations set forth at 29 CFR parts 1604, 1605, and 1627. Career services means the services described in sec. 134(c)(2) of WIOA and Sec. 678.430 of this chapter. Clearance order means a job order that is ***processed*** through the clearance system under the ***Agricultural*** Recruitment System (ARS) at part 653, subpart F, of this chapter.\* \* \* \* \* Complaint System Representative means a trained ES staff individual who is responsible for ***processing*** complaints.[[Page 23731]] Decertification means the rescission by the Secretary of Labor (Secretary) of the year-end certification made under sec. 7 of the Wagner-Peyser Act to the Secretary of the Treasury that the State agency may receive funds authorized by the Wagner-Peyser Act.\* \* \* \* \* Employment and Training Administration (ETA) means the component of the Department that administers Federal government job training and worker dislocation programs, Federal grants to States for public ES programs, and unemployment insurance benefits. These services are provided primarily through State and local workforce development systems.\* \* \* \* \* Employment Service (ES) office means a site that provides ES services as a one-stop partner program. A site must be colocated in a one-stop center consistent with the requirements of Sec. Sec. 678.305 through 678.315 of this chapter. Employment Service (ES) Office Manager means the ES staff person in charge of ES services provided in a one-stop center.\* \* \* \* \* Employment Service (ES) staff means State government personnel who are employed according to the merit-system principles described in 5 CFR part 900, subpart F--Standards for a Merit System of Personnel Administration, and who are funded, in whole or in part, by Wagner-Peyser Act funds. ES staff includes a State Workforce Agency (SWA) official.\* \* \* \* \* Field checks means unannounced appearances by ES staff and/or other State or Federal staff at ***agricultural*** worksites to which ES placements have been made through the intrastate or interstate clearance system to ensure that conditions are as stated on the clearance order and that the employer is not violating an employment-related law. Field visits means announced appearances by State Monitor Advocates, Regional Monitor Advocates, the National Monitor Advocate (or National Monitor Advocate team member(s)), or outreach staff to the working and living areas of migrant and seasonal farmworkers (MSFWs), to discuss ES services, farmworker rights and protections, and other employment-related programs with MSFWs, crew leaders, and employers. Monitor Advocates or outreach staff must keep records of each such visit.\* \* \* \* \* Hearing Officer means a Department Administrative Law Judge, designated to preside at Department administrative hearings.\* \* \* \* \* Interstate clearance order means an ***agricultural*** clearance order for temporary employment (employment on a less than year-round basis) describing one or more hard-to-fill job openings, which an ES office uses to request recruitment assistance from other ES offices in a different State. Intrastate clearance order means an ***agricultural*** clearance order for temporary employment (employment on a less than year-round basis) describing one or more hard-to-fill job openings, which an ES office uses to request recruitment assistance from all other ES offices within the State.\* \* \* \* \* Migrant farmworker means a seasonal farmworker (as defined in this section) who travels to the job site so that the farmworker is not reasonably able to return to their permanent residence within the same day.\* \* \* \* \* Occupational Information Network (O\*NET) means the online reference database which contains detailed descriptions of U.S occupations, distinguishing characteristics, classification codes, and information on tasks, knowledge, skills, abilities, and work activities as well as information on interests, work styles, and work values.\* \* \* \* \* O\*NET-SOC means the occupational codes and titles used in the O\*NET system, based on and grounded in the Standard Occupational Classification (SOC), which are the titles and codes utilized by Federal statistical agencies to classify workers into occupational categories for the purpose of collecting, calculating, and disseminating data. The SOC system is issued by the Office of Management and Budget and the Department is authorized to develop additional detailed O\*NET occupations within existing SOC categories. The Department uses O\*NET-SOC titles and codes for the purposes of collecting descriptive occupational information and for State reporting of data on training, credential attainment, and placement in employment by occupation.\* \* \* \* \* Outreach staff means ES staff with the responsibilities described in Sec. 653.107(b) of this chapter. State Monitor Advocates are not considered outreach staff. Participant means a reportable individual who has received services other than the services described in Sec. 677.150(a)(3) of this chapter, after satisfying all applicable programmatic requirements for the provision of services, such as eligibility determination. (See Sec. 677.150(a) of this chapter.) (1) The following individuals are not Participants, subject to Sec. 677.150(a)(3)(ii) and (iii) of this chapter: (i) Individuals who only use the self-service system; and (ii) Individuals who receive information-only services or activities. (2) ES participants must be included in the program's performance calculations. Placement means the hiring by a public or private employer of an individual referred by the ES office for a job or an interview, provided that the ES office completed all the following steps: (1) Prepared a job order form prior to referral, except in the case of a job development contact on behalf of a specific participant; (2) Made prior arrangements with the employer for the referral of an individual or individuals; (3) Referred an individual who had not been specifically designated by the employer, except for referrals on ***agricultural*** job orders for a specific crew leader or worker; (4) Verified from a reliable source, preferably the employer, that the individual had entered on a job; and (5) Appropriately recorded the placement.\* \* \* \* \* Reportable individual means an individual who has taken action that demonstrates an intent to use ES services and who meets specific reporting criteria of the Wagner-Peyser Act (see Sec. 677.150(b) of this chapter), including: (1) Individuals who provide identifying information; (2) Individuals who only use the self-service system; or (3) Individuals who only receive information-only services or activities. Respondent means the individual or entity alleged to have committed the violation described in the complaint, such as the employer, service provider, or State agency. Seasonal farmworker means an individual who is employed, or was employed in the past 12 months, in farmwork (as defined in this section) of a seasonal or other temporary nature and is not required to be absent overnight from their permanent place of residence. Labor is performed on a seasonal basis where, ordinarily, the employment pertains to or is of the kind[[Page 23732]]exclusively performed at certain seasons or periods of the year and which, from its nature, may not be continuous or carried on throughout the year. Workers who move from one seasonal activity to another, while employed in farmwork, are employed on a seasonal basis even though they may continue to be employed during a major portion of the year. Workers are employed on a temporary basis where they are employed for a limited time only or their performance is contemplated for a particular piece of work, usually of short duration. Generally, employment which is contemplated to continue indefinitely is not temporary.\* \* \* \* \* Significant MSFW one-stop centers are those designated by the Department and include those ES offices where MSFWs account for 10 percent or more of annual participants or reportable individuals in ES and those local ES offices that the administrator determines must be included due to special circumstances such as an estimated large number of MSFWs in the service area. In no event may the number of significant MSFW one-stop centers be less than 100 centers on a nationwide basis. Significant MSFW States are those States designated by the Department and must include the 20 States with the highest estimated number of MSFWs.\* \* \* \* \* Wagner-Peyser Act Employment Service (ES) also known as Employment Service (ES) means the national system of public ES offices described under the Wagner-Peyser Act. ES services are delivered through a nationwide system of one-stop centers, managed by SWAs and the various local offices of the SWAs, and funded by the United States Department of Labor.\* \* \* \* \*PART 652--ESTABLISHMENT AND FUNCTIONING OF STATE EMPLOYMENT SERVICE03. The authority citation for part 652 continues to read as follows: Authority: 29 U.S.C 491-2; Secs. 189 and 503, Public Law 113-128, 128 Stat. 1425 (Jul. 22, 2014).04. Amend Sec. 652.8 by revising paragraphs (h), introductory text of paragraph (j), (j)(2), and (3) to read as follows:Sec. 652.8 Administrative provisions.\* \* \* \* \* (h) Other violations. Violations or alleged violations of the Wagner-Peyser Act, regulations, or grant terms and conditions except those pertaining to audits or discrimination must be determined and ***processed*** in accordance with part 658, subpart H, of this chapter.\* \* \* \* \* (j) Nondiscrimination requirements. States must: (1) \* \* \* (2) Assure that discriminatory job orders will not be accepted, except where the stated requirement is a bona fide occupational qualification (BFOQ). See, generally, 42 U.S.C 2000e-(2)(e) and 29 CFR parts 1604, 1606, and 1625. (3) Assure that ES offices are in compliance with the veteran referral and job listing requirements at 41 CFR 60-300.84 \* \* \* \* \*05. Revise the heading for Subpart C to read as follows:Subpart C--Employment Service Services in a One-Stop Delivery System Environment06. Amend Sec. 652.204 by revising the section heading and the first sentence to read as follows:Sec. 652.204 Must funds authorized under the Governor's Reserve flow through the one-stop delivery system? No, sec. 7(b) of the Wagner-Peyser Act provides that 10 percent of the State's allotment under the Wagner-Peyser Act is reserved for use by the Governor for performance incentives, supporting exemplary models of service delivery, professional development and career advancement of ES staff as applicable, and services for groups with special needs. \* \* \*07. Amend Sec. 652.205 by revising paragraph (b)(3) to read as follows:Sec. 652.205 May funds authorized under the Wagner-Peyser Act be used to supplement funding for labor exchange programs authorized under separate legislation?\* \* \* \* \* (b) \* \* \* (3) The activity provides services that are coordinated with ES services; and\* \* \* \* \*08. Amend Sec. 652.207 by revising the section heading and paragraph (a) to read as follows:Sec. 652.207 How does a State meet the requirement for universal access to Employment Service services? (a) A State has discretion in how it meets the requirement for universal access to ES services. In exercising this discretion, a State must meet the Wagner-Peyser Act's requirements.\* \* \* \* \*09. Revise Sec. 652.215 to read as follows:Sec. 652.215 What staffing models must be used to deliver services in the Employment Service? (a) Staffing requirement. The Secretary requires that the labor exchange services described in Sec. 652.3 be provided by ES staff, as defined in part 651 of this chapter. (b) Effective date. This section becomes effective [60 DAYS AFTER DATE OF PUBLICATION OF THE FINAL RULE IN THE Federal Register]. (c) Compliance date. All obligations in this section become enforceable [18 MONTHS AFTER EFFECTIVE DATE OF THE FINAL RULE].PART 653--SERVICES OF THE WAGNER-PEYSER ACT EMPLOYMENT SERVICE SYSTEM010. The authority citation for part 653 continues to read as follows: Authority: Secs. 167, 189, 503, Public Law 113-128, 128 Stat. 1425 (Jul. 22, 2014); 29 U.S.C chapter 4B; 38 U.S.C part III, chapters 41 and 42.011. Amend Sec. 653.100 by revising paragraph (a) to read as follows:Sec. 653.100 Purpose and scope of subpart. (a) This subpart sets forth the principal regulations of the Wagner-Peyser Act Employment Service (ES) concerning the provision of services for MSFWs consistent with the requirement that all services of the workforce development system be available to all job seekers in an equitable and nondiscriminatory fashion. This includes ensuring MSFWs have access to these services in a way that meets their unique needs. MSFWs must receive services on a basis which is qualitatively equivalent and quantitatively proportionate to services provided to non-MSFWs.\* \* \* \* \*012. Revise Sec. 653.101 to read as follows:Sec. 653.101 Provision of services to migrant and seasonal farmworkers. SWAs must ensure that ES staff at one-stop centers offer MSFWs the full range of career and supportive services, benefits and protections, and job and training referral services as are provided to non-MSFWs. SWAs must ensure ES staff at the one-stop centers tailor such ES services in a way that accounts for individual MSFW preferences, needs, skills, and the availability of job and training opportunities, so that MSFWs are reasonably able to participate in the ES.013. Amend Sec. 653.102 by revising the third sentence and removing the fourth sentence to read as follows:[[Page 23733]]Sec. 653.102 Job information. \* \* \* SWAs must ensure ES staff at one-stop centers provide assistance to MSFWs to access job order information easily and efficiently.014. Amend Sec. 653.103 by revising paragraphs (a) through (c) to read as follows:Sec. 653.103 ***Process*** for migrant and seasonal farmworkers to participate in workforce development activities. (a) Each ES office must determine whether participants and reportable individuals are MSFWs as defined at Sec. 651.10 of this chapter. (b) SWAs must comply with the language access and assistance requirements at 29 CFR 38.9 with regard to all limited English proficient (LEP) individuals, including MSFWs who are LEP individuals, as defined at 29 CFR 38.4(hh). This includes ensuring ES staff comply with these language access and assistance requirements. (c) One-stop centers must provide MSFWs a list of available career and supportive services.\* \* \* \* \*015. Amend Sec. 653.107 by:0a. Revising the section heading and paragraphs (a)(1), (a)(2)(i) and (ii), and (a)(3)(i);0b. Adding paragraphs (a)(3)(i)(A) and (B); and0c. Revising paragraphs (a)(3)(ii), (a)(4), the first sentence of (a)(5), introductory text of paragraph (b), (b)(1), (b)(3), introductory text of (b)(4), (b)(4)(i) and (vi), (b)(7), the second sentence of (b)(8), and paragraphs (b)(11), (d)(2)(ii) through (v), and (d)(4) and (5). The revisions and additions read as follows:Sec. 653.107 Outreach responsibilities and ***Agricultural*** Outreach Plan. (a) \* \* \* (1) Each SWA must ensure outreach staff conduct outreach as described in paragraph (b) of this section on an ongoing basis. SWA Administrators must ensure State Monitor Advocates (SMAs) and outreach staff coordinate activities with WIOA title I sec. 167 grantees as well as with public and private community service agencies and MSFW groups. WIOA title I sec. 167 grantees' activities involving MSFWs does not substitute for SWA outreach responsibilities. (2) \* \* \* (i) Communicate the full range of workforce development services to MSFWs; and (ii) Conduct thorough outreach efforts with extensive follow-up activities identified at paragraph (b)(5) of this section. (3) When hiring or assigning outreach staff: (i) SWAs must seek and put a strong emphasis on hiring and assigning qualified candidates who speak the language of a significant proportion of the State MSFW population; and (A) Who are from MSFW backgrounds; or (B) Who have substantial work experience in farmworker activities. (ii) SWAs must inform farmworker organizations and other organizations with expertise concerning MSFWs of job openings and encourage them to refer qualified applicants to apply. (4) Each SWA must employ an adequate number of outreach staff to conduct MSFW outreach in each area of the State to contact a majority of MSFWs in all of the SWA's service areas annually. In the 20 States with the highest estimated year-round MSFW activity, as identified by the Department, there must be full-time, year-round outreach staff to conduct outreach duties. Full-time means each individual outreach staff person must spend 100 percent of their time on the outreach responsibilities described in paragraph (b) of this section. For the remainder of the States, there must be year-round part-time outreach staff, and during periods of the highest MSFW activity, there must be full-time outreach staff. These staffing levels must align with and be supported by information about the estimated number of farmworkers in the State and the farmworker activity in the State as demonstrated in the State's ***Agricultural*** Outreach Plan (AOP) pursuant to paragraph (d) of this section. All outreach staff must be multilingual, if warranted by the characteristics of the MSFW population in the State, and must spend a majority of their time in the field. (5) The SWA must publicize the availability of ES services through such means as newspaper and electronic media publicity. \* \* \*\* \* \* \* \* (b) Outreach staff responsibilities. Outreach staff must locate and contact MSFWs who are not being reached by the normal intake activities conducted by the ES offices. Outreach staff responsibilities include the activities identified in paragraphs (b)(1) through (11) of this section. (1) Outreach staff must explain to MSFWs at their working, living, or gathering areas (including day-haul sites), by means of written and oral presentations either spontaneous or recorded, the following: \* \* \*\* \* \* \* \* (3) After making the presentation, outreach staff must urge the MSFWs to go to the local one-stop center to obtain the full range of employment and training services. (4) If an MSFW cannot or does not wish to visit the local one-stop center, outreach staff must offer to provide on-site the following: (i) Assistance in the preparation of applications for ES services;\* \* \* \* \* (vi) As needed, assistance in making appointments and arranging transportation for individual MSFW(s) or members of their family to and from local one-stop centers or other appropriate agencies.\* \* \* \* \* (7) Outreach staff must be trained in one-stop center procedures and in the services, benefits, and protections afforded MSFWs by the ES, including training on protecting farmworkers against sexual harassment, sexual coercion, assault, and human trafficking. Such trainings are intended to help outreach staff identify when such issues may be occurring in the fields and how to document and refer the cases to the appropriate enforcement agencies. Outreach staff also must be trained in the Complaint System procedures at part 658, subpart E, of this chapter and be aware of the local, State, regional, and national enforcement agencies that would be appropriate to receive referrals. The program for such training must be formulated by the State Administrator, pursuant to uniform guidelines developed by ETA. The SMA must be given an opportunity to review and comment on the State's program. (8) \* \* \* These records must include a daily log, a copy of which must be sent monthly to the ES Office Manager and maintained on file for at least 3 years. \* \* \*\* \* \* \* \* (11) Outreach staff in significant MSFW one-stop centers must conduct especially vigorous outreach in their service areas. Outreach activities must align with and be supported by information provided in the State's AOP pursuant to paragraph (d) of this section.\* \* \* \* \* (d) \* \* \* (2) \* \* \* (ii) Explain the materials, tools, and resources the State will use for outreach; (iii) Describe the SWA's proposed outreach activities to contact MSFWs who are not being reached by the normal intake activities conducted by the one-stop centers, including identifying the number of full-time and[[Page 23734]]part-time outreach staff positions in the State and demonstrating that there is sufficient outreach staff to contact a majority of MSFWs in all the State's service areas annually; (iv) Describe the activities planned for providing the full range of ES services to the ***agricultural*** community, including both MSFWs and ***agricultural*** employers, through the one-stop centers; and (v) Include a description of how the SWA intends to provide ES staff in significant MSFW one-stop centers in accordance with Sec. 653.111 \* \* \* \* \* (4) The AOP must be submitted in accordance with paragraph (d)(1) of this section and planning guidance issued by the Department. (5) The Annual Summaries required at Sec. 653.108(u) must update the Department on the SWA's progress toward meeting the objectives set forth in the AOP.\* \* \* \* \*016. Revise Sec. 653.108 to read as follows:Sec. 653.108 State Workforce Agency and State Monitor Advocate responsibilities. (a) State Administrators must ensure their SWAs monitor their own compliance with ES regulations in serving MSFWs on an ongoing basis. The State Administrator has overall responsibility for SWA self-monitoring. The State Administrator and ES staff must not retaliate against staff, including the SMA, for self-monitoring or raising any issues or concerns regarding noncompliance with the ES regulations. (b) The State Administrator must appoint an SMA. The State Administrator must inform farmworker organizations and other organizations with expertise concerning MSFWs of the opening and encourage them to refer qualified applicants to apply. Among qualified candidates, the SWAs must seek and put a strong emphasis on hiring persons: (1) Who are from MSFW backgrounds; or (2) Who speak the language of a significant proportion of the State MSFW population; or (3) Who have substantial work experience in farmworker activities. (c) The SMA must be an individual who: (1) Is a senior-level ES staff employee; (2) Reports directly to the State Administrator or State Administrator's designee, such as a director or other appropriately titled official in the State Administrator's office, who has the authority to act on behalf of the State Administrator, except that if a designee is selected, they must not be the individual who has direct program oversight of the ES; and (3) Has the knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary to fulfill the responsibilities as described in this subpart. (d) The SMA must have sufficient authority, staff, resources, and access to top management to monitor compliance with the ES regulations. Staff assigned to the SMA are intended to help the SMA carry out the duties set forth in this section and must not perform work that conflicts with any of the SMA's monitoring duties, such as outreach responsibilities required by Sec. 653.107, ARS ***processing*** under subpart F of this part, and complaint ***processing*** under subpart E of part 658. The number of ES staff positions assigned to the SMA must be determined by reference to the number of MSFWs in the State, (as ***measured*** at the time of the peak MSFW population), and the need for monitoring activity in the State. (e) The SMA must devote full-time staffing to SMA functions. No State may dedicate less than full-time staffing for the SMA position, unless the Regional Administrator, with input from the Regional Monitor Advocate, provides written approval. Any State that proposes less than full-time dedication must demonstrate to the Regional Administrator and Regional Monitor Advocate that all SMA functions can be effectively performed with part-time staffing. (f) All SMAs and their staff must attend training session(s) offered by the Regional Monitor Advocate(s) and National Monitor Advocate and their team and those necessary to maintain competency and enhance the SMA's understanding of the unique needs of farmworkers. Such trainings must include those identified by the SMA's Regional Monitor Advocate and may include those offered by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, the Department's Wage and Hour Division, U.S Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, the Immigrant and Employee Rights Section of the Department of Justice's Civil Rights Division, the Department's Civil Rights Center, and other organizations offering farmworker-related information. (g) The SMA must provide any relevant documentation requested from the SWA by the Regional Monitor Advocate or the National Monitor Advocate. (h) The SMA must: (1) Conduct an ongoing review of the delivery of services and protections afforded by the ES regulations to MSFWs by the SWA and ES offices. This includes: (i) Monitoring compliance with Sec. 653.111; (ii) Monitoring the ES services that the SWA and one-stop centers provide to MSFWs to assess whether they are qualitatively equivalent and quantitatively proportionate to the services that the SWA and one-stop centers provide to non-MSFWs; and (iii) Reviewing the appropriateness of informal resolution of complaints and apparent violations as documented in the complaint logs. (2) Without delay, must advise the SWA and ES offices of problems, deficiencies, or improper practices in the delivery of services and protections afforded by these regulations and, if warranted, specify the corrective action(s) necessary to address these deficiencies. When the SMA finds corrective action(s) necessary, the ES Office Manager or other appropriate ES staff must develop a corrective action plan in accordance with the requirements identified at paragraph (h)(3)(v) of this section. The SMA also must advise the SWA on means to improve the delivery of services. (3) Participate in on-site reviews of one-stop centers on a regular basis (regardless of whether or not they are designated significant MSFW one-stop centers) using the procedures set forth in paragraphs (h)(3)(i) through (vii) of this section. (i) Before beginning an onsite review, the SMA or review staff must study: (A) Program performance data; (B) Reports of previous reviews; (C) Corrective action plans developed as a result of previous reviews; (D) Complaint logs, as required by the regulations under part 658 of this chapter, including logs documenting the informal resolution of complaints and apparent violations; and (E) Complaints elevated from the office or concerning the office. (ii) The SMA must ensure that the onsite review format, developed by ETA, is used as a guideline for onsite reviews. (iii) Upon completion of an onsite monitoring review, the SMA must hold one or more wrap-up sessions with the ES Office Manager and staff to discuss any findings and offer initial recommendations and appropriate technical assistance. (iv) After each review, the SMA must conduct an in-depth analysis of the review data. The conclusions, including findings and areas of concern and recommendations of the SMA, must be put in writing and must be sent directly[[Page 23735]]to the State Administrator, to the official of the SWA with authority over the ES office, and other appropriate SWA officials. (v) If the review results in any findings of noncompliance with the regulations under this chapter, the SMA's report must include the necessary corrective action(s). To resolve the findings, the ES Office Manager or other appropriate ES staff must develop and propose a written corrective action plan. The plan must be approved or revised by SWA officials and the SMA. The plan must include the actions required to correct any compliance issues within 30 business days or, if the plan allows for more than 30 business days for full compliance, the length of and the reasons for the extended period and the major interim steps to correct the compliance issues must be specifically stated. SWAs are responsible for assuring and documenting that the ES office is in compliance within the time period designated in the plan. (vi) SWAs must submit to the appropriate ETA regional office copies of the onsite review reports and corrective action plans for ES offices. (vii) The SMA may delegate the review described in paragraph (h)(3) of this section to the SMA's staff, if the SMA finds such delegation necessary. In such event, the SMA is responsible for and must approve the written report of the review. (4) Ensure all significant MSFW one-stop centers not reviewed onsite by Federal staff are reviewed at least once per year by the SMA or their staff, and that, if necessary, those ES offices in which significant problems are revealed by required reports, management information, the Complaint System, or other means are reviewed as soon as possible. (5) Review and approve the SWA's AOP. (6) On a regular basis, review outreach staff's daily logs and other reports including those showing or reflecting the outreach staff's activities. (7) Write and submit annual summaries to the State Administrator with a copy to the Regional Administrator and the National Monitor Advocate. (i) The SMA must participate in Federal reviews conducted pursuant to part 658, subpart G, of this chapter, as requested by the Regional or National Monitor Advocate. (j) The SMA must monitor the performance of the Complaint System, as set forth at Sec. Sec. 658.400 and 658.401 of this chapter. The SMA must review the ES office's informal resolution of complaints relating to MSFWs and must ensure that the ES Office Manager transmits copies of the Complaint System logs pursuant to part 658, subpart E, of this chapter to the SWA. (k) The SMA must serve as an advocate to improve services for MSFWs. (l) The SMA must establish an ongoing liaison with WIOA sec. 167 National Farmworker Jobs Program (NFJP) grantees and other organizations serving farmworkers, employers, and employer organizations in the State. (m) The SMA must establish an ongoing liaison with the State-level Equal Opportunity (E.O ) Officer. (n) The SMA must meet (either in person or by alternative means), at minimum, quarterly, with representatives of the organizations pursuant to paragraphs (l) and (m) of this section, to receive input on improving coordination with ES offices or improving the coordination of services to MSFWs. To foster such collaboration, the SMAs must communicate freely with these organizations. The SMA must also establish Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) with the NFJP grantees and may establish MOUs with other organizations serving farmworkers as appropriate. (o) The SMA must conduct frequent field visits to the working, living, and gathering areas of MSFWs, and must discuss the SWA's provision of ES services and other employment-related programs with MSFWs, crew leaders, and employers. Records must be kept of each such field visit. (p) The SMA must participate in the appropriate regional public meeting(s) held by the Department of Labor Regional Farm Labor Coordinated Enforcement Committee, other Occupational Safety and Health Administration and Wage and Hour Division task forces, and other committees as appropriate. (q) The SMA must ensure that outreach efforts in all significant MSFW one-stop centers are reviewed at least yearly. This review will include accompanying at least one outreach staff from each significant MSFW one-stop center on field visits to MSFWs' working, living, and/or gathering areas. The SMA must review findings from these reviews with the ES Office Managers. (r) The SMA must review on at least a quarterly basis all statistical and other MSFW-related data reported by ES offices in order: (1) To determine the extent to which the SWA has complied with the ES regulations; and (2) To identify the areas of non-compliance. (s) The SMA must have full access to all statistical and other MSFW-related information gathered by SWAs and ES offices and may interview ES staff with respect to reporting methods. After each review, the SMA must consult, as necessary, with the SWA and ES offices and provide technical assistance to ensure accurate reporting. (t) The SMA must review and comment on proposed State ES directives, manuals, and operating instructions relating to MSFWs and must ensure: (1) That they accurately reflect the requirements of the regulations; and (2) That they are clear and workable. The SMA also must explain and make available at the requestor's cost, pertinent directives and procedures to employers, employer organizations, farmworkers, farmworker organizations, and other parties expressing an interest in a readily identifiable directive or procedure issued and receive suggestions on how these documents can be improved. (u) The SMA must prepare for the State Administrator, the Regional Monitor Advocate, and the National Monitor Advocate an Annual Summary describing how the State provided ES services to MSFWs within the State based on statistical data, reviews, and other activities as required in this chapter. The summary must include: (1) A description of the activities undertaken during the program year by the SMA pertaining to their responsibilities set forth in this section and other applicable regulations in this chapter. (2) An assurance that the SMA is a senior-level official who reports directly to the State Administrator or the State Administrator's designee as described at paragraph (c) of this section. (3) An evaluation of SMA staffing levels, including: (i) An assurance the SMA devotes all of their time to Monitor Advocate functions or, if the SMA conducts their functions on a part-time basis, an assessment of whether all SMA functions are able to be effectively performed on a part-time basis; and (ii) An assessment of whether the performance of SMA functions requires increased time by the SMA (if part-time) or an increase in the number of ES staff assigned to assist the SMA in the performance of SMA functions, or both. (4) A summary of the monitoring reviews conducted by the SMA, including: (i) A description of any problems, deficiencies, or improper practices the[[Page 23736]]SMA identified in the delivery of services; (ii) A summary of the actions taken by the SWA to resolve the problems, deficiencies, or improper practices described in its service delivery; and (iii) A summary of any technical assistance the SMA provided for the SWA, ES offices, and outreach staff. (5) A summary and analysis of the outreach efforts undertaken by all significant and non-significant MSFW ES offices, as well as the results of those efforts, and an analysis of whether the outreach levels and results were adequate. (6) A summary of the State's actions taken under the Complaint System described in part 658, subpart E, of this chapter, identifying any challenges, complaint trends, findings from reviews of the Complaint System, trainings offered throughout the year, and steps taken to inform MSFWs and employers, and farmworker advocacy groups about the Complaint System. (7) A summary of how the SMA is working with WIOA sec. 167 NFJP grantees, the State-level E.O Officer, and other organizations serving farmworkers, employers, and employer organizations in the State, and an assurance that the SMA is meeting at least quarterly with these individuals and representatives of these organizations. (8) A summary of the statistical and other MSFW-related data and reports gathered by SWAs and ES offices for the year, including an overview of the SMA's involvement in the SWA's reporting systems. (9) A summary of the training conducted for ES staff on techniques for accurately reporting data. (10) A summary of activities related to the AOP and an explanation of whether those activities helped the State reach the objectives described in the AOP. At the end of the 4-year AOP cycle, the summary must include a synopsis of the SWA's achievements over the previous 4 years to accomplish the objectives set forth in the AOP, and a description of the objectives which were not achieved and the steps the SWA will take to address those deficiencies. (11) For significant MSFW one-stop centers, a summary of the State's efforts to comply with Sec. 653.111 017. Amend Sec. 653.109 by:0a. Revising paragraph (b)(9);0b. Redesignating paragraph (b)(10) as paragraph (b)(11);0c. Adding a new paragraph (b)(10); and0d. Revising paragraphs (g), (h), and (h)(1). The revision, redesignation, and additions read as follows:Sec. 653.109 Data collection and performance accountability ***measures***.\* \* \* \* \* (b) \* \* \* (9) ***Agricultural*** clearance orders (including field checks), MSFW complaints and apparent violations, and monitoring activities; (10) The number of reportable individuals and participants who are MSFWs; and (11) Any other data required by the Department.\* \* \* \* \* (g) Meet equity indicators that address ES controllable services and include, at a minimum, individuals referred to a job, receiving job development, and referred to supportive or career services. (h) Meet minimum levels of service in significant MSFW States. That is, only significant MSFW States will be required to meet minimum levels of service to MSFWs. Minimum level of service indicators must include, at a minimum, individuals placed in a job, individuals placed long-term (150 days or more) in a non-***agricultural*** job, a review of significant MSFW ES offices, field checks conducted, outreach contacts per quarter, and ***processing*** of complaints. The determination of the minimum service levels required of significant MSFW States must be based on the following: (1) Past SWA performance in serving MSFWs, as reflected in on-site reviews and data collected under paragraph (b) of this section.\* \* \* \* \*018. Amend Sec. 653.110 by revising paragraph (b) to read as follows:Sec. 653.110 Disclosure of data.\* \* \* \* \* (b) If a request for data held by a SWA is made to the ETA national or regional office, ETA must forward the request to the SWA for response.\* \* \* \* \*019. Amend Sec. 653.111 by revising the section heading and paragraphs (a) and (b) to read as follows:Sec. 653.111 State Workforce Agency staffing requirements for significant MSFW one-stop centers. (a) The SWA must staff significant MSFW one-stop centers in a manner facilitating the delivery of ES services tailored to the unique needs of MSFWs. This includes recruiting qualified candidates who meet the criteria in Sec. 653.107(a)(3). (b) The SMA, Regional Monitor Advocate, or the National Monitor Advocate, as part of their regular reviews of SWA compliance with these regulations, must monitor the extent to which the SWA has complied with its obligations under paragraph (a) of this section.\* \* \* \* \*020. Amend Sec. 653.501 by:0a. Revising the introductory text of paragraph (a) and paragraph (a)(1);0b. Adding paragraph (b)(4);0c. Revising paragraph (c)(3) introductory text; and0d. Revising the first sentence in the introductory text of paragraph (d)(1) and paragraphs (d)(3), (6), (10), and (11). The revisions and additions read as follows:Sec. 653.501 Requirements for ***processing*** clearance orders. (a) Assessment of need. No ES staff may place a job order seeking workers to perform farmwork into intrastate or interstate clearance unless: (1) The ES office and employer have attempted and have not been able to obtain sufficient workers within the local labor market area; or\* \* \* \* \* (b) \* \* \* (4) Prior to placing a job order into intrastate or interstate clearance, ES staff must consult the Department's Office of Foreign Labor Certification and Wage and Hour Division debarment lists. If the employer requesting access to the clearance system is currently debarred or disqualified from participating in one of the Department's foreign labor certification programs, the SWA must initiate discontinuation of services pursuant to part 658, subpart F of this chapter. (c) \* \* \* (3) SWAs must ensure that the employer makes the following assurances in the clearance order: \* \* \*\* \* \* \* \* (d) \* \* \* (1) The order-holding ES office must transmit an electronic copy of the approved clearance order to its SWA. \* \* \*\* \* \* \* \* (3) The approval ***process*** described in this paragraph does not apply to clearance orders that are attached to applications for foreign temporary ***agricultural*** workers pursuant to part 655, subpart B, of this chapter; such clearance orders must be sent to the ***processing*** center as directed by ETA in guidance. For noncriteria clearance orders (orders that are not attached to applications under part 655, subpart B, of this chapter), the ETA regional office must review and approve the order[[Page 23737]]within 10 business days of its receipt of the order, and the Regional Administrator or their designee must approve the areas of supply to which the order will be extended. Any denial by the Regional Administrator or their designee must be in writing and state the reasons for the denial.\* \* \* \* \* (6) ES staff must assist all farmworkers to understand the terms and conditions of employment set forth in intrastate and interstate clearance orders and must provide such workers with checklists showing wage payment schedules, working conditions, and other material specifications of the clearance order.\* \* \* \* \* (10) Applicant-holding offices must provide workers referred on clearance orders with a checklist summarizing wages, working conditions and other material specifications in the clearance order. The checklist must include language notifying the worker that a copy of the original clearance order is available upon request. (11) The applicant-holding office must give each referred worker a copy of the list of worker's rights described in Departmental guidance.\* \* \* \* \*021. Amend Sec. 653.502 by revising paragraph (d) to read as follows:Sec. 653.502 Conditional access to the ***Agricultural*** Recruitment System.\* \* \* \* \* (d) Notice of denial. If the Regional Administrator denies the request for conditional access to the intrastate or interstate clearance system they must provide written notice to the employer, the appropriate SWA, and the ES office, stating the reasons for the denial.\* \* \* \* \*022. Amend Sec. 653.503 by revising paragraphs (a) and (b) to read as follows:Sec. 653.503 Field checks. (a) If a worker is placed on a clearance order, the SWA must notify the employer in writing that the SWA, through its ES offices, and/or Federal staff, must conduct unannounced field checks to determine and document whether wages, hours, transportation, and working and housing conditions are being provided as specified in the clearance order. (b) Where the SWA has made placements on 10 or more ***agricultural*** clearance orders (pursuant to this subpart) during the quarter, the SWA must conduct field checks on at least 25 percent of the total of such orders. Where the SWA has made placements on nine or fewer job orders during the quarter (but at least one job order), the SWA must conduct field checks on 100 percent of all such orders. This requirement must be met on a quarterly basis.\* \* \* \* \*PART 658--ADMINISTRATIVE PROVISIONS GOVERNING THE WAGNER-PEYSER ACT EMPLOYMENT SERVICE023. Revise the authority citation for part 658 to read as follows: Authority: Pub. L. 113-128, 128 Stat. 1425 (July 22, 2014); 29 U.S.C chapter 4B.024. Amend Sec. 658.400 by revising the second sentence of paragraph (a) and paragraph (d) to read as follows:Sec. 658.400 Purpose and scope of subpart. (a) \* \* \* Specifically, the Complaint System ***processes*** complaints against an employer about the specific job to which the applicant was referred through the ES and complaints involving the failure to comply with the ES regulations under parts 651, 652, 653, and 654 of this chapter and this part. \* \* \*\* \* \* \* \* (d) A complainant may designate an individual to act as their representative.025. Amend Sec. 658.410 by:0a. Revising paragraphs (c), (g), (h), (k), and (m);0b. Removing paragraph (n); and0c. Redesignating and revising paragraph (o) as paragraph (n). The revisions and redesignation read as follows:Sec. 658.410 Establishment of local and State complaint systems.\* \* \* \* \* (c) SWAs must ensure centralized control procedures are established for the ***processing*** of complaints and apparent violations. The ES Office Manager and the State Administrator must ensure a central complaint log is maintained, listing all complaints taken by the ES office or the SWA and apparent violations identified by ES staff, and specifying for each complaint or apparent violation: (1) The name of the complainant (for complaints); (2) The name of the respondent (employer or State agency); (3) The date the complaint is filed or the apparent violation was identified; (4) Whether the complaint is made by or on behalf of a migrant and seasonal farmworker (MSFW) or whether the apparent violation affects an MSFW; (5) Whether the complaint or apparent violation concerns an employment-related law or the ES regulations; and (6) The actions taken (including any documents the SWA sent or received and the date the SWA took such action(s)), and whether the complaint or apparent violation has been resolved, including informally.\* \* \* \* \* (g) All complaints filed through the local ES office must be ***processed*** by a trained Complaint System Representative. (h) All complaints received by a SWA must be assigned to a trained Complaint System Representative designated by the State Administrator. Complaints must not be assigned to the State Monitor Advocate (SMA).\* \* \* \* \* (k) The appropriate ES staff ***processing*** a complaint must offer to assist the complainant through the provision of appropriate services.\* \* \* \* \* (m) Follow-up on unresolved complaints. When an MSFW submits a complaint, the Complaint System Representative must follow-up monthly on the ***processing*** of the complaint and must inform the complainant of the status of the complaint. No follow-up with the complainant is required for non-MSFW complaints. (n) A complainant may designate an individual to act as their representative throughout the filing and ***processing*** of a complaint.026. Amend Sec. 658.411 by:0a. Revising paragraphs (a)(2)(i) and (ii), (a)(3), the first sentence of paragraph (a)(4), and paragraphs (b)(1), (b)(1)(i), and (b)(1)(ii)(A), (B), (D), and (E);0b. Adding paragraph (b)(1)(ii)(F); and0c. Revising paragraphs (c), (d)(1)(i), (d)(1)(ii)(A) through (D), (d)(1)(iii) and (iv), the introductory text of (d)(3), (d)(4), the introductory text of (d)(5)(i) and (ii), (d)(5)(iii)(G), and (d)(6). The revisions and addition read as follows:Sec. 658.411 Action on complaints. (a) \* \* \* (2) \* \* \* (i) Make every effort to obtain all the information they perceive to be necessary to investigate the complaint; (ii) Request that the complainant indicate all of the physical addresses, email addresses, telephone numbers, and any other helpful means by which they might be contacted during the investigation of the complaint; and\* \* \* \* \* (3) The staff must ensure the complainant (or their representative) submits the complaint on the Complaint/Referral Form or another[[Page 23738]]complaint form prescribed or approved by the Department or submits complaint information which satisfies paragraph (a)(4) of this section. The Complaint/Referral Form must be used for all complaints, including complaints about unlawful discrimination, except as provided in paragraph (a)(4) of this section. The staff must offer to assist the complainant in filling out the form and submitting all necessary information and must do so if the complainant desires such assistance. If the complainant also represents several other complainants, all such complainants must be named. The complainant, or their representative, must sign the completed form in writing or electronically. The identity of the complainant(s) and any persons who furnish information relating to, or assisting in, an investigation of a complaint must be kept confidential to the maximum extent possible, consistent with applicable law and a fair determination of the complaint. A copy of the completed complaint submission must be given to the complainant(s), and the complaint form must be given to the appropriate Complaint System Representative described in Sec. 658.410(g). (4) Any complaint in a reasonable form (letter or email) which is signed by the complainant, or their representative, and includes sufficient information to initiate an investigation must be treated as if it were a properly completed Complaint/Referral Form filed in person. \* \* \* (b) \* \* \* (1) When a complaint is filed regarding an employment-related law with an ES office or a SWA, and paragraph (c) of this section does not apply, the office must determine if the complainant is an MSFW. (i) If the complainant is a non-MSFW, the office must immediately refer the complainant to the appropriate enforcement agency, another public agency, a legal aid organization, and/or a consumer advocate organization, as appropriate, for assistance. Upon completing the referral, the local or State representative is not required to follow-up with the complainant. (ii) \* \* \* (A) Take from the MSFW or their representative, in writing (hard copy or electronic), the complaint(s) describing the alleged violation(s) of the employment-related law(s); and (B) Attempt to resolve the issue informally at the local level, except in cases where the complaint was submitted to the SWA and the Complaint System Representative determines that they must take immediate action or in cases where informal resolution at the local level would be detrimental to the complainant(s). In cases where informal resolution at the local level would be detrimental to the complainant(s), the Complaint System Representative must immediately refer the complaint to the appropriate enforcement agency. Concurrently, the Complaint System Representative must offer to refer the MSFW to other ES services should the MSFW be interested.\* \* \* \* \* (D) If the ES office or SWA Complaint System Representative determines that the complaint must be referred to a State or Federal agency, they must refer the complaint immediately to the appropriate enforcement agency for prompt action. (E) If the complaint was referred under paragraph (b)(1)(ii)(D) of this section, the representative must notify the complainant of the enforcement agency to which the complaint was referred. (F) When a complaint alleges an employer in a different State from where the complaint is filed has violated an employment-related law: (1) The ES office or SWA receiving the complaint must ensure the Complaint/Referral Form is adequately completed and then immediately send a copy of the Complaint/Referral Form and copies of any relevant documents to the SWA in the other State. Copies of the referral letter must be sent to the complainant, and copies of the complaint and referral letter must be sent to the ETA Regional Office(s) with jurisdiction over the transferring and receiving State agencies. All such copies must be sent via hard copy or electronic mail. (2) The SWA receiving the complaint must ***process*** the complaint as if it had been initially filed with that SWA. (3) The ETA Regional Office with jurisdiction over the receiving SWA must follow up with it to ensure the complaint is ***processed*** in accordance with these regulations.\* \* \* \* \* (c) Complaints alleging unlawful discrimination or reprisal for protected activity. All complaints received under this subpart by an ES office or a SWA alleging unlawful discrimination or reprisal for protected activity in violation of nondiscrimination laws, such as those enforced by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) or the Department of Labor's Civil Rights Center (CRC), or in violation of the Immigration and Nationality Act's anti-discrimination provision found at 8 U.S.C 1324b, must be logged and immediately referred to the State-level E.O Officer. The Complaint System Representative must notify the complainant of the referral in writing. (d) \* \* \* (1) When an ES complaint is filed with an ES office or a SWA, and paragraph (c) of this section does not apply, the following procedures apply: (i) When an ES complaint is filed against an employer, the proper office to ***process*** the complaint is the ES office serving the area in which the employer is located. (ii) \* \* \* (A) The ES office or SWA receiving the complaint must ensure the Complaint/Referral Form is adequately completed, and then immediately send a copy of the Complaint/Referral Form and copies of any relevant documents to the SWA in the other State. Copies of the referral letter must be sent to the complainant, and copies of the complaint and referral letter must be sent to the ETA Regional Office(s) with jurisdiction over the transferring and receiving State agencies. All such copies must be sent via hard copy or electronic mail. (B) The SWA receiving the complaint must ***process*** the complaint as if it had been initially filed with that SWA. (C) The ETA regional office with jurisdiction over the receiving SWA must follow-up with it to ensure the complaint is ***processed*** in accordance with these regulations. (D) If the complaint is against more than one SWA, the complaint must so clearly state. Additionally, the complaints must be ***processed*** as separate complaints and must be ***processed*** according to procedures in this paragraph (d). (iii) When an ES complaint is filed against an ES office, the proper office to ***process*** the complaint is the ES office serving the area in which the alleged violation occurred. (iv) When an ES complaint is filed against more than one ES offices and is in regard to an alleged agency-wide violation, the SWA representative or their designee must ***process*** the complaint.\* \* \* \* \* (3) When a non-MSFW or their representative files a complaint regarding the ES regulations with a SWA, or when a non-MSFW complaint is referred from an ES office the following procedures apply:\* \* \* \* \* (4)(i) When a MSFW or their representative files a complaint[[Page 23739]]regarding the ES regulations directly with a SWA, or when a MSFW complaint is referred from an ES office, the Complaint System Representative must investigate and attempt to resolve the complaint immediately upon receipt and may, if necessary, conduct a further investigation. (ii) If resolution at the SWA level has not been accomplished within 20 business days after the complaint was received by the SWA (or after all necessary information has been submitted to the SWA pursuant to paragraph (a)(4) of this section), the Complaint System Representative must make a written determination regarding the complaint and must send electronic copies to the complainant and the respondent. The determination must follow the procedures set forth in paragraph (d)(5) of this section. (5)(i) All written determinations by the SWA on complaints under the ES regulations must be sent by certified mail (or another legally viable method) and a copy of the determination may be sent via electronic mail. The determination must include all the following: (ii) If the SWA determines that the employer has not violated the ES regulations, the SWA must offer to the complainant the opportunity to request, in writing, a hearing within 20 business days after the certified date of receipt of the notification. (iii) \* \* \* (G) With the consent of the SWA and of the State hearing official, the party who requested the hearing may withdraw the request for the hearing in writing before the hearing.\* \* \* \* \* (6) A complaint regarding the ES regulations must be ***processed*** to resolution by these regulations only if it is made within 2 years of the alleged occurrence.\* \* \* \* \*027. Amend Sec. 658.417 by revising paragraph (b) to read as follows:Sec. 658.417 State hearings.\* \* \* \* \* (b) The State hearing official may decide to conduct hearings on more than one complaint concurrently if they determine that the issues are related or that the complaints will be ***processed*** more expeditiously if conducted together.\* \* \* \* \*028. Amend Sec. 658.419 by revising paragraph (a) to read as follows:Sec. 658.419 Apparent violations. (a) If an ES staff member observes, has reason to believe, or is in receipt of information regarding a suspected violation of employment-related laws or ES regulations by an employer, except as provided at Sec. 653.503 of this chapter (field checks) or Sec. 658.411 (complaints), the employee must document the apparent violation and refer this information to the ES Office Manager, who must document the apparent violation in the Complaint System log, as described at Sec. 658.410 Apparent violations of nondiscrimination laws must be ***processed*** according to the procedures described in Sec. 658.411(c).\* \* \* \* \*029. Amend Sec. 658.420 by revising paragraphs (b) and (c) to read as follows:Sec. 658.420 Responsibilities of the Employment and Training Administration regional office.\* \* \* \* \* (b) The Regional Administrator must designate Department of Labor officials to ***process*** ES regulation-related complaints as follows: (1) All complaints received at the ETA regional office under this subpart that allege unlawful discrimination or reprisal for protected activity in violation of nondiscrimination laws, such as those enforced by the EEOC or CRC, in violation of the Immigration and Nationality Act's anti-discrimination provision found at 8 U.S.C 1324b, must immediately be logged and immediately referred to the appropriate State-level E.O Officer(s). (2) All complaints other than those described in paragraph (b)(1) of this section must be assigned to a regional office official designated by the Regional Administrator, provided that the regional office official designated to ***process*** MSFW complaints must be the Regional Monitor Advocate (RMA). (c) Except for those complaints under paragraph (b)(1) of this section, the Regional Administrator must designate Department of Labor officials to ***process*** employment-related law complaints in accordance with Sec. 658.422, provided that the regional official designated to ***process*** MSFW employment-related law complaints must be the RMA. The RMA must follow up monthly on all complaints filed by MSFWs including complaints under paragraph (b)(1) of this section.\* \* \* \* \*030. Amend Sec. 658.421 by revising the section heading, the first sentence of paragraph (a)(1), introductory text of (a)(2), the first sentences of paragraphs (a)(2)(i) and (b), and paragraphs (c) and (d) to read as follows:Sec. 658.421 ***Processing*** of Wagner-Peyser Act Employment Service regulation-related complaints. (a) Except as provided below in paragraph (a)(2) of this section, no complaint alleging a violation of the ES regulations may be ***processed*** at the ETA regional office level until the complainant has exhausted the SWA administrative remedies set forth at Sec. Sec. 658.411 through 658.418 \* \* \* (2) If a complaint is submitted directly to the Regional Administrator and if they determine that the nature and scope of a complaint described in paragraph (a) of this section is such that the time required to exhaust the administrative procedures at the SWA level would adversely affect a significant number of individuals, the RA must accept the complaint and take the following action: (i) If the complaint is filed against an employer, the regional office must ***process*** the complaint in a manner consistent with the requirements imposed upon State agencies by Sec. Sec. 658.411 and 658.418 \* \* \*\* \* \* \* \* (b) The ETA regional office is responsible for ***processing*** appeals of determinations made on complaints at the SWA level. \* \* \* (c)(1) Once the Regional Administrator receives a timely appeal, they must request the complete SWA file, including the original Complaint/Referral Form from the appropriate SWA. (2) The Regional Administrator must review the file in the case and must determine within 10 business days whether any further investigation or action is appropriate; however, if the Regional Administrator determines that they need to request legal advice from the Office of the Solicitor at the U.S Department of Labor, then the Regional Administrator is allowed 20 business days to make this determination. (d) If the Regional Administrator determines that no further action is warranted, the Regional Administrator will send their determination in writing to the appellant within 5 days of the determination, with a notification that the appellant may request a hearing before a Department of Labor Administrative Law Judge (ALJ) by filing a hearing request in writing with the Regional Administrator within 20 working days of the appellant's receipt of the notification.\* \* \* \* \*031. Amend Sec. 658.422 by revising the section heading and paragraphs (a) through (c) to read as follows:[[Page 23740]]Sec. 658.422 ***Processing*** of employment-related law complaints by the Regional Administrator. (a) This section applies to all complaints submitted directly to the Regional Administrator or their representative. (b) Each complaint filed by an MSFW alleging violation(s) of employment-related laws must be taken in writing, logged, and referred to the appropriate enforcement agency for prompt action. If such a complaint alleges a violation of nondiscrimination laws or reprisal for protected activity, it must be referred to the appropriate State-level E.O Officer in accordance with Sec. 658.420(b)(1). (c) Each complaint submitted by a non-MSFW alleging violation(s) of employment-related laws must be logged and referred to the appropriate enforcement agency for prompt action. If such a complaint alleges a violation of nondiscrimination laws or reprisal for protected activity, it must be referred to the appropriate State-level E.O Officer in accordance with Sec. 658.420(b)(1).\* \* \* \* \*032. Amend Sec. 658.424 by revising paragraph (d) to read as follows:Sec. 658.424 Proceedings before the Office of Administrative Law Judges.\* \* \* \* \* (d) The ALJ may decide to consolidate cases and conduct hearings on more than one complaint concurrently if they determine that the issues are related or that the complaints will be ***processed*** more expeditiously.\* \* \* \* \*033. Amend Sec. 658.425 by revising paragraph (a)(1) to read as follows:Sec. 658.425 Decision of Department of Labor Administrative Law Judge. (a) \* \* \* (1) Rule that they lack jurisdiction over the case:\* \* \* \* \*034. Amend Sec. 658.501 by revising paragraphs (a)(4), (b), and (c) to read as follows:Sec. 658.501 Basis for discontinuation of services. (a) \* \* \* (4) Are found by a final determination by an appropriate enforcement agency to have violated any employment-related laws and notification of this final determination has been provided to the Department or the SWA by that enforcement agency or are currently debarred or disqualified from participating in one of the Department's foreign labor certification programs;\* \* \* \* \* (b) SWA officials may discontinue services immediately if, in the judgment of the State Administrator, exhaustion of the administrative procedures set forth in Sec. 658.502 would cause substantial harm to a significant number of workers. In such instances, procedures at Sec. Sec. 658.503 and 658.504 must be followed. (c) If it comes to the attention of an ES office or a SWA that an employer participating in the ES may not have complied with the terms of its temporary labor certification, under, for example the H-2A and H-2B visa programs, SWA officials must engage in the procedures for discontinuation of services to employers pursuant to Sec. 658.502 and simultaneously notify the Chicago National ***Processing*** Center (CNPC) of the alleged non-compliance for investigation and consideration of ineligibility pursuant to Sec. 655.184 or Sec. 655.73 of this chapter respectively for subsequent temporary labor certification.\* \* \* \* \*035. Amend Sec. 658.502 by revising the introductory text of paragraphs (a)(1) through (3), (a)(4), introductory text of (a)(5) through (7), (a)(7)(i) and (iii), and (b) to read as follows:Sec. 658.502 Notification to employers. (a) \* \* \* (1) Where the decision is based on submittal and refusal to alter or to withdraw job orders containing specifications contrary to employment-related laws, the SWA must specify the date the order was submitted, the job order involved, the specifications contrary to employment-related laws and the laws involved. The SWA must notify the employer in writing that all ES services will be terminated in 20 working days unless the employer within that time: \* \* \* (2) Where the decision is based on the employer's submittal of an order and refusal to provide assurances that the job is in compliance with employment-related laws or to withdraw the order, the SWA must specify the date the order was submitted, the job order involved, and the assurances involved. The employer must be notified that all ES services will be terminated within 20 working days unless the employer within that time: \* \* \* (3) Where the decision is based on a finding that the employer has misrepresented the terms or conditions of employment specified on job orders or failed to comply fully with assurances made on job orders, the SWA must specify the basis for that determination. The employer must be notified that all ES services will be terminated in 20 working days unless the employer within that time: \* \* \* (4) Where the decision is based on a final determination by an enforcement agency or the employer is currently debarred or disqualified from participating in one of the Department's foreign labor certification programs, the SWA must specify the enforcement agency's findings of facts and conclusions of law and, if applicable, the time period for which the employer is debarred or disqualified from participating in one of the Department's foreign labor certification programs. The employer must be notified that all ES services will be terminated in 20 working days unless the employer within that time: (i) Provides adequate evidence that the enforcement agency has reversed its ruling and that the employer did not violate employment-related laws; or (ii) Provides adequate evidence that the Department's disbarment or disqualification is no longer in effect or will terminate before the employer's anticipated date of need; or (iii) Provides adequate evidence that the appropriate fines have been paid and/or appropriate restitution has been made; and (iv) Provides assurances that any policies, procedures, or conditions responsible for the violation have been corrected and the same or similar violations are not likely to occur in the future. (5) Where the decision is based on a finding of a violation of ES regulations under Sec. 658.411, the SWA must specify the finding. The employer must be notified that all ES services will be terminated in 20 working days unless the employer within that time: \* \* \* (6) Where the decision is based on an employer's failure to accept qualified workers referred through the clearance system, the SWA must specify the workers referred and not accepted. The employer must be notified that all ES services will be terminated in 20 working days unless the employer within that time: \* \* \* (7) Where the decision is based on lack of cooperation in the conduct of field checks, the SWA must specify the lack of cooperation. The employer must be notified that all ES services will be terminated in 20 working days unless the employer within that time: (i) Provides adequate evidence that it did cooperate; or\* \* \* \* \* (iii) Provides assurances that it will cooperate in future field checks in further activity; or\* \* \* \* \*[[Page 23741]] (b) If the employer chooses to respond pursuant to this section by providing documentary evidence or assurances, it must at the same time request a hearing if such hearing is desired in the event that the SWA does not accept the documentary evidence or assurances as adequate.\* \* \* \* \*036. Amend Sec. 658.504 by revising paragraphs (a)(2)(ii) and (b) to read as follow:Sec. 658.504 Reinstatement of services. (a) \* \* \* (2) \* \* \* (ii) The employer provides adequate evidence that it has responded adequately to any findings of an enforcement agency, SWA, or ETA, including restitution to the complainant and the payment of any fines, that were the basis of the discontinuation of services. (b) The SWA must notify the employer requesting reinstatement within 20 working days whether its request has been granted. If the State denies the request for reinstatement, the basis for the denial must be specified and the employer must be notified that it may request a hearing within 20 working days.\* \* \* \* \*037. Amend Sec. 658.602 by revising paragraphs (f)(2) through (4), (g), introductory text paragraph (j), (j)(8), (l) through (n), introductory text paragraph (o), (p) through (r), introductory text paragraph(s), (s)(2) and (3) to read as follows:Sec. 658.602 Employment and Training Administration National Office responsibility.\* \* \* \* \* (f) \* \* \* (2) Review the performance of SWAs in providing the full range of ES services to MSFWs; (3) Take steps to resolve or refer ES-related problems of MSFWs which come to their attention; (4) Take steps to refer non-ES-related problems of MSFWs which come to their attention;\* \* \* \* \* (g) The NMA must be appointed by the Office of Workforce Investment Administrator (Administrator) after informing farmworker organizations and other organizations with expertise concerning MSFWs of the opening and encouraging them to refer qualified applicants to apply through the Federal merit system. Among qualified candidates, determined through merit systems procedures, individuals must be sought who meet the criteria used in the selection of the SMAs, as provided in SWA self-monitoring requirements at Sec. 653.108(a) of this chapter.\* \* \* \* \* (j) The NMA must monitor and assess SWA compliance with ES regulations affecting MSFWs on a continuing basis. Their assessment must consider: \* \* \* (8) Their personal observations from visits to SWAs, ES offices, ***agricultural*** work sites, and migrant camps. In the Annual Report, the NMA must include both a quantitative and qualitative analysis of their findings and the implementation of their recommendations by State and Federal officials, and must address the information obtained from all of the foregoing sources.\* \* \* \* \* (l) If the NMA finds the effectiveness of any RMA has been substantially impeded by the Regional Administrator or other regional office official, they must, if unable to resolve such problems informally, report and recommend appropriate actions directly to the OWI Administrator. If the NMA receives information that the effectiveness of any SMA has been substantially impeded by the State Administrator, a State or Federal ES official, or other ES staff, they must, in the absence of a satisfactory informal resolution at the regional level, report and recommend appropriate actions directly to the OWI Administrator. (m) The NMA must be informed of all proposed changes in policy and practice within the ES, including ES regulations, which may affect the delivery of services to MSFWs. The NMA must advise the Administrator concerning all such proposed changes which may adversely affect MSFWs. The NMA must propose directly to the OWI Administrator changes in ES policy and administration which may substantially improve the delivery of services to MSFWs. They also must recommend changes in the funding of SWAs and/or adjustment or reallocation of the discretionary portions of funding formulae. (n) The NMA must participate in the review and assessment activities required in this section and Sec. Sec. 658.700 through 658.711 As part of such participation, the NMA, or if they are unable to participate, an RMA must accompany the National Office review team on National Office on-site reviews. The NMA must engage in the following activities during each State on-site review: (1) They must accompany selected outreach staff on their field visits. (2) They must participate in field check(s) of migrant camps or work site(s) where MSFWs have been placed on inter or intrastate clearance orders. (3) They must contact local WIOA sec. 167 National Farmworker Jobs Program grantees or other farmworker organizations as part of the on-site review and discuss with representatives of these organizations current trends and any other pertinent information concerning MSFWs. (4) They must meet with the SMA and discuss the full range of the ES services to MSFWs, including monitoring and the Complaint System. (o) In addition to the duties specified in paragraph (f) of this section, the NMA each year during the harvest season must visit the four States with the highest level of MSFW activity during the prior fiscal year, if they are not scheduled for a National Office on-site review during the current fiscal year, and must: \* \* \* (p) The NMA must perform duties specified in Sec. Sec. 658.700 through 765.711 As part of this function, they must monitor the performance of regional offices in imposing corrective action. The NMA must report any deficiencies in performance to the Administrator. (q) The NMA must establish routine and regular contacts with WIOA sec. 167 National Farmworker Jobs Program grantees, other farmworker organizations and ***agricultural*** employers and/or employer organizations. The NMA must attend conferences or meetings of these groups wherever possible and must report to the Administrator and the National Farm Labor Coordinated Enforcement Committee on these contacts when appropriate. The NMA must include in the Annual Report recommendations about how the Department might better coordinate ES and WIOA sec. 167 National Farmworker Jobs Program services as they pertain to MSFWs. (r) In the event that any SMA or RMA, enforcement agency, or MSFW group refers a matter to the NMA which requires emergency action, the NMA must assist them in obtaining action by appropriate agencies and staff, inform the originating party of the action taken, and, upon request, provide written confirmation. (s) Through all the mechanisms provided in this subpart, the NMA must aggressively seek to ascertain and remedy, if possible, systemic deficiencies in the provisions of ES services and protections afforded by these regulations to MSFWs. The NMA must: \* \* \* (2) Provide technical assistance to ETA regional office and ES staff for[[Page 23742]]administering the Complaint System, and any other ES services as appropriate. (3) Recommend to the Regional Administrator specific instructions for action by regional office staff to correct any ES-related systemic deficiencies. Prior to any ETA review of regional office operations concerning ES services to MSFWs, the NMA must provide to the Regional Administrator a brief summary of ES-related services to MSFWs in that region and their recommendations for incorporation in the regional review materials as the Regional Administrator and ETA reviewing organization deem appropriate.\* \* \* \* \*038. Amend Sec. 658.603 by revising paragraphs (d)(7), (f)(1) through (3), (g), (i), introductory text of paragraph (k), (k)(7) and (8), (m), (n)(2) and (3), (o)(1), (p), (q), and (s) through (v) to read as follows:Sec. 658.603 Employment and Training Administration regional office responsibility.\* \* \* \* \* (d) \* \* \* (7) Unannounced field checks of a sample of ***agricultural*** work sites to which ES placements have been made through the clearance system to determine and document whether wages, hours, and working and housing conditions are as specified on the clearance order. If regional office staff find reason to believe that conditions vary from clearance order specifications, findings must be documented on the Complaint/Apparent Violation Referral Form and provided to the State Workforce Agency to be ***processed*** as an apparent violation under Sec. 658.419 \* \* \* \* \* (f) \* \* \* (1) Review the effective functioning of the SMAs in their region; (2) Review the performance of SWAs in providing the full range of ES services to MSFWs; (3) Take steps to resolve ES-related problems of MSFWs which come to their attention;\* \* \* \* \* (g) The RMA must be appointed by the Regional Administrator after informing farmworker organizations and other organizations in the region with expertise concerning MSFWs of the opening and encouraging them to refer qualified applicants to apply through the Federal merit system. The RMA must have direct personal access to the Regional Administrator wherever they find it necessary. Among qualified candidates, individuals must be sought who meet the criteria used in the selection of the SMAs, as provided in Sec. 653.108(b) of this chapter.\* \* \* \* \* (i) The RMA must participate in training sessions including those offered by the National Office and those necessary to maintain competency and enhance their understanding of issues farmworkers face (including trainings offered by OSHA, WHD, EEOC, CRC, and other organizations offering farmworker-related information).\* \* \* \* \* (k) At the ETA regional level, the RMA must have primary responsibility for ensuring SWA compliance with ES regulations as it pertains to services to MSFWs is monitored by the regional office. They must independently assess on a continuing basis the provision of ES services to MSFWs, seeking out and using: \* \* \* (7) Any other pertinent information which comes to their attention from any possible source. (8) In addition, the RMA must consider their personal observations from visits to ES offices, ***agricultural*** work sites, and migrant camps.\* \* \* \* \* (m) The Regional Administrator's quarterly report to the National Office must include the RMA's summary of their independent assessment as required in paragraph (f)(5) of this section. The fourth quarter summary must include an Annual Summary from the region. The summary also must include both a quantitative and a qualitative analysis of their reviews and must address all the matters with respect to which they have responsibilities under these regulations. (n) \* \* \* (2) Is being impeded in fulfilling their duties; or (3) Is making recommendations that are being consistently ignored by SWA officials. If the RMA believes that the effectiveness of any SMA has been substantially impeded by the State Administrator, other State agency officials, any Federal officials, or other ES staff, the RMA must report and recommend appropriate actions to the Regional Administrator. Copies of the recommendations must be provided to the NMA electronically or in hard copy. (o)(1) The RMA must be informed of all proposed changes in policy and practice within the ES, including ES regulations, which may affect the delivery of services to MSFWs. They must advise the Regional Administrator on all such proposed changes which, in their opinion, may adversely affect MSFWs or which may substantially improve the delivery of services to MSFWs.\* \* \* \* \* (p) The RMA must participate in the review and assessment activities required in this section and Sec. Sec. 658.700 through 658.711 The RMA, an assistant, or another RMA must participate in National Office and regional office on-site statewide reviews of ES services to MSFWs in States in the region. The RMA must engage in the following activities in the course of participating in an on-site SWA review: (1) Accompany selected outreach staff on their field visits; (2) Participate in a field check of migrant camps or work sites where MSFWs have been placed on intrastate or interstate clearance orders; (3) Contact local WIOA sec. 167 National Farmworker Jobs Program grantees or other farmworker organizations as part of the on-site review, and must discuss with representatives of these organizations perceived trends, and/or other relevant information concerning MSFWs in the area; and (4) Meet with the SMA and discuss the full range of the ES services to MSFWs, including monitoring and the Complaint System. (q) During the calendar quarter preceding the time of peak MSFW activity in each State, the RMA must meet with the SMA and must review in detail the State Workforce Agency's capability for providing the full range of services to MSFWs as required by ES regulations, during the upcoming harvest season. The RMA must offer technical assistance and recommend to the SWA and/or the Regional Administrator any changes in State policy or practice that the RMA finds necessary.\* \* \* \* \* (s) The RMA must initiate and maintain regular and personal contacts, including informal contacts in addition to those specifically required by these regulations, with SMAs in the region. In addition, the RMA must have personal and regular contact with the NMA. The RMA also must establish routine and regular contacts with WIOA sec. 167 National Farmworker Jobs Program grantees, other farmworker organizations and ***agricultural*** employers and/or employer organizations in the RMA's region. The RMA must attend conferences or meetings of these groups wherever possible and must report to the Regional Administrator and the Regional Farm Labor Coordinated Enforcement[[Page 23743]]Committee on these contacts when appropriate. The RMA also must make recommendations as to how the Department might better coordinate ES and WIOA sec. 167 National Farmworker Jobs Program services to MSFWs. (t) The RMA must attend MSFW-related public meeting(s) conducted in the region, as appropriate. Following such meetings or hearings, the RMA must take such steps or make such recommendations to the Regional Administrator, as the RMA deems necessary to remedy problem(s) or condition(s) identified or described therein. (u) The RMA must attempt to achieve regional solutions to any problems, deficiencies, or improper practices concerning services to MSFWs which are regional in scope. Further, the RMA must recommend policies, offer technical assistance, or take any other necessary steps as they deem desirable or appropriate on a regional, rather than State-by-State basis, to promote region-wide improvement in the delivery of ES services to MSFWs. The RMA must facilitate region-wide coordination and communication regarding provision of ES services to MSFWs among SMAs, State Administrators, and Federal ETA officials to the greatest extent possible. In the event that any SWA or other RMA, enforcement agency, or MSFW group refers a matter to the RMA which requires emergency action, the RMA must assist them in obtaining action by appropriate agencies and staff, inform the originating party of the action taken, and, upon request, provide written confirmation. (v) The RMA must initiate and maintain such contacts as they deem necessary with RMAs in other regions to seek to resolve problems concerning MSFWs who work, live, or travel through the region. The RMA must recommend to the Regional Administrator and/or the National Office inter-regional cooperation on any particular matter, problem, or policy with respect to which inter-regional action is desirable.\* \* \* \* \*039. Amend Sec. 658.604 by revising paragraph (c)(3)(i) to read as follows:Sec. 658.604 Assessment and evaluation of program performance data.\* \* \* \* \* (c) \* \* \* (3) \* \* \* (i) Generally, for example, a SWA has direct and substantial control over the delivery of ES services such as referrals to jobs, job development contacts, counseling, referrals to career and supportive services, and the conduct of field checks.\* \* \* \* \*040. Amend Sec. 658.702 by revising paragraphs (a), (d), (e), (f)(2), and (h)(5) to read as follows:Sec. 658.702 Initial action by the Regional Administrator. (a) The ETA Regional Administrator is responsible for ensuring that all SWAs in their region are in compliance with ES regulations.\* \* \* \* \* (d) If the Regional Administrator determines that there is no probable cause to believe that a SWA has violated ES regulations, they must retain all reports and supporting information in Department files. In all cases where the Regional Administrator has insufficient information to make a probable cause determination, they must so notify the Administrator in writing and the time for the investigation must be extended 20 additional business days. (e) If the Regional Administrator determines there is probable cause to believe a SWA has violated ES regulations, they must issue a Notice of Initial Findings of Non-compliance by registered mail (or other legally viable means) to the offending SWA. The notice will specify the nature of the violation, cite the regulations involved, and indicate corrective action which may be imposed in accordance with paragraphs (g) and (h) of this section. If the non-compliance involves services to MSFWs or the Complaint System, a copy of said notice must be sent to the NMA. (f) \* \* \* (2) After the period elapses, the Regional Administrator must prepare within 20 business days, written final findings which specify whether the SWA has violated ES regulations. If in the final findings the Regional Administrator determines the SWA has not violated ES regulations, the Regional Administrator must notify the State Administrator of this finding and retain supporting documents in their files. If the final finding involves services to MSFWs or the Complaint System, the Regional Administrator also must notify the RMA and the NMA. If the Regional Administrator determines a SWA has violated ES regulations, the Regional Administrator must prepare a Final Notice of Noncompliance which must specify the violation(s) and cite the regulations involved. The Final Notice of Noncompliance must be sent to the SWA by registered mail or other legally viable means. If the noncompliance involves services to MSFWs or the Complaint System, a copy of the Final Notice must be sent to the RMA and the NMA.\* \* \* \* \* (h) \* \* \* (5) If, as a result of this review, the Regional Administrator determines the SWA has taken corrective action but is unable to determine if the violation has been corrected due to seasonality or other factors, the Regional Administrator must notify in writing the SWA and the Administrator of their findings. The Regional Administrator must conduct further follow-up at an appropriate time to make a final determination if the violation has been corrected. If the Regional Administrator's follow-up reveals that violations have not been corrected, the Regional Administrator must apply remedial actions to the SWA pursuant to Sec. 658.704 \* \* \* \* \*041. Amend Sec. 658.704 by revising the fifth sentence of paragraph (d) and the fourth sentence of (f)(2) to read as follows:Sec. 658.704 Remedial actions.\* \* \* \* \* (d) \* \* \* The Regional Administrator must notify the SWA of their findings. \* \* \*\* \* \* \* \* (f) \* \* \* (2) \* \* \* One copy must be retained. Two must be sent to the ETA National Office, one must be sent to the Solicitor of Labor, Attention: Associate Solicitor for Employment and Training, and, if the case involves violations of regulations governing services to MSFWs or the Complaint System, copies must be sent to the RMA and the NMA. \* \* \*\* \* \* \* \*042. Amend Sec. 658.705 by revising the introductory text of paragraphs (b) and (b)(3) and paragraphs (c) through (f) to read as follows:Sec. 658.705 Decision to decertify.\* \* \* \* \* (b) The Assistant Secretary must grant the request for decertification unless they make a finding that: \* \* \* (3) The Assistant Secretary has reason to believe the SWA will achieve compliance within 80 business days unless ***exceptional*** circumstances necessitate more time, pursuant to the remedial action already applied or to be applied. (In the event the Assistant Secretary does not have sufficient information to act upon the request, they may postpone the determination for up to an additional 20 business days to obtain any available additional[[Page 23744]]information.) In making a determination whether violations are ``serious'' or ``continual,'' as required by paragraph (b)(1) of this section, the Assistant Secretary must consider: \* \* \* (c) If the Assistant Secretary denies a request for decertification, they must write a complete report documenting their findings and, if appropriate, instructing an alternate remedial action or actions be applied. Electronic copies of the report must be sent to the Regional Administrator. Notice of the Assistant Secretary's decision must be published promptly in the Federal Register and the report of the Assistant Secretary must be made available for public inspection and copying. (d) If the Assistant Secretary decides decertification is appropriate, they must submit the case to the Secretary providing written explanation for their recommendation of decertification. (e) Within 30 business days after receiving the Assistant Secretary's report, the Secretary must determine whether to decertify the SWA. The Secretary must grant the request for decertification unless they make one of the three findings set forth in paragraph (b) of this section. If the Secretary decides not to decertify, they must then instruct that remedial action be continued or that alternate actions be applied. The Secretary must write a report explaining their reasons for not decertifying the SWA and copies (hard copy and electronic) will be sent to the SWA. Notice of the Secretary's decision must be published promptly in the Federal Register, and the report of the Secretary must be made available for public inspection and copy. (f) Where either the Assistant Secretary or the Secretary denies a request for decertification and orders further remedial action, the Regional Administrator must continue to monitor the SWA's compliance. If the SWA achieves compliance within the time established pursuant to paragraph (b) of this section, the Regional Administrator must terminate the remedial actions. If the SWA fails to achieve full compliance within that time period after the Secretary's decision not to decertify, the Regional Administrator must submit a report of their findings to the Assistant Secretary who must reconsider the request for decertification pursuant to the requirements of paragraph (b) of this section.043. Amend Sec. 658.706 to read as follows:Sec. 658.706 Notice of decertification. If the Secretary decides to decertify a SWA, they must send a Notice of Decertification to the SWA stating the reasons for this action and providing a 10 business day period during which the SWA may request an administrative hearing in writing to the Secretary. The document must be published promptly in the Federal Register.044. Amend Sec. 658.707 by revising paragraphs (a) and (b) to read as follows:Sec. 658.707 Requests for hearings. (a) Any SWA which received a Notice of Decertification under Sec. 658.706 or a notice of disallowance under Sec. 658.702(g) may request a hearing on the issue by filing a written request for hearing with the Secretary within 10 business days of receipt of the notice. Additionally, any SWA that has received a Notice of Remedial Action under Sec. 658.704(c) may request a hearing by filing a written request with the Regional Administrator within 20 business days of the SWA's receipt of the notice. This request must state the reasons the SWA believes the basis of the decision to be wrong, and it must be signed by the State Administrator (electronic signatures may be accepted). (b) When the Secretary or Regional Administrator receives a request for a hearing from a SWA, they must send copies of a file containing all materials and correspondence relevant to the case to the Assistant Secretary, the Regional Administrator, the Solicitor of Labor, and the Department of Labor Chief Administrative Law Judge. When the case involves violations of regulations governing services to MSFWs or the Complaint System, a copy must be sent to the NMA.\* \* \* \* \*Angela Hanks,Acting Assistant Secretary for Employment and Training, Labor.[FR Doc. 2022-07628 Filed 4-19-22; 8:45 am]BILLING CODE 4510-FN-P

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**Body**

Zagreb,Hrvatska02 March 2022 (Hina) - Europe's future depends on Kyiv's fate, Croatian PM says ZAGREB, 2 March (Hina) - The future of Europe depends on the fate of Kyiv, Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic said in the Croatian parliament on Wednesday, once against condemning Russia's aggression in the strongest terms and commending the Ukrainian army and people for a heroic resistance. "A quarter century after the Homeland War, a war is raging on European soil again. To the shock of the whole world, Russia's unprovoked brutal aggression on Ukraine is in its seventh day. There has been no war of such force and such extent in Europe for 77 years," he said, presenting a report on the Ukraine situation. The "gross violation of international law" already has "far-reaching consequences for the whole world" and this crisis will most likely last a while, Plenkovic said.

He reiterated that Croatia "condemns the Russian aggression in the strongest terms and extends full support to the Ukrainian people who at this moment is once again dying for European values." He congratulated Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal on their courage. Plenkovic said this was "a war between David and Goliath in which Russia is attacking the 28 times smaller Ukraine," adding that Russia is the aggressor and Ukraine the victim. Croatia is sending Ukraine HRK 124 million worth of weapons, ammunition and protective gear for the infantry. The EU has ensured (EURO)500 million for the procurement of protective and military equipment. Ukrainians won't bow down Plenkovic said that Croatia had shown, with its partners in the EU, determination, solidarity and unity, and that this war had identified the need for energy autonomy and strengthening defence capabilities. He said Croatia had always advocated Ukraine's European perspective, recalling that he and Zelenskyy signed a Declaration on that perspective in Kyiv last December. Plenkovic said the war in Ukraine revived memories of Croatia's Homeland War. "All those images revive in Croatia painful memories of the Milosevic regime's Great Serbian aggression and the horrors of war that we went through." He congratulated Croatian MPs on the unanimous condemnation of Russia and solidarity with Ukraine, saying he was pleased that the parliamentary majority and the opposition are "on the right side of justice and freedom." Attending the parliamentary debate were Ukrainian Ambassador Vasyl Kyrylych and members of the Ukrainian minority. The Ukrainian flag was also displayed. "By supporting Ukraine and respecting the courage of Ukrainians not to run away from tanks, not to give in to blackmail, not to bow down, to be inspired by love for the homeland like the Croats were in the Homeland War, let's stand with Ukraine and Ukrainians today. Glory to Ukraine," Plenkovic said to a round of applause. Emotional start of parliament session At the beginning of the parliament's session when PM Plenkovic started delivering the speech on the situation in Ukraine, MPs interrupted the speech with rounds of applause and displayed Ukrainian flags. Ambassador Kyrylych and representatives of ethnic Ukrainians also joined in the applause. Marko Milanovic Litre of the Croatian Sovereignists, who was clad in the Ukrainian folk costume, said that Russia had continued shelling Ukrainian civilians and that journalists, medical professionals, blocks of flats, and hospitals were exposed to shelling with cluster and vacuum bombs. Croatian ambassador has left Kyiv, PM says ZAGREB, 2 March (Hina) - Croatian Ambassador to Ukraine Anica Djamic has left Kyiv and is en route to Lviv, Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic said on Wednesday. "Given the deteriorating security situation in Kyiv and the attacks on Ukraine's capital, yesterday I instructed our Ambassador Anica Djamic to leave Kyiv," he told the press. The ambassador is en route to Lviv, where she will stay and do her duty, helping Croatian nationals and following the situation in Ukraine. "She is fine and we believe that in Lviv, a city in western Ukraine, she will be safe," Plenkovic said. Milanovic: Had Europe had stronger role, war in Ukraine might not have happened ZAGREB, 2 March (Hina) - If Europe had had a stronger role, maybe the war in Ukraine would not have happened, President Zoran Milanovic said on Wednesday, expressing support for Ukrainians who are defending themselves against the Russian ***invasion***. "I feel terribly sorry this has happened. One cannot say anything else but express support for a successful defence," Milanovic told reporters during a visit to Pakrac, where he attended an event commemorating the 31st anniversary of the start of the Homeland War in the area of that western Slavonian town. "It is practically impossible to take a big city without completely destroying it. If someone is willing to defend it," Milanovic said, recalling that the Iraqi city of Mosul had been defended for eight months before it fell. Close to 700,000 Ukrainian refugees have arrived in the EU. The Croatian president said that it was a question for the government if Croatia was ready to take in Ukrainian refugees, noting that he could say that "we are morally ready for it." "There is an information blockade. The Russian side is releasing what it wants, and that is very little. The other side actually does not know anything," Milanovic said, adding that Croatian ambassadors could not do much either, notably the ambassador in Moscow because Russia shared little information. PM Andrej Plenkovic said earlier on Wednesday that Croatia's Ambassador to Ukraine, Anica Djamic, had left Kyiv and was on her way to Lviv. Milanovic said that "one should always be concerned" when anyone threatens the use of nuclear weapons, and that that "would be the end of the world" but he does not think that that is happening now. Answering a reporter's question, Milanovic said that he had not spoken to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, adding that he did not know how it could help and that it was too late to send peace messages. "I would not want the conflict to move to cities because if it does, it will become horrible," he added. Milanovic expressed confidence that the war could be ended only by Ukraine and Russia or Russia and the USA, adding, "This is their conflict". "If Berlin and Paris had been in charge, and they could not do it, war would not have happened... the Minsk Agreement was not implemented, who is to blame?" he said. "If Europe had had a stronger role in this, and it was incapable of it, this conflict might not have happened," said Milanovic. There is no threat to Croatia Milanovic noted that PM Plenkovic should not have said that the level of the army's preparedness had been raised. "That has caused alarm in the public. This is a serious matter... the level of the army's readiness has not been raised and will not be in the current circumstances. The army operates as in normal conditions, there is a slightly higher degree of protection, but that is within the remit of the Armed Forces' Chief-of-Staff," Milanovic said, explaining that "this means one more guard." "That has nothing to do with a more serious or any threat to Croatia. That has not occurred for the time being and will not occur," he said. Milanovic noted that at present he did not see any reason for holding a session of the National Security Council and that Croatia should focus more on the rights of Croats in Bosnia and Herzegovina. BiH, Kosovo deserve EU candidate status, too The presidents of Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia said in an open letter on Monday that Ukraine deserves the prospect of immediate EU membership. In addition to Ukraine, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo, too, deserve EU candidate status, Milanovic said today. "I was willing to sign (the letter) only if that status was granted to Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo," with the latter not having been recognised by all EU members, said Milanovic. He added that Croatia "wishes BiH well" and that Sarajevo should understand that. Milanovic also called for making a decision to launch accession talks with Albania and North Macedonia "which the EU has been mistreating for years", noting that this "is equally important to Croatia as is Ukraine." In a direct message to Bosnian Serb leader Milorad Dodik, Milanovic said that "it would be good if they returned to BiH institutions" and that he could soon phone him. "Republika Srpska cannot get out of BiH, that's impossible... They belong in the West, the Serb people belong in the West, not in Russia," he added. As for Belgrade, Milanovic said that now was time for it to decide where it belonged, "whether it is the EU or Russia, for sentimental reasons which I can understand." Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic is not giving in to pressure from the West and does not want to introduce sanctions against Russia but has said that Serbia respects the territorial integrity of Ukraine. Vidovic sends reassuring message to citizens: Security services doing their job ZAGREB, 2 March (Hina) - After the Croatian Parliament Defence Committee met in closed session on Wednesday to discuss the situation in Ukraine, Chairman Franko Vidovic sent a reassuring message to Croatian citizens underscoring that the Croatian security services are doing their job. "I think the main message from this meeting is that our citizens can sleep peacefully," Vidovic said. He underscored that the security services and the Croatian Army "are working on the security and wellbeing of all of Croatia and its citizens. They are doing their job." He confirmed that the Committee had discussed the situation in the neighbourhood. "We touched on the entire region," Croatia's role in NATO and the EU as well as the situation in the Western Balkans, he said. "Our assessment is that the situation is completely under control for now, except the part relating to Ukraine," said Vidovic. HPB takes over Sberbank Croatia, clients can do business normally ZAGREB, 2 March (Hina) - The Croatian Postal Bank (HNB) said late on Tuesday it had taken over Sberbank Croatia, that all the money was secure and that clients could again do business normally. "Clients' money is secure again and the conditions of doing business are unchanged," the HPB said in a press release, adding that at noon on Wednesday the bank will reopen its branches and resume regular operations as part of the HPB Group. "We responded in an ***exceptionally*** short time and enabled our fellow citizens to freely dispose with their funds. At the same time, by taking over Sberbank, we are strengthening the HPB's future position on the market," said Marko Badurina, president of the management board. The Croatian National Bank (HNB) said earlier in the evening that the Single Resolution Board decided with the HNB as the national resolution authority to start the resolution of Sberbank Zagreb and that the HPB was the new owner. As one of the leading banks in Croatia, the HPB recorded in 2021 the best result in 30 years and a record-high profit of HRK 202 million. The European Commission has also endorsed the resolution decision that will be implemented by the HNB, the central bank said in a press release. Under the instruction of the Single Resolution Board, the HNB transfers 615,623 shares representing 100% of the share capital of Sberbank to the HPB, it added. This means, among other things, that from Wednesday Sberbank is going to be a fully liquid credit institution capable of fulfilling all of its obligations, the HNB said. "All deposits of citizens and companies, irrespective of their amount, are absolutely safe and will be available after the expiry of the moratorium." The HPB, accounting for 5.56% of the assets of the banking system, is the sixth largest bank in the country and is in the majority ownership of the state, the HNB recalled. The two-day moratorium ends today at midnight and the bank's regular operations will resume from 2 March, the HNB said. "This means that the limit of the available daily amount of HRK 7,280 will be lifted after the expiry of the moratorium and that any payments suspended during the moratorium will be enabled with no limits." The decision on the resolution of Sberbank by sale has been adopted in order to ensure Croatia's financial stability, avoid economic disruptions and protect the public interest and the clients of this bank, the HNB said. PM says HPB taking over Sberbank Croatia Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic also said late on Tuesday that the HPB was taking over Sberbank Croatia and that the resolution of Sberbank guaranteed the continuity of business operations and strengthened the stability of financial institutions. Following the European Central Bank's (ECB) warning about the liquidity deterioration of Sberbank in the wake of restrictions, the government and the HNB urgently responded so that we could protect Croatian citizens and enterprises doing business with Sberbank Croatia, he said on Twitter. The ECB and its Single Resolution Board made a decision under which the HPB can take over Sberbank, taking into consideration the protection of financial stability and public interest, he added. ((EURO)1 = HRK 7.5) HPB buys Sberbank for HRK71m to avoid damage estimated at HRK 8 bn ZAGREB, 2 March (Hina) - The Croatian Postal Bank (HPB) has bought Sberbank Croatia for HRK 71 million and had there been liquidation, the damage would have been HRK 8 billion, which has been prevented, Croatian National Bank (HNB) governor Boris Vujcic said on Wednesday. The HNB said last night that the Single Resolution Board had decided with the HNB as the national resolution authority to start the resolution of Sberbank Zagreb and that the HPB was the new owner. Speaking at a press conference, the central bank's governor said that that was possible only by urgently selling the bank, otherwise liquidation would have meant the payment of insured deposits, a cost over HRK 3.8 billion, which would have resulted in the loss of a large share of corporate and uninsured deposits. That would have been an economic damage of approximately HRK 8 billion, he added. Vujcic said Sberbank had been very successful, with capital adequacy of almost 20%. By this transaction, we'll have a very good, very capitalised, liquid, efficient bank... The deposits are now safe, both citizens' and the corporate sector's, said Vujcic. He added that the name of the new bank would be known in the days ahead as Sberbank Croatia would change both name and logo. The merger with the HPB will not occur before the introduction of the euro, he added. Since Thursday and the imposition of EU and US sanctions against Russia, retail depositors and businesses had withdrawn over (EURO)200 million from Sberbank Croatia. Due to a rapid liquidity deterioration, the European Central Bank announced on Monday that Sberbank Croatia "is failing or likely to fail" and notified the Single Resolution Board (SRB), the central resolution authority within the Banking Union. The SRB adopted a decision on a two-day moratorium on the operations of Sberbank Croatia, which ended at midnight on Tuesday. A decision on launching its resolution was made before the expiry. Sberbank Europe said in early November that it was selling its subsidiaries in Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Hungary, Serbia and Slovenia to Serbia's AIK Banka, Slovenia's Gorenjska Banka, and Agri Europe Cyprus Limited. Vujcic said they had contacted AIK, which is in the licencing ***process***, adding that "everything is clear" to AIK and that he does not expect any problems. Plenkovic: We have invested maximum effort Speaking at the same press conference, Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic said liquidation would have had negative repercussions for depositors, the bank and Croatia's finance system as the Croatian Deposit Insurance Agency would have had to pay HRK 3.8 billion in insured deposits. He said the government and the HNB had invested maximum effort and coordinated activities with the SRB for what happened yesterday. The HPB was willing to take over Sberbank, which comforts all depositors, so there is no need for anyone to withdraw their money in Sberbank, he added. "In this way, we have shown once again not only that our response was good politically and in principle, but also financially and economically as well," he said. FinMin: Gov't stands behind national financial system Finance Minister Zdravko Maric said that the government stood behind the national financial system and Croatian citizens and depositors and therefore had made this timely and resolute move. He also said that the HPB portfolio would be thus boosted. Maric said that the government, as a majority owner, had sent clear instructions to the HPB management to find certain reserves and make this step on the market. Sberbank Croatia changes its name to Nova Hrvatska Banka ZAGREB, 2 March (Hina) - Sberbank Croatia, which will start operating as part of the Croatian Postal Bank (HPB) Group, has changed its name to Nova Hrvatska Banka (New Croatian Bank), HPB Management Board Chairman Marko Badurina said on Wednesday. After a two-day moratorium, Sberbank reopened its branches and offices in Croatia at noon on Wednesday. The bank resumes doing business as usual, says HPB, adding that the transaction in which it took over Sberbank Croatia had reinforced the Croatian postal bank's position on the Croatian banking market. HPB also recalls that in 2021 it netted a profit of HRK 202 million, up 11% from 2020. The bank's assets totalled HRK 27.9 billion on 31 December 2021, or 2.4 billion more than at the end of 2020. HPB's business network consists of 58 branch offices and 12 regional centers and it is available to clients throughout Croatia. The HPB Group, which includes the bank as well as HPB Invest and HPB Nekretnine, reported a net profit of HRK 202.6 million in 2021. Croatian Competition Agency (AZTN) issues ***exceptional*** approval for takeover The Croatian regulator AZTN stated on Wednesday afternoon that following the request from HPB and Sberbank Croatia, it gave an ***exceptional*** consent for the implementation of certain activities regarding the takeover, considering the extraordinary circumstances. Serbia's AIK bank takes over Sberbank Serbia ZAGREB, 2 March (Hina) - Serbia's AIK Banka has taken over Sberbank Serbia, as a result of which it is no longer part of the group led by Sberbank Europe AG in Vienna, and Sberbank Serbia has officially changed its name to Nasa AIK Banka, it was said in Belgrade on Wednesday. The transaction was based on a share acquisition agreement between Serbia's central bank and AIK, AIK executive board president Jelena Galic said. Nasa AIK Banka executive board president Vladimir Boskovic said "the savings of all clients and the money in their accounts are insured" and that all services operated like before. Serbia's central bank said it approved the restructuring of Sberbank Serbia due to the new circumstances in the operations of its owner in the EU, whereby the direct sale of its shares was made possible. With the acquisition of Sberbank Serbia, AIK's assets increase by (EURO)1.7 billion to almost 4 billion and the number of clients by 180,000. AIK is now the sixth largest bank group in Serbia with a 9% market share. Nova Ljubljanska Banka buys Sberbank Slovenia ZAGREB, 2 March (Hina) - Nova Ljubljanska Banka (NLB) will buy Sberbank Slovenia from the Russian Sberbank Europe Group, Slovenian central bank governor Bostjan Vasle said late on Tuesday. A common solution for Sberbank has been found, which means the bank will be sold to another bank already operating in Slovenia, the NLB, he said on Slovenian Television. Vasle said a swift solution was found for a bank which did limited business in recent days in a way that would not burden other banks nor the state budget. The central bank said operations would resume normally for all Sberbank Slovenia clients as of Wednesday. Vasle said both physical and legal persons "will be able to access their accounts, have undisturbed access to their deposits, be able to conduct payment transactions, service their loan obligations." After Russia's military aggression against Ukraine and the sanctions imposed on Russia, the European Central Bank informed us over the weekend that Sberbank can no longer operate normally, Vasle said, adding that a solution was found "in only two days in cooperation with our common institutions, the ECB and the common resolution authority". ZSE indices down for third day in a row ZAGREB, 2 March (Hina) - The main Zagreb Stock Exchange (ZSE) indices fell on Wednesday for the third consecutive trading day as investors were assessing the possible impact of the Ukraine war on the Croatian economy. The Crobex shrank by 0.28% to 1,976 points and the Crobex10 by 0.66% to 1,192 points. Both indices shed 3.2% in all this week, hitting their lowest levels since the end of September 2021. Turnover at the close of the trading session reached HRK 18.3 million, which was 6 million more than on Tuesday. An additional HRK 15.2 million was generated by a block transaction with the HT telecom stock at HRK 184 per share. The highest turnover, of HRK 6 million, was generated by the Croatian Postal Bank (HPB) stock, which jumped by 7.7% in price to HRK 840 per share. It was the winner of the day, following the news that it had taken over the Croatian subsidiary of Russia's Sberbank. The stock of plastic car parts manufacturer AD Plastik turned over HRK 2.6 million, its price plunging by 14.5% to HRK 96.6 as a result of its business exposure to Russia where it has two factories. The Valamar Riviera hotel company's stock turned over HRK 1.37 million. Its price rose by 0.65% to HRK 30.9. Investor focus was also on telecommunications equipment manufacturer Ericsson Nikola Tesla, whose stock turned over HRK 1.29 million. Its price fell by 1.12% to HRK 1,770. The only other stock to pass the turnover mark of one million kuna was Koncar Electrical Industry, turning over HRK 1.03 million. It closed at HRK 830, down by 2.35%. Forty-nine stocks traded today, with 13 gaining, 20 losing and 16 remaining stable in price. ((EURO)1 = HRK 7.560543) HNB intervenes in foreign currency market to preserve kuna exchange rate ZAGREB, 2 March (Hina) - The Croatian National Bank (HNB) on Wednesday intervened in the foreign exchange market to preserve the kuna exchange rate, selling (EURO)171 million to commercial banks at an average exchange rate of HRK 7.562505 for one euro, the HNB said in a brief statement. This was the central bank's first foreign exchange intervention since 16 June 2021. The kuna strengthened against the euro by a marginal 0.0001 per cent from Tuesday. Today's middle exchange rate, effective from Thursday, is 7.560528 kuna for one euro. The Croatian financial system is currently enjoying record liquidity of about HRK 80 billion. Farmers say there is enough wheat ZAGREB, 2 March (Hina) - ***Agriculture*** Minister Marija Vuckovic and farmers, who held talks on the stocks of cereals, concluded that there were sufficient amounts of wheat and that there was no need for concern in light of the Ukraine crisis, the ministry said in a press release on Wednesday. Farmers reported that there are sufficient stocks and there is no need to worry about any possible shortage of wheat. Noting that Ukraine is the fifth largest wheat exporter and the biggest exporter of seed oils, participants at the meeting agreed that due to the crisis in Ukraine the sowing season will be particularly challenging and the survival of other ***agricultural*** products is an important factor for farmers. The meeting also discussed the impact of the increased price of gas and mineral fertilisers on the sowing season and also the autumn sowing season. Representatives of the meat industry commended the ministry's ***measures*** so far but expressed their fear over current challenges facing the livestock breeding sector. Vuckovic underscored that she shared their concern over market disruptions, assessing the further interest in the investment cycle as positive, which began with a call for applications to invest in repro centres and continue with investments in fattening facilities. She added that during 2021 Croatia managed to notify a large number of ***measures*** before the European Commission and will continue to do so with the objective of finding a solution to these specific circumstances. The ministry recalled that it is preparing a programme for ***agriculture*** and fisheries, valued at HRK 250 million, and recalled the government's package of ***measures*** to buffer increased energy prices, including the lowering of VAT on food and ***agricultural*** inputs to the 5-percent rate. Croatia enforcing EU ban on Russia Today and Sputnik ZAGREB, 2 March (Hina) - Croatia's Electronic Media Agency (AEM) has sent the Croatian Regulatory Authority for Network Industries the EU regulation banning the broadcasting of content from Russia Today and Sputnik by cable, satellite, IPTV, platforms, websites and apps. "We invite you to submit this information and decision from the Council of the EU to all operators for implementation," AEM director Josip Popovac said in a letter on Wednesday. The reaction by the Croatian media regulator came after the European Union imposed sanctions, effective from today, on the two state-owned Russian media outlets for manipulating information and spreading Russian propaganda about the attack on Ukraine. "In this time of war, words matter. We are witnessing massive propaganda and disinformation over this outrageous attack on a free and independent country. We will not let Kremlin apologists pour their toxic lies justifying Putin's war or sow the seeds of division in our Union," European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said. Both outlets are part of a coordinated information manipulation effort, including disinformation, as documented since 2015 by the European External Action Service's East StratCom Task Force, the Commission said. Cooperation with and between the independent media regulators within the European Regulators Group for Audiovisual Media Services (ERGA) is crucial in ensuring swift implementation of the ***measures*** by the operators, it added. Some of the regulators have already taken concrete actions restricting Russian assets involved in disinformation and information manipulation, for example in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland, while Germany has banned the broadcasting of programming by Russia Today because it does not have a licence. "In view of the gravity of the situation, and in response to Russia's actions destabilising the situation in Ukraine, it is necessary and consistent with fundamental rights and freedoms to introduce further restrictive ***measures*** and to suspend the broadcasting activities of Russia Today and Sputnik in or directed at the EU," the European Commission said. "All relevant licences, authorisations and distribution arrangements are suspended. These ***measures*** are covering all EU Member States and are directly applicable immediately." Plenkovic: Croatia cares for stability and security in its neighbourhood ZAGREB, 2 March (Hina) - Croatia cares for stability and security in its immediate environment, promoting peace and good-neighbourly relations with the countries in southeastern Europe on their way to integration into the European Union and NATO, Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic said in the Croatian Parliament on Wednesday. "We want everyone to refrain from any incidents, any inflammatory rhetoric or anything that might destabilise the otherwise tense situation in at least three countries in our neighbourhood. We can't have two hotspots in Europe at the same time. The chaos that we now have is enough," the prime minister said in response to questions from MPs during discussion on the situation in Ukraine following Russia's military ***invasion***. MP Bojan Glavasevic (Green-Left Bloc) recalled the statement by Bosnian Serb leader Milorad Dodik in which he supported Russian President Vladimir Putin and called Ukrainian defenders "an armed gang". "As for Dodik and his view on the Ukrainian defenders, I condemn it unequivocally," Plenkovic said. Plenkovic said that Croatia was taking care of the security of the LNG terminal on the northern Adriatic island of Krk, a strategic installation thanks to which Croatia has changed its position on Europe's energy map, and making sure there were sufficient supplies of food and at affordable prices. Asked by Andreja Maric (Social Democratic Party) about the readiness of the healthcare system for a nuclear threat, the prime minister said that the Health Ministry had formed a task force to take care of all aspects of healthcare in all scenarios. "As for threats with nuclear weapons, I sincerely hope such a scenario will not happen because it would be the end of the world as we know it," Plenkovic said. Mario Kapulica of the ruling Croatian Democratic Union recalled that President Zoran Milanovic had recently mocked the possibility of Russian aggression and spoken of extremists in Ukraine. "This is when we have to give those who were not precise enough a chance to take the right side," Plenkovic said, agreeing that there had been "misjudgements and poorly worded sentences" and calling for "unity in the time ahead of us". Condemning the aggression on Ukraine and expressing solidarity with the Ukrainian people, Plenkovic said that Ukraine was not a country that deserved the concept of neutralisation and being without a democratic leadership and its own armed forces. The PM rejected the idea that the war in Ukraine was prompted by NATO's expansion. "That's not true," he stressed. "This is a time when we have to uphold the fundamental principles no matter the cost, even if that may require giving up our way of life. This is a situation in which we must not have any doubts," he added. Independent MP Karolina Vidovic Kristo remarked that the prime minister should have submitted a report on the situation in Croatia and corruption, rather than the war in Ukraine on which he had no influence. Plenkovic described her speech as inappropriate, harmful, untrue and defamatory. "We are working, while you are obstructing. We are winning and you are losing," the PM said. Europe facing refugee influx unseen since WWII, interior minister says ZAGREB, 2 March (Hina) - Interior Minister Davor Bozinovic said on Wednesday Europe would be faced with a refugee influx unseen since WWII and that no country could deal with that alone. According to last night's numbers by Frontex, more than 600,000 people from Ukraine have entered the EU, he said on Croatian Radio. The influx is not big yet because the UNHCR and other agencies estimate that five million people could leave Ukraine, Bozinovic added. This is a humanitarian situation that is becoming dramatic and only together can everyone deal with it, he said. Speaking of meetings of EU interior ministers and what they had to agree on, Bozinovic said it was necessary to resolve the status of refugees first as more and more would be coming. "This is an exodus for which an adequate response will have to be found." 545 Ukrainian refugees in Croatia to date Bozinovic said 545 Ukrainian refugees had arrived in Croatia and that 39 were in reception centres, while the rest were in private accommodation. He said Croatia must prepare for a major influx as almost 100,000 had entered Hungary. It is difficult to expect Russia to stop at the moment as it is preparing a bigger escalation with attacks on Kyiv, Kharkiv and Mariupol, he added. Bozinovic said the entire Civil Protection system was getting ready, together with the health and education systems, so that the arrival of refugees passed with as little difficulty as possible. Accommodation capacity will be expanded as needed, there are plans for using numerous state-owned facilities, and meetings are being held with the Croatian Tourist Board, hoteliers and the Tourism Ministry, he added. Bozinovic went on to say that Croatia's first relief convoy left for Ukraine at 3 am today and that such things should be organised well by the institutions in charge. Europe has no alternative but to defend its values Commenting on Russia's threat that the countries donating military equipment to Ukraine, including Croatia, would be held accountable, he said not only NATO member states but neutral ones as well had decided to do that. "Today we are seeing a change of the paradigm that has been in force in Europe since World War II and determination that everything that Europe has achieved must not be brought into question," Bozinovic said, adding that in that time the EU has become the most developed part of the world alongside the US, an area where human rights are protected and technology and living standards progress. "If someone threatens that, and this is a threat, they will face a very clear and harsh European response because Europe has no alternative but to defend its values." Speaking of fears that some might use the Ukraine crisis to destabilise Southeast Europe, Bozinovic said there were always some who were interested in destabilisation, those thinking their only trump card was force and armament, and that one could see in Ukraine that stability did not suit them. As for Southeast Europe, he said the most important stakeholders had sent messages to every country in the region and that he was sure they would consider them well. To be in Europe and not head for integration is not smart Commenting on the stand of Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic, who has not imposed sanctions on Russia and is accusing Croatian politicians, Bozinovic said "it's a rhetoric we are used to." Now is the time for states which have doubts to make the best long-term decisions for the future of their citizens because to be in Europe and not head for integration is not the smartest thing to do, he added. Bozinovic also said he expected the political unity of the opposition and those in power on Ukraine to continue in Croatia. The government's position is clear and one of Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic's first visits was to Ukraine, which is just one sign of knowing the situation and Ukraine's importance for Europe and our bilateral relations, he added. Speaking of coronavirus, he said there were about 2,500 new cases today, 33% fewer than a week ago, a sign the steep decrease was continuing. If such trends continue, we will consider further relaxing restrictions, said Bozinovic, who heads the national COVID-19 crisis management team. Slovenian Consulate destroyed in military attacks on Kharkiv ZAGREB, 2 March (Hina) - The building housing the Slovenian Consulate has been severely damaged in a Russian army's attack on Kharkiv, the Slovenian Foreign Minister said on Tuesday. We have been informed that the Consulate of the Republic of Slovenia in Ukraine was destroyed in one of the military attacks on Kharkiv. We condemn this shocking act by the Russian Federation and the aggression on Ukraine, the ministry said on Twitter, adding that the consulate staff and Honorary Consul Anatoliy Bondarenko were not hurt. "The Slovenian Consulate in Kharkiv was destroyed as a 'collateral diplomatic damage' as well," EU Ambassador to Ukraine Matti Maasikas tweeted. Slovenian Prime Minister Janez Jansa said on Twitter the targeting of civilian buildings reminded him of the tactics of the former Yugoslav People's Army 30 years ago on the territory of the former Yugoslavia. "Well, we experienced the same approach from Yugoslav communist army 30 years ago. It didn't work, Mr. Putin. Neither will today in Ukraine. You can't defeat united and brave nation." I strongly condemn the continuation of Putin's barbaric aggression on Ukraine! Shocking!, Slovenian MEP Tanja Fajon said on Twitter following the attack on the consulate. Due to the situation in Kyiv, Slovenia withdrew its embassy personnel in Ukraine. Besides the one in Kharkiv, it has consulates with honorary consults in Zhytomyr and Odessa. Slovenia seeks compensation from Russia for destroying Kharkiv consulate ZAGREB, 2 March (Hina) - Slovenia presented the Russian ambassador in Ljubljana on Wednesday with a protest note over the destruction of the building housing the Slovenian Consulate in Kharkiv, demanding compensation and reiterating its condemnation of the Russian ***invasion*** of Ukraine. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs today again summoned Russian Ambassador Timur Eyvazov, and State Secretary Gasper Dovzan presented him with a protest note demanding an apology and compensation for the damage done, the Ministry said in a statement. The building housing the Slovenian Consulate is located in the historic heart of Kharkiv, which was shelled on Tuesday. Honorary Consul Anatoliy Bondarenko was not hurt in the attack and is safe. Slovenia strongly condemns this unacceptable act and military aggression on a sovereign country by the Russian Federation. This is a gross violation of international law and human rights, and the destruction of civilian targets is a war crime, the statement said. Slovenia preparing for possible major refugee wave from Ukraine ZAGREB, 2 March (Hina) - Besides individual cases, there has been no major influx of refugees from war-torn Ukraine in Slovenia yet, but humanitarian institutions and government offices are preparing for it. Prime Minister Janez Jansa has said the country is prepared for a possible refugee wave from Ukraine, Slovenian media said on Wednesday. Speaking with the Civil Protection leadership, he said Slovenia had received some 40 requests to help families leaving Ukraine. The first refugees arrived in Velenje on Monday, two families of Ukrainian employees working for a Slovenian company based in that town which is installing a wastewater treatment plant in Zhytomyr. At Tuesday's meeting with the Civil Protection, Slovenian Defence Minister Matej Tonin said 300 accommodation places for Ukrainian refugees had been prepared in Logatec and that 80 potential locations had been registered across the country that might accommodate unaccompanied children. Rally of support for Ukraine held in Ljubljana Several thousand people rallied in Ljubljana on Wednesday at the invitation of PM Jansa to express support for Ukraine and protest against the Russian aggression on the country. Montenegro joins sanctions against Russia ZAGREB, 2 March (Hina) - Montenegro's Ministry of Foreign Affairs on Wednesday said that the country has joined the European Union in the sanctions against Russia after it invaded Ukraine. Completely joining in with restrictive ***measures***, economic and individual sanctions, Montenegro is continuing its policy of one hundred percent agreement with the EU's foreign policy, Montenegro's foreign ministry reported. At the same time, the armed forces general staff announced that it would donate a certain quantity of protective equipment, primarily bulletproof vests and ballistic helmets while the finance ministry has decided to send (EURO)50,000 in aid to the government in Kyiv. Red Cross Montenegro has also opened a special telephone line so citizens can donate money to help Ukrainian citizens. Montenegro withdrawing its citizens from Russia Montenegro's government has said that due to increased interest by Montenegrin nationals wanting to leave Russia, the government plans to organise humanitarian flights on its national flag carrier, Air Montenegro. Authorities are currently negotiating with the Russian side regarding the organisation of flights. Schwarz-Schilling and Inzko: BiH is in danger, EU and NATO must react urgently ZAGREB, 2 March (Hina) - Former international community representatives for BiH, Christian Schwarz-Schilling and Valentin Inzko, sent a dramatic appeal to EU and NATO leaders, calling for fending the Western Balkans and in particular, Bosnia and Herzegovina from a possible scenario akin to Ukraine. They also warn that plans for a Great Serbia are still alive. In a joint letter addressed to European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg, Schwarz-Schilling and Inzko warned that Bosnian Serb leader Milorad Dodik and Serbia's President Aleksandar Vucic could exploit Russia's aggression on Ukraine and provoke incidents or even a new war. "Serbia and Republika Srpska did not achieve their objectives of the 1990s. In addition, they nurture very close relations with Russia. As such, we fear that the current aggression against Ukraine could spread to the Western Balkans, primarily to Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo," the two diplomats said as carried by Deutsche Welle (DW). The best solution to prevent a new crisis emerging on European soil would be BiH's "prompt and non-bureaucratic" accession to the EU, they said, underscoring that some sort of moral obligation exists considering the fact that the Union set an embargo on the supply of weapons in the 1990s, which in fact meant that BiH could not defend itself from the aggression. Inzko and Schwarz-Schilling believe that the plan for Republika Srpska to secede still exists even though this is not being mentioned and Russia and Serbia state they support BiH's territorial integrity. The diplomats called on NATO and Secretary-General Stoltenberg to offer a "strong guarantee to BiH's population that they will not be left alone as they were 30 years ago." That would require necessary steps aimed at preventing any threats to BiH's existence. One concrete way to achieve that is to deploy NATO and EUFOR forces near Brcko as well as on the border between BiH and Serbia. "No one knows what Putin's goals are. That is why we ask you to do everything in your power to protect BiH. Its citizens must receive NATO guarantees in case the war spreads to the Western Balkans," Inzko said. He added the formula "a peaceful Balkans - a safe Europe," is irreplaceable and that he had not seen so much interest by the international community in BiH in the past 15 years as now and that he was pleased because of that. Schwarz-Schilling and Inzko sent a message to Serbia that with its conduct regarding the Ukraine crisis it has shown that it does not deserve EU membership because it failed to follow the policy towards Russia and introduce sanctions. They recalled a tweet by the first High Representative to BiH, Carl Bildt, on 27 February when he said, "with this stance Serbia de facto disqualified itself from the EU accession ***process***. There should be no room for new EU members not sharing our fundamental values and interests." Dodik tries to impose decision on BiH's neutrality at Presidency session SARAJEVO, 2 March (Hina) - The Serb member of Bosnia and Herzegovina's collective state Presidency, Milorad Dodik, tried to impose a decision on the country's neutrality regarding Russia's aggression on Ukraine at a Presidency session on Wednesday, but the other two members of the Presidency refused it. Dodik then accused them of toppling the constitution and hence the state, to which Presidency Chairman Zeljko Komsic responded by saying that Dodik was implementing Putin's plan of destabilisation. An enraged Dodik walked out of the Presidency session in Sarajevo only some 15 minutes after it started, explaining to reporters that he did so because Komsic and the Bosniak Presidency member, Sefik Dzaferovic, refused his request to put a discussion on the Ukraine crisis on the agenda of the meeting, during which he intended to ask that Bosnia and Herzegovina take a neutral position on it. He accused Komsic and Dzaferovic of violating the country's constitution and bringing into question its survival by rejecting his request, without offering any arguments for his claim. "Every attempt to preserve the country's constitutional structure has been prevented today, and it is not certain how we will carry on," Dodik said. He said that it was against the constitution and law to refer to the BiH Presidency statement of 2014, adopted after Russia occupied and annexed Crimea, when BiH explicitly supported Ukraine's territorial integrity. Based on that statement, the BiH ambassadors to the UN and Council of Europe have supported sanctions imposed on Moscow, in line with instructions from the BiH Foreign Ministry, while ambassadors appointed by Dodik have refused to do so. Komsic told reporters that Dodik held a completely unacceptable speech at the Presidency session, insisting that there are now in Ukraine's territory "two new recognised states." Komsic said that by doing so, Dodik seemed to have embarked on the implementation of his earlier agreement with Russia to destabilise BiH. "There is evidently a plan and it has evidently been launched," Komsic said, recalling that two days ago Dodik spoke on the phone with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov. After that, the Russian Embassy in Sarajevo confirmed that the two officials discussed the implementation of Dodik's "agreement with Putin", reached in December 2021, during Dodik's visit to Moscow, but the content of the alleged agreement remained unknown. In order to overcome the current crisis, it is necessary to respect the existing foreign policy decisions until new ones are adopted, said Komsic. Dodik said on Wednesday he supported every country's integrity, including Ukraine's, but accused the West of "a hysterical reaction", adding that the EU and the USA were now acting the same way they did in 1992, which he considered unacceptable. Dzaferovic said Dodik's real goal was to obstruct the Presidency session because he insisted on changing its agenda without any prepared material. "BiH is not neutral, it stands together with the whole civilised world and will continue to do so," said Dzaferovic. Dodik calls Ukraine warriors "armed gangs" ZAGREB, 2 March (Hina) - Bosnian Serb leader Milorad Dodik, who is one of the three members of Bosnia and Herzegovina's presidency, on Wednesday called Ukrainian soldiers "armed gangs" using the same rhetoric as Russia's President Vladimir Putin to explain his motives to attack a neighbouring country. In a statement to the media in Republika Srpska, Dodik angrily commented on a statement by British Prime Minister Boris Johnson who said that Russia's attacks on Ukraine cities reminded him of the shelling of Sarajevo during the city's siege under the Serb forces from 1992 to 1995. The shelling of the Ukrainian city of Kharkiv by Russian forces is an atrocity reminiscent of the attacks on Sarajevo by the Serbs in the 1990s, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said on Tuesday during a visit to Estonia. Dodik retorted a day later saying that Johnson is right only if he is referring to armed gangs wandering around Kyiv, which can be seen on social networks. Dodik ignored the fact that 11,000 people were killed during the three and a half year siege of the Bosnian capital city and claimed that the city had been in fact a "huge concentration camp for Serbs." "I don't know how the British premier didn't recall Republika Srpska and Serbia which they bombed for months without any legal basis or reason," said Dodik. Vucic: Ukraine crisis dramatically affecting Serbia, new political traps possible ZAGREB, 2 Mar (Hina) - The crisis caused by the war in Ukraine is dramatically affecting Serbia and there is less understanding for Serbia's position and its people than ever, Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic said on Wednesday, mentioning the possibility of Russia being excluded from the UN and all EU members recognising Kosovo. In an extraordinary address to the public, he said that at a session of the UN General Assembly today Serbia joined the condemnation of the attack on Ukraine. Vucic pointed out that the text of the resolution which Serbia supported did not mention any sanctions against Russia, but that Serbia had to condemn an attack on a sovereign country. He added that Serbia was today one of the few countries in the world that hadn't imposed sanctions against the Russian Federation after the ***invasion*** of Ukraine. Vucic told a press conference that this wasn't a matter of Serbia's position and principles but of "very difficult circumstances". He confirmed that he had in the meantime spoken with representatives of the US, the European Union, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, discussing all important matters, ranging from voting for the resolution to sanctions imposed against Russia. "I think this is only the beginning and I want to say this to the citizens of Serbia. The pressures on our country will be enormous. I believe we will witness a complete collapse of the existing order," said Vucic. He expressed concern that Russia might be expelled from the United Nations, which would enable a change to the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244 which guarantees the territorial integrity of Serbia, including Kosovo. "They are planning to hold a debate on the expulsion of Russia from the UN based on Article 6 of the Charter of the United Nations, and after that there will be open pressure on China to change Resolution 1244, after which we would no longer have a legal basis for invoking the preservation of territorial integrity," said Vucic. He said Kosovo's independence would then be recognised by NATO and the EU, including member states which had not previously recognised Kosovo's statehood. "To be open -- I don't rule out that possibility at all," Vucic said. In the coming period, he also expects "several political traps" for Serbia, including pressure being put on China to give up on UN Security Council Resolution 1244 on Kosovo. Vucic also pointed to Pristina's request for Kosovo to join NATO as soon as possible, noting that it already enjoyed support, including from Turkey, one of the most powerful NATO members. The Serbian president did not rule out the possibility that Serbia would send Turkey a protest note because of that. Speaking of the economic repercussions of the Ukraine crisis, Vucic said that the banking sector in Serbia was at present "absolutely safe" and that the domestic AIK Banka had taken over Sberbank, adding that its clients would not have any problems. Under its agreement with the Russian Federation, Serbia now has a regular supply of six million cubic metres of gas at a more favourable price, Vucic said, adding that consumption was between 10 and 11 million cubic metres. He said that several task forces had been set up, including one for the reception of refugees and the wounded from Ukraine, and one for humanitarian assistance for that country. In a message to citizens Vucic said that there was no need to panic because the state had secured sufficient supplies and that in the next two weeks it would fully supply its warehouses, which would cost the state budget 100-115 million euros. He noted that Serbia's position would become "more difficult in the coming period" because its economy "has been the fastest growing in the region." One of the special task forces of the energy and finance ministries would follow only the situation with oil, he said. Currently the country's energy and commodity reserves are sufficient for a period of more than two months, said Vucic. 300 Ukrainian refugees have entered Serbia ZAGREB, 2 March (Hina) - About 300 refugees from Ukraine have entered Serbia and a larger number has proceeded to Montenegro and Croatia because they own properties there, while some have come to Serbia to stay with relatives, the head of the national authority for migrations and refugees said on Wednesday. We will provide for all who decide to stay in Serbia, Vladimir Cucic said in Belgrade. He does not think bigger accommodation capacities will be necessary for Ukrainian refugees "because quite a few have no interest" in being in Serbia. Cucic said Ukrainian and Ruthenian ethnic communities in Serbia "aren't that numerous", about 20,000 people, "whom their relatives (from Ukraine) will probably contact." "No one will head to Serbia first without a special reason," he added. At the start of the refugee crisis in the wake of Russia's aggression on Ukraine, Serbia's authority for migrations and refugees said it had the capacities and the logistics to receive and accommodate refugees from Ukraine. Red Cross Serbia has opened an account for donations to help Ukraine. Serbia calls presidential elections for 3 April ZAGREB, 2 March (Hina) - Serbian National Assembly Chairman Ivica Dacic on Wednesday called presidential elections for 3 April, after extraordinary parliamentary elections and elections for Belgrade and several other local government units had been called earlier, and the opposition said President Vucic might lose the vote unless he won in the first round. Under the Serbian law, presidential elections are called 90 days before the expiry of the President's five-year term. Aleksandar Vucic was elected President on 2 April 2017, receiving 55.06 per cent of the vote and defeating the independent candidate, then ombudsman Sasa Jankovic, who won 16.35 per cent. Even though he has not yet formally announced his candidacy, it is certain that Vucic will run for another term in office. The opposition has announced several candidates, including retired army general Zdravko Ponos from the United Serbia coalition, Democratic Party of Serbia leader Milos Jovanovic representing the conservative-royalist coalition NADA, and Vuk Obradovic from a coalition led by the nationalist movement Dveri, of which he is president. Belgrade University professor Biljana Stojkovic will be the candidate of the liberal-civic coalition Moramo (We Must), which comprises environmental and civil society groups. The opposition groups believe they have a chance to win the elections if they get to a second round of voting and stand behind a joint candidate. Vucic and his Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) have been in power since 2012, when the then SNS leader Tomislav Nikolic won the presidential race. Vucic initially served as deputy prime minister before becoming prime minister. Institut IGH to close its Russian subsidiary ZAGREB, 2 March (Hina) - The Institut IGH civil engineering company reported on Wednesday that it was closing its subsidiary in the Russian Federation, adding that this would not impact its further business plans while welcoming the bailout and acquisition of Sberbank, one of the banks IGH has an account with. "Institut IGH, JSC decided to close its subsidiary in the Russian Federation. The closure will not impact the Company's further business plans," IGH said in an Investor Disclosure on the Zagreb Stock Exchange. Several companies in the EU and USA in the finance, industrial and other sectors are withdrawing from the Russian market because of the sanctions the West has introduced against Russia in response to the ***invasion*** of Ukraine. Even though IGH has had open accounts for years in several Croatian banks and performs regular daily business transactions, it welcomes the resolution and the takeover of Sberbank Hrvatska d.d, as one of the banks in which the Company has a business account, by Hrvatska Ppostanska Banka, IGH says in its investor disclosure. That allows the continuation of the bank's regular operations towards its clients. The Single Resolution Board adopted a decision in cooperation with the Croatian National Bank (HNB) as the national resolution body, to launch the bailout of Sberbank d.d. Zagreb, and the Croatian Postal Bank is its new owner after it bought the Russian state bank's subsidiary for HRK 71 million. HNB Governor Boris Vujcic underscored that the ***process*** was possible to implement only by urgently selling the bank otherwise it would have gone into liquidation, and that would have meant paying out insured deposits, which would have required HRK 3.8 billion and many commercial and uninsured deposits would have been lost. Istria Russians' association against war in Ukraine ZAGREB, 1 March (Hina) - The Russian Home association of the Russian national minority in Istria County said on Tuesday it was "against war and any war events." "Our business is the Russian language and nurturing Russian culture among those living outside their homeland," the association said in a press release. It has about 200 members, not just Russians, but also other nationalities from the former Soviet Union, including Ukrainians. "We feel pain because thousands of innocent people are suffering and blood is being spilt. We feel despair because it seems as though this war was started on behalf of all Russians, which is absolutely incorrect," the association said, appealing to "everyone not to link the Russian language and culture with politics and aggression." It added that "a peaceful coexistence in a multicultural area is a way to open to the whole world, that's tolerance and respect for people from different countries and of different faiths." "We are for peace and friendship between peoples," the association said. Croatian visual artists' association joins in condemnation of aggression on Ukraine ZAGREB, 2 March 2022 (Hina) - The Croatian Association of Visual Artists (HDLU) strongly condemns the Russian Federation's aggression against Ukraine and supports Ukraine's territorial integrity, the HDLU has said on its website. Expressing its support to the Ukrainian association of artists and cultural workers HDLU underscored that it will not cooperate with institutions and individuals from the Russian Federation and Belarus until the aggression ends and Russian occupying forces are withdrawn from the entire internationally recognised territory of Ukraine. "HDLU will not issue its members who continue to individually cooperate with institutions and individuals from the Russian Federation and Belarus, with HDLU certificates regarding such cooperation until those individuals or institutions sign a statement on the condemnation of Russia's aggression against Ukraine and support to Ukraine's territorial integrity within its internationally recognised borders," HDLU said in a statement. Last Thursday, the Croatian Academy of Science and Arts (HAZU) expressed its solidarity with Ukraine in a letter to Ukraine's National Academy of Science in the wake of Russia's aggression on Ukraine. The Croatian Audiovisual Centre (HAVC) has said that "they stand in solidarity with the Ukrainian people following the ***invasion*** of Ukraine which violates the territorial integrity of a sovereign nation." Thus, Croatian cultural associations and associations of artists and cultural professionals are joining in the condemnation of the Russian aggression and expression of support to Ukraine. Croatia logs 2,510 new coronavirus cases, 21 deaths ZAGREB, 2 March (Hina) - In the last 24 hours 2,510 coronavirus cases, out of 7,618 tests, and 21 related deaths have been registered in Croatia, the national COVID-19 crisis management team said on Wednesday. There are 12,239 active cases, including 1,183 hospitalised patients, of whom 92 are on ventilators, while 7,342 persons are self-isolating. Croatia has registered 1,058,453 coronavirus cases to date and the death toll is 15,122. Also, 56.85% of the population has been vaccinated, or 67.72% of adults, of whom 65.51% fully. Milanovic: DORH should not be able to topple even this kind of government ZAGREB, 2 March (Hina) - President Zoran Milanovic said on Wednesday that the State Attorney's Office (DORH) could topple the government by arresting cabinet ministers. "DORH can topple the government and I have a problem with that. DORH must not be able to bring down even this kind of government," Milanovic told the press during a visit to the eastern town of Pakrac. He was asked to comment on DORH's request for Labour Minister Josip Aladrovic to be stripped of immunity from criminal prosecution. He said he considered a problem the fact that DORH had ordered the police to arrest Economy Minister Darko Horvat without asking the prime minister first. "That's the problem. No one has ever interpreted the law that way." If this is allowed, a public authority which has not been democratically elected will be given huge powers. On the other hand, DORH may conduct a criminal proceeding, but a minister must enjoy a certain degree of protection. The government can protect them and fall for it, the president said. Milanovic thinks that the prime minister should be asked if a particular member of his cabinet can be arrested and remanded in custody for a week or two. A cabinet minister must enjoy immunity from prosecution, otherwise immunity should be abolished for everyone, he said. "There is a reason why there is immunity in relations between the government and power. You give someone too much power and they will use it by reflex." Milanovic said that the government should have the option of stating its opinion on allegations against its ministers, in particular if they are arrested. He said DORH has huge powers without any responsibilities or oversight and he has no trust in its system of operation. "Those people have not been elected by the body politic. They have great power, fine, but unlimited powers are out of the question," Milanovic said, adding that there should be rules and restrictions on the use of force and repression. Commenting on the takeover of the Croatian subsidiary of the Russian bank Sberbank by the Croatian Postal Bank (HPB), he said that the government's reaction was correct. "That's why we have a bank resolution and damage control system. This was a stress test and it went well," the president said. Gov't to closely examine request to strip labour minister of immunity, PM says ZAGREB, 2 March (Hina) - Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic said on Wednesday the government would examine in detail the request by the State Attorney's Office that Labour Minister Josip Aladrovic be stripped of immunity and then decide, adding that this is the first such case in the government's history. The government received the request yesterday so that a procedure could be launched for a crime punishable with up to five years' imprisonment. Speaking to the press, Plenkovic dismissed the interpretation that stripping the minister of immunity was a routine move. "There is nothing routine about this." According to the media, Aladrovic is suspected of illegal hiring at the Croatian Pension Insurance Institute, which he headed before becoming a minister. Asked if a candidate for the new minister of physical planning, construction and state assets, after the resignation of Darko Horvat, would be known this week, Plenkovic said, "We'll see. Consultations are under way." PM says his government not vulnerable to blackmail ZAGREB, 2 March (Hina) - Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic on Wednesday dismissed the claims by Bridge party MP Nino Raspudic that "people in his government are vulnerable to blackmail", noting that in the past six years his government had shown its ability to deal with crises. "Maybe someone else, who is under pressure or influence from someone, is vulnerable to blackmail, this government definitely isn't," the PM said in response to Raspudic's criticism that his government "is riddled with corruption, with people who are controllable and vulnerable to blackmail by who knows whom, including secret services, possibly Russian as well." "This government will prove that it is stronger than any crisis, that it will be there for the citizens, their wellbeing and security, and where you will be remains to be seen," Plenkovic told Raspudic. The Bridge MP insisted that ministers were vulnerable to blackmail, were ending up in police custody, that investigations were being launched against them and that a request had been filed for Labour Minister Josip Aladrovic to be stripped of immunity from criminal prosecution. "In this situation we do not need such people in power," the MP said during a debate on the PM's report on the situation in Ukraine. Gov't taking account of possible consequences of Ukraine crisis The PM said that the government was taking account of possible consequences of the Ukraine crisis for citizens and the economy, noting that food supplies were sufficient for the time being and that the government was in touch with the Fortenova Group's management. "At the moment it is quite stable both in terms of the ownership structure and liquidity," Plenkovic told MP Sandra Bencic of the Green-Left Bloc, who asked if the government would show an interest in buying a stake in Fortenova Group in case of Sberbank Russia's failure. Andro Krstulovic Opara (HDZ) was worried about the situation in the neighbourhood, noting that in the crisis caused by Russia's attack on Ukraine Belgrade and Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic had "chosen the dark side". "As regards Serbia's policy, we expect it to be clear, it is not possible to sit on two chairs, this is an either/or situation," said Plenkovic. Only one country, East Germany, joined the EU overnight, he told SDP MP Arsen Bauk, who wanted to know if a consensus was possible in Croatia to seek an expedited accession of Western Balkan countries to the EU as Croatia's national interest. The atmosphere after the Russian aggression resembles emergency situations but it is not possible at present to say with certainty how long such "shortcut ***processes***" would last, he said. "We will support our neighbours and Ukraine as regards expediting their integration with the EU," Plenkovic said. Opposition: Govt reshuffle immediately, early election when conditions allow ZAGREB, 2 March (Hina) - Some Opposition MPs said on Wednesday that the government is non-functional because cabinet members must deal with criminal charges filed against them instead of focusing on their jobs, however, it is not the time for a snap election in light of the war in Ukraine but a government reshuffle has to be made. Peda Grbin (SDP) claimed that regardless of the complex international political circumstances, Croatia has to deal with its specific problems because we have two cabinet members, a deputy prime minister and a minister who have criminal charges filed against them, which, he said, is an untenable situation. "The government has to respond to the State Attorney Office's (DORH) notice to strip Minister Josip Aladrovic of immunity as soon as possible in order to allow criminal proceedings against him. In the situation when we can expect a new inflation blow because of the war, it is absolutely untenable for a minister to spend most of his time concerned with his defence in criminal proceedings and not how to lead his ministry. Hence, Minister Aladrovic and Deputy Prime Minister Milosevic have to go and if they don't do that of their own accord, the prime minister should relieve them," added Grbin. "Now is not the time for an election, however, we will be a little wiser in the next few days and know what is happening in Ukraine and in which direction the war is heading. In the meantime, two EU members in our neighbourhood are holding elections next month - Slovenia and Hungary - and they are not considering deferring their elections," Grbin said when asked whether early polls should be held. Exploiting the tragedy of the Ukrainian people in an effort to cover up corruption in one's own cabinet is absolutely pathetic, said Marija Selak Raspudic (Bridge). She believes the prime minister should suspend a minister who is faced with criminal charges. "We will endeavour to show our solidarity with the Ukrainian people but we will continue to warn that this government is untenable because one minister is under investigation while charges for another minister are in the pipeline and for the sake of the security of our citizens in a time of crisis, he has to go as soon as possible," said Selak Raspudic. Anka Mrak Taritas (Glas) said that Prime Minister Plenkovic needs to "urgently reshuffle the government" and that "it cannot be to just remove one minister from the cabinet, all of those who are not capable of doing their job (should be removed) because they are involved in defending their own corrupt actions." "We are all aware that this isn't the time for a snap election because you do not go to an election if you have a war in Europe, however, we have to warn about the situation in the country and be prepared for the day after," said Mrak Taritas adding that May or June could be the time for the election. She believes that a government reshuffle is necessary to obtain a functional government to some extent and to be prepared for an election as soon as global conditions allow. Opposition says Croatian problems mustn't be ignored due to war in Ukraine ZAGREB, 2 March (Hina) - Party groups in parliament on Wednesday unanimously condemned the Russian aggression against Ukraine, but part of them warned that Croatia's internal affairs must not be neglected because of the war in Ukraine. Russia's attack on Ukraine is not an argument against the government's fall but an argument in favour of the government's fall, the war cannot be used as a fig leaf to cover up crime, said Nino Raspudic (Bridge), recalling the problems the government has with former minister Darko Horvat and incumbent minister Josip Aladrovic. PM called on to replace ministers the public no longer has confidence in "In such a dangerous geopolitical situation, having the top of government riddled with crime and corruption is a security threat for Croatia, such people can be blackmailed, and that's why this government has to leave," said Raspudic. Dalija Oreskovic (Centre) thinks similarly and she pointed out this was an opportunity to realise how much internal mechanisms of control are important for democracy and peace. "While the world wonders if there's anyone in the Kremlin who can stop Putin, we must ask ourselves if Croatia today is what we wanted it to be if the HDZ's rule is unquestionable regardless of the amount of corruption," she said, calling on the prime minister to replace the ministers the public no longer had confidence in. "We don't know what awaits us and it's important that we have a stable government, and many things don't point to such a conclusion," said Stephen Nikola Bartulica of the Homeland Movement. He said Croatia couldn't afford a government in the shadow of corruption scandals, stressing that the prime minister had a great responsibility to make decisive moves. Kreso Beljak (HSS) underscored that Croatia had to protect its own interests in the crisis, suggesting that leaders of Western Balkan countries sit down and talk about defusing tensions so that the conflict doesn't expand. Marijan Pavlicek (Croatian Sovereignists) said Croatia had to be ready to receive Ukrainian refugees, work hard to increase the capacities of strategic commodity stocks and raise military readiness. "The Croatian army must be on the eastern borders of the country," said Pavlicek, adding that after Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic did not join the EU in condemning Russia, the Danube would be the border between the east and the west, and stability and instability. Groups of the parliamentary majority gave their full support to the government ***measures*** to help Ukraine and expressed solidarity with the Ukrainian people. The government reacted quickly, a few hours after the aggression, noted Branko Bacic (HDZ), pleased that the Croatian Postal Bank (HPB) was taking over Sberbank. Bacic: Passivity in current situation would be immoral In response to warnings that the sanctions against Russia, in which Croatia is also involved, would affect the Croatian economy, Bacic asked -- what's the alternative? Passivity is a situation like this would be immoral, it is important that Croatia sided with justice and freedom, he said, calling on Putin and Russia to stop the aggression and start peace talks. In a debate on the prime minister's report on the situation in Ukraine, MPs also warned about the possible repercussions of the war for Croatia's neighbourhood. Our interest, as an EU member, is to engage intensively with the neighbourhood, said Milorad Pupovac (SDSS), noting that the area of former Yugoslavia that is not integrated into the EU, as well as Albania, should be of special interest. Veljko Kajtazi (Roma minority) hopes that everything happening with Ukraine will be an incentive to the EU to grant it the status of a membership candidate. Plans for post-quake reconstruction of Sisak County presented to local builders ZAGREB, 2 March (Hina) - Sisak-Moslavina County Prefect Ivan Celjak on Wednesday presented local construction businesses and entrepreneurs with the planned dynamics of reconstruction in the earthquake-affected areas. The programme encompasses the reconstruction of buildings in health, education, culture, road infrastructure and the like so that all the projects can be implemented as planned. The county submitted 68 projects to the solidarity fund valued at HRK 698.5 million. They include 20 projects for healthcare, 11 for education, 9 for culture and 12 for road infrastructure projects. Several projects were highlighted such as the Sisak General Hospital, the Neuropsychiatric Hospital in Popovaca, the Sisak and Petrinja health clinics and the Glina branch clinic, the Topusko Sanatorium, as well as four elementary and seven secondary schools and cultural venues. Celjak said that eight projects valued at HRK 7.6 million were planned for the first quarter, 19 in the second quarter worth HRK 405.9 million and 13 projects, valued at HRK 184.2 million, should be implemented in the third quarter of 2022. "The funds for reconstruction have been secured and we decided on this clear and transparent approach to inform the construction sector of the plans and dynamics of reconstruction aimed at the timely preparation and application for tenders," he said. ((EURO)1 = HRK 7.55) Croatian engineers seek higher pay and more foreign workers ZAGREB, 2 March (Hina) - Engineers' pay should be increased by 30 to 50 percent, and in addition to the already imported 30,000 foreign workers, the Croatian construction sector still lacks 20,000 workers, an event marking Croatian Engineers Day was told in Zagreb on Wednesday. This year's Engineers Day was devoted to long-term plans to make the engineering profession more competitive on both the domestic and global markets. The focus was on untapped national resources and on what the domestic STEM industry can do to put them in the service of sustainable development. Zdravko Jurcec, head of the Croatian Engineering Association, which organised the event, said that the earthquakes that had struck the country two years ago had shown the importance of having domestic knowledge to deal with such emergencies. "Now we are facing a critical period for economic recovery, which will be a major challenge for the Croatian engineering profession," he said. "It's regrettable that none of the competent institutions has wondered what the emigration of engineers means, how much this drain of STEM resources has cost us and how to slow or neutralise these unwanted ***processes***," Jurcec said. He stressed that engineers' pay should be increased by at least 30 to 50 per cent and that in addition to about 30,000 workers already imported, the construction sector still lacked about 20,000 workers. Health Ministry combines public procurement, savings up to HRK 400 million ZAGREB, 2 March (Hina) - One of the key reform ***measures*** proposed by the Ministry of Health is to combine public procurement, which should save up to HRK 400 million a year, the ministry's state-secretary Tomislav Dulibic said on Wednesday at a conference organised by the Health Hub and Health Employers' Association. "By combining the procurement of medical and disposable material, medicines and services, we can save up to HRK 400 million a year and channel that money into improving the quality of health services," Dulibic said. He added that experience to date showed positive steps forward and that room exists for additional savings such as standardising the quality of equipment and supplies. All health institutions established by the state will be obliged to adhere to combined public procurement procedures. Other health institutions that are owned by counties and local government can be included too. "With significant savings, which will benefit patients, with combined public procurement we want to achieve and respect the principle of market competition, equal treatment of all suppliers and maximum transparency in public procurement procedures," said Dulibic. EIZ: Labour demand up 72% compared with February 2021 ZAGREB, 2 March (Hina) - The EIZ Online Vacancy Index (OVI) for February shows continued positive trends on the Croatian labour market as labour demand increased by 72 per cent from February 2021, the Zagreb Institute of Economics (EIZ) said on Wednesday. "Positive movements on the labor market, which have been recorded since mid-2021, continue. According to OVI index for February 2022, labor demand is 72 percent higher than in February 2021 and 41 and 35 percent higher than in February 2020 and 2019 respectively," the EIZ said on its website. The most sought-after occupations in February this year were salespersons, cooks, waiters, warehouse workers and bookkeepers. The EIZ said that 43 per cent of job advertisements offered permanent employment, while 44 per cent offered fixed-term employment. Some 1.9 per cent mentioned the possibility of working from home, while 3 per cent of advertisements targeted pensioners, reflecting the trend of higher demand for pensioners in the past months. The OVI is a monthly index of online job advertisements developed by the EIZ in cooperation with the MojPosao job search website to provide timely information on current labour demand. CROStartup, new national startup support organisation, launched ZAGREB, 2 March (Hina) - CROStartup is a new national umbrella organisation in Croatia representing and promoting the growing startup community in the country, the launch ceremony was told in Zagreb on Wednesday. Its establishment was initiated by the Cisex association of software exporters and prominent individuals from the ICT community. Currently, there are an estimated 6,000 startups in Croatia and they deserve greater attention and assistance, it was said. "Croatia is among the few countries in Europe with a strong startup community, but without an association to represent them. Since the EU too is devoting more and more attention to startups, seeing in them the potential for growth, we have decided to establish the association CROStartup," its president Hajdi Cenan said. The association currently has about 20 members and will focus on four main goals - eliminating regulatory barriers, pooling together resources and the know-how, strengthening the startup community, and positioning itself internationally. "We will offer support to startups and advocate tax relief for investors, employee stock ownership, and lobbying at all levels," said Marijana Sarolic Robic from the MSR law firm. Marija Brkljacic of AlgebraLab said that there was a lot of know-how in Croatia which should be shared and used. Twenty-one emigrant associations call for equality of Croats in BiH ZAGREB, 2 March (Hina) - Twenty-one Croat emigrant associations from Europe, USA, South America and Australia have sent a message of support for Croats in Bosnia and Herzegovina and expressed expectations that they will achieve equality through the election reform so that the majority peoples do not outvote them. A letter sent to the Croat authorities in BiH and the media says that Croats from around the world expect a guarantee for "legitimate representation of the constituent peoples in the BiH Presidency and the House of Peoples in the Federation entity as well as equality with the other two peoples in BiH." The Croat associations supported the position of the BiH Croat National Assembly on election reform based on the implementation of rulings by the European Court of Human Rights and the BiH Constitutional Court and called on representatives of the other two peoples, Bosniaks and Serbs, and the international community to reach an agreement. The general election in Bosnia and Herzegovina is scheduled for October this year. However, key Croat parties in BiH claim that the election result cannot be implemented because the Constitutional Court has removed the provision regarding the way delegates are elected to the upper chamber of the Federation entity's parliament, the House of Peoples. At the same time, they assess that if the Croats were to be outvoted again in the election of the Croat representative on the Presidency, that could exacerbate the crisis and undermine the Dayton-Paris Peace Accord. The Croat and Bosniak parties have been negotiating for months in an effort to reach an agreement on amendments to the election law and a limited reform of the constitution. However, they are no closer to an agreement despite the mediation of US and EU diplomats. The Croat parties insist that Croat voters should have a decisive role in the election of the Croat member of the country's Presidency and delegates to the Croat parliamentary group in the House of Peoples without the possibility of being outvoted by the Bosniaks, who are three and a half times more numerous than the Croats. The Bosniak parties, however, insist on a civil democracy and the right of every individual to exercise their rights. In other news: D.D. Specijalna Vozila closes HRK 77.5 million deal ZAGREB, 2 March (Hina) - The Duro Dakovic Specijalna Vozila (Duro Dakovic Special Vehicles) company, part of the Duro Dakovic metal and mechanical engineering group, has closed a HRK 77.5 million deal with a Swiss client for the production and delivery of Shimmns freight wagons, the group said on Wednesday. The Shimmns TTU wagons are 4-axle closed wagons used for the transport of steel coils used primarily in the automobile industry, the group said via the Zagreb Stock Exchange. Delivery of the wagons is planned for the second and third quarters of this year. "With this project the Duro Dakovic Specijalna Vozila company confirms its commitment and strategic direction towards the development and production of special-purpose wagons with the application of new generation equipment which rounds out the company's development and production ***processes***," the group said. Food, drinks and tourism equipment fair opens in Porec ZAGREB, 2 March (Hina) - Around 150 exhibitors from Croatia, Italy, Slovenia and Germany, representing some 500 best known brands from the hotel, restaurant and caf\xC3 industry, gathered for the 37th food, drinks and tourism equipment fair "Promohotel" in the northern Adriatic town of Porec on Wednesday. The fair will include a conference on human resources in tourism, to be held on March 3-4. Opening the event, Istria County head Boris Miletic recalled that one of the oldest and most reputable fairs in Istria was being held after a year-long break. THIS BULLETIN INCLUDES ITEMS RELEASED BY 2115 HRS WEDNESDAY. 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**Body**

**ABSTRACT**

***King Mohammed VI (1999-present) chairs the inauguration ceremony of Morocco's newly formed government, led by Aziz Akhannouch, and a council meeting discussing a preliminary draft of the 2022 financial bill. Morocco's unemployment rate increases to 12.8% in the second quarter of 2021, a 0.5% increase compared to the second quarter of 2020 and the highest unemployment rate since 2001. The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) holds a closed-door meeting on the Western Sahara as part of consultations prior to adopting a new resolution to renew the mandate of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO). The government launches a campaign to administer third dose "booster shots" of Covid-19 vaccines to citizens and residents***.

**FULL TEXT**

**Mohammed VI installs new government**...

King **Mohammed VI** (1999-present) chaired the inauguration ceremony on 7 October of **Morocco**'s newly formed government, led by **Aziz Akhannouch**, and launched the legislative year of parliament on 8 October.[[1]](#footnote-2)1 The new government of 24 departments includes some ministers from the former cabinet in either the same position or assuming new duties. Women will lead seven ministries, including the ministries of health, economy and finance, and energy transition and sustainable development.

Morocco's general elections on 8 September delivered a stunning upset to the political status quo (see *ARC Briefing Morocco September 2021*). Akhannouch's **Rassemblement National des Indépendants** (**RNI**) won 102 of the 395 seats in parliament, while the **Parti de la Justice et du Développement** (**PJD**), in power since 2010, secured only 13.[[2]](#footnote-3)2 Akhannouch formally became Morocco's new prime minister on 11 September.

| **Morocco's new government, as of 8 October 2021** | |
| --- | --- |
| Head of Government | Aziz Akhannouch |
| Interior | Abdelouafi Laftit (maintains role) |
| Foreign affairs | Nasser Bourita (maintains role) |
| Islamic affairs | Ahmed Toufiq (maintains role) |
| Secretary General of the Government | Mohamed Hajouil (re-appointed) |
| Minister Delegate to Head of | Abdellatif Loudiyi (maintains role) |
| Government in charge of the |  |
| national defence administration |  |
| Justice | Abdellatif Ouahbi |
| Economy and finance | Nadia Fettah Alaoui |
| Minister Delegate to the finance minister | Fouzi Lekjaa |
| ***Agriculture*** and fisheries | Mohamed Sadiki |
| Water and equipment | Nizar Baraka |
| Tourism and handicraft | Fatim-Zahra Ammor |
| Transport and logistics | Mohamed Abdeljalil |
| Economic inclusion, small | Younes Sekkouri |
| business, employment and skills |  |
| National education, preschool and sports | Chakib Benmoussa |
| Higher education, research, and innovation | Abdellatif Miraoui |
| Youth, culture and communication | Mehdi Bensaid |
| Women, family and social integration | Aawatif Hyar |
| Housing | Fatima Ezzahra El Mansouri |
| Health | Nabila Rmili |
| Energy transition and | Leila Benali |
| sustainable development |  |
| Minister delegate to the Head | Ghita Mezzour |
| of Government in charge of |  |
| digital transition and |  |
| administrative reform |  |
| Delegate minister to Head | Mohcine Jazouli |
| of Government in charge of |  |
| investment, convergence and |  |
| evaluation of public policies |  |

**Morocco's new government, as of 8 October 2021**

In his speech to parliament, Mohammed VI highlighted Morocco's most important accomplishments, urging the government and parliament to intensify efforts and assume responsibility for the country's development.[[3]](#footnote-4)3 He also expressed satisfaction with the economic growth that Morocco has recorded throughout the **Covid-19** pandemic.

... **and chairs Council of Ministers on 2022 Financial Bill**

King Mohammad VI chaired Morocco's first post-PJD council on 17 October, focussed on discussing a preliminary draft of the 2022 financial bill.[[4]](#footnote-5)4 The financial legislation represents the first major objective for the new government and will focus on implementing the new development model, generalisation of social protection, and improving early schooling among children.[[5]](#footnote-6)5 Newly appointed economy minister **Nadia Fettah Alaoui** noted the need to strengthen inclusion mechanisms and implement social protection as a priority project. 2022 will mark the launch of the second phase of generalisation of the social protection project, which aims to benefit vulnerable and disadvantaged people benefitting from the state's medical assistance plan, **Régime d'Assistance Médicale (RAMED)**:

*"Special attention will be paid to the social integration of people with disabilities, in addition to establishing the promotion of gender equality in different economic and social fields among the priorities of government action."*[[6]](#footnote-7)6

The bill will focus on reforming the public sector by strengthening governance mechanisms through the acceleration of the implementation of the *"advanced regionalisation"* project. The finance bill also aims to prioritise acceleration of the reform of public administration through activation of the charter of public services; simplification of administrative procedures; consolidation of the bases for the revival of the national economy to allow various sectors to regain dynamism and improve their capacity to preserve and create jobs and generalisation of the digital administration.[[7]](#footnote-8)7 The government has until 20 October to agree on the fiscal bill for the next year.

**Morocco records highest unemployment rate since 2001**

Morocco's unemployment rate increased to 12.8% in the second quarter of 2021, a 0.5% increase compared to the second quarter of 2020 and the highest unemployment rate since 2001, according to the **Haut Commissariat au Plan** (**HCP**) (planning commission).[[8]](#footnote-9)8 In April, Morocco's unemployed population stood at 1.6 million, an increase of 128,000 since April 2020.[[9]](#footnote-10)9 The Covid-19 pandemic and associated containment ***measures*** have led to significant job losses, which may have contributed to the PJD's September electoral loss (see above). The handicraft sector, one of the worst performing sectors, lost 53,000 job positions. However, the construction, ***agricultural*** and services sectors registered increases in employment of 108,000, 318,000 and 40,000 respectively.[[10]](#footnote-11)10

Despite higher unemployment numbers, Morocco recorded gross domestic product (GDP) of MAD 1,12 trillion ($ 124 billion), an increase of 10.45% from 2020.[[11]](#footnote-12)11 Real GDP, accounting for inflation, reached MAD 294.4 trillion ($ 32.4 billion).[[12]](#footnote-13)12 The inflation rate is 0.8%, below the 2% inflation rate recommended by economists. According to the **International Monetary Fund (IMF)**, Morocco's economy contracted by 5.9% in 2020 due to the stringent three-month lockdown and the drought that impacted the ***agricultural*** season and rural incomes.[[13]](#footnote-14)13

**UN Security Council holds closed-door meeting on Western Sahara**

The **United Nations Security Council (UNSC)** held a closed-door meeting on the **Western Sahara** issue on 13 October. UNSC consultations are being held prior to adoption of a resolution to renew the mandate of the **United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO)**, the UN's peacekeeping operation in the region.[[14]](#footnote-15)14 Moroccan forces and the **Polisario Front**, an armed group demanding independence for Western Sahara, have been fighting for decades over the vast disputed territory, bordering Morocco, **Mauritania** and **Algeria**, which was previously under **Spanish** control.[[15]](#footnote-16)15 The UNSC received a briefing from the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for the Sahara, **Alexander Ivanko**, and the assistant secretary-general for **Africa** in the UN Secretariat's department of political affairs, **Martha Pobee**.

The consultations were held amid threats from the Polisario Front, reportedly continuing to agitate for war despite repeated warnings from the UN.[[16]](#footnote-17)16 While the separatist group welcomed the appointment of **Staffan de Mistura** as UN secretary general **Antonio Guterres**' personal envoy for the Western Sahara, it demanded total Moroccan surrender as a condition to restart negotiations. Polisario Front leader **Brahim Ghali** said on 13 October that *"war will not stop"* and that *"renewed war"* between the Polisario Front and Morocco "*will affect the entire region*" should the UN continue to "*manage the conflict instead of resolving it*".[[17]](#footnote-18)17

Ghali's statement came days after the UNSC urged all parties to the conflict to show restraint and avoid any escalations that might derail the political ***process*** for a compromise-based solution to the conflict. On 4 October, the UNSC confirmed the Polisario Front's violations of the military agreement, particularly in **Guerguerat** near the Moroccan-Mauritanian border, after a MINURSO reconnaissance mission identified the separatist group in the buffer zone.[[18]](#footnote-19)18 The report stated that MINURSO observers had identified "*eight military vehicles, two of which were equipped with heavy weapons*" in the buffer zone.

Many observers expect that the diplomatic impasse will impact the future of the **Maghreb-Europe** gas pipeline.[[19]](#footnote-20)19 The 1,400-km pipeline is a system of high-pressure gas pipelines carrying natural gas from the wells in **Hassi R'Mel** (Algeria) to Spain and **Portugal** via an underwater section in the **Strait of Gibraltar**.[[20]](#footnote-21)20 The pipeline contract expires in October, but Morocco has said it is in favour of maintaining the pipeline.[[21]](#footnote-22)21 Algeria's President **Abdelmadjid Tebboune** (2019-present) said on 12 October that his country will supply Spain with gas through **Medgaz**, a submarine pipeline directly connecting Algeria to Spain. Algeria, which supports the Polisario Front, announced on 24 August its decision to sever all diplomatic ties with Morocco, accusing **Rabat** of committing *"hostile acts"* and colluding with *"terrorist groups"* to undermine Algerian interests (see *ARC Briefing Morocco September 2021*).[[22]](#footnote-23)22

Tension between Algeria and Morocco dates back to 1976, after **Algiers** started supporting the Polisario Front.[[23]](#footnote-24)23 Recent tensions stem from the recognition on 10 December by the administration of former US president **Donald Trump** (2017-2021) of Moroccan sovereignty over the Western Sahara, when the US became the first country to recognise Morocco's claim and reaffirmed its proposal to grant limited autonomy to Sahrawis under Moroccan control.[[24]](#footnote-25)24

**Government approves Covid-19 booster shots**

The government officially launched on 4 October its campaign to administer third dose *"booster shots"* of Covid-19 vaccines to citizens and residents.[[25]](#footnote-26)25 The campaign aims to strengthen public immunity against the virus and is expected to initially target those who have been fully vaccinated for at least six months.[[26]](#footnote-27)26 Approved booster shot vaccines will be independent of the type received in the first two doses or the single dose of US-based pharmaceutical company **Johnson & Johnson**'s single dose **Janssen** vaccine.[[27]](#footnote-28)27

Morocco has vaccinated over 60% of its population and its epidemiological situation seems to be improving even after easing of Covid-19 restrictions.[[28]](#footnote-29)28 The country appears to be on target to fully vaccinate 80% of its population by the end of the year. To reach its target, it will have to inoculate 33 million people by 31 December.[[29]](#footnote-30)29 According to the health ministry's update on 16 October, it has fully vaccinated 20,908,945 of its 36.4 million citizens against Covid-19 since beginning its vaccination campaign at the end of January.[[30]](#footnote-31)30 At least 23,230,919 people have received a first dose and 644,722 have received a third dose. The health ministry announced that Morocco had recorded 417 new cases throughout the country on 17 October and a further 269 cases on 18 October.[[31]](#footnote-32)31 The seven-day average as of 17 October is 417 daily cases.[[32]](#footnote-33)32 As of 18 October, Morocco had recorded a total of 942,280 cases, with 921,980 recoveries and 14,561 Covid-19-related deaths.[[33]](#footnote-34)33

Health officials have stressed the need for citizens to continue to follow the precautionary ***measures*** set by the health ministry.[[34]](#footnote-35)34 The government has extended its health state of emergency through 31 October.[[35]](#footnote-36)35 Security services will allow movement across the country without restrictions if travellers present their vaccination pass or a movement permit signed by authorities.[[36]](#footnote-37)36 Restaurants, cafes, public baths, gyms and stores are allowed to operate until 11pm daily at up to 50% capacity.[[37]](#footnote-38)37 Public transport may operate at a maximum of 75% capacity. Domestic flights and public transport, including bus and rail service, are in operation but private and public gatherings are banned.

For Covid-19 tracking and monitoring purposes, government has classified areas in the country as either "Zone-1" or "Zone-2" regions based on their local levels of Covid-19 activity. Restrictions in Zone-1 areas have been eased due to lower disease activity and residents can leave their homes without special permits; however, they must carry national identity cards at all times.[[38]](#footnote-39)38 Establishments in Zone-1, such as restaurants, beaches, hotels, cafes and all businesses, can only operate at 50% capacity and must adhere to social distancing guidelines. In Zone-2 areas, government has eased only some restrictions and residents may not travel outside their municipalities of residence without special permits.

For entry to Morocco, government classifies countries into "List A" and "List B". List A includes countries with positive indicators regarding their control of the Covid-19 epidemiological situation. Travellers from such countries, whether Moroccan or foreigners living there, can enter Morocco subject to providing a vaccination certificate or a negative polymerase chain reaction (PCR) test taken 72 hours before departure.[[39]](#footnote-40)39 List B includes countries experiencing a spread of variants or lacking precise Covid-19 case statistics. Travellers from these countries must obtain ***exceptional*** authorisation prior to travel, present a negative PCR test result taken less than 48 hours prior to arrival, and undergo mandatory quarantine on arrival. Unvaccinated or partially vaccinated individuals traveling from List B countries are required to undergo a mandatory 10-day quarantine period at a government-designated facility at their own expense. Travelers from List B countries presenting a certificate of full vaccination against Covid-19 are exempt from quarantine requirements. In the most recent update to Morocco's travel restrictions published on 4 October, the foreign ministry announced that Moroccan residents will be able to self-isolate for five days at home upon arriving from a List B country.[[40]](#footnote-41)40 The foreign affairs ministry updates the countries on List A and List B regularly and at least twice a month.

**Planner**

Oct 2021 **(Morocco)** Scheduled joint Morocco-**United Kingdom** military exercise

Oct 2021 **(Morocco)** Scheduled release of Moroccan-led **United Nations (UN)** fact-finding mission to **Libya** report on the Libyan crisis;

Oct 2021 **(Morocco)** Expiry of **Maghreb-Europe** gas pipeline contract;

Dec 2021 **(Morocco)** Scheduled start date for **Sothema** laboratory to begin manufacturing the **Sinopharm** Covid-19 vaccines;

2021 **(Morocco)** Scheduled construction of five new dams;

2021 **Oued Zem (Morocco)** Scheduled opening of automotive testing centre;

Q4 2021 **Marrakech (Morocco)** 24th **General Assembly of the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO)**

2022 **Marrakech (Morocco) International Monetary Fund** and **World Bank** annual meetings to take place in Morocco;

**Chronology**

18 Oct 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***El Al*. **Israeli** airline **El Al** will increase its flights to a biweekly frequency in the **Marrakech-Tel Aviv** route;

18 Oct 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***Morocco World News*. Government announces that **Covid-19** vaccination passports are mandatory for transportation and to access public spaces from 21 October;

17 Oct 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***Morocco World News*. King **Mohammed VI** chairs cabinet meeting on the 2022 finance bill which will focus on implementing the new development model, the generalisation of social protection, and improving early schooling among children;

15 Oct 2021 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)***African Union*. The **African Union (AU)** selects Moroccan politician and economist **Fathallah Sijilmassi** to become the first director general of the **AU Commission**;

15 Oct 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***Bank Al Maghrib*. Central bank **Bank Al Maghrib** announces at its quarterly council meeting that economic growth forecasted to reach 5.3% in June has been revised upwards by 0.9 points, reaching 6.2%;

14 Oct 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***Bank Al Maghrib*. Central bank **Bank Al Maghrib** expects remittances from Moroccans residing abroad (MREs) to reach MAD 87 billion ($ 9.6 billion) in 2021;

14 Oct 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***Morocco World News*. Morocco's epidemiological situation is improving with over 60% of its population vaccinated;

14 Oct 2021 **New York (United States)***Morocco World News*. The **United Nations Security Council (UNSC)** holds closed-door meeting on **Western Sahara** prior to adoption of a new resolution that will renew **MINURSO**'s mandate in Western Sahara;

13 Oct 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***Tellereport*. Automotive manufacturer **Opel**, a subsidiary of **Stellantis**, is reportedly considering relocating some of its operations to Morocco from **Russelsheim** in **Germany**;

13 Oct 2021 **London (United Kingdom)***Ernst & Young*. A global ranking report from **United Kingdom**-headquartered audit firm **Ernst & Young (EY)** places Morocco as the most attractive location for renewable energy investments in the **Middle East and North Africa (MENA)** region;

13 Oct 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***Morocco World News*. Experts predict that Morocco's automotive sector will contribute 24% to the Moroccan GDP by 2022;

12 Oct 2021 **Cairo (Egypt)***Morocco World News*. The embassy of **Russia** in **Egypt** has requested the postponement of the 6th **Russian-Arab Cooperation Forum** scheduled to take place in **Morocco** on 28 October;

12 Oct 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***Haut Commissariat au Plan (HCP)*. Morocco records its highest unemployment rate since 2001 with unemployment rising to 12.8% in the second quarter of 2021, a 0.5% increase compared to the second quarter of 2020;

12 Oct 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***Morocco World News*. Months after recalling its ambassador from Morocco, **Algeria** has officially ended the functions of its diplomatic representative in **Rabat**;

12 Oct 2021 **New York (United States)***Morocco World News*. **United States**-based international credit ratings agency **Fitch Ratings** says credit fundamentals of Morocco's banks are slowly recovering from the ***unprecedented*** effects of the global Covid-19 crisis;

12 Oct 2021 **Algiers (Algeria)***Echoroukonline*. **Algeria**'s President **Abdelmadjid Tebboune** says his country will supply **Spain** with gas through **Medgaz**, a submarine pipeline directly connecting Algeria to Spain;

11 Oct 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***Morocco World News*. Prime minister **Aziz Akhannouch** declares that his government is committed to promoting Moroccan labels nationally and internationally by enacting strategic protectionism;

11 Oct 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***Morocco World News*. Prime minister **Aziz Akhannouch** presents the main goals of his new government during a plenary session held by both houses of parliament;

11 Oct 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***Maroc*. Foreign minister **Nasser Bourita** hosts his **Malian** counterpart, **Abdoulaye Diop**, in **Rabat** to discuss vital issues currently impacting both countries. Diop says the Malian government is committed to *"doing everything possible"* to find the murderers of two Moroccan truckers in Mali;

11 Oct 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***Africa News*. Moroccan candidate **Abderrazak Rouwane** is elected to one of the five vacant seats of the **United Nations (UN) Committee Against Torture** for the 2022-2025 period;

11 Oct 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***Morocco World News*. **Israel** officially appoints its charge d'affaires in **Rabat, David Govin**, as its ambassador to Morocco;

11 Oct 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***Flight Global*. **Royal Air Maroc (RAM)** and **Israel**'s **EL AL** sign a cooperation agreement that will allow the two airlines to explore the possibility of codeshare services;

10 Oct 2021 **Paris (France)***Morocco World News*. **France** moves Morocco to its amber list of **Covid-19** travel amid the remarkable improvements the North African country's epidemiological situation has seen in recent weeks;

10 Oct 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***Ministère des Affaires Etrangères*. The ministry of foreign affairs officially unveils the country's investment and export brand *"Morocconow"*, on the sidelines of the kingdom's participation in **Expo 2020 Dubai**;

10 Oct 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***Morocco World News*. The embassy of **Russia** in **Rabat** announces it will expatriate its citizens from Morocco;

9 Oct 2021 **London (United Kingdom)***Morocco World News*. **British** luxury travel magazine **Conde Nast Traveler** ranks **Marrakech Menara Airport** seventh best in the world and first among **African** airports;

8 Oct 2021 **London (United Kingdom)***United Kingdom Government*. The **United Kingdom (UK)** government announces that Morocco's **Covid-19** vaccination certificate is now recognised and accepted for travel to the UK;

8 Oct 2021 **Almeria (Spain)***Morocco World News*. About 200 farmers from the **Spanish** city of **Almeria** and representatives of fruit and vegetable companies lead an ***agricultural*** strike demonstrate against Moroccan ***agricultural*** products;

8 Oct 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***Morocco World News*. King **Mohammed VI** addresses parliament, highlighting Morocco's accomplishments including economic growth throughout recent tough times;

7 Oct 2021 **Washington (United States)***World Bank*. According to a **World Bank** report, Morocco will record the highest GDP in the **Middle East and North Africa (MENA)** region due to sustainable performance of its ***agricultural*** sector, rather than a general increase of economic activity;

7 Oct 2021 **Fez (Morocco)***Africa News*. King **Mohammed VI** chairs the inauguration ceremony of Morocco's newly formed government;

7 Oct 2021 **Madrid (Spain)***Morocco World News*. Spain's foreign affairs minister, **Jose Manuel Albares**, emphasises his country's determination to build *"stronger"* diplomatic relations after months of political stalemate;

7 Oct 2021 **Western Sahara (Morocco)***Morocco World News*. **Polisario Front** responds to appointment of Special Envoy **Staffan de Mistura** by demanding total Moroccan surrender as a condition to restart negotiations;

6 Oct 2021 **Washington (United States)***State Department*. **United States** Secretary of State **Anthony Blinken** conveys his country's satisfaction with the appointment of a new personal envoy for **Western Sahara**;

6 Oct 2021 **Berlin (Germany)***North Africa Post*. **Moroccan** diplomat **Mustapha El Yamli** is the new head of the **Arab League** office in **Berlin** after his nomination by fellow members of the regional organisation;

7 Oct 2021 **New York (United States)***The Arab Weekly*. **United Nations Secretary-General**, **Antonio Guterres** officially appoints **Italian-Swiss** diplomat **Staffan de Mistura** as his new personal envoy for **Western Sahara**, nearly two and a half years after the post became vacant;

6 Oct 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***Morocco World News*. The **Moroccan Association of Exporters** warns that **France**'s decision to cut by 50% the number of visas issued to Moroccans could significantly affect Morocco's foreign exports;

6 Oct 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***Morocco World News*. The **Association of Vehicle Importers** in Morocco releases statistics highlighting the rapid growth of the local automotive industry by 12.64% in 2021;

6 Oct 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***Royal Air Maroc*. Flagship domestic carrier **Royal Air Maroc** has cancelled flights to **Russia** and is offering passengers refunds or change in flight itinerary;

5 Oct 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***Haut Commissariat au Plan (HCP)*. The **Haut Commissariat au Plan (HCP)** (planning commission) foresees 4.3% economic growth in the fourth quarter of 2021, as opposed to a 5.1% decline during the same quarter in 2020;

5 Oct 2021 **Luxembourg City (Luxembourg)***Morocco World News*. The **Mediterranean Chamber of Fisheries** is the latest organisation to voice opposition to the recent decision of the **European Court of Justice (ECJ)** to annul fisheries and ***agriculture*** agreements between Morocco and the **European Union (EU)**;

4 Oct 2021 **New York (United States)***United Nations*. Moroccan ambassador to the **United Nations (UN) Omar Hilale** assumes presidency of UN **General Assembly** 1st committee that oversees disarmament and international security, the first time that Morocco assumes the presidency of the committee;

4 Oct 2021 **New York (United States)***Morocco World News*. **United Nations (UN)** secretarygeneral **Antonio Guterres** confirms the **Polisario Front**'s violations of the military agreement, particularly in **Guerguerat**;

4 Oct 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***Daily Morocco*. According to **Skytrax Groupe**, Morocco's flagship carrier **Royal Air Maroc** ranks 81st in the world's 100 airlines, climbing 11 spots;

3 Oct 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***Ministre de la Santé*. Government approves administration of a third **Covid-19** vaccine dose;

2 Oct 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***Morocco World News*. **United States** electric car manufacturer **Tesla** has installed its first charging stations in Morocco, the first in **Africa**;

2 Oct 2021 **Tripoli (Libya)***Morocco World News*. The **United Nations (UN) Support Mission in Libya** expresses gratitude for Morocco following talks marked by a *"positive atmosphere"*;

2 Oct 2021 **Algiers (Algeria)***Morocco World News*. **Spain** sends a pre-emptive diplomatic mission to **Algiers** in response to the looming energy crisis in **Europe; Algeria**'s liquefied natural gas (LNG) production supplies Spain with half of its LNG imports;

2 Oct 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***Ministre de la Santé*. The health ministry recommends a third vaccine *"booster"* shot to fight **Covid-19** and its many variants;

1 Oct 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***Morocco World News*. Morocco is participating in the **Expo Dubai 2020**, spanning from 1 October to 31 March, to share its strategic vision for a more sustainable global future;

1 Oct 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***Haut Commissariat au Plan (HCP)*. The national economy experienced a growth of 15.2% in the second quarter of 2021, as opposed to a drop of 14.2% during the same period in 2020;

30 Sep 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***Ministre de la Santé*. The health ministry announces that Morocco will adopt new ***measures*** to ease its current Covid-19 restrictions;

30 Sep 2021 **Luxembourg City (Luxembourg)***European Commission*. The **European Commission** emphasises the importance of partnership with **Morocco** in the wake of the **European Court of Justice** ruling against the EU-Morocco fisheries and ***agriculture*** agreements;

30 Sep 2021 **Brussels (Belgium)***Morocco World News*. Morocco and the **European Union (EU)** will begin dismantling tariffs on 1 October under an agreement on reciprocal liberalisation ***measures*** relating to ***agricultural*** products, ***processed*** ***agricultural*** products, fish, and fishery products;

30 Sep 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***Ministère de l'Education Nationale*. Morocco will adopt inperson education for the 7.5 million students returning to school in the 2021-22 academic year amid projections that it is on track to reach its **Covid-19** vaccination goals by the end of the year;

30 Sep 2021 **Madrid (Spain)***Map News*. The government of **Spain** expresses support for the continuation of the EU-Morocco fisheries agreement after the **European Court of Justice (ECJ)** ruled to annul the deal;

29 Sep 2021 **Luxembourg City (Luxembourg)***European Court of Justice*. The **European Court of Justice (ECJ)** rules to annul the fisheries and ***agriculture*** agreements between **Morocco** and the **European Union (EU)**; The EU and Morocco have two months to file their appeal following the ruling;

29 Sep 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***Morocco World News*. New tobacco reforms in Morocco will enter into force in 2024, aiming to align domestic tobacco manufacturing with international standards;

28 Sep 2021 **Paris (France)***Africa News*. **Moroccan** foreign minister **Nasser Bourita** says **France**'s decision to reduce the number of visas granted to citizens from **Morocco, Tunisia**, and **Algeria** is 'unjustified', citing insufficient consular cooperation;

27 Sep 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***Morocco World News*. Officials cite 'health situation' as **Israeli**carrier **El Al** suspends **Morocco-Israel** flights;

25 Sep 2021 **Ottawa (Canada)***Morocco World News*. **Canada** announces that its current suspension of flights from **Morocco** in response to the kingdom's **Covid-19** situation will be extended until 29 October;

24 Sep 2021 **Agadir (Morocco)***Morocco Latest News*. **Agadir** municipal council appoints prime minister **Aziz Akhannouch** as mayor of the city;

23 Sep 2021 **Tangier (Morocco)***Morocco World News*. **Tangier Med Port** is ranked 25th worldwide, surpassing other large ports of the **Mediterranean** such as the **Piraeus Port** in **Greece**, and the ports of **Valencia** and **Algeciras** in **Spain**;

23 Sep 2021 **Washington (United States)***Morocco World News*. The **United States (US)** state department describes Morocco as a *"close partner"*, stressing that the two countries regularly discuss a variety of topics, including **Rabat**-**Washington** cooperation and advancing King **Mohammed VI**'s reform agenda;

22 Sep 2021 **Abuja (Nigeria)***Morocco World News*. **Nigeria**'s energy minister, **Tembri Salva**, confirms that the Nigeria gas pipeline is set to pass through **Morocco** to reach **Europe**;

19 Sep 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***Matzav Review*. Morocco's central bank, **Bank Al-Maghrib**, will purchase foreign currency surpluses in auctions from 20 September to absorb current surpluses;

17 Sep 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***Morocco World News*. **L'Office National des Pêches** (national fishing office) reports that the quantity of marketed coastal and traditional fishing products increased by 34% in 2021;

16 Sep 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***Office National Des Aéroports (ONDA)*. The **Office National des Aéroports (ONDA)** (national airports office) announces that 16 Moroccan airports have received the *"Airport Health Accreditation"* from the **International Council of Airports (ACI)**;

15 Sep 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***Ministre de la Santé*. As 15 September, over one million students aged 12 to 17 have received their first dose of a **Covid-19** vaccine across Morocco.

**About Africa Risk Consulting**:

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**FOOTNOTES**

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[***Blinken on Ukraine: 'Suffering is likely to get worse before it gets better' - live***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:64XD-86K1-JBNF-W4R6-00000-00&context=1516831)

The Guardian (London)

March 4, 2022 Friday 1:58 PM GMT

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**Highlight:** Nuclear plant seized by Russians after shelling, say authoritiesRussia-Ukraine war: latest updatesAmerica's culture war is spilling into actual war-warTrump strikes deal to evade deposition in New York case - for nowSign up to receive First Thing - our daily briefing by email

**Body**

block-time published-time 9.17pm GMT

A little tidbit from Joe Biden and his meeting today with Sauli Niinisto, the president of Finland :

enltrQuite the Oval exchange today, via pooler [*@TalKopan*](https://twitter.com/TalKopan?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) : Biden "You know my predecessor who sat in this seat, President Obama used to say (if the majority) were Nordic countries, we'd be fine." Finnish president: "Well we usually don't start wars."

- Jonathan Martin (@jmartNYT) [*March 4, 2022*](https://twitter.com/jmartNYT/status/1499851472833589254?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 8.48pm GMT

Last night, the Florida senate passed a bill banning access to abortions after 15 weeks.

Vice-president Kamala Harris issued a statement today that "the Biden-Harris Administration will continue to do everything in our power to protect access to healthcare and defend a woman's right to make decisions about her body and determine her future".

"The right of women to make decisions about their own bodies is non-negotiable," she said.

block-time published-time 8.23pm GMT

Former vice-president Mike Pence reportedly will call on Republicans to stop repeating the lie that D onald Trump keeps peddling that the 2020 presidential election was stolen.

enltrPence will call on GOP to stop fighting 2020 election results in speech to party's top donors tonight. "We cannot win by fighting yesterday's battles, or by relitigating the past."

- Josh Dawsey (@jdawsey1) [*March 4, 2022*](https://twitter.com/jdawsey1/status/1499836359305199617?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 8.00pm GMT

White House press secretary Jen Psaki fielded a question about Lindsey Graham and his comments calling for the assassination of Vladimir Putin.

"That is not the position of the United States government that is certainly not the statement you would hear coming from the mouth of anybody working in this administration," she said.

When pressed further on the topic - on whether Joe Biden agreed with Graham that Putin's death was the only way out of this war - Psaki staunchly doubled down.

"The president believes there continues to be a diplomatic path forward," she said. "President Putin has the ability to deescalate. We have left the door open for months now to engage in deescalation."

Psaki continued: "We are not advocating for killing the leader of a foreign country or a regime change. That is not the policy of the United States."

Read more about the outcry against Graham's comments here:

Related: [*Outcry after US senator Lindsey Graham suggests Putin's assassination*](https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/mar/04/lindsey-graham-suggests-putin-assassination-russia-ukraine)

block-time published-time 7.47pm GMT

White House press secretary Jen Psaki addressed the Russian attack on the Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant in Ukraine.

The US embassy in Ukraine called the attack on the nuclear plant a war crime. But Psaki said the determination of Russia's war crimes is still an ongoing ***process*** that is taking place within the administration.

enltrIt is a war crime to attack a nuclear power plant. Putin's shelling of Europe's largest nuclear plant takes his reign of terror one step further. [*#TheHague*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/TheHague?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) [*#Zaporizhzhia*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/Zaporizhzhia?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) [*#StandwithUkraine*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/StandwithUkraine?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

- U.S. Embassy Kyiv (@USEmbassyKyiv) [*March 4, 2022*](https://twitter.com/USEmbassyKyiv/status/1499708231903547394?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

"It's a legal review and a ***process*** that goes through the administration," Psaki said. "What I will say, the intentional targeting of civilians or civilian objects would be considered a war crime. Regardless of legality, this action was the height of irresponsibility. The Kremlin must cease operations around nuclear infrastructure."

block-time published-time 7.40pm GMT

White House press secretary Jen Psaki is at the podium for her press briefing and she began with the administration's request to Congress for more funding for Ukraine.

Since 2021, the US has already provided more than $1.4bn to Ukraine, and administration officials are now requesting $10bn more to "deliver additional security assistance to Ukraine, to provide life-saving humanitarian assistance for the Ukrainian people and more support for stronger sanction enforcement and for US troop deployment to reinforce Nato's eastern flank and deter Russian aggression," Psaki said.

block-time published-time 7.31pm GMT

Back to the no-fly zone and whether it can be implemented in other ways than shooting down Russian jets, and how the US assesses Russian military strength after a week of war.

Blinken says the US is looking at what can be delivered to Ukraine for it to defend itself, every day.

On conclusions about Russian military strength, Blinken says he doesn't want to draw any yet.

What we do know, he says, is "how extraordinary the Ukrainian people are. Their will, their determination, their absolute commitment to defend their country, to defend their freedom, to defend their future.

"That's the story of the past week and it's an incredibly powerful one."

And with that, he's gone.

block-time published-time 7.28pm GMT

Blinken is asked if energy sanctions on Russia are being considered.

"As a general proposition, nothing is off the table," he says, adding that minimising harm to the US and partners and allies is also part of implementing sanctions, which means the US wants to avoid raising prices at the pumps at home.

"We have a strong interest in degrading Russia status as a leading energy supplier. Over time, this would be a profound strategic shift. That's why Nord Stream two was shut down.

"That's why we're surging [liquid natural gas] to Europe right now, to help accelerate its diversification away from Russian gas. It's why we're denying critical technologies to Russia for further energy exploration ... this is part of a ***process*** to reduce reliance, dependence on Russian energy."

Blinken is asked how many more people have to die before energy sanctions are used but he avoids a direct answer, of course.

block-time published-time 7.25pm GMT

'Suffering likely to get worse before it gets better' - Blinken

Secretary of state Antony Blinken has just issued a fresh warning about the war, echoing other leaders of late who have warned that the worst is ahead.

An Irish questioner asks how much worse things are going to get in Ukraine, and if "the no to the no fly zone is set in stone completely or would you consider it if this conflict does become a massacre?

"And just to follow up - Was it naive of you and of course the Europeans to trust in Putin for diplomacy?"

"I think the terrible expectation is that the suffering we've already seen is likely to get worse before it gets better," Blinken says.

With regard to the no fly zone, Blinken cites Jens Stoltenberg, the Nato general secretary, in saying that Nato has a responsibility to "ensure the war doesn't spill over beyond Ukraine". Shooting down Russian planes could lead to a full-fledged war in Europe, Blinken says.

" President Biden has been clear that we are not going to get into a war with Russia. But we are going to tremendous lengths with allies and partners to provide Ukrainians with the means to to effectively defend themselves. And of course, we're seeing every single day, their extraordinary heroism as well as very, very real results in in what they're doing to achieve that."

About potential naivety, Blinken says the US was "the opposite of naive" and had warned for months that Putin was planning "an aggression of Ukraine", and was prepared either way.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 7.37pm GMT

block-time published-time 7.20pm GMT

Blinken is asked if nothing the west and Nato has done has slowed the Russian ***invasion*** so far, what does he tell the Ukrainian people. He is also asked if arms supplies can be increased, to include heavier weapons such as jets.

Blinken takes the second part first. He's in contact constantly with the Ukrainian government, he says, and touts how much security assistance has already been given.

He says Nato and the EU have discussed "what more we can do and how to do it effectively", with the foreign minister of Ukraine contributing. "We're working on that every day," he adds.

No specifics - no surprise there.

He touts damage to the Russian economy as a result of sanctions and so forth.

"I have a list five pages long of all the businesses that have left Russia," Blinken says, adding: "Let's see how Russia responds to that."

"Unfortunately this is not like flipping a lightswitch," he says about the prospects of increasing aid and implementing harsher ***measures***, even though "virtually the entire world" supports Ukraine.

"There is a huge weight bearing down on Russia," he says. "Let's see what the impact is."

block-time published-time 7.15pm GMT

Blinken speaks in Brussels

Of [*the Russian attack on the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/04/ukraine-nuclear-power-plant-fire-zaporizhzhia-russian-shelling) yesterday, Blinken says: "The Kremlin should immediately cease all attacks around Ukrainian nuclear facilities and allow civilian personnel do their work to ensure the facilities' safety and security, as both the IAEA director general and a resolution adopted yesterday by the agency's board of governors have called on Russia to do."

He says Nato, the EU and other partner nations have never before worked so closely together. He praises those countries which have [*accepted Ukrainian refugees*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/04/berliners-rally-to-support-ukraine-refugees-germany). Humanitarian corridors are being worked on, he said, to allow people out and supplies in.

He says Vladimir Putin cannot have imagined the united response and the tide of protest that has "increasingly turned Russia into a pariah state".

"We do not oppose the Russian people," Blinken says.

He also says the US "will defend every inch of Nato territory", if necessary.

He takes questions.

Here's our latest reporting on the fighting in Ukraine:

Related: [*Russian forces push to take key port of Odesa as fighting near Kyiv rages*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/04/russia-ukraine-mykolaiv-odesa-push-kyiv-fighting)

block-time published-time 7.06pm GMT

Tony Blinken is now speaking in Brussels.

"Stability in Europe hangs in the balance and the international rules based order that's critical to maintaining peace and security is being put to the test by Russia's unprovoked and unjustified ***invasion*** of Ukraine," he says, to begin.

[*Here's*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PZW20kW74Ew) the state department stream.

block-time published-time 6.59pm GMT

The Biden administration can continue to rapidly expel migrant families unlawfully crossing the [*US-Mexico border*](https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/us-mexico-border) , but should avoid sending them anywhere they could be persecuted or tortured, a federal appeals court ruled today.

The mixed ruling on concerning the [*increasingly-controversial Title 42 rule*](https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/apr/03/us-mexico-border-migrants-deported-no-explanation) largely upholds restrictions put in place by the administration of former Republican president Donald Trump aimed at preventing the spread of Covid-19 even as many other coronavirus-related border bans have been lifted.

Reuters writes:

A group of affected migrants, represented by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and other non-profit organizations, sued over the expulsion policy known as Title 42, which the administration of Joe Biden, a Democrat who took office a year ago, has largely kept in place.

They argued the expulsions were illegal but the panel of appeals court judges disagreed, finding it likely that the covered migrants "have no right to be in the United States, and the Executive can immediately expel them."

The court added however, that "the Executive cannot remove aliens to a country where their 'life or freedom would be threatened' on account of their 'race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion'" or "to a country where they will likely be tortured."

Biden has fought to retain the Title 42 order, which was issued in March 2020 by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Many Democrats, health experts and pro-immigrant advocates oppose the order, saying it unlawfully cuts off access to asylum and is not supported by scientific evidence.

Border arrests soared to record levels in 2021 during Biden's first year in office and could climb even higher this year, officials told Reuters in January.

A federal judge ruled last September that the Title 42 policy could not be applied to families but the Biden administration appealed that decision. Early in his presidency, Biden exempted unaccompanied children from the expulsion policy.

Since Biden took office in January 2020, more than a million migrants have been expelled under the order. Many of those have been people who have crossed the border more than once.

block-time published-time 6.53pm GMT

Joe Biden did not take questions at his event on manufacturing and infrastructure, and therefore did not make any new comment on the Ukraine crisis.

His secretary of state, Tony Blinken, is however due to talk in Brussels soon. The Department of State live stream is [*here*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PZW20kW74Ew) .

block-time published-time 6.48pm GMT

Biden describes his administration's efforts to make the federal government buy more American goods, including making agencies which want to spend money abroad publicly seek waivers to do so.

He ties this effort back to the early days of the pandemic, when states and cities had to buy PPE and Covid tests abroad.

"Yes, we're going to keep trading with our allies and friends," Biden says, saying the US also needs "resilient supply chains of our own" - a nod to difficulties affecting many sectors of the economy which are likely to be worsened by the Russian ***invasion*** of Ukraine.

"Last year," Biden says, "I released a plan to increase the number of contracts that go to small disadvantaged businesses by 50% by 2025. This means more contracts will go to Black-, brown-, Asian American-, women-owned and veteran-owned small businesses in every state and territory, in every industry, from services to manufacturing to ***agriculture***."

And with that, he thanks everyone in attendance and leaves the stage without taking questions.

block-time published-time 6.41pm GMT

Joe Biden begins with a joke and a happy birthday to an aide, and thanks to the other speakers. He then revisits his [*State of the Union remarks*](https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/mar/02/biden-state-of-the-union-opinion) about economic progress on his watch, touting various successes.

"This is what it looks like to grow an economy from the bottom up and the middle out," the president says.

He also underlines progress against the coronavirus pandemic, after "two of the hardest years this country has ever faced".

"We're coming back stronger as a country," he says.

So is American manufacturing, the president says, with companies investing at home rather than overseas. He gives examples of companies "innovating and inspiring" other companies, Tesla among them. He says he just had a "viral" (he means virtual) tour of Siemens facilities around the US.

block-time published-time 6.30pm GMT

Joe Biden is speaking in Washington, about his infrastructure policy and spending. The great Joan E Greve covered some of the [*why*](https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/live/2022/mar/04/us-ukraine-biden-democrats-republicans-politics-live?filterKeyEvents=false&page=with:block-62223e5d8f0872dfc8c95814#block-62223e5d8f0872dfc8c95814) , and the role of Siemens, [*here*](https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/live/2022/mar/04/us-ukraine-biden-democrats-republicans-politics-live?filterKeyEvents=false&page=with:block-62223e5d8f0872dfc8c95814#block-62223e5d8f0872dfc8c95814) earlier.

The White House stream is [*here*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gzIs7Tn1irQ).

block-time published-time 6.23pm GMT

America is divided. That's not news. But the authoritarian ruler in the Kremlin deciding to invade a democratic neighbor - that's the type of international crisis that traditionally might have inspired some closing of the ranks: set differences aside, let domestic quarrels rest.

But conservatives are evidently out on the idea of patriotic unity. The right's reactions to Russia's attack on Ukraine have ranged from blatant admiration for Vladimir Putin to anti-Russian saber-rattling combined with a shrill critique of Joe Biden.

Donald Trump initially called the ***invasion*** [*"genius"*](https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/feb/23/trump-putin-genius-russia-ukraine-crisis) ; he then defended his position at the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) over the weekend, adding that Nato was [*"not so smart" and "our leaders are dumb."*](https://twitter.com/Acyn/status/1497733342086647809?s=20&t=iX47jM0W0eLnUHcdpdLQiQ) Meanwhile, America's most successful cable news host Tucker Carlson ridiculed American solidarity with Ukraine, a country he derided as [*"a tyranny"*](https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2022/02/25/tucker-carlson-russia-ukraine-putin/) , led by [*"the people who paid off Joe Biden's family"*](https://twitter.com/TuckerCarlson/status/1496668655727349763?s=20&t=cynrE1tatHt09LxjEqM9xQ).

Trump is the political leader of the Republican party and probably its next presidential candidate. Carlson is one of the premier rightwing culture warriors in the country. Trump and Carlson are not fringe voices, and they aren't outliers either: a last week's CPAC, conservative speakers focused their ire on Biden's supposed weakness as the real cause for Putin's aggression; and they left no doubt who they considered the biggest threat - the [*"enemy within"*](https://twitter.com/thehill/status/1497678104449404936?s=20&t=lIJSTkv-2kiOy6QKVbWvBA) , as Senator Rick Scott put it, the "militant left - wing in our country".

Full column:

Related: [*America's culture war is spilling into actual war-war | Thomas Zimmer*](https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/mar/04/americas-culture-war-is-spilling-into-actual-war-war)

block-time published-time 6.10pm GMT

Summary

Antony Blinken, the US secretary of state, is in Brussels to meet with the foreign ministers of Nato and European Council. Ahead of his meetings, he warned that Vladimir Putin, president of Russia, will open "a Pandora's box of trouble" for entire world if he continues his attack on Ukraine.The United Nations security council convened for an emergency meeting in New York today after Russian forces attacked and seized the Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant in Ukraine .Linda Thomas-Greenfield, the US ambassador to the UN, said "Putin must stop this madness and he must stop this now". Joe Biden is meeting today with Sauli Niinisto, the president of Finland, as Russia's ***invasion*** of Ukraine raises the possibility that Finland could form a closer alliance with Nato.Conservative firebrand Lindsey Graham is calling for the assassination of Putin.

block-time published-time 6.06pm GMT

Close Donald Trump ally Roger Stone raged at the former US president in the aftermath of the failed attempt to overturn the 2020 election, according to [*a blockbuster report*](https://www.washingtonpost.com/investigations/interactive/2022/roger-stone-documentary-capitol-riot-trump-election/) from [*the Washington Post*](https://www.washingtonpost.com/investigations/interactive/2022/roger-stone-documentary-capitol-riot-trump-election/) , telling a friend Trump was a "disgrace" who would go to prison and adding: "He betrayed everybody."

The Post said it had viewed 20 hours of footage of the political operative that had been shot for a forthcoming documentary. The footage, it said, showed Stone:

Meeting and corresponding with members of a far-right militia since indicted for seditious conspiracy over the Capitol riot on January 6.Discussing a plan in which Trump would issue a blanket pardon to co-conspirators in the attempt to overturn the election, Senator Ted Cruz and congressman Jim Jordan among them.Saying Jared Kushner, Trump's son-in-law and close adviser, should be "punished" in a way that would leave him "braindead".Suggesting violence against protesters for racial justice would be possible with the election out of the way.

"Once there's no more election," Stone reportedly said, "there's no reason why we can't mix it up. These people are going to get what they've been asking for."

Full story:

Related: [*Roger Stone raged at 'disgrace' Trump over failure to overturn election - report*](https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/mar/04/roger-stone-trump-election-jared-kushner)

block-time published-time 5.48pm GMT

The supreme court has reinstated the death penalty for Dzhokhar Tsarnaev, the man convicted of the Boston Marathon bombing in 2013 that killed three people and injured hundreds of others.

enltrThe Supreme Court REINSTATES the death penalty for Boston Marathon bomber Dzhokhar Tsarnaev. In a 6-3 decision, SCOTUS holds that a federal appeals court was wrong when it vacated his death sentence based on a jury-selection issue and an evidentiary issue.

- SCOTUSblog (@SCOTUSblog) [*March 4, 2022*](https://twitter.com/SCOTUSblog/status/1499765641477332992?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 5.44pm GMT

US ambassador to UN: "Putin must stop this madness"

The United Nations security council convened for an emergency meeting in New York today after Russian forces attacked and seized the Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant in Ukraine.

Linda Thomas-Greenfield, the US ambassador to the UN, had harsh words about the attack, saying it was "incredibly reckless and dangerous and it threatened the safety of civilians across Russia, Ukraine and Europe ". "By the grace of god, the world narrowly averted a nuclear catastrophe last night," she said.

While she had a strong message about the escalation to attacks on nuclear plants - "nuclear facilities cannot become part of this conflict" - Thomas-Greenfield went harder on the overall war itself.

"Russia's ***invasion*** has turned half a million children into refugees," she said. "Russia has killed thousands of Ukrainians and sacrificed thousand more Russian soldiers' lives in the ***process***. Russia is destroying critical infrastructure, which is denying people drinking water to stay alive and gas that is preventing people from freezing to death in the middle of winter. The humanitarian impact of this destruction will be significant."

She continued: "One hundred and forty-one nations across the world have called loudly and clearly on President Putin to stop this brutal, unjustified, unprovoked attack. Not only has he not listened, we just witnessed a dangerous new escalation that represents a dire threat to all of Europe and the world.

"To my Russian counterparts: This council needs answers. We need to hear you say, this won't happen again," Thomas-Greenfield said. "We call on you to withdraw your troops and weaponry from Ukraine. We call on you to respect Ukraine's borders, its people and the UN charter. We call on you to respect your own troops enough to not send them into an unjust war, or on a suicide mission against a nuclear power plant."

Thomas-Greenfield finished by noting that Russian forces are now 20 miles away from Ukraine's second largest nuclear facility. "This imminent danger continues," she said.

"President Putin must stop this humanitarian catastrophe by ending this war and ceasing these unconscionable attacks against the people of Ukraine," she said. "Mr Putin must stop this madness and he must stop this now."

block-time published-time 4.44pm GMT

Biden meets Finnish president as support for Nato grows in Finland

Joe Biden is meeting today with Sauli Niinisto, the president of Finland, as Russia 's ***invasion*** of Ukraine raises the possibility that Finland could form a closer alliance with Nato.

Though Finland already cooperates with Nato, the country is not a member. Support for full membership has grown in the country in the days since the ***invasion***: A poll by public broadcaster Yle last Monday said 53% of Finns support joining. In late January, the number was just 28% when the Helsingin Sanomat newspaper asked the question.

Biden and Niinisto "will discuss the US-Finnish defense relationship, which is very strong and in fact complements Finland's close partnership with Nato", White House press secretary Jen Psaki [*told reporters*](https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/biden-meets-finnish-leader-russia-rattles-european-neighbors-2022-03-04/?taid=622239db07024b000155c59d&utm_campaign=trueAnthem:+Trending+Content&utm_medium=trueAnthem&utm_source=twitter) ahead of the visit.

Niinisto said in a statement that people should "keep a cool head and assess carefully the impact of the changes that have already taken place and of those that might still happen."

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 5.30pm GMT

block-time published-time 4.29pm GMT

White House celebrates Siemens' $54m investment in US manufacturing

Siemens has announced that it will invest $54m to expand US production of electrical parts, which will aid in the construction of everything from electric vehicle chargers to data centers.

Siemens said the investment will lead to the creation of 300 manufacturing jobs in the country. The CEO of Siemens USA, Barbara Humpton, is expected to join Joe Biden at the White House today to celebrate the new investment.

The White House championed Siemens' announcement as the latest indication of how Biden's "Made in America" agenda is strengthening US supply chains and creating good-paying jobs.

"You may recall the previous administration made big claims on how they would restore America's industrial might. That turned out to be just rhetoric," a senior administration official said. "President Biden followed through on his commitment to make 'Buy American' real."

In his State of the Union speech on Tuesday, Biden emphasized his commitment to reinvigorating US manufacturing to strengthen both the economy as a whole and individual families' financial prospects.

"There's something happening in America," Biden said Tuesday. "Just look around, and you'll see an amazing story - the rebirth of pride that comes from stamping products 'Made in America,' the revitalization of American manufacturing."

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.32pm GMT

block-time published-time 3.40pm GMT

Blinken warns that Putin will open 'a Pandora's box of trouble' for entire world

Antony Blinken, US secretary of state, is now heading out of his meeting with Nato 's foreign ministers in Brussels and going into one with the European Council, the policy-guiding arm of the European Union.

enltrToday's meeting with my [*@NATO*](https://twitter.com/NATO?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) Foreign Minister counterparts was essential, as we continue to consult with our Allies and European partners on Russia's war of choice against Ukraine. We are united in responding to Russia's aggression, and we remain [*#UnitedWithUkraine*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/UnitedWithUkraine?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw). [*pic.twitter.com/Wlg5sOBaAf*](https://t.co/Wlg5sOBaAf)

- Secretary Antony Blinken (@SecBlinken) [*March 4, 2022*](https://twitter.com/SecBlinken/status/1499762807948128261?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

Before his next meeting, Blinken took a moment to speak to the press along with Josep Borrell, the vice president of the E uropean Commission, and applaud the EU on taking "historic" action, "both with regard to sanctions and support for Ukraine".

"We are faced together with what is President Putin 's war of choice, a war that was unprovoked and that is having horrific consequences for real people, for mothers, fathers, for children," Blinken said. "We see the images on TV and it has to stop. We are committed to doing everything we can to make it stop."

Blinken continued: "We've established together, after two world wars, that are so important to keeping peace and security for everyone, principles that President Putin is egregiously violating every single day - the notion that one country can't simply go in and change the borders of another country by force or take it over, the principle that one country cannot dictate to another the choices that its citizens would make about their future, the principle that we are past the time of spheres of influence where one country subjugates its neighbors to its will.

"All of those things are at stake and if we allow those principles to be challenged as Putin is doing now with impunity, that will open a Pandora's box of trouble, not just for us, but, quite frankly, for the entire world."

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 3.54pm GMT

block-time published-time 3.20pm GMT

As part of his "Made in America" agenda to bolster the country's manufacturing sector, Joe Biden is also implementing changes to the Buy American Act.

As of now, products under consideration for federal procurement qualify as being made in America if 55% of the value of their component parts are domestically manufactured.

The Biden administration will change that threshold to 75% by 2029, with incremental increases to the requirement over the next seven years.

A senior administration official explained that the incremental nature of the policy change would "allow both small and large contractors time to transition their supply chains to domestic suppliers and to increase their use of American-made components".

"It marks just one of many significant improvements to domestic sourcing policy that the Biden-Harris administration will be rolling out to ensure that taxpayer dollars help America's businesses compete in strategic industries and help America's workers thrive," the official said.

block-time published-time 2.56pm GMT

Blinken: we don't seek conflict with Russia but we are ready for it

Antony Blinken, the US secretary of state, took a strong stance on the war today as he arrived for a meeting of Nato 's foreign ministers in Brussels, [*condemning*](https://www.reuters.com/world/we-dont-seek-conflict-with-russia-we-are-ready-it-us-says-2022-03-04/?taid=622209d318c5730001d46ca3&utm_campaign=trueAnthem:+Trending+Content&utm_medium=trueAnthem&utm_source=twitter) what he described as Russian attacks on civilians in Ukraine.

enltrNATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg condemned the overnight Russian attack on civilians in Ukraine, while U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken told journalists the alliance will 'defend every inch of NATO territory' [*pic.twitter.com/2g7F46UMLZ*](https://t.co/2g7F46UMLZ)

- Reuters (@Reuters) [*March 4, 2022*](https://twitter.com/Reuters/status/1499708737396912130?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

"Ours is a defensive alliance. We seek no conflict. But if conflict comes to us we are ready for it and we will defend every inch of Nato territory," Blinken said.

However, Nato secretary-general Jens Stoltenberg hedged their position a bit this morning, [*rejecting Ukraine's demand for no-fly zones*](https://www.reuters.com/business/aerospace-defense/nato-meets-ukraine-calls-no-fly-zone-hinder-russia-2022-03-04/).

"We are not part of this conflict, and we have a responsibility to ensure it does not escalate and spread beyond Ukraine," Stoltenberg told reporters.

"We understand the desperation but we also believe that if we did that (a no-fly zone) we would end up with something that could lead to a full-fledged war in Europe involving much more countries and much more suffering," Stoltenberg said.

block-time published-time 2.38pm GMT

Politico [*took a look*](https://www.politico.com/playbook) at the cracking opposition to the US agreeing to aiding in a no-fly zone over Ukraine.

Right now, Joe Biden is in the tricky position of remaining true to his promise to protect Nato territories without escalating into further war with Russia, while at the same time getting more and more pressure to intervene in a way that won't lead to boots on the ground.

enltrIn presser today from Kyiv, Zelensky repeated call to NATO for no-fly zone: "How long do you need? How many arms and legs and heads should be severed so that you understand?...If you don't have the strength to provide a no-fly zone, then give me planes. Would that not be fair?"

- Natasha Bertrand (@NatashaBertrand) [*March 3, 2022*](https://twitter.com/NatashaBertrand/status/1499443578006872075?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

On Friday. Nato allies [*rejected Ukraine's demand*](https://www.reuters.com/business/aerospace-defense/nato-meets-ukraine-calls-no-fly-zone-hinder-russia-2022-03-04/) for no-fly zones.

"We understand the desperation but we also believe that if we did that (a no-fly zone) we would end up with something that could lead to a full-fledged war in Europe involving much more countries and much more suffering," Nato secretary-general Jens Stoltenberg said.

But in Washington, Republican congressman Adam Kinzinger is pushing for a no-fly zone. Politico [*is reporting*](https://www.politico.com/playbook) that Republican senator Roger Wicker is also in support, as well as Democratic policymakers like Evelyn Farkas, the top official for Ukraine in the Obama Pentagon.

enltrThis is a good moment to renew my call for a no fly zone, at the invitation of the Ukraine government. I fear if this continues, we will have to intervene in a bigger way

- Adam Kinzinger (@AdamKinzinger) [*March 4, 2022*](https://twitter.com/AdamKinzinger/status/1499572944753807379?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 2.08pm GMT

Amid soaring tensions and continuous bloodshed in Ukraine, conservative firebrand Lindsey Graham is calling for the assassination of Vladimir Putin.

The Republican senator from South Carolina made his remarks first on Fox News with Sean Hannity - who has [*suggested assassinating Putin*](https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2022/03/03/sean-hannity-vladimir-putin-snake/) previously - before repeating his sentiments on Twitter.

enltrIs there a Brutus in Russia? Is there a more successful Colonel Stauffenberg in the Russian military? The only way this ends is for somebody in Russia to take this guy out. You would be doing your country - and the world - a great service.

- Lindsey Graham (@LindseyGrahamSC) [*March 4, 2022*](https://twitter.com/LindseyGrahamSC/status/1499574209567199235?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

enltrThe only people who can fix this are the Russian people. Easy to say, hard to do. Unless you want to live in darkness for the rest of your life, be isolated from the rest of the world in abject poverty, and live in darkness you need to step up to the plate.

- Lindsey Graham (@LindseyGrahamSC) [*March 4, 2022*](https://twitter.com/LindseyGrahamSC/status/1499575352426958848?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

Graham's remarks were met with dismay from both sides of the aisle, with progressive congresswoman Ilhan Omar [*tweeting*](https://twitter.com/IlhanMN/status/1499588619887071275?s=20&t=nVUkecKZA-d4rfjsWBCJmA) , "Seriously, wtf?"

enltrI really wish our members of Congress would cool it and regulate their remarks as the administration works to avoid WWlll. As the world pays attention to how the US and it's leaders are responding, Lindsey's remarks and remarks made by some House members aren't helpful.

- Ilhan Omar (@IlhanMN) [*March 4, 2022*](https://twitter.com/IlhanMN/status/1499597344567967744?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

Ted Cruz, the Republican senator from Texas, also responded by calling Graham's remarks "an ***exceptionally*** bad idea".

enltrThis is an ***exceptionally*** bad idea. Use massive economic sanctions; BOYCOTT Russian oil & gas; and provide military aid so the Ukrainians can defend themselves. But we should not be calling for the assassination of heads of state. [*https://t.co/crPGHw9xyJ*](https://t.co/crPGHw9xyJ)

- Ted Cruz (@tedcruz) [*March 4, 2022*](https://twitter.com/tedcruz/status/1499615452934414340?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

Even far-right extremist congresswoman Marjorie Taylor Green, who won her seat expressing support for the conspiracy theory QAnon, called Graham's statements "irresponsible, dangerous and unhinged".

"We need leaders with calm minds and steady wisdom," she [*tweeted*](https://twitter.com/RepMTG/status/1499594566789390352?s=20&t=4cV1MRsnWrKk4eD2UhlUtA). "Not blood thirsty warmongering politicians trying to tweet tough by demanding assassinations. Americans don't want war."

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.48pm GMT

block-time published-time 1.58pm GMT

Blinken: we don't seek conflict with Russia but we are ready for it

Greetings, live blog readers. Happy Friday.

Per usual, we'll have all our live updates on the Russian ***invasion*** of Ukraine [*here*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2022/mar/04/ukraine-news-russia-war-vladimir-putin-zelenskiy-kyiv-latest-live-updates-russian-invasion-nuclear-power-plant) , so make sure to keep an eye on that.

But on our end, Antony Blinken, the US secretary of state, took a strong stance on the war today as he arrived for a meeting of Nato 's foreign ministers in Brussels, [*condemning*](https://www.reuters.com/world/we-dont-seek-conflict-with-russia-we-are-ready-it-us-says-2022-03-04/?taid=622209d318c5730001d46ca3&utm_campaign=trueAnthem:+Trending+Content&utm_medium=trueAnthem&utm_source=twitter) what he described as Russian attacks on civilians in Ukraine.

enltrNATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg condemned the overnight Russian attack on civilians in Ukraine, while U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken told journalists the alliance will 'defend every inch of NATO territory' [*pic.twitter.com/2g7F46UMLZ*](https://t.co/2g7F46UMLZ)

- Reuters (@Reuters) [*March 4, 2022*](https://twitter.com/Reuters/status/1499708737396912130?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

"Ours is a defensive alliance. We seek no conflict. But if conflict comes to us we are ready for it and we will defend every inch of Nato territory," Blinken said.

Meanwhile in Washington, the Washington Post [*is reporting*](https://www.washingtonpost.com/investigations/interactive/2022/roger-stone-documentary-capitol-riot-trump-election/?itid=hp_special-topic-1) that previously unseen documentary footage shows Roger Stone, longtime ally of Donald Trump, working to overturn the 2020 presidential election results and secure pardons in the aftermath of the 6 January attack on the US Capitol.

We'll have more on that in a bit. Stay tuned.

4440 2022-03-04T13:58:01Z false false 2022-03-04T21:27:40Z true US theguardian.com [*https://www.theguardian.com/p/kqqha*](https://www.theguardian.com/p/kqqha) false true [*https://media.guim.co.uk/707b142dd5ded4e47431f2c46c4cbe6b45172056/0\_89\_4301\_2581/500.jpg*](https://media.guim.co.uk/707b142dd5ded4e47431f2c46c4cbe6b45172056/0_89_4301_2581/500.jpg) false en true A little tidbit from Joe Biden and his meeting today with Sauli Niinisto, the president of Finland: Last night, the Florida senate passed a bill banning access to abortions after 15 weeks. Vice-president Kamala Harris issued a statement today that "the Biden-Harris Administration will continue to do everything in our power to protect access to healthcare and defend a woman's right to make decisions about her body and determine her future". "The right of women to make decisions about their own bodies is non-negotiable," she said. Former vice-president Mike Pence reportedly will call on Republicans to stop repeating the lie that Donald Trump keeps peddling that the 2020 presidential election was stolen. White House press secretary Jen Psaki fielded a question about Lindsey Graham and his comments calling for the assassination of Vladimir Putin. "That is not the position of the United States government that is certainly not the statement you would hear coming from the mouth of anybody working in this administration," she said. When pressed further on the topic - on whether Joe Biden agreed with Graham that Putin's death was the only way out of this war - Psaki staunchly doubled down. "The president believes there continues to be a diplomatic path forward," she said. "President Putin has the ability to deescalate. We have left the door open for months now to engage in deescalation." Psaki continued: "We are not advocating for killing the leader of a foreign country or a regime change. That is not the policy of the United States." Read more about the outcry against Graham's comments here: White House press secretary Jen Psaki addressed the Russian attack on the Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant in Ukraine. The US embassy in Ukraine called the attack on the nuclear plant a war crime. But Psaki said the determination of Russia's war crimes is still an ongoing ***process*** that is taking place within the administration. "It's a legal review and a ***process*** that goes through the administration," Psaki said. "What I will say, the intentional targeting of civilians or civilian objects would be considered a war crime. Regardless of legality, this action was the height of irresponsibility. The Kremlin must cease operations around nuclear infrastructure." White House press secretary Jen Psaki is at the podium for her press briefing and she began with the administration's request to Congress for more funding for Ukraine. Since 2021, the US has already provided more than $1.4bn to Ukraine, and administration officials are now requesting $10bn more to "deliver additional security assistance to Ukraine, to provide life-saving humanitarian assistance for the Ukrainian people and more support for stronger sanction enforcement and for US troop deployment to reinforce Nato's eastern flank and deter Russian aggression," Psaki said. Back to the no-fly zone and whether it can be implemented in other ways than shooting down Russian jets, and how the US assesses Russian military strength after a week of war. Blinken says the US is looking at what can be delivered to Ukraine for it to defend itself, every day. On conclusions about Russian military strength, Blinken says he doesn't want to draw any yet. What we do know, he says, is "how extraordinary the Ukrainian people are. Their will, their determination, their absolute commitment to defend their country, to defend their freedom, to defend their future. "That's the story of the past week and it's an incredibly powerful one." And with that, he's gone. Blinken is asked if energy sanctions on Russia are being considered. "As a general proposition, nothing is off the table," he says, adding that minimising harm to the US and partners and allies is also part of implementing sanctions, which means the US wants to avoid raising prices at the pumps at home. "We have a strong interest in degrading Russia status as a leading energy supplier. Over time, this would be a profound strategic shift. That's why Nord Stream two was shut down. "That's why we're surging [liquid natural gas] to Europe right now, to help accelerate its diversification away from Russian gas. It's why we're denying critical technologies to Russia for further energy exploration ... this is part of a ***process*** to reduce reliance, dependence on Russian energy." Blinken is asked how many more people have to die before energy sanctions are used but he avoids a direct answer, of course. Secretary of state Antony Blinken has just issued a fresh warning about the war, echoing other leaders of late who have warned that the worst is ahead. An Irish questioner asks how much worse things are going to get in Ukraine, and if "the no to the no fly zone is set in stone completely or would you consider it if this conflict does become a massacre? "And just to follow up - Was it naive of you and of course the Europeans to trust in Putin for diplomacy?" "I think the terrible expectation is that the suffering we've already seen is likely to get worse before it gets better," Blinken says. With regard to the no fly zone, Blinken cites Jens Stoltenberg, the Nato general secretary, in saying that Nato has a responsibility to "ensure the war doesn't spill over beyond Ukraine". Shooting down Russian planes could lead to a full-fledged war in Europe, Blinken says. "President Biden has been clear that we are not going to get into a war with Russia. But we are going to tremendous lengths with allies and partners to provide Ukrainians with the means to to effectively defend themselves. And of course, we're seeing every single day, their extraordinary heroism as well as very, very real results in in what they're doing to achieve that." About potential naivety, Blinken says the US was "the opposite of naive" and had warned for months that Putin was planning "an aggression of Ukraine", and was prepared either way. Blinken is asked if nothing the west and Nato has done has slowed the Russian ***invasion*** so far, what does he tell the Ukrainian people. He is also asked if arms supplies can be increased, to include heavier weapons such as jets. Blinken takes the second part first. He's in contact constantly with the Ukrainian government, he says, and touts how much security assistance has already been given. He says Nato and the EU have discussed "what more we can do and how to do it effectively", with the foreign minister of Ukraine contributing. "We're working on that every day," he adds. No specifics - no surprise there. He touts damage to the Russian economy as a result of sanctions and so forth. "I have a list five pages long of all the businesses that have left Russia," Blinken says, adding: "Let's see how Russia responds to that." "Unfortunately this is not like flipping a lightswitch," he says about the prospects of increasing aid and implementing harsher ***measures***, even though "virtually the entire world" supports Ukraine. "There is a huge weight bearing down on Russia," he says. "Let's see what the impact is." Of the Russian attack on the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant yesterday, Blinken says: "The Kremlin should immediately cease all attacks around Ukrainian nuclear facilities and allow civilian personnel do their work to ensure the facilities' safety and security, as both the IAEA director general and a resolution adopted yesterday by the agency's board of governors have called on Russia to do." He says Nato, the EU and other partner nations have never before worked so closely together. He praises those countries which have accepted Ukrainian refugees. Humanitarian corridors are being worked on, he said, to allow people out and supplies in. He says Vladimir Putin cannot have imagined the united response and the tide of protest that has "increasingly turned Russia into a pariah state". "We do not oppose the Russian people," Blinken says. He also says the US "will defend every inch of Nato territory", if necessary. He takes questions. Here's our latest reporting on the fighting in Ukraine: Tony Blinken is now speaking in Brussels. "Stability in Europe hangs in the balance and the international rules based order that's critical to maintaining peace and security is being put to the test by Russia's unprovoked and unjustified ***invasion*** of Ukraine," he says, to begin. Here's the state department stream. The Biden administration can continue to rapidly expel migrant families unlawfully crossing the US-Mexico border, but should avoid sending them anywhere they could be persecuted or tortured, a federal appeals court ruled today. The mixed ruling on concerning the increasingly-controversial Title 42 rule largely upholds restrictions put in place by the administration of former Republican president Donald Trump aimed at preventing the spread of Covid-19 even as many other coronavirus-related border bans have been lifted. Reuters writes: A group of affected migrants, represented by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and other non-profit organizations, sued over the expulsion policy known as Title 42, which the administration of Joe Biden, a Democrat who took office a year ago, has largely kept in place. They argued the expulsions were illegal but the panel of appeals court judges disagreed, finding it likely that the covered migrants "have no right to be in the United States, and the Executive can immediately expel them." The court added however, that "the Executive cannot remove aliens to a country where their 'life or freedom would be threatened' on account of their 'race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion'" or "to a country where they will likely be tortured." Biden has fought to retain the Title 42 order, which was issued in March 2020 by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Many Democrats, health experts and pro-immigrant advocates oppose the order, saying it unlawfully cuts off access to asylum and is not supported by scientific evidence. Border arrests soared to record levels in 2021 during Biden's first year in office and could climb even higher this year, officials told Reuters in January. A federal judge ruled last September that the Title 42 policy could not be applied to families but the Biden administration appealed that decision. Early in his presidency, Biden exempted unaccompanied children from the expulsion policy. Since Biden took office in January 2020, more than a million migrants have been expelled under the order. Many of those have been people who have crossed the border more than once. Joe Biden did not take questions at his event on manufacturing and infrastructure, and therefore did not make any new comment on the Ukraine crisis. His secretary of state, Tony Blinken, is however due to talk in Brussels soon. The Department of State live stream is here. Biden describes his administration's efforts to make the federal government buy more American goods, including making agencies which want to spend money abroad publicly seek waivers to do so. He ties this effort back to the early days of the pandemic, when states and cities had to buy PPE and Covid tests abroad. "Yes, we're going to keep trading with our allies and friends," Biden says, saying the US also needs "resilient supply chains of our own" - a nod to difficulties affecting many sectors of the economy which are likely to be worsened by the Russian ***invasion*** of Ukraine. "Last year," Biden says, "I released a plan to increase the number of contracts that go to small disadvantaged businesses by 50% by 2025. This means more contracts will go to Black-, brown-, Asian American-, women-owned and veteran-owned small businesses in every state and territory, in every industry, from services to manufacturing to ***agriculture***." And with that, he thanks everyone in attendance and leaves the stage without taking questions. Joe Biden begins with a joke and a happy birthday to an aide, and thanks to the other speakers. He then revisits his State of the Union remarks about economic progress on his watch, touting various successes. "This is what it looks like to grow an economy from the bottom up and the middle out," the president says. He also underlines progress against the coronavirus pandemic, after "two of the hardest years this country has ever faced". "We're coming back stronger as a country," he says. So is American manufacturing, the president says, with companies investing at home rather than overseas. He gives examples of companies "innovating and inspiring" other companies, Tesla among them. He says he just had a "viral" (he means virtual) tour of Siemens facilities around the US. Joe Biden is speaking in Washington, about his infrastructure policy and spending. The great Joan E Greve covered some of the why, and the role of Siemens, here earlier. The White House stream is here. America is divided. That's not news. But the authoritarian ruler in the Kremlin deciding to invade a democratic neighbor - that's the type of international crisis that traditionally might have inspired some closing of the ranks: set differences aside, let domestic quarrels rest. But conservatives are evidently out on the idea of patriotic unity. The right's reactions to Russia's attack on Ukraine have ranged from blatant admiration for Vladimir Putin to anti-Russian saber-rattling combined with a shrill critique of Joe Biden. Donald Trump initially called the ***invasion*** "genius"; he then defended his position at the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) over the weekend, adding that Nato was "not so smart" and "our leaders are dumb." Meanwhile, America's most successful cable news host Tucker Carlson ridiculed American solidarity with Ukraine, a country he derided as "a tyranny", led by "the people who paid off Joe Biden's family". Trump is the political leader of the Republican party and probably its next presidential candidate. Carlson is one of the premier rightwing culture warriors in the country. Trump and Carlson are not fringe voices, and they aren't outliers either: a last week's CPAC, conservative speakers focused their ire on Biden's supposed weakness as the real cause for Putin's aggression; and they left no doubt who they considered the biggest threat - the "enemy within", as Senator Rick Scott put it, the "militant left - wing in our country". Full column: Antony Blinken, the US secretary of state, is in Brussels to meet with the foreign ministers of Nato and European Council. Ahead of his meetings, he warned that Vladimir Putin, president of Russia, will open "a Pandora's box of trouble" for entire world if he continues his attack on Ukraine. The United Nations security council convened for an emergency meeting in New York today after Russian forces attacked and seized the Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant in Ukraine. Linda Thomas-Greenfield, the US ambassador to the UN, said "Putin must stop this madness and he must stop this now". Joe Biden is meeting today with Sauli Niinisto, the president of Finland, as Russia's ***invasion*** of Ukraine raises the possibility that Finland could form a closer alliance with Nato. Conservative firebrand Lindsey Graham is calling for the assassination of Putin. Close Donald Trump ally Roger Stone raged at the former US president in the aftermath of the failed attempt to overturn the 2020 election, according to a blockbuster report from the Washington Post, telling a friend Trump was a "disgrace" who would go to prison and adding: "He betrayed everybody." The Post said it had viewed 20 hours of footage of the political operative that had been shot for a forthcoming documentary. The footage, it said, showed Stone: Meeting and corresponding with members of a far-right militia since indicted for seditious conspiracy over the Capitol riot on January 6. Discussing a plan in which Trump would issue a blanket pardon to co-conspirators in the attempt to overturn the election, Senator Ted Cruz and congressman Jim Jordan among them. Saying Jared Kushner, Trump's son-in-law and close adviser, should be "punished" in a way that would leave him "braindead". Suggesting violence against protesters for racial justice would be possible with the election out of the way. "Once there's no more election," Stone reportedly said, "there's no reason why we can't mix it up. These people are going to get what they've been asking for." Full story: The supreme court has reinstated the death penalty for Dzhokhar Tsarnaev, the man convicted of the Boston Marathon bombing in 2013 that killed three people and injured hundreds of others. The United Nations security council convened for an emergency meeting in New York today after Russian forces attacked and seized the Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant in Ukraine. Linda Thomas-Greenfield, the US ambassador to the UN, had harsh words about the attack, saying it was "incredibly reckless and dangerous and it threatened the safety of civilians across Russia, Ukraine and Europe". "By the grace of god, the world narrowly averted a nuclear catastrophe last night," she said. While she had a strong message about the escalation to attacks on nuclear plants - "nuclear facilities cannot become part of this conflict" - Thomas-Greenfield went harder on the overall war itself. "Russia's ***invasion*** has turned half a million children into refugees," she said. "Russia has killed thousands of Ukrainians and sacrificed thousand more Russian soldiers' lives in the ***process***. Russia is destroying critical infrastructure, which is denying people drinking water to stay alive and gas that is preventing people from freezing to death in the middle of winter. The humanitarian impact of this destruction will be significant." She continued: "One hundred and forty-one nations across the world have called loudly and clearly on President Putin to stop this brutal, unjustified, unprovoked attack. Not only has he not listened, we just witnessed a dangerous new escalation that represents a dire threat to all of Europe and the world. "To my Russian counterparts: This council needs answers. We need to hear you say, this won't happen again," Thomas-Greenfield said. "We call on you to withdraw your troops and weaponry from Ukraine. We call on you to respect Ukraine's borders, its people and the UN charter. We call on you to respect your own troops enough to not send them into an unjust war, or on a suicide mission against a nuclear power plant." Thomas-Greenfield finished by noting that Russian forces are now 20 miles away from Ukraine's second largest nuclear facility. "This imminent danger continues," she said. "President Putin must stop this humanitarian catastrophe by ending this war and ceasing these unconscionable attacks against the people of Ukraine," she said. "Mr Putin must stop this madness and he must stop this now." Joe Biden is meeting today with Sauli Niinisto, the president of Finland, as Russia's ***invasion*** of Ukraine raises the possibility that Finland could form a closer alliance with Nato. Though Finland already cooperates with Nato, the country is not a member. Support for full membership has grown in the country in the days since the ***invasion***: A poll by public broadcaster Yle last Monday said 53% of Finns support joining. In late January, the number was just 28% when the Helsingin Sanomat newspaper asked the question. Biden and Niinisto "will discuss the US-Finnish defense relationship, which is very strong and in fact complements Finland's close partnership with Nato", White House press secretary Jen Psaki told reporters ahead of the visit. Niinisto said in a statement that people should "keep a cool head and assess carefully the impact of the changes that have already taken place and of those that might still happen." Siemens has announced that it will invest $54m to expand US production of electrical parts, which will aid in the construction of everything from electric vehicle chargers to data centers. Siemens said the investment will lead to the creation of 300 manufacturing jobs in the country. The CEO of Siemens USA, Barbara Humpton, is expected to join Joe Biden at the White House today to celebrate the new investment. The White House championed Siemens' announcement as the latest indication of how Biden's "Made in America" agenda is strengthening US supply chains and creating good-paying jobs. "You may recall the previous administration made big claims on how they would restore America's industrial might. That turned out to be just rhetoric," a senior administration official said. "President Biden followed through on his commitment to make 'Buy American' real." In his State of the Union speech on Tuesday, Biden emphasized his commitment to reinvigorating US manufacturing to strengthen both the economy as a whole and individual families' financial prospects. "There's something happening in America," Biden said Tuesday. "Just look around, and you'll see an amazing story - the rebirth of pride that comes from stamping products 'Made in America,' the revitalization of American manufacturing." Antony Blinken, US secretary of state, is now heading out of his meeting with Nato's foreign ministers in Brussels and going into one with the European Council, the policy-guiding arm of the European Union. Before his next meeting, Blinken took a moment to speak to the press along with Josep Borrell, the vice president of the European Commission, and applaud the EU on taking "historic" action, "both with regard to sanctions and support for Ukraine". "We are faced together with what is President Putin's war of choice, a war that was unprovoked and that is having horrific consequences for real people, for mothers, fathers, for children," Blinken said. "We see the images on TV and it has to stop. We are committed to doing everything we can to make it stop." Blinken continued: "We've established together, after two world wars, that are so important to keeping peace and security for everyone, principles that President Putin is egregiously violating every single day - the notion that one country can't simply go in and change the borders of another country by force or take it over, the principle that one country cannot dictate to another the choices that its citizens would make about their future, the principle that we are past the time of spheres of influence where one country subjugates its neighbors to its will. "All of those things are at stake and if we allow those principles to be challenged as Putin is doing now with impunity, that will open a Pandora's box of trouble, not just for us, but, quite frankly, for the entire world." As part of his "Made in America" agenda to bolster the country's manufacturing sector, Joe Biden is also implementing changes to the Buy American Act. As of now, products under consideration for federal procurement qualify as being made in America if 55% of the value of their component parts are domestically manufactured. The Biden administration will change that threshold to 75% by 2029, with incremental increases to the requirement over the next seven years. A senior administration official explained that the incremental nature of the policy change would "allow both small and large contractors time to transition their supply chains to domestic suppliers and to increase their use of American-made components". "It marks just one of many significant improvements to domestic sourcing policy that the Biden-Harris administration will be rolling out to ensure that taxpayer dollars help America's businesses compete in strategic industries and help America's workers thrive," the official said. Antony Blinken, the US secretary of state, took a strong stance on the war today as he arrived for a meeting of Nato's foreign ministers in Brussels, condemning what he described as Russian attacks on civilians in Ukraine. "Ours is a defensive alliance. We seek no conflict. But if conflict comes to us we are ready for it and we will defend every inch of Nato territory," Blinken said. However, Nato secretary-general Jens Stoltenberg hedged their position a bit this morning, rejecting Ukraine's demand for no-fly zones. "We are not part of this conflict, and we have a responsibility to ensure it does not escalate and spread beyond Ukraine," Stoltenberg told reporters. "We understand the desperation but we also believe that if we did that (a no-fly zone) we would end up with something that could lead to a full-fledged war in Europe involving much more countries and much more suffering," Stoltenberg said. Politico took a look at the cracking opposition to the US agreeing to aiding in a no-fly zone over Ukraine. Right now, Joe Biden is in the tricky position of remaining true to his promise to protect Nato territories without escalating into further war with Russia, while at the same time getting more and more pressure to intervene in a way that won't lead to boots on the ground. On Friday. Nato allies rejected Ukraine's demand for no-fly zones. "We understand the desperation but we also believe that if we did that (a no-fly zone) we would end up with something that could lead to a full-fledged war in Europe involving much more countries and much more suffering," Nato secretary-general Jens Stoltenberg said. But in Washington, Republican congressman Adam Kinzinger is pushing for a no-fly zone. Politico is reporting that Republican senator Roger Wicker is also in support, as well as Democratic policymakers like Evelyn Farkas, the top official for Ukraine in the Obama Pentagon. Amid soaring tensions and continuous bloodshed in Ukraine, conservative firebrand Lindsey Graham is calling for the assassination of Vladimir Putin. The Republican senator from South Carolina made his remarks first on Fox News with Sean Hannity - who has suggested assassinating Putin previously - before repeating his sentiments on Twitter. Graham's remarks were met with dismay from both sides of the aisle, with progressive congresswoman Ilhan Omar tweeting, "Seriously, wtf?" Ted Cruz, the Republican senator from Texas, also responded by calling Graham's remarks "an ***exceptionally*** bad idea". Even far-right extremist congresswoman Marjorie Taylor Green, who won her seat expressing support for the conspiracy theory QAnon, called Graham's statements "irresponsible, dangerous and unhinged". "We need leaders with calm minds and steady wisdom," she tweeted. "Not blood thirsty warmongering politicians trying to tweet tough by demanding assassinations. Americans don't want war." Greetings, live blog readers. Happy Friday. Per usual, we'll have all our live updates on the Russian ***invasion*** of Ukraine here, so make sure to keep an eye on that. But on our end, Antony Blinken, the US secretary of state, took a strong stance on the war today as he arrived for a meeting of Nato's foreign ministers in Brussels, condemning what he described as Russian attacks on civilians in Ukraine. "Ours is a defensive alliance. We seek no conflict. But if conflict comes to us we are ready for it and we will defend every inch of Nato territory," Blinken said. Meanwhile in Washington, the Washington Post is reporting that previously unseen documentary footage shows Roger Stone, longtime ally of Donald Trump, working to overturn the 2020 presidential election results and secure pardons in the aftermath of the 6 January attack on the US Capitol. We'll have more on that in a bit. Stay tuned. 27327 false false Vivian Ho The US secretary of state, Antony Blinken, speaks to the press before an extraordinary Nato foreign ministers meeting in Brussels.

**Load-Date:** March 4, 2022

**End of Document**



[***Russian bond default 'imminent', as inflation jumps; markets surge as oil falls back - as it happened***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:64YF-8SK1-JBNF-W2RP-00000-00&context=1516831)

The Guardian (London)

March 9, 2022 Wednesday 7:57 AM GMT

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**Byline:** Graeme Wearden

**Highlight:** Rolling coverage of the latest economic and financial newsLatest: Russia's inflation rate soars 2.2% in a weekUS and European markets have rallied strongly, after recent heavy lossesFitch: a sovereign default is imminentUK launches new aviation sanctionsKFC and Pizza Hut owner, Heineken, Mothercare pause business in Russia

**Body**

block-time published-time 11.36pm GMT

Tech and banks lead Wall Street rebound Traders on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange. Photograph: Brendan McDermid/Reuters

A late update: Wall Street drove the global rally onwards, with its best day in around 21 months.

The S&P 500 index of US company stocks has closed 2.5% higher at 4,277 points, up 107 points. That's its biggest one-day percentage gain since June 2020, with financial stocks and tech firms rebounding.

enltrStocks posted sharp gains on Wednesday as recently surging commodity prices, especially oil, cooled off while the war in Ukraine continues. The Dow rallied 2%. The S&P 500 rose 2.57%. The Nasdaq surged 3.59%. [*https://t.co/vAHfBqgy3c*](https://t.co/vAHfBqgy3c) [*pic.twitter.com/EY7fXyBjZk*](https://t.co/EY7fXyBjZk)

- CNBC (@CNBC) [*March 9, 2022*](https://twitter.com/CNBC/status/1501665527013511172?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

That's quite a rebound, after New York saw its biggest drop in over a year on Monday:

Related: [*Wall Street suffers biggest slide in more than a year as oil prices surge*](https://www.theguardian.com/business/2022/mar/07/wall-street-slide-stock-market-oil-prices-surge)

Kyle Rodda of says:

Narrative. Flow. Technicals. Sentiment. In the short-run, markets are always driven by these factors more than anything else. In a highly uncertain and volatile environment, this fact only becomes more relevant. For these reasons, it's why we saw what was the biggest one day rally in US stocks since June 2020.

The key headline sparking it all were reports that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky is willing to commit to political neutrality - that is, not getting into bed with NATO in any way -- in exchange for a respect of existing Ukrainian borders. If this seems like a possibly trivial and ineffectual commitment, and one that has been effectively made prior to this point, that's because it is, and has been.

However, last night it capture the hearts of market participants, setting of a relief rally in equities and the Euro, and a drop in the major ***invasion*** trades in oil and gold, with the shift in sentiment setting off a short-term technical reversal as flows moved in the opposite direction to the prevailing trends.

Shares were also boosted by the sharp fall in oil prices on Wednesday, with US crude plunging 12%.

Oil's fall followed reports that the United Arab Emirates could favour an increase in output by Opec, to address market turmoil.

However... energy minister, Suhail al-Mazrouei, has now tweeted that the UAE is committed to the existing OPEC+ schedule of production increases, saying:

"The UAE believes in the value OPEC+ brings to the oil market"

enltrThe UAE believes in the value OPEC+ brings to the oil market. The UAE is committed to the OPEC+ agreement and its existing monthly production adjustment mechanism.

- ???? ???????? (@HESuhail) [*March 9, 2022*](https://twitter.com/HESuhail/status/1501683226884321283?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

enltrUAE believes in increasing OPEC production (which, btw, OPEC is already going to do according to its current arrangement), but it's also committed to the OPEC+ alignment with Russia and the group's unity. Transition: don't count on UAE pushing for higher output in April. [*#OOTT*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/OOTT?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) [*https://t.co/GchKckey7D*](https://t.co/GchKckey7D)

- Gregory Brew (@gbrew24) [*March 9, 2022*](https://twitter.com/gbrew24/status/1501698302751952902?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

enltrWell, that was quick. Existing monthly increases: so that's the +400,000 b/d that OPEC+ is bringing (on paper) every month. For now, it doesn't sound like Abu Dhabi is pressing for a \*faster\* output path (despite what its US embassy said earlier today) [*#OOTT*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/OOTT?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) [*https://t.co/eIoExaowZq*](https://t.co/eIoExaowZq)

- Javier Blas (@JavierBlas) [*March 9, 2022*](https://twitter.com/JavierBlas/status/1501687971917058055?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 7.49pm GMT

Closing post

A recap....

[*Rating agency Fitch has warned that a Russian sovereign debt default is imminent, as it slashed the country's credit rating to its second-lowest notch*](https://www.theguardian.com/business/live/2022/mar/09/russian-bond-default-fitch-sanctions-oil-companies-ftse-dax-business-live?filterKeyEvents=false&page=with:block-62284b528f08d38fbc42aa24#block-62284b528f08d38fbc42aa24).

Fitch predicted that the pain of escalating sanctions raised the proospect of at least a 'selective non-payment' of its sovereign debt obligations, after the US and the UK both announced bans on Russian oil imports on Tuesday.

[*Russians are already feeling the economic pain of the crisis*](https://www.theguardian.com/business/live/2022/mar/09/russian-bond-default-fitch-sanctions-oil-companies-ftse-dax-business-live?filterKeyEvents=false&page=with:block-6228d4c38f08ec6557dfa6fd#block-6228d4c38f08ec6557dfa6fd). Inflation jumped by over 2% in the first week of the Ukraine war, with consumer prices now 10% higher than a year ago.

With the economy heading into a deep recession, there is clearly much more trouble ahead, with [*the rouble weakening again this morning*](https://www.theguardian.com/business/live/2022/mar/09/russian-bond-default-fitch-sanctions-oil-companies-ftse-dax-business-live?page=with:block-622893af8f08ec6557dfa4b7#block-622893af8f08ec6557dfa4b7).

enltrWe forecast Russia will see a massive GDP drop of -15% in 2022. Downside risk to that number is building fast as war escalates. Financial conditions (blue) tightened further from just a few days ago, leaving 2009 in the dust. Russia is on course for ***unprecedented*** impoverishment. [*pic.twitter.com/rSACIeSQtP*](https://t.co/rSACIeSQtP)

- Robin Brooks (@RobinBrooksIIF) [*March 9, 2022*](https://twitter.com/RobinBrooksIIF/status/1501546480770990080?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

[*European stock markets have staged a dramatic rebound toda*](https://www.theguardian.com/business/live/2022/mar/09/russian-bond-default-fitch-sanctions-oil-companies-ftse-dax-business-live?filterKeyEvents=false&page=with:block-6228e0528f0806dde1f8b403#block-6228e0528f0806dde1f8b403) y, in their strongest recovery in two years. Germany's DAX led the way with an 8% gain, as anxiety over the crisis appeared to ease.

In London, banks, travel companies and Russian miners all had a strong day, recovering some of the major losses in the last two weeks.

[*Oil prices have tumbled*](https://www.theguardian.com/business/live/2022/mar/09/russian-bond-default-fitch-sanctions-oil-companies-ftse-dax-business-live?filterKeyEvents=false&page=with:block-6228eb228f08ec6557dfa7cd#block-6228eb228f08ec6557dfa7cd) , with crude down around 13% tonight on optimism that Opec might boost production. The move has calmed some concerns about inflationary pressures hitting the global economy.

[*But analysts have cautioned that the markets may be too optimistic*](https://www.theguardian.com/business/live/2022/mar/09/russian-bond-default-fitch-sanctions-oil-companies-ftse-dax-business-live?page=with:block-6228f5388f08d38fbc42af66#block-6228f5388f08d38fbc42af66) , given the air strike on a Children's hospital in Mariupol today, and [*Western fears*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2022/mar/09/ukraine-news-russia-war-ceasefire-broken-humanitarian-corridors-kyiv-russian-invasion-live-vladimir-putin-volodymyr-zelenskiy-latest-updates?page=with:block-6228e5bd8f08527b36853ed3#block-6228e5bd8f08527b36853ed3) that Vladimir Putin could use chemical weapons on Kyiv.

Related: [*Russia-Ukraine war: Russia admits using thermobaric weapons, UK says; fears Putin could use chemical attack - live*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2022/mar/09/ukraine-news-russia-war-ceasefire-broken-humanitarian-corridors-kyiv-russian-invasion-live-vladimir-putin-volodymyr-zelenskiy-latest-updates)

The EU has added more names to its sanctions list ,including Russian Formula One driver Nikita Mazepin and Russian business leaders.

Related: [*Russian F1 driver added to list of people sanctioned by EU*](https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2022/mar/09/eu-imposes-travel-bans-asset-freezes-russians-oligarchs-putin)

While the UK government unveiled new aviation sanctions against [*Russia*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/russia) , toughening up a ban on Russian planes flying or landing in the UK alongside powers to detain any Russian aircraft in the UK.

One private jet has already been seized, and [*could be linked to billionaire*](https://www.theguardian.com/business/live/2022/mar/09/russian-bond-default-fitch-sanctions-oil-companies-ftse-dax-business-live?page=with:block-62286c2f8f08527b36853acf#block-62286c2f8f08527b36853acf) [*Eugene Shvidler*](https://www.theguardian.com/business/live/2022/mar/09/russian-bond-default-fitch-sanctions-oil-companies-ftse-dax-business-live?page=with:block-62286c2f8f08527b36853acf#block-62286c2f8f08527b36853acf) , the close friend and business partner of Roman Abramovich.

Related: [*UK seizes private jet with suspected links to Russia*](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/mar/09/uk-seizes-private-jet-with-suspected-links-to-russia-hampshire-sanctions)

The business backlash against Russia gathered more pace, with the owner of KFC and Pizza Hut has joined the ranks of Western brands suspending its operations in Russia.

Kentucky-based Yum! Brands is suspending 70 KFC company-owned restaurants in [*Russia*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/russia) and finalising an agreement to suspend all 50 Pizza Hut outlets in partnership with its master franchisee.

Mothercare, Heineken and [*Universal Music*](https://www.theguardian.com/music/universal-music) Group also announced they were halting operations in Russia.

Related: [*KFC and Pizza Hut owner and Heineken pause business in Russia*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/09/mothercare-and-owner-of-kfc-pause-business-in-russia-yum)

Tobacco firm Imperial Brands also announced it will halt operations in Russia, but British American Tobacco will continue selling cigarettes in Russia:

Related: [*British American Tobacco to continue selling cigarettes in Russia*](https://www.theguardian.com/business/2022/mar/09/british-american-tobacco-continue-selling-cigarettes-russia-rothmans-sanctions)

While some directors are quitting the boards of Russian firms, others are holding firm:

Related: [*'My moral duty': directors quit Russian firms over Ukraine crisis*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/09/the-moral-dilemma-facing-britons-on-russian-boards-ukraine)

[*Fertiliser giant Yara has temporarily cut output at two European plants*](https://www.theguardian.com/business/live/2022/mar/09/russian-bond-default-fitch-sanctions-oil-companies-ftse-dax-business-live?page=with:block-6228ac238f08ec6557dfa591#block-6228ac238f08ec6557dfa591) , due to soaring energy prices.

With fears of food shortages already rising, Irish dairy and beef farmers are being urged to start growing crops. ***Agriculture*** ministers from G7 countries including Britain's George Eustice will meet on Friday to discuss grain shortages and food price volatility amid the [*war in Ukraine*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2022/mar/09/ukraine-news-russia-war-ceasefire-broken-humanitarian-corridors-kyiv-russian-invasion-live-vladimir-putin-volodymyr-zelenskiy-latest-updates).

Related: [*Irish dairy and beef farmers urged to grow crops amid Ukraine shortage fears*](https://www.theguardian.com/business/2022/mar/09/irish-dairy-beef-farmers-urged-grow-crops-grain-shortage-fears)

Elsewhere, the US labour market remains tight with [*11.3m job vacancies at American companies in January*](https://www.theguardian.com/business/live/2022/mar/09/russian-bond-default-fitch-sanctions-oil-companies-ftse-dax-business-live?page=with:block-6228c69c8f08d64fa95e9329#block-6228c69c8f08d64fa95e9329).

[*UK households are the gloomist about financial conditions in a decade*](https://www.theguardian.com/business/live/2022/mar/09/russian-bond-default-fitch-sanctions-oil-companies-ftse-dax-business-live?page=with:block-622897308f0806dde1f8b17b#block-622897308f0806dde1f8b17b) , as inflation squeezes incomes.

Also:

Related: [*Green credentials of world's largest investor questioned over oil industry emails*](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/mar/09/blackrock-privately-soothes-oil-industry-fears-over-its-new-green-credentials)

Related: [*Stagecoach opts for rival takeover in blow to National Express merger plan*](https://www.theguardian.com/business/2022/mar/09/stagecoach-opts-for-rival-takeover-in-blow-to-national-express-merger-plan)

Related: [*Sky Vegas fined £1.2m for sending free casino 'spins' to recovering addicts*](https://www.theguardian.com/society/2022/mar/09/sky-vegas-fined-for-sending-free-casino-spins-to-recovering-addicts)

Related: [*Gatwick expects 3 million monthly passengers as losses narrow*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/09/gatwick-forecasts-3m-monthly-passengers-this-summer-as-losses-narrow)

Goodnight. GW

block-time published-time 7.25pm GMT

enltr(Reuters) - Russia's stock market will not open on Thursday but the foreign exchange market, money market and repo market will operate starting at 10 am Moscow time, the central bank said on Wednesday. The exchange has closed several times since Russia's ***invasion*** of Ukraine.

- Phil Stewart (@phildstewart) [*March 9, 2022*](https://twitter.com/phildstewart/status/1501632161354588169?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 7.14pm GMT

Muscovites get used to life without Dior and McDonald's A Big Mac burger at the McDonald's restaurant in Pushkin Square. Photograph: Alexander Shcherbak/TASS

The irony was not lost on some of the Muscovites who were queueing outside a McDonald's on Tuesday evening, just after the company announced it was temporarily closing its nearly 850 locations in [*Russia*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/russia).

"My dad once told me how he waited in a long line when McDonald's opened when he was young. And now I ended up also queueing, but for a very different reason. History can be funny," said Dmitry Grigoryev.

When McDonald's opened its doors in Moscow's Pushkin Square in 1990, a queue thousands-long formed. Inside and outside the country, the arrival of the golden arches was seen as a definite sign of the end of cold war.

Russians' embrace of western fast food, pop culture and jeans came to signify the country's integration into the global capitalist system. Despite rising authoritarianism under Vladimir Putin over the last decade, international brands remained eager to keep their doors open in Moscow and other big cities with a sizable middle class.

But Russia's ***invasion*** of Ukraine on the morning of 24 February changed everything. Since then there has been an [*unparalleled exit of international firms*](https://www.theguardian.com/business/2022/mar/03/ikea-closes-all-stores-and-factories-in-russia-amid-exodus-of-western-firms) , among them Toyota, Heineken, Nike, Apple, Exxon, Ford, Zara, Netflix and Ikea.

"The exodus of companies is really stunning," said Maria Shagina, an international sanctions specialist at the Finnish Institute of International Affairs and the Geneva International Sanctions Network.

"The speed at which this is happening is unknown to modern history. Russia is being completely decoupled from the global commercial, technological and banking communities."

Here's the full piece:

Related: [*'History can be funny': Muscovites get used to life without Dior and McDonald's*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/09/history-can-be-funny-muscovites-get-used-to-life-without-dior-and-mcdonalds)

block-time published-time 7.12pm GMT

Russian F1 driver added to list of people sanctioned by EU

A Formula One driver and a Russian previously linked to a £300m mansion that is London's second largest house after Buckingham Palace are among 160 individuals added to an EU sanctions list designed to squeeze Vladimir Putin's "closest circle".

Nikita Mazepin's contract with the Haas F1 team was terminated after the ***invasion*** of [*Ukraine*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/ukraine). Haas F1 was sponsored by the Russian chemical firm Uralchem, whose general director is Mazepin's father, Dmitry Arkadievich Mazepin.

Also on the updated list is Andrey Guryev, a fertiliser Russian billionaire, revealed in 2015 to be the beneficiary of an offshore company that owned Witanhurst, a 25-bedroom property in Highgate,north London.

They are among 14 oligarchs and businesspeople on an expanded list of individuals announced on Wednesday whose assets in the EU will be frozen.

EU restrictive ***measures*** imposed in response to the ***invasion*** of Ukraine and before that to the annexation of Crimea in 2014 now apply to more than 30 Russian businesspeople. This compares to the UK's sanctions list, which has named just 10 oligarchs since 2014.

[*Here's the full story*](https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2022/mar/09/eu-imposes-travel-bans-asset-freezes-russians-oligarchs-putin) :

Related: [*Russian F1 driver added to list of people sanctioned by EU*](https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2022/mar/09/eu-imposes-travel-bans-asset-freezes-russians-oligarchs-putin)

block-time published-time 6.48pm GMT

We have seen [*some extraordinary moves*](https://www.theguardian.com/business/live/2022/mar/09/russian-bond-default-fitch-sanctions-oil-companies-ftse-dax-business-live?filterKeyEvents=false&page=with:block-6228e0528f0806dde1f8b403#block-6228e0528f0806dde1f8b403) in global stocks today, says Neil Wilson, chief market analyst at Markets.com.

But he also cautions that markets may be getting ahead of themselves if they're optimistic about the Ukraine crisis, especially given [*a Russian airstrike has reportedly hit a maternity hospital in Mariupol*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2022/mar/09/ukraine-news-russia-war-ceasefire-broken-humanitarian-corridors-kyiv-russian-invasion-live-vladimir-putin-volodymyr-zelenskiy-latest-updates) :

Badly beaten down sectors enjoying the flip but it does not look reasonable - it's like the war ended, and it clearly hasn't. If anything the strike on a maternity hospital paints an ugly, dark picture of where this is going. Russia is goading West into no-fly zone.

The market has latched on to [Ukrainian president] [*Zelenskiy's remarks*](https://www.forexlive.com/news/zelensky-ukraine-prepared-for-certain-compromises-20220309/) on compromising and comments from Russia's Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova, who said the Kremlin has no intention of occupying Ukraine or overthrowing its government. This could be a significant shift...but events on the ground don't match with the rhetoric for now. I remember when Macron thought he'd prevented an ***invasion***...just words but the machines are trading the headlines.

block-time published-time 6.22pm GMT

enltrOil prices dropped in a sudden move, following a March rally to 13-year highs amid supply disruptions stemming from Russia's ***invasion*** of Ukraine. Note WTI is still up 15% this month [*https://t.co/lpWeiNTFXu*](https://t.co/lpWeiNTFXu) [*pic.twitter.com/r1vV0tjstR*](https://t.co/r1vV0tjstR)

- Yun Li (@YunLi626) [*March 9, 2022*](https://twitter.com/YunLi626/status/1501621803516678149?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 6.21pm GMT

British American Tobacco will continue selling cigarettes in Russia, defying a [*gathering movement among global brands*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/08/mcdonalds-bows-to-pressure-and-closes-all-its-russian-restaurants) to halt operations there in response to the ***invasion*** of Ukraine.

The London-based cigarette manufacturer, whose brands include Lucky Strike and Rothmans, said it would "continue to operate" in Russia, one of its key growth markets for cigarettes and heated tobacco, according to the [*company's latest annual report*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/08/mcdonalds-bows-to-pressure-and-closes-all-its-russian-restaurants).

It will suspend capital investment and scale back marketing and business activities but stopped short of following its smaller British rival, Imperial Brands, by halting its operations altogether ( [*as covered earlier*](https://www.theguardian.com/business/live/2022/mar/09/russian-bond-default-fitch-sanctions-oil-companies-ftse-dax-business-live?page=with:block-62287cb78f08d64fa95e90da#block-62287cb78f08d64fa95e90da) ).

Related: [*British American Tobacco to continue selling cigarettes in Russia*](https://www.theguardian.com/business/2022/mar/09/british-american-tobacco-continue-selling-cigarettes-russia-rothmans-sanctions)

block-time published-time 6.05pm GMT

Oil tumbles over 10%

Oil prices are continuing to slide, with Brent crude now down 11% or $14 at $114 per barrel.

That's a very sharp move, but still leaves oil higher than before the Ukraine ***invasion*** (which pushed Brent over $100/barrel).

enltrBrent testing some extreme downside records, there's been no worse days in $ terms, and few worse in % [*pic.twitter.com/QrJRldomXW*](https://t.co/QrJRldomXW)

- Newsquawk (@Newsquawk) [*March 9, 2022*](https://twitter.com/Newsquawk/status/1501616365647585282?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

Hopes that the Opec group could boost production could be pushing the oil price lower.

Retuers reports that:

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) favors an oil production increase and will be encouraging OPEC to consider higher output, the UAE's ambassador to Washington said on Wednesday.

"We favor production increases and will be encouraging OPEC to consider higher production levels," Ambassador Yousuf Al Otaiba said in a statement tweeted by the UAE Embassy in Washington.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken also said on Wednesday that the UAE was giving support for increased oil production.

block-time published-time 5.52pm GMT

enltrUpdate: huge reversal underway across markets today: \*Oil down $20... that's -15%\* S&P 500 +2.5% Nasdaq +3.5% DAX +8% Euro +1.7% US 5-yr YTIPS yield +20 bps US 10-yr YTIPS yield +14 bps

- Jamie McGeever (@ReutersJamie) [*March 9, 2022*](https://twitter.com/ReutersJamie/status/1501615719506747398?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 5.51pm GMT

European markets best day in two years

European stock markets have recorded their best session since the turmoil of the Covid-19 pandemic two years ago, even as [*the Russia-Ukraine war continues to rage*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2022/mar/09/ukraine-news-russia-war-ceasefire-broken-humanitarian-corridors-kyiv-russian-invasion-live-vladimir-putin-volodymyr-zelenskiy-latest-updates).

Tthe Stoxx 600 index of leading European companies has gained 4.7%, its biggest daily gain since March 2020, as stocks recovered after heavy selling.

Car stocks gained 9.5%, while the travel sector jumped over 8% and the banking sector finished 7.5% higher.

Germany's DAX index jumped by nearly 8%, just days after falling into bear-market territory on fears the German economy would be particularly hit by the impact of Russian sanctions, soaring commodity prices, and possible disruption to energy supplies.

The mood in the markets has swung around today, and stocks are enjoying a major rally, explains analyst David Madden of Equiti Capital:

The ***invasion*** started almost two weeks ago, and stock markets have been hammered. Yesterday, the US announced plans to ban the purchase of Russian energy, and the UK are aiming to phase out oil imports from Russia too. The fact that Western governments seem to be carrying out an economic war against Russia, rather than military conflict, has helped the overall sentiment.

If the violence doesn't escalate further, it is possible that markets will continue to stabilise. The DAX is up as a mixture of bargain hunting and short covering is driving up the market. Germany's equity benchmark is arguably the most exposed of the major European stock markets to the Ukraine-Russia situation, and now that sentiment is improving, the index is driving higher.

block-time published-time 5.31pm GMT

FTSE 100 index rallies

In the City, the FTSE index has closed 3.2% higher as investors put aside some of their anxiety over inflation and the economic cost of the Russia-Ukraine war.

The blue-chip share index rallied by 226 points to end at 7191 points, a strong rebound that recovers some of its recent losses.

Financial stocks rebounded, as the drop in the oil price today reassured markets [Brent crude is now down over 6% today].

Travel stocks also recovered, with British Airways parent company IAG gaining 11%.

Russia-focused miners led the risers. Gold and metal producer Polymetal surged 69% from a record low yesterday after reporting today that its operations in Russia and Kazakhstan were not affected by the crises, while Evraz (whose stock also tumbled when the war began) gained almost 19%.

The FTSE 100 over the last three months Photograph: Refinitiv

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 5.32pm GMT

block-time published-time 5.12pm GMT

Russian households face inflation surge from slumping rouble A currency exchange shop in Moscow Photograph: Vlad Karkov/SOPA Images/REX/Shutterstock

Russian households are already beginning to feel the pinch from Western sanctions imposed after Vladimir Putin's ***invasion*** of Ukraine, with economists warning that inflation in the country could reach the highest levels seen in at least two decades.

Official figures published by Moscow this afternoon show the collapse in the rouble led to a sharp rise in weekly consumer price inflation, highlighting the early impact from the US, UK and the EU freezing the central bank of Russia's assets and hurting its ability to defend the currency.

Hitting ordinary Russians hard, [*consumer prices rose at 2.2% in the week to the 4 March*](https://www.theguardian.com/business/live/2022/mar/09/russian-bond-default-fitch-sanctions-oil-companies-ftse-dax-business-live?filterKeyEvents=false&page=with:block-6228d4c38f08ec6557dfa6fd#block-6228d4c38f08ec6557dfa6fd) - more than twice the rate seen during the collapses in the rouble during the 2008 financial crisis and in 2014 when a crash in the oil price and western sanctions imposed after Putin's annexation of Crimea hit the country.

Although officials only produce a limited breakdown, the release showed prices of new domestic cars rose 17.1% and TVs by 15% on a weekly basis.

Inflation rose in February at 9.2%, showing how a squeeze on households before the ***invasion*** was already underway.

However, economists at the consultancy Capital Economics said Russian inflation could surge further still close to 20% this year - the highest rate since 2001.

Liam Peach, an emerging markets economist at Capital Economics, explains:

"The collapse in the ruble in response to the war in Ukraine and imposition of sanctions on Russia will push up inflation significantly in the coming months. This will be compounded by restrictions on international trade and goods shortages,"

"Since 4 March, the rouble has continued to fall and reports of disruption to Russian exports and imports have become more widespread, so this is likely to be just the start of the inflation pressure feeding through."

block-time published-time 4.56pm GMT

Russia "heads for one of biggest inflation shocks in decades"

[*The jump in Russia's inflation rate*](https://www.theguardian.com/business/live/2022/mar/09/russian-bond-default-fitch-sanctions-oil-companies-ftse-dax-business-live?filterKeyEvents=false&page=with:block-6228d4c38f08ec6557dfa6fd#block-6228d4c38f08ec6557dfa6fd) is a clear sign of the damage being caused to its economy by the war in Ukraine.

Here's Bloomberg's take:

Russia is headed for one of its biggest inflation spikes this century after waves of sanctions over the ***invasion*** of Ukraine touched off the collapse of the ruble and disrupted trade.

In the first full week since the military offensive began late in February, prices for new domestic cars soared over 17% and the cost of television sets jumped 15%. Some medicines and vegetables became 5% to 7% more expensive in the seven days ending March 4.

Overall, inflation in the period reached 2.2%, according to a report by the Federal Statistics Service on Wednesday, the sharpest weekly increase since it started tracking the data in 2008 and more than double the previous record. On an annual basis, price growth was 10.4% as of March 4, according to the Economy Ministry.

enltrRussia is headed for one of its biggest inflation spikes this century after waves of sanctions over the ***invasion*** of Ukraine touched off the collapse of the ruble [*https://t.co/Xq8wY10NPi*](https://t.co/Xq8wY10NPi)

- Bloomberg (@business) [*March 9, 2022*](https://twitter.com/business/status/1501597206968680450?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 4.52pm GMT

Russian inflation rate soars

Inflation in Russia has accelerated to its highest level in seven years, as the slump in the rouble drove up the cost of living.

Annual inflation in Russia accelerated to 9.15% in February from 8.73% in January, its highest in seven years, the latest official statistics show.

The cost of living squeeze accelerated after the Ukraine war began. In the week to March 4th, weekly inflation rose to 2.22% from 0.45% in the preceding week, as the collapse in the currency pushed up costs of imports.

That pushed Russia's annual consumer inflation to 10.42% as of March 4th, the economy ministry reports.

enltrRussia's annual inflation rate jumped to 10.4% - up from 9% - in the first week of the war in Ukraine. First big jump in what is sure to be a string of significant price rises and a deep hit to living standards

- Jake Cordell (@JakeCordell) [*March 9, 2022*](https://twitter.com/JakeCordell/status/1501597646166929412?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

enltrWeekly inflation was 2.2%. Sounds small but that's the highest level in 24 years, according to Russia's official statistics agency.

- Jake Cordell (@JakeCordell) [*March 9, 2022*](https://twitter.com/JakeCordell/status/1501597889184817154?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

Reuters has more details:

According to the Rosstat data released on Wednesday, prices on nearly everything from bread to gasoline have spiked, with cost of sugar and cereals such as buckwheat - top products that Russians stockpile - showing some of the biggest increases of 20.6% and 18%, respectively.

Yet the biggest cost rise was in construction materials such as wallpaper and bathroom tiles, with prices spiking by 22.5%, indicating an increased demand to finish renovation projects amid booming costs for imported goods as the rouble was falling.

block-time published-time 4.40pm GMT

In the US, job vacancies remained high in January as firms continued to struggle to hire workers.

There were 11.3 million job openings at US firms in January, the latest JOLTS survey showed, ahead of forecast of 10.9m.

It's a slight drop on December's upwardly revised 11.45m vacancies, but suggests there were still labor shortages at the start of this year, as the omicron variant hit the economy.

enltr [*#JOLTS*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/JOLTS?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) shows a slight decline in quit rate but overall job market still looks strong. [*pic.twitter.com/hZiTkitLj5*](https://t.co/hZiTkitLj5)

- Kathy Jones (@KathyJones) [*March 9, 2022*](https://twitter.com/KathyJones/status/1501579503620870145?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

enltrJOLTS job openings came in stronger for January at 11.26M vs. 10.95M est. & 11.45M in prior month (rev up from 10.93M) ... quits rate dipped from 3% to 2.8% [*pic.twitter.com/fxVOcrhASJ*](https://t.co/fxVOcrhASJ)

- Liz Ann Sonders (@LizAnnSonders) [*March 9, 2022*](https://twitter.com/LizAnnSonders/status/1501577021704572931?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 4.24pm GMT

Pamplona to cut ties with LetterOne

Investment manager Pamplona Capital Management is cutting its ties with LetterOne Holdings, the $22bn investment group whose largest shareholders were sanctioned by the European Union following the ***invasion*** of Ukraine.

LetterOne is one of Pamplona's limited partners, but Pamplona has decided to redeem those interests after concluding that the links were "increasingly challenging". It will return the money invested in its funds by LetterOne.

LetterOne was founded by Russian billionaire oligarch [*Mikhail Fridman*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/27/two-top-russian-billionaires-speak-out-against-invasion-of-ukraine) and partners, with proceeds from the sale of oil group TNK-BP.

Fridman and fellow oligarch [*Petr Aven*](https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2022/mar/01/russian-billionaire-banker-petr-aven-royal-academy-trustee-eu-sanctions) , LetterOne's two biggest shareholders, were [*sanctioned by the EU*](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/mar/02/two-uk-based-russian-oligarchs-have-shares-in-22bn-conglomerate-frozen) , and stepped down from the group last week after their shares were frozen.

enltrPamplona Capital Management said it will begin the ***process*** of returning money to LetterOne Holdings, a company founded by Russian billionaires [*https://t.co/yLD0fLmcdC*](https://t.co/yLD0fLmcdC)

- Bloomberg Asia (@BloombergAsia) [*March 9, 2022*](https://twitter.com/BloombergAsia/status/1501591602493599749?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

Pamplona says that once the LetterOne redemption has been carried out, it will have no direct or indirect exposure to any Russian capital.

While Pamplona has received clear guidance that LetterOne is not a sanctioned entity, the ongoing crisis in Ukraine makes such relationships increasingly challenging for our portfolio companies, their management teams, customers, employees, and counterparties throughout Europe and the rest of the world.

Any such redemption will be conducted in an orderly manner and in accordance with every appropriate regulatory and counterparty consent.

On Monday, three more Russian billionares resigned from LetterOne's board, with the company also pledging a $150m donation to "support the urgent work under way to help those affected by the war in Ukraine".

Related: [*Three more Russian billionaires resign from LetterOne board*](https://www.theguardian.com/business/2022/mar/07/three-more-russian-billionaires-resign-from-letterone-board)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 5.38pm GMT

block-time published-time 3.11pm GMT

Wall Street opens higher as oil drops

The New York stock markets has opened higher, [*following Europe's lead*](https://www.theguardian.com/business/live/2022/mar/09/russian-bond-default-fitch-sanctions-oil-companies-ftse-dax-business-live?page=with:block-62286a688f08d64fa95e906e#block-62286a688f08d64fa95e906e) , as stocks recover some of their recent losses.

The Dow Jones industrial average of 30 large US companies is up 2%, or 649 points, at 33,281.

The broader S&P 500 index has gained 2.2%, with travel companies, financial stocks, tech companies and consumer goods and service providers rallying. On Monday night, the Wall Street benchmark had sunk to its lowest closing level since June 2021, as the Ukraine crisis continued to rock markets.

Today, there's relief that oil prices have extended their earlier losses, with US crude down 4.6% at $118 per barrel, and Brent crude 5% lower at $121.30 per barrel.

enltrOil (Brent Crude) eased to around $120 a barrel after soaring above $132 [*#Oil*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/Oil?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) [*#Oilprices*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/Oilprices?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) [*#Crude*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/Crude?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) [*pic.twitter.com/d84CCiVsP9*](https://t.co/d84CCiVsP9)

- Market News???? (@MarketNewsLK) [*March 9, 2022*](https://twitter.com/MarketNewsLK/status/1501561779482406914?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

European stock markets are holding their gains too. The blue-chip FTSE 100 still up over 2%, even as oil stocks and miners decline as commodity prices ease.

enltrMarkets today mopping up some of their recent froth, though energy still very costly: Brent crude oil -4% to $122 per barrel Natural gas spot -22% to 400p per therm EU and UK stock markets up strongly: FTSE350 +3.2%, Frankfurt +5.4%, Paris +4%

- Douglas Fraser?????? (@BBCDouglasF) [*March 9, 2022*](https://twitter.com/BBCDouglasF/status/1501560886770679808?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 2.32pm GMT

Robin Brooks, chief economist at the Institute of International Finance, forecasts that Russia's economy will shrink by a massive 15% this year.

enltrWe forecast Russia will see a massive GDP drop of -15% in 2022. Downside risk to that number is building fast as war escalates. Financial conditions (blue) tightened further from just a few days ago, leaving 2009 in the dust. Russia is on course for ***unprecedented*** impoverishment. [*pic.twitter.com/rSACIeSQtP*](https://t.co/rSACIeSQtP)

- Robin Brooks (@RobinBrooksIIF) [*March 9, 2022*](https://twitter.com/RobinBrooksIIF/status/1501546480770990080?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

That chart shows how financial conditions in Russia have tightened dramatically since the Ukraine war began, with the rouble tumbling to record lows and [*the central bank more than doubling interest rates to 20% last week*](https://www.theguardian.com/business/2022/feb/28/russia-central-bank-rates-rouble-sanctions-economy-ukraine#:~:text=Russia's%20central%20bank%20has%20more,rouble%20plunging%20by%20a%20fifth.).

Global financial conditions have also hit their tightest levels since early 2016, [*Goldman Sachs data showed this week*](https://www.reuters.com/markets/europe/tightening-financial-conditions-sound-alarm-world-economy-2022-03-07/) , after Russia's ***invasion*** of Ukraine sparked market turmoil.

Financial conditions reflect the availability of funding in an economy, and are a guide to future growth as they affect how companies and households spend, save and invest.

enltrGlobal financial conditions are now the tightest in six years, according to Goldman's Global Financial Conditions Index. Long rates, wider credit spreads, lower equities have all contributed in recent weeks. [*pic.twitter.com/HqNkDzrbdq*](https://t.co/HqNkDzrbdq)

- Jamie McGeever (@ReutersJamie) [*March 8, 2022*](https://twitter.com/ReutersJamie/status/1501262102832435203?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

enltrMany emerging markets may benefit from soaring energy and commodities prices, but tightening financial conditions will take their toll. And Goldman's EM financial conditions index is now the highest since Jan 2009. [*pic.twitter.com/z7CavcTXPM*](https://t.co/z7CavcTXPM)

- Jamie McGeever (@ReutersJamie) [*March 9, 2022*](https://twitter.com/ReutersJamie/status/1501541160715796480?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 2.09pm GMT

Irish dairy and beef farmers urged to grow crops amid Ukraine shortage fears

Irish dairy and beef farmers are being urged to start growing crops as ***agriculture*** ministers from G7 countries including Britain's George Eustice meet on Friday to discuss grain shortages and food price volatility amid the [*war in Ukraine*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2022/mar/09/ukraine-news-russia-war-ceasefire-broken-humanitarian-corridors-kyiv-russian-invasion-live-vladimir-putin-volodymyr-zelenskiy-latest-updates).

There are rising fears that consumers will face price hikes on staples such as bread in addition to rises in fuel, with grain supplies disrupted by the conflict.

Ukraine, once known as the breadbasket of Europe, said on Wednesday it was banning exports of rye, barley, buckwheat, millet, sugar, salt and meat for the rest of the year.

Together with Russia it supplies 30% of global wheat and barley fuelling fears of shortages not seen since the second world war when consumers in Britain were encouraged to plant vegetables in gardens, yards and on rooftops.

Government [*data*](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1055099/ukraine-trade-and-investment-factsheet-2022-02-18.pdf) shows Ukraine supplies 20% of the UK's cereals. Vikki Campbell, a market specialist at the ***Agriculture*** and Horticulture Development Board (AHDB), said the price of wheat futures - grain to be bought on 22 May - had gone up on [*six consecutive days*](https://ahdb.org.uk/cereals-oilseeds/futures-prices%20%E2%80%93).

On 18 February, days before war, wheat was trading in London at £220 a tonne, but had surged to £289.50 when the market closed on Tuesday.

[*More details here*](https://www.theguardian.com/business/2022/mar/09/irish-dairy-beef-farmers-urged-grow-crops-grain-shortage-fears) :

Related: [*Irish dairy and beef farmers urged to grow crops amid Ukraine shortage fears*](https://www.theguardian.com/business/2022/mar/09/irish-dairy-beef-farmers-urged-grow-crops-grain-shortage-fears)

block-time published-time 2.06pm GMT

Sky Vegas fined £1.2m for sending free casino 'spins' to recovering addicts

Sky Vegas has been fined £1.2m for [*sending free casino "spins" to recovering addicts*](https://www.theguardian.com/society/2021/nov/03/sky-vegas-online-casino-addicts-gambling) during the industry's annual Safer Gambling Week.

The fine comes at a sensitive time for the British gambling industry, which has been at pains to show it has improved its attitude to social responsibility.

The government is in the middle of a [*review*](https://www.theguardian.com/society/2022/feb/06/uk-government-puts-off-review-of-gambling-laws-until-may) of gambling laws, with proposals to be published in a white paper expected within weeks. Yet major brands have been hit with a series of penalties for failing to protect vulnerable people in recent weeks.

888 Casino, which is in the ***process*** of buying William Hill's UK assets, was [*fined £9.4m last week for multiple failings*](https://www.theguardian.com/society/2022/mar/01/betting-firm-888-fined-94m-after-customers-lost-thousands-in-pandemic) that led to customers racking up huge losses during the depths of the Covid pandemic. BetVictor was fined £2m in February for failures in fairness, money-laundering controls and social responsibility.

The new fine for Sky Vegas, which is owned by the global gambling firm Flutter, comes after it sent a promotional offer of "Bet £5 get 100 free spins" to 41,395 customers who had voluntarily self-excluded from gambling in an effort to stop.

A further 249,159 customers who had unsubscribed from the operator's marketing emails also received the promotion.

"Here at Sky Vegas, we love the unexpected," one marketing email read. "That's right. Simply opt in, spend £5 and claim your 100 free spins. The best part? Whatever you win is yours to keep - that's the fun in fair!"

The promotional message featured graphics of slot machines and the slogan: "Entertainment like no other".

The incident, revealed by the Guardian in November last year, led addicts to warn that receiving such messages could have triggered a relapse.

Here's the full story:

Related: [*Sky Vegas fined £1.2m for sending free casino 'spins' to recovering addicts*](https://www.theguardian.com/society/2022/mar/09/sky-vegas-fined-for-sending-free-casino-spins-to-recovering-addicts)

block-time published-time 1.57pm GMT

In the UK, Gatwick airport is expecting 3 million passengers a month this summer as the easing of travel restrictions and the return of takeoff and landing slot rules help the airport recover from its pandemic slump.

The airport reported narrower losses of just over £1m a day in 2021, down £95m on 2020 to £371m, despite passenger numbers falling further to 6.3 million last year.

Gatwick is expecting more than 30 million passengers in 2022, operating at 85% capacity in the summer, aided by the return of slot rules that ensure airlines use their alloted takeoff and landing slots at least 70% of the time.

The south terminal, mothballed to save money, will reopen at the end of March, when British Airways will also [*return to short-haul flying*](https://www.theguardian.com/business/2021/dec/14/british-airways-ba-euroflyer-restart-london-gatwick-flights-march) from the airport.

Gatwick's biggest airline customer, easyJet, is planning to expand to record levels with 120 routes this summer, partly using slots leased from BA.

The airport said the decision to restore slot regulations, paused in 2020, would "restore discipline" and be more efficient and economically beneficial [*for the region*](https://www.theguardian.com/business/2021/apr/04/bleak-future-for-crawley-a-year-after-first-covid-lockdown) but denied it would lead to "ghost flights".

The chief executive, Stewart Wingate, said load factors on flights were already high before the new rules come into effect, adding:

"My biggest worry has been having a ghost terminal."

He said the end of travel restrictions had increased demand, and businesses at the airport had been recruiting for more than 2,000 new posts over recent months.

Wingate said the airport was "very alert" to the risks from the Russian ***invasion*** of Ukraine but said at present:

"in terms of our business, presuming that the conflict doesn't escalate, there is a very small direct exposure. On oil prices, the majority of large airlines are well hedged."

Related: [*Gatwick forecasts 3m passengers a month this summer as losses narrow*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/09/gatwick-forecasts-3m-monthly-passengers-this-summer-as-losses-narrow)

block-time published-time 1.44pm GMT

The surge in natural gas prices, which intensified after the Ukraine war began, has forced fertiliser giant Yara to temporarily cut output at two European plants.

Norway's Yara, one of the world's largest fertiliser makers, is curtailing its ammonia and urea output at its plants in Ferrara, in Italy, and Le Havre, in France.

[*It says*](https://www.yara.com/corporate-releases/yara-curtails-production-due-to-increased-natural-gas-prices/) the move is due to Europe's record gas prices, adding:

Including optimisation and maintenance at other production facilities, Yara's European ammonia and urea production is expected to be operating at approximately 45% of capacity by the end of this week.

Yara will continue to monitor the situation and to the extent possible use its global production system to keep supplying customers and secure continuity in food supply chains, but curtailing production where necessary due to challenging market conditions.

Farmers have warned that fertiliser prices have risen sharply, pushing up costs, and possibly leading to lower crop yields this year if farms buy less.

Related: [*Surge in fertiliser prices from Russia-Ukraine war adds to pressure on UK farmers*](https://www.theguardian.com/business/2022/mar/08/surge-in-fertiliser-prices-adds-to-pressure-on-uk-farmers)

block-time published-time 1.25pm GMT

Related: [*The moral dilemma facing Britons on Russian boards*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/09/the-moral-dilemma-facing-britons-on-russian-boards-ukraine)

block-time published-time 12.45pm GMT

UK household financial confidence lowest in a decade

In the UK, the cost of living squeeze has pushed household financial confidence to its lowest in at least 10 years.

A poll of consumer confidence from YouGov and economic consultancy CEBR found a sharp drop in household finances over the last month, and the outlook for the next year.

Both ***measures*** are at their lowest mark since the index began a decade ago.

enltrJust in - UK household financial confidence falls to lowest levels in at least 10 years, according to [*@YouGov*](https://twitter.com/YouGov?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) / [*@Cebr\_uk*](https://twitter.com/Cebr_uk?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) survey [*pic.twitter.com/E3iNdcqYMe*](https://t.co/E3iNdcqYMe)

- Andy Bruce (@BruceReuters) [*March 9, 2022*](https://twitter.com/BruceReuters/status/1501524207062159360?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

Consumer confidence also fell, "in the face of rising energy bills and concerns about the impact of the Ukraine conflict on supplies".

Here's the details:

Consumer confidence dips by -2.4 points in February 2022 Household finance ***measures*** for the previous month (-9.2) and the year ahead (-19.3) see the worst scores in the near-ten-year history of the index House value metrics for the past 30 days (+3.7) and the next 12 months (+0.8) climb upwards for the fourth month in a row

enltrWider ***measure*** of consumer confidence falls fairly sharply, although still flattered by rising house price growth (which this survey treats in its calculation as a good thing) [*pic.twitter.com/O4pMm5ZR0E*](https://t.co/O4pMm5ZR0E)

- Andy Bruce (@BruceReuters) [*March 9, 2022*](https://twitter.com/BruceReuters/status/1501526496225206274?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 12.20pm GMT

Susannah Streeter, senior investment and markets analyst at Hargreaves Lansdown, says:

''With the sanction screws turning ever tighter, and access to the depths of its war chest out of reach, Russia's financial system looks in even greater peril.

The Fitch ratings agency has warned that [*the country is close to defaulting on its debts*](https://www.theguardian.com/business/live/2022/mar/09/russian-bond-default-fitch-sanctions-oil-companies-ftse-dax-business-live?filterKeyEvents=false&page=with:block-62284b528f08d38fbc42aa24#block-62284b528f08d38fbc42aa24) and is expected to miss a raft of bond payments. Russia has now retreated further into junk status, downgraded from B to C, as trade and financial restrictions bite.

The country's deteriorating financial situation comes as [*more big consumer names*](https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/mar/09/saudi-arabia-and-uae-leaders-decline-calls-with-biden-amid-fears-of-oil-price-spike) take a short-term hit by suspending business in Russia to protect their long-term reputations, with consumers calling for boycotts otherwise, she adds.

block-time published-time 12.17pm GMT

Ukraine's government has banned the export of wheat, oats and other staples that are crucial for global food supplies as authorities try to ensure they can feed people during Russia's intensifying war, [*Associated Press reports*](https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-business-europe-global-trade-38159046f7744b8c660ee7582dd392bf) [*.*](https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-business-europe-global-trade-38159046f7744b8c660ee7582dd392bf)

New rules on ***agricultural*** exports introduced this week also prohibit the export of millet, buckwheat, sugar, live cattle, and meat and other "byproducts" from cattle, according to a government announcement.

The export ban is needed to prevent a "humanitarian crisis in Ukraine," stabilize the market and "meet the needs of the population in critical food products," Roman Leshchenko, Ukraine's minister of agrarian and food policy, said in a statement posted on the government website and his Facebook page.

enltrUkraine will ban exports on key ***agricultural*** goods including wheat, corn, grains, salt, and meat, "to prevent a humanitarian crisis in Ukraine" and "meet the needs of the population in critical food products," Ukraine's Minister of Agrarian Policy and Food Roman Leshchenko said.

- Natasha Bertrand (@NatashaBertrand) [*March 9, 2022*](https://twitter.com/NatashaBertrand/status/1501515383727087622?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

It's the latest sign that the Russia's ***invasion*** of Ukraine threatens the food supply and livelihoods of people in Europe, Africa and Asia who rely on the farmlands of the Black Sea region - known as the "breadbasket of the world."

Russia and Ukraine together supply nearly a third of the world's wheat and barley exports, which have soared in price since the ***invasion***.

The products they send are made into bread, noodles and animal feed around the world, and any shortages could create food insecurity in places like Egypt and Lebanon.

The export ban will likely reduce global food supplies just when prices are at their highest level since 2011.

Related: [*'We need bread': fears in Middle East as Ukraine war hits wheat imports*](https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2022/mar/07/we-need-bread-fears-in-middle-east-as-ukraine-russia-war-hits-wheat-imports)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.54pm GMT

block-time published-time 11.52am GMT

The rouble weakened in Moscow and offshore this morning, hitting new record lows against the dollar and euro in Moscow, [*Reuters reports*](https://www.reuters.com/markets/deals/russian-rouble-weaker-early-moscow-trade-2022-03-09/).

The rouble was more than 10% weaker than its Friday close at 117.2 to the dollar on the Moscow Exchange, as trading resumed after a bank holiday.

block-time published-time 11.38am GMT

Gas prices have eased back from their record levels earlier this week, but remain ***exceptionally*** high.

The UK wholesale gas contract for delivery next month has dropped 17% this morning, to 421p per therm.

On Monday gas briefly hit a record 800p/therm on fears of supply disruption to Europe from Russia, but has dropped back since.

However, it's still almost 10 times higher than a year ago, following the energy crunch which is hitting the economy.

UK wholesale gas prices over the last year Photograph: Refinitiv

Oil has also dipped a little. Brent crude is down 2% at $125 per barrel, away from the 14-year high of $139/barrel seen at the start of the week.

Brent was under $100/barrel before the Ukraine ***invasion*** last month.

block-time published-time 11.31am GMT

A private plane with suspected links to [*Russia*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/russia) has been impounded at Farnborough airport in Hampshire just hours before it was due to fly to Dubai, our political correspondent[*Aubrey Allegretti*](https://www.theguardian.com/profile/aubrey-allegretti) writes.

The aircraft was detained on the orders of the transport secretary, [*Grant Shapps*](https://www.theguardian.com/politics/grant-shapps) , late on Tuesday and investigators are looking into its connection with a billionaire oil tycoon, Eugene Shvidler ( [*as flagged here*](https://www.theguardian.com/business/live/2022/mar/09/russian-bond-default-fitch-sanctions-oil-companies-ftse-dax-business-live?page=with:block-62286c2f8f08527b36853acf#block-62286c2f8f08527b36853acf) ), a friend of Roman Abramovich.

A UK government source said Shvidler was "free to continue his journey by other means" after the plane was impounded.

They said the plane would be able to leave Farnborough only if no link with Russia was established, and the ***process*** was likely to take longer than a day.

Related: [*UK seizes private jet with suspected links to Russia*](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/mar/09/uk-seizes-private-jet-with-suspected-links-to-russia-hampshire-sanctions)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 11.31am GMT

block-time published-time 10.35am GMT

Full story: KFC and Pizza Hut owner and Heineken pause business in Russia

The owner of KFC and Pizza Hut, along with [*Mothercare*](https://www.theguardian.com/business/live/2022/mar/09/russian-bond-default-fitch-sanctions-oil-companies-ftse-dax-business-live?page=with:block-62286ae68f0806dde1f8b01e#block-62286ae68f0806dde1f8b01e) , Heineken, [*Universal Music*](https://www.theguardian.com/music/universal-music) Group and Imperial Brands, have all become the latest companies to pause business in Russia following its ***invasion*** of Ukraine.

Kentucky-based Yum! Brands is suspending 70 KFC company-owned restaurants in [*Russia*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/russia) and finalising an agreement to suspend all 50 Pizza Hut outlets in partnership with its master franchisee.

Yum! has 1,000 KFC restaurants in Russia, most of which are run by franchisees. The company had already previously suspended all investment and restaurant development in Russia.

Pizza Hut opened its first Russian outlet at the start of the 1990s and the former leader of the Soviet Union Mikhail Gorbachev was featured in one of its television adverts in 1998.

[*Heineken is stopping*](https://www.theheinekencompany.com/newsroom/heineken-stops-production-and-sale-of-heineken-beer-in-russia/) the production and sale of its own-brand beer in Russia, after previously halting all new investments and exports to the country.

The Dutch brewer is taking immediate steps to ringfence its Russian operations from its wider business.

Also on Wednesday, Universal Music Group said it was "suspending all operations in Russia" and closing its offices in the country "effective immediately".

Here's the full story:

Related: [*KFC and Pizza Hut owner and Heineken pause business in Russia*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/09/mothercare-and-owner-of-kfc-pause-business-in-russia-yum)

block-time published-time 10.23am GMT

Tobacco group Imperial Brands has suspended all operations in Russia, including production at its factory in Volgograd and sales and marketing activity.

It says:

This decision comes amid a highly challenging environment in Russia as a result of international sanctions and consequential severe disruption. We will be supporting our Russian employees, who continue to be paid while operations are paused.

The maker of Winston cigarettes, Gauloises and Backwoods cigars adds it had already suspended operations in Ukraine to "prioritise the safety and wellbeing" of its 600 employees there.

block-time published-time 10.18am GMT

European stock markets are rallying this morning, with the FTSE 100 index of blue-chip shares jumping over 2%.

Travel stocks and banks are among the risers, having been badly hit by the slump in financial markets since the war in Ukraine began. Airline group IAG, engineering group Melrose, and Lloyds Banking Group have all gained around 7%.

Gold and silver producer Polymetal has surged 42%, from a record low yesteday, after reporting its operations in Russia and Kazakhstan continue undisrupted, although sales of bullion in Russia have been impacted by sanctions imposed by the US, EU and UK.

Having gained 150 points to 7,115 points this morning, the FTSE 100 is still around 5% below its levels in mid-February before the ***invasion***.

The FTSE 100 Photograph: Refinitiv

European stocks are also stronger, with Germany's DAX and France's CAC share indexes up almost 5% each.

"Markets across Europe saw strong gains on Wednesday following decisions by the UK, US and EU to ban or curb Russian oil and gas imports, thereby putting further financial pressure on Russia," says Russ Mould, investment director at AJ Bell:

"After a strong run for commodity producers on the market, names like Rio Tinto and Glencore slipped back on the FTSE 100, with investors instead fishing for bargains among more beaten-up consumer-facing stocks including International Consolidated Airlines and Primark Associated British Foods.

"In Germany, the DAX jumped 3.8%, led by another consumer-facing stock, Adidas, as well as Deutsche Post. Adidas' shares were helped by expectations of a sales recovery in China and guidance for improved operating margins, but it set the tone for many companies to come by quantifying the expected hit from halting business in Russia, which in its case is up to 250 million.

block-time published-time 9.53am GMT

Mothercare has joined the growing list of companies turning their backs on Russia following the war in Ukraine.

The parenting company has decided to suspend all business in Russia, including shipments of products, and its local partner will immediately pause operations in some 120 stores and online.

The move will hit the group - as Russia contributes around 20-25% of its worldwide retail sales. Shares in Mothercare have fallen 25% this morning.

block-time published-time 9.47am GMT

Russian-born billionaire Eugene Shvidler at home in 'Chateau Thenac', his vineyard and country retreat, back in 2009 Photograph: Andy Hall/The Observer

Eugene Shvidler, [*the billionaire linked to the impounded jet in Farnborough*](https://www.theguardian.com/business/live/2022/mar/09/russian-bond-default-fitch-sanctions-oil-companies-ftse-dax-business-live?page=with:block-622860a18f0806dde1f8afe1#block-622860a18f0806dde1f8afe1) , made his fortune in oil during the privatisation of Russian industry in the 1990s.

Shvidler worked closely with Roman Abramovich, and was chief executive of oil company Sibneft. Sibneft was privatised through the controversial loans-for-shares auction in which Russian assets were sold off below their true value.

Shvidler chairs Millhouse Capital, which manages the assets of Ambramovich and his partners, and which sold its 73% stake in Sibneft to Gazprom for $13bn back in 2005.

Shvidler has been called Abramovich's best friend; back in 2006, Abramovich gave him a superyacht, Le Grand Bleu -- a 113m vessel so immense it comes with two smaller yachts (a 22 meter sailboat and a 21 meter powerboat), and a helipad.

Back in 2009, the Observer ran [*a fascinating interview with Eugene Shvidler*](https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2009/oct/11/french-wine-chateau-thenac) , in which he explained that Abramovich gave him a flock of Highland sheep for his 45th birthday.

"A friend of ours owns a place in Scotland, and when I went there I liked the sheep," Shvidler says by way of explanation. What did he like about them particularly? "They had a special shaped head."

The sheep were then shipped to Shvidler's 16th-century manor house in Bergerac, [*Chateau Thénac*](https://www.jancisrobinson.com/articles/thenac-bergeracs-de-luxe-wine-estate) , the 200-hectare French vineyard.

Eugene among the vines at 'Chateau Thenac'. Photograph: Andy Hall/The Observer

Shvidler, who holds a masters degree in applied mathematics, an MBA in finance and MS in international tax, came across as "surprisingly unshowy" for a billionaire, [*wrote*](https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2009/oct/11/french-wine-chateau-thenac) [*Elizabeth Day*](https://www.theguardian.com/profile/elizabethday) :

Although he has flown in by private jet from his family home in Cobham, Surrey, and we are shortly to enjoy a mouth-watering three-course meal knocked up by his personal chef, these outward manifestations of his wealth are the most extravagant thing about him. He is short, a little bit plump and wears nondescript but impeccable clothes: carefully pressed trousers, a brown-black jumper and leather trainers laced up over tiny feet.

As we walk through the rows of leafy vines, each one bowed down with the weight of grapes ready to harvest, Shvidler looks towards the château's mottled brick walls surrounded by lush green lawns and rose bushes. "Here it doesn't matter who you know," he says simply.

He abhors the sort of flashiness that is often reported in the media as being synonymous with an oligarch's lifestyle. "Ninety-nine per cent of what is written is bullshit," he says. Later one of his employees will tell me that an oft-repeated story about Abramovich spending £4,000 hiring a private jet to fly him sushi in Azerbaijan is untrue: Abramovich has been a vegetarian for years.

"Oligarch is just a nonsense word," says Shvidler. "What does it mean? I don't like it." Yes, but does he actually have leather floors in his Belgravia mansion? He rolls his eyes. "We have leather, but it's not me. It was the designer before we bought the house."

Related: [*Eugene Shvidler - Russian billionaire*](https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2009/oct/11/french-wine-chateau-thenac)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 9.53am GMT

block-time published-time 8.47am GMT

Britain has impounded a private jet at Farnborough airport as it investigates whether it has breached a [*flight ban over the UK*](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/business/0/sanctions-have-west-imposed-hurting-russia/).

Transport Secretary Grant Shapps told BBC Breakfast that [*the UK's new aviation sanctions*](https://www.theguardian.com/business/live/2022/mar/09/russian-bond-default-fitch-sanctions-oil-companies-ftse-dax-business-live?filterKeyEvents=false&page=with:block-62285dd28f0806dde1f8afd0#block-62285dd28f0806dde1f8afd0) would close gaps allowing people to get around the ban on Russian airlines and private jets.

"However there were potential loopholes and I also wanted to make the issue a criminal one, so last night I also signed a law which closes off some of those loopholes to do with trying to work out the ownership of some of these aircraft.

"There is one such aircraft on the ground at Farnborough that I have essentially impounded whilst we carry out further investigations, for the last few days.

It's very important that we have the laws available to enable that to happen."

[*The Daily Telegraph reports*](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2022/03/08/grant-shapps-impounds-private-jet-linked-roman-abramovichs-oligarch/) that the jet is a Bombardier Global Express linked to oligarch Eugene Shvidler, the billionaire oil businessman and close friend of Roman Abramovich, and that officials are investigating if the jet or Mr Shvidler falls within the definition under [*the sanction order*](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/business/0/sanctions-have-west-imposed-hurting-russia/).

enltrA private jet linked to a Russian oligarch friend of Roman Abramovich was "impounded" on the orders of Grant Shapps amid claims it may have breached a flight ban over the UK. [*https://t.co/yTGIE8TDS6*](https://t.co/yTGIE8TDS6) [*pic.twitter.com/KDD4VhUDUR*](https://t.co/KDD4VhUDUR)

- Charles Hymas (@charleshymas) [*March 9, 2022*](https://twitter.com/charleshymas/status/1501436359717838852?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

The Telegraph says:

Sources said that establishing the true owner was complicated - and made more so by Mr Shvidler's residency, as a dual US-Russian citizen.

The Department for Transport was alerted soon after its landing at Farnborough Airport on Friday morning. It filed a flight plan on Monday and was due to depart on Tuesday, according to government sources.

In the early hours of Tuesday morning, the Transport Secretary ordered its foreign carrier permit be revoked, meaning that the jet could no longer leave the UK carrying passengers. It would have meant that Mr Shvidler was unable to leave the UK on his jet and would have to find alternative means to depart.

enltrEugene Shvidler's Jet LX-FLY Landed in Farnborough, England, GB. Apx. flt. time 5 Hours : 50 Mins. [*pic.twitter.com/p0zKMa7sO0*](https://t.co/p0zKMa7sO0)

- Russian Oligarch Jets (@RUOligarchJets) [*March 4, 2022*](https://twitter.com/RUOligarchJets/status/1499665180262817793?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

enltrPlaybook is told that last Friday, a private jet connected to Russian billionaire Eugene Shvidler - an ally of Putin crony Roman Abramovich - landed at Farnborough airport

- lee harpin (@lmharpin) [*March 9, 2022*](https://twitter.com/lmharpin/status/1501468416309448705?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 8.57am GMT

block-time published-time 8.22am GMT

UK announces new aviation sanctions against Russia

The UK government has unveiled new aviation sanctions against Russia this morning.

[*The new rules*](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-strengthens-ban-on-russia-aircraft-and-introduces-new-trade-sanctions) gives the power to detain any Russian aircraft in the UK, and includes any aircraft owned, operated or chartered by anyone connected with Russia or [*designated individuals or entities*](https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/uk-sanctions-on-russia).

The current overflight and landing ban on Russian aircraft is also being strengthened, making it a criminal offence for any to fly or land in the United Kingdom.

Related: [*Russian planes that enter UK airspace could be detained by government*](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/mar/08/russian-planes-that-enter-uk-airspace-could-be-detained-by-government)

The UK will also ban exports of aviation or space-related goods and technology to Russia, including technical assistance.

UK companies will also be banned from related providing insurance and re-insurance services. That means cover is withdrawn on existing policies and UK insurers and reinsurers will be unable to pay claims in respect of existing policies in these sectors, the Foreign Office says.

Foreign Secretary Liz Truss said the new ***measures*** will further tighten the growing economic pressure on Russia:

Banning Russian flagged planes from the UK and making it a criminal offence to fly them will inflict more economic pain on Russia and those close to the Kremlin.

Last night, transport secretary Grant Shapps tweeted the move would "suffocate [Vladimir] Putin's cronies' ability to continue living as normal while thousands of innocent people die".

enltrBREAKING: I have made it a criminal offence for ANY Russian aircraft to enter UK airspace and now HMG can detain these jets. We will suffocate Putin's cronies' ability to continue living as normal while thousands of innocent people die. [*pic.twitter.com/cYjreNSYRz*](https://t.co/cYjreNSYRz)

- Rt Hon Grant Shapps MP (@grantshapps) [*March 8, 2022*](https://twitter.com/grantshapps/status/1501310674911342594?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 7.56am GMT

Introduction: ?Fitch says Russia debt default imminent

Good morning, and welcome to our rolling coverage of the world economy, the financial markets, the eurozone and business.

Russia is on the brink of defaulting on its debts, rating agency Fitch has warned, as the sanctions imposed since the Ukraine war batter its economy.

Fitch has downgraded Russia's sovereign debt to its second lowest level, down six notches to C. That's just one step above borrowers who have defaulted.

The agency warns:

The 'C' rating reflects Fitch's view that a sovereign default is imminent.

enltr [*#UPDATE*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/UPDATE?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) Ratings agency Fitch again downgrades Russia's sovereign debt rating farther into junk territory from "B" to "C", saying the decision reflects the view that a default is "imminent". "Junk" status is the category of countries at risk of not being able to repay their debt [*pic.twitter.com/TNCfu3JFNb*](https://t.co/TNCfu3JFNb)

- AFP News Agency (@AFP) [*March 9, 2022*](https://twitter.com/AFP/status/1501380580541288450?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

Fitch said that developments since it last downgraded Russia on March 2nd had further undermined the country's willingness to service government debt.

It points to President Vladimir Putin's decree last week that Russian creditors can use roubles to pay some foreign currency debts, and the country's central bank's restriction of some rouble-denominated debt coupon transfers.

The intensifying sanctions could also lead Moscow to default on its obligations, Fitch says:

The further ratcheting up of sanctions, and proposals that could limit trade in energy, increase the probability of a policy response by Russia that includes at least selective non-payment of its sovereign debt obligations.

The statement comes after the US and UK said they will ban Russian oil, as the economic response to the ***invasion*** of Ukraine continued to ratchet up.

Related: [*UK to phase out Russian oil imports by 2023 and explore ending gas imports*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/08/no-10-plans-cut-russian-fossil-fuels-use)

Russia is due to make its next debt repayment on March 16 -- though it would have a 30-day grace period to meet the coupon payments.

Western sanctions, including a ban on Russia's central bank from accessing foreign currency reserves, have preventing Putin from accessing [*much of the $630bn war chest built up in foreign currencies before the* ***invasion***](https://www.ft.com/content/526ea75b-5b45-48d8-936d-dcc3cec102d8).

Related: [*Sanctions and boycotts: how the west has responded to the* ***invasion*** *of Ukraine*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/02/sanctions-boycotts-west-response-russian-invasion-ukraine)

Yesterday, a flurry of major Western countries suspended business in Russia, with Starbucks, Coca-Cola, Pepsi and McDonald's joining the pullout following the Ukraine war.

Related: [*McDonald's, Starbucks, Coca-Cola and Pepsi suspend Russian operations*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/08/mcdonalds-bows-to-pressure-and-closes-all-its-russian-restaurants)

Shell announced plans to withdraw from Russian oil and gas and Unilever has said it will stop importing and exporting its products with Russia:

Related: [*Shell to halt buying Russian oil and gas and Unilever to stop sales in Russia*](https://www.theguardian.com/business/2022/mar/08/shell-to-halt-buying-russian-oil-and-gas-and-close-all-service-stations-in-country)

European markets are set to open higher, with the FTSE 100 on track to jump more than 1% at the open.

enltr [*#Wednesday*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/Wednesday?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) mkts: [*#Europe*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/Europe?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) expected up but looks fragile. China down [*#HangSang*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/HangSang?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) new 5½ yr low. List of Co's out of [*#Russia*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/Russia?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) grows. [*#Oil*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/Oil?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) up as US UK EU plans to ban Russian output. [*#Gold*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/Gold?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) near record highs. LME halts [*#Nickel*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/Nickel?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) trade - [*#China*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/China?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) trader looses billions in Nickel short. [*pic.twitter.com/HugYHdRw1S*](https://t.co/HugYHdRw1S)

- Jeremy Naylor (@JeremyNaylor\_IG) [*March 9, 2022*](https://twitter.com/JeremyNaylor_IG/status/1501447466759204874?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) The agenda 3pm GMT: US JOLTs job openings total in January3.30pm GMT: IEA weekly US oil inventory figures

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6919 2022-03-09T07:56:15Z false false 2022-03-09T23:36:32Z false UK theguardian.com [*https://www.theguardian.com/p/yxdha*](https://www.theguardian.com/p/yxdha) false

true [*https://media.guim.co.uk/582796307b1c1e6d30d09f387d8c4b0b58d3894c/0\_12\_4500\_2701/500.jpg*](https://media.guim.co.uk/582796307b1c1e6d30d09f387d8c4b0b58d3894c/0_12_4500_2701/500.jpg) false en true A late update: Wall Street drove the global rally onwards, with its best day in around 21 months. The S&P 500 index of US company stocks has closed 2.5% higher at 4,277 points, up 107 points. That's its biggest one-day percentage gain since June 2020, with financial stocks and tech firms rebounding. That's quite a rebound, after New York saw its biggest drop in over a year on Monday: Kyle Rodda of says: Narrative. Flow. Technicals. Sentiment. In the short-run, markets are always driven by these factors more than anything else. In a highly uncertain and volatile environment, this fact only becomes more relevant. For these reasons, it's why we saw what was the biggest one day rally in US stocks since June 2020. The key headline sparking it all were reports that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky is willing to commit to political neutrality - that is, not getting into bed with NATO in any way -- in exchange for a respect of existing Ukrainian borders. If this seems like a possibly trivial and ineffectual commitment, and one that has been effectively made prior to this point, that's because it is, and has been. However, last night it capture the hearts of market participants, setting of a relief rally in equities and the Euro, and a drop in the major ***invasion*** trades in oil and gold, with the shift in sentiment setting off a short-term technical reversal as flows moved in the opposite direction to the prevailing trends. Shares were also boosted by the sharp fall in oil prices on Wednesday, with US crude plunging 12%. Oil's fall followed reports that the United Arab Emirates could favour an increase in output by Opec, to address market turmoil. However... energy minister, Suhail al-Mazrouei, has now tweeted that the UAE is committed to the existing OPEC+ schedule of production increases, saying: "The UAE believes in the value OPEC+ brings to the oil market" A recap.... Rating agency Fitch has warned that a Russian sovereign debt default is imminent, as it slashed the country's credit rating to its second-lowest notch. Fitch predicted that the pain of escalating sanctions raised the proospect of at least a 'selective non-payment' of its sovereign debt obligations, after the US and the UK both announced bans on Russian oil imports on Tuesday. Russians are already feeling the economic pain of the crisis. Inflation jumped by over 2% in the first week of the Ukraine war, with consumer prices now 10% higher than a year ago. With the economy heading into a deep recession, there is clearly much more trouble ahead, with the rouble weakening again this morning. European stock markets have staged a dramatic rebound today, in their strongest recovery in two years. Germany's DAX led the way with an 8% gain, as anxiety over the crisis appeared to ease. In London, banks, travel companies and Russian miners all had a strong day, recovering some of the major losses in the last two weeks. Oil prices have tumbled, with crude down around 13% tonight on optimism that Opec might boost production. The move has calmed some concerns about inflationary pressures hitting the global economy. But analysts have cautioned that the markets may be too optimistic, given the air strike on a Children's hospital in Mariupol today, and Western fears that Vladimir Putin could use chemical weapons on Kyiv. The EU has added more names to its sanctions list ,including Russian Formula One driver Nikita Mazepin and Russian business leaders. While the UK government unveiled new aviation sanctions against Russia, toughening up a ban on Russian planes flying or landing in the UK alongside powers to detain any Russian aircraft in the UK. One private jet has already been seized, and could be linked to billionaire Eugene Shvidler, the close friend and business partner of Roman Abramovich. The business backlash against Russia gathered more pace, with the owner of KFC and Pizza Hut has joined the ranks of Western brands suspending its operations in Russia. Kentucky-based Yum! Brands is suspending 70 KFC company-owned restaurants in Russia and finalising an agreement to suspend all 50 Pizza Hut outlets in partnership with its master franchisee. Mothercare, Heineken and Universal Music Group also announced they were halting operations in Russia. Tobacco firm Imperial Brands also announced it will halt operations in Russia, but British American Tobacco will continue selling cigarettes in Russia: While some directors are quitting the boards of Russian firms, others are holding firm: Fertiliser giant Yara has temporarily cut output at two European plants, due to soaring energy prices. With fears of food shortages already rising, Irish dairy and beef farmers are being urged to start growing crops. ***Agriculture*** ministers from G7 countries including Britain's George Eustice will meet on Friday to discuss grain shortages and food price volatility amid the war in Ukraine. Elsewhere, the US labour market remains tight with 11.3m job vacancies at American companies in January. UK households are the gloomist about financial conditions in a decade, as inflation squeezes incomes. Also: Goodnight. GW The irony was not lost on some of the Muscovites who were queueing outside a McDonald's on Tuesday evening, just after the company announced it was temporarily closing its nearly 850 locations in Russia. "My dad once told me how he waited in a long line when McDonald's opened when he was young. And now I ended up also queueing, but for a very different reason. History can be funny," said Dmitry Grigoryev. When McDonald's opened its doors in Moscow's Pushkin Square in 1990, a queue thousands-long formed. Inside and outside the country, the arrival of the golden arches was seen as a definite sign of the end of cold war. Russians' embrace of western fast food, pop culture and jeans came to signify the country's integration into the global capitalist system. Despite rising authoritarianism under Vladimir Putin over the last decade, international brands remained eager to keep their doors open in Moscow and other big cities with a sizable middle class. But Russia's ***invasion*** of Ukraine on the morning of 24 February changed everything. Since then there has been an unparalleled exit of international firms, among them Toyota, Heineken, Nike, Apple, Exxon, Ford, Zara, Netflix and Ikea. "The exodus of companies is really stunning," said Maria Shagina, an international sanctions specialist at the Finnish Institute of International Affairs and the Geneva International Sanctions Network. "The speed at which this is happening is unknown to modern history. Russia is being completely decoupled from the global commercial, technological and banking communities." Here's the full piece: A Formula One driver and a Russian previously linked to a £300m mansion that is London's second largest house after Buckingham Palace are among 160 individuals added to an EU sanctions list designed to squeeze Vladimir Putin's "closest circle". Nikita Mazepin's contract with the Haas F1 team was terminated after the ***invasion*** of Ukraine. Haas F1 was sponsored by the Russian chemical firm Uralchem, whose general director is Mazepin's father, Dmitry Arkadievich Mazepin. Also on the updated list is Andrey Guryev, a fertiliser Russian billionaire, revealed in 2015 to be the beneficiary of an offshore company that owned Witanhurst, a 25-bedroom property in Highgate,north London. They are among 14 oligarchs and businesspeople on an expanded list of individuals announced on Wednesday whose assets in the EU will be frozen. EU restrictive ***measures*** imposed in response to the ***invasion*** of Ukraine and before that to the annexation of Crimea in 2014 now apply to more than 30 Russian businesspeople. This compares to the UK's sanctions list, which has named just 10 oligarchs since 2014. Here's the full story: We have seen some extraordinary moves in global stocks today, says Neil Wilson, chief market analyst at Markets.com. But he also cautions that markets may be getting ahead of themselves if they're optimistic about the Ukraine crisis, especially given a Russian airstrike has reportedly hit a maternity hospital in Mariupol: Badly beaten down sectors enjoying the flip but it does not look reasonable - it's like the war ended, and it clearly hasn't. If anything the strike on a maternity hospital paints an ugly, dark picture of where this is going. Russia is goading West into no-fly zone. The market has latched on to [Ukrainian president] Zelenskiy's remarks on compromising and comments from Russia's Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova, who said the Kremlin has no intention of occupying Ukraine or overthrowing its government. This could be a significant shift...but events on the ground don't match with the rhetoric for now. I remember when Macron thought he'd prevented an ***invasion***...just words but the machines are trading the headlines. British American Tobacco will continue selling cigarettes in Russia, defying a gathering movement among global brands to halt operations there in response to the ***invasion*** of Ukraine. The London-based cigarette manufacturer, whose brands include Lucky Strike and Rothmans, said it would "continue to operate" in Russia, one of its key growth markets for cigarettes and heated tobacco, according to the company's latest annual report. It will suspend capital investment and scale back marketing and business activities but stopped short of following its smaller British rival, Imperial Brands, by halting its operations altogether (as covered earlier). Oil prices are continuing to slide, with Brent crude now down 11% or $14 at $114 per barrel. That's a very sharp move, but still leaves oil higher than before the Ukraine ***invasion*** (which pushed Brent over $100/barrel). Hopes that the Opec group could boost production could be pushing the oil price lower. Retuers reports that: The United Arab Emirates (UAE) favors an oil production increase and will be encouraging OPEC to consider higher output, the UAE's ambassador to Washington said on Wednesday. "We favor production increases and will be encouraging OPEC to consider higher production levels," Ambassador Yousuf Al Otaiba said in a statement tweeted by the UAE Embassy in Washington. U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken also said on Wednesday that the UAE was giving support for increased oil production. European stock markets have recorded their best session since the turmoil of the Covid-19 pandemic two years ago, even as the Russia-Ukraine war continues to rage. Tthe Stoxx 600 index of leading European companies has gained 4.7%, its biggest daily gain since March 2020, as stocks recovered after heavy selling. Car stocks gained 9.5%, while the travel sector jumped over 8% and the banking sector finished 7.5% higher. Germany's DAX index jumped by nearly 8%, just days after falling into bear-market territory on fears the German economy would be particularly hit by the impact of Russian sanctions, soaring commodity prices, and possible disruption to energy supplies. The mood in the markets has swung around today, and stocks are enjoying a major rally, explains analyst David Madden of Equiti Capital: The ***invasion*** started almost two weeks ago, and stock markets have been hammered. Yesterday, the US announced plans to ban the purchase of Russian energy, and the UK are aiming to phase out oil imports from Russia too. The fact that Western governments seem to be carrying out an economic war against Russia, rather than military conflict, has helped the overall sentiment. If the violence doesn't escalate further, it is possible that markets will continue to stabilise. The DAX is up as a mixture of bargain hunting and short covering is driving up the market. Germany's equity benchmark is arguably the most exposed of the major European stock markets to the Ukraine-Russia situation, and now that sentiment is improving, the index is driving higher. In the City, the FTSE index has closed 3.2% higher as investors put aside some of their anxiety over inflation and the economic cost of the Russia-Ukraine war. The blue-chip share index rallied by 226 points to end at 7191 points, a strong rebound that recovers some of its recent losses. Financial stocks rebounded, as the drop in the oil price today reassured markets [Brent crude is now down over 6% today]. Travel stocks also recovered, with British Airways parent company IAG gaining 11%. Russia-focused miners led the risers. Gold and metal producer Polymetal surged 69% from a record low yesterday after reporting today that its operations in Russia and Kazakhstan were not affected by the crises, while Evraz (whose stock also tumbled when the war began) gained almost 19%. Russian households are already beginning to feel the pinch from Western sanctions imposed after Vladimir Putin's ***invasion*** of Ukraine, with economists warning that inflation in the country could reach the highest levels seen in at least two decades. Official figures published by Moscow this afternoon show the collapse in the rouble led to a sharp rise in weekly consumer price inflation, highlighting the early impact from the US, UK and the EU freezing the central bank of Russia's assets and hurting its ability to defend the currency. Hitting ordinary Russians hard, consumer prices rose at 2.2% in the week to the 4 March - more than twice the rate seen during the collapses in the rouble during the 2008 financial crisis and in 2014 when a crash in the oil price and western sanctions imposed after Putin's annexation of Crimea hit the country. Although officials only produce a limited breakdown, the release showed prices of new domestic cars rose 17.1% and TVs by 15% on a weekly basis. Inflation rose in February at 9.2%, showing how a squeeze on households before the ***invasion*** was already underway. However, economists at the consultancy Capital Economics said Russian inflation could surge further still close to 20% this year - the highest rate since 2001. Liam Peach, an emerging markets economist at Capital Economics, explains: "The collapse in the ruble in response to the war in Ukraine and imposition of sanctions on Russia will push up inflation significantly in the coming months. This will be compounded by restrictions on international trade and goods shortages," "Since 4 March, the rouble has continued to fall and reports of disruption to Russian exports and imports have become more widespread, so this is likely to be just the start of the inflation pressure feeding through." The jump in Russia's inflation rate is a clear sign of the damage being caused to its economy by the war in Ukraine. Here's Bloomberg's take: Russia is headed for one of its biggest inflation spikes this century after waves of sanctions over the ***invasion*** of Ukraine touched off the collapse of the ruble and disrupted trade. In the first full week since the military offensive began late in February, prices for new domestic cars soared over 17% and the cost of television sets jumped 15%. Some medicines and vegetables became 5% to 7% more expensive in the seven days ending March 4. Overall, inflation in the period reached 2.2%, according to a report by the Federal Statistics Service on Wednesday, the sharpest weekly increase since it started tracking the data in 2008 and more than double the previous record. On an annual basis, price growth was 10.4% as of March 4, according to the Economy Ministry. Inflation in Russia has accelerated to its highest level in seven years, as the slump in the rouble drove up the cost of living. Annual inflation in Russia accelerated to 9.15% in February from 8.73% in January, its highest in seven years, the latest official statistics show. The cost of living squeeze accelerated after the Ukraine war began. In the week to March 4th, weekly inflation rose to 2.22% from 0.45% in the preceding week, as the collapse in the currency pushed up costs of imports. That pushed Russia's annual consumer inflation to 10.42% as of March 4th, the economy ministry reports. Reuters has more details: According to the Rosstat data released on Wednesday, prices on nearly everything from bread to gasoline have spiked, with cost of sugar and cereals such as buckwheat - top products that Russians stockpile - showing some of the biggest increases of 20.6% and 18%, respectively. Yet the biggest cost rise was in construction materials such as wallpaper and bathroom tiles, with prices spiking by 22.5%, indicating an increased demand to finish renovation projects amid booming costs for imported goods as the rouble was falling. In the US, job vacancies remained high in January as firms continued to struggle to hire workers. There were 11.3 million job openings at US firms in January, the latest JOLTS survey showed, ahead of forecast of 10.9m. It's a slight drop on December's upwardly revised 11.45m vacancies, but suggests there were still labor shortages at the start of this year, as the omicron variant hit the economy. Investment manager Pamplona Capital Management is cutting its ties with LetterOne Holdings, the $22bn investment group whose largest shareholders were sanctioned by the European Union following the ***invasion*** of Ukraine. LetterOne is one of Pamplona's limited partners, but Pamplona has decided to redeem those interests after concluding that the links were "increasingly challenging". It will return the money invested in its funds by LetterOne. LetterOne was founded by Russian billionaire oligarch Mikhail Fridman and partners, with proceeds from the sale of oil group TNK-BP. Fridman and fellow oligarch Petr Aven, LetterOne's two biggest shareholders, were sanctioned by the EU, and stepped down from the group last week after their shares were frozen. Pamplona says that once the LetterOne redemption has been carried out, it will have no direct or indirect exposure to any Russian capital. While Pamplona has received clear guidance that LetterOne is not a sanctioned entity, the ongoing crisis in Ukraine makes such relationships increasingly challenging for our portfolio companies, their management teams, customers, employees, and counterparties throughout Europe and the rest of the world. Any such redemption will be conducted in an orderly manner and in accordance with every appropriate regulatory and counterparty consent. On Monday, three more Russian billionares resigned from LetterOne's board, with the company also pledging a $150m donation to "support the urgent work under way to help those affected by the war in Ukraine". The New York stock markets has opened higher, following Europe's lead, as stocks recover some of their recent losses. The Dow Jones industrial average of 30 large US companies is up 2%, or 649 points, at 33,281. The broader S&P 500 index has gained 2.2%, with travel companies, financial stocks, tech companies and consumer goods and service providers rallying. On Monday night, the Wall Street benchmark had sunk to its lowest closing level since June 2021, as the Ukraine crisis continued to rock markets. Today, there's relief that oil prices have extended their earlier losses, with US crude down 4.6% at $118 per barrel, and Brent crude 5% lower at $121.30 per barrel. European stock markets are holding their gains too. The blue-chip FTSE 100 still up over 2%, even as oil stocks and miners decline as commodity prices ease. Robin Brooks, chief economist at the Institute of International Finance, forecasts that Russia's economy will shrink by a massive 15% this year. That chart shows how financial conditions in Russia have tightened dramatically since the Ukraine war began, with the rouble tumbling to record lows and the central bank more than doubling interest rates to 20% last week. Global financial conditions have also hit their tightest levels since early 2016, Goldman Sachs data showed this week, after Russia's ***invasion*** of Ukraine sparked market turmoil. Financial conditions reflect the availability of funding in an economy, and are a guide to future growth as they affect how companies and households spend, save and invest. Irish dairy and beef farmers are being urged to start growing crops as ***agriculture*** ministers from G7 countries including Britain's George Eustice meet on Friday to discuss grain shortages and food price volatility amid the war in Ukraine. There are rising fears that consumers will face price hikes on staples such as bread in addition to rises in fuel, with grain supplies disrupted by the conflict. Ukraine, once known as the breadbasket of Europe, said on Wednesday it was banning exports of rye, barley, buckwheat, millet, sugar, salt and meat for the rest of the year. Together with Russia it supplies 30% of global wheat and barley fuelling fears of shortages not seen since the second world war when consumers in Britain were encouraged to plant vegetables in gardens, yards and on rooftops. Government data shows Ukraine supplies 20% of the UK's cereals. Vikki Campbell, a market specialist at the ***Agriculture*** and Horticulture Development Board (AHDB), said the price of wheat futures - grain to be bought on 22 May - had gone up on six consecutive days. On 18 February, days before war, wheat was trading in London at £220 a tonne, but had surged to £289.50 when the market closed on Tuesday. More details here: Sky Vegas has been fined £1.2m for sending free casino "spins" to recovering addicts during the industry's annual Safer Gambling Week. The fine comes at a sensitive time for the British gambling industry, which has been at pains to show it has improved its attitude to social responsibility. The government is in the middle of a review of gambling laws, with proposals to be published in a white paper expected within weeks. Yet major brands have been hit with a series of penalties for failing to protect vulnerable people in recent weeks. 888 Casino, which is in the ***process*** of buying William Hill's UK assets, was fined £9.4m last week for multiple failings that led to customers racking up huge losses during the depths of the Covid pandemic. BetVictor was fined £2m in February for failures in fairness, money-laundering controls and social responsibility. The new fine for Sky Vegas, which is owned by the global gambling firm Flutter, comes after it sent a promotional offer of "Bet £5 get 100 free spins" to 41,395 customers who had voluntarily self-excluded from gambling in an effort to stop. A further 249,159 customers who had unsubscribed from the operator's marketing emails also received the promotion. "Here at Sky Vegas, we love the unexpected," one marketing email read. "That's right. Simply opt in, spend £5 and claim your 100 free spins. The best part? Whatever you win is yours to keep - that's the fun in fair!" The promotional message featured graphics of slot machines and the slogan: "Entertainment like no other". The incident, revealed by the Guardian in November last year, led addicts to warn that receiving such messages could have triggered a relapse. Here's the full story: In the UK, Gatwick airport is expecting 3 million passengers a month this summer as the easing of travel restrictions and the return of takeoff and landing slot rules help the airport recover from its pandemic slump. The airport reported narrower losses of just over £1m a day in 2021, down £95m on 2020 to £371m, despite passenger numbers falling further to 6.3 million last year. Gatwick is expecting more than 30 million passengers in 2022, operating at 85% capacity in the summer, aided by the return of slot rules that ensure airlines use their alloted takeoff and landing slots at least 70% of the time. The south terminal, mothballed to save money, will reopen at the end of March, when British Airways will also return to short-haul flying from the airport. Gatwick's biggest airline customer, easyJet, is planning to expand to record levels with 120 routes this summer, partly using slots leased from BA. The airport said the decision to restore slot regulations, paused in 2020, would "restore discipline" and be more efficient and economically beneficial for the region but denied it would lead to "ghost flights". The chief executive, Stewart Wingate, said load factors on flights were already high before the new rules come into effect, adding: "My biggest worry has been having a ghost terminal." He said the end of travel restrictions had increased demand, and businesses at the airport had been recruiting for more than 2,000 new posts over recent months. Wingate said the airport was "very alert" to the risks from the Russian ***invasion*** of Ukraine but said at present: "in terms of our business, presuming that the conflict doesn't escalate, there is a very small direct exposure. On oil prices, the majority of large airlines are well hedged." The surge in natural gas prices, which intensified after the Ukraine war began, has forced fertiliser giant Yara to temporarily cut output at two European plants. Norway's Yara, one of the world's largest fertiliser makers, is curtailing its ammonia and urea output at its plants in Ferrara, in Italy, and Le Havre, in France. It says the move is due to Europe's record gas prices, adding: Including optimisation and maintenance at other production facilities, Yara's European ammonia and urea production is expected to be operating at approximately 45% of capacity by the end of this week. Yara will continue to monitor the situation and to the extent possible use its global production system to keep supplying customers and secure continuity in food supply chains, but curtailing production where necessary due to challenging market conditions. Farmers have warned that fertiliser prices have risen sharply, pushing up costs, and possibly leading to lower crop yields this year if farms buy less. In the UK, the cost of living squeeze has pushed household financial confidence to its lowest in at least 10 years. A poll of consumer confidence from YouGov and economic consultancy CEBR found a sharp drop in household finances over the last month, and the outlook for the next year. Both ***measures*** are at their lowest mark since the index began a decade ago. Consumer confidence also fell, "in the face of rising energy bills and concerns about the impact of the Ukraine conflict on supplies". Here's the details: Consumer confidence dips by -2.4 points in February 2022 Household finance ***measures*** for the previous month (-9.2) and the year ahead (-19.3) see the worst scores in the near-ten-year history of the index House value metrics for the past 30 days (+3.7) and the next 12 months (+0.8) climb upwards for the fourth month in a row Susannah Streeter, senior investment and markets analyst at Hargreaves Lansdown, says: ''With the sanction screws turning ever tighter, and access to the depths of its war chest out of reach, Russia's financial system looks in even greater peril. The Fitch ratings agency has warned that the country is close to defaulting on its debts and is expected to miss a raft of bond payments. Russia has now retreated further into junk status, downgraded from B to C, as trade and financial restrictions bite. The country's deteriorating financial situation comes as more big consumer names take a short-term hit by suspending business in Russia to protect their long-term reputations, with consumers calling for boycotts otherwise, she adds. Ukraine's government has banned the export of wheat, oats and other staples that are crucial for global food supplies as authorities try to ensure they can feed people during Russia's intensifying war, Associated Press reports. New rules on ***agricultural*** exports introduced this week also prohibit the export of millet, buckwheat, sugar, live cattle, and meat and other "byproducts" from cattle, according to a government announcement. The export ban is needed to prevent a "humanitarian crisis in Ukraine," stabilize the market and "meet the needs of the population in critical food products," Roman Leshchenko, Ukraine's minister of agrarian and food policy, said in a statement posted on the government website and his Facebook page. It's the latest sign that the Russia's ***invasion*** of Ukraine threatens the food supply and livelihoods of people in Europe, Africa and Asia who rely on the farmlands of the Black Sea region - known as the "breadbasket of the world." Russia and Ukraine together supply nearly a third of the world's wheat and barley exports, which have soared in price since the ***invasion***. The products they send are made into bread, noodles and animal feed around the world, and any shortages could create food insecurity in places like Egypt and Lebanon. The export ban will likely reduce global food supplies just when prices are at their highest level since 2011. The rouble weakened in Moscow and offshore this morning, hitting new record lows against the dollar and euro in Moscow, Reuters reports. The rouble was more than 10% weaker than its Friday close at 117.2 to the dollar on the Moscow Exchange, as trading resumed after a bank holiday. Gas prices have eased back from their record levels earlier this week, but remain ***exceptionally*** high. The UK wholesale gas contract for delivery next month has dropped 17% this morning, to 421p per therm. On Monday gas briefly hit a record 800p/therm on fears of supply disruption to Europe from Russia, but has dropped back since. However, it's still almost 10 times higher than a year ago, following the energy crunch which is hitting the economy. Oil has also dipped a little. Brent crude is down 2% at $125 per barrel, away from the 14-year high of $139/barrel seen at the start of the week. Brent was under $100/barrel before the Ukraine ***invasion*** last month. A private plane with suspected links to Russia has been impounded at Farnborough airport in Hampshire just hours before it was due to fly to Dubai, our political correspondent Aubrey Allegretti writes. The aircraft was detained on the orders of the transport secretary, Grant Shapps, late on Tuesday and investigators are looking into its connection with a billionaire oil tycoon, Eugene Shvidler (as flagged here), a friend of Roman Abramovich. A UK government source said Shvidler was "free to continue his journey by other means" after the plane was impounded. They said the plane would be able to leave Farnborough only if no link with Russia was established, and the ***process*** was likely to take longer than a day. The owner of KFC and Pizza Hut, along with Mothercare, Heineken, Universal Music Group and Imperial Brands, have all become the latest companies to pause business in Russia following its ***invasion*** of Ukraine. Kentucky-based Yum! Brands is suspending 70 KFC company-owned restaurants in Russia and finalising an agreement to suspend all 50 Pizza Hut outlets in partnership with its master franchisee. Yum! has 1,000 KFC restaurants in Russia, most of which are run by franchisees. The company had already previously suspended all investment and restaurant development in Russia. Pizza Hut opened its first Russian outlet at the start of the 1990s and the former leader of the Soviet Union Mikhail Gorbachev was featured in one of its television adverts in 1998. Heineken is stopping the production and sale of its own-brand beer in Russia, after previously halting all new investments and exports to the country. The Dutch brewer is taking immediate steps to ringfence its Russian operations from its wider business. Also on Wednesday, Universal Music Group said it was "suspending all operations in Russia" and closing its offices in the country "effective immediately". Here's the full story: Tobacco group Imperial Brands has suspended all operations in Russia, including production at its factory in Volgograd and sales and marketing activity. It says: This decision comes amid a highly challenging environment in Russia as a result of international sanctions and consequential severe disruption. We will be supporting our Russian employees, who continue to be paid while operations are paused. The maker of Winston cigarettes, Gauloises and Backwoods cigars adds it had already suspended operations in Ukraine to "prioritise the safety and wellbeing" of its 600 employees there. European stock markets are rallying this morning, with the FTSE 100 index of blue-chip shares jumping over 2%. Travel stocks and banks are among the risers, having been badly hit by the slump in financial markets since the war in Ukraine began. Airline group IAG, engineering group Melrose, and Lloyds Banking Group have all gained around 7%. Gold and silver producer Polymetal has surged 42%, from a record low yesteday, after reporting its operations in Russia and Kazakhstan continue undisrupted, although sales of bullion in Russia have been impacted by sanctions imposed by the US, EU and UK. Having gained 150 points to 7,115 points this morning, the FTSE 100 is still around 5% below its levels in mid-February before the ***invasion***. European stocks are also stronger, with Germany's DAX and France's CAC share indexes up almost 5% each. "Markets across Europe saw strong gains on Wednesday following decisions by the UK, US and EU to ban or curb Russian oil and gas imports, thereby putting further financial pressure on Russia," says Russ Mould, investment director at AJ Bell: "After a strong run for commodity producers on the market, names like Rio Tinto and Glencore slipped back on the FTSE 100, with investors instead fishing for bargains among more beaten-up consumer-facing stocks including International Consolidated Airlines and Primark Associated British Foods. "In Germany, the DAX jumped 3.8%, led by another consumer-facing stock, Adidas, as well as Deutsche Post. Adidas' shares were helped by expectations of a sales recovery in China and guidance for improved operating margins, but it set the tone for many companies to come by quantifying the expected hit from halting business in Russia, which in its case is up to 250 million. Mothercare has joined the growing list of companies turning their backs on Russia following the war in Ukraine. The parenting company has decided to suspend all business in Russia, including shipments of products, and its local partner will immediately pause operations in some 120 stores and online. The move will hit the group - as Russia contributes around 20-25% of its worldwide retail sales. Shares in Mothercare have fallen 25% this morning. Eugene Shvidler, the billionaire linked to the impounded jet in Farnborough, made his fortune in oil during the privatisation of Russian industry in the 1990s. Shvidler worked closely with Roman Abramovich, and was chief executive of oil company Sibneft. Sibneft was privatised through the controversial loans-for-shares auction in which Russian assets were sold off below their true value. Shvidler chairs Millhouse Capital, which manages the assets of Ambramovich and his partners, and which sold its 73% stake in Sibneft to Gazprom for $13bn back in 2005. Shvidler has been called Abramovich's best friend; back in 2006, Abramovich gave him a superyacht, Le Grand Bleu -- a 113m vessel so immense it comes with two smaller yachts (a 22 meter sailboat and a 21 meter powerboat), and a helipad. Back in 2009, the Observer ran a fascinating interview with Eugene Shvidler, in which he explained that Abramovich gave him a flock of Highland sheep for his 45th birthday. "A friend of ours owns a place in Scotland, and when I went there I liked the sheep," Shvidler says by way of explanation. What did he like about them particularly? "They had a special shaped head." The sheep were then shipped to Shvidler's 16th-century manor house in Bergerac, Chateau Thénac, the 200-hectare French vineyard. Shvidler, who holds a masters degree in applied mathematics, an MBA in finance and MS in international tax, came across as "surprisingly unshowy" for a billionaire, wrote Elizabeth Day: Although he has flown in by private jet from his family home in Cobham, Surrey, and we are shortly to enjoy a mouth-watering three-course meal knocked up by his personal chef, these outward manifestations of his wealth are the most extravagant thing about him. He is short, a little bit plump and wears nondescript but impeccable clothes: carefully pressed trousers, a brown-black jumper and leather trainers laced up over tiny feet. As we walk through the rows of leafy vines, each one bowed down with the weight of grapes ready to harvest, Shvidler looks towards the château's mottled brick walls surrounded by lush green lawns and rose bushes. "Here it doesn't matter who you know," he says simply. He abhors the sort of flashiness that is often reported in the media as being synonymous with an oligarch's lifestyle. "Ninety-nine per cent of what is written is bullshit," he says. Later one of his employees will tell me that an oft-repeated story about Abramovich spending £4,000 hiring a private jet to fly him sushi in Azerbaijan is untrue: Abramovich has been a vegetarian for years. "Oligarch is just a nonsense word," says Shvidler. "What does it mean? I don't like it." Yes, but does he actually have leather floors in his Belgravia mansion? He rolls his eyes. "We have leather, but it's not me. It was the designer before we bought the house." Britain has impounded a private jet at Farnborough airport as it investigates whether it has breached a flight ban over the UK. Transport Secretary Grant Shapps told BBC Breakfast that the UK's new aviation sanctions would close gaps allowing people to get around the ban on Russian airlines and private jets. "However there were potential loopholes and I also wanted to make the issue a criminal one, so last night I also signed a law which closes off some of those loopholes to do with trying to work out the ownership of some of these aircraft. "There is one such aircraft on the ground at Farnborough that I have essentially impounded whilst we carry out further investigations, for the last few days. It's very important that we have the laws available to enable that to happen." The Daily Telegraph reports that the jet is a Bombardier Global Express linked to oligarch Eugene Shvidler, the billionaire oil businessman and close friend of Roman Abramovich, and that officials are investigating if the jet or Mr Shvidler falls within the definition under the sanction order. The Telegraph says: Sources said that establishing the true owner was complicated - and made more so by Mr Shvidler's residency, as a dual US-Russian citizen. The Department for Transport was alerted soon after its landing at Farnborough Airport on Friday morning. It filed a flight plan on Monday and was due to depart on Tuesday, according to government sources. In the early hours of Tuesday morning, the Transport Secretary ordered its foreign carrier permit be revoked, meaning that the jet could no longer leave the UK carrying passengers. It would have meant that Mr Shvidler was unable to leave the UK on his jet and would have to find alternative means to depart. The UK government has unveiled new aviation sanctions against Russia this morning. The new rules gives the power to detain any Russian aircraft in the UK, and includes any aircraft owned, operated or chartered by anyone connected with Russia or designated individuals or entities. The current overflight and landing ban on Russian aircraft is also being strengthened, making it a criminal offence for any to fly or land in the United Kingdom. The UK will also ban exports of aviation or space-related goods and technology to Russia, including technical assistance. UK companies will also be banned from related providing insurance and re-insurance services. That means cover is withdrawn on existing policies and UK insurers and reinsurers will be unable to pay claims in respect of existing policies in these sectors, the Foreign Office says. Foreign Secretary Liz Truss said the new ***measures*** will further tighten the growing economic pressure on Russia: Banning Russian flagged planes from the UK and making it a criminal offence to fly them will inflict more economic pain on Russia and those close to the Kremlin. Last night, transport secretary Grant Shapps tweeted the move would "suffocate [Vladimir] Putin's cronies' ability to continue living as normal while thousands of innocent people die". Good morning, and welcome to our rolling coverage of the world economy, the financial markets, the eurozone and business. Russia is on the brink of defaulting on its debts, rating agency Fitch has warned, as the sanctions imposed since the Ukraine war batter its economy. Fitch has downgraded Russia's sovereign debt to its second lowest level, down six notches to C. That's just one step above borrowers who have defaulted. The agency warns: The 'C' rating reflects Fitch's view that a sovereign default is imminent. Fitch said that developments since it last downgraded Russia on March 2nd had further undermined the country's willingness to service government debt. It points to President Vladimir Putin's decree last week that Russian creditors can use roubles to pay some foreign currency debts, and the country's central bank's restriction of some rouble-denominated debt coupon transfers. The intensifying sanctions could also lead Moscow to default on its obligations, Fitch says: The further ratcheting up of sanctions, and proposals that could limit trade in energy, increase the probability of a policy response by Russia that includes at least selective non-payment of its sovereign debt obligations. The statement comes after the US and UK said they will ban Russian oil, as the economic response to the ***invasion*** of Ukraine continued to ratchet up. Russia is due to make its next debt repayment on March 16 -- though it would have a 30-day grace period to meet the coupon payments. Western sanctions, including a ban on Russia's central bank from accessing foreign currency reserves, have preventing Putin from accessing much of the $630bn war chest built up in foreign currencies before the ***invasion***. Yesterday, a flurry of major Western countries suspended business in Russia, with Starbucks, Coca-Cola, Pepsi and McDonald's joining the pullout following the Ukraine war. Shell announced plans to withdraw from Russian oil and gas and Unilever has said it will stop importing and exporting its products with Russia: European markets are set to open higher, with the FTSE 100 on track to jump more than 1% at the open. The agenda 3pm GMT: US JOLTs job openings total in January 3.30pm GMT: IEA weekly US oil inventory figures 42501 false false Graeme Wearden Russian people walk in front of the Foreign Ministry Office building in Moscow, Russia. Traders on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange. A Big Mac burger at the McDonald's restaurant in Pushkin Square. The FTSE 100 over the last three months A currency exchange shop in Moscow UK wholesale gas prices over the last year The FTSE 100 Russian-born billionaire Eugene Shvidler at home in 'Chateau Thenac', his vineyard and country retreat, back in 2009 Eugene among the vines at 'Chateau Thenac'.

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[***Elevated fires during COVID-19 lockdown and the vulnerability of protected areas***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:671W-P2M1-JCWX-C2NR-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

Main

The year 2020 was supposed to be a ‘super year’ for biodiversity conservation during which the parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity would agree on ambitious targets for the next decade. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has both postponed the decade’s most important meeting in international biodiversity and caused ***unprecedented*** disruption to conservation activities–. Lockdowns dramatically interrupted on-site protected-area management activities in many countries and introduced uncertainty and economic difficulties to local communities, including from reduced tourism revenue. While early studies have shown that the pandemic increased fires in Colombia and decreased fires in the southeastern United States, there has been no robust assessment of the impact of the pandemic on protected-area integrity.

One of the most important threats to biodiversity in much of the world is land-use change and habitat conversion to ***agriculture***,. Effectively preventing this is an important objective of many protected areas. Where habitat loss is associated with shifting ***agriculture***, such as in much of Africa,, the prevalence of fires is commonly used as an indicator of land conversion, and the performance of conservation interventions,. Fires occur as a result of complex interactions between climatic and anthropogenic drivers, making it essential to control for climatic drivers when exploring the impact of changes in direct anthropogenic drivers. Forecasting fire activity using seasonal climate variables is still in its infancy,, but precipitation is widely recognized as an important predictor.

Madagascar is world renowned for its extraordinary biodiversity, but also for the ***exceptional*** pressures faced by that biodiversity,. Over the past decade, Madagascar has seen a rapid expansion of its reserve network. However, there are concerns that the network is inadequately managed and that protected-area expansion efforts have paid insufficient attention to building local support and governance structures,.

Drawing on the excess mortality approach, which has become widely understood as a metric for quantifying the impacts of pandemics, we explore whether the cessation of on-site protected-area management activities that followed the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the subsequent extended period of closed borders and economic hardship, coincided with greater than expected fires in Madagascar’s protected areas. Using remotely sensed data on fire and precipitation, we first predict the number of fires for each month for each year between 2012 and 2020 on the basis of precipitation that month, precipitation in the previous month, accumulated precipitation over the past 12 months and interactions with biome using a zero-inflated negative binomial model. We then look at the deviations between our predicted fires and those observed to estimate numbers of fires not predicted by weather conditions or forest type. Our analyses uncover an ***unprecedented*** increase in fires in Madagascar’s protected areas between March and July 2020 (the period when on-site activities were prevented) but also reveal that fires quickly dropped to those predicted by our model as management activities resumed. Taking advantage of the unique quasi-experimental setting provided by the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, we are thus able to show strong evidence for the importance of well-managed protected areas for retaining the integrity of globally important areas for biodiversity conservation.

Seasonality of fires in Madagascar

Madagascar’s climate is highly seasonal (Fig. ), which affects the ***agricultural*** cycle. Farmers burn vegetation to prepare for planting crops before the rains, to provide fresh forage for cattle and to control tree and shrub encroachment into pastures. Such anthropogenic factors interact with the changing combustibility of vegetation, producing a distinct seasonal pattern of fires in Madagascar’s protected areas with a peak in all biomes in October (Fig. ), at the end of the dry season (Fig. ). Fires begin earlier in desert and xeric scrubland protected areas (April onwards) and dry broadleaf forest protected areas (May onwards) compared with the moist broadleaf forest protected areas (August onwards) (Fig. ). Mean precipitation is quite variable across years (for example, the beginning of 2020 was drier than previous years (Fig. and Supplementary Fig. ), meaning a climate-adjusted model of predicted fires is needed to identify fire anomalies.

Yearly seasonal patterns in fire occurrence and precipitation in protected areas across the different biomes.

a, Fire occurrence. b, Precipitation. The box plots (centre line, median; box limits, upper and lower quartiles; whiskers, 1.5 × interquartile range; points, outliers) show the variation for the years 2012–2019; diamonds show the values for 2020.

Our climate-based model accounting for lags in precipitation and interactions with biomes (for details, see and ) shows in general that an increase in precipitation in the same month is linked to a decrease in fires and confirms that the timing of burning differs between biomes (Supplementary Data ). Accumulated rainfall over the past 12 months is a significant, positive predictor of fires during the autumn months (August, September, November and December); (Supplementary Data ). Overall, the model fit is reasonable, with observed fires falling within the 95% confidence intervals around predicted fires for 63 out of 95 months (Supplementary Fig. ) and with model accuracy metrics (mean absolute error, root mean squared error (RMSE) and normalized RMSE) indicating that the model performed poorly only in August 2015 (apparently because of unusually high rainfall during the past 12 months in three protected areas; Supplementary Fig. ).

Excess fires before pandemic

Two noticeable differences between observed fires and those predicted by our model occurred in October–November 2013 and September 2018; both periods are associated with presidential elections (Fig. ). The 2013 election (the first after the 2009 coup d’état) was particularly fiercely contested, and our data show that this political unrest was associated with two consecutive months of excess burning. The finding that political events may be correlated with increased deforestation has been observed in a recent study looking at election cycles and deforestation in Brazil and across 55 tropical forest nations.

The occurrence of months with excess fires in protected areas presented as the percentage change between the total number of observed and predicted fires across all protected areas modelled for each month for the period 2012–2020.

Shaded areas around the lines correspond to the 95% confidence intervals. The size of the circles is relative to the number of excess fires in those months with significantly more fires than predicted on the basis of climate and biome; the numbers above the circles refer to the number of excess fires for the month in question.

Burning during the pandemic

Madagascar responded rapidly to the threat of COVID-19 by closing its borders and instituting a series of lockdowns (Fig. ). Travel around the country, including by ministry officials and protected-area managers, and field activities were substantially curtailed from 20 March 2020 and started to recover only from July onwards (Fig. ). This meant that most on-site management activities (including enforcement patrols, community engagement and livelihood support projects) were effectively stopped for a period of approximately four months. International tourism into Madagascar, which contributed nearly 7% of gross national product in 2019 and is an important source of revenue for Madagascar’s protected-area network, reopened in autumn 2021.

Timeline of key events associated with COVID-19 internationally and in Madagascar during 2020.

Madagascar closed its borders and instituted a series of lockdowns from 20 March 2020 onwards. MNP, Madagascar National Parks. For sources, see .

Comparing observed fire frequency for 2020 in Madagascar’s protected areas with those predicted by our climate-adjusted model shows that the shutdown of conservation management activities from March to July was associated with an ***unprecedented*** five-month upsurge in fires inside Madagascar’s protected areas (Fig. ). In August 2020 there were slightly fewer fires than predicted, but burning quickly returned to levels predicted by our model after this. Despite a fear that the September onset of the burning period in the eastern humid forests would lead to elevated fires in the autumn of 2020, this was not seen and burning inside protected areas remained at the levels predicted by climatic variables for the rest of 2020 (Fig. ). The period of excess burning persisted for far longer (5 consecutive months compared with median of 1 month for 12 previous anomalies in 2012–2019) and was characterized by far greater increases in relative fire frequency, with 76–248% more fires than predicted by our model (March, 209 %; April, 223 %; May, 78%; June, 248%; July, 76% compared with 32–134% across all previous excess months, 2012–2019).

Extent and location of excess protected-area fires in 2020 in Madagascar.

a, The occurrence of months with excess fires in protected areas presented as the percentage change between the total number of observed and predicted fires across all protected areas modelled for each month of 2020. Shaded areas around the lines correspond to 95% confidence intervals. The size of the circles for those months with significantly more fires than predicted on the basis of climate and biome is relative to the number of excess fires in those months; the numbers above the circles refer to the number of excess fires for the month in question. b, The spatial distribution of excess fires among Madagascar’s protected areas shown as the sum of excess fires March–July 2020 divided by size of protected area. c, The number of months (out of five, March–July) for which a protected area experienced excess fires.

Spatial patterns of burning

Most of the excess fires registered in 2020 were concentrated in 16 protected areas in the west of Madagascar (Fig. ). This pattern was not associated with any known management or governance factors, such as International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) management category or management authority (Supplementary Fig. ). There were no differences in performance between protected areas managed by the parastatal Madagascar National Parks and the more recently established protected areas managed under different types of collaborative agreements with local communities and non-governmental organizations (Supplementary Fig. ).

However, during the period when management activities were on hold (March to July 2020), it is generally too wet for protected areas in the moist forest biome to burn (Fig. )–, which may explain why the excess fires were concentrated in the west, where forests are more vulnerable at this time of year. Analysing the spatial distribution of fire anomalies in previous years (Supplementary Figs. ) confirms that excess burning occurring earlier in the year is clustered in the west (Supplementary Figs. , , , ), whereas anomalies later in the year are spread across the country (Supplementary Figs. , , , ), supporting the conclusion that the time of the year the pandemic hit, rather than any specific type of protected-area governance, explains the spatial patterns in excess burning.

Discussion

Focusing on one of the world’s most megadiverse countries, we show that the COVID-19 pandemic was linked to a reduction in protected-area integrity. The overlap between excess fires and the suspension of on-site management activities suggests a causal mechanism whereby fire prevention inside protected areas depends on such active engagement. However, increased pressures, driven by people clearing more land in anticipation of lost non-***agricultural*** incomes, may also have played a role. Soon after on-site management resumed, burning inside Madagascar’s protected areas quickly reverted to levels predicted by our model. This is despite the economy of Madagascar not yet opening up and continued economic hardship, including a drought-induced famine in the south. Our findings, therefore, provide strong empirical evidence supporting previous correlational studies showing that active protected-area management can buffer against population declines– and providing evidence that this also applies for land-use change pressures for which the evidence base has been inconclusive–.

Like any analyses relying on remotely sensed data and building counterfactual scenarios, there are important caveats to our work. It is important to remember that the Visible Infrared Imaging Radiometer Suite (VIIRS) thermal anomalies serve only as a proxy for fire incidence, and ground validation was not possible due to the pandemic. However, previous studies have shown that the VIIRS product provides more coherent fire mapping compared with Moderate Resolution Imaging Spectroradiometer 1 km fire data and that the nominal confidence fire detections showed average commission error of 1.2%. VIIRS is documented as having good capacity to detect real fires, and temporal patterns converge with on-the-ground observations. VIIRS is also commonly used for practical fire management,. Despite the high performance of the VIIRS data, we caution that our fire incidence data may underestimate the true number of fires as ***agricultural*** fires in sub-Saharan Africa are often small. We chose to study fire because remote-sensing data allow us to quantify changes in this threat at fine spatial and temporal scales; however, this tells us nothing about the dynamics of other potentially important threats such as hunting, grazing or extraction of wild harvested products. Our analyses also do not account for COVID-19-induced burning outside protected areas, and, thus, we cannot say how well the protected areas mitigated potentially increased pressures compared with unprotected land. Finally, modelling what would have happened in the absence of the COVID-19 pandemic is challenging as such a counterfactual is inherently unknowable. Our predictive model considers only climatic drivers, for which we have relatively good annual data; however, the fire frequency in any given year will have been influenced by a complex mix of social and economic drivers.

The longer-term effects of COVID-19 on international conservation remain to be seen. The four-times delayed meeting to agree to the global post-2020 biodiversity framework is due to be held in the third quarter of 2022. However, this will be happening in the context of continued economic uncertainty in many parts of the world, probably affecting international support for conservation. The prolonged effects of the pandemic on tourism and on economies more broadly will harm local livelihoods and place additional pressures on protected areas. It is important to keep monitoring the situation to evaluate long-term impacts of COVID-19 and to assess how the prolonged lack of tourism revenues may be affecting protected-area performance. Our work has practical implications in that it can inform policymakers and park agencies about the importance of finding creative ways of keeping on-site protected-area management going in times of turmoil. Our results clearly demonstrate the dramatic impact that management interruptions can have and indicate that it may be important for politicians to consider protected-area management an essential service that needs to continue through times of lockdowns and travel restrictions. In Madagascar, some protected-area authorities started to increase collaboration with local communities to keep on-site activities running—an approach that might enhance conservation outcomes in the long term and beyond the pandemic.

Methods

Overview

We built models (using fire and climatic data from 2012–2020) to predict the monthly fires in Madagascar’s protected areas. We compared the observed number of fires in a given protected area in a given month to identify fire anomalies (where observed and predicted fires did not align) and used this to explore the temporal and spatial distribution of excess fires. Spatial analyses were done using ArcGIS v.10.8 and Python v.3.8.5, and all statistical analyses were performed using the software R v.4.0.2. Package ggplot2 was used for visualizations.

Datasets used

Protected-area boundaries were identified using spatial information from the World Database of Protected Areas. The June 2020 release was compared with the list of protected areas by the Malagasy protected areas platform Forum Lafa and identified in ref. ; those occurring in both were kept, and clear overlaps were removed, resulting in 114 protected areas being included in the analyses (Supplementary Table ).

Data on biomes were sourced from the RESOLVE ecoregions project, and we used the higher-level classification identifying the following main biomes for Madagascar: tropical and subtropical moist broadleaf forests (comprising humid and subhumid forests), tropical and subtropical dry broadleaf forests (comprising dry deciduous forest) and deserts and xeric shrublands (comprising the spiny thickets and the succulent woodlands; Fig. ). Protected areas were assigned to one biome on the basis of highest spatial overlap (Supplementary Table ).

We used the VIIRS 375 m active fire product from the joint National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA)/National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Suomi National Polar-orbiting Partnership and NOAA-20 satellites as this product provides near real-time open-access data on thermal anomalies and active fires at a finer spatial resolution than other satellite-based fire products. The 375 m data complement moderate-resolution imaging spectroradiometer fire detection and the previous VIIRS product at resolution 750 m (ref. ). Previous studies have shown that these coarser-resolution products tend to miss smaller fires,. At the moment, the VIIRS 375 m data are the finest-resolution publicly available data; we note its use for near real-time fire management alerts,. We sourced the full data for Madagascar from the first observation (20 January 2012) until 31 December 2020. Note that the data are almost immediately released as a near real-time version and later undergo post-***processing***, meaning that in our dataset, downloaded 29 January 2021, the data consisted of the final full product from 20 January 2012 to 31 May 2020 and the near real-time release for 1 June 2020 to 31 December 2021. The confidence values are set to low, nominal and high by the data provider. According to the data provider, low-confidence daytime fire pixels are typically associated with areas of sun glint and lower relative temperature anomaly (<15 K) in the mid-infrared channel I4. Nominal confidence pixels are those free of potential sun glint contamination during the day and marked by strong (>15 K) temperature anomaly in either day or night-time data. High-confidence fire pixels are associated with day or night-time saturated pixels. We included only the nominal and high-confidence pixels and omitted the low-confidence observations (13.88% of all pixels), possibly omitting some smaller fires, to make sure our predictions are conservative. This might have increased the zero observations in our dataset, something we consequently dealt with using a zero-inflated negative binomial approach, specifically incorporating the uncertainty behind zero observations (see details in the following). The resulting data were overlayed with the protected-area polygons and after that summed to number of observed fires per month per protected area for all the years (2012–2020). We excluded January 2012 due to its incomplete nature (only 11 days of data).

Monthly precipitation data were sourced from the Global Precipitation Measurement mission (for years 2016–2020) and its predecessor the Tropical Rainfall ***Measuring*** Mission (for years 2011–2015) at spatial resolution 10 km. Mean precipitation per protected area per month for 2011–2020 was calculated as the average of the precipitation data cells that intersected the protected area (zonal mean).

Explanatory variables in the fire prediction model

In the tropics and subtropics, the total number of fires reflects a complex interaction between climate and human activities, with precipitation being an ***exceptionally*** important driver of inter-annual and seasonal variability in burned area. Thus, controlling for precipitation variability is critical for assessing trends in fire activity. Higher precipitation before the onset of the main fire season may increase fire activity in arid regions because greater moisture availability enhances biomass production and this vegetation can then burn, whereas higher levels of precipitation during the fire season may suppress fires due to the increased moisture. In general, precipitation is negatively correlated with burned area in the short term in humid savannahs and tropical forests but positively correlated in the long term in more xeric savannahs and grasslands.

To control for the effect of precipitation on fire occurrence and thus establish a robust counterfactual of expected fires against which to compare observed fires, we built monthly models predicting the number of fires inside protected areas on the basis of a set of precipitation variables. We expected precipitation to interact with biome and so included biome as an interaction term. To account for the possible difference in long- versus short-term effects of precipitation, we explored including a number of time lags but were also concerned to avoid over-fitting. Thus, we calculated accumulated precipitation over the past 12 months on the basis of summing the precipitation during the past 12 months. Our final model included accumulated precipitation together with the precipitation in the month in question, plus precipitation during the past month, plus their interactions with biome (factor). Explanatory variables were standardised using the R function ‘scale’ on all precipitation variables in the dataset by dividing the (centred) columns of each factor by their standard deviations. Standardized variables were evaluated for collinearity by visual inspection of the data and by calculating Pearson’s correlation coefficients.

Predicting fires and identifying fire anomalies

To establish the null model for expected occurrence of fires given the levels of precipitation and in the absence of COVID-19 and other changes in human activities, we built monthly models explaining the sum of fires inside protected areas from 2012 to 2020 on the basis of fires in other years and precipitation variables. The fire occurrence data are count data, and since we had many protected areas with not a single fire in a given month, our data were also zero inflated. To account for this, we explored the use of zero-inflated Poisson and zero-inflated negative binomial (ZINB) regression models using the R package pscl. Using a likelihood ratio test, we found that ZINB outperformed zero-inflated Poisson () for our data due to overdispersion in the non-zero count data and therefore proceeded with ZINB. Previous studies have also found that ZINB models are well suited for modelling fire incidence,.

The number of fires was thus modelled using a ZINB modelling approach. The probability density function for the response variable yi (i = 1, …, n) denoting the fire count iswhere πi denotes the probability of having a zero count, μi is the mean, k is the dispersion parameter and Γ is the gamma function,. The mean μi was modelled using the log link function and predictor variables. The zero counts were modelled assuming equal probability for each zero count. The fire count predictor variables were monthly precipitation, precipitation from previous month and accumulated precipitation during the past 12 months, which all had an interaction with the biome type. The log-transformed size of protected areas was used as an offset variable.

We fitted the model for each month for each year (2012–2019) using data from the corresponding month during all other years in the data series. Further model selection was not done as we were not interested in finding out which specific explanatory variables best explained fires, but rather in excluding the potential effect of any of them. Model validation was done using residual diagnostics following the procedures described in ref. . Using the fitted model, we predicted the expected fires on the basis of model parameters and precipitation values for the month and year in question. For example, fires in April 2016 were predicted using the model fitted on the basis of April 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2017, 2018 and 2019. Excess fires were defined as the difference between observed and predicted fires. For 2020, we repeated the same procedure and fitted the model for each month using the 2012–2019 data and then predicting 2020 fires on the basis of the 2020 covariate values. We assessed model forecasting accuracy using two commonly used ***measures***, the mean absolute error and the RMSE. However, as these are both absolute ***measures***, we also report the normalized RMSE, which divides the RMSE by the range (maximum – minimum) and thus allows for comparisons across the months and years.

Effect size ***measures*** and confidence intervals

We summed predicted and observed fires across the 114 protected areas for each month of each year and created 95% confidence intervals around the predictions by bootstrapping. We resampled the predicted values for each month of each year 10,000 times using package boot in R. We used the normal 95% confidence intervals to determine for which months there were statistically significantly more fires than predicted by our model. For these months, we identified individual protected areas with excess fires as those with more fires than the 95% confidence interval around the mean for all protected areas in that month.

For the 2020 anomaly, for each protected area, we calculated excess fires per square kilometre by summing excess fires for March, April, May, June and July 2020 and dividing by the size of the protected area (km2). We tested whether the excess fires per square kilometre differed by IUCN management category or management authority using the nonparametric Kruskal–Wallis one-way analysis of variance test due to the non-normality of the data.

Reporting Summary

Further information on research design is available in the linked to this article.

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**Notes**

Supplementary informationThe online version contains supplementary material available at [*https://doi.org/10.1038/s41893-022-00884-x.Publisher’s*](https://doi.org/10.1038/s41893-022-00884-x.Publisher’s) note Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

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[***Stakeholder engagement, flexible proactiveness and democratic durability as CSR strategic postures to overcome periods of crisis***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:66GB-PY91-DY4C-F0KV-00000-00&context=1516831)

Management Decision

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**Body**

**ABSTRACT**

Purpose

The aim of this study is twofold. First, the research aims to identify Integrated Thinking (IT) stages of development. Second, the research aims to investigate how IT has reacted to the COVID-19 pandemic by accelerating integrated corporate social responsibility (CSR) practises.

Design/methodology/approach

The study employs a case study on an Italian multi-utility company, Iren Group. The research method uses triangulated data collected from semi-structured interviews and archival materials and it analyses data with a top-down and bottom-up coding procedure. This allows us to inductively develop a model of IT stages of development and CSR strategic postures as response patterns to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Findings

The research identifies the developmental paths of IT initiation, IT reactiveness and IT implementation responding to changes and challenges in times of crisis. Furthermore, the research provides stimuli for recovery to overcome periods of crisis through three main CSR strategic postures: stakeholder engagement, flexible proactiveness and democratic durability.

Practical implications

The research suggests that managers can adopt stakeholder engagement, flexible proactiveness and democratic durability as CSR strategic postures in order to integrate CSR practises into the company's DNA and overcome periods of crisis.

Originality/value

This is among the first studies that analyses how IT acts during a crisis in the multi-utility sector. There are three main stages of development, i.e. IT initiation, IT reactiveness and IT implementation, which are characterised by stakeholder engagement, flexible proactiveness and democratic durability.

**1. Introduction**

“The crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic has underscored the interconnected nature of our lives and the differential effects on individuals, organizations, and societies, as well as their responses to the crisis” (Bapuji *et al.*, 2020a, p. 1072). This pandemic has quickly reached different parts of the globe, resulting in severe consequences for our health, wellbeing and the worldwide economy. It has revealed the essential interdependence of business and society (Bapuji *et al.*, 2020b). However, every cloud has a silver lining, thus, during periods of crisis, businesses are required to navigate through them by turning challenges into opportunities (Freeman, 2020; Carroll, 2021a, b). This unforeseen and ***unprecedented*** event is no different. The silver lining in this uncertainty is the opportunity to rethink companies' business models (Crane and Matten, 2021; De Massis and Rondi, 2020) with an Integrated corporate social responsibility (CSR) approach (Freeman *et al.*, 2010). Integrated CSR is the approach that includes economic, financial, ethical, social and environmental objectives into the decision-making ***process*** of companies with the aim to create value for and with stakeholders (Freeman *et al.*, 2010). There are several constructive forces that can bring integrated CSR practises into companies' focus: for instance, customers, and society at large, have become sensitive to these topics and governments and financial institutions are supporting businesses with post-COVID-19 EU reconstruction programmes (e.g. Next Generation EU).

In this context, businesses are called to integrate CSR and sustainability initiatives into their business models and cooperatively work together (Waddock, 2004; Waheed and Zhang, 2022), in order to enhance cross-level interactions among intra-individual, intra-organisational and extra-organisational factors of CSR (Aguinis and Glavas, 2019). Furthermore, responding to societal challenges (Aguilera *et al.*, 2007) requires an inclusive and iterative ***process*** of decision-making, managing and reporting of the interrelations between financial, economic, social, environmental and ethical issues at the core of the business strategy (Busco *et al.*, 2017; Di Vaio *et al.*, 2021; Herath *et al.*, 2021).

In the literature stream of sustainability accounting and management, this approach is labelled as Integrated Thinking (IT) and refers to “decision-making, management and reporting ***processes*** of businesses' value creation” (Devalle *et al.*, 2021; Dumay and Dai, 2017; Oliver *et al.*, 2016). Prior literature on IT has investigated the role of corporate strategies (Leleux and Van der Kaaij, 2019), management control systems (Dimes and de Villiers, 2021) and organisational culture (Dumay and Dai, 2017) in shaping IT mechanisms, consequently favouring sustainable development. Sustainable business models require that corporate strategy, decisions and reporting ***processes*** are integrated with an IT approach; however, there is the need to better understand the role of IT on the realisation of CSR and sustainable business models (Di Vaio *et al.*, 2021). Furthermore, business models need to become more resilient to epidemic shocks by innovating the value proposition and value creation with CSR practises. Relatedly, academics (Schaltegger, 2021) call to analyse CSR practises and sustainable business models in times of crisis to be more resilient to epidemic shocks.

Inspired by these research gaps (Di Vaio *et al.*, 2021; Schaltegger, 2021), the study addresses the IT approach related to CSR and sustainability practises in the multi-utility sector. This sector has been chosen as the context of this research investigation because it plays a bivalent role to foster sustainable development and to stimulate sustainability transitions to other companies (Paolone *et al.*, 2021).

The aim of this study is twofold. First, the research aims to identify the IT stages of this development. Second, the research aims to investigate how IT has reacted to the COVID-19 pandemic by accelerating integrated CSR practises. To achieve these objectives, a case study on a multi-utility company, Iren Group (Iren) has been carried out. Iren is located in the North West of Italy and has adopted an IT approach towards a green transition which can serve as learning lessons for other companies operating in the same sector. More specifically, an IT approach along with joint objectives and mutual coordination with stakeholders can mitigate the negative effects and favour resilience during a crisis period.

From a theoretical viewpoint, the study contributes to the IT literature by determining the IT stages of development that evolve over time. From a managerial perspective, this work provides the three main CSR strategic posture linked to IT: stakeholder engagement, flexible proactiveness and democratic durability that addresses the DNA code of Integrated CSR (Freeman *et al.*, 2010) and CSR 2.0 (Visser, 2011), because they integrate governance, societal/stakeholder collaborations and environmental integrity for sustainable ecosystems at the core of companies' business strategies.

The research proceeds as follows. Section 2 presents the literature on IT and the CSR challenges in the time of COVID-19. Section 3 describes the research design consisting of the subsequent steps: method, case selection, data collection and analysis. Section 4 shows the research findings, then, Section 5 discusses theoretical and practical implications, by developing a model of IT stages of developments and CSR strategic postures for each of the IT phases, before and during the crisis. Section 6 concludes with the research contributions and highlights the limitations of the study and future research directions.

**2. Literature review**

This literature review analyses prior studies on the implementation of an IT approach as the basis to integrate CSR practises within the core business of companies. Then, it addresses CSR challenges occurring during the pandemic period that can be overcome by adopting an IT approach. Accordingly, Section 2.1 analyses the literature on IT and Section 2.2 contextualises the business sustainability literature in time of COVID-19.

**2.1 Integrated thinking in the value creation *process***

IT is conceptualised as “the active consideration by an organization of the relationships between its various operating and functional units and the capitals that the organization uses or affects. IT leads to integrated decision-making and actions that consider the creation of value over the short, medium and long term” (International Integrated Reporting Council, 2021) and has been encapsulated as the strategic and managerial mindset which shifts the compartmentation of organisational “silos” thinking to an integrated approach that considers the relationships between different factors affecting the company's value creation ***processes*** (International Integrated Reporting Council, 2021). IT addresses strategic, managerial and organisational decision-making ***processes*** (Busco *et al.*, 2013; La Torre *et al.*, 2019) and differs from Systems Thinking and Design Thinking for social innovation (Brown and Wyatt, 2010) because it focuses on corporate accountability in the research stream of sustainability management and accounting.

The literature of IT mainly focused on the linkages between IT and business strategies (Leleux and Van der Kaaij, 2019), management control systems (Dimes and de Villiers, 2021), organisational culture (Dumay and Dai, 2017) and Integrated Reporting (IR) (Al-Htaybat and von Alberti-Alhtaybat, 2018). Prior research on IT discussed how this approach can be developed in practice by constructively managing pressures and constraints among the capitals in strategy, resource allocation, performance measurement and control (Oliver *et al.*, 2016). The authors discussed soft vs hard IT approaches to operationalise the wide-ranging presence of indicators of well-being (soft IT) against financial sophistication in KPIs (hard IT). Even with the existence of soft IT within organisations, such an approach is a well-grounded premise for hard IT accountability expectations, which, in turn, once implemented, echo back to soft IT in a circular manner (Oliver *et al.*, 2016). Therefore, this IT approach can lead to the development of IR that improves transparency for stakeholders on the IT approach implemented through the involvement of internal and external drivers in the company (Adams, 2015, 2017a, b). This is the reason why IT and IR combine with each other as accountability approaches that connect a company's purpose and business performance in an integrated manner (Adams and Frost, 2008).

The theoretical fundamentals of IT relate to agency theory, stewardship theory, institutional theory, legitimacy to explain the rationale behind the company's dissemination choices (Di Vaio *et al.*, 2021) and to stakeholder theory to harmoniously link strategic tactics and decision-making with different stakeholders' interests (Devalle *et al.*, 2021). The greater the likelihood of a full consideration of CSR practises and key stakeholders' legitimate interests as part of the ordinary activities of conducting business, the more IT is embedded in the business (Busco *et al.*, 2021). This means that stakeholders' legitimate interests are understood, taken into account, and responded to through decisions, evaluations, actions, dialogue and ongoing communication.

An IT approach defines “how the interests and the contributions of a series of heterogeneous stakeholders are linked into the models of value-creation” (Busco *et al.*, 2017) and is likely to be more proactive to address sustainability challenges and CSR issues (Dmytriyev *et al.*, 2021; Lin *et al.*, 2019). Rinaldi (2020) conceptualised IT as a dynamic ***process*** where judgments and choices are influenced and constantly exchanged through active relations with stakeholders. To this regard, the study of Devalle *et al.* (2021) investigated how stakeholder engagement actions translate IT into practice within a case study. The results delineated IT actions that focus on the structure and the mechanisms of corporate governance, on the strategic posture, performance measurements, communication with and among stakeholders and partnerships with stakeholders in a circular manner. The integrated circularity of communication and partnerships has been delineated as a pragmatic IT approach for value creation. First, complex imbalances and paradoxes when addressing economic, social and environmental matters are common. Thus, their acknowledgement along with the analysis of the context constitutes a specific element of IT. Second, dialogue with stakeholders influences decision-making and it contributes to an active learning ***process*** and knowledge sharing that involves the company and its stakeholders (Gromis di Trana *et al.*, 2020). Third, based upon knowledge sharing, joint projects with business partners achieve the awareness and the innovation necessary to effectively consider interdependencies among stakeholders' interests which translate IT into action.

Several academic studies suggest that when companies manage internal tensions of multiple capitals and cooperate with stakeholders to deal with sustainability imbalances, they develop an IT attitude aimed at creating sustainable business models (Di Vaio *et al.*, 2021). Recently, sustainable business models have been challenged by the pandemic shock to become more resilient and to reduce negative impacts by innovating their value proposition and value creation ***process*** from a sustainability perspective (Schaltegger, 2021).

The role of IT in the implementation of sustainable business models has become worthy of investigation (Di Vaio *et al.*, 2021) especially in order to be more resilient to epidemic shocks (Schaltegger, 2021). Therefore, our research covers these knowledge-practice gaps and focuses on the longitudinal status and the knowledge structure of IT during the COVID-19 pandemic. In order to contextualise our study, in the next subsection we address CSR and sustainability practises challenged by COVID-19. An IT attitude is a relevant precondition to ensure a real and substantial integration of CSR practises within the companies. Therefore, to overcome periods of crisis, it is important to turn CSR issues into Integrated CSR practises through an IT approach. For this reason, in the next section, CSR challenges occurring during the pandemic period are addressed to better contextualise the uncertainties that companies are facing.

**2.2 CSR challenges in time of COVID-19**

CSR practises, consisting of articulated and communicated policies and initiatives that reflect the business responsibility of companies (Matten and Moon, 2008), have been impacted during past economic crises (Lins *et al.*, 2017; Waddock and Graves, 1997). On the one hand, some academic studies have demonstrated that, in times of crisis, CSR activities paid off these unexpectedly low-trust periods (Lins *et al.*, 2017) because high-CSR firms earned excess returns relative to low-CSR firms. On the other hand, companies may also cut their spending on CSR projects (Waddock and Graves, 1997) during periods of crisis. Therefore, it is worth considering CSR challenges during the COVID-19 because companies are challenged to address CSR and social concerns and, relatedly, the stakeholder view has been bolstered during the COVID-19 pandemic (Carroll, 2021a, p. 1264).

The ***unprecedented*** health crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic has rapidly spread worldwide and has pushed the world economy into a global recession that, according to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), is even worse than the Great Depression in the 1930s and the 2008 Global Financial Crisis. Because of the several waves and related lockdown periods, many companies now face financial instability and difficulties to remain afloat. The COVID-19 pandemic is a reminder of the fragility of our systems because we have witnessed the interruption of production, financial and transportation systems which have been profoundly impacted (Ramos and Hynes, 2020). This crisis has also brought about revelations regarding the understanding of grand challenges such as the biodiversity collapse, climate change, fragilities of societies, racial discrimination and income inequality (OECD, 2020). The uncertainty deriving from the COVID-19 pandemic has clearly illustrated the rootedness of companies in society, the essential value of stakeholders (Crane and Matten, 2021) and the renewed vigour to manage “responsible business without trade-offs” (Freeman, 2020). There is a need for cooperation among businesses, stakeholders and governmental and non-governmental institutions alike to act promptly and propose alternative and innovative solutions to today's global issues (Bapuji *et al.*, 2020b).

COVID-19 has highlighted the exposure of businesses to societal risks and the fundamental role in addressing them in order to maintain risk-resilience-responsibility in supply chains (Crane and Matten, 2021). For instance, before COVID-19, the exploitation of global value chains was common, However, in current times, localised value chains lead to higher reliability and lower disruption risks (Muzio and Doh, 2021). Therefore, companies are challenged to improve the ability to anticipate, absorb, recover and adapt to unexpected threats (Cheema-Fox *et al.*, 2021; Ramos and Hynes, 2020) with a re-modulation of their business plans with a CSR-oriented perspective in order to tackle the uncertainty of the crisis and improve health and safety guidelines to workers (United Nations, 2020). During these times, businesses are required to make tough decisions that express their underlying purposes and actual core values to make changes to their business models (Crane and Matten, 2021). More specifically, companies are called upon to implement risk-mitigation strategies and partnerships with other entrepreneurs in order to advocate for financial assistance to secure liquidity. Moreover, businesses must be accountable to a variety of stakeholders and leaders, who are asked to responsibly respond to disruptive changes with a rebalancing of resources, investments in workforce training and advancements in new models of learning (Crane and Matten, 2021). In fact, phenomena like changes in working habits, such as working from home, as well as alternative business models, must be developed to address such crises and their real and potential consequences.

The pandemic presents opportunities to restructure ways to design, govern and educate a future which joins financial objectives and CSR practises with an IT logic. In doing so, companies experience higher institutional money flows and fewer negative returns as demonstrated by the recent research of Cheema-Fox *et al.* (2021). This empirical analysis on a sample of US listed firms has demonstrated that firms protecting its labour force, supply chain and repurposing operations to provide solutions to the crisis increase investor confidence and make the company more resilient to the market shock during the Coronavirus pandemic. Therefore, COVID-19 renews the importance of addressing CSR and sustainability practises in an integrated manner (Carrol, 2021a).

In this context, the multi-utility sector plays an important role in dealing with disruptions and reassuring customers (Sowby, 2020). As stated by Sowby (2020), “with people staying home and being more conscious of hygiene, for example, water use is likely to be higher, peak at different times, and concentrate in residential areas” (p. 1). Moreover, social distancing has impacted on operational ***processes*** of thermoelectric production plants to protect on-site workers. For these reasons, we aim to investigate how this period of profound crisis can serve as a motivation to drive businesses operating in the multi-utility sector towards progressive changes that embrace an IT approach of decision-making, management and reporting with advanced technologies and transformative innovations alongside the imperative need to implement CSR issues into the core business (Carroll, 2021a).

**3. Research design**

**3.1 Method**

As we aim to investigate how the real-life phenomenon of COVID-19 has impacted on IT actions (Devalle *et al.*, 2021) within the context of multi-utilities, this research adopts a case study method (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 2003). Case study research is a scientific methodology used for holistic investigations of a real-life phenomenon within an environmental context (Yin, 2011), thus we interpret IT according to the meanings assigned by the interviewees (Lincoln and Denzin, 2000). This type of research favours the understanding of the meanings, activities and actions of IT in times of crisis. As our research looked at the path developments of IT in terms of decision making, management and reporting over time, a case analysis was employed by comparing these issues as events unfolded (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007), in order to hone the skills of business managers with a keen understanding of how IT evolves over time. This teases out a model of IT stages of developments and CSR strategic postures of how companies can react through crises. The research method has been developed within the following phases in accordance with Stake (1995): case selection, data collection and analysis. The selection of a case worthy of investigation has followed a pragmatic ground with a problem-centric view (Creswell, 2014) focused on a leading sector that favours sustainability transitions; details are described in Subsection 3.2. Data collection and analysis follow a qualitative approach based on an open-ended strategy of inquiry for data collection and on constructivist perspectives of multiple meanings of individual experiences for data analysis, with the intent of developing a pattern (Creswell, 2014). Detailed explanations of data collection and analysis are provided in Subsection 3.3.

**3.2 Case selection**

This first preliminary and explorative phase was aimed at collecting relevant cases in the literature on IT, starting from the identification of a relevant sector in which practising sustainability can lead to sustainable transitions. This first screening was contextualised in the multi-utility sector to identify a few targeted firms as fertile grounds of investigation. After a first analysis, the multi-utility sector emerged as a distinctive industry where the operating activities must necessarily tackle socio-economic and environmental concerns, especially during crisis periods. These companies are used to deliver essential services, such as water, electricity, natural gas, telephone service, among others, at a societal level. The investigated multi-utility companies are managed or controlled (directly or indirectly) by public sector agencies. This feature can lead to further considerations on the governments' sensitivity to non-financial matters (Pozzoli and Gesuele, 2016) and it is the consequence of the overlap between ownership and potential “customers”. In fact, final users are at the same time the owners (through public agencies) but also the recipients of the services delivered. For this reason, multi-utility companies are naturally oriented to satisfying Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) needs and disclosing a wide range of information, which gives rise to the observation that stakeholders are extremely careful with regards to the extra-financial performance, the outcomes and the impacts on the community (Pozzoli and Gesuele, 2016). These elements emphasise the relevance of this sector as a good field for the selection of an appropriate case study. Analysing sector studies, Iren highlighted a deeply rooted commitment towards an integrated approach to sustainability issues. The caring of and the engagement with communities in which Iren operates constitutes valuable ingredients for our investigation.

Iren is an Italian multi-utility company with its headquarters in Reggio Emilia and its operational offices in Genoa, Turin, Parma, Piacenza, Reggio Emilia, La Spezia and Vercelli. Iren's origins date back to July 2010 through the merger of Iride and Enìa to gain a leading position in electricity (production, distribution and sale), district heating (production, distribution and sale), gas (distribution and sale), integrated water service management, environmental services (waste collection and disposal) and services for the local authorities. With its 4,275 million Euros in revenues and 8,102 employees in 2019, Iren requires a well-structured organisation with a highly skilled management with expertise on sustainability issues as well as stakeholder engagement practises. Iren operates in 297 cities and 3,057,857 residents are served in environmental services. In this context, innovation is one of the main drivers of Iren's value creation. For instance, the IrenUp programme was launched with the aim of supporting high potential Italian start-ups, enabling them to develop know-how, integrate innovative technologies and services into Iren business and drive innovation in the local area. As stated in the sustainability report, the priority is to enhance services with innovative content, offering new ones to improve the quality of life. Regarding ESG issues, Iren focuses on resources and the responsible use of them. The reduction of the associated environmental impacts is “part of the DNA” of the company and it is evident in the Group's operating results. The aim of these commitments is decarbonisation, expressed through the use of renewable energy sources, the promotion of a more sustainable use of water resources and waste, and a project known as “resilient cities” with the roll-out of district heating helping to improve air quality and promote the energy upgrading of buildings and public street lighting. Furthermore, Iren has received an award for its commitment to sustainable business practises. It was ranked in fifth place, the best medium-sized company in the Top 10 ranking of the 2019 Integrated Governance Index, an analysis model of the degree of integration of ESG factors within business strategies. Similarly, Iren was recognised for its commitment to support the values of social and environmental sustainability at the “The New Business Economy for the Common Good” convention organised by the Business Strategies Association, the Christian Union of Entrepreneurs and Business Executives and the University of Genoa. Finally, in 2020, Iren was ranked A by Carbon Disclosure Project (CDP) and in 2021, it was recognised as the “best performing large company” at SDA Bocconi University, in Milan, during the Best Performance Award ceremony.

**3.3 Data collection and analysis**

Data collection has gathered various sources of information in order to ensure the trustworthiness of the observed phenomenon and obtain evidence of convergent validity (Voss *et al.*, 2002). The data includes primary sources (interviews with managers) and secondary data and information (company documents, press releases and other reports).

As a prime source of data, the authors conducted face-to-face semi-structured interviews and follow-up telephone interviews with managers at different institutional levels to obtain practical evidence on the events of the COVID-19 disruption and gather perception over the practises of IT and how they changed in 2020. Interviews were scheduled in the second half of 2020 with Dr. Massimiliano Bianco, CEO of Iren Group (CEO), Dr. Moris Ferretti, Vice-President of Iren Group (VP) and Dr. Selina Xerra, the Chief Corporate Social Responsibility Officer (CSRO), with a particular attention to, and collaboration with, local authorities. Authors obtained the authorisation to disclose the identity of the interviewees (names, surnames, role and years of experience). Table 1 provides the details, accordingly.

The research ***process*** is an interactive one between interviewers and interviewees in the form of dyadic relationships through discourse (Qu and Dumay, 2011). To preserve the quality of the interviews, attention was paid to maintain the flow of the interviewee's story, as well as creating a relationship with the interviewee and, finally, avoiding interviewer bias (Schensul *et al.*, 1999, p. 141). Individual interviews took place in the presence of at least two interviewers. The list of the interview questions was sent via email two weeks before the interview date. As a secondary source of data, the authors extracted secondary data and information from sustainability reports, press releases and communications about Iren. All the data was gathered on multiple occasions over a period of 24 months, starting in 2018.

Data analysis was constructed around the contextualisation of the information gathered with a qualitative content analysis (Krippendorff, 2004). The content analysis is based on a systematic and objective examination of the empirical data and is an applicable tool for arranging various types of written documents. The aim is to obtain a broad description of the phenomenon by organising and classifying the data by condensing words and phrases into fewer content-related categories and, further, forming themes and patterns (Krippendorff, 2004; Unerman, 2000). To this end, the authors familiarised themselves with the sustainability reports and transcribed the interviews verbatim to gather an overview of their CSR practises. Each author analysed the passages of written texts to make the data interpretation as objective as possible. A comparison of each individual interpretation was then made, and interviewees were again involved to confirm the authors' interpretations. Then, the authors computed together a categorisation of the quotes collected with an iterated ***process*** which facilitated the identification of an IT approach, based on the conceptual framework of Devalle *et al.* (2021). The condensed data was organised according to time and ***processes***, applying the event-listing matrix and a growth gradient for determining sequences and hierarchies following the research steps suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994). The event-listing matrix arranges chronologically the events that occur over time, while the growth gradient displays the changes across time. Thus, it was possible to derive the IT stages of developments and the IT-related features which emerged before and after the exogenous shock of the COVID-19 pandemic. This analysis was conducted with Atlas.ti and sentences and passages were taken from the unit of the qualitative content analysis. As suggested by Guion *et al.* (2011), the research method involved two different triangulations: a first one between data sources (data triangulation for data collection) and a second one among the researchers (investigators triangulation for data analysis). The use and the analysis of multiple sources of information followed the construct validity test.

Table 2 systematised the research method of the case selection, data collection and analysis methods.

**4. Results**

The findings are graphically shown in Table 3 and present the evolution of IT over time that has been developed by Iren. The results are presented considering the stages of development of IT that have been sorted out from the analysis. The first refers to the period before the pandemic crisis (1) IT before COVID-19; while the other two refer to the period during COVID-19: (2) Uncertainties and opportunities during COVID-19 disruption and (3) Implementations as a consequence of the COVID-19 disruption.

**4.1 IT before COVID-19**

The analysis of the complex imbalances when addressing economic, social and environmental matters in the public multi-utility sector is the primary objective. Generally, companies adopt different approaches to tackle these topics. In particular, some of them have developed a “greener” approach as a marketing tool to strengthen their corporate reputation, whereas in other cases companies aim to be compliant with the regulation, “*only a small part of them carry on with a substantial integration between CSR practises and the company culture*” (CIRSO). This Integrated CSR approach characterises the multi-utility sector because in this context, sustainability, defined as the attitude to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (Brundtland, 1987), is naturally embedded for its players. Therefore “*the type of services delivered and the virtual overlap between ownership and customers (users) reinforce the ESG practises as an essential element in the DNA of these companies*” (**VP**). Starting from the 90s, this strong relationship elected this sector as a driver in a corporate transition towards more sustainable business models. In the meantime, the leading companies in this sector voluntarily improved their reports in order to introduce non-financial information in the corporate disclosure. “*This trend naturally involved also Iren, which immediately realised that the green dimension was essential in its operating* ***process***” (**CEO**), because an integrated approach must be considered to be fundamental to guarantee the durability of the company, which aims to improve the quality of life of the communities and their residents. Based on this consideration, “*these elements must be directly involved in current strategies and future plans for an effective development of the business*” (**CEO**). Exogenous forces pushed public utilities to proceed towards this implementation, “*because in this sector, more than others, the attention to stakeholders is demanded and recommended*” (**VP**). This implementation has been developed year by year, but the most difficult point was to advance the CSR practises from an operating level to a strategic one, especially linked to the core business. This orientation has been initiated by the top management, trying to “*integrate the sustainability perspective in every level of our organisation with the aim of stimulating awareness on these topics*” (**CSRO**).

This involved the governance of every sub-holding company requiring the achievement also of non-financial results for the first time. “*This broadened the horizon of observation and shed relevance on a medium-long perspective against a short-termism view, which is the most effective way to monitor the integration of these practises in a continuum logic*” (**CSRO**). As a consequence, this practically means addressing “*a longer vision that naturally also required an extension of the financial perspective on the board of directors*” (**CEO**). This extension brings out a strong relationship between CSR practises and the company's durability, because CSR issues are analysed considering both their financial implications jointly with their societal impacts. At the same time, the attitude to involve new interests (from a wider audience of stakeholders) redefines the priorities for management by identifying new practises that are now fundamental in order to guarantee the survival of our company on the market over time.

For a substantial diffusion, and to avoid sole compliance, Iren opted for a widespread cooperation with the business unit managers and their staff, extending responsibilities to the entities that must directly operate with this new perspective. This approach has been translated into practice involving also external experts in the CSR field that supported the group in this transition. “*Corporate governance was our starting point because we oriented our managers toward an integrated planning of CSR objectives. However, this activity was not only an initial effort, it was an inception to develop a new model to carry on day by day and that over the years affects the achievement of short-term targets along with the long-term ones*” (**CEO**). The inception towards this transition was instilled by the board of directors as a consequence of greater pressure on these topics generated by different classes of stakeholders (shareholders, customers and associations). The executives “*collected these different inputs, but framing, at the base of this transition, stakeholder diversity as a main element in the strategic planning by allowing them to contribute to orient it accordingly*” (**VP**).

This new perspective led Iren to invest in specific activities closer to ESG aims, thus redefining the group's strategies. For instance, Iren, as a power grid operator, invested in “sustainable mobility” activities to promote integration between these two sectors and to achieve one of their main targets: cities' resilience. This diversification is based on the opportunity to exploit the company's know-how and the technologies developed over time for innovative solutions. This means that “*Iren expanded its business to collect synergic benefits and economies of scale, thus it fixed a “fil rouge” in sustainability*” (**CSRO**). “*This leads its core business to be flexible in relation to the opportunities detected*” (**CEO**).

Stakeholder engagement has a paramount significance for Iren to collect stakeholder's needs which are explicitly expressed or intrinsically latent. This is possible thanks to a continuous dialogue with stakeholders. To this aim, starting from 2014 Iren introduced local committees in the regions where the group operates. This implementation shaped the company governance structure as a source of information. The vice-president was delegated to coordinate the local committees and to summarise the evidence. Through a two-way communication, these committees gather opinions, concerns on certain ESG issues from citizens and external parties, who are generally considered to be low-power stakeholders in the decision-making ***process***. Together they analyse problems, propose solutions based on the analysis to contribute towards defining the main topics that are at the base of Iren's materiality analysis and are the core of Iren's strategic planning. These committees consist of volunteers and their composition is not driven by the group, but they are self-organised and independent. A committee represents the community from different perspectives, but common elements are the priority to maximise joint benefits and address the needs of the group. “*In this way we work together to find the best match possible for everyone*” (**CSRO**). The sole check is on the number of people involved and their expertise to guarantee an effective dialogue and the quality of the information collected. “*At the moment, this approach is unique because the participants on these committees engage with voluntary intentions, but with a high commitment and a critical but constructive view*” (**VP**). The CSRO attends these meetings. This cooperation not only generates value, but “*it orients the group towards the creation of value over time, making this change timely*” (**CEO**). An example are the investments in the energy efficiency of the buildings that involved 45 cities for more than 100 buildings. This improves the company profit, but at the same time these outcomes enrich stakeholders and the local communities.

Regarding one-way communication, Iren has progressively improved its disclosure on CSR and sustainability issues starting from the 90s. At the beginning, the company decided to communicate specific ***processes*** on the allocation of resources, but its formalisation led to possible improvements. “*This shed light on a bivalent and reciprocal relationship between strategies and communication. This has been gathered from a combination of financial and non-financial KPIs as a driver to evaluate our performance*” (**CEO**). It reveals an improvement of the company's attitude to communicate that has detailed and direct consequences. For instance, “*through an introspective analysis, the presentation of reports improved the internal knowledge of the business activities*” (CSRO). This even gained much more importance because Iren was the result of a combination of different contexts because of mergers. “*It was functional to harmonise different realities by improving the internal culture and sharing common valuables*” (**CSRO**). Internally, this led to defining a common language that linked and oriented all the people towards common aims. Externally, “*this communication enabled a real engagement with the local communities and residents, explaining the company's activities as well as its targets*” (**VP**). In conclusion, “*non-financial disclosure gives the opportunity to raise the contents to a strategic level and this is an effective tool for a deeper stakeholder engagement to achieve a substantial integration between different entities and cultures*” (**CEO**).

Ultimately, Iren has been widely active in developing circular economy projects entirely focused on environmental challenges, with a specific focus on the waste treatment. A circular economy approach to waste management is evident in several results. The first is the separated waste collection that, in 2019 in the area served by the Group, reached on average 67.3% (56.4% in 2010), against a national average of 58.1%. The second was an extension of a “pay-as-you-throw” system to around 200,000 residents, for a total of approximately 513,000 people with impacts on the reduction of non-separated waste (-7% per resident per year in 2019 compared to 2018). A further result is the major investment programme aimed at optimising Iren's production plants for the recovery of waste material (+145,000 tonnes ***processed*** in 2019), with the aim of closing the cycle in a virtuous manner. “*Iren Group manages its own waste and the waste managed on behalf of local communities with the aim of reducing its production and increasing recovery and production of energy from waste*” (Sustainability Report, 2019). Furthermore, “*we aim to enact a circular economy mindset to kids, as they will be our future generation, thus we act accordingly. In so doing, we have developed several learning programmes, for instance we have addressed a learning programme at Agri-Food Centre in Genoa which is followed up in primary schools, showing how unsold fruit and vegetables (the “waste”) can be transformed into bioplastic*” (**CSRO**). Finally, in 2018 Iren signed the “*Climate Action and Circular Economy” loan agreement with the European Investment Bank (EIB) development plan for the 2018→2023 period in relation to the circular economy, decarbonisation and with the objective of adaptation to climate change*” (Sustainability Report, 2019).

**4.2 Uncertainties and opportunities during the COVID-19 disruption**

The current pandemic reveals the strong relationship between the economy, society and the environment. “*The challenge during this disruptive time will enhance the awareness of the remarkable need to positively contribute to sustainable development over time and not only temporarily. For this reason, it is noteworthy to take into account investments for a more sustainable transition*” (**CSRO**). Generally, investments facilitating this transition will orient companies' behaviour towards new perspectives. However, this development path does not involve the multi-utility companies, as they are leading actors in this transition. This is the consequence of their strong commitment to strategic activities (infrastructures, energy production, recycling, etc.). “*Iren is going to take on this role, with the related responsibilities, to be a driving force in the national economic recovery. Obviously, Iren does not work alone, but its strategies involve a wider number of other companies that cooperate with it*” (**CEO**). Moreover, “*in September 2020 Iren evaluated the most probable pandemic effects and this sensitivity analysis led the company to improve investments. These investments are concentrated in the first two years because we estimate that in this period they can act as a flywheel for the national economy. At the moment the plan consists of 3.7 billion Euros within 2025, of which 2.2 billion Euros refer to sustainability issues, primarily with a keen attention towards digitization* ***processes*** *and internal skills*” (**VP**). It is noteworthy to remark that this strategic orientation had already been planned to some extent before the pandemic crisis and it supported operational structure to easily overcome the lockdown periods. This is fundamental because Iren, like other utility companies, could not stop their activities in those months (8,100 people continued to work without a day off). In fact, before the pandemic, 1,000 employees had already adopted smart-working solutions. When the forced lockdown was brought in, “*Iren was already organised for these smart working solutions and the crisis was an opportunity to implement them to guarantee viable working conditions for their employees*” (**CEO**). The number of employees working from home jumped to 3,000. After the spring of 2020, Iren improved investments in digitalisation by 14%, with the development of technological platforms and devices.

Furthermore, the pandemic emphasised both the importance to invest in CSR projects and the relevance of a circular approach. Four main guidelines were followed: waste collection, a new plant for waste treatment, water depuration and district heating. These elements have been affected by a substantial redefinition of the circular economy approach that is thoroughly illustrated in the next section. In Iren, “*these months did not require a revision of its strategies, but the exogenous event gave the opportunity for an acceleration in their implementation and the potential primary role that Iren plays for its country and its communities was clearer*” **(CSRO)**.

In this context, Iren emerges not only as a player on the market but also as a vehicle to lead a plurality of different entities in overcoming current and temporary difficulties. For this reason, “*we decided to improve our efforts in this direction as never before. This is because our success, in terms of profits and purpose, is strongly related to the success and the duration of our stakeholders*” (**CEO**).

**4.3 Implementations as a consequence of the COVID-19 disruption**

A greener transition constitutes a remarkable challenge, especially for public utilities which interface with several stakeholder groups. In Iren, this has been the primary objective during the COVID-19 adaptation period. In fact, “*this pandemic has opened eyes toward a more sustainable future, where innovative solutions can accelerate the development of our smart cities. This is an* ***exceptional*** *momentum to work on clean energy for the near future.*” (**CSRO**). Similarly, “*we have to act now, no matter what the circumstances are, otherwise the changes will never happen. This is also because at the moment regulators are supporting this implementation with the Recovery Plan, also known as the Next Generation EU. These financial supports may converge towards the achievement of the Agenda 2030, which is a compelling objective to achieve, thus we have to act accordingly*” (**CEO**). In so doing, Iren aims to pursue a disruptive greener transition along two concrete actions that have a long-term view for sustainable development: the “*multi-circle economy*” model and the Enterprise Risk Management (ERM) system.

The first action relates to the development of the “*multi-circle economy*” model as a result of the fusion between a circular economy and the multi-utility business model. This evolution extends the circular economy approach principally adopted for waste management to other renewable resources (water and energy), underlying the primary role of technological innovation and high investments in ***processes***. “*This emphasises the convergence between renewable resources and innovation with regards to knowledge sharing*” (**CEO**). “*This combination instils the awareness of innovation as an essential element to effectively address interdependencies among stakeholders' interests*” (**VP**). “*This is a crucial point to deal with the scarcity of natural resources, that is why we aim to enact a “multi-circle economy” model which multiplies the value of the circular economy for the years ahead, by considering all our business activities. From a social perspective, this constitutes the prerequisite for implementing sustainable smart cities*” (**CEO**). As shown in Iren’s 2025 Industrial Plan, at the base of this transition, the following main activities contribute to implementing this “*multi-circle economy*” model: responsible management and adding greater value to waste, a sustainable use of water resources, green energy that favours the decarbonisation ***processes*** with the hydroelectric production plants, energy efficiency in buildings and ultimately E-mobility, as a truly alternative solution to sustainable electric and shared mobility. Together with Ambrosetti, Iren has also addressed specific KPIs to compose a matrix where waste, water and energy are combined with the three main phases of the resource life cycle (management, ***processing*** and renewal). This matrix brings out nine metrics that, once combined and summarised, give a single performance indicator. Ambrosetti tested this multi-cycle index on other multi-utility companies and found that in 2020 Iren was a pioneer in this multiple integration.

The second action stimulates initiatives for the mitigation of risks. “*When managing risks both financial and non-financial KPIs should be taken into account (also related to ESG issues) that can lead to proper strategies and promote organisational change aimed to preserve durability over time*” (**VP**). Concretely, “*Iren decided to implement its enterprise risk management system (ERM) by matching financial and non-financial issues in an integrated way*” (**CSRO**). The ERM system assesses the “*adequacy of the identification,* ***measuring****, management and monitoring system for corporate risks, as well as to verify the appropriate and prompt application of corrective actions held to be suitable for risk reduction*” (Sustainability Report, 2019). Thus, it is essential for the integrated management of the risks which is conducted in an iterative manner. For this purpose, “*in order to gather an overview of the surrounding context, Iren systematically conducts scenario analyses and consults different sector-specific sources of information (e.g. Italian Electricity Market Study → 2019→2040), focused on topics such as climate change, modifications of laws and regulations and technological innovations*” (**CEO**). For Iren, “*climate change is the main issue to which Iren devoted particular attention in terms of identification, assessment, and management* ***processes*** *to tackle risks and exploit opportunities*” (**VP**). Such an analysis of CSR issues lies at the foundation of the risk matrix with the main risks in terms of impact and probability, which allows the Risk Management and the Corporate Social Responsibility Department to collaboratively work together in order to address mitigating actions and suggests CSR objectives and targets with reference to the strategic pillars (Battisti *et al.*, 2022). Furthermore, stress tests are conducted methodically and regularly to verify both the objectives and the targets, as well as mitigating actions parallel to a probable non-achievement of them. “*The peculiarity of our ERM system stems from the direct linkage with the planning, in other words, our ERM drives the strategic planning of the company, and redirects priorities based on the risk assessment, management and control in a synchronic and iterative way. Thus, we do believe that it is paramount to implement an ERM system so as to react proactively to the dynamic and ever-changing circumstances we are all facing during this COVID-19 pandemic*” **(CSRO)**.

In conclusion *“we believe that the pandemic impacts on the corporate culture, in particular it increased the responsibility and sense of belonging. This is translated into a more widespread system of delegation around the group, showing the role of each employee in the development of the operating strategies”* (**CEO**) Iren had already been working on them, but the crisis improved and facilitated this change. In other words, it brought to a head the need for an approach based more on leadership than on management. *“Iren opted for an inclusive approach, sharing the group's vision and perspective on every level, with a widespread engagement of the insiders toward the business targets”* (**CEO**). This can be considered as a big step. In fact, middle management is generally more oriented towards an operating approach to solve day-by-day commitments than to extend their vision to the future.

**5. Discussion**

Although accounting and management scholars have drawn attention to the importance of exploring IT, little scrutiny has been paid to the understanding of its developmental path during disruptive times. The purpose of this paper was to identify how IT stages of development evolved during the COVID-19 pandemic. We investigated how IT approaches have been applied to preserve stakeholders' interests, while maintaining an economic and financial balance. The case study of Iren brings up the following argumentation. IT has emerged as a dynamic and progressive ***process*** that includes the following IT stages of development: IT initiation, corresponding to the phase before COVID-19, IT reactiveness and IT implementation corresponding to the phase of the COVID-19 adaption. For each IT stage of development, this study identifies three CSR strategic postures that support the resilience of the multi-utility company in overcoming this period of crisis: stakeholder engagement, flexible proactiveness and democratic durability. Figure 1 shows the theoretical model of IT stages of development and CSR strategic postures.

Stakeholder engagement corresponds to the initiation phase of IT (Rinaldi, 2020). Stakeholder engagement in IT initiation is in line with the findings of Devalle *et al.* (2021) which show that stakeholder engagement is a key element to distinguish substantial CSR strategies. In a preliminary stage of implementation, stakeholder interests are multi-faced, and, for this reason, they often compete with paradoxical dilemmas to manage (Freeman, 2010; Haffar and Searcy, 2017; Van der Byl and Slawinski, 2015). In this scenario, it is much easier to trade off one interest against another, or eventually, apply compliance-based programs. An IT mindset rethinks problems by proposing new solutions so that “these interests can go together, and even more value can be created for each” (Freeman, 2010, p. 9). Stakeholder engagement in the form of one-way communication and two-way communication, along with the implementation of collaborative partnerships with common objectives, is crucial in this phase (Devalle *et al.*, 2021). Furthermore, collaboration and mutual affinity on sustainable issues and concrete exchanges on research and development are the key ingredients of new sustainable business solutions.

During the period of crisis, the capacity to have a timely optimisation in resource allocation is crucial. Moreover, a governance structure oriented to preserve and guarantee cooperation with stakeholders is an important driver to make changes timely. A continuous dialogue leads to monitoring day-by-day activities by improving the awareness of the company to identify the priorities for the users, and to suggest the needs that must be satisfied first. This is an important strategic advantage to reduce the time of a market reaction and to substitute long, complex and generally expensive market investigations. This proactiveness should be anchored to the expertise of the management with the support of the know-how gained through investments in innovation. This permits a high grade of flexibility with diversification in the operating activities, considering the opportunities detected. This CSR strategic posture can be conceptualised into “flexible proactiveness” emerging as a driving attitude in the reactiveness phase of the COVID-19 disruption.

It is a well-known fact that multi-utility companies are not only market players, but their role is a more complex one. In fact, they should be vehicles to lead communities and commercial partners in the future, overcoming current and temporary difficulties, but also promoting changes to achieve their balance. Multi-utility companies are not charity entities but their success, in terms of profits and purposes, depends on the success of their stakeholders. In this perspective, so as to preserve the company's durability, it is necessary to balance the company's interests also by taking into account the stakeholders' interests for their preservation. For these reasons, durability is the result of a multitude of interests bound together that constitute a “democratic” feature. The term “democratic” derives from “δῆμος-*demos”*, which means ordinary citizens in a city-state, and it emphasises the strong interrelations between the company and society (the community in which it operates). That is, democratic durability can be defined as the optimisation of the interdependence of a company's and stakeholders' interests towards their collective preservation over time. Through flexible proactiveness and stakeholder engagement, multi-utility companies address future stakeholders' needs to meet their future expectations. For this reason, this approach expands the horizon of CSR strategic planning because it mitigates the myopia characterising companies that are focused on short-term results. As shown by Ambrosetti, this tendency produces significant multiple effects in value added (for each euro of value added produced by Iren, there is a direct effect on society equal to an additional 0.87) and employment (for each employee, Iren generates 2.7 jobs/positions in the community). These multiples explain the outstanding growth trends in the last few years and emphasise the strong relationships between Iren and the society in which it operates.

**5.1 Theoretical implications**

From a theoretical viewpoint, the study strengthens the concept of IT by determining its developmental paths and by addressing the CSR strategic postures that characterise the IT evolution. The initiation stage of IT is mainly based on stakeholder engagement, then, the next stages of IT development are IT reactiveness and IT implementation. These IT stages of development are based on the theoretical reasoning of stakeholder theory, because stakeholder engagement practises are the cornerstone of both IT initiation and IT reactiveness and the IT implementation phases. That is because IT is the ***process*** of decision making, management and reporting, by considering the intertwined relations of the company and its stakeholders. Furthermore, and linked to this, these interdependencies have been highlighted even more greatly in this pandemic. On the one hand, the COVID-19 pandemic has underlined the limitation of globalisation (Muzio and Doh, 2021), and, on the other hand, it has strengthened the interdependence among companies and between companies and society. Within the interdependent system, each company along with stakeholders, can overcome this uncertainty by contributing to the enhancement of sustainable development (Freeman *et al.*, 2020). In the IT reactiveness phase, we conceptualise flexible proactiveness as the capability of the companies to be resilient. The term “resilience” has been used at an organisational level to describe the inherent characteristics of companies that are able to respond more quickly, recover faster or develop more unusual ways of doing business (Sutcliffe and Vogus, 2003; Vogus and Sutcliffe, 2007). Ultimately, in the IT implementation, we conceptualised democratic durability as a force that supports this ***process*** and enhances a long-term logic for sustainable development. These innovative CSR strategic postures contribute to and expand the current literature on IT, especially considering its evolution over time.

**5.2 Managerial implications**

From a practical viewpoint, the research provides practical solutions for companies that aim to face sustainability challenges and are going to implement an IT attitude towards a holistic approach. First, IT requires a corporate governance structure that supports the implementation of CSR projects at the core of companies' business strategy by addressing a forward-looking perspective. The board of directors has to take into account different stakeholders in the decision-making ***process***, considering different interests, needs and ideas (wider audience and stakeholder diversity). Second, there is the need to enhance cooperation between managers and stakeholders as the basis for an effective stakeholder engagement. Stakeholder engagement addresses one-way communication (financial and non-financial information, social media, press releases, etc.), dialogue (regional committees, interviews, reports, etc.) and promotes partnerships by developing circular economy projects with stakeholders. Stakeholder engagement leads to investing in new activities closer to CSR issues that reshape the group's strategies and priorities. Third, the dynamic attitude of flexible proactiveness corresponds to actions that foresee and tackle new opportunities in a timely way. Ultimately, the development of the “*multi-circle economy*” model and the implementation of an ERM system represent two IT actions that address a long term-view for sustainable development. They both constitute tools of CSR strategic planning: the “multi-circle economy” approach optimises resources in a sustainable and circular manner, while ERM fosters risk management as a main driver to redirect CSR objectives and priorities. All these elements contribute to the pursuit of democratic durability towards a collective value creation and, as derived from the case, they enhance both resilience and relationships between business and society.

When a company implements all these CSR strategic postures, it addresses the DNA code of CSR 2.0 conceptualised by Visser (2011), which includes value creation, strong governance, societal/stakeholder contributions and environmental integrity with sustainable ecosystems (p. 150). In this scenario, companies changed their CSR strategies from image driven to performance-driven; from specialised to integrated; from standardised to diversified (Visser, 2011, p. 148).

The current crisis can be considered to be an opportunity to rethink companies' business models with an Integrated CSR perspective. Furthermore, to overcome periods of crisis, managers can adopt these CSR strategic postures (stakeholder engagement, flexible proactiveness and democratic durability) into the company's DNA. These attitudes should be implemented subsequently to enhance collective value creation, resilience and relationships between business and society. This management behaviour addresses real CSR actions that are far from being symbolic.

**6. Conclusions, limitations and future research directions**

Businesses and society are facing the need for recovery and adjustments to a “new future” beyond the “new normal” (Muzio and Doh, 2021). In this context, IT plays a crucial role to overcome this ***unprecedented*** time with suitable responses and reactions. Thus, in the context of the multi-utility sector, this paper explores the IT stages of development and CSR strategic postures that have evolved before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. The research provides stimuli for recovery through three main guidelines: stakeholder engagement, flexible proactiveness and democratic durability as the CSR strategic postures that enhance resilience and the integration of CSR practises at the core of business strategies. Therefore, related IT actions can be addressed by managers to overcome this period of crisis, and to forge new circular CSR initiatives that will shape companies' business models for tackling societal challenges (Di Vaio *et al.*, 2021).

The research provides practical solutions for companies that face sustainability challenges and are going to implement an IT attitude towards a holistic approach. In particular, IT needs a corporate governance structure that integrates CSR practises with a forward-looking perspective in the decision-making ***process***. This is achieved by strengthening stakeholder engagement through communication, dialogue, learning activities and partnerships. This iterative ***process*** drives investments in new CSR activities that reshape companies' strategies and priorities timely and proactively. All these efforts pursue democratic durability toward value creation, strong governance, societal/stakeholder contributions and environmental integrity with sustainable ecosystems that constitute the DNA code of CSR 2.0 (Visser, 2011).

This research has limitations that can be addressed in future academic studies. Our case study is limited to an Italian multi-utility company; thus, IT actions are affected by context and firm-specific factors. For these reasons, the results cannot be generalised directly to other businesses operating in different sectors. In more detail, the study did not analyse IT actions using specific examples from industries that have been particularly challenged during the COVID-19 pandemic (e.g. automotive industry, retail and tourism industry, ***agricultural*** and food sector), as sustainability transformation will be very different in every sector (Schaltegger, 2021). The present research did not develop within-scale (e.g. within organisation), between-scale (e.g. between organisations) and cross-scale (between organisations and socio ecological systems) analysis. Additionally, the case study is limited to the period in which the pandemic is still ongoing, and the study does not consider future events that can change the course of sustainable development. As a matter of fact, the economic and societal disruption caused by the pandemic will accelerate both the decline of carbon-intensive industries and leverage low-carbon innovation (Hörisch, 2021), but this longitudinal case study did consider these impacts on IT. However, this research provides IT actions that can sustain the recovery and meet the Agenda 2030. Future lines of research can investigate how systemic and collaborative initiatives can contribute to pursuing the SDGs through IT actions. Similarly, investigations could verify which IT actions meet specific SDGs and how far they are to do so. Furthermore, multiple case studies can be fertile ground for analysis of any potential restrictions that impede the pursuit of sustainable development and that destroy value for stakeholders.

This study contributes to the debate around how business models and stakeholder relationships at the basis of IT can be innovated with an integrated CSR perspective.

**Table 1** List of interviewees

| **Interviewees** | **Role** | **Years of experience in Iren** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Dr. Massimiliano Bianco | CEO of Iren Group from December 2014 to June 2021 | 7 years |
| Current Senior Advisor in Circular Economy and Energy Transitions in the infrastructure sector |  |  |
| Dr. Moris Ferretti | Vice-President of Iren Group and Chairman of Iren Mercato S.p.A | 6 years |
| Dr. Selina Xerra | Chief Corporate Social Responsibility Officer (CSRO) of Iren Group, former External Relation Manager | 11 years |

**Table 2** Research method: case selection, data collection and analysis methods

| **Research phase (Stake, 1995)** | **(1) Case selection** | **(2) Data collection** | **(3) Data analysis** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Method | Single case study (Yin, 2003; Eisenhardt, 1989) | Primary and secondary sources of information | Qualitative content analysis (Krippendorff, 2004) implemented by adopting ordering methods by time (event-listing matrix and growth gradient) suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994) |
| Underlying reasonings | * to address the «how» question; * to understand the effects of COVID-19 on IT. | * Data triangulation (Yin, 2003) * Convergent validity (Voss *et al*, 2002) | * to obtain a condensed and broad description of the phenomenon * to derive themes and patterns (Krippendorff, 2004) |
| ***Process*** | * Selection criteria based on the relevance of the sector, dimensions and business commitments toward responsible business practices at the company's core strategy | Primary data from interviews:to interpret IT according to the meanings assigned by the interviewees (Lincoln and Denzin, 2000) to get perceptions of how COVID-19 impacted on IT | Quotes from interviews:IT (decision-making, organisational culture, collaborations, among the others)Stakeholder engagement (stakeholders, communication, cooperation, partners, value creation, among the others)Multi-utility sector (circular economy, resource management, infrastructure improvements, among the others) Crisis (COVID-19, uncertainty, disruption, opportunities, investment\*) |
| Secondary data from sustainability reports, and newspaper articles:to gather further information to extend the analysis | (2) Keywords from sentences of written texts: integrated, sustainability practices, circular economy, engagement, crisis; CSR |  |  |
| * Secondary data from prior studies on IT and mainly focused on the public utility sector | (3) Keywords from sentences of academic texts: *public-utility; COVID-19; CSR* |  |  |

**Source(s)**: Own elaboration

**Table 3** Summary of findings

| **Phases** | **IT stages of development** | **CSR strategic postures** | **IT in Iren** | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Framework of analysis (Devalle *et al.* 2021)** | **IT actions** | **Explanations based on quotes coded** |  |  |  |
| *Phase I: IT before COVID-19* | *IT initiation* | Stakeholder engagement | Acknowledging and dealing with the paradoxical tensions | * Governance mechanisms * Strategic attitude * Performance measurements | * “Corporate governance was our starting point because we oriented our managers towards an integrated planning of ESG objectives. But this activity was not only an initial effort, but it was an inception to develop a new model to carry on day by day and that will affect the achievement of short-term targets along with the long-term ones over the years”  1. “Iren expanded its business to collect synergic benefits and economies of scale, thus it fixed a “fil rouge” in sustainability” 2. “This shed light on a bivalent and reciprocal relationship between strategies and communication, this has been gathered in a combination between financial and non-financial KPIs as a driver to evaluate our performance” |
| Communication with and for stakeholders | * Two-way communication: o Institutionalisation of the regional committees * One-way communication, reporting and accounting for stakeholders | * “At the moment, this approach is unique because the participants on these committees engage with voluntary intentions, but also with a strong commitment and critical but constructive views”  1. “non-financial disclosure gives the opportunity to raise the contents to a strategic level and this is an effective tool for a deeper stakeholder engagement to achieve a substantial integration between different entities and cultures” |  |  |  |
| Partnership for collaborative innovations | * Circular economy projects | * “Iren Group manages its own waste and the waste managed on behalf of local communities with the aim of reducing its production and increasing recovery and production of energy from waste” |  |  |  |
| *Phase II: IT during the COVID-19 disruption* | *IT reactiveness* | Flexible proactiveness |  | * Investments | * “in September 2020 Iren evaluated the most probable pandemic effects and this sensitivity analysis led the company to improve investments” |
|  | * Corporate governance changes for the engagement |  |  |  |  |
| *IT implementation* | Democratic durability |  | * “Multi-circle economic model” * Implementation of the Enterprise Risk Management system | * “We aim to enact a “multi-circle economy” model which multiplies the value of the circular economy for the years ahead by considering all our business activities. From a social perspective, this constitutes the prerequisite for implementing sustainable smart cities”  1. “The peculiarity of our ERM system stems from the direct linkage with the planning g, in other words, while in other realities ERM serves solely for the internal control system, our ERM drives the strategic planning of the company, and redirects priorities based on risk assessment, management and control in a synchronic and iterative way” |  |

**Source(s)**: Own elaboration

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BLACKROCK GREATER EUROPE INVESTMENT TRUST PLC

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Half yearly financial announcement of results in respect of the six months ended 28 February 2022

Performance record

1     The change in net assets reflects proceeds from share issuance, market movements and dividends paid.

2     Alternative Performance ***Measure***, see Glossary in the Half Yearly Financial Report.

3     Further details are given in the Glossary in the Half Yearly Financial Report.

Chairman’s Statement

OVERVIEW

It has been a turbulent six months and a difficult period for your Company. At the start, markets appeared to be driven by concerns around high inflation and the response by the Federal Reserve, but company fundamentals came through in October as markets focused on the ongoing third quarter earnings season in Europe. Following a set-back at the end of November due to the ‘Omicron’ COVID-19 variant, markets returned to favour towards the end of December, as evidence suggested less severe symptoms in most cases.

It continued to be a bumpy ride for investors post the year end, with a sharp market rotation in January perpetuated by value stocks outperforming growth stocks amid rising inflation and higher interest rates. At the end of the period, Russia began a military ***invasion*** of Ukraine in a major escalation of the Russo-Ukrainian war that had begun in 2014. From a market perspective, this has resulted in foreign investors not being able to trade in Russian stocks.

PERFORMANCE

Against this backdrop, over the six months ended 28 February 2022, the Company’s net asset value per share (NAV) returned -20.0%, underperforming the FTSE World Europe ex UK Index which returned -7.8%. Over the same period, the Company’s share price returned -21.8% (all percentages calculated in Sterling terms with dividends reinvested). Exposure to Russian holdings at 28 February 2022 was 1.3% of net assets, 5.7% (£36.8m) as at 31 January 2022, and these were written down to zero after 28 February 2022 when the secondary listings of the ADRs/GDRs of Russian holdings were suspended. It is the Board's intention to sell the Company's Russian stocks, as and when circumstances permit, and it is appropriate to do so. The Company will not make any further purchases in Russian stocks for the foreseeable future. Further information on investment performance and the Company’s Russian holdings is given in the Investment Manager’s Report below.

Since the period end to 9 May 2022, the Company’s NAV has decreased by 13.8% compared with a fall in the FTSE World Europe ex UK Index of 5.2% over the same period.

REVENUE EARNINGS AND DIVIDENDS

The Company’s revenue return per share for the six month period ended 28 February 2022 amounted to 1.37p compared with 0.54p for the corresponding period in 2021, an increase of 153.7%. Revenue in the second half of the year, although strong, will be affected by the loss of income from our Russian holdings which had been expected to yield attractive income returns. The Board has declared an interim dividend of 1.75p (2021: 1.75p) per share. The dividend will be paid on 17 June 2022 to shareholders on the Company’s register on 20 May 2022, the ex-dividend date being 19 May 2022.

TENDER OFFERS

The Directors of the Company have the discretion to make semi-annual tender offers at the prevailing NAV, less 2%, for up to 20% of the issued share capital in May and November of each year. The Board announced on 30 September 2021 that it had decided not to proceed with a tender offer in November 2021 and on 29 March 2022 that the tender offer in May 2022 would not be implemented.

Over the six month period ended 28 February 2022, the Company’s shares traded at an average premium to NAV of 1.8% compared to a discount of 2.0% to NAV, the price at which any tender offer would be made. The Board has therefore concluded that it was not in the interests of shareholders as a whole to implement the latest semi-annual tender offer.

SHARE ISSUES

I am pleased to report, as indicated above, that the Company’s shares have, for the most part, traded at a premium rating and in the period to 28 February 2022, 4,300,000 shares were allotted and 1,945,000 shares were reissued from treasury at an average price of 681.87p per share for a total gross consideration of £42,632,000. All share issuance was carried out at a premium to NAV. The prices at which these shares have been issued also represent a substantial premium to the prices originally paid for them by the Company. Since the period end, and up to the date of this report, the Company has not reissued any further shares.

BOARD COMPOSITION

We are delighted to welcome Ian Sayers to the Board. Ian was appointed as a Director of the Company on 10 February 2022. Ian brings a wealth of experience having been the former Chief Executive of the Association of Investment Companies. He is also a qualified chartered accountant and chartered tax adviser.

OUTLOOK

Market volatility will likely remain elevated. In light of Russia's continuing war against Ukraine, a package of economic and individual sanctions have been imposed against Russia. A significant escalation of these sanctions has increased the cost to Russia and the rest of the world, and this could prevail for some time. The emergence of the new COVID-19 variant at the end of last year has also led to a stop-start recovery and affected global supply chains. Additionally, there is little doubt that we have now entered a more inflationary period and the impacts of the conflict are likely to increase fears of recession.

Your Company is a concentrated, high conviction portfolio with a long investment horizon and is therefore less sensitive to short-term macro and market narratives. Many of the Portfolio Managers’ strongest convictions in the European market have significantly derated this year, despite company updates showing strong earnings and positive outlooks for 2022. There are therefore opportunities to top up or add names where the Portfolio Managers see potential for strong earnings growth in the medium to long term.

ERIC SANDERSON

10 May 2022

Investment Manager’s report

OVERVIEW

The Company’s share price and NAV per share fell by 21.8% and 20.0%, respectively, over the six months to 28 February 2022. By way of comparison, the FTSE World Europe ex UK Index decreased by 7.8% during the same period. (All performance data is in Sterling terms with dividends reinvested.) The Company’s NAV therefore underperformed the FTSE World Europe ex UK Index by 12.2%, with 5.7% attributable to our holdings in Russia.

The last six months proved highly volatile, dominated by several sharp market rotations. The market was pre-occupied first by a macro narrative around high spot inflation figures and the path of monetary policy and then by the ***invasion*** of Ukraine by Russia.

During the period under review, the market at times aggressively moved into value assets which led to a mechanical derating of higher quality growth stocks. In January, all of this culminated in the most significant value rotation seen since the global financial crisis. This subsequently saw a sharp reversal in February as market participants grew concerned over the possibility of a policy mistake in an already slowing cycle and favoured defensive assets. This was significantly exacerbated by the ***invasion*** of Ukraine by Russia. Equity markets sold off heavily, while commodity prices including Brent crude oil, natural gas and wheat moved higher, as the market was quick to price potential supply disruptions as a result of this conflict.

During these market moves, only the energy sector delivered strong absolute returns while all remaining sectors fell in absolute terms. Consumer staples, utilities and financials fared slightly better, while technology, industrials and real estate sold off.

In our previous reports we highlighted how market volatility and a health crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic posed a real test to our investment philosophy. This was also the case over the past, highly volatile six months. These times require adherence to our core investment beliefs: owning growing businesses which can maintain a spread between their returns on capital and their cost of capital. If company fundamentals remain unimpaired, volatility creates opportunities to selectively add to high conviction holdings that suffered in indiscriminate market sell-offs.

Besides our exposure to Russian companies, which we address in more detail below, it is important to highlight that negative share price performance was driven by factor moves (one style significantly outperforming or underperforming another) in the market rather than earnings disappointments or weaker business fundamentals. In fact, the full year 2021 earnings season has so far been positive with many of the Company’s investee companies delivering very strong results. When markets are driven by macroeconomic narratives and factor moves, earnings season can serve as a welcome ‘reality check’ that helps us remove ourselves from the market noise and instead concentrate on the operating environment for our companies.

Following the ***invasion*** of Ukraine, countries around the world and international organisations introduced economic sanctions against Russian individuals and entities. At the time of writing, the Central Bank of Russia has been sanctioned by the United States of America, the European Union and Japan. As a result, roughly half of Russia’s US$620 billion foreign currency reserves are now frozen – this pivotal ***measure*** has generated a dollar liquidity squeeze in Russia impacting external payments, as well as creating risks around Russia's banking system's ability to meet dollar deposit withdrawals. To stabilise the domestic market, Russia’s Central Bank has hiked interest rates to 20% (from 9.5%) and is enforcing mandatory conversion of export revenues into US dollars. This was only done three times before, in Iran, North Korea and Cuba, explaining the collapse in the Rouble exchange rates, as well as share prices of key Russian banks. Russian stock markets have been closed since 25 February 2022 and secondary listings of Russian companies trading on international exchanges have been suspended since 3 March 2022.

BlackRock suspended the purchase of all Russian securities in our active and index portfolios on 28 February 2022 and, following that, BlackRock’s Pricing Committee wrote down the value of Russian securities across all portfolios to a nominal value. A significant part of negative performance during the period resulted from our exposure to these Russian companies. As of 31 January 2022, the Company held 5.7% in Russian stocks. Post-***invasion***, and at the time of writing in early March 2022, Russian securities held by the Company are valued at a nominal value. Therefore, main detractors during the period included our holdings in Russian companies which all fell between 75% to 95% over the period. One of the Russian stocks, Sberbank, held by the Company is subject to sanctions and we are addressing how to deal with this.

Outside of the first order effects described above, it is important to consider second and third order effects. Following the ***invasion***, markets were quick to price higher energy and ***agricultural*** commodity goods, given that Russia is the source of significant European oil and gas imports, while Russia and Ukraine together also account for 29% of global wheat exports (Source: The Economist, 12 March 2022). This may lead to a deterioration in spending power for consumers in the lower quartiles of the income distribution and will likely cause margin compression and/or demand destruction for energy intensive industries. The Company has little exposure to energy intensive industries and our consumer facing companies generally sell to higher-end consumers whose discretionary expenditure is relatively well insulated against higher prices.

PORTFOLIO

Coming to portfolio detractors and contributors, Lonza Group’s shares sold off despite the business demonstrating an ***exceptional*** operating performance. The health care company is adding about 30% new contract developers and manufacturers (customers) per year and its management team remains very confident in the outlook for the business given its impressive customer pipeline. The company now gives guidance up to 2025, giving very strong visibility of future earnings and cashflows.

Similarly, shares in DiaSorin struggled, although it remains one of the best positioned life sciences firms in Europe. The largely family owned, Italian diagnostics company is a well-run, high returning business, that can benefit from an increased public awareness of the role of diagnostic testing and continued decentralisation of specialties, such as providing smaller hospitals with lab equipment.

On top of the de-rating suffered by longer duration businesses (typically higher quality stocks), our position in Netcompany Group experienced stock specific weakness following the announcement of the Intrasoft acquisition and disappointing organic growth and margin guidance which has complicated the investment case. We took action to reduce the position size in December 2021.

In more positive news, our off-benchmark position RELX was the top performer over the period, as we have seen increased evidence of an acceleration of organic growth in its academic publishing and legal divisions. RELX can also benefit from structural growth in their data analytics business and generally boasts strong earnings visibility.

Novo Nordisk aided returns, showing great strength in its franchises for glucagon like peptides, as well as in the obesity market. More recently, the company delivered improved guidance on capacity for their Wegovy weight loss drug which came to the market in June 2021, expecting to be able to fill 100% of scripts through the first six months of 2022.

The Company’s position in LVMH, which we added to the portfolio in September 2021 following a volatile summer for the company’s shares, outperformed the falling market after reporting stellar results. The luxury group delivered ***exceptional*** numbers for full year 2021, with positive sentiment across almost all divisions and regions. The turnaround of the acquired Tiffany brand continues to be on track and sales in China accelerated despite continued local lockdowns. Having met with management several times over the period, we remain convinced that this is one of the best companies in Europe over the long term.

National Bank of Greece and Israeli ICL Group, both part of the Company’s Emerging European portfolio, also contributed positively to returns. The latter develops, produces and markets fertilizers, metals and other special-purpose chemical products and strongly benefited from a rise in fertilizer prices on the back of higher gas prices. We subsequently took profit in the shares and exited the stock.

Elsewhere, shares in travel related companies including Amadeus IT Group and Safran also performed well, rebounding as fears around Omicron abated which led to a more positive outlook for the travel and leisure industry.

As highlighted above, we have remained focused on our investment philosophy. Over the period we worked intensely on our well-established fundamental research ***process*** to confirm our investment cases, through meeting company management teams, forensically examining estimates of earnings and cashflows and having rigorous internal discussions about where we could be wrong. This is an ongoing ***process***, but at present we have not seen any fundamental reasons to materially change the general composition of the portfolio. This is reflected in a portfolio turnover number of just under 13%.

Rather than selling our favourite companies based on other investors’ fears, we have taken advantage of weakness in share prices and topped up position sizes in companies whose business and operational performance are intact, or if anything growing stronger. This includes Lonza Group, ChemoMetec, Hermès and Ferrari.

As mentioned above, we also bought shares in LVMH, one of the global leaders in luxury goods, and Rational - a German manufacturer and retailer of combi-ovens, steamers and cooking appliances for commercial kitchens. Rational is one of Europe’s highly profitable businesses. The company has delivered return on capital of circa 35% over the past years, coupled with high-single-digit to low-double-digit organic growth rates.

OUTLOOK

The macro-economic and geopolitical environment remains highly uncertain. As bottom-up investors, we do not seek to forecast these outcomes, but it is likely that economic growth will slow and global fiscal support will fade. The damaging impacts of the Russia-Ukraine war may cause monetary policy makers to more closely weigh high spot inflation against a deteriorating growth outlook, which could ease some of the rate induced market volatility seen in January.

Moving from macro to micro, we are of the view that we are only in the early stages of transformational shifts in many industries in Europe. Our portfolio is fundamentally set up to benefit from high-quality, long lasting investment spend to electrify the European economy, to reduce emissions from the existing building stock, and to accelerate the shift to decarbonise transport, to name but a few. Here, we focus our research hours on finding structural drivers and increased spending that can help companies deliver superior returns over the long term.

All in all, we expect greater dispersion between sector and stock outcomes and with that a need for continued selectivity. In our view, this environment will favour well-managed businesses with strong pricing power, which are able to execute in a tough market environment. We continue to believe that holding these businesses will be to the benefit of our shareholders over the medium to long term.

STEFAN GRIES AND SAM VECHT

BLACKROCK INVESTMENT MANAGEMENT (UK) LIMITED

10 May 2022

TEN LARGEST INVESTMENTS

The Company's ten largest investments represented 51.0% of the Company's portfolio as at 28 February 2022.

1= ASML(2021: 1st)

Technology companyMarket value: £45,907,000Share of investments: 7.6%

A Dutch company which specialises in the supply of photolithography systems for the semiconductor industry. The company is at the forefront of technological change, investing in leading research and development to capture the structural growth opportunity coming from growth in mobile devices and microchip components. High barriers to entry within the industry give ASML a protected position with strong pricing power allowing growth in margins whilst they continue to innovate. The company is run by an ***exceptional*** management team which aims to create long-term value whilst returning excess cash to shareholders.

2 + LVMH(2021: n/a)

Consumer Discretionary companyMarket value: £45,025,000Share of investments: 7.5%

A French multinational holding corporation specialising in luxury goods. The group has a strong and well-diversified portfolio of luxury brands ranging from handbags to spirits to cosmetics. LVMH’s business model enjoys high barriers to entry due to the heritage, provenance and exquisite quality of its product offering. Its consistent brand investment through economic cycles has helped to spur brand desirability and allowed for significant pricing power. LVMH’s management team also has an impressive track record of taking over struggling brands and accelerating their growth and returns profile over time.

3+ Novo Nordisk(2021: 6th)

Health Care companyMarket value: £37,090,000Share of investments: 6.1%

A Danish multinational pharmaceutical company which is a leader in diabetes care. We expect Novo Nordisk to post strong growth in earnings and cashflows driven by demand for ‘Ozempic’ which treats type 2 diabetes, as well as by its weight management drug Wegovy, which recently came to the market. Overall, we believe Novo Nordisk offers attractive long-term growth potential at high returns and sector leading cash flow conversion with any excess in cash being returned to shareholders.

4- Sika(2021: 3rd)

Industrial companyMarket value: £33,043,000Share of investments: 5.5%

A speciality chemical company with a leading position in both construction chemicals and in bonding agents for the automotive industry. Sika has proprietary technology within adhesives, which has an increasing array of applications as technology advances. The company benefits from structural drivers of urbanisation and has exposure to multiple points in the construction cycle including new infrastructure projects, as well as maintenance or refurbishment of existing buildings. It is also likely to benefit from the EU Recovery Fund and the EU Green Deal channelling funds towards sustainable infrastructure projects. Sika’s decentralised structure of subsidiaries and strong culture of new product innovation continues to drive pricing power.

5- Lonza Group(2021: 2nd)

Health Care companyMarket value: £32,775,000Share of investments: 5.4%

A Swiss health care services and life-sciences company. Lonza has established itself as one of the leading contract manufacturers of high-end biological drugs, as well as cell and gene therapy. Lonza’s competitive advantages stem from the complexity of the production ***process*** – where few peers can match its offering. This is cemented by high barriers to entry given that all production facilities are required to be certified by the Food and Drug Administration. Overall, we expect Lonza’s biologics business to grow in the mid-teens every year for the next ten years with positive pricing, as there is generally a shortage of capacity in the market.

6+ RELX(2021: 7th)

Consumer Discretionary companyMarket value: £30,430,000Share of investments: 5.0%

A multinational information and analytics company which has high barriers to entry in most of its divisions, including scientific publishing. This capital light business model allows for a high rate of cash flow conversion with repeatable revenues built on subscription-based models. The business also benefits from the structurally increasing usage of data globally, which supports their data analytics business.

7 - DSV Panalpina(2021: 5th)

Industrial companyMarket value: £25,649,000Share of investments: 4.3%

A Danish freight forwarding and logistics company run by an excellent management team with a strong track record in creating value through acquisitions and by instilling a best-in-class culture in its organisation. Their success in making acquisitions has been facilitated by a strong IT platform which drives operational efficiencies leading to high conversion margins. In 2019, DSV took over Swiss peer Panalpina in its largest ever acquisition which they have been integrating successfully. In 2021, DSV announced the purchase of Kuwait-based Agility’s logistics business in a US$4.1 billion deal, becoming the third largest freight forwarder globally.

8 = Royal Unibrew(2021: 8th)

Consumer Staples companyMarket value: £22,739,000Share of investments: 3.8%

A brewing and beverage company based in Denmark. Through a number of well-timed acquisitions, the group has transformed itself into a multi-beverage company offering attractive growth in soft drink niches at high returns with significant potential to export their brands with strong European heritage into international markets.

9 + Hexagon(2021: 10th)

Technology companyMarket value: £17,763,000Share of investments: 2.9%

An industrial and software conglomerate. The business specialises in the provision of geo-mapping and monitoring software and sensors, as well as plant management and automation systems. Its products have applications in diverse end markets including smart phones, mining automation, construction surveying and ***agriculture*** optimisation.

10+ Hermès(2021: 15th)

Consumer Discretionary companyMarket value: £17,263,000Share of investments: 2.9%

A French luxury design house established in 1837. It specialises in leather goods, lifestyle accessories, home furnishings, perfumery, jewellery, watches and ready-to-wear. Due to deliberate brand management and craftmanship, this ultimate high-end brand is supply constraint and enjoys strong earnings visibility given some of its products are sold on allocation to clients on waiting lists. Hermès has also increased exposure to perfume and cosmetics which is particularly attractive for its growing online business.

All percentages reflect the value of the holding as a percentage of total investments.

Together, the ten largest investments represent 51.0% of the Company’s portfolio (31 August 2021: 46.7%).

PORTFOLIO ANALYSIS AS AT 28 FEBRUARY 2022

Percentages in the table above are a % of total investments.

INVESTMENTS AS AT 28 FEBRUARY 2022

All investments are in ordinary shares unless otherwise stated. The total number of investments held at 28 February 2022 was 42 (31 August 2021: 44).

Industry classifications in the table above are based on the Industrial Classification Benchmark standard for categorisation of companies by industry and sector.

As at 28 February 2022, the Company did not hold any equity interests comprising more than 3% of any company's share capital.

INTERIM MANAGEMENT REPORT AND RESPONSIBILITY STATEMENT

The Chairman’s Statement and the Investment Manager’s Report above give details of the important events which have occurred during the period and their impact on the financial statements.

PRINCIPAL RISKS AND UNCERTAINTIES

The principal risks faced by the Company can be divided into various areas as follows:

·        Counterparty;

·        Investment performance;

·        Legal & regulatory compliance;

·        Market;

·        Operational;

·        Financial; and

·        Marketing.

The Board reported on the principal risks and uncertainties faced by the Company in the Annual Report and Financial Statements for the year ended 31 August 2021. A detailed explanation can be found in the Strategic Report on pages 31 to 34 and in note 15 on pages 86 to 92 of the Annual Report and Financial Statements which are available on the website maintained by BlackRock at[*http://www.blackrock.com/uk/brge*](http://www.blackrock.com/uk/brge).

In the view of the Board, there have not been any changes to the fundamental nature of the principal risks and uncertainties since the previous report and these are equally applicable to the remaining six months of the financial year as they were to the six months under review.

GOING CONCERN

The Directors, having considered the nature and liquidity of the portfolio, the Company’s investment objective and the Company’s projected income and expenditure, are satisfied that the Company has adequate resources to continue in operational existence for the foreseeable future and is financially sound. The Board is still mindful of the continuing uncertainty surrounding the potential duration of the COVID-19 pandemic and its longer-term effects on the global economy and recovery of economies. The Board believes that the Company and its key third-party service providers have in place appropriate business continuity plans and these services have continued to be supplied without interruption throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Company has a portfolio of investments which are predominantly readily realisable and is able to meet all of its liabilities from its assets and income generated from these assets. Accounting revenue and expense forecasts are maintained and reported to the Board regularly and it is expected that the Company will be able to meet all its obligations.

The Investment Manager generally aims to be fully invested and it is anticipated that gearing will not exceed 15% of net asset value (NAV) at the time of drawdown of the relevant borrowings. Borrowings under the overdraft facility shall at no time exceed £70 million or 15% of the Company’s net asset value (whichever is lower) and this covenant was complied with during the period. Based on the above, the Board is satisfied that it is appropriate to continue to adopt the going concern basis in preparing the financial statements. Ongoing charges for the year ended 31 August 2021 were approximately 1.02% of net assets.

RELATED PARTY DISCLOSURE AND TRANSACTIONS WITH THE MANAGER

BlackRock Fund Managers Limited (BFM) was appointed as the Company’s Alternative Investment Fund Manager (AIFM) with effect from 2 July 2014. BFM has (with the Company’s consent) delegated certain portfolio and risk management services, and other ancillary services, to BlackRock Investment Management (UK) Limited (BIM (UK)). Both BFM and BIM (UK) are regarded as related parties under the Listing Rules. Details of the fees payable are set out in note 4 and note 12 below. The related party transactions with the Directors are set out in note 11 below.

DIRECTORS’ RESPONSIBILITY STATEMENT

The Disclosure Guidance and Transparency Rules (DTR) of the UK Listing Authority require the Directors to confirm their responsibilities in relation to the preparation and publication of the Interim Management Report and Financial Statements.

The Directors confirm to the best of their knowledge that:

·        the condensed set of financial statements contained within the Half Yearly Financial Report has been prepared in accordance with applicable UK Accounting Standards and the Accounting Standards Board’s Statement ‘Half Yearly Financial Reports’; and

·        the Interim Management Report, together with the Chairman’s Statement and Investment Manager’s Report, include a fair review of the information required by 4.2.7R and 4.2.8R of the FCA’s Disclosure Guidance and Transparency Rules.

This Half Yearly Financial Report has not been audited or reviewed by the Company’s auditor.

The Half Yearly Financial Report was approved by the Board on 10 May 2022 and the above responsibility statement was signed on its behalf by the Chairman.

ERIC SANDERSONFOR AND ON BEHALF OF THE BOARD

10 May 2022

INCOME STATEMENT FOR THE SIX MONTHS ENDED 28 FEBRUARY 2022

The total column of this statement represents the Company’s profit and loss account. The supplementary revenue and capital accounts are both prepared under guidance published by the Association of Investment Companies (AIC). All items in the above statement derive from continuing operations. No operations were acquired or discontinued during the period. All income is attributable to the equity holders of the Company.

The net profit/(loss) on ordinary activities for the period disclosed above represents the Company’s total comprehensive income/(loss).

STATEMENT OF CHANGES IN EQUITY FOR THE SIX MONTHS ENDED 28 FEBRUARY 2022

1     Final dividend paid in respect of the year ended 31 August 2021 of 4.55p per share was declared on 4 November 2021 and paid on 17 December 2021.

2     Final dividend paid in respect of the year ended 31 August 2020 of 4.40p per share was declared on 22 October 2020 and paid on 9 December 2020.

3     Interim dividend paid in respect of the year ended 31 August 2021 of 1.75p per share was declared on 23 April 2021 and paid on 4 June 2021. Final dividend paid in respect of the year ended 31 August 2020 of 4.40p per share was declared on 22 October 2020 and paid on 9 December 2020.

For information on the Company’s distributable reserves, please refer to note 9 below.

BALANCE SHEET AS AT 28 FEBRUARY 2022

STATEMENT OF CASH FLOWS FOR THE SIX MONTHS ENDED 28 FEBRUARY 2022

NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS FOR THE SIX MONTHS ENDED 28 FEBRUARY 2022

1. PRINCIPAL ACTIVITY

The principal activity of the Company is that of an investment trust company within the meaning of Section 1158 of the Corporation Tax Act 2010.

2. BASIS OF PREPARATION

The financial statements of the Company are prepared on a going concern basis in accordance with Financial Reporting Standard 104 Interim Financial Reporting (FRS 104) applicable in the United Kingdom and Republic of Ireland and the revised Statement of Recommended Practice – ‘Financial Statements of Investment Trust Companies and Venture Capital Trusts’ (SORP) issued by the Association of Investment Companies (AIC) in April 2021 and the provisions of the Companies Act 2006.

The accounting policies and estimation techniques applied for the condensed set of financial statements are as set out in the Company’s Annual Report and Financial Statements for the year ended 31 August 2021.

3. INCOME

Dividends and interest received in cash during the period amounted to £2,396,000 and £nil respectively (six months ended 28 February 2021: £1,369,000 and £nil; year ended 31 August 2021: £5,031,000 and £nil).

No special dividends have been recognised in capital during the period (six months ended 28 February 2021: £nil; year ended 31 August 2021: £nil).

4. INVESTMENT MANAGEMENT FEE

The investment management fee is levied quarterly, based on 0.85% per annum of net asset value on the last day of each month. The investment management fee is allocated 80% to capital reserves and 20% to the revenue reserve. There is no additional fee for company secretarial and administration services.

5. OTHER OPERATING EXPENSES

1     Relates to prior year accrual for printing and postage fees, legal fees, reclaim of VAT and miscellaneous fees being written back during the year.

2     For the six month period ended 28 February 2022, expenses of £12,000 (six months ended 28 February 2021: £9,000; year ended 31 August 2021: £19,000) were charged to the capital column of the Income Statement. These relate to transaction costs charged by the custodian on sale and purchase trades.

The direct transaction costs incurred on the acquisition of investments amounted to £221,000 for the six months ended 28 February 2022 (six months ended 28 February 2021: £63,000; year ended 31 August 2021: £140,000). Costs relating to the disposal of investments amounted to £30,000 for the six months ended 28 February 2022 (six months ended 28 February 2021: £38,000; year ended 31 August 2021: £54,000). All transaction costs have been included within the capital reserves.

6. DIVIDENDS

The Directors have declared an interim dividend of 1.75p per share for the period ended 28 February 2022, payable on 17 June 2022 to shareholders on the register on 20 May 2022. The total cost of the dividend based on 102,300,411 ordinary shares in issue at 10 May 2022 was £1,790,000 (28 February 2021: £1,528,000).

In accordance with FRS 102, Section 32 ‘Events After the End of the Reporting Period’, the interim dividend payable on the ordinary shares has not been included as a liability in the financial statements, as interim dividends are only recognised when they have been paid.

7. EARNINGS AND NET ASSET VALUE PER ORDINARY SHARE

Revenue and capital returns per share and net asset value per share are shown below and have been calculated using the following:

There were no dilutive securities at 28 February 2022 (28 February 2021: nil; 31 August 2021: nil).

8. CALLED UP SHARE CAPITAL

During the six months ended 28 February 2022, 1,945,000 ordinary shares were reissued from treasury (six months ended 28 February 2021: 1,075,000; year ended 31 August 2021: 8,432,310) for a net consideration after expenses, of £12,537,000 (six months ended 28 February 2021: £5,819,000; year ended 31 August 2021: £50,200,000). During the period to 28 February 2022, 4,300,000 new shares were issued (six months ended 28 February 2021: nil; year ended 31 August 2021: 3,300,000) for a net consideration after expenses, of £30,014,000 (six months ended 28 February 2021: £nil; year ended 31 August 2021: £22,262,000). Since the period end and up to the date of this report, no further shares have been reissued from treasury or issued.

During the six months ended 28 February 2022, no shares were repurchased.

9. RESERVES

The share premium account and capital redemption reserve are not distributable reserves under the Companies Act 2006. In accordance with ICAEW Technical Release 02/17BL on Guidance on Realised and Distributable Profits under the Companies Act 2006, the capital reserves may be used as distributable reserves for all purposes and, in particular, the repurchase by the Company of its ordinary shares and for payments as dividends. In accordance with the Company’s Articles of Association, capital reserves and the revenue reserve may be distributed by way of dividend. The capital reserves arising on the revaluation of investments of £137,621,000 (28 February 2021: gain of £153,171,000; 31 August 2021: gain of £288,750,000) is subject to fair value movements and may not be readily realisable at short notice; as such it may not be entirely distributable. The investments are subject to financial risks; as such capital reserves (arising on investments sold) and the revenue reserve may not be entirely distributable if a loss occurred during the realisation of these investments.

10. FINANCIAL RISKS AND VALUATION OF FINANCIAL INSTRUMENTS

The Company’s investment activities expose it to the various types of risk which are associated with the financial instruments and markets in which it invests. The risks are substantially consistent with those disclosed in the previous annual financial statements with the exception of those outlined below.

Market risk arising from price risk

Price risk is the risk that the fair value of future cash flows of a financial instrument will fluctuate because of changes in market prices (other than those arising from interest rate risk or currency risk), whether those changes are caused by factors specific to the individual financial instrument or its issuer, or factors affecting similar financial instruments traded in the market. Local, regional or global events such as war, acts of terrorism, the spread of infectious illness or other public health issue, recessions, or other events could have a significant impact on the Company and the market price of its investments.

The coronavirus outbreak has had a profound impact on all aspects of society in recent years. While there is a growing consensus in developed economies that the worst of the impact is now over, there is an expectation that travel restrictions, enhanced health screenings at ports of entry and elsewhere, disruption of and delays in health care service preparation and delivery, cancellations, supply chain disruptions, and lower consumer demand will create ongoing challenges. While widescale vaccination programmes are now in place in many countries and are having a positive effect, the impact of COVID-19 continues to adversely affect the economies of many nations across the globe and this impact may be greater where vaccination rates are lower, such as in certain emerging markets. Although it is difficult to make timing predictions, it is expected that the economic effects of COVID-19 will continue to be felt for a period after the virus itself has moved from being pandemic to endemic in nature, and this in turn may continue to impact investments held by the Company.

Valuation of financial instruments

Financial assets and financial liabilities are either carried in the Balance Sheet at their fair value (investments) or at an amount which is a reasonable approximation of fair value (due from brokers, dividends and interest receivable, due to brokers, accruals, cash and cash equivalents and overdrafts). Section 34 of FRS 102 requires the Company to classify fair value measurements using a fair value hierarchy that reflects the significance of inputs used in making the measurements. The valuation techniques used by the Company are explained in the accounting policies note on page 78 of the Annual Report and Financial Statements for the year ended 31 August 2021.

Categorisation within the hierarchy has been determined on the basis of the lowest level input that is significant to the fair value measurement of the relevant asset.

The fair value hierarchy has the following levels:

Level 1 – Quoted market price for identical instruments in active markets

A financial instrument is regarded as quoted in an active market if quoted prices are readily and regularly available from an exchange, dealer, broker, industry group, pricing service or regulatory agency and those prices represent actual and regularly occurring market transactions on an arm’s length basis. The Company does not adjust the quoted price for these instruments.

Level 2 – Valuation techniques using observable inputs

This category includes instruments valued using quoted prices for similar instruments in markets that are considered less active; or other valuation techniques where all significant inputs are directly or indirectly observable from market data.

Level 3 – Valuation techniques using significant unobservable inputs

This category includes all instruments where the valuation technique includes inputs not based on market data and these inputs could have a significant impact on the instrument’s valuation.

This category also includes instruments that are valued based on quoted prices for similar instruments where significant entity determined adjustments or assumptions are required to reflect differences between the instruments and instruments for which there is no active market. The Investment Manager considers observable data to be that market data that is readily available, regularly distributed or updated, reliable and verifiable, not proprietary and provided by independent sources that are actively involved in the relevant market.

The level in the fair value hierarchy within which the fair value measurement is categorised in its entirety is determined on the basis of the lowest level input that is significant to the fair value measurement. If a fair value measurement uses observable inputs that require significant adjustment based on unobservable inputs, that measurement is a Level 3 measurement.

Assessing the significance of a particular input to the fair value measurement in its entirety requires judgement, considering factors specific to the asset or liability. The determination of what constitutes ‘observable’ inputs requires significant judgement by the Investment Manager.

Fair values of financial assets and financial liabilities

The table below is the analysis of the Company’s financial instruments ***measured*** at fair value at the balance sheet date.

There were no transfers between levels for financial assets and financial liabilities during the period/year recorded at fair value as at 28 February 2022, 28 February 2021 and 31 August 2021. The Company did not hold any Level 3 securities throughout the six month period ended 28 February 2022 (six month period ended 28 February 2021: nil; year ended 31 August 2021: nil).

11. RELATED PARTY DISCLOSURE

The Board consists of five non-executive Directors, all of whom are considered to be independent by the Board. None of the Directors has a service contract with the Company. The Chairman receives an annual fee of £42,500, the Chairman of the Audit and Management Engagement Committee receives an annual fee of £33,500 and each of the other Directors receives an annual fee of £29,000.

As at 28 February 2022, the following members of the Board held shares in the Company: Eric Sanderson held 4,000 ordinary shares, Peter Baxter held 5,000 ordinary shares and Paola Subacchi held 5,550 ordinary shares.

Since the period end and up to the date of this report there have been no changes in Directors’ holdings.

The transactions with the AIFM and Investment Manager are stated in note 12.

12. TRANSACTIONS WITH THE MANAGER AND THE INVESTMENT MANAGER

BlackRock Fund Managers Limited (BFM) provides management and administration services to the Company under a contract which is terminable on six months’ notice. BFM has (with the Company’s consent) delegated certain portfolio and risk management services, and other ancillary services, to BlackRock Investment Management (UK) Limited (BIM (UK)). Further details of the investment management contract are disclosed in the Directors’ Report on pages 41 and 42 in the Annual Report and Financial Statements for the year ended 31 August 2021.

The investment management fee is levied quarterly, based on 0.85% per annum of net asset value on the last day of each month. The investment management fee due for the six months ended 28 February 2022 amounted to £2,689,000 (six months ended 28 February 2021: £1,762,000; year ended 31 August 2021: £4,156,000). At the period end, £3,992,000 was outstanding in respect of the management fee (28 February 2021: £1,762,000; 31 August 2021: £2,376,000).

In addition to the above services, BIM (UK) provided the Company with marketing services. The total fees paid or payable for these services for the six months ended 28 February 2022 amounted to £48,000 excluding VAT (six months ended 28 February 2021: £53,000; year ended 31 August 2021: £118,000). Marketing fees of £112,000 excluding VAT were outstanding at 28 February 2022 (28 February 2021: £126,000; 31 August 2021: £64,000).

The ultimate holding company of the Manager and the Investment Manager is BlackRock, Inc., a company incorporated in Delaware USA.

13. CONTINGENT LIABILITIES

There were no contingent liabilities at 28 February 2022 (28 February 2021: £nil; 31 August 2021: £nil).

14. PUBLICATION OF NON STATUTORY ACCOUNTS

The financial information contained in this half yearly report does not constitute statutory accounts as defined in Section 435 of the Companies Act 2006. The financial information for the six months ended 28 February 2022 and 28 February 2021 has not been audited.

The information for the year ended 31 August 2021 has been extracted from the latest published audited financial statements, which have been filed with the Registrar of Companies. The report of the auditor on those accounts contained no qualification or statement under Sections 498 (2) or (3) of the Companies Act 2006.

15. ANNUAL RESULTS

The Board expects to announce the annual results for the year ending 31 August 2022 in early November 2022. Copies of the annual results announcement can be obtained from the Secretary on 020 7743 3000 [*orcosec@blackrock.com*](mailto:orcosec@blackrock.com) The Annual Report should be available by November 2022 with the Annual General Meeting being held in December 2022.

12 Throgmorton Avenue

London

EC2N 2DL

10 May 2022

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END

The Half Yearly Financial Report will also be available on the BlackRock website at[*http://www.blackrock.com/uk/brge*](http://www.blackrock.com/uk/brge). Neither the contents of the Manager’s website nor the contents of any website accessible from hyperlinks on the Manager’s website (or any other website) is incorporated into, or forms part of, this announcement.

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[***Boris Johnson pledges to say 'a lot more' on 'partygate' row after police investigation***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:64SK-8JV1-DY4H-K0Y8-00000-00&context=1516831)

telegraph.co.uk

February 14, 2022 Monday 4:05 PM GMT

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**Section:** POLITICS; Version:1

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**Body**

Europe 'closest to war in 70 years', warns minister Liz Truss warns Russia may invade 'at any moment' PM speaks of need for 'severe' sanctions on ***invasion*** [*Front line police officers have 'no faith' in Sadiq Khan*](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2022/02/14/front-line-met-police-officers-have-no-faith-sadiq-khan-forcing/) [*Tim Stanley: Self-hating West losing will to survive*](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2022/02/14/self-hating-west-losing-will-survive/)

Boris Johnson on Monday pledged to say "a lot more" on the row over alleged Downing Street parties after the end of the current police investigation.

Mr Johnson was contacted by police on Friday with a questionnaire about events he is believed to have attended during lockdown.

Asked whether he had provided his answers, he told reporters: "All that is a ***process*** that has got to be completed before I can say anything more but I look forward to telling you a lot more in due course."

The Prime Minister's comments, made on a visit to Scotland, come as he has just five days left to respond to the Met document, which could lead to fixed penalty notices.

Last week, The Telegraph revealed he is expected to say he is preparing to argue he did not break Covid laws because he was working in his flat on the night of an alleged party on Nov 13, 2020 when Abba music was reported to have been played.

14 Feb 2022-04:05PM GMT

That's all for today...

"I look forward to telling you a lot more in due course."

That was the intriguing response given by Boris Johnson when asked if he had returned the questionnaire sent to him by Scotland Yard on Friday over alleged parties in Downing Street.

For the last few weeks, the holding answer from Mr Johnson's own MPs has been "wait for Sue Gray" and then "wait for the police" when asked about the accusations surrounding their party leader.

As soon as the investigation is wrapped up, Conservatives will have to make their own judgment-and will effectively hold the Prime Minister's political future in their hands.

But in the meantime, Mr Johnson is focused on anything other than "partygate". He instead turned his attention to the crisis in Ukraine, warning that Russia could invade and trigger a land war in Europe within "the next 48 hours".

While the PM may be trying to divert attention away from "partygate", and rightly focused on what is currently a grave diplomatic impasse, it remains to be seen whether he can ride out the political storm and cling on to his premiership.

14 Feb 2022-03:49PM GMT

'This is the EU's darkest hour'

As Russian forces continued to build along the Ukrainian border last month, Netflix released one of its most popular movies to date - Munich: The Edge of War. The film is set in 1938 as German troops prepare to attack the Sudetenland while Chamberlain and other European leaders negotiate away Czechoslovakia's sovereignty. For Richard Kemp, it's almost as if President Macron is reading from Chamberlain's script.

Since his meeting last week with Putin, he's been pressing Ukraine to implement the Minsk accords, brokered by France and Germany in 2015 as Russian forces and their proxies fought in eastern Ukraine. The imposition of the Minsk accords would see an end to Kyiv's sovereignty. They would give Russia a say in running the country and its foreign policy and hand seats in parliament to Moscow's proxies. A few days ago Putin made clear exactly what he wants, telling Ukraine, with undertones of a necrophilia: "Like it or not, you'll have to tolerate it, my beauty". It is extraordinary that Macron, whose country now holds the EU Council presidency, should entertain such gunpoint bartering of a democratic nation's integrity. He has a track record of failed conciliations with Russia and has recently suggested there is "legitimacy" in the Kremlin's concerns over a putative threat from Nato. [*Colonel Richard Kemp: Any war would come to the EU elite as well*](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2022/02/14/eus-darkest-hour/) 14 Feb 2022-03:30PM GMT 'The Russians didn't like what I had to say' Speaking about her trip to Russia last week, Liz Truss told reporters: I went to Russia to deliver a very clear message, which is that it's Russia who is the aggressor, they have 100,000 troops on the Ukrainian border and if they stage an incursion into Ukraine, that would have a damaging effect on the Russian people and the Russian government. Of course, the Russians didn't like what I had to say but I say it nevertheless. And I want them to desist and I want them to be aware that there will be severe costs of an ***invasion***. The Foreign Secretary was dismissed by Sergey Lavrov, the veteran Russian foreign minister, as "deaf" and "unprepared" during a testy press conference.But Ms Truss hit back and insisted she was "not mute in our discussions" while insisting the UK was "resolute" in pursuing the path of diplomacy.14 Feb 2022-03:23PM GMTRussia faces 'severe' sanctions in event of ***invasion***, warns Liz TrussLiz Truss reiterated the "severe" sanctions Russian oligarchs would face in the event of any incursion into Ukrainian territory.Warning that a war would be "disastrous", the Foreign Secretary told reporters the West was "very clear" it was Russia who was the aggressor."They need to de-escalate because it will be a cost to Russia if they invade Ukraine," Ms Truss said."Both in terms of the cost of a long-running war, but also the sanctions that we would impose, which would be severe, and would target oligarchs and it would target companies across Russia."14 Feb 2022-03:16PM GMTCould deselecting Corbyn save Labour?There was much in Rosie Duffield's interview with The Telegraph last week that should worry her current party leadership, writes Tom Harris. One less reported observation was that Labour is now two very different parties; less a broad church than two warring tribes with very little in common.As if in an effort to emphasise the truth of this statement, it was confirmed over the weekend that party officials plan to press ahead with the selection of a new Labour candidate in Corbyn's Islington seat, taking advantage of the incumbent's current suspension from the Labour whip in the Commons.Sir Keir Starmer knows that there is no way back to the party for his predecessor, or at least not one that allows Starmer himself to retain any credibility.When Corbyn was suspended in 2020, it was made clear that a simple but sincere apology for his claim that anti-Semitism in the party had been "exaggerated" would be enough to see him re-admitted.[*Tom Harris: Corbyn has gifted Starmer a perfect opportunity*](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2022/02/14/deselecting-jeremy-corbyn-could-save-labour-party/) 14 Feb 2022-03:03PM GMTBoris Johnson: Failings should not 'cloud' Cressida Dick's record Boris Johnson insisted recent scandals and failings in the Metropolitan Police should not "cloud" the legacy of Cressida Dick, the Met's outgoing Commissioner."I think the best thing I can say about Cressida Dick is that I think that over many years she has played a remarkable role as the first female head of the Metropolitan Police," he told reporters."I thank her for all her service, it goes back a long time, and I wouldn't want any other issues to cloud what I think overall is a very considerable record of public service to this country."14 Feb 2022-02:56PM GMTLiz Truss: Russia could invade 'at any moment'Russia could invade Ukraine "at any moment", Liz Truss warned as she confirmed she chaired a COBR meeting on the threat to Ukraine."The latest information suggests Russia could invade at any moment and we urge the Kremlin to deescalate," the Foreign Secretary warned."Our focus is on prioritising the safety and security of British nationals in Ukraine. We are doing everything possible to prevent a Russian ***invasion*** in Ukraine, while also preparing for the worst."14 Feb 2022-02:51PM GMTFront line Met Police officers have 'no faith' in Sadiq KhanMartin Evans, our Crime Correspondent, has more on rank and file police officers in the capital have declared they have no confidence in Sadiq Khan, the Mayor of London, following the resignation of Dame Cressida Dick (see 1.46pm).The Metropolitan Police Federation, which represents 31,000 officers across London, accused Mr Khan of undermining public trust in the force and said confidence in the service was at "rock bottom".The move follows last week's [*shock departure of the Metropolitan Police Commissioner*](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2022/02/11/cressida-dick-resign-boris-johnson-partygate-met-police-commissioner/) , who announced she was leaving when Mr Khan declared he did not believe she could deliver the change needed in the force.A spokesman for Mr Khan said it was "the Mayor's view that a change of leadership was the only way to address this crisis in trust".Ken Marsh, chairman of the federation, said there was real anger across the Metropolitan Police Service at the way Dame Cressida had been treated, adding that his colleagues no longer had faith in Mr Khan.[*Read the full story here*](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2022/02/14/front-line-met-police-officers-have-no-faith-sadiq-khan-forcing/) 14 Feb 2022-02:33PM GMTUkraine ***invasion*** possible in next 48 hours, warns Boris Johnson14 Feb 2022-02:31PM GMTSadiq Khan hits commuters with highest Tube fare rise in more than a decade Sadiq Khan has piled misery on Londoners afflicted by the [*cost-of-living crisis*](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/money/consumer-affairs/cost-living-crisis-leaves-workers-2850-worse/) by announcing an inflation-busting increase in Tube fares.Underground fares are to rise at an average of 4.8 per cent, some 1 per cent more than the rise on the railways across the rest of the UK. Some bus fares will jump by 6.5 per cent.The increase on the Tube is the biggest since 2010, when fares rose by 10 per cent. On London's buses it is the largest rise since 2009, when a single fare increased from £1 to £1.20.Mr Khan, whose fare freeze in 2016 was a central plank of his mayoral campaign, blamed Boris Johnson's government for the increases.He said: "We have been [*forced into this position*](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/business/2021/12/04/sadiq-khan-stages-last-ditch-battle-stop-london-underground/) by the Government and the way it continues to refuse to properly fund Transport for London."The blanket 4.8p per cent, which will come into force at the start of March, is more than the scheduled 3.8 per cent rise on railways outside of the capital that will also be implemented next month. [*Oliver Gill, our Chief Business Correspondent, has more*](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/business/2022/02/14/sadiq-khan-raises-tube-bus-fares-beyond-inflation-blow-commuters/) 14 Feb 2022-02:14PM GMT'Please join us in this fight'Ukraine joining Nato will not make any difference to Russia's security, the Ukrainian Ambassador to the UK insisted as he called on other European countries to show their support."Nato is in our constitution, along with EU [membership], it is something that should stay there. I know Russians aren't happy with Ukraine becoming a member of Nato," Vadym Prystaiko told Sky News."I know they are telling everybody that it is becoming dangerously coordinated, dangerously close to Russia, becoming some security threat. If Ukraine becomes a member, it won't change the security calculations of Russians.""When Russians attacked us in Crimea, everybody was asking us not to do anything to spark World War Three or something, very dangerous. So what happened we lost Crimea without actually firing a shot. Now Ukrainians have got this lesson and they [said] openly and frankly that 'we will resist, we will defend our nation'."If you can help us, if you want to take some risk, if you understand why we are fighting for international law, please join us in this fight. Do whatever you can. Some can go as far as providing us weapons, some with weaker political systems can help us, I don't know, financially. But show up yourselves, tell us what your position is and tell Russia we are not fighting anymore in the 21st century."14 Feb 2022-01:57PM GMT'Reconsider' not sending arms to Ukraine, ambassador urges GermanyThe Ukrainian Ambassador to the UK has urged Germany to "reconsider" its decision not to send weapon to his country."We tried all peaceful ***measures***, we tried everything, but they still keep coming," Vadym Prystaiko, the Ukrainian Ambassador to the UK, told Sky. "At some point, Ukraine will have to put up a real fight if they come. We don't need this, we have to fight."But unfortunately we don't have many things which we can use to defend us against such a big army as Russia's. We're asking for some defensive weapons and instead we're receiving the army."Maybe Germans will reconsider it. Maybe they will understand we are not the aggressor on our own land-we just need something, to be helped."14 Feb 2022-01:46PM GMTBreaking: Metropolitan Police Federation declares it has no faith in Sadiq KhanThe Metropolitan Police Federation has declared it has no faith in Sadiq Khan after he forced out Dame Cressida Dick as the Commissioner of the force.Ken Marsh, chairman of the Federation, said in a statement:This is not a move we take lightly. We have let the Mayor's office know in no uncertain terms how our brave and diligent colleagues deserve better. The atmosphere among Metropolitan Police officers is horrendous-it's rock bottom. Officers in London feel saddened and angry that the commissioner Cressida Dick has been pushed out in the way she has. She was reforming. She was changing. The culture is changing. We are deeply disappointed with the actions of the Mayor.14 Feb 2022-01:33PM GMTNato 'a threat to all our safety', says Young LabourNato has been labelled "a threat to all our safety" by the youth wing of the Labour Party after Sir Keir Starmer's comments about the importance of the alliance.Sir Keir described Nato as "vital" last week as he visited its headquarters in Brussels, stressing his party's "unwavering" commitment to the defensive organisation.But the Left-wing Young Labour group said in a Twitter thread: "While we accept difference in policy positions to the current leadership of our party, we are especially concerned in this instance to see Keir Starmer pushing not only for further engagement with Nato, but celebrating it while attacking Stop The War and other pro-peace activists."Nato's acts of aggression both historical and present are a threat to all of our safety. Young Labour's delegates from across our membership and affiliates voted that we should withdraw from Nato and pursue an international policy based on peace, adopting this as official policy."Stoking up tension, macho posturing and trying to 'outdo' the Tories on hawkish foreign policy will only lead to further devastation, loss of life and displacement of people across the world. We offer solidarity with those organising against this, including members of Stop the War."After Sir Keir's comments that under his leadership Labour is a "very different party" (see 8.38am), the message does not seem to either have filtered down to, or been heeded by, Young Labour.14 Feb 2022-01:19PM GMTBoris Johnson backed to 'fight' and win next election whatever happens over 'partygate'A Cabinet minister has insisted that Boris Johnson will lead the Tory party into the next election, whatever the outcome of a police investigation into the "partygate" row.Brandon Lewis, the Northern Ireland Secretary, sought to dampen speculation about the Prime Minister's future after senior Tory MPs warned he would struggle to continue in office if he is found to have broken Covid laws.Downing Street confirmed on Friday night that Mr Johnson had received a questionnaire as part of the Metropolitan Police's inquiry into allegations of lockdown-breaking parties in government buildings.Yesterday, Mr Lewis insisted that the Prime Minister will "fight" and will win the next general election, as he faces the possibility of his backbenchers forcing a vote to oust him as leader.Fifteen Tory MPs have publicly called for Mr Johnson to quit, while more are thought to have privately written to the chairman of the 1922 Committee demanding a no-confidence vote. If Mr Johnson is found to have broken his own Covid laws, calls for his resignation are likely to grow. [*Lucy Fisher, our Deputy Political Editor, has more*](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2022/02/13/boris-johnson-backed-fight-win-next-election-whatever-happens/) 14 Feb 2022-01:05PM GMTBreaking: COBR meetings this afternoon and tomorrowLiz Truss, the Foreign Secretary, will host a COBR meeting this afternoon to discuss the consular response to Ukraine crisis, writes Lucy Fisher, our Deputy Political Editor.It comes after Foreign Office advice on Friday that urged all Brits to Ukraine as soon as possible.The Prime Minister will chair a COBR meeting tomorrow to discuss the full UK response.14 Feb 2022-01:04PM GMTNick Timothy: Democracies die when lies become acceptableWe have now been given several reasons why the Prime Minister should not, according to Downing Street, receive a fixed penalty notice from the police for breaking Covid rules, writes Nick Timothy. He believed the "gatherings" he attended were work events. One of them was held outside. His home is an office as well as a living space. A party might have taken place in his home, but he spent much of the time working as others drank and danced to music.All these arguments are irrelevant when we recall the Covid rules at the time. But more than this, they are a distraction from the most important questions. Did the Prime Minister break the rules? And did he, in denying he broke the rules and claiming not to know about others breaking the rules, lie to Parliament and the public? As many Tory MPs say, and many more say in private, it is impossible to believe Boris Johnson has told the truth. Yet Johnson insists, even if the police issue him with a fixed penalty notice for breaking Covid rules, that he will not resign. And some MPs are rehearsing the excuses - attempting to convince themselves, more than anything - as to why a fine would not be so bad. It would be worse than bad: it would be terrible. As indeed it would be terrible, even if the PM is not fined by the police, but the investigations make clear he misled Parliament and the public about what was going on in his home and office. Because, more than anything, the truth matters. In autocratic societies, as one chronicler of modern Russia puts it, "nothing is true and everything is possible".[*Nick Timothy: Wokeness, polarisation and social media are making lies acceptable*](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2022/02/13/democracies-die-truth-becomes-whatever-want/) 14 Feb 2022-12:56PM GMTEU hands Britain post-Brexit olive branch - an offer to lead new security council European leaders are planning to ask Britain to head up a new security organisation to counter future geopolitical challenges, in a move to put post-Brexit tensions behind them, writes Joe Barnes.Proposals for a "European Security Council" are being drawn up by Germany, the Netherlands and Poland in order to bring "Britain back into the fold" of major foreign policy discussions outside the confines of the European Union.The influential EU capitals believe it is now time to end years of bitterness after Brexit and forge new ties based on security and global co-operation-all to ensure Europe is better positioned to tackle world crises, in areas such as the Ukraine crisis and future pandemics.A group of countries are already urging Olaf Scholz, the German chancellor, to personally reach out to Boris Johnson to "bring Britain back into the fold". Berlin is considered to have enough political heft to ensure the proposals, which are still in their early stages, have maximum impact."Continental leaders need to say we're sitting down, and it would be great if you sat down with us," a senior European diplomat told the Telegraph.[*Full story: EU impressed with British handling of Ukraine*](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/world-news/2022/02/13/eu-hands-britain-post-brexit-olive-branch-offer-lead-new-security/) 14 Feb 2022-12:41PM GMTBoris Johnson refuses to confirm if Covid tests will remain free Boris Johnson would not say if testing will remain free when Covid regulations are set to come to an end later this month."I think the situation with Covid is that numbers remain high but it's clear that omicron is much less dangerous than delta, you can see the numbers going down in hospitals and the numbers in ICU have been nothing like what we saw with delta," he told Sky News."Together we've been taking roughly the same strategy. I know people try to make a lot of small differences and I understand that completely but the UK has been working very, very effectively together."On testing, which is important, we'll make sure we continue to work with our colleagues in Scotland. The similarities in our approach vastly outweigh the differences."14 Feb 2022-12:37PM GMTBreaking: Boris Johnson declines to apologise to Keir Starmer over SavileBoris Johnson was asked if he wished to take the opportunity to apologise to Sir Keir Starmer over his Jimmy Savile claims after the Labour leader confirmed he had received death threats (see 8.54am).His response: "I've said more than enough about that issue."14 Feb 2022-12:35PM GMTMove away from 'drip-feed' of Russian energy reliance, urges Boris Johnson Boris Johnson has called on European countries to do more to move away from Russian energy as he suggested not enough was done in the wake of the annexation of Crimea to reduce reliance on Putin's regime."We didn't really do enough to divest, to move away from dependence on Russian hydrocarbons," he told reporters."What I think all European countries need to do now is get Nord Stream out of the bloodstream, yank out that hypodermic drip-feed of Russian hydrocarbons that is keeping so many European economies going."We need to find alternative sources of energy and we need to get ready to impose some very, very severe economic consequences on Russia."14 Feb 2022-12:20PM GMTUkraine situation 'very, very dangerous' says PM Boris Johnson said the situation in Ukraine was "very, very dangerous" and urged Vladimir Putin to step back from "the edge of a precipice", writes Marcus Parekh.Speaking on a visit to Scotland, the Prime Minister also reiterated the need for the West to stand united on the issue and says that we must be ready to impose "very, very severe economic consequences on Russia" should they choose to invade."The UK, as you know, has been in the lead in bringing our allies together so that there's a tough package of sanctions.""It's very, very important that the West should stand united, particularly that Nato has done it. It's been pretty encouraging to see the way countries have pulled together."What all European countries "need to do now is get Nord Stream out of the bloodstream," he added.14 Feb 2022-12:06PM GMTJeremy Black: Yes, there is 'a whiff of Munich' about West's appeasementBen Wallace, who is emerging as a statesman of note, is under fire for saying there is a "whiff of Munich" in the western response to the Ukraine crisis, notes Jeremy Black.Certainly, some might view the Defence Secretary's comparison as offensive - particularly our Nato allies, who he appeared to suggest are as naive about the chances of a lasting settlement with Vladimir Putin as were the negotiators in Munich in 1938.Ukraine's ambassador to the UK criticised Mr Wallace, too, saying "it's not the best time for us to offend our partners".In Mr Wallace's comparison, Ukraine would play the part of Czechoslovakia, which not only lost the Sudetenland in 1938 but which was swallowed up by Germany and its client state Slovakia in 1939.But was Mr Wallace really so wrong? For one thing, there is a plan for appeasement on the table - and it has been promoted by Emmanuel Macron, the French president. He appeared to be seeking a grand bargain with Mr Putin in Moscow last week.[*Jeremy Black: Ben Wallace is right-compromise can be hazardous*](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2022/02/14/yes-whiff-munich-wests-appeasement-putin/) 14 Feb 2022-11:50AM GMTRecall Parliament if Russia invades Ukraine, urges Sir Keir StarmerParliament must be recalled if Russia invades Ukraine, Sir Keir Starmer has said.Asked if the West's strategy was failing to contain Putin, Sir Keir told Sky News: "Every effort should be made to try and ensure there's a peaceful way out of this. But this is Russian aggression and we need to stand together."I'm sure the Government would [recall Parliament] anyway because we must have a swift and strong response, a united response from the United Kingdom, a united response with our allies. So yes, Parliament should be recalled in those circumstances."On Ben Wallace's Munich comments, Sir Keir said the Defence Secretary "has been very open and collaborative with us in his dealings on a cross-party basis."14 Feb 2022-11:47AM GMTBreaking: Keir Starmer's latest comments on UkraineI would like to see tougher sanctions and I'd like that threat to be very real, because let's see for what it is, it's Russian aggression. So I want to see the Government go further on sanctions. But I will say this, Russia wants to see our allies divided, it wants to see division in the United Kingdom and we are not going to divide. Therefore we support the Government in what it's doing, we support our allies and the sovereignty of Ukraine. But yes, those sanctions should go further.14 Feb 2022-11:38AM GMTNHS targets 'women' and 'people with a cervix' in inclusive campaign The word "women" will remain in the latest NHS and Department of Health cervical screening campaign following a recent backlash in Scotland which invited "anyone with a cervix" for checks, writes Sarah Knapton, our Science Editor.The new drive, which launches on Monday, urges both "women" and "people with a cervix" to book a smear test, in a decision which has been applauded by feminists.Last October, the Scottish Government was criticised for a screening campaign in which the word "women" was largely replaced with "people", in an attempt to ensure transgender men and non-binary people with female anatomy were included.The ensuing row-which gained added traction as it coincided with party conference season-saw Sir Keir Starmer claim it was "not right" to say that only women have a cervix, causing Sajid Javid to accuse him of "total denial of scientific fact".But Boris Johnson appeared to dodge the question of whether Sir Keir was right, saying: "Biology is very important, but we have a system now in our country for many, many years in which people can change gender."[*: Feminists applaud NHS for keeping 'woman' in campaign*](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2022/02/14/nhs-targets-women-people-cervix-inclusive-smear-test-campaign/) 14 Feb 2022-11:19AM GMTCarrie Johnson: Lord Ashcroft's book claims 'spiteful and damaging' Carrie Johnson has accused Lord Ashcroft of peddling "regurgitated lies" about her as the peer prepares to publish a new unauthorised biography.Lord Ashcroft's book, which is currently being serialised in a Sunday newspaper, includes claims the Prime Minister's wife left her role at Conservative Campaign Headquarters (CCHQ) amid a row over expenses.Mrs Johnson, who was the Conservative Party's director of communications from June 2017 before leaving the following year, is alleged by sources quoted in the book to have booked minicabs under the names of junior staff for use in her private time.She is claimed to have made at least 40 "work or leisure trips abroad and in Britain" during the last decade. Lord Ashcroft wrote that her social media accounts, which featured a number of pictures of her on holiday, were also looked at by party officials.But a spokesman for Ms Johnson told the Mail on Sunday: "These regurgitated lies regarding Mrs Johnson's employment record are spiteful and damaging."[*Carrie's team hits back: 'She left her role to pursue her passion in ocean conservation'*](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2022/02/13/carrie-johnson-regurgitated-lies-lord-ashcroft-book-spiteful/) 14 Feb 2022-11:12AM GMTOnly one in 1,000 scam and fraud victims receive justice Only one in 1,000 scam and fraud victims are seeing their perpetrators brought to justice despite a dramatic rise in the crime, write Charles Hymas and Ben Butcher.Just 4,924 fraud offences resulted in a charge in 2021 out of more than five million scams reported by people in the Office for National Statistics (ONS) annual survey of crime.This means just 0.1 per cent of frauds resulted in a prosecution despite the number of offences rising by 32.4 per from 3.8 million in 2020, according to the analysis of official data by the Telegraph.Shadow Home Secretary Yvette Cooper said it was "appalling" so few cases were being solved by police forces and Action Fraud, the national police unit.14 Feb 2022-11:01AM GMTLabour's polling lead dropsLabour's polling lead over the Conservatives has dropped to three points, the latest YouGov update shows.Sir Keir Starmer's party is on 37 per cent, down four percentage points at the start of February, with the Conservatives up two points on 34 per cent.The Liberal Democrats are 10 per cent, the Greens eight per cent, the SNP five per cent and Reform UK four per cent.It comes after an Opinium poll at the weekend also showed a three-point Labour lead, but [*as Anthony Wells of YouGov points out*](https://twitter.com/anthonyjwells/status/1493171032966017035) this came as a result of significant changes to the methodology used by the company.14 Feb 2022-10:53AM GMTMinister for the (social) media roundIt's safe to say Matt Hancock is going beyond the Westminster bubble with his latest interview-given to Steven Bartlett, the newest Dragon on Dragon's Den and the founder of Social Chain, a social media marketing agency.The former Health Secretary was accompanied by Gina Coladangelo to the recording, which Mr Bartlett promises will touch on "partygate", where the now-infamous CCTV footage came from, and mistakes Mr Hancock made."This is the first time in the history of The Diary Of A CEO that things got a little heated between me and a guest at one point," the entrepreneur wrote. "However, Matt did answer all of the tough questions I asked him and nothing will be edited out."Matt Hancock x The Diary Of A CEO!Matt Hancock stopped by with his new partner Gina to speak to me.It's time to find out what really happened, it's time to ask the questions we've not had answers to; Party gate? Where did the CCTV footage come from? What mistakes did he make? pic.twitter.com/JVUiLpiDV0- Steven Bartlett (@SteveBartlettSC) February 14, 2022Molly-Mae Hague, the former Love Island contestant, made waves on the same podcast last month by saying: "We all have the same 24 hours in a day as Beyonce."[*Such was the anger over her words*](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2022/01/11/molly-mae-hague-shouldnt-have-apologised-speaking-truth-poverty/) that Ms Hague took to Instagram to apologise to "the people that have been affected negatively" by her comments. We will only know if Mr Hancock sparks any social media storms of his own when the interview lands.14 Feb 2022-10:41AM GMTBreaking: Tube and bus prices set to rise, confirms Sadiq KhanTube and bus prices in London will rise by an average of five per cent as of next month, Sadiq Khan has confirmed.Those travelling by public transport in the capital will see most fares rise by 10p or 20p, the highest increase in a decade.It is also the first time that Zone 1 fares, which are up by 10p, have increased since 2016.The move forms part of a deal with the Government to keep services running amid a protracted dispute over the future and funding of Transport for London (TfL).14 Feb 2022-10:35AM GMTWhat's happening today?In Westminster itself, not very much-Parliament is in recess this week, meaning we'll be waiting until next Monday for any action in the Commons or the Lords.This allows Boris Johnson to swap SW1 for Scotland and then northern England this morning as part of his "levelling up tour", which will see him visit a range of research and development projects-and of course a manufacturing site, adding to a pretty expansive collection of pictures of the PM in hi-vis in recent weeks.After his phone in on BBC Radio Newcastle (see today's blog posts from 8.38am to 8.52pm), Sir Keir Starmer is also touring the north this week in the hope of regaining some of Labour's suypport in the Red Wall.In Sunderland today, he will condemn the "rise of youth violence under the Conservatives" as Labour seeks to distance itself from the Corbyn years on law and order.So much so that Steve Reed, the shadow justice secretary, told the Mirror that Tony Blair "got it right" with his "tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime" approach-adding: "I think when Jeremy Corbyn was the leader, we gave the impression that we were more concerned about the criminals than about their victims."Driving the day on the foreign news front is of course the gravely serious situation on the Russia-Ukraine border. This blog will have you covered with major developments and political reaction, while my colleague Marcus Parekh [*has all the details in our up-to-the-minute coverage*](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/world-news/2022/02/14/russia-ukraine-crisis-latest-putin-nato-war-refugees-diplomats/). 14 Feb 2022-10:15AM GMTWater companies releasing raw sewage into rivers 'more than 1,000 times a day' Water companies are releasing raw sewage into rivers more than 1,000 times a day despite being told to do so only when there is heavy rainfall, Telegraph analysis reveals.More than a third of sewage discharge occurred when there was no heavy rain in the areas, according to the research, which suggests firms are breaching terms of their permits.The revelation comes as the Telegraph launches its Clean Rivers campaign, calling for action to stop water companies, industrial ***agriculture*** and urban waste from polluting England's beauty spots.Raw sewage was discharged into rivers and coastal areas for more than 3.1 million hours on more than 400,000 occasions throughout 2020, according to data from the Environment Agency.These spills are intended to occur only during times of ***exceptional*** rainfall to help the sewage network cope.[*Alex Clark, Emma Gatten and Olivia Rudgard have the latest*](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2022/02/13/water-companies-releasing-raw-sewage-rivers-1000-times-day/) 14 Feb 2022-10:07AM GMTCorbyn on the cusp of deselection?Jeremy Corbyn is on the brink of being deselected by Labour as the MP for Islington North, Mason Boycott-Owen reports as the party prepares to replace him with a new candidate.The Telegraph understands that Mr Corbyn wants the Labour whip restored and to continue as the MP for the seat.He has been an independent MP since October 2020 after he said that the scale of complaints of anti-Semitism during his time as leader were "dramatically overstated".While he would be unlikely to lose a vote in his local party, given his unpopularity in the area, a senior party insider told The Sunday Times that they are "determined to bring this to a head" and deem the current position "not sustainable".The Telegraph reported last month that Mr Corbyn [*was considering establishing a party of his own*](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2022/01/09/jeremy-corbyn-could-establish-party-hopes-fade-reinstated-labour/) after privately accepting that he would not have the whip reinstated.[*Full story: Corbyn's time is up, say sources close to Sir Keir*](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2022/02/13/jeremy-corbyn-close-deselected-labour-mp/) 14 Feb 2022-09:55AM GMTParliament being recalled may offer 'opportunity' to oppose RussiaRecalling Parliament could offer an "opportunity" for MPs to show their resolve in the face of Russia, the armed forces minister suggested this morning.Speaking to Tom Swarbrick on LBC, James Heappey said any decision for MPs to return during recess would be a matter for the Speaker, Boris Johnson and opposition leaders."If you consider what the UK is doing in all of this, Parliament being recalled may offer an opportunity for parliamentarians to show the UK's resolve in opposing what might happen or to give it support to the diplomatic efforts," he said.""We want to be clear that if Russia were to cross the border into Ukraine, we're not then entering a period of kind of febrile, tactical responses to Russian activity.14 Feb 2022-09:30AM GMTTim Stanley: The self-hating West is losing the will to survive The only person who threatens war in Ukraine is Vladimir Putin, by putting more than 100,000 troops on the border - and if you think they are there for the scenery, I would remind you that Moscow has already meddled in Crimea and the Donbass, writes Tim Stanley.Britain and America, by contrast, don't propose putting a single soldier in the country to defend it. On the contrary, their goal is to avert bloodshed by making it clear that ***invasion*** would come at an economic and political cost so high it wouldn't be worth trying. So why on earth is this effort for peace being denounced by some Westerners as "sabre-rattling" and "escalation"? There's a rational aversion to repeating the mistakes of Iraq and Afghanistan. But some of the critique of UK/US foreign policy is also an expression of domestic dissent. It is a misguided vote of no confidence in our own way of life.[*Tim Stanley: Putin-not the West-risks repeating errors of Iraq*](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2022/02/14/self-hating-west-losing-will-survive/) 14 Feb 2022-09:27AM GMTRussia risks making itself a pariah, says SNPThe SNP leader at Westminster this morning warned Russia it risks "acting as a pariah" in the event of an incursion into Ukraine.Ian Blackford called on Vladimir Putin to "drop back" the preparedness of Soviet forces amid reports of as many as 130,000 Russian troops at the border."Russia has to come into the world order, and they must recognise that what they are doing now is not a way they can win friends and influence and be part of that world order," he told Kay Burley at Breakfast."It has to be about democratic states, and one that recognises the rule of law. We do need to make sure the Russians recognise they would be acting as a pariah on the world stage if they took action against Ukraine."14 Feb 2022-09:15AM GMTPriti Patel's plan to ***process*** migrants offshore could cost at least four times more than in UK Priti Patel's plans to ***process*** migrants offshore could cost at least four times as much as keeping them in the UK, a new analysis suggests.The research by a coalition of charities estimated ***measures*** in the Government's Nationality and Borders Bill will cost an extra £2.7 billion to reform the UK's asylum system and crack down on illegal immigration and Channel migrants.This includes £1.44 billion for offshore ***processing*** centres for migrants, where they would be taken within seven days of arriving illegally in the UK.According to the analysis based on Australia-the only other country to have offshore ***processing***-the annual cost of housing an asylum seeker was £230,000 when numbers were at their peak, and rose to £1.9 million as numbers dwindled. That compares to under £50,000 for the cost of keeping an inmate locked up for a year onshore.[*Charles Hymas, our Home Affairs Editor, has this report*](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2022/02/14/priti-patels-plan-process-migrants-offshore-could-cost-least/) 14 Feb 2022-09:00AM GMTStop playing politics and find the best person to lead Met, Sadiq Khan told Sadiq Khan should put "political posturing aside" to help find the best replacement as Metropolitan Police Commissioner, sources close to the Home Secretary have said.The Labour mayor of London signalled over the weekend that he could withhold his support over the appointment of Dame Cressida Dick's successor if the Government attempted to make a decision without his involvement.The outgoing Met Police chief announced on Thursday evening that she was standing down after Mr Khan made it clear he had no confidence in her plans to reform the service.While Priti Patel, the Home Secretary, holds the power over the appointment of Dame Cressida's successor, she must take the Labour mayor's preference into account.[*Lucy Fisher, our Deputy Political Editor, has this report*](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2022/02/13/stop-playing-politics-find-best-person-lead-met-police-sadiq) 14 Feb 2022-08:54AM GMTSir Keir Starmer had death threats after Savile rowSir Keir Starmer confirmed he had received death threats in the wake of Boris Johnson's claims that he "failed to prosecute" Jimmy Savile while Director of Public Prosecutions.There had been a "right-wing conspiracy theory for some time" on the topic, the Labour leader said, adding that Mr Johnson "knew exactly what he was doing" with his comments in the Commons-which were later clarified by the PM to stress Sir Keir had no personal involvement in the decision not to prosecute Savile."He fed into that [conspiracy], that has caused difficulty but my preference if I may is not to talk about that. Because as I say I've got young children and I don't particularly want them to hear too much about what may or may not be said about me."Sir Keir confirmed he was undeterred by protesters who mobbed him outside Parliament last Monday and went on to play football the same evening."I'm an avid football player and football fan, and if I don't get my five-a-side in every week I lose a great deal of the week. So off I went to play five-a-side... still in midfield, still barking out orders, still in my head playing a good game."14 Feb 2022-08:42AM GMTSir Keir Starmer: No case for UK to rejoin EUSir Keir Starmer has insisted there is "no case" for the UK to rejoin the EU."We have exited the EU and we're not going back, and let me be very clear in the North East on that. There is no case for rejoining," he told BBC Radio Newcastle."What I want to see now is not just Brexit done in the sense that we're technically out the EU, I want to make it work. I want to make sure we take advantage of the opportunities and that we have a clear plan for Brexit."He said he was visiting the north in the spirit of "listening" to voters, urging the Government to reform social care for the benefit of millions of Britons while sorting better terms and conditions for care workers.14 Feb 2022-08:38AM GMTBritain's politicians are united on Ukraine, Starmer tells PutinThere is nothing Russia "wants more" than to divide the West, Sir Keir Starmer has told a 'Call Keir' phone-in on BBC Radio Newcastle."I was out at Nato in Brussels last Thursday to make it clear that the Labour Party unshakably supports Nato and our allies in relation to Ukraine," he said."We may argue with him over 'partygate', argue with him over what he's not done on the cost-of-living crisis... but I've been very clear we stand with the Government on this. It's very important that we send this message back to Putin that we stand together in the United Kingdom."Sir Keir noted the power to take Russian money in the UK and urged ministers to "absolutely crack down" on the issue.On Jeremy Corbyn's scepticism around Nato, he added: "We're a very different party under a very different leadership. My job after 2019, when we were rejected by the country and particularly in the North East, is not do what the Labour party often does and say it must be something to do with the voters, but it's something to do with us."14 Feb 2022-08:33AM GMTGoing up to level upBoris Johnson heads north this morning as he visits Scotland then northern England as part of a "levelling up tour".After the White Paper unveiled a couple of weeks ago by Michael Gove, the Levelling Up Secretary, Mr Johnson is to renew his focus on the Government's aim to reduce regional inequalities as he looks to move his premiership on from the "partygate" scandal that has dogged it in recent weeks.It is unlikely that the Prime Minister and Douglas Ross will be in any great rush to meet each other after Mr Ross, the leader of the Scottish Conservatives, last month called on him to tender his resignation.We can expect to hear from Mr Johnson in the form of a pooled broadcast clip this afternoon.14 Feb 2022-08:29AM GMTEverything in place for Ukraine ***invasion*** with 'no notice' Britons should leave Ukraine while they can as everything is in place for Russia to invade with "no notice", James Heappey warned."Russia has concentrated artillery missile systems and combat air in the area and perhaps more ominously although it grabs less headlines all of the combat enablers-the logistics, the fuel, the medical supplies, the bridging assets-are also now in place."So the reason that the travel advice changed on Friday and the urgency of the messaging since is [that] the attack could now effectively happen with no notice."I'm being very clear that they should leave Ukraine now while there are the commercial means to do so and whilst the motorways are available for them to drive out over the border. This is a warning because minutes after Putin gives the order, missiles and bombs could be landing on Ukrainian cities and this means British citizens should leave now while they have the opportunity to do so."14 Feb 2022-08:22AM GMTBen Wallace's Munich comments caused by frustration over 'futile' negotiations Ben Wallace was not making "direct comparisons" between any individuals when he said there was a "whiff of Munich in the air" yesterday, the armed forces minister insisted."Ben was expressing his frustration at the apparent futility of the diplomatic ***process***," James Heappey insisted. " He was in Moscow on Friday for a very exacting meeting with Minister Shoygu in which I thought he did very well."But I know both privately and as you've seen publicly he's deeply concerned that all of this is futile and I can understand why he's so frustrated. I am certain they will know exactly what he meant and they certainly know that he doesn't mean any insult or injury whatsoever, in fact quite the reverse.Vadym Prystaiko, Ukraine's ambassador to the UK, said it risked offending Nato allies by raising the spectre of the annexation of the Sudetenland in 1938, but Mr Heappey highlighted Mr Prystaiko "went out to clarify know that Ben Wallace is one of their very best friends in the world".14 Feb 2022-08:16AM GMTMy focus is pictures of Russian troops-not No 10 parties, insists minister James Heappey pulled no punches when asked about the latest "partygate" revelations during this morning's broadcast round.On whether Boris Johnson should just pay any fines he owes after he was contacted by the police on Friday, Mr Heappey said: "He needs, I think, to be found guilty by an investigation by the police first, doesn't he? I certainly don't think the Prime Minister should volunteer his culpability if his argument is that he's not culpable."We should wait and see what the police come back with."And asked about a picture showing Mr Johnson near an open bottle of Prosecco with two other people, he added: "You're asking me to offer an analysis of a photograph, I don't know the context of that photograph. If there are photographs that I'm going to spend time worrying about today, it's the photographs of Russian troop formations on the Ukrainian border."That's what's fixating me, that's what's taking up my time. I make no apology for that, this is a moment of acute geopolitical crisis and all of us in government have got a job to do."14 Feb 2022-08:12AM GMTGood morningBoris Johnson should not volunteer his culpability over "partygate", a minister said after Downing Street confirmed the Prime Minister had received a questionnaire from police.Here is the front page of your Daily Telegraph:The front page of tomorrow's Daily Telegraph:'PM urges Russia to step back from brink'[*#TomorrowsPapersToday*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/TomorrowsPapersToday?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) Sign up for the Front Page newsletter[*https://t.co/x8AV4Oomry*](https://t.co/x8AV4Oomry) [*pic.twitter.com/tN4SuhMRUX*](https://t.co/tN4SuhMRUX) - The Telegraph (@Telegraph) [*February 13, 2022*](https://twitter.com/Telegraph/status/1492982681835032579?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

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[***Australia politics live updates: Frydenberg expects 'close' battle to hold seat; Lambie disputes Hanson preference deal claims; 50 Covid deaths***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:65B0-1YJ1-JBNF-W1KH-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Byline:** Tory Shepherd (now) and Amy Remeikis (earlier)

**Highlight:** Treasurer 'not taking anything for granted' in Kooyong; low wage growth under Coalition 'not an accident', says Jason Clare; Jacqui Lambie and Pauline Hanson in dispute over preference deal claims; at least 50 coronavirus deaths recorded. Follow all the day's newsMorrison takes aim at Albanese's 'quiet week' with Covid amid wrangling over election debatesForeign minister denounces China's 'secret' security deal with Solomon IslandsOne Nation won't preference moderate Liberal MPs in key seatsVoting 101: what is voting below the line and is it important in Australian elections?Datablog: In 2019 inequality was a big federal election issue. Now it's off the radarGet our free news app ; get our morning email briefing

**Body**

block-time published-time 8.20am BST

In Boothby - South Australia's most marginal seat - candidates have been quizzed about their policies for older Australians.

Council on the Ageing SA hosted Rachel Swift (whose Liberal colleague Nicolle Flint is retiring at this election), Labor's Louise Miller-Frost, independent Jo Dyer, Greens candidate Barbara Pocock and Graeme Clark from the United Australia Party.

Cota SA's chief executive, Jane Mussared, said voters had a range of issues that were important to them at this election. She said:

Older voters in Boothby have shown they're concerned about climate change and want to see immediate action from the next government to ensure future generations will enjoy a healthy planet.

Older people appealed to candidates that oral care needs to be added to Medicare as it is fundamental to overall health, wellbeing and nutrition.

Attendees at the forum also spoke of enduring ageism as the basis of elder abuse, seeking the next government to fully implement the Royal Commission's recommendations for aged care, adding that ageism also gets in the way of continuing employment and financial stability.

block-time published-time 7.59am BST

enltrJUST ANNOUNCED: [*@Barnaby\_Joyce*](https://twitter.com/Barnaby_Joyce?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) , Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Development, will make his Federal Election Address to the NPC on the 11th May, 2022. Tickets available now: [*https://t.co/Y82SE6MOKq*](https://t.co/Y82SE6MOKq) [*pic.twitter.com/iQbyQmmpGI*](https://t.co/iQbyQmmpGI)

- National Press Club (@PressClubAust) [*April 28, 2022*](https://twitter.com/PressClubAust/status/1519571495395094528?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 7.55am BST

Paul Karp makes an excellent point. We really haven't heard much about public schools during this campaign. He talks to Jane Lee about why that is in the latest Campaign catchup :

Related: [*Campaign catchup: Why haven't we heard any promises for schools?*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/audio/2022/apr/28/campaign-catchup-why-havent-we-heard-any-promises-for-schools)

block-time published-time 7.51am BST

With more than 50 Covid-19 deaths across the country reported today, a spokesperson for the Victorian department of health told Guardian Australia that a combination of waning immunity from vaccination, advanced age and underlying vulnerability have all contributed to high death rates, especially among older Victorians aged over 70.

Between 1 January 2022 and 26 April 2022, 88% of deaths related to Covid-19 in Victoria were in people aged 70 and over.

Over the same period and across all age groups, about 52% of deceased cases had received two doses of vaccine, 17% had received three doses, 4% had received one dose, and 27% were unvaccinated. Given only a small proportion of the general population are unvaccinated, unvaccinated people are highly over-represented in deaths.

The spokesperson said:

Our heartfelt sympathies go out to all the families and friends who have lost loved ones to Covid-19 over the course of the pandemic.

Getting a third dose significantly reduces your chances of getting Covid-19, passing it on to others or going to hospital. If you're over 65 and eligible for a winter dose, don't delay. This fourth dose will boost your immunity and help combat Covid-19.

Age, vaccination status and significant comorbidities are well-recognised factors that contribute to a person's risk of death from Covid-19.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 8.21am BST

block-time published-time 7.49am BST

"I don't accept there is a housing crisis," former prime minister John Howard said earlier today.

On the same day an Anglicare report found 98% of rental properties are too expensive for people on minimum incomes, and when people are trying to come to terms with the way their mortgage repayments are about to soar, Howard said cost of living was an issue at every election campaign.

According to AAP, Howard told reporters:

I don't accept there is a housing crisis.

The cost of housing in this country is much higher than we would like, but a lot of the reasons for housing being expensive in Australia has been baked into the system over the years.

And may I say, because of planning and other decisions made by state and local governments to push up the cost of housing.

block-time published-time 7.40am BST

Steggall says she has received about $25,000 from Climate 200, that it's a small component of her fighting fund, and that her fighting fund is smaller than it was at the last election.

Kelly asks if she's seen her Liberal challenger, Catherine Deves, who has been elusive since her comments about trans people were revealed. Steggall says:

She has declined to attend public forums... I have seen her across a couple of bus stops but my focus is on listening to the community and hearing from people in Warringah.

And her electric vehicle policy will be a bargaining chip in the case of a hung parliament, she says.

block-time published-time 7.36am BST

Independent Warringah MP Zali Steggal l is up now with the ABC's Fran Kelly (it's a busy afternoon at our national broadcaster).

She's snapping back at treasurer Josh Frydenberg, who refers to the independents as "fake". She says:

Every time you play the man instead of the ball, which is what the treasurer did for example yesterday, he is saying to his community your concerns are fake.

block-time published-time 7.34am BST

Labor's Amanda Rishworth is talking about the cost of childcare, promising higher subsidies and cheaper care. Most families will be, on average, $1,600 better off a year, she says.

She's asked by the ABC's Greg Jennett what Labor would do about the temporary cut to the fuel excise if it wins, and she says Labor will do a budget, and will be managing a range of factors (so does not commit either way).

And Rishworth is looking forward to having her boss back on the road after his Covid isolation. She says:

I know that Anthony will want to get out onto the hustings as quickly as possible. And having him back on the road will be a great boost for the Labor campaign.

block-time published-time 7.26am BST

Kelly says Frydenberg is outspending his colleagues on Facebook ads, and asks what we should read into that. Frydenberg says Labor and the Greens are supporting the independent candidate, making it a "different dynamic". He says:

I think all these battles will be close. I'm certainly not taking anything for granted in Kooyong.

block-time published-time 7.21am BST

Next up is why the treasurer didn't go to a Kooyong debate last night with his independent challenger Monique Ryan.

Frydenberg says the organisers are "climate activists", that in previous years someone tried to throw what he says was a bucket of bleach at him... he has a litany of complaints, I'll try to get to the bottom of them.

So he is happy to debate Ryan, he says, but not at a rally organised by his political opponents.

block-time published-time 7.19am BST

Kelly asks: What would you say to people facing mortgage repayment increases (if the rate goes up before the election)?

Frydenberg doesn't want to "speculate" on that decision, and says higher inflation figures show how "complex and vulnerable" the economic environment is. (Which is, of course, the natural point to jump into an accusation that Labor will overspend and overtax).

Kelly moves on to the rental crisis. An Anglicare report has found 98% of rental properties are not affordable for people on the minimum wage. "What's your plan?" she asks. Frydenberg says:

What I've announced is more than $2bn of additional support for affordable housing and that sees more than $5.5bn being expended in that way. And so we've got a plan obviously to put in place more affordable housing.

We've got a plan to provide people with more rental assistance. States also have obligations in these areas. But we have seen prices go up in terms of housing. One of the reasons for that has been the historically low interest rates but also the strong employment numbers. But, again, it's not a challenge for Australia alone. It has been seen around the rest of the world.

block-time published-time 7.14am BST

ABC host Fran Kelly asks Frydenberg if he "overcooked" the pandemic stimulus payments to the housing industry. He says the homebuilder scheme was "essential" and that it's the cost of supplies driving up construction costs.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 7.17am BST

block-time published-time 7.12am BST

Inflation will settle in June quarter: Frydenberg

Treasurer Josh Frydenberg is talking about cost of living pressures on ABC television.

He says people will get their $250 payment (if they're on welfare) and their low and middle income earner tax offsets soon. Inflation will start to settle, he says:

That will be seen in the June quarter. About a quarter of a per cent is the expectation. That will be into the June quarter. And what we do know is that will make a difference to the inflationary numbers but we also know that in the context of the broader petrol prices, that budget actually has a forecast for petrol prices to come down as a barrel of oil settles in the September quarter, lower than what it has been.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 7.56am BST

block-time published-time 7.03am BST

Foreign minister Marise Payne has been quite vocal about the Solomons Island-China deal, Daniel Hurst reports:

Related: [*Australia's foreign minister denounces China's 'secret' security deal with Solomon Islands*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/28/australias-foreign-minister-denounces-chinas-secret-security-deal-with-solomon-islands)

block-time published-time 6.53am BST

During the debate Zimmerman also said he did not support comments about trans people made by controversial Liberal party candidate Katherine Deves, but stopped short of publicly calling for her to be disendorsed. He said:

I've made it very clear I don't support Katherine Deves's comments at all.

Anyone who knows me and my record in parliament knows I'm someone who for six years stood up for LGBTI community. That has been important to me and who I am and so I find comments [that are] transphobic and homophobic particularly difficult.

Asked whether she should be disendorsed he said:

She is the candidate now [and] I have views about that that I have obviously conveyed within the party. She has apologised for her remarks as she should have.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 7.01am BST

block-time published-time 6.51am BST

Liberal party MP Trent Zimmerman has said he and fellow moderate MPs "prevailed" over deputy prime minister Barnaby Joyce securing a net zero climate target, saying the Nationals leader was opposed to the policy.

Zimmerman told a Sky News debate on Thursday that he disagreed with Nationals MP [*Matt Canavan that a target of net zero emissions by 2050 is "all over"*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/apr/26/scott-morrison-forced-to-clarify-net-zero-commitment-amid-coalition-division).

Zimmerman said:

The prime minister is on my side on this and not Matt Canavan 's.

A key Liberal party moderate facing a tough challenge to hang onto his electorate of North Sydney from the independent Kylea Tink, Zimmerman, talked up his role in the Coalition's climate targets, saying he and other moderates had forced prime minister Scott Morrison to adopt a net zero policy.

Asked about recent comments from Canavan and other Nationals MPs suggesting the government was not tied to its net zero ambition, Zimmerman told the debate that he was "happy" to disagree with the Nationals' MP.

He said in response:

Thankfully that's not the government policy.

I took a position along with a number of my colleagues for net zero by 2050 and we fought really hard for it .

Like a number of key Liberal party moderates facing challenges from independents at this election, Zimmerman has been keen to distance himself from the conservative wing of the party during the election, and during the debate said he had disagreed with some decisions.

The government, he said, "hasn't been perfect", and that he had "occasionally had the odd disagreement" on policies, including the religious discrimination bill which he crossed the floor to oppose.

The debate, which also included the Labor party candidate Catherine Renshaw, saw both major party candidates target Tink over who she would support if the election ended in a hung parliament.

Tink said she would speak to "both parties", but that her support would rest on stronger climate targets, a federal integrity commission, and legislating tougher fuel standards.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 6.55am BST

block-time published-time 6.42am BST

And the next instalment: One Nation senator P auline Hanson says the Liberals are "no longer the conservative party Australians knew", and that "left-leaning Liberals" need to be cleaned out.

These preference flows will be both critical and complicated.

enltrToday I sent a shot across the bow of the Liberals. They need a wake-up call and I'm more than happy to provide it. They are no longer the conservative party Australians knew. We need to clean out a small number of left-leaning Liberals who masquerade as conservatives. -PH [*pic.twitter.com/AHeLuAKnyr*](https://t.co/AHeLuAKnyr)

- Pauline Hanson ???? (@PaulineHansonOz) [*April 28, 2022*](https://twitter.com/PaulineHansonOz/status/1519541830647676929?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 6.31am BST

More on the brouhaha over preferences, which Paul Karp covered here:

Related: [*One Nation won't preference moderate Liberal MPs in key seats*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/apr/28/one-nation-to-direct-voters-not-to-preference-moderate-liberal-mps-in-key-seats-in-election)

Senator Jacqui Lambie has responded, saying there are "no deals done", and that One Nation senator Pauline Hanson has "her facts wrong", "doesn't know what she's talking about", and more:

enltrSenator [*@JacquiLambie*](https://twitter.com/JacquiLambie?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) responds to [*@PaulineHansonOz*](https://twitter.com/PaulineHansonOz?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) regarding preference claims [*#ausvotes*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/ausvotes?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) [*pic.twitter.com/5R2M82lK9C*](https://t.co/5R2M82lK9C)

- Political Alert (@political\_alert) [*April 28, 2022*](https://twitter.com/political_alert/status/1519547711220977669?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 6.27am BST

Tasmanian man 'used chainsaw to shear sheep'

AAP reports that a Tasmanian man has been charged with animal cruelty after a video of a sheep allegedly being shorn with a chainsaw was shared on the internet.

Police launched an investigation last week into the alleged cruelty, which they say took place near Woodbury in the state's rural centre. Tasmania police said in a statement:

On 12 April... a person saw and filmed what appeared to be a sheep being crutched with a chainsaw.

The film was later circulated on social media.

According to AAP, crutching is the removal of wool from around the tail and between the back legs of a sheep. A 58-year-old man from York Plains was on Thursday charged with cruelty to animals under the Animal Welfare Act 1993.

He has been summonsed to appear in the Hobart magistrates court at a later date.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 6.42am BST

block-time published-time 6.18am BST

Further to Amy's post on preferences below, this is from independent candidate in Goldstein, Zoe Daniel. The former ABC reporter is trying to unseat Liberal MP Tim Wilson.

enltrFor those who have been asking me if I can win, the Liberal Party has answered your question. Trust me with your number 1 and number every other square to make history. Let's go Goldstein. [*#GoldsteinVotes*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/GoldsteinVotes?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) [*#ZoeForGoldstein*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/ZoeForGoldstein?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) [*#GoldsteinValues*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/GoldsteinValues?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) [*pic.twitter.com/3kFpUhVhl*](https://t.co/3kFpUhVhl)

- Zoe Daniel (@zdaniel) [*April 28, 2022*](https://twitter.com/zdaniel/status/1519541846959337472?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 6.13am BST

While we're on the independents, sitting Mayo MP (and independent) Rebekha Sharkie has hinted that if there's a hung parliament, she would be reluctant to be responsible for unseating the government.

[*According to The Australian*](https://www.theaustralian.com.au/nation/politics/rebekha-sharkie-likely-to-stick-by-scott-morrison-in-event-of-hung-parliament/news-story/0b933fe565d8d089e495af20dbbceedf) she said her seat was traditionally Liberal and that the local community would expect her to "go to the government first". But she stopped short of saying she would support the Liberal party unless a range of conditions were met.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 6.47am BST

block-time published-time 6.09am BST

From North Sydney - the major parties are putting pressure on all those independents to... be less independent and throw their lot in with a major party. Or it could be more of a ploy to undermine them, insinuating that they are "fake independents", as some MPs have been calling them.

Like Kylea Tink, most are (unsurprisingly) declining to say at this point what will happen. A lot could happen between now and 21 May.

enltrLabor Catherine Renshaw and Liberal Trent Zimmerman on the same page - running dual debate attack on [*@KyleaTink*](https://twitter.com/KyleaTink?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) demanding to know she'd support if she's North Sydney Kingmaker in a hung parliament. Remarkable to see Labor and Liberal team up in this way on TV

- Thomas O'Brien (@TJ\_\_OBrien) [*April 28, 2022*](https://twitter.com/TJ__OBrien/status/1519539757948502017?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 6.03am BST

Amy Remeikis has ridden the blog wave like a champ. And she'll do it again tomorrow. Meanwhile, let's get this afternoon under way. The North Sydney debate has just wound up, and I'll bring you a bit from a Boothby debate as soon as I can.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 6.04am BST

block-time published-time 5.57am BST

The wonderful Tory Shepherd will take you through the afternoon, as I go and stare/bang my head against a wall. (jks)

I'll probably just scream into the abyss. Just as effective.

I'll be back with you for Day 19 fun and games - when Anthony Albanese rejoins the physical campaign.

Until then - take care of you.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 5.58am BST

block-time published-time 5.51am BST

Exporters boom as others suffer high costs

AAP has an update on what has been happening with exporters:

Scott Morrison is quick to blame the largest spike in inflation in more than two decades on international factors, such as the war in Ukraine, as well as supply chain disruptions caused by the Covid-19 pandemic.

But Australian exporters are also enjoying the biggest price boom in almost half a century, largely due to the same factors.

The prime minister said his government has been able to "shield" households from rising prices with a cost-of-living support package in last month's budget that included slashing fuel excise for six months.

He said this was only achievable through his government's "economic plan" and a $100bn turnaround in the budget bottom line.

But new figures also show national income received a massive lift in the March quarter through soaring export prices - a major boost to the budget bottom line and outside the government's control.

"Australia is in the midst of another commodity price boom," Commonwealth Bank senior economist, Belinda Allen, said.

"Offshore events including the war in the Ukraine and strong demand for coal and iron ore have led to a surge in commodity prices."

The Australian Bureau of Statistics said goods exports jumped 18% in the March quarter, the highest rate since records began in 1974.

Annual export prices were up a massive 46.7%.

Surging global demand for coal saw export prices up 32% in the quarter, and an extraordinary 243.4% higher than a year earlier.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 6.04am BST

block-time published-time 5.48am BST

Meanwhile, in Victoria:

enltrVictorian Premier Daniel Andrews refuses to answer journalists questions on leaked anti-corruption report. [*pic.twitter.com/mRAU22wZ20*](https://t.co/mRAU22wZ20)

- SBS News (@SBSNews) [*April 28, 2022*](https://twitter.com/SBSNews/status/1519538786723840000?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 5.49am BST

block-time published-time 5.35am BST

A further word on preferences. There was some speculation earlier that Liberal MP Warren Entsch would be targeted by One Nation in Leichhardt, which is one of Labor's targets in Queensland. That has not eventuated, he is not on the hitlist Pauline Hanson just distributed.

The Liberals have also just released their [*Senate how-to-vote*](https://www.liberal.org.au/senate-voting-information#TAS) cards:

In Queensland, One Nation is second so I wouldn't expect PHON to be doing Labor any favours in the lower house if this reflects a deal in the Sunshine state.In Tasmania, the Liberals have put United Australia party, Liberal Democrats and Jacqui Lambie Network ahead of PHON, [*a source of ire for Hanson*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/apr/28/one-nation-to-direct-voters-not-to-preference-moderate-liberal-mps-in-key-seats-in-election). In New South Wales, the Liberals are backing the Liberal Democrats and UAP.In Victoria, it's the UAP and Derryn Hinch's Justice party.In South Australia, Bob Day gets a guernsey at number three, after the Nationals.In Western Australia, there no preferences for UAP which is notable, and the Australian Christians are second on the Liberal ticket.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 5.38am BST

block-time published-time 5.29am BST

There has been a lot of discussion today about the secrecy surrounding China's security agreement with Solomon Islands.

The foreign minister, Marise Payne, used a foreign policy speech to criticise the lack of transparency about the terms of the deal, as did Labor's home affairs spokesperson, Kristina Keneally.

Donald Rothwell, a professor of international law at the Australian National University, tells us:

Some care needs to be taken to applying Australian standards to this treaty, especially when it is asserted it is 'secret'.

Rothwell has provided us with the following explanation. I think it is useful to quote it at length to provide some context for the current debate:

The practice of the Australian government is that all treaties are made publicly available once they have been signed on the [*Australian Treaties Database*](https://www.dfat.gov.au/international-relations/treaties/australian-treaties-database).

That covers treaties that Australia has negotiated, and those that have been formally ratified and have entered into force.

Treaties that have been concluded by Australia and are awaiting ratification [*can be found here*](http://www8.austlii.edu.au/au/other/dfat/treaties/ATNIF/2022/).

Australian treaty practice in this regard is generally considered to be world leading, but I would observe that in my experience there is always a time lag between an 'announcement' that a treaty has been signed and when it becomes publicly available.

Importantly, there is no requirement under international treaty law that a treaty be immediately made publicly available.

There is, however, a general rule against 'secret treaties'. The Charter of the United Nations, Article 102 (1) provides:

"Every treaty and every international agreement entered into by any member of the United Nations after the present charter comes into force shall as soon as possible be registered with the Secretariat and published by it."

So there is a requirement under international treaty law that the treaty be registered with the United Nations, and in due course it will become publicly available through [*those* ***processes***](https://treaties.un.org/).

I have read reports to suggest that China has advised Solomon Islands they do not wish the treaty to be publicly released at this time. This is not ***exceptional***, and the treaty would only be made available with the agreement of both sides.

The question then is who will register the treaty with the UN, and when the UN will release it?

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 5.32am BST

block-time published-time 5.10am BST

Pauline Hanson's One Nation has released a statement in response to Paul Karp's story on the party recommending it's supporters [*preference sitting Liberal MPs last*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/apr/28/one-nation-to-direct-voters-not-to-preference-moderate-liberal-mps-in-key-seats-in-election).

One Nation preferences will target left-leaning Liberals in some key seats in a bid to protect Australian values and ensure strong conservative representation in the new Parliament.

One Nation leader, Senator Pauline Hanson, said her plan to target Bass in Tasmania, held by left-leaning Liberal Bridget Archer, had been her first shot across the bow.

The Liberals need a wake-up call and I'm more than happy to provide it. They are no longer the conservative party Australians knew. We need to clean out a small number of left-leaning Liberals who masquerade as conservatives. Instead of talking to me about preferences, the media should be asking Scott Morrison why he is prepared to hand Jacqui Lambie the balance of power, someone who hates the Liberals and votes consistently against them.

Hanson said that in addition to Bass, One Nation would also target Tim Wilson in Goldstein, Trent Zimmerman in North Sydney, Helen Haines in Indi and James Stevens in Sturt.

"Scott Morrison has surrendered independent Australian climate policy to these left-leaning Liberals, who are obviously in the wrong party," she said.

"He needs to be reminded that conservative Australians feel betrayed by his lurch to the left with net zero emissions by 2050, and the left-leaning Liberals who pushed him there need to be removed."

Hanson said One Nation would work with the Nationals in some seats to negate the loss of seats held by left-leaning Liberals.

"I think we are all in broad agreement that a Labor-Green government would be a disaster for Australia," she said.

"Unfortunately, left-leaning Liberals aren't giving conservative Australian voters much reason to hope their party will act differently to Labor on issues such as immigration, the housing crisis, religious freedom, critical race theory, gender reassignment, trans women competing in women's sports and climate change."

The statement goes on to say she is prepared to work with some conservatives on preferences.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 5.15am BST

block-time published-time 4.46am BST

Financial commentators continue to digest yesterday's " CPI Surprise TM " (as in trimmed mean, if not trade mark).

Westpac had created waves last week when it forecast the RBA would hold off lifting rates until June - so it could see what the wage price index looked like - but then unleash a "jumbo" rate rise of 0.4 percentage points.

That seemed bold at the time. Now that we've seen the 5.1% headline inflation (and 3.7% TM, or underlying inflation) rate, Westpac has adjusted its prediction to 0.15% next Tuesday, and then 0.25% at the June RBA board meeting.

Despite the big CPI "print", Westpac has basically left the schedule of future rises unchanged, so that by next May, the RBA will have a " terminal rate" of 2%. (Those wily investors that the ASX tracks are tipping 3.145% by then.)

The CBA remains the holdout among the major banks (and many minor ones) in sticking to their forecast that despite all the sturm und drang over the past day and say the RBA must leave the rate unchanged in May but start hiking from June.

Gareth Aird, chief economist of Australia's biggest lender, reckons the RBA will stand to lose a lot of credibility if they were to raise the 0.1% cash rate next week given it had stated clearly that it wanted to see both inflation and wage data before acting.

We won't get the latter until 18 May.

Aird said it won't make a big difference to market lending rates because they have been climbing for more than half a year already.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.52am BST

block-time published-time 4.45am BST

I didn't think Josh Frydenberg could look any more exhausted than he did yesterday, but he looks even more tired today.

He is still using his "serious" voice, where he speaks very slowly and deliberately as he blames international pressures for Australia's inflation increase:

They're being driven by international factors and we saw that particularly in terms of fuel costs, up 11% for the quarter, up 35% for the year, the single biggest increase in fuel costs since Iraq's ***invasion*** of Kuwait back in 1990, more than 30 years ago. When you look at what's happened through Covid, it's put real pressures on supply chains and disrupted those and that's why we have seen freight costs increase by five-fold at least.

When it comes to the war in Ukraine, that's lifted commodity prices very significantly - fuel, oil and gas prices, are up, wheat prices are up significantly, that's playing through, both to the bowser here in Australia as well as to the supermarket shelf prices. Now, we understand those cost-of-living pressures which are very real for Australian families and that's why we announced a comprehensive and clear set of ***measures*** in the budget just over two weeks ago.

That included halving the fuel excise. Now, for people here in this seat of McEwen, we're talking about 100,000 vehicle owners who are now seeing their fuel prices more than 22 cents lower than they were going into budget night.

We also announced that for 10 million Australians, low and middle-income earners, they would get an additional $420 on top of the existing low and middle income tax offset when they put in their tax return from 1 July and more than 70,000 people in this electorate had benefited from the Coalition's cut to taxes. We also announced that $250 payments would be provided to six million Australians on income support.

That includes in the electorate of McEwen more than 12,000 pensioners. Others who are job-seekers, others who are on disability spore, veteran veterans, carers, are all receiving these $250 payments including eligible self-funded retirees. And we have also ensured that medicines are becoming more affordable and accessible for more than 2.4 million Australians. These are a comprehensive set of ***measures*** designed to ease the cost-of-living pressures that Australians are feeling right now.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.54am BST

block-time published-time 4.43am BST

Q: I understand there's a backlog in the ***processing*** of visitor visas given that the government's...

Kristina Keneally:

I think every visa category has a backlog of some sort, yes.

Q: Under a Labor government, would you increase the workforce for the ***processing*** of these visitor visas?

Keneally:

The announcement we made yesterday is an important one because we got rid of the public sector cap. It's an artificial cap. We need to unclog the visa ***processing*** system how many more

... Well, I'm in the going to start canvassing numbers here because the other thing that's happened under this government is that the immigration portfolio has been outside of Cabinet for most of a decade. There is one portfolio and one area that the government has complete and utter control over that directly affects economic growth and that is migration.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.46am BST

block-time published-time 4.41am BST

Q: Ms Keneally, just on border protection. Would a Labor government keep in place temporary protection visas? And if not, what would you replace them with? And on offshore detention, you repeatedly spoken about about the fact you don't want it to be a permanent, you want it to be temporary, right? What would you do to enable it to be temporary and not indefinite considering the New Zealand is for the legacy caseload, not from someone who comes from now?

Kristina Keneally:

First of all, I'm not sure I understand the phrase legacy caseload. Let me explain. I have been through this several times including this morning on Sky News, but I'm happy to repeat it here for you when it comes to operation sovereign borders, we do support boat turn-backs and, resettlement and offshore ***processing***.

In terms of protection visas, the only people in Australia on temporary protection visas came before operation sovereign borders: If you attempt to come to Australia by boat you'll be turned back or you will be sent to Nauru. Even the people who come from Nauru and PNG for medical treatment do not go on temporary protection visas.

They're either on no visa because they're here with ministerial permission or they're on a bridging visa. So the only people in Australia on temporary protection visas are people who have already been recognised as refugees by a Liberal government.

They have lived in Australia for more than 10 years. They work here, they pay taxes, they run businesses, I met a family in Adelaide, they're all on temporary protection visas. They own a cafe, a successful cafe, it survived through the pandemic. They were denied jobkeeper but they were paid jobkeeper to pay to the Australians that they employ.

So this cohort of people, about 20,000, every three or five years the government demands they go through a bureaucratic ***process*** to get a protection status again. It's unnecessary and costly. Clogs up the Department of Home Affairs which has got 100,000 backlog for citizenship applications, 54,000 backlog for visa applications, businesses say it gets 12 months or more to get a skilled visa approved. When we got a skill shortage. We got a clogged up Department of Home Affairs. And we're making them go through this ***process*** for no good reason.

Q: What visas would you give to that 20,000?

Keneally:

A permanent protection visa.

... Labor's platform has a 90-day rule and we would take up the New Zealand deal. We would implement the New Zealand deal. You can't believe a word Scott Morrison says.

Scott Morrison said for years taking up the New Zealand deal would restart the boats. Peter Dutton said for years, taking up the New Zealand deal would restart the boats. That was not true. And we know it's not true because Scott Morrison backflipped just a few weeks ago and took up the New Zealand deal. He took up the New Zealand deal to send bag inner city Liberal seats, make no mistake about it. You can't believe a word he says...

We will implement the deal, anyone who has attempted to come to Australia by boat will not settle here, we will negotiate through other countries, as the government has been doing, people have been going to Canada, people have been going to other countries. There will be third country resettlement.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.45am BST

block-time published-time 4.38am BST

Decade of low wage growth 'deliberate': Jason Clare

Q: Are you ruling out one-off cash payments in the future?

Jason Clare:

Again, have a look at Jim's [Chalmers] answer. He answered this question this morning

Q: What do you believe should happen?

Clare:

That's what I said. We support the payments that are there now, but you got to do more than that in terms of long-term support to cut the cost of living as well as to make wages stronger and jobs more secure. Now, if you can do all of this, you can help people to pay the bills. The problem here is the last decade has been the worst decade for wage growth in Australia's history, full stop.

This is not an accident that this has happened. This is deliberate. The government has deliberately set itself on a path for the last ten years of keeping people's wages low. Wage growth here is lower than the United States. And we are reaping the whirlwind of that right now. OK, it's not just that you have got inflation through the roof, you got wages through the floor. And that makes it harder and harder for Aussies to make ends' meet.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 5.03am BST

block-time published-time 4.36am BST

Q: We're in the middle of a crisis. Is childcare the only policy that Labor has to alleviate this cost of living crisis? What are you going to do for pensioners, for example, that will continue to struggle to pay for essential household items.

Jason Clare:

The answer is no, and have a look at the answer I gave you to your first question in this press conference. Yes, we support to immediate cash help that people are getting.

Yes, we support the cut in petrol costs, they help everyone that has a car by you need medium and long-term changes here that are going to help people with their longer term challenges.

Don't underestimate the childcare policy in terms of the impact that it's going to make on more than a million Aussies. I know myself as the father of a child who has just moved from childcare to primary school, it felt like you got a pay rise when they leave day care. It's expensive. If you can have a policy in place that does two things. Amanda made this point in the press conference.

This policy ticks two of the big boxes to tackle two of the big challenges in this country. Cost of living and getting skilled workers into the workforce. You talk to employers who are tell you all the time they can't find skilled workers. The childcare policy will give the average family on $100 another $1600 back in their pocket every year but it also means they can go back to work.

Hang on a second, there's childcare and that's important if you've got a woman with a child - you know, a man and a woman with two kids maybe, take my house, and one person's working full-time, the other one's working 2.5 days a week and you can change the cost of childcare that 2.5 days might become three or four. The impact of that young person being in childcare is amazing.

The impact for that family in terms of the extra money is terrific and the impact that business's extra productivity because you have a skilled worker already trained back in the workforce that, he's why this is a big deal for cost of living and skilled workers for employers who desperately need it.

We're going to cut the cost of electricity, too. Anybody who pays an electricity bill, whether you're 18 or 80, know it's too expensive. You asked me about pensioners. Pensioners ask me about the cost of electricity all the time. And we've been banging on in this country about how we can fix it and try to scare the pants off people about how you might fix it for the last 10 years.

The Liberal party have been telling people that if you invest in renewable energy and try to do something about climate change your bills will group. Well, now the opposite is true.

If you invest in more in renewable energy you'll cut the cost of electricity. That is why we're saying we will do that this. If you want your electricity bills cut you've got to vote Labor at this election.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.41am BST

block-time published-time 4.34am BST

Q: I know you said Solomon Islands is a sovereign nation but they've effectively said they'll only release the details of the security pact if China gives them the green light. If elected how will you push China to see those details because it is in Australia's interests and just secondly pledge to boost foreign aid but in the wake of this pact should Australia be making a more concerted effort to strengthen defence and security ties wits Pacific neighbours?

Kristina Keneally:

Two parts to that. First, the Solomon Islands are a sovereign nation, and I think the very pointed that you raised in that question is why Australia should be quite alarmed. We have already now got China dictating terms to a member of our Pacific family.

And this points to the failure of the government to act when they became aware that this deal was potentially in the offing.

Marise Payne should have gotten up from her desk and gone to the Solomon Islands.

Now, all of the non-Pacific island nations and Timor-Leste are sovereign nations and it used to be the case that Australia was the first country of choice for them. We're at risk of losing that.

We have are at risk of losing that. So the package we announced this week is about strengthening institutional relationships in terms of our defence forces and the police forces in the Pacific nations.

It is also about projecting Australia's voice to the region through increased broadcasting.

It's also about providing financing for climate change infrastructure. It's also about the people to people links and if I can say one of the big announcements we make - made this week that I think people didn't notice enough is a real first in our migration program. 3,000 dedicated spaces per year in the permanent intake for the Pacific islands and Timor-Leste to be conducted as a lottery, apportioned to each of those nations based on population.

Last year, there were only 720 permanent arrivals from the Pacific islands to Australia. 3,000 a year. It is an opportunity for us not only to provide significant economic boost because we know that those people when they come here to work from those nations they send money back to their communities. $2,200 every six months. But 3,000 people having the opportunity to come here with their families, permanent residents, creating those people to people links, those ties, that is a fundamentally important offer and it's a fundamentally important chance for us to grow closer to our Pacific islands.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.39am BST

block-time published-time 4.33am BST

Q: First issue, NDIS. Reports are showing is it's going to be $64bn by 2030... When you're sitting around the cabinet table after 21 May if you win the election the cost of this scheme is getting bigger and bigger, is $64bn affordable or will tough decisions have to be made about reining in the NDIS to bring it in budget.

Secondly, just on debates. Labor wanted to do a debate at the press club, last week of the campaign. PM said he'll do one on Channel Nine. Channel Seven want do one as well, the ABC wants to do one. What is the ALP's position, Mr Albanese's position, on doing debates. How many debates is he prepared to do and who with?

Jason Clare:

I'll deal with the first one NDIS. I think Bill talked about that last week. He made the point that there are costs you can take out through consultants and lawyers and so forth. We need to make sure we're helping the people who need help. I told this room the story last Friday about people in my own community who get cut after cut after cut. At the risk of labouring the point, the boy's name is [Jacob] and he has autism and Angelman syndrome.

He has had his funding cut three times in a row. His dad can't get funding for care on the weekend so he can take the other boys out to footy and mum's not there because mum died of a brain tumour three or four years ago. This is serious. This is not about numbers this is about people.

The things that this government is doing to it at the moment are hurting real people. So you can manage it properly and you can make sure that you don't hurt people along the way and that's what Bill was talking about last week.

Frankly, that's what that woman at the debate was talking about last week as well. There are two types of people when it comes to the NDIS. There are people who have had their funding cut and there are people who are terrified of having their funding cut.

Now, on the debates, there are going to be more debates. I can't wait for them. I'm sure Albo can't wait for them either. There's a bit of back and forth that's happening at the moment between the parties.

We have written to the Liberal party recommending a debate at the press club. They've knocked that back. I expect that over the course of the next few days we're going to get a result here so we sort it out and organise these debates and get them together head to head. We won the first debate.

Of course you'd expect us to want more debates. I'm surprised Scott Morrison wants more debates, he's been knocking them back in the parliament for three years. You'd know this if you watch parliament. Every time we move for a debate up pops Peter Dutton and moves the member no longer be heard.

I was surprised in the Sky News debate when Albo started winning the debate that Peter Dutton didn't run in and move that the member be no longer heard.

So, yes, there will be more debates, can't wait for them.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.37am BST

block-time published-time 4.29am BST

Has Kristina Keneally spoken to Anthony Albanese about being home affairs minister if they win government?

Of course all of these decisions are made by the leader but yes I've had every indication that the portfolios I currently hold are the ones I'd take into government.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.31am BST

block-time published-time 4.27am BST

Q: What have you pledged or promised for the Fowler electorate should you win?

Kristina Keneally:

There's a lot I can talk about here. And it's good to see interest - it's good to see interest from the Daily Telegraph finally in south-west Sydney and I welcome that, because this is an area of Sydney that's got double unemployment rate.

It has people who are earning about $500 a week when the average is about $660 a week and yet they've got the same housing costs as the rest of Sydney.

It's an area of Sydney where only 8% of the population has achieved university education. Where the cuts to apprenticeships and TAFE, the cuts to university and the failure to act on flat wages and rising cost of living bites really hard.

The housing affordability crisis that we're seeing in this country bites ***exceptionally*** hard in Fowler. Which is ranked fourth out of 151 electorates for houses where they need more bedrooms, housing overcrowding is a significant problem. Now, as we come to this election, there is a choice to be made between an Albanese Labor government or three more years of the same tired, out of puff and out of time Liberal government. So this is what I say to you.

If people want action on housing affordability they need to vote Labor. If they want 465,000 fee free TAFE places they need to vote Labor. If they want 20,000 more university places, they need to vote Labor. If they want cheaper childcare they need to vote Labor. If they want cheaper electricity costs they need to vote Labor.

This, I know you're gonna say, "Oh, gosh, but is that specific to Fowler?" And I say to you, hell yes it is because the people of Fowler of south-west Sydney have been done over by this Liberal government and they deserve a strong and experienced voice in the heart of government and that's what they'll get in an Albanese government.

Q: I was talking to a fellow candidate of yours, he's pledged $12 for an oval, $12m for the Maronite community in that electorate. Have you pledged any specific projects for the seat of Fowler.

Keneally:

Yes. In fact we announced and I'm sorry you missed it half a million dollars to the sir national committee and we have some more announcements coming.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.47am BST

block-time published-time 4.24am BST

Q: Do you welcome One Nation preferencing Labor above Liberals in key seats? Are you grateful or worried?

Jason Clare:

I make three points on that. We have had no negotiations at all with One Nation on this. We have a long-standing principle of preferencing One Nation last and that has not changed. What One Nation does in terms of who they preference, frankly that is just a matter for them.

block-time published-time 4.23am BST

Q: Under doctors orders Mr Albanese can't hit the campaign trial when he leaves isolation tomorrow. What can we expect to see, a job sharing arrangement between him and you guys? What's the vibe?

Jason Clare:

What are the medical rules you've referred to?

Q: He said on radio under doctors orders he said he shouldn't be taking 16 to 20 hours a day.

Clare:

He should be taking it easy. I just want to be clear.

Look, as somebody that went through Covida couple of weeks ago, I know as well it took me about a week before I was fully recovered, before the Covid cough disappeared and before I felt like I was 100%. But Albo's out of iso tomorrow. And here's a hot tip for ya. We're heading west to Perth.

We're heading west, we have the campaign launch on Sunday and that is going to be a key moment in this campaign, a fantastic opportunity for Albo and the whole team to make the case to the Australian people. Not just why this rotten old incompetent government needs to be thrown out but why we have a better plan for Australia's future.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.25am BST

block-time published-time 4.20am BST

Q: Just on another issue, senior Indigenous leaders have spent more than a decade advocating for a referendum on constitutional [recognition]. Labor recently said it wanted a referendum in its first term if elected but is that an election commitment and will you see yourself as having failed if that doesn't happen?

Jason Clare:

I think Indigenous Australians have been extraordinarily patient. They're desperate for this to happen and we want there to happen. I think Linda's [Burney] made that point, Albo's made this point. The first and most important change we want to make to the constitution is to recognise our Indigenous brothers and sisters in it but not just that, to create an Indigenous voice to parliament. This is long overdue. This is the party of native title. This is the party of the apology. We want to be the party of the Indigenous voice to parliament.

Q: And the timing?

Clare:

Well, as soon as possible.

You know, the prime minister made the point this morning, and I think it's a fair point that, you've got to make sure that you've got bipartisanship. You want to make sure that you've got Indigenous Australians and non-indigenous Australians together in this task. The worst thing that could happen would be for Australia to vote no but I've got extraordinary confidence that Australia will vote yes to this. It takes a bit of political will, lean into this and make it happen. We can make this happen and Labor will make it happen.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.24am BST

block-time published-time 4.19am BST

Q: Should China allow Solomon Islands to release that security impact and if there are Chinese troops in Solomon Islands what does that mean potentially for Australian security detail in the [region]?

Kristina Keneally:

First of all, the Solomon Islands are a sovereign nation. I'm going to let them make their own decisions about what they release and don't release.

But I make this point. The Australian government, the Morrison government, was warned that China was seeking to strike a deal with the Solomon Islands. We saw yesterday the extraordinary commentary from the head of the office of national intelligence, Andrew Shearer, saying this was not an intelligence failure.

That means it was a government failure. It was a failure by Mr Morrison not to seek to speak to prime minister Sogavare. It was a failure by Mr Morrison not to send his foreign minister to the Solomon Islands.

Mr Morrison dropped the ball here in what has been the most significant national security failure since world war two and as a result Australia is less safe. Now, China does have a foothold now, just 1600km from Cairns. And all the chest thumping and empty rhetoric we saw yesterday from Mr Morrison about [red lines] is just tough talk with nothing behind it. That's why Labor this week announced our plan to strengthen Australia's relationship with our Pacific family. Mr Morrison has been caught asleep at the wheel. And as a result Australia is less secure.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.45am BST

block-time published-time 4.17am BST

Q: You mentioned you want to be home affairs minister if Labor wins government. On that issue why then did you tell Labor for refugees at the 2021 conference that you would welcome an approach by that group to end the offshore ***processing*** regime if Labor wins government.

Kristina Keneally:

Well, I haven't seen that information that you're sharing there with me, and I said this, this morning on Sky News. But let me be clear. Our policy is operation sovereign borders. Regional resettlement, boat turn-backs where safe to do so and offshore ***processing***...

Q: Why are they saying you did?

Keneally:

I don't know, you'd have to ask them. Let me be clear. If you attempt to come to Australia by boat you will not make it. You will be sent back or sent to offshore ***processing*** in Nauru.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.43am BST

block-time published-time 4.15am BST

Q: Can I ask for your response to comments of Karen Andrews saying that China has made these comments to coincide with the campaign. I know you've written a letter to her. Has she responded?

Kristina Keneally:

No is the answer to that. Yesterday we saw Karen Andrews indulge in conspiratorial fantasies and unhinged commentary about foreign interference in our election campaign. Offered with no proof, offered with no reference to intelligence. I make this point.

If Karen Andrews does not have intelligence briefings suggesting that there has been attempts at foreign interference in our election campaign, then she needs to clarify that to the public right now.

And if she does have such briefings, we are in caretaker mode, and I'd remind her that the Asio director-general has already made clear that such should be provided to both the opposition and the government during the caretaker period. Now, this is not the first time Karen Andrews has done this.

Just a few weeks ago she made another suggestion that she had some kind of intelligence relating to another matter. I wrote to her then and asked for a briefing. We have repeatedly requested such a briefing. Nothing has been forth coming. What I expect in this circumstances, nothing will be forth coming either because Karen Andrews can't substantiate her claims and if she can then she needs to ensure that the Labor opposition as the alternate government is briefed.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.19am BST

block-time published-time 4.14am BST

Would Kristina Keneally like to be home affairs minister if Labor wins government?

Yes.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.16am BST

block-time published-time 4.13am BST

Jason Clare turns a question on why Tanya Plibersek hasn't fronted a press conference into 'where is Alan Tudge ':

Clare:

You've been so busy on the bus you've not been watching Sunrise or the Project.

I know there are a lot of people watching this, but I guess the audience on Sunrise is bigger and so is the Project. Tanya's been out there. If you watch the things she's been saying. She's been making a real big impact on this campaign. I think what we have seen over the course of the last two weeks are two things.

One, we have seen the government stuff up on things they tell people they're good at, national security and the economy. The other thing is you've seen Albo's team.

You've seen we have a strong, united team and we're ready to govern. We're ready to earn your vote and we're ready to get started on fixing the problems that Australians want us to fix.

Compare and contrast that with the other side. Scott Morrison talks about his team. Where are they? Most are in hiding, some are in witness protection.

Where is Alan Tudge? Can anyone find Alan Tudge? I don't think Scooby-Doo could find Alan Tudge at a moment.

Here's a bloke - no, this is important. Here's a bloke who seems he's responsible for half a million dollars of taxpayer money being paid to a former staffer.

Scott Morrison said he'd be up front. He was asked a question and he refuses to answer why the money's been spent. A week later we find out there's all these WhatsApp messages which indicate Alan Tudge may have broken the law by encouraging a former staff not to tell the truth to security agencies. This bloke is running for Parliament. If you're running for Parliament then you've government stand up and answer questions from journalists. If there's an enterprising journalist in Melbourne, try and find Alan Tudge.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.41am BST

block-time published-time 4.11am BST

Labor is holding its second press conference of the day with Jason Clare and Kristina Keneally.

It is mostly about cost of living.

On whether Labor will do a cash handout to help with the cost of living:

What we're saying is there is a crisis. There are Australians that need help right now and those cash payments are welcome because they help people right now. But we need more than just short-term help, you need long-term help. You were at a childcare centre today, this is a big part of providing help to more than a million Australians. I think Amanda made the point in the press conference that the changes we make there will help an average family cut the cost of childcare by $1,600 a year. Now, that's a lot of money.

Q: Should there be another one-off cash handout?

We were asked that question. We're not going to do. There's short term help for the -- from the government. There's people are screaming out for help. Scott Morrison has a short term plan, cuts to excise of petrol ends in six months. We're saying you need a plan that lasts more than six months so you've got to change changes to childcare to cut the cost of childcare.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.41am BST

block-time published-time 4.07am BST

The Greens have released their climate policy.

enltrOur climate plan will reduce our emissions, create 805,000 jobs, and save the budget $51.9 billion over the decade. Moving past coal & gas is an opportunity. Let's seize it.

- Adam Bandt (@AdamBandt) [*April 28, 2022*](https://twitter.com/AdamBandt/status/1519510496101076992?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

enltrRead more here: [*https://t.co/g9lrnEJiMd*](https://t.co/g9lrnEJiMd)

- Adam Bandt (@AdamBandt) [*April 28, 2022*](https://twitter.com/AdamBandt/status/1519510647045640193?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.08am BST

block-time published-time 3.47am BST

There is quite a bit of side campaigning going on.

enltrToday is the National Day of Action to [*#defendourndis*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/defendourndis?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw). I'm in Cairns with [*@ElidaFaith*](https://twitter.com/ElidaFaith?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) at ARC Disability Services. An absolute stellar group of NDIS participants who need Labor to win to fix and the scheme. [*pic.twitter.com/m1l8PK032r*](https://t.co/m1l8PK032r)

- Bill Shorten (@billshortenmp) [*April 28, 2022*](https://twitter.com/billshortenmp/status/1519505547669946368?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

Angus Taylor is also back on the campaign trial after the recent loss of his father.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 3.54am BST

block-time published-time 3.38am BST

Daniel Hurst has also reported on Labor's concerns over Karen Andrews implying political interference may be one of the reasons the security pact between Solomon Islands and China was released.

Labor has raised grave concerns about the home affairs minister's use of "privileged access to intelligence reporting", after Karen Andrews publicly alluded to a potential attempt by [*China*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/china) at interference in the federal election.

The shadow minister, [*Kristina Keneally*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/kristina-keneally) , has written to Andrews to remind her of "the vital convention that opposition is briefed on any developing matters of national security" during the election caretaker mode.

The letter, seen by Guardian Australia, was sent after Andrews implied China might have timed the announcement of a security deal with [*Solomon Islands*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/solomonislands) to influence the Australian election outcome.

"Noting your privileged access to intelligence reporting in your position as home affairs minister, I am gravely concerned by these assertions," Keneally said in the letter.

Related: [*Labor 'gravely concerned' by Karen Andrews' claim about potential China election interference*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/apr/28/labor-gravely-concerned-by-karen-andrews-claim-about-potential-china-election-interference)

block-time published-time 3.36am BST

Joe Hinchliffe has taken a look at Longman, one of the electorates both major parties are targeting.

Related: [*In kaleidoscopic Longman, the status quo is dead. Who will voters turn to?*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/apr/28/in-kaleidoscopic-longman-the-status-quo-is-dead-who-will-voters-turn-to)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 3.45am BST

block-time published-time 3.22am BST

This is an important study which shows up another of the gaps in healthcare around Australia (via AAP).

Cancer patients in rural Australia are missing out on critical information about recovery and disease recurrence, potentially affecting their chances of survival, a study has found.

A survey of 201 cancer patients from rural Queensland found 65% did not receive survivorship care plans, documents which detail follow-up appointments, treatment side effects, and signs the disease has returned.

The University of Southern Queensland study is part of a project investigating why people in rural areas are up to 31% more likely to die within five years of a diagnosis compared with patients in the city.

Lead author Arlen Rowe said there had been limited research into rural patients' access to survivorship plans, which are recommended worldwide.

"You can see how if people don't receive that information, potentially, that could be contributing to those disparities in survival rates," Rowe told AAP.

The results, published in the Journal of Cancer Survivorship, also found 30% of the participants did not receive information about medical resources in their communities.

There is also a gap in information about signs and symptoms of disease recurrence, future screening, financial support and counselling programs, and recommendations for diet and exercise.

"It's not as easy to coordinate care in a rural area as it would be in a city, where resources are much more readily available," Rowe said.

"So it would be really important for people who are returning to rural areas to have all the information they need for the best outcomes."

The study, backed by Cancer Council Queensland, said overseas studies had shown the benefit of dedicated support nurses and telehealth services for rural patients.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 3.25am BST

block-time published-time 3.09am BST

Payne concerned by 'secret' China-Solomons security deal

Marise Payne has continued to spell out her concerns with the "secret" China-Solomon Islands security deal, saying it is "not transparent" and "not open" - unlike Australia's own security treaty with Solomon Islands. And despite the Australian government pointing to public commitments by Solomon Islands that there would not be a Chinese military base, the foreign minister indicated she would continue to seek those assurances.

Foreign Minister Marise Payne addresses The United States Studies Centre at the University of Sydney in Sydney on Thursday. Photograph: Dan Himbrechts/AAP

Payne was asked some direct questions at the US Studies Centre about whether the Australian government should have seen this coming, and whether the deal represented an intelligence failure.

Payne responded that Australia had been dealing with security developments "consistently for some time", and that included discussions around China's desire to establish a security presence in the region.

Those discussions have been held at the highest levels of government and held amongst both officials, leaders, ministers, senior security officers, particularly the Australian federal police, and others.

Payne said those conversations enabled Australia to "even more readily" deployed AFP and ADF personnel as part of the Solomon Islands Assistance Force late last year to respond urgently to unrest in Honiara. That was done in conjunction with New Zealand, Papua New Guinea and Fiji:

It's important to acknowledge that that is a Pacific family security response that worked, that was immediate, that addressed the needs of the Solomon Islands in that instance.But this security agreement is by the nature of its provisions that we know of secret. It's not transparent. It's not open, unlike ... Australia's bilateral security treaty with the Solomon Islands. It is not something that has been made available to partners or discussed with partners, not just not with Australia, but not with Pacific partners as well. And as I also mentioned, we know that there are concerns amongst Pacific partners in relation to that.

Payne pointed to Pacific declarations that reference regional security being handled by Pacific family, and the importance of regional responses to security issues that impact the whole region.

So whilst we have very close relationships, whilst those relationships enabled us, as I said, to be the first port of call for the Solomon Islands in November/December in response to that unrest, ultimately a security arrangement kept secret at the insistence of a partner is what we are dealing with now. We will continue to work closely with the Solomon Islands, we have been engaging right across the region as well. And we have been very clear in saying ... that it is our firm view, and the firm view overwhelmingly of the majority, if not all, of our Pacific partners that the Pacific family is best placed to respond first to such security challenges. Now the Solomon Islands government at the level of the prime minister has made clear that Australia remains the Solomon Islands' security partner of choice. He has said that a number of times including in their own parliament. He has also explicitly said that the Solomon Islands has no intention that the security arrangement... [enabled] the development of a Chinese military base in the Solomon Islands or a persistent military presence, and we have continued to seek assurances on that and we will be doing so into the future.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 3.42am BST

block-time published-time 3.08am BST

National Covid-19 update

Here are the latest coronavirus case numbers from around Australia on Thursday, as the country records at least 50 deaths from Covid-19:

ACT

Deaths: 0Cases: 1,149In hospital: 69 (with 3 people in ICU)

NSW

Deaths: 19Cases: 13,771In hospital: 1,701 (with 76 people in ICU)

Northern Territory

Deaths: 3Cases: 564In hospital: 50 (with 2 people in ICU)

Queensland

Deaths: 7Cases: 7,718In hospital: 542 (with 17 people in ICU)

South Australia

Deaths: 4Cases: 3,733In hospital: 240 (with 11 people in ICU)

Tasmania

Deaths: 0Cases: 1,202In hospital: 40 (with 1 person in ICU)

Victoria

Deaths: 10Cases: 10,427In hospital: 445 (with 35 people in ICU)

Western Australia

Deaths: 7Cases: 8,889In hospital: 237 (with 6 people in ICU)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 7.17am BST

block-time published-time 3.02am BST

AAP has an update from Coles supermarket:

Coles Group chief executive Steven Cain says employees and suppliers are working heroically to navigate ***unprecedented*** supply chain issues but he expects the challenges will last a couple of years.

So far this year Coles has faced staffing issues from Covid-19, a shortage of shipping pallets, trouble finding qualified drivers given immigration restrictions, and widespread flooding that disrupted rail traffic to Western Australia and the Northern Territory and forced 130 stores in NSW and Queensland to temporarily close.

"I can't ever recall a period where the disruption was that extensive, and that was off the back of a good solid Christmas trade, where the supply chain was already under pressure," Cain told analysts on Wednesday morning.

"And it's really been a compounding effect, and that takes time to unwind, not just our suppliers, but also in the market more broadly.

"We're focused on making sure that our customers get the products that they want, but it does take time for a level of disruption that is so enormous, for everything to be get back where it needs to be," he said.

Flooding on the east coast has lead to a sugar shortage in some supermarkets. Coles says it expects supply chain disruption to last for up to two years. Photograph: Blake Sharp-Wiggins/The Guardian

It's not just a Coles issue, or even a retail food industry issue, he added.

Coles' staff, third-party providers, carriers and subcontractors have made incredible efforts to keep stores stocked and open, said Cain, who on Tuesday visited a Coles in Queensland that had been hit by flooding.

"The continued focus on serving the community and customers, we should really reflect and congratulate them on the effort they've put in," he said.

Despite the challenges the listed company managed to lift sales and revenue during the first three months of the year, with a 3.9% increase in retail sales in the quarter to $9.3bn, compared to the same period last year.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 3.29am BST

block-time published-time 2.53am BST

The view from Murph

The Coalition has wanted the campaign conversation to orbit around the economy from the beginning - which is why the Liberals were cock-a-hoop when Anthony Albanese had a brain fade about the unemployment rate and the cash rate on his opening day on the hustings.

Albanese's stumble dragged the political conversation away from the mess of parliament's last week (including the closing character attacks on Scott Morrison from people like Concetta Fierravanti-Wells), and back into the economy zone. But then Morrison was belted by new problems - Solomon Islands' decision to sign a new security pact with China, and renewed internal disagreement about whether or not the Coalition was actually serious about achieving net zero emissions by 2050.

These disruptions have forced two pivots:

1. The government has tried again to weaponise national security to distract from accusations that it has stuffed things up on defence and Pacific diplomacy;

and 2. Try and pretend its own policy is a sneaky carbon tax that Labor wants to impose on people.

But now we are back to the economy, thanks to a very high inflation number and market speculation that the high number will force the Reserve Bank of Australia to lift the cash rate.

The government thought (hoped perhaps) an interest rate rise would happen on the other side of the election.

But now there's a reasonable prospect it will happen before Australians go to the polls on 21 May.

Conventional wisdom says this would be terrible for the government and conventional wisdom is conventional wisdom for a reason (ie: because it is very often right). John Howard faced an interest rate hike in the 2007 contest, and we know how that story ended.

But we also know this government will make a virtue of necessity. The government will use the uncertainty (the prospect of rising prices and rising rates) to reinforce its core devil-you-know narrative.

Morrison will ramp up the risk of change argument over the campaign's closing weeks. It's possible that could work.

It's also possible-to-likely that Albanese's day one stumble could also be weaponised in negative Liberal party advertisements that get hammered over the closing weeks.

It's also possible that the whole sortie will just turn voters off even more.

How does the story end? We'll know soon enough.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 3.09am BST

block-time published-time 2.42am BST

Scott Morrison couldn't help but take a swipe at Anthony Albanese being in isolation this morning.

Morrison claims he had a "very busy" week when he had Covid and was in isolation "attending Quad summits and doing all those sorts of things" while Albanese had a "pretty quiet week".

He attempted to go on to say how that it "highlights again..." but he was cut off by the host.

Not sure that "I was busier than you when I was sick" is the greatest message.

Also - Morrison is the prime minister. So of course he would have things to do. Usually though, you can count on your deputy to pick up some of the slack while off or ill. Morrison's deputy is Barnaby Joyce. So that probably says enough.

enltrScott Morrison has taken a swipe at Anthony Albanese for having a "quiet week" while he recovers from [*#COVID19*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/COVID19?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw). The Prime Minister says he was "very busy" during his isolation earlier this year. [*#AusVotes*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/ausvotes?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) [*#9News*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/9News?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) STORY: [*https://t.co/XHfmrBmRLG*](https://t.co/XHfmrBmRLG) [*pic.twitter.com/F6uKuYYjP7*](https://t.co/F6uKuYYjP7)

- 9News Australia (@9NewsAUS) [*April 28, 2022*](https://twitter.com/9NewsAUS/status/1519472707733184513?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.45am BST

block-time published-time 2.36am BST

In her speech, Marise Payne also stresses increases in Australia's defence budget.

Over the past eight years, Australia has been undertaking the most comprehensive expansion of our defence capability in our lifetimes ...

This range of initiatives strengthens our sovereignty and makes us a more capable partner in maintaining a region in which all nations can pursue their interests and values, free from coercion, intimidation or pressure.

Australia is amongst a group of nations championing democratic values. However, we clearly also have aligned interests. with countries that have different political systems.

Amongst those aligned interests is a balanced region in which no one country dominates and in which all states rights and sovereignty are respected.

Payne says Australia stands for a freer, more open region. In a reference to China's growing power, Payne adds:

A region in which an authoritarian power is dominant doesn't get us closer to that goal, and that's why the resilience of all states is essential.

Payne says that across the globe, as authoritarian powers assert themselves, smaller and vulnerable states are facing stresses. She says Australia must respond alongside partners, because no one nation alone can tackle the array of challenges we face.

We are most certainly stronger together.

block-time published-time 2.35am BST

At the US Studies Centre, Marise Payne alludes to the China-Solomon Islands security deal. The foreign minister says Australia wants to build the resilience of the region because stability benefits Australia's economy "and a safe neighbourhood is a good place to live".

We have responded to our Pacific family in times of need.

She points to practical support including vaccines, infrastructure, low-emissions technology and investments in economic resilience.

We deliver on our promises transparently.

Payne says Australia is the only country with a diplomatic post in every Pacific Island Forum country. And then she gets more pointed. She says while the Australian government will continue talking with the Solomon Islands government in Honiara, she reaffirms "that we are deeply concerned by the Solomon Islands' signing of the security agreement last week with China".

Of course I have consistently acknowledged that this is a clear sovereign decision by a sovereign government. However, we know other members of the Pacific family share our concerns. We'll continue talking with the Solomon Islands government about how the Pacific family is best placed to provide security assistance in our region.

We have done that successfully. We will continue to do that, and no document signed and kept away from public view is going to change that.

Payne says the signing of the deal reflects the geostrategic reality of the times we are in.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.39am BST

block-time published-time 2.34am BST

Anthony Albanese had a chat to Sydney radio station WSFM this morning, where he spoke of his Covid experience:

It's been a difficult week, but my symptoms have been much milder than many other people have had, so I am looking forward to getting out. My doctor tells me I have to take things easy, particularly in the first few days, to not do the 16- and 20-hour days that I was doing.

But it will be good to be out and about, and the first thing I'm doing is heading to Western Australia, where we have our campaign launch this Sunday.

So expect to continue seeing more of the Labor frontbench over the next week, even though Albanese will be back on the physical campaign trail.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.38am BST

block-time published-time 2.20am BST

The foreign minister, Marise Payne, says there is now "strong agreement from amongst the Australian people that standing firm on our values and principles, even in the face of pressure, is the right approach for our long term future".

Payne is talking about China while addressing an event at the United States Studies Centre in Sydney. She says Australia's alliance with the US will continue to evolve as the strategic circumstances change.The foreign minister says tomorrow marks 70 years since the Anzus treaty came into force. The treaty, she says, has strengthened the fabric of peace in the Pacific.

For 70 years, Australia has known that we are far more secure because we do not stand alone. This knowledge has given us confidence and assisted in enabling us to flourish and prosper. There's nothing quite like having good friends, and trusted partners.

She says those arrangements have underpinned stability and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific region.

We've entered a period that is becoming more dangerous, less stable, and less prosperous.

Australia has been at the forefront of addressing this geostrategic reality in our region.

The Morrison government's approach is founded in a firm belief that we have agency and influence to shape our strategic environment for the better. We've done so with a strong voice, through policies at home and abroad, and through practical ***measures*** with our partners, to invigorate the relationships that provide stability and confidence.

Australia has a track record as one of the countries that has been clearest and most consistent in response to the changing circumstances, particularly China's growing assertiveness in the Indo-Pacific.

We have led on this. There is now strong agreement from amongst the Australian people that standing firm on our values and principles, even in the face of pressure is the right approach for our long term future.

Payne says the government has "a clear and focused plan" on resilience, relationships and rules. On the latter point, she stresses "rules over anarchy".

Payne also notes that climate change presents additional challenges for our region.

We'll bring you more updates later.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.26am BST

block-time published-time 2.16am BST

Jim Chalmers labels Scott Morrison a 'pathological liar'

Q: Just back on to your question, while the elections are, I don't know, three weeks away, or whatever it is... early voting starts on May 9.

When can we know whether the [superannuation] policy that you referred to will or will not be part of Labor's platform? And, secondly, on the cashless debit card aged pension scare campaign, Labor's candidate in Longman is still running that scare campaign even though it's categorically false. How do you justify it?

Jim Chalmers:

Well, first of all, on our policy announcements, we make them at the appropriate time. If we come to a concluded view on a policy, we announce them when we're ready, and that's standard practice on both sides of politics forever. So, that's the answer to that question.

Now, on the cashless debit card, Labor has committed to abolishing the cashless debit card. The Liberals and Nationals have speculated about extending it. Now, those are two facts. And if the government...

Q: Not for the age pension?

Chalmers:

It's the same as what they said before the 2013 election - no cuts to the pension, no cuts to the ABC or health or education. People don't believe this government for good reason. You know, the prime minister is a pathological liar when it comes to these issues.

He was saying not that long ago there wouldn't be increased taxes under a Liberal-National government. There are increases in the budget they handed down last month. You can't believe a word that he says.

And so our commitment, our assurance to Australians is that we will abolish the cashless debit card. The prime minister and the relevant minister, this term of the parliament, have talked about extending it, and that's the difference.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.19am BST

block-time published-time 2.11am BST

Q: Just on that point of interest rate rises, you're accusing the government of not owning the bad economic news. If interest rates under your watch as treasurer in a Labor government, will you own those?

Jim Chalmers:

I'm saying the government can't have it both ways. The government bleats about the unemployment rate. If something is going badly, it's got absolutely nothing to do with them.

I was in an electorate last week and we were talking to people, and people raised all around Australia, "This is a prime minister who takes credit for the good things, takes no responsibility for the difficult things."

Now, we are realistic about inflation, we are realistic about interest rates, and we're not overpromising.

We don't intend to overpromise and we're simply pointing out that if the Prime Minister wants to take credit for things that go well in the economy, he needs to take responsibility for the fact that Australians are getting absolutely slaughtered by this triple whammy.

And he has been in office now for almost a decade, he only wants to talk about Labor, he only wants to talk about international developments.

The war in Ukraine doesn't explain or excuse a decade of this mob going after people's wages and job security, and that's a big part of the problem. He needs to take responsibility for once - not point the finger, not go missing when people need him, but actually take responsibility.

This is a cost of living crisis, a full-blown cost of living crisis, and Australians are getting absolutely hammered by it - and their prime minister, true to form, is nowhere to be seen.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.21am BST

block-time published-time 2.10am BST

Q: Are you concerned homebuyers who have accessed government schemes, like the First Home Deposit Schemes, will face additional cost pressures in light of rising interest rates because they'll have to pay back a greater proportion of interest?

And second, Labor said they would extend that policy by 10,000 spots mostly to regional seats? Is that a good policy to do, considering it will be more expensive to service a mortgage?

Jim Chalmers:

It will be more expensive to service a mortgage. It wasn't that long ago that Scott Morrison was running around, lying to the Australian people and saying, "If you elect a Labor government, your interest rates will go up." And that's blown up in his face.

And what we're seeing with the interest rate rise, which most analysts and commentators expect will either happen next Tuesday or the month after, and then subsequent to that as well, is that someone with an average-sized loan of $595,000 will be $124 worse off a month.

And so it will sting when interest rates start to go up. Most people expect they will go up substantially more than that over time.

This is the triple whammy that Scott Morrison has handed Australian homeowners: falling real wages, skyrocketing inflation, and now rising interest rates are about to add to the pain as well.

And so when it comes to government policy on housing, you know, obviously you need to strike the right balance here.

And we have been supportive about helping people into the housing market, but it is a much broader story than the government's proposals. There's also a story around social housing.

There are some other steps that a government could take, and we'll have more to say about housing between now and the election.

But these interest rate rises will hurt, and Scott Morrison - who takes credit when the economy is going well - won't take responsibility for the fact that a decade now of attacks on real wages in this country make it harder for people to meet what will be the rising costs of their mortgage.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.24am BST

block-time published-time 2.08am BST

Q: [A question on Labor dropping its policy to] pay superannuation on paid parental leave... How can you justify it, given we know it contributes to the gender pay gap? And can I get Amanda Rishworth's response too?

Jim Chalmers:

We haven't finalised and concluded a view on this yet. You read about it in the papers because we consulted with stakeholders.

...We have been consulting with stakeholders and we have been saying the same thing privately that we say publicly, which is that this is a very good policy idea and we need to weigh it up against a whole range of other great policy ideas. We are being upfront.

I thought Katy Gallagher did an incredible job yesterday of explaining how there is more good ideas than there is room in the budget.

We haven't come to a concluded view on that. We consider it to be very important. We've taken that policy to elections in the past, but we need to weigh it up against all the other priorities.

Amanda Rishworth:

Well, what I would say about the current government is their answer to the gender pay gap is actually for male wages to fall so that there is less gap between women and men. What we need to do is lift the wages, but also women's workforce participation.

Of course, there are many policies that can affect that gender pay gap, and you've mentioned one of those policies that affects the gender income in retirement, but there are many others, including - as I mentioned - those workers, majority women, who are not able to go into the workforce when they have little children because they cannot afford the cost of child care.

We also know that we have one of the highest in the OECD part-time women's workforce participation. Other countries have much higher full-time workforce participation, and a lot of that comes down to the cost of child care.

So, while there are many policies that can directly affect the gender pay gap - and we've announced another suite of policies - Tanya Plibersek has answered them, including, for example, getting rid of secrecy clauses in pay agreements, a number of things that can reduce that gender pay gap. Investing in child care is one of those critical areas that help women go back to work, earn more, and work more hours.

... As Jim said, we are having to weigh up policies right across the board. This government has completely fallen asleep at the wheel when it comes to women. I think you don't have to go very far down the road, really, to get that feedback from people out there in the community. They know that this government has abandoned women when it comes to their economic security as well as many other parts of their life.

But Labor will consider and have to weigh up a range of policies, but we've already put a very substantial one on the table around supporting women go back to work.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.16am BST

block-time published-time 2.06am BST

Q: Specifically on tax ***measures***, for the past four years, low and middle earners have been getting up to $1,500 in their tax returns every year from the Low and Middle Income Tax Offset. You were equivocal about what you will do about that yesterday, but now it's almost May, the end of the financial year is coming up, what can you say to those low- and middle-income earners that were perhaps relying on that $1,500. Will you do something to give them tax relief when they put in their tax returns?

Jim Chalmers:

Under the legislation, the Low and Middle Income Tax Offset runs out when people get their tax returns next year for this year.

And we don't have any proposals to change that.

But you are quite right that for all of those Australians that the government likes to talk about, they will get effectively a tax hike when the Low and Middle Income Tax Offset runs out. And the government doesn't like to 'fess up to that.

Now, when it comes to tax, when it comes to tax, this is the second highest-taxing government in the last 30 years. Australians are paying more tax by every ***measure*** than they were under the Labor government.

The government needs to come clean about that and admit that the changes to the LMITO which are legislated means a tax hike for people after the election.

... We've got substantial proposals on the cost of living and getting real wages moving.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.12am BST

block-time published-time 2.04am BST

Q: Will Labor extend the fuel excise beyond the six-month mark the Coalition set?

Jim Chalmers:

We supported the government policy on this and that is why we supported the policy, because that was needed. Beyond that, we are taking the economic position and how Australians are faring but we cannot do anything in a budget which is riddled with rorting and waste.

Q: Will you pledge that electricity retail prices will fall under your government?

Chalmers:

The powering Australia plan is the most comprehensive modelling any opposition has provided about a big policy...it says by the middle of this decade, $275 a year in power prices savings, and hopefully we can do even better than that. That is what the modelling says.

Our proposal to get the cost of living down after this near-term relief [runs out] on the other side of the election - we have a plan on power bills, childcare...

They [the government] dropped the ball on this, just like they dropped the ball in the Solomons and China, on rapid tests and vaccines. This is of the same ilk. This is a prime minister who takes no responsibility when times are tough. Times are tough right now. It's time to throw him out.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.11am BST

block-time published-time 2.01am BST

Q: How can Labor promise improvements when it is looking at only $5bn from its budget audit?

Jim Chalmers:

First of all, on inflation, any responsible government's task in this environment is to have an economic plan that grows [the] economy strongly without adding to inflationary pressures.

That is about a more skilled workforce, more participation - and all of the other policies are outlined yesterday and again today. That is how we get the economy growing without adding to these substantial inflationary pressures we have an economy.

We are the only party in this election taking the budget position seriously. The government announced $39 billion in new spending in the budget without any talk of offsets.

We want to improve the budget, with the budget. Two ways you can do that: trim spending on contractors, consultants and labour hire, which has blown out in this government; and the second thing, do something meaningful about multinational tax avoidance.

The responsible commitment we have made in this election costs a fraction of what this government has wasted and rorted.

The most expensive [item]... on this budget is the policy on childcare, and the total cost of that is less than what this government has admitted they are wasting on submarines that will never be built.

We need a bit of perspective here. Our commitments are responsible, [and] ***measured***, and taking into account the budget position and the proposals we made yesterday, almost $5 billion in budget improvements are much better than what the government is proposing.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.08am BST

block-time published-time 2.00am BST

Q: Will Labor commit to extending cost of living relief ***measures***/cash payments to help?

Jim Chalmers:

We are committed, if we're successful, to hand down another budget this calendar year, and that budget will take into consideration the existing economic conditions. And it will implement our plan for a better economy and a better future, and so we will play the cards we are dealt with at the time.

I have said publicly at many times, including on the budget, that this cost of living relief is important in the near term.

It would be difficult to extend it forever. We cannot do it in a budget which is riddled with waste and rort, with $1 trillion of debt...

We cannot fix every problem in one budget, but we will be more attentive to cost of living pressures, and plan to get the wages going again, and that matters as well.

On specific policies and extending them, I have made lots of comments in the past. We will see what the conditions are at the time but it will be hard to extend that relief indefinitely.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.05am BST

block-time published-time 1.58am BST

Q: You said this morning that inflation would be lower and real wages [would be] stronger under a government that you are the treasurer in. How, specifically, will you make sure that guarantee is realised, and what, specifically, will you do to increase real wages that does not increase the inflation equation?

Jim Chalmers:

The government which is about real wages growth, rather than going out of its way to undermine job security and attack wages, [will] grow wages faster.

A plan about taking inflationary pressures out of a growing economy will always give us a better chance to get inflation down.

We do not pretend that, if Labor is elected on one date, that the next day all of these challenges will be dealt with.

These are big entrenched challenges. We are thinking about real wages growth, they been stagnant for much of the decade the Coalition has been in office. What we need here is a plan. The government is long on excuses and short on a plan.

They have a plan to get themselves from one side of the election to the other side, but not a plan to deal with the cost of living pressures in a sustainable way, along the lines mentioned.

What we would do when it comes to getting real wages going again, which is central to our economic plan and budget strategy, is we would make sure we are training people for higher wage opportunities, at universities and Tafe.

Childcare be cheaper and more accessible and people can work more if they want and can. Think about aged care, the minimum wage cases, with everyone to deal with labour hire undermining wages and job security. We want to deal with the gig economy.

There are a whole range of proposals we made. The government - they say there is absolutely nothing we can do to get wages growing. That is complete and utter rubbish. The government has said in a moment of candour that stagnant wages are a deliberate design of their policy. Stronger wages is a deliberate design of our policy.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.02am BST

block-time published-time 1.55am BST

Jim Chalmers and Amanda Rishworth are at a childcare centre for today's press conference, as Labor's childcare policy underpins part of its economic plan. But it is all about cost of living and inflation today.

Q: Indigenous Australians have been grappling with costs of living pressures for decades. What are you going to do to ease those pressures on Indigenous Australians in a remote and regional Australians?

Jim Chalmers:

The highest priority when it comes to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians is to do with the housing crisis. We made an announcement about remote housing, which is a very important place to start.

We do not pretend it is the beginning and end of the challenge in remote communities. There are other challenges, including making sure we can get labour mobility as part of the story, [and] that we can have proper services, including access to decent healthcare, which is another announcement we made in central Australia.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.57am BST

block-time published-time 1.49am BST

Labor press conference

The shadow treasurer, Jim Chalmers, is up in Sydney with the message he wants people to hear:

This is a prime minister that takes credit for everything that goes well, but never takes responsibility when times are tough.

What we've seen in the economy in the last little while absolutely torpedoes Scott Morrison's claims to be good at managing the economy.

It is not good economic management if Australians cannot get ahead. It is not good economic management if Australians are falling further and further behind.

The thanks that Australians get for the sacrifices they made for each other cannot be another three years of falling real wages, skyrocketing inflation and interest rate rises.

The big risk of re-electing Scott Morrison is another three years of attacks on real wages which makes it harder and harder to keep up with the skyrocketing costs of living and to pay increasing costs on your mortgage.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.53am BST

block-time published-time 1.41am BST

Given what we know, aged care really should be more of an issue this election campaign.

Caitlin Cassidy has this report:

More than 6,500 reports of understaffing and unsafe conditions in Australia's aged care sector, including hundreds of reports of resident injuries, will be handed to the regulator on Wednesday.

The reports, from United Workers Union (UWU) whistleblower site [*Aged Care Watch*](http://link.mediaoutreach.meltwater.com/ls/click?upn=PrkP7mutHAtpH-2FpHyzYL5B8pKYCtk7V6-2BuEmCwbwPuHcCwtr5OzfFt7nahlTP-2Bk48ayg_RsEKs-2BP5asU-2BJN-2FtX0vXbDe-2BLNnC6LT716B-2BGRMIW-2FT9dL1uapLAXZKUuMLfIHu-2Fz-2BTj-2F7K45o8PPfffXuv-2F5oYGfcyecBoEiukRSGEm6d2GhcaMvhzXthCYzn-2F7AkYfQFlcKgGLBpbR384lExGIS4GqsyoPyoGrLNc7j-2FXrFtQHsu6rA7SqZKBMI1-2F0uOA8UdzVDkYZvQ3g-2B4WrXORGeEcREb6c2TUIK1AqBZxi5hTYFEIpU4Gb9BzPA6zTBHbFfIJGYu2FFGJ14VU9A02M8-2FnyV-2FKXuIAi5Ofuxk2OIm8TOagsT5UhlcFDtclCjR5ddiqF2iiMlHQNMvUJEr70g5Vp2CaDsAgh-2FngFw1jinT9frgHUORv-2ByANZ7g2Es1lOADtwzKcI4SusANiThljsUhDeYuAeT17UiAr1PT2-2Fl5A-3D) , identified thousands of instances of aged care residents' safety suffering due to unfilled shifts and understaffing.

Some 2,300 reports named a "distressed resident", while 1,900 named a resident left soiled for an "extended period" and 600 said a resident was injured due to lack of care.

Related: [*Thousands of shocking reports reveal extent of Australian aged care residents' suffering due to understaffing*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/apr/27/thousands-of-shocking-reports-reveal-extent-of-australian-aged-care-residents-suffering-due-to-understaffing)

block-time published-time 1.39am BST

As Scott Morrison pointed out, Anthony Albanese will be out of Covid isolation tomorrow. The Labor leader will officially launch Labor's election campaign in Perth on the weekend.

The major parties never launch their election campaigns until the campaign is almost over. It's sometimes not until the final week of the campaign. It's meant to give the faithful a boost in the final days - but its also designed to catch undecided voters' attention as they begin to think about where to place their vote.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.41am BST

block-time published-time 1.30am BST

It's the non-discretionary items which are the real inflation story. You can't just stop buying grocery basics altogether. And the lower your income, the harder you feel the pressures - it's not about whether you buy milk or bread. It's whether you eat every day or not.

enltrThe 2.1% rise in the CPI is certainly a jump - but the biggest jump was for items you can't avoid paying - non-discretionary items rose 3% in 3 months. That means those on lower incomes were hurt much more than others [*https://t.co/0pqXGOE0Ee*](https://t.co/0pqXGOE0Ee) [*pic.twitter.com/kae0CKkvJs*](https://t.co/kae0CKkvJs)

- Greg Jericho (@GrogsGamut)

[*April 27, 2022*](https://twitter.com/GrogsGamut/status/1519456789397327872?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 1.23am BST

Labor proposes a debate at the National Press Club in the final week

Morning all, if you watched Scott Morrison's press conference this morning, you will have seen he wants two debates next week, one on Nine and the other on Seven.

In a bit of breaking news, I can reveal Labor has sought a leaders debate for the National Press Club on May 18 - in the closing days of the campaign.

Labor's campaign director Paul Erickson wrote this morning to the Liberal campaign director Andrew Hirst seeking that agreement (which, for the record, was what the Liberal party sought from Labor for during the last election campaign - a debate in that venue with a single moderator).

The National Press Club is the traditional venue for leaders' debates. Full disclosure: I am not currently on the board of the NPC, but I was for many years. The current NPC president is the ABC's Laura Tingle and the president generally moderates the debates.

Labor has not said no to debates on Nine and Seven, but the campaign is reluctant to lock in for events next week until it is clear Anthony Albanese has bounced back fully from Covid. Albanese is due out of isolation tonight.

Morrison has said yes to Nine and Seven, but has thus far blanked a separate request by the ABC for 9 May. I'm not sure what the position on the NPC would be, but Morrison signalled this morning he was up for three debates.

One has already happened on Sky News, so two next week would make three. Albanese was scored by the audience of swinging voters as the winner of the Sky debate.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.28am BST

block-time published-time 1.16am BST

Victoria reports 10 Covid deaths

Victoria has recorded 10,427 new Covid-19 cases and 10 deaths.

enltrWe thank everyone who got vaccinated and tested yesterday. Our thoughts are with those in hospital, and the families of people who have lost their lives. More data soon: [*https://t.co/OCCFTAtS1P*](https://t.co/OCCFTAtS1P) [*#COVID19Vic*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/COVID19Vic?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) [*#COVID19VicData*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/COVID19VicData?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) [*pic.twitter.com/aznTX3FQQj*](https://t.co/aznTX3FQQj)

- VicGovDH (@VicGovDH) [*April 27, 2022*](https://twitter.com/VicGovDH/status/1519462650593243136?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.19am BST

block-time published-time 1.09am BST

Scott Morrison spoke a lot about Australians being "prepared" for an interest rate rise, by locking in fixed rates and having put money away.

But that is only if you have discretionary spending money you can save. Not everyone does.

He also blamed the inflation rise on international factors. But that doesn't take into account that productivity had fallen to terrible lows even before the pandemic.

And wages growth also hit all time lows - with disposable income per person flatlining between 2013 and 2020.

Governments do not increase wages (in the private sector), that is true. But it's wrong to say governments have no influence. It sets public sector wages, which can often be used as a benchmark for the private sector.

And since the 1970s, we have seen a systematic chipping away of unions in Australia, which has limited the power workers have to negotiate. Keeping wages suppressed was part of policy settings to keep inflation down, but Australia has had low inflation for some time. And as Grogs says:

enltrPLEASE REMEMBER wage rises do not increase inflation unless they are rising faster than inflation + productivty

- Greg Jericho (@GrogsGamut) [*April 27, 2022*](https://twitter.com/GrogsGamut/status/1519180625684488192?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

Inflation rising hits harder when your wages have not kept pace.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.18am BST

block-time published-time 12.57am BST

Q: The inflation rate is far worse than what your own budget papers say. So, going to 3% in 12 months' time just isn't realistic, is it?

Scott Morrison:

Well, the forecasts that are set out in the budget dealt with what is happening next financial year. I mean, the figures that you've seen - that have been released - that predates the halving of the petrol tax, OK?

And so Treasury estimated that that would actually cut the inflation by about 0.5% - that was their estimates in the Budget. And so, you know, the Budget sets out, as we've said at every single Budget we've delivered, it sets out that economic plan for the future. It sets out the real relief we're able to deliver right now.

As I said, providing a halving of the petrol tax, delivering $250 to all of those who are on fixed income supports from the government - pensioners and the like - and ensuring that Australians on middle to low incomes can keep more of what they earn, with $420 from 1 July to help them deal with those cost-of-living pressures.

But the budget is also an economic plan for the future. It underwrites the essential services that we can guarantee because we run a strong economy. It underpins the increasing investments that we're making in our defence forces, including here in Far North Queensland.

It underwrites those essentials that Australians rely on, those pharmaceuticals on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme, the support for Medicare, which is at record levels - over 88% bulk-billing around the country.

That is how we're able to say to Australians going into this election that the choice is between Mr Albanese and the Labor party, who Australians know don't know how to manage money and don't have the proven economic track record in a crisis, whereas Australia, under our government, does.

And we have been able to demonstrate that through some of the toughest times with a strong economic plan for the future.

And the other thing, that means, is right here, like in communities in Far North Queensland, in regional areas around the country, we continue to make the important investments. I was here with Warren at the start of the year - a billion dollars addition committed to our Great Barrier Reef, to not just protect the livelihood of the reef but to protect the livelihoods of [those tourism operators].

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.02am BST

block-time published-time 12.56am BST

Q: If your Government is re-elected, will Australians vote in a referendum to recognise Indigenous Australians in the Constitution? And, secondly, Indigenous Australians are paying some of the highest costs for basic necessities. What will your government do to be bringing down those costs for Indigenous Australians living in remote Australia?

Scott Morrison:

Well, thank you for the question. On the first one, it really goes to what change ultimately is being presented to the Australian people.

And I think it's fair to say, as Minister Wyatt has sought over this term, to try and get some consensus about what such a change would be.

And that hasn't been found yet. And so to have a referendum on an uncertain question about whether there would be support for such a referendum, I think would be unwise.

And I note that the Labor party has a similar view about that. If we're to advance in this area, then I would like to do it on the basis of a more certain question.

And I know there is... I mean, we've had views about that. Minister Wyatt has had views about that. And there are some in the Indigenous community who don't share the view about what the change should be.

And so I think, obviously, until we can get to that point where there is a greater consensus about what that is, then I think it would be unwise to try and force something along those lines, 'cause I fear ultimately that would just see us go backwards, not forwards.

Now, when it comes to supporting Indigenous communities in relation to their food security and their food prices, the support we've provided to outback stores, particularly over the course of this pandemic, has been at record levels.

And Warren will know more about that - he visits remote communities all the time and he's well-respected amongst those Indigenous communities all the way up the Cape. But that is just an example.

I mean, those $250 payment that is are going out right now, they're going to people in Indigenous communities, they're going to veterans, they're going to people who need that support right now to deal with those rising prices.

And in remote communities in particular, those price pressures, well, they are greater, 'cause they're always greater because of the remoteness and the costs of getting stores and supplies to those areas.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.05am BST

block-time published-time 12.52am BST

Q: Inflation will get worse, not better in the coming months. If you look at the wholesale energy price, for instance, what will you do when that flows through to household power bills and they skyrocket? And also, will you agree to do a second debate on Channel Nine?

Scott Morrison:

Good questions. Well, I'll deal with that last one in a second. The inflationary pressures on our economy are real. We understand that. If anything, I think what we've seen in the last 24 hours only underscores the point that I am making. We are not out of the woods yet, and we understand that.

You know, you've gotta understand the economy to have a plan that helps you manage these very real pressures.

Now, I'll give you a good example of how we've been able to mitigate that risk on gas prices today.

The gas security mechanism that we've had in place, the one that guaranteed supplies from our domestic gas producers to Australia, meant that they are not facing the international gas prices right now that others are around the world. Ours, around about, almost a quarter of what that international price is for most users.

Now, that has enabled us to keep electricity prices down and keep the costs of gas feed stock into companies who are manufacturers and producers down. And that's why over the last two years we've been able to cut the cost of electricity by 8%. And since I became Prime Minister, it's fallen by over 9%.

When Labor are in power, electricity prices doubled. They increased by over 100%. An average annual increase of over 12%.

Now, contrast that to what we've been able to achieve, particularly more recently. Now, we're not immune as an economy from all the pressures coming around the world.

But I would argue strongly that our strong economic management has enabled us to put a shield up against a lot of these pressures. The pressure is still there but we have been able to put that shield in place, which has been protecting Australians better than most, if not all, of the major advanced economies in the world today.

Now, on the debates, I mean, I'm pleased, and I'm hoping Anthony has had a week of recovery from Covid. It takes a little while to get over - I can attest to that personally. But he will be rejoining the campaign trail. It's time to make up for some lost time. I'm happy to do two debates next week.

Seven and Nine have both offered me debates next week. I'm happy to do both of them. I said I would do three. I've already done one. He said he would debate me any time. Seven and Nine\*, book the hall, I'll be there. I look forward to seeing you.

\*The ABC has also asked for a debate. You may notice that invitation is not mentioned in that spiel.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.58am BST

block-time published-time 12.47am BST

Q: How important is upping the capacity of the marine precinct here in Far North Queensland, given what's happening between China and the Solomon Islands at the moment?

Scott Morrison:

Oh, I think it's incredibly important, and that's why we'd already taken that action at HMAS Cairns. And HMAS Cairns has played a very important role. That was five years ago, yeah, well before - well before the Labor party even found the Pacific in the last few weeks.

And five years ago, HMAS Cairns, we put that investment - over $150 million.

Now, the Guardian Class patrol boats - this is where we're providing patrol boats to every single Pacific Island nation as part of our responsibilities, as we understand, to help them to secure their own fisheries.

This is what we've been doing for some time. And so to have a maritime precinct here, which Warren has been building together with the industry and partners... that's how you get things done, it's not just the government.

The government works together with far-sighted, private investors in the community to make all of this happen and to build that capability. But you're absolutely right - we agree with you. That's why we took the action five years ago to get all of this moving.

And today, to be able to stand here and see the final stage of that coming together... [it is] a real marina project - not a mirage, a real project. There's no mirage about what we're doing. What we're doing is things that actually work and have been working here in building that capacity over many years.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.09am BST

block-time published-time 12.46am BST

(A preference deal only matters if voters follow the how-to-vote card that the party puts out, which sets out how it would like its supporters to vote. You are not forced to follow any how-to-vote card.)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.55am BST

block-time published-time 12.45am BST

Q: How concerned are you that Pauline Hanson has now announced that she will be preferencing Labor against many of your sitting members, including Mr Entsch here in Leichhardt? Couldn't that, in itself, deprive you of majority government?

Scott Morrison:

Well, I think there's further information to come on that, particularly in relation to Queensland.

There's different arrangements in different states and territories, and I know that there's a view about what's occurring in Tasmania. But you know what? That's just all politics.

What matters is the choice Australians have to make.

And the choice they have to make is between a government that has a strong economic plan, a prime minister that's done eight budgets, both as a member of the Expenditure Review Committee, as a treasurer and as a prime minister, and Mr Albanese, who's never done one.

And at a time of great economic uncertainty, and what we're seeing with inflation, what we're seeing with interest rates only underscores my point about the pressures that we continue to face.

And so the real choice, at the end of the day, is about who Australians want to form a government. Now, what I know is that votes for independents, at the end of the day, will just contribute to daily chaos in the parliament.

One of the things that has greatly assisted us come through this pandemic - and it might have only been a small majority that we were given at the last election - but being able to run a majority government in the midst of one of the greatest challenges that we've ever faced as a country, without having to go each and every day to negotiate the Government's existence with minor parties and Independents, that is a recipe for chaos that Australians really can't afford.

And particularly now. And so I would urge Australians to focus on the choice about who you want to be in charge of the nation's finances and our economy and our national security because that, at the end of the day, is going to have the biggest impact on your household budget, on your economic future, and the security of the Australia that you live in.

I understand that after three years... of great difficulty, going through the pandemic, I understand that Australians feel frustrated about many things. I share those frustrations.

But the way to respond to that is not to create further chaos and uncertainty but to actually lock in further security and certainty, and that is by voting for your Liberal-National candidates.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.53am BST

block-time published-time 12.43am BST

There are some local questions on health services Scott Morrison sends Warren Entsch's way. But then he sees an opportunity to send his message and jumps in:

Just to pick up on the question that just has been raised, I mean, what we have provided in hospital payments here to the Queensland government over the course of, particularly, this agreement, sees health costs rise from $6.4 billion in the current year, and that's going to $7.6 billion in 2025-26. I mean, this is a major, significant increase in what we're putting into hospitals.

And the reason we can do that, you know, the reason we can invest more in hospitals, we've got record investments going into hospitals from the federal government all around the country.

Now, you can't do that if you don't run a strong economy, you just can't do it. And as the economy continues to grow, then GST payments to the states also increase, because a stronger economy means those stronger revenues.

So, this is why a stronger economy is so critical to health services.

If you want to have a strong hospital system, if you want to have strong healthcare, then you have to have a strong economy. And if you can't manage the economy, and if you put that at risk, you are putting all of those services at risk.

Because I remember when Labor was last in power, they couldn't list pharmaceuticals on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme because they couldn't run a border protection policy, had $17 billion worth of blow-outs, and that impacted on their ability to manage the nation's finances.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.50am BST

block-time published-time 12.38am BST

Q: All of the ***measures*** you introduced at the budget are incredibly temporary. $250 won't last long at the bowser, at the supermarket checkout. Will you extend the cut to fuel excise past September? And what happens next year when LMITO ends for low- and middle-income earners?

Scott Morrison:

The price of oil per barrel was at extraordinary levels. Treasury advised us that over a period of about six months the impact of those higher barrel prices on oil will have come down. And so what we were seeking to do in the budget was put a shield up for Australians against those higher world oil prices.

Now, they won't be permanent. And one of the hallmarks of our economic response in this pandemic is we've always designed it carefully. It's been temporary in many occasions, it's been targeted, it's been done in a way that you can be confident that it will turn up.

We've used existing distribution channels, existing ways of how we make payments, whether through the tax system or through the social security system, so when we say we're gonna do something, people know it will turn up.

And this ***measure*** is the same. You don't just spend money forever. What you do do is you make wise investments, you make strategic interventions to ensure you can limit the impact of things that are well beyond your control.

Now, those things won't go on forever, but the fundamentals of our economic management - investing in skills, investing in infrastructure and the facilities like we see here in Cairns, investing in keeping taxes low - because in the next term we've already legislated this, between 45,000 and 200,000 a year, you will not pay more than 30 cents in the dollar as your marginal rate of income tax.

Right now, you'd be paying 32.5 cents, 37 cents. That's gone. And so as the workers here get more shifts, as the workers here earn more in the years ahead, they will pay less tax.

The tax cuts are legislated, even the stage three ones, although there are questions from economists over whether the nation can afford them.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.49am BST

block-time published-time 12.37am BST

Q: Prime minister, in 2007 during the Howard election, rates went up. He apologised. He went on to lose the election. Will you apologise if they go up next week and will you suffer a similar fate?

Scott Morrison:

Well, look, I have been around politics a little while and I've also been around the economy a long while. And the first point to note is that in 2007 the cash rate was 6.5%. Today, it is 0.1%.

So, I think to draw an equivalence between those two issues would be to misunderstand history. They are very different situations. We are in the middle of a global pandemic, with a war in Europe.

Those situations were not in place in 2007. I think everyone would understand that and, more importantly, I think Australians understand that.

They're not ignorant of the issues that are happening around the world. They're not gonna be fooled by the Labor party trying to pretend that what is happening in Australia is happening in Australia alone.

I remember the Labor party tried to do that in the middle of the pandemic, where they tried to blame the recession on the government. It was an absurd proposition.

Let me tell you the difference between how we've managed the economy in difficult times compared to the Labor party when they had their crisis to deal with.

They had the global financial crisis.

This crisis that we've gone through over the last two years is 30 times worse than what Labor had to deal with during the global financial crisis, when Kevin Rudd was prime minister and Jim Chalmers, back then, was working as an adviser to Wayne Swan.

Our outcome on employment has been 50% better\* than what Labor achieved dealing with economic circumstances that are 30 times worse.

Now, these are just facts. And these facts, I hope, inform Australians as they are looking to make a very important choice.

And the choice they have to make is - do they want to turn back on the Australian recovery that's leading the world? Do they want to put at risk everything they've worked hard for, made wide decisions about in their own circumstances, whether to shift to fixed interest rates from variable rates, about how much they were saving to ensure they could get through and deal with the uncertainties ahead?

I mean, the amount of capital of finance sitting on Australians' household balance sheets and business balance sheets today is almost ***unprecedented***, and they've done that because they've been wise. And we have been wise stewards of taxpayers' money as well to ensure our economy is set up to perform in a very, very challenging environment.

(\*The borders were closed, which impacted the labour force - with employers unable to access workers from outside Australia, they had to take from those already in the labour force, which was one of the contributing factors to lower unemployment.

It also hasn't been uniform - the long-term unemployed and older workers are still struggling to find entry level jobs, which is one of the biggest issues facing the labour force at the moment.)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.47am BST

block-time published-time 12.33am BST

For the third day in a row, Scott Morrison takes the first question from the West Australian reporter (working WA even while on the other side of the country)

Q: Prime Minister, on inflation, Western Australia's inflation rate is 7.6%, much higher than the national average. You've spoken about how the resources sector has helped the national economy throughout the pandemic, so what is your government going to do, if you are re-elected, to help that really high inflation rate in WA?

Scott Morrison:

Well I've just outlined in some specific detail about how we are... providing that income support and relief at the bowser, providing that relief through lower taxes.

There are two ways your income can increase in this country - what you have in your pocket. One of them is the government can take less of what you earn, and that's what we've done as a government.

If you are earning what is the average earnings in this country, which is a bit over $90,000, let's say $90,000, if you are earning that today and on the same tax rates that Labor had you on, you would be paying more than $50 extra every week to the government. That's what you would be doing.

But we've lowered those taxes for Australians, we've lowered those taxes for small business, we've lowered taxes for businesses that can invest in the import plant machinery and equipment they need to be successful in the future.

The reason that's important is that the other way you can earn more is if the business you are working for is doing well in a stronger economy. Governments can't magically make your wages go up. There is no magic pen that enables you to write a letter to somebody which all of a sudden sees wages go up.

This is a myth that the Labor party is putting around. The only way wages rise is when you get more and more Australians into work, which is what we are achieving - but secondly, because employers, businesses are doing better and they are finding new markets and forging ahead.

That's why a strong economy is central to a stronger future for Australia and that is as true in Western Australia as it is anywhere else in the country. And that's why we are investing heavily not just here in northern Queensland but heavily in Western Australia.

Last time you were with us, we were announcing the dry dock facilities out at Henderson and increased support we are putting into those maritime industries in Western Australia, and supporting apprentices there just like we are here. So our economic plan is working for Western Australia to [Queensland] and all the way to the tip of Tasmania.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.14am BST

block-time published-time 12.30am BST

Australians have been 'insuring against the risks' of interest rate rise, PM says

Scott Morrison then says Australians have been preparing for the interest rate rise:

One of the things they did during the pandemic, particularly over the last 12 months or so, they've been shifting from variable-rate mortgages to fixed-rate mortgages.

It has gone from around 20% pre-pandemic to 40% today. Australians have been insuring against the risks that they can see all around the world.

Australians are alive to these issues, and we have also been as a government.

So we will continue through the ***measures*** we put in place to provide that shield, but importantly for the future, taking advantage of the economic situation we have got ourselves into... so we can enjoy and have strong growth in the future and we can do it from a position much more at an advantage to other parts of the world.

... But the choice is real to people in the people in this election. Do we go on a different direction and put everything that everyone has worked so hard to achieve through the pandemic at risk with a Labor party and Mr Albanese who we know can't manage the economy and never done a budget? The Labor party is not proven economic managers.

Or stay with the proven economic management and economic plan that is not only seeing Australia through these very difficult times, some of the worst times we've seen, but has the strong economic plan for the future.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.29am BST

block-time published-time 12.25am BST

Scott Morrison press conference

Scott Morrison is still in Queensland, this time in Cairns, where he is announcing $24m for the Cairns marine precinct.

But it is all about the cost of living.

Morrison says his government has provided a "shield" for people against cost of living in the last budget.

But all of these ***measures*** he mentions are temporary or one-off.

Firstly, to cut petrol tax in half and that is providing real relief at the browser every day, every week right now. We took that action because we knew that was there.

Secondly yesterday, $250 going out to those on fixed income support payments, pensioners and others in those situations to help them deal with these rising costs of living.

And on 1 July, Australians on medium to low incomes will be able to keep more of what they have, even more of what they earn, with $420 in additional tax relief to ensure that they can deal with these rising costs of living selects the first point.

We know those costs of living increases are real and we are taking action right now, providing real relief right now, because we have been able to have a strong economic plan that put us in a position to do that in this year's budget.

He blames international pressures for the inflation rise.

But wages haven't risen at pace with cost increases for the last decade - the time the Coalition has been in power.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.37am BST

block-time published-time 12.22am BST

The wash-up continues after yesterday's CPI surprise, with markets fully pricing in a move by the RBA to 0.25% from the current record low of 0.1% when the board meets next Tuesday.

Unlikely, but there's also a 40% chance or so that the rate rise will be 0.5%.

undltr [*https://t.co/BA89Sd1uOt*](https://t.co/BA89Sd1uOt)

- Peter Hannam (@p\_hannam)

[*April 27, 2022*](https://twitter.com/p_hannam/status/1519411550377099265?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

Personally, that's pretty unlikely, although Westpac had been predicting (prior to the CPI data's release) a "super-sized" 0.4% increase by the RBA at its June meeting. Should the RBA stay put next Saturday, that big jump the following month would be a strong outcome for the incoming government.

Somewhat lost in the discussion this morning is the point that because the RBA's cash rate is so far below inflation (underlying and every other type), the central bank is actually stimulating the economy.

ANZ shows that such stimulation is at a record level:

enltrTimely reminder from [*@anz\_research*](https://twitter.com/ANZ_Research?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) this morning that the RBA lifting the cash rate only starts to ease back on the central bank's stimulation of the Australian economy. They now expect 2.25% cash rate by May 2023. [*#AusVotes2022*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/AusVotes2022?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) [*#ausvotes*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/ausvotes?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) [*#auspol*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/auspol?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) [*pic.twitter.com/DPDAITSibu*](https://t.co/DPDAITSibu)

- Peter Hannam (@p\_hannam) [*April 27, 2022*](https://twitter.com/p_hannam/status/1519451515983114241?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

As for the political fallout, here's a piece from this morning that shows that the electorates where financial stress is highest are mostly in outer suburbs of major cities. And they are mostly Labor-held - for now, at least.

Related: [*Mortgage holders in outer suburbs could face 'huge cliff' as inflation and rates rise, experts say*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/apr/28/homeowners-in-outer-suburbs-could-face-huge-cliff-as-inflation-and-rates-rise-experts-say)

And while it's been pointed out this week that food prices are higher because of bad weather in eastern Australia (eg floods), more pressure in the works. Rabobank chimes in with this note this morning:

It is hard to see any significant downside to ***agricultural*** commodity markets. The US drought has worsened, resulting in the worst wheat crop conditions in 16 years. Even though there is lingering dryness in large parts of the wheat belt, recent rains in the corn belt have delayed corn planting. La Niña will likely linger for longer, making 'normal' weather unlikely.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.29am BST

block-time published-time 12.20am BST

On that budget condition Jane Hume mentions:

enltrShadow Treasurer [*@JEChalmers*](https://twitter.com/JEChalmers?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) says the current government has taxed, borrowed and spent more than Labor did. Fact check found that to be correct: [*https://t.co/5U7YL9IQ2t*](https://t.co/5U7YL9IQ2t) [*#factcheck*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/factcheck?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) [*#auspol*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/auspol?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) [*#ausvotes*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/ausvotes?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) [*pic.twitter.com/xnmWDYmDgL*](https://t.co/xnmWDYmDgL)

- RMIT ABC Fact Check (@ABCFactCheck) [*April 27, 2022*](https://twitter.com/ABCFactCheck/status/1519437898642509824?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.25am BST

block-time published-time 12.19am BST

Liberal senator Jane Hume was also everywhere this morning.

Here is some of the ABC News Breakfast interview:

Q: This argument that this is the triple whammy - it's the big increases in prices, it's the higher home repayments, it's the bigger gap with real wages - all of that is fact, isn't it, and it's happened under your government?

Hume :

Well, it's also happened under the government of the US, under Joe Biden, under Boris Johnson in the UK... And under Jacinda Ardern in New Zealand. This is a global phenomenon, higher inflation rates, which will be fed into normalising our interest rates again.

So, we knew that this was going to happen at some stage. The good news is it's actually lower than those comparative countries. It's been caused by the unrest, obviously, in Europe and also the lingering supply chain issues after Covid. You know, freight costs, for instance, container costs are about four times higher now than they were pre-pandemic, and that's feeding into prices locally.

But that's one of the reasons in this budget this year, we have delivered some targeted and responsible, proportionate cost of living ***measures***. Things like $250 payments to pensioners and to concession card holders that will come out just this week. Tax offsets for low- and middle-income earners, and, of course, the cut to fuel excise, which will feed through and actually have deflationary effects.

Q: Do you think that argument is gonna work, telling people, "Hey, it could be worse, have a look at what's going on overseas"? I mean, really, they've got bills they're paying right now, Jane Hume.

Hume:

We know people are feeling the pinch in their pockets right now and that's why this government has been listening and has been delivering those cost of living ***measures*** as part of this budget - the sustainable cost of living ***measures*** that can only be delivered because of the improvement in the budget circumstances, $103 billion turnaround.

That's the biggest turnaround in a budget in 70 years, and that's the reason why we can deliver $8 billion worth of help with cost of living.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.25am BST

block-time published-time 12.06am BST

There were some who thought that Tim Wilson forgot to switch to an alternate account for this, but this reads to me as Wilson's strange sense of humour, and done on purpose:

enltrThis guy is smart. Everyone should listen to him. He likes economic opportunity and decarbonisation. He's interested in building Australia's clean industrial future ... [*https://t.co/rhQO3BhC8z*](https://t.co/rhQO3BhC8z)

- Tim Wilson MP (@TimWilsonMP)

[*April 27, 2022*](https://twitter.com/TimWilsonMP/status/1519273476703801344?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.10am BST

block-time published-time 12.03am BST

NSW reports 19 Covid deaths

NSW Health has reported its latest figures. Just over 60% of eligible people have had their third dose.

enltrCOVID-19 update - Thursday 28 April 2022 In the 24-hour reporting period to 4pm yesterday: - 96.2% of people aged 16+ have had one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine - 94.7% of people aged 16+ have had two doses of a COVID-19 vaccine [*pic.twitter.com/5UzfiLzYT9*](https://t.co/5UzfiLzYT9)

- NSW Health (@NSWHealth) [*April 27, 2022*](https://twitter.com/NSWHealth/status/1519451392465055744?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.10am BST

block-time published-time 11.56pm BST

In his morning TV rounds, the prime minister skipped the ABC.

He did manage Seven, Nine and Sky though.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 11.58pm BST

block-time published-time 11.52pm BST

While we are on rate rises, Peter Hannam has an update on what the market expects the RBA to do next Tuesday when it meets:

enltrHere's how markets have shifted on the odds for a May 3 rate rise in the midst of an election campaign. Investors are pricing in a cash rate rise from 0.1% to 0.25%, with a 42% chance the increase will be to 0.5%. [*#ausvotes*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/ausvotes?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) [*#AusVotes2022*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/AusVotes2022?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) [*#auspol*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/auspol?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) Source: ASX [*pic.twitter.com/U7e7CCdFTK*](https://t.co/U7e7CCdFTK)

- Peter Hannam (@p\_hannam) [*April 27, 2022*](https://twitter.com/p_hannam/status/1519409170097016832?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 11.51pm BST

Jim Chalmers has also been everywhere. Labor's choice for treasurer has his one message to push, and he's making sure he gets it into every interview.

This was him following the PM on the Seven network:

You would hear it around Australia and I hear it as I move around Australia. The problem is, if things are going well, he takes the credit; if things are difficult, he never takes responsibility, and we just saw that in that interview as well.

If something is going well, he takes credit. Doesn't take responsibility for the [things that go wrong].

Some of the issues are global issues and we have acknowledged that, but there are domestic issues, and wages have been stagnant for the best part of a decade - that's been a deliberate design feature of the government's economic policy, in their own words - and we are now seeing the consequences of that.

The government has been asleep at the wheel on inflation and have deliberately attacked and targeted wages and working conditions and job security, and we are now seeing an interest rate rise to get added to the pain.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.23am BST

block-time published-time 11.37pm BST

Q: We are at a tipping point here, and the way to keep down the inflation is to increase interest rates. The reserve bank rarely increases rates in an election campaign because it doesn't want to seen to be political; will it worry you at all if they did move rates up - as they should - to get ahead of the issue, to keep inflation subdued?

Scott Morrison:

I have never been a commentator on what the reserve bank should do.

Q: I am not asking your view of what they should do, but if they did during an election campaign, would that worry you at all? Should they be completely independent and do what's best for the economy?

Morrison:

I respect the independence of the reserve bank, and they need to make the judgments they need to make... in the best interests of the Australian economy, and I have no doubt they will do that.

There's a big difference between what occurred in 2007 and where we are now, the reserve bank did that last time and the rate was 6.5%, today it is 0.1% and so I think the circumstances of the economic environment we are in now is very different.

The pressures coming on are not homegrown, they are external and what we are seeing with that impact, the lag from the pandemic, the impact of the war in Europe, of course this is going to have an impact on the global economy.

What we have seen of the recession and the pandemic was 30 times worse than what happened in the global financial crisis, but we have a 50% better record of what labour did during the GFC on getting people into jobs.

Our economic management, these numbers are not numbers, they are people's cost of living.

They're what they are having to deal with and that gives us great concern, but the way to deal with it is ensuring we keep strong economic management which is bettering the rest of the western world, whether in unemployment or growth of jobs, whether it's getting our electricity prices down by 8%, over 9% down since I became prime minister, ensuring we are keeping the Triple-A credit rating.

We have been a steady hand during the most immense pressures on our economy and it is paying dividends but still tight, so now is not the time to risk it on Labor.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 11.51pm BST

block-time published-time 11.34pm BST

Here is Scott Morrison on the Seven network saying much the same thing (and say what you will about Kochie, but his strength is understanding the economy, so his questions were a little more targeted than other commercial networks).

Q: You got unemployment down but wage growth isn't coming through to meet those inflation rises, so it's not all just coming from overseas. Did you overcook the economic stimulus, and this is the sting in the tail?

Scott Morrison:

I don't believe so, that's not borne out of what we are seeing overseas. What we are seeing in Europe... what we are seeing in the US, even across the ditch in New Zealand, their inflation rate is tapping on the door of 7%. Canada, just below that.

What we are seeing are effects on rising costs of living, and the way to deal with that is to keep your Triple-A credit rating, provide relief where you have in the budget and knew that was coming. And that is why we put that relief in the budget, because Australians are just getting up after the terrible impact of the pandemic and our economy is strengthening.

We didn't want them to be held back when the cash rates and the average discount mortgage rate is around 3.6%, and many people will be paying less than that. O ne of the things Australians have also done is during the pandemic, been very clever paying down their debt.

... What the numbers tell us is the economy is incredibly important, and who you trust to run the economy. You don't want to add further risk with a Labor party that doesn't have the formal record.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 11.45pm BST

block-time published-time 11.23pm BST

Scott Morrison has been doing the media rounds this morning. This is the main message. This is from the Nine network:

Well, cost of living pressures are very real and we understand that. And those pressures, as we know, are emanating from the war in Europe [and] the hangover from the continuing pandemic, which is disrupting supply chains, putting prices up.

And that is putting a lot of pressure on Australians. And that is why in this budget that we had before the election, we ensured that we were providing real relief now, from the ability to turn the budget around by $100 billion in the last 12 months: so we could provide a halving of the fuel tax, we could provide the $250 to those pensioners and others on income support, fixed incomes, right now, as well as providing that $420 support in people being able to keep more of what they earn when they put their taxes in on 1 July.

So they are real pressures. Over this pandemic, we saw after 27-28 years, the first time Australia went into recession because of that pandemic.

These are not ordinary times. They're the hardest economic times. They're the hardest economic times we have seen since the Great Depression. You mentioned about 2007, with John Howard, interest rates then were 6.5%. Today, they're 0.1%.

On the cash rate. Australians are taking out mortgages at around about 3.6% or thereabouts, that's the average for new loans. And that average mortgage is around $600,000.

But one of the things they've done on their mortgages, and I really want to commend Australians - we've all come through this pandemic together. And one of the things Australians have been doing is they've been paying down their mortgages, and they've also been switching from variable to fixed rates.

We have gone from 20% on variable rates to 40%. Australians have been making wise decisions about de-risking their economic future.

They know what's going on. They've been making their decisions. We've been making the same decisions. Australians don't want to risk their economic future and that's what this election is all about.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 11.42pm BST

block-time published-time 11.16pm BST

Labor is expecting Anthony Albanese will be back on the campaign trail tomorrow.

Katy Gallagher says that is the plan, anyway:

I had a phone call with him this morning. He sounded pretty good. We're expecting him out of isolation and heading back to the campaign trail. But I think that it's important, as anyone who has had Covid knows, that we follow the health advice and also take a bit of care of each other as we're getting over it and that can take a little bit of time. But he sounds pretty good to me and we're looking forward to having him back on the team.

Q: And that is back - just confirming, because you haven't actually said - will he be back out tomorrow, is that the plan?

Gallagher:

That's the expectation, yes.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 11.18pm BST

block-time published-time 11.08pm BST

In case you missed it yesterday, if the government is claiming the safeguards mechanism is a sneaky carbon tax, then the government has a sneaky carbon tax.

enltrIf requiring businesses to buy permits makes the safeguard mechanism a sneaky carbon tax, government figures show the Morrison government already has a sneaky carbon tax ?? [*#auspol*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/auspol?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) [*pic.twitter.com/XEnAqf6T5j*](https://t.co/XEnAqf6T5j)

- Katharine Murphy (@murpharoo) [*April 27, 2022*](https://twitter.com/murpharoo/status/1519437909815816192?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 11.10pm BST

block-time published-time 10.58pm BST

Cost of living is going to haunt the Coalition as it moves forward with the campaign. And while senator Jane Hume is right when she says that interest rates were always going to rise, it's happening faster than even the RBA imagined - it wasn't looking at raising rates until 2024 "at the earliest".

So perhaps this isn't the best message, especially given how many people are already on the bubble and under economic stress.

enltrDoes the Government have any understanding of the financial pain that's about to hit so many households? "We know that interest rates are at historic lows and they were inevitably going to normalise over time." - [*@SenatorHume*](https://twitter.com/SenatorHume?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

- RN Breakfast (@RNBreakfast) [*April 27, 2022*](https://twitter.com/RNBreakfast/status/1519430551572156416?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 11.05pm BST

block-time published-time 10.45pm BST

Former ADF chief calls for 'red line on climate security'

Australia must "draw a red line on climate security" amid the fallout from a security deal between China and Solomon Islands, according to a former chief of the Australian defence force.

Retired Admiral Chris Barrie, who is also an executive member of the Australian Security Leaders Climate Group, called for new commitments to the Green Climate Fund and mitigation actions consistent with the Pacific's focus on warming of less than 1.5C.

In a statement issued days after Scott Morrison said the US and Australia had the same red lines when it came to opposing a Chinese military on Solomon Islands, Barrie said:

The government needs to draw a red line on climate security, instead of specifically targeting the Solomon Islands ...

The key to Australia's successful re-engagement in the Pacific is a Pacific Climate and Security Initiative that would give priority to the Pacific's needs.

Barrie pointed to the 2018 Boe Declaration, which states that "climate change remains the single greatest threat to the livelihoods, security and wellbeing of the peoples of the Pacific". He added:

All Pacific island leaders say Australia is not taking their concerns seriously enough. Many are concerned that the government is prioritising the expansion of Australia's coal and gas industries at the expense of the Pacific's future, as the islands face fossil-fuel driven sea-level rise and extreme weather events like more intense cyclones.

They are quite right, but Australia's leaders must recognise that we are equally exposed to the climate threat. By holding on to this obsession with fossil fuels we are destroying our own future as well as theirs.

Barrie's statement is silent on particular political parties' campaign pledges. But [*Labor on Tuesday promised*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/apr/26/labor-pledges-more-foreign-aid-to-pacific-with-plan-to-restore-australias-place-as-first-partner-of-choice) to "listen and act on Pacific island warnings of the existential threat of climate change", as part of its plan to restore Australia's influence in the region.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 10.50pm BST

block-time published-time 10.43pm BST

Good morning

Happy Thursday. Another campaign week is almost down - and we're still talking defence and climate.

Labor wants to show it can be strong when it comes to defence as well, pledging to boost the Aukus agreement. And presumably keep all allies happy.

Meanwhile, as the Coalition tries to show that it's united on climate (while attempting to create a new "Labor has a carbon tax" scare campaign) a former ADF chief wants a "red line on climate security" for the Pacific, mixing both defence and climate together. Climate is a major security issue for the Pacific nations, no matter how much Ray Hadley wishes otherwise.

And of course the cost of living issue continues to rear its head, with the Morrison government facing the prospect of the reserve bank raising interest rates in the middle of its re-election campaign. The last time that happened was 2007, I believe. The mood for change was sweeping the nation then, and you can't say that now. But it's not something the government wants to happen.

But the bank is independent. And it has a responsibility to maintain its credibility. Internationally, central banks are raising rates. In Australia it's just about when it happens.

We'll bring you all the news as it happens. Thursdays are traditionally the worst day of the week (it's science) so make sure you have a double coffee this morning.

Ready?

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 10.45pm BST

block-time published-time 10.43pm BST

Labor to boost Aukus with $1.2bn defence research agency

Labor will continue its attempt to outflank the Coalition on national security by pledging to create a new strategic research agency to investigate breakthrough technologies.

The opposition says the plan, to be announced today, will reinforce the Aukus partnership with the US and the UK because the new body will "boost Australia's involvement in technology sharing and research and development".

A quick reminder that Aukus is about more than submarines: Australia, the US and the UK are also planning to deepen their work on cyber capabilities, artificial intelligence, quantum technologies, additional undersea capabilities and hypersonic weapons.

Labor's proposed new body - to be called the Advanced Strategic Research Agency (ASRA) - is expected to have $1.2bn in funding over 10 years and will be housed within the defence portfolio. Labor's plan includes transitioning the existing Defence Innovation Hub into the independent agency over time, with a focus on Aukus priorities.

The agency would work closely with its counterparts, the US Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) and the newly created UK Advanced Research and Invention Agency (ARIA).

In a statement issued in advance of the announcement, the Labor leader, Anthony Albanese, said the agency would be modelled on DARPA in the US and would become "a premier avenue for linking Australian industry (including SMEs) and universities with our Aukus partners".

Albanese said in a joint statement with the shadow defence minister, Brendan O'Connor, and the shadow defence industry minister, Matt Keogh :

After almost a decade of neglect under the current Liberal government, there has been a lack of strategic defence and national security-focused sovereign research, funding and projects. This is leaving Australia vulnerable to strategic technological surprises.

Here is the fine print about what it would actually do:

ASRA would ensure cutting-edge research from public sources, such as universities and industry, and classified research from industry and other government agencies (such as CSIRO), are supported and co-ordinated.

ASRA will also aim to leverage private investment into its research priorities. It will ensure the development of sovereign research capabilities for Australia, especially in getting prototypes to delivered technology.

The Labor statement points to previous achievements of DARPA in the US:

DARPA's recent work includes unmanned anti-submarine vessels, sixth generation jet fighter technologies, atmospheric water extraction, reusable robotic spacecraft, hypersonics and media forensics (identifying deepfakes). Famous commercialised projects from DARPA include the internet, the computer mouse, GPS, and Siri.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 10.49pm BST

22390 2022-04-28T02:30:00Z true 2022-04-27T21:43:33Z false false 2022-04-28T07:21:33Z true AUS theguardian.com [*https://www.theguardian.com/p/ybdcd*](https://www.theguardian.com/p/ybdcd) false true [*https://media.guim.co.uk/3eda05d97a194fae2dd87fa7bd4e4126f25e3fa0/0\_138\_4618\_2772/500.jpg*](https://media.guim.co.uk/3eda05d97a194fae2dd87fa7bd4e4126f25e3fa0/0_138_4618_2772/500.jpg) false en true In Boothby - South Australia's most marginal seat - candidates have been quizzed about their policies for older Australians. Council on the Ageing SA hosted Rachel Swift (whose Liberal colleague Nicolle Flint is retiring at this election), Labor's Louise Miller-Frost, independent Jo Dyer, Greens candidate Barbara Pocock and Graeme Clark from the United Australia Party. Cota SA's chief executive, Jane Mussared, said voters had a range of issues that were important to them at this election. She said: Older voters in Boothby have shown they're concerned about climate change and want to see immediate action from the next government to ensure future generations will enjoy a healthy planet. Older people appealed to candidates that oral care needs to be added to Medicare as it is fundamental to overall health, wellbeing and nutrition. Attendees at the forum also spoke of enduring ageism as the basis of elder abuse, seeking the next government to fully implement the Royal Commission's recommendations for aged care, adding that ageism also gets in the way of continuing employment and financial stability. Paul Karp makes an excellent point. We really haven't heard much about public schools during this campaign. He talks to Jane Lee about why that is in the latest Campaign catchup: With more than 50 Covid-19 deaths across the country reported today, a spokesperson for the Victorian department of health told Guardian Australia that a combination of waning immunity from vaccination, advanced age and underlying vulnerability have all contributed to high death rates, especially among older Victorians aged over 70. Between 1 January 2022 and 26 April 2022, 88% of deaths related to Covid-19 in Victoria were in people aged 70 and over. Over the same period and across all age groups, about 52% of deceased cases had received two doses of vaccine, 17% had received three doses, 4% had received one dose, and 27% were unvaccinated. Given only a small proportion of the general population are unvaccinated, unvaccinated people are highly over-represented in deaths. The spokesperson said: Our heartfelt sympathies go out to all the families and friends who have lost loved ones to Covid-19 over the course of the pandemic. Getting a third dose significantly reduces your chances of getting Covid-19, passing it on to others or going to hospital. If you're over 65 and eligible for a winter dose, don't delay. This fourth dose will boost your immunity and help combat Covid-19. Age, vaccination status and significant comorbidities are well-recognised factors that contribute to a person's risk of death from Covid-19. "I don't accept there is a housing crisis," former prime minister John Howard said earlier today. On the same day an Anglicare report found 98% of rental properties are too expensive for people on minimum incomes, and when people are trying to come to terms with the way their mortgage repayments are about to soar, Howard said cost of living was an issue at every election campaign. According to AAP, Howard told reporters: I don't accept there is a housing crisis. The cost of housing in this country is much higher than we would like, but a lot of the reasons for housing being expensive in Australia has been baked into the system over the years. And may I say, because of planning and other decisions made by state and local governments to push up the cost of housing. Steggall says she has received about $25,000 from Climate 200, that it's a small component of her fighting fund, and that her fighting fund is smaller than it was at the last election. Kelly asks if she's seen her Liberal challenger, Catherine Deves, who has been elusive since her comments about trans people were revealed. Steggall says: She has declined to attend public forums... I have seen her across a couple of bus stops but my focus is on listening to the community and hearing from people in Warringah. And her electric vehicle policy will be a bargaining chip in the case of a hung parliament, she says. Independent Warringah MP Zali Steggall is up now with the ABC's Fran Kelly (it's a busy afternoon at our national broadcaster). She's snapping back at treasurer Josh Frydenberg, who refers to the independents as "fake". She says: Every time you play the man instead of the ball, which is what the treasurer did for example yesterday, he is saying to his community your concerns are fake. Labor's Amanda Rishworth is talking about the cost of childcare, promising higher subsidies and cheaper care. Most families will be, on average, $1,600 better off a year, she says. She's asked by the ABC's Greg Jennett what Labor would do about the temporary cut to the fuel excise if it wins, and she says Labor will do a budget, and will be managing a range of factors (so does not commit either way). And Rishworth is looking forward to having her boss back on the road after his Covid isolation. She says: I know that Anthony will want to get out onto the hustings as quickly as possible. And having him back on the road will be a great boost for the Labor campaign. Kelly says Frydenberg is outspending his colleagues on Facebook ads, and asks what we should read into that. Frydenberg says Labor and the Greens are supporting the independent candidate, making it a "different dynamic". He says: I think all these battles will be close. I'm certainly not taking anything for granted in Kooyong. Next up is why the treasurer didn't go to a Kooyong debate last night with his independent challenger Monique Ryan. Frydenberg says the organisers are "climate activists", that in previous years someone tried to throw what he says was a bucket of bleach at him... he has a litany of complaints, I'll try to get to the bottom of them. So he is happy to debate Ryan, he says, but not at a rally organised by his political opponents. Kelly asks: What would you say to people facing mortgage repayment increases (if the rate goes up before the election)? Frydenberg doesn't want to "speculate" on that decision, and says higher inflation figures show how "complex and vulnerable" the economic environment is. (Which is, of course, the natural point to jump into an accusation that Labor will overspend and overtax). Kelly moves on to the rental crisis. An Anglicare report has found 98% of rental properties are not affordable for people on the minimum wage. "What's your plan?" she asks. Frydenberg says: What I've announced is more than $2bn of additional support for affordable housing and that sees more than $5.5bn being expended in that way. And so we've got a plan obviously to put in place more affordable housing. We've got a plan to provide people with more rental assistance. States also have obligations in these areas. But we have seen prices go up in terms of housing. One of the reasons for that has been the historically low interest rates but also the strong employment numbers. But, again, it's not a challenge for Australia alone. It has been seen around the rest of the world. ABC host Fran Kelly asks Frydenberg if he "overcooked" the pandemic stimulus payments to the housing industry. He says the homebuilder scheme was "essential" and that it's the cost of supplies driving up construction costs. Treasurer Josh Frydenberg is talking about cost of living pressures on ABC television. He says people will get their $250 payment (if they're on welfare) and their low and middle income earner tax offsets soon. Inflation will start to settle, he says: That will be seen in the June quarter. About a quarter of a per cent is the expectation. That will be into the June quarter. And what we do know is that will make a difference to the inflationary numbers but we also know that in the context of the broader petrol prices, that budget actually has a forecast for petrol prices to come down as a barrel of oil settles in the September quarter, lower than what it has been. Foreign minister Marise Payne has been quite vocal about the Solomons Island-China deal, Daniel Hurst reports: During the debate Zimmerman also said he did not support comments about trans people made by controversial Liberal party candidate Katherine Deves, but stopped short of publicly calling for her to be disendorsed. He said: I've made it very clear I don't support Katherine Deves's comments at all. Anyone who knows me and my record in parliament knows I'm someone who for six years stood up for LGBTI community. That has been important to me and who I am and so I find comments [that are] transphobic and homophobic particularly difficult. Asked whether she should be disendorsed he said: She is the candidate now [and] I have views about that that I have obviously conveyed within the party. She has apologised for her remarks as she should have. Liberal party MP Trent Zimmerman has said he and fellow moderate MPs "prevailed" over deputy prime minister Barnaby Joyce securing a net zero climate target, saying the Nationals leader was opposed to the policy. Zimmerman told a Sky News debate on Thursday that he disagreed with Nationals MP Matt Canavan that a target of net zero emissions by 2050 is "all over". Zimmerman said: The prime minister is on my side on this and not Matt Canavan's. A key Liberal party moderate facing a tough challenge to hang onto his electorate of North Sydney from the independent Kylea Tink, Zimmerman, talked up his role in the Coalition's climate targets, saying he and other moderates had forced prime minister Scott Morrison to adopt a net zero policy. Asked about recent comments from Canavan and other Nationals MPs suggesting the government was not tied to its net zero ambition, Zimmerman told the debate that he was "happy" to disagree with the Nationals' MP. He said in response: Thankfully that's not the government policy. I took a position along with a number of my colleagues for net zero by 2050 and we fought really hard for it. Like a number of key Liberal party moderates facing challenges from independents at this election, Zimmerman has been keen to distance himself from the conservative wing of the party during the election, and during the debate said he had disagreed with some decisions. The government, he said, "hasn't been perfect", and that he had "occasionally had the odd disagreement" on policies, including the religious discrimination bill which he crossed the floor to oppose. The debate, which also included the Labor party candidate Catherine Renshaw, saw both major party candidates target Tink over who she would support if the election ended in a hung parliament. Tink said she would speak to "both parties", but that her support would rest on stronger climate targets, a federal integrity commission, and legislating tougher fuel standards. And the next instalment: One Nation senator Pauline Hanson says the Liberals are "no longer the conservative party Australians knew", and that "left-leaning Liberals" need to be cleaned out. These preference flows will be both critical and complicated. More on the brouhaha over preferences, which Paul Karp covered here: Senator Jacqui Lambie has responded, saying there are "no deals done", and that One Nation senator Pauline Hanson has "her facts wrong", "doesn't know what she's talking about", and more: AAP reports that a Tasmanian man has been charged with animal cruelty after a video of a sheep allegedly being shorn with a chainsaw was shared on the internet. Police launched an investigation last week into the alleged cruelty, which they say took place near Woodbury in the state's rural centre. Tasmania police said in a statement: On 12 April... a person saw and filmed what appeared to be a sheep being crutched with a chainsaw. The film was later circulated on social media. According to AAP, crutching is the removal of wool from around the tail and between the back legs of a sheep. A 58-year-old man from York Plains was on Thursday charged with cruelty to animals under the Animal Welfare Act 1993. He has been summonsed to appear in the Hobart magistrates court at a later date. Further to Amy's post on preferences below, this is from independent candidate in Goldstein, Zoe Daniel. The former ABC reporter is trying to unseat Liberal MP Tim Wilson. While we're on the independents, sitting Mayo MP (and independent) Rebekha Sharkie has hinted that if there's a hung parliament, she would be reluctant to be responsible for unseating the government. According to The Australian she said her seat was traditionally Liberal and that the local community would expect her to "go to the government first". But she stopped short of saying she would support the Liberal party unless a range of conditions were met. From North Sydney - the major parties are putting pressure on all those independents to... be less independent and throw their lot in with a major party. Or it could be more of a ploy to undermine them, insinuating that they are "fake independents", as some MPs have been calling them. Like Kylea Tink, most are (unsurprisingly) declining to say at this point what will happen. A lot could happen between now and 21 May. Amy Remeikis has ridden the blog wave like a champ. And she'll do it again tomorrow. Meanwhile, let's get this afternoon under way. The North Sydney debate has just wound up, and I'll bring you a bit from a Boothby debate as soon as I can. The wonderful Tory Shepherd will take you through the afternoon, as I go and stare/bang my head against a wall. (jks) I'll probably just scream into the abyss. Just as effective. I'll be back with you for Day 19 fun and games - when Anthony Albanese rejoins the physical campaign. Until then - take care of you. AAP has an update on what has been happening with exporters: Scott Morrison is quick to blame the largest spike in inflation in more than two decades on international factors, such as the war in Ukraine, as well as supply chain disruptions caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. But Australian exporters are also enjoying the biggest price boom in almost half a century, largely due to the same factors. The prime minister said his government has been able to "shield" households from rising prices with a cost-of-living support package in last month's budget that included slashing fuel excise for six months. He said this was only achievable through his government's "economic plan" and a $100bn turnaround in the budget bottom line. But new figures also show national income received a massive lift in the March quarter through soaring export prices - a major boost to the budget bottom line and outside the government's control. "Australia is in the midst of another commodity price boom," Commonwealth Bank senior economist, Belinda Allen, said. "Offshore events including the war in the Ukraine and strong demand for coal and iron ore have led to a surge in commodity prices." The Australian Bureau of Statistics said goods exports jumped 18% in the March quarter, the highest rate since records began in 1974. Annual export prices were up a massive 46.7%. Surging global demand for coal saw export prices up 32% in the quarter, and an extraordinary 243.4% higher than a year earlier. Meanwhile, in Victoria: A further word on preferences. There was some speculation earlier that Liberal MP Warren Entsch would be targeted by One Nation in Leichhardt, which is one of Labor's targets in Queensland. That has not eventuated, he is not on the hitlist Pauline Hanson just distributed. The Liberals have also just released their Senate how-to-vote cards: In Queensland, One Nation is second so I wouldn't expect PHON to be doing Labor any favours in the lower house if this reflects a deal in the Sunshine state. In Tasmania, the Liberals have put United Australia party, Liberal Democrats and Jacqui Lambie Network ahead of PHON, a source of ire for Hanson. In New South Wales, the Liberals are backing the Liberal Democrats and UAP. In Victoria, it's the UAP and Derryn Hinch's Justice party. In South Australia, Bob Day gets a guernsey at number three, after the Nationals. In Western Australia, there no preferences for UAP which is notable, and the Australian Christians are second on the Liberal ticket. There has been a lot of discussion today about the secrecy surrounding China's security agreement with Solomon Islands. The foreign minister, Marise Payne, used a foreign policy speech to criticise the lack of transparency about the terms of the deal, as did Labor's home affairs spokesperson, Kristina Keneally. Donald Rothwell, a professor of international law at the Australian National University, tells us: Some care needs to be taken to applying Australian standards to this treaty, especially when it is asserted it is 'secret'. Rothwell has provided us with the following explanation. I think it is useful to quote it at length to provide some context for the current debate: The practice of the Australian government is that all treaties are made publicly available once they have been signed on the Australian Treaties Database. That covers treaties that Australia has negotiated, and those that have been formally ratified and have entered into force. Treaties that have been concluded by Australia and are awaiting ratification can be found here. Australian treaty practice in this regard is generally considered to be world leading, but I would observe that in my experience there is always a time lag between an 'announcement' that a treaty has been signed and when it becomes publicly available. Importantly, there is no requirement under international treaty law that a treaty be immediately made publicly available. There is, however, a general rule against 'secret treaties'. The Charter of the United Nations, Article 102 (1) provides: "Every treaty and every international agreement entered into by any member of the United Nations after the present charter comes into force shall as soon as possible be registered with the Secretariat and published by it." So there is a requirement under international treaty law that the treaty be registered with the United Nations, and in due course it will become publicly available through those ***processes***. I have read reports to suggest that China has advised Solomon Islands they do not wish the treaty to be publicly released at this time. This is not ***exceptional***, and the treaty would only be made available with the agreement of both sides. The question then is who will register the treaty with the UN, and when the UN will release it? Pauline Hanson's One Nation has released a statement in response to Paul Karp's story on the party recommending it's supporters preference sitting Liberal MPs last. One Nation preferences will target left-leaning Liberals in some key seats in a bid to protect Australian values and ensure strong conservative representation in the new Parliament. One Nation leader, Senator Pauline Hanson, said her plan to target Bass in Tasmania, held by left-leaning Liberal Bridget Archer, had been her first shot across the bow. The Liberals need a wake-up call and I'm more than happy to provide it. They are no longer the conservative party Australians knew. We need to clean out a small number of left-leaning Liberals who masquerade as conservatives. Instead of talking to me about preferences, the media should be asking Scott Morrison why he is prepared to hand Jacqui Lambie the balance of power, someone who hates the Liberals and votes consistently against them. Hanson said that in addition to Bass, One Nation would also target Tim Wilson in Goldstein, Trent Zimmerman in North Sydney, Helen Haines in Indi and James Stevens in Sturt. "Scott Morrison has surrendered independent Australian climate policy to these left-leaning Liberals, who are obviously in the wrong party," she said. "He needs to be reminded that conservative Australians feel betrayed by his lurch to the left with net zero emissions by 2050, and the left-leaning Liberals who pushed him there need to be removed." Hanson said One Nation would work with the Nationals in some seats to negate the loss of seats held by left-leaning Liberals. "I think we are all in broad agreement that a Labor-Green government would be a disaster for Australia," she said. "Unfortunately, left-leaning Liberals aren't giving conservative Australian voters much reason to hope their party will act differently to Labor on issues such as immigration, the housing crisis, religious freedom, critical race theory, gender reassignment, trans women competing in women's sports and climate change." The statement goes on to say she is prepared to work with some conservatives on preferences. Financial commentators continue to digest yesterday's "CPI SurpriseTM" (as in trimmed mean, if not trade mark). Westpac had created waves last week when it forecast the RBA would hold off lifting rates until June - so it could see what the wage price index looked like - but then unleash a "jumbo" rate rise of 0.4 percentage points. That seemed bold at the time. Now that we've seen the 5.1% headline inflation (and 3.7% TM, or underlying inflation) rate, Westpac has adjusted its prediction to 0.15% next Tuesday, and then 0.25% at the June RBA board meeting. Despite the big CPI "print", Westpac has basically left the schedule of future rises unchanged, so that by next May, the RBA will have a "terminal rate" of 2%. (Those wily investors that the ASX tracks are tipping 3.145% by then.) The CBA remains the holdout among the major banks (and many minor ones) in sticking to their forecast that despite all the sturm und drang over the past day and say the RBA must leave the rate unchanged in May but start hiking from June. Gareth Aird, chief economist of Australia's biggest lender, reckons the RBA will stand to lose a lot of credibility if they were to raise the 0.1% cash rate next week given it had stated clearly that it wanted to see both inflation and wage data before acting. We won't get the latter until 18 May. Aird said it won't make a big difference to market lending rates because they have been climbing for more than half a year already. I didn't think Josh Frydenberg could look any more exhausted than he did yesterday, but he looks even more tired today. He is still using his "serious" voice, where he speaks very slowly and deliberately as he blames international pressures for Australia's inflation increase: They're being driven by international factors and we saw that particularly in terms of fuel costs, up 11% for the quarter, up 35% for the year, the single biggest increase in fuel costs since Iraq's ***invasion*** of Kuwait back in 1990, more than 30 years ago. When you look at what's happened through Covid, it's put real pressures on supply chains and disrupted those and that's why we have seen freight costs increase by five-fold at least. When it comes to the war in Ukraine, that's lifted commodity prices very significantly - fuel, oil and gas prices, are up, wheat prices are up significantly, that's playing through, both to the bowser here in Australia as well as to the supermarket shelf prices. Now, we understand those cost-of-living pressures which are very real for Australian families and that's why we announced a comprehensive and clear set of ***measures*** in the budget just over two weeks ago. That included halving the fuel excise. Now, for people here in this seat of McEwen, we're talking about 100,000 vehicle owners who are now seeing their fuel prices more than 22 cents lower than they were going into budget night. We also announced that for 10 million Australians, low and middle-income earners, they would get an additional $420 on top of the existing low and middle income tax offset when they put in their tax return from 1 July and more than 70,000 people in this electorate had benefited from the Coalition's cut to taxes. We also announced that $250 payments would be provided to six million Australians on income support. That includes in the electorate of McEwen more than 12,000 pensioners. Others who are job-seekers, others who are on disability spore, veteran veterans, carers, are all receiving these $250 payments including eligible self-funded retirees. And we have also ensured that medicines are becoming more affordable and accessible for more than 2.4 million Australians. These are a comprehensive set of ***measures*** designed to ease the cost-of-living pressures that Australians are feeling right now. Q: I understand there's a backlog in the ***processing*** of visitor visas given that the government's... Kristina Keneally: I think every visa category has a backlog of some sort, yes. Q: Under a Labor government, would you increase the workforce for the ***processing*** of these visitor visas? Keneally: The announcement we made yesterday is an important one because we got rid of the public sector cap. It's an artificial cap. We need to unclog the visa ***processing*** system how many more... Well, I'm in the going to start canvassing numbers here because the other thing that's happened under this government is that the immigration portfolio has been outside of Cabinet for most of a decade. There is one portfolio and one area that the government has complete and utter control over that directly affects economic growth and that is migration. Q: Ms Keneally, just on border protection. Would a Labor government keep in place temporary protection visas? And if not, what would you replace them with? And on offshore detention, you repeatedly spoken about about the fact you don't want it to be a permanent, you want it to be temporary, right? What would you do to enable it to be temporary and not indefinite considering the New Zealand is for the legacy caseload, not from someone who comes from now? Kristina Keneally: First of all, I'm not sure I understand the phrase legacy caseload. Let me explain. I have been through this several times including this morning on Sky News, but I'm happy to repeat it here for you when it comes to operation sovereign borders, we do support boat turn-backs and, resettlement and offshore ***processing***. In terms of protection visas, the only people in Australia on temporary protection visas came before operation sovereign borders: If you attempt to come to Australia by boat you'll be turned back or you will be sent to Nauru. Even the people who come from Nauru and PNG for medical treatment do not go on temporary protection visas. They're either on no visa because they're here with ministerial permission or they're on a bridging visa. So the only people in Australia on temporary protection visas are people who have already been recognised as refugees by a Liberal government. They have lived in Australia for more than 10 years. They work here, they pay taxes, they run businesses, I met a family in Adelaide, they're all on temporary protection visas. They own a cafe, a successful cafe, it survived through the pandemic. They were denied jobkeeper but they were paid jobkeeper to pay to the Australians that they employ. So this cohort of people, about 20,000, every three or five years the government demands they go through a bureaucratic ***process*** to get a protection status again. It's unnecessary and costly. Clogs up the Department of Home Affairs which has got 100,000 backlog for citizenship applications, 54,000 backlog for visa applications, businesses say it gets 12 months or more to get a skilled visa approved. When we got a skill shortage. We got a clogged up Department of Home Affairs. And we're making them go through this ***process*** for no good reason. Q: What visas would you give to that 20,000? Keneally: A permanent protection visa.... Labor's platform has a 90-day rule and we would take up the New Zealand deal. We would implement the New Zealand deal. You can't believe a word Scott Morrison says. Scott Morrison said for years taking up the New Zealand deal would restart the boats. Peter Dutton said for years, taking up the New Zealand deal would restart the boats. That was not true. And we know it's not true because Scott Morrison backflipped just a few weeks ago and took up the New Zealand deal. He took up the New Zealand deal to send bag inner city Liberal seats, make no mistake about it. You can't believe a word he says... We will implement the deal, anyone who has attempted to come to Australia by boat will not settle here, we will negotiate through other countries, as the government has been doing, people have been going to Canada, people have been going to other countries. There will be third country resettlement. Q: Are you ruling out one-off cash payments in the future? Jason Clare: Again, have a look at Jim's [Chalmers] answer. He answered this question this morning Q: What do you believe should happen? Clare: That's what I said. We support the payments that are there now, but you got to do more than that in terms of long-term support to cut the cost of living as well as to make wages stronger and jobs more secure. Now, if you can do all of this, you can help people to pay the bills. The problem here is the last decade has been the worst decade for wage growth in Australia's history, full stop. This is not an accident that this has happened. This is deliberate. The government has deliberately set itself on a path for the last ten years of keeping people's wages low. Wage growth here is lower than the United States. And we are reaping the whirlwind of that right now. OK, it's not just that you have got inflation through the roof, you got wages through the floor. And that makes it harder and harder for Aussies to make ends' meet. Q: We're in the middle of a crisis. Is childcare the only policy that Labor has to alleviate this cost of living crisis? What are you going to do for pensioners, for example, that will continue to struggle to pay for essential household items. Jason Clare: The answer is no, and have a look at the answer I gave you to your first question in this press conference. Yes, we support to immediate cash help that people are getting. Yes, we support the cut in petrol costs, they help everyone that has a car by you need medium and long-term changes here that are going to help people with their longer term challenges. Don't underestimate the childcare policy in terms of the impact that it's going to make on more than a million Aussies. I know myself as the father of a child who has just moved from childcare to primary school, it felt like you got a pay rise when they leave day care. It's expensive. If you can have a policy in place that does two things. Amanda made this point in the press conference. This policy ticks two of the big boxes to tackle two of the big challenges in this country. Cost of living and getting skilled workers into the workforce. You talk to employers who are tell you all the time they can't find skilled workers. The childcare policy will give the average family on $100 another $1600 back in their pocket every year but it also means they can go back to work. Hang on a second, there's childcare and that's important if you've got a woman with a child - you know, a man and a woman with two kids maybe, take my house, and one person's working full-time, the other one's working 2.5 days a week and you can change the cost of childcare that 2.5 days might become three or four. The impact of that young person being in childcare is amazing. The impact for that family in terms of the extra money is terrific and the impact that business's extra productivity because you have a skilled worker already trained back in the workforce that, he's why this is a big deal for cost of living and skilled workers for employers who desperately need it. We're going to cut the cost of electricity, too. Anybody who pays an electricity bill, whether you're 18 or 80, know it's too expensive. You asked me about pensioners. Pensioners ask me about the cost of electricity all the time. And we've been banging on in this country about how we can fix it and try to scare the pants off people about how you might fix it for the last 10 years. The Liberal party have been telling people that if you invest in renewable energy and try to do something about climate change your bills will group. Well, now the opposite is true. If you invest in more in renewable energy you'll cut the cost of electricity. That is why we're saying we will do that this. If you want your electricity bills cut you've got to vote Labor at this election. Q: I know you said Solomon Islands is a sovereign nation but they've effectively said they'll only release the details of the security pact if China gives them the green light. If elected how will you push China to see those details because it is in Australia's interests and just secondly pledge to boost foreign aid but in the wake of this pact should Australia be making a more concerted effort to strengthen defence and security ties wits Pacific neighbours? Kristina Keneally: Two parts to that. First, the Solomon Islands are a sovereign nation, and I think the very pointed that you raised in that question is why Australia should be quite alarmed. We have already now got China dictating terms to a member of our Pacific family. And this points to the failure of the government to act when they became aware that this deal was potentially in the offing. Marise Payne should have gotten up from her desk and gone to the Solomon Islands. Now, all of the non-Pacific island nations and Timor-Leste are sovereign nations and it used to be the case that Australia was the first country of choice for them. We're at risk of losing that. We have are at risk of losing that. So the package we announced this week is about strengthening institutional relationships in terms of our defence forces and the police forces in the Pacific nations. It is also about projecting Australia's voice to the region through increased broadcasting. It's also about providing financing for climate change infrastructure. It's also about the people to people links and if I can say one of the big announcements we make - made this week that I think people didn't notice enough is a real first in our migration program. 3,000 dedicated spaces per year in the permanent intake for the Pacific islands and Timor-Leste to be conducted as a lottery, apportioned to each of those nations based on population. Last year, there were only 720 permanent arrivals from the Pacific islands to Australia. 3,000 a year. It is an opportunity for us not only to provide significant economic boost because we know that those people when they come here to work from those nations they send money back to their communities. $2,200 every six months. But 3,000 people having the opportunity to come here with their families, permanent residents, creating those people to people links, those ties, that is a fundamentally important offer and it's a fundamentally important chance for us to grow closer to our Pacific islands. Q: First issue, NDIS. Reports are showing is it's going to be $64bn by 2030... When you're sitting around the cabinet table after 21 May if you win the election the cost of this scheme is getting bigger and bigger, is $64bn affordable or will tough decisions have to be made about reining in the NDIS to bring it in budget. Secondly, just on debates. Labor wanted to do a debate at the press club, last week of the campaign. PM said he'll do one on Channel Nine. Channel Seven want do one as well, the ABC wants to do one. What is the ALP's position, Mr Albanese's position, on doing debates. How many debates is he prepared to do and who with? Jason Clare: I'll deal with the first one NDIS. I think Bill talked about that last week. He made the point that there are costs you can take out through consultants and lawyers and so forth. We need to make sure we're helping the people who need help. I told this room the story last Friday about people in my own community who get cut after cut after cut. At the risk of labouring the point, the boy's name is [Jacob] and he has autism and Angelman syndrome. He has had his funding cut three times in a row. His dad can't get funding for care on the weekend so he can take the other boys out to footy and mum's not there because mum died of a brain tumour three or four years ago. This is serious. This is not about numbers this is about people. The things that this government is doing to it at the moment are hurting real people. So you can manage it properly and you can make sure that you don't hurt people along the way and that's what Bill was talking about last week. Frankly, that's what that woman at the debate was talking about last week as well. There are two types of people when it comes to the NDIS. There are people who have had their funding cut and there are people who are terrified of having their funding cut. Now, on the debates, there are going to be more debates. I can't wait for them. I'm sure Albo can't wait for them either. There's a bit of back and forth that's happening at the moment between the parties. We have written to the Liberal party recommending a debate at the press club. They've knocked that back. I expect that over the course of the next few days we're going to get a result here so we sort it out and organise these debates and get them together head to head. We won the first debate. Of course you'd expect us to want more debates. I'm surprised Scott Morrison wants more debates, he's been knocking them back in the parliament for three years. You'd know this if you watch parliament. Every time we move for a debate up pops Peter Dutton and moves the member no longer be heard. I was surprised in the Sky News debate when Albo started winning the debate that Peter Dutton didn't run in and move that the member be no longer heard. So, yes, there will be more debates, can't wait for them. Has Kristina Keneally spoken to Anthony Albanese about being home affairs minister if they win government? Of course all of these decisions are made by the leader but yes I've had every indication that the portfolios I currently hold are the ones I'd take into government. Q: What have you pledged or promised for the Fowler electorate should you win? Kristina Keneally: There's a lot I can talk about here. And it's good to see interest - it's good to see interest from the Daily Telegraph finally in south-west Sydney and I welcome that, because this is an area of Sydney that's got double unemployment rate. It has people who are earning about $500 a week when the average is about $660 a week and yet they've got the same housing costs as the rest of Sydney. It's an area of Sydney where only 8% of the population has achieved university education. Where the cuts to apprenticeships and TAFE, the cuts to university and the failure to act on flat wages and rising cost of living bites really hard. The housing affordability crisis that we're seeing in this country bites ***exceptionally*** hard in Fowler. Which is ranked fourth out of 151 electorates for houses where they need more bedrooms, housing overcrowding is a significant problem. Now, as we come to this election, there is a choice to be made between an Albanese Labor government or three more years of the same tired, out of puff and out of time Liberal government. So this is what I say to you. If people want action on housing affordability they need to vote Labor. If they want 465,000 fee free TAFE places they need to vote Labor. If they want 20,000 more university places, they need to vote Labor. If they want cheaper childcare they need to vote Labor. If they want cheaper electricity costs they need to vote Labor. This, I know you're gonna say, "Oh, gosh, but is that specific to Fowler?" And I say to you, hell yes it is because the people of Fowler of south-west Sydney have been done over by this Liberal government and they deserve a strong and experienced voice in the heart of government and that's what they'll get in an Albanese government. Q: I was talking to a fellow candidate of yours, he's pledged $12 for an oval, $12m for the Maronite community in that electorate. Have you pledged any specific projects for the seat of Fowler. Keneally: Yes. In fact we announced and I'm sorry you missed it half a million dollars to the sir national committee and we have some more announcements coming. Q: Do you welcome One Nation preferencing Labor above Liberals in key seats? Are you grateful or worried? Jason Clare: I make three points on that. We have had no negotiations at all with One Nation on this. We have a long-standing principle of preferencing One Nation last and that has not changed. What One Nation does in terms of who they preference, frankly that is just a matter for them. Q: Under doctors orders Mr Albanese can't hit the campaign trial when he leaves isolation tomorrow. What can we expect to see, a job sharing arrangement between him and you guys? What's the vibe? Jason Clare: What are the medical rules you've referred to? Q: He said on radio under doctors orders he said he shouldn't be taking 16 to 20 hours a day. Clare: He should be taking it easy. I just want to be clear. Look, as somebody that went through Covida couple of weeks ago, I know as well it took me about a week before I was fully recovered, before the Covid cough disappeared and before I felt like I was 100%. But Albo's out of iso tomorrow. And here's a hot tip for ya. We're heading west to Perth. We're heading west, we have the campaign launch on Sunday and that is going to be a key moment in this campaign, a fantastic opportunity for Albo and the whole team to make the case to the Australian people. Not just why this rotten old incompetent government needs to be thrown out but why we have a better plan for Australia's future. Q: Just on another issue, senior Indigenous leaders have spent more than a decade advocating for a referendum on constitutional [recognition]. Labor recently said it wanted a referendum in its first term if elected but is that an election commitment and will you see yourself as having failed if that doesn't happen? Jason Clare: I think Indigenous Australians have been extraordinarily patient. They're desperate for this to happen and we want there to happen. I think Linda's [Burney] made that point, Albo's made this point. The first and most important change we want to make to the constitution is to recognise our Indigenous brothers and sisters in it but not just that, to create an Indigenous voice to parliament. This is long overdue. This is the party of native title. This is the party of the apology. We want to be the party of the Indigenous voice to parliament. Q: And the timing? Clare: Well, as soon as possible. You know, the prime minister made the point this morning, and I think it's a fair point that, you've got to make sure that you've got bipartisanship. You want to make sure that you've got Indigenous Australians and non-indigenous Australians together in this task. The worst thing that could happen would be for Australia to vote no but I've got extraordinary confidence that Australia will vote yes to this. It takes a bit of political will, lean into this and make it happen. We can make this happen and Labor will make it happen. Q: Should China allow Solomon Islands to release that security impact and if there are Chinese troops in Solomon Islands what does that mean potentially for Australian security detail in the [region]? Kristina Keneally: First of all, the Solomon Islands are a sovereign nation. I'm going to let them make their own decisions about what they release and don't release. But I make this point. The Australian government, the Morrison government, was warned that China was seeking to strike a deal with the Solomon Islands. We saw yesterday the extraordinary commentary from the head of the office of national intelligence, Andrew Shearer, saying this was not an intelligence failure. That means it was a government failure. It was a failure by Mr Morrison not to seek to speak to prime minister Sogavare. It was a failure by Mr Morrison not to send his foreign minister to the Solomon Islands. Mr Morrison dropped the ball here in what has been the most significant national security failure since world war two and as a result Australia is less safe. Now, China does have a foothold now, just 1600km from Cairns. And all the chest thumping and empty rhetoric we saw yesterday from Mr Morrison about [red lines] is just tough talk with nothing behind it. That's why Labor this week announced our plan to strengthen Australia's relationship with our Pacific family. Mr Morrison has been caught asleep at the wheel. And as a result Australia is less secure. Q: You mentioned you want to be home affairs minister if Labor wins government. On that issue why then did you tell Labor for refugees at the 2021 conference that you would welcome an approach by that group to end the offshore ***processing*** regime if Labor wins government. Kristina Keneally: Well, I haven't seen that information that you're sharing there with me, and I said this, this morning on Sky News. But let me be clear. Our policy is operation sovereign borders. Regional resettlement, boat turn-backs where safe to do so and offshore ***processing***... Q: Why are they saying you did? Keneally: I don't know, you'd have to ask them. Let me be clear. If you attempt to come to Australia by boat you will not make it. You will be sent back or sent to offshore ***processing*** in Nauru. Q: Can I ask for your response to comments of Karen Andrews saying that China has made these comments to coincide with the campaign. I know you've written a letter to her. Has she responded? Kristina Keneally: No is the answer to that. Yesterday we saw Karen Andrews indulge in conspiratorial fantasies and unhinged commentary about foreign interference in our election campaign. Offered with no proof, offered with no reference to intelligence. I make this point. If Karen Andrews does not have intelligence briefings suggesting that there has been attempts at foreign interference in our election campaign, then she needs to clarify that to the public right now. And if she does have such briefings, we are in caretaker mode, and I'd remind her that the Asio director-general has already made clear that such should be provided to both the opposition and the government during the caretaker period. Now, this is not the first time Karen Andrews has done this. Just a few weeks ago she made another suggestion that she had some kind of intelligence relating to another matter. I wrote to her then and asked for a briefing. We have repeatedly requested such a briefing. Nothing has been forth coming. What I expect in this circumstances, nothing will be forth coming either because Karen Andrews can't substantiate her claims and if she can then she needs to ensure that the Labor opposition as the alternate government is briefed. Would Kristina Keneally like to be home affairs minister if Labor wins government? Yes. Jason Clare turns a question on why Tanya Plibersek hasn't fronted a press conference into 'where is Alan Tudge': Clare: You've been so busy on the bus you've not been watching Sunrise or the Project. I know there are a lot of people watching this, but I guess the audience on Sunrise is bigger and so is the Project. Tanya's been out there. If you watch the things she's been saying. She's been making a real big impact on this campaign. I think what we have seen over the course of the last two weeks are two things. One, we have seen the government stuff up on things they tell people they're good at, national security and the economy. The other thing is you've seen Albo's team. You've seen we have a strong, united team and we're ready to govern. We're ready to earn your vote and we're ready to get started on fixing the problems that Australians want us to fix. Compare and contrast that with the other side. Scott Morrison talks about his team. Where are they? Most are in hiding, some are in witness protection. Where is Alan Tudge? Can anyone find Alan Tudge? I don't think Scooby-Doo could find Alan Tudge at a moment. Here's a bloke - no, this is important. Here's a bloke who seems he's responsible for half a million dollars of taxpayer money being paid to a former staffer. Scott Morrison said he'd be up front. He was asked a question and he refuses to answer why the money's been spent. A week later we find out there's all these WhatsApp messages which indicate Alan Tudge may have broken the law by encouraging a former staff not to tell the truth to security agencies. This bloke is running for Parliament. If you're running for Parliament then you've government stand up and answer questions from journalists. If there's an enterprising journalist in Melbourne, try and find Alan Tudge. Labor is holding its second press conference of the day with Jason Clare and Kristina Keneally. It is mostly about cost of living. On whether Labor will do a cash handout to help with the cost of living: What we're saying is there is a crisis. There are Australians that need help right now and those cash payments are welcome because they help people right now. But we need more than just short-term help, you need long-term help. You were at a childcare centre today, this is a big part of providing help to more than a million Australians. I think Amanda made the point in the press conference that the changes we make there will help an average family cut the cost of childcare by $1,600 a year. Now, that's a lot of money. Q: Should there be another one-off cash handout? We were asked that question. We're not going to do. There's short term help for the -- from the government. There's people are screaming out for help. Scott Morrison has a short term plan, cuts to excise of petrol ends in six months. We're saying you need a plan that lasts more than six months so you've got to change changes to childcare to cut the cost of childcare. The Greens have released their climate policy. There is quite a bit of side campaigning going on. Angus Taylor is also back on the campaign trial after the recent loss of his father. Daniel Hurst has also reported on Labor's concerns over Karen Andrews implying political interference may be one of the reasons the security pact between Solomon Islands and China was released. Labor has raised grave concerns about the home affairs minister's use of "privileged access to intelligence reporting", after Karen Andrews publicly alluded to a potential attempt by China at interference in the federal election. The shadow minister, Kristina Keneally, has written to Andrews to remind her of "the vital convention that opposition is briefed on any developing matters of national security" during the election caretaker mode. The letter, seen by Guardian Australia, was sent after Andrews implied China might have timed the announcement of a security deal with Solomon Islands to influence the Australian election outcome. "Noting your privileged access to intelligence reporting in your position as home affairs minister, I am gravely concerned by these assertions," Keneally said in the letter. Joe Hinchliffe has taken a look at Longman, one of the electorates both major parties are targeting. This is an important study which shows up another of the gaps in healthcare around Australia (via AAP). Cancer patients in rural Australia are missing out on critical information about recovery and disease recurrence, potentially affecting their chances of survival, a study has found. A survey of 201 cancer patients from rural Queensland found 65% did not receive survivorship care plans, documents which detail follow-up appointments, treatment side effects, and signs the disease has returned. The University of Southern Queensland study is part of a project investigating why people in rural areas are up to 31% more likely to die within five years of a diagnosis compared with patients in the city. Lead author Arlen Rowe said there had been limited research into rural patients' access to survivorship plans, which are recommended worldwide. "You can see how if people don't receive that information, potentially, that could be contributing to those disparities in survival rates," Rowe told AAP. The results, published in the Journal of Cancer Survivorship, also found 30% of the participants did not receive information about medical resources in their communities. There is also a gap in information about signs and symptoms of disease recurrence, future screening, financial support and counselling programs, and recommendations for diet and exercise. "It's not as easy to coordinate care in a rural area as it would be in a city, where resources are much more readily available," Rowe said. "So it would be really important for people who are returning to rural areas to have all the information they need for the best outcomes." The study, backed by Cancer Council Queensland, said overseas studies had shown the benefit of dedicated support nurses and telehealth services for rural patients. Marise Payne has continued to spell out her concerns with the "secret" China-Solomon Islands security deal, saying it is "not transparent" and "not open" - unlike Australia's own security treaty with Solomon Islands. And despite the Australian government pointing to public commitments by Solomon Islands that there would not be a Chinese military base, the foreign minister indicated she would continue to seek those assurances. Payne was asked some direct questions at the US Studies Centre about whether the Australian government should have seen this coming, and whether the deal represented an intelligence failure. Payne responded that Australia had been dealing with security developments "consistently for some time", and that included discussions around China's desire to establish a security presence in the region. Those discussions have been held at the highest levels of government and held amongst both officials, leaders, ministers, senior security officers, particularly the Australian federal police, and others. Payne said those conversations enabled Australia to "even more readily" deployed AFP and ADF personnel as part of the Solomon Islands Assistance Force late last year to respond urgently to unrest in Honiara. That was done in conjunction with New Zealand, Papua New Guinea and Fiji: It's important to acknowledge that that is a Pacific family security response that worked, that was immediate, that addressed the needs of the Solomon Islands in that instance. But this security agreement is by the nature of its provisions that we know of secret. It's not transparent. It's not open, unlike ... Australia's bilateral security treaty with the Solomon Islands. It is not something that has been made available to partners or discussed with partners, not just not with Australia, but not with Pacific partners as well. And as I also mentioned, we know that there are concerns amongst Pacific partners in relation to that. Payne pointed to Pacific declarations that reference regional security being handled by Pacific family, and the importance of regional responses to security issues that impact the whole region. So whilst we have very close relationships, whilst those relationships enabled us, as I said, to be the first port of call for the Solomon Islands in November/December in response to that unrest, ultimately a security arrangement kept secret at the insistence of a partner is what we are dealing with now. We will continue to work closely with the Solomon Islands, we have been engaging right across the region as well. And we have been very clear in saying ... that it is our firm view, and the firm view overwhelmingly of the majority, if not all, of our Pacific partners that the Pacific family is best placed to respond first to such security challenges. Now the Solomon Islands government at the level of the prime minister has made clear that Australia remains the Solomon Islands' security partner of choice. He has said that a number of times including in their own parliament. He has also explicitly said that the Solomon Islands has no intention that the security arrangement... [enabled] the development of a Chinese military base in the Solomon Islands or a persistent military presence, and we have continued to seek assurances on that and we will be doing so into the future. Here are the latest coronavirus case numbers from around Australia on Thursday, as the country records at least 50 deaths from Covid-19: ACT Deaths: 0 Cases: 1,149 In hospital: 69 (with 3 people in ICU) NSW Deaths: 19 Cases: 13,771 In hospital: 1,701 (with 76 people in ICU) Northern Territory Deaths: 3 Cases: 564 In hospital: 50 (with 2 people in ICU) Queensland Deaths: 7 Cases: 7,718 In hospital: 542 (with 17 people in ICU) South Australia Deaths: 4 Cases: 3,733 In hospital: 240 (with 11 people in ICU) Tasmania Deaths: 0 Cases: 1,202 In hospital: 40 (with 1 person in ICU) Victoria Deaths: 10 Cases: 10,427 In hospital: 445 (with 35 people in ICU) Western Australia Deaths: 7 Cases: 8,889 In hospital: 237 (with 6 people in ICU) AAP has an update from Coles supermarket: Coles Group chief executive Steven Cain says employees and suppliers are working heroically to navigate ***unprecedented*** supply chain issues but he expects the challenges will last a couple of years. So far this year Coles has faced staffing issues from Covid-19, a shortage of shipping pallets, trouble finding qualified drivers given immigration restrictions, and widespread flooding that disrupted rail traffic to Western Australia and the Northern Territory and forced 130 stores in NSW and Queensland to temporarily close. "I can't ever recall a period where the disruption was that extensive, and that was off the back of a good solid Christmas trade, where the supply chain was already under pressure," Cain told analysts on Wednesday morning. "And it's really been a compounding effect, and that takes time to unwind, not just our suppliers, but also in the market more broadly. "We're focused on making sure that our customers get the products that they want, but it does take time for a level of disruption that is so enormous, for everything to be get back where it needs to be," he said. It's not just a Coles issue, or even a retail food industry issue, he added. Coles' staff, third-party providers, carriers and subcontractors have made incredible efforts to keep stores stocked and open, said Cain, who on Tuesday visited a Coles in Queensland that had been hit by flooding. "The continued focus on serving the community and customers, we should really reflect and congratulate them on the effort they've put in," he said. Despite the challenges the listed company managed to lift sales and revenue during the first three months of the year, with a 3.9% increase in retail sales in the quarter to $9.3bn, compared to the same period last year. The Coalition has wanted the campaign conversation to orbit around the economy from the beginning - which is why the Liberals were cock-a-hoop when Anthony Albanese had a brain fade about the unemployment rate and the cash rate on his opening day on the hustings. Albanese's stumble dragged the political conversation away from the mess of parliament's last week (including the closing character attacks on Scott Morrison from people like Concetta Fierravanti-Wells), and back into the economy zone. But then Morrison was belted by new problems - Solomon Islands' decision to sign a new security pact with China, and renewed internal disagreement about whether or not the Coalition was actually serious about achieving net zero emissions by 2050. These disruptions have forced two pivots: 1. The government has tried again to weaponise national security to distract from accusations that it has stuffed things up on defence and Pacific diplomacy; and 2. Try and pretend its own policy is a sneaky carbon tax that Labor wants to impose on people. But now we are back to the economy, thanks to a very high inflation number and market speculation that the high number will force the Reserve Bank of Australia to lift the cash rate. The government thought (hoped perhaps) an interest rate rise would happen on the other side of the election. But now there's a reasonable prospect it will happen before Australians go to the polls on 21 May. Conventional wisdom says this would be terrible for the government and conventional wisdom is conventional wisdom for a reason (ie: because it is very often right). John Howard faced an interest rate hike in the 2007 contest, and we know how that story ended. But we also know this government will make a virtue of necessity. The government will use the uncertainty (the prospect of rising prices and rising rates) to reinforce its core devil-you-know narrative. Morrison will ramp up the risk of change argument over the campaign's closing weeks. It's possible that could work. It's also possible-to-likely that Albanese's day one stumble could also be weaponised in negative Liberal party advertisements that get hammered over the closing weeks. It's also possible that the whole sortie will just turn voters off even more. How does the story end? We'll know soon enough. Scott Morrison couldn't help but take a swipe at Anthony Albanese being in isolation this morning. Morrison claims he had a "very busy" week when he had Covid and was in isolation "attending Quad summits and doing all those sorts of things" while Albanese had a "pretty quiet week". He attempted to go on to say how that it "highlights again..." but he was cut off by the host. Not sure that "I was busier than you when I was sick" is the greatest message. Also - Morrison is the prime minister. So of course he would have things to do. Usually though, you can count on your deputy to pick up some of the slack while off or ill. Morrison's deputy is Barnaby Joyce. So that probably says enough. In her speech, Marise Payne also stresses increases in Australia's defence budget. Over the past eight years, Australia has been undertaking the most comprehensive expansion of our defence capability in our lifetimes ... This range of initiatives strengthens our sovereignty and makes us a more capable partner in maintaining a region in which all nations can pursue their interests and values, free from coercion, intimidation or pressure. Australia is amongst a group of nations championing democratic values. However, we clearly also have aligned interests. with countries that have different political systems. Amongst those aligned interests is a balanced region in which no one country dominates and in which all states rights and sovereignty are respected. Payne says Australia stands for a freer, more open region. In a reference to China's growing power, Payne adds: A region in which an authoritarian power is dominant doesn't get us closer to that goal, and that's why the resilience of all states is essential. Payne says that across the globe, as authoritarian powers assert themselves, smaller and vulnerable states are facing stresses. She says Australia must respond alongside partners, because no one nation alone can tackle the array of challenges we face. We are most certainly stronger together. At the US Studies Centre, Marise Payne alludes to the China-Solomon Islands security deal. The foreign minister says Australia wants to build the resilience of the region because stability benefits Australia's economy "and a safe neighbourhood is a good place to live". We have responded to our Pacific family in times of need. She points to practical support including vaccines, infrastructure, low-emissions technology and investments in economic resilience. We deliver on our promises transparently. Payne says Australia is the only country with a diplomatic post in every Pacific Island Forum country. And then she gets more pointed. She says while the Australian government will continue talking with the Solomon Islands government in Honiara, she reaffirms "that we are deeply concerned by the Solomon Islands' signing of the security agreement last week with China". Of course I have consistently acknowledged that this is a clear sovereign decision by a sovereign government. However, we know other members of the Pacific family share our concerns. We'll continue talking with the Solomon Islands government about how the Pacific family is best placed to provide security assistance in our region. We have done that successfully. We will continue to do that, and no document signed and kept away from public view is going to change that. Payne says the signing of the deal reflects the geostrategic reality of the times we are in. Anthony Albanese had a chat to Sydney radio station WSFM this morning, where he spoke of his Covid experience: It's been a difficult week, but my symptoms have been much milder than many other people have had, so I am looking forward to getting out. My doctor tells me I have to take things easy, particularly in the first few days, to not do the 16- and 20-hour days that I was doing. But it will be good to be out and about, and the first thing I'm doing is heading to Western Australia, where we have our campaign launch this Sunday. So expect to continue seeing more of the Labor frontbench over the next week, even though Albanese will be back on the physical campaign trail. The foreign minister, Marise Payne, says there is now "strong agreement from amongst the Australian people that standing firm on our values and principles, even in the face of pressure, is the right approach for our long term future". Payne is talking about China while addressing an event at the United States Studies Centre in Sydney. She says Australia's alliance with the US will continue to evolve as the strategic circumstances change.The foreign minister says tomorrow marks 70 years since the Anzus treaty came into force. The treaty, she says, has strengthened the fabric of peace in the Pacific. For 70 years, Australia has known that we are far more secure because we do not stand alone. This knowledge has given us confidence and assisted in enabling us to flourish and prosper. There's nothing quite like having good friends, and trusted partners. She says those arrangements have underpinned stability and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific region. We've entered a period that is becoming more dangerous, less stable, and less prosperous. Australia has been at the forefront of addressing this geostrategic reality in our region. The Morrison government's approach is founded in a firm belief that we have agency and influence to shape our strategic environment for the better. We've done so with a strong voice, through policies at home and abroad, and through practical ***measures*** with our partners, to invigorate the relationships that provide stability and confidence. Australia has a track record as one of the countries that has been clearest and most consistent in response to the changing circumstances, particularly China's growing assertiveness in the Indo-Pacific. We have led on this. There is now strong agreement from amongst the Australian people that standing firm on our values and principles, even in the face of pressure is the right approach for our long term future. Payne says the government has "a clear and focused plan" on resilience, relationships and rules. On the latter point, she stresses "rules over anarchy". Payne also notes that climate change presents additional challenges for our region. We'll bring you more updates later. Q: Just back on to your question, while the elections are, I don't know, three weeks away, or whatever it is... early voting starts on May 9. When can we know whether the [superannuation] policy that you referred to will or will not be part of Labor's platform? And, secondly, on the cashless debit card aged pension scare campaign, Labor's candidate in Longman is still running that scare campaign even though it's categorically false. How do you justify it? Jim Chalmers: Well, first of all, on our policy announcements, we make them at the appropriate time. If we come to a concluded view on a policy, we announce them when we're ready, and that's standard practice on both sides of politics forever. So, that's the answer to that question. Now, on the cashless debit card, Labor has committed to abolishing the cashless debit card. The Liberals and Nationals have speculated about extending it. Now, those are two facts. And if the government... Q: Not for the age pension? Chalmers: It's the same as what they said before the 2013 election - no cuts to the pension, no cuts to the ABC or health or education. People don't believe this government for good reason. You know, the prime minister is a pathological liar when it comes to these issues. He was saying not that long ago there wouldn't be increased taxes under a Liberal-National government. There are increases in the budget they handed down last month. You can't believe a word that he says. And so our commitment, our assurance to Australians is that we will abolish the cashless debit card. The prime minister and the relevant minister, this term of the parliament, have talked about extending it, and that's the difference. Q: Just on that point of interest rate rises, you're accusing the government of not owning the bad economic news. If interest rates under your watch as treasurer in a Labor government, will you own those? Jim Chalmers: I'm saying the government can't have it both ways. The government bleats about the unemployment rate. If something is going badly, it's got absolutely nothing to do with them. I was in an electorate last week and we were talking to people, and people raised all around Australia, "This is a prime minister who takes credit for the good things, takes no responsibility for the difficult things." Now, we are realistic about inflation, we are realistic about interest rates, and we're not overpromising. We don't intend to overpromise and we're simply pointing out that if the Prime Minister wants to take credit for things that go well in the economy, he needs to take responsibility for the fact that Australians are getting absolutely slaughtered by this triple whammy. And he has been in office now for almost a decade, he only wants to talk about Labor, he only wants to talk about international developments. The war in Ukraine doesn't explain or excuse a decade of this mob going after people's wages and job security, and that's a big part of the problem. He needs to take responsibility for once - not point the finger, not go missing when people need him, but actually take responsibility. This is a cost of living crisis, a full-blown cost of living crisis, and Australians are getting absolutely hammered by it - and their prime minister, true to form, is nowhere to be seen. Q: Are you concerned homebuyers who have accessed government schemes, like the First Home Deposit Schemes, will face additional cost pressures in light of rising interest rates because they'll have to pay back a greater proportion of interest? And second, Labor said they would extend that policy by 10,000 spots mostly to regional seats? Is that a good policy to do, considering it will be more expensive to service a mortgage? Jim Chalmers: It will be more expensive to service a mortgage. It wasn't that long ago that Scott Morrison was running around, lying to the Australian people and saying, "If you elect a Labor government, your interest rates will go up." And that's blown up in his face. And what we're seeing with the interest rate rise, which most analysts and commentators expect will either happen next Tuesday or the month after, and then subsequent to that as well, is that someone with an average-sized loan of $595,000 will be $124 worse off a month. And so it will sting when interest rates start to go up. Most people expect they will go up substantially more than that over time. This is the triple whammy that Scott Morrison has handed Australian homeowners: falling real wages, skyrocketing inflation, and now rising interest rates are about to add to the pain as well. And so when it comes to government policy on housing, you know, obviously you need to strike the right balance here. And we have been supportive about helping people into the housing market, but it is a much broader story than the government's proposals. There's also a story around social housing. There are some other steps that a government could take, and we'll have more to say about housing between now and the election. But these interest rate rises will hurt, and Scott Morrison - who takes credit when the economy is going well - won't take responsibility for the fact that a decade now of attacks on real wages in this country make it harder for people to meet what will be the rising costs of their mortgage. Q: [A question on Labor dropping its policy to] pay superannuation on paid parental leave... How can you justify it, given we know it contributes to the gender pay gap? And can I get Amanda Rishworth's response too? Jim Chalmers: We haven't finalised and concluded a view on this yet. You read about it in the papers because we consulted with stakeholders....We have been consulting with stakeholders and we have been saying the same thing privately that we say publicly, which is that this is a very good policy idea and we need to weigh it up against a whole range of other great policy ideas. We are being upfront. I thought Katy Gallagher did an incredible job yesterday of explaining how there is more good ideas than there is room in the budget. We haven't come to a concluded view on that. We consider it to be very important. We've taken that policy to elections in the past, but we need to weigh it up against all the other priorities. Amanda Rishworth: Well, what I would say about the current government is their answer to the gender pay gap is actually for male wages to fall so that there is less gap between women and men. What we need to do is lift the wages, but also women's workforce participation. Of course, there are many policies that can affect that gender pay gap, and you've mentioned one of those policies that affects the gender income in retirement, but there are many others, including - as I mentioned - those workers, majority women, who are not able to go into the workforce when they have little children because they cannot afford the cost of child care. We also know that we have one of the highest in the OECD part-time women's workforce participation. Other countries have much higher full-time workforce participation, and a lot of that comes down to the cost of child care. So, while there are many policies that can directly affect the gender pay gap - and we've announced another suite of policies - Tanya Plibersek has answered them, including, for example, getting rid of secrecy clauses in pay agreements, a number of things that can reduce that gender pay gap. Investing in child care is one of those critical areas that help women go back to work, earn more, and work more hours.... As Jim said, we are having to weigh up policies right across the board. This government has completely fallen asleep at the wheel when it comes to women. I think you don't have to go very far down the road, really, to get that feedback from people out there in the community. They know that this government has abandoned women when it comes to their economic security as well as many other parts of their life. But Labor will consider and have to weigh up a range of policies, but we've already put a very substantial one on the table around supporting women go back to work. Q: Specifically on tax ***measures***, for the past four years, low and middle earners have been getting up to $1,500 in their tax returns every year from the Low and Middle Income Tax Offset. You were equivocal about what you will do about that yesterday, but now it's almost May, the end of the financial year is coming up, what can you say to those low- and middle-income earners that were perhaps relying on that $1,500. Will you do something to give them tax relief when they put in their tax returns? Jim Chalmers: Under the legislation, the Low and Middle Income Tax Offset runs out when people get their tax returns next year for this year. And we don't have any proposals to change that. But you are quite right that for all of those Australians that the government likes to talk about, they will get effectively a tax hike when the Low and Middle Income Tax Offset runs out. And the government doesn't like to 'fess up to that. Now, when it comes to tax, when it comes to tax, this is the second highest-taxing government in the last 30 years. Australians are paying more tax by every ***measure*** than they were under the Labor government. The government needs to come clean about that and admit that the changes to the LMITO which are legislated means a tax hike for people after the election.... We've got substantial proposals on the cost of living and getting real wages moving. Q: Will Labor extend the fuel excise beyond the six-month mark the Coalition set? Jim Chalmers: We supported the government policy on this and that is why we supported the policy, because that was needed. Beyond that, we are taking the economic position and how Australians are faring but we cannot do anything in a budget which is riddled with rorting and waste. Q: Will you pledge that electricity retail prices will fall under your government? Chalmers: The powering Australia plan is the most comprehensive modelling any opposition has provided about a big policy...it says by the middle of this decade, $275 a year in power prices savings, and hopefully we can do even better than that. That is what the modelling says. Our proposal to get the cost of living down after this near-term relief [runs out] on the other side of the election - we have a plan on power bills, childcare... They [the government] dropped the ball on this, just like they dropped the ball in the Solomons and China, on rapid tests and vaccines. This is of the same ilk. This is a prime minister who takes no responsibility when times are tough. Times are tough right now. It's time to throw him out. Q: How can Labor promise improvements when it is looking at only $5bn from its budget audit? Jim Chalmers: First of all, on inflation, any responsible government's task in this environment is to have an economic plan that grows [the] economy strongly without adding to inflationary pressures. That is about a more skilled workforce, more participation - and all of the other policies are outlined yesterday and again today. That is how we get the economy growing without adding to these substantial inflationary pressures we have an economy. We are the only party in this election taking the budget position seriously. The government announced $39 billion in new spending in the budget without any talk of offsets. We want to improve the budget, with the budget. Two ways you can do that: trim spending on contractors, consultants and labour hire, which has blown out in this government; and the second thing, do something meaningful about multinational tax avoidance. The responsible commitment we have made in this election costs a fraction of what this government has wasted and rorted. The most expensive [item]... on this budget is the policy on childcare, and the total cost of that is less than what this government has admitted they are wasting on submarines that will never be built. We need a bit of perspective here. Our commitments are responsible, [and] ***measured***, and taking into account the budget position and the proposals we made yesterday, almost $5 billion in budget improvements are much better than what the government is proposing. Q: Will Labor commit to extending cost of living relief ***measures***/cash payments to help? Jim Chalmers: We are committed, if we're successful, to hand down another budget this calendar year, and that budget will take into consideration the existing economic conditions. And it will implement our plan for a better economy and a better future, and so we will play the cards we are dealt with at the time. I have said publicly at many times, including on the budget, that this cost of living relief is important in the near term. It would be difficult to extend it forever. We cannot do it in a budget which is riddled with waste and rort, with $1 trillion of debt... We cannot fix every problem in one budget, but we will be more attentive to cost of living pressures, and plan to get the wages going again, and that matters as well. On specific policies and extending them, I have made lots of comments in the past. We will see what the conditions are at the time but it will be hard to extend that relief indefinitely. Q: You said this morning that inflation would be lower and real wages [would be] stronger under a government that you are the treasurer in. How, specifically, will you make sure that guarantee is realised, and what, specifically, will you do to increase real wages that does not increase the inflation equation? Jim Chalmers: The government which is about real wages growth, rather than going out of its way to undermine job security and attack wages, [will] grow wages faster. A plan about taking inflationary pressures out of a growing economy will always give us a better chance to get inflation down. We do not pretend that, if Labor is elected on one date, that the next day all of these challenges will be dealt with. These are big entrenched challenges. We are thinking about real wages growth, they been stagnant for much of the decade the Coalition has been in office. What we need here is a plan. The government is long on excuses and short on a plan. They have a plan to get themselves from one side of the election to the other side, but not a plan to deal with the cost of living pressures in a sustainable way, along the lines mentioned. What we would do when it comes to getting real wages going again, which is central to our economic plan and budget strategy, is we would make sure we are training people for higher wage opportunities, at universities and Tafe. Childcare be cheaper and more accessible and people can work more if they want and can. Think about aged care, the minimum wage cases, with everyone to deal with labour hire undermining wages and job security. We want to deal with the gig economy. There are a whole range of proposals we made. The government - they say there is absolutely nothing we can do to get wages growing. That is complete and utter rubbish. The government has said in a moment of candour that stagnant wages are a deliberate design of their policy. Stronger wages is a deliberate design of our policy. Jim Chalmers and Amanda Rishworth are at a childcare centre for today's press conference, as Labor's childcare policy underpins part of its economic plan. But it is all about cost of living and inflation today. Q: Indigenous Australians have been grappling with costs of living pressures for decades. What are you going to do to ease those pressures on Indigenous Australians in a remote and regional Australians? Jim Chalmers: The highest priority when it comes to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians is to do with the housing crisis. We made an announcement about remote housing, which is a very important place to start. We do not pretend it is the beginning and end of the challenge in remote communities. There are other challenges, including making sure we can get labour mobility as part of the story, [and] that we can have proper services, including access to decent healthcare, which is another announcement we made in central Australia. The shadow treasurer, Jim Chalmers, is up in Sydney with the message he wants people to hear: This is a prime minister that takes credit for everything that goes well, but never takes responsibility when times are tough. What we've seen in the economy in the last little while absolutely torpedoes Scott Morrison's claims to be good at managing the economy. It is not good economic management if Australians cannot get ahead. It is not good economic management if Australians are falling further and further behind. The thanks that Australians get for the sacrifices they made for each other cannot be another three years of falling real wages, skyrocketing inflation and interest rate rises. The big risk of re-electing Scott Morrison is another three years of attacks on real wages which makes it harder and harder to keep up with the skyrocketing costs of living and to pay increasing costs on your mortgage. Given what we know, aged care really should be more of an issue this election campaign. Caitlin Cassidy has this report: More than 6,500 reports of understaffing and unsafe conditions in Australia's aged care sector, including hundreds of reports of resident injuries, will be handed to the regulator on Wednesday. The reports, from United Workers Union (UWU) whistleblower site Aged Care Watch, identified thousands of instances of aged care residents' safety suffering due to unfilled shifts and understaffing. Some 2,300 reports named a "distressed resident", while 1,900 named a resident left soiled for an "extended period" and 600 said a resident was injured due to lack of care. As Scott Morrison pointed out, Anthony Albanese will be out of Covid isolation tomorrow. The Labor leader will officially launch Labor's election campaign in Perth on the weekend. The major parties never launch their election campaigns until the campaign is almost over. It's sometimes not until the final week of the campaign. It's meant to give the faithful a boost in the final days - but its also designed to catch undecided voters' attention as they begin to think about where to place their vote. It's the non-discretionary items which are the real inflation story. You can't just stop buying grocery basics altogether. And the lower your income, the harder you feel the pressures - it's not about whether you buy milk or bread. It's whether you eat every day or not. Morning all, if you watched Scott Morrison's press conference this morning, you will have seen he wants two debates next week, one on Nine and the other on Seven. In a bit of breaking news, I can reveal Labor has sought a leaders debate for the National Press Club on May 18 - in the closing days of the campaign. Labor's campaign director Paul Erickson wrote this morning to the Liberal campaign director Andrew Hirst seeking that agreement (which, for the record, was what the Liberal party sought from Labor for during the last election campaign - a debate in that venue with a single moderator). The National Press Club is the traditional venue for leaders' debates. Full disclosure: I am not currently on the board of the NPC, but I was for many years. The current NPC president is the ABC's Laura Tingle and the president generally moderates the debates. Labor has not said no to debates on Nine and Seven, but the campaign is reluctant to lock in for events next week until it is clear Anthony Albanese has bounced back fully from Covid. Albanese is due out of isolation tonight. Morrison has said yes to Nine and Seven, but has thus far blanked a separate request by the ABC for 9 May. I'm not sure what the position on the NPC would be, but Morrison signalled this morning he was up for three debates. One has already happened on Sky News, so two next week would make three. Albanese was scored by the audience of swinging voters as the winner of the Sky debate. Victoria has recorded 10,427 new Covid-19 cases and 10 deaths. Scott Morrison spoke a lot about Australians being "prepared" for an interest rate rise, by locking in fixed rates and having put money away. But that is only if you have discretionary spending money you can save. Not everyone does. He also blamed the inflation rise on international factors. But that doesn't take into account that productivity had fallen to terrible lows even before the pandemic. And wages growth also hit all time lows - with disposable income per person flatlining between 2013 and 2020. Governments do not increase wages (in the private sector), that is true. But it's wrong to say governments have no influence. It sets public sector wages, which can often be used as a benchmark for the private sector. And since the 1970s, we have seen a systematic chipping away of unions in Australia, which has limited the power workers have to negotiate. Keeping wages suppressed was part of policy settings to keep inflation down, but Australia has had low inflation for some time. And as Grogs says: Inflation rising hits harder when your wages have not kept pace. Q: The inflation rate is far worse than what your own budget papers say. So, going to 3% in 12 months' time just isn't realistic, is it? Scott Morrison: Well, the forecasts that are set out in the budget dealt with what is happening next financial year. I mean, the figures that you've seen - that have been released - that predates the halving of the petrol tax, OK? And so Treasury estimated that that would actually cut the inflation by about 0.5% - that was their estimates in the Budget. And so, you know, the Budget sets out, as we've said at every single Budget we've delivered, it sets out that economic plan for the future. It sets out the real relief we're able to deliver right now. As I said, providing a halving of the petrol tax, delivering $250 to all of those who are on fixed income supports from the government - pensioners and the like - and ensuring that Australians on middle to low incomes can keep more of what they earn, with $420 from 1 July to help them deal with those cost-of-living pressures. But the budget is also an economic plan for the future. It underwrites the essential services that we can guarantee because we run a strong economy. It underpins the increasing investments that we're making in our defence forces, including here in Far North Queensland. It underwrites those essentials that Australians rely on, those pharmaceuticals on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme, the support for Medicare, which is at record levels - over 88% bulk-billing around the country. That is how we're able to say to Australians going into this election that the choice is between Mr Albanese and the Labor party, who Australians know don't know how to manage money and don't have the proven economic track record in a crisis, whereas Australia, under our government, does. And we have been able to demonstrate that through some of the toughest times with a strong economic plan for the future. And the other thing, that means, is right here, like in communities in Far North Queensland, in regional areas around the country, we continue to make the important investments. I was here with Warren at the start of the year - a billion dollars addition committed to our Great Barrier Reef, to not just protect the livelihood of the reef but to protect the livelihoods of [those tourism operators]. Q: If your Government is re-elected, will Australians vote in a referendum to recognise Indigenous Australians in the Constitution? And, secondly, Indigenous Australians are paying some of the highest costs for basic necessities. What will your government do to be bringing down those costs for Indigenous Australians living in remote Australia? Scott Morrison: Well, thank you for the question. On the first one, it really goes to what change ultimately is being presented to the Australian people. And I think it's fair to say, as Minister Wyatt has sought over this term, to try and get some consensus about what such a change would be. And that hasn't been found yet. And so to have a referendum on an uncertain question about whether there would be support for such a referendum, I think would be unwise. And I note that the Labor party has a similar view about that. If we're to advance in this area, then I would like to do it on the basis of a more certain question. And I know there is... I mean, we've had views about that. Minister Wyatt has had views about that. And there are some in the Indigenous community who don't share the view about what the change should be. And so I think, obviously, until we can get to that point where there is a greater consensus about what that is, then I think it would be unwise to try and force something along those lines, 'cause I fear ultimately that would just see us go backwards, not forwards. Now, when it comes to supporting Indigenous communities in relation to their food security and their food prices, the support we've provided to outback stores, particularly over the course of this pandemic, has been at record levels. And Warren will know more about that - he visits remote communities all the time and he's well-respected amongst those Indigenous communities all the way up the Cape. But that is just an example. I mean, those $250 payment that is are going out right now, they're going to people in Indigenous communities, they're going to veterans, they're going to people who need that support right now to deal with those rising prices. And in remote communities in particular, those price pressures, well, they are greater, 'cause they're always greater because of the remoteness and the costs of getting stores and supplies to those areas. Q: Inflation will get worse, not better in the coming months. If you look at the wholesale energy price, for instance, what will you do when that flows through to household power bills and they skyrocket? And also, will you agree to do a second debate on Channel Nine? Scott Morrison: Good questions. Well, I'll deal with that last one in a second. The inflationary pressures on our economy are real. We understand that. If anything, I think what we've seen in the last 24 hours only underscores the point that I am making. We are not out of the woods yet, and we understand that. You know, you've gotta understand the economy to have a plan that helps you manage these very real pressures. Now, I'll give you a good example of how we've been able to mitigate that risk on gas prices today. The gas security mechanism that we've had in place, the one that guaranteed supplies from our domestic gas producers to Australia, meant that they are not facing the international gas prices right now that others are around the world. Ours, around about, almost a quarter of what that international price is for most users. Now, that has enabled us to keep electricity prices down and keep the costs of gas feed stock into companies who are manufacturers and producers down. And that's why over the last two years we've been able to cut the cost of electricity by 8%. And since I became Prime Minister, it's fallen by over 9%. When Labor are in power, electricity prices doubled. They increased by over 100%. An average annual increase of over 12%. Now, contrast that to what we've been able to achieve, particularly more recently. Now, we're not immune as an economy from all the pressures coming around the world. But I would argue strongly that our strong economic management has enabled us to put a shield up against a lot of these pressures. The pressure is still there but we have been able to put that shield in place, which has been protecting Australians better than most, if not all, of the major advanced economies in the world today. Now, on the debates, I mean, I'm pleased, and I'm hoping Anthony has had a week of recovery from Covid. It takes a little while to get over - I can attest to that personally. But he will be rejoining the campaign trail. It's time to make up for some lost time. I'm happy to do two debates next week. Seven and Nine have both offered me debates next week. I'm happy to do both of them. I said I would do three. I've already done one. He said he would debate me any time. Seven and Nine\*, book the hall, I'll be there. I look forward to seeing you. \*The ABC has also asked for a debate. You may notice that invitation is not mentioned in that spiel. Q: How important is upping the capacity of the marine precinct here in Far North Queensland, given what's happening between China and the Solomon Islands at the moment? Scott Morrison: Oh, I think it's incredibly important, and that's why we'd already taken that action at HMAS Cairns. And HMAS Cairns has played a very important role. That was five years ago, yeah, well before - well before the Labor party even found the Pacific in the last few weeks. And five years ago, HMAS Cairns, we put that investment - over $150 million. Now, the Guardian Class patrol boats - this is where we're providing patrol boats to every single Pacific Island nation as part of our responsibilities, as we understand, to help them to secure their own fisheries. This is what we've been doing for some time. And so to have a maritime precinct here, which Warren has been building together with the industry and partners... that's how you get things done, it's not just the government. The government works together with far-sighted, private investors in the community to make all of this happen and to build that capability. But you're absolutely right - we agree with you. That's why we took the action five years ago to get all of this moving. And today, to be able to stand here and see the final stage of that coming together... [it is] a real marina project - not a mirage, a real project. There's no mirage about what we're doing. What we're doing is things that actually work and have been working here in building that capacity over many years. (A preference deal only matters if voters follow the how-to-vote card that the party puts out, which sets out how it would like its supporters to vote. You are not forced to follow any how-to-vote card.) Q: How concerned are you that Pauline Hanson has now announced that she will be preferencing Labor against many of your sitting members, including Mr Entsch here in Leichhardt? Couldn't that, in itself, deprive you of majority government? Scott Morrison: Well, I think there's further information to come on that, particularly in relation to Queensland. There's different arrangements in different states and territories, and I know that there's a view about what's occurring in Tasmania. But you know what? That's just all politics. What matters is the choice Australians have to make. And the choice they have to make is between a government that has a strong economic plan, a prime minister that's done eight budgets, both as a member of the Expenditure Review Committee, as a treasurer and as a prime minister, and Mr Albanese, who's never done one. And at a time of great economic uncertainty, and what we're seeing with inflation, what we're seeing with interest rates only underscores my point about the pressures that we continue to face. And so the real choice, at the end of the day, is about who Australians want to form a government. Now, what I know is that votes for independents, at the end of the day, will just contribute to daily chaos in the parliament. One of the things that has greatly assisted us come through this pandemic - and it might have only been a small majority that we were given at the last election - but being able to run a majority government in the midst of one of the greatest challenges that we've ever faced as a country, without having to go each and every day to negotiate the Government's existence with minor parties and Independents, that is a recipe for chaos that Australians really can't afford. And particularly now. And so I would urge Australians to focus on the choice about who you want to be in charge of the nation's finances and our economy and our national security because that, at the end of the day, is going to have the biggest impact on your household budget, on your economic future, and the security of the Australia that you live in. I understand that after three years... of great difficulty, going through the pandemic, I understand that Australians feel frustrated about many things. I share those frustrations. But the way to respond to that is not to create further chaos and uncertainty but to actually lock in further security and certainty, and that is by voting for your Liberal-National candidates. There are some local questions on health services Scott Morrison sends Warren Entsch's way. But then he sees an opportunity to send his message and jumps in: Just to pick up on the question that just has been raised, I mean, what we have provided in hospital payments here to the Queensland government over the course of, particularly, this agreement, sees health costs rise from $6.4 billion in the current year, and that's going to $7.6 billion in 2025-26. I mean, this is a major, significant increase in what we're putting into hospitals. And the reason we can do that, you know, the reason we can invest more in hospitals, we've got record investments going into hospitals from the federal government all around the country. Now, you can't do that if you don't run a strong economy, you just can't do it. And as the economy continues to grow, then GST payments to the states also increase, because a stronger economy means those stronger revenues. So, this is why a stronger economy is so critical to health services. If you want to have a strong hospital system, if you want to have strong healthcare, then you have to have a strong economy. And if you can't manage the economy, and if you put that at risk, you are putting all of those services at risk. Because I remember when Labor was last in power, they couldn't list pharmaceuticals on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme because they couldn't run a border protection policy, had $17 billion worth of blow-outs, and that impacted on their ability to manage the nation's finances. Q: All of the ***measures*** you introduced at the budget are incredibly temporary. $250 won't last long at the bowser, at the supermarket checkout. Will you extend the cut to fuel excise past September? And what happens next year when LMITO ends for low- and middle-income earners? Scott Morrison: The price of oil per barrel was at extraordinary levels. Treasury advised us that over a period of about six months the impact of those higher barrel prices on oil will have come down. And so what we were seeking to do in the budget was put a shield up for Australians against those higher world oil prices. Now, they won't be permanent. And one of the hallmarks of our economic response in this pandemic is we've always designed it carefully. It's been temporary in many occasions, it's been targeted, it's been done in a way that you can be confident that it will turn up. We've used existing distribution channels, existing ways of how we make payments, whether through the tax system or through the social security system, so when we say we're gonna do something, people know it will turn up. And this ***measure*** is the same. You don't just spend money forever. What you do do is you make wise investments, you make strategic interventions to ensure you can limit the impact of things that are well beyond your control. Now, those things won't go on forever, but the fundamentals of our economic management - investing in skills, investing in infrastructure and the facilities like we see here in Cairns, investing in keeping taxes low - because in the next term we've already legislated this, between 45,000 and 200,000 a year, you will not pay more than 30 cents in the dollar as your marginal rate of income tax. Right now, you'd be paying 32.5 cents, 37 cents. That's gone. And so as the workers here get more shifts, as the workers here earn more in the years ahead, they will pay less tax. The tax cuts are legislated, even the stage three ones, although there are questions from economists over whether the nation can afford them. Q: Prime minister, in 2007 during the Howard election, rates went up. He apologised. He went on to lose the election. Will you apologise if they go up next week and will you suffer a similar fate? Scott Morrison: Well, look, I have been around politics a little while and I've also been around the economy a long while. And the first point to note is that in 2007 the cash rate was 6.5%. Today, it is 0.1%. So, I think to draw an equivalence between those two issues would be to misunderstand history. They are very different situations. We are in the middle of a global pandemic, with a war in Europe. Those situations were not in place in 2007. I think everyone would understand that and, more importantly, I think Australians understand that. They're not ignorant of the issues that are happening around the world. They're not gonna be fooled by the Labor party trying to pretend that what is happening in Australia is happening in Australia alone. I remember the Labor party tried to do that in the middle of the pandemic, where they tried to blame the recession on the government. It was an absurd proposition. Let me tell you the difference between how we've managed the economy in difficult times compared to the Labor party when they had their crisis to deal with. They had the global financial crisis. This crisis that we've gone through over the last two years is 30 times worse than what Labor had to deal with during the global financial crisis, when Kevin Rudd was prime minister and Jim Chalmers, back then, was working as an adviser to Wayne Swan. Our outcome on employment has been 50% better\* than what Labor achieved dealing with economic circumstances that are 30 times worse. Now, these are just facts. And these facts, I hope, inform Australians as they are looking to make a very important choice. And the choice they have to make is - do they want to turn back on the Australian recovery that's leading the world? Do they want to put at risk everything they've worked hard for, made wide decisions about in their own circumstances, whether to shift to fixed interest rates from variable rates, about how much they were saving to ensure they could get through and deal with the uncertainties ahead? I mean, the amount of capital of finance sitting on Australians' household balance sheets and business balance sheets today is almost ***unprecedented***, and they've done that because they've been wise. And we have been wise stewards of taxpayers' money as well to ensure our economy is set up to perform in a very, very challenging environment. (\*The borders were closed, which impacted the labour force - with employers unable to access workers from outside Australia, they had to take from those already in the labour force, which was one of the contributing factors to lower unemployment. It also hasn't been uniform - the long-term unemployed and older workers are still struggling to find entry level jobs, which is one of the biggest issues facing the labour force at the moment.) For the third day in a row, Scott Morrison takes the first question from the West Australian reporter (working WA even while on the other side of the country) Q: Prime Minister, on inflation, Western Australia's inflation rate is 7.6%, much higher than the national average. You've spoken about how the resources sector has helped the national economy throughout the pandemic, so what is your government going to do, if you are re-elected, to help that really high inflation rate in WA? Scott Morrison: Well I've just outlined in some specific detail about how we are... providing that income support and relief at the bowser, providing that relief through lower taxes. There are two ways your income can increase in this country - what you have in your pocket. One of them is the government can take less of what you earn, and that's what we've done as a government. If you are earning what is the average earnings in this country, which is a bit over $90,000, let's say $90,000, if you are earning that today and on the same tax rates that Labor had you on, you would be paying more than $50 extra every week to the government. That's what you would be doing. But we've lowered those taxes for Australians, we've lowered those taxes for small business, we've lowered taxes for businesses that can invest in the import plant machinery and equipment they need to be successful in the future. The reason that's important is that the other way you can earn more is if the business you are working for is doing well in a stronger economy. Governments can't magically make your wages go up. There is no magic pen that enables you to write a letter to somebody which all of a sudden sees wages go up. This is a myth that the Labor party is putting around. The only way wages rise is when you get more and more Australians into work, which is what we are achieving - but secondly, because employers, businesses are doing better and they are finding new markets and forging ahead. That's why a strong economy is central to a stronger future for Australia and that is as true in Western Australia as it is anywhere else in the country. And that's why we are investing heavily not just here in northern Queensland but heavily in Western Australia. Last time you were with us, we were announcing the dry dock facilities out at Henderson and increased support we are putting into those maritime industries in Western Australia, and supporting apprentices there just like we are here. So our economic plan is working for Western Australia to [Queensland] and all the way to the tip of Tasmania. Scott Morrison then says Australians have been preparing for the interest rate rise: One of the things they did during the pandemic, particularly over the last 12 months or so, they've been shifting from variable-rate mortgages to fixed-rate mortgages. It has gone from around 20% pre-pandemic to 40% today. Australians have been insuring against the risks that they can see all around the world. Australians are alive to these issues, and we have also been as a government. So we will continue through the ***measures*** we put in place to provide that shield, but importantly for the future, taking advantage of the economic situation we have got ourselves into... so we can enjoy and have strong growth in the future and we can do it from a position much more at an advantage to other parts of the world.... But the choice is real to people in the people in this election. Do we go on a different direction and put everything that everyone has worked so hard to achieve through the pandemic at risk with a Labor party and Mr Albanese who we know can't manage the economy and never done a budget? The Labor party is not proven economic managers. Or stay with the proven economic management and economic plan that is not only seeing Australia through these very difficult times, some of the worst times we've seen, but has the strong economic plan for the future. Scott Morrison is still in Queensland, this time in Cairns, where he is announcing $24m for the Cairns marine precinct. But it is all about the cost of living. Morrison says his government has provided a "shield" for people against cost of living in the last budget. But all of these ***measures*** he mentions are temporary or one-off. Firstly, to cut petrol tax in half and that is providing real relief at the browser every day, every week right now. We took that action because we knew that was there. Secondly yesterday, $250 going out to those on fixed income support payments, pensioners and others in those situations to help them deal with these rising costs of living. And on 1 July, Australians on medium to low incomes will be able to keep more of what they have, even more of what they earn, with $420 in additional tax relief to ensure that they can deal with these rising costs of living selects the first point. We know those costs of living increases are real and we are taking action right now, providing real relief right now, because we have been able to have a strong economic plan that put us in a position to do that in this year's budget. He blames international pressures for the inflation rise. But wages haven't risen at pace with cost increases for the last decade - the time the Coalition has been in power. The wash-up continues after yesterday's CPI surprise, with markets fully pricing in a move by the RBA to 0.25% from the current record low of 0.1% when the board meets next Tuesday. Unlikely, but there's also a 40% chance or so that the rate rise will be 0.5%. Personally, that's pretty unlikely, although Westpac had been predicting (prior to the CPI data's release) a "super-sized" 0.4% increase by the RBA at its June meeting. Should the RBA stay put next Saturday, that big jump the following month would be a strong outcome for the incoming government. Somewhat lost in the discussion this morning is the point that because the RBA's cash rate is so far below inflation (underlying and every other type), the central bank is actually stimulating the economy. ANZ shows that such stimulation is at a record level: As for the political fallout, here's a piece from this morning that shows that the electorates where financial stress is highest are mostly in outer suburbs of major cities. And they are mostly Labor-held - for now, at least. And while it's been pointed out this week that food prices are higher because of bad weather in eastern Australia (eg floods), more pressure in the works. Rabobank chimes in with this note this morning: It is hard to see any significant downside to ***agricultural*** commodity markets. The US drought has worsened, resulting in the worst wheat crop conditions in 16 years. Even though there is lingering dryness in large parts of the wheat belt, recent rains in the corn belt have delayed corn planting. La Niña will likely linger for longer, making 'normal' weather unlikely. On that budget condition Jane Hume mentions: Liberal senator Jane Hume was also everywhere this morning. Here is some of the ABC News Breakfast interview: Q: This argument that this is the triple whammy - it's the big increases in prices, it's the higher home repayments, it's the bigger gap with real wages - all of that is fact, isn't it, and it's happened under your government? Hume: Well, it's also happened under the government of the US, under Joe Biden, under Boris Johnson in the UK... And under Jacinda Ardern in New Zealand. This is a global phenomenon, higher inflation rates, which will be fed into normalising our interest rates again. So, we knew that this was going to happen at some stage. The good news is it's actually lower than those comparative countries. It's been caused by the unrest, obviously, in Europe and also the lingering supply chain issues after Covid. You know, freight costs, for instance, container costs are about four times higher now than they were pre-pandemic, and that's feeding into prices locally. But that's one of the reasons in this budget this year, we have delivered some targeted and responsible, proportionate cost of living ***measures***. Things like $250 payments to pensioners and to concession card holders that will come out just this week. Tax offsets for low- and middle-income earners, and, of course, the cut to fuel excise, which will feed through and actually have deflationary effects. Q: Do you think that argument is gonna work, telling people, "Hey, it could be worse, have a look at what's going on overseas"? I mean, really, they've got bills they're paying right now, Jane Hume. Hume: We know people are feeling the pinch in their pockets right now and that's why this government has been listening and has been delivering those cost of living ***measures*** as part of this budget - the sustainable cost of living ***measures*** that can only be delivered because of the improvement in the budget circumstances, $103 billion turnaround. That's the biggest turnaround in a budget in 70 years, and that's the reason why we can deliver $8 billion worth of help with cost of living. There were some who thought that Tim Wilson forgot to switch to an alternate account for this, but this reads to me as Wilson's strange sense of humour, and done on purpose: NSW Health has reported its latest figures. Just over 60% of eligible people have had their third dose. In his morning TV rounds, the prime minister skipped the ABC. He did manage Seven, Nine and Sky though. While we are on rate rises, Peter Hannam has an update on what the market expects the RBA to do next Tuesday when it meets: Jim Chalmers has also been everywhere. Labor's choice for treasurer has his one message to push, and he's making sure he gets it into every interview. This was him following the PM on the Seven network: You would hear it around Australia and I hear it as I move around Australia. The problem is, if things are going well, he takes the credit; if things are difficult, he never takes responsibility, and we just saw that in that interview as well. If something is going well, he takes credit. Doesn't take responsibility for the [things that go wrong]. Some of the issues are global issues and we have acknowledged that, but there are domestic issues, and wages have been stagnant for the best part of a decade - that's been a deliberate design feature of the government's economic policy, in their own words - and we are now seeing the consequences of that. The government has been asleep at the wheel on inflation and have deliberately attacked and targeted wages and working conditions and job security, and we are now seeing an interest rate rise to get added to the pain. Q: We are at a tipping point here, and the way to keep down the inflation is to increase interest rates. The reserve bank rarely increases rates in an election campaign because it doesn't want to seen to be political; will it worry you at all if they did move rates up - as they should - to get ahead of the issue, to keep inflation subdued? Scott Morrison: I have never been a commentator on what the reserve bank should do. Q: I am not asking your view of what they should do, but if they did during an election campaign, would that worry you at all? Should they be completely independent and do what's best for the economy? Morrison: I respect the independence of the reserve bank, and they need to make the judgments they need to make... in the best interests of the Australian economy, and I have no doubt they will do that. There's a big difference between what occurred in 2007 and where we are now, the reserve bank did that last time and the rate was 6.5%, today it is 0.1% and so I think the circumstances of the economic environment we are in now is very different. The pressures coming on are not homegrown, they are external and what we are seeing with that impact, the lag from the pandemic, the impact of the war in Europe, of course this is going to have an impact on the global economy. What we have seen of the recession and the pandemic was 30 times worse than what happened in the global financial crisis, but we have a 50% better record of what labour did during the GFC on getting people into jobs. Our economic management, these numbers are not numbers, they are people's cost of living. They're what they are having to deal with and that gives us great concern, but the way to deal with it is ensuring we keep strong economic management which is bettering the rest of the western world, whether in unemployment or growth of jobs, whether it's getting our electricity prices down by 8%, over 9% down since I became prime minister, ensuring we are keeping the Triple-A credit rating. We have been a steady hand during the most immense pressures on our economy and it is paying dividends but still tight, so now is not the time to risk it on Labor. Here is Scott Morrison on the Seven network saying much the same thing (and say what you will about Kochie, but his strength is understanding the economy, so his questions were a little more targeted than other commercial networks). Q: You got unemployment down but wage growth isn't coming through to meet those inflation rises, so it's not all just coming from overseas. Did you overcook the economic stimulus, and this is the sting in the tail? Scott Morrison: I don't believe so, that's not borne out of what we are seeing overseas. What we are seeing in Europe... what we are seeing in the US, even across the ditch in New Zealand, their inflation rate is tapping on the door of 7%. Canada, just below that. What we are seeing are effects on rising costs of living, and the way to deal with that is to keep your Triple-A credit rating, provide relief where you have in the budget and knew that was coming. And that is why we put that relief in the budget, because Australians are just getting up after the terrible impact of the pandemic and our economy is strengthening. We didn't want them to be held back when the cash rates and the average discount mortgage rate is around 3.6%, and many people will be paying less than that. One of the things Australians have also done is during the pandemic, been very clever paying down their debt.... What the numbers tell us is the economy is incredibly important, and who you trust to run the economy. You don't want to add further risk with a Labor party that doesn't have the formal record. Scott Morrison has been doing the media rounds this morning. This is the main message. This is from the Nine network: Well, cost of living pressures are very real and we understand that. And those pressures, as we know, are emanating from the war in Europe [and] the hangover from the continuing pandemic, which is disrupting supply chains, putting prices up. And that is putting a lot of pressure on Australians. And that is why in this budget that we had before the election, we ensured that we were providing real relief now, from the ability to turn the budget around by $100 billion in the last 12 months: so we could provide a halving of the fuel tax, we could provide the $250 to those pensioners and others on income support, fixed incomes, right now, as well as providing that $420 support in people being able to keep more of what they earn when they put their taxes in on 1 July. So they are real pressures. Over this pandemic, we saw after 27-28 years, the first time Australia went into recession because of that pandemic. These are not ordinary times. They're the hardest economic times. They're the hardest economic times we have seen since the Great Depression. You mentioned about 2007, with John Howard, interest rates then were 6.5%. Today, they're 0.1%. On the cash rate. Australians are taking out mortgages at around about 3.6% or thereabouts, that's the average for new loans. And that average mortgage is around $600,000. But one of the things they've done on their mortgages, and I really want to commend Australians - we've all come through this pandemic together. And one of the things Australians have been doing is they've been paying down their mortgages, and they've also been switching from variable to fixed rates. We have gone from 20% on variable rates to 40%. Australians have been making wise decisions about de-risking their economic future. They know what's going on. They've been making their decisions. We've been making the same decisions. Australians don't want to risk their economic future and that's what this election is all about. Labor is expecting Anthony Albanese will be back on the campaign trail tomorrow. Katy Gallagher says that is the plan, anyway: I had a phone call with him this morning. He sounded pretty good. We're expecting him out of isolation and heading back to the campaign trail. But I think that it's important, as anyone who has had Covid knows, that we follow the health advice and also take a bit of care of each other as we're getting over it and that can take a little bit of time. But he sounds pretty good to me and we're looking forward to having him back on the team. Q: And that is back - just confirming, because you haven't actually said - will he be back out tomorrow, is that the plan? Gallagher: That's the expectation, yes. In case you missed it yesterday, if the government is claiming the safeguards mechanism is a sneaky carbon tax, then the government has a sneaky carbon tax. Cost of living is going to haunt the Coalition as it moves forward with the campaign. And while senator Jane Hume is right when she says that interest rates were always going to rise, it's happening faster than even the RBA imagined - it wasn't looking at raising rates until 2024 "at the earliest". So perhaps this isn't the best message, especially given how many people are already on the bubble and under economic stress. Australia must "draw a red line on climate security" amid the fallout from a security deal between China and Solomon Islands, according to a former chief of the Australian defence force. Retired Admiral Chris Barrie, who is also an executive member of the Australian Security Leaders Climate Group, called for new commitments to the Green Climate Fund and mitigation actions consistent with the Pacific's focus on warming of less than 1.5C. In a statement issued days after Scott Morrison said the US and Australia had the same red lines when it came to opposing a Chinese military on Solomon Islands, Barrie said: The government needs to draw a red line on climate security, instead of specifically targeting the Solomon Islands ... The key to Australia's successful re-engagement in the Pacific is a Pacific Climate and Security Initiative that would give priority to the Pacific's needs. Barrie pointed to the 2018 Boe Declaration, which states that "climate change remains the single greatest threat to the livelihoods, security and wellbeing of the peoples of the Pacific". He added: All Pacific island leaders say Australia is not taking their concerns seriously enough. Many are concerned that the government is prioritising the expansion of Australia's coal and gas industries at the expense of the Pacific's future, as the islands face fossil-fuel driven sea-level rise and extreme weather events like more intense cyclones. They are quite right, but Australia's leaders must recognise that we are equally exposed to the climate threat. By holding on to this obsession with fossil fuels we are destroying our own future as well as theirs. Barrie's statement is silent on particular political parties' campaign pledges. But Labor on Tuesday promised to "listen and act on Pacific island warnings of the existential threat of climate change", as part of its plan to restore Australia's influence in the region. Happy Thursday. Another campaign week is almost down - and we're still talking defence and climate. Labor wants to show it can be strong when it comes to defence as well, pledging to boost the Aukus agreement. And presumably keep all allies happy. Meanwhile, as the Coalition tries to show that it's united on climate (while attempting to create a new "Labor has a carbon tax" scare campaign) a former ADF chief wants a "red line on climate security" for the Pacific, mixing both defence and climate together. Climate is a major security issue for the Pacific nations, no matter how much Ray Hadley wishes otherwise. And of course the cost of living issue continues to rear its head, with the Morrison government facing the prospect of the reserve bank raising interest rates in the middle of its re-election campaign. The last time that happened was 2007, I believe. The mood for change was sweeping the nation then, and you can't say that now. But it's not something the government wants to happen. But the bank is independent. And it has a responsibility to maintain its credibility. Internationally, central banks are raising rates. In Australia it's just about when it happens. We'll bring you all the news as it happens. Thursdays are traditionally the worst day of the week (it's science) so make sure you have a double coffee this morning. Ready? Labor will continue its attempt to outflank the Coalition on national security by pledging to create a new strategic research agency to investigate breakthrough technologies. The opposition says the plan, to be announced today, will reinforce the Aukus partnership with the US and the UK because the new body will "boost Australia's involvement in technology sharing and research and development". A quick reminder that Aukus is about more than submarines: Australia, the US and the UK are also planning to deepen their work on cyber capabilities, artificial intelligence, quantum technologies, additional undersea capabilities and hypersonic weapons. Labor's proposed new body - to be called the Advanced Strategic Research Agency (ASRA) - is expected to have $1.2bn in funding over 10 years and will be housed within the defence portfolio. Labor's plan includes transitioning the existing Defence Innovation Hub into the independent agency over time, with a focus on Aukus priorities. The agency would work closely with its counterparts, the US Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) and the newly created UK Advanced Research and Invention Agency (ARIA). In a statement issued in advance of the announcement, the Labor leader, Anthony Albanese, said the agency would be modelled on DARPA in the US and would become "a premier avenue for linking Australian industry (including SMEs) and universities with our Aukus partners". Albanese said in a joint statement with the shadow defence minister, Brendan O'Connor, and the shadow defence industry minister, Matt Keogh: After almost a decade of neglect under the current Liberal government, there has been a lack of strategic defence and national security-focused sovereign research, funding and projects. This is leaving Australia vulnerable to strategic technological surprises. Here is the fine print about what it would actually do: ASRA would ensure cutting-edge research from public sources, such as universities and industry, and classified research from industry and other government agencies (such as CSIRO), are supported and co-ordinated. ASRA will also aim to leverage private investment into its research priorities. It will ensure the development of sovereign research capabilities for Australia, especially in getting prototypes to delivered technology. The Labor statement points to previous achievements of DARPA in the US: DARPA's recent work includes unmanned anti-submarine vessels, sixth generation jet fighter technologies, atmospheric water extraction, reusable robotic spacecraft, hypersonics and media forensics (identifying deepfakes). Famous commercialised projects from DARPA include the internet, the computer mouse, GPS, and Siri. 130345 false false Tory Shepherd (now) and Amy Remeikis (earlier) Federal treasurer Josh Frydenberg (centre) in Wallan, Victoria on day 18 of the 2022 federal election campaign. Foreign Minister Marise Payne addresses The United States Studies Centre at the University of Sydney in Sydney on Thursday. Flooding on the east coast has lead to a sugar shortage in some supermarkets. Coles says it expects supply chain disruption to last for up to two years.

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[***Briefing by Alexei Zaitsev, Deputy Director of the Information and Press Department of the Russian Foreign Ministry, Moscow, May 6, 2022***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:65DG-N091-JDG9-Y4R5-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

Moscow: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation has issued the following news release:

On the forthcoming participation of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation S.V Lavrov in the meeting of the CIS Ministerial CouncilOn the forthcoming participation of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation Sergey Lavrov in the XXX Assembly of the Council on Foreign and Defense PolicyOn the upcoming participation of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation S.V Lavrov in the educational marathon 'New Horizons'On the situation in UkraineAbout the World Press Freedom Day and the situation with the rights of journalists and media in the worldAbout the terrorist attacks in AfghanistanOn the Joint Statement of Indonesia, Cambodia and ThailandTo the 77th anniversary of the Victory in the Great Patriotic WarAbout the upcoming events on the occasion of the celebration of the 77th anniversary of the Victory in the Great Patriotic War abroadAbout the exhibition of vintage cars 'Victory'From the answers to the questions:

On the inadmissibility of nuclear conflictAbout fakes regarding general mobilizationOn the prospects for EU enlargement in the BalkansOn Global Food Security IssuesOn a possible nuclear provocation in UkraineAbout some statements of the Japanese sideOn the 'reforms' of the European UnionOn the Armenian-Azerbaijani settlementOn the information and explanatory work of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs

On the forthcoming participation of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation S.V Lavrov in the meeting of the CIS Ministerial Council

On May 13, in Dushanbe, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation Sergey Lavrov will take part in a regular meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers of the CIS.

An exchange of views is expected on topical regional and international topics, as well as promising areas for the development of multifaceted cooperation within the Commonwealth. Particular attention will be paid to issues of international security and strengthening ties in the cultural, humanitarian and scientific fields.

On the sidelines of the Council of Foreign Ministers of the CIS, it is also planned to hold a number of bilateral meetings of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation Sergey Lavrov.

On the forthcoming participation of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation Sergey Lavrov in the XXX Assembly of the Council on Foreign and Defense Policy

On May 14, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation Sergey Lavrov, according to the established tradition, will take part in the work of the annual Assembly of the Council for Foreign and Defense Policy (SVOP), which celebrates its 30th anniversary this year.

Founded in 1992, SVOP is an authoritative Russian non-governmental organization, an intellectual club that brings together leading experts in the field of international relations. The Russian Foreign Ministry highly appreciates the level and quality of dialogue with the domestic expert community and attaches great importance to its involvement in the foreign policy ***process***.

In the course of communication with members of the Council, the Minister will share his assessments of the situation in international affairs, incl. in the context of a special military operation in Ukraine.

On the upcoming participation of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation S.V Lavrov in the educational marathon 'New Horizons'

On May 17-19, the III Educational Marathon of the Russian Society 'Knowledge' will be held . Its program has three main themes: 'New Horizons', 'Russia's Role in the World' and 'We Are Together'. This large-scale event will take place at five venues - on the territory of VDNKh in Moscow, at the Expoforum convention and exhibition center in St. Petersburg, at the Knowledge studio in Sochi and at the Knowledge studio at the Russian Internet Forum in the Moscow region.

Educational marathons, which are a platform for dialogue and exchange of views on a wide range of contemporary issues, including in the field of international relations, are traditionally attended by Russian and foreign statesmen, prominent representatives of science, culture and art, as well as famous athletes and entrepreneurs.

On May 17, at the VDNKh site ( Pavilion 'Russia - My History' ), as part of the track 'The Role of Russia in the World', a speech by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation S.V Lavrov on the topic 'Multipolar World. Russia at a new turn in world history”, which will also be broadcast live on the Internet.

On the situation in Ukraine

In a few days we will celebrate the Victory Day of the Red Army and the Soviet people in the Great Patriotic War against Nazi Germany. 77 years later, we are again forced to fight Nazism, which has raised its head in Ukraine.

Today, Ukrainian nationalists and foreign mercenaries are waging war against the civilian population of Ukraine and the republics of Donbass. Indiscriminate shelling of the settlements of the DPR and LPR is carried out daily. Ukrainian military equipment is located in residential areas. Firing points are equipped in hospitals, schools, kindergartens.

I will give a few examples. In Krasny Liman (DNR), occupied by the Armed Forces of Ukraine, Ukrainian nationalists set up a stronghold in a nursing home, keeping staff and patients as a 'human shield'. From the hospital in Konstantinovka (DNR), which is under the control of Kyiv, the Ukrainian military expelled all the patients in order to use the building for their own needs. A unit of the Armed Forces of Ukraine was located in the clinical emergency hospital in Zaporozhye, and armored vehicles and artillery firing positions were located on the adjacent territory. All these are war crimes leading to casualties among innocent civilians.

There is more and more information that in Kharkov and other cities controlled by Kyiv, the militants of the territorial defense formations, together with the SBU officers, are conducting raids to identify local residents with pro-Russian views and condemning the Ukrainian authorities. They are detained and taken away in an unknown direction.

Kyiv authorities continue to block the evacuation of Ukrainian citizens to Russia. Despite this, about 1.1 million people have already left for our country, including 201 thousand children. Another 2.7 million people expressed their desire to do so.

The Investigative Committee of Russia has already opened 776 cases on the facts of crimes committed by the Ukrainian security forces against the civilian population of Donbass and Russian military personnel. Work to find evidence and identify the perpetrators continues.

Meanwhile, a peaceful life is being established in the territories liberated from the nationalists. The Russian military is clearing mines from cities and farmlands from thousands of mines and explosive objects planted by the Armed Forces of Ukraine. Monuments to the heroes of the Great Patriotic War are being restored. Shops and public institutions are opening in Mariupol, public transport is starting to work. More than 17,000 tons of humanitarian aid have been delivered to residents of the DPR, LPR and a number of regions of Ukraine.

Humanitarian corridors are opened daily to leave dangerous areas. From May 5 to May 7, from 8.00 to 18.00, such a corridor is open for the evacuation of civilians who are in the underground facilities of the Azovstal plant. For this period, Russian military units have ceased hostilities and are ensuring the safe exit of citizens and their further movement in any direction they choose.

The duplicitous policy of the NATO and EU countries continues to cause indignation. Speaking in words for an early cessation of hostilities, they are doing everything to prevent this. Arms deliveries to Ukraine are increasing, the scale of which is estimated in billions of dollars. Washington alone sent $3.8 billion worth of military products. The US Congress is considering a proposal to help Ukraine worth $33 billion, including $20 billion for military products. Great Britain, France, Canada, Poland and the Baltic countries are actively involved in the supply of arms. This leads to a prolongation of hostilities, new destruction of civilian infrastructure and civilian casualties.

Against this background, the lack of interest of Kyiv and its Western mentors in the search for a peaceful settlement is understandable. Russian-Ukrainian negotiations are in a state of stagnation. The statements of Ukrainian politicians speak most eloquently about the unwillingness to continue them. May 4 this year President of Ukraine V.A.Zelensky said that he sees no prospects for negotiations. Secretary of the National Security and Defense Council A. M. Danilov generally rejected any possibility of a peace treaty with Russia.

All this confirms the importance of implementing the tasks of a special military operation to demilitarize and denazify Ukraine, protect the inhabitants of the DPR and LPR from genocide and eliminate the threats to Russia emanating from Ukrainian territory.

About the World Press Freedom Day and the situation with the rights of journalists and media in the world

May 3 was World Press Freedom Day , proclaimed by the UN General Assembly in 1993 in order to draw the attention of the entire international community to the issues of ensuring the free operation of the media, the problem of the safety of journalists. The founders of this memorable date proceeded from the need to guarantee unhindered access to information and pluralism of opinions, respect for the rights of journalists and the media. In conjunction with it, the largest events on media issues are traditionally held, designed to give additional significance to this area as an integral part of fundamental human rights and a democratic society.

What achievements in the field of media freedom marked this day in 2022, almost 30 years after its establishment? To what extent does this date continue to justify its name? Here are just a few characteristic touches to a very far from blissful picture.

UNESCO Secretariat as a co-organizer of the conference held in Uruguay from 2 to 5 May this year. The Global Conference on the occasion of the World Press Freedom Day rejected on far-fetched grounds the Russian applications submitted in full compliance with all requirements for holding a special session on the influence of large IT companies on the work of the media, as well as for the speeches of our experts in the panel discussions. In this procedural way, the participation of representatives from Russia in this event was actually blocked, since the role of extras-observers of this once authoritative forum, turned into a Russophobic cabal at the suggestion of a number of biased countries, of course, cannot suit us.

For the one that started on May 3 this year. in New York, the 44th session of the Committee on Information of the UN General Assembly was not able to get to the Russian delegation on time due to delays on the part of the American authorities with the issuance of visas to its participants. As a result, the speech of the head of the delegation, official representative of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs M.V Zakharova at the plenary session of the forum was disrupted, the participation of our experts in the work on the final documents of the Committee was extremely difficult.

On the same days in the EU, as if there is no World Press Freedom Day, the parameters of the next portion of restrictions on Russian media operators and individual representatives of the Russian journalistic environment are being busily discussed, in addition to the massive sanctions and bans already introduced. At the same time, they practically do not hide the fact that, in fact, the main and only criterion for getting into such lists is the point of view of their defendants, which is not consistent with the Western interpretation of events taking place in the world.

At the same time, representatives of the “advanced democracies” continue to speak from high tribunes about the high ideals of media freedom and honest journalism. Such a gap between grandiloquent rhetoric and the real state of affairs is already taking on a truly grotesque character, which forces one to wonder whether the Western elites still have at least a grain of sincere, rather than declarative faith in their own fundamental norms and values.

About the terrorist attacks in Afghanistan

At the end of April this year. A wave of terrorist attacks swept through Afghanistan. Explosive devices exploded in mosques in Kabul, Mazar-i-Sharif and Kunduz province. The targets of the attack were mainly representatives of ethnic and religious minorities. As a result, dozens of people died, the number of wounded exceeded several hundred. We express our condolences to the families and friends of the victims, and wish a speedy recovery to the injured.

The terrorist attacks once again confirm the need to take more effective ***measures*** to combat international terrorism in Afghanistan. We call on the authorities of the country to take appropriate ***measures*** to ensure the safety of the population, to intensify the fight against the ISIS underground, which is trying to kindle the flame of religious extremism in the multinational Afghan society.

On the Joint Statement of Indonesia, Cambodia and Thailand

We paid attention to the published on May 4 this year. a joint statement by the foreign ministries of Indonesia, Cambodia and Thailand, the states chairing respectively this year the G20, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Forum (APEC).

We see in this document, which contains calls for inclusive cooperation and solidarity in the fight against current challenges and threats, a common focus on ensuring positive dynamics in regional development, and a collective solution to the problems of post-pandemic recovery. We consider this statement by our friends in Southeast Asia an important contribution to strengthening multilateralism, creating an atmosphere of cooperation and trust, mutual respect and mutual consideration of interests not only in the region, but also on a global scale.

We invariably support the strengthening of the central role of ASEAN in the system of interstate relations in the Asia-Pacific region. Russia has been and remains a constructive and responsible participant in the mechanisms of global governance and intends to continue to contribute to the promotion of constructive, result-oriented international dialogue and interaction.

To the 77th anniversary of the Victory in the Great Patriotic War

On May 9, one of the main holidays is celebrated - the day of the Victory of the Red Army and the Soviet people over Nazi Germany. The liberation of Europe and the whole world from Nazism, thanks to the decisive contribution of the Soviet Union, is an important milestone in world history that has determined the face of the modern world.

On May 8, 1945 at 22.43 (May 9 at 00.43 Moscow time) Nazi Germany signed the act of unconditional surrender. By decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, May 9 was declared Victory Day .

Victory Day is a day of national pride and memory of those who, not sparing their lives, heroically fought on the fronts of the Great Patriotic War, selflessly worked in the rear. This common Victory of all the peoples of the former USSR, which claimed many millions of lives, the grief of which entered every home, every Soviet family, and is still, 77 years later, remembered “with tears in our eyes. ”

The employees of the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs and other departments, who honorably fulfilled their patriotic and professional duty on the diplomatic front, certainly played their role in achieving the Victory. Largely thanks to their work, it was possible to create conditions for the speedy defeat of the Third Reich - to unite the efforts of the countries participating in the anti-Hitler coalition, open a second front in Europe in 1944, frustrate the Nazi plans to conclude separate treaties 'behind the back' of the USSR, and also lay the foundations of the post-war architecture of global security, including the creation of the UN and the Security Council.

Today, when the 'politicization of history' is becoming a reality of world politics, our efforts will be directed towards resisting attempts to revise the history of the Second World War, preserving the historical truth about the true role and place of the Soviet Union in the fight against the criminal ideology of Nazism, and creating a modern system of international relations.

On these May holidays, in many cities of Russia and abroad, the annual actions 'St. George's Ribbon' , 'Immortal Regiment' are held , wreaths are laid at the graves of the Unknown Soldier and war memorials. According to the established tradition, on May 9, a military parade will be held on Red Square in Moscow.

About the upcoming events on the occasion of the celebration of the 77th anniversary of the Victory in the Great Patriotic War abroad

In 2022, as part of the celebration of the 77th anniversary of the Victory in the Great Patriotic War, almost 130 countries are preparing commemorative events organized by Russian compatriots. The Immortal Regiment campaign remains the most significant. Such projects as St. George's Ribbon, Candle of Memory , Victory Windows , wreath-laying ceremonies at memorials to Soviet soldiers, motor races, 'lessons of courage', photo exhibitions, film screenings are planned.

Today, more than ever, it is important to preserve and strengthen the memory of the heroism of the Soviet people in the fight against Nazism, of the Great Victory. As part of the celebration of the 77th anniversary, we traditionally continue to tell, first of all, on the social networks of the Ministry, about the history of the Great Patriotic War, the exploits of the Red Army and the role played by our country in the liberation of Europe and the world from fascism. Remembering these events, plunging into the history of that time, every year we mentally go through that difficult path together with our heroic ancestors. Our foreign institutions - embassies and consulates general - are also actively involved in this work. As part of the #FacesofVictory campaign, we remember and talk about outstanding war heroes, as well as about veterans living abroad.

Remembrance Garden events continue to take place in different parts of the world . So on May 4 this year. The grand opening of an olive garden dedicated to the soldiers who died in the Great Patriotic War took place at the courtyard of the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission in Hebron. The memorial was founded two years ago, but its opening was delayed due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Even despite the ongoing ***unprecedented*** campaign of Russophobia in a number of states, our foreign community is firmly committed to holding commemorative events, realizing their ***exceptional*** importance for preserving the historical truth about the war and countering attempts to falsify it. The 'Immortal Regiment' continues to unite the diaspora and remains a symbol of the memory of those who gave their lives in the fight against Nazism. According to our information, in 88 states the action is being prepared in person. The Immortal Regiment will be held in Venezuela for the first time this year. Processions are expected in Argentina, Belarus, Bulgaria, Jordan, Spain, Kyrgyzstan, Nicaragua, Serbia and other countries. At the same time, taking into account possible provocations, the organizers will pay close attention to ensuring the safety of participants in the events.

We note with regret the desire of the authorities of a number of states to create obstacles for those who want to honor the memory of the heroes of the Great Patriotic War. In the Baltic States and Moldova, things have come to the introduction of legislative bans on holding any mass events on the occasion of May 9, on the demonstration of the St. George ribbon. In the USA, Ireland, Peru and other countries, our compatriots were simply denied approval of their applications for holding the Immortal Regiment.

We consider unacceptable attempts to prevent representatives of Russian foreign missions from participating in official commemorative events timed to coincide with the end of World War II, especially in mourning ceremonies on the territory of former Nazi concentration camps in Germany and other European countries.

We call on the authorities of foreign states to take a reasonable and constructive approach to the upcoming events in order to allow everyone who wishes to pay tribute to the memory of the victors of Nazism.

About the exhibition of vintage cars 'Victory'

The Russian Foreign Ministry traditionally carefully considers and, if possible, positively responds to various public initiatives. Today we would like to announce the announcement of another joint event with Russian civil activists. This time from the Interregional public organization 'Autoclub M-20' Pobeda ' . On May 10, from 12.00 to 17.00, in front of the main building of our Ministry on Smolenskaya-Sennaya Square, an exhibition of cars of the legendary Russian brand Pobeda will take place. We invite Muscovites and guests of the capital to communicate with car owners. We hope the weather doesn't let us down.

We remember that the car got its name in honor of the Victory of the Soviet people. It is symbolic that the upcoming exposition is timed to coincide with Victory Day and is a logical continuation of our other action - the display of a GAZ-AA truck (one and a half ), timed to coincide with the 78th anniversary of the Day of the complete liberation of Leningrad from the fascist blockade.

Previously, “Victory” has already been exhibited on the territory of the Museum of Victory on Poklonnaya. We are confident that this event will be the beginning of a strong friendship with the Auto Club, which unites owners and lovers of the masterpiece of the Soviet automobile industry.

From the answers to the questions:

Question: We heard that on Russian television they said that Britain could be subjected to a nuclear strike. Should we be worried?

Answer: We see your question as yet another clumsy attempt to shift the focus of the British public's attention from the really important events currently taking place in Ukraine to the discussion of questions, the very posing of which looks absurd.

We do not know what kind of statement “on Russian television” is being referred to. In any case, it clearly does not refer to quotations from statements by Russian officials. We repeatedly gave exhaustive comments on topics related to nuclear weapons.

In particular, in a number of recent interviews for the media, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Russia S.V Lavrov emphasized, first of all, the need to strictly follow the understandings reached on the inadmissibility of nuclear war, and taking into account the risks of escalation, respectively, and any armed conflict between nuclear powers.

At the same time, if we talk about risks and possible causes for concern, then they are generated not by “Russian television” and not even by the British media, but by the direct actions of Western countries, including the destructive activity of the British authorities.

Question: Dmitry Peskov said that the declaration of war and general mobilization is nonsense. In the military registration and enlistment offices, conversations were held with Russian reservists. Can you rule out a general mobilization and a declaration of war on Monday?

Answer: This has already been refuted by Russian representatives. Let's start from that. A clear answer was given. There is nothing more to add to it.

Question: All countries of the Western Balkans should join the EU, German Chancellor O. Scholz said at a press conference with Prime Minister of the unrecognized Kosovo A. Kurti in Berlin. How would you comment on this statement?

Answer: It is clear that EU members make such non-binding statements in order to cheer up the Western Balkan countries, where disappointment is growing over the protracted stalling of the ***process*** of their rapprochement with the European Union.

Another thing is regrettable - that Germany, like a number of other EU countries that seem to have thoroughly forgotten the lessons of history, continue to perceive the Western Balkans as a sphere of their exclusive geopolitical interests. Without hiding, they take them to their 'backyard'. At the same time, Russia is hypocritically accused of trying to establish 'zones of influence' in Europe.

For our part, we have repeatedly drawn attention to the harmful practice when the European integration aspirations of the countries of the Western Balkan region are used for overt blackmail, unfair competition and squeezing out investments from non-CIS countries that make a real contribution to the socio-economic growth and stability of the Western Balkans. Under the pretext of following the political line of Brussels, the Balkans are forced to support anti-Russian sanctions, they are faced with an artificial choice 'either with the European Union or with Russia.'

The implementation of the agenda imposed by the EU does not take into account the mentality, historical, linguistic, religious and cultural roots of the countries of the Western Balkans. It is fraught for the states of the region with the loss of sovereignty and the right to an independent multi-vector foreign policy. And no one guarantees EU membership in the foreseeable future.

We call on the European Union to abandon its neo-colonial habits and continue to adhere to a respectful and equal approach to neighboring countries, including those in the Western Balkans.

Question: French President Emmanuel Macron, in a conversation with Russian President Vladimir Putin, connected the situation in Ukraine with issues of global food security. US Treasury Secretary J. Yellen did the same when talking to the head of the WTO. It seems that these conversations may turn into a separate topic of political 'attacks' on Russia. What can be done to counter this?

Answer: The topic of ensuring food security in the conditions of turbulence in the world economy has already become the subject of discussions at international platforms. The 'collective West' is trying to accuse Russia of provoking food shortages - they say that the root cause of the crisis is a special Russian military operation .

We will not comment on speculation in this regard. At the same time, we are not going to shy away from a substantive discussion of the issue of food security. Indeed, a crisis situation is developing on the world market of agro-industrial goods. The reasons for it are much deeper than they seem at first glance - they are associated primarily with miscalculations and accumulated systemic errors in the macroeconomic, financial, trade, and energy policies of Western countries. The COVID-19 pandemic has also taken its toll, disrupting established value chains.

The ***unprecedented*** rise in food prices we are seeing today is a direct result of the huge financial injections into the economies of developed countries to overcome the consequences of COVID-19 against the backdrop of runaway budget deficits, ongoing trade wars and numerous protectionist restrictions. Problems were added by the attempts of the West to force the transition to 'green energy' to the detriment of the 'traditional' sector of fuel and mineral raw materials. Rising energy prices have led to a collapse in the transport sector (freight rates have doubled), in some countries up to half of the heavy vehicle fleet has been laid up. The cost of mineral fertilizers has increased by 2.5-4 times over two years.

The general low level of food stocks, adverse weather conditions and general underinvestment in the industry also affected. Due to the continuing rise in the cost of fuel and fertilizer, farmers are reducing their crops.

Against this background, ***unprecedented*** sanctions ***measures*** were introduced against Russia, expressed, among other things, in payment and logistical restrictions. ***Agricultural*** producers have also been hurt. It became more difficult for them to service their foreign trade contracts. Of course, this leads to interruptions in the supply of food - both for export and to our country. It is not clear why all the responsibility for the consequences of this crisis lies solely with Russia.

Our country under any conditions remains a responsible participant in the world market. We intend to continue to conscientiously fulfill our obligations under international contracts in terms of the supply of ***agricultural*** products and fertilizers. We are well aware of their importance for the socio-economic development of many of our friends and partners, the achievement of food security indicators and the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Question: Film director Oleg Stone believes that the American special services can arrange a nuclear provocation in Ukraine in order to finally harm Russia. Earlier, CIA director William Burns also speculated about Russia's possible plans to use tactical nuclear weapons in Ukraine. Mr. Burns is an official. Was there any reaction from our side?

Answer: We have repeatedly convinced ourselves that any kind of provocations can be expected from Western colleagues, and now from Kiev.

They have been commented many times. We have to be ready for any development of events both in the media field and directly “on the ground”.

We have repeatedly had to refute insinuations about Russia's possible use of nuclear weapons in the course of a special military operation in Ukraine. This is a deliberate lie. Russia firmly adheres to the principle that there can be no winners in a nuclear war and it must not be unleashed.

Last year, it was we who were able to convince the United States, and then the entire nuclear five, to reaffirm their adherence to this principle. With the Americans, a corresponding statement at the highest level was adopted on June 16, 2021. A joint statement by the leaders of the Five on this issue was issued on January 3, 2022. We proceed from the relevance of these documents.

Russia is well aware of the real risks and threats posed by irresponsible behavior in this area. Scenarios for our possible use of nuclear weapons are clearly spelled out in Russian doctrinal documents. They are not applicable to the implementation of the tasks set during the special military operation in Ukraine.

As Minister of Foreign Affairs S.V Lavrov stated: ' Russia has never stopped efforts to reach agreements that will guarantee the non-unleashing of a nuclear war .' At the same time, it would be useful for Western countries led by the United States to maintain a clear awareness of the absolute inadmissibility of an irresponsible escalation of their anti-Russian actions, including the creation of strategic threats unacceptable to Russia and the promotion of rhetoric about a fictitious “Russian nuclear threat”, distorting the words of our representatives.

Question: The Japanese Ministry of Defense has declared the inevitability of a decisive battle with Russia on the island of Hokkaido and even described the scenario of an alleged ***invasion*** by the Russian Armed Forces. How does Moscow assess such statements by Tokyo?

Answer: Not quite the right question. This private opinion, expressed by a retired military man, is obviously inspired by Cold War stereotypes. We believe that in fact there is nothing to comment on here.

Question: The European Parliament adopted a resolution on Wednesday in which it supported the reform of the European Union, including through the introduction of amendments to the fundamental documents. This proposal, among other things, provides for the empowerment of the EU with greater powers in matters of health, energy, migration and defense, which are currently largely in the hands of national governments. How does Moscow assess such a proposal? How will the resolution, if adopted, affect further relations between Moscow and Brussels?

Answer: The Russian Foreign Ministry traditionally does not comment on the activities of the European Parliament, as well as the content of its resolutions, which are purely advisory in nature. For detailed explanations on this matter, it would be suggested to apply to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation .

More generally, it is obvious that it is becoming more and more difficult for the EU leadership to write off their foreign and domestic political blunders as a lack of proper competencies. And any redistribution of powers is hardly able to radically change the situation. Be that as it may, this is the internal 'kitchen' of the EU, in which we, unlike the well-known 'partners' of the European Union, do not interfere.

As for further relations between Russia and the EU, Brussels is obviously becoming less and less independent in making its decisions on this issue, preferring to act with caution, or even on direct instructions from Washington. Therefore, at this stage, giving European institutions broader powers in one area or another is hardly capable of imparting positive dynamics to Russian-EU relations. At the same time, despite the spiral of political, trade and economic confrontation actively provoked by the EU, we are still ready for honest and pragmatic cooperation both with European institutions and with EU member states on issues of mutual interest.

Question: Since the beginning of May, protests broke out in Yerevan against the current leadership. It is clear that Moscow assesses what is happening in Armenia as an internal affair of the state. But still, the protests are connected with the Armenian-Azerbaijani settlement and, above all, the opposition's disagreement with the agreements reached. How can unrest in the country affect the ***process*** of establishing relations between Baku and Yerevan, in particular, the ***process*** of signing a peace agreement and launching the delimitation and demarcation of the Armenian-Azerbaijani border? Does this offend Moscow as a mediator in the Karabakh settlement?

Answer: You correctly said that this is an internal affair of Armenia. We are interested in the stable, secure and peaceful development of the allied Republic.

We proceed from the premise that all issues of the internal political life of the country should be resolved exclusively in the legal and constitutional field within the framework of appropriate democratic procedures.

As for linking the current events with the Armenian-Azerbaijani normalization ***process***, as we understand, this is not about the attitude of the opposition to the tripartite agreements reached, but about its perception of certain statements of the Armenian leadership.

The Russian side is invariably committed to actively contributing to the normalization of relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan, primarily through the implementation of all the provisions of the tripartite statements of November 9, 2020, January 11 and November 26, 2021 , as well as the conclusion of a peace agreement between Yerevan and Baku.

Question: Various international media have contributed to the fact that many countries see Russia as an enemy. What steps is Russia taking to prove otherwise?

Answer: Thanks for the question. Indeed, we have done and are doing a lot in this direction. At all levels, at the level of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Minister, deputies, official representative, other officials, our embassies, we constantly give numerous comments, explanations, interviews, and not only in Russian, but also in other languages. We are targeting a foreign audience.

The website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia exists in eight languages. Including, there is a Spanish-language version , the social networks of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Spanish, as well as the accounts of our embassies in Spanish-speaking countries.

We state that the principles of objective journalism are also being ignored by well-known countries. This affects, first of all, the inhabitants of those very countries that cannot get access to an alternative point of view. We remain open to communication with media representatives, including foreign ones.

Over the past week, Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov has given several interviews, including to Arabic , Chinese and Italian media. They are promptly translated into foreign languages ​​and are available on our website.

The Ministry at various levels regularly informs about our position on topical issues on the international agenda.

Although there are some plots that we do not always understand. For example, just the other day, the Spanish newspaper A-Be-Se offered to interview the official representative of the Russian Foreign Ministry, M.V Zakharova. We agreed that this interview would be in writing. They sent questions and received answers. Then they refused to publish the material. Strange situation. We have already given a corresponding comment . The full text of the interview was published on our resources.

You are asking the right question. We are doing our best to explain our position in Russian and other foreign languages.

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[***Israel and the Palestinians: From the Two-State Solution to Five Failed “States”***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:62R5-6351-JDG9-Y234-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

Washington: Center for Strategic and International Studies has issued the following press release:

There is an important distinction between prediction and warning. No one can now predict how the current fighting between Israel and the Palestinians will end, or if it will even pause for a prolonged period – a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas can easily become the prelude to a new low-level, sporadic war of attrition or Intifada. History teaches all too well that any form of new agreement can become the prelude to new acts of political extremism and polarization – to acquiring new arms and defenses, taking new security ***measures***, and creating forms of resistance and terrorism.

The latest rounds of Israeli and Palestinian violence have already reached levels where they are a further barrier to any real and lasting peace between Israel and the Palestinians. Israel has reported that more than 3,400 Hamas rockets had been fired at Israel in the week ending on May 17th. Israel had responded with steadily intensifying precision air strikes on 766 targets, and Hamas claimed that they had resulted in 200 casualties, including 59 children and 35 women – 1,305 injured by the same date – although Israel claimed that more than 130 of those killed were Palestinian militants.

There were reports that Hamas might be seeking a ceasefire, but the fighting and air strikes continued to intensify.1 Even once this fighting does end, it seems far more likely to polarize both sides than bring them together. At the same time, they already seem to be dividing outside states over support of Israel versus support of given Palestinian factions – further making the Palestinian issue one that divides Israel’s neighbors or one that they might attempt to exploit.

The Abraham Accords between Israel, Bahrain, Morocco, the Sudan, and the UAE occurred between Israel and states that had never really backed the Palestinians in war and that needed U.S aid and political support or major U.S weapons transfer like the F-35. They might, however, have still been the prelude to a broader accommodation between Israel and the Arab world.

However, the renewed attention to the Palestinian issue, the sheer intensity of the current fighting, and the level of civilian casualties and collateral damage caused by Israeli efforts to suppress Hamas’s rocket attacks seem likely to reverse such limited progress. It also opens up the risk on added divisions over the peace and Palestinian issues in Jordan, Egypt, and other moderate nations in the Arab world – an issue that Syria, Iran, and the Hezbollah will likely exploit for the Palestinian cause, and one that Russia, China, and Turkey will likely attempt to exploit to their own strategic advantage.

While many of the charges made against both Israel and given Palestinian factions are excessive, the escalating levels of Israeli air strikes and Hamas’s rocket attacks have led to new claims in the West that Israel is violating the laws of war and human rights on one side, while reinforcing charges that all Islamist movements are violent and “terrorist” in character on the other.

Any end or pause to the latest rounds of Israeli and Palestinian violence can bring neighboring Arab states and Iran back into supporting the Palestinians, divide outside states over support of Israel versus support of given Palestinian factions, and make the Palestinian issue a source of further divisions in Israel’s already divided neighbors.

No one can now choose between optimism and pessimism on the basis of clear probabilities. At the same time, there is a real danger in assuming that any ceasefire or negotiation will be a lasting solution to the forces that have turned the hope for a “two-state solution” into five key areas of Israeli-Palestinian tension and conflict that have become the equivalent of five failed “states. ” Even if the current fighting ends with some settlement that appears to move towards peace and does involve some of the usual statements of good intentions and reassuring rhetoric, the real end result seems most likely to be a “no solution” solution to the divisions between Israeli Jews and the Palestinians – and yet another increase in the overall instability of the region.From the Two-State Solution to Separation and Violence

The history of past violence and failed peace efforts sounds a clear warning. There is no one point in time when the Jewish portion of Israel’s population turned away from a “two-state solution. ” In fact, many Jewish Israelis still back such an approach to peace. Many others back a more balanced approach to Palestinian rights and some form of partnership or at least peaceful coexistence with Israeli Palestinians.

However, many other Jewish Israelis support the concept of Israel as a Jewish state, the steady expansion of Israeli control over Jerusalem, and the annexation of parts of the West Bank – and many Israeli political factions oppose any real form of a Palestinian state. These Jewish Israelis have been a steadily rising factor in Israeli politics and recent Israeli elections, and the latest round of violence almost certainly means their number has already increased significantly.

These Israeli Jewish shifts against the two-state solution did not occur without cause from a Jewish perspective – although Palestinians have reason to feel that way about Israel. The Camp David Accords in 1978 did not lead to the creation of two states, and the Palestinians responded with Arafat and his Fatah Party triggering the first Intifada – a mix of low-level violence and political protests – in 1987. This was the first serious step in the pattern of sporadic violence and warfare that has now intensified for more than 30 years.

The first Intifada did trigger new peace efforts that led to the Oslo Accords in 1993. This agreement initially appeared to be a more definitive move towards a two-state solution, but Israel and the Palestinians could not agree on a Palestinian capital in Jerusalem, on how to deal with Jewish settlements in the West Bank, and on a wide range of other lesser issues dividing the Jewish population and Palestinians.

The corruption and ineffectiveness of the Palestinian Authority “government” and the Fatah party in the West Bank and Gaza also helped to lead to the emergence of a rival and more radical party in Gaza called Hamas (an acronym for the Islamist Resistance Movement) in 1987, as well as other violent movements. Hamas then began series of low-level attacks in the 1990s, while Fatah triggered a second Intifada in 2000 that continued to 2005. Once again, this did little to create an effective peace ***process***, and Hamas was visibly more effective in the fighting.

Fatah then held Palestinian election that was intended to strengthen Fatah in 2006, but that ended in dividing the Palestinian movement into two separate Palestinian entities. Hamas won the election in Gaza – and this victory was followed by a complex mix of coup efforts that defeated Fatah and drove it out of the area.

The end result was to divide the Palestinian movement into two “states. ” One with Hamas ruling Gaza and taking a violent stand, which made progress in the peace effort even more difficult. The second with a gravely weakened Palestinian Authority, dominated by Fatah, ruling the West Bank.

A third round of more violent fighting then broke out between Hamas and Israel in 2008, killing some 1,110 Palestinians and 13 Israelis, that made the Gaza and border area in southern Israel something close to a war zone. More short bursts of fighting and violent incidents then followed in 2012, 2014, and 2018.

Hamas did reach a tentative reconciliations agreement with Fatah and the Palestinian Authority on control of the Gaza in October 2017, but it was far more cosmetic than real and might well have led to major new political battles if the Palestinian parliamentary election scheduled for May 22, 2021, and the follow-on Presidential election scheduled for July 21, 2021, had actually been held.

In practice, however, President Mahmoud Abbas (now 85 years old) cancelled the elections. He claimed to do so because Israel would not let Palestinians in East Jerusalem, but many felt he actually did so because an analysis of the probable voting showed that he and his allies might lose – either to Hamas or a mixture of younger Palestinian leaders like Marwan Barghouti and Nasser Al-Qudwa – a nephew of the party's late founder Yasser Arafat – announced a rival slate of candidates to run against Abbas’s candidates. Abbas's legitimacy was also questionable. He was elected in 2005 and had ruled by decree for more than a decade after his mandate expired – meaning that no Palestinian under 37 had ever had a chance to vote. A spokesman for Prime Minister Netanyahu also stated after Abbas’s decision that there had been no formal Israeli announcement on whether it would allow Palestinian voting in Jerusalem – as it did during the last elections in 2006 – and Israeli officials stated that Israel had made no change in this policy.2

At the same time, Hamas steadily built up its Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades and its stock of arms. It imported and assembled what some estimate as over 10,000 rockets by early 2021, and it created a steadily growing network of tunnels across the border from Gaza to Israel.

Both Israel and the Palestinians share the blame for this long history of recurrent violence, as they do for the current round of fighting. Israel has reacted by placing far more emphasis on security ***measures*** and the use of force than on the peace ***process*** and improving the living conditions and economic security of the Palestinians. It has emphasized the creation of a “Jewish state” over a peace settlement, and it has encouraged the expansion of settlements in the West Bank area, Jewish areas in Jerusalem, and the use of “facts on the ground” as a substitute for peace.

The Intifadas, lesser forms of violence, and the division of the Palestinian movement into a steadily weaker Palestinian Authority “government” in the West Bank and a Hamas “government” as well as a major military build-up in Gaza have all been a matching cause of the collapse for any prospects for a real two-state solution, including Israel’s treatment of Gaza, creeping annexations and facts on the ground, and shifts towards making Israel a Jewish state.

The end result is a situation where there now are at least three equivalents of “failed states” in the practical sense, and to some extent five. Each is a major source of division and tension that seem likely to block any lasting functional settlement between Israeli Jews and the Palestinians indefinitely into the future.

The first “state” is Israel, and its failure to both give the Palestinians the equity and aid that could bring stability and compromise on some equivalent of a two-state solution. Israeli politics have declined from an effective democracy to something beginning to approach a “chaos-cracy,” focused more and more on opportunistic annexation, and chosen security forces and the use of force over the peace ***process***.

The second “state” is the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank, which proved equally unwilling to compromise, tried to use violence when it had little chance of success, and failed to provide the leadership and governance its people need. While the Palestinian Authority and Fatah have many competent and honest officials and voices, far too much of this leadership is weak, aging, corrupt, and incompetent. It no longer moves forward with any authority, and it cannot reach a very young and often unemployed population under thirty.

The third “state” is Hamas in Gaza, which has relied on increasing levels of violence that inevitably provoked an Israeli reaction in kind, and one where Hamas’s use of civilian and urban areas to base its operations and its creation of a massive mix of tunnels and underground facilities – or “metro” – inside Gaza as well as across the border with Israel made civilians in a densely populated and highly urbanized Gaza more and more of a target.

The fourth “state” is formed by a mix of Palestinian citizens living in Israel and outside of the West Bank and Gaza. While they are divided and only beginning to emerge as an effective political bloc or identity, they are reacting to the fact that they face serious discrimination and exist as a separate class within an increasingly Jewish state and have an uncertain status and rights.

Finally, the fifth “state” is the uncertain role of religion in Jerusalem, along with Bethlehem and some other shrines, mosques, and synagogues. Religion is not a state or a cohesive political movement, but it increasingly divides Israeli Jews and Palestinians along religious lines. The violence and demonstration over the right to the Al Aqsa Mosque (Haram al-Sharif) or Temple Mount complexes, efforts to push Palestinians out of East Jerusalem and the city’s suburbs, and the debate over making some part of Jerusalem a Palestinian capitol – especially in the old city – have all been a critical and consistent barrier to any lasting settlement.

Each “state” seems likely to interact with the other sources of tension and violence in the region – sources which vary from chaos and collapse in Lebanon, civil war and state terrorism in Syria, instability in Jordan, ethnic and sectarian tensions in Iraq, and Egypt’s uncertain stability and development. And, each can further interact with Iranian and Turkish efforts to expand their regional role as well as the competition for regional influence between the U.S , Russia, and China. While principal barriers to any real and lasting peace settlement seem likely to remain dominated by Israel and the Palestinian factions, this is the Middle East.Israel as the First “Failed State”

Israel has to be classified as the first of the five major factors, or “failed states” that have locked both sides into an open-ended ***process*** of confrontation and violence simply because it is the largest and most powerful factor shaping the prospects for peace or further conflict. At the same time, one needs to be very careful not to assign special blame to Israel simply because it exerts its strength in defense of, and to the advantage of, its Jewish population. The United states and other major powers are equally guilty, and – as Hamas demonstrates – the Palestinian side would almost certainly exert its superior strength in equal or worse ways if it had that strength and could do so.

Israel is the dominant military power in the entire MENA region. It is a nuclear weapons state with the most advanced conventional forces; internal security forces; intelligence capabilities; and a massive internal security network of security forces, walls and barriers, and surveillance systems – as well as IS&R assets to target Palestinian operations in Gaza, the West Bank, and throughout the region.

As has already been described, Israel has often used force at the expense of the Palestinians – and in ways that produce civilian casualties, collateral damage, and action against Palestinian civilians by its security forces – but it has scarcely done so without provocation. Any criticism of Israel for its use of forces must be tempered with a realistic assessment of the nature of modern warfare, and it is difficult to blame either side for the violence that has followed.

Some human rights organization accuse Israeli of human rights violations and crimes against humanity, and others for violating the laws of war or for taking action that is its main option for self-defense in an era of popular warfare. The present laws of war were designed to try to limit the use of force against civilians by conventional military powers. Much of modern combat, however, consists of a government’s regular military forces on one side and irregular popular forces that do not have uniforms or formal military bases and shelter in populated areas on the other.

These asymmetric wars cannot be fought by one side’s rules or viewed from one side’s perspective. Israel’s Jewish government is the dominant military power, and it has the most effective security structure in the Middle East. When its security forces cannot take control, it can use these forces to can target hostile Palestinian forces or groups with considerable success and to escalate in ways that create more and more pressure on Palestinian civil populations to halt their campaign against Israel – so far doing so without having to invade and occupy more Palestinian territory. Israel has demonstrated this capability yet again in its current fighting with Hamas through its ability to strike at Palestinian targets in Gaza and through its ability to defend against massive Hamas rocket attacks with major success.

On the other hand, the Palestinians have counter-capabilities that to some extent turn the present laws of war into a weapon they can use in popular warfare. Palestinian resistance in the West Bank and in the rest of Israel proper now increasingly depends on massive and poorly controlled popular protests, low-level violence, and exploiting Palestinian casualties and suffering. Human rights and the laws of war become a weapon, and they encourage Palestinian protests and reactions to Israel that lead to violence.

Palestinians in Gaza and their resistance to Israel can continue to depend heavily on building up a covert set of military forces and infrastructure as well as sporadic acts of violence. This include the use of tactics like massive rocket attacks (some 3,400 by May 16th) and attacks on Israeli civilians or civil targets. The success of such attacks does, however, depend heavily on Hamas and other violent Palestinian groups using their own population as a shield and in order to limit Israel’s ability to counterattack.

It is easy to posture about human rights and the laws of war as well as to attack Israel for its use of force that produce civilian casualties. It is equally easy to label Palestinian forces as terrorists. War, however, is war, and it is not fought by lawyers or humanitarians.

Each side must fight on very different terms and in very different ways. Taking sides over the legitimacy of one side’s approach may sometimes be good politics, but war is war. Furthermore, denying these realities, may make it even more difficult to find any solution in the future. The growing problem is that the risk of Hamas acquiring precision-guided ballistic missiles and drones and all hostile Palestinian factions acquiring more lethal shorter-range systems means that future escalation is a near certainty on both sides.

As has been the case in Afghanistan and Iraq, in the real-world each side will fight and defend itself in the best way it can. Palestinian violence in Israel, the West Bank, and Jerusalem is civil – not paramilitary – and Israel’s only response inside Israel is the use of security forces in populated areas. No amount of equipment or training of such forces can fully avoid all civilian casualties, mass arrests, and other violent countermeasures against the civilians involved.

Israel almost certainly could do better by acquiring more advanced surveillance and targeting systems and providing even more training and capabilities for its security services, but outside critics should remember how well the U.S has done in attempting to secure its own capitol and in preserving the rights of Black Americans in routine law enforcement activities. They should also pay close attention to how Arab governments like Algeria and Syria repress their own citizens in retaliation for far more peaceful and legitimate forms of political opposition as well as for any form of violent resistance.

The Palestinian resistance in Gaza by violent anti-Israel Palestinian factions like Hamas is military but heavily covert, and it depends on Hamas using inaccurate rockets to conduct direct attacks, and the use of covert tunnels with openings and staging facilities in populated areas to penetrate into Israel for sabotage and civil attacks.

This means the target areas for Israel often depend heavily on targeting operations conducted – or planned and prepared – in civil areas. These military operations in a largely urban Gaza with a very young population also means children are often present in the target areas. It is also relatively clear that Hamas makes things worse by attempting to conceal key operations or shelter them by placing them in apartment buildings and areas with civil activity.

Israel cannot target and attack in ways that do not involve strikes that wound or kill civilians co-located with violent cadres or Hamas forces – or ignore the fact that civilian casualties and collateral damage put pressure on Hamas to halt its strikes, although Israel does try to minimize the impact of such attacks. Israel faces all too real of a temptation to ease the constraints on air strikes to put more pressure on Hamas.

Short of actual ***invasion*** and occupation of Gaza – which would probably sharply increase the net Palestinian civilian casualties and collateral damage – Israel’s response to Hamas must be to destroy its operational headquarters, tunnel areas, and rocket storage and launch sites in populated areas. As was the case for the U.S in Afghanistan, Iraq, and other areas where the U.S faced similar hostile forces and attacks, each side has to fight popular warfare on its own terms, and this sometimes means killing innocent civilians and collateral damage.

This does not mean, however, that Israel could not have done more to create a stable peace, help the Palestinians develop a more effective economy, protect and improve human rights, and compromise in reaching some form of statehood or its approximation. It often had options, and far too often, it was Israel – not just the Palestinians – that “never missed an opportunity to miss an opportunity. ”

Israel’s economic power is as great as its military power, and it has to some extent abused this strength in dealing with the Palestinians. The online version of the CIA World Factbook estimated in May 2021 that Israel had a real GDP (PPP) of $363 billion in 2019; a GDP of $395 billion at the official exchange rate; and a GDP per capita of $40,195. In contrast, it estimated that the Palestinian West Bank – which was far richer that Gaza – had a real GDP (PPP) under $30 billion in 2019; a GDP of $395 billion at the official exchange rate; and a GDP per capita of $6,318 – only 16% of that of Israel.

Demographics are another “weapon. ” Israel’s Jewish population clearly dominates Israel proper. To put the demographics involved in perspective, the current CIA World Factbook section on Israel estimates that the total population of Israel, the Golan Heights or Golan Sub-District, and East Jerusalem (which was annexed by Israel after 1967) will be 8,787,045 in mid-2021. It quotes a 2018 estimate that this population is 74.4% Jewish, 20.9% Arab, and 4.7% other. It estimates that their religious beliefs are is 74.3% Jewish, 17.8% Muslim, 1.9% Christian 1.9%, 1.6% Druze 1.6%, and 4.4% other.

This Jewish population benefits from Israel’s economic successes – and its status as the most developed state in the MENA region. Israeli is a major economic success and is one of the most urbanized states in the world: 92.7%. However, Israel’s progress has steadily expanded the living standards of Israeli Jews without providing matching improvements in the living standards of Palestinian citizens of Israel, much less those of the West Bank and Gaza.

Job discrimination and Palestinian unemployment in Israel, the West Bank, and Gaza are a far more critical practical problem for most Palestinians than winning statehood, especially for a very young Palestinian population that desperately needs job opportunities. While Palestinian violence is a partial excuse, Israel has done relatively little to improve the living standards of the Palestinians in the Palestinian Authority areas of the West Bank, and even less to halt the steady decline in incomes and living conditions in Gaza. It has also created major economic, travel, aid flow, revenue, and import problems – although again Palestinian corruption and poor governance have also been major factors.

At the same time, Israeli politics and deep political divisions have led to a steady shift in Jewish Israeli attitudes away from support of the two state solution They have favored a steady rise in what might be called Jewish nationalism, in the seizure of Palestinian occupied property, in efforts to make Israel into a Jewish state at the expense of the Palestinians, and in more hardline political pressure to expand Jewish rights in areas like the Temple Mount area and to carry out openly hostile public demonstrations.

Israel has clearly adopted policies that shift the facts on the ground in favor of its Jewish population in both Israel proper – particularly East Jerusalem and Palestinian areas near the old city – and in the West Bank. Estimates differ, but a CIA study in 2017 found that there were 380 Israeli civilian sites in Palestinian areas in the West Bank in 2017, including about 213 settlements and 132 small outpost communities in the West Bank and 35 sites in East Jerusalem.3

The CIA also estimates that approximately 418,600 Israeli settlers lived in the West Bank by 2018; and that 215,900 Israeli settlers lived in East Jerusalem by 2017. These numbers have steadily increased since then, and the CIA estimates that the West bank’s total population (Jewish and Arab) was only 2.95 million in 2021.4

Here, the U.S played a mixed role under the Trump Administration. Its recognition of Jerusalem as Israel’s capitol, movement of the U.S Embassy to Jerusalem, and strong support of the Netanyahu government did play a role in strengthening Israel at the expense of the Palestinians.

The Abraham Accords may have appeared to have offset some of the effect of such efforts, but they affected Arab states outside Israel, and not the Palestinians. One needs to be careful about the importance of a shift in the open political position of two small Gulf states – Bahrain and the UAE – as well as Sudan that have never been involved in Arab-Israel conflicts and have long had informal ties to Israel. The negotiation of the Abraham Accords also only delayed Israeli annexations, it did not lead to any agreement to end them.The Second Failed “State:” The Palestinian Authority

Three of the other four failed “states” are Palestinian. The first is the corrupt and all too incompetent government on the West Bank. This is the Palestinian Authority, which is ruled by Fatah, led by a burnt-out President Mahmoud Abbas who is serving long after his electoral mandate because of the failure to hold election which might critically weaken Fatah and drive it from power, while raising the relative power of Hamas.

The Palestinian Authority still performs many of the functions of a full state in some 40% of the West Bank, although it lost control of Gaza to Hamas in 2006-2007. The Palestinian Authority does formally support a two-state solution, although it has never reached a meaningful compromise with Israel over territory and sharing Jerusalem as a capitol, and it has become steadily more corrupt and incompetent.

Palestinian Authority’s security forces are, however, a partial exception and often worked well with Israeli security forces before the current wave of violence – protecting the West Bank’s access to aid, trade, and jobs in Israel in the ***process***. According to the 2021 edition of the IISS Military Balance, they were divided into a 3,000 personnel Presidential Security Force; 1,200 Special Forces; 10,000 National Security Forces (9 battalions); 4,000 Preventive Security Forces; 1,000 Civil Defense Forces plus a Fatah political force of Al-Aqsa Brigades.5

Some elements of these forces were more a means of employing young men and guaranteeing their support of Fatah and the government than an effective security force, and none had modern military structures, heavy weapons, or logistics. The more effective elements did, however, have support from the EU, Jordan and the United States. The Palestinian Authority’s NSF battalions, Presidential Guard, and Civil Police also conducted U.S -funded internal-security training at the Jordanian International Police Training Center. They showed that the Palestinian Authority probably could enforce a reasonable degree of security if it was more independent and has suitable outside support.

The Palestinian Authority governs the majority of the Palestinians who are not Israeli citizens in Israel proper. Again, estimates differ, but the CIA and Israel Central Statistics Bureau estimate that the total collective Palestinian Arab population of Israel, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip was some 5.79 million people in 2017. Some 2.16 million Arabs lived in the West Bank, 1.84 million Arabs lived in Israel, and 1.79 million Arabs lived in the Gaza Strip.

The Palestinian population is very young by international standards and rising relatively quickly. The U.S Census Bureau estimates that the population in the West Bank rose from some 690,000 in 1970 to 1,250,000 in 2000 to 252,000 in 2010. It estimates that that the population in Gaza rose from some 340,000 in 1970 to 1,130,000 on 2000 to 1,600,000 in 2010. These increases have transformed a largely ***agricultural*** population into an urban one that has far less economic success and job opportunities than Israeli Jews and that acts as a constant pressure increasing tension between Jews and Arab – and one that can only grow worse as a result of the current fighting and the impact of Covid-19.

The Palestinian population in the West Bank has suffered from both poor, self-seeking governance; Israeli support of settlements and annexation; Israeli security procedures that affect Palestinian movement and employment; and all of the cycles of violence since the Israeli conquest of Jerusalem and the West Bank in 1967. However, the Palestinian population in the West Bank has lost notably less than the Palestinian population in Gaza.

A World Bank study in April 2021 noted that the unemployment rate in the West Bank and Gaza was at 23.4% at the end of the fourth quarter of 2020. In Gaza, it was 43%, while the West Bank recorded a rate of only 15%. Some 22% of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza lived below the upper-middle income poverty line (US$5.5 2011 PPP a day) in 2016/17, a 2.8% increase since 2011. In contrast, 46% of the population in Gaza was below the poverty line in 2016/17, and only 9% in the West Bank.6

Here the World Bank report states that,7

The (West Bank) fiscal position has worsened not only due to the outbreak but also due to a political stand- off that has disrupted the flow of revenues for half of 2020. The outlook remains pre- carious and subject to numerous political, security and health risks…

Before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Palestinian economy was stagnant and the overall socio-economic situation was difficult, due to recurrent hostilities and violence, a deteriorating relation- ship with Israel, and falling aid inflows. During 2017-19, annual GDP growth aver- aged 1.3 percent, lower than the population growth rate, resulting in decreasing per capita incomes and increasing poverty… COVID-19 has exacerbated existing economic and social challenges… The decline in activity from March 2020 was rapid and broad, with GDP contracting by 3.4 percent (y/y) in the first quarter of 2020 and then by19.5 percent (y/y) in the second quarter, one of the largest contractions on record. There was a rebound in the third quarter as the economy grew by 12 percent (q/q), but nonetheless, it was still nearly 12 percent lower than the same quarter of 2019 with private consumption and capital investment continuing to record significantly lower levels. In total, the economy shrank by 11.5 percent in 2020, in real terms.

The PA’s fiscal stress heightened in 2020 due to the economic slowdown and the decision to halt coordination with Israel. The PA’s decision in May 2020 to stop coordination with the Government of Israel (GoI) in response to the proposed annexation plan resulted in a suspension of clearance revenue receipts for six months, compounding the liquidity impact of the Covid-19 crisis

… On the expenditure side, public spending increased mainly due to a rise in social assistance to the new poor and affected businesses and increased medical spending. The financing need (deficit after grants) amounted to US$1.1 billion in 2020 forcing the PA to increase its domestic borrowing and accumulate more arrears to the private sector.

During the peak closures of activity in the second quarter, some 121,000 people lost their jobs. Of this, some 96,000 people have lost a job in the Palestinian territories, especially in sectors that have been affected by social distancing ***measures***, such as tourism, restaurants, and construction, while some 25,000 Palestinian workers that cross to Israel lost their job in the second quarter of 2020… Projections based on GDP per capita growth suggest that the poverty rate has been increasing since 2016, reaching 28.9 percent in 2020—a significant increase of approximately 7 percentage points in the last four years. This represents approximately 1.4 million people living in poverty in 2020.

These material factors interact with all of the historical, religious, and political issues that divided the Palestinians from Israel. A considerable part of these problems is the fault of failed Palestinian leadership, but there is no question that Israel made only limited efforts to improve the situation, and the Palestinians that live under these conditions are unlikely to be objective in judging Israel’s degree of responsibility.

The end result seems somewhat grim. Unlike the Gaza, the Palestinian Authority security forces have generally cooperated with Israeli security forces, have never sought to arm themselves for conflict, and done far more to stabilize the situation than create new sources of fighting. At the same time, West Bank Palestinians and those in East Jerusalem have every reason to resent and fear the expansion of Israeli settlements, Israeli annexation, and seizures of property like the houses in the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood of Jerusalem that helped trigger the current fighting. The status of the Al-Aqsa Mosque and religious rights in Jerusalem are a major issue, and their economic situation not only declined even further because of Covid-19, but it may now face serious further problems because of the current fighting.

A ceasefire or settlement to the current conflict is unlikely to bring lasting stability without a better government and more dynamic and competent leadership and without Israeli government efforts to limit provocation by anti-Palestinian Israeli groups. It is also clear that tourism, economic and ***agricultural*** reform, water issues, and economic links to the Israeli economy will remain weak and limited unless some form of meaningful peace settlement and stability is achieved – and then only if both Israeli and Palestinian leaders can work together to achieve it, and do so in ways that halt the expansion of settlements and issues like the housing controversy in East Jerusalem.

Such progress is uncertain to put it mildly. Without it, any settlement simply becomes another pause before the equivalent of another Intifada.The Third Failed “State:” The Gaza and Hamas

The Gaza is the center of the current fighting. It now is only nominally part of the Palestinian Authority, competing directly with Fatah. As has been noted earlier, it is a “state” that has a long, grim history of Israeli-Palestinian violence, and one where – like all the other aspects of Israeli-Palestinian violence and warfighting – it is all too easy to blame one side and ignore the actions of the other. Here, The CIA World Factbook provides a largely neutral perspective of the prelude to the current fighting, and one that again warns that fighting and tensions between the Palestinians has played a major role in addition to the fighting and tension between Israel and the Palestinians:8

Following the 1948 Arab-Israeli War, Egypt administered the newly formed Gaza Strip; Israel captured it in the Six-Day War in 1967. Under a series of agreements known as the Oslo accords signed between 1993 and 1999, Israel transferred to the newly-created Palestinian Authority (PA) security and civilian responsibility for many Palestinian-populated areas of the Gaza Strip as well as the West Bank. In 2000, a violent intifada or uprising began, and in 2001 negotiations to determine the permanent status of the West bank and Gaza Strip stalled. Subsequent attempts to re-start negotiations have not resulted in progress toward determining final status of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Israel by late 2005 unilaterally withdrew all of its settlers and soldiers and dismantled its military facilities in the Gaza Strip, but it continues to control the Gaza Strip’s land and maritime borders and airspace. In early 2006, the Islamic Resistance Movement (HAMAS) won a majority in the Palestinian Legislative Council election. Attempts to form a unity government between Fatah, the dominant Palestinian political faction in the West Bank, and HAMAS failed, leading to violent clashes between their respective supporters and HAMAS's violent seizure of all military and governmental institutions in the Gaza Strip in June 2007. Since HAMAS’s takeover, Israel and Egypt have enforced tight restrictions on movement and access of goods and individuals into and out of the territory. Fatah and HAMAS have since reached a series of agreements aimed at restoring political unity between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank but have struggled to enact them; a reconciliation agreement signed in October 2017 remains unimplemented.

In July 2014, HAMAS and other Gaza-based militant groups engaged in a 51-day conflict with Israel culminating in late August with an open-ended truce. Since 2014, Palestinian militants and the Israel Defense Forces have exchanged projectiles and air strikes respectively, sometimes lasting multiple days and resulting in multiple deaths on both sides. Egypt, Qatar, and the UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace ***Process*** have negotiated multiple ceasefires to avert a broader conflict. Since March 2018, HAMAS has coordinated weekly demonstrations along the Gaza security fence, many of which have turned violent, resulting in one Israeli soldier death and several Israeli soldier injuries as well as more than 200 Palestinian deaths and thousands of injuries.

There are few reliable data on Hamas’s military strength at the start of the current crisis, although it seems to have organized largely as a mix of covert forces for attacks using tunnels across the Israeli border, and by creating a massive tunnel complex to secure its forces and rocket launching capabilities called the “metro” – much of which was located in urban or populated areas and virtually ensured Israeli strikes that sometimes hit civilians and did collateral damage.

The IISS Military Balance for 2021 estimates that Hamas force consisted of some 15,000-20,000 personnel in its Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades. It had a 6th brigade regional headquarters; 1 Nukhba commando unit; 27 paramilitary battalions; 100 paramilitary companies; some engineering and logistic units; and 600 maritime police. It was not equipped with heavy weapons, but it acquired or assembled some 10,000 rockets; had a large assortment of mortars; and Russian 9K11 Malyutka (AT-3 Sagger) and Dehlavieh (Kornet) light guided anti-tank weapons.9

Media reporting makes it all too clear that Hamas remains committed to preparing for a violent struggle with Israel. Estimates do differ over the size of Hamas’s forces, its holdings of rockets and other weapons, the size of its tunnel system under the Gaza Israeli border, and its other preparations and capabilities for war. It is clear, however, that it has a well-organized military structure and covert network and that it controls the Gaza both in political and security terms. It was doubtful that it would lose an election in the Gaza before the current fighting, and it already presented a challenge to Fatah.

At the same time, Hamas is to some extent a self-inflicted Palestinian wound. It has long focused on political struggle, ideology, and preparing for conflict with Israel at the expense of development. Its shifts towards political accommodation with both Fatah and Israel seem to have been more political than real. This has led to a long list of problems in financing the government and obtaining aid, and Gaza have been subject to many Israeli, U.S , and Egyptian restrictions as a result of its violence and military build-up.

Some of the civil problems Hamas has helped to create have already been described, but it is all too clear that the Gaza has suffered far more than the West Bank or the Palestinian citizens of Israel. It is to some extent a massive refugee camp packed together in an area about twice the size of the District of Columbia. Some reports indicate that its population is so young that nearly half are children, that 95% do not have access to clean water, and that electricity supplies are limited and erratic. It has an ***exceptionally*** high unemployment rate – as noted earlier, the World Bank reports: 43% for Gaza and 15% for the West Bank – and nearly half the population is dependent on at least some form of international aid.10

The practical problem for the future is that there is no clear evidence that a new ceasefire would change Hamas’s behavior on a lasting basis, regardless of any statements to the contrary, or lead to some kind of comprehensive economic changes and development that can meet the needs of its people. Most Palestinians already seem to put the blame on Israel for the recent fighting, and Hamas has visibly fought for the Palestinian cause while Fatah and the Palestinian Authority have not.

The fact that Hamas has fired well over 1,000 rounds of rockets and other ordnances at Israel by mid-May not only demonstrates the seriousness of the threat it poses to Israel and the incentive it creates for more serious retaliation and some form of strategic bombing, it also acts as an incentive for Iran and other states that are hostile to Israel to back Hamas with more arms and money – and supporting Hamas and the Palestinians politically in the UN and other international forums is a good way for states like China and Russia to put pressure on the United States and Israel.

The relative cost of any new fighting to Israel – of the intensity and nature of the Israeli response – could also increase sharply if Iran, Syria, or other states furnished Hamas with longer-range or higher speed missiles and precision guided systems or packages that could be used to attack critical Israeli military or civil targets – just as arming the Houthis with such systems in Yemen has already shown.

Hamas already has used longer-range systems like the M-75 (Iranian Fajr) with a range of 75 kilometers. It has also used much longer-range rockets in the current fighting like the Chinese-designed, Syrian-made R-160 (120km) as well as the Chinese-designed, Syrian-made M-302 Kaiber-1 (200km) missiles. These give Hamas a deep strike capability all the way into Northern Israel and Nahariyya.11

If Hamas can acquire more precise systems with higher range-payloads and interception velocities, Israel’s layered Arrow artillery/rocket/missile defense system would face far great challenges, and Israel could be forced into further broadening the range of targets in Gaza in that its air strikes must attack at much higher levels of retaliation, or an active ***invasion*** and occupation to suppress all Hamas launch capabilities.

Whatever Hamas may say in agreeing to any ceasefire or effort to negotiate a real peace, it seems far more likely to keep exploiting its military options and seeking to increase its influence or control over Palestinians in the West Bank or Israel in the ***process***.The Fourth Failed “State:” Palestinian Citizens of Israel

Once again, estimates differ but Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics estimated that the Palestinian population of Israel was 1,890,000 in 2019, representing 20.95% of the country's population. The exact numbers of Palestinians that qualify as full citizens of Israel as a citizen is unclear, but they do represent a major bloc in any potential peace settlement or in Palestinian political tensions with Israel.

These Palestinians citizens have not made any attempt to create their own approach to national governance or a major political structure, and there is little prospect they would gain by doing so or that such an effort would be tolerated by Israel. They have, however, generally maintained a Palestinian identity – rather than labeling themselves as Israeli – and they have developed more political cohesion and coordination with time.

Unlike Gaza and the West Bank, they have not created any serious violent resistance to Israel, although there have been many individual incidents over the years. There has, however, been a significant degree of separation, with Palestinians living in their own communities and sections of urban areas – partly for reasons of affinity and partly because of economic and security reasons. It is more affordable, and social networks work far better in Palestinian areas – although these can sometimes be further separated into Christian and Muslim areas as well as by sect. Some other elements – Galilee Bedouins, Negev Bedouins, and the Druze – tend to identify more as Israelis than other Arab citizens of Israel.

At the same time, Palestinian citizens of Israel do present a separate bloc, and this raises separate issues of any kind of lasting peace. They have generally had many of the benefits of full Israeli citizenship, but they are targeted by Israeli security, and they have not had several key benefits that cause tension between them and Israel.

Organizations like Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch sometimes exaggerate their criticism of Israel, but they raise a range of important issues regarding Palestinian citizenship. They include:12

Palestinian citizens have no right of return.

They do not have the right to claim housing or property lost in the fighting in 1948.

Granting and review of citizenship is discriminatory.

Special rules in the Israeli legislature or Knesset limit the right of Palestinian representatives to criticize Israel, but not Israelis to criticize Palestinians.

“Israel’s “nation state law” (formally known as Basic Law: Israel - The Nation State of the Jewish People), which came into force in 2018, defines Israel as the nation state of the Jewish people, constitutionally entrenching inequality and discrimination against non-Jews. The law grants the right to self-determination exclusively to Jews, establishes that immigration leading to automatic citizenship is exclusive to Jews, promotes the building of Jewish settlements and downgrades the status of Arabic from an official language. ”

“… a series of legislative amendments, regulations and practices in the Knesset that facilitate discrimination against Palestinian MKs. For example, a 2016 legislative amendment which allows members of the Knesset to expel elected MKs by a majority vote means that MKs who express peaceful political views or opinions that are deemed unacceptable by a majority of MKs can face expulsion from parliament. One Palestinian MK described this amendment as a “sword dangled over our heads by members of the Knesset who oppose us politically”, indicating that it was intended to intimidate Palestinian MKs into silence. ”

“Decades of land confiscations and discriminatory planning policies have confined many Palestinian citizens to densely populated towns and villages that have little room to expand. Meanwhile, the Israeli government nurtures the growth and expansion of neighboring predominantly Jewish communities, many built on the ruins of Palestinian villages destroyed in 1948. Many small Jewish towns also have admissions committees that effectively bar Palestinians from living there. ”

“The Israeli state directly controls 93 percent of the landin the country, including occupied East Jerusalem. A government agency, the Israel Land Authority (ILA), manages and allocates these state lands. Almost half the members of its governing body belong to the Jewish National Fund (JNF), whose explicit mandate is to develop and lease land for Jews and not any other segment of the population. The fund owns 13 percent of Israel’s land, which the state is mandated to use “for the purpose of settling Jews. ”

“Palestinian citizens of Israel constitute 21 percent of the country’s population, but Israeli and Palestinian rights groups estimated in 2017that less than 3 percent of all land in Israel falls under the jurisdiction of Palestinian municipalities. The majority of Palestinians in Israel live in these communities, although some live in “mixed cities” like Haifa and Acre. ”

“The Arab Center for Alternative Planning, based in Israel, told Human Rights Watch that it estimates that 15 to 20 percent of homes in Palestinian towns and villages lack permits, some because owners’ applications were rejected and others because they did not apply knowing that authorities would reject their requests on the grounds that they were contrary to the existing zoning. The group estimates that 60,000 to 70,000 homes in Israel, excluding Jerusalem, are at risk of full demolition. A 2017 amendmentto Israel’s 1965 Planning and Building Law, known as the “Kaminitz Law,” increases “enforcement and penalization of planning and building offenses. ” As of July 2015, 97 percent of Israel’s 1,348 judicial demolition orders in force were for structures located in Palestinian towns.

“Israeli law permits towns in the Negev and Galilee(which comprise two-thirds of the land in Israel) with up to 400 households to maintain admissions committees that can reject applicants from living there for being “not suitable for the social life of the community” or for incompatibility with the “social-cultural fabric. ” This authority effectively permits the exclusion of Palestinians from small Jewish towns.

“The 1965 Planning and Building Law creates a three-tiered hierarchy of planning bodies that draw up and carry out master plans at the national, district, and local levels. At the highest level, the National Board for Planning and Building prepares national master plans, expressing a national vision for everything from land use to development, and submits it to the government for approval. Based on the national plan, district and local commissions formulate local plans. ”

“While the planning ***process*** is designed to provide opportunity for engagement at the regional and local levels, in practice it marginalizes Palestinian citizens of Israel, whose representation in government planning bodies is far smaller than their proportion of the overall population and whose needs are rarely prioritized. Outside of the government committees, the only option for individuals to offer input is by filing objections to particular plans. ”

Israel has issued lengthy rebuttals to many of these charges, but they do reflect the views of many Palestinians. Moreover, Palestinian politics in Israel reflect a growing effort to obtain political leverage. Rising political tensions over Jerusalem, over Israel as a Jewish state, over jobs and economic status, and popular demonstrations against Israel did precede the outbreak of the recent fighting.

This internal fighting between Jews and Palestinians– and Hamas’s launching of longer-range missiles deep into Israel – has also created new levels of tension in a number of Israeli cities like Lod, the suburbs of Tel Aviv, and coastal cities in the North – where both Israelis and Palestinians had made major progress in working and living together – and have also added to these problems. Israel has deployed large numbers of security forces to them for the first time in some years, and it is clear that any past progress – progress than many Israeli Jews actively supported – is fragile.

Any lasting progress must deal with this “state,” as well as the West Bank and Gaza.The Fifth Failed “State:” Jerusalem and Religion

Like the Palestinian citizens of Israel, the religious divisions that divide Israeli Jews and Palestinians are far less “state”-like than the issues affecting Israel, the West Bank, and Gaza. At the same time, the religious contention over any Palestinian right of a capitol in Jerusalem, over the division of the old city nearby areas, and over other sensitive religious areas into Jewish or Palestinian control has been a key barrier to any peace settlement and was a key cause of the latest outbreak of violence.

No one who has studied the recent history of religious divisions over the control of Jerusalem and the holy places in the area or who has seen the kind of demonstrations and violence that can suddenly occur in Jerusalem can ignore the tragic history of religious anger, violence, and the competition to control Israel’s shrines. In some ways even the tiny area of the Al Aqsa Mosque (Haram esh-Sharif) or Temple Mount has been as divisive and as serious of a cause of violence as the divisions over the rest of the West Bank or over Gaza.

Some key elements of a compromise have been in place for some time. Jews have the side of the temple or “wailing wall,” and the excavations under and near the location of the Temple. Muslims control the Al Aqsa mosque (Haram esh-Sharif), although Muslims and Christians can enter as long as they do not publicly pray.

Only a few Jewish sites on the West Bank that are now held by Muslims are a source of controversy there, although this includes settlements near them and near other religious areas. The slow movement of Christian out of areas like Bethlehem – and differences between Catholic and Protestant factions – also present problems, but not in terms of an Israeli-Palestinian settlement.

Nevertheless, it seems doubtful that any real progress will be made in resolving these religious issues, and each new outbreak of Israeli and Palestinian violence has made any lasting settlement, specifically the Temple Mount/Al Aqsa Mosque (Haram esh-Sharif), more difficult. The current violence is directly connected to rising Palestinian and Jewish divisions over the control of the top of the mount, and religious extremism has risen among both Israeli Jews and at least Muslim Palestinians.The “No Solution” Solution

It is all too clear that even seemingly successful efforts to end the current fighting do not have to be more than a pause in further violence. It is also clear that no settlement is likely to last that ignores the fact that the two-state solution has so far failed because both sides can sometimes agree on a concept but can never agree on some form of practical action. Lasting success can only come from at least creating – and then actually implementing – a credible plan to deal with all of the previous issues over time. “Facts on the ground,” and time alone will not be an answer.

Both Israeli and Palestinian leaders must recognize this reality to move forward, as well as the legitimacy of the other side’s positions, and it is far from clear who such leaders now are on either side. Grim as it may be to say so, the forces that have shaped the five failed “states” may block real progress no matter how much rhetoric and statements of good intentions each side and the international community inject into the ***process***.

As has been warned in the introduction to this analysis, it will also be all too easy for outside states to posture while the crisis lasts and leave when it is over. Moreover, there is a serious real-world risk that outside instability from Syria, Iran, Turkey – or instability in Lebanon, Jordan, or Egypt – will add to the Israel-Palestinian problems. Some form, of opportunistic arming of Hamas seems particularly likely.

One should never give up hope, but history warns that the “no solution” solution does seem to be the most probable real-world outcome of the present violent tragedy.

**Load-Date:** May 21, 2021

**End of Document**



[***European Robotic Liquid Handling Devices for Genomics Market Forecast to Reach $ 665.8 Million by 2026***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:63YH-3J01-F0K1-N098-00000-00&context=1516831)

M2 PressWIRE

October 29, 2021 Friday

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**Body**

October 28, 2021

Technological Advancements Associated With Robotic Liquid Handling Devices And Rise In Genomics Applications Are Driving The Growth For European Robotic Liquid Handling Devices of Genomics Market

The market for European robotic liquid handling devices for genomics is forecast to reach $ 665.8 million by 2026, growing at a CAGR of 3.3% from 2021 to 2026. The market growth is attributed to its precise, accurate, fast and consistent operations. Moreover, technological advancements associated with robotic liquid handling systems, lack of skilled professionals and improved error-free operations propels the market growth. Automation is adopted in the wide range of life science applications ranging from genomics proteomics to systems biology. Unlike manual liquid handling, ALH micropipettes are precise, accurate, fast and consistent in its operations. In addition, ALH also decrease errors within and between operations, help conserve expensive reagents and rare or hard to- produce samples and save time. The key drivers attributed to the growing demand for automated liquid handling systems market include technological advancements associated with ALH systems, immunohistochemistry, lack of skilled professionals and improved error free operations with liquid handling robot systems over manual liquid handling systems. Operational complexity coupled with the cost my acts as restraint for the market growth.

European Robotic Liquid Handling Devices for Genomics Market Segment Analysis - By Modality Type

European robotic liquid handling devices for genomics market is segmented into disposable tips and fixed tips on the basis of modality type. The disposable tips type segment is anticipated to hold the highest market share at 68% in 2020 owing to its various reimbursements. Disposable tips offer a secure way of treating toxic or biohazardous products. Adding to this, the pipetting air displacement technique only operates with disposable tips that improves efficiency and flexibility while eliminating extra ***measures*** while transferring liquids or flushing the device. When using an air-displacement method an inline filter is an efficient way to avoid moisture from being pulled through the tubes in case by utilizing an inaccurate disposable tip. These filters is perhaps a cost-effective protection against unnecessary replacements, which would be simple to install without a service technician's assistance.

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European Robotic Liquid Handling Devices for Genomics Market Segment Analysis - By Application Type

PCR (polymerase chain reaction) setup segment held the highest market share of European robotic liquid handling devices for genomics in 2020. Moreover, it is anticipated to witness the significant market growth during the forecast period 2021-2026 at 5.6% CAGR. PCR is a prevalent method for the intensification of minute nucleic acid amounts. The approach has been an important diagnostic and analysis resource for infectious dermatology, because of its ***exceptional*** responsiveness. In addition, PCR can be used on all tissues or samples such as fresh tissues, tissues embedded in paraffin, blood, faeces and others. Samples in poor conditions may also be examined, as only fairly short intact DNA sequences are needed. Consequently archival resources can be used for retrospective studies. The long-stay of DNA in formalin could get spoiled, and that amplification subsequently failed thereby modulation is dependent on conserving the target DNA.

European Robotic Liquid Handling Devices for Genomics Market Segment Analysis - By Geography

Genomics is the rapidly increasing and incredibly diverse global field. In the field of genomics the UK is in a strong position internationally. It has played a role in genomics history and growth, and is regarded as having good academic talent and field expertise. U.K universities are now improving their capacity to translate research knowledge into market strategies through technology transfer bureaus. This is apparent from the growing number of medical spin-outs in the U. K and even the distribution of U.K. firms in the sector. The opportunity for the UK is to scale up and aggressively sell further innovations to draw on the size of its intellectual advantages in economic growth. Policy expenditures in this field have had a multiplier impact on related industrial employment. In March 2019, the UK Government's approached optimistically towards integrating genomics into healthcare. This has created ***unprecedented*** prospects for biotech companies in the region that are now taking advantage of the market prospects. Consequently this leverages a positive impact on the European robotic liquid handling devices for genomics market.

European Robotic Liquid Handling Devices for Genomics Market Drivers

Technological advancements associated with robotic liquid handling devices

Improvements in disposable tip technology, autonomous probe positioning, tracking air displacement, and the auto load alternative extend the scope of liquid handling robotics by enhancing ***process*** reliability and flexibility. Several errors inherent in modern laboratory automation are avoided or minimized considerably, such as failure of the tip connection or failure of the aspiration without confirmation.Improved efficiency of the procedure contributes to better, more reliable analytical performance, thereby boosting market growth.

Rise in Genomics Applications

As per the National Center for Biotechnology Information, U.S, the progression in oncology (study and treatment of tumor) expenses is forecast to rise 7%-10% annually throughout 2020, with universal oncology cost exceeding $ 150 billion. As per the WHO, cancer is a leading cause of death worldwide, accounting for an estimated 9.6 million deaths in 2019. And the total annual economic cost of cancer at the initial period of this decade was estimated at approximately $ 1.16 trillion. Thus the application of genomics in exploring cell-free circulating DNA by several RD sectors as a potential biomarker for cancers is driving the market towards exponential growth. The genomics market with its current potential displays all the necessary traits it can adapt in the coming years to divert a huge chunk of traffic and revenue from the omnipresent cancer diagnostics. As per the Food and ***Agriculture*** Organization of United Nations, between 1960 and 1990 the arable land increased by 1.5 billion ha, and in the recent past decades the elevation recorded is just 155 million ha. With decreasing arable floor and the increasing global population augmenting the demand for food by 70% (by 2050), obtaining a high yield is a major trend in the ***agricultural*** sector. Genomics market is all set to capitalize on this ***unprecedented*** demand scenario. Genomics supplements the understanding of gene function and the accessibility of genomic maps along with an enhanced understanding of genetic variant, thus aiding the plant breeders to identify the traits and then manipulate those traits to obtain a high yield.

European Robotic Liquid Handling Devices for Genomics Market Challenges

High cost of equipment

The prices of the electronic and automatic liquid handling systems are one of the key challenges in this industry. Software used in the robotic liquid handling systems are ostentatious. Consequently cost factor act as restraint for the market growth.

European Robotic Liquid Handling Devices for Genomics Market Landscape

Partnerships and acquisitions along with product launches are the key strategies adopted by the players in the European robotic liquid handling devices for genomics market. As of 2020, the market for European robotic liquid handling devices for genomics market is consolidated with the top players including Illumina, Inc., Thermo Fisher Scientific, Inc., Abcam Plc., Epizyme, Inc., Agilent Technologies, Qiagen N.V., Merck Co., (Merck), Active Motif, Diagenode, Inc., Zymo Research Corporationand among others.

Acquisitions/Technology Launches/Partnerships

In January 2020, at the 28th International Plant and Animal Genome Conference in San Diego Arbor Bioscience and Curio Genomics revealed an important extension of their current collaboration. The expansion aims to offer a range of new first-in-class goods and technologies for industrial plant research and production as well as non-profit organizations, consortia and academic institutions.

Key Takeaways

Robotic workstations for practical genomics are useful for replicating clone collections, setting up and cleaning PCR and sequencing, hit selection, filling gel, and purification procedures for nucleic acids. Workstations not only maximize the performance, but also ensure accurate execution of assay steps, human error and curve-free learning from run to run.

U.K region is expected to dominate the global European robotic liquid handling devices for genomics market during the forecast period 2021-2026. The market growth is due to the reduced sequencing prices, rising funding from programs funded by national and foreign governments, pharmaceutical firms and others.

Related Reports:

A. Liquid Handling Systems Market

[*https://www.industryarc.com/Report/1260/liquid-handling-systems-market-analysis.html*](https://www.industryarc.com/Report/1260/liquid-handling-systems-market-analysis.html)

B. AUTOMATED LIQUID HANDLING SYSTEM MARKET

[*https://www.industryarc.com/Report/18398/automated-liquid-hling-system-market-research-report-analysis.html*](https://www.industryarc.com/Report/18398/automated-liquid-hling-system-market-research-report-analysis.html)

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[***Braime Group PLC Annual Results for the Year -2-***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:65B3-GHG1-F0CC-S42P-00000-00&context=1516831)

London Stock Exchange Aggregated Regulatory News Service (ARNS)

April 28, 2022 Thursday 7:01 AM GMT

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**Body**

Great care is taken in the design and manufacture of our products in order to meet and maintain a multitude of complex international Standards and Approvals. This ***process*** involves significant ongoing cost. Nevertheless, the risk cannot be entirely eliminated so the Group carries insurance to enable it to defend itself against any claims that may arise.

New Business Opportunity

In April 2022, the Group purchased the exclusive sales rights, and customer list, for an additional range of electrical components used in the bulk material handling industry. This product range will be re-labelled and integrated with our own "4B" brand and the purchase increases our current small UK market, expands our customer base and creates potential for further growth.

Staff

In my 2020 Report, we praised our staff for their courage in working through the pandemic and their willingness to change their patterns of work to meet the much higher demand from our customers and compensate for those employees who became ill or who needed to be furloughed. The large degree of flexibility shown by our staff in coping with the additional problems outlined above has continued through 2021.

Just as everyone thought the pandemic was finally over and normality was slowly returning, the workload of many of our staff has been massively increased by further new challenges. As always, the continued success of the business depends almost entirely on the efforts and enthusiasm of our staff at all levels of the business.

Current Trading and Outlook

The first quarter of 2022 has begun very positively. Sales across the Group are currently running well ahead of the same period in 2021, as customers continue to enjoy a post pandemic bounce.

Group sales are diversified by product and industry and are sold in a wide spread of overseas markets, some of which will be less affected by any recession. In some cases, these markets will actually benefit from the steep rise in grain and other commodity prices. Currently though, the immediate future is uncertain and a major recession in the UK, and Europe is widely anticipated.

The ***invasion*** of Ukraine by Russia has tragic and unimaginable humanitarian consequences. It has also largely closed, for the moment, two very significant markets for agro-industrial components supplied both directly, and especially indirectly, by Group subsidiaries.

The Group is being badly affected by huge increases in the cost of our main raw materials, steel, plastic resin and rubber. In 2022, these increases have already averaged 50% and are ***unprecedented*** in peacetime. Meanwhile, the over 600% increase in the cost of sea freight, and the doubling of delivery times during 2021 has shown no sign of abating. On occasions, the shipping cost now exceeds the ex-works cost of the products. The size of the increases, and the long and unreliable delivery times, are very disruptive for a Group dependent on trading globally.

These problems seriously affect purchasing, production and sales and create a huge increase in the stress and the daily work of our employees. Above all, the knock-on effect of this instability puts every order and every customer perpetually "at risk". We therefore look to the year ahead with concern, and anticipate difficult times ahead, although historically, the diversity of our product range and the global nature of our sales have together helped us weather such challenges.

Nicholas Braime, Chairman

27th Apr il 2022

For further information please contact:

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The directors present their strategic report of the Company and the Group for the year ended 31st December 2021.

Principal activities

The principal activities of the Group during the year under review was the manufacture of deep drawn metal presswork and the distribution of material handling components and monitoring equipment. Manufacturing activity is delivered through the Group's subsidiary Braime Pressings Limited and the distribution activity through the Group's 4B division.

Braime Pressings specialises in metal presswork, including deep drawing, multi-stage progression and transfer presswork. Founded in 1888, the business has over 130 years of manufacturing experience. The metal presswork segment operates across several industries including the automotive sector and supplies external as well as group customers.

The subsidiaries within the 4B division are industry leaders in developing high quality, innovative and dependable material handling components for the ***agricultural*** and industrial sectors. They provide a range of complementary products including elevator buckets, elevator and conveyor belting, elevator bolts and belt fasteners, forged chain, level monitors and sensors and controllers for monitoring and providing preventative maintenance systems which facilitate handling and minimise the risk of explosion in hazardous areas. The 4B division has operations in the Americas, Europe, Asia, Australia and Africa and in 2021 traded in ninety countries. The US subsidiary also has an injection-molding plant. All injection-molded products are made wholly for internal consumption and this is classed as 4B division activity rather than included in the manufacturing segment.

Performance highlights

The board is pleased to report a significant improvement in the underlying results of the Group. For the year ended 31st December 2021, the Group generated revenues of GBP36.4m, up GBP3.6m from prior year. Profit from operations before ***exceptional*** costs was GBP2.5m, up GBP1.1m from prior year and EBITDA before ***exceptional*** costs was GBP3.8m up GBP1.2m from prior year. As mentioned in the Chairman's Statement, ***exceptional*** costs of GBP1.2m relate to extensive repairs to the chain cell area of our Hunslet Road property, following the discovery of a series of structural faults along three walls. As at the year end, we had spent GBP0.2m demolishing the wall, dismantling a large area of roofing and securing the surrounding area.

However, because the property is Grade II listed, the external walls will require careful restoration of original features using materials agreed with the local authority conservation officers. At the time of writing, we have provided for additional costs of GBP0.85m being our best estimate of the required cost of restoration. The chain cell repair has also contributed to GBP0.2m of delays to the completion of our warehouse which is not now expected to be completed until the summer and this is also included in our provision. Profit before tax is GBP1.1m including ***exceptional*** costs is in line with prior year (2020 - GBP1.2m).

At 31st December 2021, the Group had net assets of GBP15.7m.

Cash flow

Inventories increased by GBP1.3m as the Group planned for increased demand partly as a result of the easing of Covid-19 restrictions on world economies, and partly to reduce the impact of anticipated inflation on raw materials. Trade and other receivables increased by GBP0.3m reflecting increased customer activity close to the year end for the same reason. These were largely offset by an increase in our trade and other payables of GBP0.2m and an increase in provisions of GBP1.1m. In total the business generated funds from operations of GBP1.9m (2020 - GBP2.7m). The Group continued its investment programme during the year, spending GBP2.1m on capital items; GBP0.7m of this was on the construction of the new warehouse in the UK announced in the summer of 2021 and a further GBP0.5m to complete the new warehouse in France which was officially opened in May 2021. After the payment of other financial costs and the dividend, the cash balance (net of overdraft) was GBP1.0m, a decrease of GBP0.2m from the prior year.

Bank facilities

The Group's operating banking facilities are renewed annually. As announced last year, the new UK warehouse construction is being funded largely through the procurement of a development loan of GBP0.9m from HSBC. The development loan will be converted to a five year term loan when construction of the warehouse is completed. Our facility with HSBC provides ample headroom for the Group to make the necessary investments in the year and to carry out the repairs mentioned above to the chain cell operations. The business continues to enjoy good relations with its bankers.

Taxation

The tax charge for the year was GBP0.3m, with an effective rate of tax of 29.9% (2020 - 28.5%). The effective rate is higher than the standard UK tax rate of 19% (2020 - 19%); this results from the blending effect of the different rates of tax applied by each of the countries in which the Group operates, in particular, our US operations' tax charge affects the blended rate. In any financial year the effective rate will depend on the mix of countries in which profits are made, however the Group continues to review its tax profile to minimise the impact.

Capital expenditure

In 2021, the Group invested GBP2.1m (2020 - GBP2.1m) in property, plant and equipment. In addition to GBP1.2m spent on both the UK and French warehouse construction, the Group has made improvements to its employee facilities and enhanced its engineering capabilities, purchasing equipment in welding, bolt threading and pointing, and has continued to expand its bucket tooling portfolio.

Balance sheet

Net assets of the Group have increased to GBP15.7m (2020 - GBP15.0m). A foreign exchange gain of GBP0.1m (2020 - GBP0.1m loss) was recorded on the re-translation of the net assets of the overseas operations, which has increased retained earnings in the year.

Principal exchange rates

**Load-Date:** April 28, 2022

**End of Document**



[***UK records 26,068 cases, most since January - as it happened***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:631P-4D01-JBNF-W27S-00000-00&context=1516831)

The Guardian (London)

June 30, 2021 Wednesday 5:09 AM GMT

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**Section:** WORLD NEWS; Version:34

**Length:** 28838 words

**Byline:** Nicola Slawson (now); Mattha Busby, Alex Mistlin, Martin Belam and Helen Sullivan (earlier)

**Highlight:** This blog is closed. Follow the latest updates on the pandemic from around the world:See all our coronavirus coverage

**Body**

block-time published-time 12.03am BST

This blog is closed. Follow the latest updates on the pandemic from around the world:

[*See all our coronavirus coverage*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/coronavirus-outbreak)

block-time published-time 10.48pm BST

Brazil's president, Jair Bolsonaro, has fired a health ministry official who reportedly asked for a bribe in a vaccine deal, the latest graft accusation to rock the government amid [*investigations of its pandemic response*](https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2021/jun/25/brazil-coronavirus-investigation-bolsonaro).

With over half a million Covid-19 deaths and more new cases daily than any other country, anger is mounting in Brazil over [*missed opportunities to buy coronavirus vaccines*](https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2021/jun/29/brazil-coronavirus-deaths-jair-bolsonaro) , Reuters reports.

Accusations of corruption undercutting efforts have poured fuel on the fire, triggering new calls for Bolsonaro's impeachment.

On Tuesday, [*Brazil suspended a contract worth 1.6bn reais ($321m) for a vaccine from India's Bharat Biotech*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jun/29/brazil-cancels-covaxin-contract-after-serious-accusations-of-irregularities) , following allegations of undue pressure within the ministry. Bharat and the government have denied wrongdoing.

A former employee at the health ministry recently told the prosecutor's office that he told the president that he was [*pressured to sign a contract*](https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/brazil-official-says-he-warned-bolsonaro-over-pressure-buy-bharat-vaccine-2021-06-23/) that would increase the average price of doses by 1,000%.

Bolsonaro, whose popularity has faded as Brazil's Covid-19 death toll climbed past 500,000, has denied any wrongdoing, saying on Monday he was not aware of any irregularities.

On Wednesday Bolsonaro's chief of staff announced that the ministry's logistics chief, Roberto Ferreira Dias, had been dismissed.

Newspaper Folha de S Paulo reported late on Tuesday that Dias had suggested a bribe of one dollar a dose during a dinner to discuss a different order of 400m vaccines, citing a representative from a medical supply company.

The health ministry said the dismissal of Dias had been decided on Tuesday morning, without addressing the allegations.

Dias could not be reached immediately for comment.

Read more here:

Related: [*Bolsonaro fires health official who reportedly asked for vaccine deal bribe*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jun/30/jair-bolsonaro-brazil-health-ministry-official-bribe-covid-vaccine)

block-time published-time 10.41pm BST

Pressure is mounting on ministers to reassure the public about the safety of hosting the final stages of [*Euro 2020*](https://www.theguardian.com/football/euro-2020) and other major events after almost 1,300 Scotland fans tested positive for Covid after travelling to London for a match.

Data published by Public Health Scotland on Wednesday [*showed*](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/jun/30/younger-male-euro-2020-fans-driving-covid-rise-in-scotland) that 1,991 people who later tested positive had attended one or more Euro 2020 events during their infection period, a time when they "may have unknowingly transmitted their infection to others".

Nearly two-thirds of cases reported travelling to London for a Euro 2020 event, including 397 people who were at Wembley for the England v [*Scotland*](https://www.theguardian.com/uk/scotland) fixture on 18 June - 15% of the 2,600 [*Scotland*](https://www.theguardian.com/uk/scotland) fans given tickets for the match, which ended in a goalless draw.

The news came as 26,068 positive test results were reported across the UK on Wednesday, with 3,887 in Scotland - the highest daily total north of the border since the start of the pandemic.

Downing Street stressed that case numbers were only one of the metrics the government was monitoring, however, as the vaccination programme continues to weaken the link with hospitalisations and deaths.

But given strict [*10-day self-isolation rules*](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/self-isolation-and-treatment/how-long-to-self-isolate/) , the sharp increase in cases across the UK is already playing havoc with businesses and schools, as groups of staff and [*bubbles of pupils*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jun/30/pupils-in-england-should-not-be-sent-home-if-one-child-in-bubble-tests-positive) are forced out of workplaces and classrooms after coming into contact with a single coronavirus case.

Read the full story from my colleagues [*Heather Stewart*](https://www.theguardian.com/profile/heatherstewart) , [*Libby Brooks*](https://www.theguardian.com/profile/libbybrooks) and [*Linda Geddes*](https://www.theguardian.com/profile/linda-geddes) here:

Related: [*Surge in Scottish Covid cases raises Euro 2020 safety concerns*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jun/30/surge-in-scottish-covid-cases-raises-euro-2020-safety-concerns)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 10.47pm BST

block-time published-time 8.57pm BST

Cases of Covid-19 may be declining in North America but in most of Latin America and the Caribbean the end to the coronavirus pandemic "remains a distant future", the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) said on Wednesday.

While infections in the United States, Canada and Mexico are falling, in Latin America and the Caribbean cases are rising and vaccination is lagging badly, Reuters reports.

Only one in ten people have been fully vaccinated, which PAHO director Carissa Etienne called "an unacceptable situation."

She said:

While we are seeing some reprieve from the virus in countries in the Northern Hemisphere, for most countries in our region, the end remains a distant future.

The regional health agency discouraged summer holiday travel in the Americas now that movement restrictions are being lifted as more people are vaccinated in the Northern Hemisphere and travel destinations, such as the Caribbean, reopen for tourists.

Even people who have been vaccinated can become sick and spread Covid, Etienne said in a weekly briefing.

She said:

Given the significant gaps in vaccine coverage and the still imminent risk of infection, now may not be the ideal time for travel \* especially in places with active outbreaks or where hospital capacity may be limited.

Noting that the hurricane season in the Caribbean is arriving at a time when outbreaks are worsening, Etienne urged countries to outfit hospitals and expand shelters to reduce the potential for transmission. Social distancing and proper ventilation become difficult during storms, she said.

The highly transmissible Delta variant has already been detected in a dozen countries in the Americas, but so far community transmission has been limited, said PAHO viral disease advisor Jairo Mendez.

However, it has been found in Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Peru, the United States and Mexico, where it has spread in Mexico City, according to PAHO.

Given the presence of such variants, countries in the region should step up vigilance and consider the need to limit travel or even close borders, PAHO health emergencies director Ciro Ugarte said.

According to a Reuters tally, there have been at least 37,441,000 reported infections and 1,272,000 confirmed deaths caused by Covid-19 in Latin America and the Caribbean so far, one third more than in Asia and Africa combined.

block-time published-time 8.02pm BST

In case you missed it, Vladimir Putin has for the first time said that he was inoculated with [*Russia's own Sputnik V vaccine*](https://www.theguardian.com/society/2021/jun/23/who-voices-concerns-over-sputnik-v-covid-vaccine-plant) as he gave a careful endorsement of the [*country's floundering campaign*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jun/26/i-dont-have-a-choice-russians-scramble-to-get-covid-vaccine-amid-new-restrictions) while distancing himself from tough new ***measures*** designed to pressure more Russians into taking the jabs.

Putin has cut a mercurial figure during the pandemic, intrepidly donning a medical suit to visit a coronavirus hospital last March and then shunning public events for months, prompting ridicule that he was sheltering in a "bunker".

He also declined to release photos or videos of his [*own vaccination, or give details of the vaccine*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/mar/23/vladimir-putin-to-get-covid-19-vaccination-on-tuesday) , which the Kremlin reported took place in March. Journalists and others meeting Putin have still been required to quarantine for several weeks, fuelling speculation that he may not have received a jab.

During a nationally televised Q&A on Wednesday, the Russian leader denied that he had faked his own vaccination. "I hope that most of this country's citizens understand that if I say I got the vaccine, then that's how it is," Putin said, adding that he and top military commanders of Russia's military had been given Sputnik V but had not said so initially in order to avoid giving it a competitive advantage in [*Russia*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/russia).

He also targeted widespread vaccine hesitancy by telling Russians that Sputnik V and other domestically made Russian vaccines were safe and that inoculation was the only way to end the coronavirus pandemic.

Yet Putin also said he opposed mandatory vaccinations, said that the use of western vaccines like AstraZeneca and Pfizer had led to "tragic cases," and supported callers who said they had medical excuses not to be vaccinated.

The remarks, part of a yearly show where Putin listens to Russians' questions and appeals, showed how the Kremlin leader is caught between Covid's resurgence in Russia and public opposition to vaccinations.

Read the full story here:

Related: [*Putin says he was jabbed with Russia's Sputnik V vaccine*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jun/30/putin-says-he-was-jabbed-with-russias-sputnik-v-vaccine)

block-time published-time 7.26pm BST

Foreign tourists visiting France will have to pay for Covid-19 tests starting from 7 July, government spokesman Gabriel Attal told Les Echos newspaper.

"We have decided foreign tourists should pay for those tests, 49 for PCR tests and 29 for antigenic tests. This is about reciprocity as French people traveling abroad have to pay for those tests in most countries", Attal said.

Regarding French citizens who prefer to be tested when needed - for travel or social outings - instead of being vaccinated, Attal said the government would consider making them pay for those tests once the summer vacation is over, Reuters reports.

block-time published-time 7.19pm BST

Just 5,000 Australians in disability care, less than one in five people, have been fully vaccinated against Covid-19 more than four months into the rollout, new data shows.

The disability care industry has also warned some providers are again being forced to source their own vaccinations, rather than wait for commonwealth in-reach teams to turn up.

The federal government placed disability care residents in the highest priority cohort for its vaccine program, but faced criticism when, without consultation, it pivoted all resources to vaccinating aged care.

Related: [*'Hit and miss': less than one in five Australians in disability care vaccinated against Covid-19*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jul/01/hit-and-miss-less-than-one-in-five-australians-in-disability-care-vaccinated-against-covid-19)

block-time published-time 6.56pm BST

The World Bank is to make another $8bn in loans available for countries to finance the purchase of Covid vaccines, raising the total to $20bn, amid growing demand from developing countries, the institution's president David Malpass has said.

The global development bank has seen a sharp increase in overall financing demand from developing countries - not just health-related expenditure - during the pandemic, the bank's managing director for operations, Axel van Trostenburg, said.

He told reporters the World Bank had made nearly $100 billion in lending commitments since the outbreak of the crisis in early 2020, well above the normal level of just under $60 billion. High demand for financing was expected to continue well into 2022, he said. However, Reuters did not immediately report the terms of the loans.

The World Bank also said it had already provided more than $4 billion for the purchase and deployment of Covid vaccines to 51 developing countries, half of which are in Africa, where vaccination rates are among the world's lowest.

In a statement, the global development bank urged countries anticipating excess vaccine supplies in coming months to release surplus doses and options to developing countries with adequate distribution plans in place.

The World Bank's vaccine financing package can be used by countries to buy vaccine doses through Covax, the new African vaccine acquisition task team or other sources.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 7.05pm BST

block-time published-time 6.43pm BST

Today so far...

India's version of AstraZeneca's coronavirus vaccine is not authorised in the EU due to the possibility of "differences" with the original, [*Europe's drug regulator said*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2021/jun/30/coronavirus-live-news-thailand-suffers-record-deaths-kim-jong-un-warns-of-grave-incident-in-north-korea?page=with:block-60dc943c8f08a0630603ef20#block-60dc943c8f08a0630603ef20) after the African Union yesterday criticised as "inequitable" [*a decision not to include Covishield*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2021/jun/29/coronavirus-live-news-philippines-extends-restrictions-to-mid-july-fears-of-fifth-wave-in-tokyo?page=with:block-60db1d518f0833e43ca1dbc8#block-60db1d518f0833e43ca1dbc8) , the Indian-made vaccine used by the global Covax programme, on a list of approved vaccines for a digital certificate for travellers in the bloc.The prime minister of Portugal, Antonio Costa, went into isolation despite being fully vaccinated, [*after one of his aides tested positive*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2021/jun/30/coronavirus-live-news-thailand-suffers-record-deaths-kim-jong-un-warns-of-grave-incident-in-north-korea?page=with:block-60dc8ab58f0833e43ca1f01c#block-60dc8ab58f0833e43ca1f01c) amid a high in a new wave of infections blamed on the Delta variant.India's disaster management agency was ordered by the country's supreme court to establish guidelines [*for paying compensation to bereaved relatives*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2021/jun/30/coronavirus-live-news-thailand-suffers-record-deaths-kim-jong-un-warns-of-grave-incident-in-north-korea?page=with:block-60dc85a88f0833e43ca1efb1#block-60dc85a88f0833e43ca1efb1) of those who have died from Covid.Bangladesh will deploy soldiers tomorrow [*to enforce a strict lockdown*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2021/jun/30/coronavirus-live-news-thailand-suffers-record-deaths-kim-jong-un-warns-of-grave-incident-in-north-korea?page=with:block-60dc5b108f081f4ea9704db7#block-60dc5b108f081f4ea9704db7) amid a record spike in coronavirus cases driven by the Delta variant first detected in India, the government said. The Australian home affairs minister rejected calls to reduce caps on international arrivals amid outbreaks of the Delta variant, [*saying "we need to learn to live" with Covid*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2021/jun/30/coronavirus-live-news-thailand-suffers-record-deaths-kim-jong-un-warns-of-grave-incident-in-north-korea?page=with:block-60dc6c4d8f0833e43ca1edc5#block-60dc6c4d8f0833e43ca1edc5). France [*ended most capacity limits imposed in April*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2021/jun/30/coronavirus-live-news-thailand-suffers-record-deaths-kim-jong-un-warns-of-grave-incident-in-north-korea?page=with:block-60dc5f7b8f081f4ea9704e01#block-60dc5f7b8f081f4ea9704e01) on restaurants, cinemas, stores and other public venues, although the ***measures*** were extended in parts of the southwest over the spread of the Delta variant as the doctor who heads president Emmanuel Macron's coronavirus advisory panel said a "fourth wave" of cases [*was likely this autumn*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2021/jun/30/coronavirus-live-news-thailand-suffers-record-deaths-kim-jong-un-warns-of-grave-incident-in-north-korea?page=with:block-60dc17308f081f4ea9704952#block-60dc17308f081f4ea9704952). Vladimir Putin said for the first time that he was inoculated with Russia's own Sputnik V vaccine as he gave a careful endorsement of the country's floundering campaign [*while distancing himself from tough new* ***measures***](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jun/30/putin-says-he-was-jabbed-with-russias-sputnik-v-vaccine) designed to pressure more Russians into taking the jabs.Switzerland is to give 4m doses of AstraZeneca Covid-19 vaccine that it has reserved to the vaccine-sharing programme Covax, the government has said with the country's medical regulator, Swissmedic, yet to approve the shot, on grounds [*it has not received all necessary data from clinical trials*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2021/jun/30/coronavirus-live-news-thailand-suffers-record-deaths-kim-jong-un-warns-of-grave-incident-in-north-korea?page=with:block-60dc66428f0833e43ca1ed48#block-60dc66428f0833e43ca1ed48). Brazil's president, Jair Bolsonaro, fired a health ministry official [*who reportedly asked for a bribe in a vaccine deal*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jun/30/jair-bolsonaro-brazil-health-ministry-official-bribe-covid-vaccine) , the latest graft accusation to rock the government amid investigations of its pandemic response.Dozens of Italian prison guards beat unarmed inmates with truncheons and fists in the aftermath of a coronavirus-related protest last year, [*video footage captured on surveillance shows*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2021/jun/30/coronavirus-live-news-thailand-suffers-record-deaths-kim-jong-un-warns-of-grave-incident-in-north-korea?page=with:block-60dc6fcf8f081f4ea9704f26#block-60dc6fcf8f081f4ea9704f26) , with fifty-two people working in the prison network facing arrest or legal action in the case this weekA UK vaccine advisor made a significant intervention to the debate [*over whether to inoculate children*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2021/jun/30/coronavirus-live-news-thailand-suffers-record-deaths-kim-jong-un-warns-of-grave-incident-in-north-korea?page=with:block-60dca39c8f08a0630603f047#block-60dca39c8f08a0630603f047) against Covid, saying "it is not immoral to think that they may be better protected by natural immunity generated through infection than by asking them to take the possible risk of a vaccine."Cases of Covid-19 are declining in North America, but in most of Latin America and the Caribbean an end to the pandemic "remains a distant future", [*the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) director Carissa Etienne said*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2021/jun/30/coronavirus-live-news-thailand-suffers-record-deaths-kim-jong-un-warns-of-grave-incident-in-north-korea?page=with:block-60dc8e338f08a0630603ee94#block-60dc8e338f08a0630603ee94). Members of the US military who were vaccinated against Covid showed higher-than-expected rates of heart inflammation, although the condition was still extremely rare, [*according to a new study*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2021/jun/30/coronavirus-live-news-thailand-suffers-record-deaths-kim-jong-un-warns-of-grave-incident-in-north-korea?page=with:block-60dc74bc8f0833e43ca1ee4b#block-60dc74bc8f0833e43ca1ee4b).

block-time published-time 6.25pm BST

Germany plans to buy some 204 million doses of Covid-19 vaccine for 2022, far more than the two each needed for its 84 million population, in order to have a comfortable buffer in case of mutations or a need for booster shots.

A health ministry paper seen by Reuters said that the contract the European Union signed with Biontech and Pfizer for their mRNA-type vaccine covered Germany's needs next year in the best case, but the extra would provide added security.

The paper said at least one other mRNA-type vaccine should be procured, as well as a vaccine using another technology, to help guard against production bottlenecks, Reuters reports.

block-time published-time 6.16pm BST

A UK vaccine advisor has made a significant intervention to the debate over whether to inoculate children, saying "it is not immoral to think that they may be better protected by natural immunity generated through infection than by asking them to take the possible risk of a vaccine."

In comments which hold relevance around the world, Prof Robert Dingwall, a sociologist on the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation, said in a string of tweets that since teenagers were at an extremely low risk of Covid, "vaccines must be ***exceptionally*** safe" for there to be a significant benefit.

The Times reports that the committee is set to produce recommendations on vaccinating children within the coming weeks but has continually delayed a decision, seeking further safety data. However, the paper said it understands it may be leaning towards recommending against jabs for teenagers.

But Dingwall's comments are likely to ignite heated conversations. He said that "medicine cannot deliver immortality" and that it was "profoundly damaging to society to imply that it can".

The critic of tough pandemic restrictions also suggested that there can be unintended and unforeseen consequences when humans rush to reshape ecosystems; with humans, viruses and bacteria forming an environment which has evolved over millennia.

enltrThe risk/benefit for teenagers must be firmly established. The UK programme has already been modified because the risk/benefit of AZ was not clear for 20 and 30 somethings. Teenagers are at intrinsically low risk from Covid. Vaccines must be ***exceptionally*** safe to beat this (2/8)

- Robert Dingwall ?????????????? ???? Reunite (@rwjdingwall) [*June 30, 2021*](https://twitter.com/rwjdingwall/status/1410177456179449861?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

enltrIt is well past time to panic about infection rates and to publish them obsessively. Even hospitalization rates are increasingly misleading as better therapy reduces length of stay. Covid is now a long way from being an important cause of mortality (5/8)

- Robert Dingwall ?????????????? ???? Reunite (@rwjdingwall) [*June 30, 2021*](https://twitter.com/rwjdingwall/status/1410177462877687810?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

However, Stephen Griffin, associate professor of medicine at the University of Leeds told the Times that "it is immoral" to let infections "run riot" in children.

Even that small proportion of kids who get severe disease is going to increase. That is a problem. We don't know the longer term consequences of this virus in children and that could be quite concerning. Long Covid for a child is incredibly damaging.

If we have a partially vaccinated population and allow widespread circulation of the virus that is the recipe for variants that will start to evade our vaccines.

block-time published-time 5.54pm BST

Here's the full story on Vladimir Putin saying for the first time that he was inoculated with Russia's own Sputnik V vaccine as he gave a careful endorsement of the country's floundering campaign while distancing himself from tough new ***measures*** designed to pressure more Russians into taking the jabs.

Related: [*Putin says he was jabbed with Russia's Sputnik V vaccine*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jun/30/putin-says-he-was-jabbed-with-russias-sputnik-v-vaccine)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 5.55pm BST

block-time published-time 5.30pm BST

In related news, shares elsewhere around the world have today retreated from recent highs, as Asian markets grew jittery about a resurgence of Covid-19 cases and Western markets awaited Friday's US jobs report and what it might mean for monetary policy.

Reuters reports that asset markets have been significantly buoyed over the past year by trillions of dollars of monetary and fiscal stimulus by central banks and governments around the world to mitigate their responses to the pandemic.

Vaccination rollouts in some places have fuelled an economic recovery, and consumer confidence this month surged to 21-year-highs in Europe.

While the Dow Jones Industrial Average rose 0.39%, and the S&P 500 gained 0.07%; the Nasdaq Composite dropped or 0.09%, the pan-European STOXX 600 index lost 0.77% and the German DAX fell 1.02%, along with London's FTSE 100 0.71% fall.

block-time published-time 5.17pm BST

London's FTSE 100 fell slightly today amid concerns that a recent jump in coronavirus infections could hinder the pace of economic growth, but it has nonetheless seen the fifth straight monthly gain.

The FTSE 100 eased 0.7%, but reported its best monthly winning streak since 2016, according to Reuters. The index has gained 8.9% so far this year to stand just under 12% away from its record high.

However, it has significantly underperformed against its European peers with the STOXX 600 hovering near its all-time high, as inflation concerns and rising Covid-19 infections hinder the recovery ***process***.

"There is a sense of general unease at the moment as we're seeing a rise in the number of Delta variant cases, while we're just under three weeks away from what is supposed to be 'Freedom Day' for the UK," said Danni Hewson, analyst at AJ Bell. "Investors are just taking a look at the support mechanisms winding down," Hewson said, referring to business rates support and the furlough scheme. "Then wondering whether or not the economy really is going to open up and then trying to balance that with rising prices." Dixons Carphone jumped 5.9% after the electricals retailer reported a 34% rise in annual profit. Opioid addiction treatment maker Indivior Plc rose 6.4% to the top of the FTSE 250 index after it said its 2021 revenue and profit would be significantly above its previous outlook.

block-time published-time 5.06pm BST

EU responds to 'inequitable' treatment of African citizens claims amid WHO pressure

India's version of AstraZeneca's coronavirus vaccine is not authorised in the EU due to the possibility of "differences" with the original, Europe's drug regulator has said.

The African Union yesterday criticised as "inequitable" [*an EU decision not to include Covishield*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2021/jun/29/coronavirus-live-news-philippines-extends-restrictions-to-mid-july-fears-of-fifth-wave-in-tokyo?page=with:block-60db1d518f0833e43ca1dbc8#block-60db1d518f0833e43ca1dbc8) , the Indian-made vaccine used by the global Covax programme, on a list of approved vaccines for a digital certificate for travellers in the bloc.

The European Medicines Agency (EMA) said in a statement to AFP:

Even though it may use an analogous production technology to Vaxzevria [AstraZeneca's vaccine], Covishield as such is not currently approved under EU rules.

This is because vaccines are biological products. Even tiny differences in the manufacturing conditions can result in differences in the final product, and EU law therefore requires the manufacturing sites and production ***process*** to be assessed and approved as part of the authorisation ***process***.

Should we receive a marketing authorisation application for Covishield or should any change to the approved manufacturing sites for Vaxzevria be approved, we would communicate about it.

The World Health Organization has however approved Covishield and lamented the fact that some countries were rejecting Covishield's use on vaccination passes.

"This is a great pity because AstraZeneca-Covishield is exactly the same vaccine as AstraZeneca-Vaxzevria, which is accepted as proof of vaccination," said Richard Mihigo of the WHO Regional Office for Africa yesterday.

"It is only that AstraZeneca-Covishield is manufactured and distributed in other parts of the world other than Europe." He urged EU countries to recognise Covishield on vaccine passes.

The EMA statement said it was "not responsible for any decision regarding travelling into the EU", which is the responsibility of the European Commission and EU member states.

People in some African nations have also complained about the lack of recognition for any of the widely used Chinese vaccines.

block-time published-time 4.53pm BST

Brazil's president, Jair Bolsonaro, has fired a health ministry official who reportedly asked for a bribe in a vaccine deal, the latest graft accusation to rock the government amid investigations of its pandemic response.

With over half a million Covid-19 deaths and more new cases daily than any other country, anger is mounting in Brazil over missed opportunities to buy coronavirus vaccines. Accusations of corruption undercutting efforts have poured fuel on the fire, triggering new calls for Bolsonaro's impeachment.

Yesterday, Brazil suspended a contract worth 1.6bn reais ($321m) for a vaccine from India's Bharat Biotech, following allegations of undue pressure within the ministry. Bharat and the government have denied wrongdoing.

Related: [*Bolsonaro fires health official who reportedly asked for vaccine deal bribe*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jun/30/jair-bolsonaro-brazil-health-ministry-official-bribe-covid-vaccine)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.56pm BST

block-time published-time 4.38pm BST

UK records 26,068 new cases - highest total for five months - and 14 more deaths

The UK has recorded a further 26,068 cases of Covid-19, the highest daily figure since 29 January, and 14 further deaths, official data shows.

Daily cases have been rising for more than a month, but fatalities have remained low, with scientists saying the rapid vaccine rollout has weakened the link between infections and deaths. The UK recorded 20,479 cases the day before. The data showed that 84.9% of adults have had a first vaccine while 62.4% have had both.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 5.40pm BST

block-time published-time 4.31pm BST

Warning that end to pandemic is 'a distant future' in Latin America

Cases of Covid-19 are declining in North America, but in most of Latin America and the Caribbean an end to the pandemic "remains a distant future", the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) director Carissa Etienne has said.

While infections in the United States, Canada and Mexico are falling, in Latin America and the Caribbean just one in ten people have been fully vaccinated against Covd-19, "an unacceptable situation," she said in a briefing.

Etienne warned that the hurricane season in the Caribbean is arriving at a time when outbreaks are worsening and she urged countries to outfit hospitals and expand shelters to reduce the potential for transmission, Reuters reports.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 5.40pm BST

block-time published-time 4.18pm BST

Fully vaccinated Portuguese PM isolates after aide gets Covid

The prime minister of Portugal, Antonio Costa, has gone into isolation despite being fully vaccinated, after one of his aides tested positive.

It comes as authorities in the country reported more than 2,000 new cases of coronavirus in 24 hours, a high in a new wave of infections blamed on the Delta variant.

There were 2,362 reported cases in the country of 10 million people, the highest level since mid-February. More than half were in the Lisbon region, official figures showed, with the numbers of hospitalised people also rising, AFP reports.

Latest figures also show that the Delta variant, which was first detected in India, has become the dominant strain in Portugal. Hoping to halt the spread, the government has reimposed infection control ***measures*** including reducted opening hours for bars and restaurants in the worst-hit towns.

There are weekend restrictions on travel between the Lisbon region and the rest of the country.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.31pm BST

block-time published-time 4.08pm BST

Interesting piece here by [*Bloomberg columnist Andreas Kluth*](https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2021-06-30/mandating-vaccinations-may-be-reasonable-but-may-not-be-smart) (paywall), a classical liberal "who treasures individual freedom" and sees three intertwined routes - the moral, the legal and the practical - in the complicated debate on whether vaccination against Covid should be mandatory. He himself got the jab as soon as possible.

For our familiar vaccines, such as the measles, mumps and rubella jab children get in many countries, that case is easily made. A few of the new Covid vaccines, such as the mRNA shots of BioNTech/Pfizer and Moderna, should also clear the hurdle, although their youth still means that regulators like the US Food and Drug Administration have so far only given "emergency use authorization." Others, such as the AstraZeneca shot, have left people and regulators confused. Others yet, including the jabs hawked by Russia and China, are in my opinion simply too opaque about risk to justify coercion.

Beyond the risk of a given vaccine, we also need to know whether it prevents the recipient only from getting sick or also from transmitting the virus. If the answer is the first, remember, we can't invoke the harm principle or the public good.

There's also human nature to consider. New research based on surveys in Germany suggests that a vaccine mandate might send psychological signals that actually hinder overall compliance. People resent being manipulated, with either carrots or sticks, an effect known as "control aversion." Coercion also tends to cause "moral disengagement," making people who might have gotten jabbed for altruistic reasons tune out.

The complexities of the debate mean that the choices facing policymakers won't get easier any time soon. Even lovers of freedom, like me, can agree that sometimes coercion is necessary to prevent harm. But what's permissible needn't always be wise. Our best shot for now is still to keep rooting for science, to stay ruthlessly transparent with the data, and to hope that people bare their arms because they want to. For my part, I got my jabs as soon as they became available.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.32pm BST

block-time published-time 3.58pm BST

India's disaster management agency has been ordered by the country's supreme court to establish guidelines for paying compensation to bereaved relatives of those who have died from Covid.

A public interest litigation had sought Rs400,000 ($5,380) in relief payments to every family that has lost a family member to the virus, the Financial Times reports.

A bench of three judges gave the National Disaster Management Authority six weeks to prescribe "minimum standards for relief", while accusing the body of failures. It said "the national authority has failed to perform its statutory duty," according to Bloomberg.

However, the federal government has opposed the compensation demand, claiming it cannot afford it. But the court reportedly said the disaster management body would be able to decide the amount of money after considering the economic situation and government priorities.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.00pm BST

block-time published-time 3.49pm BST

The cancelling of San Francisco's Pride parade is a move that has been replicated in other cities across the world. There will be no parade in Britain's unofficial gay capital, Brighton, or in New York. In many cities, celebrations of the LGBTQ+ community will be toned down, often online, and, for the second year in a row, considerably less visible than usual.

Pride organisers have made these decisions amid a pandemic that has placed LGBTQ+ people and communities under ***unprecedented*** pressure, be that socio-economic, psychological or political.

In May 2020, a report by OutRight Action International, at the height of the first wave of Covid-19, warned that the LGBTQ+ community was likely to be disproportionately affected, particularly those living in countries where "stigma, discrimination, and criminalisation of same-sex relations or transgender identities prevail".

Related: [*'You can't cancel Pride': the fight for LGBTQ+ rights amid the pandemic*](https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2021/jun/29/you-cant-cancel-pride-the-fight-for-lgbtq-rights-amid-the-pandemic)

block-time published-time 3.46pm BST

Portugal is the latest country to require travellers to be double vaccinated in order to avoid quarantining for two weeks on arrival. Some have expressed concern that young people will be unable to travel to countries that older people who have been double jabbed will be able to.

My colleague on the community team would like to hear form young people over the age 18 about their thoughts on double vaccinations and travelling abroad. Are you still waiting to receive your second jab? How do you feel about not being able to travel if you have not been fully vaccinated?

Related: [*Young people: share your thoughts on double vaccinations and travelling abroad*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jun/29/share-your-thoughts-on-double-vaccinations-and-travelling-abroad)

block-time published-time 3.26pm BST

The global economy is recovering from the pandemic at an uneven pace due to unequal access to vaccinations, the IMF's chief economist has warned.

Well over a year on from the start of the pandemic, many countries are still battling the virus, particularly the increasingly dominant and highly infectious Delta variant.

"Right now what we are seeing is highly unequal access to vaccinations, including therapeutics and diagnostics. Therefore, what we're seeing is a diverging recovery," International Monetary Fund chief economist Gita Gopinath said during a webinar at the annual meeting of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development.

"The number one issue is how do we get to a point where we have good coverage of populations in terms of vaccination rates everywhere in the world."

Referencing surges in sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America, Gopinath said there were countries that will not have the required testing, personal protective equipment or oxygen to "survive this surge."

block-time published-time 3.20pm BST

The cost to the global economy of the tourism freeze caused by Covid-19 could reach $4tn (£2.9tn) by the end of this year, a UN body has said, with the varying pace of vaccine rollouts expected to cost developing nations and tourist centres particularly dear.

Nations including Turkey and Ecuador will be among the hardest hit by the severe disruption to international tourism, with holiday favourites such as Spain, Greece and Portugal also badly affected. Pandemic-related losses have reached up to $2.4tn this year alone, according to a report by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (Unctad).

The potential lost tourism-related income in 2021 alone is equivalent to the effect of switching off 85% of the UK economy, while projected losses over 2020 and 2021 could equate to removing Germany from the global economy for two years.

Related: [*Covid tourism freeze could cost global economy $4tn by year end*](https://www.theguardian.com/business/2021/jun/30/covid-tourism-freeze-could-cost-global-economy-4tn-by-year-end)

block-time published-time 3.06pm BST

There could soon be "two Americas", one where most people are vaccinated and another where there are low vaccination rates, top US health official Dr Anthony Fauci has warned.

The US National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases chief and the top medical advisor to the president told CNN he is "very concerned" about a disparity between places with low and high vaccination rates

When you have such a low level of vaccination superimposed upon a variant that has a high degree of efficiency of spread, what you are going to see among under-vaccinated regions - be that states, cities or counties - you're going to see these individual types of blips... It's almost like it's going to be two Americas.

If you are vaccinated, you diminish dramatically your risk of getting infected and even more dramatically your risk of getting seriously ill. If you are not vaccinated, you are at considerable risk.

CNN reports that 29.7% of the population is fully vaccinated in Mississippi, and that unvaccinated people have accounted for more than 90% of Covid-19 cases and deaths in the past month, according to Dr. Thomas Dobbs, the state health officer for the Mississippi Department of Public Health.

Mississippi joins Alabama, Arkansas, Wyoming, and Louisiana in having less than 35% of residents fully vaccinated, with entrenched scepticism over vaccines in some communities and concerns that the jabs have not received full approval appearing to lead to significant resistance.

block-time published-time 2.47pm BST

Members of the US military who were vaccinated against Covid showed higher-than-expected rates of heart inflammation, although the condition was still extremely rare, according to a new study.

Reuters reports that the study found that 23 previously healthy males with an average age of 25 complained of chest pain within four days of receiving a Covid-19 shot. The incident rate was higher than some previous estimates would have anticipated, it said.

All the patients, who at the time of the study's publication had recovered or were recovering from myocarditis - an inflammation of the heart muscle - had received shots made by either Pfizer/BioNTech or Moderna.

US health regulators last week added a warning to the literature that accompanies those mRNA vaccines to flag the rare risk of heart inflammation seen primarily in young males. But they said the benefit of the shots in preventing Covid-19 clearly continues to outweigh the risk.

The study, which was published in the JAMA Cardiology medical journal, said 19 of the patients were current military members who had received their second vaccine dose. The others had either received one dose or were retired from the military.

General population estimates would have predicted eight or fewer cases of myocarditis from the 436,000 male military members who received two Covid-19 shots, the study said.

block-time published-time 2.28pm BST

Dozens of Italian prison guards beat unarmed inmates with truncheons and fists in the aftermath of a coronavirus-related protest last year, video footage captured on surveillance shows.

The video of the 6 April 2020 incident at the Santa Maria Capua Vetere prison north of Naples was published by Italian daily Domani today, prompting outrage.

Prosecutors launched an investigation last year following complaints by prisoners of retaliatory beatings carried out over four hours the day after an inmate protest prompted by news that an inmate had tested positive for Covid-19, AFP reports.

Fifty-two people working in the prison network faced arrest or legal action in the case this week, accused variously of torture, violence and abuse of office, with a total of over 110 people under investigation.

In the more than six minutes of footage compiled by Domani, dozens of prison guards, many of them in helmets and carrying shields, can be seen setting upon inmates.

Prisoners are seen covering their heads as they hurry through a human corridor of guards, receiving slaps on the head, kicks and beatings with truncheons as they pass. In other images, prisoners - some of them limping and in visible pain - can be seen climbing a stairway where guards on a landing slap them or beat them with their batons.

The images also show an inmate in a wheelchair being hit on the back, and at least three men who have fallen to the ground being beaten and kicked, according to AFP.

At least 150 inmates barricaded themselves inside their cells during the prison protest last year, according to news reports, nearly a month after a wave of riots in Italian prisons spurred by demands for Covid-19 tests and anger at the banning of family visits during the coronavirus lockdown.

Text messages between guards revealed that the operation, which involved over 280 penitentiary police, was planned and retaliatory in nature, prosecutors said.

block-time published-time 2.15pm BST

The Australian home affairs minister has rejected calls to reduce caps on international arrivals amid outbreaks of the Delta variant, saying "we need to learn to live" with Covid.

Leaders in Queensland, Victoria and Western Australia are calling on prime minister Scott Morrison to reduce passenger caps - of about 1,000 passengers entering Queensland and 3,000 coming to New South Wales, AAP reports.

Home affairs minster Karen Andrews said the caps were not large and that Australia should resist more draconian ***measures***. "We need to learn to live and to work in the Covid environment in which we find ourselves," she said. "The first response should not be to close down our borders."

Australian Industry Group chief executive Innes Willox said further limiting international arrivals would ignore critical skill shortages. "This would be take us in precisely the wrong direction," he said, according to AAP.

Outbreaks of the contagious Delta variant have led authorities to put more than 12 million Australians into lockdown.

WA premier Mark McGowan meanwhile believes the vast majority of people granted exemptions to travel overseas for work and study should not have been allowed to leave. "They should stay home while there is a pandemic running wild around the world," he said, calling for a tougher approach to granting permission to leave

Between 25 March last year and 31 May this year, 156,507 Australian citizens and permanent residents were granted exemptions to leave Australia with 84,031 requests denied.

Earlier this month, an Australian court rejected a challenge to the federal government's draconian power to prevent most citizens from leaving the country so that they don't bring Covid-19 home.

Australia is alone among developed democracies in preventing its citizens and permanent residents from leaving the country except in "***exceptional*** circumstances" where they can demonstrate a "compelling reason". This has left most Australians stranded in their island nation since March 2020.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.23pm BST

block-time published-time 1.58pm BST

The head of the UN's World Food Programme has warned there could be "***unprecedented*** famine of biblical proportions" in dozens of countries without further action to address food shortages.

Speaking at a G20 event on humanitarian aid in Brindisi, Italy, WFP chief David Beasley said world leaders had stepped up last year with funds to help those already struggling when the coronavirus pandemic hit - but must now do so again.

"We thought Covid would be in our rearview mirror by the end of 2020, only to see it recycled, with Delta and other variants taking place, devastating particularly and especially low-income and developing nations around the world who have been catastrophically smited by this perfect storm," he said.

"These are not just numbers, these are not just statistics, these are people with real names, real lives, fragile and literally on the brink of starvation. If we don't address their needs, over the next six to nine months you could have ***unprecedented*** famine of biblical proportions, destabilisation of nations and mass migration. The simple solution is we need more support."

Aid agencies say food shortages driven by conflict, climate change and economic shocks has been exacerbated by the crisis of the pandemic, AFP reports.

block-time published-time 1.44pm BST

Switzerland donates 4m AstraZeneca doses to Covax, with shot unapproved by regulator

Switzerland is to give 4m doses of AstraZeneca Covid-19 vaccine that it has reserved to the vaccine-sharing programme Covax, the government has said.

Switzerland originally reserved 5.4m doses of AstraZeneca's vaccine, but the country's medical regulator, Swissmedic, has yet to approve the shot, on grounds it has not received all necessary data from clinical trials, Reuters reports.

It is the latest example in a seemingly emerging trend of some countries seeking to offload jabs from the British-Swedish pharma giant.

"Through the unequal distribution of vaccines we can expect that the pandemic will continue for a long time to come," the government said in a statement, seeking to play a small part in remedying the issue.

Switzerland has ordered significantly more mRNA vaccines from Moderna and from Pfizer and its German partner BioNTech. "The Swiss federal government is concentrating on mRNA vaccines," it said. "These have proven themselves to be highly effective and tolerable."

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.27pm BST

block-time published-time 1.33pm BST

Thailand is to import nearly 4m doses of Moderna's mRNA coronavirus vaccine towards the end of this year and a further million in early 2022, for use by private hospitals.

Reuters reports that Thailand's vaccinations strategy so far has relied heavily on the viral vector vaccine developed by Oxford University and AstraZeneca and Sinovac Biotech's inactivated Covid-19 vaccine.

The government pharmaceutical organization in a statement said 3.9m doses of the Moderna vaccine would be delivered in the fourth quarter and 1.1m doses in the first quarter of 2022.

The announcement comes as the Infectious Disease Association of Thailand (IDAT) urged prime minister Prayuth Chan-ocha to secure more mRNA vaccines to better contain the outbreak.

"The vaccine procurement plan of 150m doses has a high proportion of Sinovac," the association said in a letter to Prayuth, citing that mRNA vaccines had a higher efficacy rate than that of Sinovac.

Thailand has also ordered five million doses of Johnson & Johnson vaccines and 20m doses of the mRNA vaccine developed by Pfizer and BioNTech. The south-east Asian country today reported a new daily record of 53 coronavirus deaths, and 4,786 new infections.

Related: [*Is this the beginning of an mRNA vaccine revolution? | Adam Finn*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/nov/22/mrna-vaccines-covid-signal-new-era-disease-prevention-science)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.28pm BST

block-time published-time 1.25pm BST

In related news, AFP reports that the wearable gadgets market has been booming as the pandemic led to greater interest in health monitoring amid working from home.

While worldwide sales of smartphones slumped last year, a record 527 million wearables were sold in 2020, up from 384 million in 2019, according to research firm Strategy Analytics.

It was the first time that global wearable sales topped half a billion and analysts expect the trend to continue, with the firm forecasting the devices will overtake smartphone sales by the end of the decade.

Ear-worn devices such as earbuds, which can be used to make calls and listen to music, accounted for nearly two-thirds of global wearable sales last year as people working from home upgraded their headphones for video calling.

Wristwear such as fitness trackers and smartwatches, which can monitor steps, the heart rate and even oxygen levels, accounted for 36% of worldwide wearable sales, as people paid more attention to their health during the pandemic and exercise moved outdoors since gyms were closed in many places.

"Everybody is becoming much more health focused and wearables are a good device to assist with that," said Neil Mawston, an executive director at Strategy Analytics.

block-time published-time 1.23pm BST

British households built up their savings to the second highest level on record at the start of the year as the Covid-19 lockdown limited opportunities to spend, according to official figures.

Related: [*Covid savings: Britain built up second highest level on record in early 2021*](https://www.theguardian.com/money/2021/jun/30/covid-savings-britain-built-up-second-highest-level-on-record-in-early-2021)

block-time published-time 1.15pm BST

France has today ended most capacity limits imposed in April on restaurants, cinemas, stores and other public venues, although the ***measures*** were extended in parts of the southwest over the spread of the coronavirus Delta variant.

The move came as the doctor who heads president Emmanuel Macron's coronavirus advisory panel said a "fourth wave" of cases [*was likely this autumn*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2021/jun/30/coronavirus-live-news-thailand-suffers-record-deaths-kim-jong-un-warns-of-grave-incident-in-north-korea?page=with:block-60dc17308f081f4ea9704952#block-60dc17308f081f4ea9704952).

In the southwestern Landes department, officials said the capacity limits would be extended to 6 July because of "weak collective immunity" in the area.

Around 45% of new cases are being caused by the Delta variant, which was first detected in India and has been blamed for an increase in daily Covid deaths in Britain, AFP reports.

Seven virus clusters have been discovered in businesses or retirement homes, Didier Couteaud of the regional health service in western France said during a video press conference.

Elsewhere across France, events will no longer be limited to 1,000 people, whether indoors or outdoors, though participants will have to show proof of their Covid inoculation, a negative test or a recent infection.

Professional sporting matches will no longer be limited to 5,000 people, though capacity limits may still be applied to the summer music festivals that traditionally attract huge crowds. The next stage in the lifting of restrictions will see nightclubs reopen on 9 July. Face masks remain required in public indoor spaces and in crowds outdoors.

Dense crowds at the annual Gay Pride march in Paris, Saturday, 26 June 2021. Photograph: Lewis Joly/AP

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 3.07pm BST

block-time published-time 12.57pm BST

Bangladesh will deploy soldiers tomorrow to enforce a strict lockdown amid a record spike in coronavirus cases driven by the Delta variant first detected in India, the government has said.

Most restrictions imposed as part of a strict lockdown introduced in April have since been lifted, but a record spike in cases this week of the highly contagious Delta variant has prompted the government to order a week of tight controls, Reuters reports.

"No one will be allowed go out except in case of an emergency during this period," the government said in a statement, adding army troops alongside law-enforcement agencies would be deployed to enforce the lockdown.

All offices and transportation will be shut during this period while factories, including the country's prime garment export sector, will be allowed to remain open if they follow health protocols, it said.

Police have vowed to arrest if anyone comes out of their home without a valid reason. Tens of thousands of migrant workers left the capital, Dhaka, over the weekend amid a looming strict lockdown.

Bangladesh sealed its border with India in April as a precaution against infection, although trade continues. Bangladesh has seen a record surge in cases this week, with 7,666 new cases reported on Tuesday as well as 112 fatalities.

There have been 904,436 infections and 14,388 deaths reported in the country since the pandemic began.

Bangladesh's vaccination drive suffered a blow after India stopped exports of the AstraZeneca shot in response to a record surge in domestic infections, with only three percent of its population of 170 million getting two doses.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.58pm BST

block-time published-time 12.46pm BST

Three members of Singapore's Covid task force have laid out a proposed framework for a return to life as normal - scrapping lockdowns, mass contact tracing, and Covid case counting, while resuming large gatherings.

In what would be a radical departure from the zero transmission model also seen elsewhere, stringent ***measures*** would be abandoned. The task force members say such policies are not sustainable in the long term.

"The bad news is that Covid-19 may never go away. The good news is that it is possible to live normally with it in our midst," said Singapore's trade minister Gan Kim Yong, finance minister Lawrence Wong and health minister Ong Ye Kung, in a piece in the [*Straits Times*](https://www.straitstimes.com/opinion/living-normally-with-covid-19) last week.

"We can turn the pandemic into something much less threatening, like influenza, hand, foot and mouth disease, or chickenpox, and get on with our lives."

Titled "Living normally, with Covid-19", the piece said that with "vaccination, testing, treatment and social responsibility, it may mean that in the near future, when someone gets Covid-19, our response can be very different from now."

[*CNN reports that*](https://edition.cnn.com/travel/article/singapore-covid-plan-intl-hnk/index.html?utm_medium=social&utm_source=twCNN&utm_content=2021-06-30T11%3A00%3A09&utm_term=image) Singapore is on track for two-thirds of its population to have received their first vaccine dose by early July, and aims to fully vaccinate that figure by 9 August.

It said that Singapore is considered a success story in terms of controlling Covid, with strict border controls, enforced quarantines, effective contact tracing, and rules on social gatherings and mask wearing.

The city-state of 5.7 million people averaged about 18 cases a day in the past month and has recorded just 36 deaths throughout the pandemic, according to Johns Hopkins University.

block-time published-time 12.29pm BST

Brazil saw a fall in life expectancy by 1.3 years last year amid the pandemic, returning to 2014 levels, with that figure continuing to widen slightly, according to a new report in the journal Nature Medicine.

The New York Times reports that Brazil has reported more than 514,000 deaths from Covid-19, a reported death toll surpassed only by that in the US which has lost more than 604,000 people.

The study said that between 1945 and 2020, life expectancy in Brazil increased from 45.5 years to 76.7 years, an average of about five months per year, but the setbacks have reverted the country to the levels of seven years ago.

Marcia Castro, chair of the Department of Global Health and Population at Harvard, the lead author of the study, estimated along with her fellow researchers that the resulting decline in life expectancy for this year, based on the death toll recorded in the first four months of 2021, would be about 1.78 years.

When intense shocks like a pandemic or war occur, life expectancy drops, but it often rebounds quickly. This was the case with the 1918 influenza pandemic in the US, when [life expectancy at birth] in 1919 was higher than in 1917, likely due, in part, to selective mortality of individuals with tuberculosis. We argue that, in the case of COVID-19 in Brazil, the rebound will not happen in 2021, and the pre-pandemic trajectory of annual gains in [life expectancy at birth] will likely slow down.

States in the Amazon region, including Amazonas, Rondônia, Roraima and Mato Grosso, experienced the steepest declines in life expectancy last year.

block-time published-time 12.07pm BST

The Associated Press has this dispatch from a prison in Florida, reporting that there are few suggestions that US correctional institutions have made significant reforms and changes to better deal with future waves of Covid infection after an estimated half a million people in prisons contracted the virus and 3,000 died.

Derrick Johnson had a makeshift mask. He had the spray bottle of bleach and extra soap that corrections officers provided. But he still spent every day crammed in a unit with 63 other men in a Florida prison, crowding into hallways on their way to meals and sleeping feet from one another at night.

As the coronavirus ravaged the Everglades Correctional Institution, Johnson was surrounded by the sounds of coughing and requests for Tylenol. And while he thought a lot of the prison's policies were ineffective at protecting prisoners, he also wondered if that was the best the facility could do.

"Prison is not built to compete with a pandemic," said Johnson, who was released in December. "The pandemic's gonna win every time." With crowded conditions, notoriously substandard medical care and constantly shifting populations, prisons were ill-equipped to handle the highly contagious virus, which killed nearly 3,000 prisoners and staff.

Corrections systems responded with inconsistent policies, struggling to contain the virus amid understaffing and overcrowding. At its peak in mid-December, more than 25,000 prisoners tested positive in a single week. But in recent months, infections behind bars nationwide have slowed to a few hundred new cases each week, and many prisons have eased what restrictions they had in place, including mask-wearing, visitors and other movement in and out, going back to business as usual.

It's a critical moment, with new coronavirus cases low but the threat of infection looming as new variants spread around the world, said Dr David Sears, an infectious-disease specialist and correctional health consultant. "The medical community, prison leadership and society at large have learned so much about Covid in a short period of time," Sears said. "We need to take these lessons and make sure that the things we've learned after a lot of real human suffering are not in vain."

According to the data collected by The Marshall Project and the AP, about three in 10 people in state and federal prisons were infected with the virus. But correctional health experts widely agree that this number is an undercount. "A great many of the people who ever had Covid, they were never tested," said Dr Homer Venters, a former chief medical officer of the New York City jail system who has inspected health conditions in prisons around the country over the last year. "In most prisons it ran through these places like wildfire. People were never tested."

Even when facilities did conduct tests, they still allowed prisoners who tested positive to come in contact with others. But many prisons simply lack the space needed to adequately isolate sick prisoners. There are structural and logistical changes prisons could make, such as upgrading ventilation systems and creating surge capacity for staff and health care workers. But the most effective approach, Sears said, is to drastically reduce prison populations.

Protesters hold signs at a rally to bring awareness to the conditions inside the Marion Correctional Institution in Ohio on 2 May 2020, as it became the most intensely infected institution across the country, with more than 80% of its nearly 2,500 inmates, and 175 staff on top of that, testing positive for Covid-19. Photograph: Megan Jelinger/Megan JELINGER/AFP/AFP via Getty Images

Hello and greetings to everyone reading, wherever you are the in the world. Mattha Busby here to take you through the next few hours of global Covid developments. Thanks to my colleagues for covering the blog up until now. Please feel free to drop me a line [*on Twitter*](https://twitter.com/matthabusby) or message me via email ([*mattha.busby.freelance@guardian.co.uk*](mailto:mattha.busby.freelance@guardian.co.uk)) with any tips or thoughts on our coverage.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.25pm BST

block-time published-time 11.25am BST

Vladimir Putin - who received the Russian Sputnik vaccine earlier this year ( [*see entry at 10.39*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2021/jun/30/coronavirus-live-news-thailand-suffers-record-deaths-kim-jong-un-warns-of-grave-incident-in-north-korea?page=with:block-60dc3b808f08a0630603e80b#block-60dc3b808f08a0630603e80b) ) - has said he is opposed to mandatory vaccinations in Russia despite a surge in coronavirus infections in the country.

"I do not support mandatory vaccinations," Putin said on a phone-in broadcast on television, according to the AFP news agency.

Russia reported 669 coronavirus deaths over the past 24 hours, a record number of fatalities for the second day in a row.

One of the pandemic hotspots is the city of St Petersburg, which is due to host a Euro 2020 quarter-final on Friday in front of thousands of fans, many of them flying in from abroad for the match.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 11.32am BST

block-time published-time 11.17am BST

Cambodia has reported record daily rises in coronavirus deaths and cases, reaching what its government called the "red line" in its biggest outbreak so far. Reuters reports that the country reported 27 deaths from Covid-19 and 1,130 cases on Wednesday.

Cambodia successfully contained its outbreaks through last year and had among the world's smallest caseloads, but it has been battling to control the spread since its detection of a highly transmissible variant late in February.

"We are now at the red line for Covid-19 virus transmission in the country. Everyone must act responsibly together in order to suppress virus transmission now," Or Vandine, secretary of state and health ministry spokeswoman said in a tweet.

"We do not want to pass the red line which will require lockdown again," she said.

The record numbers took the overall cases to 50,385 and deaths total to 602.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 11.34am BST

block-time published-time 11.00am BST

Today so far...

The North Korean leader, Kim Jong-un, has [*sacked several senior party officials over a "grave" coronavirus incident that had threatened public safety*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jun/30/north-korea-covid-outbreak-fears-after-kim-jong-un-warns-of-huge-crisis-in-antivirus-fight) , fuelling speculation that the coronavirus has breached the country's defences.The state-run KCNA news agency quoted Kim as telling a meeting of the ruling party's politburo that: "In neglecting important decisions by the party that called for organisational, material and science and technological ***measures*** to support prolonged anti-epidemic work in face of a global health crisis, the officials in charge have caused a grave incident that created a huge crisis for the safety of the country and its people."Thailand reported a record 53 Covid-19 fatalities on Wednesday and 4,786 infections, as the country struggles to contain its most severe outbreak since the start of the pandemic. The government has stopped short of imposing a full lockdown, but introduced new restrictions this week.Russia reported 669 coronavirus-related deaths nationwide, the most confirmed in a single day since the pandemic began, amid a surge in cases that authorities blame on the Delta variant. The government coronavirus taskforce also confirmed 21,042 new Covid-19 cases in the last 24 hours. Vladimir Putin said this morning that he had received Russia's Sputnik V vaccine earlier this year. He had previously declined to disclose which vaccine he had taken.Japan is considering an extension of its coronavirus prevention ***measures*** in Tokyo and other areas by two weeks to a month, Japanese media said, with less than a month to go until the Tokyo Summer Olympics are set to open.South Korea 's capital, Seoul, and its neighbouring regions will delay by a week the relaxation of social distancing rules due to a sudden increase in Covid cases.England fans are being warned against trying to travel to Rome for the Euro 2020 quarter final match with Ukraine. Current restrictions require visitors from the UK to quarantine for five days upon arrival.Malta, the Balearic islands and parts of the Caribbean were moved on to England 's "green list" from 4am this morning.The outsourcing company [*Serco predicts its profits will jump 50% during the first half of the year*](https://www.theguardian.com/business/2021/jun/30/serco-expects-jump-in-profits-covid-contracts-nhs) because of its continued work on Covid-19 contracts for various governments, including the UK's test-and-trace service.France is likely to have a fourth wave of the virus, due to a resurgence of cases caused by the Delta variant, said Prof Jean-François Delfraissy, the French government's leading scientific adviser.Tunisia has [*extended*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2021/jun/29/coronavirus-live-news-philippines-extends-restrictions-to-mid-july-fears-of-fifth-wave-in-tokyo?page=with:block-60db99398f0833e43ca1e390#block-60db99398f0833e43ca1e390) curfew hours to try and stop the rapid spread of coronavirus as it recorded a daily record number of cases.Malaysia says it will receive 1m AstraZeneca vaccines donated by Japan tomorrow, and 1m Pfizer doses on Friday donated by the US.China 's Clover Biopharmaceuticals has announced an advance purchase agreement to supply up to 414m doses of its Covid-19 vaccine candidate through the global vaccine sharing scheme Covax.Brazil is to [*suspend*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2021/jun/29/coronavirus-live-news-philippines-extends-restrictions-to-mid-july-fears-of-fifth-wave-in-tokyo?page=with:block-60db901d8f0833e43ca1e32b#block-60db901d8f0833e43ca1e32b) its $324m Indian vaccine contract that has mired President Jair Bolsonaro in accusations of irregularities.Romania is to [*sell*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2021/jun/29/coronavirus-live-news-philippines-extends-restrictions-to-mid-july-fears-of-fifth-wave-in-tokyo?page=with:block-60db75d08f081f4ea9704341#block-60db75d08f081f4ea9704341) 1.7m excess doses of the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine to Denmark because it was unable to use them within its own population due to vaccine hesitancy.In Australia, a number of state governments have [*directly criticised the commonwealth's new position on the AstraZeneca vaccine*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2021/jun/30/rift-between-states-and-morrison-government-over-astrazeneca-vaccine-for-under-40s-grows) , with Queensland saying that it does "not want under-40s to get AstraZeneca" and Victoria accusing Scott Morrison of creating unnecessary confusion.The Australian state of Queensland has just eight days of the Pfizer coronavirus vaccine left. The state's health minister, Dr Yvette D'ath, said the federal government had denied Queensland's request for more doses of the Pfizer vaccine.Also in Australia, [*Aboriginal organisations have expressed frustration at the Northern Territory government's "flawed" pandemic response*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2021/jun/30/northern-territory-urged-to-accommodate-homeless-aboriginal-people-during-covid-lockdown) , demanding it do more to accommodate hundreds of Aboriginal people sleeping rough around town centres they say are at risk of Covid-19.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 11.13am BST

block-time published-time 10.55am BST

Head of Indonesia's paediatric society warns over rise in infant Covid deaths

Although still quite low, the number of Indonesian children contracting the coronavirus has almost tripled since May, with infant deaths from Covid rising sharply as the country suffers its most severe wave of infections so far, a senior paediatrician has said.

Indonesia has been hit by a surge in cases this month, with new records on six days since 21 June including a daily high of over 21,807 today, putting pressure on the government to impose tighter ***measures***.

Dr Aman Pulungan, head of Indonesia's paediatric society, said weekly child deaths from Covid rose to 24 last week from 13 in the previous week, many under five years old.

That was a larger rate of increase than the overall rise in Covid deaths from 1,783 to 2,476 fatalities nationwide over the same period. Aman said infections among minors were rising fast.

Kate Lamb reports for Reuters that the percentage of overall cases that were under 18 years of age has risen to 12.6% in June compared with 5% in July last year, according to official data, although Aman noted children were now being tested more.

President Joko Widodo this week announced that authorities had given a green light for children age 12 to 17 to be inoculated with the Sinovac vaccine.

Aman said paediatricians were already seeing cases of "long Covid" - debilitating and lingering symptoms months after infection - among Indonesian children.

He believed the rising infections among children was more likely pandemic fatigue and lack of knowledge than the impact of more transmissible variants.

"It's not the Delta variant, but the system," he said. "Less testing, less tracing. And people still don't think that children can suffer and die from Covid. Awareness is still low."

Updated at 11.14am BST

10.51am BST

The outsourcing company [*Serco*](https://www.theguardian.com/business/sercogroup) predicts its profits will jump 50% during the first half of the year because of its continued work on Covid-19 contracts for various governments, including the UK's test-and-trace service.

Serco [*runs large parts*](https://www.theguardian.com/business/2021/jun/14/serco-upgrades-profit-forecast-as-covid-test-and-trace-work-soars) of the UK's largely privatised test-and-trace service, which is labelled NHS test and trace. The firm runs a quarter of Covid-19 testing sites and half the tier 3 contact tracers, who are mostly required to phone the contacts of people who have tested positive.

Serco's appointment to run parts of the UK's test-and-trace system has proved controversial and the firm has [*drawn criticism for the decision*](https://www.theguardian.com/business/2021/feb/25/serco-to-pay-first-dividend-in-seven-years-after-profits-double) to pay £17m in dividends to investors, partly funded by its pandemic profits.

Read more of Joanna Partridge's report here: [*Serco expects 50% jump in profits on back of Covid contracts*](https://www.theguardian.com/business/2021/jun/30/serco-expects-jump-in-profits-covid-contracts-nhs)

Related: [*Serco expects 50% jump in profits on back of Covid contracts*](https://www.theguardian.com/business/2021/jun/30/serco-expects-jump-in-profits-covid-contracts-nhs)

10.39am BST

Kremlin reveals that Vladimir Putin received the Russian Sputnik V vaccine

President Vladimir Putin said this morning that he had received Russia's Sputnik V vaccine against Covid earlier this year. Reuters report that he had previously declined to disclose which vaccine he had taken.

Putin, 68, received two vaccine shots against Covid in March and April, the Kremlin has said. Authorities did not publish video footage of him being inoculated.

10.17am BST

China's Clover Biopharmaceuticals has announced an advance purchase agreement to supply up to 414m doses of its Covid-19 vaccine candidate through the global vaccine sharing scheme Covax.

The firm said it will supply an initial 64m, pending an emergency use listing from the World Health Organization (WHO) of its vaccine candidate.

Reuters report that the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization (Gavi), which leads the Covax scheme alongside the WHO, has options for an additional 350m doses in 2022, Clover said.

Updated at 10.25am BST

10.15am BST

Seoul to delay relaxing of restrictions due to rise in local cases

South Korea's capital, Seoul, and its neighbouring regions will delay by a week the relaxation of social distancing rules due to a sudden increase in Covid cases, authorities said today.

Sangmi Cha reports for Reuters from Seoul that the government had said it would relax social distancing and allow private gatherings of up to six people in the greater Seoul area, from the current four, starting 1 July as the country's inoculation drive has been picking up speed.

While the number of daily new infections have remained below 700 since early this month, South Korea reported 794 new coronavirus cases on Tuesday, according to the Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency (KDCA).

Of the 759 new locally transmitted cases, 631 or 83% were from the greater Seoul area, Yoon Tae-ho, a senior health ministry official, told a briefing. The cases, including the more transmissible Delta variants, were found in universities, workplaces and restaurants in the metropolitan area, Yoon said.

Application of the revised social distancing in the current situation of "severe and critical crisis" may lead to further confusion and more transmission, Seoul city said in a statement.

Experts said the announced relaxing of restrictions, including longer operation hours for pubs and easing of the private gatherings ban, may have sent the wrong signal to the public and health authorities called on the public for caution.

South Korea has inoculated close to 30% of its 52 million population with at least one dose of Covid vaccine, putting it on track to meet a target of 70% by September.

Updated at 10.26am BST

9.40am BST

Russian Covid daily deaths at highest level since pandemic began

Russia reported 669 coronavirus-related deaths nationwide on Wednesday, the most confirmed in a single day since the pandemic began, amid a surge in cases that authorities blame on the Delta variant.

Reuters notes that the government coronavirus taskforce also confirmed 21,042 new Covid-19 cases in the last 24 hours, including 5,823 in Moscow

Updated at 9.41am BST

9.38am BST

Andrew Sparrow has [*the UK live blog*](https://www.theguardian.com/politics/live/2021/jun/30/uk-politics-live-uk-state-aid-brexit-covid-coronavirus-latest-updates) for the day, which will be covering major UK Covid lines as well. I'll be carrying on here with international coronavirus news.

Related: [*UK politics live: UK state aid will be 'more agile and flexible' under post-Brexit rules, says business secretary*](https://www.theguardian.com/politics/live/2021/jun/30/uk-politics-live-uk-state-aid-brexit-covid-coronavirus-latest-updates)

9.23am BST

A little bit more on the context of North Korea and Covid here from AFP, who point out that Pyongyang's coronavirus defence has come at a high price. Ever since the pandemic began, North Korean state media have highlighted anti-coronavirus ***measures*** and officials have exhorted citizens to remain vigilant.

At a military parade in October, Kim Jong-un himself tearfully thanked his people for their efforts and said North Korea had not seen a single case of the "evil virus", although analysts have long doubted the assertion.

Its self-imposed and strictly enforced blockade has left it more isolated than ever: trade with Beijing - its economic lifeline - slowed to a trickle while all international aid workers have left.

Several UN relief groups confirmed to AFP that the Needs and Priorities document - a key report that summarises the humanitarian situation in the country and forms the basis of UN appeals - will not be published this year.

And this month, Pyongyang admitted it was tackling a food crisis, sounding the alarm in a nation with a moribund ***agricultural*** sector that has long struggled to feed itself. Earlier, Kim warned his people to prepare for the "worst-ever situation".

Pyongyang has been looking to shore up loyalty to the authorities, with state television last week showing a resident of the capital expressing concern and saying everyone was "heartbroken" over the "emaciated" condition of Kim, who has lost significant weight recently.

Analysts say Pyongyang is using Kim's appearance as a way to glorify him by portraying him as a "devoted, hardworking" leader as the country struggles to tackle its food crisis and other challenges.

Justin Murray's report for us can be read in full here: [*North Korea Covid-19 outbreak fears after Kim Jong-un warns of 'huge crisis' in 'antivirus fight'*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jun/30/north-korea-covid-outbreak-fears-after-kim-jong-un-warns-of-huge-crisis-in-antivirus-fight)

Related: [*North Korea Covid-19 outbreak fears after Kim Jong-un warns of 'huge crisis' in 'antivirus fight'*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jun/30/north-korea-covid-outbreak-fears-after-kim-jong-un-warns-of-huge-crisis-in-antivirus-fight)

Updated at 9.43am BST

8.49am BST

I've got to be honest with you, at this time of day I'm normally bringing you lots of quotes from government ministers in the UK about Covid from the morning media round, but pretty much every TV station or radio channel I've switched on has been talking wall-to-wall about [*England-Germany*](https://www.theguardian.com/football/2021/jun/29/england-germany-euro-2020-last-16-match-report). It's relentless.

PA Media, though, is carrying some quotes from the domestic science community, and this morning they are highly critical of the UK government.

On Times Radio, Prof Stephen Reicher, from the University of St Andrews and a member of the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (Sage) subcommittee on behavioural science, has warned the country was in danger of repeating last summer's mistakes.

My fear is that we're on line to repeat the mistakes of last summer - if you remember, the prime minister told us it was our patriotic duty to go to the pub, that people should go to work or they might lose their jobs, we had eat out to help out.

The consequence was we never got infections low enough to be able to deal with the disease and so when conditions changed in the autumn, when schools went back and people went back to work and universities went back and the weather got worse and we went inside, so infections spiked.

And I think this time round, we should learn from that and we should get infections low to a point where we're in a much better place in the autumn, where we don't have to reimpose restrictions. So I think the real question is how can we do that without inconveniencing people too much?

It seems to me that if we got right the basic public health moves to suppress infection, we wouldn't be talking about a high reservoir of infection which can then spike very quickly when conditions change.

Deenan Pillay, professor of virology at University College London, who is also a member of Sage, has been on LBC radio, and called into question changes in travel rules that will allow [*business executives from large companies to skip quarantine*](https://www.ft.com/content/8bc1f376-dcf6-4bdd-93b6-abd52bf810da). He said:

Scientifically, of course, the virus does not distinguish between chief executive and anyone else in terms of transmission. Behaviourally, this just adds to the variation and people feeling why should they stick to the rules?

There's a social fairness issue as well - I know many colleagues who are healthcare workers who have been working for more than a year flat out, desperate to go away on holiday, but cannot do so because they have to quarantine on coming back. So on all those bases, it does not make sense to me whilst we've got the regulations that apply to everyone.

The Government has made it very clear that they expect to open up the economy and reduce all of the constraints on 19 July, but we just need to think back a few months to the delay in putting in limits to travel from India ... and that delay for political reasons did lead to this import of the Delta variant, which, as we all know has led to mayhem within the UK - children being off school and increasing infection rates.

Updated at 9.04am BST

8.21am BST

In Australia, Aboriginal organisations have expressed frustration at the [*Northern Territory*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/northern-territory) government's "flawed" pandemic response, demanding it do more to accommodate hundreds of Aboriginal people sleeping rough around town centres they say are at risk of Covid-19.

Both [*Darwin*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/darwin) and Alice Springs were in lockdown amid concerns about the significant risk posed to Aboriginal communities.

The CEO of the Danila Dilba Aboriginal health service, Olga Havnen, said the lack of support for homeless people created a "ridiculous situation".

She said a senior doctor at the clinic spent four hours unsuccessfully trying to find emergency accommodation for a patient who had just had a Covid test.

"The pandemic response plan doesn't include any provision for housing people who may be homeless or visitors to town," Havnen said. "Here we are on day four of a lockdown, and they're only just sorting out the arrangements that might be made available for Aboriginal people, particularly visitors and rough sleepers who might need a Covid test, and who will need to self-isolate.

"Who else in the community gets so studiously ignored under these sorts of circumstances? It's either gross incompetence, maladministration or straight out racism. Or probably, a combination of all three," Havnen said.

Read more of Lorena Allam's report here: [*Northern Territory urged to accommodate homeless Aboriginal people during Covid lockdown*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2021/jun/30/northern-territory-urged-to-accommodate-homeless-aboriginal-people-during-covid-lockdown)

Related: [*Northern Territory urged to accommodate homeless Aboriginal people during Covid lockdown*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2021/jun/30/northern-territory-urged-to-accommodate-homeless-aboriginal-people-during-covid-lockdown)

Updated at 8.23am BST

8.05am BST

French government scientific adviser: 'we will have a fourth wave'

France is likely to have a fourth wave of the virus, due to a resurgence of cases caused by the Delta variant, said the French government's leading scientific adviser, Prof Jean-François Delfraissy, this morning.

Nevertheless, Delfraissy added that the rollout of vaccines would help mitigate the effect of this new wave of the virus, which many medical experts think could hit France by September or October.

French immunologist Jean-Francois Delfraissy in September last year.Photograph: Yoan Valat/EPA

"I think we will have a fourth wave, but it will be much more moderate than the previous three waves because the level of vaccinations is different compared to before," Delfraissy told France Info radio.

Reuters report that the French epidemiologist Arnaud Fontanet, who also advises the government on scientific matters, told a television programme that he too expected France's Covid infection numbers to rise again in September or October.

Updated at 8.24am BST

8.00am BST

"It was a dangerous, false sense of security. Now a tragedy is unfolding," - that's Dr Johannes Marisa, president of the Medical and Dental Private Practitioners of Zimbabwe Association in Harare, who spoke to Associated Press as part of a report into Covid's rising impact across Africa.

AP reports that the delta variant has now been detected in at least 14 African countries including Congo, Mozambique, Namibia, Uganda, South Africa and Zimbabwe, and not just in the cities. Early in the pandemic many rural inhabitants had dismissed Covid as an urban problem.

In Zimbabwe, three of the four districts under strict lockdown and declared as centres of the outbreak are in the predominantly rural Mashonaland West province, which recorded over half of the 801 cases reported last weekend. Other hot spots also are largely rural, a first for this country.

"We are going to see a lot of deaths, especially arising from rural areas. Covid is now coming from the rural areas," said Marisa, attributing the spike to "a high degree of complacency", a lack of information and few vaccinations, with urban areas prioritised.

The virus can also spread at funerals when city dwellers return to visit rural relatives. "I was at a funeral in a rural area recently and people were surprised to see me wearing a mask," he said.

Rural areas are ill-equipped to deal with the surge, and urban health care facilities are under strain in treating an increasing number of people from the countryside. Zimbabwe's major referral hospital, Parirenyatwa in Harare, is prioritising beds for Covid patients.

Rural residents are finding it difficult to get vaccinated because of weak public health systems and vaccine distribution problems. Only 1% of Africa's 1.3 billion people have been vaccinated, according to the WHO and the Africa Centers for Disease Control.

Updated at 8.24am BST

7.48am BST

AstraZeneca rift between Australian states and Morrison government grows

In Australia, a number of state governments have directly criticised the commonwealth's new position on the AstraZeneca vaccine, with Queensland saying that it does "not want under-40s to get AstraZeneca" and Victoria accusing [*Scott Morrison*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/scott-morrison) of creating unnecessary confusion.

In a series of press conferences on Wednesday, Queensland, Victoria, New South Wales and Western Australia all distanced themselves from the prime minister's [*suggestion that people aged under 40*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2021/jun/29/premiers-question-astrazeneca-vaccine-backflip-and-demand-morrison-government-lower-international-arrivals-cap) should approach GPs for the AstraZeneca dose.

Queensland and Victoria were more strident in their comments, explicitly criticising the commonwealth's new approach, while NSW premier [*Gladys Berejiklian*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/gladys-berejiklian) said simply that the health advice remained that Pfizer was preferred for under-60s.

In an explosive press conference in Brisbane, [*Queensland*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/queensland) chief health officer Dr Jeannette Young said the state would stick with the expert advice from Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (Atagi) that Pfizer was preferred for those under 60.

"I do not want under-40s to get AstraZeneca," she said. "I don't want an 18-year-old in Queensland dying from a clotting illness who, if they got Covid, probably wouldn't die. We've had very few deaths due to Covid-19 in Australia in people under the age of 50, and wouldn't it be terrible that our first 18-year-old in Queensland who dies related to this pandemic died because of the vaccine?"

The federal health minister, [*Greg Hunt*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/greg-hunt) , insisted there had been "no change" to the medical advice, which he described as "clear", and suggested the government's new position was in line with the Atagi position.

Read more of Christopher Knaus' report here: [*Rift between states and Morrison government over AstraZeneca vaccine for under-40s grows*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2021/jun/30/rift-between-states-and-morrison-government-over-astrazeneca-vaccine-for-under-40s-grows)

Related: [*Rift between states and Morrison government over AstraZeneca vaccine for under 40s grows*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2021/jun/30/rift-between-states-and-morrison-government-over-astrazeneca-vaccine-for-under-40s-grows)

Updated at 8.29am BST

7.44am BST

Malaysia to receive 2m vaccines from Japan and US this week

A quick Reuters snap that Malaysia says it will receive 1m AstraZeneca vaccines donated by Japan tomorrow.

Science minister Khairy Jamaluddin confirmed the move to reporters this morning, and also said that Malaysia country will receive another 1m doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine donated by the US on Friday.

7.42am BST

Anne-Marie Trevelyan, the UK's minister for climate change, has been doing the media round in the UK this morning. She's been asked on Sky News whether the government should consider stopping publishing daily coronavirus case numbers once there is a "return to normal" on 19 July - for England at least. She said:

I think for as long as there is that intense testing regime that we will need to continue to be able to manage our day-to-day lives and make sure that we are looking after each other, there will be that substantial data set to share. Whether it's published on the front page of a newspaper everyday, or whether it's something that those who are monitoring and making sure that they're looking after us have at their fingertips will no doubt be set out by the Department of Health in due course.

[*#KayBurley*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/KayBurley?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) : 'Should we continue to publish daily [*#COVID19*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/COVID19?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) figures?' "As long as there is an intense testing regime" says Climate Change Minister [*@AnnieTrev*](https://twitter.com/annietrev?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) , adding when the UK returns "back to normal", the [*@DHSCgovuk*](https://twitter.com/DHSCgovuk?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) and Number 10 will make a decision. [*https://t.co/BL4hYEW3Ef*](https://t.co/BL4hYEW3Ef) [*pic.twitter.com/ZVDvRZAG39*](https://t.co/ZVDvRZAG39)

- Sky News (@SkyNews) [*June 30, 2021*](https://twitter.com/SkyNews/status/1410125187815817217?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

Updated at 8.30am BST

7.36am BST

A lot of England football fans will have woken up this morning wondering if they'll be able to get a ticket for England-Ukraine at Euro 2020 in Rome on Saturday. The answer is that you probably can't get to Rome anyway - well, not legally.

Tess de la Mare for PA media sets out the rules for travel, noting that you have to have proof of a negative coronavirus test taken in the 48 hours before you travel. UK passengers must fill in one of the European Union's passenger locator forms, and then spend five days in isolation.

So even if you'd had a test a couple of days ago and get a flight this morning, the earliest you would be out would be Sunday - subject to a second Covid-19 test - meaning you will probably be watching the game from a hotel room anyway.

The exception is if you are a member of transport crew, or can prove that you are in Italy for "work, health or emergency", or of course, if you happen to be an England supporter who lives in Italy already.

None of these restrictions would have applied to fans heading from Germany to Rome if the Germans had won the match - as part of the EU digital Covid-19 certificate scheme they would not have had to do the quarantine.

7.30am BST

There's some response in India to the news that Brazil is suspending a vaccine contract. The deal to buy 20m doses of Bharat Biotech 's Covaxin shot has become a headache for Brazil's president Jair Bolsonaro after whistleblowers went public with concerns over irregularities. One health ministry official said he personally alerted the president about his concerns.

Reuters are now carrying the news that India's Bharat Biotech has said it followed a "step-by-step" approach for the regulatory approval and supply contract of its Covid-19 vaccine in Brazil, and that it has not received advance payments from the Brazilian health ministry.

7.14am BST

Malta, Balearic and Caribbean islands added to UK 'green list' from today

Good morning, it is Martin Belam here in London. If you arrived in England today from Malta, the Balearic islands and parts of the Caribbean, and your flight landed after 4am, then [*the new "green list" applies*](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-travel-update-malta-added-to-green-list-and-green-watchlist-extended-as-plans-for-quarantine-free-travel-for-fully-vaccinated-passengers-from-ambe) to you and you don't have to self-isolate for 10 days.

That doesn't mean your trip is hurdle free. The [*"green list" rules*](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/red-amber-and-green-list-rules-for-entering-england#green-list) state that:

Before you travel to England you must, take a Covid test, book and pay for a day 2 Covid test in advance, and complete a passenger locator form. On arrival in England you must take that Covid test on or before day 2 after you arrive. Children aged 4 and under do not need to take this test and you do not need to quarantine unless the test result is positive.

And an additional word of caution for those planning trips. Aside from Malta, the countries are all also on the "green watch list", which means that they are, according to the government, "at risk of moving from green to amber".

6.53am BST

Tokyo may extend coronavirus restrictions into Olympics period

Japan is considering an extension of its coronavirus prevention ***measures*** in Tokyo and other areas by two weeks to a month, Japanese media said, with less than a month to go until the Tokyo Summer Olympics are set to open. Reuters: the Japanese capital and other areas are currently under a 'quasi' state of emergency set to be lifted on July 12, but a recent uptick in coronavirus cases has officials concerned and could affect the number of spectators allowed in to Olympics venues. According to the Mainichi Shimbun daily, the government is considering extending the ***measures*** by two to four weeks, a period that would overlap with the Olympics, already delayed a year, that open on 23 July.

6.52am BST

Australian state of Queensland says Pfizer vaccine supply will run out in days

The Australian state of Queensland has just eight days of the Pfizer coronavirus vaccine left, authorities warned on Wednesday, as confusion over who should receive the AstraZeneca jab continued and outbreaks across the country grew.

The state's health minister, Dr Yvette D'ath, said the federal government had denied Queensland's request for more doses of the Pfizer vaccine, despite having given another state, Victoria, 100,000 doses three weeks ago.

"So we are getting to that point that we'll have to start prioritising only second doses if the commonwealth do not have any vaccine left," she said. "And they need to tell us. Is what they gave Victoria the end of it? Have we only got what is allocate and no contingency stock left until that big delivery in October? Because we all need to know."

Large parts of Queensland have begun a [*snap three-day lockdown*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2021/jun/29/queensland-covid-update-annastacia-palaszczuk-furious-as-unvaccinated-hospital-worker-tests-positive) , triggered by an unvaccinated Covid-positive hospital worker who travelled between Brisbane and north [*Queensland*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/queensland) :

Related: [*Australia Covid: Queensland says Pfizer vaccine supply will run out in days*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jun/30/australia-covid-queensland-says-pfizer-vaccine-supply-will-run-out-in-days)

6.22am BST

Thailand suffers record deaths

Thailand reported a record 53 Covid-19 fatalities on Wednesday and 4,786 infections, as the country struggles to contain its most severe outbreak since the start of the pandemic.

Thailand's third wave began in April, when cases were linked to bars and clubs in Bangkok. Since then, the virus has spread rapidly inside prisons, construction sites, factories and crowded areas of the capital.

The government has stopped short of imposing a full lockdown, but introduced new restrictions this week.

On Monday, hundreds of construction sites in Bangkok and surrounding provinces were sealed off, with workers forced to stay inside for 30 days. Rights groups have warned that people are being trapped in squalid conditions, without sufficient food or access to medical care.

Some were reportedly dumped on the side of the road by employers, while trucks were also seen ferrying workers away from sites before the movement restrictions were imposed. It's feared this exodus could spread the virus more widely across the country.

Other restrictions have also been introduced, including a ban on dining in restaurants and on gatherings of more than 20 people in the capital and other high risk areas. The recent wave is placing immense pressure on hospitals in Bangkok, which have reported shortages of beds for severely ill patients.

Thailand's vaccination rollout has been slow, and hindered by supply shortages. So far, less than 4% are fully vaccinated, while less than 10% have had at least one dose.

6.03am BST

North Korea Covid outbreak fears after Kim Jong-un warns of 'huge crisis' in 'antivirus fight'

The North Korean leader, [*Kim Jong-un*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/kim-jong-un) , has sacked several senior party officials over a "grave" coronavirus incident that had threatened public safety, fuelling speculation that the [*coronavirus*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/coronavirus-outbreak) has breached the country's defences.

"In neglecting important decisions by the party that called for organisational, material and science and technological ***measures*** to support prolonged anti-epidemic work in face of a global health crisis, the officials in charge have caused a grave incident that created a huge crisis for the safety of the country and its people," the state-run KCNA news agency quoted Kim as telling a meeting of the ruling party's politburo.

KCNA did not explain the nature of the transgressions, but analysts believe Kim's outburst indicate [*North Korea*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/north-korea) is no longer free of Covid-19:

Related: [*North Korea Covid outbreak fears after Kim Jong-un warns of 'huge crisis' in 'antivirus fight'*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jun/30/north-korea-covid-outbreak-fears-after-kim-jong-un-warns-of-huge-crisis-in-antivirus-fight)

5.09am BST

Summary

Hello and welcome to today's live coverage of the coronavirus pandemic.

Thailand reported on Wednesday 53 new deaths from the coronavirus, bringing the total number of fatalities to 2,023 since the pandemic started last year. The country's Covid taskforce also reported 4,786 new coronavirus cases, taking the total number of infections to 259,301.

Meanwhile North Korean leader [*Kim Jong-un*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/kim-jong-un) has said failures in anti-epidemic work have led to an unspecified "grave incident" that has put the safety of the country and people at risk, state media reported.

Here are the key developments from the last few hours:

Tunisia has [*extended*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2021/jun/29/coronavirus-live-news-philippines-extends-restrictions-to-mid-july-fears-of-fifth-wave-in-tokyo?page=with:block-60db99398f0833e43ca1e390#block-60db99398f0833e43ca1e390) curfew hours to try and stop the rapid spread of coronavirus as it recorded a daily record number of cases.Maree Todd, Scotland's minister for public health, has [*tested positive*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2021/jun/29/coronavirus-live-news-philippines-extends-restrictions-to-mid-july-fears-of-fifth-wave-in-tokyo?page=with:block-60db96be8f081f4ea97044c6#block-60db96be8f081f4ea97044c6) for coronavirus. Announcing the news on Twitter tonight, the SNP MSP for Caithness, Sutherland and Ross said she is self-isolating after testing positive today but has not had any symptoms.Brazil is to [*suspend*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2021/jun/29/coronavirus-live-news-philippines-extends-restrictions-to-mid-july-fears-of-fifth-wave-in-tokyo?page=with:block-60db901d8f0833e43ca1e32b#block-60db901d8f0833e43ca1e32b) its $324m Indian vaccine contract that has mired President Jair Bolsonaro in accusations of irregularities.Romania is to [*sell*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2021/jun/29/coronavirus-live-news-philippines-extends-restrictions-to-mid-july-fears-of-fifth-wave-in-tokyo?page=with:block-60db75d08f081f4ea9704341#block-60db75d08f081f4ea9704341) 1.7m excess doses of the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine to Denmark because it was unable to use them within its own population due to vaccine hesitancy.Guatemala has [*demanded*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2021/jun/29/coronavirus-live-news-philippines-extends-restrictions-to-mid-july-fears-of-fifth-wave-in-tokyo?page=with:block-60db6c868f08a0630603df77#block-60db6c868f08a0630603df77) its money back from Russia after it failed to deliver paid-for vaccines. Guatemalan health minister Amelia Flores has said the government has not received its promised Sputnik V vaccines.

Updated at 5.45am BST

133262021-06-30T04:09:46Zfalsefalse2021-06-30T23:04:08ZfalseUKtheguardian.com[*https://www.theguardian.com/p/txjgkfalsetruehttps://media.guim.co.uk/f3be7c0bc291acca13fb116620e9aa364d67c9ea/0\_166\_7496\_4498/500.jpgfalseentrueThis*](https://www.theguardian.com/p/txjgkfalsetruehttps://media.guim.co.uk/f3be7c0bc291acca13fb116620e9aa364d67c9ea/0_166_7496_4498/500.jpgfalseentrueThis) blog is closed. Follow the latest updates on the pandemic from around the world: See all our coronavirus coverage Brazil's president, Jair Bolsonaro, has fired a health ministry official who reportedly asked for a bribe in a vaccine deal, the latest graft accusation to rock the government amid investigations of its pandemic response. With over half a million Covid-19 deaths and more new cases daily than any other country, anger is mounting in Brazil over missed opportunities to buy coronavirus vaccines, Reuters reports. Accusations of corruption undercutting efforts have poured fuel on the fire, triggering new calls for Bolsonaro's impeachment. On Tuesday, Brazil suspended a contract worth 1.6bn reais ($321m) for a vaccine from India's Bharat Biotech, following allegations of undue pressure within the ministry. Bharat and the government have denied wrongdoing. A former employee at the health ministry recently told the prosecutor's office that he told the president that he was pressured to sign a contract that would increase the average price of doses by 1,000%. Bolsonaro, whose popularity has faded as Brazil's Covid-19 death toll climbed past 500,000, has denied any wrongdoing, saying on Monday he was not aware of any irregularities. On Wednesday Bolsonaro's chief of staff announced that the ministry's logistics chief, Roberto Ferreira Dias, had been dismissed. Newspaper Folha de S Paulo reported late on Tuesday that Dias had suggested a bribe of one dollar a dose during a dinner to discuss a different order of 400m vaccines, citing a representative from a medical supply company. The health ministry said the dismissal of Dias had been decided on Tuesday morning, without addressing the allegations. Dias could not be reached immediately for comment. Read more here: Pressure is mounting on ministers to reassure the public about the safety of hosting the final stages of Euro 2020 and other major events after almost 1,300 Scotland fans tested positive for Covid after travelling to London for a match. Data published by Public Health Scotland on Wednesday showed that 1,991 people who later tested positive had attended one or more Euro 2020 events during their infection period, a time when they "may have unknowingly transmitted their infection to others". Nearly two-thirds of cases reported travelling to London for a Euro 2020 event, including 397 people who were at Wembley for the England v Scotland fixture on 18 June - 15% of the 2,600 Scotland fans given tickets for the match, which ended in a goalless draw. The news came as 26,068 positive test results were reported across the UK on Wednesday, with 3,887 in Scotland - the highest daily total north of the border since the start of the pandemic. Downing Street stressed that case numbers were only one of the metrics the government was monitoring, however, as the vaccination programme continues to weaken the link with hospitalisations and deaths. But given strict 10-day self-isolation rules, the sharp increase in cases across the UK is already playing havoc with businesses and schools, as groups of staff and bubbles of pupils are forced out of workplaces and classrooms after coming into contact with a single coronavirus case. Read the full story from my colleagues Heather Stewart, Libby Brooks and Linda Geddes here: Cases of Covid-19 may be declining in North America but in most of Latin America and the Caribbean the end to the coronavirus pandemic "remains a distant future", the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) said on Wednesday. While infections in the United States, Canada and Mexico are falling, in Latin America and the Caribbean cases are rising and vaccination is lagging badly, Reuters reports. Only one in ten people have been fully vaccinated, which PAHO director Carissa Etienne called "an unacceptable situation." She said: While we are seeing some reprieve from the virus in countries in the Northern Hemisphere, for most countries in our region, the end remains a distant future. The regional health agency discouraged summer holiday travel in the Americas now that movement restrictions are being lifted as more people are vaccinated in the Northern Hemisphere and travel destinations, such as the Caribbean, reopen for tourists. Even people who have been vaccinated can become sick and spread Covid, Etienne said in a weekly briefing. She said: Given the significant gaps in vaccine coverage and the still imminent risk of infection, now may not be the ideal time for travel \* especially in places with active outbreaks or where hospital capacity may be limited. Noting that the hurricane season in the Caribbean is arriving at a time when outbreaks are worsening, Etienne urged countries to outfit hospitals and expand shelters to reduce the potential for transmission. Social distancing and proper ventilation become difficult during storms, she said. The highly transmissible Delta variant has already been detected in a dozen countries in the Americas, but so far community transmission has been limited, said PAHO viral disease advisor Jairo Mendez. However, it has been found in Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Peru, the United States and Mexico, where it has spread in Mexico City, according to PAHO. Given the presence of such variants, countries in the region should step up vigilance and consider the need to limit travel or even close borders, PAHO health emergencies director Ciro Ugarte said. According to a Reuters tally, there have been at least 37,441,000 reported infections and 1,272,000 confirmed deaths caused by Covid-19 in Latin America and the Caribbean so far, one third more than in Asia and Africa combined. In case you missed it, Vladimir Putin has for the first time said that he was inoculated with Russia's own Sputnik V vaccine as he gave a careful endorsement of the country's floundering campaign while distancing himself from tough new ***measures*** designed to pressure more Russians into taking the jabs. Putin has cut a mercurial figure during the pandemic, intrepidly donning a medical suit to visit a coronavirus hospital last March and then shunning public events for months, prompting ridicule that he was sheltering in a "bunker". He also declined to release photos or videos of his own vaccination, or give details of the vaccine, which the Kremlin reported took place in March. Journalists and others meeting Putin have still been required to quarantine for several weeks, fuelling speculation that he may not have received a jab. During a nationally televised Q&A on Wednesday, the Russian leader denied that he had faked his own vaccination. "I hope that most of this country's citizens understand that if I say I got the vaccine, then that's how it is," Putin said, adding that he and top military commanders of Russia's military had been given Sputnik V but had not said so initially in order to avoid giving it a competitive advantage in Russia. He also targeted widespread vaccine hesitancy by telling Russians that Sputnik V and other domestically made Russian vaccines were safe and that inoculation was the only way to end the coronavirus pandemic. Yet Putin also said he opposed mandatory vaccinations, said that the use of western vaccines like AstraZeneca and Pfizer had led to "tragic cases," and supported callers who said they had medical excuses not to be vaccinated. The remarks, part of a yearly show where Putin listens to Russians' questions and appeals, showed how the Kremlin leader is caught between Covid's resurgence in Russia and public opposition to vaccinations. Read the full story here: Foreign tourists visiting France will have to pay for Covid-19 tests starting from 7 July, government spokesman Gabriel Attal told Les Echos newspaper. "We have decided foreign tourists should pay for those tests, 49 for PCR tests and 29 for antigenic tests. This is about reciprocity as French people traveling abroad have to pay for those tests in most countries", Attal said. Regarding French citizens who prefer to be tested when needed - for travel or social outings - instead of being vaccinated, Attal said the government would consider making them pay for those tests once the summer vacation is over, Reuters reports. Just 5,000 Australians in disability care, less than one in five people, have been fully vaccinated against Covid-19 more than four months into the rollout, new data shows. The disability care industry has also warned some providers are again being forced to source their own vaccinations, rather than wait for commonwealth in-reach teams to turn up. The federal government placed disability care residents in the highest priority cohort for its vaccine program, but faced criticism when, without consultation, it pivoted all resources to vaccinating aged care. The World Bank is to make another $8bn in loans available for countries to finance the purchase of Covid vaccines, raising the total to $20bn, amid growing demand from developing countries, the institution's president David Malpass has said. The global development bank has seen a sharp increase in overall financing demand from developing countries - not just health-related expenditure - during the pandemic, the bank's managing director for operations, Axel van Trostenburg, said. He told reporters the World Bank had made nearly $100 billion in lending commitments since the outbreak of the crisis in early 2020, well above the normal level of just under $60 billion. High demand for financing was expected to continue well into 2022, he said. However, Reuters did not immediately report the terms of the loans. The World Bank also said it had already provided more than $4 billion for the purchase and deployment of Covid vaccines to 51 developing countries, half of which are in Africa, where vaccination rates are among the world's lowest. In a statement, the global development bank urged countries anticipating excess vaccine supplies in coming months to release surplus doses and options to developing countries with adequate distribution plans in place. The World Bank's vaccine financing package can be used by countries to buy vaccine doses through Covax, the new African vaccine acquisition task team or other sources. India's version of AstraZeneca's coronavirus vaccine is not authorised in the EU due to the possibility of "differences" with the original, Europe's drug regulator said after the African Union yesterday criticised as "inequitable" a decision not to include Covishield, the Indian-made vaccine used by the global Covax programme, on a list of approved vaccines for a digital certificate for travellers in the bloc. The prime minister of Portugal, Antonio Costa, went into isolation despite being fully vaccinated, after one of his aides tested positive amid a high in a new wave of infections blamed on the Delta variant. India's disaster management agency was ordered by the country's supreme court to establish guidelines for paying compensation to bereaved relatives of those who have died from Covid. Bangladesh will deploy soldiers tomorrow to enforce a strict lockdown amid a record spike in coronavirus cases driven by the Delta variant first detected in India, the government said. The Australian home affairs minister rejected calls to reduce caps on international arrivals amid outbreaks of the Delta variant, saying "we need to learn to live" with Covid. France ended most capacity limits imposed in April on restaurants, cinemas, stores and other public venues, although the ***measures*** were extended in parts of the southwest over the spread of the Delta variant as the doctor who heads president Emmanuel Macron's coronavirus advisory panel said a "fourth wave" of cases was likely this autumn. Vladimir Putin said for the first time that he was inoculated with Russia's own Sputnik V vaccine as he gave a careful endorsement of the country's floundering campaign while distancing himself from tough new ***measures*** designed to pressure more Russians into taking the jabs. Switzerland is to give 4m doses of AstraZeneca Covid-19 vaccine that it has reserved to the vaccine-sharing programme Covax, the government has said with the country's medical regulator, Swissmedic, yet to approve the shot, on grounds it has not received all necessary data from clinical trials. Brazil's president, Jair Bolsonaro, fired a health ministry official who reportedly asked for a bribe in a vaccine deal, the latest graft accusation to rock the government amid investigations of its pandemic response. Dozens of Italian prison guards beat unarmed inmates with truncheons and fists in the aftermath of a coronavirus-related protest last year, video footage captured on surveillance shows, with fifty-two people working in the prison network facing arrest or legal action in the case this week A UK vaccine advisor made a significant intervention to the debate over whether to inoculate children against Covid, saying "it is not immoral to think that they may be better protected by natural immunity generated through infection than by asking them to take the possible risk of a vaccine." Cases of Covid-19 are declining in North America, but in most of Latin America and the Caribbean an end to the pandemic "remains a distant future", the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) director Carissa Etienne said. Members of the US military who were vaccinated against Covid showed higher-than-expected rates of heart inflammation, although the condition was still extremely rare, according to a new study. Germany plans to buy some 204 million doses of Covid-19 vaccine for 2022, far more than the two each needed for its 84 million population, in order to have a comfortable buffer in case of mutations or a need for booster shots. A health ministry paper seen by Reuters said that the contract the European Union signed with Biontech and Pfizer for their mRNA-type vaccine covered Germany's needs next year in the best case, but the extra would provide added security. The paper said at least one other mRNA-type vaccine should be procured, as well as a vaccine using another technology, to help guard against production bottlenecks, Reuters reports. A UK vaccine advisor has made a significant intervention to the debate over whether to inoculate children, saying "it is not immoral to think that they may be better protected by natural immunity generated through infection than by asking them to take the possible risk of a vaccine." In comments which hold relevance around the world, Prof Robert Dingwall, a sociologist on the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation, said in a string of tweets that since teenagers were at an extremely low risk of Covid, "vaccines must be ***exceptionally*** safe" for there to be a significant benefit. The Times reports that the committee is set to produce recommendations on vaccinating children within the coming weeks but has continually delayed a decision, seeking further safety data. However, the paper said it understands it may be leaning towards recommending against jabs for teenagers. But Dingwall's comments are likely to ignite heated conversations. He said that "medicine cannot deliver immortality" and that it was "profoundly damaging to society to imply that it can". The critic of tough pandemic restrictions also suggested that there can be unintended and unforeseen consequences when humans rush to reshape ecosystems; with humans, viruses and bacteria forming an environment which has evolved over millennia. However, Stephen Griffin, associate professor of medicine at the University of Leeds told the Times that "it is immoral" to let infections "run riot" in children. Even that small proportion of kids who get severe disease is going to increase. That is a problem. We don't know the longer term consequences of this virus in children and that could be quite concerning. Long Covid for a child is incredibly damaging. If we have a partially vaccinated population and allow widespread circulation of the virus that is the recipe for variants that will start to evade our vaccines. Here's the full story on Vladimir Putin saying for the first time that he was inoculated with Russia's own Sputnik V vaccine as he gave a careful endorsement of the country's floundering campaign while distancing himself from tough new ***measures*** designed to pressure more Russians into taking the jabs. In related news, shares elsewhere around the world have today retreated from recent highs, as Asian markets grew jittery about a resurgence of Covid-19 cases and Western markets awaited Friday's US jobs report and what it might mean for monetary policy. Reuters reports that asset markets have been significantly buoyed over the past year by trillions of dollars of monetary and fiscal stimulus by central banks and governments around the world to mitigate their responses to the pandemic. Vaccination rollouts in some places have fuelled an economic recovery, and consumer confidence this month surged to 21-year-highs in Europe. While the Dow Jones Industrial Average rose 0.39%, and the S&P 500 gained 0.07%; the Nasdaq Composite dropped or 0.09%, the pan-European STOXX 600 index lost 0.77% and the German DAX fell 1.02%, along with London's FTSE 100 0.71% fall. London's FTSE 100 fell slightly today amid concerns that a recent jump in coronavirus infections could hinder the pace of economic growth, but it has nonetheless seen the fifth straight monthly gain. The FTSE 100 eased 0.7%, but reported its best monthly winning streak since 2016, according to Reuters. The index has gained 8.9% so far this year to stand just under 12% away from its record high. However, it has significantly underperformed against its European peers with the STOXX 600 hovering near its all-time high, as inflation concerns and rising Covid-19 infections hinder the recovery ***process***. "There is a sense of general unease at the moment as we're seeing a rise in the number of Delta variant cases, while we're just under three weeks away from what is supposed to be 'Freedom Day' for the UK," said Danni Hewson, analyst at AJ Bell. "Investors are just taking a look at the support mechanisms winding down," Hewson said, referring to business rates support and the furlough scheme. "Then wondering whether or not the economy really is going to open up and then trying to balance that with rising prices." Dixons Carphone jumped 5.9% after the electricals retailer reported a 34% rise in annual profit. Opioid addiction treatment maker Indivior Plc rose 6.4% to the top of the FTSE 250 index after it said its 2021 revenue and profit would be significantly above its previous outlook. India's version of AstraZeneca's coronavirus vaccine is not authorised in the EU due to the possibility of "differences" with the original, Europe's drug regulator has said. The African Union yesterday criticised as "inequitable" an EU decision not to include Covishield, the Indian-made vaccine used by the global Covax programme, on a list of approved vaccines for a digital certificate for travellers in the bloc. The European Medicines Agency (EMA) said in a statement to AFP: Even though it may use an analogous production technology to Vaxzevria [AstraZeneca's vaccine], Covishield as such is not currently approved under EU rules. This is because vaccines are biological products. Even tiny differences in the manufacturing conditions can result in differences in the final product, and EU law therefore requires the manufacturing sites and production ***process*** to be assessed and approved as part of the authorisation ***process***. Should we receive a marketing authorisation application for Covishield or should any change to the approved manufacturing sites for Vaxzevria be approved, we would communicate about it. The World Health Organization has however approved Covishield and lamented the fact that some countries were rejecting Covishield's use on vaccination passes. "This is a great pity because AstraZeneca-Covishield is exactly the same vaccine as AstraZeneca-Vaxzevria, which is accepted as proof of vaccination," said Richard Mihigo of the WHO Regional Office for Africa yesterday. "It is only that AstraZeneca-Covishield is manufactured and distributed in other parts of the world other than Europe." He urged EU countries to recognise Covishield on vaccine passes. The EMA statement said it was "not responsible for any decision regarding travelling into the EU", which is the responsibility of the European Commission and EU member states. People in some African nations have also complained about the lack of recognition for any of the widely used Chinese vaccines. Brazil's president, Jair Bolsonaro, has fired a health ministry official who reportedly asked for a bribe in a vaccine deal, the latest graft accusation to rock the government amid investigations of its pandemic response. With over half a million Covid-19 deaths and more new cases daily than any other country, anger is mounting in Brazil over missed opportunities to buy coronavirus vaccines. Accusations of corruption undercutting efforts have poured fuel on the fire, triggering new calls for Bolsonaro's impeachment. Yesterday, Brazil suspended a contract worth 1.6bn reais ($321m) for a vaccine from India's Bharat Biotech, following allegations of undue pressure within the ministry. Bharat and the government have denied wrongdoing. The UK has recorded a further 26,068 cases of Covid-19, the highest daily figure since 29 January, and 14 further deaths, official data shows. Daily cases have been rising for more than a month, but fatalities have remained low, with scientists saying the rapid vaccine rollout has weakened the link between infections and deaths. The UK recorded 20,479 cases the day before. The data showed that 84.9% of adults have had a first vaccine while 62.4% have had both. Cases of Covid-19 are declining in North America, but in most of Latin America and the Caribbean an end to the pandemic "remains a distant future", the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) director Carissa Etienne has said. While infections in the United States, Canada and Mexico are falling, in Latin America and the Caribbean just one in ten people have been fully vaccinated against Covd-19, "an unacceptable situation," she said in a briefing. Etienne warned that the hurricane season in the Caribbean is arriving at a time when outbreaks are worsening and she urged countries to outfit hospitals and expand shelters to reduce the potential for transmission, Reuters reports. The prime minister of Portugal, Antonio Costa, has gone into isolation despite being fully vaccinated, after one of his aides tested positive. It comes as authorities in the country reported more than 2,000 new cases of coronavirus in 24 hours, a high in a new wave of infections blamed on the Delta variant. There were 2,362 reported cases in the country of 10 million people, the highest level since mid-February. More than half were in the Lisbon region, official figures showed, with the numbers of hospitalised people also rising, AFP reports. Latest figures also show that the Delta variant, which was first detected in India, has become the dominant strain in Portugal. Hoping to halt the spread, the government has reimposed infection control ***measures*** including reducted opening hours for bars and restaurants in the worst-hit towns. There are weekend restrictions on travel between the Lisbon region and the rest of the country. Interesting piece here by Bloomberg columnist Andreas Kluth (paywall), a classical liberal "who treasures individual freedom" and sees three intertwined routes - the moral, the legal and the practical - in the complicated debate on whether vaccination against Covid should be mandatory. He himself got the jab as soon as possible. For our familiar vaccines, such as the measles, mumps and rubella jab children get in many countries, that case is easily made. A few of the new Covid vaccines, such as the mRNA shots of BioNTech/Pfizer and Moderna, should also clear the hurdle, although their youth still means that regulators like the US Food and Drug Administration have so far only given "emergency use authorization." Others, such as the AstraZeneca shot, have left people and regulators confused. Others yet, including the jabs hawked by Russia and China, are in my opinion simply too opaque about risk to justify coercion. Beyond the risk of a given vaccine, we also need to know whether it prevents the recipient only from getting sick or also from transmitting the virus. If the answer is the first, remember, we can't invoke the harm principle or the public good. There's also human nature to consider. New research based on surveys in Germany suggests that a vaccine mandate might send psychological signals that actually hinder overall compliance. People resent being manipulated, with either carrots or sticks, an effect known as "control aversion." Coercion also tends to cause "moral disengagement," making people who might have gotten jabbed for altruistic reasons tune out. The complexities of the debate mean that the choices facing policymakers won't get easier any time soon. Even lovers of freedom, like me, can agree that sometimes coercion is necessary to prevent harm. But what's permissible needn't always be wise. Our best shot for now is still to keep rooting for science, to stay ruthlessly transparent with the data, and to hope that people bare their arms because they want to. For my part, I got my jabs as soon as they became available. India's disaster management agency has been ordered by the country's supreme court to establish guidelines for paying compensation to bereaved relatives of those who have died from Covid. A public interest litigation had sought Rs400,000 ($5,380) in relief payments to every family that has lost a family member to the virus, the Financial Times reports. A bench of three judges gave the National Disaster Management Authority six weeks to prescribe "minimum standards for relief", while accusing the body of failures. It said "the national authority has failed to perform its statutory duty," according to Bloomberg. However, the federal government has opposed the compensation demand, claiming it cannot afford it. But the court reportedly said the disaster management body would be able to decide the amount of money after considering the economic situation and government priorities. The cancelling of San Francisco's Pride parade is a move that has been replicated in other cities across the world. There will be no parade in Britain's unofficial gay capital, Brighton, or in New York. In many cities, celebrations of the LGBTQ+ community will be toned down, often online, and, for the second year in a row, considerably less visible than usual. Pride organisers have made these decisions amid a pandemic that has placed LGBTQ+ people and communities under ***unprecedented*** pressure, be that socio-economic, psychological or political. In May 2020, a report by OutRight Action International, at the height of the first wave of Covid-19, warned that the LGBTQ+ community was likely to be disproportionately affected, particularly those living in countries where "stigma, discrimination, and criminalisation of same-sex relations or transgender identities prevail". Portugal is the latest country to require travellers to be double vaccinated in order to avoid quarantining for two weeks on arrival. Some have expressed concern that young people will be unable to travel to countries that older people who have been double jabbed will be able to. My colleague on the community team would like to hear form young people over the age 18 about their thoughts on double vaccinations and travelling abroad. Are you still waiting to receive your second jab? How do you feel about not being able to travel if you have not been fully vaccinated? The global economy is recovering from the pandemic at an uneven pace due to unequal access to vaccinations, the IMF's chief economist has warned. Well over a year on from the start of the pandemic, many countries are still battling the virus, particularly the increasingly dominant and highly infectious Delta variant. "Right now what we are seeing is highly unequal access to vaccinations, including therapeutics and diagnostics. Therefore, what we're seeing is a diverging recovery," International Monetary Fund chief economist Gita Gopinath said during a webinar at the annual meeting of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. "The number one issue is how do we get to a point where we have good coverage of populations in terms of vaccination rates everywhere in the world." Referencing surges in sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America, Gopinath said there were countries that will not have the required testing, personal protective equipment or oxygen to "survive this surge." The cost to the global economy of the tourism freeze caused by Covid-19 could reach $4tn (£2.9tn) by the end of this year, a UN body has said, with the varying pace of vaccine rollouts expected to cost developing nations and tourist centres particularly dear. Nations including Turkey and Ecuador will be among the hardest hit by the severe disruption to international tourism, with holiday favourites such as Spain, Greece and Portugal also badly affected. Pandemic-related losses have reached up to $2.4tn this year alone, according to a report by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (Unctad). The potential lost tourism-related income in 2021 alone is equivalent to the effect of switching off 85% of the UK economy, while projected losses over 2020 and 2021 could equate to removing Germany from the global economy for two years. There could soon be "two Americas", one where most people are vaccinated and another where there are low vaccination rates, top US health official Dr Anthony Fauci has warned. The US National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases chief and the top medical advisor to the president told CNN he is "very concerned" about a disparity between places with low and high vaccination rates When you have such a low level of vaccination superimposed upon a variant that has a high degree of efficiency of spread, what you are going to see among under-vaccinated regions - be that states, cities or counties - you're going to see these individual types of blips... It's almost like it's going to be two Americas. If you are vaccinated, you diminish dramatically your risk of getting infected and even more dramatically your risk of getting seriously ill. If you are not vaccinated, you are at considerable risk. CNN reports that 29.7% of the population is fully vaccinated in Mississippi, and that unvaccinated people have accounted for more than 90% of Covid-19 cases and deaths in the past month, according to Dr. Thomas Dobbs, the state health officer for the Mississippi Department of Public Health. Mississippi joins Alabama, Arkansas, Wyoming, and Louisiana in having less than 35% of residents fully vaccinated, with entrenched scepticism over vaccines in some communities and concerns that the jabs have not received full approval appearing to lead to significant resistance. Members of the US military who were vaccinated against Covid showed higher-than-expected rates of heart inflammation, although the condition was still extremely rare, according to a new study. Reuters reports that the study found that 23 previously healthy males with an average age of 25 complained of chest pain within four days of receiving a Covid-19 shot. The incident rate was higher than some previous estimates would have anticipated, it said. All the patients, who at the time of the study's publication had recovered or were recovering from myocarditis - an inflammation of the heart muscle - had received shots made by either Pfizer/BioNTech or Moderna. US health regulators last week added a warning to the literature that accompanies those mRNA vaccines to flag the rare risk of heart inflammation seen primarily in young males. But they said the benefit of the shots in preventing Covid-19 clearly continues to outweigh the risk. The study, which was published in the JAMA Cardiology medical journal, said 19 of the patients were current military members who had received their second vaccine dose. The others had either received one dose or were retired from the military. General population estimates would have predicted eight or fewer cases of myocarditis from the 436,000 male military members who received two Covid-19 shots, the study said. Dozens of Italian prison guards beat unarmed inmates with truncheons and fists in the aftermath of a coronavirus-related protest last year, video footage captured on surveillance shows. The video of the 6 April 2020 incident at the Santa Maria Capua Vetere prison north of Naples was published by Italian daily Domani today, prompting outrage. Prosecutors launched an investigation last year following complaints by prisoners of retaliatory beatings carried out over four hours the day after an inmate protest prompted by news that an inmate had tested positive for Covid-19, AFP reports. Fifty-two people working in the prison network faced arrest or legal action in the case this week, accused variously of torture, violence and abuse of office, with a total of over 110 people under investigation. In the more than six minutes of footage compiled by Domani, dozens of prison guards, many of them in helmets and carrying shields, can be seen setting upon inmates. Prisoners are seen covering their heads as they hurry through a human corridor of guards, receiving slaps on the head, kicks and beatings with truncheons as they pass. In other images, prisoners - some of them limping and in visible pain - can be seen climbing a stairway where guards on a landing slap them or beat them with their batons. The images also show an inmate in a wheelchair being hit on the back, and at least three men who have fallen to the ground being beaten and kicked, according to AFP. At least 150 inmates barricaded themselves inside their cells during the prison protest last year, according to news reports, nearly a month after a wave of riots in Italian prisons spurred by demands for Covid-19 tests and anger at the banning of family visits during the coronavirus lockdown. Text messages between guards revealed that the operation, which involved over 280 penitentiary police, was planned and retaliatory in nature, prosecutors said. The Australian home affairs minister has rejected calls to reduce caps on international arrivals amid outbreaks of the Delta variant, saying "we need to learn to live" with Covid. Leaders in Queensland, Victoria and Western Australia are calling on prime minister Scott Morrison to reduce passenger caps - of about 1,000 passengers entering Queensland and 3,000 coming to New South Wales, AAP reports. Home affairs minster Karen Andrews said the caps were not large and that Australia should resist more draconian ***measures***. "We need to learn to live and to work in the Covid environment in which we find ourselves," she said. "The first response should not be to close down our borders." Australian Industry Group chief executive Innes Willox said further limiting international arrivals would ignore critical skill shortages. "This would be take us in precisely the wrong direction," he said, according to AAP. Outbreaks of the contagious Delta variant have led authorities to put more than 12 million Australians into lockdown. WA premier Mark McGowan meanwhile believes the vast majority of people granted exemptions to travel overseas for work and study should not have been allowed to leave. "They should stay home while there is a pandemic running wild around the world," he said, calling for a tougher approach to granting permission to leave Between 25 March last year and 31 May this year, 156,507 Australian citizens and permanent residents were granted exemptions to leave Australia with 84,031 requests denied. Earlier this month, an Australian court rejected a challenge to the federal government's draconian power to prevent most citizens from leaving the country so that they don't bring Covid-19 home. Australia is alone among developed democracies in preventing its citizens and permanent residents from leaving the country except in "***exceptional*** circumstances" where they can demonstrate a "compelling reason". This has left most Australians stranded in their island nation since March 2020. The head of the UN's World Food Programme has warned there could be "***unprecedented*** famine of biblical proportions" in dozens of countries without further action to address food shortages. Speaking at a G20 event on humanitarian aid in Brindisi, Italy, WFP chief David Beasley said world leaders had stepped up last year with funds to help those already struggling when the coronavirus pandemic hit - but must now do so again. "We thought Covid would be in our rearview mirror by the end of 2020, only to see it recycled, with Delta and other variants taking place, devastating particularly and especially low-income and developing nations around the world who have been catastrophically smited by this perfect storm," he said. "These are not just numbers, these are not just statistics, these are people with real names, real lives, fragile and literally on the brink of starvation. If we don't address their needs, over the next six to nine months you could have ***unprecedented*** famine of biblical proportions, destabilisation of nations and mass migration. The simple solution is we need more support." Aid agencies say food shortages driven by conflict, climate change and economic shocks has been exacerbated by the crisis of the pandemic, AFP reports. Switzerland is to give 4m doses of AstraZeneca Covid-19 vaccine that it has reserved to the vaccine-sharing programme Covax, the government has said. Switzerland originally reserved 5.4m doses of AstraZeneca's vaccine, but the country's medical regulator, Swissmedic, has yet to approve the shot, on grounds it has not received all necessary data from clinical trials, Reuters reports. It is the latest example in a seemingly emerging trend of some countries seeking to offload jabs from the British-Swedish pharma giant. "Through the unequal distribution of vaccines we can expect that the pandemic will continue for a long time to come," the government said in a statement, seeking to play a small part in remedying the issue. Switzerland has ordered significantly more mRNA vaccines from Moderna and from Pfizer and its German partner BioNTech. "The Swiss federal government is concentrating on mRNA vaccines," it said. "These have proven themselves to be highly effective and tolerable." Thailand is to import nearly 4m doses of Moderna's mRNA coronavirus vaccine towards the end of this year and a further million in early 2022, for use by private hospitals. Reuters reports that Thailand's vaccinations strategy so far has relied heavily on the viral vector vaccine developed by Oxford University and AstraZeneca and Sinovac Biotech's inactivated Covid-19 vaccine. The government pharmaceutical organization in a statement said 3.9m doses of the Moderna vaccine would be delivered in the fourth quarter and 1.1m doses in the first quarter of 2022. The announcement comes as the Infectious Disease Association of Thailand (IDAT) urged prime minister Prayuth Chan-ocha to secure more mRNA vaccines to better contain the outbreak. "The vaccine procurement plan of 150m doses has a high proportion of Sinovac," the association said in a letter to Prayuth, citing that mRNA vaccines had a higher efficacy rate than that of Sinovac. Thailand has also ordered five million doses of Johnson & Johnson vaccines and 20m doses of the mRNA vaccine developed by Pfizer and BioNTech. The south-east Asian country today reported a new daily record of 53 coronavirus deaths, and 4,786 new infections. In related news, AFP reports that the wearable gadgets market has been booming as the pandemic led to greater interest in health monitoring amid working from home. While worldwide sales of smartphones slumped last year, a record 527 million wearables were sold in 2020, up from 384 million in 2019, according to research firm Strategy Analytics. It was the first time that global wearable sales topped half a billion and analysts expect the trend to continue, with the firm forecasting the devices will overtake smartphone sales by the end of the decade. Ear-worn devices such as earbuds, which can be used to make calls and listen to music, accounted for nearly two-thirds of global wearable sales last year as people working from home upgraded their headphones for video calling. Wristwear such as fitness trackers and smartwatches, which can monitor steps, the heart rate and even oxygen levels, accounted for 36% of worldwide wearable sales, as people paid more attention to their health during the pandemic and exercise moved outdoors since gyms were closed in many places. "Everybody is becoming much more health focused and wearables are a good device to assist with that," said Neil Mawston, an executive director at Strategy Analytics. British households built up their savings to the second highest level on record at the start of the year as the Covid-19 lockdown limited opportunities to spend, according to official figures. France has today ended most capacity limits imposed in April on restaurants, cinemas, stores and other public venues, although the ***measures*** were extended in parts of the southwest over the spread of the coronavirus Delta variant. The move came as the doctor who heads president Emmanuel Macron's coronavirus advisory panel said a "fourth wave" of cases was likely this autumn. In the southwestern Landes department, officials said the capacity limits would be extended to 6 July because of "weak collective immunity" in the area. Around 45% of new cases are being caused by the Delta variant, which was first detected in India and has been blamed for an increase in daily Covid deaths in Britain, AFP reports. Seven virus clusters have been discovered in businesses or retirement homes, Didier Couteaud of the regional health service in western France said during a video press conference. Elsewhere across France, events will no longer be limited to 1,000 people, whether indoors or outdoors, though participants will have to show proof of their Covid inoculation, a negative test or a recent infection. Professional sporting matches will no longer be limited to 5,000 people, though capacity limits may still be applied to the summer music festivals that traditionally attract huge crowds. The next stage in the lifting of restrictions will see nightclubs reopen on 9 July. Face masks remain required in public indoor spaces and in crowds outdoors. Bangladesh will deploy soldiers tomorrow to enforce a strict lockdown amid a record spike in coronavirus cases driven by the Delta variant first detected in India, the government has said. Most restrictions imposed as part of a strict lockdown introduced in April have since been lifted, but a record spike in cases this week of the highly contagious Delta variant has prompted the government to order a week of tight controls, Reuters reports. "No one will be allowed go out except in case of an emergency during this period," the government said in a statement, adding army troops alongside law-enforcement agencies would be deployed to enforce the lockdown. All offices and transportation will be shut during this period while factories, including the country's prime garment export sector, will be allowed to remain open if they follow health protocols, it said. Police have vowed to arrest if anyone comes out of their home without a valid reason. Tens of thousands of migrant workers left the capital, Dhaka, over the weekend amid a looming strict lockdown. Bangladesh sealed its border with India in April as a precaution against infection, although trade continues. Bangladesh has seen a record surge in cases this week, with 7,666 new cases reported on Tuesday as well as 112 fatalities. There have been 904,436 infections and 14,388 deaths reported in the country since the pandemic began. Bangladesh's vaccination drive suffered a blow after India stopped exports of the AstraZeneca shot in response to a record surge in domestic infections, with only three percent of its population of 170 million getting two doses. Three members of Singapore's Covid task force have laid out a proposed framework for a return to life as normal - scrapping lockdowns, mass contact tracing, and Covid case counting, while resuming large gatherings. In what would be a radical departure from the zero transmission model also seen elsewhere, stringent ***measures*** would be abandoned. The task force members say such policies are not sustainable in the long term. "The bad news is that Covid-19 may never go away. The good news is that it is possible to live normally with it in our midst," said Singapore's trade minister Gan Kim Yong, finance minister Lawrence Wong and health minister Ong Ye Kung, in a piece in the Straits Times last week. "We can turn the pandemic into something much less threatening, like influenza, hand, foot and mouth disease, or chickenpox, and get on with our lives." Titled "Living normally, with Covid-19", the piece said that with "vaccination, testing, treatment and social responsibility, it may mean that in the near future, when someone gets Covid-19, our response can be very different from now." CNN reports that Singapore is on track for two-thirds of its population to have received their first vaccine dose by early July, and aims to fully vaccinate that figure by 9 August. It said that Singapore is considered a success story in terms of controlling Covid, with strict border controls, enforced quarantines, effective contact tracing, and rules on social gatherings and mask wearing. The city-state of 5.7 million people averaged about 18 cases a day in the past month and has recorded just 36 deaths throughout the pandemic, according to Johns Hopkins University. Brazil saw a fall in life expectancy by 1.3 years last year amid the pandemic, returning to 2014 levels, with that figure continuing to widen slightly, according to a new report in the journal Nature Medicine. The New York Times reports that Brazil has reported more than 514,000 deaths from Covid-19, a reported death toll surpassed only by that in the US which has lost more than 604,000 people. The study said that between 1945 and 2020, life expectancy in Brazil increased from 45.5 years to 76.7 years, an average of about five months per year, but the setbacks have reverted the country to the levels of seven years ago. Marcia Castro, chair of the Department of Global Health and Population at Harvard, the lead author of the study, estimated along with her fellow researchers that the resulting decline in life expectancy for this year, based on the death toll recorded in the first four months of 2021, would be about 1.78 years. When intense shocks like a pandemic or war occur, life expectancy drops, but it often rebounds quickly. This was the case with the 1918 influenza pandemic in the US, when [life expectancy at birth] in 1919 was higher than in 1917, likely due, in part, to selective mortality of individuals with tuberculosis. We argue that, in the case of COVID-19 in Brazil, the rebound will not happen in 2021, and the pre-pandemic trajectory of annual gains in [life expectancy at birth] will likely slow down. States in the Amazon region, including Amazonas, Rondônia, Roraima and Mato Grosso, experienced the steepest declines in life expectancy last year. The Associated Press has this dispatch from a prison in Florida, reporting that there are few suggestions that US correctional institutions have made significant reforms and changes to better deal with future waves of Covid infection after an estimated half a million people in prisons contracted the virus and 3,000 died. Derrick Johnson had a makeshift mask. He had the spray bottle of bleach and extra soap that corrections officers provided. But he still spent every day crammed in a unit with 63 other men in a Florida prison, crowding into hallways on their way to meals and sleeping feet from one another at night. As the coronavirus ravaged the Everglades Correctional Institution, Johnson was surrounded by the sounds of coughing and requests for Tylenol. And while he thought a lot of the prison's policies were ineffective at protecting prisoners, he also wondered if that was the best the facility could do. "Prison is not built to compete with a pandemic," said Johnson, who was released in December. "The pandemic's gonna win every time." With crowded conditions, notoriously substandard medical care and constantly shifting populations, prisons were ill-equipped to handle the highly contagious virus, which killed nearly 3,000 prisoners and staff. Corrections systems responded with inconsistent policies, struggling to contain the virus amid understaffing and overcrowding. At its peak in mid-December, more than 25,000 prisoners tested positive in a single week. But in recent months, infections behind bars nationwide have slowed to a few hundred new cases each week, and many prisons have eased what restrictions they had in place, including mask-wearing, visitors and other movement in and out, going back to business as usual. It's a critical moment, with new coronavirus cases low but the threat of infection looming as new variants spread around the world, said Dr David Sears, an infectious-disease specialist and correctional health consultant. "The medical community, prison leadership and society at large have learned so much about Covid in a short period of time," Sears said. "We need to take these lessons and make sure that the things we've learned after a lot of real human suffering are not in vain." According to the data collected by The Marshall Project and the AP, about three in 10 people in state and federal prisons were infected with the virus. But correctional health experts widely agree that this number is an undercount. "A great many of the people who ever had Covid, they were never tested," said Dr Homer Venters, a former chief medical officer of the New York City jail system who has inspected health conditions in prisons around the country over the last year. "In most prisons it ran through these places like wildfire. People were never tested." Even when facilities did conduct tests, they still allowed prisoners who tested positive to come in contact with others. But many prisons simply lack the space needed to adequately isolate sick prisoners. There are structural and logistical changes prisons could make, such as upgrading ventilation systems and creating surge capacity for staff and health care workers. But the most effective approach, Sears said, is to drastically reduce prison populations. Hello and greetings to everyone reading, wherever you are the in the world. Mattha Busby here to take you through the next few hours of global Covid developments. Thanks to my colleagues for covering the blog up until now. Please feel free to drop me a line on Twitter or message me via email ([*mattha.busby.freelance@guardian.co.uk*](mailto:mattha.busby.freelance@guardian.co.uk)) with any tips or thoughts on our coverage. Vladimir Putin - who received the Russian Sputnik vaccine earlier this year (see entry at 10.39) - has said he is opposed to mandatory vaccinations in Russia despite a surge in coronavirus infections in the country. "I do not support mandatory vaccinations," Putin said on a phone-in broadcast on television, according to the AFP news agency. Russia reported 669 coronavirus deaths over the past 24 hours, a record number of fatalities for the second day in a row. One of the pandemic hotspots is the city of St Petersburg, which is due to host a Euro 2020 quarter-final on Friday in front of thousands of fans, many of them flying in from abroad for the match. Cambodia has reported record daily rises in coronavirus deaths and cases, reaching what its government called the "red line" in its biggest outbreak so far. Reuters reports that the country reported 27 deaths from Covid-19 and 1,130 cases on Wednesday. Cambodia successfully contained its outbreaks through last year and had among the world's smallest caseloads, but it has been battling to control the spread since its detection of a highly transmissible variant late in February. "We are now at the red line for Covid-19 virus transmission in the country. Everyone must act responsibly together in order to suppress virus transmission now," Or Vandine, secretary of state and health ministry spokeswoman said in a tweet. "We do not want to pass the red line which will require lockdown again," she said. The record numbers took the overall cases to 50,385 and deaths total to 602. The North Korean leader, Kim Jong-un, has sacked several senior party officials over a "grave" coronavirus incident that had threatened public safety, fuelling speculation that the coronavirus has breached the country's defences. The state-run KCNA news agency quoted Kim as telling a meeting of the ruling party's politburo that: "In neglecting important decisions by the party that called for organisational, material and science and technological ***measures*** to support prolonged anti-epidemic work in face of a global health crisis, the officials in charge have caused a grave incident that created a huge crisis for the safety of the country and its people." Thailand reported a record 53 Covid-19 fatalities on Wednesday and 4,786 infections, as the country struggles to contain its most severe outbreak since the start of the pandemic. The government has stopped short of imposing a full lockdown, but introduced new restrictions this week. Russia reported 669 coronavirus-related deaths nationwide, the most confirmed in a single day since the pandemic began, amid a surge in cases that authorities blame on the Delta variant. The government coronavirus taskforce also confirmed 21,042 new Covid-19 cases in the last 24 hours. Vladimir Putin said this morning that he had received Russia's Sputnik V vaccine earlier this year. He had previously declined to disclose which vaccine he had taken. Japan is considering an extension of its coronavirus prevention ***measures*** in Tokyo and other areas by two weeks to a month, Japanese media said, with less than a month to go until the Tokyo Summer Olympics are set to open. South Korea's capital, Seoul, and its neighbouring regions will delay by a week the relaxation of social distancing rules due to a sudden increase in Covid cases. England fans are being warned against trying to travel to Rome for the Euro 2020 quarter final match with Ukraine. Current restrictions require visitors from the UK to quarantine for five days upon arrival. Malta, the Balearic islands and parts of the Caribbean were moved on to England's "green list" from 4am this morning. The outsourcing company Serco predicts its profits will jump 50% during the first half of the year because of its continued work on Covid-19 contracts for various governments, including the UK's test-and-trace service. France is likely to have a fourth wave of the virus, due to a resurgence of cases caused by the Delta variant, said Prof Jean-François Delfraissy, the French government's leading scientific adviser. Tunisia has extended curfew hours to try and stop the rapid spread of coronavirus as it recorded a daily record number of cases. Malaysia says it will receive 1m AstraZeneca vaccines donated by Japan tomorrow, and 1m Pfizer doses on Friday donated by the US. China's Clover Biopharmaceuticals has announced an advance purchase agreement to supply up to 414m doses of its Covid-19 vaccine candidate through the global vaccine sharing scheme Covax. Brazil is to suspend its $324m Indian vaccine contract that has mired President Jair Bolsonaro in accusations of irregularities. Romania is to sell 1.7m excess doses of the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine to Denmark because it was unable to use them within its own population due to vaccine hesitancy. In Australia, a number of state governments have directly criticised the commonwealth's new position on the AstraZeneca vaccine, with Queensland saying that it does "not want under-40s to get AstraZeneca" and Victoria accusing Scott Morrison of creating unnecessary confusion. The Australian state of Queensland has just eight days of the Pfizer coronavirus vaccine left. The state's health minister, Dr Yvette D'ath, said the federal government had denied Queensland's request for more doses of the Pfizer vaccine. Also in Australia, Aboriginal organisations have expressed frustration at the Northern Territory government's "flawed" pandemic response, demanding it do more to accommodate hundreds of Aboriginal people sleeping rough around town centres they say are at risk of Covid-19. Although still quite low, the number of Indonesian children contracting the coronavirus has almost tripled since May, with infant deaths from Covid rising sharply as the country suffers its most severe wave of infections so far, a senior paediatrician has said. Indonesia has been hit by a surge in cases this month, with new records on six days since 21 June including a daily high of over 21,807 today, putting pressure on the government to impose tighter ***measures***. Dr Aman Pulungan, head of Indonesia's paediatric society, said weekly child deaths from Covid rose to 24 last week from 13 in the previous week, many under five years old. That was a larger rate of increase than the overall rise in Covid deaths from 1,783 to 2,476 fatalities nationwide over the same period. Aman said infections among minors were rising fast. Kate Lamb reports for Reuters that the percentage of overall cases that were under 18 years of age has risen to 12.6% in June compared with 5% in July last year, according to official data, although Aman noted children were now being tested more. President Joko Widodo this week announced that authorities had given a green light for children age 12 to 17 to be inoculated with the Sinovac vaccine. Aman said paediatricians were already seeing cases of "long Covid" - debilitating and lingering symptoms months after infection - among Indonesian children. He believed the rising infections among children was more likely pandemic fatigue and lack of knowledge than the impact of more transmissible variants. "It's not the Delta variant, but the system," he said. "Less testing, less tracing. And people still don't think that children can suffer and die from Covid. Awareness is still low." The outsourcing company Serco predicts its profits will jump 50% during the first half of the year because of its continued work on Covid-19 contracts for various governments, including the UK's test-and-trace service. Serco runs large parts of the UK's largely privatised test-and-trace service, which is labelled NHS test and trace. The firm runs a quarter of Covid-19 testing sites and half the tier 3 contact tracers, who are mostly required to phone the contacts of people who have tested positive. Serco's appointment to run parts of the UK's test-and-trace system has proved controversial and the firm has drawn criticism for the decision to pay £17m in dividends to investors, partly funded by its pandemic profits. Read more of Joanna Partridge's report here: Serco expects 50% jump in profits on back of Covid contracts President Vladimir Putin said this morning that he had received Russia's Sputnik V vaccine against Covid earlier this year. Reuters report that he had previously declined to disclose which vaccine he had taken. Putin, 68, received two vaccine shots against Covid in March and April, the Kremlin has said. Authorities did not publish video footage of him being inoculated. China's Clover Biopharmaceuticals has announced an advance purchase agreement to supply up to 414m doses of its Covid-19 vaccine candidate through the global vaccine sharing scheme Covax. The firm said it will supply an initial 64m, pending an emergency use listing from the World Health Organization (WHO) of its vaccine candidate. Reuters report that the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization (Gavi), which leads the Covax scheme alongside the WHO, has options for an additional 350m doses in 2022, Clover said. South Korea's capital, Seoul, and its neighbouring regions will delay by a week the relaxation of social distancing rules due to a sudden increase in Covid cases, authorities said today. Sangmi Cha reports for Reuters from Seoul that the government had said it would relax social distancing and allow private gatherings of up to six people in the greater Seoul area, from the current four, starting 1 July as the country's inoculation drive has been picking up speed. While the number of daily new infections have remained below 700 since early this month, South Korea reported 794 new coronavirus cases on Tuesday, according to the Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency (KDCA). Of the 759 new locally transmitted cases, 631 or 83% were from the greater Seoul area, Yoon Tae-ho, a senior health ministry official, told a briefing. The cases, including the more transmissible Delta variants, were found in universities, workplaces and restaurants in the metropolitan area, Yoon said. Application of the revised social distancing in the current situation of "severe and critical crisis" may lead to further confusion and more transmission, Seoul city said in a statement. Experts said the announced relaxing of restrictions, including longer operation hours for pubs and easing of the private gatherings ban, may have sent the wrong signal to the public and health authorities called on the public for caution. South Korea has inoculated close to 30% of its 52 million population with at least one dose of Covid vaccine, putting it on track to meet a target of 70% by September. Russia reported 669 coronavirus-related deaths nationwide on Wednesday, the most confirmed in a single day since the pandemic began, amid a surge in cases that authorities blame on the Delta variant. Reuters notes that the government coronavirus taskforce also confirmed 21,042 new Covid-19 cases in the last 24 hours, including 5,823 in Moscow Andrew Sparrow has the UK live blog for the day, which will be covering major UK Covid lines as well. I'll be carrying on here with international coronavirus news. A little bit more on the context of North Korea and Covid here from AFP, who point out that Pyongyang's coronavirus defence has come at a high price. Ever since the pandemic began, North Korean state media have highlighted anti-coronavirus ***measures*** and officials have exhorted citizens to remain vigilant. At a military parade in October, Kim Jong-un himself tearfully thanked his people for their efforts and said North Korea had not seen a single case of the "evil virus", although analysts have long doubted the assertion. Its self-imposed and strictly enforced blockade has left it more isolated than ever: trade with Beijing - its economic lifeline - slowed to a trickle while all international aid workers have left. Several UN relief groups confirmed to AFP that the Needs and Priorities document - a key report that summarises the humanitarian situation in the country and forms the basis of UN appeals - will not be published this year. And this month, Pyongyang admitted it was tackling a food crisis, sounding the alarm in a nation with a moribund ***agricultural*** sector that has long struggled to feed itself. Earlier, Kim warned his people to prepare for the "worst-ever situation". Pyongyang has been looking to shore up loyalty to the authorities, with state television last week showing a resident of the capital expressing concern and saying everyone was "heartbroken" over the "emaciated" condition of Kim, who has lost significant weight recently. Analysts say Pyongyang is using Kim's appearance as a way to glorify him by portraying him as a "devoted, hardworking" leader as the country struggles to tackle its food crisis and other challenges. Justin Murray's report for us can be read in full here: North Korea Covid-19 outbreak fears after Kim Jong-un warns of 'huge crisis' in 'antivirus fight' I've got to be honest with you, at this time of day I'm normally bringing you lots of quotes from government ministers in the UK about Covid from the morning media round, but pretty much every TV station or radio channel I've switched on has been talking wall-to-wall about England-Germany. It's relentless. PA Media, though, is carrying some quotes from the domestic science community, and this morning they are highly critical of the UK government. On Times Radio, Prof Stephen Reicher, from the University of St Andrews and a member of the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (Sage) subcommittee on behavioural science, has warned the country was in danger of repeating last summer's mistakes. My fear is that we're on line to repeat the mistakes of last summer - if you remember, the prime minister told us it was our patriotic duty to go to the pub, that people should go to work or they might lose their jobs, we had eat out to help out. The consequence was we never got infections low enough to be able to deal with the disease and so when conditions changed in the autumn, when schools went back and people went back to work and universities went back and the weather got worse and we went inside, so infections spiked. And I think this time round, we should learn from that and we should get infections low to a point where we're in a much better place in the autumn, where we don't have to reimpose restrictions. So I think the real question is how can we do that without inconveniencing people too much? It seems to me that if we got right the basic public health moves to suppress infection, we wouldn't be talking about a high reservoir of infection which can then spike very quickly when conditions change. Deenan Pillay, professor of virology at University College London, who is also a member of Sage, has been on LBC radio, and called into question changes in travel rules that will allow business executives from large companies to skip quarantine. He said: Scientifically, of course, the virus does not distinguish between chief executive and anyone else in terms of transmission. Behaviourally, this just adds to the variation and people feeling why should they stick to the rules? There's a social fairness issue as well - I know many colleagues who are healthcare workers who have been working for more than a year flat out, desperate to go away on holiday, but cannot do so because they have to quarantine on coming back. So on all those bases, it does not make sense to me whilst we've got the regulations that apply to everyone. The Government has made it very clear that they expect to open up the economy and reduce all of the constraints on 19 July, but we just need to think back a few months to the delay in putting in limits to travel from India ... and that delay for political reasons did lead to this import of the Delta variant, which, as we all know has led to mayhem within the UK - children being off school and increasing infection rates. In Australia, Aboriginal organisations have expressed frustration at the Northern Territory government's "flawed" pandemic response, demanding it do more to accommodate hundreds of Aboriginal people sleeping rough around town centres they say are at risk of Covid-19. Both Darwin and Alice Springs were in lockdown amid concerns about the significant risk posed to Aboriginal communities. The CEO of the Danila Dilba Aboriginal health service, Olga Havnen, said the lack of support for homeless people created a "ridiculous situation". She said a senior doctor at the clinic spent four hours unsuccessfully trying to find emergency accommodation for a patient who had just had a Covid test. "The pandemic response plan doesn't include any provision for housing people who may be homeless or visitors to town," Havnen said. "Here we are on day four of a lockdown, and they're only just sorting out the arrangements that might be made available for Aboriginal people, particularly visitors and rough sleepers who might need a Covid test, and who will need to self-isolate. "Who else in the community gets so studiously ignored under these sorts of circumstances? It's either gross incompetence, maladministration or straight out racism. Or probably, a combination of all three," Havnen said. Read more of Lorena Allam's report here: Northern Territory urged to accommodate homeless Aboriginal people during Covid lockdown France is likely to have a fourth wave of the virus, due to a resurgence of cases caused by the Delta variant, said the French government's leading scientific adviser, Prof Jean-François Delfraissy, this morning. Nevertheless, Delfraissy added that the rollout of vaccines would help mitigate the effect of this new wave of the virus, which many medical experts think could hit France by September or October. "I think we will have a fourth wave, but it will be much more moderate than the previous three waves because the level of vaccinations is different compared to before," Delfraissy told France Info radio. Reuters report that the French epidemiologist Arnaud Fontanet, who also advises the government on scientific matters, told a television programme that he too expected France's Covid infection numbers to rise again in September or October. "It was a dangerous, false sense of security. Now a tragedy is unfolding," - that's Dr Johannes Marisa, president of the Medical and Dental Private Practitioners of Zimbabwe Association in Harare, who spoke to Associated Press as part of a report into Covid's rising impact across Africa. AP reports that the delta variant has now been detected in at least 14 African countries including Congo, Mozambique, Namibia, Uganda, South Africa and Zimbabwe, and not just in the cities. Early in the pandemic many rural inhabitants had dismissed Covid as an urban problem. In Zimbabwe, three of the four districts under strict lockdown and declared as centres of the outbreak are in the predominantly rural Mashonaland West province, which recorded over half of the 801 cases reported last weekend. Other hot spots also are largely rural, a first for this country. "We are going to see a lot of deaths, especially arising from rural areas. Covid is now coming from the rural areas," said Marisa, attributing the spike to "a high degree of complacency", a lack of information and few vaccinations, with urban areas prioritised. The virus can also spread at funerals when city dwellers return to visit rural relatives. "I was at a funeral in a rural area recently and people were surprised to see me wearing a mask," he said. Rural areas are ill-equipped to deal with the surge, and urban health care facilities are under strain in treating an increasing number of people from the countryside. Zimbabwe's major referral hospital, Parirenyatwa in Harare, is prioritising beds for Covid patients. Rural residents are finding it difficult to get vaccinated because of weak public health systems and vaccine distribution problems. Only 1% of Africa's 1.3 billion people have been vaccinated, according to the WHO and the Africa Centers for Disease Control. In Australia, a number of state governments have directly criticised the commonwealth's new position on the AstraZeneca vaccine, with Queensland saying that it does "not want under-40s to get AstraZeneca" and Victoria accusing Scott Morrison of creating unnecessary confusion. In a series of press conferences on Wednesday, Queensland, Victoria, New South Wales and Western Australia all distanced themselves from the prime minister's suggestion that people aged under 40 should approach GPs for the AstraZeneca dose. Queensland and Victoria were more strident in their comments, explicitly criticising the commonwealth's new approach, while NSW premier Gladys Berejiklian said simply that the health advice remained that Pfizer was preferred for under-60s. In an explosive press conference in Brisbane, Queensland chief health officer Dr Jeannette Young said the state would stick with the expert advice from Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (Atagi) that Pfizer was preferred for those under 60. "I do not want under-40s to get AstraZeneca," she said. "I don't want an 18-year-old in Queensland dying from a clotting illness who, if they got Covid, probably wouldn't die. We've had very few deaths due to Covid-19 in Australia in people under the age of 50, and wouldn't it be terrible that our first 18-year-old in Queensland who dies related to this pandemic died because of the vaccine?" The federal health minister, Greg Hunt, insisted there had been "no change" to the medical advice, which he described as "clear", and suggested the government's new position was in line with the Atagi position. Read more of Christopher Knaus' report here: Rift between states and Morrison government over AstraZeneca vaccine for under-40s grows A quick Reuters snap that Malaysia says it will receive 1m AstraZeneca vaccines donated by Japan tomorrow. Science minister Khairy Jamaluddin confirmed the move to reporters this morning, and also said that Malaysia country will receive another 1m doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine donated by the US on Friday. Anne-Marie Trevelyan, the UK's minister for climate change, has been doing the media round in the UK this morning. She's been asked on Sky News whether the government should consider stopping publishing daily coronavirus case numbers once there is a "return to normal" on 19 July - for England at least. She said: I think for as long as there is that intense testing regime that we will need to continue to be able to manage our day-to-day lives and make sure that we are looking after each other, there will be that substantial data set to share. Whether it's published on the front page of a newspaper everyday, or whether it's something that those who are monitoring and making sure that they're looking after us have at their fingertips will no doubt be set out by the Department of Health in due course. A lot of England football fans will have woken up this morning wondering if they'll be able to get a ticket for England-Ukraine at Euro 2020 in Rome on Saturday. The answer is that you probably can't get to Rome anyway - well, not legally. Tess de la Mare for PA media sets out the rules for travel, noting that you have to have proof of a negative coronavirus test taken in the 48 hours before you travel. UK passengers must fill in one of the European Union's passenger locator forms, and then spend five days in isolation. So even if you'd had a test a couple of days ago and get a flight this morning, the earliest you would be out would be Sunday - subject to a second Covid-19 test - meaning you will probably be watching the game from a hotel room anyway. The exception is if you are a member of transport crew, or can prove that you are in Italy for "work, health or emergency", or of course, if you happen to be an England supporter who lives in Italy already. None of these restrictions would have applied to fans heading from Germany to Rome if the Germans had won the match - as part of the EU digital Covid-19 certificate scheme they would not have had to do the quarantine. There's some response in India to the news that Brazil is suspending a vaccine contract. The deal to buy 20m doses of Bharat Biotech's Covaxin shot has become a headache for Brazil's president Jair Bolsonaro after whistleblowers went public with concerns over irregularities. One health ministry official said he personally alerted the president about his concerns. Reuters are now carrying the news that India's Bharat Biotech has said it followed a "step-by-step" approach for the regulatory approval and supply contract of its Covid-19 vaccine in Brazil, and that it has not received advance payments from the Brazilian health ministry. Good morning, it is Martin Belam here in London. If you arrived in England today from Malta, the Balearic islands and parts of the Caribbean, and your flight landed after 4am, then the new "green list" applies to you and you don't have to self-isolate for 10 days. That doesn't mean your trip is hurdle free. The "green list" rules state that: Before you travel to England you must, take a Covid test, book and pay for a day 2 Covid test in advance, and complete a passenger locator form. On arrival in England you must take that Covid test on or before day 2 after you arrive. Children aged 4 and under do not need to take this test and you do not need to quarantine unless the test result is positive. And an additional word of caution for those planning trips. Aside from Malta, the countries are all also on the "green watch list", which means that they are, according to the government, "at risk of moving from green to amber". Japan is considering an extension of its coronavirus prevention ***measures*** in Tokyo and other areas by two weeks to a month, Japanese media said, with less than a month to go until the Tokyo Summer Olympics are set to open. Reuters: the Japanese capital and other areas are currently under a 'quasi' state of emergency set to be lifted on July 12, but a recent uptick in coronavirus cases has officials concerned and could affect the number of spectators allowed in to Olympics venues. According to the Mainichi Shimbun daily, the government is considering extending the ***measures*** by two to four weeks, a period that would overlap with the Olympics, already delayed a year, that open on 23 July. The Australian state of Queensland has just eight days of the Pfizer coronavirus vaccine left, authorities warned on Wednesday, as confusion over who should receive the AstraZeneca jab continued and outbreaks across the country grew. The state's health minister, Dr Yvette D'ath, said the federal government had denied Queensland's request for more doses of the Pfizer vaccine, despite having given another state, Victoria, 100,000 doses three weeks ago. "So we are getting to that point that we'll have to start prioritising only second doses if the commonwealth do not have any vaccine left," she said. "And they need to tell us. Is what they gave Victoria the end of it? Have we only got what is allocate and no contingency stock left until that big delivery in October? Because we all need to know." Large parts of Queensland have begun a snap three-day lockdown, triggered by an unvaccinated Covid-positive hospital worker who travelled between Brisbane and north Queensland: Thailand reported a record 53 Covid-19 fatalities on Wednesday and 4,786 infections, as the country struggles to contain its most severe outbreak since the start of the pandemic. Thailand's third wave began in April, when cases were linked to bars and clubs in Bangkok. Since then, the virus has spread rapidly inside prisons, construction sites, factories and crowded areas of the capital. The government has stopped short of imposing a full lockdown, but introduced new restrictions this week. On Monday, hundreds of construction sites in Bangkok and surrounding provinces were sealed off, with workers forced to stay inside for 30 days. Rights groups have warned that people are being trapped in squalid conditions, without sufficient food or access to medical care. Some were reportedly dumped on the side of the road by employers, while trucks were also seen ferrying workers away from sites before the movement restrictions were imposed. It's feared this exodus could spread the virus more widely across the country. Other restrictions have also been introduced, including a ban on dining in restaurants and on gatherings of more than 20 people in the capital and other high risk areas. The recent wave is placing immense pressure on hospitals in Bangkok, which have reported shortages of beds for severely ill patients. Thailand's vaccination rollout has been slow, and hindered by supply shortages. So far, less than 4% are fully vaccinated, while less than 10% have had at least one dose. The North Korean leader, Kim Jong-un, has sacked several senior party officials over a "grave" coronavirus incident that had threatened public safety, fuelling speculation that the coronavirus has breached the country's defences. "In neglecting important decisions by the party that called for organisational, material and science and technological ***measures*** to support prolonged anti-epidemic work in face of a global health crisis, the officials in charge have caused a grave incident that created a huge crisis for the safety of the country and its people," the state-run KCNA news agency quoted Kim as telling a meeting of the ruling party's politburo. KCNA did not explain the nature of the transgressions, but analysts believe Kim's outburst indicate North Korea is no longer free of Covid-19: Hello and welcome to today's live coverage of the coronavirus pandemic. Thailand reported on Wednesday 53 new deaths from the coronavirus, bringing the total number of fatalities to 2,023 since the pandemic started last year. The country's Covid taskforce also reported 4,786 new coronavirus cases, taking the total number of infections to 259,301. Meanwhile North Korean leader Kim Jong-un has said failures in anti-epidemic work have led to an unspecified "grave incident" that has put the safety of the country and people at risk, state media reported. Here are the key developments from the last few hours: Tunisia has extended curfew hours to try and stop the rapid spread of coronavirus as it recorded a daily record number of cases. Maree Todd, Scotland's minister for public health, has tested positive for coronavirus. Announcing the news on Twitter tonight, the SNP MSP for Caithness, Sutherland and Ross said she is self-isolating after testing positive today but has not had any symptoms. Brazil is to suspend its $324m Indian vaccine contract that has mired President Jair Bolsonaro in accusations of irregularities. Romania is to sell 1.7m excess doses of the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine to Denmark because it was unable to use them within its own population due to vaccine hesitancy. Guatemala has demanded its money back from Russia after it failed to deliver paid-for vaccines. Guatemalan health minister Amelia Flores has said the government has not received its promised Sputnik V vaccines.82508falsefalseNicola Slawson (now); Mattha Busby, Alex Mistlin, Martin Belam and Helen Sullivan (earlier)Dense crowds at the annual Gay Pride march in Paris, Saturday, 26 June 2021.Protesters hold signs at a rally to bring awareness to the conditions inside the Marion Correctional Institution in Ohio on 2 May 2020, as it became the most intensely infected institution across the country, with more than 80% of its nearly 2,500 inmates, and 175 staff on top of that, testing positive for Covid-19.French immunologist Jean-Francois Delfraissy in September last year.

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[***LEGISLATIVE SESSION; Congressional Record Vol. 167, No. 139 (Senate - August 04, 2021)***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:639K-7BY1-JDG9-Y1M2-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

Washington: The Library of Congress, The Government of USA has issued the following house proceeding:

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of H.R 3684, which the clerk will report. The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows: A bill (H.R 3684) to authorize funds for Federal-aid highways, highway safety programs, and transit programs, and for other purposes. Pending: Schumer (for Sinema) amendment No. 2137, in the nature of a substitute. Carper-Capito amendment No. 2131 (to amendment No. 2137), to strike a definition. Carper (for Johnson) amendment No. 2245 (to amendment No. 2137), to prohibit the cancellation of contracts for physical barriers and other border security ***measures*** for which funds already have been obligated and for which penalties will be incurred in the case of such cancellation and prohibiting the use of funds for payment of such penalties. Recognition of the Majority Leader The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Democratic leader is recognized. Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that following Senator Kelly's maiden speech, that Senators Johnson, Peters, and Carper be permitted to speak for up to 5 minutes each prior to the start of the vote. The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered. H.R 3684 Mr. President, for information of the Senators, the vote scheduled at 12:15 will likely begin closer to 12:30 p.m As you have seen, as America has seen, the Senate is moving full steam ahead on the bipartisan infrastructure bill. Since the legislative text of the bill was finalized, the Senate has considered eight amendments. Five amendments were led by Senators from the Republican minority, and seven amendments have received rollcall votes. One amendment offered by the [[Page S5792]] uncommon pairing of Senators Warnock and Cruz was adopted yesterday by voice vote. Miracles happen even here in the Senate. So the Senate is making great progress on amendments, and we are going to make further progress very soon. While the specific number of additional amendments has yet to be agreed to, I believe we can consider another substantial tranche on the floor today. Senators should expect multiple rollcall votes this afternoon. Eviction Moratorium Mr. President, yesterday afternoon, millions of American families were able to breathe a sigh of relief as the Biden administration announced an extension of the eviction moratorium that expired last month. According to the CDC, the new ban on evictions will apply for 60 days across regions of the country that are experiencing high levels of COVID infections. In total, roughly 90 percent of American renters--90 percent--will be protected by this order. That is what the head of the CDC told me yesterday. There are so many individuals who helped make this happen. First, I applaud the President--President Biden--and the CDC for taking action to protect American families. I want to commend Speaker Pelosi. She and I worked closely together to get this done from our first conversations with the President at the White House on Thursday, on through the weekend and the beginning of this week. But I also want to recognize the amazing courage of my colleagues, including Representatives Ocasio-Cortez, Jones, and Gomez and, above all, Representative Cori Bush. Congresswoman Bush knows what it is like to be evicted. She knows the pain and fear and indignity of being told to get your things and get out. When you lose your home, you lose everything. It is hard to get to a job if you have it. What do the kids do about school? What if there is a local clinic taking care of somebody with a healthcare problem? You lose your home and that is it. The roof, literally and figuratively, falls in. Well, Congresswoman Bush has known this through her own experience, and she took her passion and converted it into effective action. I salute to her. It is a moment of history that shows when you persist, you can get things done. For four nights, she slept on the steps of the Capitol, drawing attention to this issue in a way we rarely see from a Member of Congress. She made yesterday's announcement possible. So amazing credit lies with Congresswoman Bush and the Americans who joined her in her righteous cause. And, of course, I want to give real credit as well to Senator Brown, our chairman of the Banking Committee, who worked hard on this issue along with Senator Warren and many others in the Senate. While yesterday's announcement by the CDC was very welcome, it is only the first step. In the weeks ahead, the administration must continue working with State governments to better distribute emergency rental assistance that Congress has appropriated at the end of the last year. The money is there. We in Congress provided it. I want to call out my State of New York, which has done a poor job at distributing this money. Two weeks ago, along with housing advocates, I called on the State to move things more quickly. A week before that, New York State along with South Carolina were the only two States that sent out no dollars--no dollars. Some of our localities that didn't cede the money to the State have done a better job, like Monroe County, where Rochester is. But too much of the money is just sitting up there in Albany. We need Mike Hine, who is head of the relevant administrative department in the State, and all of the State to get that money out fast. An eviction ban is a good thing. It prevents people from being kicked out of their homes. Once the eviction ban ends, if there is not rental assistance, we are back in the same boat. We need the States to get that money out. State governments--my State of New York--must do a better job of getting that support out the door and into the hands of Americans who need help. One other thing, there is not Treasury bureaucracy in the way. States like Texas, like Monroe County, have been able to get out a lot of the money. The fault lies in the State governments that are not doing this, and they have to move. Authorization for Use of Military Force Mr. President, on another matter, AUMF. Today, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee will vote on the repeal of the authorization for the use of military force in Iraq. This authorization was initially passed by Congress in 2002, 19 years ago. It has far outlived its usefulness. The Iraq war has been over for nearly a decade. An authorization passed in 2002 is no longer necessary in 2021. It has been nearly 10 years since this particular authorization has been cited as a primary justification for a military operation, and there is a real danger to letting these legal authorities persist indefinitely. Allowing an authorization for military force to just lie around forever is an invitation to a future administration to use it for any military adventurism in the region. Americans, frankly, are sick of endless wars in the Middle East. Congress simply has to exert more authority over matters of war and peace, as we all know the Constitution prescribes. So, this morning, I reiterate my strong support for the repeal of the 2002 authorization of military force in Iraq. I urge the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, under the able leadership of Chairman Menendez, to advance the ***measure*** to the floor. I want to thank Chairman Menendez, Senator Kaine, and every Republican cosponsor of the bill for working to bring this issue to the floor. As majority leader, in consultation with Chairman Menendez, I intend to bring up the repeal for a vote on the Senate floor later this year. Members should be on notice: We are going to vote on this. Judicial Nominations Now, Mr. President, finally, judicial nominations. One of our most important jobs here in the Senate is to confirm President Biden's judicial appointments. The Democratic majority in the Senate is committed to swiftly and consistently filling judicial vacancies with highly qualified, ideologically mainstream, and professionally and demographically diverse jurists. Later this week, the Senate will have the opportunity to confirm another judge who meets all three of these criteria. Last night, I filed cloture on the nomination of Eunice Lee to serve on the Second Circuit Court of Appeals. Since the Second Circuit covers my home State of New York and is one of the most important Federal courts in the country, it was my honor to have recommended Ms. Lee to the White House for an appointment. She will be the fourth circuit judge confirmed in the first 7 months of the Biden administration. Eunice Lee is not only an excellent lawyer, with sound judgment and a jurist's temperament, but she brings the kind of legal experience that is all too rare on the Federal bench. Ms. Lee spent her entire career in public service, representing criminal defendants who could not afford counseling. Once confirmed, she will be the only former Federal defender among the active judges on the Second Circuit. When I met her, I saw what a caring, compassionate, thoughtful woman she was, and I was so glad--so glad--to recommend her to the White House, who quickly agreed and has sent her name forward. Perhaps the highest compliment paid to Ms. Lee came from a group of over 70 former Federal prosecutors from New York. These are the folks who most often found themselves on the opposite side of Ms. Lee in a courtroom. They called her a ``brilliant, accomplished advocate, who is supremely well qualified to serve on the bench.'' She is a model. She is a model in diversity. You know, we don't have very many people of color on our Second Circuit Court of Appeals. I am trying to increase that with the nomination of Ms. Lee--Ms. Perez as well. Not only is she from a diverse background demographically, but she is diverse professionally. To have someone who has been a Federal defender up there on the Second Circuit will really expand the breadth and width and depth of knowledge that that bench has. So I am proud to have recommended her, and I am looking forward to confirming this nominee later this week. [[Page S5793]] With that, I yield the floor. I suggest the absence of a quorum. The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll. The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll. Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded. The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered. Recognition of the Minority Leader The Republican leader is recognized Government Funding Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, this morning, the Appropriations Committee considered a first partial batch of government funding bills for next year. I want the Senate to secure bipartisan appropriations through the regular ***process***. I want us to fund the government in an orderly fashion just like the successful Appropriations Committee work we saw throughout Republicans' recent years in the majority. We accomplished that because we built a truly bipartisan ***process***. Importantly, it began at the beginning. Early in the calendar year, we convened bipartisan talks to produce top-line numbers so the appropriators would have actual targets. That let good-faith bipartisan conversations happen at the subcommittee and committee levels throughout the spring and summer, and we got results on a bipartisan basis. Unfortunately, this year, our Democratic colleagues haven't done anything like that. Either our colleagues don't have any big-picture plan or they are privately working off the President's partisan budget request. There has been no big-picture, bipartisan conversation. The Democrats didn't even let the committee vote on top-line allocations, which normally happens at the start of a markup. Our colleagues' fixation on far-left shiny objects is distracting them from basic governance. They are more focused on ramming through another reckless, inflationary taxing-and-spending spree than ensuring we avoid a stalemate over government funding. Now, look, I understand and I appreciate that Senators on both sides have worked hard to develop appropriations titles with a lot of good content. The problem is bigger picture. When it comes to floor consideration, we cannot and will not start planting individual trees before we have bipartisan consensus on the shape of the forest. Here is what it will take to get a Senate appropriations ***process*** back on track, two--two--simple things. No. 1, Democrats will need to honor the longstanding bipartisan truce that provides parity for defense and nondefense spending growth--parity for defense and nondefense spending growth--and at a responsible overall number that we can all accept. Our men and women in uniform and the Nation they defend deserve better than a budget that cuts our national defense after inflation and allows adversaries to get an edge. No. 2, we must have agreement that we are going to keep longstanding bipartisan policy riders in and new poison pill riders out. We need to keep foundational mainstays, like the Hyde amendment, right where they are, and neither side should throw new wrenches into the ***process***. Parity for national and border security and a bipartisan deal on policy riders--this is not rocket science; it is a roadmap. We all know it very, very well. That is what it will take to move bipartisan appropriations bills across this floor, but the majority is behind on the homework. Afghanistan Now, Mr. President, on a totally different matter, in April, when President Biden announced his intention to pull U.S forces out of Afghanistan, he said it was ``time to end the forever wars''--``time to end the forever wars,'' said President Biden, but at every stage of the rushed and rudderless retreat that has followed, the Biden administration's wishful thinking hasn't come within a country mile of reality. By any account, the situation in Afghanistan has become worse as we have headed to the exits, and we will live with the security, humanitarian, and moral consequences for years to come. This whole debacle was not only foreseeable; it was, in fact, foreseen. Remember what top national security experts were saying around the time the President announced his decisions: The Taliban is likely to make gains on the battlefield, and the Afghan Government will struggle to hold the Taliban at bay if the coalition withdraws support. Administration officials shrugged it off. They downplayed the chances that Afghanistan's pro-American government would fall to the pro- terrorist Taliban, but now that outcome appears all but inevitable. The administration literally glossed over the risk of an al-Qaida resurgence, but now Secretary Austin is acknowledging al-Qaida could reestablish a safe haven and threaten the homeland in less than 2 years--that is the Secretary of Defense--and even that could be optimistic. They insisted that over-the-horizon operations would be enough to keep terrorists in check, but now, just as the CIA Director warned from the start, intelligence gathering is already suffering. The administration claimed that resources tied up in the fight against terrorists were more urgently needed to counter Chinese aggression, but now the manpower demands of this over-the-horizon approach have required redeployment of forces to the Middle East and pulled an entire carrier group away--away--from China's backyard so it can conduct costlier, less-efficient, long-range missions over Afghanistan from the Gulf. Much of the rhetoric from the President's team has sounded almost laughingly--laughingly--naive. The Secretary of State publically suggested he thinks he can bribe the Taliban into being a responsible, peaceful regime with diplomatic carrots. So that is where we are. In 6 months, this administration has taken us from helping local partners fight the Taliban to abandoning our partners and pretending that a future Taliban government will care about foreign assistance and being accepted by the so-called international community. The Taliban have already begun paving their way to Kabul with innocent blood. Al-Qaida is already rebuilding capabilities to strike at our homeland. So what on Earth are we doing here? What are we doing? Surely, the administration would not consider the fall of Kabul a success. Surely, it will not look at the fate awaiting Afghan women and girls and say: Mission accomplished. Surely, a terrorist resurgence or the assassination of our Afghan partners cannot look to President Biden's team like a ``deliberate'' or ``responsible'' exit from Afghanistan. But these are the predictable results of these terrible decisions: the consequences of making enormous changes with no real plan to mitigate the risk; the failure to learn from similar mistakes, like the disastrous withdrawal from Iraq back in 2011. Here in the Senate, it is curious to see that some of our colleagues who are the most exercised--the most exercised--about trying to undo authorizations for the use of military force are somehow also among the quietest--the quietest--when it comes to the unfolding disaster in Afghanistan and oversight of ongoing conflicts. Make no mistake, whether America is on the ground or over the horizon, the war in Afghanistan will continue, and Americans will not be safer with the Taliban ruling from Kabul. We will not be safer when al-Qaida regains a safe haven and inspires a new generation of global jihadists. And we won't be safer when coalition partners doubt they can trust our word. A strategic disaster is what we are witnessing from top to bottom, and a growing risk that this war will end in a victory--a victory--for the Taliban and al-Qaida and become a greater threat to the United States. I suggest the absence of a quorum. The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll. The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll. Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded. The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered. Tribute to Nick Rossi Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, around here, it is Members of Congress who typically get the spotlight. When we talk about a bill getting passed, for example, you usually hear about the [[Page S5794]] Members who introduced and pushed for the bill. You don't usually hear about the staffers. But none of us in Congress works alone. We are supported by dedicated staffers who spend long days and oftentimes nights and weekends working to serve our constituents and our country. Today, I want to talk about one of those staffers, my whip office chief of staff who is leaving the Hill after 26 years of government service. Nick Rossi has been with me since 2013, when I became the ranking member of the Commerce Committee. He came on as deputy staff director and took over as staff director 2 years later. There isn't one thing that we did in my years as Commerce ranking member and chair that wasn't at least partially owing to Nick Rossi: the 2018 FAA reauthorization; the FAST Act; Coast Guard legislation; FCC bills; broadband legislation; spectrum legislation; section 230 reform legislation, known as SESTA-FOSTA; legislation to reduce the number of annoying robocalls; other consumer protection legislation like the FTC Consumer Fairness Review Act; legislation to advance 5G; and the list goes on. Nick came to my staff after an already illustrious career on the Hill. He had served as chief counsel at the Senate Judiciary Committee, as chief counsel and chief investigator on the Commerce Committee, and as staff director on the Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee. But his career in government started much earlier. He actually started his government service in the FBI, applying on a whim when he couldn't join the U.S Attorney's Office because of a hiring freeze. As is typical for Nick, he graduated first in his class at the FBI Academy and then went on to spend 11 years in the FBI as a special agent, a supervisory special agent, unit chief, associate legal counsel, and media spokesperson. That sounds like a lot for 11 years but not so much when you know Nick. I mentioned that he graduated first in his class at the FBI Academy. He also graduated with honors from Notre Dame and from Harvard Law School, where he was in the drama society with our colleague Ted Cruz. I don't think I have ever asked Nick about any issue and gotten anything less than a thoroughly informed answer, whether the subject was technically in his area of expertise or not. I will never forget when he accompanied me and former Senator Bill Nelson to the Sanford Underground Research Facility in Lead, SD. This is a lab where scientists are conducting research in particle physics and the expansion of the universe. So it is pretty complicated stuff. Well, apparently not to Nick. He was in the car with us, and he was throwing out technical formulas and the finer points of physics and cosmology with the ease he might use when discussing the lunch menu in the Dirksen cafeteria. When asked how he knew all this stuff--he definitely didn't major in physics, and space wasn't his issue area--he just said it was a hobby. Trust Nick to be flirting with particle physics as a hobby. But while Nick may often be the smartest person in the room, he is also the most humble. He is often the last to speak. He listens. He asks questions, sometimes maybe when he doesn't really need to. And he gives thoughtful, wise counsel. It has been clear over the last few days as staffers across the Senate learned that Nick was leaving just how respected his voice is in the Senate. I have had more than one committee staff director talk to me about how he or she learned to run a committee from Nick. And I know a lot of senior staffers--inside my office but outside of it as well--who will tell you that when they are facing a challenge, the first person that they go to to provide a sounding board is Nick. And Nick always makes himself available. He is uniformly generous with his time and knowledge, and he treats everyone the same, whether the individual in question is a staff assistant or a chief of staff. He has brought out the best in every team I have seen him work with, whether at the Commerce Committee or in the whip office. Nick has been chief of staff in my whip office for 2 years--2 very eventful years. Through it all, Nick has been a steady presence in the whip office and in the Senate. No matter the crisis, Nick is calm and collected, and he inspires that calm in others, although I do hear that it is a different story when he is watching Notre Dame football. The word is that there is a lot of ranting, pacing, and yelling at the TV, but I have not observed that. Above all, Nick is a character guy, which matters a lot to me. He is a man of honor, integrity, and principle. I never have to worry that Nick is going to cut corners or bend the rules. He is always going to do things the right way, and there is nothing more important than that. I can't talk about Nick without also mentioning his commitment to his family. His pride in his kids always shines through, and just as he is never too busy to talk to a staffer who is having a problem, he is always ready to take a break from his work to help his daughter Elena with her math homework--another subject Nick didn't major in but is, of course, really good at--or to build swords and helmets and bows and arrows with his son Johnny. I am very grateful to his wife Katherine and to Elena and Johnny for sharing him with us for all these years. And I am very happy that there are fewer late nights in his future so that he can get in some more time with his family. I realize that Nick may be starting to sound a little superhuman here, so let me just say that while he is a man of many talents who has not only not successfully repaired the family's microwave and dishwasher but is also known for building a balloon arch in the shape of a shark for his kids' school, I am reliably informed that he is not a good cook. And I am pretty sure that ``not'' was bold and underlined. But, seriously, Nick is one in a million, and it has been my privilege to have him lead the team in the whip office. His absence will be sorely felt by me, by my staff, and throughout Capitol Hill, and I hope he won't mind the occasional phone call to pick his brain on some of the issues that are facing the Senate. Nick, thank you for your service, and God bless you in all your future undertakings. Wherever you land next, they will be lucky to have you. I yield the floor. I suggest the absence of a quorum. The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll. The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll. Mr. LEE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded. The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered. H.R 3684 Mr. LEE. Mr. President, infrastructure is the physical backbone of our country, and it is an example of positive, constructive American achievement and accomplishment. Unfortunately, this particular bill, in its ***process***, content, pricetag, and long-term effects, simply will not serve the country, Americans, and particularly Utahns well. It will ultimately be detrimental to our economy, to the daily lives of the American people, and even in some cases the infrastructure itself. Now, I am not saying I don't appreciate the hard work, goodwill, and excellent intentions of my colleagues who put many long hours, weeks, and months into crafting it; nor am I suggesting that there aren't good things in the bill, good things that would benefit deserving people in this country. As I have said before, the question is not whether or not infrastructure is a good and a necessary thing; nor is the question whether the bill contains some good things. The question is, rather, how much should the Federal Government be involved in infrastructure? And if it should, where it should. How much should it be spending on it? The truth is the particulars of this bill take the scope far beyond what should be under the realm of the Federal Government, under the domain of the Federal Government, specifically at a price far beyond what we can afford and at a time when we are already far into feeling the sting of inflation. [[Page S5795]] There is a reason that our Founding Fathers reserved ``numerous and indefinite'' powers to the States while providing ``few and defined'' powers to the Federal Government. Article I, section 8 of the Constitution literally lists the particular powers given to Congress. It tells us what they are. And you will notice that infrastructure generally is not one of them. Now, in some cases it does make sense that the Federal Government is involved in some infrastructure. The Interstate Highway System is a good example of that. Postal roads, also specifically accounted for in article I, section 8, are another example of that. This bill, however, includes things like bike paths and beautification projects, mass transit systems, surface roads, roads that start and stop in one State and are not part of the Interstate Highway System--things that, while good and lovely and useful, are a far cry from what the Federal Government can and should reasonably and successfully oversee. What is more, it does so at an enormous pricetag, one that will dig us even deeper and deeper into debt at the expense of the American people, both now and further down the road. Now, proponents of the bill insist, and will continue to insist as we debate this, that the bill is paid for. But, in fact, despite the staggeringly large amount of money that it spends--estimated to be $1.2 trillion in total, the largest amount for a package of this kind in history by far--it still does not have a score from the Congressional Budget Office. Normally we don't vote on, much less pass, something like this without a CBO score. We don't have one. And I regret to say that many of the so-called pay-fors amount to flimsy budget gimmicks that, in reality, do no such thing as pay for the bill. So what are these so-called pay-fors? Well, let's take the new reporting requirements on cryptocurrency, for example, which would allegedly bring in $28 billion. Everything about this pay-for is half-baked and unclear. How exactly will additional revenue reporting generate new tax revenue? And how can you possibly apply stock exchange-style reporting requirements to something so different and decentralized as Bitcoin, Dogecoin, and other cryptocurrencies? At best, this revenue gimmick will fail. At worst, it will hamper financial innovation for decades to come. Take the mandated sales of oil from the Strategic Petroleum Reserve, which the bill sponsors claim will produce $6 billion in revenue starting 7 years from now. But do we realistically know what the demand for oil might be at that time or what can happen in the meantime when we might need to use oil in this Strategic Petroleum Reserve? What happens when we get 5 years down the road and Congress determines that we should hold onto the oil a bit longer until we might be able to generate more revenue from the sale? What if even more of these sales are congressionally mandated in these years, essentially flooding the market and causing the price of that same oil to crash? Take the pension smoothing component of the bill, which would only cause us to lose more money in the long-term and simultaneously threaten the solvency of retirement benefits--the retirement benefits of millions and millions of American workers. Take the rebate rule delay, which so far has never, and may never, go into effect. Delaying something that has no set time for implementation cannot realistically be predicted to produce $49 billion in savings. Take the $20 billion in future spectrum auctions. While spectrum auctions can certainly produce a great deal of revenue, this possible future auction may end up never happening. It could have significant restrictions on it due to the dynamics of adjacent bands, or it could simply produce far less than we are being asked to assume today. Finally, take the claim of $205 billion in unused COVID funds. Upon further investigation, it includes only roughly $50.2 billion of unused COVID funds as a real pay-for. The other $150 billion is simply spending that didn't happen because the country began to emerge from the pandemic. Many States ended the enhanced unemployment benefits that were keeping more people out of work, and other States, local communities, businesses, and families didn't require as much Federal spending, thanks to their own successes and their own resiliency. In other words, this other $150 billion is not a pay-for. It is fake. It is simply spending or lost revenue that was never realized. And whether this bill passes or not, this $150 billion will never be realized. No, the numbers for these pay-fors do not add up. The math for this bill is faulty, to say the least. What is more, much of the massive amount that it will be spending will not even be efficient or effective spending on infrastructure. Even if this were the role of the Federal Government, then we ought to make sure that it spends those funds efficiently and effectively. But, unfortunately, the fact of the matter is that along with Federal dollars come a whole host of Byzantine laws and regulations that prevent precisely that, including restrictions imposed by everything from NEPA to the Davis-Bacon Act. The Davis-Bacon Act artificially inflates labor prices by requiring that all federally funded construction projects worth more than $2,000 pay workers at least the prevailing wage rate on non-Federal projects in the same locality. And it has substantially driven up the cost of Federal projects, hindered economic growth, wasted taxpayer dollars, and hurt unskilled laborers each year. In fact, it is estimated that repealing it would save taxpayers $10.7 billion over 10 years. NEPA has imposed similar burdens and costs. Signed into law in 1970, it was intended to account for the environmental consequences of proposed Federal actions or projects. But over the last 50 years, it has substantially deviated from its original purpose, morphing into a complex, bureaucratic labyrinth; stalling projects from frivolous lawsuits and bureaucratic delays; and dramatically increasing the cost and timeline of their completion. Sometimes this law stretches projects that should take a couple of years to complete into decades. At the very least, we ought to reform these costly, ineffective regulations--and do so drastically--so that Federal infrastructure can be completed better and faster, which is exactly what I proposed in the amendment that I put before this body yesterday. But this bill, in its current form, is ultimately not good for Utahns, and it is not good for the American people. Driving more Federal money into infrastructure, unfortunately, means we will pay more to build less. We will be paying more to build less. It means less money going to steel and concrete in the ground, and a whole lot more going to lawyers, accountants, lobbyists, compliance specialists, and bureaucratic delays. It means longer and more expensive projects. Now, this varies State by State, but in Utah, it is estimated that adding Federal dollars to a project increases the overall cost by 20 percent--sometimes as much as 40 percent. Not only will it mean more expensive projects, but more expensive products too. Another provision in this bill would impose new fees on dozens of chemicals used in countless products and consumer goods in our day-to- day lives--chemicals found in concrete, wood, plastics, rubber, dyes, detergents, drugs, and pesticides for food, just to name a few. So every time you buy one of those products--or almost any product, for that matter--you will be paying a little bit for this. Only it is not a tax; it is a fee, and it is hidden from your view. So the consumer--the poor and middle-class taxpayer--doesn't see a tax increase. They just see that they are paying even more for everything that they buy. Another provision would extend Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac's ``g- fees'' for an entire decade. These fees could add thousands of dollars to the mortgages of home buyers at a time when that first home is increasingly out of reach for many. Utahns can't afford this. Congress is supposed to be addressing problems like these, not making them worse with sneaky new fees. This comes at a time when Americans are already feeling the sharp sting of snowballing inflation. Now, this graph highlights some of the problem. It highlights what the American people have felt over the last 12 to 18 months. You will notice a [[Page S5796]] curve sloping sharply upward. Today, inflation is at 5.4 percent, which means, on average, the goods you buy today are 5.4 percent more expensive and the savings you have responsibly accrued are actually worth less. And don't forget--the Federal Government's reckless spending has exacerbated this trend. Look at how the red has grown, what we see here. The red that you see in this chart, these are deficits. Look at how it has grown. The red portion of the graph is deficit spending. While we surely needed to spend some additional money during the COVID pandemic, did we really need to spend this much more, to the point where we were borrowing a lot more than we were taking in? You know, we borrowed close to $4 trillion last year. Even if you think that we did need to spend this much more, wouldn't we try to get our country back on track and to discontinue this unfunded spending spree that contributes to runaway inflation? Look, from gas to groceries and from homes to healthcare, every day, it is getting harder for hard-working Americans to afford the basic necessities of day-to-day life. Take just a quick look here at everyday items. These are not luxury items that we associate with the elite; these are things that ordinary people purchase every day. Compared to the period of time before the pandemic, not so very long ago, just 16 months ago, eggs are now 13 percent more expense; milk is 11.3 percent more expensive; chicken breast, 11.3 percent more expensive; bread is 9.4 percent more expensive; and gas is more than 27.5 percent more expensive. The fact is that packages like this one are not without their effects on the people we have taken an oath to represent. At the end of the day, it is the American people whose tax dollars we take to pay for packages like this. At the end of the day, it is the American people who will bear the brunt of the debt we are forcing upon them. At the end of the day, it is the American people who will feel the effects in every aspect of their daily lives--in their workplaces, their communities, and their families--and they should get a say in it. They certainly shouldn't have to sign on to something that was made known to the American people at 10 p.m on Sunday night. Those who drafted this legislation had 4 months to review it and 4 months to get to know it. The American people shouldn't be asked to pass this in 4 days. I yield the floor. The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Delaware. Amendment Nos. 2146 and 2210 to Amendment No. 2137 Mr. CARPER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the following amendments be called up to the substitute and be reported by number: Wicker No. 2146 and Kennedy No. 2210; further, that upon disposition of the Johnson amendment, the Senate vote in relation to the amendments in the order listed, with no amendments in order to the amendments prior to a vote in relation to the amendments, with 60 affirmative votes required for adoption of the Kennedy amendment, 5 minutes for debate for Senator Wicker and 2 minutes for debate for opponents before the Wicker vote, and 4 minutes for debate equally divided before the Kennedy vote. The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Is there objection? Without objection, it is so ordered. Amendment No. 2146 to Amendment No. 2137 The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will report. The legislative clerk read as follows: The Senator from Delaware [Mr. Carper], for Mr. Wicker, proposes an amendment numbered 2146 to amendment No. 2137. The amendment is as follows (Purpose: To provide that the Administrative Procedures Act shall apply to actions taken by the Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Communications and Information in carrying out the Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment Program) On page 2081, strike line 3 and all that follows through ``(3)'' on line 7 and insert the following: Act''); and (2) Amendment No. 2210 to Amendment No. 2137 The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will report. The legislative clerk read as follows: The Senator from Delaware [Mr. Carper], for Mr. Kennedy, proposes an amendment numbered 2210 to amendment No. 2137. The amendment is as follows (Purpose: To provide emergency assistance for disaster response and recovery, and for other expenses, directly related to Hurricanes Laura, Delta, and Zeta) At the end of division I, add the following: SEC. 90009. EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE THROUGH THE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT BLOCK GRANT PROGRAM. (a) In General.--In addition to amounts otherwise appropriated, out of any money in the Treasury of the United States not otherwise appropriated, there is appropriated to the ``Community Development Fund'', for necessary expenses related to disaster relief, long-term recovery, and restoration of infrastructure, housing, and economic revitalization in areas in States for which the President declared a major disaster under title IV of the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act of 1974 (42 U.S.C 5170 et seq.) related to Hurricanes Laura, Delta, and Zeta, $1,100,000,000, to remain available until expended, for activities authorized under title I of the Housing and Community Development Act of 1974 (42 U.S.C 5301 et seq.). (b) Deposit of c-band Spectrum Auction Proceeds in Treasury.--Section 309(j)(8) of the Communications Act of 1934 (47 U.S.C 309(j)(8)) is amended-- (1) in subparagraph (A), by striking ``and (G)'' and inserting ``(G), and (H)''; (2) in subparagraph (C)(i), by striking ``and (G)'' and inserting ``(G), and (H)''; and (3) by adding at the end the following: ``(H) C-band auction proceeds.--Notwithstanding subparagraph (A), and except as provided in subparagraph (B), of the proceeds (including deposits and upfront payments from successful bidders) from the use of a system of competitive bidding under this subsection to award licenses in the band of frequencies between 3700 megahertz and 3980 megahertz (designated by the Commission as `Auction 107'), $1,100,000,000 shall be deposited in the general fund of the Treasury and used for emergency assistance under section 90009(a) of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act.''. The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Wyoming. Infrastructure Mr. BARRASSO. Mr. President, I come to the floor today because I note the Democrats being so eager to move to their reckless tax-and-spending spree, and it is something I absolutely oppose. If we pass a bill of that magnitude, the American people will be paying more in taxes, will be paying more in the cost of living, and it will continue to impact the American people in a very negative way. Right now, the Senate is debating a separate bill, an infrastructure bill, and, in fact, the bills are not completely separate. It would be nice if they were, but they are not. The reason they are not separate is because Nancy Pelosi, the Speaker of the House, has made it abundantly clear that any bipartisan infrastructure bill that is passed here in this Senate won't see the light of day in the House of Representatives unless and until, as she has said, the Senate also sends her a multitrillion-dollar reckless tax-and-spending bill. According to one nonpartisan group, that bill could cost up to $5.5 trillion over the next 10 years. Now, Nancy Pelosi has said time and time again that there will not be one penny for roads, not one penny for bridges, not one penny for airports or ports until she gets the reckless tax-and-spending bill that she is demanding. It wasn't a negotiation; it was a hijacking. And Nancy Pelosi isn't just a hijacker; she is also an arsonist. What she is proposing is going to pour jet fuel on the fire of inflation that is currently ravaging the country. The flame was lit months ago when Democrats borrowed $2 trillion under the name of COVID relief. But just look at the economic projections before the bill became law. Some people failed to predict the inflation. The Federal Reserve failed to predict it. The White House budget office said: Oh, no, we won't get inflation. The Congressional Budget Office said no. There were Democratic economists, though, who warned that it would happen, and Republicans pointed out clearly that it was going to happen, and that is what has happened now. Democrats refused to listen. They borrowed and spent an additional $2 trillion, and inflation has gone up every month since. Core inflation is now the fastest and highest it has been in 40 years. Who are the victims of this? Well, they are people who are on fixed incomes; they are seniors; they are working families trying to get by. Now it costs $25 more every time you fill up your vehicle with gasoline. If you fill up a truck in Wyoming, it could be even more than [[Page S5797]] that compared to the fill-ups of Inauguration Day. If you go to the grocery store now, it is about $25 more for the weekly trip to the grocery store. So you are talking $25 extra a week in gas, $25 extra a week in groceries; $50 extra a week, which comes to $2,500 annually for a hard-working family in America because of the inflation Joe Biden and the Democrats have brought upon us. Of course, this kind of inflation slows our economic recovery. I just found out last week that economic growth is significantly below what economists had predicted it should be at this point. It does seem the Democrats still haven't learned basic economics. Now they want to make the same mistake all over again, even at a higher level. They want to borrow and spend trillions more. Last week, we found out that the previous Democratic bill gave $800 million to prisoners behind bars. Now, Tom Cotton and I came to this floor, and we tried to stop the Democrats from giving our taxpayer dollars to prisoners currently behind bars. We specifically warned it would happen as stimulus checks were sent out around the country. We tried to stop this as part of the Democratic spending bill, but all 50 Democrats, every one of them supported direct checks to prisoners behind bars. The senior Senator from Illinois came to the floor and gave a speech defending it. He implied it would be racist not to give free money to people behind bars Every one of the 50 Democrats put $800 million of American taxpayer dollars on the credit card and sent checks to prisoners behind bars. This means more debt and more inflation for law-abiding citizens in exchange for money to criminals. It tells the American people all we need to know about the priorities of the Democratic Party. Now Democrats want another round of payoffs. This payoff is even more expensive than the last one. Democrats are promising payoffs to all their favorite groups: climate activists, leftwing professors, trial lawyers, and union bosses. This bill, this reckless tax-and-spending bill, includes one liberal priority after another. Even as we face the worst border crisis in the last two decades, Democrats are now promising amnesty and citizenship and voting rights for millions of illegal immigrants. Once they get amnesty, then they can get all the other Democratic payoffs as well. This is going to lead to an additional tidal wave of illegal immigration, and all of this has a price tag, and someone has to pay. Democrats tell nice stories, and Republicans do the math. This bill is so expensive, the Democrats will have to go after every working family in America in order to pay for it. One way or another, every working American will end up paying for this. There is not some rich person who is going to be able to pay for all of this. There aren't enough rich people on Earth to pay for this level of spending. Democrats are going to go after the majority of the people in this country, and, of course, that is the middle class. That is exactly what they intend to do with this bill because this bill is going to raise taxes on family farms and ranches. According to the accounting firm Ernst and Young, this bill, this spending bill that Nancy Pelosi is demanding go from the Senate to the House before any infrastructure bill is passed, would eliminate 80,000 jobs over 10 years. The bill would raise taxes on small businesses, which are already struggling to stay open because of Democratic policies. Anyone who sells their home will pay thousands and thousands more in taxes. Now, this is also going to include a carbon import tax, which will drive up prices even higher. The bill would be a socialist takeover of our economy--more taxes, more spending, more debt, more government eating into people's paychecks and eating into their savings. There is not a single Republican in the House or in the Senate who is going to support this reckless tax-and-spending spree. We need to stop this freight train to socialism. We don't have a taxing problem in this country; we have a spending problem. Inflation is already high enough. We know what the cause is. We know it is the cause of the excessive Democratic spending, and this is going to make it worse. Families across this country are struggling right now to make ends meet. Family businesses are struggling to stay open. It is time to stop this reckless tax-and-spending spree. I yield the floor. The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. Hickenlooper). The Senator from Arizona. Maiden Speech Mr. KELLY. Mr. President, it is an honor to rise today to deliver my maiden speech. Nine months ago, the people of Arizona trusted me with a great responsibility: to represent them in the U.S Senate; to do so during a pandemic that has challenged every one of us, taken loved ones too soon, and battered our economy; and to fill the remaining years of Senator John McCain's sixth term. Each day since then, I have gone to work for the people of Arizona, striving to fulfill that responsibility, undeterred by the challenges we have in front of us because that is what Arizonans have done over the last year and a half--protecting their families from this virus, keeping themselves and their businesses afloat, and looking out for their neighbors. Arizonans have faced down this virus and the economic fallout that came with it with determination. And I came here to have their backs and to work towards a brighter future for our growing State because we can't just rebuild our economy the way it was before. We have to reinvent it and create the jobs of the future, good-paying jobs that you can actually raise a family on. It is a long to-do list. But, hey, I am used to those. The checklist for flying the Space Shuttle stands about 6 feet tall. The Senate, though, is not NASA. It doesn't move as fast. And it is not the U.S Navy, either, where everyone works together toward a common goal. But my wife, Gabby, taught me a thing or two about how to listen and how to find common ground. Now, she loved representing Arizona in Congress, and no one works harder than she does. Now, neither of us expected that it would be me serving here in the U.S Senate. I might have been the astronaut, but it turned out that she is the one who would nearly lose her life serving our country. I am so proud of her and of her relentless positivity that she brings to her continued rehabilitation. It inspires me each and every day. I could not do this without her support or the support of my daughters, Claudia and Claire, or my first grandchild, Sage, who was born in May. Maybe, I am not so sure about her support; she is only 2 months old. But in my first days here, I spoke to Republicans and Democrats to work on emergency COVID relief. For so many Arizonans, the relief we got passed was a lifeline--the difference between bankruptcy and keeping the lights on, between losing their small business and paying their employees. I have heard that countless of times as I have traveled across the State. In March, on my 100th day in the Senate, I spoke with a group of Arizonans to understand how COVID-19 was impacting them and their families. One of those conversations really stuck with me, and I want to take a second to tell you about Susana Andrade. Prior to the pandemic, Susana worked in a school cafeteria in South Phoenix. Her husband worked as a landscaper. When the pandemic spiked in Arizona, her husband's work slowed down and the school closed. But Susana and her coworkers kept going to work. The school was continuing to offer meals for pickup for students and families who needed them, and a lot of them needed these meals. She told me that they initially were just offering breakfast and lunch, but then they added dinner and a snack because the demand was just so high. Susana and her coworkers knew how hard the pandemic had hit the community, how many folks were out of work. There were students who wouldn't eat if they weren't there to make the meals. So she kept going to work, making and packing meals for students and their families. And, then, in February, she and her entire family got sick with COVID. She couldn't go to work for weeks, and she and her family struggled to pay their bills that month while they tried to recover. Now, Susana's story has stuck with me over the last year. Here is a hard- [[Page S5798]] working Arizona family doing everything right, who just got knocked off their feet. At the same time, Susana embodies the best of what we saw during this awful pandemic: neighbors and parents making tremendous sacrifices to help one another get through this. I spoke to Susana recently. She told me that days after we spoke in March, she and her family received their stimulus checks, and it made such a big difference in their lives. But she is still now living paycheck to paycheck, working two jobs, trying to provide for her family to just get ahead. I understand that. Growing up, my mother worked both as a secretary and a waitress at the same time. When my brother and I were in middle school, she decided to become a police officer, like my dad. But she had to pass this physical fitness test, which was designed for men. But my mother was not discouraged. She wasn't discouraged by that or by the fact that, if she would pass, she would become one of the first female police officers in our home town. In fact, I think she liked that. That was my mom for you. But I knew that she believed that the increased and steady salary would help our family. My mother wanted to give my brother and me every opportunity to succeed. She showed us what we could achieve by having a goal and a plan and working hard at it. I am here because of a good public education and because of the opportunity that my parents created for me to serve our country and pursue my dreams. But for so many families, it is becoming harder to get ahead, and the pandemic only made this more difficult. Businesses shuttered, savings drained, and debt and bills piled up. What every parent wants--what my mom wanted--is to be able to work hard and give their children a future filled with opportunity. That is why the most important responsibility we have here is not just to rebuild our economy but to reinvent it for the future. And doing that starts with infrastructure: roads, bridges, water, the power grid, high-speed internet. And it is not just in big cities but in rural and small towns, in smalltown Arizona and Tribal communities. That is the item on our checklist now. Arizona is facing a severe drought that requires us to improve our water infrastructure and increase or resiliency. Schoolbuses on the Navajo Nation cost three times as much to maintain because so many of the roads are unpaved. I-10, which runs through the center of our State, between Tucson and Phoenix, has not been expanded in years. A signal accident can cause delays for hours. That happens almost every day. It is clear that Arizona will benefit from upgrading and modernizing our infrastructure. That is why, for the past few months, I have been working with a group of Republicans and Democrats to come to an agreement on a historic investment in our infrastructure. I advocated for Arizona's priorities, and we worked together to find common ground and work out our differences. And now we are on the verge of passing it This is going to fix roads and bridges, improve Tribal water and transportation infrastructure, expand affordable high-speed internet access, and make Arizona more resilient to drought and wildfires. I have been determined to deliver these infrastructure investments that Arizona needs to continue to grow. We want to grow, and we want to attract new and innovative companies to our State because Arizona's prosperity depends on continuing to create new, high-paying jobs, including growing our tech sector. Now, one of the biggest success stories of our growing tech sector is an industry that actually produces something physically small, microchips. Microchips go in everything, from our phones and appliances and cars to computers, but also the most sophisticated fighter jets and missile systems. There is currently a global shortage of microchips, and the truth is, today, just 12 percent of them are manufactured here in the United States. It used to be 40 percent. Many foreign competitors, including China, are investing heavily to try to dominate this industry. Now, Arizona does manufacture a lot of microchips. It already employs about 30,000 people in good-paying jobs in this industry, and it is poised to grow. We recently announced investment plans from Intel and the Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company. Arizona can lead the way as we restore more microchip manufacturing and development to American soil. That is the goal of this $52 billion plan that I spent months working on with Senators Cornyn and Warner, to create new advanced manufacturing facilities, or fabs, in places like Arizona. I made it my mission to get this passed through the Senate because it is important. It is important to our economy, and it is important to our national security, ensuring that our supply chain for something so critical does not depend on adversaries like China. Transformational investments such as this will create thousands of high-paying jobs, and we got it passed through the Senate, Republicans and Democrats working together. Now, we must continue working on this checklist, getting Arizonans the skills they need for these new jobs. For some, that will mean getting a college degree in science or engineering. Arizona is home to three world-class universities that are leaders in research and innovation. We must continue to educate the best scientists and engineers in the world. That is the only way we are going to stay ahead. At the same time, we know that about a third of students who graduate from high school will not pursue a 4-year degree. Now, that doesn't mean that they can't be set up for success in the 21st century economy, and we need to make sure that they are. Advanced manufacturing facilities, like the microchip fabs that I mentioned earlier, for those we need well-trained semiconductor processors, and we need electricians, and we need HVAC technicians. These are good-paying careers for those who get the skills and training that they need. And right now, a lot of young Arizonans are getting those skills through our community college system. At Pima Community College's downtown campus in Tucson, they have a new Automotive Technology and Innovation Center that I visited last month. Their students are learning how to operate the software that automatically controls drills and lathes and milling machines and 3D printers and other tools. They can be trained not just in traditional automotive technology but in electric vehicles as well. Arizona is becoming a center for innovative electric vehicle manufacturers. So why shouldn't we be getting these students the skills they need for this technology right now? Pima Community College's chancellor, Chancellor Lambert, calls this much needed approach ``moving at the speed of business.'' What he means is our education system must meet the demands of today's workforce, and that has to be the case not just in major metro areas but in rural Arizona, as well, and in rural America. At Yavapai College in Northern Arizona, they just opened a new Skilled Trades Center in Clarkdale, where they will train a new generation of construction workers and plumbers and electricians and HVAC technicians. I could not be more impressed with Arizona's community college system. Yavapai College is also taking advantage of partnerships with companies to set students up with opportunities that prepare them to immediately enter the workforce in industries like mining. Moving at the speed of business, that is how we are going to prepare hard-working young students to get these good-paying jobs. It is also how we are going to outcompete and outinnovative other countries like China, having a talented workforce that can fill the jobs of the future and develop cutting-edge technologies that are critical not just to our economy but to our national security as well. Now, these are issues that I know Republicans and Democrats agree on. And even on tough issues, I believe that we can also find common ground. We have had crisis after crisis at our border, each a result of decades of failure in Washington to adequately address border security and fix our broken immigration system. Senator Portman and I have introduced bipartisan legislation that would require the Department of Homeland Security to finally develop a plan to [[Page S5799]] handle increases at the border, to take the politics out of this, no matter which party controls Congress or the White House, and to provide dedicated funding to carry out that plan and ensure a secure, humane ***process*** at the border. Finding common ground on issues like this is hard, but it is important. Like many of you, like many of my colleagues, I spent years admiring the way the late Senator John McCain represented Arizona in the U.S Senate. But my first impressions of John McCain were not of him as a Senator but of his service in the Navy. He was a hero of young naval aviators like me--an example of how to serve your country honorably and bravely, including in the impossible circumstance of being shot down and captured. His legacy means so much to the State of Arizona, and it lives on through his children and his wife, Cindy, whom I am so grateful to have here today in the Gallery. Thank you. (Applause, Senators rising.) His legacy, it is something that cannot be matched, but it is what inspires me serving in this Senate seat. And it is his example of bipartisanship, of independence that continues to demand more of us. So I am going to continue focusing on delivering results, on beating this virus, and reinventing our economy for the future so that hard-working Arizonans have every opportunity to succeed. Arizonans sent me here to have their backs, and that is what I intend to do. Thank you. I yield the floor. (Applause, Senators rising.) The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Delaware. H.R 3684 Mr. CARPER. Mr. President, there are a lot of folks gathering around our new Senator from Arizona, congratulating him, commending him on his speech. I said to him--I am Navy. We have got a bunch of military people that serve here: Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines. But in the Navy, when somebody does an especially good job, we say ``Bravo Zulu.'' And that was an ***exceptional***, ***exceptional*** address. We are delighted to be joined by Cindy McCain. Before I yield to the Senator from Wisconsin for his amendment, the theme that we just heard from our new Senator from Arizona really focuses on preparing, through the groundwork, plowing the field in anticipation of creating jobs. And we do that in a lot of ways. He has mentioned a bunch of them in terms of technology jobs and so forth. One of the other ways is what we are doing with the legislation before us today, and that is investing in our infrastructure broadly, not just roads, highways, and bridges; not just waterworks; not just broadband; not just surface transportation. All of the above. All of the above. So it is a great way to start our day today. With that, I yield the floor. I think the gentleman, our colleague from Wisconsin, has some comments that he may want to make, unless the leader wishes to go next. The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Wisconsin. Amendment No. 2245 Mr. JOHNSON. Mr. President, I rise to speak to my amendment that is completely germane to the discussion of infrastructure. I can't think of more important infrastructure that would actually secure our homeland from a variety of threats. But as I have always said, coming from a manufacturing background, the first step in solving a problem is admitting you have one, and right now this administration is in a complete state of denial regarding the crisis that is on the border. This crisis has been growing. It is not a seasonal surge; this is a growing problem. This has been a growing problem, and I have my chart here that demonstrates that. Here is January. This is when President Biden came into office. You can see the enormous surge of the crisis he created. Vice President Harris went down to Central America looking for the root cause of this crisis. She only would have had to walk into the Oval Office and look at President Biden because President Biden is the root cause of this crisis. It is his policies, the dismantling of successful policies from the previous administration that had stemmed the flow, that had largely secured our border until this President took office and reversed all that progress. It is a real shame. Let me just give you the numbers because you have to describe the problem. This has been growing. For the last 4 or 5 months, in particular, we have been averaging, first, almost 6,000 and now over 6,000 apprehensions per day--6,000. In June it was 6,249. In July it will probably be over 6,500. There have been weeks we believe it is over 7,000 people per day coming in and being apprehended at the border. Now, that doesn't even count the 750 to 1,000 known got-aways. DHS is now--or CPP, at least, is now estimating that is going to result in about 269,000 people coming into this country that we know they came in; we just couldn't catch them. This also doesn't even describe or enumerate how many unknown got-aways. So, again, the fact of the matter is, from January through July, approximately 1.3 million people have been apprehended coming into this country without documentation. About 173,000 of those individuals have been released in the interior, either with a notice to appear or, even worse, a notice to report. If you multiply that times 2, that is 346,000 people dispersed to all points of America. DHS, this administration, is not notifying the States, not notifying the cities that these individuals, apparently claiming asylum, are coming into communities near you. You add that to the 269,000 estimated known got-aways, that is over 600,000 people just this year. That is larger than the population in the State of Wyoming. It is approaching the population of the State of Vermont. And, again, this is while we have the title 42 restrictions in place. Probably about 900,000 people in the first 7 months had been returned under title 42. If the administration ends that program, imagine the surge. Now, there once was a time when securing the border was a nonpartisan issue. Senator McCain led the charge. In 2006, this body passed, on a vote of 80 to 19, the Secure Fence Act, which was going to build about 700 miles of fence. In the end, only 36 miles was double-layer fencing; the rest was pretty ineffective, as we have seen. But voting for that bill was President Biden, President Obama, Senator Carper, Secretary of State Clinton, Senator Feinstein, Senator Schumer, Senator Wyden, Senator Stabenow. This was a bipartisan effort to secure our border. But somewhere between 2006 and 2021, this has become a partisan issue. Now, what is absurd is, in the last administration, again, we pretty well solved the problem, had allocated about $10 billion to build the fence. It has all been contracted. It has all been paid for. We have built about 453 miles of the 738 miles that was contracted for; 285 miles remain unbuilt. An exit report by Senator Lankford shows that we have spent about $2 billion getting out of those contracts--$2 billion to not build the wall. It is costing us $3 million a day just to guard the steel fencing that is lying there not being used. So my amendment is very simple. It is very common sense. It says, please, let's recognize fences work. Certainly, Congress recognized it when we put a double layer around the people's House for a number of months, spent hundreds of millions of dollars on that security effort. So let's not waste the taxpayers' money. Let's recognize walls work. We need to complete the 285 miles of wall that will help secure our border, that will help secure our homeland, and that will help keep Americans safe. It is a very simple amendment. Let's hope it is not a partisan result. With that, I yield the floor. The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Michigan. Mr. PETERS. Mr. President, I rise to oppose the Johnson amendment. This ***measure*** would force continued payment of government contractors to build an ill-conceived border wall. Most of these funds were never intended for this purpose. More than $10 billion was redirected from the Department of Defense, and these funds were intended for military installations and functions such as schools for military [[Page S5800]] children and National Guard equipment. The Biden administration is conducting a comprehensive review of these contracts, led by the Department of Defense and Homeland Security. DHS has recently announced that they will continue work on certain commonsense projects on the southern border to address life, safety, environmental, and operational considerations. These decisions will be guided by what is best for our national security, not well- connected government contractors profiting off of hard-earned taxpayer dollars. We need to move forward with smart, bipartisan investments that secure both our southern and our northern borders, and we must not look backward at the former administration's boondoggle. I urge my colleagues to vote no on the Johnson amendment. The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Wisconsin. Mr. JOHNSON. Mr. President, in quick response, the prior administration's--what the good Senator claimed a ``boondoggle'' worked. During this comprehensive review by this administration--again, this administration is the root cause of this problem; they caused this--the problem is growing worse. It is not getting better. Congress, by supporting a double layer of fence around this Capitol for months, spent hundreds of millions of dollars keeping us safe and secure, recognizes that fencing and walls work. Again, this fencing has been paid for. This wall has been paid for. Two billion dollars will be wasted. Three million dollars a day will be wasted. This is just common sense, and it will improve the security of this Nation. And, again, in 2006, this was a bipartisan type of effort. Building 700 miles of fence was bipartisan: 80 to 19. It should be bipartisan today. I am urging my colleagues, let's finish building this wall. Let's not waste billions of dollars in taxpayer money. I yield the floor. The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from West Virginia. Mrs. CAPITO. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to address the Senate for several minutes on this amendment. The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered. Mrs. CAPITO. Mr. President, I rise in support of this amendment. I am the ranking member of the Subcommittee on Appropriations for Homeland Security. The President's budget request included a rescission of $2 billion that we, as Members of this body, put, enacted, as the gentleman from Wisconsin has clearly illuminated. And, at the same time, we are having a tremendous problem at our southern border. We all know this. We don't have the July numbers out yet, but we know that apprehensions are going to be in excess of over 200,000 in 1 month. The July numbers also indicate that the number of unaccompanied children is the largest ever encountered in 1 month. There are currently now over 150 miles of wall system projects that we as Congress legally funded that are now in jeopardy of being canceled. When you go to the border, you see millions of dollars' worth of steel slats lying on the ground that were to be constructed until President Biden canceled those projects. Do you know who else sees those border walls on the ground? Human traffickers. Drug smugglers. I have, as we all have, been to the southern border several times. Customs and Border Patrol agents have told us that a border wall is a necessary part of a system to stop the flow of illegal immigration and illicit drugs. The border wall is infrastructure. It is infrastructure to keep America safe. It is infrastructure to keep drugs out of this country. It is infrastructure to control illegal immigration. I urge my colleagues to vote yes on the Johnson amendment to prohibit the cancelation of contracts to build the border wall. The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Delaware. Mr. CARPER. Mr. President, over the years, I have made any number of trips to our Nation's southern border. I have also traveled extensively throughout Central America--and sometimes with the author of this legislation--with many colleagues, Democratic and Republican. One of the people who have been to that part of the world more than me is a guy who used to serve here in the Senate--later, Vice President--and that is our President, Joe Biden. There is a verse in Scripture in the New Testament, Matthew 25, which speaks to the least of these, and one of the things: When I was hungry, did you feed me? When I was naked, did you clothe me? When I was thirsty, did you get me to drink? When I was a stranger in your land, did you welcome me? Did you welcome me? To the extent we have looked out for the least of these, then we have a brighter future. But anyway, the reason I raise that, we have this moral imperative to look out for the least of these, and that includes people who end up on our borders looking for safe haven. The reason why so many people continue to come to our borders from Central America--especially Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador--is because they live lives in fear; deprived of economic opportunity and hope; corruption, crime. You know, if any of us lived there with our families, we would want to get out of there, too, and find a place to go to with a brighter future. As a former chairman of the Homeland Security Committee, border security is enormously important. We need secure borders; no question about that. There are a whole bunch of force multipliers which help provide more secure borders, including barriers--including barriers-- and I have supported them. So has the Senator, who is also a former chairman of the committee. We have traveled in that part of the world together. One of the things we fully agree on is what I just said. We can spend the next, you know, year, 5 years, 10 years securing our border. That is important. But if we don't address those root causes of why people are coming here, 10, 20 years from now, they will still be coming. They will still be coming. We have to be smarter than that. This is a shared responsibility; it is not all on the United States. I said to my colleague from West Virginia, I like to use the example of Home Depot, which Ron Johnson, Senator Johnson, heard me use more than a few times. Home Depot--their ad line is ``You can do it. We can help.'' In these countries we are getting all this immigration flow from, they can do it, but we can help. One of the things we set up was something called the Alliance for Prosperity a number of years ago, with Democratic and Republican support--I think with support of certainly then-Vice President Biden and Senator McCain, the late John McCain. Among the things that we need to focus on and we are doing under the Alliance for Prosperity are, one, addressing crime and violence; two, addressing corruption; and three, economic hope and opportunity. Those are the three buckets. We put money in those buckets, the expectation is that those three countries put even more money in those buckets, matching us 2, 3, 4, 5 dollars for every dollar that we put up. There are other countries that we have an expectation for them to help. There are private businesses; there is an expectation for them to help. Nonprofits. There is an expectation for all. This is a shared responsibility. As the place where all these illegal drugs are coming from, moving those drugs through these three countries--we have some moral responsibility to do something to help the situation down there, not just at the border. So with that in mind, I am not going to support this amendment. But I would just note, I always look for common ground. The author of the amendment knows full well--I have heard him talk about it eloquently, about the need to go after root causes. For as long as we have been working on this issue, all those years, we have needed to work on root causes, and we still do today as well. Mr. JOHNSON. Mr. President, I need to respond quickly. The PRESIDING OFFICER. There are now 2 minutes equally divided before a vote on the Johnson amendment. The Senator from Wisconsin. Mr. JOHNSON. Mr. President, I need to respond quickly. [[Page S5801]] Senator Carper was talking about root causes. The root cause of the instability--the primary cause of the violence in Central America is Americans' insatiable demand for drugs. If you solve that problem, you solve the root cause of the problem, and you won't have the violence. But the root cause of this current crisis--because it was already solved--the root cause of this current crisis is President Biden's policies. President Biden is the root cause. So if you want to fix this, we can fix it. Secure the border. Go back to the policies that worked. We are not going to be able to fix Central America until we end our insatiable demand for drugs. With that, I yield the floor. Mr. CARPER. Mr. President, colleagues, in about 48 hours, about a third of the Senate is going to be on an airplane heading for Gillette, WY, and we are going to go and say goodbye to our friend and colleague Mike Enzi. I will never forget where I was sitting about, I don't know, 20 years ago as the Presiding Officer, and Mike Enzi was literally standing almost right where you are, talking about the 80-20 rule and why they were so successful in the Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee. Senator Kennedy and Mike Enzi--Democrat, Republican--how they were able to find common ground and get stuff done: the 80-20 rule. I said to Mike Enzi that day: What is the 80-20 rule? He said: About 80 percent of the stuff, Ted and I agree on, and about 20 percent, we don't. What we do is we focus on the 80 percent where we agree. There is common ground here. I think that the Senator from Wisconsin knows what it is. And I would ask that in addition to talking about our differences, let's talk about where we agree, and let's do good work there. Vote on Amendment No. 2245 The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the amendment. Mr. JOHNSON. I ask for the yeas and nays. The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second? There appears to be a sufficient second. The clerk will call the roll. The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll Mr. THUNE. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from South Carolina (Mr. Graham), the Senator from Oklahoma (Mr. Inhofe), and the Senator from Nebraska (Mr. Sasse). The result was announced--yeas 48, nays 49, as follows: [Rollcall Vote No. 298 Leg.] YEAS--48 Barrasso Blackburn Blunt Boozman Braun Burr Capito Cassidy Collins Cornyn Cotton Cramer Crapo Cruz Daines Ernst Fischer Grassley Hagerty Hawley Hoeven Hyde-Smith Johnson Kennedy Lankford Lee Lummis Manchin Marshall McConnell Moran Murkowski Paul Portman Risch Romney Rounds Rubio Scott (FL) Scott (SC) Shelby Sullivan Thune Tillis Toomey Tuberville Wicker Young NAYS--49 Baldwin Bennet Blumenthal Booker Brown Cantwell Cardin Carper Casey Coons Cortez Masto Duckworth Durbin Feinstein Gillibrand Hassan Heinrich Hickenlooper Hirono Kaine Kelly King Klobuchar Leahy Lujan Markey Menendez Merkley Murphy Murray Ossoff Padilla Peters Reed Rosen Sanders Schatz Schumer Shaheen Sinema Smith Stabenow Tester Van Hollen Warner Warnock Warren Whitehouse Wyden NOT VOTING--3 Graham Inhofe Sasse The PRESIDING OFFICER. On this vote, the yeas are 48, the nays are 49. Under the previous order requiring 60 votes for the adoption of this amendment, the amendment is not agreed to. The amendment (No. 2245) was rejected. The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Mississippi. Amendment No. 2146 Mr. WICKER. Mr. President, I offer today what should be considered a friendly amendment to the broadband section of this infrastructure bill. Why is it a friendly amendment? Because by using the Administrative Procedure Act, which my amendment would provide, it would save billions of dollars in broadband build-out funds. It would provide for consumer input, stakeholder input, local and State government input into NTIA--the Agency that will be in charge of this broadband build-out. And also because it will not delay the broadband build-out in any way. Now, as written today, the broadband section waives the Administrative Procedure Act. The Wicker amendment would simply strike that waive and make the Administrative Procedure Act apply to the broadband section as it applies to so many big programs that are enacted. If we pass this amendment, here will be the timeline: Let's assume the President doesn't get around to signing this bill until October 1. I would expect the President would sign it earlier than that, but let's assume that he does that. There will be 30 days of notice, 30 days of public comment after the notice is published, a review of those comments, which could take 30 to 40 days. At that point the regulations are published and, after 30 days, they go into effect. So by my calculations, assuming the President is very, very late in signing the bill, the act and the regulations under the Administrative Procedure Act would be done by February 7. Now, what we all know--what everyone in this Chamber knows--is that we have to wait on the FCC maps, and they will not be ready until the earliest--until the earliest--by spring of next year, and that is--that is very, very optimistic. So we have time to do it right, to get public input, to have people who have already experienced this come to the Agency and say: You might want to do it this way; or: You might want to avoid doing it that way because here is our experience. We did this one time before, and it was only $4.7 billion. This is $42 billion. That was the BTOP program, which was enacted in 2009. We skipped this. We gave it to an Agency which is going to have it this time, the NTIA--a staff of only 157 people--to monitor back then $4.7 billion; this time it is $42 billion. Here is what we learned about the BTOP program, which is an awful lot like this one: When Congress asked NTIA to administer this, the results were deeply troubling. Let me quote the inspector general, let me quote the Stanford Institute for Economic Policy, and the Phoenix Center. Their own inspector general found that the Agency faced significant challenges in managing the size and complexity of the program. It is a program a tenth the size of what we are talking about today. The Stanford Institute said NTIA's mechanism for selecting projects was incoherent. NTIA, had they adopted more a reasonable framework, many more households could have been connected with the same money, or the same number of connections could have been realized for a fraction of the cost, because they didn't do what I am advocating today. The Phoenix Center, an independent think tank, said they found no positive effect on home broadband adoption from the BTOP program. My fellow colleagues, years from now, when someone realizes we have wasted billions of dollars on this build-out, I would want, and I think my colleagues would want, to say: Well, I voted yes on the Wicker amendment to take the extra 130, 140 days to hear what went right and what went wrong in the past and to make sure we get it right. No Senator has worked harder than I have on broadband build-out. I want this program to succeed. This is a way to make sure we spend the money correctly, to make sure we do it right. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to have printed in the Record an article dated August 3, just yesterday, from the National Journal. It says: ``How $65 billion for broadband infrastructure could fall short.'' I ask unanimous consent that it be printed in the Record at this point There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the Record, as follows: [[Page S5802]] [From the National Journal, Aug. 3, 2021] How $65 Billion for Broadband Infrastructure Could Fall Short (By Brendan Bordelon) The $65 billion set aside for high-speed internet in the Senate's bipartisan infrastructure deal is just a small piece of the bill's $550 billion in new spending. But don't call the plan unambitious. ``It's the biggest broadband bill in the history of the country,'' said Gigi Sohn, a fellow at the Georgetown Law Institute for Technology Law & Policy and a former Democratic official at the Federal Communications Commission. ``Would I have preferred more money for deployment? Yeah,'' said Sohn. ``I would like to see $100 billion rather than $65 billion. But this is a bipartisan bill, and I think that is super important to remember and appreciate.'' Some of those billions are earmarked for a tribal connectivity fund, `middle-mile' broadband deployments rural telemedicine, distance learning, and other discrete provisions. But the heart of the Senate's broadband infrastructure deal is a $42 billion pot of money for state and territorial governments, which will have to convince Washington that their plan to build out high-speed internet to rural and underserved regions will work before receiving federal grants. But there's a catch. While that money will be set aside immediately after the legislation is signed into law, the bill stipulates that no funds can be sent to states until after the FCC fixes its much-maligned set of national broadband maps showing where coverage exists and where it doesn't. The latest FCC estimate suggests that around 14.5 million Americans now live in regions without access to broadband. But other estimates have come in much higher, and the persistence of inaccurate maps means no one really knows for sure. Lawmakers and policy experts alike had mulled whether it made sense to move ahead on broadband funding despite not knowing how much money is needed or where to put it. In the end, however, the increasing importance of high-speed- internet access in a pandemic-stricken world--and the unlikely chance that Congress can summon the energy and bipartisanship needed to address the question at a later date--pushed the Senate to act. ``To wait would make the perfect be the enemy of the very good,'' said John Horrigan, a senior fellow at the Benton Institute for Broadband and Society. ``If you're going to not act until you have the best data, it's going to take a long time for you to act.'' The FCC will not say when it expects to finish the new, more accurate maps. But so far the commission hasn't even completed the necessary procurement and contracting efforts. And most telecom experts believe the maps won't be ready for prime time until next year at the earliest. ``It's going to be a couple of years before really substantial amounts of money start being dug into the ground and strung up on telephone poles,'' said Doug Brake, the director of broadband and spectrum policy at the Information Technology and Innovation Foundation. A lack of accurate maps could further slow broadband deployment by making it hard for states to formulate their own plans. Even once the FCC maps are completed, it will take time for state governments to digest their findings, determine where and how to spend federal dollars, and submit those plans to Washington for approval. Some states are taking matters into their own hands. In 2020, Georgia partnered with LightBox, a commercial real- estate-data provider, to publish their own statewide broadband map. And there's a surge of interest from other states--Pennsylvania and Maine are already working on their own maps, and Caroline Stoll, the head of sales and strategic partnership at LightBox, said the company is in talks with several more states looking to replicate Georgia's map. ``It is a very, very good use of time and resources by the states to develop their own map,'' said Sohn. Beyond a lack of maps, there are other potential pitfalls in the Senate's plan to fund broadband infrastructure. Recent efforts by the federal government to finance high-speed- internet projects have been conducted through reverse auctions run by the FCC. The new plan puts individual states in charge of their buildouts, allowing for greater experimentation with funding structures and broadband technologies--states can decide whether to pursue primarily wired or wireless options, for example. But it could also open the door to overbuilding and waste. Scott Wallsten, the president of the Technology Policy Institute, said the decision to put states in the driver's seat ``is going to tremendously reduce the efficiency of the program.'' ``The most efficient way to allocate the money--the way you get the biggest bang for the buck--is a reverse auction,'' said Wallsten. Gregory Rosston, the director of the public-policy program at Stanford University and a former FCC economist, said he expects state efforts will be spotty, with some doing a good job of planning buildouts while others fall short. He also worried that state broadband plans will be ``much more subjective and subject to influence than a more centralized, transparent system.'' And Brake has issues with the $100 million minimum that each state is slated to receive for high-speed internet. He said that smaller, denser states like Connecticut may not need that much money to provide complete coverage to its citizens. ``To get something through the Senate, that's kind of the price of doing business,'' said Brake. ``Everyone's got to get something.'' Still, Brake said the Senate's infrastructure deal is a marked improvement from recent proposals like the BRIDGE Act, which would've ignored the lack of broadband maps and divvied up federal funds through imprecise metrics like raw population and the percentage of rural or low-income citizens. ``I think it could be potentially more efficient if this was sort of run through a single ***process*** within the federal government,'' Brake said. ``[But] it's improved a lot in this new version.'' Mr. WICKER. Mr. President, I don't want this program to fall short; I want it to succeed. This amendment gives us a chance to get the money right, to take the extra time that we are going to have to take anyway to get the maps right. It is a good government amendment, a friendly amendment, and I urge bipartisan adoption of it. The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Maine. Mr. KING. Mr. President, with all due respect to my friend from Mississippi, I don't consider this a friendly amendment. I consider this a major departure from the agreed-upon structure of this broadband section of the bill that we are talking about. This, as we all know, was a heavily negotiated bill. There are provisions in it that I don't like. There are provisions in it that I wish were there that aren't there because of the negotiation. This provision, which appears innocent, to reinsert the Administrative Procedure Act into this ***process*** would bureaucratize the ***process***, slow it down, and would not assist in the ***process***. Here are some points that I think need to be made: The first is I consider the broadband section one of the crown jewels of this entire bill. And the fact that it is structured in such a way that the grants will go to the States and the States will decide how best to administer those programs because of their knowledge of their needs in their States--yes, they are going to use maps--updated maps, I should say--from the FCC, but this is, really, a State-driven ***process***. The Administrative Procedure Act is principally a regulatory ***process***, and we are not talking about a regulatory ***process*** here. We are not talking about the issuance of a lot of long and detailed regulations. We are talking about a grant program to States, and so the burdensome administrative requirements of the APA are really not necessary in this case because it is not a regulatory ***process***. There is already significant oversight built into the statute. There are 68 pages that have all kinds of requirements for public notice, filing online, public disclosure, comment, and involvement of communities of other providers, of all of those interested parties in this ***process***. So it is not like it is some kind of closed ***process***. There is no doubt that this will slow down the ***process***. There is no doubt that this would restrict the ability of the NTIA to tailor programs to fit individual States. As I said, that is one of the beauties of this whole provision, is that it has the flexibility to meet the needs of States as they define them. It would hamper that State flexibility, and it would make it more difficult for the States to follow through on a timely basis to make this tremendously important. Where the Senator and I agree--and I know how hard he has worked on this, as have I. This is, I think, one of the most important things that we can do in this bill, to get Americans connected. I don't need to make that argument. Everyone in the Chamber knows that. The other piece, unfortunately, that this amendment would do would be enable and, in fact, invite lawsuits. There would, undoubtedly, be challenges to the regulations, challenges to the--if indeed the APA said you have got to do this by regulation, you are building a whole new bureaucratic ***process***, and the bill already provides for the kinds of protections that the Senator is talking about. So I think this is an unnecessary amendment. I certainly, as one of those [[Page S5803]] who worked on the negotiation of the bill, don't consider it a friendly amendment, and I believe that it is a major change in the agreement that would not have been agreed to in the negotiation; and I hope my colleagues across the aisle who have supported this agreement will oppose this amendment because it is not something that was in the negotiation and it would not have been accepted by those who were negotiating it on this side of the aisle. So with that, I strongly oppose this amendment. It is a--I don't think I can say it. It makes this a bureaucratic ***process*** that is unnecessary, will only slow and impede the distribution of these desperately needed funds to connect the people of America. I yield the floor. Vote on Amendment No. 2146 The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the Wicker amendment, No. 2146. Mr. WICKER. Mr. President, I ask for the yeas and nays. The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second? There appears to be a sufficient second. The clerk will call the roll. The legislative clerk called the roll. Mr. THUNE. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from South Carolina (Mr. Graham) and the Senator from Oklahoma (Mr. Inhofe). The result was announced--yeas 43, nays 55, as follows: [Rollcall Vote No. 299 Leg.] YEAS--43 Barrasso Blackburn Blunt Boozman Braun Burr Capito Cornyn Cotton Cramer Crapo Cruz Daines Ernst Fischer Grassley Hagerty Hawley Hoeven Hyde-Smith Johnson Kennedy Lankford Lee Lummis Marshall McConnell Moran Paul Risch Rounds Rubio Sasse Scott (FL) Scott (SC) Shelby Sullivan Thune Tillis Toomey Tuberville Wicker Young NAYS--55 Baldwin Bennet Blumenthal Booker Brown Cantwell Cardin Carper Casey Cassidy Collins Coons Cortez Masto Duckworth Durbin Feinstein Gillibrand Hassan Heinrich Hickenlooper Hirono Kaine Kelly King Klobuchar Leahy Lujan Manchin Markey Menendez Merkley Murkowski Murphy Murray Ossoff Padilla Peters Portman Reed Romney Rosen Sanders Schatz Schumer Shaheen Sinema Smith Stabenow Tester Van Hollen Warner Warnock Warren Whitehouse Wyden NOT VOTING--2 Graham Inhofe The amendment (No. 2146) was rejected The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. Rosen). Under the previous order, there will now be 4 minutes of debate, equally divided, prior to a vote relating to the Kennedy amendment No. 2210. The Senator from the Louisiana. Amendment No. 2210 Mr. KENNEDY. Madam President, with respect to my amendment, I offer it on behalf of myself and Senator Cassidy. The last 18 months have been challenging for Louisiana. First, there was Hurricane Laura. Then there was Hurricane Delta. Then there was Hurricane Zeta. The hurricanes alone did about $25 billion of damage. Then we had the historic freezes. Then we had historic flooding. The total amount of damage was $47.1 billion. My people are tough, but they are tired. This amendment would appropriate $1.1 billion in community development block grants to help my people recover. I bring you a problem but also a solution. Thanks to the efforts of Senator Cantwell and Senator Schatz and myself, 3 years ago, we convinced the FCC not to give away the spectrum auction, which belongs to the American people, and instead to auction it off. There is now $80 billion sitting in Treasury. The money for these block grants would come from that $80 billion in cash. Thank you. The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Michigan. Mr. PETERS. Madam President, we all agree that responding to natural disasters is a core Federal responsibility. But, unfortunately, this ***unprecedented*** amendment would take funds from the Federal Communications Commission's spectrum auction revenues to pay for disaster relief. The spectrum auction revenues my colleagues seeks to reallocate are intended to help expand high-speed internet in the United States. All Americans, no matter where they live, should have access to the 21st century economy. We can't pick winners and losers when it comes to natural disasters. The ***process*** should be set in law, which is something my colleague from Hawaii, Senator Schatz, has been working on for years. I support disaster relief, but this is not the way to do it. My heart goes out to all Americans impacted by natural disasters, not just those affected by hurricanes but also devastating wildfires and flooding caused by climate change. I am committed to ensuring they receive the assistance they need, but we need a comprehensive solution. I would like to yield time to my colleague from Maine. The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Maine. Ms. COLLINS. Madam President, first, let me offer to work with both Senators from Louisiana to secure the funding that their State so desperately needs, in my capacity as ranking member of the Transportation, HUD Appropriations Subcommittee. Louisiana has been particularly hard hit, experiencing three hurricanes almost back to back, and, certainly, the need for disaster assistance is clear. But we also have other States that have been affected: Alabama, California, Florida, Iowa, Michigan, Oregon, Puerto Rico--a Territory, not a State, obviously. But they need help too. What I would propose is that we work together on an emergency disaster supplemental that will take care of all these needs, including the needs of the people in hard-hit Louisiana. I pledge my personal help and support to both of my colleagues and friends from Louisiana to bring this about. Finally, let me just say, I am surprised that the administration has not submitted a request for supplemental disaster assistance. And I look forward to see-- The PRESIDING OFFICER. The time has expired. Ms. COLLINS. Thank you. Vote on Amendment No. 2210 Mr. KENNEDY. Madam President, I ask for the yeas and nays. The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the amendment. Is there a sufficient second? There appears to be a sufficient second. The clerk will call the roll. The senior assistant legislative clerk called the roll. Mr. THUNE. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from South Carolina (Mr. Graham) and the Senator from Oklahoma (Mr. Inhofe). The result was announced--yeas 19, nays 79, as follows: [Rollcall Vote No. 300 Leg.] YEAS--19 Blackburn Blunt Burr Cassidy Cornyn Cramer Cruz Ernst Hagerty Hawley Hoeven Hyde-Smith Kennedy Ossoff Rubio Scott (FL) Sullivan Tuberville Warnock NAYS--79 Baldwin Barrasso Bennet Blumenthal Booker Boozman Braun Brown Cantwell Capito Cardin Carper Casey Collins Coons Cortez Masto Cotton Crapo Daines Duckworth Durbin Feinstein Fischer Gillibrand Grassley Hassan Heinrich Hickenlooper Hirono Johnson Kaine Kelly King Klobuchar Lankford Leahy Lee Lujan Lummis Manchin Markey Marshall McConnell Menendez Merkley Moran Murkowski Murphy Murray Padilla Paul Peters Portman Reed Risch Romney Rosen Rounds Sanders Sasse Schatz Schumer Scott (SC) Shaheen Shelby Sinema Smith Stabenow Tester Thune Tillis Toomey Van Hollen Warner Warren Whitehouse Wicker Wyden Young NOT VOTING--2 Graham Inhofe The PRESIDING OFFICER. The yeas are 19, the nays are 79. [[Page S5804]] Under the previous order requiring 60 votes for the adoption of this amendment, this amendment is rejected. The amendment (No. 2210) was rejected. The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority whip. Eviction Moratorium Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, after many weeks of uncertainty and distress, millions of Americans can--for now--let go of the fear of losing their homes and the roofs over their head. Last night, the Biden administration announced a new 60-day Federal eviction moratorium. I certainly support that decision. I want to thank all those who insisted that we do something, especially U.S Congresswoman Cori Bush, of Missouri, who knows the trauma, personally, of being without a home, having been a victim of eviction in her life. Representative Bush camped out outside on the Capitol steps for 5 nights. She slept on the steps of this building so that some of the most vulnerable people in America would be able to sleep with a roof over their heads while we were made sure the law caught up with our intentions. I also want to thank my fellow Democratic Senators, especially Sherrod Brown and Elizabeth Warren, who pushed for a fair and just solution to avoid what would have been an entirely preventable tragedy for families who already lost so much in this pandemic. As many as 11 million Americans have fallen behind on their rent during this pandemic because of job losses and other misfortunes. Let me tell you about one of them. Patricia Vasquez. She lives in Chicago's Little Village neighborhood. She told her story to the Chicago Sun-Times. By the time Patricia Vasquez received an email on July 23 telling her that she qualified for help from Chicago's Emergency Rental Assistance Program, the gas to her apartment had already been cut off because of an overdue $1,400 bill. She had sold some clothes and jewelry to pay the electric bill and keep the lights on, and she was 6 months behind in rent. The Federal eviction moratorium will enable people like Patricia to avoid homelessness while they wait for emergency assistance to reach them. Between the bipartisan CARES Act that Congress passed in December and President Biden's American Rescue Plan, Congress has provided State and local governments more than $46 billion in emergency rental assistance to help families pay their landlords. Unfortunately, many States and localities have been slower than expected in getting that money to the people who need it. So far, only $3 billion of the $46 billion has reached tenants and landlords. To punish renters who have already lost so much for delays over which they have no control and to evict them with the Delta variant tearing the country apart would be unfair, unconscionable, and, in many cases, deleterious to public health. It would harm our efforts to bring this virus under control for good. Fortunately, in recent weeks, many cities and States have made progress in getting the help out to the people who need it. That includes the city of Chicago and the State of Illinois. The CDC's new eviction moratorium is only a first step. It is imperative that all State and local governments step up their efforts to get Federal relief to the families who need it and the landlords as well. This pandemic has caused enough pain. Redtape can't be allowed to deepen that pain for everyone. Immigration Madam President, I would like to address another issue that comes up on the floor quite regularly, usually from speeches on the other side of the aisle. I heard one of my colleagues in the Senate on the Republican side who is a personal friend talk about it today--and he is not the only one-- and it is, of course, the issue of immigration. I have been involved in this issue for a long time. I can recall when I was first elected to the Senate, I got a phone call from Ted Kennedy. He said: I heard you are going to be on the Senate Judiciary Committee. I said: That is right. He said: Can I ask you to be a member of my Immigration Subcommittee? Well, how do you say no to Ted Kennedy, to start with? I was fascinated by the invitation. I got involved in the immigration debate then and over the years. At one point, I joined three other Democratic Senators and four Republican Senators--the so-called Gang of 8--and tried to sit down and fix this broken immigration system. We actually wrote a bill, a good bill. It passed here on the floor of the Senate with 68 votes. Senator McCain was one of the contributors to it. Senator Flake of Arizona was also one of them--Senator Graham of South Carolina, Senator Rubio of Florida, Senator Schumer, Senator Bennet, Senator Menendez. We put our hearts and souls into that effort and put it together and brought it to the floor of the Senate and it was enacted into law. Comprehensive immigration reform--I should say, it passed the Senate. It failed to become enacted into law because the House of Representatives, under Republican control, wouldn't bring it up for debate, let alone a vote. That was an unfortunate missed opportunity. It just comes down to this. We have not passed a significant immigration bill in the United States of America in 35 years. Everyone but everyone concedes that our immigration system is broken. There are parts of it that are just fundamentally unfair. There are parts of it which do not serve our Nation. There are certain things we ought to all agree on, Democrats and Republicans. Let me give you three that I think are the starting points. First, we need a safe and secure border. I want to know who is coming into America and what they are bringing. In the age of terrorism, in the age of drugs, I want to know who is coming in and what they are bringing. Yes, we need border security. Secondly, we should never knowingly allow a dangerous person to come into this country, period. If someone is here without legal protected status and they are dangerous to us, they are gone--no ifs, ands, or buts about it The third point is an important one as well. We cannot allow everyone in the world who wants to come into the United States to arrive tomorrow. It just won't work. We have to have an orderly ***process***, and we ought to show some caring and humanitarian instinct in that ***process***, too, whether it is a refugee or asylee. These are people who desperately need some safe place to be, and the United States has often opened its doors since World War II to show that kind of kindness. Our generation should do the same. Now, there are those who come to the floor and say: Because so many people want to come into the United States, it is a mistake for us to give anybody legal status in this country because it is a green light. It is an incentive for even more to show up. That argument, I think, is not strong, and here is why. Each year, the orderly legal ***process*** in America makes 1 million new Americans from immigrants. It happens every year. These people are following the law, every letter of it, to become legal permanent residents in America. So to say we are going to cut them off and no longer allow them to become citizens makes no sense. Secondly, immigrants are a critical part of America. When my farmers come to me and tell me how desperately they need farmworkers, and they don't have enough immigrants to fill them, my natural reaction is, why don't you go to the Americans who live near your farms? And they say: Senator, we do. Nobody wants to do that backbreaking work of picking fruit or vegetables and all the hard labor that goes with it. We need immigrants to do it. Two million people in our country pick our crops, 2.4 million. Did you know half of them are undocumented? That is a fact. They have come to this country and get paid to do the worst, hardest work you can imagine. Go to a meat ***processing*** plant or a poultry ***processing*** plant--you pick it--anyplace in the United States and look at the workforce that comes out of that gate at the end of the day. The majority of them--well, I should say 40 percent across the Nation--40 percent of them are immigrants who are working in that field; tough, dangerous, hot, hard work. They do it because others [[Page S5805]] aren't lining up to do it in their place. That is part of America today. Immigrants are a critical element. I might add one other element which is timely. Think of all the times we tune into the Olympics and look at the people who make us just beam with pride, with ``USA'' written across their chest on uniforms, who are winning these medals and competing on behalf of us, the United States, in the Olympics. Suni Lee of Minnesota, who is she? Well, it turns out that she is a child of a Hmong family. The Hmongs, you remember from the Vietnam era, were a people who were killed because they sided with the United States, and they were caught in the crossfire of war. Many of them settled in the United States, many in the State of Minnesota. Here is this young woman, this daughter of refugees who is making us so proud as she stands on the podium crying her eyes out with ``USA'' written on her uniform, proudly holding that gold medal. We cheer her on. Yet when it comes to the U.S Senate, there are no cheers from some quarters. These are immigrants. Many people look at them negatively. I am not one of those people. There has to be a better way. There has to be a humane way for us, this Nation of immigrants, for us to be able to have a system that is fair, that really is based on the three principles I mentioned: border security, no dangerous persons, and we have got to have an orderly ***process*** to come up with. We are going to see in the next few days, I am sure, debate on the budget resolution. It is going to be, in some part, a debate on immigration policy. I am certainly ready for it. I hope my colleagues are too. I hope that they will keep an open mind to a ***process*** of creating a new immigration policy in America that really reflects our values, that is fair to the people who seek to be part of our future, and that recognizes the great heritage which the immigrants have brought to this country. I hope those people who are on the other side who don't feel as I do will take the time to meet some of these immigrant people. Meet my Dreamers. These young people who I first started championing 20 years ago have lived lives in the shadow of doubt for decades. They were told they were undocumented; they could be deported at any moment; and yet they soldiered on. They worked hard. They went to school. They have done remarkable things, becoming doctors and nurses and teachers and entrepreneurs and even members of our military. They are amazing. They never let me down. They are just terrific young people. I think they deserve a chance to become part of America's future. I think they have earned it, and I think we ought to have that kind of attitude in our minds when we talk about the role of immigrants in the future of America. I yield the floor. The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Texas. Mr. CORNYN. Madam President, I didn't come to the floor to speak on this matter, but listening to the comments of my friend from Illinois about the contributions made by immigrants to our country, I wholeheartedly agree with him about that. Really, when I think about immigration, I think it is really sort of the secret sauce to American success. It is the notion that you can come from anywhere, with virtually nothing, and you can legally immigrate to the United States and you can begin to get one of those very difficult jobs working in the fields, working in a meatpacking plant, or someplace else and begin your climb toward the American dream. That, to me, is one of the crown jewels of our country. It is what makes us different. You look at other countries around the world; they don't welcome immigrants. They shun immigrants, and their economies and their countries suffer for it. Let me just say, I agree with the Senator from Illinois about the contribution of immigrants. I listened very carefully as a border State Senator. My State is 40 percent Hispanic. I am sure the Senator from Nevada has a large Hispanic population. They are part of us. They are part of our great Nation and make tremendous contributions. The Hispanics in my State are patriots. They volunteer in disproportionate numbers to serve in the military. They work at jobs that are very difficult. They are very tight-knit families. They are people of faith. They believe in hard work and, most fundamentally, they believe in the American dream. But I don't think it does any tribute to their contributions or their sacrifices to say that people can come to this country without complying with our laws. I also join in the Senator's frustration at our inability to get anything substantially done in this space, but I don't think it is good enough for us to complain about how hard it is. We are all volunteers. What we have to do is do the hard work, and we have not done it since I have been here. We have not done the hard work to try to build that consensus in order to pass meaningful immigration reform, and we need to do that. It is on us. We can't blame somebody else. We are the ones responsible. We haven't done it, and we need to do it. But I would just point out, and the Senator from Illinois knows this, that my State has a 1,200-mile border with Mexico. This is ground zero for the humanitarian crisis that is currently appearing at the border. The Biden administration reversed a lot of the policies of the previous administration without having an alternative plan in place, and it was interpreted as laying out the welcome mat for anybody and everybody who wanted to come to the United States. That is why we are seeing these ***unprecedented*** numbers, or at least numbers we haven't seen for 20 years, in people trying to stream across the border into the United States. I know that there is a lot of debate about, well, should we have physical barriers at the border? The truth is, the experts, the Border Patrol, have told all of us that, yes, you have to have physical barriers in some hard-to-control places, but you also need technology, and you need boots on the ground because this is not just about people immigrating to the United States; this is about the drugs that killed 93,000 Americans last year alone, most of which come across the southern border--cocaine, meth, fentanyl, heroin, just to name a few. When we see the current crisis at the border because of this reversal of the previous administration's policies without any alternative plan in place, this is an open invitation to the cartels to take advantage of the circumstances. What it means, as a practical matter, when so many people come across at the same time, which is what is happening now, including tens of thousands of unaccompanied children, the Border Patrol, which is the law enforcement officials who are given the mission of securing our border--they have to leave the frontline of the border to go change diapers and clean and feed these kids because there is simply not enough personnel there in order to handle this flood of humanity. What happens when they leave the frontlines? Well, in one sector, the Border Patrol Chief told me 40 percent of their agents had to leave the frontlines, which then was a green light for the drug components, the drug smugglers, to bring the poison that killed 93,000 Americans in the United States last year alone across the border. These criminal organizations are very sophisticated. They know exactly what they are doing. They know exactly how to exploit the vulnerabilities in our law, which is why they also have understood that if you flood tens of thousands--in 1 month alone, nearly 200,000--of people across the border, that you are going to overwhelm the system, and that if you coach the migrants to make a claim of credible fear of persecution, that you might just be put into our asylum system, which then has about 1.3, I think, million cases backlogged in our immigration courts, which means we are forced to give you a notice to appear at a future hearing so you can present your case in front of an immigration judge, and maybe, just maybe, you can make your case. As a practical matter, only about 10 percent of the people who do appear in front of an immigration judge are able to meet the legal criteria for asylum. But here is how the cartels, how the transnational criminal organizations, have figured out how to exploit our [[Page S5806]] laws: Because we have to release people and give them a notice to appear because of the sheer volume, most of them don't show up for their court hearing. So they have succeeded because of the gaps in our law, not because of a lack of a physical barrier along the border. They are turning themselves in to the Border Patrol and making this claim of asylum because they know that they will more than likely succeed in making their way into the United States. I don't care how many times the Vice President goes to Central America or talks about root causes of illegal immigration. I don't care how many times Director Mayorkas tells Cubans: Don't come to America because of the danger of coming overseas into our country. These organizations are smart. They are whispering in the ear of these migrants. They are saying: If you will pay us enough money, we will get you to America. And these migrants watch TV. They watch cable TV. They take phone calls and get emails from their friends and relatives in the United States. They know that this statement ``don't try to come to America'' is just completely inconsistent with what is happening on the ground. So I don't think it does us any good to complain about how hard our job is or how many times we have failed to get the job done. What I am really concerned about right now is that the majority whip, who is also chairman of the Judiciary Committee, has basically told us he is going to give up on a bipartisan immigration reform bill, and they are going to try to jam this through on a purely party-line vote in this reconciliation bill, otherwise known as the reckless tax-and-spending spree. Now, I don't expect that the Parliamentarian will allow them to do that under the rules of the Senate. This would completely circumvent the rules of the Senate, which require, on matters of substantive legislation, 60 votes to close off debate, the so-called filibuster rule. But I couldn't resist responding to the majority whip's--the Senator from Illinois--statements about how hard our job is. I don't think it does us much good to come here and say: This is really hard. This is really hard. Our constituents expect us to fix it, and we know how to do it if we will just do our job H.R 3684 So, Madam President, on the bipartisan infrastructure bill now before the Senate, I am glad to see that the majority leader, Senator Schumer, is allowing amendments to be presented from folks on both sides. Senator Schumer had given us an artificial deadline to finish the bill, but he has also told us we are not going home until we do so, and we take him at his word. But I hope he will continue to allow this ***process*** to play out, no matter how long it takes, until this legislation is ready to be voted on. That is principally because the ***process*** that brought this bill to the floor did not involve the regular, normal hearings and markups across multiple Senate committees. That is certainly not a criticism of the bipartisan group who has gotten us to where we are; it is really just a statement of the dysfunction of the legislative ***process*** in the Senate these days. But the fact is, the vast majority of the Senators in this Chamber did not have a hand in crafting this legislation even though it will impact every single community across the country. I believe the bipartisan group worked in good faith to get us to the starting gate. Now it is time to allow every Senator, representing every State in the country, to weigh in and offer improvements to the bill. I have said from the beginning that an open amendment ***process*** will be critical to the success of this legislation, and that is especially true when it comes to paying for this legislation. We are waiting for the Congressional Budget Office, the official scorer, to tell us what the costs will be and whether we have been successful in offering offsetting pay-fors. One budget expert at the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget has already forecasted a discouraging score. He estimated the bill would only raise about $208 billion--less than half of the new spending in the bill. But it is important for all of us to realize we are also reauthorizing the expiring surface transportation bill, which is ordinarily financed by the highway trust fund, and it is going to require another $118 billion to shore that up because the White House has taken off the table any other pay-fors that would include a user fee on electric vehicles or indexing the gas tax or other ideas that would fill in that gap. So another $118 billion of borrowed money is going to be necessary to fill that gap. I don't think any of us regard that as a good outcome. Maybe it is the best we can do under the circumstances. But as it stands now, our debt to GDP, our debt to our gross domestic product ratio, is at the highest level it has been since World War II. In other words, we fought a world war to defeat imperial Japan and Nazi Germany, and we didn't ask how much it cost; we did what we had to do. We did the same thing when it came to COVID, which was a domestic equivalent, I think, of war, defeating the virus and shoring up our economy. Our country has invested a huge amount of money in the war against COVID-19, and now is not the time to double down on out-of-control spending for a nonemergency matter. We need to find responsible ways to finance these new expenses, and I hope we will have an opportunity to vote on a range of amendments to that end. I have been proud to work with Senator Padilla, our new Senator from California, a Democrat, to offer an amendment that would provide more funding for a variety of infrastructure projects, including roads, bridges, and public transit. What it does is it gives State and local leaders more authority when it comes to identifying and investing in the greatest needs of their States and their communities. And here is the kicker: It does so without increasing the deficit one penny. That is because it gives State and local leaders the ability to spend COVID relief funding that they already have on infrastructure projects that might otherwise be neglected. They are not required to do so, but our amendment would allow them to do so rather than to claw that money back when the appropriation sunsets or to put guardrails on it and say you can only use it for some prescribed uses, which, frankly, they have more money to spend than they know what to do with when it comes to those authorized uses. As folks hunkered down in their home to slow the spread of the virus, the change in travel patterns hurt more than airlines and hotels; it put a serious dent in State and local transportation budgets in all of our States. State departments of transportation are facing an estimated $18 billion in shortfalls through 2024. Leaders across the country have had to delay or cancel critical transportation projects because of a lack of funding, and it is unclear when those projects may get back on track. I might say that one of the things we have seen with the eviction moratorium expiring is that $46 billion of money we appropriated last year still hasn't gotten to the intended beneficiary, to the people who are trying to pay their rent but can't pay their rent. So we have a huge problem, logistical problem, in voting on money and actually getting it to the intended beneficiary. That is true in COVID-19. That is true in disaster relief. The type of thing that Senator Padilla and I are suggesting is to take money that is already in the hands of the State and local governments and let them use it so they can do it quickly on investments which will last and endure rather than just spend it on operating expenses. There is an urgent need for more transportation funding, and that is exactly what our amendment would provide. There is no mandate, as I said, that it be spent for a single transportation project. If a city or a State or a county has plans to use their funds on pandemic-related expenses, those plans will not be interrupted or called into question. It simply provides our local leaders what they have asked each of us for most, and it starts with flexibility. If a city is experiencing a spike in COVID cases and needs to use Federal funding to buy additional ICU bedspace or hire new healthcare workers, they can and they should move forward with those plans. This is not about cutting resources that are needed. But we [[Page S5807]] know that many States and localities simply don't have enough qualifying expenses to use the money that they have been given. They are looking for ways to spend the dollars they already have as given to them in the CARES Act and the American Rescue Plan. That is not to say they don't want this funding; they just want to be able to use it consistent with the guardrails that Congress has provided, and that is what our amendment will allow. The broad support for this amendment is a testament to the importance of these changes. Our amendment has been endorsed by two dozen organizations that represent a diverse range of stakeholders, from the National League of Cities, the U.S Conference of Mayors, the Association of Metropolitan Planning Organizations--all of which advocate on behalf of cities across the country. We have also received endorsements from the American Road & Transportation Builders Association, which represents all facets of the transportation construction industry, as well as the American Public Transportation Association. It also includes organizations that advocate for safer roads, like the American Traffic Safety Services Association. I have been pleased to find common ground with Senator Padilla and our colleagues on both sides of the aisle to help build support for this amendment and, I think, actually enhance the work done by the bipartisan negotiating group. This is not something they were able to get done in that negotiating group--they have told me--even though it was a subject of discussion. So now it is a chance for the rest of us, on a bipartisan basis, to weigh in and make this bill better. Throughout the ***process***, we have made adjustments so States with unique, but no less important, infrastructure needs can put this funding toward those uses. We are in the ***process*** of making some final tweaks to ensure that we receive broad bipartisan support, as well as that of the White House, and I hope we will have a vote on this amendment on the Senate floor soon. Our amendment will empower local officials to make the best decisions for their communities and ensure that taxpayers get the most bang for their buck with these relief funds that have already been appropriated; and then, if we do not authorize their use in the manner I have described, will likely be spent on annual or reoccurring expenses rather than on something that will endure for a long time, like infrastructure. So I hope our amendment will come to a vote in the Senate very soon. There is no reason--there is no reason--to rush the amendment ***process*** and to cut off good amendments for a vote or consideration that will actually improve this legislation. There are a lot of great ideas out there to strengthen this bill, to maximize the impact of every dollar, and pay for these investments responsibly. So let me just close by saying I appreciate the hard work that has gone into this bill so far, and I hope we will continue to have more opportunities to improve it as the amendment ***process*** goes forward. The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. Baldwin). The junior Senator from North Dakota. Mr. CRAMER. Madam President, I want to take some time to share some of my thoughts on this Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act that we are debating today, and I wasn't intending to speak specifically to the amendment Senator Cornyn just brought up, but I just can't resist saying: Man, I wish you well. I think when--a bipartisan solution, like Senator Cornyn and Senator Padilla have come up with, to provide flexibility to our Governors and our communities just makes all the sense in the world. So I am looking forward to voting yes, and I hope we can get a resolution that allows at least 59 of my closest friends to do the same. I want to start out by thanking Senators Portman and Sinema for providing such incredible leadership, and to the group of bipartisan Senators who negotiated and coordinated this incredible effort. I also want to thank Senator Capito, who is managing, of course, this floor ***process***, along with Environment and Public Works Committee Chairman Tom Carper. The progress that they have made on this issue with the administration earlier this year, paired with the excellent leadership that they provided the committee, really exemplifies what is possible when we work together, and it has allowed us to get to this point. Reviving America's roads and bridges is a longstanding national priority of Congress, and is one that has taken us too long to address. We need reliable, accessible infrastructure to operate locally and to compete globally; and as it currently stands, the bill before us is well positioned to meet that exact need. The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act isn't perfect--no bill ever is--but it makes historic investments in assets that will benefit every American for many, many years. I applaud the group for using the surface transportation bill that we unanimously passed out of the Environment and Public Works Committee as the foundation for this bill. As the lead Republican on the Transportation and Infrastructure Subcommittee, I know how much time and effort both sides of the aisle have put in to surface transportation reauthorization. The end result reflected the good work we accomplished, and it was the perfect building block for the package that is before us. As you know, I was not an original part of this bipartisan negotiating group. However, when I was approached for my input, I made my top priorities clear: One, keeping the permitting reforms in our bill--permitting reforms like the one-agency decision that was a rule that President Trump put into place, that President Biden removed his first day in office. It is codified in this bill for surface transportation; Prioritizing dedicating funding to States and to their departments of transportation as part of the traditional formula for distribution; Limiting the expansion of urban transit programs; and Including the bipartisan bill that Senator Lujan and I introduced to clean up orphaned and abandoned oil and gas wells. I was glad to see these provisions, as well as our committee's Drinking and Wastewater Infrastructure Act, in the bill. I also appreciate the use of unspent COVID-19 relief funds to help pay for these priorities rather than being used for paying people to not work and adding fuel to the fire of inflation. This does just the opposite. I thank my colleagues for asking for my opinion, and I am even more grateful that they listened and included these provisions in our final product. Infrastructure has been a priority for Congress because it is a priority for our constituents. America cannot succeed without a robust infrastructure from one coast to the other and all the places, like North Dakota, in between. We need roads and bridges to go from farm to town and from town to city, from city to city, and State to State. We use ports and waterways and railroads to move the products that we produce to places they could otherwise never get to. We use rail and air to connect with family and friends and other business associates around the world. And we use broadband connectivity to facilitate transactions, both personal and business. Infrastructure is foundational to our way of life, and it is the constitutional responsibility of the Federal Government to facilitate interstate commerce, including the movement of goods and services along our highways and byways and waterways and railways. Rural States, like North Dakota, know this better than most. In fact, Rugby, ND, is literally the geographical center of the North American continent. We are landlocked, and we rely on our transportation infrastructure to get where we need to go and, more importantly, to move the products that we produce to where they need to get. For example, North Dakota is the top producer of durum wheat, which gets ground into semolina flour, which becomes the main ingredient in pasta. The wheat goes from the field to a grain elevator by a farm road, to a mill by rail, and to a ***processing*** plant by both, and then it goes anywhere from a [[Page S5808]] grocery store in California to a restaurant in New York, or perhaps overseas to a market far away. And just like every other commodity we produce, it requires a reliable infrastructure system that is safe and sufficient for every single mile on the journey. The United States needs rural America, and rural America needs infrastructure. The personal needs it fulfills and the economic benefits it delivers are obvious. Rather than investing trillions of taxpayer dollars on government handouts to people to not work, we can spend money on putting people to work, revitalizing a system that directly benefits all of us, and that is what the plan before us would help accomplish. It is not perfect--no bill is, as I said--and there are parts of it that I don't support, but there are parts, I know, that some of my colleagues do not support, even though they are top priorities for me. Our Founding Fathers intended for Congress to collaborate and find common ground. Those are functions of our system; they are not a side effect. It is easy to imagine if every Founder had demanded to get everything they wanted and nothing else, well, then we would have had a king, and we may not have had the system of cooperative Federalism that we do today. And if enough of them believed that doing nothing is better than getting 80 or 90 percent of what they wanted or--then our more perfect Union would never have gotten started and had a chance to become that. The inability to meet in the middle is not an excuse for inaction, especially when it comes to addressing not just the pressing needs of the American people here at home, but also protecting our standing as a country on the world stage. We understand how important infrastructure is, but so does China, so does Russia, so do all of our adversaries who would like to see us continue to fall behind. The Chinese Communist Party would love to see America's roads and bridges crumble. They would be happy to let infrastructure get in the way of American production and allow for them to meet the needs of the global economy in our absence. The bill that we have before us gives us an opportunity to help stop that from happening. Now, while I am all for working across the aisle, that doesn't mean I will support bills that I fundamentally disagree with, like the $3.5 trillion-plus spending bill that Senate Democrats plan to cobble together after we finish this bipartisan infrastructure bill. I oppose the Democrats' reckless tax-and-spend agenda, and I will join each of my Republican colleagues in opposing it and offering amendments to change its harmful outcomes. That bill is completely separate from the bipartisan infrastructure bill that we are talking about today. They are not tied together, despite what rhetoric there may be otherwise. Both should be considered on their own merits separately. What a shame it would be for Democrats to offer the American public a glimpse of bipartisanship and cooperation to only do an about-face and hold it hostage while they jam through a massive tax increase and growth of the Federal Government, adding to inflation. I hope my colleagues will choose to build on this bipartisan success and resist the urge to follow the partisan whims of their political base. As it stands, the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act would be a significant win for our country. I know it would be for my State. So far we have avoided adding poison pills or derailing the ***process***, and I urge my colleagues to keep it that way. North Dakota needs safe and sufficient infrastructure. America needs safe and sufficient infrastructure. And the world needs the United States to have safe and sufficient infrastructure. I urge my colleagues to keep the negative parts of the bill in perspective and to appreciate the opportunity we have today to make a difference for our constituents. I yield the floor. The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Utah. Mr. ROMNEY. Madam President, the remarks of my colleague from North Dakota have inspired me to stand and join him; and also the fact that we are in a room of great significance and silence reigns, and I hate just to fill it with words, but I think the topic we are talking about is extremely important. I appreciate the good Senator's support and effort in helping craft this legislation--this bipartisan legislation to improve our infrastructure in our country. I also salute the leadership on both sides of the aisle for allowing a robust amendment ***process***. There is no question but that there are many opportunities to improve the legislation as written. The chance for our colleagues to offer adjustments and improvements is a part of our tradition and a good part of our tradition. I would concur that we do need to upgrade our infrastructure. I think most Americans who have experienced our infrastructure would come to the same conclusion. Too often, our roads are in need of repair. Many times, we have communities that are not connected with high-speed travel opportunities from one part of the city to another. Our transit, in some cases, is old, slow, and does not reach communities that need it. Our rail system, particularly in the northeast, which is an important corridor for travel, is way out of date. Some people know you can drive between some cities. Where there are trains, you can drive faster than you can take the train. We have structurally deficient and dangerous bridges, in some cases, that need to be repaired. So I think there is general agreement on both sides of the aisle that we need to improve our infrastructure. It is known by people in this country, and I think particularly brought home to us, if you travel in other countries and see what they are doing and then you compare where we are--you would think: Boy, we used to lead the world in these things, and now we are not. And it is having an impact on our productivity as a nation because of additional travel time necessary for us to get to and from work as well as other endeavors. If that is going to happen, we have only two options right now and probably for the indefinite future. Right now, we have a circumstance where my party is in the minority--not by much. We are basically tied here in the Senate, although the tie is broken by the Vice President. So the Democrats have the majority in the Senate, in the House, and, of course, with the White House. Given that circumstance, it is possible for the Democrats to write an infrastructure bill all by themselves and simply pass it through a ***process*** known as reconciliation. That is one option. The other option is to work together on a bipartisan basis, where we craft a better bill with the input of Republicans and Democrats. That is the option that is before us now. There is not a third alternative, which is Republicans only draft the bill. I would love that alternative, but it is just not available to us because we don't hold the House, the Senate, and the White House. So we have two options. Do we want our Democrat colleagues to draft a bill all by themselves or do we want to work together with Republicans and Democrats and fashion something that is bipartisan. Now, I note that when you work in a bipartisan basis, there are some things the Democrats will want to include that we Republicans would rather not have there, and it is obvious that that is the case. I am sure that is the case for Democrats as well. They will see things that we have included that they just as soon would not have there. And it is very easy for either side--or both sides, rather--to point out the things in the bipartisan bill that they don't like and to attack it as not being fully in conformity with their views. But that is the nature of two parties working together. Now, some would say: We could do better. Let's have another alternative, a different bipartisan approach. My answer is: Go at it. Have at it. No one is keeping people from working together if they want to come up with a better piece of legislation. Boy, I would be anxious to see what it is. But in order to get a bill passed, it must be acceptable to Democrats and Republicans. And that is unless, in my party, we are able to have Republicans [[Page S5809]] in the majority in the House and the Senate, and the White House, which we don't have at this stage. So, again, the alternative is, if you can come up with a better bipartisan bill, do it. Two, amend it as you feel appropriate--and I think there are good amendments that are coming forward that I have supported and will support going forward. But we must not let the desire for perfection on the part of people like myself overcome the desire to have a good bill ultimately reached. I think it is actually counterproductive for either side to take attack shots at the items in the bill they don't like. Instead, bring forward amendments. See if you can improve the bill. If you can't do that, come up with a bill that has bipartisan support, because that is the only alternative we face, other than a bill drafted exclusively by Democrats. I, for one, think this bill is a good bill, on balance. It will be good for my State. I think it will be good for every State. We will get an upgrade--a badly needed upgrade--in the infrastructure of this country. Again, is it ideal, perfect? Far from it, but it is a big step forward and one heck of a huge step of advantage relative to having one party alone write a piece of legislation. I think it is fair to say if Democrats alone write an infrastructure bill, my State of Utah won't be real happy by the time it is done. The PRESIDING OFFICER. The senior Senator from New Hampshire. Mrs. SHAHEEN. Madam President, I am here on the floor today to speak in support of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, which is the bipartisan legislation that is before the Chamber that will make historic investments in our Nation's core infrastructure, and I am pleased to follow my colleague and friend from Utah, Senator Romney, who was one of those whom I worked with to help negotiate this package. This is historic legislation that provides $550 billion in new Federal investments over the next 5 years to respond to the needs that are facing our country. This bill will rebuild crumbling roads and bridges and tunnels across the country. It will provide clean drinking water in homes and address harmful contaminants. It will increase connectivity in our communities to bring broadband to even the most rural parts of our country. It will prioritize sustainable solutions to improve our infrastructure systems for future generations. And it will combat climate change by making the monumental investments in our clean energy grid and electric vehicle infrastructure that we must make. Now, this bill was a long time in the making, as I am sure my colleague from Utah would agree. Over the past 3 months, there have been many late nights, early mornings, and countless conversations about how to make the best use of this opportunity to invest in our Nation's infrastructure. I very much appreciate the continued good faith and negotiations from lawmakers on both sides of the aisle and the White House and the leadership of Senators Kyrsten Sinema and Rob Portman to deliver this bipartisan infrastructure agreement. I also appreciate the work of the chairs and ranking members of relevant Senate committees who laid the foundation for so much of the bipartisan work that has gone into this bill, as well as the leadership of both parties for giving us the space and time to get this agreement to the floor Now, I could spend all day talking about the many aspects of this legislation that meaningfully invest in our communities and in our country, but today I want to specifically talk about two key areas that I worked on. Both of these issues, water and broadband, speak to the critical needs in New Hampshire and across the country. Water and wastewater infrastructure is one of the major investments we make in this bill, with $55 billion invested in this area. Now, no parent should have to worry about the safety of their family's water when they turn on the tap, but, unfortunately, as most of us know, this is not the case for too many Americans, because compromised water supplies, due in part to our rundown water infrastructure, is an issue across this country and in some places in New Hampshire. This was a problem for decades before the pandemic hit, but looking at a crisis like COVID-19 has illustrated just how basic and essential clean and safe drinking water is for our communities. Righting this wrong starts with investing in our water systems, which have been severely underfunded for too long. According to the Environmental Protection Agency, drinking water utilities will need to invest $472.6 billion over the next 20 years in order to provide safe and sufficient drinking water to the American public. Well, fortunately, we have a big chunk of that as a down payment in this proposal. And earlier this year, the Senate passed overwhelmingly, on a bipartisan vote, the Drinking Water and Wastewater Infrastructure Act. That bill makes a historic investment in our water infrastructure through authorizations. And in addition to putting significant funding toward that effort, the bipartisan infrastructure package before us includes $15 billion to replace lead service lines, which is a huge public health priority, and it is an issue that has long plagued communities across this country. Another real public health concern that is addressed in this bill is the presence of per- and polyfluoralkyl substances, or PFAS, in our water supplies. Preventing exposure, cleaning up contaminated sites, and understanding the full scope of the health implications associated with these chemicals is critical for so many affected by PFAS in their water. As I have heard again and again from New Hampshire families, discovering that you have been drinking contaminated water can produce a range of emotions from anger and fear to guilt. That is what I heard from so many parents who had children at the former Pease Air Force Base, where they were in childcare, and parents thought they were safe in those childcare centers. But they found out that they had been drinking water contaminated with PFAS. That contamination at the former Pease Air Force Base forced the city of Portsmouth to shut off three drinking water wells in 2014. The contamination was created by the use of firefighting foam by the Air Force when Pease was an Air Force base. One of those wells that was shut down, the Haven well, has just come back online this week, after 7 years. It was inoperable for 7 years. PFAS contamination surrounding the Saint-Gobain manufacturing plant in Merrimack, NH, and in areas around the Coakley Landfill Superfund site in the Seacoast create an ongoing worry for Granite State families also because of PFAS contamination. So you can imagine what those parents felt like when they found out that their children had an elevated level of PFAS in their bloodstream, and they didn't really understand what that meant. I remember talking to one mother who told me she had taken her daughter to Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center for her health exam, and she talked to the doctor about the elevated levels of PFAS in her blood. She said: The doctor didn't know what I was talking about, because this is an emerging contaminant. But thanks to the work of so many of those affected--people like Andrea Amico in Portsmouth, who helped found a group called Testing for Pease, and folks involved with the Merrimack Citizens for Clean Water-- they have raised awareness and worked to find solutions to clean up our drinking water. We owe it to them, to all of those families affected by PFAS and contaminated water supplies, a serious commitment to stop this problem where it starts and to give them the peace of mind that they so deserve. The comprehensive ***measures*** to address our water infrastructure that are contained in this historic bill will help do just that. Now, water infrastructure is a serious issue that New Hampshire shares with many other States throughout the country. Like water, another shared issue is access to broadband or high-speed internet service. The challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic--just as I highlighted the challenge of not having enough access to clean water--highlighted just how important it is for our communities to have fast and reliable access to the internet. Whether we like it or not, we live in a digital world. We all relied on that digital world more than ever during the COVID crisis so that our kids could go to school, so our grandparents and families could keep their medical [[Page S5810]] appointments, and so our businesses could stay afloat. Of course, even before the pandemic started, the digital divide created an equity issue that deepened disparities in education, health, and business. If you live in a community in northern New Hampshire, how can you attract business to your community if you don't have access to high- speed internet, if the business can't open a website and tell people what they do? Just last month, I met with representatives from several towns in southwestern New Hampshire, another part of our State where they have been struggling to bring high-speed internet service to their residents. Due to their rural nature, these towns and others like them are unable to attract a provider to work with them. About a quarter of those that live in these towns are considered unserved and far more are underserved. At that session, I talked to a woman named Molly Miller. She is a telecommunications committee member from Hancock, NH, a town with about 1,600 residents. She talked about the challenges that her family had experienced trying to work and do school from home during the pandemic. She said everyone had to disconnect while her youngest son was participating in college classes, and she shared a story about her son. She said: He was unable to turn in his final exam from one of his courses because the file was too large. He couldn't print it because they didn't have enough speed--download speed in their house. By the time he made it to the library to print out the file, it was too late. His exam was not accepted. That is just the kind of everyday challenges that families, who don't have access to high-speed internet, face. And broadband access isn't a partisan priority. Lawmakers on both sides of the aisle recognize the need for significant investments to ensure that all of our workers, our students, and our families are able to connect to the critical resources that are provided by the internet. This infrastructure bill commits $65 billion to bring high-speed internet to communities in New Hampshire and all across the country. These bold investments are what we need to create jobs, to enhance the safety of our infrastructure networks, and to improve this Nation's competitiveness. Now, had I written the bill before us on my own, I am sure, like everyone in this Chamber, it would have included different priorities than what is before us in some cases. But, as we know, that is not how the give and take of negotiations work. It is not how compromise works. You give and you get. And the fact is that New Hampshire and the United States are going to get a whole lot in this infrastructure package. We also know that legislation that has broad bipartisan support stands a better chance at lasting longer without threats of being repealed or reversed. President Biden supports this package, and we have received strong support across the aisle through the procedural votes that we have had so far. I am proud to have worked with my colleagues to help craft this bipartisan bill, and over the coming days, I know that I will work with even more people in this Chamber as we try and move this legislation through the Senate. Thank you. I look forward to a strong, positive vote by the end of this week. I yield the floor. I suggest the absence of a quorum. The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll. The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll. Mr. HAWLEY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded. The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. Hickenlooper). Without objection, it is so ordered. Cattle Ranchers Mr. HAWLEY. I rise today, Mr. President, to talk about the challenges facing the cattle ranchers in my State and across the country, challenges not just to their day-to-day operations but to their very livelihoods, and I rise today to talk about what we can do about it. I have a simple message: We can take action today that will work and we can take action that will make a difference and we should take it now. The situation that faces our cattle ranchers in Missouri and around the country, and, for that matter, many other livestock producers, is very, very serious, and the situation is, frankly, untenable. Let me tell you what I am talking about. Just in the last year, the cost to consumers for beef has increased by double digits. That is year-on-year, from 2019 to 2020, a double- digit increase. What has happened, though, to cattle ranchers, to those who actually raise the beef, who raise the cattle, and then sell it to market? The price for them, has it gone up? No, it has gone down. In fact, over the last decade, cattle ranchers have seen their share of profits decline by double digits. So what is happening here? Cattle ranchers are getting less, much less, in some instances--and, by the way, so are other producers of livestock--and yet the cost to consumers is going up. Somebody is getting wealthy in this transaction, and that ``somebody'' is the packers, the ***processing*** companies. In America today, our meat ***processing*** supply chain, equipment--the entire apparatus--is owned by just a small handful of companies. Here is what I am talking about: Four companies--four--together control over 80 percent of this country's beef ***processing*** operations, 80 percent. Even more remarkably, three of the giant meatpacking companies control 63 percent of pork producing, 46 of beef packing, 38 of poultry producing. That is just three of them. And two--two--are based in Brazil and China. So you have got four major packers that control 80 percent of the market, two of them based overseas. This market concentration is squeezing out the farmers and the ranchers. It is enriching the packers, and it is ultimately hurting consumers. So I say, again, in this system, the only people who seem to win are the monopolists. We have got to do something about it. It is made even worse--the situation--by the fact that these same monopoly packers have been found guilty or otherwise pled to criminal violations, criminal uses of their monopoly status. For example, Pilgrim's Pride, a subsidiary of a Brazilian-owned company called JBS, received $107 million in criminal fines for price- fixing in chicken markets. JBS separately paid out at least three multimillion-dollar settlements over the past year, while Smithfield, which is owned by China, has paid $83 million to settle pork price- fixing allegations. So here we have these monopoly companies, two of them foreign owned, that are controlling the meat ***processing*** industry, controlling the entire supply chain, squeezing American farmers and ranchers, raising prices on consumers, and committing criminal violations while they do it. Now, many have called, including me, for antitrust investigations. Some have called, including me, for antitrust prosecution. And I stand behind those positions. But I am here today to say that we must do more. And, specifically, it is time for this administration, the Biden administration, to do more because they have the tools to do so at their disposal. Under Federal law, the Secretary of ***Agriculture***, Tom Vilsack, has the authority to refuse to provide or to withdraw inspection services from any of these monopoly packers or anyone who is reasonably connected to them who has been convicted of a felony or any other act or circumstance that indicates a lack of integrity as it concerns public health. That is a broad grant of authority. What it means is that USDA could, right now, begin to suspend the inspection services for these monopoly companies, to say to these companies: We are not going to allow inspections to go forward; we are not going to allow your production to go forward until you come to the table and agree to resolve and desist any criminal misconduct and to get a better deal to ranchers and farmers across this country. This authority is already existing under Federal law. I want to be clear. It is already on the books. It is already provided for by Federal statute. And our ranchers and our farmers need it to be used, and they need it to be used now. So, today, I am calling on the Secretary of ***Agriculture***, Tom Vilsack, to invoke these authorities, say to the major monopoly companies that USDA [[Page S5811]] will suspend inspection services until they come to the table, until they open their books, until our cattle ranchers and our farmers in Missouri and across this country get relief. I am making that request to the Secretary of ***Agriculture*** today. I hope that he will act today because our farmers and our ranchers deserve relief today, and they deserve our help and our support as they work to protect the life that they lead, the life that is the backbone, in many ways, of this country, and as they continue their noble work of feeding the world. Thank you. I yield the floor. The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Delaware. Order of Business Mr. CARPER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the following amendments be called up to the substitute and be reported by number: Peters-Rounds, 2464; Lankford, 2233; Cardin-Wicker, 2478; Daines, 2449; and Scott, 2338, CBO inflation verification; further, that at 4:15 p.m today, the Senate vote in relation to the amendments in the order listed, with no amendments in order to the amendments prior to a vote in relation to the amendments, with 60 affirmative votes required for adoption of the amendments listed, with up to 4 minutes equally divided prior to the first four votes and up to 7 minutes for Senator Scott of Florida and 2 minutes for opponents prior to the Scott vote. Mr. President, let me amend that request to 4:25--not 4:15 but 4:25. I ask unanimous consent to make that modification. The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection? Without objection, it is so ordered. Amendment No. 2464 to Amendment No. 2137 The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the amendments by number. The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows: The Senator from Delaware [Mr. Carper], for Mr. Peters, proposes an amendment numbered 2464 to Amendment No. 2137. The amendment is as follows (Purpose: To modify certain provisions relating to cybersecurity) In section 40121(b)(1) of subtitle B of title I of division D, in the matter preceding subparagraph (A), strike ``consultation with the Secretary of Homeland Security and'' and insert ``coordination with the Secretary of Homeland Security and in consultation with''. In section 40121(c) of subtitle B of title I of division D, in the matter preceding paragraph (1), strike ``consultation with the Secretary of Homeland Security and'' and insert ``coordination with the Secretary of Homeland Security and in consultation with''. In section 40122(b) of subtitle B of title I of division D, strike ``consultation with the Secretary of Homeland Security and'' and insert ``coordination with the Secretary of Homeland Security and in consultation with''. In section 40122(c) of subtitle B of title I of division D, in the matter preceding paragraph (1), strike ``consultation with the Secretary of Homeland Security and'' and insert ``coordination with the Secretary of Homeland Security and in consultation with''. In section 40124(b) of subtitle B of title I of division D, strike ``consultation with the Secretary of Homeland Security,'' and insert ``coordination with the Secretary of Homeland Security and in consultation with''. In section 40125(b)(1) of subtitle B of title I of division D, in the matter preceding subparagraph (A), strike ``consultation with the Secretary of Homeland Security and'' and insert ``coordination with the Secretary of Homeland Security and in consultation with''. In section 40125(d)(1) of subtitle B of title I of division D, in the matter preceding subparagraph (A), strike ``consultation'' and insert ``coordination''. Amendment No. 2233 to Amendment No. 2137 The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows: The Senator from Delaware [Mr. Carper], for Mr. Lankford, proposes an amendment numbered 2233 to Amendment No. 2137. The amendment is as follows (Purpose: To prohibit Federal funding for any entity that fails to enroll in and comply with the E-Verify Program) At the appropriate place in division I, insert the following: SEC. \_\_\_. E-VERIFY COMPLIANCE REQUIREMENT. (a) Limitation.--Notwithstanding any other provision of law, Federal assistance, grants, subgrants, contracts, and subcontracts authorized under this Act may only be awarded to entities that have enrolled in, and maintain compliance with all statutes, regulations, and policies regarding the E- Verify Program described in section 403(a) of the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996 (8 U.S.C 1324a note). (b) Requirement.--Any entity that has not previously enrolled in, or had enrolled but did not maintain compliance with all statutes, regulations, and policies regarding, the E-Verify Program shall enroll in and certify compliance with such statutes, regulations and policies before being eligible to receive any Federal assistance, grants, subgrants, contracts, or subcontracts authorized under this Act. Amendment No. 2478 to Amendment No. 2137 The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows: The Senator from Delaware [Mr. Carper], for Mr. Cardin, proposes an amendment numbered 2478 to Amendment No. 2137. (The amendment is printed in today's Record under ``Text of Amendments.'') Amendment No. 2449 to Amendment No. 2137 The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows: The Senator from Delaware [Mr. Carper], for Mr. Daines, proposes an amendment numbered 2449 to Amendment No. 2137. The amendment is as follows (Purpose: To provide additional funds for post-fire restoration activities and restoration activities carried out using good neighbor agreements) Beginning on page 1799, strike line 13 and all that follows through page 1800, line 10, and insert the following: (15) $300,000,000 shall be made available for post-fire restoration activities that are implemented not later than 3 years after the date that a wildland fire is contained, of which-- (A) $125,000,000 shall be made available to the Secretary of the Interior; and (B) $175,000,000 shall be made available to the Secretary of ***Agriculture***; On page 1800, line 11, strike ``(17)'' and insert ``(16)''. On page 1800, line 17, strike ``(18)'' and insert ``(17)''. On page 1816, strike lines 1 through 12 and insert the following: (2) $300,000,000 shall be made available to provide to States and Indian Tribes for implementing restoration projects on Federal land pursuant to good neighbor agreements entered into under section 8206 of the ***Agricultural*** Act of 2014 (16 U.S.C 2113a) or agreements entered into under section 2(b) of the Tribal Forest Protection Act of 2004 (25 U.S.C 3115a(b)), of which-- (A) $60,000,000 shall be made available to the Secretary of the Interior; and (B) $240,000,000 shall be made available to the Secretary of ***Agriculture***; On page 2568, line 12, strike ``$905,000,000'' and insert ``$925,000,000''. On page 2568, line 15, strike ``$337,000,000'' and insert ``$341,000,000''. On page 2568, line 17, strike ``$142,000,000'' and insert ``$146,000,000''. On page 2568, line 18, strike ``$142,000,000'' and insert ``$146,000,000''. On page 2568, line 20, strike ``$142,000,000'' and insert ``$146,000,000''. On page 2568, line 22, strike ``$142,000,000'' and insert ``$146,000,000''. On page 2570, line 19, strike ``$1,055,000,000'' and insert ``$980,000,000''. On page 2570, line 23, strike ``$327,000,000'' and insert ``$312,000,000''. On page 2570, line 25, strike ``$182,000,000'' and insert ``$167,000,000''. On page 2608, line 17, strike ``$2,115,000,000'' and insert ``$2,095,000,000''. On page 2608, line 21, strike ``$587,000,000'' and insert ``$583,000,000''. On page 2608, line 23, strike ``$382,000,000'' and insert ``$378,000,000''. On page 2613, line 18, strike ``$696,200,000'' and insert ``$771,200,000''. On page 2613, line 23, strike ``$552,200,000'' and insert ``$567,200,000''. On page 2613, line 24, strike ``$36,000,000'' and insert ``$51,000,000''. On page 2614, line 1, strike $36,000,000 and insert ``$51,000,000''. On page 2614, line 3, strike ``$36,000,000'' and insert ``$51,000,000''. On page 2614, line 4, strike ``$36,000,000'' and insert ``$51,000,000''. Amendment No. 2338 to Amendment No. 2137 The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows: The Senator from Delaware [Mr. Carper], for Mr. Scott of Florida, proposes an amendment numbered 2338 to Amendment No. 2137. The amendment is as follows (Purpose: To prohibit funds from being disbursed or obligated if the Congressional Budget Office determines that such disbursement or obligation would result in an increase in inflation) At the appropriate place, insert the following: SEC. \_\_\_\_\_. INCREASES IN INFLATION. (a) In General.--None of the funds made available by this Act may be disbursed or obligated unless the Congressional Budget Office certifies, not later than 45 days after the date of enactment of this Act, that such funds would not result in an increase in any fiscal year to the baseline forecast for the Consumer Price Index, All Urban Consumers in the most recent 10-year economic outlook publication of the Congressional Budget Office. (b) Result of Increase.--If the Congressional Budget Office does not make the certification under subsection (a), the funds [[Page S5812]] shall be transferred to the general fund of the Treasury to be used only for deficit reduction. Amendment No. 2464 The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, there will now be 4 minutes of debate equally divided prior to a vote in relation to the Peters-Rounds amendment, No. 2464. The Senator from Michigan. Mr. PETERS. Mr. President, I rise to urge adoption of the Peters- Rounds amendment, No. 2464. I first want to thank Chairman Manchin and Ranking Member Barrasso of the Energy and Natural Resources Committee for working with me on this amendment. I would also like to thank Senators Rounds, Portman, and Warner for joining me in offering this amendment. It is very straightforward. It simply would align several cyber security provisions for the Department of Energy in this infrastructure legislation with existing law. It would require the Department of Energy, the sector risk management Agency for the energy sector, to coordinate with the Department of Homeland Security on cyber security efforts. DHS is the lead Federal Agency for cyber security, and they have a central role to play in working across the government to strengthen our cyber defenses. As we have seen from the damaging SolarWinds and Microsoft Exchange attacks, a whole-of-government approach is necessary to protect critical infrastructure. This amendment will ensure that there is a comprehensive approach that effectively coordinates our cyber security protections for critical infrastructure across all sectors. It reduces duplication of efforts and helps protect our Nation from the persistent threat posed by cyber attacks. Mr. President, I urge my colleagues to support this straightforward, bipartisan amendment. The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from South Dakota. Mr. ROUNDS. Mr. President, I rise to support the Senator's motion and the amendment. This is a case where we are trying to eliminate the silos within the Federal Government. When it comes to cyber security, this is a really good example of one where you have multiple Agencies trying to work together. This makes it very clear that it is not just a matter of discussing or consulting but, rather, that it will be a coordinated effort. It recognizes once again that the Department of Homeland Security and the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency are taking the lead role. With that, I would offer my full support as well. Thank you, Mr. President. The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Michigan. Mr. PETERS. Mr. President, I yield back all remaining time. The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered. Vote on Amendment No. 2464 The question is on agreeing to amendment No. 2464. Mr. PETERS. I would ask for the yeas and nays. The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second? There appears to be a sufficient second. The clerk will call the roll. The senior assistant legislative clerk called the roll. Mr. THUNE. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from South Carolina (Mr. Graham), and the Senator from Oklahoma (Mr. Inhofe). The result was announced--yeas 96, nays 2, as follows: [Rollcall Vote No. 301 Leg.] YEAS--96 Baldwin Barrasso Bennet Blackburn Blumenthal Blunt Booker Boozman Braun Brown Burr Cantwell Capito Cardin Carper Casey Cassidy Collins Coons Cortez Masto Cotton Cramer Crapo Cruz Daines Duckworth Durbin Ernst Feinstein Fischer Gillibrand Grassley Hagerty Hassan Hawley Heinrich Hickenlooper Hirono Hoeven Hyde-Smith Johnson Kaine Kelly Kennedy King Klobuchar Lankford Leahy Lee Lujan Lummis Manchin Markey Marshall McConnell Menendez Merkley Moran Murkowski Murphy Murray Ossoff Padilla Paul Peters Portman Reed Risch Romney Rosen Rounds Rubio Sanders Sasse Schatz Schumer Scott (FL) Scott (SC) Shaheen Shelby Sinema Smith Stabenow Sullivan Tester Thune Tillis Toomey Tuberville Van Hollen Warner Warnock Warren Wicker Wyden Young NAYS--2 Cornyn Whitehouse NOT VOTING--2 Graham Inhofe The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. Smith). On this vote, the yeas are 96, the nays are 2. Under the previous order requiring 60 votes for the adoption of this amendment, the amendment is agreed to. The amendment (No. 2464) was agreed to. The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, there will now be 4 minutes of debate, equally divided, prior to the vote in relation to Lankford amendment No. 2233. Mr. CARPER. Madam President, I ask the clock not start running right away. Senator Capito and I want to just raise an issue with the Chair and our colleagues. That last vote took about 50 minutes--50 minutes--and they are getting longer, not shorter. And Senator Capito and I want to use this as an opportunity just to start a conversation amongst our colleagues, see if we can't do better than that, maybe a lot better than that. So start thinking about it, and we would be interested to hear from you. Mrs. CAPITO. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would just like to add my voice with the chairman of the EPW Committee. I think, in consideration of everybody's time, we have got four more amendments and maybe more. We could roll through these if we would just be concise with the time and come in and vote on time. So if we don't, we might look for more punitive ***measures***; right, Mr. Chairman? Mr. CARPER. You never know. We might do some voice votes. That would be good. All right. We thank you. The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oklahoma. Amendment No. 2233 Mr. LANKFORD. Madam President, I have an amendment that we are calling up. It is a very straightforward amendment. This deals simply with how we handle E-Verify. The E-Verify system is very simple and straightforward. It has been used all over the country. It is a nonpartisan issue that we have used for decades now. It verifies whether the people that we are actually hiring, and all this purchasing that we are doing, this massive billions of dollars will actually be--the simple, straightforward piece of it is, we are putting billions of dollars into our economy right now. We are doing a lot of infrastructure with this bill. The promise should be that we are not just buying American, but we are actually hiring Americans as well. This is a bipartisan issue, quite frankly. President Biden, just today, released a statement that this is a once-in-a-generation investment in our infrastructure and will create good-paying union jobs, repairing our roads and bridges, replacing lead pipes, building energy transmission lines. It invests in clean energy, manufacturing, and zero-emission vehicles, ensuring that the jobs in the clean energy industry are good- paying, quality American jobs. That is a great promise to be able to make, and it is a great statement to make. What this amendment does is to make sure it actually is American jobs. We know there is a tremendous pull factor with the American good- paying jobs that are out there. This E-Verify requirement puts in place, both for the contractors and subcontractors, they will actually be American citizens. So, with that, I ask support for this bill. The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Illinois. Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, if you like Federal mandates, here is one. Senator Lankford wants a Federal mandate to require that anyone who receives a grant from this bill has to sign up for E-Verify. Well, what does that mean? [[Page S5813]] It means a school district in my home State that ended up getting a grant under this bill for energy-efficient improvements, renewable energy improvements at public school facilities would now be required by the Lankford amendment, the Federal mandate, to have E-Verify to check out the cafeteria workers in the school district. Is that what we really want to do? Well, how good is E-Verify? Some States have done it voluntarily. Eight of them have done it for all or most employers. You think if you run all these employees through the E-Verify ***process***, how good is it? Well, I can tell you how good it is. Do you know how many illegal aliens you find when you go through E-Verify? One percent. One percent. So he is creating a Federal mandate and regulations on districts that are just trying to get energy improvements and reduce their costs and putting in an E-Verify requirement to get those illegal aliens. Well, it turns out that isn't the situation at all. It is a mandate that is unnecessary. I beg my colleagues to give these school districts and others no more redtape but less redtape. Please oppose the Lankford amendment. The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oklahoma. Mr. LANKFORD. Madam President, are there any of my 2 minutes left? The PRESIDING OFFICER. Nineteen seconds remaining. Mr. LANKFORD. Madam President, this is not just a mandate; this is just a statement, if we are going to put American tax dollars in place, that we are actually hiring Americans to do it. If we are going to build America, let's also hire Americans in the ***process***. That shouldn't be inconsistent with our basic values. Vote on Amendment No. 2233 The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there further debate? Hearing none, the question is on agreeing to amendment No. 2233. Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, I ask for the yeas and nays. The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second? There appears to be a sufficient second. The clerk will call the roll. The senior assistant bill clerk called the roll. Mr. THUNE. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from South Carolina (Mr. Graham) and the Senator from Oklahoma (Mr. Inhofe). The result was announced--yeas 53, nays 45, as follows: [Rollcall Vote No. 302 Leg.] YEAS--53 Barrasso Blackburn Blunt Boozman Braun Burr Capito Cassidy Collins Cornyn Cotton Cramer Crapo Cruz Daines Ernst Fischer Grassley Hagerty Hassan Hawley Hoeven Hyde-Smith Johnson Kaine Kelly Kennedy Lankford Lee Lummis Marshall McConnell Moran Murkowski Ossoff Paul Portman Risch Romney Rounds Rubio Sasse Scott (FL) Scott (SC) Shelby Sullivan Thune Tillis Toomey Tuberville Warnock Wicker Young NAYS--45 Baldwin Bennet Blumenthal Booker Brown Cantwell Cardin Carper Casey Coons Cortez Masto Duckworth Durbin Feinstein Gillibrand Heinrich Hickenlooper Hirono King Klobuchar Leahy Lujan Manchin Markey Menendez Merkley Murphy Murray Padilla Peters Reed Rosen Sanders Schatz Schumer Shaheen Sinema Smith Stabenow Tester Van Hollen Warner Warren Whitehouse Wyden NOT VOTING--2 Graham Inhofe The PRESIDING OFFICER. On this vote, the yeas are 53, the nays are 45. Under the previous order requiring 60 votes for the adoption of this amendment, the amendment is not agreed to. The amendment (No. 2233) was rejected. Amendment No. 2478 The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, there will now be 4 minutes of debate equally divided prior to a vote in relation to the Cardin amendment No. 2478. The Senator from Maryland. Mr. CARDIN. Madam President, I rise to speak in support of amendment No. 2478, which would make permanent and expand the Minority Business Development Agency, or the MBDA, which is the only Federal Agency to focus exclusively on the needs of minority businesses. This amendment is based on the Minority Business Resiliency Act, which I introduced in April, and the language is identical to what was passed out of the Commerce Committee earlier today by a voice vote. I want to thank Senator Wicker and Senator Cantwell of the committee for their help in getting this to the floor. I also want to thank Senator Tim Scott, Senator Cornyn, and Senator Baldwin, who were also cosponsors of this amendment, for helping us reach this moment. This amendment will give the Agency the resources and leadership necessary to help underserved entrepreneurs overcome historical barriers to small business ownership, innovate and start and grow successful businesses, and create jobs. This Agency will also partner with Historically Black Colleges and Universities and other minority-serving institutions to reach rural minority business enterprises and create a regional network supporting entrepreneurial education and help to coordinate Federal resources in service of minority business enterprises. Last year, the MBDA programs and services helped minority businesses secure nearly $8 billion in contracts and capital, and created nearly 12,000 jobs. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent to have printed in the Record a letter from 17 stakeholders in support of this amendment, which includes the Small Business Majority, U.S Black Chamber, and U.S Hispanic Chamber of Commerce There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the Record, as follows: August 4, 2021. Hon. Chuck Schumer, Majority Leader, U.S Senate, Washington, DC. Hon. Mitch McConnell, Minority Leader, U.S Senate, Washington, DC. Dear Majority Leader Schumer and Minority Leader McConnell: We write you in strong support of Amendment #2478, which would codify the Minority Business Development Agency (MBDA) at the Department of Commerce. As the leaders in the small business and minority business communities, we hope our unified support represented by the signatures below will urge your fellow Senators to include this language in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. We urge you to support this Amendment. The link between infrastructure, revitalized manufacturing, and technical assistance to the minority entrepreneur community cannot be overstated, and we strongly encourage building a strong national support system through MBDA to ensure minority participation in infrastructure investment. This amendment, which is based on the bipartisan Minority Business Development Act of 2021, will support the expansion of Minority-owned Business Enterprises (MBEs) and bolster the country's economy. Moreover, it will ensure that the infrastructure investments made in the legislation can utilize and support America's minority-owned businesses. Prior to the Coronavirus pandemic, MBEs consisted of 30 percent of the country's 28.6 million small businesses, contributed nearly $1.5 trillion in annual gross receipts and employed over 7.2 million Americans. Despite these significant figures, MBEs stand disproportionately disadvantaged as evidenced by challenges with access to capital and collateral, lower credit scores, and less access to technical assistance services. Created under President Nixon by executive order, the MBDA has been a significant resource in reducing market and capital access challenges while growing the number of MBEs. In 2020 alone, the MBDA assisted MBES in attaining over $7.8 billion in contracts and capital, with 10% of contracts made in the manufacturing sector and another 15% made in the utility and construction sector. Overall, the MBDA assisted MBEs at the height of the pandemic to retain or create over 27,000 jobs. Despite MBDA's progress, the pandemic's economic downturn has amplified the need to invest in services for underserved and minority small business owners--particularly those within Women, People of Color, and Tribal markets. MBEs overwhelmingly are concentrated in industries that remain susceptible to economic disruption, such as personal and laundry services, and retail. As the nation experiences a resurgence of Coronavirus cases, these fragile markets face near-fatal consequences. We urge lawmakers to support this amendment as it will strengthen and establish the MBDA into federal statute. This critical bipartisan proposal, introduced by Senators [[Page S5814]] Ben Cardin (D-MD), Tim Scott, (R-SC), Roger Wicker (R-MS), and Maria Cantwell (D-WA) would increase MBDA's fiscal year 2021 budget to further safeguard MBEs from the devastating inequities brought on by the health crisis and promote a diverse entrepreneurial pipeline by establishing a ***process*** for the Minority Business Development Center Program to expand its regional coverage to reach MBEs in rural areas. During this time of economic emergency, we believe now is the time for Congress to pass equitable and targeted legislation that will benefit underserved and rural markets and encourage underserved and rural markets enterprise formation. This amendment achieves that while strengthening the infrastructure package more broadly. We commend your work on ensuring that all small businesses receive the resources necessary to withstand the current economic downturn, as well as grow now and into the future. We urge you to reach out directly to John Stanford ([*js@prismgroup.global*](mailto:js@prismgroup.global)) with any questions or comments. Thank you for your consideration. Airport Minority Advisory Council (AMAC), Asian/Pacific Islander American Chamber of Commerce & Entrepreneurship (National ACE), Association for Enterprise Opportunity (AEO), Association of Women's Business Centers (AWBC), Gusto, Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC), National Association of Latino Community Asset Builders (NALCAB), NextGen Chamber of Commerce, Pacific Community Ventures, Page 30 Coalition. Prosperity Now, Small Business Majority, Small Business Roundtable, US Black Chambers, Inc., US Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, Virginia Asian Chamber of Commerce, Women Impacting Public Policy (WIPP). Mr. CARDIN. Madam President, I understand that we may be able to do this by a voice vote, so I would ask unanimous consent that after my colleagues have had a chance to speak, we can vitiate the 60-vote requirement. With that, I yield to my colleague from Mississippi. The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Mississippi. Mr. WICKER. Madam President, I do appreciate the Senator from Maryland joining on this. Everything he said about the committee action today in the Commerce Committee is exactly correct. I subscribe to every statement that he made. I couldn't improve on it. I urge a ``yes'' vote, and I am indeed hopeful we can vitiate the rollcall vote and save some time by voicing this one. I yield the floor. The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Maryland. Mr. CARDIN. We have cleared this with both the Democrats and the Republicans for managing the bill, and I would ask unanimous consent to vitiate the 60-vote requirement on the Cardin-Wicker amendment No. 2478. The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection? Without objection, it is so ordered. Vote on Amendment No. 2478 The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the amendment No. 2478. The amendment (No. 2478) is agreed to. Amendment No. 2449 The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, there will now be 4 minutes of debate equally divided prior to a vote in relation to Daines amendment No. 2449. The Senator from Montana. Mr. DAINES. Madam President, there is funding in this bill for a complex program that would lead to very few actual forest projects, and I fear it will only function as a shell for programs like the Climate Conservation Corps. And to be good stewards of our forests, we need to be good stewards of our limited resources. This amendment does that by redirecting these funds to higher priority accounts, like Good Neighbor Authority and post-fire treatment. Good Neighbor Authority has routinely enjoyed very bipartisan support in this body and has proven to be one of the most effective forestry tools. Given recent past and present wildfire seasons, redirecting funds to post-fire treatment just makes sense. It is early August, and Montana is on fire. There are nearly 300,000 acres burning across our State. We need to manage our forests before they manage us. And in order to do so, we need to invest in higher priority accounts, and my amendment would do just that. The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from West Virginia. Mr. MANCHIN. Madam President, I rise in opposition to the amendment, and I will explain my reasons. Senator Daines' amendment seeks to alter the funding levels of provisions in the Energy Infrastructure Act as reported out of the Energy and Natural Resources Committee. Specifically, the amendment cuts funding for hiring veterans and Native youth to do fire prevention projects and directs that funding to postfire rehabilitation projects and to States that carry out projects on Federal land. We are supportive of both postfire projects and States doing work on Federal land. That is why we funded these programs at ***unprecedented*** levels in our bill. However, we also support funding for veterans and Native youth. So I do not believe it is appropriate to cut the funding for this program. So I urge my colleagues to please vote no on this amendment. The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Delaware. Unanimous Consent Agreement Mr. CARPER. Madam President, we have had two votes in this tranche; first vote about 50 minutes from start to close and the second vote about 25 minutes. We are going to propound a unanimous consent request--and I am tempted to do it right now--to try to figure out what would be reasonable. My sense is that maybe 15 minutes would be reasonable but a real 15 minutes, and we will start with that. Mr. WICKER. Hear! Hear! Mr. CARPER. Any objection? A SENATOR. Without objection. Mr. CARPER. All right. Madam President, I would ask that we make it a 15-minute vote, a real 15-minute vote. Thank you. The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered. Vote on Amendment No. 2449 Is there further debate? The Senator from Montana. Mr. DAINES. I ask for the yeas and nays. The PRESIDING OFFICER. If there is no further debate, the question is on agreeing to the amendment. Is there a sufficient second? There appears to be a sufficient second? The clerk will call the roll. The bill clerk called the roll. Mr. THUNE. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from South Carolina (Mr. Graham) and the Senator from Oklahoma (Mr. Inhofe). The result was announced--yeas 48, nays 50, as follows: [Rollcall Vote No. 303 Leg.] YEAS--48 Barrasso Blackburn Blunt Boozman Braun Burr Capito Cassidy Collins Cornyn Cotton Cramer Crapo Cruz Daines Ernst Fischer Grassley Hagerty Hawley Hoeven Hyde-Smith Johnson Kennedy Lankford Lee Lummis Marshall McConnell Moran Murkowski Paul Portman Risch Romney Rounds Rubio Sasse Scott (FL) Scott (SC) Shelby Sullivan Thune Tillis Toomey Tuberville Wicker Young NAYS--50 Baldwin Bennet Blumenthal Booker Brown Cantwell Cardin Carper Casey Coons Cortez Masto Duckworth Durbin Feinstein Gillibrand Hassan Heinrich Hickenlooper Hirono Kaine Kelly King Klobuchar Leahy Lujan Manchin Markey Menendez Merkley Murphy Murray Ossoff Padilla Peters Reed Rosen Sanders Schatz Schumer Shaheen Sinema Smith Stabenow Tester Van Hollen Warner Warnock Warren Whitehouse Wyden NOT VOTING--2 Graham Inhof The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. Ossoff). On this vote, the yeas are 48, the nays are 50. Under the previous order requiring 60 votes for the adoption of this amendment, the amendment is not agreed to. The amendment (No. 2449) was rejected. The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Florida. Unanimous Consent Request--S. Res. 327 Mr. SCOTT of Florida. Mr. President, our Nation is nearly $30 trillion in debt. That is $233,000 in debt for every American family. The American people are already feeling the pressure of rising inflation thanks to reckless government spending. And, make no mistake about it, inflation is a tax, a tax that hurts our [[Page S5815]] families on low and fixed incomes the most. I am hearing it from families across Florida who are worried. I heard from a dad in Jacksonville with three kids who is helping to temporarily take care of two other kids because their father is out of work. As a result of having five kids in his home, he has started working a second job to pay for all of the groceries that are rapidly increasing in price. His second job is driving Uber, and that is less and less profitable by the day because of the rising price of gas. Over the weekend, the suspension on the Federal debt ceiling expired. That leaves Congress with two choices: Continue this reckless, wasteful spending with no accountability to the American people, or start making the tough choices to put our Nation on a successful path. I know we can make the right choices and start moving America in a better direction. That is exactly what I did when I was Governor of Florida. Our State was on a bad path. I had to make difficult choices, but I paid down one-third of State debt, all while cutting taxes 100 times. It can be done. Washington's choice to keep raising or suspending the debt ceiling is like raising the limit on your credit card, month after month, with absolutely no plan to pay it off. It is irresponsible, and it is no way to operate. You would never run your business or family the way Washington runs. It is wasteful and dysfunctional. I came to Washington to rein in this exact type of dysfunction. We have to get our debt and spending under control. We need to make Washington work for families in Florida and all across the Nation. That is why I am leading my colleagues in a proposed rule change that would require every piece of legislation passed by a Senate committee to include a report on how it will impact inflation. It is very simple. When legislation, directly or indirectly, raises the cost of living or raises taxes on American families, families deserve to know. Too many in Washington believe the lie that inflation is impossible, debt doesn't matter, and spending has no consequences. That is why this rule change is needed. This rule change is to protect that father in Jacksonville who is struggling to get by. It is to protect those living on fixed incomes, low-income earners, and small businesses that can't absorb cost increases. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Committee on Rules be discharged from further consideration and that the Senate now proceed to S. Res. 327. I ask unanimous consent that the resolution be agreed to, the preamble be agreed to, and that the motions to reconsider be considered made and laid upon table. The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection? Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, reserving the right to object. The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority whip. Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I rise in opposition to the unanimous consent request from the Senator of Florida. The amendment before us would change the Standing Rules of the Senate and require additional reporting requirements regarding inflation, a change which would substantially increase the administrative burden on committees and staff and the ***process*** on the floor. We already have significant tools at our disposal to evaluate economic indicators. We have economists at the Department of Labor, Treasury Department, Congressional Budget Office, Federal Reserve, and other Federal offices regularly consulting with Congress on issues about inflation and other economic indicators. This is totally unnecessary. For these reasons, I oppose this resolution and the request for unanimous consent. I object. The PRESIDING OFFICER. The objection is heard. The Senator from Florida. Amendment No. 2338 Mr. SCOTT of Florida. Mr. President, while I am disappointed that my colleague won't accept this ***measure***, we do need to start doing something about inflation, and we can do that today with the infrastructure spending bill. We can all get behind real infrastructure--like roads, bridges, airports, and seaports--but we have to acknowledge that $1.2 trillion is a massive amount of taxpayer dollars, and we have to know exactly how this will impact families. I have been told by supporters of this infrastructure bill that it will not cause inflation. I will not support anything that increases inflation on American families. I have an amendment to the infrastructure package that will require the Congressional Budget Office to certify that the spending in this bill will not increase inflation on the American people. If CBO does not certify that the spending authorized and appropriated in the bill would not increase inflation, my amendment would prohibit the funding from being obligated or spent, and the funds would instead be transferred to the Treasury Department for deficit reduction. I hope that everybody will get behind this amendment. The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there time in opposition? Mr. DURBIN. I yield back my time. Mr. CARPER. Yield back. The PRESIDING OFFICER. The time is yielded back. Vote on Amendment No. 2338 The question is on agreeing to the amendment. Mr. LANKFORD. I ask for the yeas and nays. The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second? There appears to be a sufficient second. The clerk will call the roll. The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll. Mr. THUNE. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from South Carolina (Mr. Graham), the Senator from Oklahoma (Mr. Inhofe), and the Senator from South Dakota (Mr. Rounds). The result was announced--yeas 42, nays 55, as follows: [Rollcall Vote No. 304 Leg.] YEAS--42 Barrasso Blackburn Boozman Braun Burr Capito Cornyn Cotton Cramer Crapo Cruz Daines Ernst Fischer Grassley Hagerty Hawley Hoeven Hyde-Smith Johnson Kennedy Lankford Lee Lummis Marshall McConnell Moran Paul Portman Risch Rubio Sasse Scott (FL) Scott (SC) Shelby Sullivan Thune Tillis Toomey Tuberville Wicker Young NAYS--55 Baldwin Bennet Blumenthal Blunt Booker Brown Cantwell Cardin Carper Casey Cassidy Collins Coons Cortez Masto Duckworth Durbin Feinstein Gillibrand Hassan Heinrich Hickenlooper Hirono Kaine Kelly King Klobuchar Leahy Lujan Manchin Markey Menendez Merkley Murkowski Murphy Murray Ossoff Padilla Peters Reed Romney Rosen Sanders Schatz Schumer Shaheen Sinema Smith Stabenow Tester Van Hollen Warner Warnock Warren Whitehouse Wyden NOT VOTING--3 Graham Inhofe Rounds The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. Van Hollen). On this vote, the yeas are 52, the nays are 45. Under the previous order requiring 60 votes for the adoption of this amendment, the amendment is not agreed to. The amendment (No. 2338) was rejected. The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Delaware. Mr. CARPER. Mr. President, Senator Capito and I have a couple of comments we would like to offer before we start on this amendment with Senator Lee, and that is we have consulted with both leaders, with Senator Schumer and Senator McConnell. They are in agreement that 15 minutes firm is the vote. So when we start this vote, folks have 15 minutes to get here after we start the vote to vote, and if they are not here, they are too late. So that is the idea. We have spent way too much time waiting for people. We have three amendments lined up, and we are going to vote them and be punctual. Senator Capito. Mrs. CAPITO. Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am in full support of using the 15-minute deadline that we have anyway and actually enforcing this. [[Page S5816]] There is a lot of interest in this bill, as there should be. There are a lot of amendments pending. We want to get as many Members in--and have their amendments in the queue--as we possibly can. But if people don't come down and vote and show courtesy to everybody, I said in my last statement we are going to go to punitive ***measures***. I am not sure voting within the allotted time is really a punitive ***measure***, but that is what we are aiming for, and I am fully supportive of that. Mr. CARPER. Thank you. I would just ask any staff and Members who are watching, staff, let your Senators know it is 15 minutes, and that is it. Amendment Nos. 2279 and 2358 to Amendment No 2137 Mr. CARPER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the following amendments be called up to the substitute and be reported by number: No. 1 is Lee No. 2279; No. 2 is Rosen No. 2358; further, that the Senate vote in relation to the amendments in the order listed, with no amendments in order to the amendments prior to a vote in relation to the amendments, with 60 affirmative votes required for the adoption of the Lee amendment listed and with up to 4 minutes, equally divided, prior to each vote. The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection? Without objection, it is so ordered. Amendment No. 2279 to Amendment No. 2137 (Purpose: To establish a project delivery program under the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 for water storage infrastructure projects.) The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report. The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows: The Senator from Delaware [Mr. Carper], for Mr. Lee, proposes an amendment numbered 2279 to the amendment No. 2137. (The amendment is printed in the Record of August 2, 2021 under ``Text of Amendments.'') Amendment No. 2358 to Amendment No. 2137 The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report. The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows: The Senator from Delaware [Mr. Carper], for Ms. Rosen, proposes an amendment numbered 2358 to amendment No. 2137. The amendment is as follows (Purpose: To modify a provision relating to providing support for activities to increase the resiliency of the National Highway System to mitigate the cost of damages from wildfires) On page 60, line 22, insert ``wildfires,'' after ``flooding,''. The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Utah. Mr. LEE. Mr. President, in reference to my amendment No. 2279, this is what we are trying to deal with here. In order to help expedite the review of projects that are subject to NEPA, Congress authorized in the FAST Act for States to assume the duties of conducting the NEPA analysis. For example, the Federal Highway Administration has entered into agreements with seven States--including Alaska, Arizona, California, Florida, Ohio, Texas, and Utah--to assume this responsibility with great success, providing an opportunity for States to leverage their unique understanding of their own States in order to better carry out NEPA's requirements. To build on this success, Congress should look to expand the ability of States to partner with the Federal Government for these types of reviews in their States' water infrastructure projects. My amendment would require the Department of the Interior to set up a program similar to the existing Surface Transportation Project Delivery Program so that any State may voluntarily assume the Agency's NEPA responsibilities for their water storage infrastructure projects. As I said just a moment ago, States already have a history of successfully conducting this work in the transportation space. In 2020, for example, California conducted 33 environmental assessments, 32 findings of no significant impact, 2 environmental impact statements, 3 records of decision, and the list goes on and on. In just the last half of 2020 alone, Arizona conducted over 50 categorical exclusion analyses. These are clearly roles that States are able and excited to handle. In fulfilling these responsibilities, States would be subject to the same rigorous environmental requirements as their Federal partners, employing the very same standards. Just as projects led by Federal Agencies can be halted due to insufficient NEPA analysis, States would also be held to the same standard. With much of the West experiencing severe drought, with dire consequences, allowing States to aid the Federal Government in NEPA review in order to expedite water storage infrastructure projects is not just common sense, it is a necessity. It is a matter of survival. I urge my colleagues to support amendment No. 2279. The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Delaware. Mr. CARPER. Mr. President, I rise in opposition to the amendment offered by our colleague from Utah. This amendment would undermine the National Environmental Policy Act, also known as NEPA, by allowing States to assume responsibility for undertaking complex reviews of Federal action. These are reviews that Congress vested explicitly in the Federal Agencies that permit or license projects that could adversely affect our environment. NEPA is designed to ensure that Federal Agencies consider major actions carefully to ensure those decisions do not unduly impact water quality, endangered species, community well-being, air quality, and other environmental resources. NEPA is a critical analytical tool that ensures that Federal decision makers are better informed and that the affected community has an opportunity to engage and be heard. Today, as the world is in the midst of a sixth great extinction event, and climate change is having ever greater impacts on our natural world, we should be making decisions more carefully than ever, not just to improve outcomes but also to avoid wasting money on projects that are not resilient to withstand climate change. This amendment would instead turn over responsibility for that critical analysis to the States. The bill before us includes many environmental deregulatory provisions--more, in fact, than many of us would prefer. However, it has been drafted in the spirit of bipartisan compromise. This bill, as drafted, includes provisions to set deadlines for project review schedule in order to reduce project review timelines. It provides or expands categorical exclusions from NEPA. It also permanently authorizes the Federal Permitting Improvement Steering Council. Unlike these provisions, which were the product of committee deliberation and compromise, the amendment that our friend from Utah has offered would significantly alter the ***process*** for Federal environmental review without any committee deliberation on such major changes. These sweeping changes are inappropriate and unwarranted, and I urge our colleagues to join me in voting no. Mr. LEE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that for an additional 30 seconds. The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered. Mr. LEE. Mr. President, it is important to remember these are the exact same standards that would apply. We do this all the time in other areas. Federal regulatory Agencies, on a continual basis, with the blessing of Congress, are given authority to carry out a Federal program. In fact, we already do this with NEPA in the context of the Federal Highway Administration. This works. States are competent. It is a matter of expanding the human resources to which we have access. These are the exact same standards. There is no environmental threat. This would just allow this stuff to get done faster. Vote on Amendment No. 2279 The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to amendment No. 2279. Mr. LEE. I ask for the yeas and nays. The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second? There appears to be a sufficient second. The clerk will call the roll. The legislative clerk called the roll. Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from Vermont (Mr. Sanders) is necessarily absent. [[Page S5817]] Mr. THUNE. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from South Carolina (Mr. Graham) and the Senator from Oklahoma (Mr. Inhofe). The result was announced--yeas 47, nays 50, as follows: [Rollcall Vote No. 305 Leg.] YEAS--47 Barrasso Blackburn Blunt Boozman Braun Burr Capito Cassidy Cornyn Cotton Cramer Crapo Cruz Daines Ernst Fischer Grassley Hagerty Hawley Hoeven Hyde-Smith Johnson Kennedy Lankford Lee Lummis Marshall McConnell Moran Murkowski Paul Portman Risch Romney Rounds Rubio Sasse Scott (FL) Scott (SC) Shelby Sullivan Thune Tillis Toomey Tuberville Wicker Young NAYS--50 Baldwin Bennet Blumenthal Booker Brown Cantwell Cardin Carper Casey Collins Coons Cortez Masto Duckworth Durbin Feinstein Gillibrand Hassan Heinrich Hickenlooper Hirono Kaine Kelly King Klobuchar Leahy Lujan Manchin Markey Menendez Merkley Murphy Murray Ossoff Padilla Peters Reed Rosen Schatz Schumer Shaheen Sinema Smith Stabenow Tester Van Hollen Warner Warnock Warren Whitehouse Wyden NOT VOTING--3 Graham Inhofe Sanders The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order requiring 60 votes for adoption, the amendment is not agreed to. The amendment (No. 2279) was rejected. The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Vermont. Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, parliamentary inquiry: How long did that last 15-minute vote take? The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. While the vote was scheduled for 15 minutes, it took 37. Mr. CARPER. Would the Senator yield? Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the following rollcall votes be 10 minutes in length. Mr. CARPER. I object. The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The objection is heard. Order of Procedure Mr. CARPER. Mr. President, let me just take a minute from Senator Capito to explain what is going on. OK? So lined up right now, we are going to do three voice votes. Negotiations are going forward on an amendment from Senator Schumer, related to the Commerce Committee's jurisdiction. And after that, I think the last vote will be that of Senator Fischer, and we will be done. And the reason why that is delayed is in order to provide time for negotiation to occur on the Schumer amendment with the Commerce Committee, and I think we are just about resolved. I don't like it. It is what it is. I just want to thank all for your patience. We are close to the end. I would just ask, when we ask for a voice vote on the amendment from Senator Jacky Rosen, that we get a voice vote. And I would ask that when we ask for a voice vote on the Carper-Inhofe amendment, we get a voice vote. And beyond that, we will be halfway home, halfway home. So thank you for your patience. We are almost there. The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, there will now be 4 minutes of debate, equally divided, prior to-- Mr. CARPER. Mr. President, let me have order. Let me have order, please. The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Order. Mr. CARPER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the following amendments be called up to the substitute and be reported by number: Carper-Inhofe 2564, Bennet-Hoeven 2548; further, that the Senate vote in relation to the amendments in the order listed, with no amendments in order to the amendments prior to voting in relation to the amendments, with up to 2 minutes equally divided prior to each vote. The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered. Amendment No. 2564 to Amendment No. 2137 The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will report the amendments by number. The bill clerk read as follows: The Senator from Delaware [Mr. Carper], for himself and others, proposes an amendment numbered 2564 to amendment No. 2137. The amendment is as follows (Purpose: To improve provisions relating to appropriations for the Corps of Engineers) On page 2486, line 14, strike ``Provided'' and all that follows through ``proviso:'' on line 21 and insert the following: ``Provided further, That of the amount provided under this heading in this Act, $2,500,000,000 shall be for construction, replacement, rehabilitation, and expansion of inland waterways projects: Provided further, That section 102(a) of the Water Resources Development Act of 1986 (Public Law 99-662; 33 U.S.C 2212(a)) and section 109 of the Water Resources Development Act of 2020 (Public Law 116-260; 134 Stat. 2624) shall not apply to the extent that such projects are carried out using funds provided in the preceding proviso: Provided further, That in using such funds referred to in the preceding proviso, the Secretary shall give priority to projects included in the Capital Investment Strategy of the Corps of Engineers:''. On page 2487, lines 9 through 11, strike ``or section 1135 of the Water Resources Development Act of 1986 (Public Law 99-662; 33 U.S.C 2309a),'' and insert ``section 1135 of the Water Resources Development Act of 1986 (Public Law 99-662; 33 U.S.C 2309a), or section 165(a) of division AA of the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021 (Public Law 116- 260),''. On page 2489, line 9, insert ``Provided further, That in selecting projects under the previous proviso, the Secretary of the Army shall prioritize projects with overriding life- safety benefits: Provided further, That of the funds in the proviso preceding the preceding proviso, the Secretary of the Army shall, to the maximum extent practicable, prioritize projects in the work plan that directly benefit economically disadvantaged communities, and may take into consideration prioritizing projects that benefit areas in which the percentage of people that live in poverty or identify as belonging to a minority group is greater than the average such percentage in the United States, based on data from the Bureau of the Census:'' after ``purpose:''. On page 2496, between lines 2 and 3, insert the following: general provisions--corps of engineers Sec. 300. For projects that are carried out with funds under this heading, the Secretary of the Army and the Director of the Office of Management and Budget shall consider other factors in addition to the benefit-cost ratio when determining the economic benefits of projects that benefit disadvantaged communities. Amendment No. 2548 to Amendment No. 2137 The bill clerk read as follows: The Senator from Delaware [Mr. Carper], for Mr. Bennet and Mr. Hoeven, proposes an amendment numbered 2548 to amendment No. 2137. The amendment is as follows (Purpose: To require the Secretary of ***Agriculture*** to establish a Joint Chiefs Landscape Restoration Partnership program) At the end of title VIII of division D, add the following: SEC. 408\_\_\_\_\_. JOINT CHIEFS LANDSCAPE RESTORATION PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM. (a) Definitions.--In this section: (1) Chiefs.--The term ``Chiefs'' means the Chief of the Forest Service and the Chief of the Natural Resources Conservation Service. (2) Eligible activity.--The term ``eligible activity'' means an activity-- (A) to reduce the risk of wildfire; (B) to protect water quality and supply; or (C) to improve wildlife habitat for at-risk species. (3) Program.--The term ``Program'' means the Joint Chiefs Landscape Restoration Partnership program established under subsection (b)(1). (4) Secretary.--The term ``Secretary'' means the Secretary of ***Agriculture***. (5) Wildland-urban interface.--The term ``wildland-urban interface'' has the meaning given the term in section 101 of the Healthy Forests Restoration Act of 2003 (16 U.S.C 6511). (b) Establishment.-- (1) In general.--The Secretary shall establish a Joint Chiefs Landscape Restoration Partnership program to improve the health and resilience of forest landscapes across National Forest System land and State, Tribal, and private land. (2) Administration.--The Secretary shall administer the Program by coordinating eligible activities conducted on National Forest System land and State, Tribal, or private land across a forest landscape to improve the health and resilience of the forest landscape by-- (A) assisting producers and landowners in implementing eligible activities on eligible private or Tribal land using the applicable programs and authorities administered by the Chief of the Natural Resources Conservation Service under title XII of the Food Security Act of 1985 (16 U.S.C 3801 et seq.), not including the conservation reserve program established under subchapter B of chapter 1 of subtitle D of that title (16 U.S.C 3831 et seq.); and [[Page S5818]] (B) conducting eligible activities on National Forest System land or assisting landowners in implementing eligible activities on State, Tribal, or private land using the applicable programs and authorities administered by the Chief of the Forest Service. (c) Selection of Eligible Activities.--The appropriate Regional Forester and State Conservationist shall jointly submit to the Chiefs on an annual basis proposals for eligible activities under the Program. (d) Evaluation Criteria.--In evaluating and selecting proposals submitted under subsection (c), the Chiefs shall consider-- (1) criteria including whether the proposal-- (A) reduces wildfire risk in a municipal watershed or the wildland-urban interface; (B) was developed through a collaborative ***process*** with participation from diverse stakeholders; (C) increases forest workforce capacity or forest business infrastructure and development; (D) leverages existing authorities and non-Federal funding; (E) provides measurable outcomes; or (F) supports established State and regional priorities; and (2) such other criteria relating to the merits of the proposals as the Chiefs determine to be appropriate. (e) Outreach.--The Secretary shall provide-- (1) public notice on the websites of the Forest Service and the Natural Resources Conservation Service describing-- (A) the solicitation of proposals under subsection (c); and (B) the criteria for selecting proposals in accordance with subsection (d); and (2) information relating to the Program and activities funded under the Program to States, Indian Tribes, units of local government, and private landowners. (f) Exclusions.--An eligible activity may not be carried out under the Program-- (1) in a wilderness area or designated wilderness study area; (2) in an inventoried roadless area; (3) on any Federal land on which, by Act of Congress or Presidential proclamation, the removal of vegetation is restricted or prohibited; or (4) in an area in which the eligible activity would be inconsistent with the applicable land and resource management plan. (g) Accountability.-- (1) Initial report.--Not later than 1 year after the date of enactment of this Act, the Secretary shall submit to Congress a report providing recommendations to Congress relating to the Program, including a review of-- (A) funding mechanisms for the Program; (B) staff capacity to carry out the Program; (C) privacy laws applicable to the Program; (D) data collection under the Program; (E) monitoring and outcomes under the Program; and (F) such other matters as the Secretary considers to be appropriate. (2) Additional reports.--For each of fiscal years 2022 and 2023, the Chiefs shall submit to the Committee on ***Agriculture***, Nutrition, and Forestry and the Committee on Appropriations of the Senate and the Committee on ***Agriculture*** and the Committee on Appropriations of the House of Representatives a report describing projects for which funding is provided under the Program, including the status and outcomes of those projects. (h) Funding.-- (1) Authorization of appropriations.--There is authorized to be appropriated to the Secretary to carry out the Program $90,000,000 for each of fiscal years 2022 and 2023. (2) Additional funds.--In addition to the funds described in paragraph (1), the Secretary may obligate available funds from accounts used to carry out the existing Joint Chiefs' Landscape Restoration Partnership prior to the date of enactment of this Act to carry out the Program. (3) Duration of availability.--Funds made available under paragraph (1) shall remain available until expended. (4) Distribution of funds.--Of the funds made available under paragraph (1)-- (A) not less than 40 percent shall be allocated to carry out eligible activities through the Natural Resources Conservation Service; (B) not less than 40 percent shall be allocated to carry out eligible activities through the Forest Service; and (C) the remaining funds shall be allocated by the Chiefs to the Natural Resources Conservation Service or the Forest Service-- (i) to carry out eligible activities; or (ii) for other purposes, such as technical assistance, project development, or local capacity building. Amendment No. 2358 The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, there will now be 4 minutes of debate, equally divided, prior to a vote in relation to the Rosen amendment No. 2358. The Senator from Nevada. Ms. ROSEN. Mr. President, last summer, the United States saw up close the horrific damage that wildfires can do to our communities. In 2020, nearly 300,000 acres in Nevada burned to the ground. Right now, the Tamarack fire is devastating the Nevada-California border and local communities. These natural disasters have done real, lasting damage to our Nation's highways, causing cracks, potholes, and, in some cases, literally melting the roads that we drive on. My colleague Senator Risch and I offer this bipartisan amendment to the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, which would add wildfires as a specified damage for which Federal assistance from the National Highway Performance Program may be used to rebuild our highways. This will provide support to increase the resiliency of the national highway system, helping to mitigate the cost of the damages. I ask all of my colleagues to support this amendment. The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Is there further debate? Mr. CARPER. I rise in support of this amendment. I hope we will get everybody to vote for it. Let's do a voice vote so we can move on. Mrs. CAPITO. I am in support also as a ranking member. Vote on Amendment No. 2358 The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Hearing no further debate, the question is on agreeing to the amendment. The amendment (No. 2358) was agreed to. The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Delaware. Amendment No. 2447 Mr. CARPER. Mr. President, I rise now to discuss my amendment with Senators Inhofe, Wicker, and Duckworth. This amendment makes several changes to the appropriations section of the substitute in the section that funds the Army Corps of Engineers. In WRDA 2020, Senator Barrasso and I heard multiple times about the struggles of small, rural, and economically disadvantaged communities in meeting project cost shares. These projects range from aquatic ecosystem restorations to flood control and new levees. Yet because the Corps is required to cost share the work, these small, rural, and poor communities never get the assistance they need. Last year, Senator Barrasso and I created a cap authority that allows the Corps to pay for full expense of these projects to help these disadvantaged communities finance the infrastructure the community needs. This amendment also makes clarifying changes to the inland waterways funding. In addition to a technical correction, it makes clear that the funding provided in this act must be prioritized for projects on the Capital Investment Strategy Report, the guiding document for the Corps inland waterways projects. Finally, this amendment makes sure that inland flooding projects are prioritized for economically disadvantaged communities and life-safety- related projects. This supports equity for disadvantaged communities while prioritizing projects with the highest need. This is a good bill. It is a good amendment, and these small tweaks make it stronger. I urge my colleagues to support our amendment and hope that we might do so unanimously. Senator Inhofe would be here. He is in Oklahoma with his family right now. I think some would understand that. He urges us to support this as well. The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Is there further debate? Vote on Amendment No. 2564 The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The question is on agreeing to the amendment No. 2564. The amendment (No. 2564) was agreed to. Mr. CARPER. With that, Mr. President, I would suggest the absence of a quorum, waiting for the arrival of Senator Bennet, who will be here momentarily. The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll. The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll. Mr. BENNET. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded. The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered. Under the previous order, there will now be 2 minutes of debate equally divided prior to a vote in relation to Bennet-Hoeven amendment 2548. [[Page S5819]] Amendment No. 2548 Mr. BENNET. Mr. President, I rise to speak about Bennet-Hoeven amendment 2548. Our amendment would formally establish the Joint Chiefs Program at USDA. I know a lot of people haven't heard of this initiative, but it is really, really important. As I have said on this floor before, in Western States like Colorado and North Dakota, our forests and our grasslands are as important to our economy as the Lincoln Tunnel or the Brooklyn Bridge are to New York, but they haven't received nearly enough investment over the years. The result is that we have people on the ground across the West who are working with incredibly constrained resources. But, despite their best effort, there is a lot of important work to maintain the health of our forests and grasslands that they are unable to do. The consequences of this have been terrible in the West. In Colorado, we had the three largest wildfires in our history last year. The fires were still burning when the snow fell, for the first time. That has never happened in anyone's memory. As we consider this infrastructure bill tonight, one of the major east-west corridors in America is closed because of mudslides that poured down the burn scar from the wildfires last year. Now I-70 may be closed for weeks. We need to deal with this on the front end, and that is why the Joint Chiefs Program matters. At USDA, the Forest Service works mostly on public lands, while the Natural Resources Conservation Service supports efforts on private lands. Joint Chiefs allows them to work in a collaborative way. I thank Senator Hoeven for his support, and I hope we will vote for this on voice vote. The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from North Dakota. Mr. HOEVEN. Mr. President, I am pleased to join with the Senator from Colorado on this Joint Chiefs Landscape Restoration Partnership Act. I appreciate his leadership. There are several points I want to make here before we vote, and that is, this program is very popular with landowners, and I think that is important. This is a very popular program with landowners. It is completely voluntary, a voluntary program. We have chatted with CBO. It does not score, so it does not have a score. Again, both the majority and minority on Ag agree and support this legislation. So, again, it is farmer-friendly, rancher-friendly, and popular with landowners. I thank the Senator from Colorado, and I urge a ``yes'' vote on this amendment. Thank you, Mr. President. Vote on Amendment No. 2548 The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The question is on agreeing to the amendment. The amendment (No. 2548) was agreed to. The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Delaware. Amendment Nos. 2164 and 2570 to Amendment No. 2137 Mr. CARPER. Mr. President, colleagues, I ask unanimous consent that the following amendments be called up to the substitute and be reported by number. The first of those is Fischer, 2164, with Cortez Masto--is that correct? Yes--and the second is Schumer, 2570; further, that the Senate vote in relation to the amendments in the order listed, with no amendments in order to the amendments prior to a vote in relation to the amendments, with up to 2 minutes equally divided prior to each vote. The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Is there objection? Without objection, it is so ordered. Amendment No. 2164 to Amendment No. 2137 The clerk will report the amendments by number. The legislative clerk read as follows: The Senator from Delaware [Mr. Carper], for Mrs. Fischer, proposes an amendment numbered 2164 to amendment No. 2137. The amendment is as follows (Purpose: To promote transparency by requiring the establishment of an online interactive map displaying the location of broadband deployment projects that are funded by the Federal Government) At the appropriate place in division F, insert the following: SEC. 60\_\_\_. BROADBAND DEPLOYMENT LOCATIONS MAP. (a) Definitions.--In this section: (1) Broadband infrastructure.--The term ``broadband infrastructure'' means any cables, fiber optics, wiring, or other permanent (integral to the structure) infrastructure, including wireless infrastructure, that-- (A) is capable of providing access to internet connections in individual locations; and (B) is an advanced telecommunications capability, as defined in section 706(d) of the Telecommunications Act of 1996 (47 U.S.C 1302(d)). (2) Commission.--The term ``Commission'' means the Federal Communications Commission. (3) Deployment locations map.--The term ``Deployment Locations Map'' means the mapping tool required to be established under subsection (b). (b) Establishment of Deployment Locations Map.--Not later than 18 months after the date of enactment of this Act, the Commission shall, in consultation with all relevant Federal agencies, establish an online mapping tool to provide a locations overview of the overall geographic footprint of each broadband infrastructure deployment project funded by the Federal Government. (c) Requirements.--The Deployment Locations Map shall be-- (1) the centralized, authoritative source of information on funding made available by the Federal Government for broadband infrastructure deployment in the United States; and (2) made publicly available on the website of the Commission. (d) Functions.--In establishing the Deployment Locations Map, the Commission shall ensure that the Deployment Locations Map-- (1) compiles data related to Federal funding for broadband infrastructure deployment provided by the Commission, the National Telecommunications and Information Administration, the Department of ***Agriculture***, the Department of Health and Human Services, the Department of the Treasury, the Department of Housing and Urban Development, the Institute of Museum and Library Sciences, and any other Federal agency that provides such data relating to broadband infrastructure deployment funding to the Commission, including funding under-- (A) this Act; (B) the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (Public Law 116-136); (C) the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021 (Public Law 116-260); (D) American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (Public Law 117-2); or (E) any Federal amounts appropriated or any Federal program authorized after the date of enactment of this Act to fund broadband infrastructure deployment; (2) contains data, with respect to each broadband infrastructure deployment program, relating to-- (A) the Federal agency of jurisdiction; (B) the program title; and (C) the network type, including wired, terrestrial fixed, wireless, mobile, and satellite broadband infrastructure deployment; (3) allows users to manipulate the Deployment Locations Map to identify, search, and filter broadband infrastructure deployment projects by-- (A) company name; (B) duration timeline, including the dates of a project's beginning and ending, or anticipated beginning or ending date; (C) total number of locations to which a project makes service available; and (D) relevant download and upload speeds; and (4) incorporates broadband service availability data as depicted in the Broadband Map created under section 802(c)(1) of the Communications Act of 1934 (47 U.S.C 642(c)(1)). (e) Periodic Updates.-- (1) In general.--The Commission shall, in consultation with relevant Federal agencies, ensure the Deployment Locations Map is maintained and up to date on a periodic basis, but not less frequently than once every 180 days. (2) Other federal agencies.--Each Federal agency providing funding for broadband infrastructure deployment shall report relevant data to the Commission on a periodic basis. (f) No Effect on Programmatic Missions.--Nothing in this section shall be construed to affect the programmatic missions of Federal agencies providing funding for broadband infrastructure development. (g) Nonduplication.--The requirements in this section shall be consistent with and avoid duplication with the provisions of section 903 of division FF of the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021 (Public Law 116-260). (h) Funding.--Of the amounts appropriated to carry out this division under this Act, $10,000,000 shall be made available to carry out this section. Amendment No. 2570 to Amendment No. 2137 The legislative clerk read as follows: The Senator from Delaware [Mr. Carper], for Mr. Schumer, proposes an amendment numbered 2570 to amendment No. 2137. The amendment is as follows (Purpose: To establish safety standards for certain limousines) At the appropriate place in division B, insert the following: SEC. \_\_\_\_. LIMOUSINE COMPLIANCE WITH FEDERAL SAFETY STANDARDS. (a) Limousine Standards.-- [[Page S5820]] (1) Safety belt and seating system standards for limousines.--Not later than 2 years after the date of enactment of this Act, the Secretary shall prescribe a final rule that-- (A) amends Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standard Numbers 208, 209, and 210 to require to be installed in limousines on each designated seating position, including on side-facing seats-- (i) an occupant restraint system consisting of integrated lap-shoulder belts; or (ii) an occupant restraint system consisting of a lap belt, if an occupant restraint system described in clause (i) does not meet the need for motor vehicle safety; and (B) amends Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standard Number 207 to require limousines to meet standards for seats (including side-facing seats), seat attachment assemblies, and seat installation to minimize the possibility of failure by forces acting on the seats, attachment assemblies, and installations as a result of motor vehicle impact. (2) Report on retrofit assessment for limousines.--Not later than 2 years after the date of enactment of this Act, the Secretary shall submit to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation of the Senate and the Committee on Energy and Commerce of the House of Representatives a report that assesses the feasibility, benefits, and costs with respect to the application of any requirement established under paragraph (1) to a limousine introduced into interstate commerce before the date on which the requirement takes effect. (b) Modifications of Certain Vehicles.--The final rule prescribed under subsection (a)(1) and any standards prescribed under subsection (b) or (c) of section 23015 shall apply to a person modifying a passenger motor vehicle (as defined in section 32101 of title 49, United States Code) that has already been purchased by the first purchaser (as defined in section 30102(b) of that title) by increasing the wheelbase of the vehicle to make the vehicle a limousine. (c) Application.--The requirements of this section apply notwithstanding section 30112(b)(1) of title 49, United States Code. The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, there will now be 2 minutes of debate equally divided prior to a vote in relation to the Fischer amendment, No. 2164. The Senator from Nebraska. Amendment No. 2164 Mrs. FISCHER. Mr. President, I thank Senator Carper and Senator Capito for the work they have been doing here on the floor. I appreciate their diligence in trying to get amendments up. I am glad to offer this bipartisan amendment with my colleague from Nevada. It would promote transparency among all Federal funding avenues for broadband infrastructure deployment. Right now, funding is divided among several Agencies: FCC, NTIA, USDA, HHS, Treasury, and many others. Some of these programs have detailed maps of where funding is going, but some do not. Even when there are maps, it still requires searching through several web pages and sources to find out what you are looking for, if you can find it at all. Without a clear picture of where the funding is going, it will be increasingly difficult to avoid duplication and distribute resources where they are needed the most. So our amendment would create an online mapping tool through an interagency ***process*** so we can view the latest progress of all of these deployment projects in one place. I would urge adoption of the amendment. Thank you. The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Nevada. Ms. CORTEZ MASTO. Mr. President, I join my colleague from Nebraska in support of this bipartisan amendment. Transparency around broadband is so important for all of our communities, and it fits with, I think, what we are all doing to address our broadband needs across the country and trying to ensure we are bringing broadband into the communities most in need. So I urge my colleagues to support this amendment. Mr. CARPER. Mr. President, I understand there has been a request--let me ask the Senator. I understand there has been a request for a recorded vote. Can you confirm that or not? Mrs. FISCHER. A recorded vote would be fine. Mr. CARPER. All right. Then it will be a recorded vote. Let me ask our colleagues: 10 minutes; is that OK? Ten minutes from start to finish, and that is it. And the last amendment will be Schumer. All right? Let's do this in 10 minutes, OK? Vote on Amendment No. 2164 The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The question is on agreeing to the amendment. Mr. THUNE. I ask for the yeas and nays. The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Is there a sufficient second? There appears to be a sufficient second. The clerk will call the roll. The legislative clerk called the roll. Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from New Jersey (Mr. Menendez) is necessarily absent. Mr. THUNE. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from Missouri (Mr. Blunt), the Senator from South Carolina (Mr. Graham), the Senator from Oklahoma (Mr. Inhofe), and the Senator from Pennsylvania (Mr. Toomey). The result was announced--yeas 95, nays 0, as follows: [Rollcall Vote No. 306 Leg.] YEAS--95 Baldwin Barrasso Bennet Blackburn Blumenthal Booker Boozman Braun Brown Burr Cantwell Capito Cardin Carper Casey Cassidy Collins Coons Cornyn Cortez Masto Cotton Cramer Crapo Cruz Daines Duckworth Durbin Ernst Feinstein Fischer Gillibrand Grassley Hagerty Hassan Hawley Heinrich Hickenlooper Hirono Hoeven Hyde-Smith Johnson Kaine Kelly Kennedy King Klobuchar Lankford Leahy Lee Lujan Lummis Manchin Markey Marshall McConnell Merkley Moran Murkowski Murphy Murray Ossoff Padilla Paul Peters Portman Reed Risch Romney Rosen Rounds Rubio Sanders Sasse Schatz Schumer Scott (FL) Scott (SC) Shaheen Shelby Sinema Smith Stabenow Sullivan Tester Thune Tillis Tuberville Van Hollen Warner Warnock Warren Whitehouse Wicker Wyden Young NOT VOTING--5 Blunt Graham Inhofe Menendez Toomey The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. On this vote, the yeas are 95, the nays are 0. The amendment (No. 2164) was agreed to. Amendment No. 2570 The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, there will be 2 minutes of debate, equally divided, prior to the vote in relation to the Schumer amendment, No. 2570. The Senator from New York. Mrs. GILLIBRAND. Mr. President, I rise in support of this amendment. It is a bipartisan amendment with Senator Wicker. And this is about just giving basic safety regulations to those superlong, stretch limousines. The reason why Senator Schumer and I care about this, there was a horrible, horrible incident in Upstate New York, in Schoharie, where 20 people were killed. In that 1 limousine, 17 passengers: 4 young women from the same family--a mom lost 4 daughters--and 2 recently married couples. They hired the limousine to go safely to a birthday party. This cannot continue. And I yield to Senator Wicker. The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Mississippi. Mr. WICKER. Mr. President, I, too, rise in support of this amendment. It is in response to a tragic automobile accident that affected a number of families. I want to thank Senator Schumer's staff for working with me, the ranking member, and the chair of the Commerce Committee to get this language correct. It is in good shape. I entirely agree with the junior Senator from New York. Vote on Amendment No. 2570 Mr. CORNYN. I ask for the yeas and nays. The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Is there a sufficient second? There appears to be to be a sufficient second. The clerk will call the roll. The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll. Mr. THUNE. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from Missouri (Mr. Blunt), the Senator from South Carolina (Mr. Graham), the Senator from Oklahoma (Mr. Inhofe). The result was announced--yeas 58, nays 39, as follows: [[Page S5821]] [Rollcall Vote No. 307 Legislative] YEAS--58 Baldwin Bennet Blumenthal Booker Brown Burr Cantwell Capito Cardin Carper Casey Collins Coons Cortez Masto Cramer Duckworth Durbin Feinstein Gillibrand Hassan Heinrich Hickenlooper Hirono Hyde-Smith Kaine Kelly King Klobuchar Leahy Lujan Manchin Markey McConnell Menendez Merkley Murphy Murray Ossoff Padilla Peters Reed Rosen Rubio Sanders Schatz Schumer Shaheen Sinema Smith Stabenow Thune Van Hollen Warner Warnock Warren Whitehouse Wicker Wyden NAYS--39 Barrasso Blackburn Boozman Braun Cassidy Cornyn Cotton Crapo Cruz Daines Ernst Fischer Grassley Hagerty Hawley Hoeven Johnson Kennedy Lankford Lee Lummis Marshall Moran Murkowski Paul Portman Risch Romney Rounds Sasse Scott (FL) Scott (SC) Shelby Sullivan Tester Tillis Toomey Tuberville Young NOT VOTING--3 Blunt Graham Inhofe The amendment (No. 2570) was agreed to. The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. Warnock). The majority leader. Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, before I close, I have some brief remarks. First, on the bill that just passed, let me thank my colleagues for passing this very important bill. It stems from the fact that, in 2018, 20 lives were lost in a tragic limousine accident in Schoharie, NY. The families came from the small city of Amsterdam, the people. They had done just the right thing. It is a group that went out. They knew they might be enjoying themselves, and so they hired a big, long stretch limo. Unfortunately, as the limo came down the hill in Schoharie, it crashed, and 20 people died. I met the families. These were young people in the prime of life. I met one mom. She lost four daughters--four daughters--in this crash. This community of Amsterdam and these families have endured endless tragedy. But instead of cursing the darkness, they have lit a candle, and they are pushing for the fact that there is a hole in regulation. We regulate trucks, and we regulate smaller limos, but when it is a large limo, and they are not sure what it is classified as, then there is virtually no regulation. This legislation fills that hole. The accident was preventable. There was another accident on Long Island--four young women in the prime of life killed in the same way. That was preventable. Now Congress finally has the opportunity to address the gaps and loopholes that have allowed limousines to escape the basic safety standards that cover other vehicles. My amendment--and that with Senator Gillibrand--would ensure that limousines meet minimum safety standards. It mandates seatbelts and seat safety standards, and it will save lives. So I thank my colleagues for supporting this amendment. It is a beautiful thing what these families are doing. The hole in their heart will never go away. The hole in the heart of the whole city of Amsterdam, which lost so many of their vital young men and women, will never go away. But instead of cursing the darkness, they are lighting the candle, and, tonight, the candle was lit thanks to the bipartisan cooperation we have here. So I thank my colleagues. H.R 3684 Mr. President, now on the matter of today, the Senate is making really good progress, really good progress. As you know, I had promised, when we opened up our two-track ***process***, that we would be fully bipartisan in the amendment ***process*** as we move forward on the bipartisan infrastructure bill. Well, I think no one can deny that we have kept our word here in the Democratic majority. So far, the Senate has considered 22 amendments on this bipartisan piece of legislation, 15 of them today. That is more amendments than probably happened in many months when we were in the minority. Of those amendments, 12 have been agreed to--5 by voice vote, 7 by rollcall; 10 were not agreed to; 13 of those 22 amendments--more than half--were sponsored by Republicans. So, clearly, we have shown a willingness to allow Members who are not part of the bipartisan group to have input into this important bill. Tomorrow, we will continue to consider amendments, and then, hopefully, we can bring this bill to a close in the very near future. So the Chamber is working as Members on both sides of the aisle have wanted it to. I am proud of what we have been able to do today and hope we can continue tomorrow in that vein

**Load-Date:** August 6, 2021

**End of Document**



[***Live updates: Zelenskyy says Russia carries out more airstrikes***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:65GK-6DJ1-JDJN-60H8-00000-00&context=1516831)

The Malta Independent

May 18, 2022

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**Length:** 5068 words

**Body**

KYIV, Ukraine — A Russian soldier facing the first war crimes trial since the start of the war has pleaded guilty to charges of killing a Ukrainian civilian.

Sgt. Vadim Shyshimarin pleaded guilty to the charges during his trial in Kyiv on Wednesday. The 21-year-old soldier could get life in prison if convicted of shooting a Ukrainian man in the head through an open car window in a village in the northeastern Sumy region on Feb. 28, four days into the ***invasion***.

Ukraine's Prosecutor General Iryna Venediktova has previously said her office was readying war crimes cases against 41 Russian soldiers for offenses including bombing civilian infrastructure, killing civilians, rape and looting.

It was not immediately clear how many of the suspects are in Ukrainian hands and how many could be tried in absentia.

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MOSCOW — Russia says it is expelling 27 Spanish diplomats after announcing the expulsion of dozens of diplomats from France and Italy.

Moscow said on Wednesday the move is in response to the expulsion of Russian diplomats last month from Spain.

Earlier, the Russian Foreign Ministry said the country was expelling 34 French and 24 Italian diplomats.

Multiple European countries expelled Russian diplomats last month after accusing Russian forces of killing civilians in Bucha and other towns outside Kyiv, accusations the Kremlin has fiercely denied.

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BRUSSELS — The European Commission is proposing a nine-billion euro ($9.5 billion) loan to Ukraine to help the war-torn country.

The EU's executive arm said Wednesday that the macro-financial assistance in the form of loans will be complemented by support from other partners including countries from the Group of Seven major economies.

"We are proposing to top up the significant short-term relief provided until now, with a new ***exceptional*** macro-financial assistance for Ukraine of up to 9 billion (euros) in 2022," European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen said.

"But we also need to think about the day after for the wider reconstruction effort. The EU has a responsibility and a strategic interest in leading this reconstruction effort." The EU said it already has mobilized around 4.1 billion euros ($4.3 billion) to support Ukraine.

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MOSCOW — Russia is expelling 34 French and 24 Italian diplomats following similar expulsions of Russian diplomats throughout Europe last month.

The Russian Foreign Ministry said Wednesday that the French diplomatic staff would be given two weeks to leave the country.

Russia said it was responding to "the provocative and utterly baseless decision of French authorities" in April to expel 41 Russian diplomats, which it said had damaged the relationship between the two countries.

Spokeswoman Maria Zakharova told state news agency RIA Novosti that 24 Italian diplomats also will be expelled. She gave no other details.

Italy's Prime Minister Mario Draghi said after a meeting with his Finnish counterpart that "this should not interrupt diplomatic channels, because it is through the channels that, if successful, peace will arrive.''

Mutliple European countries expelled Russian diplomats last month after accusing Russian forces of killing civilians in Bucha and other towns outside Kyiv, accusations the Kremlin has fiercely denied.

Russian state news agencies reported Wednesday that the ambassadors of Spain and Sweden had also been summoned to the Foreign Ministry. Russia expelled two Finnish diplomats on Tuesday.

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MOSCOW — The Russian military says it has destroyed several artillery pieces that the U.S. delivered to Ukraine.

Russian Defense Ministry spokesman Maj. Gen. Igor Konashenkov, said Wednesday that the Russian military has hit a battery of U.S.-supplied M777 howitzers near the village of Pidhirne of the eastern Donetsk region. The ministry later released a video showing a drone strike on Ukrainian artillery positions.

Konashenkov's claims couldn't be independently verified.

The Russian Defense Ministry has repeatedly reported strikes targeting Western-supplied weapons.

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ANKARA, Turkey — Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan says NATO's enlargement would depend on Finland and Sweden showing respect to Turkish "sensitivities" concerning "terrorism."

Erdogan on Wednesday told his ruling party legislators that "NATO's enlargement would be meaningful for us to the extent that our sensitivities are respected."

Erdogan spoke hours after Finland and Sweden officially applied to join the military alliance, a move that was driven by security concerns over Russia's war in Ukraine. His comments suggested Erdogan is refusing to back down on his opposition to the two Nordic countries' membership in the alliance because of their alleged support for Kurdish militants.

He said Sweden and Finland "will not hand over terrorists to us, but you will ask us to allow you to join NATO."

"NATO is a security entity. It is a security agency," Erdogan said. "Therefore, we cannot say 'yes' to depriving this security organization of security."

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MOSCOW — The Kremlin says the Ukrainian soldiers at a giant steel mill in the port of Mariupol are surrendering.

The Russian Defense Ministry said Wednesday that 959 Ukrainian soldiers had surrendered since Monday.

Ukrainian authorities say they ordered the fighters to save their lives and said the mission to tie up Russian forces by defending the Azovstal plant is complete.

But they have have avoided describing the action of the ones who left the plant as a surrender.

Asked about the conflicting Russian and Ukrainian narratives, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters, "There can be just one interpretation: the troops holed up at Azovstal are laying down their weapons and surrendering."

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BERLIN — The United States has mobilized about three times as much support for Ukraine as the European Union, according to figures compiled by a German think tank.

The Kiel Institute for the World Economy said Wednesday that a new aid package passed by the U.S. House of Representatives takes American military, financial and humanitarian support for Ukraine to almost 43 billion euros (over $45 billion) between Jan. 24 and May 10.

The institute found that aid from the EU amounted to just under 16 billion euros ($16.8 billion) during the same period. However, some countries in the 27-nation bloc have shied away from giving the value of their Ukraine aid, particularly for arms supplies.

Compared to their gross domestic products, Estonia, Latvia and Poland provided the most support, ahead of the United States, according to the think tank's calculations.

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BERLIN -- Austria's government says it has no intention of following Sweden and Finland into NATO.

Austria joined the European Union at the same time as the two Nordic nations in 1995. The Swedish and Finnish applications to join NATO will likely leave Austria as one of very few EU countries that aren't also a member of the trans-Atlantic military alliance.

Austrian Foreign Minister Alexander Schallenberg told Germany's Deutschlandfunk radio on Wednesday that "we decided on neutrality in 1955 and is still the case that a very, very large majority of the population views this positively."

He said that hasn't prevented Austria from backing EU sanctions against Russia and giving Ukraine non-lethal support.

Schallenberg said he "takes note" of the Swedish and Finnish decision to make a "massive change" to their security policy -- "but the situation looks a bit different here: we will, like Ireland and Malta -- there are three states in all in the (European) Union -- continue to remain neutral."

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COPENHAGEN, Denmark — The Danish Defense Intelligence Service on Wednesday heightened the threat level for cyber activism against Denmark because of the recent pro-Russian cyber activist attacks on Western European NATO countries.

Denmark's Center for Cyber Security which is under the Scandinavian country's foreign intelligence service, raised the threat level from low to medium - the third level on a five-step scale.

The national IT security authority said that in the initial phase after Russia's ***invasion*** of Ukraine, cyber-activist attacks mainly targeted Russia, Ukraine and Belarus.

However, "in recent weeks, cyber activists have also hit targets in Western European NATO countries." It added that cyber-activist attacks have affected in recent weeks targeted "countries in the immediate vicinity of Ukraine. Pro-Russian activist groups have attacked companies and authorities in, for example, the Czech Republic, Poland and Estonia."

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KYIV, Ukraine — The Russian military says that almost 1,000 Ukrainian troops left Mariupol's last stronghold this week. Ukraine has not confirmed.

Russian Defense Ministry spokesman Maj. Gen. Igor Konashenkov said Wednesday that 694 Ukrainian soldiers at the Azovstal steel plant handed themselves over to Russian troops the past 24 hours, bringing the total of Ukrainian troops who have conceded since Monday to 959.

Konashenkov's claim couldn't be independently verified.

Ukrainian authorities have avoided mentioning any numbers for the troops who left the plant.

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LONDON — British military authorities say Russia relied heavily on auxiliary forces, including Chechen fighters, to overcome Ukrainian resistance in Mariupol, underscoring the manpower and command problems that are hampering Russian operations.

The U.K. Ministry of Defense, in a briefing posted Wednesday morning, says "staunch" Ukrainian resistance delayed Russia's ability to take full control of the strategic port city and inflicted "costly personnel losses" on Russian forces.

The ministry says the Kremlin has made significant use of auxiliary personnel, including thousands of Chechen fighters concentrated around Mariupol and in the Luhansk region.

These forces include individual volunteers and National Guard units that are usually dedicated to securing the rule of Ramzan Kadyrov, leader of the Chechen Republic.

"The combat deployment of such disparate personnel demonstrates Russia's significant resourcing problems in Ukraine and is likely contributing to a disunited command which continues to hamper Russia's operations," the ministry said.

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BRUSSELS — NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg says Finland and Sweden have applied to join the world's biggest military alliance, a move driven by security concerns over Russia's war in Ukraine.

"I warmly welcome the requests by Finland and Sweden to join NATO. You are our closest partners," Stoltenberg told reporters Wednesday after a receiving their application letters from the two Nordic countries' ambassadors.

The application must now be weighed by the 30 member countries.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has expressed reservations about Finland and Sweden joining.

If his objections are overcome, and accession talks go as well as expected, the two could become members within a few months. The ***process*** usually takes eight to 12 months, but NATO wants to move quickly given the threat from Russia hanging over the Nordic countries' heads.

KYIV, Ukraine — Ukraine's human rights ombudsman said the Russian military was holding more than 3,000 civilians from Mariupol at another former penal colony near Olenivka in the Donetsk region of eastern Ukraine.

Seven buses carrying an unknown number of Ukrainian soldiers evacuated from the Mariupol steel plant were seen arriving Tuesday at former penal colony No. 120 near Olenivka.

Ombudsman Lyudmyla Denisova said on Telegram earlier Tuesday that the civilians were being held at former penal colony No. 52, also near Olenivka.

She said most civilians are held for a month, but those considered "particularly unreliable," including former soldiers and police, are held for two months.

Denisova said those held include about 30 volunteers who delivered humanitarian supplies to Mariupol while it was under Russian siege.

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MELITOPOL, Ukraine — Ukrainian guerrilla fighters reportedly have killed several high-ranking Russian officers in the southern city of Melitopol, the regional administration said on Telegram.

Russian forces have occupied the city since early in the war.

According to the regional administration, the occupiers are trying to conceal the situation but Russian troops were more actively checking private cars in the city Tuesday, most likely looking for the guerrillas.

No details of the killings were given and the report could not immediately be confirmed.

Throughout the war, the Ukrainians have claimed to have killed many Russian generals and other officers. A few of the deaths have been confirmed by the Russians.

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LVIV, Ukraine — Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said Tuesday began with a combination of Russian attacks with Russian forces firing missiles at the western Lviv region and the Sumy and Chernihiv regions in the northeast and carrying out airstrikes in the eastern Luhansk region.

Zelenskyy said the border regions of Ukraine saw Russian "sabotage activity."

"All of this is not just creating tension for our state, is not just a test of our strength," Zelenskyy said in his nightly video address. "This is kind of an attempt to compensate the Russian army for a series of failures in the east and south of our country."

According to Zelenskyy, the Russians are unable to demonstrate any success in the areas where they are trying to attack.

So "they are trying to show success through their missiles and other activities, but also to no effect," Zelenskyy said. "These strikes, like the many previous ones, do not fundamentally change anything. Moreover, our air defense and anti-sabotage ***measures*** are getting stronger."

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KYIV, Ukraine — The fall of Mariupol appears at hand as Ukraine is moving to abandon a sprawling steel plant where its soldiers had held out under relentless bombardment for months, which would make it the biggest city to fall into Russian hands.

Much of the steel plant has been reduced to rubble.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said Ukraine is working to get its remaining troops safely out of the Azovstal steel plant.

In his nightly video address to the nation, Zelenskyy said the evacuation mission was being supervised by Ukraine's military and intelligence officers and "the most influential international mediators are involved."

However, hundreds of Ukrainian fighters have left the Azovstal steel plant and turned themselves over to Russian hands.

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CANNES, France — The 75th Cannes Film Festival has kicked off with a video address from Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

Zelenskyy appeared Tuesday night live via satellite on video wearing a short-sleeved shirt and flanked by Ukrainian flags. His message played before formally attired attendees at the French Riviera festival that lasts through May 28.

Zelenskyy spoke at length about the connection between cinema and reality, referencing films like Francis Ford Coppola's "Apocalypse Now" and Charlie Chaplin's "The Great Dictator" as not unlike Ukraine's present circumstances.

"We need a new Chaplin who will demonstrate that the cinema of our time is not silent," said Zelenskyy, who drew a standing ovation.

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PARIS — Emmanuel Macron of France has spoken with Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy for over an hour on the phone to discuss the war, including Mariupol and evacuations at the Azovstal steel plant, according to a communique by the Elysee palace.

The communique said the French president stated his "full determination to respond to all requests for support expressed by Ukraine," particularly in defense equipment, fuel and humanitarian aid, as well as financial support.

It said Macron also confirmed Tuesday that arms deliveries by France would continue and "increase in intensity in the days and weeks to come," along with the delivery of humanitarian equipment.

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WASHINGTON — U.S. Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo says concerted efforts by the European Union and the U.S. to cut off Russia's access to technology over its war on Ukraine have greatly succeeded.

She spoke Tuesday after returning from a meeting near Paris of the EU-U.S. Trade and Technology Council.

Representatives of the EU Commission, the bloc of 27 nations' executive body, and the Biden administration agreed to further coordinate their actions "to mitigate the negative impacts" of Russia's war in Ukraine on the global economy.

Raimondo told reporters on a call that the cooperative efforts to implement a series of export controls against Russia "are having a strong and significant effect."

For the U.S., she said, exports to Russia have decreased by 80% from February, when Russia invaded Ukraine.

"We've essentially stopped sending high-tech to Russia, which is what they need for their military," Raimondo said.

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KYIV, Ukraine — Russian troops kept up their blockade of the Azovstal steel plant in Mariupol on Tuesday, the Ukrainian military said in its evening operational update.

The army's General Staff said in a post on its official Facebook profile that "in Mariupol, the enemy concentrated its main efforts on blocking our units in the area of the Azovstal plant,"

Ukrainian authorities did not disclose the number of fighters who remain in the steel mill, the last bastion of Ukrainian resistance in the ruined port city, after 264 soldiers were extracted Monday and taken to territory held by Russia-backed separatists east of Mariupol.

The military also said that the eastern Donetsk region remained the focus of the fighting on Tuesday, with particularly fierce clashes around the Ukrainian-held cities of Siverodonetsk, Avdiivka, and Bakhmut.

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MOSCOW — Russia's main federal investigative body said Tuesday that it intended to interrogate Ukrainian troops extracted from the Azovstal steel plant in Mariupol, as part of its probe into alleged "crimes by the Ukrainian regime against the civilian population" in Ukraine's industrial east.

Russia's Investigative Committee said in a Telegram post that "Russian investigators will identify the nationalists (and) test whether they have been involved in crimes committed against the civilian population; the information obtained during interrogations will be compared with other data available in records pertaining to criminal cases."

It did not provide any additional information regarding the location or legal status of the Ukrainian fighters.

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KYIV, Ukraine — Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy says he and his French counterpart have discussed issues ranging from the evacuation of Ukrainian fighters from Mariupol to Ukraine's EU membership prospects.

Zelenskyy wrote on Twitter Tuesday evening that he had finished "a long and meaningful phone conversation with Emmanuel Macron."

Zelenskyy said he told Macron about "the course of hostilities, the operation to rescue the (Ukrainian) military from Azovstal and the vision of the prospects of the negotiation ***process***."

He said he also raised the issue of fuel supply to Ukraine.

"We also discussed defense support from France, preparation of the 6th package of sanctions (against Russia), possible ways to export Ukrainian ***agricultural*** products," Zelenskyy added, saying that the two had also held a "substantive" discussion of Kyiv's potential bid to gain EU candidate status.

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Ukraine's deputy defense minister expressed hope on Tuesday that the 264 Ukrainian fighters extracted from the Azovstal steel mill in Mariupol will be exchanged for Russian prisoners of war, despite remarks by a top Russian official who called them "criminals" who have to be "brought to justice."

Hanna Maliar said at a briefing Tuesday that the comment by Russian State Duma speaker Vyacheslav Volodin is a political statement, "conceived as internal propaganda, (with an eye to) internal political ***processes*** in the Russian Federation."

Maliar said that from Ukraine's perspective both the negotiation ***process*** and rescue operation itself is ongoing.

Earlier Tuesday, the Russian news agency Interfax cited Volodin as calling the Azovstal fighters "Nazi criminals" who should be excluded from any future exchanges.

Volodin was cited calling the fighters "war criminals" and that Russia "must do everything to bring them to justice."

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justifiable, they are never OK and they must be investigated," he said, adding that the U.N. health agency would be sharing details of the attacks with Ukrainian authorities and other independent investigators.

Kluge also said he was "deeply troubled" by reports of increasing sexual violence in Ukraine and the potential for cholera outbreaks in occupied parts of the country. He said WHO was preparing cholera vaccines to combat water-borne disease.

Dr. Dorit Nitzan, WHO Europe's emergencies director, said the organization was worried about the situation in Mariupol, citing reports of numerous broken pipes.

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Russian Deputy Prime Minister Marat Khusnullin visited the Kherson region of southern Ukraine on Tuesday, according to the RIA Novosti state news agency.

It's a sign of Russia's increasing influence over areas held by its forces,

The Kherson region is in southern Ukraine outside of the areas claimed by Russia-backed separatists and has been under control of Russian forces since soon after the ***invasion*** began in February.

Khusnullin was quoted by RIA as saying Kherson could take "a worthy place in our Russian family." He also said Russia was organizing road and bridge repairs and signaled produce from the largely ***agricultural*** region could be exported to Russia.

A Kremlin-installed politician in the Kherson region said last week that officials there planned to appeal to Russian President Vladimir Putin to incorporate the region into Russia.

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BRUSSELS — The International Criminal Court prosecutor says he's sent a team of 42 investigators, forensic experts and support personnel to Ukraine as part of a probe into suspected war crimes during Russia's ***invasion***.

ICC Prosecutor Karim Khan said Tuesday that the team "will significantly enhance the impact of our forensic and investigative actions on the ground."

Khan says the team will improve the gathering of witness testimony, the identification of forensic materials and help ensure that "evidence is collected in a manner that strengthens its admissibility in future proceedings" at the Netherlands-based court.

Several thousand civilians are believed to have died since the Russian ***invasion*** began on Feb. 24. Exact figures are impossible to verify. Incidents of summary executions and the use of cluster bombs by Russian forces have regularly been reported.

To be classed as crimes against humanity, attacks have to be part of what the ICC's founding treaty, the Rome Statute, calls "a widespread or systematic attack directed against any civilian population."

Khan says that "now more than ever we need to show the law in action" in Ukraine.

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HELSINKI — A small Finnish brewery has launched a NATO-branded beer as Finland has sought membership in the 30-member Alliance along with neighboring Sweden.

The OTAN beer features a blue label, a beer-drinking cartoon character in a metal armor emblazoned with NATO's compass symbol.

The words "OTAN olutta" means "I will have a beer" in Finnish.

According to a Twitter posting, the Olaf brewery in the eastern Finnish town of Savonlinna, the pun is intended. OTAN is French abbreviation for NATO -- The North Atlantic Treaty Organization which has two official languages, English and French.

The town of Savonlinna which houses the Olavinlinna Castle from 1475, has been the site of numerous battles and lies close to the Russian border.

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HELSINKI, Finland — Finland's Parliament has overwhelmingly endorsed a bid from the Nordic country's government to join NATO.

Lawmakers at the 200-seat Eduskunta legislature voted 188-8 Tuesday to approve Finland seeking membership in the 30-member Western military alliance.

The vote was considered a formality as Finnish President Sauli Niinisto and Prime Minister Sanna Marin announced the intention to join on Sunday.

Lawmakers' approval wasn't necessarily required. However, both Niniisto and Marin stressed that it was important for the Parliament to weigh in on the NATO bid, described by the Finnish head of state as "historic."

Finland is now expected to sign a formal application and file it to NATO headquarters in the coming days together with Nordic neighbor Sweden where the government announced a similar NATO bid on Monday.

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BERLIN — German Chancellor Olaf Scholz says Sweden and Finland "can always rely on our assistance" as they wait to join NATO, and is voicing confidence that Turkey will back their membership bid.

Scholz pledged Tuesday that Germany will push for quick accession by the Nordic nations. He noted that United Nations and European Union provisions call for mutual protection.

Asked whether that means Germany is giving the two countries a security guarantee for the period between their application and becoming members, Scholz replied: "Both countries can always rely on our assistance, particularly in this very special situation."

Scholz signaled that he's confident a skeptical Turkey can be won over to the Nordic membership bid, though he sidestepped a question on whether it's time to rethink restrictions on arms exports to Ankara.

He said: "I am as confident as the NATO secretary general that this (accession) will succeed quickly with the support of all countries, including Turkey as a NATO member." He said that Turkey has made "very many constructive contributions" in addressing the war.

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WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden Biden will host Prime Minister Magdalena Andersson of Sweden and President Sauli Niinistö of Finland at the White House for a meeting Thursday amid their push to join NATO.

The White House said they would discuss the two countries' applications to join the alliance, as well as European security broadly. The meeting is set to take place before Biden departs for a four-day trip to South Korea and Japan.

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MOSCOW — Russia says it is expelling two Finnish diplomats and will leave a multinational organization focused on the Baltic Sea, as tensions remain high over Finland and Sweden's ambitions to join NATO.

The Russian Foreign Ministry on Tuesday framed the expulsion of the two Finnish diplomats as a response to Finland expelling two Russians last month.

It also said the Finnish ambassador was read a protest against "Finland's confrontational course in relation to Russia," including its role in international sanctions against Russia and arms supplies to Ukraine. The statement made no mention of NATO.

Russia said it was leaving the Council of the Baltic Sea States, an 11-nation grouping where Finland and Sweden are prominent members, and the related Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference, a grouping of national lawmakers.

Moscow says European Union and NATO member countries were seeking to use the CBSS as "an instrument of anti-Russian policy." Russia was suspended from participating in the CBSS in March by the other members.

\_\_\_

STOCKHOLM — Sweden has signed a formal request to join NATO, a day after the country announced it would seek membership in the alliance. In neighboring Finland, lawmakers are expected later Tuesday to formally endorse Finnish leaders' decision also to join.

The moves by the two Nordic countries, ending Sweden's more than 200 years of military nonalignment and Finland's nonalignment after World War II, have provoked the ire of the Kremlin.

Finnish President Sauli Niinisto arrived in Sweden for an official two-day visit and said: "we took peace for granted; on Feb. 24 the peace was broken," in a reference to the date that Ukraine was invaded by Russia.

"Our old ways of handling things no longer correspond to the new situation," Niinisto told Swedish lawmakers. "Our relations with Russia have changed."

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BERLIN — Germany's foreign minister says she is "very confident" that Sweden and Finland will be cleared to join NATO, despite objections from Turkey.

Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock said Tuesday that the two Nordic nations' military standards are "more than NATO-compatible" so it is in the alliance's own interest for them to become members.

Baerbock, who hosted a meeting of NATO foreign ministers at the weekend, said the allies had "taken note" of Turkish concerns over "some things." She adds that "this is being talked about now, but I am very confident that there will be a quick accession of Sweden and Finland because everyone is very aware that this is a decisive moment, a historic moment."

All 30 current NATO members must agree to let the Nordic neighbors join. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has said that they failed to take a "clear" stance against Kurdish militants and other groups that Ankara considers terrorists, and imposed military sanctions on Turkey.

\_\_\_

STOCKHOLM — Finnish President Sauli Niinisto says Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's comments on Finland's accession to NATO were "surprising and interesting."

"Turkey's statements have changed and toughened very quickly in recent days, but I am sure that we will resolve the situation with the help of constructive talks," Niinisto said during a visit to neighboring Sweden, which also has sought membership in the 30-member Alliance.

The twin move comes after Russia's Feb. 24 ***invasion*** of Ukraine.

Also Tuesday, Turkey's justice minister accused Sweden and Finland of topping a list of European Union countries that he says "openly support" organizations that his country views as terrorists.

Bekir Bozdag said the two countries "have not returned a single" suspect that Turkey wants extradited for alleged links to the banned Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK, or to the movement led by Muslim cleric Fethullah Gulen, whom Ankara accuses of orchestrating a failed military coup in 2016.

Turkish media say Turkey has sought the extradition of 33 suspects from Finland and Sweden.

\_\_\_

VIENNA — The head of the International Atomic Energy Agency says that it plans to send another team of experts to the decommissioned Chernobyl nuclear plant in Ukraine in "the coming weeks."

Tuesday's announcement by the U.N. nuclear watchdog's director general, Rafael Mariano Grossi, came after he led a first mission to the site in northern Ukraine late last month. Russian forces took control of Chernobyl, the site of the 1986 nuclear disaster, at the beginning of the ***invasion*** and withdrew at the end of March.

Grossi said in a video message that, after that trip and a previous visit to the active South Ukraine nuclear plant, "we now have a clear picture of what needs to be done." He said he has drawn up a "comprehensive program of assistance" to Ukraine.

**Load-Date:** May 19, 2022

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[***Mitch McConnell says he will not support Ketanji Brown Jackson nomination - as it happened***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:652N-NW31-DY4H-K30D-00000-00&context=1516831)

The Guardian (London)

March 24, 2022 Thursday 1:25 PM GMT

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**Section:** US NEWS; Version:17

**Length:** 6982 words

**Byline:** Lauren Gambino (now), Gloria Oladipo and Joan E Greve (earlier)

**Highlight:** Senate Republican leader says he will not back Biden's nomineeBiden hints he may meet Ukrainian president Volodymyr ZelenskiyTrump sues Hillary Clinton and others over accusations of collusion

**Body**

block-time published-time 9.18pm GMT

Evening summary

It's been a busy day in Washington and around the world.

The supreme court confirmation hearing for Ketanji Brown Jackson concluded on Thursday, with judges and lawyers extolling her as a "brilliant" legal mind and ***exceptional*** jurist. Senate minority leader Mitch McConnell announced he would not support Jackson's historic nomination to the court in a sign of how difficult it will be for her to win Republican votes.The state department announced indictments against four Russian nationals for allegedly attempting to hack hundreds of energy companies in countries around the world. It comes as the US is on heightened alert for a cyberattack by Russia.Joe Biden met in Brussels with allied leaders to discuss the war in Ukraine. He warned Vladimir Putin against using chemical weapons and said Russia should be removed from the G20. If not, he said Ukraine should be added to the group. The US and its allies announced new sanctions on more than 400 Russian elites and institutions. The US will accept up to 100,000 Ukrainian refugees who have fled their country because of the war. The White House also announced it will provide more than $1bn in humanitarian assistance to Ukraine, helping its citizens access food, medical care and psychological treatment.

The blog will have more coming up, so stay tuned.

That's all from us today. For updates on Ukraine, please follow our global live blog.

Related: [*Russia-Ukraine war: Nato has never been more united, says Biden; Kyiv and Moscow exchange prisoners - live*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2022/mar/24/russia-ukraine-war-latest-news-zelenskiy-expects-meaningful-steps-at-nato-eu-and-g7-summits-live)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 9.19pm GMT

block-time published-time 9.10pm GMT

US indicts four Russians on charges of hacking energy companies

The United States has indicted four Russian nationals, including three intelligence officers, for allegedly engaging in a series of hacking campaigns that targeted hundreds of energy companies and organizations in approximately 135 countries.

The alleged incidents cover activity from 2012 through 2018, but come as the US warns operators of critical infrastructure that to be on high alert for a Russian cyberattack as tensions between the two superpowers escalate in response to Moscow's ***invasion*** of Ukraine.

Russian state-sponsored hackers pose a serious and persistent threat to critical infrastructure both in the United States and around the world," said deputy attorney general Lisa Monaco. "Although the criminal charges unsealed today reflect past activity, they make crystal clear the urgent ongoing need for American businesses to harden their defenses and remain vigilant. Alongside our partners here at home and abroad, the Department of Justice is committed to exposing and holding accountable state-sponsored hackers who threaten our critical infrastructure with cyber-attacks."

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 9.12pm GMT

block-time published-time 8.46pm GMT

Earlier on Thursday, senators heard from experts extolling Jackson's judicial record.

"Outstanding, excellent, superior, superb," testified Ann Claire Williams, chair of the American Bar Association committee that makes recommendations on federal judges.

Of the nearly 250 judges and lawyers they interviewed about Jackson, Williams said: "The question we kept asking ourselves: How does one human being do so much so extraordinary well?"

McConnell's opposition does not derail Jackson's nomination. In the Senate divided 50-50, Democrats can confirm Jackson, who would be the first Black woman to sit on the supreme court, without any Republican support but were hoping she would attract bipartisan appeal. If the vote is tied, vice president Kamala Harris would cast a tiebreaking vote.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 8.46pm GMT

block-time published-time 8.16pm GMT

'I cannot and will not support Judge Jackson'

"I went into the Senate ***process*** with an open mind, but after studying the nominee's record and watching her performance this week , I cannot and will not support Judge Jackson for a lifetime appointment to the supreme court," McConnell said in a speech on the Senate floor.

His announcement was hardly a surprise. He did [*not*](https://www.senate.gov/legislative/LIS/roll_call_votes/vote1171/vote_117_1_00231.htm) support her confirmation to the US court of appeals, but his announcement on Thursday, the final day of her four-part confirmation hearing, is a signal to the rest of his caucus, especially members who may be on the fence or under pressure to support her nomination.

Explaining his decision he said it was because Jackson refused to "reject the fringe position that Democrats should try to pack the supreme court."

His rationale is also important.

He first points to her refusal to answer direct questions about whether she supports "court-packing" - a proposal that has gained traction on the left to expand the number of justices on the supreme court. It's a contentious issue, and nominees for the high court typically avoid taking positions on highly politically issues. Nevertheless, many Republicans uncomfortable with their colleagues' dubious characterization of her judicial record as too lenient in sentencing child sex offenders have seized on the issue of court-packing as a reason to oppose her.

In his floor speech, McConnell said the late justice Ruth Ginsberg and the retiring justice Stephen Breyer had "no problem denouncing this unpopular view and defending their institution."

"I assumed it would be an easy softball for Judge Jackson, but it wasn't," he said. Republicans have been trying to cast Jackson as the chosen nominee of the far-left as part of a broader strategy to tie Biden and the Democratic party to its most progressive flank ahead of the midterm elections.

Mitch McConnell on Thursday. Photograph: Michael Brochstein/Sopa/Rex/Shutterstock

He did cite her sentencing another factor, and used it to hammer Republicans midterm message that Democrats are "soft on crime" as violent crime rates rise in some areas of the country.

He also claimed that she was not forthcoming with her "judicial philosophy," giving him reason to believe that she would be an "activist judge" on the bench.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 8.25pm GMT

block-time published-time 8.01pm GMT

McConnell will not support Jackson's supreme court nomination

This just in: Senate minority leader Mitch McConnell has said he cannot support the nomination of Ketanji Brown Jackson to the supreme court.

enltr. [*@LeaderMcConnell*](https://twitter.com/LeaderMcConnell?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) : "I cannot and will not support Judge Jackson for a lifetime appointment to the Supreme Court." [*pic.twitter.com/iWkSBAmJmT*](https://t.co/iWkSBAmJmT)

- CSPAN (@cspan) [*March 24, 2022*](https://twitter.com/cspan/status/1507085188215586816?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

Details are still emerging - stay tuned.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 8.26pm GMT

block-time published-time 7.49pm GMT

The Guardian's [*Dominic Rushe*](https://www.theguardian.com/profile/dominic-rushe) also wrote about falling jobless claims, providing context as to why many Americans are still unhappy with the state of the economy despite signs of economic recovery:

In April 2020, during the height of the first wave of the pandemic, weekly unemployment claims [*hit a record 6.6m*](https://www.theguardian.com/business/2020/apr/09/us-unemployment-filings-coronavirus) and they stayed above 1m until August. But the remarkable recovery in the jobs market has coincided with soaring inflation and left many Americans unhappy with the Biden administration's handling of the economy.

The majority of Americans (58%) surveyed for the latest [*Grinnell College national poll*](https://www.kcrg.com/2022/03/23/poll-bidens-job-approval-rating-declines-amid-concerns-over-economy/) believe the economy will be worse a year from now and just 37% approve of Joe Biden's handling of the economy, [*according to Gallup*](https://news.gallup.com/poll/390086/biden-ratings-economy-foreign-affairs-russia-near.aspx).

At least a dozen states are considering paying rebate checks of several hundred dollars directly to taxpayers to ease the burden of soaring prices for gas, food, utilities and other essentials.

A proposal from the Maine governor, Janet Mills, is among the most generous in a state where the cost of food and fuel has soared in recent months. The Democratic governor wants to send $850 to most residents as part of the state's budget bill. The rebate "will help Maine people grapple with these increased costs by putting money directly back into their pockets", Mills said.

Read the full article [*here*](https://www.theguardian.com/business/2022/mar/24/us-unemployment-lowest-level-since-1969).

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 8.36pm GMT

block-time published-time 7.33pm GMT

The House committee that is investigating the January 6 Capitol attack will vote next week to consider contempt chargers for two aides of Trump, reported the Guardian's [*Hugo Lowell*](https://www.theguardian.com/profile/hugo-lowell).

The House select committee investigating the January 6 Capitol attack will consider holding in criminal contempt of Congress next week two of [*Donald Trump's*](https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/donaldtrump) most senior White House advisers in Dan Scavino and Peter Navarro, the panel announced on Thursday.

The move to initiate contempt proceedings against the two Trump aides amounts to a biting rebuke of their refusal to cooperate with the inquiry, as the panel deploys its most punitive ***measures*** to reaffirm the consequences of noncompliance.

House investigators said in a notice that it would consider a contempt report against Scavino and Navarro in a business meeting scheduled for next Monday on Capitol Hill, after they defied subpoenas compelling them to provide documents and testimony.

The select committee is expected to vote unanimously to send the contempt report for a vote before the [*House of Representatives*](https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/house-of-representatives) , according to a source close to the panel, so that the Trump aides can be referred to the justice department for prosecution.

The select committee took a special interest in Scavino, since, as Trump's former deputy chief of staff for communications, he was intimately involved in a months-long effort by the Trump White House to overturn the results of the 2020 election.

Read the full article [*here*](https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/mar/24/peter-navarro-dan-scavino-contempt-january-6-panel).

Related: [*House January 6 committee to consider holding two Trump aides in contempt*](https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/mar/24/peter-navarro-dan-scavino-contempt-january-6-panel)

block-time published-time 7.17pm GMT

Having said that NATO would respond if Russia used chemical weapons in Ukraine, but without going into detail how, Joe Biden was asked a follow up at his press conference in Brussels earlier.

A reporter for the US ABC TV network asked if Vladimir Putin using a chemical weapon would lead to a military response from the Nato partners. The US president first said it would "trigger a response in kind," which made it sound as though he was implying chemical weapons in return, but he quickly pivoted mid-sentence to say simply that "we would make that decision at the time.

Biden also said he was committed to the idea that the US will play "a major", and he emphasized the word, "part" in helping to resettle refugees streaming out of Ukraine in their millions, adding that neighbors such as Romania and Poland should not carry the task "on their own". "This is an international responsibility," he said.

He noted that over the decades as a senator and vice president, he has been to many parts of the world where refugees had fled war and seen "the blank looks" of terrified people not knowing where their future lay.

block-time published-time 7.02pm GMT

Here's footage of Biden speaking earlier today in Brussels about Putin's desire to break up Nato.

"The very thing that Putin has tried to do from the beginning, and I've been saying this since my days as Vice President of the United States, is to break up NATO," said Biden, underscoring the importance of the Nato alliance and continued unity amid the Ukraine ***invasion***.

enltr"The very thing that Putin has tried to do from the beginning, and I've been saying this since my days as Vice President of the United States, is to break up NATO." President Biden highlighted unity ahead of his meeting with European Council President Charles Michel. [*pic.twitter.com/i2sehGMw0L*](https://t.co/i2sehGMw0L)

- CNN (@CNN) [*March 24, 2022*](https://twitter.com/CNN/status/1507067283457384456?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

Here is additional footage of Biden answering a reporter's question about if Russia using chemical weapons would trigger a military response from Nato.

enltrBiden says the U.S. and NATO will respond if Russia uses chemical weapons in Ukraine [*https://t.co/KXBrSDaILG*](https://t.co/KXBrSDaILG) [*pic.twitter.com/AbcizRIshe*](https://t.co/AbcizRIshe)

- Bloomberg Quicktake (@Quicktake) [*March 24, 2022*](https://twitter.com/Quicktake/status/1507066963893399561?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

"It would trigger a response in kind," said Biden, adding that Nato would make that decision "at the time."

block-time published-time 6.45pm GMT

Biden says Russia should be expelled from G20

Biden also said today in Brussels that he wants Russia expelled from the G20 alliance, confirming that he has raised the issue with other world leaders, reports the Associated Press.

Biden made these comments following a series of Nato meetings amid Russia's ongoing ***invasion*** of Ukraine.

Biden said that while he would prefer Russia to be removed from the alliance, if other countries disagreed, he would call for Ukraine to attend meetings with alliance members.

enltrJUST IN: President Biden says Russia should be expelled from the G20 group of nations, and that if the other G20 nations don't support expelling Russia from the group, he will make the case for Ukraine to attend the meetings. [*https://t.co/juu6TV2k5X*](https://t.co/juu6TV2k5X)

- NBC News (@NBCNews) [*March 24, 2022*](https://twitter.com/NBCNews/status/1507061407925342208?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

Biden and other western allies also called for increased sanctions against Russia and more humanitarian aid for Ukraine as the conflict continues.

Follow the Guardian's Ukraine coverage on the live blog [*here*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2022/mar/24/russia-ukraine-war-latest-news-zelenskiy-expects-meaningful-steps-at-nato-eu-and-g7-summits-live).

Related: [*Russia-Ukraine war latest: Nato to strengthen forces along Ukraine border and send more military supplies - live*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2022/mar/24/russia-ukraine-war-latest-news-zelenskiy-expects-meaningful-steps-at-nato-eu-and-g7-summits-live)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 6.54pm GMT

block-time published-time 6.29pm GMT

Linking up [*Donald Trump*](https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/donaldtrump) and [*Joe Biden*](https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/joebiden) , here, the current US president was asked about his one-term predecessor at a press conference following the NATO summit in the Belgian capital of Brussels just now.

Biden told the gathered journalists his familiar story of deciding to run for president this time after the violent and ugly far-right protests in Charlottesville, Virginia, in the summer of 2017, during Donald Trump's early months in the White House.

Biden recounted how the Nazi flags and hate-chanting reminiscent of Germany in the 1930s had sickened him when he saw white supremacists marching with torches and shouting in Charlottesville.

The far right crowds sparks widespread violence when counter-protesters turned out to demonstrate against their nationalist agenda, culminating a day later in a right-wing extremist driving his car into counter-protesters, injuring many and killing liberal activist Heather Heyer.

At the time, Donald Trump said there were very good people "on both sides", which Biden said was the final spur he needed to decide to run for the White House in 2020.

Asked about the 2024 presidential election, Biden said he would "be very fortunate" if the Republican he ended up running against was Trump.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 6.30pm GMT

block-time published-time 6.08pm GMT

Trump sues Hillary Clinton over collusion allegations

[*Donald Trump*](https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/donaldtrump) today sued [*Hillary Clinton*](https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/hillary-clinton) and several other Democrats, alleging they tried to rig the 2016 US presidential election by tying his campaign to Russia.

"Acting in concert, the defendants maliciously conspired to weave a false narrative that their Republican opponent, Donald J Trump, was colluding with a hostile foreign sovereignty," the former president alleged in a lawsuit filed in federal court in Florida, Reuters reports.

Trump and Clinton at the second presidential debate in St Louis in October 2016. Photograph: Robyn Beck/AFP/Getty Images

The news wire further reports (links to relevant Guardian US articles/pages added by this reporter):

Trump, who beat Democratic nominee Clinton in the 2016 presidential election, alleges "racketeering" and a "conspiracy to commit injurious falsehood," among other claims.

Trump's allegations in the lawsuit are undermined by a 966-page report issued by a Republican-led U.S. Senate committee in August 2020. That report concluded that Russia used Republican political operative [*Paul Manafort*](https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/paul-manafort) and the [*WikiLeaks*](https://www.theguardian.com/media/wikileaks) website to try to help Trump win the [*2016 election*](https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/us-elections-2016).

Manafort worked on Trump's presidential campaign for five months in 2016.

Russia's alleged election interference, which Moscow denies, sparked a two-year-long [*U.S. investigation*](https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/trump-russia-inquiry) headed by Special Counsel [*Robert Mueller*](https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/robert-mueller) .

In the lawsuit, Trump is seeking compensatory and punitive damages. Trump said he was "forced to incur expenses in an amount to be determined at trial, but known to be in excess of twenty-four million dollars ($24,000,000) and continuing to accrue, in the form of defense costs, legal fees, and related expenses."

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 6.20pm GMT

block-time published-time 6.00pm GMT

Biden hints he may meet with Ukrainian president Zelenskiy

Joe Biden appeared to signal that he may attempt to meet with Volodymyr Zelenskiy, the embattled Ukrainian president, after the US president travels to Poland tomorrow.

We await clarification or further intel. But during discussion of his trip to Poland and meeting Ukrainian refugees, Biden just said at a press conference in Brussels after a Nato meeting that he would probably meet "with those who have made it across the border" from Ukraine.

Biden hinted he may meet Zelenskiy. Photograph: Evelyn Hockstein/Reuters

And he added: "As well, I hope I'm going to be able to see Z... I guess I'm not supposed to say where I'm going am I?" And he chuckled softly.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 6.05pm GMT

block-time published-time 5.42pm GMT

Biden laments Russian 'carnage' and says Nato 'would respond' if Putin used chemical weapons

The US president is holding a press conference in Brussels now after his meeting with North Atlantic Treaty Organization (Nato) colleagues.

Joe Biden lamented that "it is one month since Russia began its carnage in Ukraine." But he said that Russian president Vladimir Putin "was banking on Nato being split, he did not think we could sustain this cohesion. Nato has never, never been more united than we are today."

Biden was then asked by an Associated Press reporter who was called upon if he had military intelligence to suggest that Russia will use a chemical weapon in Ukraine. And if it did, would Nato forces respond?

The president said he could not talk about military intelligence.

And he then added on Putin and chemical weapons: "We would respond if he uses it. The nature of our response would depend on the nature of the use."

He did not expand on that. The press Q&A is taking place now.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 5.54pm GMT

block-time published-time 5.35pm GMT

'Brilliant' Jackson 'unquestionably belongs' on supreme court - Schumer

On the final day of the Senate judiciary committee's hearings on Jackson's nomination, majority leader Chuck Schumer shared more praise for Jackson.

"Judge Jackson has erased any doubt that she is brilliant, she is beloved, and she belongs, unquestionably belongs, on the United States Supreme Court," said Schumer, while also highlighting the next steps for Jackson's nomination.

enltr [*#SCOTUSCONFIRMATION*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/SCOTUSCONFIRMATION?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) : Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY) says, "Judge Jackson has erased any doubt that she is brilliant, she is beloved, and she belongs, unquestionably belongs, on the United States Supreme Court." [*pic.twitter.com/YyQRjcgoKu*](https://t.co/YyQRjcgoKu)

- Forbes (@Forbes) [*March 24, 2022*](https://twitter.com/Forbes/status/1507007289558896651?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

"There's not a shred of doubt in my mind that she merits confirmation to the US Supreme court," said Schumer.

Schumer also spoke on accusations Jackson faced during the hearings, including several Republican senators claiming that Jackson has shown leniency during sentencing of child sexual abuse crimes, but noted that Jackson "remained poised, thoughtful, and strong in her answers."

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 5.40pm GMT

block-time published-time 5.23pm GMT

ABA representatives testifying also addressed concerns raised by some senators over Jackson's sentencing record, finding that there was "no evidence" to support claims that Jackson was lenient on child sexual abuse cases.

enltr"We found no bias." ABA officials address concerns with Judge Jackson's sentencing record. [*#SCOTUSHearing*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/SCOTUSHearing?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) [*pic.twitter.com/TZbL106sy1*](https://t.co/TZbL106sy1)

- CSPAN (@cspan) [*March 24, 2022*](https://twitter.com/cspan/status/1506999990404665349?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

Ann Claire Williams, chair of the ABA's federal judiciary committee, said that concerns about Jackson's sentencing record on child sexual abuse cases "never came up" amid the 250 interviews with lawyers and judges.

"None of them felt that she demonstrated bias in any way," seconded Joseph Drayton, the ABA's lead evaluator for Jackson.

Drayton, who also emphasized the confidential interview ***process*** that those sharing experiences with Jackson go through, said he found "no evidence" of previously made claims that Jackson showed bias during sentencing.

block-time published-time 5.05pm GMT

Additional testimony came from American Bar Association (ABA) leaders who were tasked with interviewing members on their experiences with Jackson.

ABA representatives found that of the 250 judges and lawyers who had first-hand knowledge of Jackson, no one had criticism to share on the Supreme court nominee.

"It is surprising that unanimously the bar appreciates judge Jackson and sees that she has high competency, integrity, and temperament," said one ABA representative who testified in front of the committee.

enltrABA Committee member says they were surprised to find zero criticisms of [*#KBJ*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/KBJ?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) "It is surprising that unanimously the bar appreciates judge Jackson and sees that she has high competency, integrity, and temperament." [*pic.twitter.com/QtZ222UtQG*](https://t.co/QtZ222UtQG)

- Sarah Reese Jones (@PoliticusSarah) [*March 24, 2022*](https://twitter.com/PoliticusSarah/status/1507029941917003778?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

Representatives found that those interviewed [*used terms like*](https://www.washingtonpost.com./politics/2022/03/24/ketanji-brown-jackson-supreme-court-hearing-live-updates/) "brilliant," "beyond reproach," "impeccable" and "A-plus" to describe Jackson.

block-time published-time 4.48pm GMT

Witnesses and outside experts are now testifying to the Senate judiciary committee about the confirmation of Supreme Court justice nominee Ketanji Brown Jackson.

Testifying against Jackson's nomination is Alabama Attorney General Steve Marshall who seemingly dodged repeated questions on whether Joe Biden was the "duly elected and lawfully serving" president of the US.

enltrTestifying against Judge Jackson's SCOTUS nomination, Alabama Attorney General Steve Marshall (R) repeatedly sidesteps direct questions from Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI) about whether President Biden is the "duly elected and lawfully serving" president. [*pic.twitter.com/9E28nkNzRP*](https://t.co/9E28nkNzRP)

- The Recount (@therecount) [*March 24, 2022*](https://twitter.com/therecount/status/1507025896070422528?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

Repeatedly going back and forth, Democratic Senator Sheldon Whitehouse of Rhode Island asks Marshall: "Is [Biden] the duly elected and lawfully serving president of the US of America?"

Marshall replies: "He is the president of our country."

After Whitehouse repeats his question, he asks Marshall if Marshall is purposefully omitting "duly elected and lawfully serving" from his response.

"I'm answering the question. He is the president of the US," says Marshall.

block-time published-time 4.33pm GMT

Today so far

I'm going to hand the US politics blog over to my Guardian colleagues now. Here's where the day stands so far:

Joe Biden is in Brussels, Belgium, for meetings with allied leaders to discuss the war in Ukraine. The US president participated in a "extraordinary" summit of Nato leaders and a meeting with G7 members. Biden said the Nato summit showed the alliance is "as strong and united as it has ever been" in the face of Russia's military assault on Ukraine.The US and its allies announced new sanctions on more than 400 Russian elites and institutions. Among those sanctioned were Russia's lower house of parliament, the Duma, and 328 of its members. "They personally gain from the Kremlin's policies, and they should share in the pain," Biden said of those sanctioned.The US will accept up to 100,000 Ukrainian refugees who have fled their country because of the war. The White House also announced it will provide more than $1bn in humanitarian assistance to Ukraine, helping its citizens access food, medical care and psychological treatment.

The blog will have more coming up, so stay tuned.

block-time published-time 4.19pm GMT

Moscow's stock market rallied after share trading resumed for the first time since the Ukraine ***invasion*** began nearly a month ago, although the US dismissed Thursday's limited reopening as a "charade".

The market initially rose by more than 11% when a limited, shortened trading session got under way on the Moscow Exchange. But the rally lost some momentum, with the Moex index of blue-chip shares ending the day 4.4% higher, on its first session since 25 February.

The US was scathing about Moscow's attempt to restart equities trading.

"What we're seeing is a charade, a Potemkin market opening," said Daleep Singh, the US deputy national security advisor for international economics, referring to fake villages supposedly created for the Russian empress Catherine the Great to give the illusion of prosperity.

"After keeping its markets closed for nearly a month, Russia announced it will only allow 15% of listed shares to trade, foreigners are prohibited from selling their shares, and short selling in general has been banned. Meanwhile, Russia has made clear they are going to pour government resources into artificially propping up the shares of companies that are trading," he said.

"This is not a real market and not a sustainable model - which only underscores Russia's isolation from the global financial system."

Read the Guardian's full report:

Related: [*Russia's stock market rallies in first day of trading since Ukraine war*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/24/russia-stock-market-rallies-in-first-day-of-trading-since-ukraine-war)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.19pm GMT

block-time published-time 4.01pm GMT

The White House said the Russian economy may shrink by as much as 15% as a result of the sanctions imposed by the US and its allies in response to the war in Ukraine.

"To put that into perspective, that would be three times as much as the GDP declined after Russia's debt default in 1998," a senior administration official said on a press call today.

The official pointed to an analysis from the Institute for International Finance, which showed the sharp downtown in Russia's GDP will wipe out the past 15 years of the country's economic gains.

"If you consider the depreciation of the ruble already and the projected shrinking of its economy, it's now looking at an economy half of the size that it was before this ***invasion***. So it would fall out of the top 20 economies by ranking," the official said.

The US and its allies unveiled a new set of sanctions today, targeting members of the Duma, Russian elites and some state-backed entities.

block-time published-time 3.45pm GMT

Joe Biden met with the Japanese prime minister, Fumio Kishida on the sidelines of the G7 summit in Brussels, Belgium, today to discuss North Korea's latest missile launch.

"The two Leaders discussed DPRK's launch of a long-range ballistic missile, which both Leaders strongly condemned, stressed the need for diplomacy, and agreed to continue working together to hold the DPRK accountable," a White House official told the press pool.

"President Biden conveyed to Prime Minister Kishida our rock solid commitment to the security of Japan and the Republic of Korea, thanked Prime Minister Kishida for Japan's robust response to Putin's war of choice in Ukraine, and agreed on the need for continued unity going forward."

Experts believe North Korea launched its largest intercontinental ballistic missile to date, marking Kim Jong-un 's first use of the missile system since 2017.

Related: [*North Korea test-launches its 'largest intercontinental ballistic missile yet'*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/24/north-korea-test-launches-its-largest-intercontinental-ballistic-missile-yet)

block-time published-time 3.19pm GMT

The Nato secretary general, Jens Stoltenberg, will extend his term by one year in response to the war in Ukraine.

"Honoured by the decision of #NATO Heads of State and Government to extend my term as Secretary General until 30 September 2023," Stoltenberg said on Twitter.

"As we face the biggest security crisis in a generation, we stand united to keep our Alliance strong and our people safe."

enltrHonoured by the decision of [*#NATO*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/NATO?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) Heads of State and Government to extend my term as Secretary General until 30 September 2023. As we face the biggest security crisis in a generation, we stand united to keep our Alliance strong and our people safe. [*https://t.co/06YkRkmX8J*](https://t.co/06YkRkmX8J)

- Jens Stoltenberg (@jensstoltenberg) [*March 24, 2022*](https://twitter.com/jensstoltenberg/status/1506980885140316163?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

Stoltenberg's term was initially set to end on October 1, and he had been expected to become a central bank governor in his native Norway later this year, [*Reuters reports*](https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/stoltenberg-extend-nato-term-by-one-year-amid-ukraine-war-say-reports-2022-03-24/).

Joe Biden met with Stoltenberg in Brussels, Belgium, earlier today to discuss the war in Ukraine, and the US president applauded the announcement that his term had been extended.

"NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg has done a remarkable job leading and strengthening our Alliance - particularly during this critical moment for international security," Biden said in a tweet. "I welcome the extension of his tenure and look forward to working closely together in the year ahead.

enltrNATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg has done a remarkable job leading and strengthening our Alliance - particularly during this critical moment for international security. I welcome the extension of his tenure and look forward to working closely together in the year ahead.

- President Biden (@POTUS) [*March 24, 2022*](https://twitter.com/POTUS/status/1506996547837472769?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 3.02pm GMT

The Guardian's Virginia Harrison, Daniel Boffey and Julian Borger report:

The Ukrainian president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, has called for citizens worldwide to take to the streets "in the name of peace" and hold global protests against Russia's bloody war, one month after the ***invasion*** began.

Zelenskiy's appeal came as world leaders prepared to hold a series of emergency summits in Europe that aim to ratchet up pressure on the Russian president, Vladimir Putin, to end the war.

In a late-night television address from the emptied streets of his nation's besieged capital, Kyiv, a defiant but visibly tired Zelenskiy said on Thursday Ukraine was "waiting for meaningful steps" from the three gatherings - Nato, EU and European Council - and listed some so-far unheeded requests, such as a no-fly zone, aircraft, and tanks.

Zelenskiy said, "Our firm position will be represented at these three summits. At these three summits we will see: Who is a friend, who is a partner, and who betrayed us for money."

Read the Guardian's full report:

Related: [*Ukraine war: Zelenskiy urges global protests 'in the name of peace' to mark month since* ***invasion*** *began*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/24/ukraine-war-zelenskiy-urges-global-protests-in-the-name-of-peace-to-mark-month-since-invasion-began)

block-time published-time 2.41pm GMT

The US secretary of state, Antony Blinken, said the [*new sanctions*](https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/live/2022/mar/24/joe-biden-ukraine-republicans-democrats-us-politics-talks-live?filterKeyEvents=false&page=with:block-623c6f8a8f0867da37217e55#block-623c6f8a8f0867da37217e55) on members of the Russian Duma would punish lawmakers who have "supported the Kremlin's violations of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity".

"President Putin's war continues to inflict horror and widespread suffering on the people of Ukraine," Blinken said in a statement.

"At the same time, in Russia, the State Duma continues to use its legislative power to target domestic dissenters and political opponents, disrupt the free flow of information, and restrict the human rights and fundamental freedoms of the citizens of Russia."

enltrToday, the United States designated 328 members of the Russian State Duma, scores of Russian defense companies and the head of Sberbank, a close ally of Putin. The United States will continue to raise the costs on Putin for his war against Ukraine.

- Secretary Antony Blinken (@SecBlinken) [*March 24, 2022*](https://twitter.com/SecBlinken/status/1506992315797233669?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

Blinken said the new sanctions on the Duma members, as well as other Russian elites and state-backed entities, will "complement the ongoing efforts of our allies and partners to hold to account enablers of this unconscionable war of choice against Ukraine and its people".

"With our partners and allies, the United States aims to strike the heart of Russia's ability to engage in warfare and carry out aggression against other countries, including Ukraine," Blinken said.

"We will continue to impose costs until Putin ends this unprovoked war against Ukraine."

block-time published-time 2.23pm GMT

Nato is 'as strong and united as it has ever been,' Biden says after summit

Joe Biden said that today's "extraordinary" Nato summit on the war in Ukraine showed that the alliance is "as strong and united as it has ever been".

"NATO leaders met today on the one-month anniversary of Russia's unprovoked and unjustified ***invasion*** of Ukraine to reiterate our strong support for the Ukrainian people, our determination to hold Russia accountable for its brutal war, and our commitment to strengthening the NATO Alliance," Biden said in a statement.

"We had the privilege of hearing directly from President Zelenskyy, and we will continue to support him and his government with significant, and increasing, amounts of security assistance to fight Russian aggression and uphold their right to self-defense."

Biden is in Brussels, Belgium, today for meetings with allied leaders to discuss providing humanitarian and defense assistance to Ukraine. Biden applauded his European counterparts for their efforts to give military aid to Ukraine to push back against Russia's brutal airstrikes.

"Between now and the NATO summit in June, we will develop plans for additional forces and capabilities to strengthen NATO's defenses," Biden said.

The president added that the US and its allies would work together "to ensure NATO is ready to meet any challenge in the new and more dangerous security environment".

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.25pm GMT

block-time published-time 2.07pm GMT

Joe Biden said the new sanctions on more than 400 Russian individuals and entities would further the west's goal of making Vladimir Putin 's allies suffer financial consequences for the war in Ukraine.

"They personally gain from the Kremlin's policies, and they should share in the pain," the US president said on Twitter.

enltrI'm announcing additional sanctions on over 400 Russian elites, lawmakers, and defense companies in response to Putin's war of choice in Ukraine. They personally gain from the Kremlin's policies, and they should share in the pain.

- President Biden (@POTUS) [*March 24, 2022*](https://twitter.com/POTUS/status/1506986001176141836?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 2.01pm GMT

The US and its allies have imposed sanctions on Russia's lower house of parliament, the Duma, and 328 of its members.

New sanctions were also announced for Herman Gref, the head of Sberbank, Russia's largest financial institution. Gref has served as an advisor to Vladimir Putin for decades.

The Russian oligarch and billionaire G ennady Timchenko was also targeted by the new sanctions, as were his companies and family members.

Finally, the US and its allies have imposed sanctions on 17 board members of Sovcombank and 48 Russian defense state-owned enterprises.

"We are targeting, and will continue to target, the suppliers of Russia's war effort and, in turn, their supply chain," the White House said in its press release.

block-time published-time 1.44pm GMT

The Biden administration confirmed reports that it will accept up to 100,000 Ukrainians who have fled their home country because of Russia's military assault.

"In particular, we are working to expand and develop new programs with a focus on welcoming Ukrainians who have family members in the United States," the White House statement says.

"The United States and the European Union are also coordinating closely to ensure that these efforts, and other forms of humanitarian admission or transfers, are complementary and provide much-needed support to Ukraine's neighbors."

More than 3 million people from Ukraine have fled to neighboring countries, while another 6 million have been displaced within Ukraine itself. Joe Biden is meeting with European leaders in Brussels, Belgium, today to discuss, among other things, providing assistance to countries accepting refugees.

block-time published-time 1.39pm GMT

The US is also committing $11bn over the next five years to address global food security threats that may arise from the war in Ukraine.

"Russia's war of aggression threatens to disrupt the supply of critical ***agricultural*** commodities from the Black Sea region, jeopardizing global food security, particularly for vulnerable populations in the Middle East and Africa," the White House said in its press release about humanitarian assistance to Ukraine.

The efforts to bolster food security will include "increasing the productivity of smallholder farmers, including women, through access to improved ***agricultural*** technologies and inputs, financing, and markets; strengthening ***agricultural*** market systems by building a vibrant local private sector; and improving people's access to higher quality diets and safer food for improved nutrition," per the press release.

block-time published-time 1.28pm GMT

US announces $1bn in Ukraine humanitarian assistance and new sanctions on Russia

The White House has announced plans to provide more than $1bn in new funding for humanitarian efforts in Ukraine, and the US and its allies have also imposed new sanctions on Russia.

According to a White House statement, the US will provide funds to help struggling Ukrainians access food, medical care and psychological treatment. The US will also launch the European Democratic Resilience Initiative, which will deliver at least $320 million to Ukraine to "support societal resilience and defend human rights".

The US similarly confirmed plans to accept up to 100,000 Ukrainian refugees who have fled the country to escape the war. More than 3 million people have already fled Ukraine.

Meanwhile, the US and its allies announced new sanctions on more than 400 Russian individuals and entities, including the Duma and 328 of its members.

G7 leaders and the European Union are also launching an initiative to target sanction evasion among Russian individuals and businesses. The countries are additionally taking steps to prevent Russia from using international reserves, including gold, to prop up the country's economy and currency.

Joe Biden is in Brussels, Belgium, today to meet with European leaders, and some of those discussions will likely focus on these new ***measures***. Stay tuned.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.47pm GMT

block-time published-time 1.25pm GMT

US to accept up to 100,000 Ukrainians fleeing war

The Guardian's Chris Michael and agencies report:

The United States plans to accept up to 100,000 Ukrainians fleeing the Russian ***invasion***, two sources familiar with the forthcoming announcement said.

It was not immediately clear how the effort would work, including travel and immigration logistics.

Not all of the accepted Ukrainians will come through the US refugee program, one Biden administration official told Reuters. Others will come on family-based visas or another ***process*** known as "humanitarian parole", which thousands of Afghans used to enter the US last year after the chaotic US withdrawal.

The national security adviser, Jake Sullivan, told reporters onboard Air Force One as it travelled to Brussels that Europe's refugee crisis was a priority for Joe Biden to address on his trip this week.

"Here Europe has really stepped up in a huge way and it's the United States that will be coming with additional commitment on both humanitarian assistance and refugees tomorrow," Sullivan said on Wednesday.

Related: [*US to accept up to 100,000 Ukrainians fleeing war, sources say*](https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/mar/24/us-to-accept-100000-ukrainians-fleeing-war)

block-time published-time 1.25pm GMT

On 24 February, shortly before dawn broke in Moscow, Vladimir Putin made the latest in a series of televised addresses. His previous appearances had contained increasingly ominous tirades about Ukraine. Now here was the culmination: the declaration of what the Russian president euphemistically called a "special military operation".

The goal, said Putin, was the "demilitarisation and denazification" of Ukraine.

Minutes later, missiles were launched towards Kyiv, Kharkiv and many other Ukrainian cities. For the Ukrainians who woke up to sound of the impacts, and then for millions across the world who woke up to the news of Putin's decision, the first reaction was shock.

Even those Ukrainians in government who had spent the past weeks rehearsing what to do in the event of a Russian attack were stunned when the ***invasion*** became reality.

"I had 10 minutes of panic when I was running around the house and I had no idea what to do. Then I pulled myself together and went to work," said Natalia Balasynovych, the mayor of Vasylkiv, a town outside Kyiv hosting an airbase that was hit in the first hours of the war.

Before long, makeshift checkpoints were being put up across the country, volunteers flocked to sign up for territorial defence units, and even some pensioners got to work making molotov cocktails. At the same time, millions of people, mostly women and children, fled to the west of Ukraine, or crossed borders into neighbouring countries.

Read the Guardian's full report:

Related: [*One month on: how a tragedy has unfolded in Ukraine*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/24/one-month-on-how-a-tragedy-has-unfolded-in-ukraine-russia-war)

block-time published-time 1.25pm GMT

Biden meets with allied leaders in Brussels to discuss war in Ukraine

Greetings from Washington, live blog readers.

Joe Biden is in Brussels, Belgium, today meeting with allied leaders and other European leaders to discuss the devastating war in Ukraine.

The US president sat down with the Nato Secretary General, Jens Stoltenberg, earlier today and will soon meet with G7 leaders and the European Council president, Charles Michel.

The White House said of Biden's meeting with Stoltenberg, "They discussed the unity and strength of the alliance and Nato's ongoing efforts to deter and defend against any aggression, and they welcomed the support of Allies for the government and people of Ukraine."

Biden's meetings in Brussels come as the world [*marks one month*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/24/one-month-on-how-a-tragedy-has-unfolded-in-ukraine-russia-war) since the start of Russia's military assault on Ukraine. In the weeks since, [*10 million people*](https://www.bbc.com/news/world-60555472) have been forced to flee their homes in Ukraine, with about 3.6 million leaving for neighboring countries. Thousands have been killed, although the exact death toll is difficult to calculate amid the chaos of war.

Biden and his counterparts must now grapple with how to address a refugee crisis and a severely damaged country, as the war has come to a bloody standstill.

The blog will have more updates from Biden's trip coming up. Stay tuned.

**Load-Date:** March 24, 2022

**End of Document**



[***Labor launches first federal election ad; 26 Covid deaths - as it happened***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6511-3951-DY4H-K2BW-00000-00&context=1516831)

The Guardian (London)

March 16, 2022 Wednesday 8:32 PM GMT

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**Section:** AUSTRALIA NEWS; Version:24

**Length:** 21988 words

**Byline:** Cait Kelly (now) and Matilda Boseley (earlier

**Highlight:** Albanese promises to 'show up and take responsibility' as campaign begins; Scott Morrison says 'further names' added to sanctions list every day after Ukraine embassy calls for sanctions against two Russian oligarchs ; at least 26 Covid deaths recorded. This blog is now closedFederal government extends NSW flood relief after pressure from local MPsAustralia's unemployment rate falls to 4% - the lowest since 2008Great Barrier Reef hit by sixth mass bleaching event, leading coral scientist saysTracking Australia's booster rollout: data shows millions of eligible Australians yet to get third Covid vaccine doseFollow the Ukraine live blogSee all our coronavirus coverageGet our free news app ; get our morning email briefing

**Body**

block-time published-time 7.52am GMT

And with that, we are going to put this blog to bed. Thank you so much for spending the day with us. Here's a recap of what we saw today:

The NSW premier, Dominic Perrottet, and his wife, Helen, announced the [*birth of their seventh child*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/live/2022/mar/17/australia-news-updates-live-scott-morrison-anthony-albanese-nsw-victoria-queensland-floods-weather-covid-coronavirus-omicron?page=with:block-62324ad38f081efd3276d52e#block-62324ad38f081efd3276d52e) - a girl named Celeste Grace. The federal environment minister, Sussan Ley, said the response to the full federal court's ruling that she did not have a duty of care to protect young people from the climate crisis was " [*an emotional response*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/live/2022/mar/17/australia-news-updates-live-scott-morrison-anthony-albanese-nsw-victoria-queensland-floods-weather-covid-coronavirus-omicron?page=with:block-62324eaf8f0832c62addf776#block-62324eaf8f0832c62addf776) ". Ukraine's embassy added to calls for the Australian government to impose sanctions on [*two Russian oligarchs*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/live/2022/mar/17/australia-news-updates-live-scott-morrison-anthony-albanese-nsw-victoria-queensland-floods-weather-covid-coronavirus-omicron?page=with:block-62325a3d8f0832c62addf82e#block-62325a3d8f0832c62addf82e) , Oleg Deripaska and Viktor Vekselberg. NSW Labor leader, Chris Minns, called for an [*upper house parliamentary inquiry*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/live/2022/mar/17/australia-news-updates-live-scott-morrison-anthony-albanese-nsw-victoria-queensland-floods-weather-covid-coronavirus-omicron?page=with:block-6232662d8f0832c62addf8cb#block-6232662d8f0832c62addf8cb) into the northern rivers flood response, saying: "The worst thing that could happen, worse than even the floods... is if we don't learn from the mistakes that were made." The AFLW finals series has been [*thrown into chaos*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/live/2022/mar/17/australia-news-updates-live-scott-morrison-anthony-albanese-nsw-victoria-queensland-floods-weather-covid-coronavirus-omicron?page=with:block-62327cc98f081efd3276d7a7#block-62327cc98f081efd3276d7a7) , with a Covid-19 cluster at Collingwood causing the Magpies' qualifying final to be postponed. Unemployment rates [*are now at 4.0%*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/live/2022/mar/17/australia-news-updates-live-scott-morrison-anthony-albanese-nsw-victoria-queensland-floods-weather-covid-coronavirus-omicron?page=with:block-623282b68f08ee17b5370990#block-623282b68f08ee17b5370990) , the lowest they have been since 2008. WA premier, Mark McGowan, and Scott Morrison announced a [*multimillion-dollar boost*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/live/2022/mar/17/australia-news-updates-live-scott-morrison-anthony-albanese-nsw-victoria-queensland-floods-weather-covid-coronavirus-omicron?page=with:block-62328bdf8f0832c62addfa44#block-62328bdf8f0832c62addfa44) for two Perth construction projects, a new city campus for Edith Cowan University and a new Swan River bridge. Flood disaster payments [*have been extended*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/live/2022/mar/17/australia-news-updates-live-scott-morrison-anthony-albanese-nsw-victoria-queensland-floods-weather-covid-coronavirus-omicron?page=with:block-6232b7598f08ee17b5370ba1#block-6232b7598f08ee17b5370ba1) beyond Lismore to the Ballina, Byron, Kyogle and Tweed LGAs in the form of an additional two-weekly payment. The NSW Electoral Commission won its bid to overturn [*three NSW local government elections*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/live/2022/mar/17/australia-news-updates-live-scott-morrison-anthony-albanese-nsw-victoria-queensland-floods-weather-covid-coronavirus-omicron?page=with:block-6232c5718f081efd3276daba#block-6232c5718f081efd3276daba) in Kempsey, Shellharbour and Singleton after electronic voting failures last year. Labor has launched its [*first election ad*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/live/2022/mar/17/australia-news-updates-live-scott-morrison-anthony-albanese-nsw-victoria-queensland-floods-weather-covid-coronavirus-omicron?page=with:block-6232d0d98f08ee17b5370ccb#block-6232d0d98f08ee17b5370ccb) , featuring leader Anthony Albanese promising to "show up and take responsibility" and a suite of policies to tackle the cost of living.

Victoria recorded seven Covid deaths and 9,752 new infections; NSW recorded 20,087 new Covid infections and five deaths; Tasmania recorded 1,859 Covid cases; the ACT recorded 1,311 Covid cases; Queensland recorded 10 Covid deaths and 7,190 cases; WA recorded one Covid death and 7,151 cases; and South Australia recorded three Covid deaths and 4,474 cases.

We will see you all again tomorrow.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 8.17am GMT

block-time published-time 7.35am GMT

From AAP:

Most of Australia's threatened species are not being monitored and there's no effort to determine if rescue plans are working, a new audit has found.

The Australian National Audit Office has offered a scathing assessment of the federal government's efforts to save threatened plants and animals from extinction.

It said the Department of ***Agriculture***, Water and the Environment did not have measurement and reporting systems to provide reliable information on the status of threatened species.

Nor did it have systems to monitor and report back on efforts to safeguard species.

"There is limited evidence that desired outcomes are being achieved," it said.

"There is no measurement, monitoring or reporting on progress, or on the contribution of listing assessments, conservation advice, recovery plans and threat abatement plans to their desired outcomes.

"Available information indicates that the status of threatened species is declining."

Conservation groups says the audit is full of alarming findings, including a blowout in the time it takes for species of concern to be formally listed as deserving of protection under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act.

block-time published-time 7.17am GMT

Experts have called on the [*New South Wales*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/new-south-wales) government to reintroduce mandatory face masks in high-risk settings as Covid-19 infections spike across the state.

NSW reported its second day in a row of cases above 20,000, with 20,087 cases recorded in the 24 hours to 4pm on Wednesday [*and an estimated 20,402*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/16/covid-cases-rise-sharply-in-nsw-with-data-glich-only-partly-to-blame) the day before. NSW health minister, Brad Hazzard, warned the number [*could double by next month*](https://www.smh.com.au/national/nsw/concerning-nsw-covid-19-cases-tipped-to-double-within-weeks-20220310-p5a3e0.html).

Related: [*More than 20,000 Covid cases in NSW as some experts call for reintroducing mask mandate*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/mar/17/more-than-20000-covid-cases-in-nsw-as-some-experts-call-for-reintroducing-mask-mandate)

block-time published-time 6.58am GMT

2GB is reporting that the Rail, Tram & Bus Union have called off their planned industrial action tomorrow, and are now negotiating with the government:

enltrBREAKING | RBTU have dropped planned industrial action and are working towards a relationship with Government. They will enter 6 weeks of intensive negotiations.

- 2GB Sydney (@2GB873) [*March 17, 2022*](https://twitter.com/2GB873/status/1504350122532286465?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

We will bring you more on this as it breaks.

block-time published-time 6.43am GMT

A report by the Australian National Audit Office (ANAO) has found the government is unsure if its efforts to prevent the extinction of flora and fauna are working.

The federal environment department oversees the Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act, which requires the government to make plans to prevent the extinction of threatened species.

But the report says there is "limited evidence" the government is meeting its requirements:

There is limited evidence that desired outcomes are being achieved, due to the department's lack of monitoring, reporting and support for the implementation of conservation advice, recovery plans and threat abatement plans.

Most recommendations from past evaluations and reviews have not yet been implemented.

The report adds that failings identified in previous audit reports have not been addressed and there is "no schedule or plan for future evaluations".

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 6.46am GMT

block-time published-time 6.20am GMT

Labor party launches its first federal election ad

Labor has launched its first election ad, featuring leader Anthony Albanese promising to "show up and take responsibility" and a suite of policies to tackle the cost of living.

The ad nominates childcare, reducing power bills, fee-free Tafe and making it "easier to see the doctor" as Labor priorities - the latter signalling that [*a new health policy*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/jan/25/australian-labor-will-always-be-better-than-coalition-on-health-anthony-albanese-says) is imminent that will focus on GP and specialist out-of-pocket costs.

With the Morrison government struggling in opinion polls, the Coalition has increasingly sought to frame the election around the economy and national security.

In the ad, Albanese declares that "Australians deserve a prime minister who shows up, takes responsibility and works with people", in an implicit criticism of Morrison's handling of the pandemic and natural disasters including bushfires and flood.

"I'll work with business to invest in manufacturing. Making more things here will create more secure jobs here ... It's my plan for a better future."

enltrI'm focused on delivering for all Australians, with real plans for stronger Medicare, secure jobs, and more manufacturing. Together we will build a better future. [*pic.twitter.com/tUs7QekzNE*](https://t.co/tUs7QekzNE)

- Anthony Albanese (@AlboMP) [*March 17, 2022*](https://twitter.com/AlboMP/status/1504336732367425539?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

The ad will run from Friday on primetime on all commercial TV networks including in rugby league and Australian rules football matches, and in South Australia after the Saturday state election.

The ad refers to three policies Labor has already released, to improve subsidies to [*reduce the cost of childcare*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2020/oct/08/anthony-albanese-unveils-childcare-and-energy-plans-in-budget-2020-reply-speech) , to "reduce power bills", [*in reference to its clean energy policies*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2021/dec/03/anthony-albanese-commits-labor-to-emissions-reduction-target-of-43-by-2030) , and to [*create 465,000 fee-free Tafe courses in areas of skills shortage*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2021/dec/05/labor-pledges-extra-university-and-tafe-places-to-help-rebuild-industries-hit-by-pandemic).

Labor is yet to release its health policy, but [*Albanese has signalled the opposition will outbid the Morrison government*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/jan/25/australian-labor-will-always-be-better-than-coalition-on-health-anthony-albanese-says) in the leadup to the election by declaring it "will always be better" on health and education than the Coalition.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 6.35am GMT

block-time published-time 5.59am GMT

The finance minister, Simon Birmingham, was on ABC's Afternoon Briefing this afternoon, discussing unemployment figures and the risk of increasing inflation.

Birmingham said Australia's inflation rate was running at "half" the US's, but conceded it was a "deeply uncertain time" and referred to international "pressures" in his explanation, a recurring theme for him this week.

This is indeed a very challenging and uncertain environment, that for all the goodness we have in the jobs numbers, it sits against a global environment where we still face the challenges of the Covid recovery and, in Australia, the first winter with Covid and the flu to run concurrently, we face the challenges of inflationary pressures, and while Australia is doing much better than many other nations - it has in fact an inflation rate running around half that of the United States - we do face the knock-on effects of those other nations, and we face a war in Europe and the disruptions that is causing to supply chains, as well as the humanitarian catastrophe that is unfolding here.

So it is a deeply uncertain time against which we frame the budget, and we do so very clear that our objective is to ensure we keep the economic growth going in Australia, we keep the jobs growth going in Australia, because that is the most important pillar for Australians, in terms of addressing any pressures they face, is to have a job and to have the income that comes from employment.

But we also do so mindful of the fact that with those global inflationary pressures, we don't wish to add to those, we don't wish to put any additional pressure that is already there from the rest of the world for upwards movement in interest rates.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 6.19am GMT

block-time published-time 5.45am GMT

An interaction from earlier today that I just had to share:

enltrJournalist: What about the state opposition? Why aren't you meeting with the state opposition leader? Scott Morrrison: I have. I saw Dr (David) Honey yesterday. J: Dr Honey is not the opposition leader. SM: Sorry? J: Mia Davies is the state opposition leader. [*#wapol*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/wapol?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) [*#auspol*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/auspol?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) [*pic.twitter.com/0TB4QPWEeB*](https://t.co/0TB4QPWEeB)

- David Marler (@Qldaah) [*March 17, 2022*](https://twitter.com/Qldaah/status/1504287619941040131?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 5.23am GMT

Three NSW council elections voided after electronic voting failures

Results from three local government elections in NSW have been voided after electronic voting failures last year, AAP is reporting:

The NSW Electoral Commission has won its bid to overturn the results of three local government elections, after a broken electronic voting system failed to register people's votes on election day last year.

"With considerable reluctance I consider that, because the system of election for the three councils is proportional representation, it is necessary to declare all of the councillors' elections void," the supreme court judge Robert Beech-Jones said in his judgment on Thursday.

The election results for Kempsey, Shellharbour and Singleton could have been different if all voters who registered to use iVote had been able to vote on the day, the electoral commissioner argued in December.

The iVote system failed when registered voters were blocked from voting because the system failed to recognise their security credentials.

Voters will have to head to the polls once again for fresh elections.

Beech-Jones noted that although the number of voters blocked by the iVote failure was small "the votes that were denied to those voters had the real potential to affect the election of at least one councillor in each of the three subject elections".

The electoral commissioner approved last year's disputed results while waiting for the judgment, saying last year it would have been impossible to hold fresh elections until mid-2022, due to it being a federal election year.

In a statement on Wednesday, the commission said it would not use iVote at the state election scheduled for 25 March 2023 or at any byelections between 1 July and then.

The decision not to use iVote at the state election in 2023 has not been driven by any concerns about cybersecurity matters in previous elections.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 5.31am GMT

block-time published-time 5.05am GMT

The Queensland education minister, Grace Grace, says she is appalled at federal minister Stuart Robert 's comments that there are "dud teachers" in public schools who couldn't keep a job in the private sector.

Grace says:

He's been acting in the job for five minutes and thinks he knows it all.

The account of the minister's comments at the conference reeks of a boys club, slapping each other on the back telling themselves how good they are, and sneering at the state system that educates around 580,000 students in Robert's home state of Queensland.

Our state system has some of the best teachers in the world, who go above and beyond every single day for the benefit of their students.

Over the past couple of years in particular, the support they have provided students throughout Covid has been outstanding.

And the latest Naplan results suggest state schools and teachers are doing something right.

For minister Robert to say our state schoolteachers are 'dragging the chain' is outrageous, inaccurate, and an insult to hard working teachers across Queensland and Australia.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 5.25am GMT

block-time published-time 4.57am GMT

Victorians are being warned the combination of flu and Covid-19 is set to create a difficult winter, AAP reports:

Premier Daniel Andrews on Thursday would not give a timeline for the removal of the remaining few coronavirus public health ***measures***, including masks for hospitality and retail workers and some primary school students.

"At this stage I've got no advice that we'll be able to take off those mask rules," he told reporters.

"We are open and things are closer to normal than they have been for a long time."

Daniel Andrews speaks to the media during a press conference in Melbourne today. Photograph: Diego Fedele/AAP

However, as the more contagious BA.2 sub-variant of the Omicron coronavirus strain starts to dominate in the state, the government has been pushing for people who have not yet had a third dose of vaccine to do so ahead of the colder months.

"Winter will be challenging, it always is whether you've got a pandemic or not - flu, for instance, always knocks our health system around every single winter," Andrews said.

However, the opposition leader, Matthew Guy, said it was time for the state to do away with masks completely and "move on" from the pandemic.

"How's it fair that there's 60,000 people at the MCG, sanctioned by the state government, but kids in primary school in grades four, five and six are wearing a mask? That's ridiculous," Guy told reporters.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 5.07am GMT

block-time published-time 4.42am GMT

The Australian Education Union has slammed "the deplorable comments" directed at public school teachers, principals and education support staff made by the acting education minister, Stuart Robert, at an independent schools' conference today.

The Australian Education Union federal president, Correna Haythorpe, said:

Referring to public school teachers as the 'bottom 10% dragging the chain', Stuart Roberts has slandered the public school workforce that has been the backbone of Australia's education system, especially during the past two turbulent years.

Public school teachers have always been an easy target for politicians like minister Robert who think that a cheap and easy headline which attacks teachers for declining educational outcomes will let his government off the hook for their failure to prioritise public education.

Today's comments once again show the Morrison government's outrageous preference for the private school system, a preference which comes at great cost to the teachers and students in public schools.

Public schools are underfunded by at least $4bn every year and successive Coalition governments have shirked their responsibility time and time again. Where is minister Robert's outrage about the deep inequality facing public school students across the nation? Put simply, the Morrison government is missing in action for public schools.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.45am GMT

block-time published-time 4.30am GMT

Flood disaster payments extended beyond Lismore

I mentioned just before that there was additional support for flood-impacted residents in the Northern Rivers. Now I have the press release from the minister for emergency management, Bridget McKenzie, and the minister for government services, Linda Reynolds.

The National Recovery and Resilience Agency and Emergency Management Australia have further assessed the flood extent area, the proportion of the population affected and seeking assistance for disaster recovery payments, and have declared the Ballina, Byron, Kyogle and Tweed LGAs are in need of additional support.

This next phase of support includes:

An additional two-weekly disaster payment - known as Australian government disaster recovery payment (AGDRP) special supplement - for affected residents in Ballina, Byron, Kyogle and Tweed will be automatically paid to those who have already claimed and received the AGDRP, at the current rate of $1,000 an adult and $400 a child. These payments will be made from 22 March.

McKenzie said the government was realising the full impact of the floods:

As the full scale and impact to these areas in northern NSW is being realised, the Liberal and Nationals government is implementing this extra support as quickly as possible.

While people in northern NSW aren't able to work, are still clearing out their homes ad businesses, the extra two $1,000 payments we're rolling out to eligible families and individuals will support our communities as they start to rebuild their lives.

The additional two $1,000 payments for adults and $400 for children will automatically apply for AGDRP recipients in the Ballina, Byron, Kyogle and Tweed LGAs, so there is no need for people to reapply.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.38am GMT

block-time published-time 4.18am GMT

South Australia records three Covid deaths and 4,474 cases

SA has recorded three Covid deaths and 4,474 new cases. There are 132 people in hospital with eight in ICU and three people on ventilators.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.21am GMT

block-time published-time 4.10am GMT

We are seeking to confirm reports that locals in more northern rivers communities will receive the disaster payments.

I will have more on this soon.

enltrBREAKING: Residents in Kyogle, Tweed, Ballina and Byron LGA's will receive $2000 in additional disaster payments off the back of floods. The National Recovery and Resilience Agency has updated its assessment that initially only offered the cash to Lismore LGA.

- Chris O'Keefe (@cokeefe9) [*March 17, 2022*](https://twitter.com/cokeefe9/status/1504306726119436288?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.11am GMT

block-time published-time 4.02am GMT

[*New South Wales*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/new-south-wales) government MPs and local mayors have lined up to blast the federal government over the decision to exclude some flood-hit areas from disaster funding.

One upper house [*Liberal party*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/liberal-party) MP, Catherine Cusack, has announced her intention to resign from politics altogether, telling Guardian Australia her decision was not a protest but "me not wanting to fight the machine any more".

Related: [*'Really messed this up': NSW MPs blast flood disaster funding as one Liberal prepares to quit*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/mar/17/really-messed-this-up-government-mps-blast-flood-disaster-funding-as-one-prepares-to-quit)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.04am GMT

block-time published-time 3.52am GMT

Who needs home security when we have all this smashed av, amirite boys!

enltrIf a few years ago you had told me property prices had increased 24% in a year & it was \*not\* a major election issue I would have told you the parties are beholden to the idea of ever rising prices and wealth with no regard to people under the age of 40 and.. err...... yeah...

- Greg Jericho (@GrogsGamut) [*March 16, 2022*](https://twitter.com/GrogsGamut/status/1504236850286047235?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 3.43am GMT

The New South Wales premier, Dominic Perrottet, has announced he will spend two weeks on parental leave after welcoming his seventh child.

Last night my wife Helen and I welcomed our newest member of the family, a gorgeous daughter, Celeste Grace Perrottet.

Celeste and Helen are doing great, and Celeste's six siblings are over the moon.

From today I am taking leave to spend time with Helen and the kids as we all adjust to welcoming a new child to our family.

Deputy premier Paul Toole will assume the role of acting premier. Deputy leader of the parliamentary Liberal party Stuart Ayres will assume the role of acting leader of the parliamentary Liberal party.

He says he will return from leave on Monday 4 April.

I will be seeking a Pair from the Opposition for the parliamentary sitting period commencing 22 March and concluding 31 March.

Given the current flood emergency I will continue to receive briefings on the response and recovery work and remain ready to return to official duties immediately should the need arise.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 3.45am GMT

block-time published-time 3.32am GMT

One of the world's leading coral scientists claims a sixth mass bleaching event is unfolding across the [*Great Barrier Reef*](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/great-barrier-reef) , with official monitoring flights now under way all along the Queensland coastline.

The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA) has confirmed monitoring flights are being conducted "along the length and breadth" of the 2,300km world heritage reef.

But the authority is not due to make a formal update on conditions over the reef, or the initial findings from those flights, until Friday.

Related: [*Great Barrier Reef hit by sixth mass bleaching event, leading coral scientist says*](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/mar/17/great-barrier-reef-hit-by-sixth-mass-bleaching-event-leading-coral-scientist-says)

block-time published-time 3.26am GMT

In Queensland, disaster assistance has been extended to the local government areas of Croydon and Etheridge which were both hit by severe thunderstorms and flooding in February.

Emergency management and national recovery and resilience minister, B ridget McKenzie, said the assistance would support more communities affected by the deluge from 1 to 7 February.

Croydon shire council and Etheridge shire councils are the latest LGAs to receive assistance, as the impacts of these floods are realised in far north Queensland.

An unstable air-mass produced multiple days of extreme showers and storms over far north queensland, which resulted in damaged roads and other essential public infrastructure.

Funding is made available to the two councils to help with cleanup efforts and towards repairing the damage so the community can get back on its feet as soon as possible.

Queensland's fire and emergency services minister, Mark Ryan, said the funding would help with cleaning up debris and repairing of roads, culverts and floodways.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 3.29am GMT

block-time published-time 3.08am GMT

enltrGovt new talking point - a person earning $90k now is $50 a week better off than when Coalition came to office. Time to unpick this - assumes a person's wage hasn't grown since 2013, which means in real terms they've gone backwards 16.6%... (a thread)

- Shane Wright (@swrighteconomy) [*March 16, 2022*](https://twitter.com/swrighteconomy/status/1504201723115581444?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

enltr$90K is not the median wage. According to Treasury it's $55,063 per year. Average wage (or mean wage) is $62,000 Median tax-filers income is just under $45,000 per year (Grattan Inst) Most wage earners are getting nowhere near $90,000 per year

- Jan Thorpe (@JANICET98048606) [*March 16, 2022*](https://twitter.com/JANICET98048606/status/1504242184425336835?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 2.53am GMT

The Antipoverty Centre has put out a statement in relation to today's job figures.

Spokesperson Kristin O'Connell said:

The rosy picture painted by the government after today's unemployment figures were published doesn't reflect reality for the millions of people who are forced to survive on poverty-level Centrelink payments because there aren't enough jobs.

The unemployment rate is past it's use-by date. It's become increasingly irrelevant with the dramatic rise of casualisation and underemployment, which has left hundreds of thousands of employed people relying on unemployment payments to survive.

The pandemic was the nail in the coffin for this simplistic employment survey being useful, and we've now had a sustained decoupling of the unemployment rate and the number of unemployed and underemployed people who need income support.

Prices for basic necessities, particularly food and fuel are undeniably skyrocketing. The Henderson poverty line is skyrocketing. The length of time people are trapped on JobSeeker is skyrocketing. Low unemployment means nothing to those of us hurting.

It's time for politicians to wake up to reality - people are in despair and scared for the future. We are stretched beyond belief.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.55am GMT

block-time published-time 2.42am GMT

Western Australia records one Covid death and 7,151 new cases

WA has recorded 7,151 new cases with 140 people in hospital and of those four are in ICU. One person has died with Covid.

enltrThis is our WA COVID-19 update for Thursday, 17 March 2022. For official information on COVID-19 in WA, visit [*https://t.co/gIGAhoXMnm*](https://t.co/gIGAhoXMnm) [*https://t.co/Ka61NyhllJ*](https://t.co/Ka61NyhllJ) [*pic.twitter.com/2Nsu0Oaygo*](https://t.co/2Nsu0Oaygo)

- Mark McGowan (@MarkMcGowanMP) [*March 17, 2022*](https://twitter.com/MarkMcGowanMP/status/1504277439660191747?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.58am GMT

block-time published-time 2.37am GMT

Scott Morrison has incorrectly claimed that the unemployment rate has reached a near 50 year low.

Morrison told reporters in Perth:

The unemployment rate at 4% is the lowest rate that we've seen in almost 50 years. I was 5 years old when we last had an unemployment rate this low - and I think that says something.

This is incorrect - the unemployment rate was also 4% in February and August 2008, under the Rudd Labor government.

The employment minister, Stuart Robert, claimed the prime minister was "quite correct".

Robert told reporters in Canberra:

The last time it was 4% was August 2008, February [2008] and [1974]. That's why I chose my words carefully to say it is the equal lowest rate - so the prime minister is absolutely correct.

Reporters noted Morrison did not say the "equal" lowest, and he said it was the "last" time the unemployment had been that low.

Looks like Morrison has been caught with a clumsy paraphrase that incorrectly (and conveniently) ignores two stellar results in 2008.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.41am GMT

block-time published-time 2.29am GMT

Barnaby Joyce has earmarked close to $500m to build the Urannah Dam in central Queensland, despite the project not yet securing environmental approvals and several studies suggesting the idea is not economically viable.

The proposal, long championed by the [*Queensland*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/queensland) Nationals, has been around since the 1960s and a number of feasibility studies have queried the viability of the project.

Related: [*Barnaby Joyce tags $500m for Queensland dam despite lack of environmental approvals*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/mar/17/barnaby-joyce-tags-500m-for-queensland-dam-despite-lack-of-environmental-approvals)

block-time published-time 2.17am GMT

From AAP :

If Ukraine falls, further countries will face the wrath of Russian expansionism, Ukraine's top diplomat, Volodymyr Shalkivskyi, warned in Canberra, as he reiterated his president's call for more aid.

Shalkivskyi said Ukraine needs more aircraft, modern anti-aircraft systems and a no-fly zone over Ukraine to stave off the Russian advance as troops close in on the country's capital, Kyiv.

"[Russia's] ally Belarus needs access to the Baltic Sea and [needs] to go through the EU and Nato members, so there is already clear evidence that in case Ukraine falls, then there will be next countries in line," he told the Seven Network.

"Our president is calling for the active participation of the world community and helping Ukraine to protect our land."

President Joe Biden announced the US would send an additional $US800m ($AUS1.1bn) in military aid, including anti-aircraft and anti-tank weapons, as well as drones, but Zelenskiy reiterated his calls for a Nato-imposed no-fly zone.

His representative in Canberra, Shalkivskyi, said Ukraine needed defensive systems and lethal support "in order for us to effectively sustain that military pressure that's coming from Russia".

"Russia has air superiority and the devastation that it caused on the ground in terms of civilian death and destruction of residential areas and civilian infrastructure is just striking," he said.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.21am GMT

block-time published-time 2.07am GMT

Robert:

What we're seeing is that New South Wales has come out of the Omicron wave. The economic growth there and the strength is being well seen. Right across the board, we are seeing a strong economy.

We're seeing dividends of the Morrison government's $2bn investment in JobTrainer, $3.7bn in boosting the apprenticeship commencement.

We're seeing record Australians now into jobs, which indicates the $13bn that was spent during the pandemic on skills. We are seeing a generation of skilled Australians, not a generation of scarred Australians because of the economic investment that we've been putting in place. These numbers are also cognisant of the fact that since 20 November, through to the beginning of March, 583,000 visa arrivals have occurred into Australia, including 122,000 students, 49,000 skilled visa arrivals, 47,000 temporary worker visas and 162,000 visitors.

But the Morrison government is unashamedly focused on skilling and seeking opportunities for the employment of Australians. And these pleasing economic numbers today are occurring at the time the economy is opening up, that visa holders are returning to Australia and over 583,000 people have arrived into Australia.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.12am GMT

block-time published-time 2.05am GMT

Robert says Australia is one of only "a few" nations that has more citizens employed now than before the pandemic.

What is ***exceptionally*** pleasing is that there were 121,900 full-time jobs created and part-time jobs decreased by 44,000 to net out that 77,000 job total.

Pleasingly, employment increased across every single state and territory, but the stand-out was New South Wales. Unemployment in NSW now has dropped to the lowest level since 1978 at 3.7%, at the same time as their participation rate increased to 65.4%.

NSW saw a net increase of 57,000 jobs. Whilst jobs increased across every single state and territory over the period, something like 80% of those jobs increased in NSW and full credit to treasurer Kean for the work he's been doing and his economic stewardship of the state of NSW.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.11am GMT

block-time published-time 2.04am GMT

Stuart Robert:

Unemployment today at 4 % is the equal lowest since 1978 - extraordinary. The participants rate at 66.4% is a record for our country. Again, an extraordinary result for a strong and growing economy.

We're seeing female unemployment at 3.8%, the lowest since May 1974 and the participation rate at an historic high.

An extraordinary set of economic number that is show the strength and the resilience of the Australian economy and shows that the Morrison Government's economic settings are, indeed, correct. 77,400 new jobs were added in terms of the jobs market, win brings to a total of 13.372m total jobs. Hundreds of thousands more than when we went into the pandemic.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.10am GMT

block-time published-time 2.02am GMT

The minister for employment, Stuart Robert, is speaking in Canberra now about the jobs figures.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.09am GMT

block-time published-time 1.51am GMT

Morrison:

I can tell you who my defence minister is going to be. It's Peter Dutton. I can tell you who my home affairs minister is going to be - it's Karen Andrews. These are the most important national security portfolios there are.

And it's bad enough that the Australian people are not being told who the leader of the Opposition is, but to not even know who their defence minister and their home affairs minister is going to be - well, that's cause for pause.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.55am GMT

block-time published-time 1.50am GMT

A reporter asks if he will be making major announcements with Annastacia Palaszczuk or Daniel Andrews ahead of the election?

We're doing a lot, as Paul knows in particular, we'll be quite busy between now and certainly the election. We have the budget coming up in just under a fortnight.

We've spent a lot of time together, the premiers, the chief ministers and I, and we've got to know each other extremely well. And the overwhelming experience of that has been one on trying to focus on the challenges in the national interest.

Morrison says that they all work on a lot of issues together - again saying how much he works with Mcgowan - this is the third day he has used his presser to stress how well they work together.

I want to thank the premier for his partnership. It's been a good partnership. It's been an honest partnership. It's been a candid partnership. Haven't agreed on everything, but we've always been prepared to listen to each other and we're... I think I've had to change my view based on the premier's representations. I certainly have and we share one thing above all and that is our commitment to Australia and our commitment to the people of WA.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.53am GMT

block-time published-time 1.46am GMT

The prime minister has been asked about the WA economy - he says it will bounce back after the Omicron wave:

In terms of the economy, we saw in other states and territories when they went through their waves, that that would have a short-term impact on the economy. We saw it in the other states.

And so, that doesn't surprise me that that would have occurred in the short-term here in. And I have no doubt that that will actually rebound quite likely here in WA. And why is that? Because we've continued to invest together in the very fabric of the Western Australian state economy. And it is very resilient.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.50am GMT

block-time published-time 1.43am GMT

Morrison asked about sanctions on oligarchs

Morrison has been asked about reports there are some oligarchs linked to a Queensland oil refinery and if sanctions will be imposed on them.

We add further names to the list every single day of with whom we're applying sanctions to and there's a proper ***process*** for doing that. And Australia, which is a long way away from the Ukraine, but I can tell you that our support and our action has been on the leading edge of the world when it comes to standing up for Ukraine. Applying those heavily. Remember, the autonomous sanctions act, that was something that we put in a position to respond so quickly. And we will continue to take action on all of those to whom sanctions should apply.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.59am GMT

block-time published-time 1.40am GMT

With that, I'll hand you over to the amazing Cait Kelly to take you through the rest of this press conference.

block-time published-time 1.38am GMT

Reporter:

And what about with Anthony Albanese in 2019. The premier did not meet with Albanese when he was in Perth.

Morrison :

What I'm telling you is that as a prime minister and a premier, we work together and we do things. We do these things and we do lots of things together and we have done lots of things together. And that's been to the great benefit of the people of WA.

But one thing that I have to particularly thank Mark for, and Mark has always been a keen supporter of the national cabinet, and I remember Mark, I think one of the first premiers to say - we should get rid of this thing and just make it permanent. And we did.

Because it is a far more effective way I think, for premiers, chief ministers and the prime minister to work together. The old system was bureaucrats and agendas being driven up from the bottom and seriously, if you wanted something, some policy issue to just fade away, send it to COAG. It was certainly never going to come out of there.

But with the national cabinet, whether it's deregulation initiatives. Whether it's additional investment into skills and training. Whether it's the major changes we've made during Covid. Sometimes in a matter of days - the reason that's worked is because the premiers, the chief ministers and I, have just set the leaders' level decisions down into our government. And they've got the message and gone on with it. That doesn't mean that you agree with everything. Of course, that's never going to happen.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.41am GMT

block-time published-time 1.35am GMT

The prime minister is trying to draw a clear distinction between state and federal Labor given what a powerhouse McGowan has proven to be.

One thing that I know is that after the next election, whoever you vote for, premier McGowan is still going to be the premier. So this is about who's going to lead the country. And it's about federal Labor.

It's not about state Labor. And there's quite a bit in common I found working with the WA state government when it comes to how we manage the economy, particularly on issues like deregulation and support for the resources industry and major projects which we worked well together on.

And I think we've demonstrated, despite being from different political parties, that as professional leaders of governments, we get stuff done together for WA.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.37am GMT

block-time published-time 1.33am GMT

enltrChance of thunderstorms today across most of inland [*#NSW*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/NSW?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) due to a trough moving from west to east. The dots show current thunder in the west, lines are the districts. Check forecasts as thunderstorms are possible tomorrow in the east with light showers: [*https://t.co/NONIzWrvY1*](https://t.co/NONIzWrvY1) [*pic.twitter.com/aWtIAdz315*](https://t.co/aWtIAdz315)

- Bureau of Meteorology, New South Wales (@BOM\_NSW) [*March 17, 2022*](https://twitter.com/BOM_NSW/status/1504269289024593922?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 1.32am GMT

Reporter:

Prime minister, WA has actually gone up 4.1% today. So are you doing enough for jobs in WA? And what do you take from it? The premier has done a public event today. He didn't do a public event with Anthony Albanese when he was in town. Does he think that you're going to win the election rather than Anthony Albanese?

Morrison:

I don't draw any of those conclusions whatsoever. What I draw from us being here today is on the many occasions we have been. We're meeting later today as we often do when I'm in town to work through the usual issues as part of our partnership.

I think that you can simply say that we work together cooperatively, in the public interest, in the national interest and in the interest of Western Australians. We are both leaders of governments that have much to do and for a long time now, worked out that the best way to do that is to do that together. In WA, I think that we have a lot of commonality on the importance of having a strong economy, which supports everything else.

Just this week, $4.3bn for the Henderson dry dock. That's a massive important commitment for the future of the WA economy. More than $400m coming directly into WA in relation to the development of the critical minerals sector. And on top of that, probably the biggest partnership was working together to ensure that WA got their fair share of the GST.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.35am GMT

block-time published-time 1.31am GMT

Ummm, so Scott Morrison seems to be claiming that he has always been supportive of WA's Covid ***measures***. Which is... a bold statement.

As the premier knows, I have been very supportive of the ***measures*** taken in Western Australia to go down that path, and I think that has been wise and I think the results speak for themselves.

But nationally, we have saved 40,000 lives right across the country, and those lives were saved here in WA as well.

And now, as WA is going through its peak of the Omicron variant, the challenge has been the same. Minimise the impact on your hospital system, that's been achieved. Minimise these severe health impacts of Covid, that is being achieved.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.33am GMT

block-time published-time 1.27am GMT

This presser seems to be going well.

enltrCyclist riding past event with PM [*@ScottMorrisonMP*](https://twitter.com/ScottMorrisonMP?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) and WA premier [*@MarkMcGowanMP*](https://twitter.com/MarkMcGowanMP?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) shouts out "scumbag". Some joking after between the group of pollies about who in the it was actually directed to ?? [*@westaustralian*](https://twitter.com/westaustralian?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

- Lanai Scarr (@lanai\_scarr) [*March 17, 2022*](https://twitter.com/lanai_scarr/status/1504268006280806402?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 1.19am GMT

enltrMinister for Employment, Workforce, Skills, Small and Family Business, Stuart Robert, will hold a press conference to discuss February Labour Force data at 1pm, APH [*https://t.co/YAQRTuNLvg*](https://t.co/YAQRTuNLvg) [*#auspol*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/auspol?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

- Political Alert (@political\_alert) [*March 17, 2022*](https://twitter.com/political_alert/status/1504265037803757568?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 1.19am GMT

McGowan and Morrison announce multi-million dollar boost for two Perth construction projects

The reason for the joint McGowan/Morrison press conference has been revealed. It's to announce a multibillion-dollar "Perth city deal" which will see a new city campus for Edith Cowan University built, along with a new Swan River bridge.

Here is what the joint press release has to say:

Both governments have announced an additional $49m for the ECU campus while ECU has also provided a $60m boost, taking the value of the landmark project to $853m - with the Australian government investing a total of $294m, the Western Australian government $199m, and ECU $360m.

The major construction contract for the new ECU campus has also been awarded to WA builders Multiplex, while a consortium made up of companies Civmec Construction and Engineering Pty Ltd, Seymour Whyte Constructions Pty Ltd and WSP Australia Pty Ltd, will construct the bridge.

The Swan River bridge is being jointly funded by Morrison and McGowan governments on a 50:50 basis, with each providing an additional $25m to the project, bringing the total to $100m.

Today's funding announcements take the total value of the city deal to $1.69bn.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.23am GMT

block-time published-time 1.17am GMT

National Covid-19 update

Here are the latest coronavirus numbers from around Australia today, as the country records at least 26 deaths from Covid-19:

ACT

Deaths: 0Cases: 1,311In hospital: 39 (with three people in ICU)

NSW

Deaths: 5Cases: 20,087In hospital: 1,036 (with 34 people in ICU)

Queensland

Deaths: 10Cases: 7,190In hospital: 263 (with 19 people in ICU)

South Australia

Deaths: 3Cases: 4,474In hospital: 132 (with eight people in ICU)

Tasmania

Deaths: 0Cases: 1,859In hospital: 25 (with three people in ICU)

Victoria

Deaths: 7Cases: 9,752In hospital: 197 (with 23 people in ICU)

Western Australia

Deaths: 1Cases: 7,151In hospital: 140 (with 4 people in ICU)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.24am GMT

block-time published-time 1.08am GMT

Queensland records 10 Covid deaths and 7,190 new cases

enltrToday we have recorded 7,190 new COVID-19 cases. Sadly, 10 deaths were reported in the past 24 hours. Full details ? [*https://t.co/MyDwPPzP2F*](https://t.co/MyDwPPzP2F) [*pic.twitter.com/neI1ad44gZ*](https://t.co/neI1ad44gZ)

- Queensland Health (@qldhealth) [*March 17, 2022*](https://twitter.com/qldhealth/status/1504261234547474439?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 1.00am GMT

The shadow minister for climate change, Chris Bowen, has written to the emergency management minister, Bridget Mckenzie, urging her to speed up disaster payment distribution for the Cumberland council area in New South Wales.

enltrIt's been almost a week since Cumberland Council was included in the eligible LGAs for Disaster Recovery Payments and residents still can't access any assistance. I've written to the Minister [*@senbmckenzie*](https://twitter.com/senbmckenzie?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) to fix this urgently. It's not good enough. [*pic.twitter.com/Okbz9ezUMH*](https://t.co/Okbz9ezUMH)

- Chris Bowen (@Bowenchris) [*March 17, 2022*](https://twitter.com/Bowenchris/status/1504260635193839616?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.01am GMT

block-time published-time 12.54am GMT

The ACT records 1,311 new Covid cases

enltrCOVID-19 case numbers ? New cases today: 1,311 (727 PCR and 584 RAT) ? Active cases: 4,894 (2,293 PCR and 2,601 RAT) ? Total cases: 63,148 (41,994 PCR and 21,154 RAT) ? In hospital: 39 ? In ICU: 3 ? Ventilated: 1 ? Lives lost: 0 ? Total lives lost since March 2020: 38 [*pic.twitter.com/Y2BXVePFmI*](https://t.co/Y2BXVePFmI)

- ACT Health (@ACTHealth) [*March 17, 2022*](https://twitter.com/ACTHealth/status/1504258875616161797?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 12.48am GMT

We will be hearing from the Western Australia premier and the prime minister at a press conference soon.

How very bi-partisan of them!

enltrPM [*@ScottMorrisonMP*](https://twitter.com/ScottMorrisonMP?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) is in Perth today and will hold a joint press conference with WA Premier [*@MarkMcGowanMP*](https://twitter.com/MarkMcGowanMP?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) discussing Perth City Deal announcement at 9:00am AWST (12:00pm AEDT) [*#auspol*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/auspol?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

- Political Alert (@political\_alert) [*March 17, 2022*](https://twitter.com/political_alert/status/1504256728912654345?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.52am GMT

block-time published-time 12.38am GMT

Unemployment at lowest rate since 2008

Australia's labour figures for February have just landed, courtesy of the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

Last month, the unemployment rates came in at a seasonally adjusted 4.0%, compared with 4.2% in January. That's the lowest rate since August 2008. The economy added 77,400 jobs, and the participation rate edged up to 66.4%.

Notably, full-time jobs jumped 121,900 to 9.2m, while those in part-time employment fell 44,500 to 4.1m. Hours worked also rose by 149m.

On the face of it, it's a good time to be looking for work and perhaps to be seeking a pay rise.

More to come.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.40am GMT

block-time published-time 12.34am GMT

enltr [*#BREAKING*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/BREAKING?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) : Unemployment fell to 4 percent in February, down from 4.2 percent [*#auspol*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/auspol?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) [*@9NewsAUS*](https://twitter.com/9NewsAUS?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

- Fiona Willan (@Fi\_Willan) [*March 17, 2022*](https://twitter.com/Fi_Willan/status/1504254496146292736?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 12.27am GMT

The Bureau of Meteorology has indicated that the La Niña pattern in the Pacific might be with us a bit longer than predicted.

As we enter autumn, forecasting gets a bit more difficult, but what the bureau told us yesterday is [*we should expect the La Niña*](http://www.bom.gov.au/climate/enso/#tabs=Pacific-Ocean) to last longer. Potentially into early winter, in fact.

enltrLooks like the La Nina will be with a bit longer than previously forecast: [*pic.twitter.com/7tYXOb81IO*](https://t.co/7tYXOb81IO)

- Peter Hannam (@p\_hannam) [*March 16, 2022*](https://twitter.com/p_hannam/status/1504242933473898496?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

"Persistent easterly wind anomalies in the western Pacific over recent weeks have delayed the anticipated decay of the La Niña," the BoM said.

The thresholds are a bit arbitrary of course, and so long as conditions remain "La Niña-like", they will tend to make for above-average rain over eastern Australia and potentially a longer tropical cyclone season.

(Given the strained emergency services and of the ADF, a big cyclone hitting a populated region just now is not what we want.)

Australia, as an island continent, has weather influences from all corners of the compass. The Indian Ocean is one of those, and while the models are not so useful at this time of year, the predictions they are making aren't so great either.

enltrAnd although model predictability isn't great for the Indian Ocean Dipole beyond autumn, a reversion to a negative phase would also tilt conditions towards wetter-than-average in the south-east of the country. [*@BOM\_au*](https://twitter.com/BOM_au?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) [*pic.twitter.com/YcpwVbrLga*](https://t.co/YcpwVbrLga)

- Peter Hannam (@p\_hannam) [*March 16, 2022*](https://twitter.com/p_hannam/status/1504243937116303360?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

We've still got a long way to go, but a "negative" phase of the Indian Ocean dipole (where the eastern part of the ocean is relatively warm versus the basin's west) typically means above-average rainfall in the winter and spring.

Seems like flood watches aren't going to go away for a while.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.38am GMT

block-time published-time 12.19am GMT

One in three jobs will be slashed at the Australian Human Rights Commission as a record number of complaints and low base funding take their toll.

The human rights agency has issued a blunt warning that its funding "does not provide us with the resources required to perform our statutory functions".

The commission handles complaints under federal discrimination and human rights law, providing a check on government over issues including [*offshore detention*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2019/jun/18/australias-onshore-immigration-detention-unlike-any-other-liberal-democracy) and [*Covid-19 border restrictions*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2020/oct/22/australias-cap-on-arrivals-during-covid-pandemic-may-break-international-laws).

You can read the full report below:

Related: [*Australian Human Rights Commission to slash staff after budget cuts and surge in workload*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/mar/17/australian-human-rights-commission-to-slash-staff-after-budget-cuts-and-surge-in-workload)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.26am GMT

block-time published-time 12.12am GMT

AFLW final postponed after Covid outbreak

The AFLW finals series has been thrown into chaos, with a Covid-19 cluster at Collingwood causing the Magpies' qualifying final to be postponed, Oliver Caffrey reports.

Collingwood were due to take on the Brisbane Lions at the Gabba on Saturday night, but the AFL has decided that it won't go ahead as planned. The AFL is yet to confirm a new date for the sudden-death final.

The other qualifying final between North Melbourne and Fremantle at Arden Street on Saturday will go ahead as scheduled.

AFL competition management boss Laura Kane said the league had received a request from Collingwood to postpone the match.

AFLW Covid-19 guideline states a team is required to have a minimum 16 primary-listed players and five train-on players available to play. Kane said:

The health and safety of all members of the Collingwood AFLW program remains the priority and we will continue to work closely with both clubs.

Working alongside the club, it has been determined Collingwood would not be able to participate in a match this weekend.

While the ongoing pandemic continues to impact and challenge our competition and our wider community, we remain committed to progressing the finals series as safely as possible.

The Magpies have also lost men's player Will Hoskin-Elliott and two assistant coaches to coronavirus protocols before Friday night's AFL clash with St Kilda.

Magpies men's assistants Brendon Bolton and Josh Fraser are also isolating at home due to Covid guidelines.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.18am GMT

block-time published-time 12.06am GMT

enltrUS President Joe Biden has called Russian President Vladimir Putin a 'war criminal'. [*pic.twitter.com/FJBDlcTUyv*](https://t.co/FJBDlcTUyv)

- SBS News (@SBSNews) [*March 16, 2022*](https://twitter.com/SBSNews/status/1504240769141403649?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 11.51pm GMT

enltr?? Thursday's Thunderstorm Forecast: Storms are possible today across the Far North, the far southwest and parts of Herbert and Lower Burdekin. Isolated rainfall accumulations in excess of 100mm possible north of [*#Innisfail*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/Innisfail?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw). Full forecast details at [*https://t.co/8WARTeXON5*](https://t.co/8WARTeXON5) [*pic.twitter.com/XvDLMflyhu*](https://t.co/XvDLMflyhu)

- Bureau of Meteorology, Queensland (@BOM\_Qld) [*March 16, 2022*](https://twitter.com/BOM_Qld/status/1504243610996420619?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 11.48pm GMT

enltrPremier and Transport Infrastructure Minister [*@JacintaAllanMP*](https://twitter.com/JacintaAllanMP?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) are at Bulleen to talk about projects in North East suburbs. In Eltham major disruptions expected as crews remove roundabout & Main Road / Fitzsimons Lane. 10,000 jobs avail on [*@nelpvic*](https://twitter.com/nelpvic?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) [*@10NewsFirstMelb*](https://twitter.com/10NewsFirstMelb?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) [*#springst*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/springst?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) [*pic.twitter.com/dhlVvyoeJ*](https://t.co/dhlVvyoeJ)

- Simon Love (@SimoLove) [*March 16, 2022*](https://twitter.com/SimoLove/status/1504238496487141376?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 11.44pm GMT

Australia's unemployment rate could have a "3" in front of it as soon as this morning, when the ABS releases labour figures for February.

Back in February 2008, the rate [*reportedly reached 3.98%*](https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-02-02/how-is-the-unemployment-rate-falling-to-such-low-levels/100796028) , technically the last time it was sub 4%.

January's "print" came in at 4.2%, [*the lowest in 13 years*](https://www.theguardian.com/business/2022/feb/17/australias-unemployment-rate-steady-at-42-but-omicron-hits-hours-worked) , and the ANZ bank is among those predicting the jobless rate will drop to 3.9% when today's figures land.

A key statistic will be how many people started to look for work, as a big increase may nullify the effect on the jobless rate. On the other hand, if the participation rate stayed flat, the 4.2% unemployment could drop a lot.

In any case, hours worked will probably show a job as the economic effects of the Omicron Covid outbreaks, with the resulting staff shortages started to ease. ANZ said in a briefing note this morning:

We've already seen a surge in Australian job ads in the wake of the disruption caused by the Omicron outbreak - and it's looking like the labour market should be able to shake off its impacts pretty quickly.

Westpac, meanwhile, expects the jobless rate to drop too, but only to 4.1%, because of a higher participation rate.

Treasurer Josh Frydenberg will be out talking up the figures but he faces a hard sell.

True, jobs look a lot more secure than they did during the pandemic but wage rises aren't keeping up with price increases - and there are a lot more of those coming.

Perhaps the jobless rate will come in as "the lowest since the 1970s" - but will that give consumers (and voters) much consolation?

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.01am GMT

block-time published-time 11.33pm GMT

Tasmania records 1,859 new Covid cases

Tasmania reports 1,859 new Covid cases overnight.

There are now 25 Covid-positive people in hospital, including three in ICU.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 11.37pm GMT

block-time published-time 11.22pm GMT

enltrTell me it's an election year without telling me it's an election year [*pic.twitter.com/7ruK7oWUXa*](https://t.co/7ruK7oWUXa)

- Benita Kolovos (@benitakolovos) [*March 16, 2022*](https://twitter.com/benitakolovos/status/1504236245060567040?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 11.20pm GMT

enltrJust in: Old Parliament House will reopen to the public on April 28, almost 4 months since a fire destroyed the doors of the historic building. Restoration work will still continue and the original entrance will reopen later this year

- Andrew Brown (@AndrewBrownAU) [*March 16, 2022*](https://twitter.com/AndrewBrownAU/status/1504235726753259521?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 11.10pm GMT

This is evergreen.

enltrThe Federal Government will put $483m towards building the Urannah Dam, west of Mackay -- which is a chance to revisit this grab from the now deposed LNP MP Jason Costigan. [*pic.twitter.com/4fOUuiwzVL*](https://t.co/4fOUuiwzVL)

- Josh Bavas (@JoshBavas) [*March 16, 2022*](https://twitter.com/JoshBavas/status/1504230910333698048?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 10.58pm GMT

The federal government is signalling that the sanctions targeting Russian oligarchs could be expanded, potentially as soon as today. A spokesperson for the foreign affairs minister, Marise Payne, issued the following brief statement today:

Minister Payne is waiting on advice on further sanctions ***measures*** from her department and will consider that advice as soon as possible, once it is received.

We are consulting and cooperating closely with partners on sanctions, and would note that the UK only sanctioned Viktor Vekselberg yesterday and Oleg Deripaska in recent days.

For more on this issue, see this morning's story:

Related: [*Putin-linked Russian oligarchs with Australian assets escape Morrison government sanctions*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/mar/17/putin-linked-russian-oligarchs-with-australian-assets-escape-morrison-government-sanctions)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 11.02pm GMT

block-time published-time 10.49pm GMT

Threatened duck species were among those killed on the first day of Victoria's hunting season - the longest in four years - reigniting calls from animal advocates for an end to the practice.

Wildlife Victoria's lead veterinarian, Natasha Bassett, who joined rescue teams at Lake Connewarre near Geelong on Wednesday, said the first duck she treated was a female blue-winged shoveler.

Hunters are prohibited from shooting both the blue-winged shoveler and hardhead ducks in Victoria this season, given both have been listed as threatened due to declining populations.

You can read the full report below:

Related: [*Threatened duck species killed as extended Victorian hunting season begins*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/mar/17/threatened-duck-species-killed-as-extended-victorian-hunting-season-begins)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 11.01pm GMT

block-time published-time 10.36pm GMT

enltrThe unofficial election campaign has now officially unofficially started [*pic.twitter.com/DSNfhLBUD3*](https://t.co/DSNfhLBUD3)

- Josh Butler (@JoshButler) [*March 16, 2022*](https://twitter.com/JoshButler/status/1504224779565690880?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 10.36pm GMT

NSW Labor calls for inquiry into flood response

NSW deserves a thorough investigation of what happened in the northern rivers flood disaster to ensure a similar catastrophe is never repeated, Labor says, according to Phoebe Loomes from AAP.

Opposition Leader Chris Minns is calling for an upper house parliamentary inquiry to "make sure... it doesn't happen again".

During the height of the Covid pandemic, the chief health officer had a central role in leading the response, as did the commissioner of the rural fire service in the bushfires. Minns said:

My concern about the flood response over the last two weeks is that's not the case in NSW. The worst thing that could happen, worse than even the floods... is if we don't learn from the mistakes that were made. We want to find out what has gone poorly and make sure mistakes are corrected.

In the 24 hours after flooding began in Lismore on 28 February, the area's communication system failed, Minns said, stopping SES communications.

SES infrastructure needed to be in place in local communities, and the government needed to ensure the emergency response teams were properly resourced, he said.

A political fight has broken out between NSW and the commonwealth over the allocation of disaster funding by the federal government in flood-affected areas.

Liberal upper house member Catherine Cusack, from the northern rivers, said she was quitting the party over a decision to allocate commonwealth disaster payments on partisan lines.

Funding has been given to Nationals-held council areas Lismore, the Clarence Valley and Richmond Valley while not being made available to Byron, Ballina and the Tweed shires, which are Labor seats. Cusack:

The idea that being a flood victim in a National party-held seat makes you more worthy than a flood victim who is in the Richmond electorate... is probably the most unethical approach I have ever seen.

She has informed premier Dominic Perrottet and the Liberal party of her intention to quit:

The whole northern rivers should have been given funding according to their need, not according to their LGA. It's ***unprecedented***.

The NSW government has been working on an additional flood response package valued at up to $1bn, to be jointly funded by the state and federal governments, according to multiple reports.

The funding will look to help people whose homes were damaged in the floods after assessors found some 95,000 homes in northern NSW were damaged or destroyed.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 10.49pm GMT

block-time published-time 10.27pm GMT

Karen Thorne's rental home heats up as soon as the morning sun hits her east-facing bedroom in the Sydney suburb of Rosemeadow:

I could wake up at 8am to 28-degree heat in there. The heat is what actually wakes me up.

Thorne's bedroom is at the front of the home, but it's the back bedrooms, which receive the full glare of the afternoon sun, that get the hottest. Thorne's 19-year-old son, Connor, took to sleeping on the kitchen tiles over summer because the heat in his room was unbearable. She says:

I've recorded on my own thermometer before - it actually reached up to 38 degrees in there one day, and it didn't cool down until 2am in the morning. That's why Connor likes to perch on the floor in the lounge room, or in the kitchen. I am just grateful I have an en suite so I don't trip over him in the night.

You can read the full report below:

Related: [*'It reached 38 degrees': rental properties across Australia routinely exceeding safe temperatures, study reveals*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/mar/17/it-reached-38-degrees-rental-properties-across-australia-routinely-exceeding-safe-temperatures-study-reveals)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 10.44pm GMT

block-time published-time 10.20pm GMT

enltrMost of [*#Victoria*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/Victoria?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) is dressed up for [*#StPatricksDay*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/StPatricksDay?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) ! Showers & possible storms today as a cloud band crosses the State, still a bit muggy in parts too.??? Cooler and less humid in the south tomorrow, but remaining mild north of the ranges. More forecasts: [*https://t.co/snYkj323Sk*](https://t.co/snYkj323Sk) [*pic.twitter.com/G25DAk7atn*](https://t.co/G25DAk7atn)

- Bureau of Meteorology, Victoria (@BOM\_Vic) [*March 16, 2022*](https://twitter.com/BOM_Vic/status/1504214498500091912?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 10.14pm GMT

New South Wales treasurer Matt Kean has not spoken to north coast-based Liberal upper house MP Catherine Cusack who announced she will leave parliament over what she called "unethical" flood relief decisions for different local government areas.

Speaking on RN Breakfast, he said:

She's been an outspoken and passionate advocate for her community in northern New South Wales. She'll be a great loss to the Liberal party room.

Kean said the criteria for flood relief grants "certainly does" need to change to take into account more extreme weather:

The existing framework in place has helped us deal with fires, floods and previous major storms but this is unique. We need to make sure that our policies and guidelines that are in place and tailored to help those who need it most. We're working through that ***process*** at the moment.

He said he'd be "really angry" if he was in one of those areas like Ballina or Byron that missed out, despite being flooded. Kean also dismissed claims the announcement of flood grants was being delayed until Scott Morrison returns from Western Australia:

We're working through a ***process*** with the prime minister's office and the federal government. We're working through some additional support packages for those who need it most, so it's not an unusual ***process***.

He would not be drawn on the details of the $10,000 family assistance grant but said they would be announced soon.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 10.27pm GMT

block-time published-time 10.02pm GMT

NSW records 20,087 new Covid infections and five deaths

Another large day of Covid cases in NSW, with 20,087 infections recorded and five lives lost.

enltrCOVID-19 update - Thursday 17 March 2022 In the 24-hour reporting period to 4pm yesterday: - 95.9% of people aged 16+ have had one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine - 94.5% of people aged 16+ have had two doses of a COVID-19 vaccine [*pic.twitter.com/zgVGZ430dW*](https://t.co/zgVGZ430dW)

- NSW Health (@NSWHealth) [*March 16, 2022*](https://twitter.com/NSWHealth/status/1504215961338990602?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 11.36pm GMT

block-time published-time 10.01pm GMT

Victoria records seven Covid deaths and 9,752 new infections

enltrWe thank everyone who got vaccinated and tested yesterday. Our thoughts are with those in hospital, and the families of people who have lost their lives. More data soon: [*https://t.co/OCCFTAtS1P*](https://t.co/OCCFTAtS1P) [*#COVID19Vic*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/COVID19Vic?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) [*#COVID19VicData*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/COVID19VicData?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) [*pic.twitter.com/tXA8A9QRQM*](https://t.co/tXA8A9QRQM)

- VicGovDH (@VicGovDH) [*March 16, 2022*](https://twitter.com/VicGovDH/status/1504216003131052036?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 9.55pm GMT

enltrNSW treasurer Matt Kean hasn't spoke to Catherine Cusack since she announced she was quitting parliament over "unethical" flood funding. "She'll be a great loss to the liberal party room, but she's made a huge contribution to our party and to our state."

- Tamsin Rose (@tamsinroses) [*March 16, 2022*](https://twitter.com/tamsinroses/status/1504211878917992450?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 9.52pm GMT

I cannot express to you how irrationally sad this actually makes me.

New Zealand's "world largest potato" isn't in fact the world's largest potato... or a potato at all.

Related: [*Giant New Zealand potato is not in fact a potato, Guinness World Records rules*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/16/giant-new-zealand-potato-is-not-in-fact-a-potato-guinness-world-records-rules)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 9.59pm GMT

block-time published-time 9.47pm GMT

Ukraine embassy calls for Australian sanctions against two Russian oligarchs

From senior economics reporter Ben Butler and foreign affairs and defence correspondent Daniel Hurst :

Ukraine's embassy in Canberra has joined calls for the Australian government to sanction two Russian oligarchs who have assets here, Oleg Deripaska and Viktor Vekselberg.

As we reported this morning, activist groups have questioned why the pair were left off a list of 31 oligarchs Australia has sanctioned over Russia's ***invasion*** of Ukraine.

The head of Ukraine's embassy in Canberra, Volodymyr Shalkivskiy, told Guardian Australia he hoped the sanctions were extended to include Deripaska and Vekselberg, although he stopped short of criticising the Australian government for the omission:

The government of Ukraine is grateful to the government of Australia for its proactive and extensive sanctions policy against Russia, which is the biggest among the Indo-Pacific countries...

We hope that those Russian oligarchs will be included in the next round of sanctions.

Meanwhile, the Australasian Centre for Corporate Responsibility said Origin Energy shouldn't wait for sanctions before suspending its venture with Vekselberg, a gas exploration project in the Beetaloo Basin.

The ACCR's Dan Gocher said:

Vekselberg has already been sanctioned by the British and US governments. It's curious that the Australian government has not yet followed suit given its claims of being in lockstep with the US and UK.

Vekselberg's interest in Falcon pre-dates Origin's farm-in agreement agreed in 2015, so Origin was entered into the joint venture with eyes wide open.

If Origin's exploration in the Beetaloo Basin is successful, it would be to the benefit of Vekselberg - a situation which must be avoided."

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 9.59pm GMT

block-time published-time 9.29pm GMT

A new bushfire lab in Canberra will help firefighters deal with Australia's escalating bushfire threat.

The CSIRO lab unveiled this week is home to a 29-metre long pyrotron - an artificial tunnel-like environment in which to light fires to better understand how they behave under different conditions, AAP reports.

The data will then be used to refine predictive models authorities use during events like the devastating black summer blazes of 2019 and 2020.

The $2.1m facility also boasts a vertical wind tunnel to study the physics of spot fires, which are responsible for the loss of most homes in Australia.

The lab will build on about 70 years of CSIRO bushfire research that has historically relied on experimental fires lit in natural bush settings. Such field experiments are not without risk, and are impossible when fire conditions are at their most dangerous.

The pyrotron provides a safe solution to test any combination of variables including wind speed, fuel type and load, and moisture content to determine what fires will do.

Bushfire behaviour expert Andrew Sullivan :

We certainly have had very limited capability to conduct experimental fires under extreme conditions. Nobody in their right mind is going to give us the go ahead to light a fire on a Black Saturday-type day...

This lab means we'll be able to study particular aspects of fire behaviour under the extreme conditions that are more likely to occur under climate change.

ACT Rural Fire Service chief Rohan Scott says the lab is a bit like having a crystal ball:

By using the data collected by the pyrotron, our prediction tools become more accurate. And that means better decision making about where firefighters can safely go, what firefighting strategies to use, and also improved emergency warnings for communities.

The lab is located at CSIRO's Black Mountain campus in Canberra.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 9.35pm GMT

block-time published-time 9.18pm GMT

enltrThe dam has been on the drawing board since the 1960s. There have been more than 25 feasibility studies but the project has never proceeded will this represent value for taxpayers? "Well that's not a guarantee I can give on this program" - [*@sussanley*](https://twitter.com/sussanley?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) , Environment Minister

- RN Breakfast (@RNBreakfast) [*March 16, 2022*](https://twitter.com/RNBreakfast/status/1504197458674405377?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 9.11pm GMT

Australian academic Kylie Moore-Gilbert, who was jailed in Iran for two years before being released in November 2020, has welcomed the release of British-Iranian prisoners Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe and Anoosheh Ashoori, who were [*released last night after being held for six years*](https://www.theguardian.com/news/2022/mar/16/nazanin-zaghari-ratcliffe-to-leave-iran-after-six-years-in-detention-reports).

Both were held in the notorious Evin prison in Tehran.

enltrSo happy for Nazanin and Anoosheh. I remember this moment well;such a tumult of emotions- fear of the unknown,apprehension,expectation. Both are endlessly fortunate to have warm and loving families to welcome them home, and navigate a complex adjustment back to a life of freedom

- Kylie Moore-Gilbert (@KMooreGilbert) [*March 16, 2022*](https://twitter.com/KMooreGilbert/status/1504065931966054403?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 9.15pm GMT

block-time published-time 9.06pm GMT

Aged care workers are struggling to obtain the government's promised $800 bonus which the cash-strapped sector is being asked to pay to staff before their funding applications are approved by government.

In January the [*government announced*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/jan/31/aged-care-workers-to-get-bonus-payments-as-morrison-government-tries-to-claw-back-support) it would give 265,000 aged care staff a maximum of $800 in two instalments before the election, responding to pressure over its handling of the pandemic and the underpayment of the sector's workforce.

Employers were told to make applications for the payment from 1 March for eligible workers who were active in the industry on 28 February.

You can read the full report below:

Related: [*'Lot of show and not a lot of go': aged care workers struggling to get Morrison government's $800 bonus*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/mar/17/lot-of-show-and-not-a-lot-of-go-aged-care-workers-struggling-to-get-morrison-governments-800-bonus)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 9.11pm GMT

block-time published-time 8.58pm GMT

enltrAn upper and surface trough is moving from west to east today and bringing the chance of showers to inland [*#NSW*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/NSW?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) , while a ridge of high pressure along the coast is bringing the chance of light showers. Check the forecast for your area at: [*https://t.co/aOd2XIGYlX*](https://t.co/aOd2XIGYlX) [*pic.twitter.com/Wn2ZvklXsg*](https://t.co/Wn2ZvklXsg)

- Bureau of Meteorology, New South Wales (@BOM\_NSW) [*March 16, 2022*](https://twitter.com/BOM_NSW/status/1504200353641869324?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 8.57pm GMT

Sussan Ley calls response to overruling of climate duty of care 'emotional'

ABC Radio host Patricia Karvelas:

OK. Minister, on the court ruling that you don't have a legal duty of care to young people to consider climate change when approving projects. What about a moral duty of care? Wouldn't people expect no less from the environment minister?

Sussan Ley:

So I understand that there's been an emotional response to the duty of care question in this particular case.

I do care about the climate. I do care about the children. I do respect their advocacy, but what that duty of care was what was being considered by the court was whether I had obligations over and above the law. And the point is that I implement national environmental law under the EPBC Act.

I'm very conscious of my statutory responsibilities, and I make decisions in the interests of Australians. Every single day now, the three judges agreed that the duty of care was incoherent and inconsistent with my statutory obligations. And that was what this court case was about. But I know that people interpret it as a sort of broader duty of care, but I want to separate that emotional response from the legal question before the court.

Karvelas:

Minister, you call it an emotional response. I mean, there is catastrophic climate change. On the horizon, young people are concerned because the future is at risk. It's not really emotional, it's based on science and people having a response based on what they've been told by the experts.

Ley:

When you just ask me about a moral duty of care, which is not the legal question before the court.

I mean, I just want to make that point. And but I understand the emotion in the responses that have come to me and in the responses of those who took the case to the court, but I do want to separate what my obligations are under Australian law, and a court case that was effectively asking me to go further beyond what my statutory obligations are, and clearly the three judges of the fourth federal court agreed with the case that the government impose terms of the inconsistency of what was being asked for under the duty of care with my statutory obligations are.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 9.13pm GMT

block-time published-time 8.47pm GMT

The federal government announced this morning that it will provide $483m for the 970 gigalitre Urannah Dam project in Queensland.

It comes as a new survey revealed nearly three-quarters of respondents want the budget to focus on services and recovery efforts from the Queensland and NSW floods as well as the Covid-19 pandemic.

It's estimated the dam will unlock 103 gigalitres of water and help nearby producers develop 20,000 hectares of irrigated land. But there are also fears that this development would result in lower water flow into the nearby rivers, destroying acres of wetlands which include the habitat of a turtle species discovered by Steve Irwin.

Federal environment minister Sussan Ley has just been asked if she supports the dam being built while speaking to ABC radio:

Well, I'm not going to jump into the impact on one matter of national environmental significance or one threatened species, but the assessment ***process*** will absolutely pick up on that and every other impact on every other species and indeed the world heritage places that are close to the dam.

Host Patricia Karvelas:

So if that determines that there is too big a risk in the environment, will you abandon the plant would you push to abandon the plan?

Ley:

Well, we will take it one step at a time. So what you've asked me is you've jumped forward, you've made a supposition about an impact and its effect and the way that, in terms of this terminology, the controlled actually is carried out. And you suggested but I foreshadow that, well, I'm not going to do that. But what I am going to say is that we'll go through those steps and we'll do it properly.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 8.54pm GMT

block-time published-time 8.39pm GMT

NSW premier welcomes seventh child

NSW premier Dominic Perrottet and his wife Helen have announced the birth of their seventh child - a girl named Celeste Grace.

The new arrival is the couple's sixth daughter - they also have a son - and was born on Wednesday night, AAP reports.

The premier posted news of the birth on his Instagram page, saying mother and baby were doing well:

She's looking forward to being kissed and cuddled, fought over and cherished by her big brother and sisters. Special thanks to the incredible midwives who were with us every step of the way.

enltr1/2 Here she is! Helen and I are absolutely thrilled to welcome our beautiful baby girl, Celeste Grace Perrottet, born last night. Both Mum and baby are doing well. [*pic.twitter.com/En4LjGL5uf*](https://t.co/En4LjGL5uf)

- Dom Perrottet (@Dom\_Perrottet) [*March 16, 2022*](https://twitter.com/Dom_Perrottet/status/1504171052011692035?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 8.57pm GMT

block-time published-time 8.32pm GMT

Good morning

Good morning everyone, Matilda Boseley here to take you through this glorious Thursday's worth of news.

The NSW health minister is urging the more than 330,000 residents aged over 60 who have not received a booster vaccine to get that done Asap, with daily cases expected to keep rising.

Brad Hazzard told the Sydney Morning Herald that the case number increase is being driven by the Omicron BA.2 strain of the virus and is expected to accelerate as the country enters winter:

What we've seen in the last few years is that as soon as positive cases start going up, people start getting vaccinated. It would make a lot more sense if they got [boosted] now, so they are less likely to catch the virus and be part of those rising numbers...

Boosters are our passage to safety and normal life - go and get it, don't muck around.

There were 30,402 new infections were recorded in the state yesterday, but NSW Health says this dramatic jump was due to a data glitch, with about 10,000 positive rapid antigen tests registered between Sunday and Monday missed due to a data ***processing*** problem, so they were included in figures on Wednesday.

It comes a day after NSW reported 10,689 cases, up by more than 1,700 from the previous day.

With that why don't we jump right into the day!

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 8.46pm GMT

9509 2022-03-17T04:00:00Z true 2022-03-16T20:32:54Z false false 2022-03-17T08:25:44Z false AUS theguardian.com [*https://www.theguardian.com/p/y3pab*](https://www.theguardian.com/p/y3pab) false true [*https://media.guim.co.uk/390cbeb60345146a461e7066ae0b8b9d1bec9af8/0\_306\_3424\_2055/500.jpg*](https://media.guim.co.uk/390cbeb60345146a461e7066ae0b8b9d1bec9af8/0_306_3424_2055/500.jpg) false en true And with that, we are going to put this blog to bed. Thank you so much for spending the day with us. Here's a recap of what we saw today: The NSW premier, Dominic Perrottet, and his wife, Helen, announced the birth of their seventh child - a girl named Celeste Grace. The federal environment minister, Sussan Ley, said the response to the full federal court's ruling that she did not have a duty of care to protect young people from the climate crisis was "an emotional response". Ukraine's embassy added to calls for the Australian government to impose sanctions on two Russian oligarchs, Oleg Deripaska and Viktor Vekselberg. NSW Labor leader, Chris Minns, called for an upper house parliamentary inquiry into the northern rivers flood response, saying: "The worst thing that could happen, worse than even the floods... is if we don't learn from the mistakes that were made." The AFLW finals series has been thrown into chaos, with a Covid-19 cluster at Collingwood causing the Magpies' qualifying final to be postponed. Unemployment rates are now at 4.0%, the lowest they have been since 2008. WA premier, Mark McGowan, and Scott Morrison announced a multimillion-dollar boost for two Perth construction projects, a new city campus for Edith Cowan University and a new Swan River bridge. Flood disaster payments have been extended beyond Lismore to the Ballina, Byron, Kyogle and Tweed LGAs in the form of an additional two-weekly payment. The NSW Electoral Commission won its bid to overturn three NSW local government elections in Kempsey, Shellharbour and Singleton after electronic voting failures last year. Labor has launched its first election ad, featuring leader Anthony Albanese promising to "show up and take responsibility" and a suite of policies to tackle the cost of living. Victoria recorded seven Covid deaths and 9,752 new infections; NSW recorded 20,087 new Covid infections and five deaths; Tasmania recorded 1,859 Covid cases; the ACT recorded 1,311 Covid cases; Queensland recorded 10 Covid deaths and 7,190 cases; WA recorded one Covid death and 7,151 cases; and South Australia recorded three Covid deaths and 4,474 cases. We will see you all again tomorrow. From AAP: Most of Australia's threatened species are not being monitored and there's no effort to determine if rescue plans are working, a new audit has found. The Australian National Audit Office has offered a scathing assessment of the federal government's efforts to save threatened plants and animals from extinction. It said the Department of ***Agriculture***, Water and the Environment did not have measurement and reporting systems to provide reliable information on the status of threatened species. Nor did it have systems to monitor and report back on efforts to safeguard species. "There is limited evidence that desired outcomes are being achieved," it said. "There is no measurement, monitoring or reporting on progress, or on the contribution of listing assessments, conservation advice, recovery plans and threat abatement plans to their desired outcomes. "Available information indicates that the status of threatened species is declining." Conservation groups says the audit is full of alarming findings, including a blowout in the time it takes for species of concern to be formally listed as deserving of protection under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act. Experts have called on the New South Wales government to reintroduce mandatory face masks in high-risk settings as Covid-19 infections spike across the state. NSW reported its second day in a row of cases above 20,000, with 20,087 cases recorded in the 24 hours to 4pm on Wednesday and an estimated 20,402 the day before. NSW health minister, Brad Hazzard, warned the number could double by next month. 2GB is reporting that the Rail, Tram & Bus Union have called off their planned industrial action tomorrow, and are now negotiating with the government: We will bring you more on this as it breaks. A report by the Australian National Audit Office (ANAO) has found the government is unsure if its efforts to prevent the extinction of flora and fauna are working. The federal environment department oversees the Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act, which requires the government to make plans to prevent the extinction of threatened species. But the report says there is "limited evidence" the government is meeting its requirements: There is limited evidence that desired outcomes are being achieved, due to the department's lack of monitoring, reporting and support for the implementation of conservation advice, recovery plans and threat abatement plans. Most recommendations from past evaluations and reviews have not yet been implemented. The report adds that failings identified in previous audit reports have not been addressed and there is "no schedule or plan for future evaluations". Labor has launched its first election ad, featuring leader Anthony Albanese promising to "show up and take responsibility" and a suite of policies to tackle the cost of living. The ad nominates childcare, reducing power bills, fee-free Tafe and making it "easier to see the doctor" as Labor priorities - the latter signalling that a new health policy is imminent that will focus on GP and specialist out-of-pocket costs. With the Morrison government struggling in opinion polls, the Coalition has increasingly sought to frame the election around the economy and national security. In the ad, Albanese declares that "Australians deserve a prime minister who shows up, takes responsibility and works with people", in an implicit criticism of Morrison's handling of the pandemic and natural disasters including bushfires and flood. "I'll work with business to invest in manufacturing. Making more things here will create more secure jobs here ... It's my plan for a better future." The ad will run from Friday on primetime on all commercial TV networks including in rugby league and Australian rules football matches, and in South Australia after the Saturday state election. The ad refers to three policies Labor has already released, to improve subsidies to reduce the cost of childcare, to "reduce power bills", in reference to its clean energy policies, and to create 465,000 fee-free Tafe courses in areas of skills shortage. Labor is yet to release its health policy, but Albanese has signalled the opposition will outbid the Morrison government in the leadup to the election by declaring it "will always be better" on health and education than the Coalition. The finance minister, Simon Birmingham, was on ABC's Afternoon Briefing this afternoon, discussing unemployment figures and the risk of increasing inflation. Birmingham said Australia's inflation rate was running at "half" the US's, but conceded it was a "deeply uncertain time" and referred to international "pressures" in his explanation, a recurring theme for him this week. This is indeed a very challenging and uncertain environment, that for all the goodness we have in the jobs numbers, it sits against a global environment where we still face the challenges of the Covid recovery and, in Australia, the first winter with Covid and the flu to run concurrently, we face the challenges of inflationary pressures, and while Australia is doing much better than many other nations - it has in fact an inflation rate running around half that of the United States - we do face the knock-on effects of those other nations, and we face a war in Europe and the disruptions that is causing to supply chains, as well as the humanitarian catastrophe that is unfolding here. So it is a deeply uncertain time against which we frame the budget, and we do so very clear that our objective is to ensure we keep the economic growth going in Australia, we keep the jobs growth going in Australia, because that is the most important pillar for Australians, in terms of addressing any pressures they face, is to have a job and to have the income that comes from employment. But we also do so mindful of the fact that with those global inflationary pressures, we don't wish to add to those, we don't wish to put any additional pressure that is already there from the rest of the world for upwards movement in interest rates. An interaction from earlier today that I just had to share: Results from three local government elections in NSW have been voided after electronic voting failures last year, AAP is reporting: The NSW Electoral Commission has won its bid to overturn the results of three local government elections, after a broken electronic voting system failed to register people's votes on election day last year. "With considerable reluctance I consider that, because the system of election for the three councils is proportional representation, it is necessary to declare all of the councillors' elections void," the supreme court judge Robert Beech-Jones said in his judgment on Thursday. The election results for Kempsey, Shellharbour and Singleton could have been different if all voters who registered to use iVote had been able to vote on the day, the electoral commissioner argued in December. The iVote system failed when registered voters were blocked from voting because the system failed to recognise their security credentials. Voters will have to head to the polls once again for fresh elections. Beech-Jones noted that although the number of voters blocked by the iVote failure was small "the votes that were denied to those voters had the real potential to affect the election of at least one councillor in each of the three subject elections". The electoral commissioner approved last year's disputed results while waiting for the judgment, saying last year it would have been impossible to hold fresh elections until mid-2022, due to it being a federal election year. In a statement on Wednesday, the commission said it would not use iVote at the state election scheduled for 25 March 2023 or at any byelections between 1 July and then. The decision not to use iVote at the state election in 2023 has not been driven by any concerns about cybersecurity matters in previous elections. The Queensland education minister, Grace Grace, says she is appalled at federal minister Stuart Robert's comments that there are "dud teachers" in public schools who couldn't keep a job in the private sector. Grace says: He's been acting in the job for five minutes and thinks he knows it all. The account of the minister's comments at the conference reeks of a boys club, slapping each other on the back telling themselves how good they are, and sneering at the state system that educates around 580,000 students in Robert's home state of Queensland. Our state system has some of the best teachers in the world, who go above and beyond every single day for the benefit of their students. Over the past couple of years in particular, the support they have provided students throughout Covid has been outstanding. And the latest Naplan results suggest state schools and teachers are doing something right. For minister Robert to say our state schoolteachers are 'dragging the chain' is outrageous, inaccurate, and an insult to hard working teachers across Queensland and Australia. Victorians are being warned the combination of flu and Covid-19 is set to create a difficult winter, AAP reports: Premier Daniel Andrews on Thursday would not give a timeline for the removal of the remaining few coronavirus public health ***measures***, including masks for hospitality and retail workers and some primary school students. "At this stage I've got no advice that we'll be able to take off those mask rules," he told reporters. "We are open and things are closer to normal than they have been for a long time." However, as the more contagious BA.2 sub-variant of the Omicron coronavirus strain starts to dominate in the state, the government has been pushing for people who have not yet had a third dose of vaccine to do so ahead of the colder months. "Winter will be challenging, it always is whether you've got a pandemic or not - flu, for instance, always knocks our health system around every single winter," Andrews said. However, the opposition leader, Matthew Guy, said it was time for the state to do away with masks completely and "move on" from the pandemic. "How's it fair that there's 60,000 people at the MCG, sanctioned by the state government, but kids in primary school in grades four, five and six are wearing a mask? That's ridiculous," Guy told reporters. The Australian Education Union has slammed "the deplorable comments" directed at public school teachers, principals and education support staff made by the acting education minister, Stuart Robert, at an independent schools' conference today. The Australian Education Union federal president, Correna Haythorpe, said: Referring to public school teachers as the 'bottom 10% dragging the chain', Stuart Roberts has slandered the public school workforce that has been the backbone of Australia's education system, especially during the past two turbulent years. Public school teachers have always been an easy target for politicians like minister Robert who think that a cheap and easy headline which attacks teachers for declining educational outcomes will let his government off the hook for their failure to prioritise public education. Today's comments once again show the Morrison government's outrageous preference for the private school system, a preference which comes at great cost to the teachers and students in public schools. Public schools are underfunded by at least $4bn every year and successive Coalition governments have shirked their responsibility time and time again. Where is minister Robert's outrage about the deep inequality facing public school students across the nation? Put simply, the Morrison government is missing in action for public schools. I mentioned just before that there was additional support for flood-impacted residents in the Northern Rivers. Now I have the press release from the minister for emergency management, Bridget McKenzie, and the minister for government services, Linda Reynolds. The National Recovery and Resilience Agency and Emergency Management Australia have further assessed the flood extent area, the proportion of the population affected and seeking assistance for disaster recovery payments, and have declared the Ballina, Byron, Kyogle and Tweed LGAs are in need of additional support. This next phase of support includes: An additional two-weekly disaster payment - known as Australian government disaster recovery payment (AGDRP) special supplement - for affected residents in Ballina, Byron, Kyogle and Tweed will be automatically paid to those who have already claimed and received the AGDRP, at the current rate of $1,000 an adult and $400 a child. These payments will be made from 22 March. McKenzie said the government was realising the full impact of the floods: As the full scale and impact to these areas in northern NSW is being realised, the Liberal and Nationals government is implementing this extra support as quickly as possible. While people in northern NSW aren't able to work, are still clearing out their homes ad businesses, the extra two $1,000 payments we're rolling out to eligible families and individuals will support our communities as they start to rebuild their lives. The additional two $1,000 payments for adults and $400 for children will automatically apply for AGDRP recipients in the Ballina, Byron, Kyogle and Tweed LGAs, so there is no need for people to reapply. SA has recorded three Covid deaths and 4,474 new cases. There are 132 people in hospital with eight in ICU and three people on ventilators. We are seeking to confirm reports that locals in more northern rivers communities will receive the disaster payments. I will have more on this soon. New South Wales government MPs and local mayors have lined up to blast the federal government over the decision to exclude some flood-hit areas from disaster funding. One upper house Liberal party MP, Catherine Cusack, has announced her intention to resign from politics altogether, telling Guardian Australia her decision was not a protest but "me not wanting to fight the machine any more". Who needs home security when we have all this smashed av, amirite boys! The New South Wales premier, Dominic Perrottet, has announced he will spend two weeks on parental leave after welcoming his seventh child. Last night my wife Helen and I welcomed our newest member of the family, a gorgeous daughter, Celeste Grace Perrottet. Celeste and Helen are doing great, and Celeste's six siblings are over the moon. From today I am taking leave to spend time with Helen and the kids as we all adjust to welcoming a new child to our family. Deputy premier Paul Toole will assume the role of acting premier. Deputy leader of the parliamentary Liberal party Stuart Ayres will assume the role of acting leader of the parliamentary Liberal party. He says he will return from leave on Monday 4 April. I will be seeking a Pair from the Opposition for the parliamentary sitting period commencing 22 March and concluding 31 March. Given the current flood emergency I will continue to receive briefings on the response and recovery work and remain ready to return to official duties immediately should the need arise. One of the world's leading coral scientists claims a sixth mass bleaching event is unfolding across the Great Barrier Reef, with official monitoring flights now under way all along the Queensland coastline. The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA) has confirmed monitoring flights are being conducted "along the length and breadth" of the 2,300km world heritage reef. But the authority is not due to make a formal update on conditions over the reef, or the initial findings from those flights, until Friday. In Queensland, disaster assistance has been extended to the local government areas of Croydon and Etheridge which were both hit by severe thunderstorms and flooding in February. Emergency management and national recovery and resilience minister, Bridget McKenzie, said the assistance would support more communities affected by the deluge from 1 to 7 February. Croydon shire council and Etheridge shire councils are the latest LGAs to receive assistance, as the impacts of these floods are realised in far north Queensland. An unstable air-mass produced multiple days of extreme showers and storms over far north queensland, which resulted in damaged roads and other essential public infrastructure. Funding is made available to the two councils to help with cleanup efforts and towards repairing the damage so the community can get back on its feet as soon as possible. Queensland's fire and emergency services minister, Mark Ryan, said the funding would help with cleaning up debris and repairing of roads, culverts and floodways. The Antipoverty Centre has put out a statement in relation to today's job figures. Spokesperson Kristin O'Connell said: The rosy picture painted by the government after today's unemployment figures were published doesn't reflect reality for the millions of people who are forced to survive on poverty-level Centrelink payments because there aren't enough jobs. The unemployment rate is past it's use-by date. It's become increasingly irrelevant with the dramatic rise of casualisation and underemployment, which has left hundreds of thousands of employed people relying on unemployment payments to survive. The pandemic was the nail in the coffin for this simplistic employment survey being useful, and we've now had a sustained decoupling of the unemployment rate and the number of unemployed and underemployed people who need income support. Prices for basic necessities, particularly food and fuel are undeniably skyrocketing. The Henderson poverty line is skyrocketing. The length of time people are trapped on JobSeeker is skyrocketing. Low unemployment means nothing to those of us hurting. It's time for politicians to wake up to reality - people are in despair and scared for the future. We are stretched beyond belief. WA has recorded 7,151 new cases with 140 people in hospital and of those four are in ICU. One person has died with Covid. Scott Morrison has incorrectly claimed that the unemployment rate has reached a near 50 year low. Morrison told reporters in Perth: The unemployment rate at 4% is the lowest rate that we've seen in almost 50 years. I was 5 years old when we last had an unemployment rate this low - and I think that says something. This is incorrect - the unemployment rate was also 4% in February and August 2008, under the Rudd Labor government. The employment minister, Stuart Robert, claimed the prime minister was "quite correct". Robert told reporters in Canberra: The last time it was 4% was August 2008, February [2008] and [1974]. That's why I chose my words carefully to say it is the equal lowest rate - so the prime minister is absolutely correct. Reporters noted Morrison did not say the "equal" lowest, and he said it was the "last" time the unemployment had been that low. Looks like Morrison has been caught with a clumsy paraphrase that incorrectly (and conveniently) ignores two stellar results in 2008. Barnaby Joyce has earmarked close to $500m to build the Urannah Dam in central Queensland, despite the project not yet securing environmental approvals and several studies suggesting the idea is not economically viable. The proposal, long championed by the Queensland Nationals, has been around since the 1960s and a number of feasibility studies have queried the viability of the project. From AAP: If Ukraine falls, further countries will face the wrath of Russian expansionism, Ukraine's top diplomat, Volodymyr Shalkivskyi, warned in Canberra, as he reiterated his president's call for more aid. Shalkivskyi said Ukraine needs more aircraft, modern anti-aircraft systems and a no-fly zone over Ukraine to stave off the Russian advance as troops close in on the country's capital, Kyiv. "[Russia's] ally Belarus needs access to the Baltic Sea and [needs] to go through the EU and Nato members, so there is already clear evidence that in case Ukraine falls, then there will be next countries in line," he told the Seven Network. "Our president is calling for the active participation of the world community and helping Ukraine to protect our land." President Joe Biden announced the US would send an additional $US800m ($AUS1.1bn) in military aid, including anti-aircraft and anti-tank weapons, as well as drones, but Zelenskiy reiterated his calls for a Nato-imposed no-fly zone. His representative in Canberra, Shalkivskyi, said Ukraine needed defensive systems and lethal support "in order for us to effectively sustain that military pressure that's coming from Russia". "Russia has air superiority and the devastation that it caused on the ground in terms of civilian death and destruction of residential areas and civilian infrastructure is just striking," he said. Robert: What we're seeing is that New South Wales has come out of the Omicron wave. The economic growth there and the strength is being well seen. Right across the board, we are seeing a strong economy. We're seeing dividends of the Morrison government's $2bn investment in JobTrainer, $3.7bn in boosting the apprenticeship commencement. We're seeing record Australians now into jobs, which indicates the $13bn that was spent during the pandemic on skills. We are seeing a generation of skilled Australians, not a generation of scarred Australians because of the economic investment that we've been putting in place. These numbers are also cognisant of the fact that since 20 November, through to the beginning of March, 583,000 visa arrivals have occurred into Australia, including 122,000 students, 49,000 skilled visa arrivals, 47,000 temporary worker visas and 162,000 visitors. But the Morrison government is unashamedly focused on skilling and seeking opportunities for the employment of Australians. And these pleasing economic numbers today are occurring at the time the economy is opening up, that visa holders are returning to Australia and over 583,000 people have arrived into Australia. Robert says Australia is one of only "a few" nations that has more citizens employed now than before the pandemic. What is ***exceptionally*** pleasing is that there were 121,900 full-time jobs created and part-time jobs decreased by 44,000 to net out that 77,000 job total. Pleasingly, employment increased across every single state and territory, but the stand-out was New South Wales. Unemployment in NSW now has dropped to the lowest level since 1978 at 3.7%, at the same time as their participation rate increased to 65.4%. NSW saw a net increase of 57,000 jobs. Whilst jobs increased across every single state and territory over the period, something like 80% of those jobs increased in NSW and full credit to treasurer Kean for the work he's been doing and his economic stewardship of the state of NSW. Stuart Robert: Unemployment today at 4 % is the equal lowest since 1978 - extraordinary. The participants rate at 66.4% is a record for our country. Again, an extraordinary result for a strong and growing economy. We're seeing female unemployment at 3.8%, the lowest since May 1974 and the participation rate at an historic high. An extraordinary set of economic number that is show the strength and the resilience of the Australian economy and shows that the Morrison Government's economic settings are, indeed, correct. 77,400 new jobs were added in terms of the jobs market, win brings to a total of 13.372m total jobs. Hundreds of thousands more than when we went into the pandemic. The minister for employment, Stuart Robert, is speaking in Canberra now about the jobs figures. Morrison: I can tell you who my defence minister is going to be. It's Peter Dutton. I can tell you who my home affairs minister is going to be - it's Karen Andrews. These are the most important national security portfolios there are. And it's bad enough that the Australian people are not being told who the leader of the Opposition is, but to not even know who their defence minister and their home affairs minister is going to be - well, that's cause for pause. A reporter asks if he will be making major announcements with Annastacia Palaszczuk or Daniel Andrews ahead of the election? We're doing a lot, as Paul knows in particular, we'll be quite busy between now and certainly the election. We have the budget coming up in just under a fortnight. We've spent a lot of time together, the premiers, the chief ministers and I, and we've got to know each other extremely well. And the overwhelming experience of that has been one on trying to focus on the challenges in the national interest. Morrison says that they all work on a lot of issues together - again saying how much he works with Mcgowan - this is the third day he has used his presser to stress how well they work together. I want to thank the premier for his partnership. It's been a good partnership. It's been an honest partnership. It's been a candid partnership. Haven't agreed on everything, but we've always been prepared to listen to each other and we're... I think I've had to change my view based on the premier's representations. I certainly have and we share one thing above all and that is our commitment to Australia and our commitment to the people of WA. The prime minister has been asked about the WA economy - he says it will bounce back after the Omicron wave: In terms of the economy, we saw in other states and territories when they went through their waves, that that would have a short-term impact on the economy. We saw it in the other states. And so, that doesn't surprise me that that would have occurred in the short-term here in. And I have no doubt that that will actually rebound quite likely here in WA. And why is that? Because we've continued to invest together in the very fabric of the Western Australian state economy. And it is very resilient. Morrison has been asked about reports there are some oligarchs linked to a Queensland oil refinery and if sanctions will be imposed on them. We add further names to the list every single day of with whom we're applying sanctions to and there's a proper ***process*** for doing that. And Australia, which is a long way away from the Ukraine, but I can tell you that our support and our action has been on the leading edge of the world when it comes to standing up for Ukraine. Applying those heavily. Remember, the autonomous sanctions act, that was something that we put in a position to respond so quickly. And we will continue to take action on all of those to whom sanctions should apply. With that, I'll hand you over to the amazing Cait Kelly to take you through the rest of this press conference. Reporter: And what about with Anthony Albanese in 2019. The premier did not meet with Albanese when he was in Perth. Morrison: What I'm telling you is that as a prime minister and a premier, we work together and we do things. We do these things and we do lots of things together and we have done lots of things together. And that's been to the great benefit of the people of WA. But one thing that I have to particularly thank Mark for, and Mark has always been a keen supporter of the national cabinet, and I remember Mark, I think one of the first premiers to say - we should get rid of this thing and just make it permanent. And we did. Because it is a far more effective way I think, for premiers, chief ministers and the prime minister to work together. The old system was bureaucrats and agendas being driven up from the bottom and seriously, if you wanted something, some policy issue to just fade away, send it to COAG. It was certainly never going to come out of there. But with the national cabinet, whether it's deregulation initiatives. Whether it's additional investment into skills and training. Whether it's the major changes we've made during Covid. Sometimes in a matter of days - the reason that's worked is because the premiers, the chief ministers and I, have just set the leaders' level decisions down into our government. And they've got the message and gone on with it. That doesn't mean that you agree with everything. Of course, that's never going to happen. The prime minister is trying to draw a clear distinction between state and federal Labor given what a powerhouse McGowan has proven to be. One thing that I know is that after the next election, whoever you vote for, premier McGowan is still going to be the premier. So this is about who's going to lead the country. And it's about federal Labor. It's not about state Labor. And there's quite a bit in common I found working with the WA state government when it comes to how we manage the economy, particularly on issues like deregulation and support for the resources industry and major projects which we worked well together on. And I think we've demonstrated, despite being from different political parties, that as professional leaders of governments, we get stuff done together for WA. Reporter: Prime minister, WA has actually gone up 4.1% today. So are you doing enough for jobs in WA? And what do you take from it? The premier has done a public event today. He didn't do a public event with Anthony Albanese when he was in town. Does he think that you're going to win the election rather than Anthony Albanese? Morrison: I don't draw any of those conclusions whatsoever. What I draw from us being here today is on the many occasions we have been. We're meeting later today as we often do when I'm in town to work through the usual issues as part of our partnership. I think that you can simply say that we work together cooperatively, in the public interest, in the national interest and in the interest of Western Australians. We are both leaders of governments that have much to do and for a long time now, worked out that the best way to do that is to do that together. In WA, I think that we have a lot of commonality on the importance of having a strong economy, which supports everything else. Just this week, $4.3bn for the Henderson dry dock. That's a massive important commitment for the future of the WA economy. More than $400m coming directly into WA in relation to the development of the critical minerals sector. And on top of that, probably the biggest partnership was working together to ensure that WA got their fair share of the GST. Ummm, so Scott Morrison seems to be claiming that he has always been supportive of WA's Covid ***measures***. Which is... a bold statement. As the premier knows, I have been very supportive of the ***measures*** taken in Western Australia to go down that path, and I think that has been wise and I think the results speak for themselves. But nationally, we have saved 40,000 lives right across the country, and those lives were saved here in WA as well. And now, as WA is going through its peak of the Omicron variant, the challenge has been the same. Minimise the impact on your hospital system, that's been achieved. Minimise these severe health impacts of Covid, that is being achieved. This presser seems to be going well. The reason for the joint McGowan/Morrison press conference has been revealed. It's to announce a multibillion-dollar "Perth city deal" which will see a new city campus for Edith Cowan University built, along with a new Swan River bridge. Here is what the joint press release has to say: Both governments have announced an additional $49m for the ECU campus while ECU has also provided a $60m boost, taking the value of the landmark project to $853m - with the Australian government investing a total of $294m, the Western Australian government $199m, and ECU $360m. The major construction contract for the new ECU campus has also been awarded to WA builders Multiplex, while a consortium made up of companies Civmec Construction and Engineering Pty Ltd, Seymour Whyte Constructions Pty Ltd and WSP Australia Pty Ltd, will construct the bridge. The Swan River bridge is being jointly funded by Morrison and McGowan governments on a 50:50 basis, with each providing an additional $25m to the project, bringing the total to $100m. Today's funding announcements take the total value of the city deal to $1.69bn. Here are the latest coronavirus numbers from around Australia today, as the country records at least 26 deaths from Covid-19: ACT Deaths: 0 Cases: 1,311 In hospital: 39 (with three people in ICU) NSW Deaths: 5 Cases: 20,087 In hospital: 1,036 (with 34 people in ICU) Queensland Deaths: 10 Cases: 7,190 In hospital: 263 (with 19 people in ICU) South Australia Deaths: 3 Cases: 4,474 In hospital: 132 (with eight people in ICU) Tasmania Deaths: 0 Cases: 1,859 In hospital: 25 (with three people in ICU) Victoria Deaths: 7 Cases: 9,752 In hospital: 197 (with 23 people in ICU) Western Australia Deaths: 1 Cases: 7,151 In hospital: 140 (with 4 people in ICU) The shadow minister for climate change, Chris Bowen, has written to the emergency management minister, Bridget Mckenzie, urging her to speed up disaster payment distribution for the Cumberland council area in New South Wales. We will be hearing from the Western Australia premier and the prime minister at a press conference soon. How very bi-partisan of them! Australia's labour figures for February have just landed, courtesy of the Australian Bureau of Statistics. Last month, the unemployment rates came in at a seasonally adjusted 4.0%, compared with 4.2% in January. That's the lowest rate since August 2008. The economy added 77,400 jobs, and the participation rate edged up to 66.4%. Notably, full-time jobs jumped 121,900 to 9.2m, while those in part-time employment fell 44,500 to 4.1m. Hours worked also rose by 149m. On the face of it, it's a good time to be looking for work and perhaps to be seeking a pay rise. More to come. The Bureau of Meteorology has indicated that the La Niña pattern in the Pacific might be with us a bit longer than predicted. As we enter autumn, forecasting gets a bit more difficult, but what the bureau told us yesterday is we should expect the La Niña to last longer. Potentially into early winter, in fact. "Persistent easterly wind anomalies in the western Pacific over recent weeks have delayed the anticipated decay of the La Niña," the BoM said. The thresholds are a bit arbitrary of course, and so long as conditions remain "La Niña-like", they will tend to make for above-average rain over eastern Australia and potentially a longer tropical cyclone season. (Given the strained emergency services and of the ADF, a big cyclone hitting a populated region just now is not what we want.) Australia, as an island continent, has weather influences from all corners of the compass. The Indian Ocean is one of those, and while the models are not so useful at this time of year, the predictions they are making aren't so great either. We've still got a long way to go, but a "negative" phase of the Indian Ocean dipole (where the eastern part of the ocean is relatively warm versus the basin's west) typically means above-average rainfall in the winter and spring. Seems like flood watches aren't going to go away for a while. One in three jobs will be slashed at the Australian Human Rights Commission as a record number of complaints and low base funding take their toll. The human rights agency has issued a blunt warning that its funding "does not provide us with the resources required to perform our statutory functions". The commission handles complaints under federal discrimination and human rights law, providing a check on government over issues including offshore detention and Covid-19 border restrictions. You can read the full report below: The AFLW finals series has been thrown into chaos, with a Covid-19 cluster at Collingwood causing the Magpies' qualifying final to be postponed, Oliver Caffrey reports. Collingwood were due to take on the Brisbane Lions at the Gabba on Saturday night, but the AFL has decided that it won't go ahead as planned. The AFL is yet to confirm a new date for the sudden-death final. The other qualifying final between North Melbourne and Fremantle at Arden Street on Saturday will go ahead as scheduled. AFL competition management boss Laura Kane said the league had received a request from Collingwood to postpone the match. AFLW Covid-19 guideline states a team is required to have a minimum 16 primary-listed players and five train-on players available to play. Kane said: The health and safety of all members of the Collingwood AFLW program remains the priority and we will continue to work closely with both clubs. Working alongside the club, it has been determined Collingwood would not be able to participate in a match this weekend. While the ongoing pandemic continues to impact and challenge our competition and our wider community, we remain committed to progressing the finals series as safely as possible. The Magpies have also lost men's player Will Hoskin-Elliott and two assistant coaches to coronavirus protocols before Friday night's AFL clash with St Kilda. Magpies men's assistants Brendon Bolton and Josh Fraser are also isolating at home due to Covid guidelines. Australia's unemployment rate could have a "3" in front of it as soon as this morning, when the ABS releases labour figures for February. Back in February 2008, the rate reportedly reached 3.98%, technically the last time it was sub 4%. January's "print" came in at 4.2%, the lowest in 13 years, and the ANZ bank is among those predicting the jobless rate will drop to 3.9% when today's figures land. A key statistic will be how many people started to look for work, as a big increase may nullify the effect on the jobless rate. On the other hand, if the participation rate stayed flat, the 4.2% unemployment could drop a lot. In any case, hours worked will probably show a job as the economic effects of the Omicron Covid outbreaks, with the resulting staff shortages started to ease. ANZ said in a briefing note this morning: We've already seen a surge in Australian job ads in the wake of the disruption caused by the Omicron outbreak - and it's looking like the labour market should be able to shake off its impacts pretty quickly. Westpac, meanwhile, expects the jobless rate to drop too, but only to 4.1%, because of a higher participation rate. Treasurer Josh Frydenberg will be out talking up the figures but he faces a hard sell. True, jobs look a lot more secure than they did during the pandemic but wage rises aren't keeping up with price increases - and there are a lot more of those coming. Perhaps the jobless rate will come in as "the lowest since the 1970s" - but will that give consumers (and voters) much consolation? Tasmania reports 1,859 new Covid cases overnight. There are now 25 Covid-positive people in hospital, including three in ICU. This is evergreen. The federal government is signalling that the sanctions targeting Russian oligarchs could be expanded, potentially as soon as today. A spokesperson for the foreign affairs minister, Marise Payne, issued the following brief statement today: Minister Payne is waiting on advice on further sanctions ***measures*** from her department and will consider that advice as soon as possible, once it is received. We are consulting and cooperating closely with partners on sanctions, and would note that the UK only sanctioned Viktor Vekselberg yesterday and Oleg Deripaska in recent days. For more on this issue, see this morning's story: Threatened duck species were among those killed on the first day of Victoria's hunting season - the longest in four years - reigniting calls from animal advocates for an end to the practice. Wildlife Victoria's lead veterinarian, Natasha Bassett, who joined rescue teams at Lake Connewarre near Geelong on Wednesday, said the first duck she treated was a female blue-winged shoveler. Hunters are prohibited from shooting both the blue-winged shoveler and hardhead ducks in Victoria this season, given both have been listed as threatened due to declining populations. You can read the full report below: NSW deserves a thorough investigation of what happened in the northern rivers flood disaster to ensure a similar catastrophe is never repeated, Labor says, according to Phoebe Loomes from AAP. Opposition Leader Chris Minns is calling for an upper house parliamentary inquiry to "make sure... it doesn't happen again". During the height of the Covid pandemic, the chief health officer had a central role in leading the response, as did the commissioner of the rural fire service in the bushfires. Minns said: My concern about the flood response over the last two weeks is that's not the case in NSW. The worst thing that could happen, worse than even the floods... is if we don't learn from the mistakes that were made. We want to find out what has gone poorly and make sure mistakes are corrected. In the 24 hours after flooding began in Lismore on 28 February, the area's communication system failed, Minns said, stopping SES communications. SES infrastructure needed to be in place in local communities, and the government needed to ensure the emergency response teams were properly resourced, he said. A political fight has broken out between NSW and the commonwealth over the allocation of disaster funding by the federal government in flood-affected areas. Liberal upper house member Catherine Cusack, from the northern rivers, said she was quitting the party over a decision to allocate commonwealth disaster payments on partisan lines. Funding has been given to Nationals-held council areas Lismore, the Clarence Valley and Richmond Valley while not being made available to Byron, Ballina and the Tweed shires, which are Labor seats. Cusack: The idea that being a flood victim in a National party-held seat makes you more worthy than a flood victim who is in the Richmond electorate... is probably the most unethical approach I have ever seen. She has informed premier Dominic Perrottet and the Liberal party of her intention to quit: The whole northern rivers should have been given funding according to their need, not according to their LGA. It's ***unprecedented***. The NSW government has been working on an additional flood response package valued at up to $1bn, to be jointly funded by the state and federal governments, according to multiple reports. The funding will look to help people whose homes were damaged in the floods after assessors found some 95,000 homes in northern NSW were damaged or destroyed. Karen Thorne's rental home heats up as soon as the morning sun hits her east-facing bedroom in the Sydney suburb of Rosemeadow: I could wake up at 8am to 28-degree heat in there. The heat is what actually wakes me up. Thorne's bedroom is at the front of the home, but it's the back bedrooms, which receive the full glare of the afternoon sun, that get the hottest. Thorne's 19-year-old son, Connor, took to sleeping on the kitchen tiles over summer because the heat in his room was unbearable. She says: I've recorded on my own thermometer before - it actually reached up to 38 degrees in there one day, and it didn't cool down until 2am in the morning. That's why Connor likes to perch on the floor in the lounge room, or in the kitchen. I am just grateful I have an en suite so I don't trip over him in the night. You can read the full report below: New South Wales treasurer Matt Kean has not spoken to north coast-based Liberal upper house MP Catherine Cusack who announced she will leave parliament over what she called "unethical" flood relief decisions for different local government areas. Speaking on RN Breakfast, he said: She's been an outspoken and passionate advocate for her community in northern New South Wales. She'll be a great loss to the Liberal party room. Kean said the criteria for flood relief grants "certainly does" need to change to take into account more extreme weather: The existing framework in place has helped us deal with fires, floods and previous major storms but this is unique. We need to make sure that our policies and guidelines that are in place and tailored to help those who need it most. We're working through that ***process*** at the moment. He said he'd be "really angry" if he was in one of those areas like Ballina or Byron that missed out, despite being flooded. Kean also dismissed claims the announcement of flood grants was being delayed until Scott Morrison returns from Western Australia: We're working through a ***process*** with the prime minister's office and the federal government. We're working through some additional support packages for those who need it most, so it's not an unusual ***process***. He would not be drawn on the details of the $10,000 family assistance grant but said they would be announced soon. Another large day of Covid cases in NSW, with 20,087 infections recorded and five lives lost. I cannot express to you how irrationally sad this actually makes me. New Zealand's "world largest potato" isn't in fact the world's largest potato... or a potato at all. From senior economics reporter Ben Butler and foreign affairs and defence correspondent Daniel Hurst: Ukraine's embassy in Canberra has joined calls for the Australian government to sanction two Russian oligarchs who have assets here, Oleg Deripaska and Viktor Vekselberg. As we reported this morning, activist groups have questioned why the pair were left off a list of 31 oligarchs Australia has sanctioned over Russia's ***invasion*** of Ukraine. The head of Ukraine's embassy in Canberra, Volodymyr Shalkivskiy, told Guardian Australia he hoped the sanctions were extended to include Deripaska and Vekselberg, although he stopped short of criticising the Australian government for the omission: The government of Ukraine is grateful to the government of Australia for its proactive and extensive sanctions policy against Russia, which is the biggest among the Indo-Pacific countries... We hope that those Russian oligarchs will be included in the next round of sanctions. Meanwhile, the Australasian Centre for Corporate Responsibility said Origin Energy shouldn't wait for sanctions before suspending its venture with Vekselberg, a gas exploration project in the Beetaloo Basin. The ACCR's Dan Gocher said: Vekselberg has already been sanctioned by the British and US governments. It's curious that the Australian government has not yet followed suit given its claims of being in lockstep with the US and UK. Vekselberg's interest in Falcon pre-dates Origin's farm-in agreement agreed in 2015, so Origin was entered into the joint venture with eyes wide open. If Origin's exploration in the Beetaloo Basin is successful, it would be to the benefit of Vekselberg - a situation which must be avoided." A new bushfire lab in Canberra will help firefighters deal with Australia's escalating bushfire threat. The CSIRO lab unveiled this week is home to a 29-metre long pyrotron - an artificial tunnel-like environment in which to light fires to better understand how they behave under different conditions, AAP reports. The data will then be used to refine predictive models authorities use during events like the devastating black summer blazes of 2019 and 2020. The $2.1m facility also boasts a vertical wind tunnel to study the physics of spot fires, which are responsible for the loss of most homes in Australia. The lab will build on about 70 years of CSIRO bushfire research that has historically relied on experimental fires lit in natural bush settings. Such field experiments are not without risk, and are impossible when fire conditions are at their most dangerous. The pyrotron provides a safe solution to test any combination of variables including wind speed, fuel type and load, and moisture content to determine what fires will do. Bushfire behaviour expert Andrew Sullivan: We certainly have had very limited capability to conduct experimental fires under extreme conditions. Nobody in their right mind is going to give us the go ahead to light a fire on a Black Saturday-type day... This lab means we'll be able to study particular aspects of fire behaviour under the extreme conditions that are more likely to occur under climate change. ACT Rural Fire Service chief Rohan Scott says the lab is a bit like having a crystal ball: By using the data collected by the pyrotron, our prediction tools become more accurate. And that means better decision making about where firefighters can safely go, what firefighting strategies to use, and also improved emergency warnings for communities. The lab is located at CSIRO's Black Mountain campus in Canberra. Australian academic Kylie Moore-Gilbert, who was jailed in Iran for two years before being released in November 2020, has welcomed the release of British-Iranian prisoners Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe and Anoosheh Ashoori, who were released last night after being held for six years. Both were held in the notorious Evin prison in Tehran. Aged care workers are struggling to obtain the government's promised $800 bonus which the cash-strapped sector is being asked to pay to staff before their funding applications are approved by government. In January the government announced it would give 265,000 aged care staff a maximum of $800 in two instalments before the election, responding to pressure over its handling of the pandemic and the underpayment of the sector's workforce. Employers were told to make applications for the payment from 1 March for eligible workers who were active in the industry on 28 February. You can read the full report below: ABC Radio host Patricia Karvelas: OK. Minister, on the court ruling that you don't have a legal duty of care to young people to consider climate change when approving projects. What about a moral duty of care? Wouldn't people expect no less from the environment minister? Sussan Ley: So I understand that there's been an emotional response to the duty of care question in this particular case. I do care about the climate. I do care about the children. I do respect their advocacy, but what that duty of care was what was being considered by the court was whether I had obligations over and above the law. And the point is that I implement national environmental law under the EPBC Act. I'm very conscious of my statutory responsibilities, and I make decisions in the interests of Australians. Every single day now, the three judges agreed that the duty of care was incoherent and inconsistent with my statutory obligations. And that was what this court case was about. But I know that people interpret it as a sort of broader duty of care, but I want to separate that emotional response from the legal question before the court. Karvelas: Minister, you call it an emotional response. I mean, there is catastrophic climate change. On the horizon, young people are concerned because the future is at risk. It's not really emotional, it's based on science and people having a response based on what they've been told by the experts. Ley: When you just ask me about a moral duty of care, which is not the legal question before the court. I mean, I just want to make that point. And but I understand the emotion in the responses that have come to me and in the responses of those who took the case to the court, but I do want to separate what my obligations are under Australian law, and a court case that was effectively asking me to go further beyond what my statutory obligations are, and clearly the three judges of the fourth federal court agreed with the case that the government impose terms of the inconsistency of what was being asked for under the duty of care with my statutory obligations are. The federal government announced this morning that it will provide $483m for the 970 gigalitre Urannah Dam project in Queensland. It comes as a new survey revealed nearly three-quarters of respondents want the budget to focus on services and recovery efforts from the Queensland and NSW floods as well as the Covid-19 pandemic. It's estimated the dam will unlock 103 gigalitres of water and help nearby producers develop 20,000 hectares of irrigated land. But there are also fears that this development would result in lower water flow into the nearby rivers, destroying acres of wetlands which include the habitat of a turtle species discovered by Steve Irwin. Federal environment minister Sussan Ley has just been asked if she supports the dam being built while speaking to ABC radio: Well, I'm not going to jump into the impact on one matter of national environmental significance or one threatened species, but the assessment ***process*** will absolutely pick up on that and every other impact on every other species and indeed the world heritage places that are close to the dam. Host Patricia Karvelas: So if that determines that there is too big a risk in the environment, will you abandon the plant would you push to abandon the plan? Ley: Well, we will take it one step at a time. So what you've asked me is you've jumped forward, you've made a supposition about an impact and its effect and the way that, in terms of this terminology, the controlled actually is carried out. And you suggested but I foreshadow that, well, I'm not going to do that. But what I am going to say is that we'll go through those steps and we'll do it properly. NSW premier Dominic Perrottet and his wife Helen have announced the birth of their seventh child - a girl named Celeste Grace. The new arrival is the couple's sixth daughter - they also have a son - and was born on Wednesday night, AAP reports. The premier posted news of the birth on his Instagram page, saying mother and baby were doing well: She's looking forward to being kissed and cuddled, fought over and cherished by her big brother and sisters. Special thanks to the incredible midwives who were with us every step of the way. Good morning everyone, Matilda Boseley here to take you through this glorious Thursday's worth of news. The NSW health minister is urging the more than 330,000 residents aged over 60 who have not received a booster vaccine to get that done Asap, with daily cases expected to keep rising. Brad Hazzard told the Sydney Morning Herald that the case number increase is being driven by the Omicron BA.2 strain of the virus and is expected to accelerate as the country enters winter: What we've seen in the last few years is that as soon as positive cases start going up, people start getting vaccinated. It would make a lot more sense if they got [boosted] now, so they are less likely to catch the virus and be part of those rising numbers... Boosters are our passage to safety and normal life - go and get it, don't muck around. There were 30,402 new infections were recorded in the state yesterday, but NSW Health says this dramatic jump was due to a data glitch, with about 10,000 positive rapid antigen tests registered between Sunday and Monday missed due to a data ***processing*** problem, so they were included in figures on Wednesday. It comes a day after NSW reported 10,689 cases, up by more than 1,700 from the previous day. With that why don't we jump right into the day! 57217 false false Cait Kelly (now) and Matilda Boseley (earlier Labor leader Anthony Albanese in the Brisbane suburb of Mitchelton on Wednesday. The party's first federal election ad promises a suite of policies to tackle cost of living concerns. Daniel Andrews speaks to the media during a press conference in Melbourne today.

**Load-Date:** March 17, 2022

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[***Learning to live with climate change: lessons from Los Angeles***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:63C8-CXR1-F039-6237-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Length:** 1690 words

**Byline:** Christopher Grimes in Los Angeles and Camilla Hodgson in London

**Body**

As the population of  [*Los Angeles*](https://www.ft.com/topics/places/Los_Angeles) boomed in the early 20th century, William Mulholland had a realisation: the city’s climate was far too dry to provide enough water to support the grand metropolis he envisioned. So Mulholland, an Irish-born, self-taught engineer who ran Los Angeles’ water department, worked out a scheme with the city’s mayor to snatch the water rights away from rural Owens Valley, roughly 200 miles away. Water from Owens still flows into LA today.

Mulholland’s underhanded manoeuvring primed his adopted city for a century of growth, launched years of water wars and inspired the classic 1974 film *Chinatown*, but it did not solve Los Angeles’ fundamental  [*water problem*](https://www.ft.com/content/1b055c14-d46e-11e4-9bfe-00144feab7de).

Today, with California suffering through another biblical summer of  [*drought, rampaging fires and record-breaking heat*](https://www.ft.com/content/0243006e-ad78-4f55-a260-33e4b79540c2), LA and the rest of the state is facing an acute water crisis. A host of emergency ***measures*** have come into force in recent weeks across California, with officials imposing restrictions on ***agricultural*** and residential water use.

But  [*Eric Garcetti, LA’s*](https://www.ft.com/stream/1b89cf39-4df4-470c-8a41-f6f52b9b4f35) mayor, has some big ideas about the city’s future water supply that Mulholland might admire for their ambition. LA still imports most of its water from places like Owens, but Garcetti hopes that the arid city will finally be able to source its own water — including as much as 70 per cent of its drinking water by 2035.

To do this, his administration plans to recycle all of its wastewater — water that is flushed down a toilet or sloshes down a drain — and capture stormwater. The city also hopes that a clean-up of groundwater basins in the San Fernando Valley that were polluted by Lockheed Martin and other manufacturers will produce 1.5bn gallons a year of clean drinking water. In all, developing the technology to recycle the city’s wastewater is expected to cost about $8bn.

The water plans are just one part of LA’s Green New Deal, a wide-ranging blueprint  [*championed by Garcetti in 2019*](https://plan.lamayor.org/targets/targets_plan.html) to combat climate change and achieve net zero carbon emissions in the city by 2035.

The urgent need for such planning was underscored by the sweeping report released on Monday by the UN’s Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, which laid bare the overwhelming likelihood of the  [*globe reaching 1.5C of warming within 20 years*](https://www.ft.com/content/9a11b08c-4fb3-49ec-8939-9d853745bfce). A temperature rise of that size from pre-industrial levels, the report said, would wreak havoc worldwide and trigger “***unprecedented***” extreme weather events.

With every fraction of warming, the IPCC made clear, weather extremes will become more frequent and intense: in a 1.5C world, for example, a heatwave that would have occurred only once in 50 years before human-induced warming would likely happen nine times over the same period.

“The idea that the problem is accelerating faster than we thought validates what we feel on the ground,” says Lauren Faber-O’Connor, the city’s chief sustainability officer. “In LA climate change impacts our everyday experience, through extreme heat and drought.”

The IPCC’s findings — which were accepted by 195 governments just months ahead of November’s COP26 climate summit — reaffirmed what climate scientists have been forecasting for years. The stark warning, delivered as  [*parts of Europe, China and Canada also battled to recover*](https://www.ft.com/content/fe4e658e-0473-4f98-b995-4606aefa90bc) from devastating floods and fires, has focused minds on a burning and existential question: how do we prepare for what is coming?

Given the pressing threats that it faces, LA is more advanced in its thinking than most places. But cities, states and national governments around the world will need to develop their own detailed plans for how they can cope in a 1.5C world. And in some cases, they will be very expensive and require dramatic changes in the way they operate.

“The timeline is short and the response must be immediate,” says Tina Stege, climate envoy for the low lying Marshall Islands, which are highly vulnerable to rising sea levels. “Climate change is going to impact every region in the world. Adaptation planning needs to be at the forefront of what we’re all doing collectively.”

From villain to model

With its endless traffic jams and low-density, air-conditioned lifestyle, the Los Angeles model is in some ways a significant cause of the problem. But California also has a long history of groundbreaking environmental policy.

In the mid-1960s, the Golden State began regulating vehicle exhaust fumes and established the first air quality standards. More recently, it passed the California Global Warming Solutions Act of 2006, which set rules aimed at dramatically cutting greenhouse gas emissions.

Garcetti, who also chairs the C40 Cities climate action network (and has been nominated to be President Joe Biden’s ambassador to India), has sought to extend California’s role as a policy laboratory.

The city’s Green Deal is already pumping nearly $1bn into Los Angeles’ woeful public transportation network every year, thanks to a 2016 ballot ***measure*** that increased sales tax to raise money for rail and other projects. It says it is expanding or creating 15 new public rail lines and spending more on mass transit than any other metropolitan area in the US. Its fleet of city buses is scheduled to go all-electric by 2030.

And Garcetti’s administration recently brought forward its zero-carbon emissions target for its electrical grid to 2035 from 2050, with planners projecting that it will operate with no coal power by 2025 thanks to success with its solar and wind power generation. It is also exploring “green” hydrogen storage in Utah, though the technology is unproven.

Besides these big-ticket projects, LA has rolled out small incentives to help change Angelinos’ behaviour. Rebates and incentives have helped spur the installation of rooftop solar panels, helping LA to capture the most sun power  [*of any US city*](https://frontiergroup.org/reports/fg/shining-cities-2019). The city also has the most electric vehicle charging stations in the country.

Civic nudging has led residents to pull up their grass lawns and replace them with more drought-friendly landscaping, purchase high-efficiency washing machines and install environment-friendly shower heads, which the city offers for free.

If it seems extreme to replace the grassy lawn with a garden of stones and drought-tolerant plants — or even artificial grass, as some Angelenos have — it is worth a look at the data. Since 2000, at least one part of California has experienced “***exceptional***” drought conditions, the most severe level, in 190 out of a total of 1,127 weeks — or 17 per cent of the time — according to US Drought Monitor. In only 22 weeks, all in the year 2000, has the state been entirely drought-free.

Defining when a drought begins and ends is tricky. But California is now around 15 years into this one, which the occasional wet year — most recently in 2017 — has not broken, says Daniel Griffin, an assistant professor of Geography at the University of Minnesota.

“The intensity of this drought in individual years is rivalling anything that we’ve seen for the past 1,200 years,” says Griffin, adding that the drought’s duration is also coming close to breaking records.

As the effects of climate change intensify, both wet and dry extremes in the state are expected to become worse and more frequent. Heavy rain delivered in short bursts can be harder to capture for storage and cause erosion and landslides, while not necessarily ending a drought.

“This is the reality of climate change,” says Heidi Roop, a climate scientist at the University of Minnesota. “How do we plan for living at both ends of these extremes sometimes in the same place in the same season?”

Solutions are likely to be both technical and behavioural: learning to use water more efficiently and waste less, while investing in new tools such as desalination, an energy intensive ***process*** that removes salt from water.

A key question is “how to do more with less?” says Griffin. As dry spells get longer and more intense, and California’s population gets bigger, “I don’t think we can just engineer our way out of this problem.”

A major barrier to preparing for extremes is a lack of money and resources — a challenge that is set to feature prominently at COP26.

The UN Environment Programme has estimated that the annual cost of adaptation in developing countries could reach $300bn by 2030 and $500bn by 2050. So far, the world’s wealthiest nations have failed to deliver the $100bn a year they promised to developing nations in support for climate adaptation and mitigation.

The $100bn is “sort of the litmus test on whether we are moving forward or not, and at the moment we’re not”, says Patrick Verkooijen, chief executive of the Global Center on Adaptation, adding that climate finance should be split evenly between funding adaptation and mitigation. “There is no way forward for a successful Glasgow [COP26] outcome if that’s not solved.”

Building resilience

Fires and drought are not the only threats facing Los Angeles. Another looming problem that Garcetti’s Green New Deal doesn’t address directly is  [*coastal erosion*](https://www.ft.com/content/44c2d2ee-422c-11ea-bdb5-169ba7be433d). The prospect of rising sea levels — which one projection says could add 9 feet of water along the California coast by the end of the century — could spell disaster for Malibu, Venice and the iconic Pacific Coast Highway.

Mid-century projections suggest 17,000 residents and $7bn in property along the California coast are at risk of coastal flooding due to rising sea levels and intensifying storms. Half of the beaches could be lost by 2100.

The city is looking for ways to protect people and infrastructure from storm surges. But planners say there is no choice but to establish priorities. In the immediate future, that means making sure the city has reliable supplies of drinking water and is cool enough to live in.

“Yes, the city is a coastal city, and our analysis shows that sea level rise is an issue,” says Faber-O’Connor. “But it is not necessarily one of the nearest-term problems we face. What we’re most heavily invested in [over] the near term is really around urban cooling and water resilience.”

**Letter in response to this article:**

[*Britain’s salad washing plant days are still to come*](https://www.ft.com/content/03b6942a-0051-47e3-8d57-a5aec1c9b360) */*  [*From Robert Field and others*](https://www.ft.com/content/03b6942a-0051-47e3-8d57-a5aec1c9b360)

**Load-Date:** August 20, 2021

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[***AMERICA CREATING OPPORTUNITIES FOR MANUFACTURING, PRE-EMINENCE IN TECHNOLOGY, AND ECONOMIC STRENGTH ACT OF 2022; Congressional Record Vol. 168, No. 52 (Senate - March 23, 2022)***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6544-FN71-JDG9-Y07C-00000-00&context=1516831)

Impact News Service

March 24, 2022 Thursday

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**Length:** 16169 words

**Body**

Washington: The Library of Congress, The Government of USA has issued the following house proceeding:

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the bill by title. The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows: A bill (H.R 4521) to provide for a coordinated Federal research initiative to ensure continued United States leadership in engineering biology. The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader. Amendment No. 5002 (Purpose: In the nature of a substitute) Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, I call up amendment No. 5002. The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report. The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows: The Senator from New York [Mr. Schumer] proposes an amendment numbered 5002. Mr. SCHUMER. I ask to dispense with further reading of the amendment. The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered. (The amendment is printed in the Record of March 22, 2022, under ``Text of Amendments.'') Mr. SCHUMER. I ask for the yeas and nays. The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second? There appears to be a sufficient second. The yeas and nays are ordered. Amendment No. 5003 to Amendment No. 5002 Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, I have an amendment at the desk. The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report. The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows: The Senator from New York [Mr. Schumer] proposes an amendment numbered 5003 to amendment No. 5002. Mr. SCHUMER. I ask to dispense with further reading of the amendment. The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered. The amendment is as follows: (Purpose: To modify the effective date) At the end, add the following: ``This Act shall take effect on the date that is 1 day after the date of the enactment of this Act.''. Mr. SCHUMER. I ask for the yeas and nays. The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second? There appears to be a sufficient second. The yeas and nays are ordered. Amendment No. 5004 to Amendment 5003 Mr. SCHUMER. I have a second-degree amendment at the desk. The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report. The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows: The Senator from New York [Mr. Schumer] proposes an amendment numbered 5004 to amendment No. 5003. Mr. SCHUMER. I ask to dispense with further reading of the amendment. The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered. The amendment is as follows: (Purpose: To modify the effective date) On page 1, line 2, strike ``1 day'' and insert ``2 days''. Amendment No. 5005 Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, I have an amendment to the underlying bill at the desk. The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report. The senior legislative clerk read as follows: The Senator from New York [Mr. Schumer] proposes an amendment numbered 5005 to the language proposed to be stricken by amendment No. 5002. Mr. SCHUMER. I ask to dispense with further reading of the amendment. The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered. The amendment is as follows: (Purpose: To modify the effective date) At the end, add the following: ``This Act shall take effect on the date that is 3 days after the date of the enactment of this Act.''. Mr. SCHUMER. I ask for the yeas and nays. The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second? There appears to be a sufficient second. The yeas and nays are ordered. Amendment No. 5006 to Amendment No. 5005 Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, I have a second-degree amendment at the desk. The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report. The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows: The Senator from New York [Mr. Schumer] proposes an amendment numbered 5006 to amendment No. 5005. Mr. SCHUMER. I ask to dispense with further reading of the amendment. The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered. The amendment is as follows: (Purpose: To modify the effective date) On page 1, line 2, strike ``3 days'' and insert ``4 days''. Motion to Commit with Amendment No. 5007 Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, I move to commit H.R 4521 to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation with instructions to report back forthwith with an amendment. Mr. SCHUMER. The clerk will report. The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows: The Senator from New York [Mr. Schumer] moves to commit H.R 4521 to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation with instructions to report back forthwith with an amendment numbered 5007. Mr. SCHUMER. I ask to dispense with further reading. The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered. The amendment is as follows: (Purpose: To modify the effective date) At the end, add the following: ``This Act shall take effect on the date that is 5 days after the date of the enactment of this Act.''. Mr. SCHUMER. I ask for the yeas and nays. The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second? There appears to be a sufficient second. The yeas and nays are ordered. Amendment No. 5008 Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, I have an amendment to the instructions at the desk. The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report. The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows: The Senator from New York [Mr. Schumer] proposes an amendment numbered 5008 to the instructions of the motion to commit. Mr. SCHUMER. I ask to dispense with further reading of the amendment. The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered. The amendment is as follows: (Purpose: To modify the effective date) On page 1, line 2, strike ``5 days'' and insert ``6 days''. Mr. SCHUMER. I ask for the yeas and nays. The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second? There appears to be a sufficient second. The yeas and nays are ordered. Amendment No. 5009 to Amendment No. 5008 Mr. SCHUMER. I have a second-degree amendment at the desk. The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report. The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows: The Senator from New York [Mr. Schumer] proposes an amendment numbered 5009 to amendment No. 5008. Mr. SCHUMER. I ask to dispense with further reading of the amendment. The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered. The amendment is as follows: (Purpose: To modify the effective date) On page 1, line 1, strike ``6 days'' and insert ``7 days''. The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader. Mr. SCHUMER. Now, Madam President, as President Biden begins the most important foreign trip of his Presidency, the best thing the Senate can do this week is pass permanent normal trade relation legislation so we can land another devastating blow on Putin's economy. In a few moments, I will ask the Senate for consent to do just that. [[Page S1721]] Last week, the House passed legislation revoking Russia's normal trade relations with the United States by 424 to 8--424 to 8. The vast majority of House Republicans backed it, including Leader McCarthy and the Republican leadership. Here in the Senate, my friend, the senior Senator from Idaho, sincerely believes that we should amend the bill by including an oil ban. I don't believe we should do that. As I said earlier today, there are four reasons why we should move forward quickly on PNTR and then have a separate discussion on the oil ban. First, President Biden has already implemented a ban on Russian oil and gas, so passing something the President has already done is not even remotely as urgent as passing the PNTR first, especially because the President is leaving today and meeting with our European allies. What could be better than a united Senate putting further sanctions on Russia as the President meets with our European allies, where he has done a very good job of bringing them together? Second, there is still some disagreement, including with the administration, about how to best draft an oil ban proposal. There are some who worry that the proposal that my friend from Idaho is pushing would actually delay the ban on Russian oil compared to the President's proposal. This is a consequence no one wants. Third, it is so important we show unity right now as President Biden meets with our European allies. Swift Senate action, combining Democrats and Republicans with one voice supporting PNTR, would do just that. Finally, the House is not in session. Any changes we would make to the PNTR legislation by amendment delays enactment by at least a week. There is no reason--absolutely no reason--to change the PNTR legislation the House has already approved and delay action. Now, again I repeat: I am, Senator Wyden is, and all we Senate Democrats are willing to work with Senator Crapo on this issue, if he can agree to let the ***process*** move forward. So let me say again, PNTR has already been overwhelmingly passed by the House. It is a very important and logical step in the fight against Putin's barbaric war. We should move the House bill ASAP. Unanimous Consent Request--H.R 7108 So, Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that at a time to be determined by the majority leader, following consultation with the Republican leader, the Senate proceed to the consideration of H.R 7108, which is at the desk; that there be 4 hours of debate equally divided; and that no amendments be in order; that upon the use or yielding back of the time, the bill be considered read a third time and the Senate vote on passage of the bill; and that the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table without further intervening action or debate. The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there an objection? The Senator from Idaho. Mr. CRAPO. Madam President, reserving the right to object. I rise to address Ukraine's perilous situation. There is broad agreement in this Chamber and in the House of Representatives that America's response in all areas to Russia and Belarus's aggression against Ukraine must be comprehensive and strong. Leveraging the benefits of the U.S trade relationship with Russia is just such a response that will add to the pressures on Putin to rethink his actions in Ukraine and punish him for what he has already done. On March 8, the Democratic and Republican leadership in the Senate Finance Committee and the House Committee on Ways and Means reached an agreement on precisely that type of response. The bicameral, bipartisan agreement is called the Suspending Normal Trade Relations with Russia and Belarus Act, and its provisions include banning Russian energy imports, including various forms of petroleum, natural gas, and coal; moving Russia and Belarus to the same pariah trade status as North Korea and Cuba; providing the President additional authority to raise tariffs on Russia and Belarus even further; calling on WTO members to take similar actions to deprive Russia of its trade benefits; and sending a crystal-clear message to Russia's dictator, Vladimir Putin, that he will never see these trade benefits restored until he reverses his aggression, stops threatening our NATO allies, and recognizes the right of the Ukrainian people to live freely. None of this is controversial, and all of it is necessary. Yet only a day after the deal was made and with neither warning nor explanation, the House split the energy ban from the trade status provision and bifurcated the two ***measures*** further by imposing separate standards on Putin's actions in Ukraine before any President can think to restore these trade benefits to Russia without congressional approval. Each bill passed by over 400 votes, but the House decided to only transmit the bill on Russia's trade status, its permanent normal trade relations, or PNTR piece, even though it had passed more than a week after the energy ban. The important point is that our House colleagues on both sides of the aisle agree both restrictions need to happen. Some may wonder why the urgent need for the congressional energy import ban after President Biden provided one in his Executive order. Speaker Pelosi was asked just that question when she put the new House version of the import ban up for a vote, and she stated, correctly, to her House colleagues: ``You're here to legislate.'' Absolutely, that is why we are here. And our legislative response-- more especially its certification requirements--must deliver an unmistakable message to Putin: no relief until you stop your aggression and recognize Ukraine's inalienable right to live free and choose its leaders. The energy ban and its trade status revocation are complementary, and they must work together. While President Biden's Executive order to ban Russian oil was a positive step, the Senate and House need to impose tough conditions on Putin's treatment of Ukraine to be met before any President seeks an end to the energy import ban. These conditions are like those Congress had done in the bipartisan CAATSA legislation, which we negotiated when I was the Banking Committee chairman during the Trump administration. Enacting a Russian oil ban will demonstrate to the Ukrainian people and our NATO allies that Congress is committed to cutting off Russia's funding for its war effort. Many of our allies, including in Europe, are debating whether to adopt an energy ban against Russia. By the U.S Congress acting definitively and with certainty through our congressional action, our allies will all be more encouraged to take similar stands against Russian energy exports, which account for over a third of Russia's budget. I seek to continue our bipartisan tradition by introducing text that is as close to the original deal as possible, except in two respects, that respond to the points made by our majority leader--both made to facilitate our colleagues on the other side of the aisle. First, I am making a single technical correction, made at the request of Senators Manchin and Murkowski, to comport with the timeline of the President's Executive order regarding the oil ban so that no delay such as was mentioned as a possible problem will exist. This edit is necessary to avoid that delay, and it solves that problem. Second, I have revised the certification criteria that would allow the restoration of trade benefits to match exactly what the House passed. The original deal provided that benefits could not be restored until Russia withdrew its forces and stopped posing an immediate threat to NATO allies and partners. To secure bipartisan support, I yielded to what the House passed: that Russia need only reach an agreement with the President to withdraw its forces rather than have definitively withdrawn them and that Russia not pose a threat to NATO members as opposed to NATO members and their partners. Again, this is to match what the House has requested. Mind you, I have many colleagues on my side who would like to do many more things, and I agree with their requests. But on the trade front, I am willing to make these concessions to get this done. My view is that we should act quickly. I agree with the majority leader on [[Page S1722]] this. We must do it together, and we must do it today. There is no reason to wait for another revenue bill to come from the House before we act. So let us mark the bravery of the Ukrainian people by passing the strongest legislation we can, today, in the trade space. Accordingly, I am asking the Senator to modify his request to take the firm, comprehensive action against Vladimir Putin that circumstances require. I would like to ask that the Senator modify his request to make it in order for the Crapo substitute amendment, which is at the desk, to be considered and agreed to and that the Senate vote on the passage of the bill as amended. The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Maryland. Mr. CARDIN. Madam President, reserving the right to object to the request from the Senator from Idaho, it is my understanding that the Senator's modification would not include provisions that were included in the House-passed legislation that modifies the global Magnitsky sanction regime. I just would like to speak for a moment, if I might. There is no question that we stand with the people of Ukraine against the unprovoked attack by Mr. Putin. We are inspired every day by the courage of the Ukrainian people and by their inspirational leader, President Zelenskyy. The United States has shown leadership, and I congratulate the Biden administration. We have led the free world in providing defensive lethal weapons to Ukraine to defend itself. We have provided humanitarian assistance, joining the global community, including dealing with 3 million Ukrainians that are now refugees in other countries and 10 million that have been displaced as a result of Mr. Putin's unprovoked attack. And we have led on sanctions. We have led in getting the global unity to impose sanctions against not just the Russian sectors, but also against individuals. And when Mr. Zelenskyy spoke before the Members of Congress, he specifically mentioned the importance of these sanctions; and he asked us to expand those covered by the sanctions to include the enablers, those that are enabling Mr. Putin--the oligarchs--to be able to fund his aggression against Ukraine. So what did the House send over to us? In their bill, they sent over a global Magnitsky modification. It is identical to legislation that was filed by Senator Portman and myself that included the revocation of PNTR for Russia, along with the global Magnitsky. First and foremost, it removes the sunset that is in the legislation that would sunset this year. Mr. Zelenskyy asked for us to be resolved in being willing to stand up to Mr. Putin, that it would take some time. A clear message is that we remove the sunset on the global Magnitsky statute. And we know how difficult it is to get legislation passed in this body. It also expands the global Magnitsky to include the enablers--exactly what Mr. Zelenskyy asked us to do--those that enabled--the oligarchs that allowed him to be able to finance this. The language that is included in here is very similar to the language that was included in President Trump's Executive order. This is critical legislation. Now, let me just tell you how appropriate it is that it is included in a PNTR bill--because the first Magnitsky sanction bill--and Senator Wyden was very important in getting this done--was included in the original PNTR bill for Russia, and we were able to get it done at that time. We then made it a global Magnitsky, and my partner on that was the late Senator McCain. It has always been bipartisan. My partner now is Senator Wicker. The two of us have joined forces to make sure we get it done now. It is critically important in order to impose banking restrictions on those that are targeted under the global Magnitsky, as well as visa restrictions on being able to travel. How important is it? Ask Mr. Usmanov, who is one of the principal oligarchs to Mr. Putin, who solves Mr. Putin's business problems. Guess how he solves those problems? Well, his yacht has now been confiscated in Germany. That is how important these sanctions are and how we have to move them forward. So, if I understand my colleague's request, it would deny the opportunity for us to act on the global Magnitsky, which Mr. Zelenskyy has specifically asked us to do. We would lose that opportunity. We would be sending this bill back to the House that is not in session, which means there will be a further delay in repealing PNTR for Russia, which is something we need to do now, today. We can get it to the President for signature today under the majority leader's request. And as the majority leader has indicated, I support the energy ban--I support the Russian energy ban. President Biden has already taken steps to do that. And I agree with my colleague from Idaho. I would like to incorporate that in statute, but there is no urgency to do that as there is on repealing PNTR and the global Magnitsky. That is the urgency. That is what we need to get done today. That is what we can get to the President this afternoon under the majority leader's request, and that will be denied if my friend from Idaho's request were granted. So, for all those reasons, I object. The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard to the modification. Is there an objection to the original request? Mr. CRAPO. Madam President, reserving the right to object and just briefly. The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Idaho. Mr. CRAPO. I would like to say to my colleague Senator Cardin, I believe we could easily work the global Magnitsky legislation into whatever we do today. I don't believe there will be objections to moving ahead on that. It is not included in what I submitted because that was not a part of the original four-corners agreement which I am proposing. I think that could be added. I also have colleagues on my side of the aisle who have other items they would like to see discussed because the idea we are talking about here is to move ahead with no amendments on legislation that is major. And I am willing to discuss that as well, but I believe we need time to work this out. We can get this done today. And even though the House is not in session today, our passage of global legislation on this entire issue would send a powerful message that the House could affirm when it does come back into session next week. So I will still need to object, but I will commit to my colleagues on the other side that I will work with you today to try to iron out these differences. I need to have assurances that these other pieces that, for some unexplained reason, the House has not been willing to put into this package can be put into a package that will pass. And if we can get to that point, we can move today. So I commit that I will work with you; but at this point, I must object. The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard. The majority leader. Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, first, I thank my colleague from Idaho. I know he sincerely wants to move forward. The best way to send a message is pass the House bill, get it to the President, and have him be able to sign it while the European allies and we are meeting. But I am disappointed, though, that we were unable to take quick action now, but I very much appreciate what Senator Crapo has said now. And Senator Crapo and I had a good discussion this morning. We agree. We want to get to a bipartisan resolution to this legislation. So Senators Wyden, Crapo, and my staff are going to work throughout the day on language related to the oil ban and the other issues that Senator Crapo talked about that we could consider separately. We would then move to pass PNTR separately, which we hope we can pass today or certainly tomorrow. So I am committed to getting this issue resolved and very much appreciate my friend, the Senator from Idaho's willingness to discuss it so we can work out something that both sides can accept. Mr. CRAPO. I thank Leader Schumer. Mr. SCHUMER. I yield the floor. The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oregon. Mr. WYDEN. Madam President, let me pick up on what both of my colleagues have just said. Senator Schumer and Senator Crapo have both said [[Page S1723]] how committed we are to getting this worked out today. And as Senator Schumer said, under his leadership, the Finance Committee--the chair and the ranking member--that is what we are going to be working on so that this actually happens. And I want to make sure everybody understands what that means. It means that while the President is in these crucial discussions right now in Europe, the Senate--in the most expedited way, which is to pass the House legislation today--would revoke permanent normal trade relations with Russia. And here is why that is so important. Vladimir Putin's inhumane conduct means that Russia has forfeited the right to the benefits of the international trade order that was established after World War II. And what the Senate can do by passing the House bill today would amount to the harshest economic consequences in a generation. Let me be specific about that. When we pass that legislation that came over from the House here in the Senate, it would immediately trigger a significant increase in tariffs on Russian-made products. Adding to that, the proposal also includes authority for the President to raise tariffs even higher in the future. These tariffs would directly level a significant set of restrictions on Putin's circle of oligarchs, who export everything from chemicals to plywood. This is an absolutely essential step in ensuring that Russia is a pariah state. So to wrap up, apropos of the comments from the distinguished Senate majority leader and our ranking member--and the President of the Senate has worked with him as well--we had a good discussion over the last half-hour that is going to focus on getting passage of the House bill done today. And as Senator Schumer, Senator Crapo, and I have all noted, those discussions have been ongoing, but we are going to step it up so we can get this done today and send the House bill to the President's desk by close of business today. With that, Madam President, I yield the floor. The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Jersey. Mr. MENENDEZ. Madam President, I wanted to join in the comments made by the distinguished chairman of the Finance Committee, which I currently sit on, and my distinguished colleague on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, who is the author of the Magnitsky Act. I just hope--I came loaded for bear to the floor because I thought we were going to have a different result, but I am optimistically going to expect that we are going to have a resolution because, look, there are burnt bodies in the streets of Ukraine. There are mass graves to bury the dead. There are Ukrainians who are melting snow in order to drink water to survive. So it is truly mind boggling that we cannot get this legislation passed that eliminates Russia's preferred trade status and reauthorizes the Magnitsky Act. We see that Putin's actions are not only creating a horrific set of circumstances in Ukraine; they are creating a severe shortage of wheat across the Middle East and North Africa, bombing maternity hospitals and theaters housing children, causing the worst refugee crisis in Europe in decades. While we have long called out Putin's thugishness, his unprovoked and devastating attack on Ukraine has united the world in its resolve to levy severe repercussions for Putin and his cronies. So we must revoke this preferential trade status immediately. I think we should do the same for Belarus, which continues to provide a launching pad for Putin's war. But, certainly, not including Magnitsky makes no sense. Now, it makes no sense when last week I came to the floor and asked for unanimous confirmation of a key number of nominees at the State Department and USAID that are at the heart of helping the United States help Ukraine on coordinating sanctions, on our USAID Director for that part of the world, on the Assistant Secretary for refugees--millions of Ukrainian refugees. We should have these people in place to do the job. But we also have to have the law that is going to expire in place that Putin hates. He hates it. It is named after someone he was trying to eliminate. We have to continue to expand our options for keeping the pressure on Putin's regime and those who enable him. Reauthorizing Magnitsky is a critical part of doing just that. With Magnitsky sanctions, we can hold human rights abusers to account. We can call out their unacceptable and appalling acts, and we can hand the President a powerful tool to sanction those who profit off the Russian people and exploit state assets. But if we don't act, Magnitsky provisions will sunset later this year. Putin shouldn't be able to think: I can wait it out. He should know that the law is going to continue and the sanctions that have been levied under Magnitsky will continue to be levied and enhanced. He wants to see this law go away. His oligarchs and top officials would breathe a sigh of relief. Allowing Magnitsky sanctions to expire would send exactly the wrong message at the most critical time. This bill not only extends these tools; it sharpens them. This reauthorization would expand sanctions to cover other serious human rights abuses, giving the President the power to sanction a broader array of conduct. So we have to get this done today. We have to revoke normal trade relations with Russia. We have to send an unequivocal message that Putin's cronies cannot and will not act with impunity. They will pay a price, and we must show the world that whether human rights abusers are in Moscow or Minsk, America stands up for our values and our principles, and we put them into action wherever they are attacked. That is what this effort is all about. I do hope that before this day is out, we will see this passed on the Senate floor. There is no excuse not to get it done. I yield the floor. The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Maryland. Mr. CARDIN. Mr. President, let me thank the chairman on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee for his incredible leadership on this issue and so many others. I want to point out that our committee has already approved this language. This is already approved. This is not something that is new to this body. We have been debating this for some time. It has been the United States and the U.S Senate that have taken the leadership to provide tools to go after human rights abusers. We were the first to act, but, as a result of our action, Europe has now acted, the UK has acted, and Canada has acted. So we have provided global leadership. It is one of the strongest tools we have against human rights violators, and our No. 1 target today is Mr. Putin and what he has done. So we have a chance to really show our leadership--continued leadership--in this area. I am also encouraged by Senator Crapo's assurances that we are going to try to get this done today. We want to get this bill to the President. We want to have it clear that we reauthorized it in a way that would be effective moving forward. On one last point, if I might, no one knows exactly what happened in the first summit meeting between President Putin and President Trump, but the reports were that probably one of the very first issues that was raised by Mr. Putin was global Magnitsky sanctions, how it is so sensitive to him. A clear message against Mr. Putin is the passage of the reauthorization and, as the chairman said, fine-tuning of the global Magnitsky statute. I hope we can get that done today. I thank my colleagues for their comments. I yield the floor. I suggest the absence of a quorum. The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll. The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll. Mr. THUNE. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded. The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered. IRS Mr. THUNE. Madam President, Tax Day 2022 is fast approaching. Americans around the country are prepping their tax returns. If you talked to most Americans, I don't think you would find that the IRS is their favorite government Agency and with good reason. The Agency [[Page S1724]] has gained a reputation for poor taxpayer service. The last tax filing season was particularly miserable for taxpayers. ``If you call the IRS, there is only a 1-in-50 chance that you'll reach a human being,'' noted a headline in the Washington Post last April. The national Taxpayer Advocate noted in her 2021 report to Congress: Calendar year 2021 was surely the most challenging year taxpayers and tax professionals have ever experienced--long ***processing*** and refund delays, difficulty reaching the IRS by phone, correspondence that went unprocessed for many months, collection notices issued while taxpayer correspondence was awaiting ***processing***, little or no information on the Where's My Refund? tool for delayed returns. . . . And bad customer service isn't the only thing tarnishing the IRS's reputation. The IRS has also gained a reputation for mishandling the confidential taxpayer information it has access to. In fact, the IRS was recently subject to a massive leak or hack of private taxpayer information--information that somehow ended up in the hands of advocates at ProPublica, an outfit that promotes progressive causes and went on to publish taxpayers' private information last June. Months later, neither the Treasury Department nor the IRS has provided meaningful followup about the data breach, much less any accountability. Who could forget the IRS scandal during the Obama administration when the IRS targeted a number of organizations based on their political beliefs? Nor did the IRS inspire confidence a few months ago when it announced it would start requiring taxpayers to submit biometric data in order to access certain IRS services. Fortunately, after Republicans on the Senate Finance Committee and others weighed in, the IRS abandoned its plans to allow the harvesting of taxpayers' biometric data, but it was a concerning instance of government overreach from an Agency notable for repeated mishandling of private taxpayer information. The IRS was a frequent subject of discussion in regard to the Democrats' so-called Build Back Better plan. It would have been nice if this was because Democrats had proposed a real plan to improve taxpayer services and increase Agency accountability. But, no, what they proposed in their Build Back Better plan was a massive increase in funding for the IRS--$80 billion--essentially doubling the size of the Agency without any plan for ensuring improvements to basic taxpayer services. I am hard pressed to imagine why anyone would contemplate handing a massive budget increase to the IRS without simultaneously prioritizing a plan to substantially increase accountability and improve taxpayer services. But, of course, Democrats weren't interested in improving taxpayer services. Their main interest in handing the IRS a supersized budget increase was to increase tax collections to raise revenue to help pay for their partisan tax-and-spending spree. It is the same reason why they included a provision, until widespread public opposition forced them to remove it, that would have allowed the IRS to examine the details of Americans' bank accounts. Under one version of this provision, the IRS would have been able to sift through the bank records of any American with just $600 in annual transactions--$600. In other words, the IRS would have been able to look through the bank records of just about every American and find out just how much you spent on Starbucks or your last doctor's bill or that new pair of running shoes. Republicans are not opposed to enhancing resources for the IRS if needed to improve taxpayer services, but any enhanced resources for the IRS must be paired with serious reform, including ***measures*** to improve customer service, ensure that existing resources are being used optimally, and promote smarter and more effective audits. I am a cosponsor of Senator Crapo's Tax Gap Reform and IRS Enforcement Act, which would codify additional protections for taxpayers against IRS overreach. Among other things, the legislation would help ensure that the IRS is not able to target taxpayers for their political and ideological beliefs, and it would prohibit the kinds of bank reporting requirements that Democrats sought to impose in their Build Back Better spending spree. It would also take steps to increase IRS expertise and improve the audit ***process***. It would improve the information that we have on the tax gap, which is the difference between taxes owed and taxes paid. Reducing the size of the tax gap and improving enforcement of our tax laws is something we should look at, but any effort has to be balanced with taxpayer responsibilities and taxpayer rights. Vastly increasing the size of the IRS without any new accountability or Agency oversight, as Democrats wanted to do with their Build Back Better spending spree, would be more likely to result in increased harassment of law-abiding taxpayers than in a meaningful reduction in the tax gap. Just in case anyone thinks I am exaggerating about harassment, I would like to note that a provision in the House version of Democrats' reckless tax-and-spending spree would repeal a ***measure*** requiring written approval of a supervisor before an IRS agent can assess any penalties. The provision was intended to prevent overreaching IRS agents from threatening Americans with unjustified penalties. It is hard to imagine why Democrats would try to repeal this ***measure*** if they were not trying to pave the way for much more aggressive IRS pressure on American taxpayers. In her 2021 report to Congress, the National Taxpayer Advocate noted that ``there is no way to sugarcoat the year 2021 in tax administration. From the perspective of tens of millions of taxpayers, it was horrendous.'' Taxpayers deserve better. They deserve an efficient and accountable IRS and timely and effective customer service, and Congress should focus on giving it to them. I hope to be able to move away from Democrats' intrusive and reckless Build Back Better IRS proposals and toward bipartisan efforts to reform the IRS and ensure the taxpayers can reliably depend on the Agency. I yield the floor. I suggest the absence of a quorum. The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll. The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll. Mr. BROWN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded. The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. Hickenlooper). Without objection, it is so ordered. Ukraine Mr. BROWN. Mr. President, since Russia's brutal ***invasion*** of Ukraine, Vladimir Putin has been shocked by two things: He has been shocked by the courage and the resilience and skill of the Ukrainian army and the resistance by the Ukrainian people. He has also been shocked by the way President Biden has unified the world and put together this broad, effective coalition. Think about this: Countries like Germany and Sweden and Finland, even Switzerland, have never been involved in these kinds of international operations. They are all on board, all working with us on weapons and on humanitarian assistance and on sanctions. The President's team has done an extraordinary job in mustering the strength of this allied coalition to impose a broad range of powerful, punishing sanctions. We have cut off huge portions of their banking, finance, and business sectors from the Western financial world. We have shut down access to their monetary reserves--what Putin considered his war chest. We have sanctioned their central bank, their large commercial banks, and their sovereign wealth funds. We have cut off their ability to finance their debt. We have blocked key sanctioned banks from the SWIFT financial messaging system. We are shutting down their borrowing privileges at international institutions like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. We have gone after Putin personally and the oligarchs who prop up his regime. We have gone after their intelligence entities and defense firms and others supporting them and supporting the war effort. We have sanctioned disinformation agents, freezing their assets, cutting off their ability to propagandize Putin's lies. Together with our allies, we have begun to go after their lucrative energy sector. We shut down the Nord [[Page S1725]] Stream 2 gas pipeline. We imposed a broad ban on Russian oil and gas and coal coming to the United States. We have cut off all new American investments into their oil and gas sector, and our big oil and gas firms have withdrawn in droves. We have cut off the sophisticated technology Russia's refining industry needs and other technologies that have powered their industrial efforts. In all this, we make it clear: Russia cannot invade its neighbors, cannot kill civilians, cannot expect to benefit from being part of the international economic order. And again, this has been the leadership of President Biden and the State Department and the Defense Department and the Commerce Department and others and strong leadership that has pulled everybody together. The fact that we have put together this coalition so quickly, again, with countries that really haven't, since World War II, participated in anything like this--again, Sweden and Finland; Germany for the first time; Switzerland, which has been a neutral country since way before even you were born, Mr. President. So this has been a long time that these countries that were neutral are coming to the fore and making a difference for us. Putin's mistake will set back a generation or more. It will sever its main economic, political, and diplomatic ties with the West and countries around the world which want to have nothing to do with Putin and his regime. In Brussels tomorrow, the President is set to announce a major new wave of powerful sanctions, including against hundreds of members of the Russian Parliament, the duma, and other elites who have enthusiastically supported this brutal war. He will intensify American efforts, along with our allies, to impose further sanctions on any defense or intelligence or other Russian firms that have in any way supported this ***invasion***, either directly or indirectly. Our goal is to reach everybody that has been part of Putin's machine, of Putin's war crimes. Every day, large teams at Treasury and the Department of Justice work with our allies to find and freeze and seize the assets of the oligarchs and other Russians who have supported Putin's war machine-- their yachts, their mansions, their overseas bank accounts. There will be no place to hide. All of that is vital. We can always do more. Russia should not have free and unlimited access to America's economy or to the global economy. The President has committed already--and one of the reasons we are here today--to end permanent normal trade relations with Russia so that they aren't permanent. We need to do our part to give the President the immediate legal authority he needs to work with our allies on this to shut off access to favorable tariff treatment for Russia's goods here and around the world. We should not delay this another day. The bill passed the House with a nearly unanimous bipartisan vote. We need to finalize this in the Senate so we can ratchet up the pressure further and cut off Russia's ability to finance any of its unprovoked ***invasion*** of another member country of the World Trade Organization. Even before this war, we knew that Russia, along with China, cheats on the rules of trade. They subsidize their industries, and they pollute the environment to gain an unfair advantage in the global market. My State, Ohio, knows all too well about being forced to compete with countries that cheat. If we don't remove this now, Russia will continue to use its status to position their industries in the global market, hurting American companies in the ***process***. It is not a partisan issue. I introduced a bicameral, bipartisan bill with Senator Cassidy of Louisiana to remove Russia's permanent normal trade relation status. We did that almost a month ago. There is bipartisan support to do this quickly. I have worked with my colleague Senator Crapo from Idaho on many Russian sanction efforts over the years. I know we share the same goals. I am hopeful there is a path forward in getting this done today. He is arguing that an oil ban should be included in this, even though the President already issued an Executive order on this that is already in effect. I hope we can work out our differences quickly so we can send a clear, strong, unified message to Russia and to the world: Countries that invade another sovereign nation will not ever have free and unrestricted access to our economy. They will not be able to finance that ***invasion*** by continuing to cheat the rules on trade. It is time to come together to end permanent normal trade relations with Russia. I suggest the absence of a quorum. The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll. The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll. Ms. STABENOW. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded. The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered. Gas Prices Ms. STABENOW. Mr. President, if you know anything about Michigan, you know we love our cars. We put the world on wheels, and we have been keeping Michigan moving ever since. But recently this love affair has hit a rough patch. Nearly everyone in Michigan drives--to work, to school, and to the lake on the weekends, and it is getting warmer and warmer to be able to do that. And high gas prices have made this Michigan way of life a lot more expensive. I am thinking of the driver who uses his own car to deliver meals and other essentials to families in Detroit. Gas prices have gone up so much, he is barely breaking even. I am thinking of the student who drives 40 minutes every day to attend classes at Michigan Tech in Houghton. She is training for a great career, but the price at the pump is cutting into the money she needs to pay her tuition and her rent. And I am thinking about farmers. Fuel is absolutely essential to power our tractors and produce fertilizer and keep the world fed. But income is tight even in the good times, and in the tight times, the folks who grow our food can struggle to fill their own refrigerators. High fuel prices hurt Michigan families, our businesses, and our economy. And that is why it is so frustrating when oil and gas companies make choices that keep prices high to boost their own bottom lines. It is true that part of the reason gas prices are so high is because demand is so high. Thanks to President Biden and Democrats in Congress, our economy came roaring back from COVID-19. Now, with all the challenges of the supply chains and the cost issues we are dealing with--but the foundation of our economy is strong, and that is a good thing. But a roaring economy requires energy, and production isn't keeping pace. It is not that we don't have enough oil. In fact, the United States is the world's largest oil-producing country. And we could be producing more. There are currently 9,000 approved oil leases that the oil companies aren't even using. Yet the oil companies have made a conscious decision to hold back production, to raise prices, and pad the pockets of their shareholders. One CEO even admitted as much last month when he said that his company is ``capturing value from higher prices for gas.'' Let me translate that. ``Capturing value from high prices for gas'' really means taking money out of your pocket and my pocket and putting it into the pockets of their shareholders. It is working for them. His company's revenue nearly tripled during the fourth quarter, and they are not alone. In fact, the 25 largest oil and gas companies raked in $205 billion in profits last year--$205 billion in profits last year--while price-gouging now at the pump. And they used that money to buy back $40 billion of their own stock and pay their shareholders and top executives $50 billion in dividends. And they are not particularly eager to pass on any savings to anybody else, unfortunately. It is interesting. The last time a barrel of oil was $96, gas was $3.62 a gallon. Last week, a barrel of oil was again $96, but this time gas was $4.31 a gallon. What is the difference? Well, the truth is, they set the price based on what they can get away with, [[Page S1726]] arguing a global economy and supply and so on, a supply which they determine, and they set the price with what they think they can get. And that is called price-gouging right now; taking advantage of situations around the world, our willingness to sacrifice to be part of supporting the Ukrainians and what is happening. And instead of doing their part to maybe say: OK, $205 billion in profits last year, pretty good. OK. Maybe we can, like, do our part here--instead, the prices at the pump go up and up and up, and it has got to stop. A single mom of three in Michigan is standing at a gas pump right now with a knot in her stomach, watching her bill go up and up and her monthly budget for everything else go down. So that is the problem. What is the solution? First of all, the Senate Commerce Committee is calling for the CEOs of the major oil companies to testify before the committee, and I am really looking forward to that hearing and what they have to say for themselves on why. I want to thank the chairwoman, Chairwoman Cantwell, and the committee for their leadership. Secondly, I introduced the Gas Prices Relief Act with a number of my Democratic colleagues. This gas tax holiday is immediate relief--yes, short term, but it would save Michigan drivers nearly $650 million at the pump this year. I also think it is about time to stop subsidizing these oil companies that are doing just fine on their own. They don't need our tax dollars to subsidize them anymore. For more than 100 years, Congress has given major, permanent tax benefits to the fossil fuel industry. This decade, they have received $35 billion in fossil fuel-related tax breaks. Do the American people really need to keep subsidizing an industry whose pollution is responsible for creating the global climate crisis, all the while enjoying record profits and picking people's pockets? The answer is no. Yet our Republican colleagues stand with the oil companies over and over again. I just came from an Environmental and Public Works Committee meeting on this very topic and heard over and over again the rationale for letting the oil and gas companies keep doing what they are already doing with no accountability and no real effort for us to move in the direction of clean energy where we need to move. Most importantly, it is time to shift to new clean sources of energy. For more than 100 years, scientists have known that burning fossil fuels creates carbon pollution that builds up in our atmosphere, and that traps heat. It just stays there. For more than 100 years, we just kept on burning fossil fuels anyway. And the industry has spent billions trying to convince us it is not really happening. We really aren't seeing the climate change. No, this isn't happening. Don't look up. Well, it is time for a change. We can start by using more homegrown and cleaner burning biofuels to save consumers money. It is time to allow the year-round sale of E15--a change I have encouraged the administration to make. According to the Renewable Fuels Association, E15 is 10 to 15 cents per gallon less than standard gasoline and cleaner. There is no time like the present to accelerate our shift to clean energy production, which I know the Presiding Officer cares deeply about and has been a leader in, and the use of electric vehicles. We know that part of that is moving to clean energy electricity--power as well as electric transportation. Both are very, very important. Buying an amazing Michigan-made EV means you can drive right on by the gas station. You don't even have to stop. That is what I am looking forward to. You don't even have to pay attention to what is on the sign--won't matter. The exciting thing is, we can take action to make this happen more quickly by ensuring that electric vehicles are affordable for more families and, critically, that they are built right here in America-- not in China, not somewhere else around the world, in America--and I am laser-focused on making that happen. The good news is, we will tackle the climate crisis at the same time because the transportation sector is the single largest source of carbon pollution. Shockingly, a few weeks ago, a fossil fuel executive said this about his industry: You've made a promise to be more disciplined about getting cash back to shareholders with these dividends. The question is, are you going to keep your promise? Or are you going to be patriotic? Hmm. It is pretty clear whose side the oil companies are on, and it isn't the side of the American people. It is time for them to stop price-gouging and try a little patriotism. I yield the floor. The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Iowa. Putin Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, tomorrow will be 1 month since Putin started his war in Ukraine. Every day, we get a chance to see that war being fought on our TV, so I want to tell you what I have seen in 1 month of viewing the war in Ukraine or what I have heard from people who report on that war in Ukraine. Putin is a child killer. Putin kills hospital patients. Putin is a bully. Putin kills elderly people. Putin kills pregnant mothers and their babies. Putin has uprooted at least 10 million people. Putin deliberately shells residential areas. Putin shells shopping centers. Putin shells apartment buildings. Putin destroys historic buildings. Putin bombs theaters. Putin bombs hospitals. Putin destroys cultural heritage. Putin threatens world peace. Putin silences dissent. Putin threatens nuclear war. Putin starts war to boost his popularity. Putin jails his political opponents. Putin jails citizens speaking against the war. Putin twists history. Putin is consumed with power. Putin feeds off corruption. Putin is acting like a true Nazi. Putin kills to feed his ego. Putin lies to his own people and the world. Putin admires Stalin. Putin acts like Stalin. Putin forcefully deports civilians, like Stalin. Putin is intentionally starving Ukrainian civilians, like Stalin. Putin is destroying families. Putin reintroduced mass graves to Europe--no different than the executions of 20,000 Polish generals and soldiers at Katyn Forest in 1940. Putin lies to mothers of Russian soldiers. Putin poisons with impunity, particularly people whom he considers traitors. Putin came to power by bombing Russian apartments and blaming Chechens. Putin is still KGB. Putin lied before invading Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula. Putin lied about Russian troops in the Donbas. Putin lied that he would not invade the rest of Ukraine. Putin lies that NATO had anything to do with his decision to invade. Putin thinks Ukraine isn't a real country. Putin thinks other Eastern European countries belong to Russia. Putin thinks Ukrainians are lesser people than Russians. Putin is afraid of his own people. Putin imprisons political opponents. Putin is afraid of Ukrainian democracy. Putin got rich by stealing from Russians. Putin is destroying his own country. Putin has damaged the global economy. Putin uses banned weapons against civilians. Putin kidnapped Ukrainian mayors. Putin tries to assassinate Ukrainian President Zelenskyy. Putin has troops fire on humanitarian corridors. Putin is in bed with organized crime. Putin supports America's enemies. Putin has made the Russian Orthodox Church a tool of state power. Putin oppresses religious minorities. Putin has forced labor camps for prisoners. Putin has people who support him or just follow orders or who are afraid to speak up, just like Hitler did. [[Page S1727]] I yield the floor. I suggest the absence of a quorum. The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll. The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll. Ms. WARREN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded. The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered. Nomination of Ketanji Brown Jackson Ms. WARREN. Mr. President, I rise today in support of Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson, President Biden's nominee to be an Associate Justice of the U.S Supreme Court. Judge Jackson brings an ***exceptional*** level of experience to the bench. After serving for nearly 8 years on the U.S District Court for the District of Columbia, Jackson has more trial court experience than any sitting Supreme Court Justice and more than almost any Justice in a century. She will also be only the second sitting Justice to have served on all three levels of the Federal judiciary. Judge Jackson's nomination is historic. If confirmed, she will be the first Black woman to sit on the Supreme Court, bringing a long overdue representation to the Bench. After serving as an assistant Federal public defender in Washington, DC, Judge Jackson will also be the first former Federal public defender to serve on our Nation's highest Court. It matters that someone nominated to sit on our Nation's highest Court has represented people other than corporate clients. It matters that someone nominated has had real experience with people who can't afford lawyers. It matters that someone nominated has had real experience in fighting for the public interest. The Sixth Amendment of our Constitution grants criminal defendants the right to have the assistance of counsel in their defenses, but it wasn't until 1963, in Gideon v. Wainwright, that the Supreme Court unanimously ruled that the Constitution required State courts to appoint lawyers for defendants who could not otherwise afford one. Now, some Republicans have complained about the very idea of having a public defender on the Supreme Court, but their objections run squarely afoul of the meaning of the Constitution. This fundamental constitutional right to counsel is safeguarded by the work public defenders do every single day. Public defenders are literally on the frontlines of helping America live up to our constitutional ideals. Every American who supports and defends the Constitution should welcome a Supreme Court Justice who has worked so hard to turn our constitutional ideals into reality. When asked about her work as a public defender, Judge Jackson said: Every person who is accused of criminal conduct by the government, regardless of wealth and despite the nature of the accusations, is entitled to the assistance of counsel. Judge Jackson restates a foundational constitutional point, one that she has lived--up close and personal. Public defenders understand better than anyone that none of us should be defined by the worst thing we have ever done. Everyone, regardless of who they are or what they have been accused of, deserves a lawyer. Our legal system, as imperfect as it may be, strives to deliver equal justice under law. It is only because of the commitment of public defenders, civil rights attorneys, and legal aid lawyers that we can aspire to achieving that ideal. That is why we need Judge Jackson's expertise on the Supreme Court, and that is why, for a long time now, I have called for prioritizing professional diversity on our Federal bench. For far too long, our Federal judiciary has been dominated by those who only have experience representing the wealthy and well connected, but what about those who don't have money or influence? We need more judges with experience in representing the voiceless and the disadvantaged. The makeup of our Federal and State courts has never fully reflected the American people. Over time, this lack of representation has formed cracks in the foundation of our legal system--cracks that weaken public trust and threaten the legitimacy of our institutions. A diverse judiciary matters. Judges--all judges--draw on their past personal and professional experiences when analyzing the law and reviewing the facts of individual cases. Judges who have experience as public defenders, civil rights attorneys, and legal aid lawyers are well equipped to understand the circumstances that bring everyday Americans into courtrooms. It is that background that strengthens public trust and that reinforces the legitimacy of our judicial system. Supreme Court Justice Elena Kagan said it best: If the court doesn't have legitimacy with the American public, it can't do all that much. All kinds of different people should be able to look at the court and say, ``I see somebody there who looks like me, who thinks the way I do, who has experiences of the kind that I had.'' And that's the kind of thing that gives the court public legitimacy. Justice Kagan is right. Our judiciary will, undoubtedly, be made stronger because of Judge Jackson's confirmation to the Supreme Court. It is not only her work as a public defender that informs Judge Jackson's experience. Prior to joining the bench, Judge Jackson served first as an assistant special counsel and, later, as the Vice Chair of the U.S Sentencing Commission. These experiences give her deep insight into the sentencing guidelines and enhance her ability to think critically about our criminal legal system's impact on ordinary people. Judge Jackson's first stint on the Commission inspired her to become an assistant Federal public defender in order to gain practical, firsthand insight into our criminal legal system. Her work in the trenches, representing those without means or power, provided Judge Jackson with an invaluable perspective into our system of justice, and it gave her the opportunity to effectuate the fundamental right to counsel, which is outlined in our Constitution. I look forward to supporting her confirmation, and I urge all of my colleagues to do the same. I yield the floor. I suggest the absence of a quorum. The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll. The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll. Ms. ERNST. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded. The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered. Ukraine Ms. ERNST. Mr. President, I returned to the United States Sunday night after leading a bipartisan Senate delegation visit to Poland and Germany. Ten Senators--Republicans and Democrats--traveled together to demonstrate America's unwavering support for the freedom-loving people of Ukraine and affirm the strength of the world's most powerful alliance. I will never forget an engagement with Ukrainian civil society leaders. This group of passionate, strong women demonstrated Ukraine's spirit and their will to fight. They delivered a very clear message to the United States. They said that Ukraine can win, but they need more lethal aid delivered now. Our bipartisan delegation departed with the conviction that the United States, Ukraine, and the free world have the will and the means to stop Vladimir Putin's tyranny. I am here on the Senate floor today to state my belief that Ukraine will beat back Vladimir Putin's bloody ***invasion***. They will throw the Russian army out of their country, and they will declare victory over this lawless criminal incursion. Folks, Ukraine can win this war. When the shooting is over, the Russian military will be broken, and the Russian economy will collapse--consequences brought about by Putin's chosen isolation and rejection of the free world. He and his cronies, their futures are not bright either. Putin's propaganda media machine will break down. He will be marked by the international community as a war criminal and, I predict, will be held accountable by his own people. His best days are behind him. Freedom will win. Most of us thought these outcomes were improbable just a few weeks ago. The President's policymakers circulated intelligence assessments in the first days of the ***invasion*** which concluded unequivocally that Ukraine didn't stand a chance. They predicted Putin would topple Kyiv within 3 to 5 days. Tomorrow marks 1 month since the start of the war. The Russian military is disorganized and demoralized. [[Page S1728]] Four separate divisions are all competing for logistics resupply. Putin knows he is losing, and he is panicking. He jailed his deputy chief of intelligence, and his military is burning the bodies of their Russian casualties. Russia's manpower and ammunition are tapping out while, on the other side, Ukraine's forces are hanging tough. The weapons the United States and our allies and partners provided are being deployed with lethal proficiency. The frontlines have been frozen for over a week, and Russian casualties are greater than 1,000 a day. Ukrainians are intercepting unclassified calls and eliminating Russian field commanders. Most crucially, the Ukrainian people are ready to fight to the last man. The Russian army is a force of teenaged conscripts, subjects of an authoritarian war criminal whose delusions of grandeur about the old Soviet Union drove this ***invasion***. The Ukrainian army is made up of free citizens who chose freedom over Russian tyranny. Putin's ***invasion*** doesn't change Ukraine's choice, and they will not go quietly. Given all of this, has the United States shifted its strategy? Do we believe we can help make a Ukrainian victory a near certainty? We all know why we must come to Ukraine's aid. This body's memory is not that short. The United States is an agreement-bound partner with Ukraine. We entered into an agreement. We are their partners. In 1994, Ukraine dismantled and surrendered its nuclear armament entirely in exchange for our security guarantee--the protection of the world's greatest superpower. Our agreement resulted in a prosperous Ukraine and made the world a much, much safer place. Before Vladimir Putin attempted to snuff it out for good 3 weeks ago, the American people and the world benefited from the breadbasket of Europe's vital ***agricultural*** sector and energy production. Ukraine has been an invaluable economic and security partner for nearly 30 years. Putin is not only testing that agreement today in the streets of Kyiv, Mariupol, and Kharkiv, he wants to break freedom's momentum all around the globe. Folks, we can't allow that to happen. We must not. If it has not been made clear enough already, an unshakeable commitment to allies and partners keeps Americans prosperous and our families safe. Authoritarians--whether it is the Taliban, Vladimir Putin, Xi Jinping, the terrorists who rule Iran--they cannot dictate terms to our security and our economy. We still are the world's superpower 28 years after we made a security agreement with Ukraine. America cannot be pushed around. We also know how we can come to Ukraine's aid. Congress just passed $14 billion of support for Ukraine, which included nearly $2 billion of lethal weaponry. That aid--those weapons and that logistical support-- must flow right now. I fought for a provision in the aid package that allows the President to draw down on pre-positioned military equipment, and I will be ensuring he follows through and gets these weapons into Ukrainian hands. There is no excuse for American inaction. The Commander in Chief now has the authority to transfer pre- positioned weapons and logistical support, including as many as 40 Soviet-style helicopters purchased for Afghan security forces, to the Ukrainians. America's commitment to Ukraine and our NATO allies demands we expedite the delivery of weapons and capabilities to Ukraine. Any delay due to the fears of escalation is reflective of a doctrine of appeasement that will only further embolden our adversaries. Pentagon Press Secretary John Kirby said recently that success for the U.S mission in Ukraine is, at the end of the conflict, a free and independent, sovereign Ukraine. Folks, I wholeheartedly agree with this sentiment, but if that is our mission, America has to provide more support to enable Ukraine to win this war. We cannot hold back. The U.S mission in Ukraine must go beyond ensuring the country merely has the means to defeat itself-- defend itself against Russian aggression, defeat the Russians. Now is not the time to be risk-averse. This administration did little to deter Putin's march on Kyiv, an ***invasion*** set in motion as early as April 2021. President Biden lifted sanctions on Nord Stream 2, framed the United States-Russia relationship as stable and predictable as late as June of last year, and canceled European Command military exercises calling them ``too provocative.'' Public opinion, Congress, and even European nations have hammered, begged, dragged, and pushed the Biden administration to action. From economic sanctions to the Russian oil ban, the administration has led from behind and from a position of weakness. Take the Polish MiG debacle; three Sundays ago, Secretary Blinken gave Poland a green light to transfer MiG fighter jets to Ukraine. The following Tuesday, the White House did a flip and rejected the transfer of planes out of fear Putin would see the move as escalatory. Forty-one Republicans joined my letter voicing displeasure to the President for his failure to act. Letting an adversary define your military's rules of engagement, letting the aggressor dictate the boundaries of our response is not just a folly, it is suicidal. The administration crossed their fingers and hoped Putin would play nice. Well, folks, we know Putin. He didn't play nice, and deterrence failed. But the failure of this administration's doctrine of appeasement doesn't mean Ukraine will lose the war. I commend actions taken to shore up the NATO alliance following the ***invasion***, but our Commander in Chief must now lead and give Ukraine the means to win. If he is to continue being the most powerful man in the free world, he must act as such. Delaying the loss of Ukraine to Vladimir Putin is not a strategy. Success is not a Russian-occupied Ukraine. Success is not a protracted insurgency. Success is a free, independent, and sovereign Ukraine. Defending freedom in Ukraine is defending freedom everywhere. Authoritarianism cannot prevail in this conflict. I yield the floor. The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. Rosen). The Senator from West Virginia. Mrs. CAPITO. Madam President, I would like to thank my fellow Senator, Senator Ernst from Iowa, for leading the delegation trip that we took this past weekend, the bipartisan delegation. It was most informative, impactful, and she did a wonderful job leading that. I was proud of the efforts. I am here to join my colleagues today to discuss the ***invasion***--the unjust and immoral ***invasion*** of Ukraine by Vladimir Putin--in light of the trip that we just took to Germany and to Poland. In a way, I am kind of hesitant to do so, not because there isn't a lot to say or a lot to share but because of the powerful words that some of the Ukrainians whom we met implored us, which was: Enough talking. It is time to act. I could not agree more. But out of deep respect for them, I would like to take a moment to make sure we all understand why we have to act and why we must act now. As Americans, you realize this when you talk to--we did, certainly, when we were talking with Germans and other Europeans. We don't have the same perspective sometimes that Europeans have who faced World War II. One of the most powerful comments conveyed when we were meeting with German officials was that their new generation who has heard for decades about the atrocities from their parents and their grandparents--they were told this would never happen again. And yet what we see is that it is happening again. This is an unjust war, and there seems to be no level of atrocity that Vladimir Putin is unwilling to commit. Putin overestimated his ability, his army, his ability to conquer. ``This must be over in 3 days,'' according to him. He overestimated his own abilities, and he grossly underestimated the will of the Ukrainian people and the will to not just live but to live freely. On top of this, Putin has also failed to understand the commitment of the free world--of NATO--to stand up for freedom. We certainly saw that over the last several days. We, in our Nation and in our history, know that freedom is worth fighting for, and it is also worth defending. Generations have done this in our past and will do this in the future. We believe this to our core. [[Page S1729]] We also believe that the deliberate and evil bombing of hospitals, targeting supply routes, and killing civilians are the actions of war criminals. But in the face of all of this evil, we see hope. We see hope from the Ukrainian people; we see hope from the Ukrainian leadership; we see hope from the Ukrainian military; and we see hope in our own military forces as a part of NATO, including all nations of NATO as well as the generosity of people around the world, the nongovernmental organizations we saw helping at the refugee center, and, most especially, the Polish people. We saw them stepping in militarily. And on the humanitarian side, we saw an incredible outpouring. We saw this firsthand at the refugee center. Poland has now taken in over 2 million people into their country, which is more than the entire population of my State. During our trip, as I said, we visited the refugee center where Ukrainians are going first to be ***processed*** as they are leaving and having to flee their country. After this, they end up not at another refugee center but most likely in somebody's home or a friend's. That is the level of care and support that they are receiving. And that is the level of care and support that they deserve as a tribute of their willingness to fight and defend their freedom. Many of these women and children--mostly women and children--are leaving their husbands and their homes behind. Ukraine is united. As we were told, Ukraine will fight to the last man. May it never come to the last man because the free world must help. Make no mistake, the United States of America has chosen a side. We side with freedom. We side with the people of Ukraine. Just a few weeks ago, Congress passed $14 billion in support for Ukraine and Central European allies amid Putin's unprovoked war. It is critical to get these funds and equipment to them now because time is of the essence. As an example, Congress took an extra week to pass this package. When you are there on the ground talking to the leadership who are trying to push back on Putin, a week is a lifetime--a week is a lifetime. So we cannot afford to hesitate or to cause inaction. In our efforts to get them funds--lethal aid--and to oppose sanctions on Russia, we must act now and keep acting. Madam President, as you know--you were on the trip, as well--we met with diplomats and generals, representatives from many of our executive branch Agencies, NGOs, brave soldiers, including many from our home States. But I will never forget the words of a woman we met named Katarina, whom we met at the refugee ***processing*** center. She said, in desperate tones, she didn't want to leave Ukraine. She didn't want to leave her home. She wants to live in freedom and peace, but she has a 6-year-old and 8-year-old who are constantly hearing the sirens of bomb alerts, the sounds of bombing--just the violence. She had no choice. She had to leave to protect her children. Let's do what we can, as much as we can, and as fast as we can--and that last part is critical--to return freedom to Ukraine and justice to those who do not respect the sovereignty of nations. This is really what we owe every child in Ukraine, in Germany, in Poland, and in the United States. I yield the floor. The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Maine. Ms. COLLINS. Madam President, on February 24, approximately 1 month ago, Vladimir Putin launched an unprovoked and unjustified war against his neighbor, the free, democratic, and sovereign nation of Ukraine. The bipartisan Senate delegation visit to Europe led by Senator Ernst that I joined over this past weekend was truly extraordinary. It has reinforced my already strong belief that the United States must do all that it can to provide lethal aid to the courageous Ukrainians fighting for their families and their freedom, as well as to provide the humanitarian assistance necessary to ease the suffering of the Ukrainian people. The Presiding Officer was on this trip, as well. Like the Senator from West Virginia, who just spoke, my most memorable conversation was with a young mother named Katarina, who had two children, one age 8 and one age 6, with her. I met her at the Polish refugee welcome center. It was only a few miles from the Ukrainian border. She said to me: I want to live in peace. I want to be back in Ukraine, but I have to keep my children safe. She was weary-looking but determined to keep her children safe. This young mother and her two children were leaving the only country she had ever known. She left her husband behind, not knowing when or if she would see him again--all in order to keep her children safe. We have only to watch the scenes of what Putin is doing to try to destroy Ukraine and to break the will of its people. He has bombed apartment buildings, schools, theaters, shelters, humanitarian corridors. He has bombed a maternity hospital. What does that tell you about this man, this war criminal? What more do we need to know? The only way that we can end this humanitarian crisis is to provide Ukraine with the weapons, supplies, ammunition, and other assistance that they need to bring to an end this Russian war of aggression. We must provide, without further delay, the Ukrainians with the MiG fighter aircraft that have been held up by this administration and which Ukrainian President Zelenskyy has requested. We must ensure that Ukraine receives additional anti-aircraft defenses, including the S- 300, whether directly from our stocks or those of our allies. We must ensure that the Ukrainians have the means to fight and defend their people from these ongoing atrocities ordered by Putin. And we know of--we saw firsthand--their extraordinary bravery, their determination to fight for their country, to put everything they have on the line. Every moment, every hour, every day counts. We do not have time for endless debate and delay that costs the lives of innocent Ukrainians. As the Ukrainian leader told us, the administration must stop telling Putin what America will not do. It must say what we will do. The administration should also make every effort in collaboration with Congress, when necessary, to ease the ***process*** of allowing Ukrainians with family members here in America to come stay with them until it is safe to return home. I know many Mainers are eager to help. Finally, I want to acknowledge the terrific American soldiers that we met, including several from the great State of Maine. Many of them left their families with days' or even hours' notice over the past few weeks. They rapidly deployed to Germany, Poland, and other NATO allies to deter Russia's aggression and defend these NATO members from any Russian threats. Each of these members of our military were motivated, patriotic, and impressive, and I am so grateful for their service. I have read that President Biden is considering stationing our troops close to the frontline to send an unmistakable message to the Russians on a more permanent basis, and I hope that he will indeed do that. The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Kansas. Mr. MORAN. Madam President, it is a privilege to be here on the Senate floor speaking to Kansans and to Americans, to Vladimir Putin and to Ukrainians, and to the rest of the world, our allies, our friends, and our adversaries. It is a privilege to be here with the opportunity of speaking with one voice. As we know, that does not happen frequently enough in the U.S Senate, but the Presiding Officer was on this trip with us to Eastern Europe and to the Ukrainian border, and my colleagues here on the Senate floor--Republicans, Democrats, and Independents; Members of the U.S Senate, together--saw what we saw and resolved what we resolved together. I am so pleased that that is the case. Particularly our adversaries, but clearly our allies, as well, must know that this is not a Democratic or Republican issue. It is an American issue. It is a world issue. It is something about freedom that transcends any of the differences that we have here in the United States or in the U.S Senate. And every day matters. While it is important for us to bring our report [[Page S1730]] home to our colleagues and to our constituents about what we saw, what we heard, and what, most importantly, we felt, it is important that we act. Remember the Ukrainian citizens who told us: It is OK to proclamate. It is OK to have a statement. It is OK to pass a resolution. But what we need is action. Every day matters in the fight against Vladimir Putin's unprovoked, unjust, and immoral ***invasion*** of Ukraine. To any of the people who say Ukraine is at fault here, I cast all doubt about that. That is not the case. What is happening in Ukraine, what is happening in Eastern Europe, and what may happen beyond the borders of Ukraine is the result of an evil man named Vladimir Putin. The United States--this administration--must stop telling Putin what we won't do. Don't ever tell our adversaries: We are not going to do this. It makes absolutely no sense. But we do need to do what we said we will do and even more. Our slow bureaucratic march to provide aid is not keeping up with the Russian forces. I dread when I get up in the morning, each morning, before, but especially after, I returned from the Ukrainian border. I dread turning on the television to see what the latest news is and what the sights are from Ukraine, only to find more onslaught, more death, more destruction. Every minute, every day matters. We have delayed ourselves in providing financial sanctions and in imposing financial sanctions. We were slow in energy sanctions, and we were slow in getting a defensive military package in place. But we are moving now. This Congress has reached its conclusions about the importance of these things. This administration has acted, but the things that we have promised, apparently, still have not in total reached Ukraine. How difficult it must be to be a Ukrainian, knowing that something is coming from the outside world to help? While I get up and dread the news of the day, every moment in their lives has to be the expectation, the hope that something is going to arrive today to bring this incursion, this massacre, this death and destruction to an end. If you are a parent in Ukraine, it is not about what you see on the nightly news, on the morning news. It is about how am I going to save my children's lives today? What is going to occur in a few moments? And our answer can't be: It is coming. We will be there later. It has to be: We are there now. The defensive military package includes Stinger anti-aircraft systems, Javelin anti-armor weapon systems, tactical unmanned aerial systems, grenade launchers, firearms, ammunition, and body armor and helmets. But they must be delivered. They mean nothing on a list. They mean nothing on a piece of paper that says we are shipping these things, on a bill of lading. They mean nothing en route to Ukraine. They mean something when they are in the hands of the Ukrainians that we know to be committed, brave, persistent, undeterred. You know in visiting, the Senator spoke about the military men and women we have seen from our own country and what an inspiration they are and how much we appreciate their service and their sacrifice and their families back here in Kansas and across the country. Our military men and women from Kansas have been training Ukrainians over the last several years, and even they are amazed that, despite their relationships and training with the Ukrainian soldiers, how successful they are. I think, unfortunately, in this country we thought that this ***invasion*** would last a few days and that it would be over and the Ukrainian people decimated or surrendered. And so our expectations, apparently, were that we were not necessary, that we were not a solution to this problem. The course of events is already predetermined, but the human spirit defies all expectations-- the human spirit of the Ukrainian people, the tremendous leadership. My experience suggests to me the value of a leader. You can have highly trained soldiers, but if you don't have leaders who inspire, their abilities to succeed, their abilities to persevere disappear. And President Zelenskyy has been the role model. My guess is that citizens around the world look at Zelenskyy and say: Oh, that is the kind of clear leadership, determination that we need-- clear spoken, clear acting, not running, fighting the fight. We must make certain--this is a moral issue, Americans, the world. If you think that the war was going to be over in a few days, you may have a different attitude. But now that we know that it is not, we have to provide the military equipment, the means for the Ukrainian people, their military, their civilians, not just to survive another day but to win the war. How immoral it is to provide just enough to live but not enough to win. What we saw on the Polish-Ukrainian border is the impact of Putin's war to these people, to the people of Ukraine, to the people of the neighboring countries--the fear that our NATO allies have that Ukraine may not be next. Not only do we need to provide the equipment and support for Ukrainians to win for purposes of the Ukrainian people, but if Putin doesn't pay the price, if he feels that he is all-empowered after his march through Ukraine, I have no level of comfort that he stops at the Ukrainian border. I am saddened by what I saw: the human suffering, the tragedies. We all have kids and grandkids. And we saw Ukrainian children; we saw parents who love them but had to give them up for their safety and security. We saw families--wives who love their husbands, spouses who love each other but departing because dad, brother needs to stay behind to fight the fight. And on the other hand, there was the tremendous relief in seeing the response by others. It happens often in crises around the world, when Americans and others--the whole world--resolve to help people in these circumstances. But this is not a flood; this is not is tsunami; this is not an earthquake. The sadness of this comes from: This is unnecessary. This is one man's evil actions causing the desperation and death, the tragedy, in Ukraine. And we should know that it doesn't end at the Ukrainian borders. Even if Putin doesn't cross the border, the hunger, the starvation, the lack of food around the world--Ukraine is the breadbasket of Europe, and its ability to feed itself and its ability to feed the rest of the world is disappearing. We will see the need for assistance and humanitarian aid in countries around the globe only increase at a time in which there is famine in so many places. It is a circumstance caused by a tyrant, whose actions will not just affect Ukrainian people, but the rest of the world. We must be unified with our NATO allies. And it was so pleasing to see the NATO countries who now recognize the importance of NATO and are stepping up to fulfill their commitments, in support of the Ukrainians, but in support of this pact that at the end of World War II, across the Atlantic, it was decided that America had a role to play, but we could only play that role with the cooperation of others. It is still true today. America has a role to play, but we need friends and allies, and we made our commitment to NATO. They, too, need to know that America will be steadfast. We can demonstrate that by being steadfast in Ukraine. It is immoral, it is death causing, it is damning should the United States of America fail in its obligations. I will conclude with the story I have told before. It comes from watching the news--something I try to avoid doing--about the reporter who is asking what appears to me to be a 10-, 11-year-old boy in a Ukrainian orphanage that question we often ask young people: What do you want to be when you grow up? This little boy, through an interpreter, answered that question, What do I want to be when I grow up? His response was: I want to be an American. What does that tell us about us? Americans? It tells us that we are still something special. We still matter. The rest of the world still pays attention to us, and an 11-year-old boy across the globe knows enough about us to know that is what he wants to be. That should make us feel proud as Americans, but it also ought to make us accept and fulfill our responsibilities. [[Page S1731]] No 11-year-old boy in an orphanage in Ukraine ought to be in an orphanage in Ukraine. And we, our allies, must fulfill our responsibilities of what it is to be an American. Madam President, I offer my willingness to work with you and everyone in this U.S Senate, the Congress, and the administration to make sure that, knowing that there are people in the world who know what they want when they grow up is to be an American, to do my part to make sure that America is the place and an American is who you would want to be. I yield the floor. The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Kansas. Mr. MARSHALL. Madam President, let me start by thanking the junior Senator from Iowa for her leadership. I thank Senator Ernst for fighting for freedom. Thanks for showing me the way to continue to fight for those who need help. This weekend, together, we witnessed the worst of mankind, but we also saw the best of humankind, and that would be the Polish people and the job that they have done welcoming--yes, welcoming--almost a million refugees from Ukraine over a period of about 2 weeks. They didn't just welcome them. They gave them food; they gave them clothing and shelter. And then more than that, they helped ***process*** them and get them to a location, to a friend, to a relative, buying them plane tickets, putting them on trains. I have done missionary healthcare work all across the world, and what we saw the Polish people doing there was absolutely incredible. Half of the Polish people have taken a refugee into their own homes. But like I said, we also witnessed the worst of humankind, the worst of mankind, and that would be Vladimir Putin's war on the people of Ukraine. One Ukrainian woman--her name was Olena--whom I spoke with said: The Russians are attacking Ukraine from the north, from the east, and the south. With their missiles, they can reach every place of our country--there is no safe place in Ukraine any more. Everything can be targeted: hospitals, kindergartens, maternity wards, hospitals, everything. And another Ukrainian we spoke to, Daria, said: In the city of Mariupol, almost every single building was hit by a Russian bomb or a Russian missile. People are residing in bomb shelters. They are cut from electricity. They are cut from aid, food, and from water. They are melting snow to drink water. Russians are deliberately throwing bombs into hospitals. And, again, I am quoting Daria. There is only one hospital remaining. One of the hospitals was a maternity hospital. Men were trying to evacuate a woman who was in labor, and she died with her unborn baby. Another pregnant woman--her name was Mariana--was going down the stairs. She survived. She gave birth. They don't have food now to feed the mother. I don't know if the baby girl is still alive. There are thousands of people dead, but it's impossible to bury them. The bodies--it's a horror movie which is happening--people are dead on the streets. These stories are heart-wrenching, and there is no doubt the world needs to step up and we need Europe to lead. And I am so proud to report the buzz across Europe and the buzz across Germany as we landed, that the Germans are committed once again to this transatlantic partnership and a willingness to commit dollars and funds to this NATO alliance and to the security of the world. That said, there is so much more that we can still do short of boots on the ground. And like my Ukrainian friends remind me: This war didn't start with Russia on February 24. And this is Olena again. She said the weakness of the United States started much earlier: Since the beginning of November, we've been shouting out loud to help arm Ukraine, sanction Nord Stream 2--why did the U.S lift sanctions on Nord Stream 2 and basically give the green light for Putin to move forward in Ukraine? We clearly warned that that might happen--we were not heard. Earlier this month, the Ukrainians said that they met with Secretary Blinkin and they begged him to please send air defense systems now. But weeks later, they still don't have them. This is day No. 26 since Russia invaded, and the Ukrainians are telling us they are not seeing any American weapons yet. I asked them to describe to me what they needed to win this war, and their answer was very simple: maximum military assistance as it relates to weapons, including, MiGs, A-10s, Javelins, Stingers, drones. Look, the Ukrainians can win this ground war, but the problem is Russia is launching bombs from their own airspace, from their own land, from the seas as well. What they need are missiles that will intercept the Russian bombs. Another Polish woman we met said: We were ready as Poland to give these MiGs-- This is a Polish woman speaking now. We were ready as Poland to give them the MiGs, but the Biden administration didn't want us to provide them. And what happened--instead of consulting us, the Biden administration decided to go public without the Polish Government even knowing that this was the case. The impression in Ukraine is that the White House is undermining the giving of weapons from our allies to the Ukrainians, that they are thwarting the transfer of these weapons. One of the Ukrainians even went so far as to say she wanted to steal the MiGs because there was just no other option. This war was completely preventable had the United States projected its strength. The United States can do so much more. President Zelenskyy has begged us, the United States, to lead more, but this administration is following the footsteps of President Obama by leading from behind. They have been slow to react at every step. This is a portion of a cruise missile that hit in Ukraine. Two Ukrainian diplomats describing to me what happened, where 35 people were killed by the cruise missile. This was launched by Russia on one of the days that President Biden said what NATO will not do to help Ukraine. Let me say that again. This was launched the day that President Biden said what NATO will not do to help Ukraine. This is the very telegraphing that has, yet again, proved to be deadly. As Ukrainians pointed out to us, this is what led to the disastrous Afghanistan withdrawal. In their words--the words of the Ukrainians, not mine--they say this administration is operating what they call an ``Afghanistan syndrome.'' The Ukrainian people don't need speeches. They don't need words. They don't need resolutions. They don't need Americans forming committees and praying about it. They need more than our prayers. They need action. They need action. I call for a war tribunal to be formed and Putin and his generals to be held accountable and put on trial for crimes against humanity. The world needs to seize his personal assets and the assets of his oligarchs, and we need to use those personal assets to rebuild Ukraine. The world needs to stop doing business with Russia today. Don't wait on your governments. Don't wait on the sanctions. I call on every business in the world to stop doing business with Russia today. And finally, the United States needs to implement our sanctions today, not yesterday. We don't need to delay until June 24 a waiver on energy payments from Russian banks. We still have so much more we could do short of putting American boots on the ground. We need to send this military aid yesterday--not tomorrow, not next week. It is not a time to debate. Give them the damn weapons. The brave Ukrainian people will use them. They will fight to the death, but they have to be empowered to do it, and every day we wait, thousands more will die. I want to finish on a positive note. I am so proud of these young men and women, American fighters in the Big Red One, the 1st Infantry Division of Fort Riley, KS. They have been there for years training Ukrainians, training our partners. Some of the folks will ask me back home: Are we going to be safe? I have got all the faith and confidence in the world of our soldiers, of our military--all the confidence in the world of these men and women that are willing to put their lives on the line. And let me reassure you also that the Ukrainian people are not going to give up. They are not going to give up. They are going to fight for every inch, every mile of their home soil. In Poland, Olena and Daria told me just before we departed: America is the leader of NATO. Every NATO country is looking at what America is [[Page S1732]] doing and not doing. What America is saying and what America is not saying. We know that there are NATO countries here on the border who have weapons which we need, but they simply need backup from America. We will win this war. But, at which price will we win this war? Help us win it at the price of less casualty. That's what we are asking the United States. Like I said earlier, the Ukrainians can win this war. There is a path to victory. I believe in them, but the world has to step up. We have to empower them. We are doing so little of what we could be doing. I was taught at a young age: Of him who much is given, much is required. And the United States has been given so much. We are still the leader of the free world. It is time we start acting like it. I yield the floor. The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Maryland.

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[***Climate Change and Cascading Risks from Infectious Disease***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:673K-K051-JCWX-C461-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

Key Summary Points

|  |
| --- |
| **Why carry out this study?** |
| Climate change is considered to be one of the greatest threats to human health in the twenty-first century, with significant increases in temperature extremes, heavy precipitation, and severe droughts. |
| These climate hazards can activate cascading risk pathways with a sequence of secondary, causally connected events that can disrupt critical infrastructure, vital for a functional society. |
| **What was learned from the study?** |
| This study examines cascading risk pathways from climate change for vector-, water-, food-, and air-borne infectious diseases in a global context. |
| Cascading effects from climate hazards include also stagnant water that serve as breeding ground for mosquitoes after a flood; contamination of drinking water after a storm surge; breakdown of vector control programs after a hurricane; cholera outbreak after a drought. |
| A narrow, siloed, and linear assessment of these risks will misinform decision- and policymakers of the magnitude and pattern of future risks, and of the opportunities to modify policies to reduce inherent vulnerabilities and enhance infectious disease control programs. |
| Elucidating cascading risk pathways from infectious diseases is a first step towards tacking infectious disease threats from climate change. |

Digital Features

This article is published with digital features, including a Talking Head video to facilitate understanding of the article. To view digital features for this article go to [*https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.19621077*](https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.19621077).

Introduction

Global surface temperature increased at an ***unprecedented*** rate over the last 50 years and will continue to do so, until at least the mid-century under all greenhouse emissions scenarios []. Climate futures include increases in the frequency and intensity of hot extremes, heavy precipitation, and ***agricultural*** and ecological droughts. Pathogens, vectors, hosts, and disease transmission can be sensitive to these changing conditions []. Specifically, pathogens develop only within a narrow temperature envelope, with development ceasing at lower or higher temperatures. Temperature influences the reproduction and extrinsic incubation period of pathogens within a vector, with higher temperatures accelerating pathogen maturation. Mosquito biting rate is also a function of temperature, which can affect disease transmission. Moreover, ambient temperature affects the spatial–temporal distribution of disease vectors that carry and transmit pathogen to humans. Disease transmission can in turn be influenced by weather patterns, albeit indirectly, by altered contact rates between human and pathogen, human and vector, or human and host.

However, infectious disease transmission is also a function of underlying vulnerabilities in society (Table ). Vulnerability is defined as the propensity or predisposition to be adversely affected by infectious disease or a susceptibility to harm and lack of capacity to cope and adapt (Fig. ). There are multiple vulnerability factors for health impacts of climate change that can be grouped into biomedical (e.g., immunocompromised, malnourished), demographic (e.g., age, sex), geographic (e.g., land use, flood zones), socioeconomic (e.g., poverty, education), or sociopolitical (e.g., civil strife, political instability) (Table ) []. From an infectious disease standpoint, vulnerability is also determined by the lack of safeguards such as door/window screens for vectors or flood barriers for storm surges [].

Combination matrix of climate hazards, vulnerabilities, cascading risks, and climate-sensitive infectious disease (ID) impacts

This is not a complete list but is intended to be illustrative only

Sources: UNDRR/ISC Sendai Hazard Definition and Classification Review Technical Report; The Impacts of Climate Change on Human Health in the United States: A Scientific Assessment; Lindgren E, Andersson Y, Suk JE, Sudre B, Semenza JC. Monitoring EU Emerging Infectious Disease Risk due to Climate Change. Science 2012;336(6080):418–419. Semenza JC. Cascading risks of waterborne diseases from climate change. Nature Immunol. 2020 May;21(5):484–487

Cascading risks from infectious disease, due to a nexus of hazard, vulnerability, and exposure. Climatic hazards (e.g., extreme rain event or heat; outer spiral), amplified by societal vulnerabilities can trigger new hazards, such as floodwater contaminated with pathogens or high mosquito densities. Cascading events (inner spiral) caused by these infectious disease hazards and amplified by newly attained vulnerabilities can result in population exposure and give rise to water-borne or mosquito-borne disease outbreaks, respectively

Furthermore, infectious disease transmission depends on the exposure pattern in human populations, which is defined as the state of people, livelihoods, species, property, (eco-) systems, or other elements present in hazard zones that thereby could be adversely affected. Individuals or communities can be exposed to contaminated drinking water, vectors, or pathogens. The nexus of these three elements—hazard, vulnerability, and exposure—determines the current infectious disease impacts or future risks due to climate change (Fig. ).

In addition to these impacts of weather and climate on pathogens, vectors, hosts, and disease transmission, a weather or climate event can activate cascading risk pathways with a sequence of secondary, causally connected events. Table  presents a combination matrix of how climate hazards can be combined with societal vulnerabilities that give rise to cascading risk pathways resulting in climate-sensitive infectious disease outbreaks. The dynamic interactions between climate hazard, exposure, and vulnerability set the stage for cascading risks (Fig. ; outer spiral). For example, a hurricane can result in flooding or disrupt vector control programs as a result of infrastructure vulnerabilities. Contamination of floodwater with pathogens or high mosquito populations can cause population exposure to pathogens and then trigger cascading events (Fig. ; inner spiral) such as water-borne or mosquito-borne outbreaks. These resulting impacts of a sequential chain reaction within natural and human systems can be significantly larger than the initial hazard and can cause additional physical, natural, social, or economic disruption (Fig. ; inner spiral) []. If these secondary effects such as flooding disrupt critical infrastructure that is vital for a functional society, the consequences can be substantial. Such events can have a ripple effect across society and generate direct losses through immediate impacts or more secondary losses through consequential impacts. The combination matrix in Table  illustrates the predicament of climate change adaptation where virtually any climate hazard can be combined with specific vulnerabilities resulting in cascading risk pathways and infectious disease impacts. Examples of such cascading effects from climate hazards that have been described in the peer-reviewed literature include stagnant water after a flood that serves as a breeding ground for mosquitoes; contamination of drinking water after a storm; injuries from landslides or storm surges with risk of tetanus infections in populations with low vaccination coverage; or a cholera outbreak after a drought (Table ).

Selected examples of climate hazards, societal vulnerabilities, and cascading events resulting in infectious disease outbreaks

| **Climate hazard** | **Vulnerability and cascading events** | **Infectious disease outcome** | **References** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Hurricane | Lack of WASH in mega-shelter after hurricane Katrina | Widespread outbreak of norovirus gastroenteritis among evacuees | Yee EL, Palacio H, Atmar RL, et al. Widespread outbreak of norovirus gastroenteritis among evacuees of Hurricane Katrina residing in a large ?megashelter? in Houston, Texas: lessons learned for prevention. Clin Infect Dis. 2007;44:1032?9 |
| Typhoon | Serious flooding in Metro Manila | Outbreak of Leptospirosis | Amilasan A-shereT, Ujiie M, Suzuki M, et al. Outbreak of leptospirosis after flood, the Philippines, 2009. Emerg Infect Dis. 2012;18:91?4 |
| Cyclones: Idai and Kenneth in Mozambique | Lack of access to safe water, poor sanitation, contact with stagnant floodwater, overcrowding in the camps for displaced people | Diarrheal diseases, malaria | Mugabe VA, Gudo ES, Inlamea OF, et al. Natural disasters, population displacement and health emergencies: multiple public health threats in Mozambique. BMJ Global Health. 2021;6:e006778. doi:10.1136/bmjgh-2021-006778 |
| Heavy rainfall and elevated temperature | Contamination of surface water by compromised WASH systems | Cholera outbreaks in Yemen | Camacho A, Bouhenia M, Alyusfi R, et al. Cholera epidemic in Yemen, 2016?18: an analysis of surveillance data. Lancet Glob Health. 2018 Jun;6(6):e680?e690. [*https://doi.org/10.1016/S2214-109X(18)30230-4*](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2214-109X(18)30230-4) |
| Monsoon: heavy rain | Record-breaking deluge and floods | Acute diarrhea, skin and eye infections, leptospirosis, malaria epidemic, leishmaniasis, respiratory infections, hepatitis | Baqir M, Sobani ZA, Bhamani A, et al. Infectious diseases in the aftermath of monsoon flooding in Pakistan. Asian Pac J Trop Biomed. 2012;2:76?9 |
| Floods | Health care access | Inadequate access to health care after the disaster | Jacquet GA, Kirsch T, Durrani A, Sauer L, Doocy S. Health care access and utilization after the 2010 Pakistan floods. Prehosp Disaster Med. 2016 Oct;31(5):485?91 |
| Floods, storms, droughts | Displacement | Infectious disease outbreaks including measles, cholera, cutaneous leishmaniasis, dengue | Desai AN, Ramatowski JW, Marano N, Madoff LC, Lassmann B. Infectious disease outbreaks among forcibly displaced persons: an analysis of ProMED reports 1996?2016. Confl Health. 2020 Dec;14(1):1?0 |
| Heavy rain | Overwhelmed water treatment and distribution system | Water-borne disease outbreaks, e.g., cryptosporidium | Semenza JC, Nichols G. Cryptosporidiosis surveillance and water-borne outbreaks in Europe. Euro Surveill. 2007 May;12(5):E13?14 |
| Extreme temperatures, droughts | Crop failures, undernutrition | Vulnerability to infectious diseases, especially diarrhea, pneumonia, and measles | Gwela A, Mupere E, Berkley JA, Lancioni C. Undernutrition, host immunity and vulnerability to infection among young children. Pediatr Infect Dis J. 2019 Aug 1;38(8):e175?7 |
| Droughts | Water scarcity, hygiene | Cholera outbreaks; infectious disease outbreaks | Charnley GE, Kelman I, Green N, Hinsley W, Gaythorpe KA, Murray KA. Exploring relationships between drought and epidemic cholera in Africa using generalised linear models. BMC Infect Dis. 2021 Dec;21(1):1?2Jofre J, Blanch AR, Lucena F. Water-borne infectious disease outbreaks associated with water scarcity and rainfall events. In: Sabater S, Barceló D, editors. Water scarcity in the Mediterranean; 2009: pp. 147?59. Berlin, Heidelberg: Springer |

Protecting and promoting health requires understanding and preparing for these causal interdependencies that permeate many aspects of society. A climate hazard can adversely affect one sector in society by surpassing a threshold that causes system failure (Fig. ). As a result of the interconnected nature of modern society, this can have implications for other sectors []. The potential for cross-scale failures need to be defined in relation to the initial climate trigger. By doing so, the complexity of interactions within the public health network can be modeled mathematically. That way, cascading risk pathways can be simulated and analyzed. Understanding the weaknesses in the system can help advance adaptive capacity and intervention ***measures***. Only then can cascading failures be anticipated and intercepted quickly with targeted ***measures*** that can prevent a public health impact. Here we critically review interlinked drivers of infectious disease transmission and elucidate the cascading risks associated with climate variability and change. We thoroughly examine cascading risk pathways from climate change for vector-, water-, food-, and air-borne infectious diseases in a global context, as opposed to a focused assessment of one infectious disease category [] or one geographic area [], which, to our knowledge, has not been attempted before. Such a comprehensive assessment is critical in order to elucidate cascading risk pathways from infectious diseases, in the context of the complex branching configuration of a globalized, dendritic society; indeed, it is a first step towards tackling infectious disease threats from climate change.

Methods

Peer-reviewed research articles were retrieved from PubMed using the following search terms: infectious diseases, vector-, water-, food-, air-borne diseases, climate change, climate variability, global warming, temperature, heat wave, precipitation, flooding. Disease-specific searches by pathogen name were also conducted. Keywords of the concepts and MeSH terms (when available) were used in the search strategies. A special focus was given to English language publications from the last 5 years. Of particular interest were publications that examined the specific aims of this study, climate change and cascading risks from infectious disease, and assessed the association between climate change and disease transmission. Research reports from international organizations and gray literature were also included in our analysis. This article is based on previously conducted studies and does not contain any new studies with human participants or animals performed by any of the authors.

Vector-Borne Diseases

Climatic conditions indirectly affect vector-borne diseases such as mosquito- and tick-borne diseases. Alterations in environmental conditions can have secondary effects on vector populations, replication rates of pathogens, and vector–host interactions. Further, climatic events can result in cascading secondary effects that can alter the transmission pathway for vector-borne diseases discussed in this section.

Mosquito-Borne Diseases

Malaria

Malaria is caused by five species of plasmodium parasites that are transmitted by Anopheles mosquitoes. The disability-adjusted life years (DALYs) rate of malaria declined by almost 40% globally between 2007 and 2017. The largest burden of disease occurs in Africa where more than 90% of all malaria-related deaths occur [, ]. The RTS,S/AS01 malaria vaccine for the prevention of Plasmodium falciparum malaria in children living in regions with moderate to high transmission in combination with chemoprevention should further decrease the disease burden [, ]. While there have been recurrent, local outbreaks of malaria in Europe [], the risk for widespread transmission is relatively low.

Malaria has expanded its geographic range into higher altitudes during warmer years in the highland areas of Columbia and Ethiopia [, ]. Thus, without interventions, it is possible that declining trends in the number of malaria DALYs will be offset by additional climate change. Cascading risk pathways from a number of hurricanes disrupted anti-malaria vector control programs and resulted in a resurgence of P. falciparum malaria in Haiti, Guatemala, and Nicaragua in the 1980s and 1990s [, ]. In the Amazon region, the dry season is getting longer and the rainy season that used to start at the end of October now starts at the beginning of December; this exacerbates and accelerates the burning of the rainforest. Heat stress and fires in the Amazon rainforest along with deforestation, road density, and selective logging are associated with malaria risk in the Amazon [–]. Smoke exposure from the Amazon fires is associated with increased respiratory illnesses such as pneumonia, acute bronchitis, and asthma in indigenous populations [].

The Anopheles vector is projected to expand its geographic range under different climate change scenarios, in part due to an increase in temperature and an expansion of the rainy season in the tropical areas of Africa [, ]. Similarly, an expansion is projected in South Africa and China but a contraction in India and Southeast Asia as a result of a reduction in climatic suitability [, ]. In China, Plasmodium vivax and P. falciparum malaria distributions are projected to increase under higher emission scenarios, such as representative concentration pathway (RCP) 4.5 and RCP8.5 []. Under a multi-scenario climate change framework, these are also the areas projected to experience a lengthening of the transmission season by 1.6 additional months in the tropical highlands in the African region, the Americas, and the Eastern Mediterranean region. The improvement in climatic suitability is expected to be greater in rural areas than in urban areas, and the epidemic belt would expand towards temperate regions []. Similarly, a general rise in months suitable for transmission is projected to increase in India; in other areas, the transmission season is projected to contract, when the climatic conditions will be too extreme for the vector species [].

Arboviral Diseases

Dengue

Aedes aegypti, the principal mosquito vector of many arboviral diseases, such as dengue, chikungunya, yellow fever, and Zika, has experienced a global expansion, threatening almost half of the world’s population [, ]. This expansion is attributed in part to the global temperature increase [] but also globalized population movement through air traffic and urbanization, and insufficient vector control ***measures*** [, ]. Dengue is responsible for an estimated 10,000 deaths and 100 million symptomatic infections per year in over 125 countries [, ]. Dengue incidence is positively associated with temperature, precipitation, and relative humidity in several settings worldwide, including the Americas [], India [], and Philippines []. Sea surface temperature, rain, and variation in wind associated with the El Niño Southern Oscillation over the Pacific Ocean has also been used as a predictor of dengue incidence []. Cascading risks due to a breakdown of vector control ***measures*** in countries of Central America after hurricane Mitch in 1998 resulted in almost 40,000 cases of dengue and dengue hemorrhagic fever [].

The change in potential for global abundance in the future of the dengue vector A. aegypti is shown in Fig. , with big increased potential in Southeast Asia, China, Japan, East Australia, and Africa []. More favorable temperatures and increased rainfall by 2050 from climate change could increase the suitability for dengue in southern and western Africa, southeastern USA, central Mexico, northern Argentina, and inland areas of Australia. In addition, coastal cities in eastern China and Japan are projected to become more suitable by 2050 []. The potential transmission season will lengthen by 4 months because of an increase in climatic suitability, particularly in lowlands in the Western Pacific region and the Eastern Mediterranean region [].

Change in the potential abundance of A. aegypti (per larval site) over the twenty-first century (2090–2099 relative to 1987–2016). The two panels correspond to two carbon emission scenarios: RCP2.6 (a) and RCP8.5 (b).

Source: Reference []

Chikungunya

The chikungunya virus was first identified in Tanzania in 1952, where it caused a localized outbreak in Africa and parts of Asia, and then spread to countries around the Indian Ocean. Travel and trade have contributed to a continuous geographic spread to temperate areas []. The virus has also been repeatedly imported into Europe where conducive climatic conditions contributed to two large outbreaks in Italy in 2007 and 2017 [, ]. Projecting the chikungunya risk under RCP4.5 and RCP8.5 indicates an expansion of the transmission-suitable areas in China, sub-Saharan Africa, South America, the USA, and continental Europe, although also some contraction of the transmission risk along parts of the Adriatic coast of Europe as a result of unfavorable climatic conditions for example [].

Zika

The Zika virus has also expanded globally, causing large outbreaks in South America in 2016 following a period of record high temperatures and severe drought conditions in 2015 []. Storing drinking water in open containers at home as a result of the drought might have created ideal vector breeding and exposure conditions that contributed to the outbreak. Zika could expand north with longer seasons as temperatures move towards the predicted thermal optimum (29 °C) [].

West Nile Fever

Europe experienced uncharacteristically high spring temperatures in 2018 followed by an ***exceptionally*** early and intense West Nile virus (WNV) transmission season, with 2083 cases [, ]. These weather anomalies could have activated the mosquito breeding season early and reduced the extrinsic incubation period, which would explain the high prevalence of WNV in mosquito vectors (Culex pipiens) (Fig. ) and avian hosts, compared to previous years. In fact, birds infected with WNV were discovered before the virus was detected in humans, in both the Netherlands and Germany [, ]. In Europe, progressive expansion of WNV is projected along the edges of the current transmission areas, which can result in a cascading risk to the safety of blood banks []. WNV-infected, but asymptomatic donors can inadvertently contaminate the blood supply which can arrest blood transfusion services. In order to prevent cascading risk pathways affecting the blood supply, a number of steps need to be taken, such as screening, deferral and pathogen reduction strategies [].

The vector for West Nile virus: C. pipiens mosquito distribution in Europe as of September 2021. Source: ECDC, [*https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/publications-data/culex-pipiens-group-current-known-distribution-september-2021*](https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/publications-data/culex-pipiens-group-current-known-distribution-september-2021)

Tick-Borne Diseases

Lyme Disease

Vector surveillance in Canada has documented a geographic range expansion of the black-legged tick Ixodes scapularis, the main vector of Borrelia burgdorferi, the agent of Lyme disease []. This expansion is associated with elevated temperatures, the emergence of tick populations, increases in their range and recent geographic spread, as well as with a rapid increase in human Lyme disease cases [–]. In Europe, transmission by Ixodes ricinus ticks is also determined by factors besides temperature, such as host populations and habitats []. A higher transmission risk is projected under all RCP scenarios for I. scapularis in some areas of Canada []. The season of Lyme disease is projected to expand in the USA under a 2 °C warming scenario with a 20% increase of cases over the coming decades and lead to an earlier onset and longer length of the annual Lyme disease season [, ]. In Europe, the risk of transmission could even be reduced under the low-emission greenhouse gas scenario [].

Tick-Borne Encephalitis

Tick-borne encephalitis (TBE) is an important zoonotic infection, with an increasing disease burden and expanding geographic range across Europe, Russia, and parts of Asia. Among a number of contributing factors, milder winters and warmer springs due to climate change have been implicated in this range expansion [–]. TBE is a potentially serious disease, with 3411 TBE cases reported in EU/EEA countries in 2019 of which 20 died (case fatality, 0.7%). TBE cases generally display a seasonal peak in the months of July and August. Conducive climatic conditions can result in a cascading chain of events where goats, sheep, or cows are infected with the TBE virus that can result in alimentary infection of humans after consumption of unpasteurized milk and cheese from domestic ruminants [–].

Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever

Rocky Mountain spotted fever is the most common fatal tick-borne disease in the USA, with 21 fatalities between 2003 and 2016, caused by Rickettsia rickettsia []. Warmer wetter climates have led to an expansion of tick habitat range and distribution [, ]. For example, the range expansion of the lone star tick is correlated with an increased incidence of spotted fever group rickettsiosis in the USA [].

Leishmaniasis

The protozoa Leishmania infantum, the main causative agent of zoonotic visceral leishmaniasis and cutaneous leishmaniasis, are transmitted by infected Phlebotomine sandflies. Leishmaniasis is found in southern Europe and northern Africa around the Mediterranean as well as parts of Asia []. The primary reservoirs of human infections are domestic and stray dogs that have experienced a progressive increase of Leishmania seroprevalence rates at higher latitudes and altitudes, more so than might be expected in Mediterranean countries []. There has been a climate change-related expansion of sandflies into more northern latitudes and higher altitudes in Italy [], in the Pyrenees [], and Germany []. The convergence of vector dispersion and the scattering of infected dogs (e.g., through adoption services) can compound this public health issue. The climate in Central Europe is projected to become increasingly more suitable for sandflies in the future, under climate change scenarios [].

Food-Borne Diseases

Salmonella is climate sensitive and grows in a narrow temperature envelope with a strong seasonality. An increase in ambient temperature is associated with an upsurge in Salmonella incidence in a number of settings, indicating a direct impact on replication rates [–]. The situation for Campylobacter is different, because the pathogen cannot replicate outside of the host. Thus, warm weather conditions may not directly affect Campylobacter replication rates but rather reflect human behavioral issues such as riskier patterns of food production/consumption or other seasonal factors [–]. Nevertheless, with an increase in ambient temperature and extreme weather events, the food safety risk is anticipated to increase as a result of risks from existing and emerging food-borne pathogens along the food chain [–].

The transmission pathway of food-borne diseases through the food chain is complex and susceptible to several climatic drivers []. For example, in 2017, hurricane Irma contaminated many commercial fruit and vegetable fields in Florida with pathogens and parasites, which led the US Food and Drug Administration to warn against the consumption of fresh produce that had been in contact with floodwater []. Hurricanes can also disrupt food ***processing***, preparation, transport and spoil foodstuff.

Water-Borne Diseases

Water-borne diseases causing diarrheal diseases have been declining globally since the 1990s, owing to improvements in water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH), reductions in poverty, and vaccination programs []. Despite this, the disease burden is considerable in low- and high-income countries [] and is usually caused by microbial contamination of the drinking water supply [–]. Bacteria, protozoa, viruses, or parasites have been implicated in water-borne outbreaks due to an inability of the water treatment system to clear pathogens from the water supply [, ].

Water-borne outbreaks can occur because of climate variability and change followed by secondary events that are causally connected. Such cascading risk pathways can lead to a succession of system failures and damage critical infrastructure. For instance, extreme precipitation can mobilize pathogens from pastures and fields and overwhelm water treatment and distribution systems resulting in drinking water contamination []. In fact, empirical studies have documented cascading risks from heavy rain that give rise to water-borne outbreaks [, ]. Similarly, cascading risk pathways of floods can contaminate drinking water wells, treatment and distribution systems, and produce water-borne outbreaks [, ]. Conversely, water shortages and drought can also give rise to cascading risks and cause diarrheal diseases [, ], although this association has been documented inconsistently [].

Cholera

Natural disasters can trigger a sequence of cascading events that can compromise WASH. For example, poor sanitation after a hurricane can result in cholera outbreaks []. Cholera, is an acute diarrheal disease, caused by the bacterium Vibrio cholerae that can result in severe morbidity and mortality; it has been associated with several climatic parameters, in situations with poor WASH and where cholera has already been seeded in the population [–]. For example, elevated ambient temperature is a key parameter for cholera incidence [, ], as well as lower and higher precipitation [, ]. The projected risk for non-cholera Vibrio cases, including gastroenteritis, wound infections, and septicemia, is projected to increase in the Baltic Sea region with higher sea surface temperatures [].

Leptospirosis

Leptospira bacteria can contaminate water, soil, or food through the urine of infected animals, and cause leptospirosis, a bacterial disease that affects humans and animals. For example, recreational water use during hot weather increases the risk of exposure to water contaminated with Leptospira []. As part of a time series from 2006 to 2016, human leptospirosis notification was significantly associated with rainfall and land surface temperature in high-risk counties in China []. Floodwater or drinking water contaminated with Leptospira can cause outbreaks of leptospirosis [, ], vividly illustrating the nexus of climate hazard, societal vulnerability, and population exposure in creating cascading risk pathways for leptospirosis (Fig. ).

Schistosomiasis

Infections with parasitic blood flukes of the species Schistosoma mansoni, S. japonicum, S. intercalatum, S. mekongi, and S. guineensis can cause intestinal schistosomiasis, associated with systemic inflammation. Cases have been reported in Africa, Latin America, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia [–]. Temperature is a determinant of the geographic distribution of flukes and a climate change assessment indicated increased transmission as well as potential shrinkages in certain areas []. For example, a decade-long drought between 2001 and 2009 resulted in the disappearance of significant clustering around historical transmission hot spots in coastal Kenya, due to the disappearance of the flukes from ponds along with urinary schistosomiasis transmission []. Conversely, extreme precipitation in June 2017 in Brazil resulted in a large schistosomiasis outbreak after a large flooding period [].

Hotter areas in Africa are projected to experience reduced snail populations but higher populations are projected in areas with currently lower winter temperature [, ]. In China, currently endemic areas in Sichuan Province are projected to contract, but non-endemic areas in Sichuan and Hunan/Hubei provinces expand [, ].

Respiratory Infections

Respiratory infections tend to be highly seasonal, with higher incidence in the winter months, in part due to increased pathogen survival, indoor crowding, and elevated host susceptibility []. For example, temperature and humidity determine the incidence of influenza in temperate regions of the world. Low daily temperatures and both low and high relative humidity were associated with an increased risk of influenza incidence in Seoul, Republic of Korea []. Similarly, low temperature correlated with peaks of influenza virus activity in Northern Europe []. Conversely, warm winters tend to be followed by severe and early-onset influenza incidence the following season [], partially due to waning population immunity to previous infections.

A respiratory disease outbreak caused by hantavirus in 1999 and 2000 in Santos, Panama was preceded by extreme precipitation []. Such unusual rainfall patterns may have led to increases in rodent populations and contact rates with humans [, ]. Infected rodents can harbor the hantavirus in their saliva, urine, or feces which can result in human exposure. Another aspect of cascading effects in a warming world is the increased risk for flooding, which can result in respiratory infections; the incidence of respiratory infections has been observed to increase after flooding in a number of settings [–].

Conclusion

Increasing climate variability is already leading to cascading risks from infectious disease. With projections of increases in multiple modes of climate variability with additional climate change, it is vital for health systems to prepare for more and more extreme cascading risks, taking into account multiple other drivers of outbreaks of infectious diseases. The preparation needs to consider that these changes will vary over time and space, so are inherently difficult to predict. That means health systems need to prepare for uncertainty as much as for climate change. This requires flexibility in planning modifications to vector control programs to ensure they are prepared for a range of possible futures.

Climate effects can have far-reaching implications for public health through inherent societal vulnerabilities that can magnify the impacts of cascading risk pathways (Fig. ). A narrow, siloed, and linear assessment of these risks will misinform decision- and policymakers of the magnitude and pattern of future risks, and of the opportunities to modify policies to enhance infectious disease control programs, building from current programs. For example, current malaria control programs include treatment, bed nets, and vector control; also incorporating land use (e.g., wetland management, drainage of standing water) and socioeconomic determinants (e.g., housing, occupational exposure) can indirectly counteract the impacts of increasing climate variability on disease transmission.

A comprehensive understanding is critical of the interconnected nature of public health with social, demographic, and environmental drivers of infectious diseases. To this end, a better collaboration is warranted between public health practitioners, climate scientists, civil engineers, social scientists, network modelers, and decision-makers. Mathematical modelling of climate hazards, vulnerabilities, and exposures can improve projections of cascading events and facilitate transformative adaptation.

Failure to invest in research and health systems would jeopardize the resilience of individuals and communities to cascading impacts from infectious disease, leading to a sicker future.

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This article is based on previously conducted studies and does not contain any new studies with human participants or animals performed by any of the authors.

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**Body**

Washington: The Library of Congress, The Government of USA has issued the following house proceeding:

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senate will now resume legislative session. The Senator from Kansas. Ukraine Mr. MORAN. Mr. President, I have lent my voice with my colleagues here in the U.S Senate many times, here on the Senate floor, and elsewhere back home in Kansas in condemnation of Vladimir Putin's attack, ***invasion***, the death and destruction that his actions--his sole actions--have taken on the people of Ukraine. But those actions have consequences broader than just within the borders of the independent country of Ukraine. I want today to bring awareness to a pressing consequence coming out of this ***invasion***, and that is hunger. A month ago, Russia, the world's largest supplier of wheat, invaded Ukraine. Ukraine is the fifth largest [[Page S1761]] supplier of wheat. Together, they account for about 30 percent of global exports. This has exacerbated--tremendously exacerbated--the already existing global food crisis, and it will only get worse. Coming from a State like Kansas, coming from Kansas, America's largest supplier of wheat, I can tell you the effects this ***invasion*** will have on the stability of our ag markets here in the United States, and it should be alarming and could prove to be a catastrophic outcome for our global food supply. When there is a shortage of food, one of the things we can do is produce more. I would tell you that while the prices of ***agricultural*** commodities we grow in Kansas and across the United States have increased, I also would tell you that the input cost--the things that a farmer or a rancher has to purchase in order to produce that crop, to produce that outcome--has increased even more dramatically. I would encourage the administration and this Congress to do more in regard to the cost of everything. The increasing cost of food for the American consumer and the absence of food for many around the world can be alleviated by increasing the supply--can be addressed at least in part by increasing the supply. To help do that, we need to make certain that we increase our own production of oil and natural gas and of fertilizer. The cost of fertilizer is a huge input cost for the Kansas farmer, and we still have tariffs on phosphates coming from Morocco. The Department of Commerce is contemplating tariffs on nutrients for fertilizer coming from Trinidad and Tobago. Increasing the cost of the inputs of producing food is a very damaging thing to occur and should stop. We need to reduce the price-- slow the increase in the price of diesel fuel and fertilizer. Natural gas is a major component of producing fertilizer, and diesel fuel is hugely important. Again, we need to increase the supplies of our fossil fuels to help the farmers survive during these times. Today, I wear on behalf of Kansans the sunflower pin. It is the State flower of our State, but it also is an important symbol in Ukraine. It is a symbol of the resistance to Putin's ***invasion***. Just as Kansas is the breadbasket of America, Ukraine is the breadbasket of Europe. Ukraine, as I said earlier, is a large grain- producing country, not just in wheat but a top 10 global exporter of corn, sunflower oil, and other commodities. It provides produce to markets not just in Europe but to some of the most vulnerable countries throughout the Middle East. According to the magazine The Economist, ``The last time Egypt raised bread prices, the Soviet Union was still intact.'' Food stability is essential to political stability. We may recall that it was an increase in food prices that sparked mass protests throughout the Arab world a decade ago. As we have seen in the humanitarian disaster unfolding in Afghanistan and the developing crisis caused by the ***invasion*** of Ukraine, it is critical to utilize every tool at our disposal to meet these challenges. And it extends much further than the countries we see in the news each day. Currently, 45 million people across 43 countries are on the brink of famine. Hunger isn't an isolated issue; it affects each and every one of us. Prior to this assault, Afghanistan was facing a dire food shortage, with 23 million people going hungry. This will worsen as Putin's assault continues. In Sudan, 87 percent of the country's wheat comes from Russia and Ukraine. By the end of this year, an expected 20 million people will be food insecure, one in two Sudanese. In Bangladesh, despite progress in recent years, 11 million people are still suffering from acute hunger. In Ethiopia, 20 million people currently require food support, and this will worsen as Putin's assault continues. According to the U.N agency chiefs, Yemen is teetering on the edge of an outright catastrophe. The No. 1 driver of hunger on the planet is manmade conflict, according to the World Food Programme. As Russia's tyranny continues-- this Putin-made war--countries around the globe will teeter on the edge, falling further into widespread hunger. As the cochair of the Senate Hunger Caucus and a member of the ***Agriculture*** Appropriations Subcommittee, which funds Food for Peace and the McGovern-Dole Program--what I like to call Food for Peace and the Dole-McGovern Program--combatting any threat of hunger is not only the smart thing to do, it is the morally right thing to do to save the lives of not only those living in Ukraine but around the world. In January and, again, earlier this month, I called on USDA Secretary Vilsack and USAID Administrator Power to release the resources within the Bill Emerson Humanitarian Trust, an emergency international food assistance program to combat global hunger in times of ``***exceptional*** need.'' The Emerson Trust was created in 1980 for a moment just like this: when existing global hunger programs cannot--cannot--adequately address the prospects of multiple looming famines. As both the immediate and long-term effects on Ukraine's ***agriculture*** sector become clearer, the United States should work--the United States, with the rest of the world, should work to quickly provide the necessary commodities through sale or donation to meet countries' unsatisfied food and commodity needs. Doing so will help alleviate a greater humanitarian crisis than has already been caused by the unprovoked ***invasion*** and will help foster political stability in food- insecure countries. We are seeing the worst of evil--Putin's ***invasion*** of Ukraine--and the tremendous cost--humanitarian cost, loss-of-freedom cost--by that ***invasion***. We can also see the best in humanity: helping a starving world to be fed. I yield the floor. I suggest the absence of a quorum. The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll. The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll. Ms. CANTWELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded. The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. King). Without objection, it is so ordered. Recognizing Western Washington University Vikings Women's Basketball Team Ms. CANTWELL. Mr. President, I come to the floor to talk about supply chain issues, but before I do, I wanted to say a word about March Madness. I am pretty sure that most of my colleagues who know me think the next words out of my mouth are going to be something about a small Jesuit school in the eastern part of our State, but it is not. What I am going to talk about is congratulating the Western Washington University Vikings Women's Basketball team Division II final championship game players. The Vikings will be playing in the NCAA Division II Championship after defeating North Georgia last night with a score of 74 to 68. It was an outstanding performance by Brooke Walling, Emma Duff, and the entire team that represents people from all over our State--Everson, Tumwater, Monroe, Vancouver, Arlington, Marysville, Napavine, Ferndale, and various other places. I also want to congratulate Head Coach Carmen Dolfo, who is in, I think, her 31st season leading the Vikings, and the fact that this is such a great accomplishment for the women of Western Washington. I hope that we will continue to figure out ways to promote women's basketball in the NCAA tournament. I watched this game last night and saw a few people from our State who had made it there to cheer on the Vikings, but the actual pavilion looked pretty empty. Yet I guarantee you it was great basketball. We need to continue to encourage the NCAA to figure out ways to promote women's NCAA March Madness. They are great players, they are great teams, and they deserve to have the same kind of attention. So we look forward to cheering them on in that final NCAA tournament Division II game. H.R 4521 Now, Mr. President, I would like to come to the floor and talk about a continuation of our supply chain challenges that we are facing in the United States of America, particularly around the issues facing us in the high cost of cars, electronics, and appliances. Actually, you can say that our chip supply chain issues actually impact just about [[Page S1762]] everything because, yesterday, we had a hearing with major producers of chip semiconductors in the United States and also talked with one of the witnesses who happens to be in the freight business, because they produce trucks that are moving freight throughout the United States of America. They said the fact that they can't get these new generation trucks out the door because of the semiconductor shortage means that it is even impacting the cost of freight of every product. So I implore my colleagues to come to the floor and support sending the bill back to the House, telling them that we want to go to conference, and get into conference as soon as possible. Those who want to delay this are just delaying the United States in our competition with the world in producing and manufacturing great product. If you don't have the best chips, if you don't have the manufacturing, you are not going to lead. We already know that in 2021, we needed 1.2 trillion chips per year. In 2031, that is going to be 2 trillion chips per year. So we know that this shortage is going to continue far into the future unless we act. Why is this so important? Obviously, there are sectors like energy, transportation, high-tech, communications, national security--they all depend on us acting. But believe it or not, there are companies all throughout the United States right now that are looking at this issue on supply chain and saying: Are we going to make moves to take the supply chain back into the United States right now? I am saying, they are making these decisions this month. They are making these decisions next month. But there are some here who think that we can dillydally along and maybe take months and months and months to reconcile these two bills. They are absolutely wrong. I guarantee you, the Europeans are not waiting. The Europeans have decided they are going to fund this investment. They are going to continue to move faster than the United States of America to decide to do the next level of investment in semiconductors. So are we just basically saying to those U.S manufacturers and other companies that have products: Well, if you want the next generation chips, maybe you should locate in Europe? Do not think this is an idle issue; it is not. There is great competition for the demand for these semiconductors, but some here want to wait months and months and months before we get to the resolution of this issue. We need to send a signal to the market that the United States is determined to be a leader in this area, that we are determined for our national security and manufacturing competitiveness, and that we are going to build the best chips in the world. And for the supply chain, we want that supply chain here in the United States of America. But, again, some of our colleagues here would like to wait months and months and months to have that debate. We have already waited 286 days since the Senate passed, in a bipartisan ***measure***, this particular proposal. And now, again, people want to hold up this ***process*** because they don't quite understand the pain at the pump. This is the demand increase that we are going to see in semiconductors, as I said, by 2030. There is a demand increase of 200 percent. There is a demand increase in the wireless sector, 60 percent by 2030; consumer electronics, 80 percent by 2030. What are we waiting for? What are we waiting for? We know there is demand. We know that we can make these chips. We know, as one of my colleagues said, if something happened with Taiwan, where they are making a lot of the leading-edge chips, the table is going to be turned on the United States. What would we do then? It is not like a little situation, like we are talking about now with shortages and huge price increases. What would we do if the major supply coming out of Taiwan was affected? We have to get busy here and work on this legislation and start focusing on the fact that it is affecting our consumers right now. The price increase for our consumers is a 41-percent increase in the cost of a car, for a used car today. If you think about it, we estimated that a used car or truck that cost $5,000 a year ago now costs $7,000--so a 41-percent increase. That is $2,000 that a young family that could be going on a vacation or taking care of something in the house or maybe making a downpayment on a home or buying groceries or taking care of rent, now, they have an extra $2,000 if they just want to get a car to get them to and from work. That is what we are talking about. We are talking about real impacts that are happening in real people's lives today, and some here are cavalier about these costs. They think this is all about how long are they going to wait until they give the President of the United States another victory, and that is a wrong approach. The approach should be: What are we going to do to deal with the high cost of products that we now don't have because of supply chain disruptions, and what are we going to do to resolve these issues? I will debate anybody on either side of the aisle who does not want to move forward on this bill because they don't like the approach. Maybe they don't like the concept of the United States making an investment here. But I will tell you, it is very clear that the United States has fallen behind. It is very clear that we went from 36 percent of the market down to 12. And if we do nothing, we are going to fall even worse, and we won't have any of the supply chain here. It will be located in other places. I know the American people get this in an intuitive fashion. The information age is run by semiconductors that increase their capacity to translate more, to translate in the automobile the voice-activated commands, to do the intricacies of communications, as I know the Presiding Officer knows, on the issues of communication and national security. We have to depend on these for our national security. We need to quit wasting our time here. These issues are, and my colleagues know well--come and make your vote. Make your vote, but quit holding up a bipartisan discussion by both Houses on facing a supply chain shortage that is affecting Americans every single day. If you do nothing, this demand is going to continue to increase, and we are going to continually be falling behind. So I plead with my colleagues: Put this aside and vote the way you want to vote, but let's get to conference. Let's show the American people that we can collaborate on solving our supply chain problems, on trying to be serious about sending signals to the automotive industry, to the communications sector, to the national security sector. Bring the supply chain back, put it here in the United States of America, and let's get busy doing what we know how to do best, and that is innovate and make America competitive. I yield the floor. The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader. Unanimous Consent Request--H.R 6968 and H.R 7108 Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, as I have said all week long, there has been an imperative for the Senate to unite and quickly pass legislation stripping Russia of normal trade relation status with the United States. The House has acted; the White House supports it. As the President meets with our allies in Europe, it is very important we send a message to the world that we are united in making sure Putin pays a heavy price for his war on Ukraine. After the House passed PNTR last week by 424 to 8, including the support from Leader McCarthy, it is unreasonable and deadly wrong for the Senate not to do the same, especially while the President is abroad. So we are seeking consent to move this legislation forward ASAP. After a day of long negotiations yesterday, I reached an agreement with Senator Crapo, with concurrence from Senators Wyden and Manchin, to move forward on PNTR while also taking action on oil ban legislation separately. Now, I understand that Senator Paul has further objection and is demanding we amend this agreement with a major change to the legislation. Senator Paul appears to be the lone Senator demanding this. I believe that all other 99 Senators are in agreement to proceed. Look, all of us want to see this bill move quickly because it is so very much needed and it is so bipartisan. I [[Page S1763]] am willing to include, as part of our unanimous consent right now, that Senator Paul be entitled to have his amendment with a majority vote threshold. The question before Senator Paul is, even though the vote was 424 to 8 in the House and is very bipartisan here in the Senate, is he going to tank PNTR because his arcane interpretation is not forced into the bill? Can Senator Paul take yes for an answer? Can he let us move forward today to hold Putin accountable? Every Senator would like his proposal or her proposal put in the bill, but in the Senate, we vote; and we are willing to give the Senator a vote, even though we greatly disagree with his interpretation of the law that is here. I truly, I earnestly, and I strongly hope that my Republican colleague does not object to bipartisan legislation that would deal a heavy, heavy blow on Putin's Russia, especially after the House of Representatives acted with overwhelming bipartisan support. Many of our Republican colleagues have criticized the Biden administration for supposedly not acting quickly enough on Putin, but now, one Republican Senator is holding up this overwhelmingly bipartisan bill. I strongly hope some of my other Republican colleagues can persuade Senator Paul to accept our agreement here so that we can move forward. Let us be equally resolute in standing with Ukraine and fighting back against Putin's brutal war by passing PNTR in the Senate right away. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that at a time to be determined by the majority leader, following consultation with the Republican leader, the Senate proceed to the en bloc consideration of H.R 6968, the Russian Oil Ban, and H.R 7108, Russia PNTR, both of which are at the desk; that there be 2 hours for debate on the bills en bloc equally divided between the two leaders or designees; that it be in order for Senator Crapo, or a designee, to offer the Crapo-Wyden amendment at the desk to H.R 6968; that there be 30 minutes for debate equally divided prior to the vote on the amendment; that it be in order for Senator Paul to offer the amendment at the desk to H.R 7108; that there be 2 hours for debate equally divided and controlled in the usual form prior to a vote on the Paul amendment, and that these be the only amendments in order to either bill; that upon the use or yielding back of time, the bills be considered read a third time en bloc and the Senate vote on passage of H.R 7108, as amended, if amended, and H.R 6968, as amended, if amended; finally, that the motions to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table without further intervening action or debate. The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection? The Senator from Kentucky. Mr. PAUL. Reserving the right to object, Mr. President, I think it is incredibly important that we read bills before we vote on them, that we have adequate debate, and that we really understand what we are doing. The Magnitsky Act was originally an act that sought to sanction people in Russia--still does--but was expanded beyond Russia, and now, this bill would expand it further. When you are going to sanction people, there has to be an argument about whom you are going to sanction, so the original Magnitsky Act has in law that you would sanction people who have gross violations of internationally recognized human rights. Well, that sounds good, but the Magnitsky Act goes a step further and defines what these are. Gross violations of human rights include torture; cruel, inhumane, or degrading treatment; punishment or long detention without charges and trial; causing the disappearance of persons by the abduction and clandestine detention of those persons--a lot of this applies to, really, what happened to Magnitsky; this was named after him because of what happened to him--other flagrant denials of the right to life, liberty, and the security of the person. What we are having happen right now is sort of--they are trying to pull a fast one, basically. We are going to get rid of all definitions of gross human rights, and we are going to replace them with not a list of things like torture and murder, indefinite detention; we are going to replace it with the words ``serious human rights abuse.'' Well, it still sounds pretty good, but it is like, what does that mean? The problem is that many different people have different definitions of rights. The left, including the U.N , believes you have a right to an abortion, to a house, to the internet, to healthcare. So you can see how, if you have wide-open, vague, vastly ambiguous language, someone could be President and say: The leader of that country is denying the human right to abortion, so therefore, we must sanction them. Without any sort of tribunal, without any sort of due ***process***, they would just simply sanction them. Or what if they are not providing the internet? So the thing is, words are important. You can't have vacuous sort of definitions. Where did this definition--it came from the Trump administration. So basically, what they are trying to do is mirror the Trump administration, which gave unlimited authority to the President. It is kind of surprising, for all the superficial rhetoric and opposition to President Trump, that they are trying to adopt his language now. But this language also comes from the Biden administration because the one thing Presidents have in common is they like unlimited power without checks and balances. If this language goes through, it will remove any checks and balances or any definitions as to what human rights abuses are. It is a terrible mistake. It is rash, and we shouldn't do it. I have offered an amendment, and I will offer it here in a moment. My amendment simply includes the definition that I just read. Gross violation of human rights--torture, cruel and inhumane treatment, indefinite detention. That is what we would put in the bill, is the actual definition. These aren't my words; these are the words of the mostly Democrats who wrote the bill, the Magnitsky Act. What they are trying to do is take the Magnitsky Act and drive an enormous hole in it that you can push anything through and do sanctions on anybody, anywhere in the world, based on a vague, ambiguous, and vast definition that is not specific. All I am asking is that you keep the Magnitsky Act. The irony here is the very authors of the Magnitsky Act are on the floor saying: We don't want the Magnitsky Act anymore. We want a big, enormous hole, that the President can sanction anybody in the world anytime. It is a terrible idea. It is ripe for abuse from a President. Many on the other side had arguments with the previous President, and they worried about him having unlimited power. So they want to give unlimited power to their President because they like him better. Well, guess what? I am an equal opportunity, ecumenical kind of guy who says: No President should have vast powers. All Presidents' powers should be circumspect. All Presidents' powers should be controlled. All I am asking for is that we pass the original Magnitsky Act. So this is going to be forever. This isn't a year or 2. When we first started into the Magnitsky Act, we were going to do it for just a year or 2 and see how it is going. This is forever. It will never come back up again. And we are doing it with 5 minutes' worth of debate, not going through a committee, and we are just simply going to say: Do whatever you want. Sanction anybody in the entire world. It is a huge mistake, it is a huge expansion of government power, of Presidential power, and it will lead to abuse. And I promise you, the moment there is a Republican President back in the White House, the other side will be squawking, saying: Why is he doing this? Why is he doing this? So I would say take a step back. We could talk about this over the next several days. We could come to an agreement. I have even said we could expand the definition. The definition of ``gross violation of human rights'' from Magnitsky should not be thrown away. And we could add to it. If there are other things, such as corruption, that you don't think are included, give us some words, and we will talk about it and see if we can come to a compromise. That is what was offered, and what we get back is that, oh, everybody else agrees on the other side, so I should be quiet. I am talking about something that is arcane. This is your [[Page S1764]] language. This is the Magnitsky Act from the last 5 years, and you are calling it arcane? This is a very reasonable request. It is a very unreasonable request to ram this down the throats of Americans, to expand Presidential power with no checks and balances, and I absolutely object to it. I will offer as a counter, though, a unanimous consent request that is at the desk to have my amendment pass immediately, and if my amendment is passed immediately, that the remaining request from Senator Schumer be passed as well. The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. Van Hollen). The majority leader is recognized. Mr. SCHUMER. Before I yield to my friend from the State of Maryland, the author of the Magnitsky Act, let me just say this to my good friend from Kentucky: Every Senator would like their amendment to be easily inserted into a bill, but in the Senate, we vote. I am offering the Senator a vote on his amendment. If each Senator said ``my way or the highway,'' we would have total paralysis even on an important piece of legislation like this. I yield to the Senator from Maryland. The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Maryland. Mr. CARDIN. I reserve the right to object in regard to the Senator from Kentucky's request. Mr. President, first, let me just correct some of the statements that were made. This bill went through the committee. It was voted on in the committee. Amendments were offered in the committee. The Senator from Kentucky was present during the markup in the committee. That is the way legislation should be considered in this body. We are talking about how the Senate can work the way it should? Let the committees function. And that is exactly what we did in regard to the legislation that is on the floor. It went through the regular ***process***. And the Senator's request is despite the fact that the majority leader has said he will allow a vote on the floor and let the Members of the Senate make the decision as to whether they agree or disagree with the arguments made by the author of the amendment. That is how a democracy should work. That is how the legislative ***process*** should work. So I am somewhat shocked that the Senator would object to the majority leader's request that would allow the legislation to come to the floor and let the Senate work its will by majority vote. That is what the majority leader said. Let me give you a little bit more history on this. The original Magnitsky bill was originally attached to the PNTR for Russia, and it was aimed solely at the tragic death of Sergei Magnitsky. We wanted to hold those responsible for his death accountable. That is why the language the Senator is referring to was included in the original act. It was aimed at one episode and one set of abusers. It became such a successful tool for diplomacy that, working with Senator McCain, the two of us worked on making it a global bill so that it would apply beyond just Russia and that we could use this to advance American foreign policy. And we worked--and quite frankly, we didn't have the enthusiastic support of the administration because the Senator from Kentucky is right: Administrations like to have their own authority; they don't like Congress to intercede. And on the Magnitsky, we can make recommendations as to who should be considered for sanctions. So it was a major step forward, and we were able to pass Global Magnitsky. In the meantime, President Trump worked with us on this. He was a supporter of using this tool. And he passed an Executive order--signed an Executive order, that included provisions that we asked him to include in the Executive order because we recognized that corruption was the fuel for Mr. Putin and Russia and authoritarian regimes. So we wanted to make sure that we could include corruption. We wanted to make sure that we could include the enablers--those who enabled these human rights abusers to do what they do, and that was included in the Executive order. And we worked with the Trump administration. And we have worked with the Biden administration. And we now have a workable standard. And better than that, as a result of our leadership, we have gotten our countries around the world to conform to our tool. The European Union has passed Global Magnitsky. The UK has passed Global Magnitsky. Canada has passed Global Magnitsky. Japan is considering it as we speak. It is becoming the standard. So from a ***process*** point of view, what was passed out of our committee, what was passed out of the House committee, both authorizing committees have agreed on this language, which has been signed off by Treasury so they know they can use it, which has due ***process*** in it because we are dealing with property rights. So now let's get to the substance of what the gentleman's amendment would do. The substance of it is that it would not allow us to do what we need to do in regards to Mr. Putin and Russia as a result of his ***invasion*** of Ukraine. And the sponsor of this amendment is very clear what he is trying to do. He is trying to take back the current authority under the Executive order and would, therefore, not even be useful at all in regards to going after Mr. Putin. We would be taking a step back. It was just a few days ago that President Zelenskyy asked us to expand the individual sanctions, and that is what is on the floor right now in the majority leader's request, so we can expand it, we can give him the tools he needs, so that we can respond and help the people of Ukraine. That is what is involved here. But with the amendment being offered by the gentleman from Kentucky, we would be moving backwards. We would be doing just the opposite. It would weaken where we are today. So I am really puzzled as to why we can't trust the judgment of the Members of the Senate to make this decision. Let's argue over the 2 hours that the majority leader will give us to argue this point. I look forward to that argument on the floor of the Senate. I already had that argument in our committee. Because the two--the gentleman from Kentucky and I, along with the Presiding Officer, served on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. We had this argument in committee. And if I am correct, I believe, the vote was all but one supporting my position. So we have already had this debate where it should take place among the experts. And the gentleman's not satisfied with that. I am at a loss here because I know how important it is for us to move forward to help the people of Ukraine. Every day, we see the bodies on the ground. We see the horrific action by Mr. Putin, and we really want to do everything we can to help the people of Ukraine. The action the majority leader is asking us to take will help the people of Ukraine. And as I understand it, one Senator is going to deny us the opportunity to take a very positive step, to stand up for democracy, and for standing up for the people of Ukraine. I object to the request. The PRESIDING OFFICER. The objection is heard to the modification. Is there objection to the original request? Mr. PAUL. Mr. President, I object. The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard. The Senator from Oregon is recognized. Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, I am going to keep my remarks short and simple. America and the world need immediately the toughest possible sanctions against the Russian oligarchs, who are working constantly to devise Byzantine schemes to get around the kind of sanctions that are in this trade bill. We all understand what is at issue here, and that is that we need to move quickly. We need to move while the President is mobilizing the collective strength of our allies. And I am interested in working with all of my colleagues. With the majority leader's leadership, we have been working for days on this. But what is important--and our friend from Maryland has touched on it-- is that we not just relitigate what came up in one committee or another, if it is going to hold up the essential task ahead, and that is that these oligarchs who are Putin's [[Page S1765]] best allies and are working with him constantly to figure out ways to get money to fuel the Putin war machine--what they really don't want is what the sanctions will do: rein them in and limit them as they continually try to devise these schemes. So I would just urge my colleagues--and we are here to continue to work on this--to get this done and get it done now because to do otherwise allows the oligarchs and all their lawyers and financial managers to look at what is happening in the U.S Senate. And those oligarchs say, ``Doesn't look like there is going to be anything right now--don't have to worry immediately.'' The Senate is better than this. I urge my colleagues to pass this bill, which would impose the harshest economic consequences of a generation on the Russians, and particularly the oligarchs, who have done so much to prop Putin up against the odds. Pass this bill. Pass it now. I yield the floor. The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Ohio. Mr. BROWN. Mr. President, today's powerful new sanctions against hundreds of Putin allies are another critical step in U.S leadership, bringing our allies together to ratchet up pressure on Russia to halt its brutal ***invasion*** of Ukraine. I think Putin has been shocked by a couple things. Putin has been shocked that the Ukrainians have had such furious, effective, courageous resistance. He didn't see that coming. The other thing that shocked Putin has been the skill with which President Biden assembled this coalition of countries to stand up to Putin, to provide assistance to refugees and assistance to Ukrainians in their country, to provide military assistance, and to put the squeeze on sanctions against Russia. He has assembled this coalition skillfully, including countries like Germany and Sweden and Finland and Switzerland, even--countries that never really played here and nobody really expected. And Biden has brought them in, in a coalition, and extracted--and with the right kind of target on sanctions. In addition to sanctioning the banks and the oil companies, in addition to sanctioning the oligarchs and Putin himself, the President is announcing now sanctioning Russian parliamentarians and the Parliament itself, the Russian Duma, a dozen more Russian arms merchants and defense firms that have enabled this war, and additional Putin cronies, including the CEO of Russia's largest bank. I don't understand opposition to what we are trying to do. I don't know. Do we have Members of this Senate, perhaps, that, for whatever reason, side with Putin or side with the oligarchs? I don't know. But this is legislation we ought to be able to get moving quickly through this body as it did in the House. As long as Putin's ***invasion*** goes on, we will continue to lead the world, turning up the heat and weakening Russia's war machine. Today, I come to the floor to support the removal of permanent normal trade relations with Russia. It is not, as the Presiding Officer from Maryland knows--it is not the first time a number of us have been concerned about our government's mistakes, in large part, because of corporate lobbying on permanent normal trade relations with countries around the world. One of worst decisions ever made in this body, or at least in recent history, and the damage it did to manufacturing in the industrial Midwest and elsewhere, was giving permanent normal trade relations to China and the advantages that gave them. American companies, always in pursuit of cheaper labor, if going south wasn't good enough--they would go to Mexico and then they would go to China, close the plants in Ohio or Western Maryland, move to China, open up plants there with cheap labor and with pretty much nonexistent environmental regulations, and then ship those jobs back to the United States. That was permanent normal trade relations with China that we gave them some 20 years ago. It was a horrible mistake, but, today, this is about--for a different reason--permanent normal trade relations with Russia that we have granted. The President has already committed to ending permanent normal trade relations with Russia, and the House has already passed a bill ending PNTR with Russia, so what are Senate Republicans waiting for? Russia should not have free and unlimited access to America's economy or to the global economy. There should be no place for Putin and his cronies to hide. We are trying to get this done in the Senate. I was on the floor yesterday hoping we could see this done then. Twenty-four hours more have passed; 24 hours more of Putin attacking, as a war criminal, people in Ukraine, people who are innocent, people who should never have to deal with this; another night in Ukraine under fire from an unprovoked Russian advance on civilian families; another day of destruction of civilian buildings in peaceful cities. So waiting every day hurts the Ukrainian people. We need to do our part to give the President immediate legal authority he needs to work with our allies on this to shut off access to favorable tariff treatment for Russia's goods here and around the world. Senator Paul, one Republican Senator, needs to relent to let us pass this. I mean, I know what Liz Cheney, a Member of the House, the daughter of Vice President Cheney under President Bush--I know what she said some time ago, and she is a Republican. She talked about the Putin wing of the Republican Party. I have no idea who in this body is in the Putin wing of the Republican Party, but I do know that there is resistance on the other side of the aisle to doing what we need to do to give President Biden even more tools to do even more than he has already done in this. The bill passed the House with a nearly unanimous vote. We need to finalize it in the Senate so we can ratchet up the pressure further, cut off Russia's ability to finance its unprovoked ***invasion*** of another member country in the World Trade Organization. Even before this war, we knew that Russia, like China, games the rules. They cheat on trade. I said it yesterday on the floor: They subsidize their industries. They pollute the environment to gain that unfair advantage. It is cheaper to make something if you don't dispose of waste or you put contaminants into the air instead of disposing of them in another way. Ohioans know all too well about being forced to compete with countries that cheat. Why have we let another day go by with this still on the books? If we don't remove it now, Russia will continue to use the status to position their industries in the global market, hurting American companies in the ***process***. It is not a partisan issue. A couple weeks ago--almost a month ago--I introduced the bicameral, bipartisan bill with Senator Cassidy of Louisiana to remove Russia's permanent normal trade relations status. There is bipartisan support to do this quickly. I have worked with my colleague Senator Crapo on many Russia sanctions efforts over the years. I trust him. I know we share the same goals, but it is Senator Paul, speaking for whomever on this, not letting this bill through. I am hopeful there is a path forward. I hope we can work out differences quickly. The majority--an overwhelming majority of this body wants to move. We all--we should all stand together saying countries that invade a sovereign nation will not have free and unrestricted access to our economy, period. Again, countries that invade another sovereign nation will not-- should not--have free and unrestricted access to our economy. It is time to come together to end permanent normal trade relations with Russia. The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Massachusetts is recognized. Mr. MARKEY. Mr. President, Vladimir Putin has continued to wage horrific war against Ukraine and the Ukrainian people. This ***invasion***, waged upon the profits of Russia's oil and gas empire, has caused destruction and devastation beyond ***measure***. We must denounce Putin's war of choice, and we must call out profiteering and the ricochet effects of that conflict that affect Americans and others across the world. This connection to conflict is only possible as a result of the fallacy of [[Page S1766]] American energy independence from oil and gas extraction--a lie that has been sold by the American Petroleum Institute or the ``American Prevarication Institute,'' as they should be called. For years, the oil and gas industry has sold Americans more snake oil than actual oil, promising security and safety in exchange for unlimited drilling, unlimited exports, unlimited profits for Big Oil and Big Gas in the United States. And after yet another year of price spikes caused by Putin and profiteering, it is time to say enough is enough with these false promises and crocodile tears from the American Petroleum Institute, from ExxonMobil, from Chevron, from all of these companies. President Biden was right to follow my SPIGOT Act and the bipartisan consensus in the House and Senate to ban all oil imports from Russia. The only way to end Putin's oil- and gas-funded wars is to cut off his oil- and gas-funded piggy bank, which comes, unfortunately, historically, from American consumers at the pump buying Russian oil for their cars. That has to end. And, thankfully, President Biden has now made that decision. And it is because we have a moral moment here to provide all possible humanitarian aid to the Ukrainian people. We have a moral moment here to cut off the money pipeline that is funding the missiles and the tanks that are destroying the homes of innocent people in Ukraine. And we have a moral moment that ensures that we take the action to build a better world that is safe from the climate-change-fueled crisis. But our ability to meet this moral moment hinges on what we do next on the floor of the U.S Senate, what action we take to respond to this obvious crisis that we have on the planet, all related to this oil- and gas-fueled military ***invasion*** of Ukraine--the tanks, the planes, the soldiers--all paid for by oil and gas money. We could fail to meet this moral moment by accepting the bad faith arguments from Big Oil, which is using this horrifying ***invasion*** to push for more drilling and money to fossil fuel companies with more lands and waters lost to extraction, more profit for Big Oil at the expense of American pocketbooks; or we can meet the moral moment that the United States is willing to lead with innovation, moving away from global oil chaos and closer to clean, cheap, domestic renewable energy sources--sources that will not fall victim to price hikes from despots, dictators, and criminals overseas. Now, we have all heard the Big Lie from Big Oil, FOX News, and the GOP, the Gas and Oil Party. Their message is: All you need to do is give us a few more leases, cut a few more regulations, provide us with a few more subsidies, and then we will be on our way to energy independence. Trust the oil and gas companies, they say, and FOX News says, ``Yes, trust the oil and gas industry,'' but that argument is leakier than an old oil tanker, and it has been proven again and again. If Big Oil wanted to make us energy independent, they would have already done it. Instead, they resort to their Big Lie. So here are the facts: Big Oil is sitting on 11,000 unused oil and gas leases, and 9,000 of those leases are on Federal lands in the United States. They have already been purchased by the oil and gas industry, mostly for $2 an acre, but they have got them; and 2,000 leases are offshore, in the waters of the United States, and they have all been already approved for drilling. Big Oil also has 6,000 partially drilled wells that they can use to drill right now. In other words, they have already done the drilling, and they are still not going there right now, on an emergency basis, to produce that additional oil and gas. Why is that? Because rather than using the resources they already have to drill, they are using this crisis as an excuse to get more leases, more wells, more profit for themselves while sitting on, squatting on, the existing leases they already have that could produce the additional oil and gas that they say they want to produce. Of course, they don't want to produce that oil or else they would be doing it already. They just want more leases that they can sit on and profit from in the years ahead. In terms of solving this crisis that we have right now, they can do it if they want, but they don't want to because it might actually drive down the price of oil or it might drive down the price of natural gas if they produce more here. So this is not a problem of governmental overreach. If you don't trust me on this, how about trusting the oil executives themselves. In a recent survey, 60 percent of oil executives said that investors are keeping them from drilling. Just 10 percent pointed to regulations. These are the oil company executives. They say it is the investors--the millionaires in their companies--who don't want to drill, not Federal regulations. Remember the Keystone Pipeline--the pipeline that the Republicans wanted so they could be energy independent? In 2015, every single Republican on the floor of the U.S Senate voted against my amendments to ban the exports of that oil from the Keystone Pipeline. They kept saying then it would lead to energy independence, and when I said, ``Fine. Let's have an amendment that says it cannot be exported,'' every single Republican voted no--allow it to be exported out of our country. These crocodile tears from the Republican Party--from the GOP, Gas and Oil Party--are just so predictable, and it comes back every single time. Big Oil has kept up their export shenanigans. In 2021, we exported 8.6 million barrels of oil a day while importing 8.4 million barrels per day. Last year, we imported, on average, 600,000 barrels of oil a day from Russia. At the same time, we exported the same amount to China. That is what the Republican Party and the gas and oil industry got in 2015 when we lifted the ban on the export of American oil. That is not energy independence; it is profit dependence of the American people on the agenda of Big Oil and Big Gas. The Gas and Oil Party doesn't want to drill for oil here in America to protect Americans from economic harm; they want to do it for their own economic benefit. Big Oil has a need for greed. The Republican Party, as we just heard in the confirmation hearing, kept talking about crime in the streets. No. The big problem is crime in the suites--crime in the oil and gas executive suites of our country--and the Republican Party's inability to stand up to them so that we have true energy independence in our country. In 2021, while consumers sacrificed at the pump, with gas prices increasing by 50 percent, Big Oil made over--get this number--$200 billion in profits. That is what is happening. That is why they don't want to drill-- because the price of oil might come down; therefore, their profits might come down, but they have built all the leases they need right now. This isn't about energy supply for consumers; it is about Big Oil's demand for profits for their shareholders and for their executives. That is what the agenda of the oil and gas industry in America is all about, not American security, not American consumers, not American environmental and healthcare issues, but the profits of their executives. We don't need sacrifice in our country. We need innovation. We need a way to ensure that we unleash all of the potential, which we have, in our country in order to tap into all of our rich natural resources. Instead of supporting energy independence and getting out of the way of a real domestic, clean energy boom, Big Oil would rather force consumers to sacrifice with high prices at the gas pump. We don't need Americans to sacrifice by paying high gas prices. Instead, we need to innovate and install clean energy solutions. This is our short-term and our long-term solution to price disruptions, climate chaos, environmental injustice, and wars paid for with oil and gas profits--much of it war profiteering. Here are some more facts: An additional 16 million electric vehicles on the road would replace all of the oil that we currently import from Russia. Let me say that again. If we would just deploy 16 million all-electric vehicles, we would back out all the oil from Russia. The next 16 million all- electric vehicles would back out all the Saudi oil that we import into the United States. ``EVs'' just doesn't stand for ``electric vehicles''; it also [[Page S1767]] stands for ``ending violence''--getting the United States tied up into situations around the world because of all of the money that these wealthy oil states get from the United States. Here is another way to break it down: We can put 5 million electric vehicles on the road, 5 million heat pumps in homes, and replace 75 percent of our public bus fleet with electric buses and still back out all the oil we import from Russia. In the time it would take to implement these ***measures***, we can release the already congressionally mandated sales of the Strategic Petroleum Reserve to give consumers relief at the gas pump. We can accomplish all of this by passing my SAVE Consumers Act with Senator Heinrich, which would grant the President additional authority to implement energy efficiency standards and release another 265 million barrels of oil from the Strategic Petroleum Reserve by the end of 2023. We can do this. We can deploy the Strategic Petroleum right now, invest in a renewable, clean energy agenda, and actually produce enough energy that substitutes for all the Russian oil and do so in a very brief period of time; but we have to commit to destroying the demand by Putin's dirty energy business model by powering our own country with clean, American-made renewable energy. We can power our way to peace. We can power our way to stopping the most dangerous effects of greenhouse gases that are creating climate change on our planet. Putin banks on divisions in the West. What he found instead was our complete solidarity with the people of Ukraine. Imagine if we were to channel that same spirit of unity to unlock a safe, healthy future and untether ourselves from Putin's dirty profits. We should agree that no country continues to have a veto on our energy security or of our friends and allies. The future lies not in the extracted fossil fuels of the Industrial Revolution but in technologies that will power the clean energy revolution. It is in our interest to build a well-trained, well-paid battalion of American union workers to lead countries to look to their energy needs from the red, white, and blue of the United States instead of Putin's cronies who finance Russia's repression at home and adventurism abroad. By passing a $555-billion investment in clean energy and climate justice, we can build a made-in-America clean economy that delivers real energy independence for our country, and we can export those technologies around the world. With tax credits and rebates in wind and solar, all-electric vehicles, offshore wind, battery storage technologies, heat pumps, and advanced domestic manufacturing, we can cut costs at home while cutting off Putin's money line from oil and natural gas. These investments would reduce our dependence on global oil markets and, instead, power our country through localized clean energy. The solar from our deserts, the solar power from those States that have near year-round Sun, the wind off of our coast from Massachusetts down to Maryland, which the Presiding Officer represents, the wind off of the west coast, the hydropower from our Southeast, the geothermal from our Northwest--all of it can be tapped, and we can end an era wherein our country is held hostage by the need to import more oil. Our Federal climate policies are exactly what we need--this national security moment, this environmental moment, this healthcare moment, this moral moment for our country and for the planet. There is no quick solution to this quagmire that Big Oil has drilled the United States into. There are only better and worse solutions, moral and immoral solutions. We can innovate and install clean energy that produces all of the energy which we need and that protects us, protects our allies, and protects our planet at the very same time or we can continue down the pathway of false promises and profiteering. It is our moral moment. Let's stand in solidarity with those affected by oil and gas wars and seize this chance for a cleaner, safer, more affordable future for Americans, for our allies, and for the world. There are doubters that we can make this transition, people who say: Well, wind and solar and all-electric vehicles and battery and storage technology--that sounds fine, but it just won't solve the problem. They are the same people who said that we could not deploy the spectrum. I was the author of the bill that accomplished and that made it possible for everyone, by 1995, to have a flip phone in their pockets at 10 cents a minute. Then, in using that very same spectrum 10 years later, a young guy, Steve Jobs, invented a phone which is a computer that has the same power as the computers on the Apollo mission to the Moon. We innovated; we moved; and we can actually see the people, in their fleeing Ukraine, all holding smartphones invented in the United States because we put together the policies that changed us from black rotary dial phones to these powerful computers in everyone's pockets. We can do the same thing with energy. We can create a revolution. We just have to get Big Oil and Big Gas out of the way and allow our young people to innovate, allow our entrepreneurs to innovate, allow for the deployment of all of these technologies, and then children will have to look to the history books to find if there ever was such a crisis that we are living through today. So my hope is that the Senate will respond and that they will understand how much of this conflict is created by the globe's dependence upon oil and gas. Putin is proving that to us once again, and if we look at the Middle East, we can see that hole that we have dug for ourselves and our dependence upon that region. We have the solution. It is innovation; it is optimism; it is unleashing the entrepreneurial spirit in our country. That will be the challenge of the U.S Senate over the next 2 months. Will we have the same courage to respond, to take on those energy titans, in the same way that the Ukrainian people, every day, are giving us the example that we should be following? With that, I yield the floor. I suggest the absence of a quorum. The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll. The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll. Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded. The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered. Unanimous Consent Agreement--H.R 4521 Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that notwithstanding rule XXII, the cloture motions on amendment No. 5002 and H.R 4521 ripen at 5:30 p.m , Monday, March 28; that if cloture is invoked on the substitute, all postcloture time be considered expired; the remaining pending amendments be withdrawn; no further amendments be in order; the substitute amendment be agreed to; the cloture motion on the bill be withdrawn; the bill, H.R 4521, be considered read a third time, and the Senate vote on passage of the bill, as amended, with 60 affirmative votes required for passage, all without further intervening action or debate. The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Is there objection? The Senator from Vermont. Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, reserving the right to object. The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator is recognized. Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, I am requesting votes on two very important issues regarding this competition bill: No. 1 to put the Senate on record in opposition to providing $53 billion in corporate welfare to the highly profitable microchip industry, with no protections for the American taxpayer; and two, to eliminate the $10 million bailout included in this bill for Blue Origin, a space company owned by Jeff Bezos, the second wealthiest person in this country who is now worth over $180 billion. So, Mr. President, I ask the majority leader: Will you now give me your commitment to receive two rollcall votes next week on each of these motions to instruct at a simple majority threshold? The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The majority leader. Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, yes, I give the Senator from Vermont my firm commitment to do whatever I can to get an agreement to have votes on his two motions to instruct when the message comes back from the House on this ***measure***. [[Page S1768]] Having made that commitment, I ask the Senator from Vermont whether he might allow the Senate to agree to my original unanimous consent request? The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Vermont. Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, I appreciate the commitment of the majority leader to ensure that I will receive rollcall votes on these two issues. Having received the majority leader's firm commitment, I will not object. I ask unanimous consent to address the body for 10 minutes. The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Is there an objection to the original request? Hearing none, it is so ordered. Without objection, the Senator from Vermont is recognized for up to 10 minutes. Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, let me thank the majority leader for his willingness to put my two motions to instruct on the floor next week for a vote. And I want to take a minute to explain to my colleagues and the American people what these amendments are about. As I think most Americans understand, half of the people in our country are living paycheck to paycheck. They cannot afford the high cost of healthcare. They are often spending more than they can afford for housing. If they are fortunate enough to be able to have gotten a higher education, it is more likely than not that they are struggling with significant student debt. If they are young parents, they are probably finding it hard to locate quality, affordable childcare or pre-K. If they are older Americans, it is likely they are having a hard time paying for the dental care, the hearing aids, the eyeglasses, or the home healthcare that they desperately need. Meanwhile, as many middle-class and working-class Americans fall further and further behind, there is another economic reality taking place in our country. We don't talk about it enough--but we should--and that is that the people on top, the very wealthiest people in our country, are doing phenomenally well and, in fact, have never had it so good. Today in America, we have more income and wealth inequality than ever before. We talk a lot about Russian oligarchy--and that is certainly true--but anybody who thinks that we don't have an oligarchy in this country is surely mistaken. In our country today, we have two people who own more wealth than the bottom 40 percent of the American population, and the top 1 percent own more wealth than the bottom 92 percent. And, unbelievably, during this terrible pandemic--which has cost us almost 1 million lives--when thousands of essential workers died, they died because they had to go to their jobs, and going to their jobs, they contracted the virus. During that same period of time, the billionaire class became much, much wealthier. In fact, over 700 billionaires in America became nearly $2 trillion richer during the pandemic. In other words, for the people on top, the pandemic has been a very, very good time economically. But it is not just the increased wealth of the very rich that we are seeing. Corporate profits are at an alltime high, and CEOs have seen huge increases in their compensation packages. And a lot of this is happening because of the ***unprecedented*** level of corporate greed-- corporate greed that we are seeing. Let me just give you a few examples of the corporate greed that is taking place right now. Everybody knows that the price of gas is soaring. Last I saw, it is averaging about $4.25 a gallon. Meanwhile, ExxonMobil, Chevron, BP, and Shell made nearly $30 billion in profit last quarter alone. The price of gas is soaring and major oil companies are making huge, huge profits. Amazon recently raised the price of its Prime membership by 16.8 percent. Meanwhile, it increased its profits by 75 percent to a record-breaking $35 billion. In terms of food, everybody knows food prices are going up. The price of beef is up 32 percent, price of chicken is up 20 percent, price of pork is up 13 percent. Meanwhile, Tyson Foods, a major producer of chicken, beef, and hot dogs, increased its profits by 140 percent last quarter to $1.1 billion. The price of food is soaring, and food companies are enjoying huge profits. While Americans are finding it harder and harder to pay for the outrageous costs of prescription drugs--we pay the highest prices in the world for our medicine--last year Pfizer, Johnson & Johnson, and AbbVie, three major pharmaceutical companies--increased their profits by over 90 percent to $54 billion. People can't afford the price of prescription drugs, but pharmaceutical industry profits are soaring. Again, all of which kind of takes me to the legislation that is on the floor right now, the so-called Competitiveness Act. Do we need to increase computer chip production in the United States? Yes, we do. But we need to do it in a way that does not provide massive amounts of corporate welfare to an already enormously profitable industry. In my view, it makes zero sense to provide $53 billion in corporate welfare. That is a blank check: Here it is, microchip industry, no strings attached, no protections for the American taxpayer to the microchip industry. And as part of this legislation, in addition--I don't know how many people know this--some may think I am actually kidding when I say this--but this legislation provides $10 billion in bailout to Jeff Bezos--the second wealthiest person in America who is worth over $180 billion--so that his company, Blue Origin, can launch a rocket ship to the Moon. A word about the microchip industry. We are talking about an industry that has shut down over 780 manufacturing plants in the United States and eliminated 150,000 American jobs over the last 20 years, while moving most of its production overseas. Got that? So this is an industry that said: Hey, we are making money, but we can make even more money by going to low-wage countries. Let's do that. Let's throw 150,000 American workers out on the street. We are going to go abroad. Now, in terms of this $53 billion bailout, nobody knows exactly who will be receiving that money. My guess is that the bulk of that money will go to five major semiconductor companies, and that is Intel, Texas Instruments, Micron Technology, Global Foundries, and Samsung. These five companies in line for tens of billions of dollars of corporate welfare made over $75 trillion in profit last year. The American people are sick and tired of our government working for wealthy campaign contributors and for the Big Money interests. I know it is a radical concept to suggest, but maybe--just maybe--we might want to be working for ordinary working-class and middle-class Americans. Let me talk a little bit about what our amendments would do. Our amendments are very simple. The first amendment, obviously, would prevent microchip companies from receiving taxpayer assistance unless they agree to issue warrants or equity stakes to the Federal Government. If private companies are going to benefit from over $53 billion in taxpayer subsidies, the financial gains made by these companies must be shared with the American people, not just wealthy shareholders. In other words, all this amendment says is that if these companies want taxpayer assistance, we are not going to socialize all of the risks and privatize all of the profits. If these investments turn out to be profitable as a direct result of these Federal grants, the taxpayers of this country have a right to get a return on this investment. This is not a radical idea. These are exact conditions that were imposed on corporations that received taxpayer assistance in the bipartisan CARES Act, which passed the Senate 96 to 0. It is not a radical idea. I believe in industrial policy. That means the government works with the private sector. It does not mean that the government simply gives the private sector everything they want with no protection to the taxpayer. So if the result of these $53 billion in grants is these companies make money, that is good--that is good--but the taxpayers who helped invest in these new production facilities should be able to enjoy some of those profits as well and get some of that money returned to them. The second amendment is really a very, very simple one. It asks: Why in God's name would we be giving $10 billion to a company owned by the second wealthiest person in this country, Jeff Bezos? If Mr. Bezos wants to go to the [[Page S1769]] Moon, if he wants to go to Mars, he wants to go to Saturn, that is his business. He has every right in the world to do that, but he does not have a right to ask the taxpayers of this country for $10 billion to help him make his trip to outer space. This second amendment simply eliminates that $10 billion grant that goes to Mr. Bezos. I look forward to winning the support for these two important amendments, which I think are strongly supported by the American people. I yield the floor. The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. Warnock). The majority leader.

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[***Highlights from Central Asian press, websites 18 Jun 21***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:62Y5-RJG1-DYRV-33VB-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

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The dominance of Russian literature in Kazakh school curriculum, corruption being an obstacle to foreign investment in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan's relations with its neighbours and the sale of a former security service building in Uzbekistan were among the main stories covered by newspapers and websites in Central Asia on 16-18 June.

KAZAKHSTAN

Experts comment on appointments at Samruk-Kazyna national fund

Privately-owned Azattyq-ruhy.kz website carries experts' comments on the appointment of two new members to the board of the National Welfare Fund Samruk-Kazyna. The report says the appointments of Vyachelav Kim, a co-founder of Kaspi.kz bank, and Daniyar Akishev, a former National Bank chairman, are "quite unexpected". "According to experts, these appointments are not just a routine refreshment of the [Samruk-Kazyna] team. It is, most likely, a recognition that it is time the Fund's strategy was changed and, therefore, the Board of Directors, which is usually responsible for such things, needs new people," the website says.

It further quotes financial consultant Rasul Rysmambetov as saying that Kim's appointment to the Fund is "a recognition of their [Kaspi.kz bank's] highly-technological approach to business, with the use of various hybrid business models". "I think, they expect that Kim will bring some innovations to help develop the Fund," Rysmambetov says. "At the moment, it is an extremely inefficient, cumbersome structure, which is taking quite a lot of resources from the budget." The report also quotes economist Arman Bayganov as saying that ex-National Bank chief Akishev is, probably, coming to Samruk-Kazyna "with a mission to synchronise Samruk-Kazyna's strategy with the National Bank's fiscal policies". (Azattyq-ruhy.kz, in Russian, 17 June)

Principal argues against continued focus on Russian literature

Privately-owned nationalist Abai.kz website carries an article by Ayatzhan Akhmetzhanuly, the principal of a school in the Kazakh capital Nur-Sultan, arguing against the continued domination of Russian literature in the national school curriculum. He writes that literature "has always been one of the most powerful ideological tools" and "colonisers' main weapon". "It is a weapon the nations and regimes that want to spread their influence in the world will never put down - the colonisation of other people's minds begins from literature, and continues through other kinds of art," Akhmetzhanuly writes. "This year we are marking 30 years since independence. But have we been working on freeing our minds all these years? Have we developed a free Kazakh's independent mind?" the principal says. "Freedom, independence is no just having your own government and national symbols. Independence is not ***measured*** by national borders. Independence means true independence in every sphere of life!"

Akhmetzhanuly says Kazakhstan's education sphere continues to "wear a colonial yoke of Russian literature". He writes that the continued extensive study of Russian literature at Kazakh schools begs a question: "Is the Russian [literature] the second most important one for us after the Kazakh one?" "I am not saying that Russian literature is no good, it is full of great works," Akhmetzhanuly adds. However, he argues, "why a Kazakh child who reads Tolstoy should not read Byron, a Kazakh child who reads Tolstoy should not read Shakespeare? Why a Kazakh child who reads Pushkin should not read [Walter] Scott? Tell me, is it fair?" He also asks: "Is Russian literature more superior for us than Turkic literature? Why do not Kazakh children read literature of the brotherly Uzbeks, Kyrgyz, Turkish and Tatars?" Akhmetzhanuly also mentions the modern Western literature, the Islamic world literature, as well as that of Japan and Korea. "Is Russian literature the world's most superior literature? No, if you look at who has been getting the Nobel Prize for literature in the past 30 years, you will know the answer. This is the kind of world literature that the Kazakh children should be reading and absorbing," he adds. (Abai.kz, in Kazakh, 16 June)

President praised for 'clear' stance on Russian language

The website of the Russian weekly Argumenty I Fakty's Kazakhstan edition carries a commentary by Viktor Verk, who praises Kazakh President Kasym-Zhomart Tokayev's stance on the language issues amid Ruslan Tusupbekov's Facebook calls for shutting down the Russian centres operating in the country in the wake of the opening of the Russian language room at Karagandy State University. The website says Tusupbekov graduated from the People's Friendship University of Russia with a degree in international law. Yet he calls for closing all three Russian centres and declare the Russkiy Mir (Russian World) Foundation as an extremist organisation and ban it in Kazakhstan, it adds.

However, the commentator goes on to cite several remarks by the president addressing the language issue, implying that Tokayev is unlikely to give into such calls. "Language is a big political issue, so haste and shame can damage our statehood. In practical terms, teaching the exact sciences at universities in Russian could continue. This is where Malaysia's experience can be of use for us - at first, it decided to stop using English, but later restored its status at universities and as a language of diplomatic communications. Our younger generation should be fluent in Russian along with Kazakh. This is the imperative of the present time. In primary school, priority should be given to the Kazakh language. It is also necessary to teach Russian, whereas learning English could start in year five or six," one of the remarks says.

"The widespread use of Kazakh does not mean that the use of any other language, especially Russian, should be restricted," another remark adds. "A head-on attack aimed at raising the status of the state language and forcibly expanding the area of its use is counterproductive, since it can provoke destabilisation of relations between various ethnic groups," the president is quoted as saying once. "I do not belittle whatsoever the historical significance of the Russian language, which gave us the way to world science and culture. Residents of Kazakhstan should know this language at a high level. We only benefit from it," one more remark is cited by Verk. The author says in conclusion that this is a quite convincible response to Tusupbekov and the like who call for "banning and restricting" a language. (Kzaif.kz, in Russian, 16 June)

Paper revisits scene of deadly ethnic clashes in south

Privately-owned tabloid Karavan website carries a report from the villages in southern Korday District which in February 2020 saw bloody clashes between Kazakhs and ethnic Dungan community. The report says that "almost all the buildings damaged in the villages of Masanchi, Bular Batyr, and Aukhatty during the pogroms have been rebuilt". "Practically all the settlements in the district have been provided with natural gas. In four settlements they have built sports centres, where children and adults can play football, volleyball, use fitness equipment and get martial arts training. New schools have been built. Roads in many villages are being asphalted. Nobody has seen anything like this here for 40 years," the report says. "Korday [district] head Rustem Daulet visits Masanchi almost every day to keep an eye on the progress [of the construction and reconstruction work]. Zhambyl Region's Governor Berdibek Saparbayev visits at least once a month. People here have got used to seeing him so much that they freely walk up to him on the street to make their requests. He knows many people here in person, which was not the case before," the report continues.

It adds that the district's budget has been increased threefold. It also says the district now has a new imam, who has taken all the mosques "under strict control". "First of all, he introduced a ban on giving a blessing to marriages of underage couples. Usually Dungan girls would marry at 16-17. Some would quit school because of that. Now all children must get secondary education," the report says. It says further that despite all the changes, there is still almost no communication between the villages' ethnic Kazakh and Dungan residents - "they try not to cross each other's paths, not to mix with one another". It also says that the Dungans still do not speak, or have not learnt, Kazakh, "hence the communication problems between the two communities". (Caravan.kz, in Russian, 18 June)

KYRGYZSTAN

Expert says corruption main obstacle to foreign investment

Independent newspaper Aziya News features economic expert Venera Osmonbetova who identifies corruption as the biggest obstacle to foreign investment inflow into Kyrgyzstan. She says it is not possible to improve the investment climate in the country unless corruption schemes are rooted out. "There is a solution to any problem. Prominent investment experts say: 'We should work abiding by law, and everything should be transparent.' If we take on such a path, the investment climate will gradually improve and investors will start to come. We will see the result in the next six to 10 years," the expert says.

Speaking of the development of the mining sector, investors also face opposition on the part of local population where mining fields are located. "Investors will start to come when local people agree on development projects, are informed of terms of development and understand mine development programmes. We see at many places that local people or village councils are opposing development of sites," Osmonbetova adds. However, she is convinced that if there is no corruption in the sector, local population will also benefit from development projects. (Aziya News, in Kyrgyz, 17 June p9)

Uneconomic public companies to be auctioned off

Pro-government weekly Jany Ordo reports on a government meeting chaired by Prime Minister Ulukbek Maripov, which discussed raising the effectiveness of public sector management. Given the current socio-economic situation, it is necessary to revise the principles in the sphere of public property management, the report quotes the premier as saying. Maripov says that although the main purpose of state-owned companies is to make profits and contribute to the national budget, many such companies are unprofitable, the paper says. "It is necessary to carry out a profound analysis in the sphere of public property management. When the analysis is made, it will become clear which company is inefficient for the country's economy. They should be auctioned off, and the ***process*** of sale of property should be open and transparent," the prime minister tells the government session, as reported in the weekly. (Jany Ordo, in Kyrgyz, 18 June p9)

Pundit wonders if regional bloc can prevent another Kyrgyz-Tajik conflict

Commercial news and analysis website Vzglyad carries an article by political commentator Yevgeniy Pogrebnyak who wonders if the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) could prevent another conflict on the border between two of its members, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. The author recalls the two-day deadly conflict on the Kyrgyz-Tajik border in late April, which "for the first time involved the armed forces, armoured vehicles and aircraft" and which "nearly ended in a full-fledged war". He says the Russia-led regional bloc refrained from being involved in the conflict. "Principled disagreements do not make it possible in the near future to settle the confrontation between two Russia's allies, which undermines Moscow's reputation as an arbiter in Central Asian conflicts," Pogrebnyak adds.

He also recalls that a day before the deadly conflict broke out, on 27 April, the Tajik capital hosted a meeting of the CSTO defence ministers who discussed "regional security issues". Strangely enough, the expert goes on to say, the CSTO defence ministerial summit was followed by a meeting of the security council chiefs of the organisation's member countries. Kyrgyz Security Council chief Ryskeldi Musayev attended the meeting. "Why do we need the CSTO? It is a useless organisation," Pogrebnyak quotes Kyrgyz social media users as reacting to the regional bloc's inaction. There were also calls for Kyrgyzstan to quit the organisations, along with speculations that a US military base may return to the country, the pundit says. "Other geopolitical players, including Turkey, are also trying to take advantage of the protracted crisis," he says. (Vzglyadriv.kg, in Russian, 17 June)

MPs says NGO bill to ensure state security

Pro-Russian news website Region.kg reports MP Yevgeniya Strokova as saying that a new bill aimed at increasing government control over NGO funding is a matter of national security. The Kyrgyz parliament recently adopted amendments to the law on NGOs, the report says. The authors of the bill say that "today many NGOs in Kyrgyzstan operate ***exceptionally*** in the interests of their western donors, organizing various rallies and other events that go against the country's national interests". "The adoption of the bill will increase financial transparency of the non-governmental sector, which meets Kyrgyzstan's interests in terms of ensuring security," Strokova is quoted as saying. She says that in general, the country needs NGOs, but "in order to ensure its security, it is not simply the government's right, but its obligation, to know the sources and purposes of funding, as well as how that money is spent". "We need to get money to resolve socioeconomic issues, but not for what foreign donors are interested in, because if such an approach is taken, grants sometimes may only harm our state," the MP adds.

The report goes on to quote expert Murat Imankulov as saying that NGOs are sometimes "actively interfering" in domestic politics. "What is more, NGOs often use western money to create these or those problems in the country, and then criticise the authorities for them. The problem is that money that arrive via a donor organisation is not controlled by the government at all, that is to say, it is unknown how much money is allocated for which organisation and for what purposes," Imankulov is quoted as saying. "It is worth noting that the amendments concern several thousand NGOs currently registered in Kyrgyzstan. Many of them are funded through various international donors, somewhat linked to the US government or a number of European countries," the report says. (Region.kg, in Russian, 17 June)

TAJIKISTAN

Threat from Afghanistan 'still exist'

Privately-owned weekly Samak carries Islomiddin Sharifzoda's article headlined "Impact of Afghan war on Tajikistan", which argues Tajikistan has been serving as a shield against instability so that it does not spread across the region. "In the early 1990s, there was no international coalition against terrorism. The government and people Tajikistan were at the front line of the struggle against terrorism, experienced it and did not allow other countries to face it," the author says.

"Unfortunately, our struggle is sometimes overlooked and even ignored by other countries in the region. They should know that the creation of religious parties and movements, the first example of which took place in Tajikistan, was just a test that Tajikistan was able to pass," he says in reference to the Islamic Rebirth Party of Tajikistan, which was outlawed in the country in 2015. Sharifzoda goes on to say that the threat from Afghanistan has yet to be completely eliminated. "There are many terrorist forces and groups in the northern part of Afghanistan which borders Tajikistan, and some of those aim to destroy Central Asian states," he concludes. (Samak, Tajik, June 16, p13)

President's 'wise policy' to solve any border problem

Privately-owned weekly Payk, published in Khatlon Region, carries an article headlined "We will not give a piece of our homeland to anyone!". The author, military expert and journalist Sharifkhon Tilloyev, accuses Kyrgyzstan of "abusing the good neighbourly tradition" and attempting to usurp Tajik lands. "Some of our neighbours, such as Kyrgyzstan, abuse our tradition of good neighbourliness and try to usurp our land. Although these are only verbal threats and desires, it stirs a lot of rumour on social media, the cyber world is full of rumours about the Kyrgyz government having a good appetite for our piece of land - Vorukh," he writes. Vorukh is a Tajik enclave inside Kyrgyzstan.

"People must use the instructions of the supreme leader of the nation [Tajik President Emomali Rahmon] and stand up against all kinds of rumours and intrigues on social media by raising their voices and saying: 'We give our lives, but protect our home!'" Tilloyev also praises President Rahmon's "political wisdom" and his negotiation abilities, which he says will be key to settle the border conflict with Kyrgyzstan via a dialogue. "We must resolutely tell people about the achievements of the leader of the Tajiks, Emomali Rahmon, because the leader of the nation can solve any border problem with his wise policy," he concludes. (Payk, in Tajik, 17 June, p12)

'Isolated' Tajikistan replaces Chinese imports with Uzbek goods

'Isolated' Tajikistan will benefit from substituting goods imported from China for products made in neighbouring Uzbekistan, reports privately-owned website Tochka Zreniya (Nuqta-i Nazar in Tajik, or Point of View). A total of 36 new cooperation documents, as well as contracts and investment deals worth over $1bn were signed between Tajikistan and Uzbekistan as a result of the talks held between Tajik President Emomali Rahmon and his visiting Uzbek counterpart, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, on 10-11 June. "The first five-year presidential term of Shavkat Mirziyoyev ends late this year and Tajikistan can only hope for his victory in the upcoming election. The thing is that Tajikistan is actually in isolation at the moment and Uzbekistan remains the only reliable 'window' to the rest of the world," the website says.

Tajikistan shares borders with four countries - Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, China and Afghanistan. The Kyrgyz authorities closed all the border crossings for their southern neighbour after a deadly conflict between them on 28-29 April. Kyrgyzstan was a transit route for Tajikistan to import most Chinese products due to a lack of good roads linking it with the main trade partner. The unstable situation in Afghanistan also prevents Tajikistan from using it as a trade corridor. "And in this situation, most consumer goods can be imported from Uzbekistan, where almost all finished products are made today. Uzbekistan is also in close proximity [to Tajikistan] and there is a decent road and rail infrastructure, and most importantly, transit [of goods] through third countries is excluded. All these contribute to a significant decrease in the cost of goods, which means a decrease in the final price for the goods in Tajikistan's retail markets," it adds. (Nuqta.tj, in Russian, 16 June)

Pundits ponder on Taliban's statement on Tajik-Kyrgyz border row

Privately-owned analytical web portal Cronos Central Asia carries comments by experts about the Afghan Taliban movement's recent statement on the late April armed border conflict between Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. The statement calls on the two "Islamic and brotherly countries to resolve their disputes through dialogue".

Kyrgyz political analyst Mars Sariyev is quoted as saying that the Taliban's call for peaceful settlement of the conflict is "very interesting and positive". "I think this is an objective and sober message sent by the Taliban to the Kyrgyz and Tajik authorities, which I consider as a certain hint of a warning at the same time. They say that, if Central Asian countries - in particular, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan - host American troops who are now actively looking for places to deploy new bases, the Taliban will not stand aside and will be forced to intervene," Sariyev says. "In my opinion, the Taliban are confident that deployment of US troops in Central Asian countries will lead to destabilisation of the region. Besides, it is quite possible that an 'Afghanisation' of the situation may occur." The pundit goes on to say that the Taliban are "warning" Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan that there is "an external player in the political arena which is interested in destabilisation and war between these two countries". Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan will play an important role in solving this situation, he adds.

Another political analyst, Igor Shestakov, says that, through this statement, the Taliban are trying to build the image of a peacekeeper. "I think that we, first of all, are talking about the fact that the Taliban are positioning themselves as a real political force that could influence socio-political ***processes*** not only in Afghanistan, but also in Central Asia, by addressing an acute conflict situation that has recently took place on the Kyrgyz-Tajik border," Shestakov argues. He notes that in the international arena, the Taliban are seen as a Islamist terrorist organisation, not a creative-political force. There is a real possibility that the Taliban can take over power in Afghanistan, the pundit says and adds that, therefore, the group is using the Kyrgyz-Tajik conflict as an opportunity to change the way it is perceived in the media. "The Taliban's call for peace between the two Central Asian countries is, to a certain extent, a PR move seeking to improve their image. If the Taliban come to power in Afghanistan, they will need to position themselves from the perspective of a creating force, because without international support, Afghanistan will not be able to resolve its socio-economic issues. The Taliban will have to work with the international community, which is going to be very difficult if they do not improve their image," the expert concludes.

The website goes on to quote Tajik political scientist Sayfullo Saparov as voicing scepticism about the Taliban's political future. "The Taliban cannot offer peace, but they are able to engage [others] in cooperation for peace, which is very attractive to all sides," Saparov says. Although peace is possible, the Taliban might be pursuing certain goals such as winning time to strengthen the positions, take a time-out or develop, the pundit argues. Another Tajik political analyst, Sherali Rizoyon, reckons that amid the withdrawal of the US troops, the Taliban are making every effort to become a legitimate power-forming factor in Afghanistan in the eyes of the international community. Therefore, he says, the Taliban's statement "can be taken as a kind of message that the Taliban today see themselves as a future political force in Afghanistan and intends to develop closer and friendly relations with neighbouring countries". However, the political calls into question whether this friendship is going to be possible at all, wondering against whom this friendship would be and if Central Asian countries will accept such an offer. (Cronos.asia, in Russian, 16 June)

UZBEKISTAN

Senator hails president for 'freeing' Uzbeks from cotton monoculture

Xalq Sozi, a pro-government newspaper founded by the Uzbek parliament, carries an article headlined "Cotton policy and monoculture", which is the latest in series of articles dedicated to President Shavkat Mirziyoyev's tenure in office so far. The author of the article, Murtazo Rahmatov, a senator and chief of the country's Association of Cotton and Textile Clusters, says Mirziyoyev has "liberated" the country from the "cotton monoculture oppression". "Changes taking place in the country's ***agriculture*** at the initiative of President Shavkat Mirziyoyev are based on the noble goals of making cotton growing one of the most lucrative industries in the country, freeing our people from hard labour and also making our farmers rich," Rahmatov says.

"Cotton used to be cultivated entirely manually, and even the harvest was picked by hand. It was a big problem for people living in the countryside. Did you know that village women bent over a thousand times a day to weed and take care of cotton fields from dawn to dusk for a promise that they would get cotton stocks after the harvest? Unfortunately, this is the truth," the senator adds. "Now no one forces small schoolchildren to leave their desks and pick cotton during the harvest. Anyone who tries to do this will get a severe comeuppance. Students are no longer spending an equal half of the academic year sowing seeds and picking cotton. No-one dares to do this now."

Rahmatov, who holds a PhD in economics, notes that such "***unprecedented***" ***agricultural*** reforms carried out by President Mirziyoyev are "reminiscent" of ***agricultural*** reforms introduced in China by the late Chinese Leader Deng Xiaoping. "The former leader of China is recognised as the architect of the Chinese miracle. It is known from history that Deng Xiaoping inherited a very difficult situation from Mao Zedong. When Den Xiaoping came to power, he introduced reforms, above all, in the ***agriculture***: first, the land was handed over to real owners; second, he gave freedom to peasants; and third, all bureaucratic barriers were removed. Today, the same can be seen in the agrarian life of Uzbekistan," the senator says. (Xalq Sozi, in Uzbek, 17 June pp1-5)

Influential NGO chief derides spokesman over incident with TV crew

Russian-language website Asiaterra.info reports about an incident in central Samarkand Region, in which a spokesman for the local governor snatched a memory stick from a journalist's camera at a time when a TV crew was interviewing protesting vendors shortly after their goods were destroyed in a fire at a market in the region's Ishtikhon District. The spokesman, identified as Ilkhom Boboyev, chewed up the seized memory stick and then swallowed it, the report says. The website carries reaction from Komil Allamjonov, head of the Public Fund for Supporting and Developing the National Media, to the incident in Ishtikhon District.

"An employee of the press service of the [Ishtikhon District] administration snatched a camera from a journalist's hands, took out the flash drive, chewed it up and then swallowed. I believe that such employees should be examined by a psychiatrist and vaccinated against rabies. It is very interesting, what punishment is envisaged by law for an employee of a government body for chewing up an operator's flash drive? This is probably a vivid example of a dog's loyalty of an official to its boss. The more you live, the more you see such things," Allamjonov says, as published by the website. (Asiaterra.info, in Russian, 17 June)

Commenting on the incident, outspoken MP Rasul Kusherbayev says: "Press secretaries eating journalists' memory sticks are not as laughable as the system which gives rise to such press secretaries." (Telegram, in Uzbek, 17 June)

Sale of $20m building to firm linked to minister's son in spotlight

Privately-owned news website Sof.uz carries a report entitled "The State Security Service's former building has been sold for 210bn soms. Who is the buyer?" The report says a large building belonging to the country's State Security Service (SSS) in the central part of Tashkent has been sold to the Metropol Group LLC for about $20m at an online auction. It asks who the businessman behind the private company is. (Sof.uz, in Uzbek, 17 June)

Commenting on the news, outspoken news website Uzmetrom.com says that "the complex of buildings located in the very centre of Tashkent" has become the property of the Metropol Group founded by the son of the country's foreign minister, Daniyar Kamilov. "It should be noted that the current minister of foreign affairs [Abdulaziz Kamilov] was a KGB officer during the Soviet era. He is also a son-in-law of [the late] first secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Uzbekistan, Sharaf Rashidov," the website says.

"Analysts monitoring the redistribution of state property in the past four years note that the so-called 'family-contract' business, in which profitable businesses are given to relatives of influential officials or relatives of their relatives, has been flourishing in the country. Relatives of noblemen often use budget funds as well. Something similar happened during the reign of the first president of Uzbekistan [late Islam Karimov], but not on such a large scale... The analysts do not exclude that the new owner of the KGB-SSS complex of buildings will focus on extreme tourism. Tourists visiting the complex will experience how the ***process*** of denunciation, arrest and interrogation of suspects took place in the building in the past, and how such people were sent to prison camps. Execution of people by a firing squad has been banned under the country's legislation. So there will be no such scenes. Nevertheless, I believe that there will be no end of foreign tourists visiting the complex," Sergei Yezhkov, editor of the website, says sarcastically. (Uzmetronom.com, in Russian, 17 June)

Police bust banned religious group cell in Samarkand

Privately-owned news website Ahnor.uz reports that six suspected members of the banned religious organisation Hizb ut-Tahrir have been detained in central Samarkand Region. "Police and security officers in Samarkand Region have busted a group of six people engaged in the activities of the religious extremist organisation Hizb ut-Tahrir al Islami. According to the police, some of those detained had been previously convicted of propagating extremist ideas and involvement in the activities of the abovementioned terrorist organisation. A preliminary investigation is under way," the report says. (Anhor.uz, in Russian, 18 June)

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ARC Briefing Morocco

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**Body**

**ABSTRACT**

***The International Monetary Fund (IMF) announces that Morocco's economy has regained most of the ground it lost during the sharp recession of 2020. The Trésorerie Générale du Royaume (treasury general) reports a slight decrease in Morocco's budget deficit, which stood at MAD 63.6 billion ($6.8 billion) at the end of December. Morocco is facing its worst drought in over 30 years, threatening the year's grains yield and prompting King Mohammed VI (1999-present) to call for nationwide prayers for rain to aid an industry employing one in three Moroccan workers. The expected record-low rainfall will deepen the kingdom's reliance on imports amidst Covid-19-induced spikes in food prices. European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen announces that the European Union (EU) plans to invest 1.6 billion ($1.8 billion) in Moroccan green energy. The government reopens the country's airspace to international travel, after more than two months of closure, a move welcomed by tourism professionals and air companies***.

**FULL TEXT**

**IMF upbeat about Morocco's post-Covid-19 economic rebound...**

The **International Monetary Fund** (**IMF**) announced on 9 February that **Morocco**'s economy has regained most of the ground it lost during the sharp recession of 2020.[[41]](#footnote-42)1 The IMF forecasted a growth rate of 3% in 2022 with "***agricultural*** *production returning to average levels and nonagricultural activity continuing its recovery*".[[42]](#footnote-43)2 In a statement issued after its Article IV Executive Board consultations with Morocco, the IMF emphasised that, in addition to the ***exceptional*** harvest after two years of drought, other factors propelling its rebound will be "*continued fiscal and monetary stimulus, and the persistent buoyancy of remittances*".[[43]](#footnote-44)3 The country's commercial banks have also weathered the crisis well due to prompt and "***exceptional*** *support*" from the central bank, **Bank al-Maghrib** (**BAM**).[[44]](#footnote-45)4 The IMF noted that, although most of the jobs lost by 2020 will have been recovered, Morocco's unemployment rate of 11.8% is higher than pre-pandemic levels.[[45]](#footnote-46)5

Inflationary pressures in Morocco are expected to dissipate over the medium term as cost constraints linked to global supply disruptions subside.[[46]](#footnote-47)6 The IMF also says that Morocco's current account deficit will rebound this year to a level similar to the pre-pandemic period, stabilising at about 3.5% of the country's gross domestic product (GDP) in the medium term.[[47]](#footnote-48)7 Morocco's foreign currency reserves have also increased following a sharp decline in 2020.[[48]](#footnote-49)8 The IMF highlighted that, although there are risks to the pandemic's progression, effective and timely government reforms should accelerate growth in the medium term.

**... amid slight decrease in budget deficit**

The **Trésorerie Générale du Royaume** (**TGR**) (general treasury) reported on 27 January that Morocco had registered a budget deficit of MAD 63.6 billion ($6.8 billion) at the end of December.[[49]](#footnote-50)9 The treasury's monthly report on finance statistics for December shows a notable decrease in the budget deficit, which stood at MAD 82 billion ($8.8 billion) a year earlier. Treasury data show that the deficit takes into account "*a positive balance of MAD 15.8 billion ($1.6 billion)*" from the **Comptes Spéciaux du Trésor** (**CST**) (special treasury accounts) and the **Services de l'Etat gérés de manière autonome** (**SEGMA**) (autonomously managed state services).[[50]](#footnote-51)10 The report also showed an increase of 4.7% in gross ordinary revenues, amounting to MAD 261 billion ($28 billion).

TGR's statistics note that a positive ordinary balance of MAD 2.9 billion ($311m) is due to a rise in custom duties by 26.4%, indirect taxes by 16.3%, and registration and stamp duties by 19.3%.[[51]](#footnote-52)11 However, direct taxes and non-tax revenues fell by 2.3% and 13.4% respectively. Government expenditure issued under the general budget stands at MAD 389.9 billion ($41 billion) at the end of December; a decrease of 3.1% in comparison to the same period a year earlier.[[52]](#footnote-53)12 The decline was due to an 8.5% fall in investment expenditure and 19.9% in budget debt charges, combined with the 6.8% increase in operating expenses.[[53]](#footnote-54)13 TGR notes that the country's expenditure commitments, involving those not subject to prior commitment approval, stood at MAD 549 billion ($58 billion) at the end of December.[[54]](#footnote-55)14 The report also notes that the issue rate on commitments was 92% compared to 93% a year earlier, adding that the revenues of the CST reached MAD 129.7 billion ($13 billion).[[55]](#footnote-56)15

**Record-low rainfall threatens economic stability**

There is growing concern that Morocco may face its worst drought recorded in over 30 years. The drought threatens the year's grains yield and has prompted King **Mohammed VI** (1999-present) to call for nationwide Islamic prayers for rain to aid an industry employing one in three Moroccan workers.[[56]](#footnote-57)16 The expected record low rainfall will deepen Morocco's reliance on imports amidst Covid-19-induced spikes in food prices, on the backdrop of continuing global supply chain disruptions.[[57]](#footnote-58)17 Wheat is a staple to **North African** countries and, as the region faces drought, global wheat demand is likely to increase in the coming months, pushing global prices even higher amid tight supplies, increasing government spending, and a widening trade deficit for all North African countries, including Morocco.[[58]](#footnote-59)18

Morocco's reliance on rainfall makes it particularly vulnerable to adverse weather changes. ***Agriculture*** minister **Mohammed Sadiki** expressed *"extreme concern"* about the drought and predicted that this year may mark the worst harvest output in decades. His comments echo those of the **United States (US) Department of *Agriculture***, which called the drought "***exceptional***".[[59]](#footnote-60)19 Morocco faces severe drought every two to three years on average, up from once in every 10 years in the 1990s.[[60]](#footnote-61)20

Authorities in several regions, including **Marrakech** and **Oujda** in the north-east, have already announced plans to ration water, reflecting the scale of water scarcity.[[61]](#footnote-62)21 March and April are two of the most critical months for rainfall in Morocco, and there is hope that the low rainfall trend will reverse.[[62]](#footnote-63)22 However, a report by financial, software, data and media company **Bloomberg** released on 9 February indicates that the country's short-term weather forecasts do not look promising.[[63]](#footnote-64)23 Bloomberg quoted Moroccan farmers' lobby group **Comader** vice president **Rachid Benali** saying that the famers are "*trying to save what can be saved, spare the minimum of water we have*" and "*it is a particularly complex situation, quite* ***unprecedented***."[[64]](#footnote-65)24

The ruling **Parti Authenticité et Modernité** (**PAM**) has called on the majority of parties in government to hold an urgent meeting to discuss the delayed rainfall in the country and the implications for the ***agricultural*** sector.[[65]](#footnote-66)25 PAM has suggested ***measures*** including the provision of financial and material assistance to farmers and residents in rural areas in order to minimise the impact of the lack of rainfall.

**EU plans to invest $1.8 billion in Moroccan green energy...**

**European Commission** president **Ursula von der Leyen** announced on **Twitter** during a visit to Morocco that the **European Union** (**EU**) plans to invest 1.6 billion ($1.8 billion) in Moroccan green energy.[[66]](#footnote-67)26 In a Tweet on 9 February, Von der Leyen said that the investment is a "*great opportunity for the green and digital transition*" as part of **Europe**'s "*Global Gateway*" programme. The Global Gateway is the EU's investment scheme to compete with **China**'s **Belt and Road Initiative** (**BRI**) by offering funding for investments outside the European region.[[67]](#footnote-68)27 Von der Leyen described the investment scheme as "*a template for how Europe can build more resilient connections with the world*" and said the EU will offer up to up to 300 billion ($340 billion) in investments.[[68]](#footnote-69)28

Von der Leyen's announcement comes a month after Morocco signed a landmark agreement with **Beijing** to join the BRI (see *ARC Briefing Morocco Jan 2022*). The agreement, signed on 5 January, seeks to boost cooperation between Morocco and China in various fields, including investment, trade, security, military, education, culture and tourism.[[69]](#footnote-70)29 The BRI, launched in 2013, is China's $1-trillion infrastructure investment programme seeking to connect **Asia** with **Africa** and Europe "*via land and maritime networks with the aim of improving regional integration, increasing trade and stimulating economic growth*".[[70]](#footnote-71)30 Morocco and China signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on the BRI in November 2017, with Morocco becoming the first country in the **Maghreb** to subscribe to Beijing's investment plan.[[71]](#footnote-72)31 China sees Morocco as a prime trading hub given its location at the southernmost point of Europe, with nautical links across the **Atlantic** and an "*important potential bridgehead in the****Mediterranean***".[[72]](#footnote-73)32

European and **North American** countries are increasingly seeing China as a threat following its transition from a developing power to a global economic and military power. Local political analysts say that the evolving rivalry between Europe and China may be a net positive for Morocco in the near term, with Morocco benefitting from increased economic and political competition towards investment within the country.[[73]](#footnote-74)33

**Morocco reopens airspace...**

Morocco's airspace has reopened to international travel after more than two months of closure, but its maritime borders remain closed until further notice.[[74]](#footnote-75)34 The government announced on 27 January its decision to reopen borders, following recommendations from members of the scientific community who were monitoring the country's epidemiological situation. Tourism professionals and air companies welcomed Morocco's decision to lift its air travel ban on 7 February. Shortly after the government announced the reopening of air borders, national carrier **Royal Air Maroc, France**-headquartered **Air France, Ireland**-based **Ryanair, Dutch** low-cost airline **Transavia** and **Canary Islands** flag carrier **Binter Canarias** all announced the resumption of their flights to and from Morocco.[[75]](#footnote-76)35 A local source told **Africa Risk Consulting** (**ARC**) that the ban should never have been installed in the first place:

"*There was no need to put economic pressure on the economy and on travel companies only for the Omicron variant to be dominant here just like in other countries. Government misfired*."[[76]](#footnote-77)36

In collaboration with Morocco's **Office National des Aéroports** (**ONDA**) (national airports office) and the ministry of health, all domestic airports are taking intensive ***measures*** to limit the spread of Covid-19. These include social distancing, disinfection of facilities and equipment, and instalment of antiseptic gel distributors.[[77]](#footnote-78)37 In order to ensure an effective air border reopening, health authorities on 1 February announced special conditions that international travellers wishing to visit Morocco must meet. All travellers entering Morocco must be in possession of a Covid-19 vaccination pass and a negative PCR result of a test taken fewer than 48 hours before departure.[[78]](#footnote-79)38 Passengers may also be randomly selected to undergo rapid tests upon arrival and potentially another PCR test. The requirements also include the possibility of carrying out an additional Covid-19 test at travellers' hotels or residences 48 hours after arrival.[[79]](#footnote-80)39 Those testing positive upon arrival will be confined at their places of residence while being subjected to careful monitoring. The health ministry has set up a vaccination programme at the airport to allow passengers to complete their vaccination programme and receive a third dose of a Covid-19 vaccine.[[80]](#footnote-81)40

Health officials announced on 1 February that the third wave of Covid-19 infections was on a downward trend in Morocco, with the reproduction rate (R0) standing at 0.85 as of 30 January.[[81]](#footnote-82)41**National Center for Public Health Emergency Operations** coordinator at the ministry of health, **Mouad Mrabet**, said the current wave was marked by strong dominance of the Omicron variant (98% of cases).[[82]](#footnote-83)42

According to its update on 14 February, the health ministry has fully vaccinated 23,143,633 of Morocco's 36.4 million citizens against Covid-19 since beginning its vaccination campaign at the end of January 2021.[[83]](#footnote-84)43 At least 24,707,540 people have received a first dose and 5,164,400 have received a third or booster dose. As of 13 February, Morocco has 634 active cases of Covid-19 and the seven-day average as of the same date is 1,132 daily cases.[[84]](#footnote-85)44 As of 14 February, Morocco had recorded a total of 1,155,534 cases, with 1,126,340 recoveries and 15,802 Covid-19-related deaths.[[85]](#footnote-86)45

The government has extended the country's health state of emergency through 28 February.[[86]](#footnote-87)46 Although night curfew was lifted on 9 November due to the improving epidemiological situation at the time and the successful national Covid-19 vaccination campaign,[[87]](#footnote-88)47 a new curfew was temporarily put into force from 11:59 pm on 31 December to 6am 1 January.[[88]](#footnote-89)48 As of early December, there are no restrictions on inter-state or inter-city travel in effect.[[89]](#footnote-90)49 However, several domestic restrictions remain in place nationwide. Vaccination certificates are required to enter most public and private spaces, including hotels, restaurants, cafes, gyms, public baths, grocery stores, and to use public transport.[[90]](#footnote-91)50 Cafes, public baths, public swimming pools, gyms, sports facilities and stores can operate with up to 50% capacity. Public and private gatherings are limited to 50 people. Domestic flights and public transport, including bus and rail service, are in operation, and international travel has now resumed. Wearing a facemask is mandatory in public spaces. Authorities could reimpose, extend, further ease, or otherwise amend any restrictions with little to no notice depending on disease activity over the coming weeks.

**Planner**

2022 **Marrakech (Morocco) International Monetary Fund** and **World Bank** annual meetings to take place in Morocco;

4-5 Mar 2022 **Rabat (Morocco) Parti Authenticité et Modernité** (**PAM**) 7th National Congress;

10-12 May 2022 **Marrakech (Morocco) European Bank for Reconstruction and Development** (**EBRD**) Annual Meeting;

11-13 May 2022 **Tangier (Morocco) Worldwide Network of Port Cities** (**WNPC**) 17th World Conference on Cities and Ports;

24-26 Oct 2022 **Marrakech (Morocco) Airports Council International** (**ACI**) conference

**Chronology**

14 Feb 2022 **Rabat (Morocco)***Morocco World News*. **Poland**-headquartered lighting solution group **LUG** inaugurates its newest **LUG Morocco** branch in the southern city of **Laayoune**;

14 Feb 2022 **Rabat (Morocco)***Royal Air Maroc*. National carrier **Royal Air Maroc** (**RAM**) has scheduled a repatriation flight from **Ukraine** to Morocco on 15 February amid a threat of conflict in the country;

13 Feb 2022 **Rabat (Morocco)***Morocco World News*. Record-low rainfall threatens Morocco's rainfall-dependent grains harvest, risking to increase the country's reliance on imports amidst Covid-19-induced spikes in food prices;

13 Feb 2022 **New York (United States)***Fitch Ratings*. **United States** global ratings house **Fitch** maintains the outlook of Morocco's **Credit Immobilier et Hotelier** (**CIH**) bank at 'BB'Stable', supported by the bank's strong status as a real-estate lender;

13 Feb 2022 **Rabat (Morocco)***Middle East Monitor*. Morocco and **Israel** have concluded a $500m deal for a missile defence system;

11 Feb 2022 **Rabat (Morocco)***Map News*. Prime minister **Aziz Akhannouch** has led a Moroccan delegation at the **One Ocean Summit**, a three-day international event;

11 Feb 2022 **Madrid (Spain)***Morocco World News*. The **Spanish** government reports that Morocco spent MAD 4 billion ($443m) in the acquisition of Spanish weapons between 1991 and 2020;

10 Feb 2022 **Rabat (Morocco)***Morocco World News*. Morocco's central bank, **Bank Al- Maghreb** (**BAM**), and **CDG Invest**, the investment arm of the **CDG Group**, sign an agreement to develop Morocco's fintech ecosystem;

10 Feb 2022 **Rabat (Morocco)***Morocco World News*. The **Economist Intelligence Unit** (**EIU**) has ranked Morocco 95th on the **Democracy Index 2021** and third in the **Middle East and North African region** (**MENA**);

10 Feb 2022 **Rabat (Morocco)***Government of Morocco*. Government spokesperson **Mustapha Baitas** says the government is making great efforts to preserve citizens' purchasing power;

10 Feb 2022 **Rabat (Morocco)***Morocco World News*. Government adopts decrees to develop educational sector and solve problems related to administrative positions in the sector;

10 Feb 2022 **New York (United States)***Morocco World News*. **United States** (**US**) ratings agency **Fitch** says the market outlook of **Attijariwafa Bank** remains stable with the possibility of the bank failing to meet future financial commitments;

9 Feb 2022 **Rabat (Morocco)***International Monetary Fund*. The **International Monetary Fund** (**IMF**) announces that Morocco's economy regained most of the ground lost during the sharp global recession of 2020;

9 Feb 2022 **Rabat (Morocco)***Morocco World News*. Morocco's aerospace industry reports total export volume of MAD 15.4 billion ($1.6 billion) at the end of 2021, up from MAD 12.7 billion ($1.3 billion) in 2020;

9 Feb 2022 **Madrid (Spain)***Morocco Latest News*. **Spain**'s government has said that Morocco is *"sovereign"* to install drones with missiles near the borders of **Melilla** and **Ceuta** and that relations with Morocco are steadily improving as expected;

9 Feb 2022 **Rabat (Morocco)***Morocco World News*. Prime minister **Aziz Akhannouch** emphasises the importance of cooperation between Morocco and the **European Union** (**EU**) during a meeting with **EU Commission** president **Ursula von der Leyen**;

8 Feb 2022 **Rabat (Morocco)***Khaleej Times*. Morocco ranks 20th in the 2022 **Agility Emerging Markets Logistics Index** (**AEML**), an assessment by global logistics provider **Agility**;

8 Feb 2022 **Rabat (Morocco)***Diplomatie*. Foreign affairs minister **Nasser Bourita** welcomes **European Commission** president **Ursula von der Leyen** at the airport of **Rabat-Sale**;

8 Feb 2022 **Rabat (Morocco)***Morocco World News*. **Bank Al Maghrib** (**BAM**) (central bank) is to hold a joint conference with the **International Monetary Fund** (**IMF**) and the IMF Economic Review;

8 Feb 2022 **Rabat (Morocco)***Morocco World News*. Foreign affairs minister **Nasser Bourita** says the Moroccan autonomy proposal is the best and only route to a sustainable and feasible political solution to the **Western Sahara** conflict;

7 Feb 2022 **Rabat (Morocco)***Maroc*. Prime minister **Aziz Akhannouch** and **Qatar**'s prime minister and minister of the interior, **Sheikh Khalid Bin Khalifa Al Thani**, chair the 8th session of the **Moroccan-Qatari High Joint Committee**, which results in the signing of six agreements and memoranda of understanding (MoUs);

7 Feb 2022 **Rabat (Morocco)***France24*. Morocco reopens its airspace after almost three months, but maritime travel to and from Moroccan ports remains suspended;

6 Feb 2022 **Tangier (Morocco)***Morocco World News*. A group of 18 foreign ambassadors in Morocco visit the northern Moroccan city of **Tangier** to explore investment opportunities;

6 Feb 2022 **Swords (Ireland)***Ryan Air*. Irish airline **Ryanair** intends to finalise its 2022 summer programming in Morocco with a capacity that may exceed by more than 50% that of the same period of 2019;

4 Feb 2022 **Rabat (Morocco)***Morocco World News*. Morocco's fourth-largest bank, the **Société Générale** banking group, has received a loan of 25m ($28m) from the **European Development Bank** to support green ventures;

4 Feb 2022 **Rabat (Morocco)***Morocco World News*. **United Kingdom**-headquartered mining firm **Emmerson PLC** has contracted local firm **Managem** subsidiary **Reminex** for engineering work at its **Khemisset** potash project, with plans to invest more than $500m over the project's first 19 years and to create over 2,000 jobs in Morocco, expecting to launch production at the facility in early 2024;

4 Feb 2022 **Washington (United States)***United States State Department*. **United States** (**US**) army general **Stephen Townsend** affirms that the US takes *"sparring"* in the **Morocco- Algeria** conflict seriously;

3 Feb 2022 **Rabat (Morocco)***Morocco World News*. Morocco plans to import liquefied natural gas (LNG) using a pipeline that previously sent transported gas from **Algeria** to **Spain**, using Spanish facilities to regasify by turning the liquefied gas, intended for easy transport, back into gas for energy use;

3 Feb 2022 **Washington (United States)***United States State Department*. **United States** (**US**) secretary of state **Antony Blinken** reiterates US support for the **United Nations**-led negotiation ***process*** on **Western Sahara**;

2 Feb 2022 **Rabat (Morocco)***Morocco World News*. Morocco's maritime forces are participating in a **United States**-led naval exercise that will continue until 17 February;

2 Feb 2022 **Rabat (Morocco)***Morocco World News*. **United Kingdom**-based renewable energy solutions company **Xlinks** has launched a call for tenders to conduct technical and geophysical studies along the route of the electric cable that is projected to connect Morocco and the UK, with 22 February as the deadline to receive offers for the tenders;

1 Feb 2022 **Rabat (Morocco)***Ministère de la Santé*. The health ministry announces that the third wave of **Covid-19** is on a downward trend, with the reproduction rate (R0) standing at 0.85 as of 30 January;

1 Feb 2022 **Rabat (Morocco)***Morocco World News*. Moroccan exports in the automotive sector reached MAD 83.78 billion ($8.94 billion) at the end of December 2021;

1 Feb 2022 **New York (United States)***Morocco World News*. **United Nations (UN) General Assembly** president **Abdulla Shahid** commends Morocco's response to the Covid-19 crisis and the country's plans to become an exporter of Covid-19 vaccines in the coming years;

1 Feb 2022 **Rabat (Morocco)***Garda*. Government extends the suspension of maritime travel to and from all Moroccan ports until 6 February, but the suspension excludes utility vehicles such as trucks or vans used for transporting personnel, merchandise, or parcels;

31 Jan 2022 **Rabat (Morocco)***Parti Authenticité et Modernité (PAM)*. The **Parti Authenticité et Modernité** (**PAM**) says it has so far held 53 provincial congresses in all regions, while the 7th National Congress is expected to take place on 4 and 5 March;

28 Jan 2022 **Rabat (Morocco)***MAScIR Foundation*. Researchers from the **MAScIR Foundation** report they have developed a 100% Moroccan-made molecular test for tuberculosis screening, called MAScIR TB SS-LAMP, which is *"precise and fast, delivering results in 30 minutes"*;

28 Jan 2022 **Rabat (Morocco)***Morocco World News*. The **Economic, Social and Environmental Council** has launched a digital platform for citizen contribution, "**Ouchariko**";

28 Jan 2022 **Washington (United States)***Times of Israel*. **United States** (**US**) ambassador to **Israel, Tom Nides**, announces the launch of the **Ambassadorial Abraham Accords Working Group**; Morocco, **United Arab Emirates** (**UAE**), and **Bahrain** are the only Arab states represented in the group;

27 Jan 2022 **Rabat (Morocco)***Garda*. Government decides to resume air travel to and from Morocco starting on 7 February and extends the state of emergency until 28 February;

27 Jan 2022 **Rabat (Morocco)***Morocco World News* Morocco's The **Trésorerie Générale du Royaume** (General Treasury) reports a budget deficit of MAD 63,6 billion ($6.8 billion) at the end of December 2021;

26 Jan 2022 **New York (United States)***Map News*. **G-77** members have elected Morocco's permanent representative to the **United Nations (UN)** Office in **Vienna, Azzeddine Farhane**, to the presidency of the **UN G-77+China Group**;

24 Jan 2022 **Rabat (Morocco)***Morocco World News*. Government is planning to expand consular services to meet the needs of Moroccans residing abroad;

24 Jan 2022 **Cairo (Egypt)***Morocco World News*. **Egypt**'s ambassador to Morocco, **Yasser Mustafa Kamal Othman**, has reaffirmed that his country does not recognise the **Polisario Front**'s self-styled "**Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic**" (**SADR**).

**FOOTNOTES**

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[***“A purer form of government”: African American constitutionalism in the founding of Liberia***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:671W-P2K1-JCWX-C05D-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

Introduction

One of the unique features of the US founding generation was its immense experience in constitution-writing. In the fifteen years between declaring independence in 1776 and ratifying the Bill of Rights in 1791, America’s revolutionary leaders wrote constitutions for thirteen newly independent states, two national constitutions—the Articles of Confederation and the constitution of 1787—and a national bill of rights. Prominent and long-lived founders like James Madison were even consulted for ideas in drafting constitutions for new western states—Kentucky in Madison’s case—and participated in writing a second constitution for their own states. Altogether, the American founders were arguably the most experienced constitution writers in the world.

Since the founders, however, very few Americans have had the chance to participate in writing a new national constitution. Yet in 1847 a group of African Americans did just that, writing and ratifying the constitution of Liberia. In creating the oldest written constitution in Africa, these African Americans brought a simultaneously unique and critical perspective to American constitutionalism.

Liberia’s historical relationship with the USA has received substantial scholarly attention. It is perhaps because of this close connection with the USA that the Liberian constitution has been overlooked, dismissed as simply “a replica of that of the United States.” At first glance, such dismissal appears to be valid. Many aspects of the Liberian constitution are similar to its American counterpart, including its bicameral legislature, single executive, independent judiciary, and language of rights. Yet there are marked differences. Because the Liberian constitution of 1847 is one of the few instances of Americans constructing a national constitution after 1787, I argue that such differences should be viewed as implicit critiques of the American constitution. That is, we can see what the African American founders of Liberia disliked about the American constitution by examining which parts they chose to change or discard in their own constitution, as well as how they altered American constitutional principles to apply to the west coast of Africa.

Assessing the Liberian constitution as a critique of the American constitution contributes to the research on Liberia and extends other diverse strands of the scholarly literature, particularly in comparative constitutionalism, American political development, and African American political thought. In comparative constitutionalism, assessing how American constitutional ideas were transmitted to Africa gets to the heart of comparative constitutional studies, “the uneasy reconciliation of foreign constitutional ideals with local realities.” The American authors of the Liberian constitution clearly display the types of decisions that confront constitutional framers who must to reconcile historical traditions with their new environment. Liberia also provides an additional data point in the growing literatures on constitution-making and how features of American constitutionalism have been adopted by other countries. Furthermore, evaluating the Liberian constitution adds nuance to “institutional mimicry” theory, where one country copies—or nearly copies—the institutions of another. For while Liberia seems to be a clear case of “mimicry,” its constitution demonstrates how a country “mimicking” another may make substantive adjustments in line with environmental factors and their own differing values.

Liberia’s uniqueness as a foreign country founded by Americans also allows it to be viewed as part of American political development. Most research in American political development has naturally focused on the history and evolution of institutions or ideas within the borders of the USA. Yet those developments were done in an “institutionally thick” environment and had to be layered on top of, or imposed in opposition to, existing political structures. In other words, any changes that Americans wished to make to their political or constitutional system had to be done within the context of an existing overarching framework. For example, the abolition of slavery and the initial nineteenth-century push for civil rights for African Americans in the USA had to be undertaken as constitutional amendments to change the underlying structure itself, as there were strong arguments that the constitution’s system of federalism did not allow for national action on either slavery or civil rights. At a more political level, the expansion of the American presidency’s administrative and military authority in the mid-twentieth century was done in opposition to entrenched institutions who argued that such changes would distort the constitutional order. Similarly, some scholars have argued that the presidency’s increased rhetorical connection with the people was “layered” on top of the original constitutional structure in ways that created tensions within the system. In each case, these changes required Americans to either amend the constitution itself or push back against existing institutional pressures in ways that altered the political reality, but which also created intra-institutional conflicts.

By contrast, the Liberians had a relative tabula rasa for implementing their own constitutional system and shaping it to be what they wanted. The President of the Liberian Constitutional Convention Samuel Benedict—who later became the first Chief Justice of Liberia—asserted that this freedom gave the Liberians the opportunity to create “a purer form of government than any now to be found, even in the United States.” The Liberian constitution, therefore, serves as a snapshot of what a subset of Americans in the mid-nineteenth century disliked about the American system and what they changed when given the chance.

Of course, the Americans in Liberia were a specific group: African Americans. Little has been written on the Liberian founders in the context of African American political thought. This is not to say that early Liberian political thought has been completely ignored. The ideas of Hilary Teage—author of the Liberian Declaration of Independence and “Liberia’s Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, and James Madison”—as well as Alexander Crummell and Edward W. Blyden—both of whom immigrated to Liberia after independence—have received scholarly attention, but typically in the context of African political thought. If American émigrés to Liberia are mentioned relative to African American political thought, it is usually in reference to their work in the USA or to contrast the pro-colonization views of the Liberians with the anti-colonization views of other African American thinkers.

Yet the Liberian founders “were essentially American rather than African in outlook and orientation,” and saw themselves as distinct from the indigenous Africans, expressing that belief in their constitution and declaration of independence and effectively creating a new ethnic group: Americo-Liberians. As Howard Temperly succinctly put it, “The settlers […] were expatriates. Their ‘country’ was the USA.” Teage provides an excellent example of this mindset. Writing of the New Virginia settlement, he compares it to his birthplace, “Old Virginia,” and urges his fellow Liberians to “copy all in the old that is good, and reject the bad” and “establish Virginia in Africa, of which Virginians everywhere may be truly proud.” Viewing Liberians as part of the African American political tradition allows us to examine how African Americans approached constitution-making and gain a unique perspective on the criticisms African Americans made of the American constitution.

More fundamentally, the Liberians provide insight into how African Americans in the antebellum period perceived the constitutional identity of the USA. As described by Gary Jacobsohn, a nation’s constitutional identity consists in those values, principles, and normative commitments that a society seeks to uphold and weaves into their constitution. In the American context, slavery created a “constitutional disharmony,” as the US normative principles of equality conflicted with the realities of slavery and racial discrimination. This constitutional disharmony takes on further significance as racial oppression and discrimination were the primary reasons why the Liberians left the USA. In Africa, the Liberians sought to resolve the disharmony at the center of the Americans’ constitutional identity and forge a new identity. In essence, the Liberian founders responded to Frederick Douglass’ question “What Country have I?” by creating a new, explicitly black republic to call their own, adopting what they viewed as the best of the American system while dispensing with the worst.

To explore these issues, I first discuss the pre-independence governing structure instituted by the American Colonization Society to assess how much of that structure was carried over into the Liberian constitution. I then examine the differences between the Liberian and American constitutions and classify them into three categories: environmental, institutional, and racial. Environmental changes refer to those that were not entirely discretionary but which were principally driven by the African Americans’ new geographic and sociopolitical setting. The institutional category focuses on those adjustments to the government’s structure and powers, while the racial category concerns changes made with regard to racial questions such as slavery and Liberia’s relationship with the indigenous Africans.

Liberia under the American Colonization Society

Liberia gained independence in 1847, but its origins stretch back to 1816 with the founding of the American Colonization Society (ACS). While the question of whether the ACS was pro- or anti-slavery continues to be debated, the underlying goal was the same: the settlement of free African Americans outside the USA. Colonizing African Americans outside the USA was not a new idea. Thomas Jefferson had proposed it in as early as 1785 in his Notes on the State of Virginia, and small-scale efforts at repatriation by men like African American sailor Paul Cuffe had previously been attempted. Yet colonization had not been attempted on a broad scale by Americans, although the British had successfully established the colony of Sierra Leone with a similar aim in 1786. In 1820, the ACS sent its first group of settlers to Africa on the Elizabeth. Upon arriving, they formed what appears to be the colony’s first governing document, the no longer extant “Elizabeth Compact.” In 1822, a permanent settlement called Monrovia was established, named after President James Monroe.

In 1820, the ACS promulgated a colonial constitution which reserved all lawmaking and governing power to the ACS and its agents, the latter of whom “compose[d] a Board, to determine all questions relative to the government of the Settlement.” Yet, the constitution looked forward to when the ACS would “withdraw their Agents, and leave the settlers to the government of themselves.” Along with abolishing slavery, the constitution guaranteed that all who moved to or were born in the territory would be “entitled to all the rights and privileges of the free people of the United States.”This structure was preserved in the 1824 constitution, which added an ACS-appointed chief administrator and allowed the settlers to nominate individuals for subordinate positions, with the ACS retaining confirmation authority. Aspects of the 1824 constitution were amended in 1828 by the Plan of Civil Government submitted by the ACS’ Colonial Agent Jehudi Ashmun but it remained “in its principles the same” as the 1824 constitution.

While the primary settlement remained in Monrovia, other settlements sponsored by state auxiliary chapters of the ACS developed in the surrounding area. Several attempts were made in the 1830s to bring the settlements together. The most prominent was the ACS proposal to consolidate the settlements into the single colony of Monrovia in 1837. In that system, the ACS-appointed governor would have also served in the legislative and judicial branches alongside the chief magistrates of each settlement, creating an ***exceptionally*** centralized unitary governing system. By contrast, in 1838 a convention of societies with African settlements proposed “Articles of Association” which “would have been a league of states, not a state itself” and resembled the American states under the Articles of Confederation in the 1780s. Both of these efforts ultimately failed, largely due to opposition from the auxiliary societies, particularly the Maryland society whose settlement, Maryland in Africa, remained separate from Liberia until it was annexed by the young republic in 1854.

Only in 1839 was the Monrovia settlement united with some of the surrounding settlements to form the Commonwealth of Liberia. This change also necessitated a new institutional arrangement. As part of this ***process***, the Liberians themselves participated in constitutional politics for the first time. In an effort to ease what had been growing tensions between ACS officials and the Liberian settlers, a group of delegates were called to a convention by the ACS to propose amendments subject to ACS approval. Perhaps taking a cue from their American forebears, the delegates used the opportunity to craft an entirely new constitution, known as the “Monrovia draft.” This constitution would have significantly expanded Liberian opportunities for self-rule. While the ACS retained ultimate political authority and the power to appoint the governor, the lieutenant governor and six councilors would be elected by the Liberians. The councilors would also, with the governor, make up the legislative branch and confirm gubernatorial appointments not vested with the ACS. A separate judiciary, an impeachment ***process*** for the governor and other officials, and a list of protections resembling a bill of rights were also laid out. One area where the constitution was restrictive, however, was in its provisions for citizenship and suffrage. Under the Monrovia draft, only “colored persons” could become citizens of the colony, and suffrage was limited to citizens who owned property and paid taxes.

While the ACS wished to increase settler participation and ease tensions, it was not willing to grant the Liberians self-rule and ignored the Monrovia draft. Instead, the ACS turned to Thomas Buchanan, the governor of the Bassa Cove settlement who had substantial support from the Pennsylvania and New York societies. Appointing Buchanan as governor of Liberia in 1839, the ACS tasked him with drawing up a new constitution. The Buchanan draft resembled the Monrovia draft in having an ACS-appointed governor serve as the executive and as part of the legislature alongside a popularly elected council. Unlike the Monrovia draft, however, Buchanan’s governor also possessed an unqualified veto and, similar to the aborted 1837 ACS plan, served as the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. Additionally, while there were fewer rights protections—those listed mainly ensured due ***process*** rights—there was universal manhood suffrage for every male citizen over the age of twenty-one. The ACS approved Buchanan’s draft, only later amending the governor’s veto to allow the council a two-thirds override.

The Buchanan draft proved to be Liberia’s last colonial constitution as the colony moved toward independence. This shift is particularly evident in the appointment of Joseph J. Roberts as the first African American governor of Liberia following Buchanan’s death in 1841. Roberts’ administration does not seem to have differed much policy-wise from his predecessors, and his light skin has been characterized as a legacy of the Old South where individuals of his complexion “served as a ‘buffer’ between masters and slaves.” Yet his selection as governor, as well as the expanded opportunities for settler participation in government, signaled the shift toward increased Liberian self-rule.

The move to independence was also accelerated by commercial disputes between Liberia and Britain. British merchants refused to pay customs duties or obey other Liberian laws on the grounds that Liberia was not a legitimate government but a mere collection of private individuals. The conflict led to discussions over Liberia’s sovereignty between Britain, the USA, and the ACS. The ACS insisted that the “Commonwealth of Liberia is a sovereign State, having its own constitution, government, and laws” with “the powers, prerogatives, and privileges essential to sovereignty.” The position of the American government was less clear. While the ACS had led in establishing Liberia, the government had supported it throughout the ***process***. In the 1820s Congress appropriated $100,000 to the ACS to jumpstart the project and Monroe interpreted the Slave Trade Act of 1819 broadly to send naval ships to aid the colonists. At the same time, Monroe’s Secretary of State John Quincy Adams argued that a “colonial establishment” was unconstitutional. In the 1840s, when President John Tyler’s administration was pressed by the British government to state its relationship to Liberia, the Americans’ response was confused. Edward Everett, the American minister to Britain, insisted that the Americans were simply treating Liberia as they would treat any other nation without definitively saying if Liberia was a nation. The House Committee on Commerce issued a report which recommended a plan “devis[ing] for the permanent and prosperous guidance of the [Liberian] colonies.” Secretary of the Navy Abel Upshur similarly noted Liberia’s American origins and seemingly subordinate status as a protectorate, observing that “it was established by our people, and has gone on under the countenance and good offices of our Government.” Tyler’s Secretary of State Daniel Webster, however, followed Adams’ argument that the Constitution prohibited colonial possessions and determined that Liberia was not an American colony. When Upshur succeeded Webster as Secretary of State he continued Webster’s policy of seeing Liberia as an independent society, offering to mediate the conflict between Britain and Liberia as a neutral third party. While the USA insisted London should recognize Liberia’s existence and rights, it was evident that the USA “had no intention of claiming sovereignty over the Commonwealth, but was trying as hard as it could to avoid any responsibility for Liberia, claiming only charitable interest in its welfare.”

The controversy with Britain and lack of support from the USA encouraged nationalist sentiment among the Liberians. An article printed in the Liberia Herald declared that these issues necessitated Liberian independence so it could deal directly with European powers, as “sovereigns can only treat with sovereigns.” Teage, who was the editor of the Liberia Herald, told a crowd in December 1846 that “the eyes of Europe and America are upon us” and that it was up to the Liberians “to give the answer, whether the African race is doomed to interminable degradation.” Governor Roberts—who later became the first President of Liberia—also argued that they must be more than “a private company of traders, or settlers.” The rise in nationalism spurred the ACS to write Roberts about the move to independence, resulting in the Liberian Council passing an independence resolution.

Distinguishing adaptation from critique

In July 1847, twelve delegates gathered to write Liberia’s first national constitution. Eleven of the twelve were originally from the American South, and their time in the colony varied widely. Elijah Johnson had been on the Elizabeth in 1820, while J.B. Gripon had only arrived in 1843. Several also had prior experience in some level of constitutional politics. Teage and Beverly R. Wilson had contributed to writing the Monrovia draft while J.N. Lewis had put together a compilation of the colony’s laws in 1841. Among the professions represented were clergymen, newspaper editors, lawyers, and judges, and several delegates would go on to serve in high office within Liberian government. Benedict and John Day served as Liberia’s first and second chief justices, Teage was the first secretary of state, and A.W. Gardiner went on to an illustrious political career as attorney general, speaker of the House, vice president, and, finally, president from 1878 to 1883.

Unfortunately, there are few records from the actual convention, and those we have do not provide much information on the debates themselves. For example, the discussion over the president’s term length is captured in a single sentence: “After a great deal of debating, it was resolved that the President be elected for two years.” Nonetheless, we may still see how the Liberian founders critiqued the American constitution by observing what they chose to alter and discard in their own constitution. The differences can be divided into three categories: (1) environmental; (2) institutional; and (3) racial. Environmental differences emerge from the Liberians’ geographic and sociopolitical circumstances. Institutional and racial differences are not attributable solely to circumstance but represent conscious departures from American constitutional practice and are positive critiques of the American constitution. I also note when these alterations may fall into more than one of these categories.

Environmental changes

The most prominent adjustment the Liberians made which can be attributed to their new environment was in the powers granted to the national government. In the USA, the national government’s powers are limited to those enumerated in the constitution. By contrast, the Liberian constitution places no such restriction on the Liberian government. This is likely due to the lack of federalism. The Liberians chose to remain a unitary republic like it had been under the 1839 constitution rather than a confederation of the counties or a “partly federal, partly national” government like the USA. The lack of strong subnational units had the corollary effect of allowing Liberia to sidestep questions about the proper arrangement of power between the states and the national government which continually bedeviled antebellum American politics.

Apart from avoiding a contentious debate, the effects of ejecting federalism from the constitution are reflected in the Liberian legislature’s powers. Whereas the American constitution vested Congress only with those legislative powers “herein granted,” that is, listed in the constitution, the Liberian constitution drops such qualifiers, indicating that the Liberian legislature’s powers were plenary and general. As a result, the Liberian constitution does not possess sections listing which powers are granted or denied to the legislature like the American constitution does in article 1, Sects. 8 and 9.

The decision to be a unitary republic is, to some degree, discretionary. Yet the historic and geographic position of Liberia affected that choice. For the Americans, the existence of the states prior to their constitution’s creation meant that there were quasi-sovereign entities who already possessed powers derived from the people. The American constitution then had to accommodate these preexisting political bodies as part of the constitutional system. Liberia, however, did not have a preexisting confederation system and was quite small. An 1843 census found that the total population was only 2390. With so few people and without a history of decentralized power, there was not as much pressure to preserve the counties’ authority.

Liberia’s small size and resulting unitary government gave Liberia a structural appearance closer to that of an American state rather than the American national government. This impacted other features of the constitution, most notably the inclusion of a declaration of rights, requirements for citizenship, suffrage, and the presidency, as well as the selection methods of both the presidency and the senate.

While the decision to include a declaration of rights was likely influenced by established American practice—the national constitution and nearly every state constitution had one—the unitary structure of government undoubtedly shaped the declaration’s structure. During the American ratification debates, opponents of a national bill of rights claimed that it was unnecessary for two reasons. First, because the states already had bills of rights. Second, because the national government would only have limited, enumerated powers, meaning “that the constitution is itself in every rational sense, and to every useful purpose, A BILL OF RIGHTS.” Neither of those arguments could be applied to Liberia. The lack of federalism and the central government’s plenary power made a declaration of rights far more necessary if the Liberian founders wished to be consistent with the principles of limited government. The Liberian founders seemed to recognize this as they included the declaration of rights as Article I of the constitution rather than being added later as a series of amendments.

The length of the Liberian declaration of rights—containing twenty sections as opposed to the American bill of rights’ ten amendments—is indicative of the declaration needing to guard against a government with plenary rather than enumerated powers. In this, the Liberian constitution is more in line with American state constitutions, nearly all of which begin with extensive declarations of rights. Many of the major discrepancies in language between the Liberian and American constitutions can also be explained by referring to state constitutions of the time. For example, the more detailed protections for religious liberty and the press; defining the role of juries in libel and sovereign immunity cases; expanded language on bail; noting the fear of standing armies along with the right to bear arms; limiting martial law; explicitly connecting imposts with popular consent; and providing clear language on separation of powers are all similar to provisions found in state constitutions. The lack of a Liberian provision equivalent to the American tenth amendment can also be attributed to the government’s unitary character. A general government without a federalist structure does not require a provision reserving all powers not delegated “to the States respectively, or to the people.”

The lack of federalism also compelled the Liberians to clearly define issues of citizenship and suffrage. Prior to the fourteenth amendment, citizenship in the USA lacked a clear constitutional definition. Similarly, the American constitution originally sidestepped the suffrage question by allowing the states to set voting standards, stating that individuals could vote in national elections if they were qualified to vote for the “most numerous Branch of the State Legislature.” Without states, Liberia could not circumvent these issues and had to decide them. As with the declaration of rights, however, the specifics on who was a citizen and who could vote were up to their discretion.

The country’s size even impacted the structures of the presidency, vice presidency, the Senate, and the amendment ***process***. The first three institutions were popularly elected, a clear break from the USA where the president and vice president were elected by the Electoral College and senators were elected by state legislatures. Similarly, amendments could only be passed by two-thirds of the legislature—dispensing with the American constitution’s option allowing states to introduce amendments—and then ratified by a two-thirds popular vote instead of by the states.

While it is significant that the Liberians chose to make these institutions and the amendment ***process*** more democratic—as will be discussed below—we should not dismiss the effect of the republic’s size on this decision. With only 2390 citizens it would be much easier logistically to organize direct national elections for president and vice president and for ratifying amendments, as well as direct elections in each county for the Senate. Similarly, without federalism and strong subnational political units, having indirect elections and an amendment ***process*** which relies heavily on those subunits would not have seemed necessary.

The Liberian constitution also had lower age thresholds and shorter residency requirements and for the House, Senate, and presidency, with the president not even having to be a natural-born citizen. These lower requirements were likely due to the small population limiting the pool of candidates and the fact that most Liberians were immigrants. Shorter residency requirements allowed new arrivals to become involved in public life more quickly.

Finally, the inclusion of provisions relating to widows’ property and relations with the indigenous Africans were almost certainly driven by circumstances. While the Liberians retained discretion in how they approached these questions—as will be discussed below—the fact that they required specific constitutional clauses concerning property relations with the indigenous population was a result of having the native tribes included within Liberia’s borders. Similarly, without federalism, it became necessary for the national constitution to discuss property rights which, in the USA, were handled at the state and local levels.

Institutional changes

In contrast to the alterations driven, at least partially, by the Liberians’ circumstances, the institutional changes were taken at the initiative of the Liberians. They should, therefore, be viewed as critiques of the American constitution, as the Liberians positively chose to change the blueprint provided by prior American constitutions, suggesting they found the existing provisions insufficient. We see these institutional critiques most prominently in four different areas: rights, suffrage and office qualifications, the executive, and the judiciary.

The differences when it comes to rights are particularly evident with religious rights and women’s property rights. With religious rights, the Liberians forged a middle ground between the American first amendment and most state constitutions. On the one hand, they referred explicitly to Christianity and its blessings as aiding the republic’s establishment, demonstrating a clear preference for Christianity over other faiths and stepping away from the disestablishmentarianism of the first amendment and the constitution of Virginia. On the other hand, the constitution declares that “no sect of Christians shall have exclusive privileges or preference, over any other sect,” constitutionalizing disestablishment in stricter language than states like Massachusetts which allowed state support of churches.

That the Liberians took a nuanced approach to religious rights is not surprising given the background of the ACS and the convention delegates. The ACS was at least partially driven by a missionary zeal which sought “salvation for Africa and moral redemption for the United States,” and it relied heavily on funding from American churches of a variety of denominations. Colonization societies even boasted that “nearly every denomination of Christians in our land have adopted resolutions approving the scheme and commending it to the liberality of their numerous members.” Several of the Liberian constitutional convention delegates were also clergymen from different denominations. The Liberians’ general religiosity is particularly clear in their declaration of independence, which echoes the Pilgrims in proclaiming that “among the strongest motives to leave our native land […] was the desire for a retreat where, free from the agitations of fear and molestation, we could in composure and security approach in worship, the God of our fathers.” In threading the needle between having a state religion and enshrining disestablishmentarianism, the Liberians constitutionalized what was for them a social reality. Christianity was something all Liberians had in common, but they could not risk alienating particular denominations by favoring one over another. The result was a general and non-specific embrace of Christianity. This approach reflected the political traditions of the Antifederalists, who saw religion—specifically Christianity—as a necessary support for republican government and envisioned a role for government in “fostering religion and morals.”

Further discretionary changes are apparent with women’s property rights. Such concerns were particularly prominent during the colonial period, and a “Remonstrance” issued by the Liberians to the ACS board in 1823 included a petition about widows and orphans receiving the property and rights of their deceased husbands and fathers who had “worked and fought” for the colony. The inclusion of these problems in a formal remonstrance so early in the colony’s history demonstrates that questions over women’s property were long-standing issues that required concrete resolutions.

The Liberian constitution addressed these concerns. First, it banned coverture—the common law practice whereby a woman’s property became her husband’s property upon marriage—and dictated that a married woman would continue to own property in her own name after marriage and may continue to acquire personal property during the marriage. Second, it decreed that widows were entitled to one-third of insolvent estates “during her natural life.” These provisions provided more protection for women’s property than the American constitution and state constitutions, placing married Liberian women “as regards their property, in the same legal position as unmarried women,” that is, in control of their property.

In the USA, the move to protect women’s property was largely undertaken through legislation as states began passing Married Women’s Property Acts beginning in 1839, “open[ing] a legal door for women to gain greater control over their own and their families’ financial matters.” That Liberia constitutionalized these protections for women and their property demonstrates a higher concern for such rights protections, as constitutional provisions are much harder to repeal than mere legislation. Notably, the Liberian constitution was ratified a year before the first American women’s rights convention at Seneca Falls in 1848 and preempted some of the complaints listed by that convention’s famous Declaration of Sentiments, showing the Liberians to be ahead of the Americans on this issue.

Liberian women were not, however, allowed to vote, suffrage being restricted to property-owning male citizens over twenty-one years old. The property requirement was a step away from the 1839 ACS constitution which had allowed for universal manhood suffrage but was consistent with the Monrovia draft constitution. The American constitutional framers had considered including property requirements for suffrage but ultimately rejected the idea. Similarly, by the mid-1850s nearly all states had dropped property requirements for suffrage.

The Liberian constitution also imposed property requirements for holding office. Such requirements are not present in the American constitution and were in only a few state constitutions by the 1840s. While these property requirements separated the Liberians from the American constitutional framers and their contemporaneous counterparts in the states, the requirements suggest that the Liberians adhered to the classical republican idea that property was necessary to preserve freedom. As Carl Patrick Burrowes has pointed out, the ACS and Liberians often touted the potential for owning property in Liberia as a draw for African Americans who were either considered property themselves or who had few economic opportunities for their own advancement. One example of this argument came from the pseudonymous “A Sojourner” in the Liberia Herald. Sojourner made the Jeffersonian argument that property ownership and “cultivation of the soil” was “the principal road to wealth and independence” and urged the Liberians to devote themselves to a “a regular, systematic, and persevering course in ***agricultural*** operations.”

Beyond linking property to liberty, establishing property requirements for holding office also ensured individuals were invested in the community before being allowed to enter public life. Considering the influx of new arrivals and the republic’s precarious situation, wanting individuals to demonstrate a commitment to the community through property ownership before giving them a stake in public life is perhaps unsurprising. It is, however, in tension with the lower age and residency requirements for office-holding described above. We may also see a cultural element in these requirements. As will be discussed below, owning property distinguished the Liberians from the indigenous Africans. Having such requirements, therefore, not only ensured those eligible for public office were economically invested, but also indicated that they were a “responsible citizen” who met “measurable settler cultural standards.”

With the executive branch, the Liberians elaborated far more on the internal structure and authority of the executive than the Americans did in their constitution. Most of these changes fall into one of two categories: (1) constitutionalizing powers and offices that had been established by legislation in the USA; or (2) providing answers to issues that were disputed in the USA. Both tendencies are evident in the Liberian president’s military authority with regard to the militia and habeas corpus. The American constitution allowed Congress “to provide for calling forth the Militia” yet it was not until 1792 that it did so, giving the president the authority to call forth the militia “whenever the United States shall be invaded, or be in imminent danger of ***invasion*** from any foreign nation or Indian tribe.” The Liberian constitution gave the president this power from the start. That provision, however, limited the power to legislative recesses, making it slightly more restrictive than the American Militia Act which does not qualify the president’s militia authority based on congressional sessions. Similarly, the Liberia constitution’s habeas corpus provisions are more specific, making the suspension of habeas corpus a sole power of the legislature, and only for twelve months. In doing so, Liberia avoids the constitutional ambiguity over habeas corpus that confounded the Americans during their Civil War as President Abraham Lincoln and Chief Justice Roger Taney debated whether the president could suspend habeas corpus.

Both changes are limitations on executive power, suggesting that since the governor had been an ACS appointee for so long the Liberians developed a wariness of executive power similar to that expressed by Americans after the Revolutionary War. Having a shorter presidential term of two years also reflects such suspicion. Although, the fact that senators also had shorter terms than their American counterparts—four years as opposed to six—suggests that the Liberians may have generally had Antifederalist-like preferences for short terms and rotation in office. The republic’s small size may also have led the Liberians to believe that the legislature would be able to assemble more quickly during emergencies and thus not need to trust the executive with undefined emergency authority, implicitly demonstrating the influence of geographic circumstances on institutional divisions of power.

The tendency to constitutionalize and expand on issues that were ambiguous in the American constitution is present in other areas of the executive. Many of these changes are examples of Liberia accounting for and constitutionalizing developments within the American executive branch since 1789. Liberia did this with the vice presidency by integrating features of the American twelfth amendment directly into the constitution. Similarly, the Liberians skipped having legislation create the executive departments and wrote cabinet offices into the constitution itself. Notably, the five cabinet offices listed in the Liberian constitution were all American cabinet offices at the time, highlighting how closely the Liberians were constitutionalizing institutional developments in the American executive. Giving the cabinet an explicit constitutional foundation also enabled the Liberians to give some of those offices constitutional, rather than statutory, duties. Considering the intense debate in the USA throughout this period over how much authority the president had in directing his subordinates, these provisions clarified that cabinet officers are executive officials with ministerial responsibilities partially outside the president’s discretion. Some of the listed duties include obligations to the legislature as well as to the president, promoting stability in the administration of the law separate from political considerations and direct presidential oversight.

The Liberian constitution also went beyond its American counterpart in explicitly constitutionalizing powers the American constitution was silent on, anticipating later developments. The president’s removal power is the most notable example of this impulse. In the USA, the question over whether the president has the authority to unilaterally remove his subordinates in the executive branch had raged since the Founding. Alexander Hamilton argued in Federalist 77 that just as the president needed the senate’s approval to appoint officers, he would also need the senate to remove them. By contrast, James Madison argued in the First Congress that the president needed unilateral removal authority to ensure that the executive branch remained responsible to him and, by extension, to the people who elected him. While the First Congress sided with Madison in “the decision of 1789,” the question came up again in the 1830 and 1840s as Presidents Andrew Jackson and John Tyler aggressively utilized the removal power to shape their administrations, triggering furious responses from Congress. In the 1860s, Congress even impeached President Andrew Johnson for removing his Secretary of War. While the Supreme Court ruled in Myers v. U.S. (1926) that the president had sole removal authority over executive branch officials, the precise contours of that authority continue to be debated.

The Liberians avoided this contentious dispute by embracing James Madison’s answer to the removal question from the beginning, giving sole removal authority over cabinet officials unambiguously to the president. The president could also remove lower offices, like justices of the peace, sheriffs, and notaries, but required legislative approval in those cases. These offices were, however, limited to two-year terms. Such a limit was similar to that of the American Tenure of Office Act of 1820, which limited executive branch officials to four-year terms, and was used by Jackson to promote rotation in office. This aspect of the Liberian removal power not only constitutionalized another statutory aspect of American political development, but also enshrined the Jacksonian conception of rotation in office into the constitution. Through these provisions, the Liberians clarified the relationship between ministerial administrators and the president, and tempered their embrace of Madisonian responsibility with a ***measure*** of Hamiltonian stability by having the legislature involved in removal decisions for lower offices.

We also see the Liberians going beyond the Americans in their embrace of popular election for the president, vice president, and the senate. As aforementioned, this shift may, to some degree, be explained by Liberia’s circumstances as a small republic. Yet the choice of popular election was not a foregone conclusion. Other options like an Electoral College or legislative selection—the latter of which was still used in several states—could have been used for the presidency. Similarly, size did not prevent them from retaining a pseudo-federalist structure for the senate, allowing each county to send two senators. The choice to adopt a popular election method for these offices does, however, line up with contemporaneous arguments in the USA. Throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, multiple attempts were made to reform the Electoral College, with Jackson even suggesting constitutional amendments to “remove all intermediate agency in the election of the President and Vice President.” The clear thrust of these various reform efforts was for a more democratic system, a contention which has persisted into the twenty-first century. The Liberians’ choice of popular election suggests they clearly observed the Electoral College’s operation, heard the contemporary critiques, and chose to dispense with it altogether. Similarly, by having direct election for senators the Liberians anticipated the American seventeenth amendment by over sixty years.

In the only major change to the judiciary, the Liberians added provisions on judicial removals. Aside from regular impeachment, the constitution allowed the president to initiate a justice’s removal with a two-thirds vote in both houses of the legislature. While this is a high bar, it is a ***process*** absent from the American constitution and a limitation on judicial independence. We may see this as a response to the American judiciary which, under the leadership of Chief Justice John Marshall, had proved quite resilient when opposed by the Jeffersonians and Jacksonians who dominated the political branches. Viewed in this light, the Liberians’ removal provision serves as a stronger constitutional, and even popular, check on the judiciary.

One development in the USA that is notably absent from the Liberian constitution is the existence of political parties. The American founders were generally suspicious of parties, an attitude exemplified by George Washington who spent most of his Farewell Address warning about “the danger of parties in the State.” Yet despite the American constitution being silent on political parties, within a few years of ratification a competitive two-party system developed that was firmly institutionalized by 1847. Similar to its American counterpart, the Liberian constitution does not acknowledge political parties. If we take Teage as representative of the Liberian founders, his condemnation of “the rage and rancor of party spirit” as “deforming” constitutions and ultimately destroying them suggests that the Liberians sought to outdo the American founders and keep their republic non-partisan. As with the USA, however, parties formed soon after the constitution went into effect. Yet the Liberians’ decision not to acknowledge parties in the constitution is a glaring omission and speaks to an anti-party sentiment among at least some of the Liberians.

That many of these institutional changes echo particular strains within American political thought, specifically Anti-Federalism and its ideological successors Jeffersonianism and Jacksonianism, suggests that the Anti-Federal tradition was particularly influential for the Liberians. One explanation is that American political development in the antebellum period was dominated by Jeffersonian and Jacksonian politicians and thinkers, who were in turn the intellectual heirs of the Anti-Federalists. To the extent that the Liberians were simply constitutionalizing political developments, it is reasonable that their changes would reflect the political values of the dominant coalitions adapted to their own purposes. This explanation gains additional strength when we consider that the ACS itself had a strong Jeffersonian influence. Jefferson had proposed colonization in 1785 and during his presidency he explored ways to establish an African American colony in Africa. Thus, while the early leadership of the ACS was comprised of both Federalists and Jeffersonian Republicans—and later on Whigs and Jacksonian Democrats—its goal could be categorized as fundamentally Jeffersonian.

Another explanation comes from the fact that nine out of ten Liberian settlers were from the upper South. Between 1820 and 1849, 43 percent of the émigré population was from Virginia, the center of Jeffersonianism and a stronghold of the Jacksonian Democrats. Furthermore, many of the Liberian founders—including convention delegates Teage, Day, and Gardiner, as well as President Roberts—were from Virginia. The prominence of these strains of American political thought may, therefore, be explained by the geographic background of the Liberian founders, as the political milieu in which they were raised was distinctly Jeffersonian. In picking up on these ideas, the Liberians give us a glimpse of what a constitution with these traditions more prominently integrated into the text looks like. We must not, however, push this connection too far. For even in picking up and extending those strands of American political thought, the Liberians adapted the ideas to their own purposes and were selective in what they adopted and what they discarded. For example, the Liberians did not institute presidential term limits despite the lack of such limits being one of Jefferson’s primary complaints about the American constitution. Nonetheless, that the Liberians pulled from a particular part of the American political tradition serves as a reminder of the diversity and adaptability of American political thought. It also highlights the creativity of the Liberians in shaping the ideas to fit their context.

Racial critiques

The most serious critiques of the American constitution by the Liberians are those involving race. The Liberian Declaration of Independence includes a host of grievances against the USA, citing disenfranchisement, discrimination, and deprivation of civil and political rights as causes for retreating from “our native land-to abandon forever the scenes of our childhood and to sever the most endeared connexions [sic]” to be “free from the agitation of fear and molestation.”

The most important provisions dealing with race in the Liberian constitution are those on the abolition of slavery and the ban on the slave trade. Given Liberia’s origins such provisions are unsurprising, but they also serve as a clear rebuke of the US continuing allowance of slavery and constitutional protection of the slave trade until 1808. Liberia’s anti-slavery stance was a rejection of the American constitution’s ambiguity which allowed both sides of the slavery debate to claim constitutional support, as even abolitionists disagreed on slavery’s place in the constitution. Some, like Frederick Douglass and Lysander Spooner, argued that slavery was unconstitutional. Others, like William Lloyd Garrison, called the Constitution “a covenant with death, and an agreement with hell” for its allowance of slavery. The Liberians dispensed with such uncertainty.

While the Liberians were certainly ahead of the USA regarding abolition, when viewed from a broader transatlantic perspective, Liberia fits neatly into the slow abolitionist wave that began in the late eighteenth century and continued throughout nineteenth century. By the time Liberia declared independence, slavery had been largely abolished in Western Europe, and Britain had abolished slavery in its colonial possessions. A year after Liberia’s independence, France and Denmark followed suit and abolished slavery in their colonial possessions, although it took until 1863 for slavery to end in Dutch colonies.

The record is more varied among the new nations in Central and South America and the Caribbean. These countries serve as better comparisons to Liberia since they were also former colonial possessions that achieved independence during this period. Argentina and Colombia had put gradual emancipation plans in place in 1813 and 1814, respectively, while Haiti, Chile, the short-lived Republic of Central America, Mexico, Bolivia, and Uruguay all abolished slavery prior to Liberian independence. By 1854, Ecuador, Peru, and Venezuela followed suit. Only Brazil and the Spanish colonies of Cuba and Puerto Rico allowed slavery after its abolition in the USA in 1865, permitting the peculiar institution until 1888, 1886, and 1873, respectively.

Yet the Liberians were not only concerned with abolition but also with the political rights of free African Americans. As the Liberian Declaration of Independence makes clear, even free African Americans were denied their civil rights in the USA being “every where shut out from all civil office […] excluded from all participation in the government […] taxed without our consent […] compelled to contribute to the resources of a country, which gave us no protection [and] made a separate and distinct class, and against us every avenue to improvement was effectually closed.”

In response to this discrimination, the Liberians used race to define who could be a Liberian citizen, declaring that “none but persons of color shall be admitted to citizenship in this Republic,” the same definition proposed by the Monrovia draft. Additionally, only citizens could hold real estate in Liberia, meaning that the racial definition of citizenship had wide-ranging political and socioeconomic consequences. The American national constitution did not have any provisions on citizenship until the ratification of the fourteenth amendment in 1868. The argument that African Americans could not be citizens under the American constitution would only enter American constitutional law in Chief Justice Taney’s infamous decision in Dred Scott v. Sandford (1857), which was overturned by the aforementioned fourteenth amendment. At the state level, however, free African Americans were often denied citizenship and, in those cases where they were citizens, denied the privileges and rights that came with citizenship. During his contemporaneous travels in the USA, Alexis de Tocqueville noted that even when African Americans had legal rights and privileges, social pressure often prevented them from being exercised. In a direct comparison, the Liberians seemed to have explicitly constitutionalized a photo-negative of the restrictive citizenship found in the USA, even going “further than the United States to establish race as a core value of nationhood.”

Yet we should not see these racialized views of citizenship as equivalent. The Liberians structured their provisions to remedy the past discrimination they had endured and to offer the new nation as “an asylum from the most grinding oppression.” The citizenship clause is even preceded by a statement explaining that the colony’s initial purpose was “to provide a home for the dispersed and oppressed children of Africa.” This intent becomes even clearer when we consider that supporters of colonization repeatedly emphasized the superior political status of the Liberians relative to their counterparts in the USA. An article from the African Luminary declared that “the people of color immigrating to the American colony of Liberia […] can be, not only free, in all the meaning which that significant word embraces, but happy to the same extent of meaning.” The article goes on to argue that Liberia demonstrated that those of African descent could “in common with other races of the same Creator’s forming hand, possess the faculty of self-government.” Beverly R. Wilson, one of the constitution’s drafters, similarly declared to an American audience that only in Liberia could African Americans “enjoy the same privileges” as other races, arguing that “to fly to the North or South is all folly; to go to Canada or Hayti [sic] is nonsense; for in either there are obstacles as high as mountains. Here [Liberia] is our home.”

That the constitution follows in this line of thinking is particularly evident from a circular letter addressed “to the Free People of Color in the U.S.” promulgated by “a numerous meeting of the citizens of Monrovia” which was published in the USA with the Liberian constitution. In that letter, the Liberians argued that.

We did not enjoy that freedom in our native country [and were] certain it was not there attainable for ourselves or our children. […] Forming a community of our own in the land of our forefathers, having the commerce, and the soil, and the resources of the country at our disposal, we know nothing of that debasing inferiority with which our very color stamped us in America. There is nothing here to create the feeling of caste—nothing to cherish the feeling of superiority in the minds of foreigners who visit us. It is this moral emancipation, this liberty of the mind from worse than iron fetters, that repays us ten thousand times over for all that it has cost us.

With these arguments, it appears that far from trying to establish racial supremacy, the Liberian citizenship clause was a defensive ***measure*** to protect those of African descent from exploitation and oppression. Having achieved independence and the political and economic rights that they had been denied in the USA, these clauses helped ensure that they would retain those rights against white Americans and Europeans who might seek to enter the country. Given Liberia’s small population, including such racial provisions may also have had the practical purpose of trying to draw black immigrants to Liberia and give the population numbers a much-needed boost.

Notably, the only other black republic at the time, Haiti, also made race a qualification for citizenship in its 1846 constitution, specifying that citizens had to be of African or indigenous descent. Just as in Liberia, white people were also banned from holding property in Haiti. The Haitian constitution, however, does not include any language about these provisions being to defend individuals of African and indigenous descent, unlike the Liberian constitution.

From these racial provisions, we see the Liberian founders were early theorists and practitioners of black nationalism, prioritizing race as a distinctive feature of their republic. While black nationalism has long been a part of American political thought, the Liberians made it into a key component of their constitution even before early advocates of black nationalism like Martin Delany came to prominence. More notably, through these clauses, the Liberians demonstrate how black nationalism can be merged with American constitutional structures and how the universalistic rights of the American constitution can be integrated with a conception of racial solidarity.

There are, however, limitations to the Liberians’ black nationalism, particularly when it came to the indigenous Africans. The separation of the Liberians from the indigenous Africans is evident in the declaration of independence, as the Liberians defined themselves as “originally the inhabitants of the United States,” implicitly excluding the indigenous Africans from the new political community. When the indigenous Africans are mentioned, it is in the third person as a separate group. In their relations with indigenous Africans, the Liberians followed the pattern set by European settlers in America in not treating the indigenous populations as parties to the political compact, seeing themselves as “agents of civilization.” Even the citizenship clause, which speaks of providing a home for those affected by the African diaspora, adds that a purpose of the Liberian colony was “to regenerate and enlighten this benighted continent.”

In line with this idea, the Liberians required the president to appoint agents to tour the indigenous tribes and promote their “improvement” and “advancement.” According to a law passed before independence, and which remained in force under the constitution, indigenous Africans were considered aliens and could only gain the right to vote if “creditable and disinterested persons” could testify that the individual had “conformed to the forms, customs, and habits of civilized life” for at least three years. Western social standards became critical distinguishing features between the two groups, as Liberians used manners and clothing to demonstrate that they had not “rever[ted] to African norms.”

The Liberian constitution’s property requirements for suffrage also acted as a barrier to indigenous African participation in government as the Africans’ held property in common. For indigenous Africans to participate in Liberian political life they had to give up “virtually everything else that made them distinctively African, becoming, in effect, African Americans.” This allowed the Liberian founders to construct an “Americo-Liberian oligarchy,” treating the indigenous Africans in a manner analogous to how the Americans treated Native Americans, as “domestic dependent nations.” Thus, even while the Liberians made great strides in resolving the American constitutional disharmony of slavery, they accepted and perpetuated the constitutional disharmony of colonialism.

Conclusion

Observing the differences between the Liberian and American constitutions and considering whether they are due to environmental factors or genuine critiques of the American system, we can make some general observations about the Liberian constitution in relation to mimicry theory, American political development, and African American political thought. Beginning with mimicry theory, the Liberians demonstrate that even in the context of mimicking other nations, there is a significant amount of discretion in how institutions may be changed or adapted. While the American constitution acted as a kind of baseline, the Liberians did not blindly attempt to institute the American constitution in Africa. Instead, they adjusted their constitutional inheritance to be more in line with their environment and, more significantly, their own sociopolitical values. Additionally, the Liberians drew some inspiration from the American states, reminding us of the influence of the state constitutional tradition within American constitutionalism. Future research should elaborate on the discretion exercised by constitution writers who use the American constitution as a basic framework, whether in Latin America, domestic settings such as the short-lived republics of Texas and Hawaii, or former American colonies like the Philippines.

The circumstances faced by the Liberians also highlight which components of American constitutionalism are most liable to be altered due to environmental factors. For the Liberians, federalism and the corollary notion of a national government of enumerated powers were jettisoned in favor of a unitary government of general powers. This suggests that federalism and enumerated powers may be the least adaptable of America’s constitutional principles as they seem to require a reasonably large territory and a history of strong subnational bodies to be properly adapted.

In American political development, the many institutional changes made by the Liberians demonstrates that they were aware of the political and constitutional developments and debates occurring in the USA at both the national and state level. We see this first in how they constitutionalized institutions which lacked explicit constitutional grounding, but which had gained quasi-constitutional status over time. It is also evident in how they constitutionalized answers to major questions that had emerged due to the American constitution’s vagueness, often taking a clear side in debates that continued in the USA decades after Liberian independence. Such actions point to which developments in American politics had reached significant enough prominence during the antebellum period that the Liberians felt it necessary to address them at a constitutional level. To the extent that they took a side in ongoing debates further signals the influence of that argument among Americans at the time, as well as suggesting which arguments were considered the most persuasive. That the Liberians seemed to be particularly influenced by the Anti-Federalists and their intellectual heirs—most notably Jefferson—also illustrates how such strands of American political thought can be adapted to a variety of circumstances.

The clearest Liberian critiques, however, concerned racial issues. The Liberians left no room for doubt on where they stood on the peculiar institution. Yet they went beyond abolishing slavery to constitutionalize black nationalism as a reaction to the oppression African Americans suffered in the USA. The Liberian constitution, therefore, is important to African American political thought on two levels. First, in being a constitution written by African Americans it highlights what was important to African Americans when it came to constitutional principles and provides a constitutional angle within African American political thought. The Liberians embraced substantial portions of the American system, holding on to separation of powers, checks and balances, and individual rights, even building on the bills of rights from the states in areas ranging from religious establishment to women’s rights. Thus, the African Americans who founded Liberia valued major aspects of the American constitutional identity, even as they adjusted and critiqued it in an attempt to resolve the constitutional disharmonies of slavery and racial discrimination. Second, the Liberian constitution is an early example of black nationalism, and the Liberians are innovative in blending black nationalism with American constitutionalism, providing a blueprint for how racial identity may be woven into American institutions.

Dismissing the Liberian constitution as a carbon copy of the American constitution does the Liberian founders a disservice and is simply inaccurate. The Liberian constitution points to how American constitutionalism can be adjusted to fit new circumstances as well as demonstrating how a subset of Americans believed the original American constitution of 1787 fell short and how they could improve it. In a period of racial unrest and upheaval, the Liberians provide a unique perspective in wrestling with America’s fundamental principles at a constitutional level while being set apart from America itself. In doing so, they formed a new republic they hoped would have all the virtues of the American system with none of its vices.

**Notes**

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[***Firms going from strength to strength despite challenging times; Angela McGowan, regional director of the CBI, on what the Top 100 Companies tells us about the economy***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:644V-79S1-JCBW-N2J6-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Byline:** Angela McGowan

**Body**

Each year I enjoy sitting down to write my thoughts on the latest Top 100 Northern Ireland businesses because it reminds me just how many local companies are moving from strength to strength despite the challenging backdrop.

Together the companies on this list employ more than 76,000 workers, made around £1.6bn in pre-tax profits and have generated some £18.6bn in turnover.

The last figure represents 45% of Northern Ireland's total economic activity (as ***measured*** by GVA).

This year we have the usual mixture of energy companies, manufacturing, IT, construction, banking, retail and distribution, as well as business services. We also have the full complement of foreign direct investors (FDI) and the home-grown success stories.

This annual list is always great for making me stop and reflect on what makes a successful business and why we need more of them in Northern Ireland if we are to have wider economic success.

When I think of a successful business though, I don't just think about size of labour force or profit, although these are important. I think of success in a wider sense. The sort that correlates with day-to-day conversations I have with CEOs across Northern Ireland.

These touch on issues including sustainability, diversity and inclusion, participating in local communities, agility when facing new challenges, horizon scanning and adopting new technologies.

While many NI businesses, especially larger ones, have continued growing, others (particularly smaller ones) and those in certain sectors such as aviation or hospitality, have been severely impacted.

With skills and labour shortages, supply chain issues, inventory shortages and inflationary pressures all causing problems for CEOs, it is now fair to say that the 2021 summer optimism of a post-Covid economic bounce back has faded to a certain degree.

But every business in Northern Ireland has skin in the game when it comes to ensuring

our economic recovery gains traction. And it is important we all seize opportunities to

collaborate and help each other through the recovery.

Without doubt growth will be dependent upon the well-recognised economic drivers: investment, innovation, trade etc.

Thus, the CBI's economic strategy Seize the Moment is pushing for government and industry to have a relentless focus on the areas that make the economy grow in an inclusive and sustainable way.

It would be my view that if we get investment and innovation right, then increased trade and export levels will follow suit. The companies we see on this year's Top 100 list are clearly good at both investing and innovating.

But we know more can be done to support their growth journey and unleash the potential of small and medium sized firms.

Right now, there is a mountain of cash reserves awaiting investment, but CBI members across Northern Ireland tell us they need a higher degree of certainty around the region's future.

For firms on the Top 100 list, the big ask of government is to create some stability and a

clear direction of travel. They want clarity from the Executive on issues such as the NI Protocol and the stability of devolved government.

They want clear strategies on issues like energy policy and detailed direction on matters such as electric vehicle charging infrastructure and the retrofitting of housing.

Firms want to know the Executive's plans for waste, carbon reduction and the circular economy. They need to know plans for public infrastructure investment so that they can participate in procurement, plan and allocate resources appropriately.

Firms tell the CBI that planning permission in Northern Ireland is the biggest barrier to investment right now. For example, in 2020, it took on average over two years to get a decision on regionally significant renewable projects.

Investors crave agility when it comes to planning. Greater certainty around all these issues will allow the investment to flow.

Innovation will also be a significant factor in boosting economic growth and is also a key theme in the Department of Economy's 10x economic strategy.

When it comes to innovation, the CBI know large companies have a wealth of information

and expertise smaller firms would find of value.

So, in October this year we launched a new campaign called Big Fish, Little Fish to support new, successful innovative partnerships between larger and smaller businesses.

Collaborative relationships for building innovation work both ways. For many large companies, partnerships with start-ups and scale-ups are an increasingly important part of their innovation strategies.

And for start-ups and scale-ups, innovation partnerships and contractswith large companies can be a vital stage in their development.

But firms have been telling us that these partnerships and relationships are not always easy. Common cultural, legal, financial and technical challenges have hindered some from reaching their full potential and, in other cases, resulted in parties stepping away altogether.

The consequence of this is that Northern Ireland's economy could miss out on achieving our innovation ambitions, and with it, productivity growth which we can ill afford to lose.

This new CBI campaign will hopefully help us understand two things. Firstly, what is best practice for managing successful business to business relationships? Second, how can firms be assisted in creating new commercial

partnerships?

In the months ahead CBI will be convening a series of problem-solving roundtables to develop best practice guides based on insights shared by high-performing CBI members.

For example, Kainos, a home-grown success story (ranked No 7 here in the Top 100 list) is a dedicated supporter of CBI's Big Fish Little Fish campaign.

Kainos is working with us and other stakeholders to help develop a better understanding of what best practice looks like when building these collaborative relationships.

At the CBI we are absolutely committed to utilising our convening power to bring together the expertise we know resides in those large successful firms listed in this year's Top 100.

We want to harness their great ideas, insights, and contacts to help smaller and medium sized firms achieve their goals and move Northern Ireland plc closer to economic success.

NORTHERN IRELAND'S TOP 100 COMPANIES IN PROFILE

1

Northern Ireland Electricity Networks Limited Managing director: Paul Stapleton

Pre-tax profit: £92.7m Turnover: £302.2m Employment:1,205 Pay bill: £72m 120 Malone Road Belfast BT9 7HT Tel: 03457 643 643 [*www.nienetworks.co.uk*](http://www.nienetworks.co.uk)

NIE Networks is the owner of the electricity transmission and distribution network in Northern Ireland, transporting electricity to over 895,000 customers including homes, businesses and farms.

It is owned by Republic of Ireland utility company ESB, which is majority-owned by the Irish government.

Through the employment of 1,200 employees and payments to local businesses and authorities, NIE Networks contributed over £142m to the Northern Ireland economy in 2020.

In line with the current RP6 price control period the company continues to invest in the electricity network with significant upgrade and asset replacement projects taking place across Northern Ireland. The company is investing over £100m annually in maintaining and upgrading the network.

As well as being an accredited Investor in People Gold Company for almost a decade, NIE Networks was first awarded a Bronze Diversity Charter Mark in 2020 and retained its accreditation in 2021. Attracting female talent into the energy industry is a key focus for the organisation and they have been working to increase awareness of STEM subjects through educational outreach programmes and partnerships with local universities and industry bodies. Since 2015 over 20% of the company's

graduate intake and 25% of sponsored scholars intake, have been female.

With over 47% of the total annual electricity consumption in Northern Ireland now being generated from local renewable sources, NIE Networks has played a critical role by providing the network connections for the renewable sources and investing £365m in the network to facilitate the generation.

The company is proactively engaging with key policy makers on Northern Ireland's energy future as one of four members of the Department for the Economy's Energy Strategy Electricity Stakeholder Group.

They are contributing to the department's Northern Ireland Strategic Energy Framework to 2030, which will define the government's approach to the evolution of the energy sector here over the next decade working towards a 2050 net zero economy.

In 2021 the company launched two significant research reports in relation to reaching a net zero economy. The first report, Networks for Net Zero, sets out options and pathways for decarbonisation in Northern Ireland and how electrification can play a significant role.

It focuses on the decarbonisation of transport and heating, as well as promoting energy efficiency and demand reduction through customer education and advice programmes. The report also outlines how NIE Networks will support new technologies such as hydrogen electrolysis and battery storage, as well as the development

and operation of new services and markets.

The second research report which was commissioned by NIE Networks with KPMG, shines a light on the scale of the transformative potential of electricity in a decarbonised future. The report - Electrification: Economic Opportunity for Northern Ireland - sets out how the electrification of heating and transport systems would be transformative for both Northern Ireland's economy and environment, creating around 5,000 jobs, reducing the spend on imported fossil fuels by £1.4bn a year and playing a significant role in putting Northern Ireland on the pathway to an 82% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2050.

Additionally, it suggests that electrification has the potential to act as a catalyst for a wave of innovation as demand from the sector increases, creating a cluster of expertise which will be a springboard for international growth.

As the company moves into 2022, a key focus will be the implementation of the company's newly launched Vulnerable Customer Strategy. The strategy details how the company will both identify and provide the best possible service standards to those who may need additional support in the coming years. There are over 20 specialist services the company provides to vulnerable customers, including help for those with communication barriers, translation requirements, the elderly, those who are visually impaired or those reliant on life saving medical equipment.

2Moy Park President: Chris Kirke Pre-tax profit: £75.8m Turnover: £1.5bn Employment: 10,209 Pay bill: £289.1m 39 Seagoe Industrial Estate Craigavon BT35 5QE Tel: 028 3835 3223 [*www.moypark.com*](http://www.moypark.com)

oultry specialist Moy Park is Northern Ireland's biggest private sector business and has been part of Pilgrim's Pride in the US since 2017.

P

Its sales during 2020 reached nearly £1.5bn, while pre-tax profit went up by nearly 12% from £67.8m to £75.8m.

As well as supplying branded and own-brand poultry products, Craigavon-based Moy Park also makes beef products, vegetarian products and desserts.

Moy Park president Chris Kirke says that the importance of its mission to deliver food products was highlighted during the pandemic, a time when he says its teams have adapted to every-changing challenges.

He described its workers as "genuine food heroes".

Strong year-on-year growth continues across its poultry category, Mr Kirke said.

And the company continues to innovate, and last year spent £35m on the latest technologies to improve ***processes*** and work more safely and sustainably.

The business has joined forces with worldleading academics in research projects.

Mr Kirke said the company has committed to reaching net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2040 He added: "We are proud to have set science-based targets, positioning Moy Park as industry leaders on emissions reduction.

"This will be achieved through continued investment in our facilities to reduce emissions, investing in R&D to strengthen and scale regenerative farming practices, having 100% renewable

electricity across our facilities by 2025 and reducing our water use intensity by 15% by 2030."

Parent company Pilgrim's is one of the world's largest protein producers.

The company accounts for Moy Park Holdings (Europe) said the company had a total workforce of 10,209 during 2020, across 12 facilities spread around Northern Ireland, England, Netherlands and France. That was a fall from 10,393 a year earlier.

It has around 6,300 employees in NI.

The company pay bill for the year was £289m, which was down from £292.6m the year before.

The accounts state that Moy Park had availed of job support schemes in the UK and continental Europe, including the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme in the UK.

The company said the government support was claimed for March to November last year, when food service plants in the UK and Europe had been shut or were operating at reduced capacity.

3Almac Group Chief executive: Alan Armstrong Pre-tax profit: £63.6m Turnover: £677.3m Employment: 5,466 Pay bill: £290m Almac House Seagoe Industrial Estate BT63 5QD Tel: 028 3833 5815 [*www.moypark.com*](http://www.moypark.com)

T

heAlmac Group is an established contract development and manufacturing organisation that provides an extensive range of integrated services across the drug development lifecycle to the pharmaceutical and biotech sectors globally.

Over the past 18 months Almac has faced ***unprecedented*** challenges as result of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic.

However, as an organisation at the forefront of the development, manufacturing, testing and distribution of essential medicines to vulnerable patients across the globe, the company says that it was essential to rise above the challenges and continue to thrive and meet client and patient expectations.

Almac says it is proud that its global facilities have remained open and operational, without interruption, since the initial outbreak, a feat that has been made possible by employees' dedication to the company's mission to "advance human health".

Keeping up with a rapidly-changing situation was a challenge for Almac as a global business with over 6,000 employees.

However, it was well prepared - its business continuity framework included a provision for facilitating lines of decision-making through two tiers of command leadership, to ensure reliability and consistency across the organisation.

Almac also adopted additional new behaviours and working arrangements designed to ensure the safety of its staffwithin its global manufacturing facilities.

Almac monitored all restrictions issued by national and local government bodies and used

it as minimum requirements across its sites to minimise any potential impact to the company's worldwide operations whilst ensuring the safety and wellbeing of all employees whilst on site.

A key priority for Almac was ensuring employees' health and well-being was considered throughout and it rolled out essential wellness programming.

But Almac said it was also proud to play a part in the solution to the Covid-19 pandemic.

It says it's proud to be supporting over 140 separate crucial research programmes in the race to accelerate Covid-19 treatment through a range of service areas, including analytical services, peptide development, expedited Interactive Response Technology (IRT) support and clinical trial manufacturing, packaging and distribution.

Notably, this included supporting Pfizer/ BioNTech on their ground-breaking vaccination

clinical trial by performing a range of services including secondary labelling, storage, distribution, provision of depots, temperature management through its TempEZ™ platform, drug returns and pharmacist services across the globe. All of this was made possible by the dedication of hundreds of Almac employees who live and work in Northern Ireland.

Almac has experienced continued growth in revenue and employee numbers annually over the past 15 years. As demand steadily increases for its solutions, it says its aim is to continue to grow its global team.

It recently announced plans to hire another 1,800 people, including 1,000 here in NI.

And Almac says it's actively recruiting for various opportunities across a wide variety of diverse and exciting areas which help Almac continue its provision of solutions whilst making a real and positive contribution to health.

4NI Water Chief executive: Sara Venning Pre-tax profits: £58.4m Turnover: £418.9m Employees: 1,321 Pay bill: £73.8m Westland House Old Westland Road Belfast BT14 6TE Tel: 08457 440088 [*www.niwater.com*](http://www.niwater.com)

N

I Water says that every aspect of life in Northern Ireland depends on its vital infrastructure. It says its business is essential to support a healthy and thriving population, a growing economy and a flourishing natural environment. Every day NI Water provides around 600 million litres of great tasting, safe drinking water and recycles around 370 million litres of wastewater back to the natural environment. Thousands of assets at a value of around £3bn, are operated and maintained to provide these services. This includes over 40,000km of water mains and sewers - one and a half times longer than Northern Ireland's entire road network.

But it adds that over £2bn is required in its next business plan period PC21 (2021-27), including £0.5bn for the Living With Water Programme to address strategic drainage in Belfast. This investment is required to start to

address the problems of economic development constraints facing towns and cities.

Constraints are impacting adversely on social housing and wider building construction. It stresses that improved funding isn't just something that would be "nice to have" but that it will help ensure NI Water can deliver in a strong, modern regional economy. It adds that changes are also required to Government policy, funding and regulation to rethink infrastructure as a total interconnected system rather than isolated silos. Such changes can help Northern Ireland's economy to be productive and competitive in a decarbonised world.

NI Water is calling on Government policymakers and regulators to tap into the potential of its water and wastewater infrastructure to tackle the climate emergency and nature crisis. The company says that it "stands ready to deliver," adding: "Our PC21 business plan will start to address the underinvestment in our infrastructure. We need a multi-year funding settlement from Government to efficiently deliver our multi-year plan."

5Bank of Ireland UK Managing director NI: Ian Sheppard Pre-tax profits: £57m Turnover: n/a Employment: 888 Pay bill: n/a 1 Donegall Square South Belfast BT1 5LR Tel: 028 9043 3420 [*www.bankofirelanduk.com*](http://www.bankofirelanduk.com)

I

n March, Bank of Ireland announced the outcome of a strategic review of its Northern Ireland business which had been underway since August 2020. The review underlined Bank of Ireland's commitment to Northern Ireland, but with a restructuring of the business to respond to significant and accelerating changes in how customers are banking.

By the end of 2021, the number of Bank of Ireland branches in Northern Ireland will have reduced by 15 to 13. Alongside the closures, the bank announced a £2.2m investment in the branch network to ensure a wide range of digital and physical banking options for customers.

A further £4.8m investment in technology is being made to improve customer services across the local business, including enhancing video conferencing, webchat and online banking options.

Bank of Ireland UK also announced that it would relocate its head office from London to Belfast by the end of December this year.

Bank of Ireland UK has provided continued Covid-19 support for over 8,000 local businesses through the pandemic and extended its commitment to fast-track payments to its SME suppliers to the end of this year to help ease cash flow pressures on businesses during the pandemic.

Its current accounts have been awarded a Fairer Finance Gold Ribbon (reflecting better customer experience than 80% of the market) and rank second in the UK for customer experience. In April, the bank announced the recruitment of 130 technology professionals to support the delivery of its ambitious digital agenda.

The bank has announced initiatives to promote greater ethnic diversity within its workforce including a new recruitment charter, a commitment to diverse hiring and the introduction of an Ethnic Minority Talent Programme (RISE) designed for colleagues whose ethnicity and race are not those of the majority group.

6Energia Group NI Holdings Chief executive: Ian Thom Pre-tax profits: £56.7m Turnover: N/A Employees: 658 Pay bill: £9m Greenwood House 64 Newforge Lane Belfast BT9 5NF Tel: 028 9038 3757 [*www.energiagroup.com*](http://www.energiagroup.com)

E

nergia Group describes itself as the leading energy company in Northern Ireland, and says its renewables, flexible generation and customer solutions businesses are powering the transition across the island of Ireland to decarbonise the energy system and limit the effects of climate change.

Energia Group is the parent company of electricity supplier Power NI.

It supplies approximately 20% of the island of Ireland's total electricity requirements and is responsible for approximately 25% of wind power capacity on the island. The group employs over 900 people and supplies over 823,000 homes and businesses across the island of Ireland. Energia Group says it continues to make progress on its Positive Energy investment programme, focussed on renewable energy projects.

Energia Group NI Holdings, the accounts of which are used in the Top 100, is an Energia Group company.

Energia Group commented that Energia Group NI Holdings' results are not representative of the entirety of its operations in Northern Ireland, including Power NI.

7Kainos Group plc Chief executive: Brendan Mooney Pre-tax profits: £50.3m Turnover: £235m Employment: 1,584 Pay bill: £126m 4-6 Upper Crescent Belfast BT7 1NT Tel: 028 9057 1100 [*www.kainos.com*](http://www.kainos.com)

K

ainos, headquartered in Belfast, is a major provider of digital services and digital platforms and the only NI company listed on the main London Stock Exchange. Kainos works with over 300 public and private sector clients across the globe.

Kainos employs over 1,500 people across 12 offices in Europe and the US. In the year to the end of March, the company more than doubled its pre-profits in its its 11 year of growth in a row. Revenue was also up 31% to £234.7m.

Digital services include full lifecycle development and support for government and commercial customers. Kainos is a major supplier to the UK Government, and is also the leading European partner for Workday. Its digital platforms are Smart, an automated testing platform for Workday customers, Evolve Electronic Medical Records, for the digitisation of patient notes.

In recent months it's acquired UNE Consulting SRL and UNE Consulting.

The company is due to build new premises at Bankmore Square on Dublin Road, Belfast. But in meantime, it's leasing out the site to a social enterprise which will run a market on the site.

8Translink Chief executive: Chris Conway Pre-tax profit: £49m Turnover: £292.6m Employees: 4,144 Pay bill: £163m 3 Milewater Road Belfast BT3 9BG Tel: 028 9066 6630 [*www.translink.co.uk*](http://www.translink.co.uk)

F

inancial support from its funder the Department for Infrastructure helped Translink, the company behind Ulsterbus, Goldliner, NI Rail, Belfast Metro and the Glider, to reach a pre-tax profit of just under £49m over the year to March 2021, against a budgeted loss of £43.4m.

Commenting in its annual report, chairman Michael Wardlow said the high figure was "due primarily to significantly increased in-year government funding, cost reduction and efficiency ***measures***" after its operations were hit during lockdowns.

DfI provided Translink with just over £223m of revenue support and £156m in capital support. But it has warned that the business behind faces a "significant risk" to its financial sustainability. And it said long-term planning for public transport will need private sector input.

DfI said it anticipates a loss of around £77m by the end of the year for Translink, with £50m is down to a lack of passengers.

Translink said: "Translink, in common with all public transport providers, saw a dramatic reduction in passenger numbers as a result of restrictions imposed during the Covid-19 pandemic."

9W&R Barnett Chief executive: William Barnett Pre-tax profit: £43.4m Turnover: £1.1bn Employees: 1,629 Pay bill: £67.5m Clarendon House Belfast BT1 3BG Tel: 028 9032 5465 [*www.wrbarnett.com*](http://www.wrbarnett.com)

P

re-tax profits fell by 5.6% from £46.3m to £43.7m over the year at W&R Barnett, Nortehrn Ireland's most successful family business and one of just two firms in the Top 100 with annual sales of over £1bn.

The company's interests range from the international trade in grains and derivatives, molasses trading and making animal feeds, to breeding horses and manufacturing corrugated packaging.

In a strategic report filed with the accounts, the directors commented that the level of business and financial position at year end were satisfactory, and that investment in people, products, facilities and acquisitions would continue.

The report added that it had acquired 13.33% of the issued shares in corrugated packaging company Logson Holdings Ltd for an estimated £21m, so that it now owns the entire company outright.

It also acquired remaining shareholdings in Jersey-based molasses trading company Kruden Limited and Premier Molasses Company Ltd for £15.5m.

10 Encirc Managing director: Adrian Curry Pre-tax profits: £39.6m Turnover: £327m Employment: 1,329 Pay bill: £62.3m 11 Gortahurk Road Derrylin BT92 9DD Tel: 028 6774 8888 [*www.encirc360.com*](http://www.encirc360.com)

ncirc says it's had another incredible year in the face of a challenging climate for the manufacturing industry.

E

Based in Co Fermanagh, with sister plants in Cheshire, England, and Milan, Italy, the business formerly known as Quinn Glass employs 350 people in Northern Ireland and the Republic.

The NI plant has led world-first sustainable innovations in 2021 that have propelled the business to being a global leader in the decarbonisation of container glass.

After many challenges posed by Brexit, operations were dominated by Covid-19. Products were moved from pubs and restaurants to shops and supermarkets and new safety practices were brought in across all production areas.

The business has also been impacted by carbon dioxide shortages, a lack of drivers and soaring energy costs. It's now lobbying government on tackling the rise in energy costs.

Encirc says it's moving ahead with a trial to create sustainable glass bottles, and fuelled one of its two furnaces with a sustainable bio-fuel and used 100% recycled glass to create bottles with up to a 90% reduced carbon footprint.

11 Schrader Electronics Chief executive: Jeff Cote Pre-tax profit: £38.4m Turnover: £300.7m Employees: 1,137 Pay bill: £43.3m Schrader Electronics Belfast Road Antrim Tel: 028 94 461300 [*www.schraderinternational.com*](http://www.schraderinternational.com)

G

lobal company Sensata Technologies (which took over Schrader in 2014) provides sensor-rich hardware and software for the automotive, industrial, commercial and aerospace industries.

Locally, it is synonymous within the Tyre Pressure Monitoring System market, a standard safety feature on most cars.

The growing market for electric vehicles, e-mobility applications for heavy vehicles, charging infrastructure and industrial grid management all present significant new opportunities for business development over the next five to 10 years.

The company has recently lodged a planning application for a major new technology hub in Mallusk which will serve its global operations in Europe, Asia and the Americas. The new technology centre with offices, laboratories and on-site testing facilities is being designed to meet Sensata's 'back to better' hybrid working model.

This latest initiative leads on from Sensata's position to consolidate its manufacturing interests to its main site in Antrim and close its other plant in Carrickfergus in January 2020.

12 Terex GB President: Kieran Hegarty Pre-tax profit: £33.4m Turnover: £318.4m Employees: 1,757 Pay bill: £53.9m Drumquin Road, Omagh BT78 5PN Tel: 0845 0305 200 [*www.terex.com*](http://www.terex.com)

T

erex GB operates within the Terex Materials ***Processing*** (MP) segment of Terex Corporation, an American-owned, NYSE-listed global manufacturer of lifting and material ***processing*** products serving industries including construction, infrastructure, manufacturing, shipping, transportation, refining, energy, utilities, quarrying and mining.

The company's NI-based businesses include brand names known locally as Powerscreen and Finlay, both global leaders in crushing and screening equipment. They were in business between 50 and 60 years before being acquired by Terex in 1999. Through considerable growth Terex GB has expanded to include Terex Ecotec, Terex Washing Systems, EvoQuip and ProStack.

Despite Terex GB undergoing many of the same challenges experienced by other companies in 2021, including the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, Brexit, supply chain, shipping/transportation, material cost increases and labour pool issues, the company is growing fast. In May, it announced the purchase of a new facility in China to manufacture Powerscreen equipment for the domestic China market but without causing any disruption to Powerscreen's production capacity in Northern Ireland.

13 LCC Group Holdings Director: Michael Loughran Pre-tax profit: £28.8m Turnover: £717.8m Employees: 329 Pay bill: £12m 18 Churchtown Road Cookstown BT80 9XD Tel: 028 8676 5588 [*www.lcccoal.com*](http://www.lcccoal.com)

L

CC Group is made up of LCC Coal, LCC Oil, Go Power and a number of other companies. Profits are largely derived from overseas bulk trading activities as far afield as South Africa, Colombia and across Europe.

But the business also diversified into film production with the opening of Loop Studios in east Belfast.

This year it's been one of the locations for the shooting of Netflix's adaptation of young adult fantasy series The School For Good And Evil.

Now LCC Group also plans to extend the existing site into a new 23,000 sq ft studio in a big boos to film and TV production here.

A spokesman said the expansion "will go some way to improving the facilities on offer at the Castlereagh Road site".

In 2017 the group bought Cloghan Point Oil Terminal near Carrickfergus from AES Power in a multi-million pound deal.

In October 2016 LCC also bought out its joint venture partner, Norwegian oil giant Statoil ASA, to acquire full ownership of the Maydown oil terminal.

Go Power also supplies electricity in the business market.

14 John Henderson Holdings Sales director: Paddy Doody Pre-tax profit: £28.5m Turnover: £956.6m Employees: 4,171 Pay bill: £97.3m Hightown Road Mallusk BT36 4RT Tel: 028 9034 2733 [*www.henderson-group.com*](http://www.henderson-group.com)

H

enderson Group, the grocer and retailer which owns the SPAR, EUROSPAR and ViVO franchises in Northern Ireland, opened 26 stores in 2021, with Henderson Wholesale now supplying to some 500 stores.

The group, registered at Companies House as John Henderson Holdings. posted sales of over £957m for 2020, experiencing a 7.3% rise throughout the year despite the dual challenges of Covid-19 and Brexit. It continued to invest throughout the pandemic, setting around £18m aside to deal with Covid costs, including health and safety ***measures*** seen throughout its stores, warehouses and HQ offices.

Henderson Technology has kept retail life going throughout lockdowns and restrictions, allowing retailers to keep their local connection with shoppers, all the while keeping them safe. Electronic door access, self checkouts, handle-less cash systems and food waste reduction apps have helped lead the way, especially in the past couple of years.

Henderson says that with the pandemic came a new reliance from communities on their local stores, which continued to provide throughout panic buyin g and stock shortages.

15 Gardrum Holdings Director: Derek Keys Pre-tax profit: £28.4m Turnover: £145.6m Employees: 151 Pay bill: £4.7m 72-74 Omagh Road Dromore BT78 3AJ Tel: 02882 898262 [*www.euroauctions.com*](http://www.euroauctions.com)

G

ardrum Holdings is the parent company of equipment giant Euro Auctions in Co Tyrone, which is being sold to Ritchie Bros in Canada for nearly £775m ($1.1bn) in a deal announced earlier this year.

Euro Auctions was founded in 1998 by Derek Keys and other members of the Dromore family. Brother Jonnie is the company's commercial manager. Derek Keys will remain with the company for at least three years following the deal, Ritchie Bros has said.

In 2020, Euro Auctions held 60 auctions, selling close to 90,000 items for more than £484m at nine locations in Great Britain, Northern Ireland, Germany, Spain, the United Arab Emirates, Australia and the United States.

The company operates two brands, Euro Auctions and Yoder & Frey, and has more than 200 employees in 14 countries.

Euro Auctions also sells equipment through a timed auction format and a daily marketplace with Buy Now and Make Offer options, similar to Ritchie.

Derek Keys has said the Ritchie brothers were always an inspiration. "We modelled much of what we do offDave's customer-centric philosophy, which still runs through Ritchie Bros."

16 Lynn's Country Foods Founder: Denis Lynn Pre-tax profit: £28.2m Turnover: £94.7m Employees: 513 Pay bill: £14.6m Down Business Park Downpatrick BT30 9UP Tel: 028 44 619300 [*www.finnebrogue.com*](http://www.finnebrogue.com)

ood company Lynn's Country Foods says it has had an "extraordinary" decade of growth, going from sales of £3m in 2009 to £150m in 2020.

F

However, the business was struck by tragedy in May when its founder Denis Lynn was killed in a quad bike accident.

Jago Pearson, chief strategy officer at Finnebrogue Artisan, said: "Denis's loss has been felt very hard by all of the Finnebrogue family. He was our founder, leader and inspiration - and the list of achievements he leaves are ***exceptional***."

The business is the top marker of premium sausages in the British Isles and developed nitrite-free bacon, its Naked brand of rashers.

And it's pivoting into vegan food with the opening of a new factory for plant-based products, bringing its overall investment in the last six years to £90m.

Mr Pearson added that the business was facing the same challenges as others, such as difficulties finding staffand inflationary pressures. But he added that the business remains "in a very strong place, with a clear strategy, phenomenal investment and a vision for what the food industry of the future should look like".

17 MRP Land Managing director: Stephen Surphlis Pre-tax profit: £28.2m Turnover: £96.4m Employees: 35 Pay bill: £2.8m Cookstown Co Tyrone BT80 8TL Tel: 028 8676 3741 [*www.mcaleer-rushe.co.uk*](http://www.mcaleer-rushe.co.uk)

M

RP Land is the property development and investment division of Northern Ireland-based construction company, McAleer & Rushe. Its headquarters are in Cookstown with offices in London, Belfast and Dublin.

The company says that it continued to experience strong interest from funders and occupiers in the UK and Ireland in 2020, with profit before tax of £28.2m and turnover of £96.4m. And it says performance is set to remain strong into 2022 with new acquisitions and planning consents advancing on a number of schemes, particularly in the student accommodation and build to rent sectors.

Developments in 2021 include 140,000 sq ft office building City Square House in Leeds, the largest pre-let deal in the city in the last 20 years, with global law firm DLA Piper occupying the majority of the building, and a 780-bed student accommodation at Warwick University.

Here, office developments include recently-completed The Vantage on Great Victoria Street in Belfast. And a 210,000 sq ft office development at Bedford Square is due to complete next year. At 17-storeys high, the Ewart will be new headquarters for Deloitte.

18 Coca-Cola HBC General manager: Miles Karemacher Pre-tax profit: £27.2m Turnover: £204.7m Employees: 450 Pay bill: £21.4m 12 Lissue Rd Lisburn BT28 2SZ Tel: 028 9262 0520 [*www.ie.coca-colahellenic.com*](http://www.ie.coca-colahellenic.com)

C

oca-Cola HBC Ireland and Northern Ireland is the franchised bottling partner to The Coca-Cola Company for the island and responsible for the manufacture, distribution, sale and channel marketing of its non-alcoholic beverages. It produces global brands Coca-Cola, Coca-Cola Zero Sugar, Diet Coke, Fanta, Sprite and Schweppes, as well as locally-owned brands Deep RiverRock and Fruice.

Coca-Cola HBC has a strong heritage in Northern Ireland and is also a significant employer. The business employs more than 700 people across the island, with more than 450 people employed in Northern Ireland through its manufacturing and office facility in Knockmore Hill, Lisburn.

The Lisburn plant serves the island of Ireland market, with 93% of all product sold produced in Northern Ireland.

Coca-Cola HBC says it contributes £27m to the economy through direct, indirect and induced wages and £59m Gross Value Added. Following an initial £93.5m investment, Coca-Cola HBC has continued to invest in the Lisburn site since it opened in 2010.

19 SSE Airtricity Energy Managing director: Klair Neenan Pre-tax profit: £23.8m Turnover: £349m Employees: 161 Pay bill: £4.4m Millennium House 19 - 25 Great Victoria Street Belfast Tel: 0345 8508940 [*www.sseairtricity.com*](http://www.sseairtricity.com)

S

SE Airtricity is a supplier of electricity and gas to homes and businesses in Northern Ireland. The entry in the Top 100 combines results for SSE Airtricity Energy Supply (NI) Ltd and SSE Airtricity Gas Supply (NI).

Like other suppliers the business has been hit by an increases in wholesale energy costs in recent months, which have been passed on to customers.

Earlier this year it announced a 9% increase to its residential electricity prices, which will apply from December and means typical customer will see costs rise by around £1.12 per week.

SSE Airtricity Gas had already announced an increase in its natural gas prices of 21.8% from October, meaning a typical household customer will see an annual increase of £112, equivalent to around £0.31 per day.

Andrew Greer, SSE Airtricity general manager (NI), said: "Over the last year, commodity costs have risen sharply with the cost of purchasing natural gas on the wholesale market more than doubling since last summer."

20 SHS Group Chief executive: Elaine Birchall Pre-tax profit: £23.1m Turnover: £655.6m Employees: 1,210 Pay bill: £50.5m 199 Airport Road West Belfast BT3 9ED Tel: 028 9045 4647 [*www.shs-group.com*](http://www.shs-group.com)

T

he SHS Group, founded in 1975, has evolved from a family-run sales and marketing company into a diverse multinational operation employing over 1,000 people with turnover of £655m.

Operating in the fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) sector, the SHS Group owns brands such as WKD, Shloer, Bottlegreen, Merrydown Cider, Meridian nut butters, Rocks squash drinks, Crucial Sauces, Zip firelighters and Maguire & Paterson matches.

It also distributes brands including Jordans, Ryvita, Pot Noodle, Finish, Mars Drinks and Colgate.

The group supplies own label herbs and spices in Great Britain and manufactures branded and private label condiments and sauces.

Its commercial divisions are supported by Belfast-based centres of excellence including information systems, HR, finance, procurement, logistics, customer services and corporate affairs.

The group says that in 2020 it delivered top line growth through innovation, new business and increased demand in its core grocery and convenience channels.

21 Brett Martin Holdings Managing director: Laurence Martin Pre-tax profit: £23m Turnover: £194.8m Employees: 1,077 Pay bill: £38.3m 24 Roughfort Road Mallusk BT36 4RB Tel: 028 9084 9999 [*www.brettmartin.com*](http://www.brettmartin.com)

rett Martin is Northern Ireland's largest thermoplastics manufacturer with sales of £195m in 2020. At nearly £23m, pre-tax profits were well up from £7.2m in 2019.

B

Established in 1958, the company has grown in significance to become one of the largest manufacturers of polycarbonate in Europe. Privately owned and managed, it has operations at seven separate UK sites with export activities extending to over 70 global markets.

Brett Martin's competencies include plastics extrusion, injection moulding and rotational moulding. Output consists of flat, corrugated and structured plastic sheet in polycarbonate, GRP, PVC, foam PVC, PET and acrylic, pipe extrusions, profile extrusions, and, moulded parts and fittings.

Principal market sectors include construction, fabrication, print and display.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, it has worked with Bangor manufacturer Denroy in the production of plastic visors. And its latest company accounts advise that it's been able to trade with minimal disruption to activities during the pandemic.

22 Eakin Healthcare Group Managing director: Jeremy Eakin Pre-tax profit: £22.7m Turover: £88.8m Employees: 367 Pay bill: £16.3m 15 Ballystockart Road Comber BT23 5QY Tel: 028 9187 1000 [*www.eakin.eu*](http://www.eakin.eu)

E

akin Healthcare Group is now made up of several businesses, including the Comber-based Eakin Healthcare headquarters. Eakin Healthcare produces wound care products for people who have major surgery.

In an interview with Ulster Business earlier this year, managing director Jeremy Eakin said: "The ostomy and stoma care have done well, with repeat business through the pandemic."

It's latest high-profile acquisition was Coleraine's Armstrong Medical in late 2020. Mr Eakin has said that the acquisition ***process*** only took a few weeks, from the initial inquiry to the deal being done. Armstrong Medical produces respiratory systems which were hugely in demand during the pandemic.

Mr Eakin said: "We were approached in September, and the deal was completed in December".

The group has made a number of other acquisitions in the last few years, and Mr Eakin said it has expanded its range and invested in R&D to help grow internationally. That includes taking on Pelican Healthcare in Cardiff.It now has around eight offices across the UK, Netherlands, France and Japan. SEE ENTRY 96.

23 EOS IT Holdings Chief executive: Daniel Strain Pre-tax profit: £21.3m Turnover: N/A Employees: N/A Pay bill: N/A 53 Moss Road Banbridge BT32 3NZ Tel: 028 4065 1006 [*www.eosits.com*](http://www.eosits.com)

E

OS IT Solutions is a global technology and logistics company, providing collaboration and business IT support services to some of the world's largest industry leaders. The family-run company is headquartered in Banbridge with offices globally and currently operates in over 175 countries worldwide.

EOS has grown to become a market leader in IT supply chain, AV collaboration and logistics. And it also continues to expand their service offerings into the security, data centre, enterprise networking and service provider technology marketplace.

The business says that it continues to scale hurdles to provide global IT excellence for a multitude of customers.

During the pandemic EOS launched a service that provided a solution for global remote workers referred to as 'Remote Excellence'. The new initiative facilitates large organisations by providing their employees with the best work-from-home experience.

The holding company has not filed consolidated accounts this year. For that reason, no figures are given for turnover, employees and pay bill.

24 Belfast Harbour Chief executive: Joe O'Neill Pre-tax profit: £18.5m Turnover: £62.8m Employees: 211 Pay bill: N/A Corporation Square Belfast BT1 3AL Tel: 028 9055 4403 [*www.belfast-harbour.co.uk*](http://www.belfast-harbour.co.uk)

B

elfast Harbour is the region's primary gateway for trade, services and tourism, handling more than two thirds of the imports and exports that come into and out of Northern Ireland by sea. The port handled 23.5 million tonnes of cargo in 2020, and is a major contributor to the economy here.

The 2,000-acre Harbour Estate is also home to commercial and residential real estate, and companies in sectors such as financial and IT services, R&D, film production, engineering, ship repair and aerospace manufacturing, employing more than 27,000 people. All profits from Belfast Harbour are re-invested for the longterm benefit of customers and wider society.

A significant programme of strategic investments over the last decade continues to create jobs, stimulate growth and aid the region's socio-economic recovery, with more than £250m of ongoing investment committed to the development of port and estate infrastructure up to 2023.

This includes Belfast Harbour's significant investment in port infrastructure, with a £65m investment programme in container and ferry terminal upgrades.

25 MJM Marine Chief executive: Gary Annett Pre-tax profit: £18m Turnover: £116.6m Employees: 281 Pay bill: £10.3m Carnbane Business Park Newry BT35 6QH Tel: 028 302 58450 [*www.mjm-group.com*](http://www.mjm-group.com)

M

JM's core business is in marine fit-out. It combines design services, specialist joinery and manufacturing with project management. It also provides fit-out services to high-end land-based clients.

In 2018 it completed the fit-out of cruise ship the Azamara Pursuit at Harland & Wolff, Belfast. In 2019 it was involved in a takeover bid for Harland & Wolffbefore the shipyard was sold out of administration to Infrastrata plc.

The company took a major hit from Covid-19 and its devastating impact on the cruise sector in early 2020, and was one of the first Northern Ireland businesses to announce large-scale job losses.

The company was founded by chairman Brian McConville.

Two of his children, Conleth McConville and Naoimh McAteer, now work in the business.

As well as marine fit-out, the business also works on specialist interiors and residential property.

It also has interests in commercial property and acquired Newry's Damolly Retail Park in 2016. Other acquisitiosn include Top Glass, whicih it acquired in 2018, and the specialist construction firm Mivan, which it bought in 2014.

26 Severfield (NI) Managing director: Adrian McCoy Pre-tax profit: £17.5m Turnover: £182m Employees: 341 Pay bill: £16.4m Fisher House Ballinamallard BT94 2FY Tel: 028 6638 8521 [*www.severfield.com*](http://www.severfield.com)

S

everfield (NI) is part of Severfield plc Group - the largest structural steel fabrication company in the UK. Based in Ballinamallard outside Enniskillen, it manufactures and provides structural steelwork to the construction industry across Ireland, the UK and Europe.

Its work spans data centres, commercial offices, energy from waste facilities and sports and leisure arenas.

Severfield (NI)'s work features in iconic buildings such as the V&A Museum, Dundee and King's College Hospital in London. The company says it's now working on high profile projects in London, Dublin, and Finland, and successfully building on its presence in the European market.

Severfield (NI) says it invests heavily in innovative engineering techniques, ensuring it can provide the most up-to-date and value engineered solutions for clients. The design, fabrication, painting, and fireproofing is all undertaken at its manufacturing plant here.

The company has said it's committed to best practice in all sustainability activities with a sustainability programme which considers whole life impact, taking it beyond compliance and ensuring continuous improvements.

27 Andor Technology Managing director: Kristian Laskey Pre-tax profit: £17.1m Turnover: £63.8m Employees: 255 Pay bill: £12.3m Springvale Business Park Belfast BT12 7AL Tel: 028 9023 7126 [*www.andor.oxinst.com*](http://www.andor.oxinst.com)

M

uch has changed since Andor Technology developed the world's first scientific imaging camera in 1989. Today with over 400 people in 16 offices worldwide, distributing products to over 10,000 customers in 55 countries, the company says it continues to innovate in scientific solutions for life and physical science research. Andor's range of high performance imaging solutions are widely regarded as the best in the industry, allowing the business to dominate many of its market segments. The business says its current strong growth curve is fuelled by investment in people and a detailed strategy to evolve all aspects of the business to best-in-class performance.

Its cameras have allowed researchers worldwide to push the boundaries of discovery from the smallest particles to the furthest galaxies, enabling in-depth studies of the sun, life-saving understandings of the human body and ground-breaking leaps in quantum technology. Among its customers are several Nobel prize winners, with applications including cancer research, astronomy and neurodegenerative diseases.

Andor continues to operate out of purpose-built 50,000 sq ft premises in west Belfast.

28 Coolkeeragh ESB ESB chief executive: Paddy Hayes Pre-tax profit: £17m Turnover: £126.7m Employees: N/A Pay bill: N/A 2 Electra Road Maydown Londonderry BT47 6UL [*www.esb.ie*](http://www.esb.ie)

T

he gas-fired Coolkeeragh power plant in Eglinton in Londonderry is solely owned by ESB, which is 95% owned by the Republic's government. In 2010 ESB acquired NIE Networks, which owns the electricity grid in Northern Ireland.

The company's operation centres on a 400MW combined cycle gas turbine (CCGT) supplied by gas from Scotland and a 53MW open cycle gas turbine (OCGT) fuelled by kerosene supplied by road tankers. The turbines operate in the all-island Integrated Single Electricity Market.

The company said the fall in profit from £26.5m a year earlier was down to a decrease in spark spreads in comparison to the previous year, negatively impacting the margin. And while the pandemic had disrupted economic activity, the directors said that given the nature of the company's business, they did not think the pandemic would have any material impact.

The power plant was built in 2005 by ESB International, and the company registered Coolkeeragh ESB as the business to operate the north-west plant. In 2020, ESB entered into a (EURO)1.4bn five year revolving credit facility with a syndicate of 14 banks. Coolkeeragh ESB Ltd is a co-borrower on the sustainability linked loan.

29 GNI (UK) Managing director: Denis O'Sullivan Pre-tax profit: £16.3m Turnover: £60.1m Employees: N/A Pay bill: N/A Rockboro Road Ballintemple Cork T12 RX96 Tel: 00353 21 453 4000 [*www.gasnetworks.ie*](http://www.gasnetworks.ie)

G

NI (UK) Ltd, registered in London, is a subsidiary of Gas Networks Ireland (GNI), which delivers natural gas to nearly 705,000 natural gas customers on the island of Ireland. It operates and part-owns the high pressure pipelines running from Moffat, in Scotland, to Ireland and the Isle of Man, via subsea pipelines which supply the Republic, Northern Ireland and Isle of Man.

It also owns and operates two pipelines in Northern Ireland, the South North pipeline running from Gormanston, Co Meath to Co Antrim and the North West pipeline running from Carrickfergus to the Coolkeeragh power station.

GNI (UK) works with the other gas transmission operator in Northern Ireland, Mutual Energy Limited (MEL), to deliver a secure supply of natural gas for customers here.

In 2019, GNI (UK)'s work at the Derryhale above-ground installation facilitated the commissioning of the MEL 'Gas to the West' pipeline project.

This brought gas to Dungannon, Coalisland, Omagh and Enniskillen.

30 Isaac Agnew (seven companies) Group managing director: Yuile Magee Pre-tax profit: £15.4m Turnover: £437.2m Employees: 1,057 Pay bill: £36m 18 Boucher Way Belfast BT12 6RE Tel: 028 9038 0300 [*www.agnewcars.com*](http://www.agnewcars.com)

T

he Agnew Group was set up in 1931 by the Agnew family. In January 2012, the Agnew Group became part of the Sytner Group of companies, the UK's largest motor retailer. Its parent company is Penske Automotive Group Inc, listed on the New York Stock Exchange.

The business represents nine manufacturer brands across 14 dealership locations and five additional business entities including a used car outlet, contract leasing, trade parts, body shop and trade auction.

Following a significant market change in 2020, the group delivered an 18% rise in pre-tax profits to nearly £15.4m, despite enforced closures during the pandemic. The group said the figure was "encouraging" as overall group revenues at £437m were down 12% on the previous year.

During the year Agnew Group registrations outperformed both the NI and UK market trend, securing a growing market share in Northern Ireland accounting for 22% of all registrations, up from 20% in 2019.

Efficiencies and learnings from forced closures in 2020 have been integrated into the current business model.

31 Dartan Hall Holdings Director: James Wright Pre-tax profit: £14.5m Turnover: £83.4m Employees: 224 Pay bill: £7.2m Killylea Armagh BT60 4NQ Tel: 028 3756 9799 [*www.jmwfarms.com*](http://www.jmwfarms.com)

D

artan Hall Holdings is the group company which owns JMW Farms, made up of pig units and a feed mill in Northern Ireland. There are also pig units in the Republic of Ireland and GB, and an anerobic digestion plant in Tonnagh.

Brothers Jim and Mark Wright are behind the pork business and have revealed plans to construct a £75m pig slaughter facility on the site of the old Lovell & Christmas factory in Co Antrim.

JMW Fams is one of Northern Ireland's biggest pig producers and in 2016, Jim Wright was in the running for the EY Entrepreneur of the Year Ireland competition. The brothers have been producing pigs and feed since 1986, with their company established three years later. It also runs its own haulage fleets.

In 2016 at the time of his nomination for the EY Enterpreneur of the Year, Jim Wright told the Irish Times: "At 14 I had asked my parents for a motor-scrambler bike for my birthday and instead they presented me with two pigs for breeding and from this we began to build up a small sow herd."

According to JMW Farm's website, the business "started at the bottom with humble makeshift outhouses, graduating to more superior purpose-built housing all manufactured by the brothers.

32 Westland Horticulture Chief executive: Edward Conroy Pre-tax profit: £14.5m Turnover: £208m Employees: 747 Pay bill: £27m 90 Granville Road Dungannon BT70 1NJ Tel: 028 8772 7500 [*www.gardenhealth.com*](http://www.gardenhealth.com)

W

estland Horticulture is one of the leading horticultural companies across the UK and Europe, specialising in growing media, plant foods, plant protection, wild bird care, gardening tools and watering products.

The company was established in Northern Ireland in 1990 and and now employs over 740 people, offering a wide range of gardening solutions to consumers across the UK, Republic of Ireland and Europe.

As well as Westland branded lines, the company's brand portfolio also includes Peckish, Kent & Stowe, FloPro, Resolva and Unwins.

A multi-award winning company, Westland continues to focus on revolutionising the garden sector with innovative solutions to enhance both the garden and wider environment.

The business says that its ethos "centres around helping gardeners achieve better, long term results - making the gardening experience both enjoyable and sustainable".

Westland Horticulture enjoyed a boost to its profits from a new enthusiasm for gardening during lockdown last year when restrictions confined many of us to our homes and gardens.

33 Linamar Light Metals Group general manager: John McMichael Pre-tax profit: £14.3m Turnover: £84.5m Employment: 565 Pay bill: £21.4m Dunmurry Belfast BT17 9HN Tell: 028 9030 1049 [*www.linamar.com*](http://www.linamar.com)

L

inamar Light Metals has been operating in Northern Ireland since 1989, originally as part of the Montupet Group and since 2016 as part of the Canadian industrial Group Linamar, based in Guelph, Ontario.

The Dunmurry plant designs and manufactures complex aluminium castings for the automotive OEMs Ford, Peugeot, Citroen, VW, Jaguar Land Rover.

The plant manufactures cylinder heads, structural components and electric drive unit housings with a range of casting, machining and assemble ***processes***, and has significantly diversified its product range in response to the changing automotive market in the transition to hybrid and electric.

Linamar consists of 61 manufacturing plants worldwide with a total workforce of 27,000 employees and total turnover of CAN$7.4bn.

Linamar Corporation is described as "a diversified global manufacturing company of highly engineered products powering vehicles, motion, work and lives".

The global business also includes McLaren Engineering, which Linamar acquired in 2003.

34 GE Grid Solutions General manager: Graham McGuigan Pre-tax profit: £14.2m Turnover: £76.3m Employees: 249 Pay bill: £19m 7 Lissue Walk Lisburn BT28 2LU Tel: 028 92 622915 [*www.gegridsolutions.com*](http://www.gegridsolutions.com)

E Grid Solutions (UK) Limited, a global technology business headquartered in Lisburn, is a subsidiary of US multi-national General Electric (GE).

G

Operating across aviation, healthcare, capital, transportation, power, oil and gas and digital solutions, GE's global teams work on powering, curing and moving the world.

Leveraging manufacturing and core product expertise out of Lisburn supported by global direct and indirect sales networks, the Northern Ireland operation is a leading vendor in condition monitoring devices, software and services for Asset Performance Management (APM) of electrical grid and substation equipment such as AIS/GIS and power transformers.

GE has announced it will split itself into three public companies from 2023 focusing on healthcare, aviation and energy, as chief executive Larry Culp strives to streamline the business. The announcement ended years of speculation about GE's future.

Mr Culp said the move would mean each entity "can benefit from greater focus, tailored capital allocation, and strategic flexibility to drive long-term growth and value for customers, investors and employees".

35 Mutual Energy Chief executive: Paddy Larkin Pre-tax profit: £13.2m Turnover: £80m Employees: 30 Pay bill: £3m The Arena Building 85 Ormeau Rd Belfast BT7 1SH Tel: 028 9043 7580 [*www.mutual-energy.com*](http://www.mutual-energy.com)

M

utual Energy describes itself as a major player in the Northern Ireland energy sector, managing critically important gas and electricity assets providing vital energy links with Great Britain, including the Scotland to Northern Ireland gas pipeline and the Moyle Interconnector.

Mutual Energy's governance model operates under a 'mutual' mode so that the organisation does not have shareholders. It says that instead, it reinvests the money it earns for the long-term benefit of NI energy consumers.

Over the past year, Mutual Energy's gas assets operated at 100% availability, and the Moyle Interconnector was available a world-leading 99.7% of the time. The company has invested millions of pounds to ensure the assets deliver benefits for years to come, while at the same time returning £5.8m to gas and electricity customers during this time of high energy costs.

Mutual Energy says that its singular focus on the interests of consumers mean the company has a valuable role to play in addressing the many challenges facing the energy industry and the firm recently established a dedicated team to focus on NI's transition to net zero.

36 Danske Bank Chief executive: Vicky Davies Pre-tax profit: £13m Turnover: N/A Employees: 1,341 Pay bill: £57.7m Donegall Square West Belfast BT1 6JS Tel: 028 9024 5277 [*www.danskebank.co.uk*](http://www.danskebank.co.uk)

D

anske Bank, which was last year's number one company, with a pre-tax profit of £90m, said it had not been "immune to the negative financial impacts of the pandemic". But it adopted a "force for good" strategy at the outset of the health crisis that included "supporting our customers and looking after our colleagues, who, as key workers, continued to provide reliable, trusted and responsive banking services".

"Lending was up due to ***unprecedented*** levels of support given to business customers during the pandemic, alongside mortgage lending, which remained at healthy levels," it said.

"In 2020, many customers focused on paying offdebt and holding cash, with deposit growth up 27% year-on-year."

The bank's low pre-tax profit for 2020 will not be repeated this year. In October, it posted pre-tax profits of almost £50m for the first nine months of the year. Loan impairment provisions - the money set aside to deal with losses - continued to reduce and income was down 4% from £153.3m to £147.3m.

On September 1 this year, Kevin Kingston retired as chief executive. He was replaced by former deputy Vicky Davies, the first female boss in the bank's 200-year history.

37 Greencoat UK Wind Chairman: Shonaid Jemmett-Page Pre-tax profit: £12.9m Turnover: £35m Employment: N/A Pay bill: N/A 5 Wilton Road London SW1V 1AN Tel: 020 7832 9400 [*www.greencoat-renewables.com*](http://www.greencoat-renewables.com)

T

he Greencoat financial figures are the consolidation of Northern Ireland-registered subsidiaries for the operation of wind farms owned by Greencoat UK Wind plc, which is registered in London.

These include Bin Mountain, Church Hill, Crighshane, Screggagh and Slieve Divena in Co Tyrone, Brockaghboy in Coleraine, Co Londonderry, and Tappaghan in Co Fermanagh.

Greencoat acquired the Slieve Divena II wind farm, around 10 miles south of Omagh, for £51m from UK energy giant SSE in February last year. It has already acquired the first Slieve Divena wind farm from SSE.

Greencoat UK Wind plc is the leading listed renewable infrastructure fund, and has invested in 40 operating UK wind farms with net generating capacity of 1,090 MW. The fund is part of the FTSE 250 and has a market capitalisation of over £2.6bn.

Affiliate business Greencoat Renewables in the Republic recently raised (EURO)165m in an oversubscribed share placing.

The funds will be used to partly pay down its revolving credit facility, which is currently drawn by (EURO)115m, according to a statement from the group.

38 EP Kilroot & Ballylumford Commercial director: Ian Luney Pre-tax profit: £12.8m Turnover: £184m Employees: 230 Paybill: £19m Larne Road Carrickfergus Antrim BT38 7LX Tel: 028 9338 1100 [*www.epuki.co.uk*](http://www.epuki.co.uk)

I

n June 2019, EP UK Investments (EPUKI) acquired the Kilroot and Ballylumford power stations from the AES Corporation, as part of a strategic move into Northern Ireland and the all-island Single Electricity Market.

The entry in the Top 100 for the power stations combines results from both entities, giving rise to a combined pre-tax profit of £12.8m.

The profit reversed losses for Ballylumford and Kilroot of £3.6m and £1.1m respectively in 2019.

In July 2020, EP Kilroot launched their vision for an investment of up to £600m in the creation of a new energy park, at the Kilroot site in Co Antrim.

This included the replacement of existing coal fired generation at the site with flexible, lower carbon gas fired open cycle gas turbine technology providing essential security of supply for Northern Ireland and facilitating the further integration of renewable generation in Northern Ireland.

As well as Kilroot and Ballylumford, EPUKI owns power plants in Plymouth, Lincolnshire and Northumberland. It also has a majority share in the Tynagh power station in Galway.

39 John Graham Holdings Chief executive: Michael Graham Pre-tax profit: £12.1m Turnover: £808m Employees: 2,111 Pay bill: £108m Ballygowan Road Hillsborough BT26 6HX Tel: 028 9268 9500 [*www.graham.co.uk*](http://www.graham.co.uk)

C

onstruction giant Graham, which is based in Hillsborough, said trading throughout the year had been "resilient" as it reported an increase of 7.4% in pre-tax profits to £12.1m for the year to March 2021.

But overall revenue of £808.1m was a 5.3% or £45m decrease from the 2020 financial year.

However, looking ahead, its company report states that its pipeline of work was worth £1.7bn.

The company recently announced it had won a 25-year facilities management contract with South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust, working at Lisburn Primary and Community Care Centre.

All business units - building, civil engineering, interior fit-out, facilities management and investment projects - stayed profitable over the year, according to the company report.

However, the initial onset of the pandemic had created uncertainty and a drop in productivity as the industry adjusted to restrictions - leading to a £100m fall in forecast revenues between April and June.

To protect the employment of staff, the business also used the government's Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme.

40 FD Technologies plc Chief executive: Seamus Keating Pre-tax profit: £11.1m Turnover: £233m Employees: 2,363 Pay bill: £146.9m 3 Canal Quay Newry BT35 6BP Tel: 028 3025 2242 [*www.fdtechnologiesplc.com*](http://www.fdtechnologiesplc.com)

F

ounded by the late Brian Conlon in 1996, FD Technologies plc in Newry has grown into an AIM-listed international technology provider working with some of the world's largest finance, technology, manufacturing and energy institutions.

It is a software and services company combining world-leading intellectual property in ultra-high-performance analytics (Kx) and extensive domain expertise and capabilities in capital markets systems and technology through its managed services and consulting arm. With revenues of more than £233m, it now employs more than 2,500 people globally with offices in 15 locations across four continents.

In a trading update for the first half of 2021, the company reported sales of £128m, up 7% from £120m. However, the company made a loss after spending a large sum on a new strategy to increase subscription sales of its Kx software products.

Chief executive Seamus Keating said: "The outlook across our businesses is positive, with each business unit expected to meet or exceed its full year growth target. We are particularly excited by the growing evidence that Kx Insights can make real-time decision-making easy to implement for organisations."

41 Phoenix Natural Gas Chief executive: Michael McKinstry Pre-tax profit: £11m Turnover: £63.5m Employees: 122 Pay bill: £6.3m 197 Airport Road West Belfast BT3 9ED Tel: 028 9055 5541 [*www.phoenixnaturalgas.com*](http://www.phoenixnaturalgas.com)

hoenix Natural Gas says that it transformed the home heating market in Northern Ireland when it was set up to bring natural gas here for the first time in 1996.

P

Like its competitors, this winter it has been increasing its customer tariffs in response to rising wholesale gas prices.

Now as the owner and operator of the largest natural gas distribution network locally, Phoenix Natural Gas is responsible for the safe and secure supply of natural gas to its 235,000 customers already connected to its 3,850km pipeline network.

The company says that it continues to grow its customer base by around 8,000 new connections per annum and has further extended its network into a number of new areas including east Down and Whitehead.

Having played a crucial role in the delivery of lower carbon fuel choice for consumers, Phoenix Natural Gas says that it "continues to play an instrumental role in the development of the NI Gas Industry's Roadmap to net carbon zero and demonstrating the potential for the continued utilisation of the existing gas network to deliver renewable gas solutions, such as hydrogen and biomethane, directly to consumers homes and businesses".

42 Gilbert-Ash Holdings Managing director: Raymond Hutchinson Pre-tax profit: £11m Turnover: £176.2m Employees: 174 Pay bill: £12.4m 60 Boucher Place Belfast BT12 6HT Tel: 028 9066 4334 [*www.gilbert-ash.com*](http://www.gilbert-ash.com)

ilbert-Ash is an award-winning UK construction and fit out contractor with 193 employees at offices in London and Belfast.

G

The company works throughout the UK and has undertaken numerous projects worldwide in a total of 43 countries from Poland and Bahrain to China, Japan and Australia on behalf of the UK Foreign & Commonwealth Office.

Stand-out projects, either completed or started in 2021, include the National Portrait Gallery, the City of London Freemen's School and Belfast's Merchant Square.

Earlier this year Gilbert-Ash revealed it has had its most profitable year with the second highest turnover in the company's history. Gilbert-Ash more than doubled its profits in 2020 from £5.7m to around £11m. Turnover rose to £176.2m, up 8% from £163m the previous year.

In October 2021, one of Gilbert-Ash's landmark projects, Cambridge Central Mosque was shortlisted for the Stirling Prize.

It's the fourth time a Gilbert-Ash project has been shortlisted for the coveted award. Their first nomination was in 2012 when Belfast's Lyric Theatre was shortlisted.

43 NIIB Group Managing director: James McGee Pre-tax profit: £11m Turnover: N/A Employees: 135 Pay bill: £7.7m 1 Donegall Square South Belfast BT1 5LR Tel: 02890 724 464 [*www.northridgefinance.com*](http://www.northridgefinance.com)

N

IIB Group is a motor and asset finance, vehicle leasing and fleet management business which trades as Northridge Finance. It is a wholly-owned subsidiary of Bank of Ireland UK.

Northridge helps businesses and individuals access finance across the UK and is an established prime motor finance lender.

Four years ago it acquired Marshall Leasing, which is the 22nd-largest fleet leasing company in the UK.

Northridge was impacted when car dealerships closed across the UK during the Covid-19 lockdowns in 2020 leading to a reduction in new business lending.

When face-to-face business wasn't possible, Northridge moved quickly and made a significant investment in technology and software design which meant the business could support customers through payment breaks.

Retail partners now enjoy enhanced services to support sales and every stage of the purchasing ***process*** can be carried out remotely. Northridge Finance says innovation is also helping it maintain service standards, while considering the wellbeing of colleagues at all times.

44 Tobermore Concrete Managing director: David Henderson Pre-tax profit: £10.7m Turnover: £48.2m Employees: 303 Pay bill: £11.2m

2 Lisnamuck Road Tobermore Tel: 028 7964 2411 [*www.tobermore.co.uk*](http://www.tobermore.co.uk)

obermore is a major manufacturer of paving and walling, supplying the commercial and domestic markets throughout the UK and Ireland.

T

Tobermore manufactures and supplies block paving, permeable paving, paving flags, kerbs, steps, retaining walls and facing brick.

It's a trusted supplier of leading contractors and housebuilders with a large team to provide expert guidance.

It now employs over 400 people and is expanding further into the UK, investing in world-class technology. It says it has built the systems, procedures and structures inherent in the world's leading businesses.

Last year, Tobermore announced a £30m investment and the creation of 95 jobs to fulfil ambitious growth plans.

It has completed a new £10m factory which has significantly increased manufacturing capacity. The company has ramped up production in response to a surge in market demand for their hard landscaping products. It has benefited from a trend for homeowners to spend more on their homes following the effects of Covid-19 lockdowns.

45 Northstone (NI) Chief executive: John Wilson Pre-tax profits: £10.6m Turnover: £383.5m Employees: 1,462 Pay bill: £61.9m 99 Kingsway Dunmurry BT17 9NU Tel: 028 90 551276 [*www.northstone-ni.co.uk*](http://www.northstone-ni.co.uk)

N

orthstone (NI) is one of the biggest construction and building materials groups in Northern Ireland. It has three operating divisions - Farrans Construction, Northstone Materials and CUBIS Systems.

Northstone (NI) is a wholly owned subsidiary of CRH plc, the leading global diversified building materials business. Its building and civil engineering division Farrans Construction employs more than 500 people with offices in London, Cambridge, Edinburgh and Belfast.

Northstone Materials supplies concrete and quarry products into the construction industry in the UK and Ireland. It makes roof tiles at its plant in Toomebridge. Cubis Systems is the global leader in network access and cable protection solutions. It exports to 30 countries and employs 900 people at nine sites including Australia.

46 Seagate Technology Plant manager: Fergus O'Donnell Pre-tax profit: £10.5m Turnover: £123.5m Employees: 1,456 Pay bill: £66m Springtown Industrial Estate Londonderry BT48 0LY Tel: 028 7127 4000 [*www.seagate.com*](http://www.seagate.com)

S

eagate Technology (Seagate) is a world leader in data storage and management solutions. Globally the company reported revenues in 2021 of $10.7bn and employs some 40,000 people across the US, Europe and Asia.

Figures to June 2020 show the company in Northern Ireland had revenues of $167m with profits before tax at $14m. The company says that manufacturing read-write transducers or heads here in NI is a capital-intensive business, with continued investment required to match the pace of technological advancement.

In the 2020 financial year, Seagate invested a further $54m in plant and equipment at the NI facility and just under $40m was invested in R&D-supporting efforts here.

It is estimated that Seagate has invested more than £1bn in capital in total in the NI operation.

47 Nelipak Operations director: John Muir Pre-tax profit: £10.3m Turnover: £68.5m Employees: 282 Pay bill: £10.3m Campsie Industrial Estate Londonderry BT47 3GQ Tel: 028 7181 4008 [*www.nelipak.com*](http://www.nelipak.com)

N

elipak Healthcare Packaging, formerly known as Bemis, is a leading global manufacturer of high-quality packaging for the protection of medical devices, sensitive drugs and sophisticated diagnostic systems.

It specialises in the manufacture of co-extruded, laminated and flexible films, foil barrier laminations, pouches, bags, thermoformed trays, lids, labels, heat seal coated DuPont Tyvek and medical grades of paper.

With 10 international facilities, Nelipak says that it "actively collaborates with customers to understand their business requirements and to effectively design and deliver technologically superior, reliable and trusted packaging solutions with a competitive edge". The company continues to experience revenue growth from cross-selling products and services.

48 Cranswick Country Foods Chief executive: Adam Couch Pre-tax profit: £10m Turnover: £115.5m Employees: 431 Pay bill: £9.39m 146 Fenaghy Road Cullybackey Ballymena BT42 1EA Tel: 028 2588 1180 [*www.cranswick.plc.uk*](http://www.cranswick.plc.uk)

U

K pork ***processing*** giant Cranswick Group has had a presence in Ballymena since acquiring the former Dunbia Ballymena operation in a cash deal five years ago, following seven years in the ownership of Dunbia.

According to the company accounts for the year up to March 2020, the company had year on year growth in sales revenue of 23.5%, compared to 0.8% for the previous period. The growth was down to an increase in the number of pigs ***processed*** through the site, combined with higher pig prices over the period. Higher prices also led to an increase in gross profit as a percentage of sales revenue, which was 15.8% compared to 9.4% in the year to March 2019.

During 2020 the group suspended its China exporting licenses for Ballymena and Norfolk following outbreaks of Covid-19 at the plants.

49 Dale Farm Co-op Chief executive: Nick Whelan Pre-tax profit: £9.8m Turnover: £504.5m Employees: 1,172 Pay bill: £43.7m Dale Farm House 15 Dargan Road Belfast Tel: 028 9037 2200 [*www.dalefarm.com*](http://www.dalefarm.com)

D

ale Farm is a cooperative, meaning that the 1,300 dairy farmers that supply the company with milk also own the business. Headquartered in Belfast, Dale Farm employs 1,384 people across the UK and Ireland.

The co-op manufactures an extensive range of dairy products for the retail, foodservice and food ingredients sectors in the domestic and international markets, spanning milk, butter, cheese, yogurts and desserts. It also collects members' milk and supplies animal feed to farmers.

Dale Farm experienced a strong year during which it secured a significant export partnership for its whey protein and strengthened its retail sales despite the challenges of the pandemic. The company reported a solid year's performance for the financial year ending March 2021. Group operating profit was reported at £14m, group profit before tax £8.2m, EBITDA £20.8m and overall group turnover £524m.

50 Heron Bros Group MD Damien O'Callaghan Pre-tax profit: £9.7m Turnover: £85.6m Employees: 281 Pay bill: £11.3m 2 St Patrick Street Draperstown BT45 7AL Tel: 028 7962 8505 [*www.heronbros.com*](http://www.heronbros.com)

H

eron Bros was formed in 1956 by six brothers in Draperstown. Its principal activities are construction, joinery manufacturing, building suppliers, quarrying, property investment and development. It also has an extensive property portfolio which provides a sustainable annual profit, and the directors are pleased to see a significant increase in rental income.

Heron Bros has also diversified into the renewable energy sector through its HHT Renewables Division.

It is delivering landmark schemes including redeveloping Northern Regional College, Coleraine, work on Belfast's Paper Exchange Office Complex and the redevelopment of Templemore Baths in east Belfast, the fifth scheme secured as part of the £105m Belfast Leisure Transformation Programme. It has recently expanded into new headquarters at Draperstown and continues to invest in new equipment.

51 Medwyn Holdings Director: Brian Hewitt Pre-tax profit: £9.6m Turnover: £65m Employment: 408 Pay bill: £15.9m Medwyn Park Carnwath South Lanarkshire Tel: 01555 840006 [*www.bhc.ltd.uk*](http://www.bhc.ltd.uk)

M

edwyn Holdings is a family-owned engineering company with its registered offices in Enniskillen. It is the parent company of BHC, formerly known as Brian Hewitt Construction.

Its activities are described as the design, fabrication and erection of structural steelwork. It employs nearly 410 people.

BHC Ltd was formed in 1992 with the capacity to fabricate 30 tonnes of structural steel a week. The company says that since then, it has "grown in strength and stature and can now ***process*** 800 tonnes of structural steel per week".

The firm is owned and operated by husband and wife Brian and Marjorie Hewitt. It has a production facility in Lanarkshire, Scotland.

BHC was recently responsible for the fabrication and erection of 1,194 tonnes of structural steelwork at Orkney's Balfour Hospital, Scotland's first net-zero hospital.

52 Foyle Food Group Holdings Chief executive: Terry Acheson Pre-tax profit: £9.2m Turnover: £382m Employees: 1,342 Pay bill: £37.5m 52 Doogary Road Omagh BT79 0BQ Tel: 028 8224 3201 [*www.foylefoodgroup.com*](http://www.foylefoodgroup.com)

oyle is the largest dedicated beef processor in the UK and Ireland.

F

The family-owned business specialises in premium beef products, which are exported around the world.

The company, which is owned by the Acheson family, says all its beef comes from a closed supply chain supported by experienced farmers in its producer clubs.

It has nearly 1,350 employees on five sites here, in the Republic and in England.

The company says: "We slaughter and debone over 7,000 cattle each week across our five primary ***processing*** plants and rendering facilities ensuring all of our waste is handled in-house."

The business runs a shared service centre in Omagh, which the company says enables it to streamline its ***processes*** for customers. Its use of advanced technology enables management to access live business data to improve its services.

53 McBurney Holdings Chairman: Norman McBurney Pre-tax profit: £9m Turnover: £104m Employees: 816 Pay bill: £27.4m 205 Moorfields Road Ballymena BT42 3EG Tel: 028 2589 1419 [*www.mcburneytransport.com*](http://www.mcburneytransport.com)

F

ounded in 1965 by Norman McBurney OBE with a single lorry, the McBurney Transport Group has become a trusted supplier to many companies across the UK and Ireland. Their customer base includes major supermarkets, food and drinks manufacturers and distributors, high street retailers, and those involved in construction, and horticulture sectors.

It's now one of Ireland's biggest independently-owned logistics groups, and is still family-owned, with its board headed by chairman Norman McBurney and his wife Lynn. The company has enjoyed long-lasting business relationships with many of Northern Ireland's food manufacturers. McBurney now employs over 800 people from its head office in Ballymena with operations in Dublin Port, Liverpool, Heysham and Cairnryan. The latest accounts posted for 2020 shows turnover similar to 2019 despite the pandemic.

54 Allstate NI Managing director: John Healy Pre-tax profit: £8.8m Turnover: £128.4m Employees: 2,298 Pay bill: £98.8m 10 Mays Meadow Belfast BT1 3PH Tel: 028 9067 8000 [*www.allstateni.com*](http://www.allstateni.com)

A

llstate NI has maintained its position as our largest IT company and one of the region's largest employers, with 2,300 staff. A subsidiary of Allstate Corporation in the US, it provides business support services to its parent company, including technology, data, cybersecurity and finance.

In response to the pandemic it supported employees around the world to move operations online. The company keeps up with fast-moving areas of technology to continue as an innovator in various sectors.

With a Force for Good committee in each office, Allstate continues to give back to local communities through charitable initiatives and programmes. These include cyber safety training sessions for children and older people, supporting domestic abuse charities, and providing informative sessions for parents supporting school leavers to consider their next move.

55 McAleer & Rushe Managing director: Martin Magee Pre-tax profit: £8.7m Turnover: £290m Employees: 328 Pay bill: £21m 17-19 Dungannon Road Cookstown BT80 8TL Tel: 028 8676 3741 [*www.mcaleer-rushe.co.uk*](http://www.mcaleer-rushe.co.uk)

C

onstruction company McAleer & Rushe said it performed robustly in 2020 with a pre-tax profit of £8.7m despite its sites in the UK and Ireland being closed for long periods.

Its strong performance in the second half of 2020 has been sustained throughout 2021 with record turnover of more than £400m expected this year. With a considerable pipeline of projects, those levels of turnover are expected to be maintained next year.

Operations within the broad residential market continue to expand. Activity levels within student accommodation and office development are also very strong.

Contracts this year include its largest project to date, a £190m residential scheme for Legal & General in Wandsworth, and also in London, a £145m mixed-use residential-led scheme for Taylor Wimpey London at Farringdon.

56 Full Circle Energy Generation Director: Brett Ross Pre-tax profit: £8.5m Turnover: £20.5m Employees: N/A Pay bill: N/A 7 Irwin Way Airport Road West Belfast Tel: 028 9531 3313 [*www.riverridge.co.uk*](http://www.riverridge.co.uk)

F

ull Circle Generation (FCG) is Northern Ireland's only large-scale waste to energy facility. The project is a response to Northern Ireland's growing household waste volumes as well as Spirit AeroSystems' requirement for a predictable source of energy.

Construction began in March 2016 and was completed in August 2019. The £107m FCG facility represents a key piece of infrastructure for NI and was funded via investors including Equitix, RiverRidge Holdings and P3P Partners.

Equitix is a long-term investor, developer, and fund manager of core infrastructure assets in the UK and Europe and has invested over £500m into the Northern Ireland economy to date.

RiverRidge Holdings is NI's most integrated waste management operator. It manages over 400,000 mt of waste annually. P3P is also focused on infrastructure projects and in particular energy, waste and vertical farming

57 PharmaPac Holdings Chief executive: John Pugh Pre-tax profit: £8.48m Turnover: £60m Employees: 202 Pay bill: £5.7m 19 Church Road Portadown Craigavon BT63 5HT [*www.pharmapacuk.com*](http://www.pharmapacuk.com)

P

harmaPac Holdings is the holding company behind PharmaPac, which produces packaging for some of the world's largest pharmaceutical, healthcare and veterinary firms.

One of the holding firm's directors is Geoffrey Elliott, the ex-finance chief at the pharmaceutical company Galen, which was founded by the late Sir Allen McClay. Sir Allen went on to establish Almac.

PharmaPac's Liverpool facility says it can rapidly and accurately fill solids, semi-solids, liquids and powders into diverse packaging. The firm describes itself as "a highly ethical contract manufacturer with quality credentials".

According to company results for PharmaPac Holdings, over the year to the end of June 2020 it started providing consumer health products.

A review filed with the accounts said the directors were confident the firm was well placed to take advantage of new business opportunities.

58 Lough Erne Investments Managing director: Charles Crawford Pre-tax profit: £7.4m Turnover: £58.4m Employees: 160 Pay bill: £3.9m Manor Waterhouse Farm Fermanagh BT92 0BN Tel: 028 6772 1345 [*www.readyeggproducts.com*](http://www.readyeggproducts.com)

E

gg ***processing*** business Lough Erne Investments posted a drop in sales of 10% to £58m in its latest accounts. The company's pre-tax profits were also down 7% to £7.4m.

Its main subsidiary is Ready Egg Products, which produces pasteurised liquid egg products, hard boiled eggs and scrambled egg, as well as egg yolk and egg white products.

Commenting in the accounts, managing director Charles Crawford said the pandemic and its restrictions contributed to the declines.

He added: "The onset of Covid in March caused a decrease of 70% in sales, which affected profit and employment, but fortunately we were able to recover our market quite quickly.

"Despite all the difficulties, we regard the final 2020 results as satisfactory."

The Fermanagh company, which produces around four million eggs per day, is one of the biggest operations of its kind in the UK.

59 Old Bushmills Distillery Master distiller: Colum Egan Pre-tax profit: £7.3m Turnover: £31.8m Employees: 101 Pay bill: £5.8m 2 Distillery Road Bushmills BT57 8XH Tel: 028 207 33218 [*www.bushmills.com*](http://www.bushmills.com)

O

ld Bushmills Distillery says this year has been a very exciting time for its most famous product, Bushmills Irish Whiskey, despite the challenges facing every business.

In the autumn, it released its second Causeway Collection of rare Irish single malt whiskies.

The business has been working on expansion plans for some time, and said that this year, "we were able to make significant strides towards the completion of additional distilling facilities".

"The development will support the growth of The Old Bushmills Distillery with production launching in early 2022," the company added.

It is part of a £60m plan to double production capacity over five years to meet the increasing demand for its portfolio of single malts.

The company said: "Looking ahead to 2022, we are committed to craftsmanship and innovation and have lots of exciting announcements and products in the pipeline."

60 Balcas Timber Chief executive: Brian Murphy Pre-tax profit: £7.2m Turnover: £110m Employees: 376 Pay bill: £15m Killadeas Road Enniskillen BT94 2FN Tel: 028 6641 1001 [*www.balcasenergy.com*](http://www.balcasenergy.com)

B

alcas operates in the sustainable use of timber. It has been acquired by Glennon Brothers from parent company SHV Energy (LPG) Holding BV in a deal approved by the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission in the Republic and the Competitions and Markets Authority in the UK.

Balcas has a workforce of nearly 380. Its sawmills in Enniskillen and combined plants in Enniskillen and Invergordon in Scotland are described as energy-efficient and self-sufficient.

It has a 72-acre site in Enniskillen, with an annual capacity of 268,000 cubic metres of sawn timber. Its Invergordon base includes a 34MW boiler alongside a pellet plant producing 100,000 tonnes of pellets each year.

The firm's product range includes kiln-dried graded structural timber, unseasoned and preservative pre-treated fencing timbers, pallet wood components and sleepers.

61 Liberty IT Managing director: William Hamilton Pre-tax profit: £7.1m Turnover: £52.9m Employees: 567 Pay bill: £33.2m Adelaide Exchange Belfast BT2 8GD Tel: 028 9044 5500 [*www.liberty-it.co.uk*](http://www.liberty-it.co.uk)

B

elfast-based Liberty IT says it's a leader in digital innovation, and having continued to invest in its people and infrastructure, is on track to have close to 700 employees in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland by the end of 2021.

It describes itself as "the cogs behind the #71 Fortune-ranked Liberty Mutual Insurance, the key drivers behind its global digital enablement journey, reimagining insurance by delivering an ever more efficient service for its customers".

Liberty IT, which is led by William Hamilton, says it aspires to be a workplace where everyone feels included, one that values diversity and brings its values to life every day. It recently won a Silver Diversity Mark, one of only seven organisations in NI to achieve the award for its commitment to advancing diversity in the workplace, and ranked third in the Best Workplaces for Women 2021 listing by Great Place to Work UK.

62 Haldane Group Managing director: Ian Haldane Pre-tax profit: £7.1m Turnover: £132m Employees: 653 Pay bill: £18.7m Shepherd's Way Newry BT35 6QQ Tel: 028 3026 3201 [*www.haldane-group.com*](http://www.haldane-group.com)

he Haldane Group continued to grow its business in Ireland, the Isle of Man and the north-west of England in 2020/2021.

T

The firm said that because of Brexit and Covid, it had been a time of challenge and opportunity.

Challenges included setting up a policy for safe working practices, IT to allow employees to work from home and meeting the demand for increased materials driven by home improvement projects, relocation and new-build housing.

The family and directors said they were "immensely proud" of how colleagues had pulled together at a difficult time.

Haldane Fisher (NI) started selling online in July this year, which the company said had progressed well.

It recently acquired the Wigan firm Prowood, which specialises in the importing, saw-milling and distribution of softwoods and hardwoods. Haldane said that it was a significant investment.

63 Caterpillar (NI) Director: Patricia Greene Pre-tax profit: £7m Turnover: £439.5m Employees: 1,509 Pay bill: £65.4m Old Glenarm Road Larne BT40 1EJ Tel: 028 2826 1000 [*www.caterpillar.com*](http://www.caterpillar.com)

T

he Northern Ireland arm of US equipment giant Caterpillar reported pre-tax profits of just over £7m on turnover of £439m in 2020.

Its core businesses here is the design and manufacture of diesel and gas generating sets, as well as axle and transmission components.

The £7m pre-tax profits compares with a loss of £13.6m in 2019, though that included a one-off£21.7m impairment charge, the write down of the value of a fixed asset.

The accounts for 2020 also include money set aside for redundancies, around £10m. Group headquarters is also contributing £14.4m to the redundancies, off-setting losses on Caterpillar NI's books.

In November 2020, it announced that up to 700 people would be made redundant as part of restructuring. It's also selling offsome of its Larne base, seeking offers of around £3.25m.

64 WRM Holdings Chairman: Colin Cherry Pre-tax profit: £7m Turnover: £46m Employees: 91 Pay bill: £2m 23 Sunwich Street Belfast BT6 8HR Tel: 028 9045 0821 [*www.stothersm-e.co.uk*](http://www.stothersm-e.co.uk)

RM is the holding company behind the Belfast-based building engineering services contractor Stothers (M&E).

W

The 60-year-old business also has premises in Glasgow and Warrington.

Its offices support project delivery across the UK and Republic of Ireland, with work stretching from the Scottish Highlands to the south coast of England and into Dublin.

The company has grown from a small-scale maintenance provider to a national market leader in the provision of mechanical and electrical building services and contract maintenance.

It has completed contracts for the NHS, Hastings Hotels, Maybourne Group and a number of blue-chip main contractors.

Recent work includes a project at the Royal Mail delivery office in Mallusk that included the replacement of all gas boilers and replacement of office fan coil units.

65 BSG Civil Engineering Chief executive: Seamus Gillan Pre-tax profit: £7m Turnover: £33.2m Employees: 77 Pay bill: £3.7m 6 Bank Square Maghera BT46 5AZ Tel: 028 7964 3610 [*www.bsgcivilengineering.co.uk*](http://www.bsgcivilengineering.co.uk)

B

SG Civil Engineering Ltd in Maghera has developed from a civil engineering contractor into a construction company with a large turnover.

NI Water and Irish Water are among its main customers. It's one of four Northern Ireland companies to win a major new £100m water improvement contract with NI Water.

As well as its work for NI Water, it has also carried out multi-million pound contracts for clients such as the Belfast Harbour Commission and Donegal County Council.

In 1987 Seamus Gillan Civil Engineering diversified into sheet pile driving, which led to the formation of BSG Piling Ltd. Around 17 years ago, Seamus Gillan Civil Engineering and BSG Piling Ltd amalgamated to form BSG Civil Engineering Limited.

The company has also acquired and developed

66 Avondale Foods Co-chairmen: Harry and Derek Geddis Pre-tax profit: £7m Turnover: £63m Employees: 499 Pay bill: £15.3m Dukestown Lane Craigavon BT66 8TB Tel: 028 3834 1619 [*www.avondale-foods.co.uk*](http://www.avondale-foods.co.uk)

A

vondale Foods develops and manufactures wet salads, such as coleslaw and potato salads, as well as side salads, salad meals, vegetable accompaniments, porridges, soups, dressings, mayonnaises and sauces.

The business initially operated under the name of S Geddis & Sons and grew vegetables for Northern Ireland retail outlets.

The company supplies its products under the Country Kitchen brand and supermarket own-label throughout the UK and Ireland. It also supplies wholesale and foodservice. It has been in business for 56 years.

Customers include Sainsbury's, Tesco, Waitrose and Marks & Spencer. Avondale was also the first firm here to produce coleslaw on a large scale. Today, Avondale supplies around 30% of retail packs of coleslaw sold throughout the UK. In 2018, it announced a deal with Asda to produce

67 Golf Holdings Director: Patrick Hunt Pre-tax profit: £6.9m Turnover: £185.6m Employees: 1,614 Pay bill: £25.7m 3 Duncrue Place Belfast BT3 9BU Tel: 028 9074 6274 [*www.winemark.com*](http://www.winemark.com)

olf Holdings is the holding company for a group of businesses in the hospitality sector.

G

It's best-known for Wine Inns, which owns pubs and restaurants such as south Belfast's Chelsea Wine Bar, and off-licence chain Winemark, which is made up of 84 stores around the province. The group also includes wholesale wine company James E McCabe.

Philip Russell Ltd - a wholesale and retail distributor of wines, spirits, drinks and pet food products - is another subsidiary.

Golf Holdings is also behind the Russell's Food and Drink chain of convenience stores.

Wine Inns' Belfast bars also include The Doyen, formerly the King's Head, Alibi, Cutters Wharf, The Four Winds and Robinsons.

The business is actively recruiting for personnel including cleaners, kitchen porters, door supervisors and duty managers across its bars.

68 Multi-Packaging General manager: Chris Dears Pre-tax profit: £7m Turnover: £33.3m Employees: 164 Pay bill: £6.7m 1 Enterprise Way Hightown Industrial Estate, Newtownabbey BT36 4EW Tel: 028 90 804033 [*www.westrock.com*](http://www.westrock.com)

M

PS - now WestRock-MPS - came into being in June 2017 when Multi Packaging Solutions (MPS) was taken over by WestRock.

According to the company, the Belfast site has benefited from over £5m of investment in new technology and machine assets.

That investment has enabled it to better serve new customers such as Reckitt in England as well continue its relationships with major Northern Ireland companies such as Almac, Randox and Norbrook.

As a global supplier of speciality packaging to the pharma/healthcare, branded food and drink and media sectors, WestRock-MPS' history goes back more than 150 years in Northern Ireland. It began in Belfast as WW Cleland in 1865. The company says that WestRock-MPS Belfast is "the modestly-scaled local centre of the organisation of over 45,000 staffoperating in 30 countries".

69 Firmus Energy Chairman: David Dobbin Pre-tax profit: £6.7m Turnover: £23.8m Employees: 109 Pay bill: £5.7m Kilbegs Business Park Antrim Tel: 028 9442 7814 [*www.firmusenergy.co.uk*](http://www.firmusenergy.co.uk)

F

irmus energy was initially awarded a licence to develop a 'Ten Towns' natural gas network in 2005 and has invested more than £210m in the NI economy.

Along with other energy suppliers, it has attracted headlines in recent months for consecutive price increases for its customers following huge growth in wholesale gas prices.

Firmus energy has laid over 1.9 million metres of natural gas network connecting over 55,000 customers in over 35 cities towns and villages with connections available to a further 111,000 properties. This year it is celebrating the 10th anniversary of bringing natural gas to Warrenpoint.

In addition to its network business firmus energy supplies natural gas to more than 108,000 business and domestic customers in NI. As part of its commitment to a low carbon economy, it has formed a sustainability team to introduce renewable gases into its natural gas network.

70 Mzuri Group/Decora Managing director: Stuart Dickson Pre-tax profit: £6.6m Turnover: £87.8m Employees: 1,170 Pay bill: £22.3m 1 Knockmore Road Ferguson Drive Lisburn BT28 2FL Tel: 028 9266 3600 [*www.decora.co.uk*](http://www.decora.co.uk)

M

zuri Holdings was established in 2018 by the owners of Decora Blind Systems to facilitate acquisitions. In 2020 the business received significant investment from BGF, the UK and Ireland's most active investor in growing businesses.

Earlier this year it acquired TCMM Shutter Group. Following the acquisition, Mzuri now employs a total over 1,000 people, the majority at its headquarters in Lisburn.

Established over 40 years ago, Decora has grown into a well-known brand and a significant player in the European window blind industry.

Founders Michael and Lynda Dickson started out selling external awnings to Northern Ireland trade. The business then invested in machinery to create manufacturing capability and, in 1981 expanded to provide internal blinds. It took a further step with the wholesaling of components and fabric to the trade, which the company.

71 Tennent's NI Managing director: Tom McCusker Pre-tax profit: £6.6m Turnover: £58.7m Employees: 93 Pay bill: £3.9m Culcavy Hillsborough Down BT26 6JJ Tel: 028 9595 2100 [*www.candcgroupplc.com*](http://www.candcgroupplc.com)

T

ennent's NI is part of C&C Group plc, a premium drinks company which manufactures, markets and distributes branded beer, cider, wine, spirits and soft drinks across the UK and Ireland.

The portfolio of beer and cider brands includes Tennent's, Heverlee, Clonmel, Five Lamps, Magners Irish Cider, Magners Dark Fruit, Magners Rosé, and Outcider alongside brands suc h as the Whitewater Craft Range and Estrella.

Earlier this year C&C Ireland announced 34 job losses in its operations on the island Ireland.

In July last year, Tennent's NI announced the strengthening of its portfolio with the exclusive distribution of Budweiser, the world's biggest alcohol brand. C&C then announced exclusive distribution of Budweiser Brewing Group's (part of AB InBev) complete beer brand portfolio across Ireland. Tennent's NI also added Bibendum in Northern Ireland to its portfolio in 2019.

72 Diageo Country manager: James Davies Pre-tax profit: £6.4m Turnover: £207m Employees: 240 Pay bill: £12.6m Capital House Upper Queen Street Belfast 028 9068 2021 [*www.diageo.com*](http://www.diageo.com)

D

iageo describes itself as integral part of the community in Northern Ireland, both as a major exporter and employer. It's best known for world famous brands including Guinness, Harp, Hop House 13, Rockshore, Smithwick's, Baileys, Smirnoff, Gordons and Tanqueray. Recent innovations include Guinness 0.0; Guinness Nitrosurge and Guinness Microdraught.

The company employs over 320 people across three sites in Northern Ireland including a beer bottling, canning and packaging plant in east Belfast, corporate headquarters in Belfast city centre - home to its UK and Ireland customer service and credit teams - and the Baileys global supply facility at Mallusk.

The business said the Baileys and Guinness brands will lead the implementation of Diageo's 2030 targets on the island of Ireland. Every drink produced will take 30% less water and packaging will be 100% reusable, recyclable or compostable.

73 Aidan Strain Electrical Managing director: Aidan Strain Pre-tax profit: £6.3m Turnover: £40m Employees: 130 Pay bill: £10.3m 40 Maphoner Road Mullaghbawn Newry BT35 9TR Tel: 028 3088 8861 [*www.aseeltd.com*](http://www.aseeltd.com)

A

idan Strain Electrical Engineering is a privately owned family business with a strong European focus. Established in Mullaghbawn, Co. Armagh over 40 years ago, ASEE's early years centred around electrical fitout of domestic and commercial properties in Ireland and the UK.

However, it has since evolved into a full-service mechnical, electrical and plumbing (MEP) provider delivering complex installs across a wide variety of multi-million pound projects. Some of the world's most valuable companies are among its customers.

ASEE has enjoyed rapid growth over the past five years, with turnover increasing by 95%.

And the company adds that given its very strong pipeline of projects, and due to continued investment in new facilities, ***processes*** and staff, turnover is expected to double over the next 24 months.

74 Capita Public sector lead: Gary Martin Pre-tax profit: £6.3m Turnover: £78.6m Employees: 477 Pay bill: £19.8m

61 Church Road Newtownabbey Tel: 028 9085 9085 [*www.capita-it.co.uk*](http://www.capita-it.co.uk)

C

apita Managed IT Solutions, now known by group name Capita, is an IT services and solutions organisation working in education, energy, health, public and private sector organisations.

It recently worked with the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust at the Covid-19 Mass Vaccination Centre at the SSE Arena in Belfast.

The NHS in NI awarded Capita a project to stand up and support the ICT infrastructure to allow the centre to fully function over a 22 week period. Capita designed the solution, and supplied and installed the equipment including PCs, handheld devices, printers, network switches and other associated hardware.

Capita has also won a contract for the provision of Microsoft licences to the health sector in Northern Ireland. Capita says the deal will allow health trusts to take advantage of Microsoft Technologies and Cloud Computing.

75 D Shannon Stewart Director: Robert Gordon Pre-tax profit: £6.2m Turnover: £92.6m Employees: 844 Pay bill: £16.4m 74 Scarva Road Banbridge BT32 3QD Tel: 028 4066 9000 [*www.gordonsdirect.com*](http://www.gordonsdirect.com)

Shannon Stewart is the registered company name of Gordons Chemist.

D

Gordons Chemists was establish in 1980 by brothers Neil and Robert Gordon. It is Northern Ireland's largest, independently owned pharmacy chain, with 54 stores in the province and nine in Scotland.

Providing a wide range of professional healthcare services along with an extensive selection of health and beauty products, Gordons Chemists says it prides itself on delivering friendly, efficient and highly professional services. It also has an online store [*www.gordonsdirect.com*](http://www.gordonsdirect.com) which serves the UK market from its head office in Banbridge.

The company says that its continued success "is a testament to the dedication, resilience and perseverance of the staffwho throughout the challenges faced due to the pandemic, continued to provide a high standard of healthcare advice and support to their local communities".

76 Lagan Homes Group Chairman: Kevin Lagan Pre-tax profit: £6.2m Turnover: £95m Employees: 86 Pay bill: £3.2m 19 Clarendon Road Belfast BT1 3BG Tel: 028 9026 1000 [*www.laganhomes.com*](http://www.laganhomes.com)

agan Homes Group's pre-tax profits almost doubled to £6.2m in 2020, with turnover rising by 23% to £95m.

L

The firm continues to grow its footprint with land bank acquisitions across Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland and the English Midlands. Funded by the £455m sale of his construction materials group to Breedon plc in April 2018, owner Kevin Lagan and the family investment vehicle embarked on a growth strategy that involves expanding the firm's Northern Irish and English divisions and launching a new Irish business to cater for the Dublin commuter belt.

Mr Lagan said: "While there are some challenges ahead, including planning ***process*** delays, the effects of Covid-19 and supply chain issues, we remain focused on consistent, quality delivery on our commitments to our customers, suppliers and, of course, to our key resource, our people."

77 Nicholl Fuel Oils Managing director: Hugh Nicholl Pre-tax profit: £6m Turnover: £278.6m Employees: 248 Pay bill: £6.4m 176 Clooney Road Londonderry BT47 3DY Tel: 0800 022 4422 [*www.nicholloils.com*](http://www.nicholloils.com)

N

icholl Oils has grown to become Northern Ireland's largest independent oil distributor. The family-run business supplies products including heating oil, red diesel for tractors and lubricants for the garage.

Over the year to May 2020, pre-tax profit increased almost three-fold though group turnover had fallen by 20%.

It said that the improvements in profit "can be attributed to organic growth and consumer reaction to the uncertainty arising from the Covid-19 pandemic and the related restrictions". It adds that its financial position had remained resilient despite the restrictions.

A strategic report filed with the accounts adds: "The fuel market continues to be extremely price-competitive due to the movement in base oil prices which leads to varying working capital requirements and increased risk of exposure with trade customers".

78 McCloskey International President: Paschal McCloskey Pre-tax profit: £6m Turnover: £91.4m Employees: 357 Pay bill: £13.9m 47 Moor Road Coalisland BT71 4QB Tel: 028 8774 0926 [*www.mccloskeyinternational.com*](http://www.mccloskeyinternational.com)

M

cCloskey International leads the screening, crushing and washing system industry with a complete line of equipment including crushers, screeners, trommels and stacking conveyors. Its equipment is in a wide range of industries including aggregates, landscaping, infrastructure and road building, construction and demolition, mining, waste management and recycling.

The business was established in Canada in 1985 by Paschal McCloskey. Its head office in Ontario, Canada is an advanced and highly capable 410,000 square foot production plant.

It describes its site on Moor Road in Coalisland as a secondary facility and "the world's premier crusher and screener engineering office".

McCloskey International says the facilities make it one of the largest manufacturers of portable screening and crushing equipment in the world. It is part of Metso Outotec Corporation.

79 PJ Conway Contractor Chief executive: PJ Conway Pre-tax profit: £6m Turnover: £18.3m Employees: 607 Pay bill: £10.5m 58 Moneymore Road Magherafelt BT45 6HG Tel: 028 7963 2001 [*www.conwaygroup.com*](http://www.conwaygroup.com)

C

onway Group was set up in 1974 by its chief executive, PJ Conway. The business says that its growth has been steady since then, and that it's diversified into a multi-disciplined organisation, specialising in property development, investment, asset management, construction and Healthcare.

It is headquartered in Magherafelt and has over 700 staffacross group businesses and associated companies.

Conway Group says that it has "a progressive, forward-thinking approach to business development, diversification and expansion along with an impressive track record of successfully delivering major projects that redefine the benchmark for quality".

Its commercial and residential investment properties include the Centrepoint office building in Belfast and the Brackenvale Retail Complex outside the city.

80 UTV Head of news and programmes: Simon Clemison Pre-tax profit: £6m Turnover: £26.9m Employees: 87 Pay bill: £4.8m City Quays 2 Belfast BT1 3YD Tel: 028 9026 2000 [*www.u.tv*](http://www.u.tv)

UTV is based in Belfast and holds the Channel 3 public service broadcast licence for Northern Ireland. Its company results for 2019 - the last period for which accounts are available - show a jump in pre-tax profit from £3.5m to just under £6m.

However, revenue was down from £27.7m to £26.9, which its company report said driven by lower total advertising revenue, with the decline in revenue reflecting decline in the spot advertising market. But a share of viewing of 18.99% was up by 0.16 percentage points on the previous year.

It commented that daytime shows like Loose Women and The Chase grew their audiences year on year. And while Coronation Street and Emmerdale maintained their position as number one soaps, viewing figures were "marginally" down year on year after big storylines in 2018.

UTV first went on air in 1959 as part of the ITV Network.

81 McLaughlin & Harvey Managing director: Philip Cheevers Pre-tax profits: £5.9m Turnover: £480m Employees: 800 Pay bill: £49.5m 15 Trench Road Newtownabbey BT36 4TY Tel: 028 9034 2777 [*www.mclh.co.uk*](http://www.mclh.co.uk)

T

urnover at construction company McLaughlin & Harvey slipped 6% to £480m during 2020. But the company says that in the context of the challenges brought by Covid-19, it was another successful year for the Newtownabbey-based business.

Although Covid-19 restrictions meant many sites had to close, it was able to keep sites open and facilitate important work at critical NHS units and key infrastructure sites.

When restrictions were lifted work continued at Buchanan Wharf in Glasgow, Old Bushmills Distillery, Alexander Stadium in Birmingham and the V&A Museum in London. Its civil engineering team has also been busy and a number of flood alleviation works have been progressing well. The company said: "Our order book remains very strong."

82 The Sycamore Avenue Company Director: Sean Coyle Pre-tax profit: £5.9m Turnover: £83.7m Employees: 758 Pay bill: £24m Unit 2 Ballyreagh Industrial Estate Cookstown Tyrone BT80 9DG Tel: 028 8676 2184 [*www.keystonelintels.com*](http://www.keystonelintels.com)

T

he Sycamore Avenue Company in Co Tyrone designs, makes and distributes building products. It's the parent company of Keystone Lintels, which specialises in steel lintels.

The company's sole director is Sean Coyle, also the founder and chairman of Keystone Lintels. He set the company after realising that steel lintels were a niche opportunity in the Irish market.

Mr Coyle initially worked in partnership with McAleer & Rushe, before setting up Keystone as an independent company.

Pre-tax profit of £5.86m for 2019 were up from £684,000 a year earlier. There were net assets of £37.5m, up from £33.3m, and staffcosts for its 458 employees were £24m. A strategic report filed with the accounts states Mr Coyle is confident that the current level of business community will be sustained in the future.

83 Conexpo Managing director: Jonathan McCluskey Pre-tax profit: £5.7m Turnover: £29m Staff: 43 Pay bill: £1.6m Port of Belfast Northern Road Belfast BT3 9AL Tel: 028 9075 5085 [*www.conexpo.co.uk*](http://www.conexpo.co.uk)

C

onexpo NI is a supplier of stone aggregates produced from company-owned and operated quarries, located in Northern Ireland. The main focus of its business is road repair and maintenance in England but it also serves some markets in western Europe.

The company operates a seven hectare terminal in the port of Belfast for loading and discharging vessels with aggregates, which are one of Northern Ireland's main export commodities.

According to Belfast Harbour's annual report, Conexpo exported more than 1m tonnes of aggregates during 2020. Conexpo's quarries are located within a 15km radius of the Port of Belfast terminal. It operates vehicles under its own stevedoring license and can load vessels at up to 1,000 tones per hour. It also operates a distribution hub at Avonmouth Docks, Bristol.

84 CDE Group Holdings Chief executive: Marc Jennings Pre-tax profit: £5.7m Turnover: £46.9m Employees: 401 Pay bill: £10.9m Sandholes Road Cookstown BT80 9HJ Tel: 028 8676 7900 [*www.cdeglobal.com*](http://www.cdeglobal.com)

C

DE has been at the forefront of the materials ***processing*** industry for 30 years, designing and engineering advanced wet ***processing*** solutions for the waste recycling and natural materials ***processing*** sectors.

Its aim is to turn waste into the third most used natural resource in the world after air and water - sand and aggregate. CDE says it continues to invest millions in its Cookstown headquarters and Monkstown site. Its products span the globe from Tyrone to Brazil and Australia to the US.

It says it's "leading the global effort in advancing the circular economy by empowering customers to transform waste streams into valuable resources". It has delivered 2,000 projects for the construction, demolition and excavation waste recycling (CD&E), sand and aggregates, mining, industrial sands and environmental sectors.

85 Agricolor Group chief executive: Trevor Lockhart Pre-tax profit: £5.7m Turnover: £141m Employees: 340 Pay bill: £10m Glenavy Road Craigavon BT67 0LT Tel: 028 9261 9620 [*www.fanevalleystores.com*](http://www.fanevalleystores.com)

A

gricolor is a wholly owned subsidiary of Fane Valley Co-operative Society, the Moira-based farmer-owned co-operative. It includes the trading activities of Fane Valley's agri-business division which sells animal feed, farm supplies and an expanding range of technical services to the ***agricultural*** community.

Agricolor incorporates Fane Valley Feeds in Omagh and Newry and Smyths Daleside in Ballindrait, Co Donegal. Together the businesses manufacture 450,000 tonnes annually of animal feedstuffs.

The company said that the macro environment for the agri-food sector was positive. Challenges with global logistics and Covid resulted in lower levels of imports to the UK which boosted demand and returns for local food products.

Fane Valley Group chief Trevor Lockhart said: "Our business continues to grow through investment in our people and products and facilities."

86 Kilmona Group Managing director: Paddy Kearney Pre-tax profit: £5.6m Turnover: £18m Employees: 372 Pay bill: £4m Bedford House 16-22 Bedford Street, Belfast BT2 7FD Tel: 028 9089 1444 [*www.kilmonaholdings.com*](http://www.kilmonaholdings.com)

K

ilmona Holdings is a property investment and property development group, based in Belfast, operating in the retail, office, industrial, leisure and residential property sectors.

Kilmona is supported by CausewayAsset Management, which describes itself as "a multi-disciplinary commercial and residential property investment and asset management company".

In recent months it has acquired 200-acre hotel and golf resort at the Hilton Templepatrick. The venue will also be rebranded as a Doubletree by Hilton, one of the premium brands in the Hilton stable.

Assets include the former CarryduffShopping Centre in Co Down. In Belfast , it also owns Nine Lanyon Place, where the Department of Finance rents 150,000 sq ft of Grade A office space and city centre hotel Ten Square. Outside Belfast it owns Chimney Corner Hotel in Newtownabbey and the Loughshore Hotel, in Carrickfergus.

87 Macnaughton Blair Chief executive: Peter Kearney Pre-tax profit: £5.5m Turnover: £75m Employees: 380 Pay bill: £11.9m

10 Falcon Road Belfast BT12 6RD Tel : 028 9038 5363 [*www.macblair.com*](http://www.macblair.com)

M

acnaughton Blair is one of the leading builders merchants in Northern Ireland supplying to both the construction and DIY markets.

In 2016 the company undertook a major rebrand and now trades under three main brands - Macblair for building materials, Watershed for bathrooms and Tiles and Doorways for specialist doors and ironmongery.

The company was formed in 1973 as a result of a merger between Norman Macnaughton & Son's Ltd and Joseph Blair Ltd before being subsequently acquired by Irish giant Grafton Group plc in 1989.

Since then the company has grown both organically and through acquisition, now having 16 branches in NI and one in the Isle of Man. Other brands owned by Grafton Group plc include Woodie's DIY and Garden Centres, Chadwicks, Lloyd Worrall and The Timber Group.

88 Germinal Holdings Managing director: William Gilbert Pre-tax profit: £5.4m Turnover: £29.5m Employees: 80 Pay bill: £5m 1 Clarence Street Belfast BT2 8DX Tel: 028 4066 2277 [*www.germinalni.com*](http://www.germinalni.com)

G

erminal is a sixth-generation family-owned grass and forage seed specialist. The business recently moved its headquarters to a new location in Belfast's Linen Quarter from its previous base in Banbridge.

Germinal also has offices in Great Britain, Republic of Ireland and New Zealand.

The company supports farmers and amenity customers in all markets through its commitment to research and development resulting in a constant pipeline of innovative products.

The business says that it's an exciting time with a growing focus on sustainability. Its plant breeding and management innovations are helping its customers improve soils, enhance biodiversity, increase climate resilience and reduce the requirements for inputs.

The move back into Belfast, its original home from 1825, is enabling the company to strengthen its digital capabilities, the company said.

89 Kilwaughter Holdings Chief executive: Gary Wilmot Pre-tax profit: £5.4m Turnover: £38.5m Employees: 204 Pay bill: £7.7m 9 Starbog Road Larne BT40 2TJ Tel: 028 2826 2144 [*www.kilwaughter.com*](http://www.kilwaughter.com)

K

ilwaughter Minerals Ltd works across the ***agriculture*** and construction industries in UK & Ireland under its market brands K Rend, K Systems and Kilwaughter Lime.

The company has grown organically and through acquisition and are building for the future with innovative solutions to inspire and transform markets along with ***exceptional*** customer service.

They have a 75 acre manufacturing facility and head office in Kilwaughter with office and distribution facilities in St Helens, Glasgow and Cork.

The company has said there has been ***unprecedented*** demand for its products, including colour renders, external wall insulation systems and soil health conditioning minerals, as the economy rebounds following the pandemic.

It recently hired three PhD scientists, boosting its R&D team by 50% as part of a long term £3.4m strategic investment in innovation.

90 P&O Ferrymasters MD: Peter Hebblethwaite Pre-tax profit: £5.1m Turnover: £458m Employees: 393 Pay bill: £17.8m Larne Harbour Larne BT40 1AX Tel: 01304 448888 [*www.poferries.com*](http://www.poferries.com)

P

&O Ferries says it's proud to be among the leading ferry providers on the Irish Sea. The rapid Larne to Cairnryan route includes two of the company's fastest 21,000-ton freight ships, The European Causeway and its younger sister, the European Highlander. Taking just two hours, the crossing is the quickest and most efficient way to ship freight to and from Scotland.

Up to 88 weekly crossings deliver the most frequent service on the Irish Sea, with existing capacity for expansion to 92 sailings.

Improvements have been made to vessels including a fully refurbished driver restaurant and a new carvery station.

P&O adds: "Amidst regulatory change and political uncertainties, we are uniquely positioned to use our deep sector knowledge in support of customers operating on the Irish Sea, helping them to navigate supply chain challenges, drive efficiency and eliminate waste."

91 Walter Watson Managing director: Walter Watson Pre-tax profit: £5m Turnover: £52m Employees: 230 Pay bill: £7.9m Ballylough Road Castlewellan BT31 9JQ Tel: 028 4377 8711 [*www.walter-watson.co.uk*](http://www.walter-watson.co.uk)

O

perating from manufacturing facilities in Castlewellan, with a distribution depot in Kilmarnock and a regional office in Kildare, Walter Watson Ltd has grown into an industry leader in five market sectors. The firm specialises in structural steel fabrication, reinforcement steel fabrication, steel stockholding, overhead crane systems and ***agricultural*** machinery.

Current and recently-completed projects include Lidl's regional distribution centre in Mullingar, Exeter Logistics Park, Meadowbank Arena in Edinburgh, Allander Leisure Centre in Glasgow, City Quays 3, Belfast, Viking Energy Wind Farms in the Shetland Islands and Queen's University's Students Union.

Its cranes division designs and manufactures overhead travelling cranes and has maintained steady business growth during challenging market conditions. The group now employs over 250 people across its five divisions.

92 Fane Valley Stores Group chief executive: Trevor Lockhart Pre-tax profit: £5m Turnover: £116m Employees: 352 Pay bill: £7.4m Glenavy Road Craigavon BT67 0LT Tel: 028 9261 9620 [*www.fanevalleystores.com*](http://www.fanevalleystores.com)

F

ane Valley Stores is a subsidiary of Fane Valley Co-operative Society and Northern Ireland's leading ***agricultural*** retailer. It has experienced rapid growth following acquisitions over the past five years, most recently when it acquired the ***agricultural*** merchant business of Francis Connon near Ballymena in 2020.

Fane Valley Stores has 17 stores across Northern Ireland selling ***agricultural***, animal health, garden, and companion animal products. It is investing in its store network. A new store in Armagh and a renovated store in Portadown are both scheduled to open before Christmas.

Group chief executive Trevor Lockhart said: "Despite the challenges posed by Brexit and Covid-19 the business recorded sales and profit growth in 2020. This has continued into 2021 which we feel reflects the positive customer response to the investments and improvements being made across our store network."

93 Savage & Whitten Holdings Managing director: Michael Skelton Pre-tax profit: £5m Turnover: £126m Employees: 242 Pay bil: £8.5m 7 Springhill Road Carnbane Industrial Estate Newry BT35 6EF Tel: 028 3083 5976 [*www.savageandwhitten.com*](http://www.savageandwhitten.com)

S

&W Wholesale in Newry is one of the largest independent wholesalers in Ireland. Its history dates back to 1916 with the establishment of Newry Cash and Carry.

Newry Cash and Carry then merged with J&E Whitten in 2000 to become Savage and Whitten, or S&W.

The company offers more than 5,000 stocked products covering all categories: ambient, chilled and fresh & frozen. There are also 4,000 lines available via central billing (direct shipment).

S&W services over 2,500 customers within the market throughout Ireland using tri-temp distribution vehicles from their combined warehouse space of over 100,000 sq ft.

The business says that it's committed to driving its footprint in the local community, with plans to further build on its 250+ strong workforce and to work with local organisations in making a positive difference in the community.

94 Kingspan Water and Energy Managing director: Pat Freeman Pre-tax profit: £4.8m Turnover: £91.5m Employees: 718 Pay bill: £28.7m 180 Gilford Road Portadown BT63 5LE Tel: 028 3836 4400 [*www.kingspan.com*](http://www.kingspan.com)

K

ingspan Water & Energy is a global market leader in sustainable water and energy solutions for buildings. Part of the Kingspan Group plc, Kingspan Water & Energy has presence in over 40 countries worldwide, with its global headquarters in Co Armagh.

It creates sustainable solutions for sourcing, storing and protecting water and energy, supporting homes and businesses across the world.

Kingspan Water & Energy business helps building owners to sustainably manage water as a resource and says it can help to protect local communities through reducing flood risk and the risk of polluted run-offto waterways.

The company is also a market-leading manufacturer of energy management solutions and says it delivers first class customer service to distributors, installers and commercial and domestic end users. It has developed Planet Passionate, a 10-year global sustainability strategy.

95 Cooneen by Design Director: John B McGuckian Pre-tax profit: £4.7m Turnover: £70.4m Employees: 218 Pay bill: £7.6m 23 Cooneen Road Fivemiletown BT75 0NE Tel: 028 8952 1401 [*www.cooneengroup.com*](http://www.cooneengroup.com)

C

o Tyrone textile firm Cooneen By Design, whose directors include Northern Ireland industrialist John B McGuckian, reported a slight fall in pre-tax profits to £4.7m from £5m, although revenues increased from £70.2m to £70.4m.

The company added 27 staff, leaving its workforce at 218. The firm's products range from military clothing to work uniforms and childrenswear. Since the Covid-19 pandemic, it has diversified into PPE. It has supplied corporate face coverings to customers including UK bus operator Stagecoach.

Cooneen by Design's IT team was recognised at the 2021 Belfast Telegraph IT Awards, and was shortlisted in the categories of Best Place to Work in IT, IT Professional of the Year and Small IT team of the year. It was highly commended in the categories of Best Place to Work and Small IT Team of the Year.

96 Armstrong Medical Managing director: Jeremy Eakin Pre-tax profits: £4.7m Turnover: £19m Employees: 210 Pay bill: £5.3m Wattstown Business Park Coleraine BT52 1BS Tel: 028 7035 6029 [*www.armstrongmedical.net*](http://www.armstrongmedical.net)

A

rmstrong Medical, based in Coleraine, manufactures specialist medical devices. Its range includes respiratory critical care products which help very ill patients to breathe, as well as products used in anaesthesia.

The business has developed ranges of high quality niche products all designed to allow clinicians to provide the best possible care to their patients. Armstrong Medical has said it is building a strong reputation in both domestic and global markets. International sales account for approximately two-thirds of the company's turnover. In 2020 Armstrong Medical became part of the Eakin Healthcare Group.

Earlier this year the company launched its therapy-enhancing heated ventilator circuits at medical conference MEDICA 2021.The breathing circuits, used in critical care settings for life-support mechanical ventilation, have been designed to manage humidity within the breathing circuit.

97 SISK Healthcare Managing director: Mark Reid Pre-tax profit: £4.7m Turnover: £34.9m Employees: 57 Pay bill: £4m 6 Wildflower Way Boucher Road Belfast BT12 6TA Tel: 028 9066 9000 [*www.siskhealthcare.com*](http://www.siskhealthcare.com)

C

ardiac Services Group, now a company registered in Northern Ireland as SISK Healthcare, was founded in Belfast in 1969 and is at the forefront of supplying and supporting diagnostic and measurement equipment in Ireland and the UK.

It was formed by Tom Beare and Jim Brown and initially traded from the Antrim Road, Belfast before moving to the Lisburn Road in 1974.

The business relocated to Wildflower Way in 2007, where the premises now feature an endoscopy workshop for the service and repair of flexible endoscopes. Cardiac Services became part of the SISK Group in 2006 and operates under the umbrella structure of SISK Healthcare.

SISK Healthcare is one of the largest privately owned medical device distributors with 380 staffacross 15 markets. It also includes MED Surgical, Tekno Surgical, Synapse Medical, Macromed, EPS Vascular, Angiocare and M3 Medical.

98 Whitemountain Quarries Managing director: Aidan Mullan Pre-tax profit: £4.6m Turnover: £77.7m Employees: 245 Pay bill: £10.7m

11B Sheepwalk Road Lisburn Tel: 028 9250 1000 [*www.whitemountain.co.uk*](http://www.whitemountain.co.uk)

W

hitemountain Quarries Ltd was acquired by the East Midlands-based Breedon Group in April 2018. It was part of a £455m deal, which included most of Kevin Lagan's former construction businesses. However, Mr Lagan retained the Lagan Homes Group.

During 2020, turnover at the company fell from £91.5m to £77.7m. Pre-tax profit fell by 50% from £9.3m to £4.6m.

In its company accounts, Whitemountain Quarries comments that 2020 had been a challenging year, with Covid-19 lockdowns leading it to halt operations temporarily at its sites.

However, volumes gradually returned to 2019 levels in the second half of the year, with the company able to deliver what it said was a "pleasing" result despite the challenging backdrop. And it continued with the planned replacement of its transport fleet and key contracting equipment.

99 M Keys Director: Malcolm Keys Pre-tax profit: £4.6m Turnover: £37.5m Employees: 124 Pay bill: £3.6m 22 Annagh Road Clogher BT76 0UX Tel: 028 8554 886 [*www.mkeystransport.com*](http://www.mkeystransport.com)

T

he group of companies owned by the Keys family, registered in Fivemiletown, carries out pig farming and logistics operations. M Keys Transport started out providing transport for the farm business before developing into a fully-fledged transport company specialising in livestock, bulk feeds and bulk liquid transport.

The fleet operates mainly throughout Ireland and the UK, with a European livestock haulage service. During 2020, pre-tax profit increased four-fold at the family business, growing from £1.2m to £4.5m. There was also a healthy rise in revenue, which went from £29m to £37.4m.

The company says in its results that it hasn't seen any downturn in sales as a result of the pandemic. It adds that it did see an increase in production costs at the outset of the pandemic but that it had since entered into a fixed price agreement with its supplier, which mitigated the risks of future price increases.

100 Huhtamaki, Lurgan General manager: Richard Smith Pre-tax profit: £4.5m Turnover: £39m Employees: 264 Pay bill: £9.4m 41 Inn Road Dollingstown Lurgan BT66 7JN TelL 028 3832 7711 [*www.huhtamaki.com*](http://www.huhtamaki.com)

H

uhtamaki Lurgan is the largest user of recycled paper in Northern Ireland converting old newspapers and printing offcuts into egg cartons, egg trays and cup carriers for the food service sector. The Lurgan operation, which employs 264 people, has been making moulded fibre products for over 70 years, and has completed a £6m new line which increased output by 25%.

The plant focuses on egg cartons and egg trays made from molded fiber. It also makes fruit trays, other fresh produce packaging, cup carriers and wine bottle separators.

The company also works with the group's research and development (R&D) team to develop other products from recycled paper to meet the consumer needs for alternatives to plastic packaging. One interesting example is the use of grass in egg cartons which are in use at supermarket giant Waitrose.

COMPANIES ON THE TOP 100 EMPLOY MORE THAN 76,000 WORKERS AND HAVE GENERATED SOME £18.6BN IN TURNOVER

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**Body**

Zagreb,Hrvatska27 September 2021 (Hina) - SOA: Pandemic has spurred rise in extremism, radicalism ZAGREB, 27 Sept (Hina) - In its report for 2020-21, the Security and Intelligence Agency (SOA) says Croatia is a secure and stable democracy, but warns about rising extremism and radicalism due to the COVID-19 pandemic. We are witnessing the biggest pandemic in modern history which has caused ***unprecedented*** disruptions to everyday life and enormous damage to the global economy, SOA director Daniel Markic says in the introduction. The pandemic has additionally increased extremism and radicalism, notably due to disinformation and conspiracy theories concerning Europe's response to the crisis and the effectiveness of democratic and liberal political and social systems, SOA's seventh report says. Despite 20 years of international efforts in bringing democracy to the local society, the Taliban have taken power in Afghanistan. SOA also monitored the increasing world dominance of geopolitical reshufflings and competitions as well as the strengthening of the economic, political and value challengers to liberal democracies in the international order.

Climate change is increasingly showing its consequences, the report says. Non-Western actors active in southeastern neighbourhood It indicates that non-Western actors are active in Croatia's southeastern neighbourhood and that reforms aimed at reaching European standards are slow. The Western Balkans is still burdened by unfinished stabilisation ***processes*** and unsolved inter-state and inter-ethnic issues as well as difficulties in achieving European integration due to insufficient reforms. Unfavourable political and economic conditions facilitate the strengthening of radical and extreme tendencies as well as rifts within fragile societies, and social and inter-ethnic tensions may lead to incidents, notably in communities with unsolved inter-ethnic relations. Bosnia and Herzegovina is still politically unstable, primarily due to the different views its constituent peoples have on the country's future constitutional and legal system. Failure to reach a Serbian-Albanian agreement on Kosovo continues to contribute to instability in the region, and the social rift in Montenegro, where anti-NATO, pro-Serb and pro-Russian parties have significant political power in relation to sovereignist, pro-Western forces, is causing particular uncertainty in the Western Balkans. Promotion of "Serbian world" additionally destabilises delicate relations In the regional context, some state officials in Serbia are promoting the concept of a "Serbian world" as a single Serbian political people and a single political and state union of all Serbs in Southeast Europe in which all Serbs should follow one political direction, that of Serbia. The promotion of such ideas by Serbia's top officials is additionally destabilising the delicate inter-ethnic and inter-state relations in Southeast Europe, notably in regards to BiH and Montenegro. Organised crime in this part of Europe is additionally bolstered by the proliferation of illegal activities, while hotspots like Syria and Libya continue to represent sources of instability and threats. Cyber technologies have facilitated large-scale cyber attacks aimed at stealing state and industry data, while illegal migration has increased enormously in Southeast Europe, with hundreds of thousands of migrants passing through. Croatia target of dozens of state-sponsored cyber attack in recent years SOA warns that state-sponsored cyber attacks are becoming increasingly common in espionage. Those attacks are aimed at carefully selected targets which have been well studied in advance, and they are carried out by state-sponsored APT (Advanced Persistent Threat) groups which are closely linked to the security and intelligence systems of individual countries. Such cyber attacks are primarily aimed at EU and NATO member states. In recent years, Croatia has been the target of dozens of state-sponsored cyber attacks. The largest number of them were attempts to break into the information and communication systems of the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs and the Ministry of Defence. SOA concludes that cyber resilience is becoming a key to national security in the digital era. The past period was also marked by the creation, rapid expansion and territorial defeat of Islamic State, the largest terrorist organisation in the world, and the agency has also been monitoring how the spread of democratic values in the world has been replaced by authoritarian tendencies with the return of Cold War tensions, espionage, and the spreading of fake news and propaganda. There are currently no identified direct terrorist threats to Croatian institutions, citizens or interest from terrorist groups, and the threat of organised attacks by terrorist groups is still low, but the possibility of a terrorist attack (primarily by independent attackers) can never be ruled out. Although ISIL and Al Qaida have been significantly weakened and their capacities to carry out external operations and attacks have been reduced, they remain a threat to Europe. In EU member states, the level of threat from Islamist terrorism varies from low in Central and Eastern European countries to medium or high in most Western European countries. Many steps forward in security sphere Since its first public report, SOA has also followed a number of developments in the security sphere. EU and NATO membership has allowed us to multiply our capabilities and strengthen our security mechanisms and links to other democratic security and intelligence systems; European countries are getting closer to confronting common security threats; Croatian society and institutions have confirmed their stability and efficiency in many crisis situations, the report says. In addition to that, new infrastructure projects have strengthened energy and national security, SOA says, noting that they are building a new generation of employees through public calls. All those changes show that security dynamics in the modern world are extremely fast and often unpredictable, new and non-traditional security threats are emerging, and the role of timely and accurate information and assessments is becoming crucial, SOA says. The report, published on the SOA website, also stresses that there is no indication of significant destabilisation for Croatia, even at such a challenging time and in such a dynamic security environment. Plenkovic: Croatia is a safe country ZAGREB, 27 Sept (Hina) - Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic said on Monday that Croatia is a safe country and that his government "is keeping its eyes open" to what is going on in the neighbourhood. "Croatia is, as we said a year and three months ago, a safe country. "That's the most important thing and it has a bearing on our international position to the largest extent possible," Plenkovic said after a meeting of the leadership of his Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) party. He was asked by the press to comment on the annual report by the Security and Intelligence Agency (SOA), which cited risks of growing Serbian extremism, radicalism and increasingly frequent cyber attacks. He stressed the importance of the issue of the relationship with the Serb minority being dealt with in Croatia, in a spirit of tolerance, inclusion and co-existence. He said that his government is also taking care of the rights of the Croats in Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and elsewhere. Speaking of terrorist threats and cyber attacks, Plenkovic said that these are global phenomena that affect all countries. "We remain vigilant and are still in a position to strengthen our security and intelligence system and the capabilities of the Croatian military and police in the context of our entry into the Schengen area. The procurement of multi-purpose fighter jets is under way and they will be in Croatia in 2024." Plenkovic noted that his government had upgraded the homeland security system and increased the protection of national interests. Asked about growing tension in Kosovo and Montenegro and Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic's ultimatum to NATO, Plenkovic appealed for common sense and de-escalation on the Serbia-Kosovo border. He stressed that Croatia's messages were always aimed at defusing tensions there. Asked whether Croatia can be satisfied with this year's tourist season, Plenkovic said that this is the assessment by all stakeholders. He added that fiscalisation data for this year show that the value of fiscalised receipts for this month reached 90 per cent of the value of fiscalised receipts for September 2019. He said that revenues per visitor will be higher because spending was higher. Asked about an initiative by the Solidarna Foundation to declare a day for the prevention of violence against children, the prime minister condemned the crime that happened in Zagreb this weekend, when a father killed his three underage children, extending his condolences to the mother and other family members. He said that social services had not intervened previously because there were no indications that anything was wrong with this family. He said that the case would be investigated and that all initiatives regarding this tragedy would be considered. Plenkovic announced a major reform of social services, saying that several bills will soon be put to public consultation. Plenkovic expressed satisfaction with the results of a recent public opinion survey which revealed that his HDZ party enjoyed the support of 30.8 percent of those interviewed. He said that this was strong support and an obligation for his government to continue its work. He said that the HDZ leadership also discussed the election results in Germany, adding that they expect the very good relations between Germany and Croatia to continue. Minister: No major incidents of extremism or radicalism recorded last year ZAGREB, 27 Sept (Hina) - Commenting on the annual report by the SOA intelligence agency, Interior Minister Davor Bozinovic said on Monday that the Interior Ministry had not registered any hacker attacks against the ministry's IT infrastructure. The minister said that the authorities had not detected any attempts on a large scale by Serbian extremists or Islamic radicals. "It is a fact that in public discourse there have been certain messages in that regard and that sometimes they are directed against Croatia. However, they have no foothold in Croatia, and as a result no such cases have been detected, particularly not on a large scale," Bozinovic said, underscoring that the ministry would continue to take preventive steps and promptly respond in any such cases. Commenting on the current COVID-19 situation, he said that in the past week the new numbers had not risen in comparison to the week before that. "The number of new cases can either rise or fall, and we hope that the latter will happen." The government has procured enough doses of vaccines for all Croatian citizens, and the minister called on citizens to get vaccinated. The higher vaccination rate, the faster we can go back to normal, he said. Commenting on the outcome of the German election, the Croatian minister said that the winners were pro-European parties. All of them are for a stronger Europe, advocating green technology and digitalisation, which is also on the Croatian government's agenda, Bozinovic said, adding that he is confident that Zagreb will cooperate well with the next German government, too. According to initial results, the SPD led by Olaf Scholz narrowly beat the CDU/CSU. The Social Democrat won 25.7 % and CDU/CSU led by Armin Laschet 24.1 % of the vote. The Grune follows at 14.8% and the FDP at 11.5 %. President: Croatia can be calm but should't cut defence outlays ZAGREB, 27 Sept (Hina) - Croatia governs from the Prevlaka peninsula in the south to Savudrija Bay in the north, which is a great responsibility and obligation that costs, and that's why the defence budget should remain at the pre-pandemic level, President Zoran Milanovic said at a Navy Day celebration in Split on Monday. "Croatia can be calmer more than ever," the president, who also serves as the country's commander in chief of the armed forces, said and added that for the first time in its history the Croatia political community governs the Adriatic coastal stretching between Prevlaka and Savudrija Bay. "This is a great responsibility and obligation" Milanovic said Therefore it is necessary to invest into the armed forces and not to reduce defence outlays. The defence budget should be kept at the pre-crisis level, or we will not be able to maintain all that we are procuring, he said, adding that all the equipment needs backup. Commenting on the latest report by the SOA intelligence agency, which warned about cyber and other security threats, Milanovic commented on developments in the neighbourhood, with Serbia "prating on about the Serbian world" and growing tensions between Serbia and Kosovo, as well as tensions in Montenegro" where a part of the political milieu behaves as if Belgrade is their capital city." We have an unresolved situation in the region, there is the government in Belgrade that "is prating on about the Serbian World," Milanovic said and corroborated his arguments with some statistics from the past. For instance, in 1900 the city of Subotica, in the northern Serbian province of Vojvodina, had 100,000 inhabitants and at that time, Split was inhabited by 15,000 people and Zagreb by 60,000 people. Of the 100,000 residents in Subotica, over 50% were Croats, Milanovic said, adding that obviously at the time Subotica was the biggest Croatian city. Milanovic posed a rhetorical question whether it could mean that Subotica belongs "to a Croatian world" alluding to theses of Serbia's leadership about a Serbian world. "I call on the Croats living outside Croatia to be on good terms with their neighbours, foster their tradition and their identity and be aware that they live in Serbia," Milanovic said in this context. As for the tensions in Kosovo, Milanovic said that Kosovo's authorities had now taken a reciprocal ***measure*** after Serbia had been barring cars with Kosovo licence plates from passing through its territory for 20 years. Serbs in the north of Kosovo have been blocking the roads near the border crossings with Serbia after authorities in Pristina barred cars with Serbian licence plates from coming into Kosovo. "This is a row that has been going on for years," he said, adding that he could now also call for de-escalation as European diplomats have done for years without achieving anything regarding this issue. Milanovic does not expect any changes in German policy in respect of EU enlargement to include Western Balkan aspirants, after the end of the chancellorship of Angela Merkel. In that regard, Germany has done nothing in the last five years, he added. A summit meeting on EU enlargement and the Western Balkans will be held soon but the Croatian president does not expect any progress at that event in the light of the fact that the other biggest EU economy, France, is holding elections in 2022. Milanovic said that the situation in Montenegro was serious since a portion of its politicians and their followers were opposed to the country's independence. Commenting on the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Milanovic said that the Croats in Bosnia and Herzegovina see Sarajevo as their capital city and they want to be represented, as a constituent people, by a politician they elect, he added. Milanovic and the Croatian government call for amending Bosnia and Herzegovina's election legislation to prevent the Croats, the smallest constituent people in the country, from being outvoted. The current practice has resulted in the election of Zeljko Kosic as the Croat member of Bosnia's tripartite presidency due to ballots cast for him by Bosniak voters. Those causing problems for Croats do not understand how simple the solution is, Milanovic said. Milanovic: There won't be any major changes after 16 good years of Angela Merkel ZAGREB, 27 Sept (Hina) - President Zoran Milanovic believes that the outcome of the parliamentary election in Germany will not lead to any major changes in Europe or towards Croatia. "These are slim victories and slim results," Milanovic said commenting on the results of the election in Germany held on Sunday where the difference between the two leading parties is very slim, with the centre-left party slightly in the lead. According to the latest provisional results, the centre-left Social-Democratic Party (SPD) has won 26.0% of the vote, while outgoing Chancellor Angela Merkel's conservative CDU/CSU bloc has won 24.5%. Merkel is withdrawing after leading the county for the past 16 years. This isn't a great difference, said Milanovic, adding that a rearrangement has occurred. "Angela Merkel's 16 years have ended and those were a good 16 years," Milanovic said. It seems by all accounts that the now government will be formed by the Social-Democrats but "there won't be any major changes in German politics, towards Europe and towards Croatia," he said. Croatia reports 217 new coronavirus cases, 11 fatalities ZAGREB, 27 Sept (Hina) - In the past 24 hours 217 coronavirus cases and 11 related deaths have been confirmed in Croatia, the national COVID-19 crisis management team said on Monday. There are 7,145 active cases and 720 hospitalised patients, including 97 on ventilators, while 23,204 persons are self-isolating. Croatia has registered 400,108 coronavirus cases to date as well as 8,606 deaths and 384,357 recoveries, including 1,245 in the past 24 hours. To date 2,793,951 persons have been tested for the virus, including 3,016 in the past 24 hours, and 44.5% of the population has been vaccinated, including 53.39% of adults, of whom 50.15% fully. Brnjac: Tourist sector preparing for 2022 ZAGREB, 27 Sept (Hina) - On the occasion of World Tourism Day, marked on 27 September, Minister of Tourism and Sports Nikolina Brnjac said on Monday that she had met with the task group for the recovery and development of tourism and that apart from this season's good results, they also discussed preparations for the next tourism season. "World Tourism Day is an opportunity to reflect on this year's results but also on the people, without whom tourism would be nothing. Hence, congratulations to everyone in the sector for the good results this year and on their day," Minister Brnajc said. She underscored that the topic of this year's World Tourism Day, Tourism for inclusive Growth, means including young and vulnerable groups in tourism, keeping jobs and employment, the community's sustainability and the like. Considering that since spring this year, Croatia had been actively involved in the activities of the UN World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) regarding sustainability, it will have an opportunity to participate in creating a global direction for the sustainable development of tourism, she said. "We expect investments in tourism to continue. The sector is already now preparing for the next 2022, and we are hoping for the best," she said. Brnjac said that in September Croatia's tourism had surpassed 70% of the overall turnover in 2019 and the positive fiscal trends in September were encouraging. She announced that October would be Croatia's tourism month. Fiscal Policy Commission calls for stronger consolidation of public finance ZAGREB, 27 Sept (Hina) - Croatia's Fiscal Policy Commission has called on the government to use the expected recovery and the lifting of coronavirus-related restrictions next year to ensure stronger consolidation of public finance and full application of fiscal rules as of 2023. The commission met on 21 September to discuss a proposed report on the execution of the state budget in the first half of 2021, guidelines for the preparation of a 2022 budget and budget projections for 2023 and 2024. The commission said in a statement on Monday that the trends observed this year indicated a faster than expected recovery driven by fiscal ***measures*** aimed at alleviating the consequences of the coronavirus pandemic. It called on the government to adjust its budget projections for 2022 to the latest trends and avoid ***measures*** with a lasting negative effect on public finance. It warned that in the circumstances of anticipated continued growth the Croatian economy might soon face limitations arising from the low potential growth rate, which should be increased through reform and investment. That is why already next year the expected recovery and the lifting of coronavirus crisis restrictions should be used for stronger consolidation of public finance and full application of fiscal rules as of 2023. As for the execution of the state budget in the first half of this year, the commission said that Croatia's economic activity was recovering fast and was expected to reach its pre-pandemic levels soon. S&P affirms Zagreb's rating, revises outlook to stable ZAGREB, 27 Sept (Hina) - Standard & Poor's has revised its outlook to stable from negative and affirmed its 'BB-' long-term issuer credit rating on Zagreb, estimating that the Croatian capital will benefit from the recovery of the national economy from the COVID crisis and budget consolidation. This reflects "the city's strained liquidity, moderately high tax-supported debt burden, and volatile policy environment. These weaknesses are partly mitigated by the support Zagreb will receive from the EU and the central government to rebuild infrastructure after earthquakes in 2020," the agency said. "We believe that the ongoing reconstruction of earthquake-devastated areas should not lead to significant funding gaps for the city," it added. Zagreb is dependent on EU support and has good cooperation with the government, S&P said, but noted that it "remains to be seen how the cooperation between the city administration and central government will develop over the next four years, especially because Zagreb is now ruled by parties which are in opposition role at the national level." The agency said it expected "a sound rebound of the national economy with real GDP expanding by 6.5% in 2021, which should create additional tax revenue for Zagreb." "We base the stable outlook on our expectation that Zagreb will continue to consolidate its budgetary performance with the help of increased revenue collection and a tight grip on expenditure," the agency said. Post-earthquake reconstruction will be long-term burden "Drawings on Zagreb's share in reconstruction costs after devastating earthquakes are very low so far, but will continue to weigh on the city's financial situation for years," it said, adding, "Although the city is likely to face fewer costs than initially thought, we continue to include in our assessment that Zagreb will have to cover some reconstruction costs, which will fall due over years, if not decades." According to S&P, "continued investment needs will continue to create pressures on Zagreb's budgetary performance." First positive steps "We note a policy shift in the city administration following municipal elections in spring 2021. The new mayor, supported by a two-party coalition with the majority of seats in the city council, initiated consolidation ***measures*** in summer 2021, including the merger of city departments and reduction in salaries," the agency said. "We view positively as first steps to consolidating city finances" the new management's "steps to increase the transparency of city financials and decisions" and to install new management boards at the main city companies, including Zagrebacki Holding. Unpredictable framework "The rating on the city also considers our view of the unpredictable institutional framework for Croatian local and regional governments...."The framework changes frequently, and the distribution of resources is unbalanced and insufficiently aligned to tasks delegated to municipalities. This is highlighted by Zagreb's accrued deficit, which reflects the funds the city expects to receive from the central government to compensate for delegated tasks." S&P also said that "multiple changes to the tax system make financial planning difficult, citing the example of "tax cuts at the central government level, aimed at supporting the local economy after the COVID-19 shock." Consolidation and support "We could lower the rating if, contrary to our expectation, the financial pressure on Zagreb and its companies would rise, for example if additional payables are accumulated and the cash holdings deteriorate. In addition, fading government support in channelling funds to the city to finance major investment projects could weigh on the rating," S&P said. "We see upward potential for the rating if Zagreb further reduces its contingent liabilities and increases transparency about the city's financial planning. In addition, an improving budgetary performance, further increased cash holdings, and the debt burden staying at current levels could provide uplift to the ratings," it added. Milanovic: Tacit overdrafts are a matter for government and parliament ZAGREB, 27 Sept (Hina) - President Zoran Milanovic said on Monday he was aware that many central banks were dealing with the problem of so-called "tacit overdrafts" of private current accounts, adding that this was also a political issue that should be addressed by the government and parliament. "It is nice that the Croatian National Bank is looking after consumers, but the Consumer Protection Act, which regulates situations like this, was passed by other authorities. The National Bank should primarily be dealing with the stability of banks, and this isn't affecting the stability of banks but the stability of people and families," Milanovic said in response to questions from the press in Split, where he was attending a ceremony marking Croatian Navy Day. Milanovic expressed hope that a solution would be found, because "if I could resolve the matter with loans denominated in the Swiss franc, this is a small matter." He said that the banks were in a different situation now than they had been ten years ago. "The banks are looking for their space, and they should be told what they can and can't do. If you let them have it their way, they will always take money from you. They will invent fees to charge you for getting out on the wrong side of the bed or the right side, or things like that," he said. Sovereignists to start collecting signatures for euro referendum on 24 Oct ZAGREB, 27 Sept (Hina) - Croatian Sovereignists will begin collecting signatures on 24 October for a referendum on Croatia's eurozone entry, claiming that the people must have their say on the renouncing of monetary sovereignty. Croatia's euro area entry is too important an issue on which only the Croatian people can decide in a referendum, the opposition party's MP Marijan Pavlicek told the press outside the Croatian National Bank. The party will be collecting signatures two weeks. Two months ago, Croatian Sovereignists launched the "Let's Protect the Croatian Kuna" initiative, which has been joined in the meantime by non-parliamentary parties: the Croatian Party of Rights, Independents for Croatia, the Renewal Generation and prominent individuals, Pavlicek said, confident that the initiative will receive even broader support. Croatian company wins UN award for ***agriculture*** innovation ZAGREB, 27 Sept (Hina) - Agrivi Farm Management Software, which has developed one of the most successful global ***agricultural*** production management apps, has won a UN award for ***agriculture*** innovation, the Croatian company said on Monday. In late July, Agrivi was one of the 27 finalists, out of 171 eligible solutions, for the 'Digital Excellence in ***Agriculture*** in Europe and Central Asia' award, which is given by the UN Food and ***Agriculture*** Organization. Agrivi won in the category "***Agriculture*** innovations systems and sustainable farming - connected farm management systems". The awards were presented virtually at the end of last week. Agrivi said its app was present in more than 100 countries worldwide, that it had offices in Zagreb, Warsaw, Bucharest and Vienna, and that last year it had received an award as the fastest growing food-tech company in Europe. Raffanelli on importance of Croatia chairing European Coast Guard Function Forum ZAGREB, 27 Sept (Hina) - On the occasion of Croatian Navy Day, which was celebrated in Split on Monday, Rear-Admiral Ivo Raffanelli underscored that chairing the European Coast Guard Forum from 1 July until the end of September 2022, is one of the most important tasks that the Croatian Navy has been assigned. "The purpose of the forum is to develop and coordinate international, interagency cooperation between EU member states and EU agencies with the aim of combating security challenges in the area of protecting the sea border, safety of navigation, search and rescue, protecting the marine environment, monitoring fishing and the fight against the smuggling of people, goods, weapons and drugs," Raffanelli said. He explained that the duty of the chairing country is to organise a plenary conference of three thematical workshops. "The Croatian Navy will have an ***exceptionally*** important role in that event. All the planning, organisation and preparations have been created and developed at the Navy level. The role it has been assigned will certainly contribute to promoting, positioning and strengthening the role of the Navy and of the Croatian Coast Guard, at the national and European level," said Raffanelli. Banozic: Navy defended Croatia's existence, history on its part of Adriatic ZAGREB, 27 Sept (Hina) - Defence Minister Mario Banozic on Monday congratulated Croatian Navy (HRM) personnel on its 30th anniversary, saying the HRM was created at a watershed time in 1991 when it was necessary to defend Croatia's existence on its part of the Adriatic as well as history and tradition. "On the 30th anniversary of the HRM, we remember with gratitude, in thought and in prayer, all those who contributed to our freedom with their lives," Banozic said, according to a ministry press release. He said that today the HRM was "protecting the Croatian Adriatic and defending national interests at sea," and urged its personnel to "strive for excellence, strengthen our Navy." The main ceremony marking the HRM's 30th anniversary will be held in Split later today, with President and Armed Forces Supreme Commander Zoran Milanovic, Banozic and Chief-Of-Staff Admiral Robert Hranj attending. President Milanovic decorates US Lieutenant General Jensen ZAGREB, 27 Sept (Hina) - Croatian President and Armed Forces' Supreme Commander, Zoran Milanovic, on Monday bestowed the order of Duke Trpimir with Neck Badge and Morning Star on US Lieutenant General Jon A. Jensen, who currently serves as the 22nd director of the Army National Guard. Jensen received this medal for his ***exceptional*** contribution to Croatia's international reputation and to developing bilateral relations between Croatia and the US, as well as the successful cooperation between the Croatian Armed Forces and the Minnesota National Guard. At the ceremony in Split on the occasion of Croatian Navy Day, Jensen said that it was an ***exceptional*** honour to accept this decoration. He said that when someone joins the army as a young man they can never be sure where the road will take them but that he is very glad that it was among his friends with whom he had the opportunity to cooperate. Dormitories at Police Academy refurbished with American donation ZAGREB, 27 Sept (Hina) - Interior Minister Davor Bozinovic and US Charg\xC3 d'Affaires Mark L. Fleming on Monday visited the Police Academy in Zagreb where 30 dormitories on the 2nd floor of the building were refurbished with an American donation. Minister Bozinovic thanked the US Embassy and US Command in Europe for the joint project which, he underscored, is proof of the excellent security cooperation between Croatia and the USA. "Cooperation is getting increasingly intensive and filled with new content and I thank our American partners for their cooperation, for our partnership and for the fact that we are working together and will continue to do, so that the world that we live in can be a better and safer place," said Bozinovic. Security cooperation between the USA and Croatia is the foundation stone of our relationship, said Fleming who, together with Bozinovic, unveiled a plaque commemorating Dan Chuck Lewis. Lewis, who passed away recently, was the head of the USAF Acquisition Management & Integration Center (AMIC), which made this project possible. The initiative to refurbish the Police Academy's premises with funding from US European Command (EUCOM) began in 2017, with the first tender advertised in September 2020 and awarded to the Technology Management Company, the Interior Ministry said. The project's value was $1.5 million, which was used to refurbish the 2nd floor and to partially equip and refurbish three lecture rooms at the Police Academy. Due to the March 2020 earthquake in Zagreb, the work on the lecture rooms has been postponed until spring next year. All judges, state attorneys will be vetted - VL ZAGREB, 27 Sept (Hina) - The government will soon put to e-consultation amendments to the laws on courts and the State Attorney's Office (DORH) which recommend mandatory vetting for all judges and prosecutors every five years, Vecernji List daily said on Monday. Under the amendments, the heads of courts and local state attorney's offices will ask the Security and Intelligence Agency, via the Justice Ministry, to do the vetting. A collective body within the Supreme Court and DORH would assess if there are security obstacles, while the president of the Supreme Court, the attorney general and the justice minister would only take note of the findings. If this body finds that there are obstacles preventing a judge from remaining in office, it will notify all authorised initiators of disciplinary action which would take action at the State Judicial Council. All judges who have not been vetted in the five years before the amendments are passed will have to be vetted within three months of the passage. This would also apply to state attorneys. The amendments also envisage the establishment of family departments at municipal courts. Only judges meeting special professional requirements will be able to work at those departments. They will be appointed by the president of the Supreme Court to a term of five years at the recommendation of municipal court presidents. Furthermore, the amendments introduce mandatory permanent training for judges and prosecutors instead of "at least once a year" as is now the case, which often ends up being "once", the newspaper said. Union: Anti-corruption ***measures*** target only lower-level customs officers ZAGREB, 27 Sept (Hina) - The Croatian independent union of customs workers said on Monday that the anti-corruption ***measures*** at the Customs Administration mostly targeted lower-level officers and were not aimed at the management. The union's leaders met with the director of the Customs Administration, Mario Demirovic, for talks on the ration of customs officers as a ***measure*** to combat corruption. The union said in a statement after the meeting that the programme was "a sort of damage control, a pro forma anti-corruption ***measure*** that comes after the latest corruption scandals at lower levels of the customs service." The programme is not good because it targets mostly lower-level customs officers and a negligible number of managers, without tackling the roots of corruption, the union said, adding that the most serious forms of corruption actually involve high-level customs officials. As an example, the union cited the case of former Customs Administration director Hrvoje Covic, who was not suspended or dismissed by the finance minister, but stayed on until the expiry of his five-year term despite the fact that a criminal case was opened against him, the union said, warning that at the same time many lower-level customs officials are suspended for much milder forms of corruption. Middle-aged women most frequent victims of workplace harassment ZAGREB, 27 Sept (Hina) - A survey on workplace violence and harassment shows that women aged 36-50 are harassed most frequently, specifically by their superiors, as well as deep distrust of the system, due to which the violence goes unreported. The survey was conducted in June and July in companies and services in which the NHS union federation is active, covering 2,430 respondents employed in the energy sector, forestry, postal services, finance, insurance, and public services. Presenting the findings on Monday, survey creators Petra Rodik and Jelena Ostojic said that while men most often experienced physical violence in the workplace, women were the most frequent victims of abuse, harassment and mobbing. The most frequent form of harassment was gossiping and spreading rumours, failure to receive or receiving too many assignments, and criticising how a job was done. Ignoring employees was also quite frequent. Those forms of harassment were most frequent in the 36-50 age group and least frequent among those aged 51 and over. In most cases, employees were harassed by their superiors, followed by co-workers or unknowns. Harassment was most frequent on company premises and via e-mail. The survey also shows that harassment was more frequent when the work was physically riskier and more demanding, and less frequent where there was social support, participation in decision making, and intrinsic rewards. Father suspected of murdering his three children transferred to psychiatric hospital ZAGREB, 27 Sept (Hina) - The 56-year-old man, suspected of having killed his three children in Zagreb on 25 September, was transferred to the Vrapce Psychiatric Hospital on Monday afternoon. He was admitted to the Vinogradska Street Hospital on Saturday after he was found in a stupefied state by the police. The man reportedly attempted suicide after he suffocated his three underage children. The police found the man after receiving information that he had announced on social networks that he would commit suicide. At the time of the crime, the children's mother was not in Zagreb and the children were spending the weekend with the father. Police Director Nikola Milina said earlier on Monday that the father suspected of killing his three minor children was still in hospital and would be arrested as soon as he was discharged. "The police are present in the hospital and will continue the investigation as soon as the suspect is discharged. The police are gathering information and are taking all the necessary steps to shed light on the circumstances of this murder, one of the most horrendous crimes ever recorded in Croatia," Milina said. He confirmed that the father, an Austrian national, had never been reported for domestic violence and that the police had never had any need to conduct any intervention in the family in which three minor children were killed in the early hours of Saturday. Commenting on the traumas for the police officers who were first to arrive in the flat in Zagreb where the triple murder was committed, Interior Minister Davor Bozinovic said that no one could ever brace themselves to see a crime of that nature. During police education and physical training, we work on the psychological preparation of young police officers. However, there are always some extreme situations to which people respond emotionally. That's why we have experts specialised to provide psychological support and assistance to other employees to be able to go back to their everyday lives, he said. Upon arriving on the scene at the flat in the Mlinovi neighbourhood at about 2 a.m. Saturday, police found a man in a poor state and three children who gave no signs of life. A doctor who arrived on the scene confirmed they had experienced a violent death, while the man was hospitalised. The Zagreb County Prosecutor's Office said that an Austrian national born in 1965 was suspected of the murders. The media reported that Harald Kopitz, of Vienna, who lives and works in Zagreb as a financial consultant for a number of big companies, is suspected of murdering his three children. They added that the mother works in a hotel in Dubrovnik and that the children were spending the weekend with the father. World Heart Day: 20,000 people in Croatia have hereditary increased cholesterol ZAGREB, 27 Sept (Hina) - An increased cholesterol level is one of the key risks to develop cardiovascular diseases, and a hereditary metabolic disorder is particularly dangerous, which is something 20,000 people in Croatia suffer from, but is recognised in only one per cent of cases, it was said on Monday on the occasion of World Heart Day. This year's World Heart Day, marked on 29 September, is dedicated to the influence of bad cholesterol, or an increased LDL-cholesterol on cardiovascular health, which was the topic of a round table held by the Croatian Cardiological Association on Monday. They warned that heart and vascular system diseases are the leading cause of death in European countries, accounting for 30 to 50 per cent. An increased cholesterol level is not rare in the general population and it leads to a large number of people becoming ill and dying from complications, such as heart attack or brain haemorrhage. Metabolic fat disorders can be hereditary. This then refers to family hypercholesterolemia, a genetic mutation that can be inherited not just in the family but from close relatives too with the system being exposed from birth to high LDL cholesterol values. These patients have a 20 times greater risk of becoming ill or dying from atherosclerosis diseases and it could affect very young, healthy-looking and vital people without any symptoms. An estimated 20,000 people in Croatia suffer from a hereditary fat metabolic disorder, but it is recognised in only one per cent of these people. Serb officials might end their boycott of BiH government bodies due to lack of money ZAGREB, 27 Sept (Hina) - Bosnian Serb ministers will end their boycott of the BiH Council of Ministers since there is no other way to resolve problems such as paying wages for thousands of employees in state administration, Council of Ministers Chairman Zoran Tegeltija said on Monday. Following a decision by the Republika Srpska parliament, officials from that entity have been blocking the work of central government bodies since August, protesting against the appointment of Christian Schmidt as High Representative in Bosnia and Herzegovina because they consider that an imposed decision. The Presidency of BiH, both houses of the state parliament and the Council of Ministers have not been functioning for two months now. Serb officials in those bodies either do not go to work or block decision-making, like, for example, Milorad Dodik does in the state leadership. One of the problems is that the BiH parliament has not adopted the 2021 budget yet, so the Council of Ministers has to make decisions on temporary financing every three months. The current decision expires at the end of September, so a new one needs to be adopted in order for about 20,000 employees in state services and agencies, including about 7,000 employees from the RS entity, to receive their wages by the end of the year. Speaking in an interview with the Banja Luka daily Glas Srpske, Tegeltija confirmed this would have to be discussed, indirectly confirming that Dodik's announcements that the RS entity would provide wages for employees in BiH government bodies from its budget were unrealistic. "There will be a session (of the Council of Ministers)," Tegeltija said, stressing they will be acting in the interest of the RS entity. "Many decisions need to be discussed, and it needs to be assessed how much they endanger the RS entity or individuals from Republika Srpska, and there is also the decision on temporary financing," he said. According to him, the payment of salaries to civil servants from the RS budget would be "an expensive decision", and an additional unjustifiable expense of more than (EURO)35 million just by the end of this year. In this way, he dismissed Dodik's earlier confident claim that the RS entity had enough money for that. "We have the money to make the payment by the end of the year, so there will be no problems. Next year we will plan it in the budget," said Dodik, who is planning to continue with the boycott indefinitely. Tegeltija admitted there was no chance the international community would agree to the requests from the RS entity to revise the decision on Schmidt's appointment, or to discuss his position at the UN Security Council, as requested by Russia and China. Outgoing German Chancellor Angela Merkel also conveyed such a message to Tegeltija during a collective farewell meeting with prime ministers from the region, held last week in Tirana. Schmidt himself has recently warned that the boycott in Bosnia and Herzegovina could cause the biggest harm to those imposing it because they were actually blocking themselves. Boycotts never contribute to success or bring good, said the experienced German politician in an interview with the BHT public broadcaster, stressing that those wishing to do something, must talk in order for that to happen. Mast with Croatian flag in churchyard in central Bosnia town torn down ZAGREB, 27 Sept (Hina) - During the night between Sunday and Monday, unidentified perpetrators tore down the mast with the flag of the Croatian people in the yard of the Catholic church of St.Michael in Vares, central Bosnia and Herzegovina, the local parish priest Friar Leon Pendic said on Monday. The mast was set up 10 days ago and the incident happened two days before the patron saint's day, observed on 29 September, the priest said. Pendic said that the incident upset the local Croatian Catholic community, adding that such anti-Croat sentiments were not present in Vares even during the 1992-1995 war. The flag and the mast were set up in memory of Croatian Defence Council (HVO) soldiers killed in the war. Local police said an investigation was under way. In other news: Self-enumeration extended until midnight ZAGREB, 27 Sept (Hina) - Croatian Bureau of Statistics (DZS) director Lidija Brkovic said on Monday that self-enumeration, which was supposed to end at midnight on Sunday, was extended until midnight on Monday because the system was slow "due to extremely high interest" on Sunday. She told the press that over 100,000 citizens had self-enumerated since 3 pm on Sunday, dismissing journalists' claims that the system had crashed yesterday. Due to the prolongation, the second stage of the population census will begin on Tuesday, instead of today, with 8,000 census-takers visiting households across the country. Despite the prolongation, the census is expected to end on 17 October as planned. Since 13 September, over 1.42 million citizens have completed census questionnaires online on their own, which Brkovic said surpassed expectations. The City of Zagreb accounts for over 50% of them. She said 4,000 census-takers did not have a COVID certificate and that free testing would be ensured for them three times a week. Brkovic added that citizens were free to ask census-takers to show them their certificates as well as DZS accreditation. EU and local communities for better life of young people ZAGREB, 27 Sept (Hina) - How local and regional government can improve living conditions for young people in their communities with the support of the largest European project "Europe Goes Local" was the topic of a conference held in Sisak on Monday, organised by the National Agency for Mobility and EU Programmes (AMEUP). The conference entitled "Local work with young people: Croatia in the European context" was an opportunity for representatives to speak about the benefits the project can bring, particularly in creating better opportunities for young people at the local level. The conference was opened by the state secretary at the Central Office for Demography and Youth, Zeljka Josic, who said that these projects are very important with regard to working with young people and motivating them to be involved in the local community. The agency's director, Antonija Gladovic, recalled that 28 local government units were involved in the project in the past three years and that they were motivated to work on strategic plans on how to work with young people in their local communities. "Europe Goes Local" is currently the biggest European project in the field of working with young people and it attracts national agencies responsible for the implementation of the Erasmus+ programme and European institutions and networks involved in working with young people in a strategic partnership. Since 2016, 28 municipalities, cities and counties around Croatia have been directly involved in the project at the national level. NGO: 1 in 5 dogs in Croatia neither microchipped nor vaccinated against rabies ZAGREB, 27 Sept (Hina) - A large number of dogs have not been vaccinated against rabies, although it is mandatory, or microchipped, Animal Friends Croatia said on Monday on the occasion of World Rabies Day, which is observed on 28 September. Thanks to an Animal Friends Croatia petition, as of this year dogs no longer have to be vaccinated every year but based on vaccine manufacturers' instructions as immunity is guaranteed for up to three years. Vaccination is linked to microchipping as every dog without a microchip has not been vaccinated against rabies either. Under the 2017 Animal Protection Act, local authorities must visit every household to check if all dogs are microchipped. According to the Animal Protection Network, 44% of local government units have failed to do so, which is a prerequisite for checking the vaccination of dogs in foster care. An estimated 20% of dogs in Croatia have not been microchipped or vaccinated, which Animal Friends Croatia says is deplorable considering the systematic checks being done across the country. That is partly due to owners who avoid to have their dogs microchipped and vaccinated, the association said, adding that the rising number of abandoned animals was due to owners' irresponsibility and breaking the law. The association recommends that the ***Agriculture*** Ministry stipulate microchipping puppies 45 days after they are born at the least, before they receive the first rabies shot, instead of doing so when they are 90 days old and receive the first rabies shot, as is now the case. ZSE starts week off on a positive note ZAGREB, 27 Sept (Hina) - The main Zagreb Stock Exchange (ZSE) indices increased slightly on Monday, with investors' focus on the Podravka food company. The Crobex increased by 0.2% to 1,979 points and the Crobex10 by 0.16% to 1,210 points. Regular turnover amounted to HRK 8.09 million, about the same as on Friday, with an additional HRK 2.13 million generated in a block transaction with the Ericsson Nikola Tesla stock at HRK 1,700 per share. The most liquid stock in regular trading was Podravka, turning over HRK 2.6 million, and its price increased by 1.65% to HRK 616. Zagrebacka Banka generated a turnover of HRK 1.07 million. The price of its share also increased, jumping by 1.56% to HRK 65. The stock of telecommunications equipment manufacturer Ericsson Nikola Tesla also crossed the million kuna mark with a turnover of HRK 1.06 million. The price of its share dropped by 0.88% to HRK 1,685. A total of 44 stocks traded today, with 17 of them increasing, 16 decreasing and 11 remaining stable in price. ((EURO)1 = HRK 7.487768) THIS BULLETIN INCLUDES NEWS ITEMS RELEASED BY 2100 HOURS MONDAY. (Hina) vm Masthead Brief News Bulletin is published by the Croatian News Agency HINA Marulicev trg 1610 000 ZagrebCroatia web:[*www.hina.hr*](http://www.hina.hr) mail: [*hina@hina.hr*](mailto:hina@hina.hr) phone: (+385 1) 48 08 660; fax (+385 1) 48 08 822 Publisher: Branka Gabriela Valentic, DirectorEditor in Chief: Serdo Obratov Bulletin Editor: Marija Sestan

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[***Supreme Court of Ireland Decision: Kelly v Minister for Agriculture & Ors (Approved) [2021] IESC 62\_3 (15 September 2021)***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:63MJ-2C01-F0YC-N1KR-00000-00&context=1516831)

Baltic Legal Updates

September 16, 2021 Thursday

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**Body**

Dublin:Supreme Court of Ireland has issued the following Decision on (15 September 2021):

An Chúirt Uachtarach

The Supreme Court

Clarke CJ

O ’ Donnell J

MacMenamin J

Dunne J

Charleton J

Supreme Court appeal number: S:AP:IE:2020:000044

[2020] IESC 000

Court of Appeal record number 2014/745

[2019] IECA 299

High Court record number 2010/319 JR

[2012] IEHC 000

Between

Patrick J Kelly

Applicant/Appellant

- and -

The Minister for ***Agriculture***, Fisheries and Food, The Minister for Finance, The Government of Ireland, Ireland and the Attorney General

Respondents

Judgment of Mr Justice Peter Charleton of Wednesday 15 September 2021

1. The gravamen of the majority judgment of 30 March 2021 is this: that the presence at Cabinet of Minister Coughlan, a person of strong views about the propriety of the actions of Patrick Kelly as harbourmaster of Killybegs, and more generally, when he was dismissed constituted a situation of objective bias. What remains are two issues: firstly, as a matter of discretion, is the Court entitled not to proceed to quash the Cabinet decision; and, secondly, were the matter to be returned on being quashed, would the Cabinet be deciding on Patrick Kelly ’ s dismissal as if on the first occasion or, in stark contrast, because of Patrick Kelly reaching retirement age, 65 years old, would they as of now be deprived of the power to dismiss him as he is no longer an established civil servant but, as it is claimed without evidence, has become a retired one? The majority judgment on this supplemental issue is that of O ’ Donnell J. The analysis herein moves to a similar conclusion but would encompass a wider principle as hereunder stated. It is also worth reiterating that while the principles in the conduct of enquiries are straightforward, regrettably Irish law leave far too much room for argument and contrariness. Hence, this enquiry lasted years and the judicial review of it took six days in the High Court. That is unnecessary and should not be repeated.

Discretion

2. Halsbury (4th edition, Volume 1(1) 108, 117) describes certiorari and the other judicial review remedies as derived from the prerogative and, hence, as being discretionary. There may also be a common law origin, as Lord Bingham implies in the article later cited; but that is not significant for this analysis. As thus described, they are akin to equitable remedies which derive from the power of the sovereign, through the Chancellor, to ameliorate a legal judgment towards what was regarded as fair and just, as opposed to meeting the letter of the law; see Keane, Equity and the Law of Trusts in Ireland (3rd edition, 2017) chapter 2. Hence, even though a defect in jurisdiction, in procedure or in the written form of an order is identified as a matter of law, the discretionary nature of the remedy of certiorari does not compel a court to quash that order where to do so would be unfair or unjust. Ordinarily, faced with the inevitability of a judgment based on the conformity of one side or the other in litigation with the law but left with a sense that the party succeeding lacked merit, a court is confined to its discretion solely on awarding costs; s 168 of the Legal Services Regulation Act 2015.

3. The rule of law demands that those facing litigation should be able to be informed as to the legal principles applicable to their situation. That a statute declares a wrong in particular circumstances and the law proposes a remedy conforms to that imperative, but in interpreting law judges strive as far as is possible to reach conclusions which are just and which accord with good sense. The limitation on interpretation towards what seem right and fair comes from the wording of the law, and the need to conform to precedent, into what is predictable and towards that which accords fairness on the foundation rules that meet the multiple situations to which the law must be addressed. In framing statutes, the legislature strives to shape rules so that, ideally, an outcome that is fair and just results to those to whom legislation applies. A similar approach to the interpretation of precedent must similarly underly judicial interpretation of the common law. Limits are set and rules are applied but outcomes must still be guided by an innate sense of fairness. Lord Cooke, writing in The Golden Metwand and the Crooked Cord: Essays on Public Law in Honour of Sir William Wade QC (Oxford, 1998) page 211, states that the “law will always recognize that there are some limits to the reasons which will legally justify the exercise of a discretion. It is a matter of degree. The depth of the court ’ s examination will vary with the subject-matter and what can be discerned of the purpose of any relevant statute. ”

4. Those limits set by law are real; but discretion is also real and must not be shorn of its efficacy. The strictures of the law are enforced; but where discretion is possible as a matter of law, unjust outcomes may be avoided. Hence, as it used to be the case, a contract for the sale of goods of value £10 or more was required by the Sale of Goods Act 1893 to be in writing, otherwise it was unenforceable. Even though a judge found the evidence as to the formation of the contract utterly convincing, no damages for breach of contract could result were one party to the bargain to back away, perhaps for as unmeritorious a motivation as a better offer, and the court would have had to dismiss the claim. There was no discretion. A case for the sale of land, however, attracted the equitable remedy of specific performance of a contract, acknowledging that since land is unique it is not readily replicable, whereby part performance of the obligation to sell or buy would overcome the requirement of writing under s 2 of the Statute of Frauds 1695, now s 51(1) of the Land and Conveyancing Law Reform Act 2009. Equity stepped in where the legal rule would produce an unjust outcome since the statute existed to prevent fraud but to rely on the statute might in itself be a fraudulent action which fairness ought not tolerate. Delay, unfair conduct, want of mutuality or inequity might tip the discretion of the court against enforcement of the contract; see Keane chapter 16.

5. Discretion, however, where vested in a court, is not equivalent to arbitrariness. What is fair and just is adjudged as against sets of precedents, on lines laid down through experience as to how the best outcome is arrived at. Consequently, Lord Halsbury LC in describing discretion distinguished what is “arbitrary, vague, and fanciful but legal and regular”; Sharp v Wakefield [1891] AC 173, 179. The law abhors what is capricious and moves towards the guidance of discretion by what has substantial and solid reason for its exercise; United States v Lotempio (1931) 58 F (2d) 358. Lord Bingham, [1991] PL 64, 67 described the difference between the application of the law by a judge and the use, where permitted, of judicial discretion thus:

an issue falls within a judge ’ s discretion if, being governed by no rule of law, its resolution depends on the individual judge ’ s assessment (within such boundaries as have been laid down) of what it is fair and just to do in the particular case. He has no discretion in making his findings of fact. He has no discretion in his rulings on the law. But when, having made any necessary finding of fact and any necessary ruling of law, he has to choose between different courses of action, orders, penalties or remedies he then exercises a discretion. It is only when he reaches the stage of asking himself what is the fair and just thing to do or order in the instant case that he embarks on the exercise of a discretion.

6. In discretion, the search is on for what is right, what accords with good sense, what is reasonable, towards that which meets each and every circumstance found by a court to exist as a fact and is directed towards the drawing up of an order that will meet the justice of case with an outcome that harmonises with innate feelings of appropriateness in the variable circumstances of a case. While discretion is guided by precedent, and rightly so from the point of view of certainty of law, it parts with the rigidity of legal rules in not being constricted into a particular outcome simply because that result is recorded in a similar case elsewhere. Principles, rather than rules, are laid down by precedent in discretion. And since cases diverge in circumstances, precedent should be regarded as a guide and not as governing outcomes. Both Halsbury and Lord Bingham describe the principles upon which, notwithstanding the identification by an applicant for judicial review of a defect in procedure, jurisdiction or form of order, discretion may result in the refusal by the court of aid in the form of quashing the order, as including delay, acquiescence, failure to exhaust other remedies, adverse public consequences, such as the effect on third parties, and futility or lack of useful purpose. In that regard, the guidance of Denham J in Stefan v The Minister for Justice, Equality & Law Reform [2001] 4 IR 203 accords. There, at 217, having reviewed the authorities on whether judicial review should lie in circumstances where an administrative appeal was available, said:

Certiorari may be granted where the decision maker acted in breach of fair procedures. Once it is determined that an order of certiorari may be granted, the court retains a discretion in all the circumstances of the case as to whether an order of certiorari should issue. In considering all the circumstances, matters including the existence of an alternative remedy, the conduct of the applicant, the merits of the application, the consequences to the applicant if an order of certiorari is not granted and the degree of fairness of the procedures, should be weighed by the court in determining whether certiorari is the appropriate remedy to attain a just result.

7. Notable in this approach is the positive statement of principles and the shunning of any fetter on the exercise of discretion which would do more than channel its exercise as opposed to replacing it with rigid rules. There cannot be such rigidity for otherwise discretion ceases in being the flexible exercise of the choice of the right and fair outcome and becomes instead a rule of law. In Lord Bingham ’ s review of discretion, the idea of futility in making a declaration, another equitable remedy, but one now also expressed as part of the under Order 84 of the Rules of the Superior Courts dealing with judicial review, is based on the justice of undermining those who have done their best by facing them with a court order. Hence, he points out that courts have declined “declarations which will serve no useful purpose”; AG v Scott [1905] 2 KB 160, 169; Eastham v. Newcastle United Football Club Ltd [1964] Ch 413, 449: that relief will be refused “where the applicant has achieved the substantial result which he seeks without any order”; R v Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis, ex p. Blackburn [1968] 2 QB 118: that there should not be a declaration “where a public body has shown that it is doing all it honestly can to comply with its statutory duty”: R v Bristol Corporation, ex parte Hendy [1974] 1 WLR 498: that there should be no declaration “where an error has been substantially cured”; R v Secretary of State for Social Services, ex parte Association of Metropolitan Authorities [1986] 1 WLR 1: nor should a court interfere when it is clear “that a public body will readily perform its duty once the court tells it what its duty is”.

8. In R (on the application of Hibbert) v General Medical Council [2013] EWHC 3596 (Admin) at [22]-[23], Simler J stated that “ordinarily” nullification of a public body ’ s decision is retrospective but indicated that there could be circumstances where such nullification was treated as having prospective effect only. In R (on the application of British songwriters, composers and authors and others) v Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills [2015] EWHC 2041 (Admin) Green J outlined the extent to which a court has discretion over the nature of a quashing order:

[15] There was some debate before me as to the extent to which the court has the power to impose a temporal limitation upon a quashing order. In my judgment it is clear that the court has a discretion to limit the effects of such an order. In Mossell (Jamaica) Ltd v Office of Utilities Regulations Cable and Wireless Jamaica Ltd [2010] UKPC 1 Lord Phillips described the jurisprudence on the question of the effect of executive orders and administrative decisions before a final judgment was reached on their validity as “vexed” (ibid para 43). In para 44 Lord Phillips summarised the position in the following terms:

“44 What it all comes to is this. Subordinate legislation, executive orders and the like are presumed to be lawful. If and when, however, they are successfully challenged and found ultra vires, generally speaking it is as if they had never had any legal effect at all: their nullification is ordinarily retrospective rather than merely prospective. There may be occasions when declarations of invalidity are made prospectively only or are made for the benefit of some but not others. Similarly, there may be occasions when executive orders or acts are found to have legal consequences for some at least (sometimes called 'third actors') during the period before their invalidity is recognised by the court - see, for example, Percy v Hall [1997] QB 924. All these issues were left open by the House in Boddington. It is, however, no more necessary that they be resolved here than there. ”

9. The above cases demonstrate the extent of a court ’ s discretion in fashioning the appropriate remedy where a government, administrative or quasi-judicial or lower court decision has been nullified. The precedent, that nullification has retrospective effect, is a guide only, and there may be, and indeed have been, cases where it is appropriate for nullification to have prospective effect. What does this tell us about the present case? While there may be “ordinary” cases where the precedents indicate that the remedy should have a particular effect, this does not prevent the court, where the facts justify it, from altering this effect to meet the requirements of justice in that particular case.

10. What should not be forgotten in any review of the law on discretion in the grant of an order of certiorari is that just as the courts of equity, in exercising their discretion, are not to be drawn into the approval of fraud through the application of a legal rule designed to prevent deceitful conduct for gain, no judicial review remedy should be squeezed from a court by the rigid application of legal rules where those legal rules lead to a manifestly unjust outcome. The one exception, that where notwithstanding that it may be unfair, an order quashing the outcome of a ***process*** should always be made is where the tribunal is so manifestly improperly constituted as not to exist at all on the face of the record as the body charged with making the decision impugned. In those circumstances, ex debito justitiae, the order is made notwithstanding the merits. A defect, known to an applicant but not protested at when before the tribunal, is otherwise and may be acquiesced in to his or her being refused relief.

11. Discretion is about what is just. To grant Patrick Kelly the quashing of the Cabinet decision dismissing him would be an unjust outcome. The worst that can be said of the Cabinet decision, on the state of proof advanced on his behalf, is that Minister Coughlan had previously pursued, as was her right, a political function in pointing out a grave situation of commercial exploitation in conflict with public duties, expressed other colourful views, and then sat in Cabinet and on consideration of whether he should be dismissed or not voted in the same way as the investigative report suggested. To that should be added that on behalf of Patrick Kelly it was not suggested in representations to Cabinet that the report was wrong but that the penalty might be disproportionate.

12. The majority judgments accept that the ***process*** leading to the recommendation was conducted fairly and was not undermined by the dissemination by Minister Coughlan of her strong views, including to the person tasked with investigating her legitimate complaints. What would be the result were a public representative not enabled to express views based on genuine concerns? From fear of contamination, their task in pointing to potential wrong would be silenced and manifest wrong might be enabled to continue. Fortunately, the robustness of procedures enables an investigator, in all but the most extreme circumstances, to shrug off rumour, suspicion, or preliminary views in favour of a genuine search for the truth. A judge must often do no less.

13. Patrick Kelly ceased to work as a public servant after he was dismissed by Cabinet. He should not now be paid for work he did not do. During the time when this over-complicated judicial review was taking up all of 10 days of hearing in the High Court, he apparently reached 65 years of age and hence was eligible to retire, having reached retirement age, but there is no proof of him proffering his resignation from public service. The result of quashing the outcome of the Cabinet would be a windfall of several years of salary out of public funds. That is unjust, most especially as the investigative report put before Cabinet outlines in stark terms the wrong for which he was ultimately dismissed.

14. This outcome, of a declaration with no other order, is not ***unprecedented***. In Histon v Shannon Foynes Port Company [2004] IESC 107, reorganisation of harbours led to the appointment of two former harbourmasters to one company, the defendant, but where only one was needed to operate in the role as such, the other, the plaintiff, being required to report to him as a subordinate. This he would not do. In consequence, and in due course, he was dismissed. The only order granted by this Court, in the judgment of Geoghegan J, was a declaration that he had “not been validly removed from office in the employment of the respondent”.

15. On this issue, it should finally also be noted that the extent of the powers of the Government under Article 28 of the Constitution, whether the Government in exercising “The executive power of the State” is bound by any form of procedural rule and whether political actions, or prior expressed views or political actions as a public representative, could ever disentitle a Minister as a member of the Government from voting as part of the Government have not been argued. The resolution of any issue arising from Article 28 should be reserved to a case where such argument has been properly advanced. It might be wondered how the collective authority of the Government might be split and how in particular the power to vote granted by the Constitution might be taken away through political action prior to a vote where that issue came for consideration at a later stage?

Remedy

16. Even were it to be that discretion was exercised, in addition to the grant of a declaration in favour of Patrick Kelly and some portion of his costs, to quash the order of the Government, issues as to damages would remain. In that regard, the contribution of Patrick Kelly towards his pleaded wrong could not be ignored. McCord v ESB [1980] ILRM 153, cited most often in relation to the duty of reasonableness where an essential service, electricity supply, is cut off, also has powerful statements as to the role of contributory negligence where it is pleaded that an unreasonable action has resulted in the loss to the applicant. There, a disconnection of supply was outside the statutory remit of the ESB and nominal damages of £50 were awarded by the High Court. That was reversed by a majority of this Court, O ’ Higgins CJ dissenting. The electricity meter in his home had been tampered with and a new seal attached. So, he got a lot of free supply. On being presented with a document by the ESB taking responsibility for paying back the supply actually used by his household, he refused to sign, thereby, for seven months until litigation caused restoration, as Henchy J records, depriving his wife and four children of heat, light, cooking and household appliance power; something “excruciating to bear and dangerous to their physical and psychological health. ” This was all, according to the majority, due to his intransigence. The ESB were wrong to act on a power which they did then have, but Mr McCord ’ s untrammelled intransigence had entirely set the scene for what would otherwise have been the awarding of substantial damages. Even when asked to sign in the middle of such deprivation and without admission of wrongdoing, his foot remained down. Should there be a remittal under Order 84 Rule 27 of the Rules of the Superior Courts, the degree of contribution of Patrick Kelly to his dismissal would be in issue. Manifestly, as well, that remittal power is, under the Rules, discretionary.

17. Order 84 Rule 27(4) was introduced in furtherance of the discretionary nature of judicial review remedies. It provides:

Where the relief sought is an order of certiorari and the Court is satisfied that there are grounds for quashing the decision to which the application relates, the Court may, in addition to quashing it, remit the matter to the Court, tribunal or authority concerned with a direction to reconsider it and reach a decision in accordance with the findings of the Court.

18. The Superior Courts Rules Committee was established under s 67 of the Courts of Justice Act 1936 and thereby stepped into the shoes of the Minister for Home Affairs under s 36 of the Courts of Justice Act 1924 in making rules for “pleading, practice and procedure generally … in all civil cases, including revenue cases and proceedings as to the validity of any law having regard to the provisions of the Constitution and proceedings in the nature of a petition of right”; which latter category fits State side remedies. In terms of powers, the Rules Committee is limited by the express boundaries set by the legislation and in making rules is to be guided by the terms of the statute and its boundaries and purpose, as opposed to any, as can happen in modern legislation, iteration in express terms of a recital of principles and policies; see for instance the Health (Preservation and Protection and other Emergency ***Measures*** in the Public Interest) 2020 which contains, in European law fashion, recitals including “ WHEREAS an emergency has arisen of such character that it is necessary for compelling reasons of public interest and for the common good that extraordinary ***measures*** should be taken to deal with the immediate, ***exceptional*** and manifest risk to human life and public health posed by the spread of the disease known as Covid-19” and in s 6(1) introduces a new s 40A to the Social Welfare Consolidation Act 2005 and recites, ss (2), a range of matters to which a Minister in making delegated legislation is to have regard. In contrast, the courts are well used to reading legislation, discerning the boundaries thereof and drawing out from the terms of what has been enacted the limits of what has been delegated, to a Minister or other rulemaking body, and the expected subject matter and circumspection of what can legitimately be provided for; Island Ferries v Minister for Communications [2015] IESC 95.

19. The Rules Committee exercises the power of making legislation on a delegated basis and is thus bound by the limits of the existing statutory law and, as to the choice made as between possible modifications to, or new rules as to, practice and procedure, constrained by the boundaries set and principles discernible from the parent legislation; Cityview Press v An Chomhairle Oiliúna [1980] IR 381, Bederev v Ireland [2016] IESC 34, [2016] 3 IR 1, O ’ Sullivan & Anor. v. Sea Fisheries Protection Authority & Other. [2017] IESC 75, [2017] 3 IR 751. Moreover, an important indication of the retention of control by the Oireachtas, return and vote on delegated legislation, as noted in NECI v The Labour Court & Others [2021] IESC 36, is not present for rules of court. Since the original rule maker was the Minister for Home Affairs, but became the Rules Committee, rules made return to the Minister for Justice for assent, rather than to the Oireachtas for a positive vote, or a vote should the matter be objected to by sufficient public representatives to get the issue on the order paper of Dáil Éireann; the model in Bederev.

20. Section 91 of the Courts of Justice Act 1924 enables the “the adaptation or modification of any statute that may be necessary” for the purposes of rule-making. But, even here, the Rules Committee, setting aside any question that may thus arise, is limited to, in the words of Kingsmill Moore J in State (O ’ Flaherty) v O ’ Floinn [1954] IR 295, 304 “the manner in which, or the machinery whereby, effect is given to a substantive power which is either conferred on a Court by statute or inherent in its jurisdiction. ”

21. Consequently, there is no power in the Rules Committee in providing for remittal upon quashing an order of an administrative or quasi-judicial tribunal, to modify the fundamental principle that judicial review remedies are within the discretion of the High Court. Remittal is discretionary upon quashing and quashing an order is inherently discretionary. Moreover, remittal must reflect the nature of the remedy granted. It is not there to give more than the justice and right of the case demands. Nor is it any exception to good sense whereby a windfall of public money on the basis of no work is to be bestowed upon a former public servant, whether by retirement or by dismissal.

22. The remedy is always to be what is just. That is why it is within the discretion of the courts. In contrast, the argument on behalf of Patrick Kelly is a mechanistic one whereby since an order is quashed and he has, as is claimed, retired by operation of law, a result of several years of salary are to be paid. That is not right.

22. If, as the majority have held, the presence of Minister Coughlan at Cabinet was in itself an indication of objective bias that requires the decision of Government to be quashed, the remedy must reflect the wrong. Had she excused herself or, as seems likely and has not been proven, taken no part in the discussion, the decision would be unimpeachable on any reading of the law. Since, she was merely one vote out of 15 members of Cabinet, perhaps considerations of proof would require a wider influence, accepting for the moment the divisibility of governmental decisions. If that is the wrong, the remedy required is for the matter to be reconsidered by Cabinet, Patrick Kelly being again entitled to make submissions on a humanitarian or legal or other attempted persuasive basis; but the Cabinet will revisit the original decision and if they dismiss, that is valid, but if they decide to retain his services then retirement might possibly then be relevant. The analysis above, derived from McCord v ESB would be of potential relevance to any damages claim.

23. That is especially so as the majority judgment of Dunne J upheld the report of the investigation. Consequently, any potential damages claim necessarily and inescapably would proceed with the findings therein intact.

**Load-Date:** September 17, 2021

**End of Document**



[***Liberal senator denies making 'dog noise' at Lambie after culture review handed down - as it happened***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6466-6PK1-JBNF-W3CJ-00000-00&context=1516831)

The Guardian (London)

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**Section:** AUSTRALIA NEWS; Version:28

**Length:** 26707 words

**Byline:** Stephanie Convery and Amy Remeikis (earlier)

**Highlight:** Jacqui Lambie question in Senate met with 'dog noises' and 'growling' ; Labor targets Coalition over federal integrity bill during question time ; new Covid ***measures*** for NSW and Victoria as authorities confirm fifth Omicron case ; human remains found in search for Russell Hill and Carol Clay ; Victoria records 917 cases and six deaths; NSW records 179 cases and three deaths. This blog is now closedWatch: 'Dog noises', 'growling', 'boofhead': bad behaviour in parliament as Jenkins review launched'States introduce tougher border rules as Scott Morrison urges them to 'not get spooked' by Omicron'Revolting and humiliating': 10 things we learned about working at parliament from Kate Jenkins reviewRussell Broadbent quits privileges committee after leak of Christian Porter donation reportGet our free news app ; get our morning email briefing

**Body**

block-time published-time 8.17am GMT

What we learned today, Tuesday 30 November

That's where we're going to wrap things up today. Thanks for sticking with us. Here's a recap of the day's big stories:

A long-awaited review of parliamentary workplace culture has recommended better leadership, a crackdown on boozing, a better gender balance, and codes of conduct. The Jenkins review found more than half the people working in commonwealth parliamentary workplaces have experienced at least one incident of bullying, sexual harassment or actual or attempted sexual assault.The review was sparked by the alleged rape of the former Liberal staffer Brittany Higgins, who responded to the review today, saying: "I want to thank the many brave people who shared their stories which contributed to this review. I hope all sides of politics not only commit to but implement these recommendations in full".Members of federal parliament [*didn't exactly cover themselves in glory*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/video/2021/nov/30/dog-noises-growling-boofhead-bad-behaviour-in-parliament-as-jenkins-review-launched-video) this afternoon, though, with "dog noises" and "growling" heard in the Senate and opposition leader Anthony Albanese telling Peter Dutton to "sit down, boofhead" in the House of Representatives. Speaker Andrew Wallace warned the parliament "the Australian public does not want to see this place descend into a political coliseum" and cited the Jenkins report's focus on respect.

The senator accused of barking, David Van, later offered an apology for his interjection, but he said he hadn't been making an animal noise. National cabinet met this afternoon to discuss the response to the Omicron variant. NSW and Victoria announced 14-day quarantine requirements for arrivals from selected African countries and NSW increased fines for noncompliance, just hours after Scott Morrison urged premiers to "not get spooked" by the new variant.We still don't know about the level of vaccine effectiveness with regards to Omicron. All six people who have been confirmed so far to have the variant in Australia are fully vaccinated returned travellers.Victoria's controversial pandemic laws are set to pass parliament after the crossbench MP Rod Barton agreed to support the legislation, securing amendments to give parliament power to disallow pandemic orders. Debate was scheduled to begin at 3pm this afternoon and expected to run late into the night. Westpac has admitted it broke the law and agreed to pay penalties totalling $113m after the Australian Securities and Investments Commission hit the bank with six lawsuits over shoddy treatment of customers that included charging dead people fees and lambasted the bank for a "poor compliance culture" that needs urgent improvement. Human remains have been found in the search for missing Victorian campers Carol Clay and Russell Hill. The remains have not been formally identified yet but they were found in the bushland near Dargo that's been the subject of an intensive search over the last few days.

Amy Remeikis will be back with you tomorrow morning. Enjoy your Tuesday night!

This post was amended on 1 December 2021 to correct a reference to the NSW and Victorian 14-day quarantine requirements, which apply only to certain African countries, not all international arrivals.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 5.41am GMT

block-time published-time 8.10am GMT

The royal commission into defence and veteran suicide has been running again today, and heard that young defence force recruits trained to become fearless warriors are sometimes left tortured by the experience. AAP again:

Psychiatrist and PTSD specialist Andrew Khoo on Tuesday told the commission that military training aimed to make people "totally emotionally disconnected" so they could survive combat.

"But having done that, they were absolutely terrible at taking that warrior... and making them a human again," Khoo said.

Under questioning from counsel assisting the commission, Kevin Connor SC, Khoo said the "breaking down ***process***" was a critical part of the training for young recruits who were routinely deprived of sleep and water, overexercised and demoralised.

The psychiatrist said at least one in four veterans would later suffer PTSD, and every one of the 2,000 veterans he had treated suffered from anxiety, the legacy of having shut down their emotions to survive.

"There is a culture in the military that you can't show weakness... you can't talk about the terrible anxiety... What they do is shut it all down," Khoo said.

Mental health treatment for veterans, especially those with PTSD, remained patchy and inconsistent, due to a lack of specialist training among GPs, psychologists and psychiatrists, the commission was told.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 8.29am GMT

block-time published-time 7.49am GMT

The Liberal senator who was accused of making animal noises during question time, David Van, has apologised for his interjection but says he wasn't growling or making dog noises. From AAP:

Labor senator Penny Wong sought to have the remarks withdrawn at the time but no senator claimed responsibility for the noise.

Van later came back to the chamber and owned up but rejected the characterisation of his interjection, inferring he did not make any growling or dog noises.

"I reflected on my behaviour in question time and I acknowledge that interjections are always disorderly," he said. "I also acknowledge I was making interjections when senator Lambie was asking a question during question time. I commit to holding myself to the highest standards in the future."

Greens senator Sarah Hanson-Young said it was not appropriate for the noises to be made while a female member was on her feet, especially on the same day a damning review into the culture at Parliament House was released.

"If we are going to change culture from the top, that means all of us," Hanson-Young told the Senate.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 8.08am GMT

block-time published-time 7.33am GMT

The question on everyone's lips for the last 24 hours - or at least everyone with an eye on social media politics - answered by the excellent Matilda Boseley.

Related: [*Flame wars: why is Daniel Andrews being grilled over barbecue selfie with Anthony Albanese?*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2021/nov/30/flame-wars-why-is-daniel-andrews-being-grilled-over-barbecue-selfie-with-anthony-albanese)

block-time published-time 7.21am GMT

A former Australian human rights commissioner has called for a widespread audit of the use of automated software in debt collection after a scathing report found the New South Wales government had for years unlawfully taken money from financially vulnerable people.

Labelled "Robodebt 2.0" by the state opposition, the NSW Ombudsman report revealed the state's debt recovery agency unlawfully used automated technology to issue garnishee orders over the accounts of thousands of people during a three-year period from 2016.

The report, tabled in the NSW parliament, found some vulnerable people's bank accounts had been "emptied" by the scheme, which used automated technology to issue the orders to recoup unpaid fines.

Read the full story here:

Related: [*'Robodebt 2.0': NSW government unlawfully took money from financially vulnerable people, report finds*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2021/nov/30/robodebt-20-nsw-government-unlawfully-took-money-from-financially-vulnerable-people-report-finds)

block-time published-time 7.16am GMT

The former prime minister Tony Abbott is heading on another trade trip to India, to "advance the significant Australia-India economic and trade relationship under the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership", according to a press release from the office of the trade minister, Dan Tehan:

Mr Abbott will travel to India to meet valued stakeholders across business and government, further strengthening Australia's trade and investment relationship with India.

The Australian government has supported Mr Abbott's travel to India. Mr Abbott will not be remunerated for his work.

Here's some background from Daniel Hurst on Abbott's previous trip, for which the former Liberal leader signed a conflict of interest declaration, due to his role as a trade adviser to the British government:

Related: [*Coalition to spend $19,000 to send Tony Abbott on trade mission to India*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2021/aug/02/coalition-to-spend-19k-to-send-tony-abbott-on-trade-mission-to-india)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 7.20am GMT

block-time published-time 7.03am GMT

Further to the case of the worker that was hit by a car today at a Victorian Covid-19 testing clinic:

enltrWe are also aware of an alleged incident of aggression against a COVID-19 testing site worker in Pakenham today. This did not result in injury, but will be reported to police.

- VicGovDH (@VicGovDH) [*November 30, 2021*](https://twitter.com/VicGovDH/status/1465573111592415232?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 6.51am GMT

enltrBREAKING: the Victorian senator [*@VanSenate*](https://twitter.com/VanSenate?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) has told [*@newscomauHQ*](https://twitter.com/newscomauHQ?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) he did NOT make a dog noise at [*@JacquiLambie*](https://twitter.com/JacquiLambie?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) but unreservedly apologised for interjecting at her during her speech Which he says may have been misheard as a dog noise because he was wearing a mask. More to come [*pic.twitter.com/l6zVgIjQ6c*](https://t.co/l6zVgIjQ6c)

- Samantha Maiden (@samanthamaiden) [*November 30, 2021*](https://twitter.com/samanthamaiden/status/1465573609892507648?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 6.49am GMT

Victoria also announces precautionary ***measures*** against Omicron

These basically mirror the requirements for international arrivals just announced in NSW, minus the bit about massive increases to fines.

enltrThe last few days are a reminder that this isn't over yet and our response needs to change as the virus changes. That's why - as a precaution - we're making changes to quarantine for some international arrivals to keep Victorians safe until we know more about Omicron. [*pic.twitter.com/uWuwmPQ1cD*](https://t.co/uWuwmPQ1cD)

- Dan Andrews (@DanielAndrewsMP) [*November 30, 2021*](https://twitter.com/DanielAndrewsMP/status/1465572912987979777?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 6.59am GMT

block-time published-time 6.40am GMT

NSW announces precautionary ***measures*** against Omicron

Basically, everyone who arrives in NSW who has been in South Africa, Lesotho, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Namibia, Eswatini and Malawi during the 14-day period before their arrival must enter hotel quarantine for 14 days, irrespective of their vaccination status.

Everyone else coming from overseas must complete a PCR test and isolate for 72 hours. They can only leave isolation after 72 hours if they have received a negative test result, and then they must complete an additional PCR test on day six.

NSW has also increased penalties for non-compliance with the isolation, testing and quarantine requirements to $5,000 for individuals (up from $1,000) and $10,000 for corporations (up from $5,000). This will take effect tomorrow.

enltrMedia release: Precautionary ***measures*** to manage the [*#Omicron*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/Omicron?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) variant. [*#COVID19nsw*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/COVID19nsw?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) [*#nswpol*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/nswpol?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) [*#auspol*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/auspol?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) [*pic.twitter.com/M5R7bNCjy5*](https://t.co/M5R7bNCjy5)

- Dom Perrottet (@Dom\_Perrottet) [*November 30, 2021*](https://twitter.com/Dom_Perrottet/status/1465566120191037442?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 6.45am GMT

block-time published-time 6.32am GMT

The government says the first step will be consultation with the opposition, minor parties and independents, followed by provision of "every necessary resource and support required by the multiparty approach".

The "existing supports" within parliament will continue: this includes the dedicated support unit, the independent complaints mechanism, the 24-hour support line and workplace safety training.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 6.33am GMT

block-time published-time 6.27am GMT

We've heard a bit from Scott Morrison this afternoon already on the Jenkins report, but the PMO has just released an official statement about it:

The Government welcomes the Independent Review into Commonwealth Parliamentary Workplaces, and thanks Sex Discrimination Commissioner Kate Jenkins for her leadership of this important review.

We thank the over 1,750 individuals and organisations who contributed to the Jenkins Review. These experiences, observations and insights will be crucial to driving the positive change that is required.

It is an important review with a series of findings and recommendations that the Government, Opposition, minor parties and crossbench must all carefully consider and respond to. These are problems we all own. And we all have a responsibility to fix this.

The Review was established with cross-party support because everyone believes the Parliament of Australia should set the standard for the nation and reflect best practice in the prevention of and response to any instances of bullying, sexual harassment or sexual assault.

Every single Australian has a right to feel and to be safe at work. However, the report highlights that people, particularly women, in Parliamentary workplaces have experienced bullying, sexual harassment and sexual assault.

It is clear that practical and cultural changes are necessary to make our Parliamentary workplaces safer.

Related: [*'Revolting and humiliating': 10 things we learned about working at parliament from the Kate Jenkins review*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2021/nov/30/revolting-and-humiliating-10-things-we-learned-about-working-at-parliament-from-kate-jenkins-review)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 6.33am GMT

block-time published-time 6.24am GMT

Good evening. Thank you as always to the excellent Amy Remeikis. I'm Stephanie Convery and I'll be with you for the next couple of hours as we await the outcome of this afternoon's national cabinet.

block-time published-time 6.20am GMT

It's been another rough day in the parliament, where it hasn't exactly covered itself in glory. There are two days to go.

The lovely Stephanie Convery will take you through the evening, like the absolute trooper she is, while I once again go question my life choices.

Let's hope tomorrow is better. Given the history - doubtful.

The House has yet to get to voter ID, so if they don't get there tonight, that will be one for tomorrow - the government wants it passed before the sitting rises.

There is also the national cabinet meeting which Steph and the Canberra team will take you through - Scott Morrison is determined that the domestic borders stay open. Tasmania has already announced it is closing its border to returned travellers (outside of the NZ south island) so there are some little moves afoot, but let's hope there are no major changes coming our way.

A very big thank you to Mike Bowers and Katharine Murphy, Sarah Martin, Paul Karp and Daniel Hurst for all the work they do, as well as everyone in the Guardian team who keep everything ticking over.

And a very big thank you to everyone who followed along with us today - and all days - you do, I can not stress this enough, make it all worth it. There have been some meaty issues covered off today - I hope you are all taking some space for yourselves. It can be very rough, and it is OK to take a break, or not look. This is real life, not a game, and we all have to watch out for each other.

I'll see you again tomorrow for the second last day. In the meantime - take care of you.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 6.44am GMT

block-time published-time 6.14am GMT

NSW confirms fifth Omicron case

NSW Health has just issued this statement:

NSW Health can officially confirm the traveller who recently arrived in NSW and is isolating at home on the Central Coast has been infected with the Omicron COVID-19 variant of concern.

The number of people with the Omicron COVID-19 variant of concern is now five.

The person, who is fully vaccinated, arrived in Sydney on flight QR908 from Doha to Sydney on 25 November and travelled by private car to the Central Coast. They had been in southern Africa.

NSW Health reiterates that everyone on the flight is considered a close contact and will need to get tested immediately for COVID-19 and isolate for 14 days, regardless of their vaccination status.

NSW Health is contacting all passengers and flight crew to advise them of their isolation requirements. They can also call NSW Health on 1800 943 553 for further advice.

Two more people who had been on the same flight, QR908, have now been confirmed as COVID-19 cases. Urgent genomic testing is underway for these travellers to determine if they have also been infected by the Omicron COVID-19 variant of concern. Neither of these two travellers had spent time in southern Africa.

NSW Health is awaiting the final results of genomic testing on a case now residing in Broken Hill, who also arrived on the same flight QR908. However, initial results indicate this person is unlikely to have been infected with the Omicron variant. This person is fully vaccinated and isolating at home. The results are expected tomorrow.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 6.19am GMT

block-time published-time 6.06am GMT

Mike Bowers was in the chamber as Sharon Bird was farewelled:

Sharon Bird, the member for Cunningham, is congratulated by Labor leader Anthony Albanese after giving her valedictory speech. Photograph: Mike Bowers/The Guardian Sharon Bird with Tanya Plibersek. Photograph: Mike Bowers/The Guardian

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 6.08am GMT

block-time published-time 5.53am GMT

Labor's Stephen Jones is asked on the ABC about whether Anthony Albanese calling Peter Dutton a "boofhead" was appropriate and he says that today's question time was a particularly a mess, but on the whole, no, the language isn't appropriate.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 6.09am GMT

block-time published-time 5.50am GMT

Independent MP Helen Haines has also responded to the Jenkins review into parliamentary culture:

After working as a nurse and midwife and as an academic, working outside politics, I was shocked by the lack of structure, guidance and management systems in place for the offices of Members of Parliament. I am glad to see that addressed in this report.

... Australia is better served when the Parliament reflects the true diversity of our society. And for years the power imbalances, lack of accountability, entitlement and exclusion and gender inequality have meant this place has not reflected the community at all.

Acting on this report will ensure we can work to becoming a more representative Parliament that people can be proud of.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 6.04am GMT

block-time published-time 5.48am GMT

Here is just some of what parliament looked like today (thank you to our amazing video team for quickly pulling this together):

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 5.50am GMT

block-time published-time 5.37am GMT

Labor has responded to the Kate Jenkins review:

Labor welcomes the [*report*](https://alp.us12.list-manage.com/track/click?u=942ebc4c1cf8fc522a4f4c50e&id=3f321fc76d&e=2d118b04cb) on the Independent Review into Commonwealth Parliamentary Workplaces by Sex Discrimination Commissioner Kate Jenkins.

We sincerely thank Ms Jenkins and Australian Human Rights Commission staff for their diligent work.

We also thank all former and current staff, former and current parliamentarians, other building occupants, experts, and volunteers who made submissions to the review.

Labor called for the review and supported the participation of current and former parliamentarians and staff.

We are committed to working across the Parliament to improve working conditions for staff, parliamentarians, and other building occupants, and changing the culture of the parliamentary workplace.

Now the report has been tabled, Labor will carefully consider its findings and recommendations, and most importantly - we will consult with our staff on our response.

This is their workplace, and they deserve nothing less than a safe, respectful, and supportive environment.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 5.48am GMT

block-time published-time 5.36am GMT

Simon Birmingham was asked about the dog noises and growling in the Senate in response to Jacqui Lambie asking a question this afternoon while on Afternoon Briefing.

He tells Patricia Karvelas that Anthony Albanese also engaged in name calling today (he called Peter Dutton "boofhead" while Dutton accused Albanese of having "a glass jaw").

Which isn't exactly the same thing. For one "boofhead" isn't gender specific like dog noises tend to be when directed at women. And it also doesn't answer the question.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 5.47am GMT

block-time published-time 5.25am GMT

Sharon Bird, the member for Cunningham, is delivering her valedictory speech to the House.

She was first elected in 2004.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 5.28am GMT

block-time published-time 5.20am GMT

National cabinet is meeting at 4.30 this afternoon, so we should hear more about the domestic reaction then.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 5.23am GMT

block-time published-time 5.20am GMT

Tasmania closes border to overseas arrivals

Tasmania has closed its borders to overseas arrivals.

From [*the Tasmanian government website*](https://www.coronavirus.tas.gov.au/travellers-and-visitors/international-travel) :

\*\*\*Any traveller who has spent time in any overseas location (not including the South Island of New Zealand) on or since Sunday 28 November will not be permitted to enter Tasmania at this time. Any traveller intending to travel to Tasmania and who has spent time overseas in the 14 days prior to Sunday 28 November, will not be permitted to enter Tasmania unless approved as an [*Essential Traveller*](https://aus01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.coronavirus.tas.gov.au%2Ftravellers-and-visitors%2Fessential-travellers&data=04%7C01%7CRobert.Blackwood%40police.tas.gov.au%7C6179b34b2a4a47637f5408d9b38e33f0%7Ced13a8afa76343dcb114891492b38482%7C0%7C0%7C637738245620556929%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000&sdata=FZRGVQ19Vf%2BlrpTgU%2BPo9tYvjIjspd%2Ffa0ITApWUtTE%3D&reserved=0). To be assessed for Essential Traveller status, travellers must provide evidence of having returned a negative Covid-19 test result in the 72 hours before they are due to arrive in Tasmania. If approved, [*quarantine*](https://aus01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fcoronavirus.tas.gov.au%2Ftravellers-and-visitors%2Fquarantine&data=04%7C01%7CRobert.Blackwood%40police.tas.gov.au%7C6179b34b2a4a47637f5408d9b38e33f0%7Ced13a8afa76343dcb114891492b38482%7C0%7C0%7C637738245620556929%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000&sdata=k7G%2BS0TN2KuzAyoIW13DpsB8Yl9pDwy7PImVtJg%2Bdok%3D&reserved=0) is required, other conditions also apply.

This ***measure*** is in addition to national restrictions and requirements in relation to travellers who have been overseas. See [*travel restrictions and exemptions*](https://aus01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fcovid19.homeaffairs.gov.au%2Ftravel-restrictions&data=04%7C01%7CRobert.Blackwood%40police.tas.gov.au%7C6179b34b2a4a47637f5408d9b38e33f0%7Ced13a8afa76343dcb114891492b38482%7C0%7C0%7C637738245620566923%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000&sdata=KhFMsB5DvVobwqqQj1Ioy9yVUqMndegtDj5hhlCYI7I%3D&reserved=0) for more information on Australian arrival information.\*\*\*

International arrivals in Tasmania (other than from New Zealand) include international workers who are in Australia to work within the ***agricultural*** sector, Antarctic expeditioners who are transiting to Antarctica and people who return via repatriation flights.

Between 1 November and 14 December 2021, travellers who are approved to arrive in Tasmania within 14 days of being overseas (other than direct flights to Australia from low-risk areas of New Zealand, or approved Australian Antarctic Division travellers), will be required to meet the same requirements as domestic arrivals from high-risk areas.

Read more about [*Travel to Tasmania*](https://www.coronavirus.tas.gov.au/transition-plan/travel-to-tasmania) under Tasmania's plan to transition our Covid-19 response.

Every precaution is being taken to make sure that international arrivals can be managed safely in Tasmania and our community can remain protected.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 5.27am GMT

block-time published-time 5.14am GMT

The "growling and dog noises" Jacqui Lambie was subjected to happened during her second supplementary question to Simon Birmingham.

Sarah Hanson-Young stood up on a point of order and was the first to call it out:

It happened. I don't know who is responsible for it, but it is inappropriate and we are going to change culture from the top. That means all of us.

Penny Wong backs her when the president of the Senate, Slade Brockman, said he didn't hear anything:

Well, I did because I in fact said who's growling. And I would ask one of the senators at that end helps to do the right thing and withdraw. At least fess up.

Come on. Gee you are tough aren't you.

... Growling, Mr President.

Brockman said he "did not hear it".

Wong replies emphatically:

I did".

Brockman:

I'm not challenging what you heard. I certainly did not hear. I cannot ask someone to withdraw something I did not hear.

Members of the chamber interject, causing Brockman to again say:

I did not hear the particular incident that you have raised. If it occurred, I would ask the senator involved to reflect upon it and to withdraw if they did do what has been stated. However, I did not hear the particular interjection myself.

The Senate moved on.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 5.37am GMT

block-time published-time 5.01am GMT

The Law Institute of Victoria says it now supports the Victorian government's proposed pandemic management laws after amendments were introduced to increase parliamentary oversight. The Public Health and Wellbeing (Pandemic Management) Bill 2021 is currently being debated before the Victorian upper house.

The LIV had previously opposed the legislation. But president Tania Wolff said the latest suite of amendments, which cover many of the concerns the LIV had about the bill, have tipped the balance.

She said:

The LIV believes that the proposed amendments to the bill are an improvement and the government has come a long way in addressing the concerns raised by the LIV and other bodies who have been consulted. There are notable changes in important areas of independent oversight, scrutiny and review proposed. Given what we are seeing in these additional amendments, this is an improvement, and, on balance, the LIV would support this bill.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 5.16am GMT

block-time published-time 4.50am GMT

An executive from the cohealth community health centre in Melbourne, where a nurse carrying out Covid testing was hit by a car, has released a statement:

Nicole Bartholomeusz says :

I am distressed to report that this morning at the cohealth community health centre at 365 Hoddle Street, Collingwood, a testing clinic coworker was hit by a car as they were helping clients queueing for a Covid test.

The incident occurred outside the Easey Street entrance.

Emergency services attended the scene, and the coworker involved is now in hospital.

We are providing support and counselling to staff who were present when the incident occurred. We are also reaching out to clients and neighbours who may be affected to make sure counselling is available to them.

We have also made the decision to close the Collingwood Covid testing clinic until Thursday, though all other health services at Collingwood clinic will remain operating.

This is an incredibly distressing event, and our thoughts are with the coworker and their family.

As a police investigation is now under way, we are unable to comment further, however I can say that this incident has sent shockwaves through the cohealth community.

We hope to reopen the Collingwood Covid testing services soon and resume our work as a vital health partner of the community. The cohealth community is strong and resilient, and we are rallying together through this difficult incident.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 5.14am GMT

block-time published-time 4.48am GMT

Sarah Hanson-Young is speaking on what happened in the Senate now.

She says the noises "came from the government side of the chamber".

I was appalled that only after a matter of hours that the prime minister was on his feet, growling was coming from his side of the chamber. It is a disgrace.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 5.08am GMT

block-time published-time 4.46am GMT

That was quite the question time, and a lot happened during it (and around it).

But it is worth revisiting what happened in the Senate.

On the same day the Kate Jenkins review into parliamentary culture was handed down, where the sex discrimination commissioner made a point of speaking on the issues that women in particular face because of the environment they work in - and her shock at what some women, including parliamentarians, were subjected to, Jacqui Lambie was subjected to dog noises in the Senate, while asking a question.

This is not normal workplace culture. A woman, in her workplace, doing her job, was greeted with growls and dog noises. And it was other women who had to call it out and ask for something to be done.

Scott Morrison spoke on the review at 12.15pm.

Jenkins held a press conference on it at 1.15pm.

It was still going when question time started at 2pm.

And then, not even an hour after Jenkins finished speaking, someone was making dog noises at a female senator as she asked a question.

We don't know who it was - no one was identified. But that it even happened, and that so many people within the chamber were prepared to sit there in silence until women spoke up, speaks volumes about why the report was needed in the first place.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 5.07am GMT

block-time published-time 4.35am GMT

Just before question time, Labor's Justine Elliot has just given a 90-second speech about the cashless debit card, which she described as a "cruel and unfair" ***measure*** that directs welfare recipients "where and when to spend their own money".

Apparently, 45,000 people have now signed a Labor petition to scrap the card, a promise which it has attempted to enact with a private member's bill by Julian Hill.

Elliot said:

We know the Morrison government wants to roll the cashless card out nationally. We know the Liberals and Nationals have already started forcing pensioners onto the card.

... At the next election - make your vote count. Vote Labor - because only a vote for Labor will scrap these cruel cashless debit cards for good.

The social services minister, Anne Ruston, has completely rejected the suggestion pensioners could be moved onto the card. The Morrison government has ruled it out. But Elliot keeps saying it - just will not be deterred from this scare campaign. It's going to be a brutal election.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.40am GMT

block-time published-time 4.35am GMT

And for those who didn't see question time (I assume most of you, because you are normal people with actual lives, who value how they spend their time), here is when Peter Dutton and Anthony Albanese went each other at the dispatch box:

enltr [*#AnthonyAlbanese*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/AnthonyAlbanese?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) : "Sit down, Boofhead!" [*#Peter*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/Peter?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) Dutton: "Glass jaw!" A moment of real intensity between two men who both want to be Prime Minister during [*#QuestionTime*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/QuestionTime?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw). [*@10NewsFirst*](https://twitter.com/10NewsFirst?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) [*pic.twitter.com/S1EJu9zTo8*](https://t.co/S1EJu9zTo8)

- Hugh Riminton (@hughriminton) [*November 30, 2021*](https://twitter.com/hughriminton/status/1465526003103531018?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.38am GMT

block-time published-time 4.30am GMT

Our video team has put together a quick video on how the Kate Jenkins review was handed down and greeted:

block-time published-time 4.28am GMT

The CPSU, the public service union, has responded to the Jenkins report:

The CPSU welcomes the publishing of the Jenkins review, which lays bare issues that CPSU members have been consistently raising for years, such as the need for improved supports, mandatory training, and an independent complaints ***process***.

The work our members do for our democracy is so important, but as reflected in this report the parliament has significant power imbalances, which allows bullying, sexual harassment, and sexual assault to fester and go unpunished.

Implementation for the review is in question, as zero funding was announced today by the prime minister, it is essential that there is practical application of key recommendations, and this requires more than words.

Many of the recommendations are the very same recommendations that CPSU members have been calling for, including:

Training on respectful workplace behaviour, people management and inclusive leadership for all parliamentarians.Establishment of an independent human resources mechanism to oversee employment practices.Formation of an independent complaints ***process*** for informal/formal and anonymous complaints free from political interference, with ability to enforce code of conduct and sanctions including in relation to parliamentarians.Develop capability and professionalisation of MoPS workforce.Improve representativeness and inclusiveness of parliament and MoPS workforce.Proactive and preventative approach to worker health and safety.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.33am GMT

block-time published-time 4.27am GMT

Victorian nurse injured at Covid testing site

AAP has some more information on a nurse who was hit by a car at a Melbourne Covid-19 testing site:

The man, aged in his 50s, was taken to hospital with non-life-threatening injuries after the incident that occurred just before 9.30am on Tuesday.

Police say he was hit by a white Holden station wagon near the corner of Easey and Hoddle streets and the driver then fled the scene.

A nearby nurse provided first aid to the Tarneit man until an ambulance arrived.

A short time later, police found the station wagon and arrested the male driver in Carlton.

He is currently being questioned by police.

It's believed witnesses saw the vehicle driving erratically near the Melbourne CBD.

Police have called for anyone with information or dashcam footage to contact Crime Stoppers.

CoHealth, who runs the Collingwood testing site, has been contacted for comment.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.31am GMT

block-time published-time 4.25am GMT

While the first-glance reporting suggested Australia's greenhouse gas emissions were on the slide, a closer look tells a different story.

Yes, national pollution is down if you look at the year to June and compare it with all previous years in the survey, the trajectory is lately, and the electricity sector has done most of the work.

However, if you take the quarterly data, the recent trend has been upwards. So the year to June was up about 2% from the year to March, and preliminary data for the September quarter suggest a slight increase or at least stabilising in the pollution.

And odds favour the December quarter likely having a further increase as private transport in the half of the country that was locked down probably increased, as did other activities in the economy.

Any increase in emissions, of course, is going the wrong way if we're serious about heading towards net zero by 2050.

Related: [*Emissions rise 2% in Australia amid increased pollution from electricity and transport*](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/nov/30/emissions-rise-2-in-australia-amid-increased-pollution-from-electricity-and-transport)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.29am GMT

block-time published-time 4.24am GMT

The Therapeutic Goods Administration [TGA] has fined someone $7,990 for allegedly advertising ivermectin and zinc lozenges to treat Covid-19 despite no strong evidence that the treatments work.

Ivermectin is a prescription-only medicine and cannot be advertised to the Australian public. The TGA has previously warned consumers and advertisers about illegal advertising relating to Covid-19.

The individual allegedly claimed on their website that ivermectin and zinc lozenges are effective in the treatment of Covid-19. It is also alleged that the individual claimed that ivermectin is "safe" when used for Covid-19. Under the Therapeutic Goods Advertising Code the advertising of products for therapeutic use in humans must not claim they are safe, cannot cause harm or have no side-effects.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.28am GMT

block-time published-time 4.23am GMT

Victorian police say they have located human remains in search for missing campers

Stepping outside parliament for a moment, Victoria police have issued a statement:

Victoria police has located human remains in bushland near Dargo as part of their ongoing investigation into the disappearance of Russell Hill and Carol Clay.

The remains are yet to be formally identified and it is expected this ***process*** will take some time.

As this matter is now before the courts, we will not be facilitating any interviews in relation to the investigation.

We ask that you respect the privacy of the families at this time.

enltr [*#BREAKING*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/BREAKING?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) Victoria Police has located human remains in bushland near Dargo as part of their investigation into the disappearance of Russell Hill and Carol Clay. [*@9NewsMelb*](https://twitter.com/9NewsMelb?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

- Reid Butler (@reid\_butler9) [*November 30, 2021*](https://twitter.com/reid_butler9/status/1465535041228849155?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.26am GMT

block-time published-time 4.22am GMT

Here is some of how Mike Bowers saw question time:

Scott Morrison during question time in the House of Representatives. Photograph: Mike Bowers/The Guardian The prime minister with the Jenkins report on workplace culture in Parliament House. Photograph: Mike Bowers/The Guardian The member for Cooper, Ged Kearney, is evicted from the House under standing order 94a during question time. Photograph: Mike Bowers/The Guardian

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.25am GMT

block-time published-time 4.14am GMT

The great Yol?u actor David Dalaithngu is being honoured by both Scott Morrison and Anthony Albanese in the parliament.

Related: [*Vale David Dalaithngu: the inimitable actor who changed the movies, and changed us*](https://www.theguardian.com/film/2021/nov/30/vale-david-dalaithngu-the-inimitable-actor-who-changed-the-movies-and-changed-us)

block-time published-time 4.11am GMT

There are two more left in the year (and possibly until after the election).

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.19am GMT

block-time published-time 4.11am GMT

Question time ends.

block-time published-time 4.10am GMT

Luke Gosling to Scott Morrison:

Does the prime minister's model of a national anti-corruption commission have the power to investigate a cabinet minister's decision to grant visas to au pairs for mates?

Morrison:

These questions go to the very heart, Mr Speaker, of why the model we have put forward in 349 pages of draft legislation - it is there, it is publicly available, Mr Speaker, on the attorney general's website - to the issue of why, Mr Speaker, it's important that an integrity commission which is introduced not to be used and weaponised for the sort of political stunts and game playing that we're seeing here from the Labor party.

They don't want an integrity commission, Mr Speaker, they just want to engage in the slurs. Mr Speaker, criminal corrupt conduct is the sort of conduct, Mr Speaker, that sent the former minister Ian MacDonald, Mr Speaker, to prison, which the leader of the opposition was a keen supporter of his...

Anthony Albanese gets very, very angry and demands the prime minister withdraw.

Peter Dutton says he can make a personal explanation at the end of question time.

Andrew Wallace asks the prime minister to be careful, while also pointing out the question flies close to the wind.

Scott Morrison speaks during question time. Photograph: Mike Bowers/The Guardian

Morrison continues, using the word 'visa' to talk about immigration more widely, so he can segue to the case of the disgraced former Labor MP Craig Thomson:

In relation to Mr Thomson, Mr Speaker, and what the leader of the opposition had to say about, Mr Speaker, he said he had complete confidence in Mr Thomson. Mr Speaker, as we know, we saw him on the beers with Mr Thomson. Mr Speaker, this is, Mr Speaker, the standard that the leader of the opposition said, Mr Speaker, when he was in government, they were indeed, the leader of government business in this House seeking to secure the vote of Mr Thomson, Mr Speaker, who has been shamed by his own actions. Mr Speaker, those opposite talk a big game on this issue.

As I said, more of their members are in the Silverwater branch of the Labor party...

It is not the first time Morrison has used the Silverwater prison line - which is one of the reasons his attacks on Icac haven't made sense, because Icac investigations were what led to some of the cases he has spoken about in QT being eventually found guilty in a court. But this time, Wallace asks him to withdraw the comment.

He does.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.23am GMT

block-time published-time 4.00am GMT

While Alan Tudge muddles his way through this dixer, Ben Butler has a titbit for you:

Two NSW men have been charged over allegations of involvement in a Ponzi scheme that took almost $200m from about 590 investors, mostly from Sydney's well-heeled eastern suburbs.

Tony Iervasi of Tweed Heads, who was the sole director of Courtenay House, and Athan Papoulias of Brighton-Le-Sands, a contractor employed to promote investment in the business, appeared before the local court at Sydney's Downing Centre today.

The charges follow a four-year investigation by the Australian Securities and Investments Commission.

Iervasi is charged with nine criminal counts of dishonest conduct and one of carrying on a financial services business without a licence while Papoulias faces one charge of dealing in the proceeds of crime.

Dishonest conduct carries a prison sentence of up to 10 years while the maximum jail term for dealing with the proceeds of crime is 25 years.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.09am GMT

block-time published-time 3.59am GMT

Tanya Plibersek to Scott Morrison:

Does the prime minister's model of a national anti-corruption commission have the power to investigate the energy minister's use of forged documents to attack the lord mayor of Sydney?

Peter Dutton tries to stop the question, but is not successful. Morrison sends the question to Paul Fletcher, who speaks about the '349-page' exposure draft again, but the short answer is no, it does not.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.01am GMT

block-time published-time 3.58am GMT

Peter Dutton continued his attempt to tar Labor as weak on national security in the lead-up to the election. The defence minister took aim at the Fremantle MP, Josh Wilson, branding him "Comrade Wilson" over his comments about the potential impact of Aukus on the international non-proliferation regime.

Dutton was taking aim at Labor's Josh Wilson over his comments about the potential use of a loophole in the international nuclear safety regime to acquire the submarines.

The [*AFR quoted*](https://www.afr.com/politics/federal/questions-over-whether-nuclear-subs-breach-international-law-20211129-p59d0h) Wilson as saying at a committee hearing on Monday it was an "interesting interpretation" that the government would try to qualify for an exemption from the International Atomic Energy Agency's inspection regime by claiming military submarines, which will be fuelled with weapons-grade uranium, were for peaceful purposes, adding: "If it was determined that was acceptable, we will have broken new ground in weakening the existing non-proliferation regime."

Dutton was not amused, suggesting it was just Russia and China that had raised such concerns. Fact check: Indonesia has also raised concerns about the impact on the non-proliferation regime.

Anthony Albanese evidently had had enough of this, standing up and seeking leave to move a motion expressing support for the US alliance. Dutton declined to grant leave, saying he would not "grant leave to stunts".

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.06am GMT

block-time published-time 3.57am GMT

'Dog noises' and 'growling' greet Jacqui Lambie question in the Senate

In the Senate, the independent Jacqui Lambie has asked a series of questions about public housing and homelessness, prompting growling and dog noises from someone in the chamber.

The Greens senator Sarah Hanson-Young alerted the president to the interjection, arguing that making "growling and dog noises" while a female senator is on her feet is not consistent with achieving "change from the top", on the day the Jenkins report has been released.

Penny Wong also asked whoever was responsible to withdraw.

The Senate president, Slade Brockman, said at first he can't ask senators to withdraw something he did not hear. Then Brockman asked them to "reflect and withdraw if they did do what was stated", adding that he did not hear the interjection.

Senate question time continued - nobody has owned up so far.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.03am GMT

block-time published-time 3.55am GMT

Peter Dutton has just done his daily defence dixer, which is just an excuse to call Labor "weak".

This time, he refers to the Labor MP Josh Wilson as "comrade Wilson" and Anthony Albanese as "weak leader".

Daniel Hurst will bring you more on that.

But Albanese is prepared and asks to move a motion saying the House "declares its support for our alliances with the United States and the United Kingdom".

Dutton denies leave, saying:

We don't grant leave to stunts, Mr Speaker, and I'll tell you what, you could [speak] here all day and you wouldn't convince the Australian public you're strong.

So everything is going really well.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.04am GMT

block-time published-time 3.52am GMT

Just for context, here is part of the constitutional expert Prof Anne Twomey's conclusion on the government's 349-page exposure draft (from her submission to the call for consultation on the draft):

In general, the bill is absurdly long and complicated. It is currently 347 pages in length. The definitions in Part 2 of the bill run to 10,765 words. That is around the same length as the Commonwealth Constitution, as originally passed ... It is ... evidence of a lack of conceptual clarity behind the bill and an attempt to make it do both too much and too little.

The excessive length, complexity and duplication also leads to mistakes.

And she concludes:

... If it is seriously being proposed that there be a Commonwealth Integrity Commission which cannot investigate most public sector corruption, and in those few areas in which it can, it has to hold all its hearings in secret, and then issue secret reports that the public may not know about, then you can expect justifiably high levels of public distrust in, and contempt for, the system.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.05am GMT

block-time published-time 3.50am GMT

Anthony Albanese to Scott Morrison:

The 2022 parliamentary calendar the Morrison-Joyce government has in place only 10 sitting days for the House and five for the Senate before August. Doesn't this show the prime minister has no intention of establishing a federal anti-corruption commission before the election?

Morrison:

The leader the opposition knows full well that we have 349 pages of legislation (it is an exposure draft, not legislation) and $150m, Mr Speaker, committed to this ***measure***.

All it takes is for the Labor party to support it (again, the opposition doesn't have to support legislation for the government to introduce legislation - something which happens all the time), which they don't, they have a two-page policy.

Mr Speaker, we have 349 pages of legislation (exposure draft) which if they wish to support, Mr Speaker, we would welcome that, but I'm asked also about the parliamentary calendar, which is I know a topic that the leader of the opposition has been putting keen interest in now, Mr Speaker.

As the leader of the opposition may not be aware that in order to prepare a budget, Mr Speaker, next year, the normal practice is to ensure there are a set number of weeks before the preparation of that budget before the budget is delivered.

Now Mr Speaker, I've personally delivered three budgets as a treasurer and there have been three budgets as prime minister, Mr Speaker, and I have served seven years on the expenditure review committee, Mr Speaker. Now I can understand why the leader of the opposition would be unfamiliar with the time taken to prepare a budget because he's never delivered one, Mr Speaker. Mr Speaker, there are people who have been serving refreshments in the expenditure review committee longer than this person, Mr Speaker, the leader of the opposition spent in that chamber, Mr Speaker.

The answer then goes to the economy, manufacturing, economic management and other places - none of which are relevant, but here we are.

Tony Burke gets up for a second time to tell the speaker that the time on the prime minister's answer expired "some time ago".

Andrew Wallace does not look impressed.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 3.59am GMT

block-time published-time 3.44am GMT

Uh huh.

Peter Dutton taunts Labor leader Anthony Albanese during question time, yelling that he has a glass jaw. Photograph: Mike Bowers/The Guardian

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 3.49am GMT

block-time published-time 3.40am GMT

We are back to the '30,000 Australians would have perished' line from Scott Morrison.

That is based on an OECD report about Covid deaths based on population (if there were no lockdowns or border closures).

So the prime minister, who has spent the last month telling people that the government needed to get out of people's lives, is again crowing about how the government being in people's lives saved Australians.

It is a little hard to keep up at times.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 3.50am GMT

block-time published-time 3.37am GMT

Peter Dutton, who sued over a tweet, which was deleted (and won his defamation case), was just yelling "glass jaw" at Anthony Albanese across the chamber.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 3.48am GMT

block-time published-time 3.35am GMT

Mark Butler to Scott Morrison:

My question is to the prime minister. In her national review of quarantine published this month, the prime minister's handpicked quarantine adviser Jane Halton told him some quarantine settings, such as quarantine in a purpose-built facility, are better able to mitigate transmission risks, especially for high-risk travellers and in respect of variants of concern and further that, quote, the Centre for National Resilience at Howard Springs was not purpose-built for quarantine.

Why has the prime minister failed to establish a single purpose-built quarantine facility?

Morrison:

The member will be aware that that was a report that I commissioned, Mr Speaker, that I commissioned.

And Mr Speaker that led to the ***process*** to developing that report, to the decisions that were taken for the additional facilities, Mr Speaker, that are being completed in Victoria, in Queensland, Mr Speaker, in Western Australia.

Mr Speaker, those facilities are important, not just for what we may have to face next year for the more severe cases that might have to be taken.

And as we've discussed those with state governments, but for future pandemics that might present in the future, and that's why we have invested in those facilities. So Mr Speaker, I would only encourage those opposite, as Australians continue to push through this pandemic.

And as we continue to face these new variants of concern, and Omicron is a variant of concern, but we've dealt with many before.

What I do know, from certainly the premier of NSW, and I appreciate the ***measures*** that they've taken in relation to this most recent variant, and I believe the view was also headed by the Victorian premier, that we don't want to return to those arrangements that were put in place for those quarantine facilities.

That is in hotels, Mr Speaker, that they are moving now to home quarantine, home quarantine and isolation. And that is how we live with the virus and we live together with the virus. Now those opposite have been playing politics with this pandemic for 18 months.

Mr Speaker, Australians know that our government has worked closely with others to ensure that we have one of the highest vaccination rates in the world.

We are one of the strongest economies coming through this pandemic of the economies in the world. And we have one of the lowest fatality rates, Mr Speaker, of any country in the world from Covid.

So what part of those three results, what part of those three results, Mr Speaker, that many other countries, in fact most around the world, would happily exchange places with Australia to achieve?

Why is it that this opposition constantly throughout this pandemic has not sought to support but has only sought to undermine for their petty political benefit?

We told you he was back on that line.

Scott Morrison during question time in the House of Representatives. Photograph: Mike Bowers/The Guardian

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 3.51am GMT

block-time published-time 3.24am GMT

Josh Frydenberg still hasn't worked out how microphones work.

Or that he doesn't need to read out the LinkedIn profile of every backbencher who asks him a dixer.

block-time published-time 3.23am GMT

The Greens leader Adam Bandt asks a question on emissions reduction and Scott Morrison turns it into a bit on a 'Labor-Greens alliance'.

Eventually, Anthony Albanese gets up on a point of order and Peter Dutton gets up at the same time, but Albanese has the call and tells Dutton to "sit down".

So there is an argy-bargy at the dispatch box, before Dutton sits down. Albanese doesn't really have a point of order though, so then Dutton is back, but he also doesn't have a point of order (it's on 'glass jaws' if that gives you any indication) so he is also sat down.

Morrison returns to his bit.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 3.31am GMT

block-time published-time 3.20am GMT

Brendan O'Connor to Scott Morrison:

The home affairs minister said today we do not need purpose-built quarantine because hotel quarantine had worked very effectively. How many state borders have been closed and how many lockdowns have occurred because of the prime minister's reliance on hotel quarantine, instead of purpose-built quarantine facilities?

Morrison:

The commonwealth government has established and did establish the national resilience facility, Mr Speaker, and so that the questionnaire is an urge to the commonwealth has not established those embassies.

We indeed have, Mr Speaker, and they were there to support. They were there to support, Mr Speaker, the broader quarantine arrangements that were put in place necessarily with all the states and territories because the sheer volume of arrivals that would come back to Australia and needed to be accommodated in that way.

The Labor party seems to think that we would have somehow established facilities to accommodate 100,000 people around the country, Mr Speaker, and that's simply absurd. So we came up with a practical, innovative solution, Mr Speaker, a solution that was actually followed by the New Zealand government.

And I don't hear those opposite criticising the Labour government in New Zealand about having hotel quarantine, Mr Speaker, but they're happy to criticise their own government for doing it, Mr Speaker, they're happy to criticise the Australian government for taking exactly the same response to the New Zealand government. Which tells you everything about this Labor opposition when it comes to the handling of the pandemic.

Tony Burke has a point of order on relevance:

I put it that we're at the point now, where it's quite a deliberate breach of the standing orders from the prime minister. That he knows there's no reference to alternative policies or alternative approaches. And every single time he has to pivot to an attack on the opposition.

Wallace tells Morrison to stay relevant to the question.

Morrison:

Mr Speaker, the leader of the opposition may wish to reflect on the chair and those comments. Mr Speaker, he may wish to reflect on the chair, Mr Speaker, that that goes to the nature of the leader of the opposition, Mr Speaker, happy to play political games in here every other day of the week.

Burke returns to the dispatch box:

Standing order 91, the prime minister's disregarding your ruling.

Wallace tells Morrison to stay relevant to the question. Again.

Morrison:

I will resist responding to the sneering interjections of the leader of the opposition, Mr Speaker, because what Australians know is as a result of the response to this pandemic, Mr Speaker, more than 30,000 lives have been saved by the very arrangements we put in place with the states and territories.

Now those opposite might want to sneer at that and not support it, Mr Speaker. But this country has come through this pandemic and continues to move through this pandemic, particularly, Mr Speaker, in response to new variants, and we're dealing with Omicron. Now in a common sense and sensible and balanced way we'll deal with other governments on these issues. Because we know when it comes to the pandemic, the Labor party always plays politics before putting forward the national interest.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 3.38am GMT

block-time published-time 3.13am GMT

Barnaby Joyce is back and still attempting to make words seem like sentences, but he is very stuck on how the opposition 'sneers' at regional areas, but he can't quite get there.

block-time published-time 3.12am GMT

Mark Butler to Scott Morrison:

The home affairs minister said today that Australia doesn't need purpose-built quarantine because hotel quarantine has worked very effectively. Can the prime minister confirm that there have been almost 30 breaches of hotel quarantine which have led to closed state borders and statewide lockdowns?

Morrison launches into how Labor hasn't supported the government during the pandemic and this is another example of that, going over his well-trodden ground, which doesn't actually reflect reality, but then we are used to that.

Labor raises a point of order on relevance - Andrew Wallace, who I think has decided he will be sitting towards the Bishop end on the scale of Speakers, says he is being relevant, so we get three minutes of it.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 3.39am GMT

block-time published-time 3.08am GMT

Question time begins

Anthony Albanese to Scott Morrison:

Kate Jenkins has made shocking findings in her report today. Does the prime minister agree that everyone working in this building, including staff, deserve a safer and more respectful place at work?

Morrison:

I'm sure I join with the leader of the opposition and the leaders of all parties represented in this chamber, including the members of the crossbench, the independents, the leader of the Nationals, in answering that question on behalf of all of us, which is yes, Mr Speaker, of course we do, because in this place, Mr Speaker, we are not just members.

We are also employers individually, each and every one of us are employers, and we have responsibilities as employers to make this workplace as safe as it possibly can be.

And so today, the report that commissioner Jenkins has provided to all of us, to the government, Mr Speaker, and happy to table that report, Mr Speaker, this report, I think, goes to the root causes here that we have had to address in our workplaces.

This is a challenge that, for those of us who have been in this place a long time, have known have been experienced over that course.

And it deals with the issues of power imbalances. It deals with the issues of gender imbalances. It deals with the issues of accountability. And independent complaint mechanisms, which I'm very pleased we have already taken action on as we have with the counselling support and other services.

We didn't have to wait, Mr Speaker, for this report. Before taking the action. I commend again commissioner Jenkins and indeed have already commended Brittany Higgins, Mr Speaker, because it was her speaking up that has led to this chain of events, Mr Speaker, that has brought parties together in the multiparty ***process*** that has been working together to produce this set of recommendations, and I now look forward to us continuing to work together in a multiparty ***process***.

The recommendations cover the full terrain, I think, of the issues that need to be addressed. And we need to come together now and work to those together to ensure that this place becomes a safer place and sets standards, Mr Speaker, for all who work in this building.

The surveys that are in this report don't just relate actually to the staff of members of parliament and senators.

They, in fact, relate to all people who work in this building, whether it's in the press gallery or elsewhere, Mr Speaker, amongst members, senators, and so it is important that we read this, reflect on it carefully to understand what commissioner Jenkins has rightly set out as the drivers.

I said earlier today, we have the great privilege to work in this place, and all of those who are here also have that privilege. But the significant matters of state and the importance of our work and the stresses that we work under are no excuse whatsoever, Mr Speaker, for inappropriate behaviour, for bullying, for harassment, for any of these things, Mr Speaker. There is no place for that in this workplace or any other, so I join with all members of this House, and I'm sure the leader of the opposition, in condemning that behaviour and doing all we can, Mr Speaker, to make this a safer workplace for everyone in this building.

And that that is also the truth for those who worked outside this building as well.

Scott Morrison speaks during question time in parliament. Photograph: Lukas Coch/AAP

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 3.25am GMT

block-time published-time 3.05am GMT

Both the Prime Minister and the deputy prime minister, Barnaby Joyce, urged MPs to have a break over Christmas before the election in the new year.

Joyce told MPs that voters did not want to see them between Christmas and Australia Day, and urged them to connect with constituents before the summer break.

Joyce said there is "no such thing as a safe seat" and he had seen "tenacious" MPs hang on to seats by a small number of votes, and losses in safe seats when there are "massive swings."

"So ask yourself, what's my relationship with my electorate? How am I going with my volunteers? How am I going with my local mayors? Have I sent my Christmas cards? Have I rung them up? Don't take anyone for granted because by the time the election is called, if you haven't done the work, it is too late and they are highly cynical of you if you turn up just before the election."

Morrison also told MPs to have a break over Christmas to come back feeling refreshed for "a fight we can win".

"We need to get around each other and respect each other and the contributions that we all made.

"We will have a fight that we will win in the new year. So we need to take your time to reconnect and recharge over Christmas. "Election results change the course of nations."

The Treasurer, Josh Frydenberg, recounted a conversation he had at a recent dinner with senior members of the Carlton Football Club in which he was told the most important thing for success was the "character of the team over individual talent and a sense of purpose".

"It's no difference to politics. There are a lot of stars out there, but unless we pull together as a team and look after each other then we don't have the successes that we should have."

block-time published-time 3.04am GMT

Scott Morrison has spoken to MPs about focusing on the issues of concern for Australians, saying the government had a "deep responsibility" to represent those who had elected the coalition.He said the pandemic would be here for the foreseeable future, and keeping Australians safe would remain his focus.

He said this would give

"the Australian people confidence in a time when they're quite concerned and they're uncertain and worried about their futures."

He said MPs had supported Australians through the "greatest crisis since WWII".

He also spoke about the importance of freedom, saying it was "a time when those freedoms cannot be taken for granted."

The prime minister also spoke about the Jenkins review, saying it was a "serious problem that needs to be addressed.

"The issues and recommendations raised so need to be carefully worked through and responded to make this a better workplace for everybody."

block-time published-time 3.01am GMT

The transcription service, Tveeder, has been down since the prime minister's press conference, so bear with me while I muddle through QT.

block-time published-time 3.00am GMT

Question time is about to begin, so we will have to leave the Kate Jenkins press conference there.

We'll come back to it once the worst of the hours is over

block-time published-time 2.54am GMT

There was a lot in the question which was just asked, and repeating it might actually break some brains/re-traumatise people, so I won't.

In response though, Kate Jenkins speaks on the toll speaking out has on victim-survivors. Jenkins says it is time for the community to step up.

I think the momentum is that as a community, we've got to stop asking these people to step up to share their trauma with us. We need to provide that if they want to speak we want to support them.

block-time published-time 2.49am GMT

Is the parliamentary culture different to what we see in corporate Australia?

( Scott Morrison had said the cultural issues were some that many workplaces across Australia struggled with.)

Kate Jenkins:

We talked about the systemic risk factors that exist in parliament. So if I just give you kind of the overview of the five of them, you realise that it's actually more risk factors than exist in many corporate workplaces.

So the first was just multiple workers in this one workplace, but we've unclear or inconsistent standards, so there wasn't sort of one code of conduct or one clear standard expected in the workplace.

Second was the leadership or really a lack of people leadership skills, the lack of focus of particularly parliamentarians on their job as an employer, their focus absolutely on their job of representing us and as parliamentarians, so that's the second.

Another one is the workplace dynamics that feel loyalty and particularly that sort of political dynamic that exists inevitably in parliament.

Kate Jenkins speaks during a press conference in Sydney. Photograph: Dan Himbrechts/AAP

Other things were the social conditions of work, so this is a fly-in fly-out, 22 weeks you're in Canberra, the rest of the time you're at your location, irregular hours, high pressure, high scrutiny, lots of focus, really quite unusual.

You can't really compare it to many other industries in that sense.

And then the final thing was the employment structures.

So in the main if you'd like to say the bosses are actually elected parliamentarians - they're not employed, they're not senior executives.

And then you have a whole category of people that are the members of parliament staffers who are employed and under their own act with their own particular circumstances.

And then you have the press gallery and you have the public servants.

Everyone's employed them to different arrangements that have come about over time. So I know I'm giving you the long version, but there is just a bucketload of risk factors there that in combination particularly put young people, I would say young staffers, particularly the what's called the mob SEC staffers, and in practice the female parliamentarians and women across the board at high risk - the need to sort of maintain your relationships and your reputation to get ahead when doing that can put you at personal risk.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 3.08am GMT

block-time published-time 2.46am GMT

Is Kate Jenkins confident the recommendations will be implemented, en masse as she has asked?

One of my key observations about this is we were engaged to do this, with both the support of the government the opposition, the Greens and the crossbench.

We have had full parliamentary support as we have gone about the investigation which has been an incredible privilege, and I think unusual because of the nature of how government normally works.

And our recommendations really add to the whole parliament. So we wouldn't look to an expectation that and we're being informed that all parts of the parliament are taking these recommendations seriously.

So I guess I'm an optimist, but I'm also really certain that this pace of work reflects the voices of the people that work in there, including that 147 current and former parliamentarians who participated so there's a really good ground for this to be implemented. And I will look forward to the response in due course.

block-time published-time 2.43am GMT

Kate Jenkins on the gender imbalance in the parliament:

What we have recommended is what we know works in terms of advancing diversity. So to really underpin this, we did find the four key drivers in of this misconduct were power imbalances, gender inequality, lack of accountability and really a lack of diversity.

So when you look at those, there's an urgent need to change.

And that's why one of the case shifts is to get about bring to the Parliament, better diversity.

The reality is Parliament should match the community if there's one workplace that should represent the community it absolutely is our parliament.

In considering what the best practice is, we did look at the name for targets and also public reporting so that we can both in the workplace and externally understand what's happening, particularly also looking at positions so not only for parliamentarians, but within locks at staff so their parliamentarian staff is when you look at the spread of the workplace and that's in the report.

You will say that whilst there are more women as parliamentary staff as their men, the majority of the senior roles are held by men so there's a real imbalance.

block-time published-time 2.41am GMT

Kate Jenkins:

So the issue of alcohol use was very consistent thing that came up across the inquiry. We have made a recommendation that the parliament sets for itself, policy and particularly looks at harm minimisation and work health and safety obligations. Now, what would that look like in practice, we did hear some officers actually have a no alcohol policy.

We also did hear that whilst alcohol was consumed in the premises, some of the most concerning conduct was pressure to drink outside of parliament in in social environments.

So we have given some guidance that there should be some restrictions and some governance around that relating to bring it in line with what happens in most workplaces in Australia now.

So those we've asked parliament to recommend what those standards will be. We've made a pretty clear picture on how that might work. So we didn't come up with no alcohol because we this conduct isn't caused by alcohol. It is one of the risk factors at play.

block-time published-time 2.40am GMT

Kate Jenkins said she was "to some degree" shocked by some of what she learnt - particularly about what was happening with younger workers, and she was also shocked by what women, including female parliamentarians experienced.

( Scott Morrison said he was appalled but wish he found the results more surprising)

Jenkins:

Because I know what happens across Australian workplaces so that one in three Australian workers is actually experienced sexual harassment last five years, so to some degree, I wasn't shocked.

But those 500 or so interviews that we did made us really hear in real terms how that works in practice, and then statistic of more than half have experienced one or more of bullying, sexual harassment and sexual assault was really concerning.

If I come to this specifics, to some degree, I was shocked at how the young workers who perhaps arrived really positive and enthusiastic and feeling privileged to work there, how quickly they become in an environment where this bullying and harassment is normalised.

I would say I was a little shocked even though I expected women to experience a more difficult situation, but certainly it's really clear that our female parliamentarians have a much tougher time in that place.

Whether it's through online abuse, direct sexual harassment, the rates were amongst the highest in the reporting and that was really shocking to me.

block-time published-time 2.37am GMT

Kate Jenkins finishes her introduction with this:

Asking that our nation's parliament should do no more than it expects from all Australian workplaces. This report describes how Parliament can create safe, respectful and inclusive working environments to ensure it can attract the best who can deliver the best for us. This is a firm basis for an historic legacy this parliament can leave creating a stronger parliament for the future.

block-time published-time 2.37am GMT

Kate Jenkins warns that the recommendations "not be cherry picked for implementation" as they work in conjunction with each other:

In making our recommendations, we've sought to balance the need for better support with robust accountability, better support and includes systems and ***processes*** to guide people and set them up for success.

Improved accountability is achieved by clear standards and an independent report and compliance buddy to create a safe reporting environment and enforce those standards.

Drawing on lessons from other Parliament's as well as high pressure high profile workplaces in sporting military business and education settings. The report breaks our proposed solutions down to five shifts that are required.

The first is leadership. recommendations have focused on strengthening leadership to foster safe and respectful work environments. This includes both institutional leadership and individual leadership with parliamentarians office holders and party leaders.

Leaders set the tone and leadership from the top is particularly important to set clear expectations and role model safe and respectful behaviour.

The second is diversity, equality and inclusion in line with corporate Australia all parties need to set targets and take specific actions for gender balance and diversity in the parliament and ratio regularly ***measure*** and publicly report on progress.

We know that what gets ***measured*** gets done the 30 systems to support performance.

Our recommendations are focused on ensuring parliamentarians and their staff have human resources, systems, ***processes*** and advice tailored to the specific needs of their context to support their important work and help them perform at their best

The fourth is standards reporting and accountability. We recommend establishing clear and consistent codes of conduct alongside an independent complaint body where it is safe to make a report. Standards are enforced and people are held accountable through sanctions.

The final shift is around safety and wellbeing. This includes a proactive approach to safety and well being including a focus on prevention to meet applicable withheld work health and safety duties. It also involves developing policies to restrict alcohol use, in line with harm minimisation and safety principles.

block-time published-time 2.34am GMT

Brittany Higgins responds to the Kate Jenkins review

The woman who triggered the Jenkins review, Brittany Higgins, has made a short statement via the Global Institute for Women's Leadership at The Australian National University. Higgins said she was pleased to see the review deliver its report and hoped it "inspired immediate action".

Brittany Higgins:

I want to thank the many brave people who shared their stories which contributed to this review. I hope all sides of politics not only commit to but implement these recommendations in full".

block-time published-time 2.34am GMT

The main message here is there is nothing to stop the parliament from upholding the standards we would expect in any other workplace.

block-time published-time 2.33am GMT

Kate Jenkins:

Misconduct is often dealt with as a political problem, rather than as a people issue. As a result, we heard that people are often punished for reporting misconduct, while others are protected, rewarded or even promoted for engaging in misconduct. This permissive environment is reflected in the data from our review.

Over half that is 51% of all people currently in come along parliamentary workplaces have experienced at least one incident of bullying, sexual harassment or actual or attempted sexual assault.

Gender plays a significant role in shaping these experiences in these workplaces. Across all parliamentary workplaces 40% of women have been sexually harassed compared to 26% of men.

Some cohorts in the parliament are particularly involved were vulnerable with staffers and women parliamentarians at highest risk.

Women we spoke to told us they felt lucky when they had not directly experienced sexual harassment or sexual assault.

block-time published-time 2.32am GMT

Kate Jenkins continues:

We heard that offices function better where their parliamentarians or chiefs of staff prioritise people leadership, ensuring people were clear on their roles and responsibilities and expected behaviour and felt safe to report misconduct.

However, parliamentarians and their staff largely do not come into these roles with the skills to lead teams effectively and are not set up for success.

High performing teams are essential to the important work of the parliament. Yet people leadership skills are not valued and systems to support people are inadequate, combined with the lack of accountability to make consistent standards and enforcement of those standards, and the absence of a strong human resources system to support performance. All these factors create a permissive environment where misconduct can and does occur.

block-time published-time 2.30am GMT

Kate Jenkins on what she learnt from the parliamentary review:

There is sometimes a temptation to say that because of its role in national life, it is an ***exceptional*** workplace, to say that parliamentarians and their staff not like the rest of us that they live and work in a different world.

But this does them and us a great disservice. Being ***exceptional***, does not mean we should make exceptions.

Our report sets out clearly what we heard about working in the hundreds of parliamentary workplaces across the country without identifying anyone.

We heard that there are unique characteristics in this workplace that create risks for bullying, sexual harassment and sexual assault to occur and go unreported.

We heard that parliamentary workplaces are characterised by the intensity and inherently political nature of the work, the pursuit of political power and advantage of win at all costs. [Also] the frequent blurring of personal and professional life and an expectation of intense loyalty to political parties.

Parliament is inherently about power, and that power runs in multiple directions. We heard that power imbalances and the misuse of power is one of the primary drivers of bullying, sexual harassment and sexual assault, gender inequality and a wider lack of diversity, particularly evident in the low representation of women in leadership roles, means women are more likely to experience misconduct.

block-time published-time 2.28am GMT

Brittany Higgins has responded to the review:

enltr. [*@BrittHiggins\_*](https://twitter.com/BrittHiggins_?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) has responded to the release of the Jenkins review. [*pic.twitter.com/8XhxiBKxqg*](https://t.co/8XhxiBKxqg)

- courtney gould (@heyycourtt) [*November 30, 2021*](https://twitter.com/heyycourtt/status/1465506696642531330?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 2.26am GMT

Kate Jenkins press conference

The sex discrimination commissioner, Kate Jenkins, is now holding her press conference on the report she has handed to the government.

She thanks Brittany Higgins as well as everyone who engaged with the report.

Jenkins:

We heard that there is no single parliamentary workplace or culture.

There are many individual workplaces and workplace cultures within the parliamentary system.

This includes a wide array of workers beyond parliamentarians and their staff. There are ComCare car drivers, Parliamentary Library staff, staff who work with parliamentary committees, public servants, journalists, security, planning, events and catering staff. We made every effort to ensure that we heard from people in as many of these different settings as possible and overwhelming sentiment shared by review participants was that working in these workplaces is an honour and a privilege, participants told us of both positive and concerning experiences. Many people shared distressing experiences of bullying, sexual harassment and sexual assault, sometimes for the first time they said these things could never be shared with anyone else.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.31am GMT

block-time published-time 2.13am GMT

Most of the pieces in the Gross Domestic Product pie are now in the public domain with the release today of the trade stats and a couple of others.

In short, net exports (that is exports minus imports, not actually nets) have ballooned thanks to rising demand for our minerals and farm products while supply-chain snarls curbed what we imported in the September quarter, the Australian Bureau of Statistics said.

The result is a record $23.9bn for the current account surplus, up about $1bn. The larger surplus magically will add about 1 percentage point to the GDP figures due out tomorrow.

That will come in handy because the market has already pencilled in a contraction for the quarter alone, or about 3%, the worst quarterly dive save for the 7% plunge in the June quarter of 2020 when the Covid chaos first descended.

Also out on Tuesday was data on public demand. According to Westpac, such demand expanded by 3.1%, an upside surprise compared with the bank's forecast of an increase of 1.2%.

The result will be a 0.8 percentage point addition to the GDP growth number when it lands.

Still, with a bigger drop in September quarter inventories reported yesterday chipping off some of the growth propellant, Westpac is predicting a 2.5% quarterly contraction for GDP, while on a year-to-year basis the growth will come in at 3.2%, it predicts.

Of course, eyes are largely turned to the current quarter since the Victoria, NSW and ACT lockdown distorted so much of the July-September period.

Dwelling approvals in October extended their slide, dropping 12.9% for the month, compared with a 3.9% fall in September. Still, the October result remains a third higher than pre-pandemic levels in October 2019 thanks to government stimuli and record low interest rates, the ABS said.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.29am GMT

block-time published-time 2.10am GMT

Fifth likely Omicron case in NSW

NSW Health also confirmed a very likely fifth Omicron Covid case in NSW - as well as the reports the woman had been on the Central Coast before she was diagnosed - the woman arrived back in Australia BEFORE any restrictions were put in place

( [*you can find a list of places which were visited on the Central Coast, here*](https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/news/Pages/20211130_01.aspx) )

NSW Health can confirm initial testing strongly indicates one more overseas traveller, who recently arrived in NSW and is isolating at home on the Central Coast, has been infected with the Omicron Covid-19 variant of concern.

When confirmed, this would bring the total number of confirmed cases of Omicron in NSW to five.

The traveller, who is fully vaccinated, arrived in Sydney on flight QR908 from Doha to Sydney on 25 November and travelled by private car to the Central Coast. The traveller had been in southern Africa.

Everyone on the flight is considered a close contact and will need to get tested immediately for Covid-19 and isolate for 14 days, regardless of their vaccination status. NSW Health is contacting all passengers and flight crew to advise them of their isolation requirements. They can also call NSW Health on 1800 943 553 for further advice.

NSW Health advises a number of venues were visited by the traveller in Sydney and on the Central Coast before NSW Health directed travellers from southern Africa to go into isolation.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.45am GMT

block-time published-time 2.08am GMT

While that presser was going on, the former South Australian attorney general (she stepped down last week) Vickie Chapman has been suspended from the SA parliament for six days.

enltrBREAKING: Attorney-General Vickie Chapman has been suspended from Parliament for 6 days after being found guilty of contempt for misleading the house on 3 occasions [*#SAParli*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/SAParli?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) [*@abcadelaide*](https://twitter.com/abcadelaide?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

- Stacey Lee (@Staceylee\_) [*November 30, 2021*](https://twitter.com/Staceylee_/status/1465498020036759558?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.18am GMT

block-time published-time 2.07am GMT

Scott Morrison also says he will be urging premiers to "hold their nerve" on borders when the national cabinet meets later today.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.18am GMT

block-time published-time 2.06am GMT

Kate Jenkins will be speaking at 1.15 from Sydney.

block-time published-time 2.05am GMT

Scott Morrison says "parliament awaits" and finishes the press conference.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.19am GMT

block-time published-time 2.02am GMT

The NSW premier has said that he will be welcoming 250 international students next week. How is that consistent with the 'pause' the prime minister and his government have put in place?

Scott Morrison:

That is a separate matter that, because that is a pilot program that was already in place. We are not ceasing things we were already doing.

... The pilot programs we had discussed this with the premier yesterday, so that is entirely consistent.

It's entirely consistent because it was already a ***measure*** that had been taken and it is under very controlled circumstances.

And as part of of that ***process***, what we have done is not taken the next, we are just delaying postponing temporarily for two weeks.

And indeed if the information allows us to bring that forward again, great, tremendous, because in Australia we're moving forward.

We're not going back when it comes to this virus. We're going to keep moving forward into Christmas and into 2022 and we're going to open safely and we're going to stay safely open.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.20am GMT

block-time published-time 2.00am GMT

Scott Morrison moves on to the response to the Omicron Covid variant:

This is a prudent and temporary pause. We don't know enough yet about it. And the advice that I received at the National Security Committee of cabinet for Covid, which my colleagues joined me on last night, was that this temporary pause will provide the opportunity to understand and learn more about this.

It is not a reason to step back. It is just [reasonable that we] momentarily pause and we seek further information before taking that next step, and that next step is obviously skilled migration.

Students coming as well as those on working holiday maker and humanitarian programs.

We will continue, obviously, in areas where we already have exceptions, like under the Afghan program and so on. But that said, this is just about a prudent and temporary pause.

Scott Morrison speaks at a press conference in the prime minister's courtyard at Parliament House. Photograph: Mike Bowers/The Guardian

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.24am GMT

block-time published-time 1.55am GMT

enltrCredit belongs to strong women like [*@BrittHiggins\_*](https://twitter.com/BrittHiggins_?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) , Rachelle Miller, Dhanya Mani, Chelsey Potter & fabulous women in the Press Gallery, for the existence of the Jenkins report to make parli a safer workplace. All 28 recs must be adopted; cultural change is urgently needed [*#auspol*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/auspol?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

- Larissa Waters (@larissawaters) [*November 30, 2021*](https://twitter.com/larissawaters/status/1465493126508777480?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 1.54am GMT

Scott Morrison again, on how the solution is one for everyone:

This is a multiparty ***process***. This is just not a response of the Liberal party or the National party or indeed the government. This is a joint project because we have a joint problem when it comes to these issues of bullying and abuse and sexual harassment.

It is a problem in this building of all parties. It is a problem of the Labor party, the Liberal party, the National party, the Greens party, all the parties that are represented here.

We have been here a long time, we know that we all have a problem that we all have to own and we all have to deal with.

And I hope that we can deal with this in the most multipartisan, good faith way that we possibly can. And that that will enable us to move as we can on what is set out here.

And I don't want to prejudice that approach.

Because I want to engage with everybody around the table in good faith to make sure that we can make that progress.

I don't want to see this fall into camps. I don't want to see this fall into any sort of partisan approach. I want us to stay around the table and get it done.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.02am GMT

block-time published-time 1.52am GMT

How will any of the victims see justice?

Scott Morrison:

Well, we will continue to support the work of the Australian federal police and the courts, as the states and territories do.

And this is a challenge not just for us, but all levels of government. And of course we want to see offenders brought to justice.

Now that is done through our justice ***process*** and you won't find a stronger supporter of Australia's justice system than me.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.59am GMT

block-time published-time 1.51am GMT

Does Scott Morrison think politics needs to change?

Morrison:

Well, look, I think we all have a role to play in that, don't you?

There's great interest in the conflict of this place.

And that is something that many of you write about constantly, and on occasions, perhaps... encourage, perhaps.

That's been the nature of politics, not just in this place, but many parliamentary democracies and we're a robust democracy. But we're all accountable for how we engage in the affairs of politics and how we report them and the environment in which we seek to communicate.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.52am GMT

block-time published-time 1.49am GMT

Was Scott Morrison shocked by the findings in the report - one in three having experienced sexual harassment, while more than half of workers faced some form of harassment?

Like anyone who works in this building, I find the statistics that are presented there, of course appalling and disturbing. I wish I found them more surprising. But I find them just as appalling.

And that's why the actions I think that are recommended do cover all the territory, that they've been able to take us forward. And what I've seen in has only reinforced my view about the actions that we've already taken.

What Kate Jenkins also recommended here, it is not just the accountabilities that are necessary for employers in this building, but supports and resources for employees to be better employees.

And that is a practice that employers are getting support from right across the country in the private sector and the public sector. And I think that's a good thing.

And the report notes that one in three figure that you mentioned is similar to figures that we've seen in other workplaces. Now that doesn't excuse it by any sense of the imagination. That's not my suggestion. It's simply to say that we're dealing with issues here that are quite specific to this building.

In particular, that idea I was talking about before that just because we sit here and deal with national matters of state that in no way condones behaviour of that nature ever, under any circumstances, and care what your job is, or what you think your responsibilities are.

Nothing justifies that. I always take the approach, particularly when I deal with my own team, but also the members of the public service who I deeply respect in this place. You've heard me say expect and respect.

That is, I think, the right way to approach the engagement in this place with the work that we do. So it is a challenge I think all workplaces are dealing with but I want, as my colleagues do, and I have no doubt the leaders of the other parties in this place, to want this building to be a [new] standard set.

Scott Morrison presents the Jenkins report into workplace culture at Parliament House. Photograph: Mike Bowers/The Guardian

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.25am GMT

block-time published-time 1.45am GMT

Does Scott Morrison support gender equality within the political parties, given that is one of the recommendations, and how does the parliament police that, given it is a political party decision and not one of the parliament?

And what of the new bodies for the independent HR ***process***, which is separate to political actors - such as political parties, ministers, MPs and the prime minister?

Scott Morrison speaks about the women he has appointed to cabinet, and how he will be pushing for more women candidates to be preselected (he does not commit to gender quotas though, which is how Labor got to gender equality once it began addressing the issue in the 90s - the Greens do it as a matter of course).

As for the independent HR ***process***, Simon Birmingham says:

The office of parliamentarian staffing and culture is supposed to essentially operate as a human resources function to take on many of the current functions and responsibilities of the Department of Finance in that regard, to report and be responsible to parliament, rather than to the executive wing of government and to essentially oversee the operation of the Mops Act (the act which covers staffers) which is recommended for some particular changes as well as broader review under commissioner Jenkins' recommendations.

The independent parliamentary standards commission is proposed to be the oversight mechanism to handle consistent responses and independent investigation in relation to complaints bullying, sexual harassment, sexual assault and other misconduct practices.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.51am GMT

block-time published-time 1.38am GMT

Scott Morrison is again saying that fixing the culture is the job of everyone in the building - there is no one action which can make the changes spoken about in the report.

This government has taken actions on this issue like no other government has prior and that has been led by the events that took us to this place, and rightly it's taken us to this place.

Has he spoken with Brittany Higgins since the report came out?

In relation to specific individuals in their briefing of the report, we have been taking advice on how this should be appropriately handled, as I've always had the view always happy to meet with people on these issues should they wish to but I don't presume upon that.

And that's why the briefings have been provided through the Human Rights Commission to [Brittany] and a number of others as I understand it, and we stand ready to work with anyone on this issue as we go forward.

But the appropriate actions we've taken and how we're handling this report is we've been following the advice we've been receiving from the commission and how it's released.

Should they wish to have further discussions certainly with me or my ministers, then I'm sure they would only be too happy to do so.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.46am GMT

block-time published-time 1.34am GMT

Meanwhile, back in the Senate (the press conference has not moved to questions and answers yet, so we are moving between the two issues) the assistant minister, Amanda Stoker, has told the Senate no one is saying corruption is a good thing.

Stoker, opposing Rex Patrick 's attempt to suspend standing orders to bring on a debate and vote on an integrity commission, tells the chamber:

"Senator Patrick says he's motivated in bringing this suspension motion by the accusation, the frustration that the government is running out of time to deliver its commonwealth integrity commission by the end the year. So in order to give effect to that frustration, he decides to attempt to derail the government's legislative program in a game of competitive one-upmanship about who around this chamber most stands against corruption. The reality is there's nobody in this room saying corruption is a good thing ... everyone in this place stands against corruption."

Stoker said the government had engaged in a detailed consultation to "deliver an institution that has the teeth it needs" while "learning the lessons" from other states where "they have gone horribly awry".

Stoker is going through all the greatest hits. She talks about injustices "inflicted by a star chamber" in some states. She talks about slurs levelled in the "coward's castle of parliamentary privilege".

"Can you bear it? The hypocrisy of those around this chamber makes my eyes water."

Earlier, Labor's Katy Gallagher told the Senate that if a federal integrity commission were in place, "this government is at most risk from having that body".

Gallagher also took aim at the government for next year's sitting calendar:

"The Senate will sit for three days in the first half of next year ... They are worried that they will continue to lose votes, because they have lost their way, they have no agenda and they have managed to divide this parliament."

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.37am GMT

block-time published-time 1.33am GMT

Back to the press conference, Simon Birmingham is now addressing the media.

He again points to the supports in place and thanks those who took part.

This is a landmark document reflecting decades of problems, some of the findings and many of the stories that are told are distressing and reflect completely unacceptable behaviours.

To affect change, there are lessons for all of us to lead to accept responsibility to set the example and Commissioner Jenkins's recommendations reflect those approaches.

The report provides a positive roadmap for change in behaviour, culture and practice.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.37am GMT

block-time published-time 1.31am GMT

Over in the Senate, the independent senator Rex Patrick has moved to suspend standing orders to bring on debate about legislation to set up a federal integrity commission.

The Greens senator Larissa Waters welcomed the move, saying her party has been pushing for a federal corruption watchdog since 2009. "We don't mind whose name is on the bill so long as it's a bill with teeth."

Waters took aim at the government for a lack of progress: "They are using shame consultation as a delay tactic.

"It's just One Nation and the Coalition standing in the way of a watchdog with teeth."

The Labor senator Katy Gallagher said Labor would also support the motion.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.37am GMT

block-time published-time 1.31am GMT

Marise Payne, as the minister for women, is also addressing the report at this press conference:

I also want to say today that I know from the many conversations that I have had around this place and more broadly, since the beginning of this year, that the release of this report today may have an impact on people inside and outside this place.

On members, on senators, on staff and on others who work or who have worked in this building.

Please, if this is a difficulty for you, please seek the support that the prime minister has spoken to.

Payne also thanked Brittany Higgins.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.39am GMT

block-time published-time 1.29am GMT

Scott Morrison on the response:

I've asked the minister of finance and special minister for state to consult with the opposition, minor parties and the independents on a way forward to respond to Commissioner Jenkins' review.

Secondly, I've instructed my department to provide every necessary resource and support required by the multi-party approach.

This multi-party approach with the coordinating support of the department has already served the parliament will this year in implementing the significant reforms recommended by the foster your view.

And the success of this approach through the Foster review has delivered positive outcomes.

Third, the government will continue the existing supports that we already have in place the dedicated units support staff within the parliamentary workplace support service and the independent complaints mechanism 24-hour support line and the continued workplace safety training.

These important supports will keep running and adapt as necessary as parliament responds to these recommendations.

We did not wait to receive this report to take action.

We took action through the parallel commissioning of the foster report and implementing those recommendations.

So we now address these not from a standing start, but already underway, taking action together to respond to the very serious issues that have been highlighted in this place.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.40am GMT

block-time published-time 1.28am GMT

One in three parliament staffers experience sexual harassment, review reveals

A long-awaited review of parliamentary workplace culture has recommended better leadership, a crackdown on boozing, a better gender balance, and codes of conduct.

The review, sparked by the alleged rape of former Liberal staffer Brittany Higgins, found more than half the people working in commonwealth parliamentary workplaces (CPWs) have experienced at least one incident of bullying, sexual harassment or actual or attempted sexual assault.

The Australian Human Rights Commission review found 37% of people had experienced some form of bullying, one in three some form of sexual harassment, and 1% actual or attempted sexual assault.

The commission made 28 recommendations, including better leadership at many levels and a leadership "taskforce" to implement the recommendations.

It called for an acknowledgement of the harm done by abuse, an independent review of progress, targets to achieve gender balance, an increase in diversity and respect, better measurement and public reporting, better support, and tighter alcohol policies.

There should also be a new office of parliamentarian staffing and culture, a code of conduct for parliamentarians and one for their staff, as well as standards for others who work there including the press gallery.

The commission heard that "power, including power imbalances and the misuse of power, is one of the primary drivers of misconduct in CPWs" and that bullying is not only top down, but lateral and upwards.

Gender inequality was found to be a key driver of bullying, sexual harassment and sexual assault.

"The experiences of Grace Tame, Brittany Higgins, Chanel Contos and others, as well as a national conversation about consent, have also prompted renewed calls in the Australian context for an end to gendered violence," the report noted.

One participant said: "It is a man's world and you are reminded of it every day thanks to the looks up and down you get, to the representation in the parliamentary chambers, to the preferential treatment politicians give senior male journalists."

The review, led by commissioner Kate Jenkins, began in March and spoke to 1,723 individuals and 33 organisations.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.43am GMT

block-time published-time 1.26am GMT

Scott Morrison says a multi-party response has already begun and he has ordered his department to provide any resources needed.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.44am GMT

block-time published-time 1.25am GMT

Scott Morrison:

The power imbalance, the gender imbalance, the lack of accountability for behaviour as well as understanding the challenging and demanding work environment using this building, but I want to stress just as I think Kate Jenkins does and I'm sure my colleagues support and people across this building, just because this is a challenging and demanding environment just because we work under great stress and strain and long hours had to deal with issues that are of great importance for the future of our nation... but this is no excuse whatsoever, to normalise, inappropriate, unhealthy and unprofessional behaviour.

Just because what you do is important and stressful and demanding [it is never OK] to never normalise that behaviour [or to think it] has been somehow OK. It's not OK and we all need to understand the drivers here - of course we do important things in this place. It's a great privilege to be here and do those things.

That should only stress upon us the need for those highest standards.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.44am GMT

block-time published-time 1.20am GMT

"We all share in the ownership of the problems which are set out in this report, but we all share in the solutions as well," Scott Morrison says.

block-time published-time 1.19am GMT

In the Senate, Rex Patrick is trying to bring on the federal Icac bill for debate again.

Daniel Hurst is watching that for you.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.45am GMT

block-time published-time 1.19am GMT

Scott Morrison also thanks Brittany Higgins for her advocacy work (stressing he has no comment on the criminal case).

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.45am GMT

block-time published-time 1.16am GMT

Scott Morrison press conference

The prime minister is speaking on the Kate Jenkins review.

He starts with thanking her and her team for the "incredible sensitive way in which they undertook the review".

He then thanks those who participated in the review.

block-time published-time 1.12am GMT

There are 25 recommendations in that review. Here are the top five:

Recommendation 1:

Statement of Acknowledgement

The Presiding Officers should convene party leaders and the heads of the parliamentary departments to come together, agree and deliver a joint Statement of Acknowledgement to the Parliament. This Statement should acknowledge the harm caused by bullying, sexual harassment, and sexual assault in Commonwealth parliamentary workplaces and a commitment to action and shared accountability.

Recommendation 2:

Institutional leadership

To demonstrate institutional leadership to ensure safe and respectful Commonwealth parliamentary workplaces, the Houses of Parliament should:

establish a leadership taskforce, with oversight by the Presiding Officers, chaired by an independent expert and supported by an Implementation Group, to oversee the implementation of the recommendations made in this Report. It should have the following responsibilities developing and communicating an implementation plan with specific timeframes

defining and communicating common values which can drive cultural change across parliamentary workplaces

preparing an annual public report of progress made in the implementation of recommendations

tracking, on a quarterly basis, key ***measures*** of a safe and respectful work environment to monitor progress in implementation.

Recommendation 3:

External independent review of progress The Australian Government should establish a follow up external independent review to examine the implementation of recommendations made in this Report within 18 months of its tabling in the Parliament.

Recommendation 4:

Individual leadership

To strengthen individual leadership to ensure a safe and respectful work environment:

parliamentarians and senior Members of Parliament (Staff) Act employees, including chiefs of staff, should:

engage in regular discussions to set expectations of conduct and champion the Codes of Conduct

create a safe reporting culture, including supporting people who experience misconduct

take responsibility for discharging work health and safety obligations

attend training on respectful workplace behaviour, people management and inclusive leadership

support employees to attend relevant training

office-holders, parliamentary party leaders and leaders of parliamentary departments should:

engage in regular discussions to set expectations of conduct, champion the Codes of Conduct and create a safe reporting culture

demonstrate and reinforce the message that those individuals who engage in misconduct will not be protected, rewarded or promoted

parliamentarians, party leaders and office- holders should report annually to the Parliament on the actions that they have taken to ensure a safe and respectful work environment.

(b) convene an annual parliamentary discussion in both Houses of Parliament for office- holders, parliamentary party leaders and parliamentarians to share progress on the implementation of recommendations.

Recommendation 5:

Diversity among parliamentarians

To advance gender equality, diversity and inclusion among parliamentarians, parliamentary party leaders should lead and champion a 10-year strategy which includes the following elements

targets to achieve gender balance and specific actions to support the achievement of the targets

specific actions to achieve gender balance and diverse representation across all parliamentary roles and portfolios

specific actions to increase the representation of First Nations people, people from CALD backgrounds, people with disability, and LGBTIQ+ people.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.16am GMT

block-time published-time 1.03am GMT

Kate Jenkins report into parliamentary culture launched

The Kate Jenkins review has been released.

[*You can find it here.*](https://humanrights.gov.au/set-standard-2021)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.15am GMT

block-time published-time 12.59am GMT

Anthony Albanese will hold Labor's first campaign rally on Sunday, telling MPs that the opposition is kicking goals ahead of an election early next year.

"I said we would kick with the wind in the fourth quarter, well we are in the fourth quarter and we are kicking with the wind," Albanese said.

"The government is fracturing to the right and to the left. This is a government that has run its course."

Albanese said the party would continue to work on the three themes of a better life for working families, secure jobs, and a future made in Australia. MPs will meet again on Friday to discuss the party's campaign strategy.

He compared federal Labor's standing to other opposition parties in Australia and around the world, commending MPs for their discipline.

The government does not deserve a second decade in politics.

If elected, we will be the most experienced incoming Labor government in history.

Speculation is mounting that an election will be held in May after a revised sitting calendar scheduled a budget for March.

Albanese criticised the sitting calendar for 2022 and the limited sitting days planned for the first half of the year, and said a March election was still a live option.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.09am GMT

block-time published-time 12.55am GMT

We [*reported two weeks ago*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2021/nov/17/prime-ministers-department-breached-foi-laws-over-release-of-brittany-higgins-documents) that the department of prime minister and cabinet had breached freedom of information law by dragging out a request for documents related to the alleged rape of Brittany Higgins.The department had repeatedly missed legally-imposed deadlines and claimed the FOI request was "voluminous" and overly complex.

The request was, in fact, highly targeted and narrow, and identified only 20 documents in the department's systems.

The information watchdog, the Office of the Australian Information Commissioner (OAIC) made a series of recommendations to improve the department's compliance with the law.

One of those was to appoint an information champion, tasked with providing "leadership, oversight and accountability necessary to promote and operationalise the department's compliance with the FOI act".

That was to be done by 5 November.But newly released documents strongly suggest the department has not acted on that recommendation.

An FOI lodged on 11 November asked for any document held by the department related to the OAIC's recommendation that an information champion be appointed. The department told the FOI applicant that they held no such records.

"I have decided to refuse your request under section 24A(1) of the FOI Act, on the basis that the Department has taken all reasonable steps to locate the documents you have requested, and those documents do not exist," the department told the applicant.

block-time published-time 12.54am GMT

Labor caucus has determined its position on the religious discrimination bill:

Labor will not adopt a final position on the bill until a parliamentary committee has completed an inquiry;In the unusual event the government attempts to bring the bill on prior to the inquiry completing, Labor will "pursue procedural ***measures*** to defer such a vote until Labor has adopted a final position on the bill";In the event that the government succeeds in bringing the bill on for a vote in the house prior to Labor adopting a final position - Labor WILL NOT OPPOSE the bill in the house, while making clear the principles that will guide Labor's position and the need for the government to deliver on its 3-year old commitment to protect LGBT students from discrimination.

The caucus discussed concerns including the implications of the bill on outsourcing government services to religious organisations; and how to ensure minorities within faith communities are heard.

The shadow attorney general, Mark Dreyfus, said Labor should encourage submissions to the inquiry, but it is set to only have three public hearings. Dreyfus said he was "disappointed" the government had not used this moment for harmony and bringing people together; and that the government had let many communities down when it attempted to amend 18C of the Racial Discrimination Act.

block-time published-time 12.52am GMT

Keep in mind that journalists have not seen the review - it has been given to the government, but no one has seen it as yet, so asking questions will be a little tricky

block-time published-time 12.51am GMT

Simon Birmingham will be standing up with the prime minister at 12.15 - so take that as confirmation that it will be on the Kate Jenkins review.

(as the finance minister, Birmingham is the minister responsible for parliamentary staff)

block-time published-time 12.48am GMT

Parliament is due to sit at midday today (it is always later on Tuesday because of the party room meetings).

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.50am GMT

block-time published-time 12.46am GMT

The prime minister has announced a press conference for 12.15pm.

It's in the courtyard.

That is presumably on the Kate Jenkins report into parliamentary culture, which has been handed to the government.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.49am GMT

block-time published-time 12.45am GMT

The ABC has reported a fifth case of the Omicron variant of Covid has been confirmed in NSW - a woman who arrived in Sydney before the travel restrictions were in place. The ABC says the woman had visited several venues on the NSW central coast.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.49am GMT

block-time published-time 12.43am GMT

Ben Butler has more on Westpac:

Westpac has admitted it broke the law and agreed to pay penalties totalling $113m after the corporate regulator hit the bank with six lawsuits over shoddy treatment of customers that included charging dead people fees and lambasted the bank for a "poor compliance culture" that needs urgent improvement.

The bank has admitted the allegations in the lawsuits, filed in the federal court by the Australian Securities and Investments Commission, and in addition to the penalty will pay customers $80m in remediation.

Tens of thousands of customers were improperly charged tens of millions of dollars as a result of Westpac's misconduct, Asic said.

Related: [*Westpac admits it broke law and agrees to pay $113m in penalties*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2021/nov/30/westpac-admits-it-broke-law-and-agrees-to-pay-113m-in-penalties)

block-time published-time 12.38am GMT

The Labor caucus has made at least one decision

enltrUpdate: Labor will reserve its position on religious discrimination until after an inquiry; then if govt forces a vote will aim to delay it; THEN if STILL forced it will "not oppose" in the lower house. [*@AmyRemeikis*](https://twitter.com/AmyRemeikis?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) [*https://t.co/7vhO8dePXJ*](https://t.co/7vhO8dePXJ)

- Paul Karp (@Paul\_Karp) [*November 30, 2021*](https://twitter.com/Paul_Karp/status/1465478655954456580?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 12.28am GMT

This is coming very soon:

enltrMedia alert: Sex Discrimination Commissioner [*@Kate\_Jenkins\_*](https://twitter.com/Kate_Jenkins_?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) will today launch Set the Standard, the final report on the Independent Review into Commonwealth Parliamentary Workplaces. [*pic.twitter.com/utNNM7QteE*](https://t.co/utNNM7QteE)

- Australian Human Rights Commission (@AusHumanRights) [*November 30, 2021*](https://twitter.com/AusHumanRights/status/1465470691021451267?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

In the parliament, Simon Birmingham, as the minister who has carriage of parliamentary staff, is expected to take carriage of the report, although it would be expected that the prime minister also say something.

Either way, it will be an issue in question time.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.14am GMT

block-time published-time 12.22am GMT

The political parties have broken from their meetings - we will bring you the updates on what was said in the rooms very soon

block-time published-time 12.12am GMT

NSW Health has put out its release on the latest case numbers, which includes this:

NSW Health is investigating two Covid cases who arrived in NSW on flight QR908 on 25 November. Both are isolating at their respective homes. Urgent genomic sequencing is underway to determine whether these cases have been infected with the Omicron Covid-19 variant. All passengers on this flight must be tested immediately, regardless of previous test results and vaccination status, and isolate until a negative result is received.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.22am GMT

block-time published-time 12.08am GMT

Activists have stopped an Adani train carrying a load of coal towards the company's export port in north Queensland.

Adani says it will be exporting its first shipment from the Carmichael coalmine by the end of the year.

But the company remains cagey about the specifics and whether the train (which is branded with the logo of Adani's subsidiary, Bowen Rail Company) stopped by activists near Bowen - on the line to the Abbot Point port - contains a first load.

The moment will be significant - and heavily stage-managed by both the company and climate activists - given the decade-long controversy about the mine's construction and the ***unprecedented*** campaign to stop it proceeding.

Activists from the group Frontline Action Against Coal claim they have stopped the train on the outskirts of Bowen. Two activists have locked themselves to the railway line. Another two activists, a mother and daughter, used steel pipes to lock themselves to train wagons.

Police are in attendance at the two separate sites.

Images shared with Guardian Australia show the wagons fully laden with coal.

Earlier this month a Bowen Rail Company locomotive broke down on the shared section of railway, near Collinsville.

Adani said that the train was undergoing testing.

The company says: "Testing and commissioning on the trains has been underway for several weeks which has included transporting coal.

"As is the usual ***process*** for new pieces of equipment and infrastructure, this is expected to take a period of time as the new machines and infrastructure are tested.

"The Carmichael mine is on track to export coal in 2021."

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.13am GMT

block-time published-time 12.07am GMT

The House of Representatives' daily program for Tuesday is out.

A draft circulated on Friday suggesting the religious discrimination bill would come on for debate on Tuesday afternoon, but it has now been bumped down the program.

enltrGood morning. The House will resume at noon. The day will begin with two committee reports being presented, after which debate will resume on the National Health Amendment (Enhancing the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme) Bill 2021. See the full program here: [*https://t.co/pWJxbQVHJK*](https://t.co/pWJxbQVHJK) [*pic.twitter.com/1qNQhsbihn*](https://t.co/1qNQhsbihn)

- Australian House of Representatives (@AboutTheHouse) [*November 30, 2021*](https://twitter.com/AboutTheHouse/status/1465470907917344775?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

CORRECTION: An earlier post suggested it had been removed from the program. In fact, it has been bumped down the program (but not removed).

[*https://twitter.com/Paul\_Karp/status/1465473698182287363*](https://twitter.com/Paul_Karp/status/1465473698182287363)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.15am GMT

block-time published-time 12.05am GMT

Well this is a change:

enltr [*#breaking*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/BREAKING?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) - Religious Discrimination bill has been ditched from Tuesday's program. [*#auspol*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/auspol?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) [*https://t.co/JpTvGNmx3n*](https://t.co/JpTvGNmx3n)

- Paul Karp (@Paul\_Karp) [*November 30, 2021*](https://twitter.com/Paul_Karp/status/1465471689295208451?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.10am GMT

block-time published-time 12.01am GMT

Queensland extending vaccine mandate

The Queensland premier, Annastacia Palaszczuk, has announced an extension of the state's vaccine mandates. Workers on the list will have to be fully vaccinated by 23 January (with at least one dose by 17 December).

enltrBREAKING: Vaccinations will be mandated for people who work in schools, early childhood centres, correctional centres, youth detention facilities and airports. [*#covid19*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/COVID19?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) [*pic.twitter.com/Akq3S8VQIG*](https://t.co/Akq3S8VQIG)

- Annastacia Palaszczuk (@AnnastaciaMP) [*November 29, 2021*](https://twitter.com/AnnastaciaMP/status/1465469253130211329?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.09am GMT

block-time published-time 11.59pm GMT

Outside parliament and GetUp has organised a couple of events on the lawn.

One is calling for the government to pass a cultural heritage protection act and the second is on the hand over of a petition for a federal Icac.

block-time published-time 11.43pm GMT

The joint human rights committee has [*announced some details*](https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Joint/Human_Rights/ReligiousDiscrimination) of its inquiry into the the three religious discrimination bills.

As Guardian Australia revealed yesterday, the chair, Anne Webster, is [*keen to keep the inquiry narrowly focused on the religious discrimination bills*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2021/nov/29/inquiry-into-religious-discrimination-bill-should-not-consider-other-exemptions-chair-says) - not religious exemptions to other discrimination laws, such as the Sex Discrimination Act.

The committee said: " The committee has resolved that it will accept submissions strictly addressing its terms of reference: that is, relating to the religious discrimination legislative package."So, in effect, submitters are being told they can raise concerns about the effect of allowing religious schools to discriminate on the grounds of religious ethos, but should not raise the bigger concern about sacking gay teachers and expelling gay students, powers contained in the SDA.

The committee has set a deadline of 21 December for submissions, and announced public hearings on 21 December, 13 and 14 January. Merry Christmas stakeholders, MPs and senators.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 11.49pm GMT

block-time published-time 11.32pm GMT

Anyone who isn't very online may have missed the whirlwind of conspiracy theories that swirled around this photo - were the steaks actually cooked on the barbecue, when was it taken, it's cold in Melbourne, where are the jumpers, the gas isn't on... it was a ride (that at least one federal government MP jumped on).

Anyways, now Daniel Andrews has addressed it in a press conference, because this is what Australian politics is about now:

enltrThe premier on THAT barbecue selfie with Albo: "The gas was on. Searing a steak before you put on the barbecue is not the most novel thing ... The asparagus - I assure you we didn't eat it raw. It was windy and not that warm so that's why I have a jumper on". [*pic.twitter.com/xQrvCsBhhl*](https://t.co/xQrvCsBhhl)

- Benita Kolovos (@benitakolovos) [*November 29, 2021*](https://twitter.com/benitakolovos/status/1465459912402636800?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 11.45pm GMT

block-time published-time 11.29pm GMT

The committee looking into the religious discrimination review is due to report back on 4 February.

Which means it needs submissions by 21 December, with public hearings scheduled for mid-January (when most people are still on holidays/switched off).

enltrThe Human Rights Joint Committee has issued a media release regarding its inquiry into the Religious Discrimination Bill 2021 and related bills More information: [*https://t.co/JswKXtK8VB*](https://t.co/JswKXtK8VB) [*pic.twitter.com/A26GUgUjQz*](https://t.co/A26GUgUjQz)

- Australian Senate (@AuSenate) [*November 29, 2021*](https://twitter.com/AuSenate/status/1465441794833879040?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 11.43pm GMT

block-time published-time 11.16pm GMT

Probably not a surprise to anyone paying attention:

enltrFederal government lags all Australian states on renewable energy action, new report finds [*https://t.co/wJbD8KMDnH*](https://t.co/wJbD8KMDnH)

- Lisa Cox (@\_LisaMCox) [*November 29, 2021*](https://twitter.com/_LisaMCox/status/1465459619795398662?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 11.11pm GMT

You can set your calendar to it. The Morrison government is required to release national emissions figures within five months of the end of a quarter.

So, lo and behold, on the final day, here we have the [*June quarter and fiscal year data on our greenhouse emissions*](https://www.industry.gov.au/data-and-publications/national-greenhouse-gas-inventory-quarterly-update-june-2021).

Given the nature of the release, it's perhaps apt that fugitive emissions fell the most in the June quarter, dropping 8.7%.

That's a little bit surprising, though, as it implies gas and coal production was reduced during the April-June months by some margin.

Be that as it may, the headline figure is probably that for the year to June, Australia's total emissions were under 500 million tonnes of carbon-dioxide equivalent.

That looks like the lowest annual rate since records have been kept, and was down 10.8m tonnes, or 2.1%, from a year earlier.

The government has made much of the fact national emissions are now at 20.4% below levels from 2005 - the baseline year for the 2030 Paris Agreement target.

Once again, emissions from the electricity sector led the falls. The surge in renewable energy, which arguably has been in deviance of many of the federal Coalition's policies, helped shave 7.7mln tonnes, or 4.5%, from that national total.

If you exclude land use changes, the national story is a lot less rosy. The government booked a net sink of 24.4 mln tonnes - little changed from a year ago.

Excluding that sector, then Australia's national emissions were 523.3m tonnes, the lowest at an annual rate since 2003.

As Guardian Australia has reported, [*there are good reasons to be sceptical*](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/nov/08/australias-emissions-from-land-clearing-likely-far-higher-than-claimed-analysis-indicates) about Australia's emissions savings from the land sector.

In short, Australia's emissions are probably on the downward trajectory, thanks mostly to the advance of zero carbon solar and wind farms but the rest of the economy is largely still chugging along.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 11.33pm GMT

block-time published-time 11.10pm GMT

The ABC is reporting Hobart woman Susan Neill-Fraser [*has lost her second appeal against her murder conviction.*](https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-11-30/susan-neill-fraser-loses-appeal-dismissed/100660392)

She has always maintained her innocence. She was allowed a second appeal after a change in Tasmanian law. Under the original sentence, Neill-Fraser is eligible for parole next August.

block-time published-time 10.59pm GMT

More than half of all Ambulance Victoria employees have experienced bullying at work and almost one in five experienced sexual harassment, an independent review by the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission has found.

The first part of the review, which included a survey of more than 2,000 Ambulance Victoria employees, was released on Tuesday. It found that 52.4% reported experiencing bullying, 47.2% said they had experienced discrimination in the workforce, 34% had experienced victimisation, and 17.4% had experienced sexual assault.

Commissioner Ro Allen said these experiences had a "profound" impact on many of the 255 who spoke in depth to the inquiry.

Allen said:

"The Victorian community rightly hold Ambulance Victoria in high regard, due to the incredible dedication and care that so many of us have experienced from the service.

"It is vitally important that that same level of care be extended to all who work for Ambulance Victoria, and that those within the organisation treat each other with the same level of respect and compassion that they give to the community."

The report found that many members of Ambulance Victoria do not feel safe or valued in the workplace. One respondent told the commission:

" This organisation's culture is unsafe for people who are not white males. It's really bad."

Ambulance Victoria's chairman, Ken Lay, said the report was "both painful and confronting" and revealed a depth of discrimination, bullying and harassment in the workplace that was "deeply disturbing".

The report made 24 recommendations, all of which have been accepted by Ambulance Victoria. In a statement, health minister Martin Foley said the behaviour and culture outlined in the report was " simply unacceptable and in no way meets the standards this government, and the broader community, expect of a workplac e".

Foley said:

"To anyone in Ambulance Victoria who has experienced discrimination, sexual harassment, bullying and victimisation of any kind - please know we hear you, we believe you and there will be immediate action taken."

Volume two of the final report will be released in March.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 11.04pm GMT

block-time published-time 10.56pm GMT

Daniel Andrews says the Omicron variant, at this point, doesn't change anything.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 11.05pm GMT

block-time published-time 10.55pm GMT

Daniel Andrews press conference

Daniel Andrews is holding a press conference after his government secured the votes it needed to pass its amended pandemic legislation.

He is asked about the vaccine mandates:

They won't be here forever but they're based on health advice and we'll continue to follow health advice. Whilst we review all the rules and, because of the rules and the vaccinate rates, we've been able to achieve, just over a few weeks ago, we took all the rules off pretty much except for masks in a number of sensitive settings, really.

But we will continue to review continuously all of the rules and that includes the way the vaccinated economy operates.

But I will say this, we've got to get boosters done, we've got to get the paediatric vaccine done, and the last couple of days show us that this virus is not static. It's going to keep changing. And our response will need to be nimble. And the inherent protections that come from encouraging everyone to get vaccinated, well, the hospitalisation numbers tell you all that you need to know. There are very, very few people, a handful in fact, that are in hospital, double jabbed, really sick.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 11.05pm GMT

block-time published-time 10.53pm GMT

The political parties are holding their party room/caucus meetings today, which means the next few hours will be a little more quiet.

block-time published-time 10.50pm GMT

And so ends the press conference.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 11.05pm GMT

block-time published-time 10.50pm GMT

Does the federal government have any idea on when the national plan will move from the third stage to the fourth, given the new variant?

Greg Hunt:

The position at the moment is right now we're in the ***process*** of moving through the stages of border reopening. The last part of it would be up vaccinated arrivals.

We're not at a point yet to make that decision. We've always set out the time frames for decisions and that will be considered at a later time.

Right now we have to work with the states and territories and we're working with them cooperatively.

The national cabinet is meeting today and the health ministers are meeting collectively today and so the national plan is always under constant review at this point in time. The next phases are the students and the workers.

Then double vaccinated tourists and the progressive bubbles and then we'll continue to follow the medical advice and when we believe that that's safe we would look at unvaccinated arrivals. That's not today.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 11.06pm GMT

block-time published-time 10.46pm GMT

Prof Paul Kelly on the issue of boosters:

We need to be cognisant of the international evidence and international decisions but remember the northern hemisphere is in winter so boosters in winter make a lot of sense.

We're more than six months away from winter. We know that respiratory viruses circulate a lot more in winter. It's likely that that's when we would want the boosters to to be totally actively working. There are some significant reasons behind the day of a booster more than three months but it's a balance and that's exactly the sort of issues that I discussed this morning with Atagi and they'll look at that now.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 10.52pm GMT

block-time published-time 10.42pm GMT

Karen Andrews goes through the declaration requirements of returning travellers:

Internationally, we have very high expectations and requirements of international travellers coming into Australia.

That requires them to have a negative PCR test before they are uplifted and there are quite heavy penalties for airlines should they choose to uplift someone who does not have the appropriate vaccination or does not have a negative PCR test.

So we have those protocols in place. On arrival, well, passengers are required to have filled in an Australia travel declaration indicating what their vaccination status is and the countries through which they have travelled to come to Australia.

A number of those requirements have been mandated now and there are significant penalties for false declarations, so that's over $6,000 can be applied as a fine but also up to a 12-month prison sentence for people who do not declare and appropriately on the [arrival card].

In addition, if it is fraudulently filled out, then potentially there are offences under the criminal code that may well be enforced should they be determined to be appropriate and, of course, when passengers arrive here, the Australian Border Force takes a very active role in compliance to make sure that all the proper authorities are in place including the negative PCR test before they were uplifted and vaccination status.

block-time published-time 10.40pm GMT

How are vaccination rates going in Indigenous communities? Greg Hunt:

We've seen a strong spike in Indigenous vaccinations over recent weeks. There was a significant hesitancy. That's the honest answer.

We're now, as of today, at 74% Indigenous first dose and 62.6% Indigenous second dose and so I want to thank all of the Indigenous community leaders.

They've really stepped up. They're working with commonwealth, state and territory governments as an implementation partnership signed with all states and territories for co-leadership in this space.

We're seeing that initial hesitancy falling away. Northern Territory in particular is doing a great job. Western Australia is where we have to do the most work.

That's just a fact, not a reflection, and all the states and territories are absolutely doing their best to provide encouragement.

There has been some, I think, fairly malicious targeting by some anti-vaxx groups of Indigenous groups and we've been fighting against that for a long while but we're beginning to win that fight and I think the Northern Territory has been the model in the way in which we're beginning to see very significant growth in Indigenous communities.

The change in Indigenous communities is because of the work so many Indigenous people have been doing to combat vaccine misinformation and anti-vaxxer campaigns, as well as working with community leaders to get to the people who need the information. The work they have done to protect their community has been above and beyond and needs to be acknowledged by anyone reporting on this issue.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 10.45pm GMT

block-time published-time 10.31pm GMT

CMO: 'We don't know still about vaccine effectiveness' against Omicron variant

Then we get to the chief medical officer, Prof Paul Kelly :

In terms of what we know, we now have five cases that have been diagnosed in Australia.

They've all been diagnosed quickly.

They're all in quarantine, one in the Northern Territory at the centre for national resistance and the other four in New South Wales.

What do we know about those cases? And it's similar to travellers in other countries in the world, almost all of them directly linked with southern Africa - they are young.

They're doubly vaccinated. Several of them have had infection previously, either known or on serological testing.

And they have very mild or in fact no disease. That's what we know so far.

In terms of transmission on from those people, the only case we really know about is the one we talked about on Saturday in hotel quarantine in Hong Kong where there was someone who had come from southern Africa and transmitted to another person from another part of the world across the corridor. So we know it's transmissible.

We don't know still about the vaccine effectiveness. We don't know about severity and there's mixed reports on that from South Africa itself - and I would echo Minister Hunt's view that this has been a difficult time for them and their neighbouring countries, one of which, Malawi, I worked in myself, so I feel for that country and I still have links to there.

It's difficult but they've been extremely open and helpful in relation to what they know.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 10.53pm GMT

block-time published-time 10.28pm GMT

Karen Andrews is also at this press conference, where she speaks about the decision to delay the border reopening for skilled worker visa holders and international students (as well as the travel bubble with South Korea and Japan).

So this 14-day pause, as I've indicated, was taken as a result of the briefing by Prof Paul Kelly last night. It wasn't a decision that the Australian government took lightly.

We have been very focused on doing all we can to open our international borders as safely and quickly as we possibly can do. I want to stress that this is a 14-day pause and we will be working to ensure that we will open our borders as soon as we possibly can.

We are acutely aware of the impact this will have on individuals, families and businesses here in Australia but I stress this is a 14-day pause. I would also like to commend the state and territory governments for their response to the issues relating to the Omicron variant. They have been calm, ***measured*** and responsible in their approach and I thank them for doing so.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 10.48pm GMT

block-time published-time 10.24pm GMT

Greg Hunt press conference

As is his habit, Greg Hunt goes through information we already know - vaccination updates, what the government is doing, announcements which been made in the last little bit - before moving on:

I want to particularly single out and thank South Africa. South Africa has been very cooperative and transparent, both internationally and directly with Australia. Our High Commission has been working with South Africa, the deputy chief medical officer, Prof Michael Kidd, has been working being South Africa. And the advice is that this may - may - turn out to be a milder variant... has come very much from the field evidence on the ground in South Africa.

We want to acknowledge and recognise it's a difficult time for them but everybody is working together. Australia's dealt with challenges and we're ready for this. We're able to deal with this and we want to give Australia that confidence.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 10.51pm GMT

block-time published-time 10.14pm GMT

Greg Hunt has called a press conference to give the Omicron update - he'll be up in just a few minutes.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 10.52pm GMT

block-time published-time 10.06pm GMT

Victorian government secures votes for amended pandemic legislation

As Calla Wahlquist has been reporting, the Victorian government appears to have the votes to pass its amended pandemic legislation (by one).

The other crossbencher the government was negotiating with has said no:

enltrSustainable Australia MP Clifford Hayes says he's not supporting the amended pandemic legislation. "I would argue that myself and my colleague, Rod Barton, fought hard and long for these changes but the final position of the govt was not enough to garner my support," he says. [*pic.twitter.com/SjKWlrFzAf*](https://t.co/SjKWlrFzAf)

- Benita Kolovos (@benitakolovos) [*November 29, 2021*](https://twitter.com/benitakolovos/status/1465431861266575361?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 11.04pm GMT

block-time published-time 10.03pm GMT

Victoria records 917 Covid cases and six deaths; NSW records 179 cases and three deaths

NSW and Victoria have reported their Covid data for the day:

enltrNSW COVID-19 update - Tuesday 30 November 2021 In the 24-hour reporting period to 8pm last night: - 94.5% of people aged 16+ have had one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine - 92.4% of people aged 16+ have had two doses of a COVID-19 vaccine [*pic.twitter.com/jvgNKwp8uJ*](https://t.co/jvgNKwp8uJ)

- NSW Health (@NSWHealth) [*November 29, 2021*](https://twitter.com/NSWHealth/status/1465440678045835268?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

enltrWe thank everyone who got vaccinated and tested yesterday. Our thoughts are with those in hospital, and the families of people who have lost their lives. More data soon: [*https://t.co/OCCFTAtS1P*](https://t.co/OCCFTAtS1P) [*#COVID19Vic*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/COVID19Vic?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) [*#COVID19VicData*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/COVID19VicData?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) [*pic.twitter.com/hflZSgmc00*](https://t.co/hflZSgmc00)

- VicGovDH (@VicGovDH) [*November 29, 2021*](https://twitter.com/VicGovDH/status/1465440525163532288?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

The nine deaths across Victoria and NSW show that, for many, the virus is still having a massive impact on people's lives.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 10.35pm GMT

block-time published-time 9.56pm GMT

It's that time of year again - when everyone argues over whether they have ever heard the word of the year.

enltrStrollout chosen as Macquarie dictionary's 2021 word of the year [*https://t.co/nRIt7ZSqDA*](https://t.co/nRIt7ZSqDA)

- Guardian Australia (@GuardianAus) [*November 29, 2021*](https://twitter.com/GuardianAus/status/1465439133535555598?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 10.10pm GMT

block-time published-time 9.55pm GMT

In case you missed this yesterday:

enltrGeoffrey and Jane Smith have been friends to migrant workers functioning in slave-like conditions. What do they get in return? A home raid from the Border Force, who also cited Vanuatu's High Commissioner in their targets. This is outrageous behaviour by the Morrison government. [*pic.twitter.com/YWkHjYbSRF*](https://t.co/YWkHjYbSRF)

- Senator Tony Sheldon (@senator\_sheldon) [*November 29, 2021*](https://twitter.com/senator_sheldon/status/1465139846515609604?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 9.48pm GMT

Sarah Martin has a story on an independent challenger for Liberal MP Fiona Martin in Reid:

A high-profile NSW Liberal woman is quitting to run as an independent at the next federal election, partly to protest the handling of an internal complaint in which she alleged "inappropriate" behaviour by some senior men within the party and government.

Natalie Baini, a lawyer and sports administrator who nominated as a Liberal candidate for the marginal Sydney seat of Reid in May, is withdrawing from the preselection ***process*** and quitting the party to run as an independent.

Her decision is also due to her concerns about the preselection ***process***, with expectations growing the Liberals [*will not allow a ballot of members*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2021/nov/19/liberals-push-to-speed-up-nsw-preselections-amid-frustration-at-tactics-of-key-scott-morrison-ally) in the seat that would have seen her compete against the sitting moderate MP, Fiona Martin.

Baini, who advised the party on Monday that she would be withdrawing from the preselection race and cancelling her membership, told Guardian Australia she had initially decided to nominate after being approached by party faithful unhappy with their representation in Canberra.

Related: [*High-profile Liberal woman quits party to run as independent after alleging 'inappropriate' behaviour*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2021/nov/30/high-profile-liberal-woman-quits-party-to-run-as-independent-after-alleging-inappropriate-behaviour)

block-time published-time 9.43pm GMT

Key crossbench MP agrees to support Victorian pandemic laws

Transport Matters MP Rod Barton has agreed to support the Victorian government's pandemic laws in exchange for amendments including giving parliament the power to disallow pandemic orders.

In a statement released this morning, the Andrews government said the emergence of the Omicron variant showed the continued need for pandemic powers.

They said:

Over the past fortnight, we offered negotiations to the entire crossbench, giving them the opportunity to work with us on changes to this bill that would ensure Victoria has such a framework in place.

These were rigorous negotiations - and we thank Rod Barton who came to the table in good faith.

If this bill passes, we will have strengthened parliamentary oversight, with an independent joint investigatory committee and the ability for the parliament to revoke pandemic orders.

The amendments negotiated with Barton include creating a cross-parliamentary committee with the power to recommend the disallowance of pandemic orders. They also state that if such a recommendation is made, the orders can be disallowed by an absolute majority in a joint sitting of both houses of parliament.

It also replaces the current detention review officer panel with a new independent merits review for detention orders, and clarifies that complaints made about detention can be filed with the ombudsman.

The government will also remove the aggravated offence clause, and require that independent experts conduct a review of a pandemic declaration after 18 months of it being in operation.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 9.54pm GMT

block-time published-time 9.38pm GMT

Again, you'll hear a lot about "wedge politics" in the coming weeks and months - the religious discrimination bill is just one example.

"Wedge politics" refers to an issue which one side of politics raises in order to push the other side into a decision, in order to expose divides. It's an issue for many reasons - one, it treats politics as a game, when it has real world impact on actual people, and two, it shows politics as being about staying in power, rather than trying to make lives better.

The issues used for wedge politics - climate, religion, sexuality, etc - have real world effects that are very important to a lot of people, not as some ephemeral concept, but for their life and identity. They should be treated with the respect they deserve.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 9.43pm GMT

block-time published-time 9.29pm GMT

Paul Karp also has an update on Labor's position on the religious discrimination bill:

Labor will aim to sidestep the religious discrimination stoush by reserving its position on the Morrison government bill until after a committee inquiry.

The shadow attorney general, Mark Dreyfus, took that recommendation to shadow cabinet on Monday evening before Labor caucus will gather on Tuesday, its first meeting since [*Scott Morrison introduced the bill late last week*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2021/nov/25/religious-discrimination-bill-introduced-scott-morrison-prime-minister-australia-lgbt-lgbtiq-catholic-christian-protections).

On Friday, Morrison [*referred the bill to a joint human rights committee inquiry*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2021/nov/26/bridget-archer-says-she-didnt-want-to-meet-pm-immediately-after-crossing-floor-on-integrity-commission) reporting on 4 February, despite previously calling for a Senate-only inquiry with no input from MPs.

Labor argues that having backed down from that position it would be highly unusual for the government to attempt to force a vote in the House of Representatives before the committee reports, and is seeking to enlist support from Liberal moderates to prevent it happening.

Related: [*Labor to wait for inquiry into religious discrimination bill before declaring position*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2021/nov/30/labor-to-wait-for-inquiry-into-religious-discrimination-bill-before-declaring-position)

block-time published-time 9.20pm GMT

Murph has the latest on the the Scanlon Foundation Research Institute annual report - seems more Australians have actually had a look around:

Australians are increasingly aware that racism is a problem in their country, while positive sentiment about immigration and multiculturalism has also increased over the past 12 months, according to an authoritative survey on social cohesion.

The annual Mapping Social Cohesion Report from the Scanlon Foundation Research Institute, released on Tuesday, has charted a 20 percentage point increase in 12 months in response to the question "How big a problem is racism in Australia?"

Back in 2020, 40% of respondents thought racism in Australia was either a very big or fairly big problem. But in the 2021 survey of 3,572 respondents, 60% held that view.

The survey authors note "an increase of 20 percentage points in response to a general question of this nature is almost ***unprecedented*** in the Scanlon Foundation surveys", [*which have been conducted annually*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2021/feb/04/coronavirus-toughing-out-covid-why-australia-chose-not-to-fracture-during-a-once-in-a-century-crisis) since 2007. But they say there is no clear trigger or cultural catalyst explaining such a large shift.

Related: [*'Almost* ***unprecedented****' spike in number of Australians who see racism as a problem, survey finds*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2021/nov/30/almost-unprecedented-spike-in-number-of-australians-who-see-racism-as-a-problem-survey-suggests)

block-time published-time 9.18pm GMT

Deputy chief medical officer Dr Sonya Bennett has had a chat to the ABC, reminding people to just get vaccinated (viruses, as we know, don't really give a fig about borders, because they are viruses):

What we're done in Australia is very proportionate and ***measured*** and the intent is to slow any spread of this new variant into Australia whilst we learn more about the virus.

We're in a very good position here.

Our vaccination coverage is good.

The virus does appear to be showing indications it causes mild illness in vaccinated people.

So it's really a reminder, whilst we have high vaccine coverage, we still have a large number of people who don't have a single dose.

So it's really a reminder for people to consider that. We won't be able to stop this virus at the border.

It does look like it's highly transmissible and we know even with the strictest mitigation ***measures*** with Delta, it's a virus.

It will get through the borders at some stage and spread. So just a reminder to people really to consider both getting double-dose vaccination and, if you're due for a booster, get that as soon as you can.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 9.24pm GMT

block-time published-time 9.14pm GMT

The World Health Organisation has entered the conversation (via AAP):

Developed nations such as Australia have been warned slamming borders shut to countries reporting new Covid-19 variants could backfire.

The World Health Organisation says it could make countries less willing to share information about emerging strains.

"We don't like to see that level of restriction because that really punishes [those countries]," WHO spokeswoman Margaret Harris told Sky News on Tuesday.

"It makes other countries less comfortable about being so helpful to the rest of the world."

Australia has delayed it reopening to international students and visa holders from Wednesday until December 15 to buy time to find out more about the Omicron variant that appears to be more transmissible.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 9.24pm GMT

block-time published-time 9.05pm GMT

For those asking, there are five cases of the new Omicron confirmed in Australia - all are in quarantine.

There are four in Sydney (after two more were confirmed late yesterday) and one in the Northern Territory.

All five people had been vaccinated.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 9.09pm GMT

block-time published-time 9.01pm GMT

Asic takes 'multiple' actions against Westpac

AAP has this update:

The corporate regulator has taken the ***unprecedented*** step of launching multiple legal actions at once against one of Australia's big four banks.

The Australian Securities and Investments Commission has hit Westpac with six civil penalty proceedings in the federal court, which could draw a combined penalty of more than $100m.

The actions follow separate Asic investigations conducted in 2021, resulting in allegations of widespread compliance failures across multiple Westpac businesses.

These include its banking, superannuation and wealth management brands and the former general insurance business.

The alleged conduct - mostly involving "poor systems, poor ***processes*** and poor governance" - occurred over many years and affected many thousands of consumers, Asic said.

"It is ***unprecedented*** for Asic to file multiple proceedings against the same respondent at the same time," Asic deputy chair Sarah Court said on Tuesday.

"However, these were ***exceptional*** circumstances... and we decided to expedite those matters for consideration by the court at the earliest opportunity."

Westpac admitted the allegations in each of the proceedings and would remediate about $80m to customers, Asic said.

Asic and Westpac will also submit to the court that combined penalties of more than $100m "are appropriate".

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 9.08pm GMT

block-time published-time 8.47pm GMT

The Andrews government has been negotiating with crossbench MPs in an attempt to get the one final vote needed to pass its proposed pandemic laws in the final parliamentary sitting week of the year.

Debate on the Public Health and Wellbeing Amendment (Pandemic Management) Bill was [*postponed earlier this month*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2021/nov/18/victorias-pandemic-bill-in-disarray-as-former-minister-adem-somyurek-vows-to-oppose-it) after former Labor MP Adem Somyurek belatedly declared his vaccination status in order to be able to return to parliament and vote against the bill.

The proposed legislation would replace the state of emergency, which is due to expire on 15 December. If it expires before the legislation is past, the Victorian government will not be able to enforce public health orders.

Labor had already gained the support of three upper house crossbench MPs - Reason party's Fiona Patten, Greens leader Samantha Ratnam and Animal Justice party's Andy Meddick - who negotiated [*a raft of reforms including a significant reduction in fines for breaching public health orders and a fully funded independent oversight committee*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2021/nov/16/victorian-pandemic-legislation-what-changes-have-been-made-to-the-controversial-bill).

It is now having to negotiate with two more crossbenchers, Transport Matters MP Rod Barton and Sustainable Australia's Clifford Hayes, to secure the final vote. The pair have called for even greater parliamentary oversight than was negotiated by the other three crossbenchers, and further checks on the new powers.

Hayes told AAP late yesterday that negotiations were still ongoing:

"I understand the need for some kind of pandemic framework but if we do not achieve a result that withstands expert and community scrutiny, I will not hesitate to vote against the bill."

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 9.04pm GMT

block-time published-time 8.46pm GMT

Solomon Islands province premier Daniel Suidani [*spoke to the ABC yesterday*](https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-11-30/solomon-islands-prime-minister-defends-australian-troops-honiara/100660318) and said the Australian intervention was "not helpful".

Karen Andrews was asked about that on the ABC and said Australia had made it clear it was not involving itself in the political situation in any way:

It was exactly the right move for Australia to make. Let's be clear, we made that in response to a request from the Solomon Islands' prime minister. We're there supporting the Solomon Islands police force. This is a policing matter.

We made it very clear that we are not there to participate at all in domestic political matters. We are there to work with the Solomon Islands' police force to restore law and public order as soon as possible.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 8.49pm GMT

block-time published-time 8.35pm GMT

It was vile and unacceptable that ABC journalists were abused by anti-vaxxers on the weekend, ABC managing director David Anderson told Senate estimates on Monday night.

enltrBroome ABC office this morning: anti vax protesters fire off air horns, mega phones, shout, faces pushed up against the glass. Inside staff working overtime to provide emergency bushfire warnings as fire threatens homes just outside town. [*pic.twitter.com/sTJFCAqQtY*](https://t.co/sTJFCAqQtY)

- Matt Bamford (@BamfordMatt) [*November 27, 2021*](https://twitter.com/BamfordMatt/status/1464413600232079362?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

Anderson said ABC journalists were increasingly under attack while out in the field and were also receiving abuse and even threats online which have been reported to police.

It is something that is happening at protests and alike.

It is quite confronting, it's completely unacceptable. And it is vile what is happening to some of our people more regularly and more often.

We're having to change the way we might cover a protest or change the way we're putting people in some of these situations.

The minister representing communications minister Paul Fletcher at estimates, Jane Hume, said the government was not responsible for derogatory comments made by senators about the ABC managing director and chair.

Hume was asked if the government agreed with comments made by Liberal senator Ben Small to the Australian newspaper on Monday, which included him accusing Anderson of failing in his job.

A fish rots from the head, so the managing director needs to account for his leadership when the organisation is falling so short of any reasonable expectation.

Hume said Small was in the government but was "not in the executive" and his views "did not represent the views of the government".

Hume also distanced herself from a speech by Queensland senator James McGrath's last week in which he called for the [*ABC to be broken up and Triple J to be sold off.*](https://www.theguardian.com/media/2021/nov/26/grotesque-leftwing-back-scratching-failed-senate-inquiry-into-abc-leaves-coalition-enraged)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 8.37pm GMT

block-time published-time 8.34pm GMT

The new variant talk has turned attention back to quarantine facilities - Victoria and Queensland are building purpose-built quarantine centres, but the federal government hasn't pushed ahead with any on its own (Howard Springs in the NT has been expanded).

Karen Andrews says there is no need for new quarantine facilities:

Look, not at all. Not at all. We have very high vaccination rates. Now, over 86%, in this country.

We have very much focused as a government on vaccinations and making sure that Australians are prepared. Purpose-built quarantine facilities are very limited in their capacity.

Now, Howard Springs has been very effective at managing international arrivals, particularly those from high risk countries. We've had around the country hotel quarantine working very effectively and the good thing about hotel quarantine is that you can manage it up and down as is required.

So purpose built facilities, particularly from the federal government's point of view, have always had a limited life.

We have made it clear that any facilities that we will be involved in will need to be multiple purpose so they can be repurposed in the future, for example, if we needed to accommodate, house people, in a future pandemic, or if we particularly needed to look at where we were going to house people during a domestic crisis, which would include floods or bushfires.

(Both Queensland and Victoria say their facilities will be able to be multi-use.)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 8.37pm GMT

block-time published-time 8.29pm GMT

What about domestic borders?

Karen Andrews:

Well, that's a matter for the state and territory governments to determine. We have been very keen federally to focus on the international borders, because that's our key responsibility.

Look, so far the state and territory first ministers have been very, very conscious of the impacts of the omicron variant but they've been taking advice and they've been excellent to deal with. They have made it very clear that they are focused on finding out more about this particular variant and what the impacts are.

So it has been a very ***measured*** response from everyone here in Australia. And that's very positive.

block-time published-time 8.28pm GMT

The home affairs minister, Karen Andrews, is doing the media rounds this morning after the government announced it was pausing the border reopening for skilled worker visa holders and international students. That decision was announced late yesterday after a national security committee meeting.

We took the health advice from our chief medical officer last night. So that advice was given to the national security committee of cabinet. We listened very carefully to what Paul Kelly had to say. And the decision that was taken was that we would need to pause.

The decision we had already taken in relation to international students and skilled workers. The reason that we did that is because based on the health advice, more time was needed to make sure that we had all the relevant information in relation to that variant. But the good thing is here in Australia we have such a high vaccination rate, over 86% of eligible Australians are double vaccinated, so that does put us in very good stead to face Omicron and any other variant.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 8.34pm GMT

block-time published-time 8.25pm GMT

For those who missed it yesterday, why is everyone talking about an election being held in May?

Because the government tabled its proposed sitting calendar for 2022 late yesterday, and it includes minimal sittings in the first four months of the year, and a March budget.

As Shane Wright from Nine newspapers pointed out (he tends to know these things) if the budget is held in March, it will be a first - previously the earliest a budget had been handed down was in early April.

So the thinking goes, a short February sitting (seven days) then three days of sitting in March for the budget, and then an election in May. (Which potentially means parliament may not sit again until August, given the traditional July break, and the month after an election is usually a rest/down tools time).

Scott Morrison has said he would like to hand down a budget. But in reality (except for public servants who have to work to the timetable set down, no matter whether it happens or not) Morrison can call an election whenever he likes (as long as it is before the statutory time period, which in this case for both houses, is 22 May). Which means there can be an election called at any time, no matter what the sitting calendar says.

There is nothing stopping Morrison, if he thinks the timing is right, calling an election after the summer holidays (politicians try not to annoy people by calling elections during holiday periods, plus they want you to be able to be in your electorate so you can vote). There could be an election in March, April or May.

So while the sitting calendar points to one outcome, it is not the only one.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 8.33pm GMT

block-time published-time 8.25pm GMT

Good morning

Welcome to the third last sitting day of the year (and possibly before the election), where the government is trying for its latest reset.

Scott Morrison is back on the "won't be distracted" train, where he waxes lyrical about knowing what Australians actually care about.

So the government is pushing its social media "reforms", which are dressed up as protecting young people and women from anonymous trolling and online bullying, but really, is aimed at those looking at defamation action.

That legislation should be released today, where we will learn more, including whether the government plans on allowing public funds to be used for defamation action - something Peter Dutton, [*who sued over a (then deleted) tweet*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2021/nov/24/peter-dutton-wins-defamation-case-against-refugee-activist-shane-bazzi-over-tweet) , floated just a short time ago.

The government's voter ID laws, which have been roundly criticised as a solution looking for a problem, are also due for an airing today - despite not having Labor's support (not having Labor's support is one of the reasons the government says it is not introducing its integrity commission legislation).

But of course, it is all about the new Covid variant, with national cabinet to meet this afternoon to get an update. There is still a lot health experts don't know about the new Omicron variant - on first impressions, it seems more mild than Delta, but just as contagious. A more mild version of the virus is potentially the first step to it becoming endemic, rather than a pandemic, and there is nothing to suggest that vaccine effectiveness is affected

Still, the government that was selling itself as "getting out of people's lives" has paused the border reopening for skilled visa holders and international holders for two weeks while it works out what Omicron means. So far, that is the only major change. It's a blow for those on visas hoping to return to Australia. As yet, there is no change for vaccinated Australian passport holders being able to return. There is also no changes for people wanting to leave Australia.

We will keep you updated on what happens as it does - including any changes national cabinet decides on. The health expert panel, Atagi, are also meeting to consider whether or not there is any need to bring forward the booster shots from six months to four months (for example), so if there is any decision there, you'll be among the first to know.

Mike Bowers is out and about, and in the Canberra bureau you have Sarah Martin, Paul Karp, Daniel Hurst and Katharine Murphy. It being a parliament sitting, you have Amy Remeikis on the blog for most of the day and the entire Guardian team will keep you in the know on what is happening around the country. I hope you have had your coffee (or three).

Ready?

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 8.30pm GMT

**Load-Date:** December 1, 2021

**End of Document**



[***Reserve bank holds interest rates at record low; 38 Covid deaths reported - as it happened***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6552-PCP1-JBNF-W3RV-00000-00&context=1516831)

The Guardian (London)

April 4, 2022 Monday 10:25 PM GMT

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**Section:** AUSTRALIA NEWS; Version:26

**Length:** 35187 words

**Byline:** Caitlin Cassidy and Matilda Boseley (earlier)

**Highlight:** Central bank keeps cash rate at 0.1% ; Queensland vaccination rules to ease further from 14 April; new sanctions on Russia as foreign and defence ministers label Putin a 'war criminal' ; Sydney bus drivers to launch industrial action ; 38 Covid deaths recorded. This blog is now closedLabor flags further cost of living support if elected and attacks 'wasteful spending' in Coalition budgetKatharine Murphy: With Scott Morrison on the nose in parts of the country, Liberal MPs may want 'permission to distance'Court ruling on NSW Liberal preselections will end chaos but leave a bitter tasteBlue Mountains landslide: bodies of British father and son recovered from Wentworth FallsFollow the Ukraine live blogSee all our coronavirus coverageGet our free news app ; get our morning email briefing

**Body**

block-time published-time 9.50am BST

What we learned: Tuesday 5 April

With that, we will wrap up the blog for the evening. Stay safe and dry, wherever you are.

Here are today's major developments:

The New South Wales court of appeal has [*declined to overturn preselections*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/apr/05/court-ruling-on-nsw-liberal-preselections-will-end-chaos-but-leave-a-bitter-taste) for a raft of NSW seats, clearing the way for the prime minister's hand-picked candidates to contest the federal election.The Reserve Bank of Australia has today confirmed it will keep interest rates at the historically low rate of 0.1% despite concerns over living costs for Australians. It says inflation has increased sharply "in many parts of the world" in part due to Russia's ***invasion*** of Ukraine and pandemic recovery, however the [*Australian economy*](https://www.theguardian.com/business/australia-economy) remains "resilient" and spending is picking up following the Omicron outbreak.Shadow treasurer Jim Chalmers has repeated his challenge to Josh Frydenberg to debate at least three times during the election campaign. At a National Press Club address, he said the election would be "a referendum on the past 10 years" and a choice for what the next 10 would look like.The [*Queensland*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/queensland) premier has confirmed the state's Covid restrictions will again ease from 14 April, allowing unvaccinated residents to enter most venues in the state.A young boy has sustained significant head injuries after falling off a carousel ride at Movie World.

He is in a serious but stable condition in hospital. Two bodies have been recovered from the Blue Mountains after a family of five were caught in a freak landslide there on Monday. The national park is set to close from 9am tomorrow in anticipation of further heavy rainfall.Two people died in a helicopter crash in NSW overnight.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 9.59am BST

block-time published-time 9.38am BST

A climber has been rescued after falling and becoming stuck on a cliff in the Grampians, west of Melbourne.

A Country Fire Authority spokesperson confirmed rescue crews were called just before midday on Tuesday and found the climber on a rock ledge five to eight metres from the ground at Mt Arapiles.

The CFA worked with Fire Rescue Victoria and the State Emergency Service to bring the climber down from the ledge using "high angle rescue crews".

The climber was stretchered from the ledge before being transported to hospital. Ambulance Victoria has been contacted for comment.

block-time published-time 9.33am BST

Blue Mountains National Park to close after rockslide

New South Wales National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) has confirmed the Blue Mountains national park, excluding Evans lookout and Govetts Leap lookout, will be closed from tomorrow morning with heavy rainfall predicted in the coming days.

It follows a rockslide yesterday afternoon that resulted in the death of two people. In a statement, NPWS extended heartfelt sympathies to the family and those affected.

The site is currently closed and a comprehensive review will be undertaken.

NPWS has a world class program in place to assess geotechnical risks and maintain the safety of walking tracks and other infrastructure to the greatest extent practicable. Unfortunately it is not possible to predict and eliminate all natural risks such as rockslides, which can occasionally occur around the state.

The walking track where this incident occurred was inspected in the days before the rockslide as part of a routine track assessment program. The tracks in the Wentworth Falls precinct of the Blue Mountains national park are closed until further notice.

A significant rainfall event is predicted later this week. As a result, Blue Mountains national park will be closed, except for Evans lookout and Govetts Leap lookouts, from 9am tomorrow.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 9.39am BST

block-time published-time 9.16am BST

We are so close to a federal election now that the distinction between the faux campaign and the real one is basically nonexistent.

But as the real contest creeps closer to being officially called, there's a thorny problem for the Liberal campaign to navigate - how do you win an election when, for some voters, [*Scott Morrison*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/scott-morrison) is the problem?

Related: [*With Scott Morrison on the nose in parts of the country, Liberal MPs may want 'permission to distance' | Katharine Murphy*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/apr/05/with-scott-morrison-on-the-nose-in-parts-of-the-country-liberal-mps-have-been-given-permission-to-distance)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 9.20am BST

block-time published-time 8.58am BST

Bad news for Tasmanian friends. Intense rainfall is currently hitting the state, with flash flooding possible this evening, especially in Devonport and surrounding coastal areas.

From the Bureau of Meteorology:

Heavy to locally intense rainfall which may lead to dangerous and life-threatening flash flooding is currently occurring across northern Tasmania this afternoon and evening. Six-hourly rainfall totals between 50mm and 80mm are possible.

Rainfall rates are expected to gradually ease later this evening.

Locations which may be affected include Devonport, Ulverstone and George Town.

enltrThe Severe Weather Warning for [*#Tasmania*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/Tasmania?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) , and especially the [*#Devonport*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/Devonport?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) area, has been updated to intense rainfall with dangerous flash flooding a possibility. [*pic.twitter.com/LXCJ8KB4LG*](https://t.co/LXCJ8KB4LG)

- Bureau of Meteorology, Tasmania (@BOM\_Tas) [*April 5, 2022*](https://twitter.com/BOM_Tas/status/1511249285769310210?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 9.03am BST

block-time published-time 8.45am BST

The Australian Electoral Commission has confirmed [*a report*](https://antonygreen.com.au/loophole-allows-liberal-democrats-to-retain-party-name/) from the ABC's Antony Green that a loophole will allow the Liberal Democrats to contest the upcoming election with their current name.

Last year Labor and the Morrison government [*teamed up to pass a law*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2021/aug/24/labor-to-back-electoral-reforms-that-could-deregister-dozens-of-minor-parties) giving older registered parties an effective monopoly over use of certain words in their name on the ballot paper.

The Liberal Democrats challenged the law in the high court but lost, with a majority of four justices upholding the validity of the effective naming rights veto.

Served with a notice of an intention to deregister the Liberal Democrats, the party changed their name to Liberty and Democracy, but when objections to that name were lodged, withdrew the application - reverting back to the name they wanted all along: Liberal Democrats.

On 1 April, the AEC again served a notice it will deregister that name - but given it has to give the party three months to respond, it is now too late for that decision to bite before the May election.

Labor's Tim Ayres said the party appeared to have "taken advantage of a loophole not anticipated by drafters of the legislation".

The AEC commissioner, Tom Rogers, told Senate Estimates: "I'm aware of what the intent of parliament was and... it doesn't appear to have been met in this case."

Rogers blamed "some side routes in this legislation [that were] a bit too generous".

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 8.49am BST

block-time published-time 8.32am BST

Here's the latest from the Bureau of Meteorology, with minor to moderate flooding expected in New South Wales in the coming days as the wet weather returns (how brief our relief).

Heavy rain is expected to develop along the NSW south coast during Wednesday due to the combination of a low pressure trough and an onshore airstream. Heavy rain is expected to increase and extend to the south-east of NSW during Thursday and Friday. Minor to moderate flooding is possible for central and southern coastal rivers from Wednesday into Thursday.

Catchments in the flood watch areas are wet from recent rainfall.

enltrSevere [*#Weather*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/Weather?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) [*#Warning*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/Warning?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) issued for [*#HeavyRainfall*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/HeavyRainfall?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) , extending from central parts of the coast down to the southern coast and pushing into the adjacent ranges: [*https://t.co/tOJ57vhkrv*](https://t.co/tOJ57vhkrv). Flash [*#flooding*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/flooding?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) is possible. Renewed riverine flooding may be expected: [*https://t.co/5TwxfHWlHF*](https://t.co/5TwxfHWlHF) [*pic.twitter.com/eBNB9a2mFC*](https://t.co/eBNB9a2mFC)

- Bureau of Meteorology, New South Wales (@BOM\_NSW) [*April 5, 2022*](https://twitter.com/BOM_NSW/status/1511241378168254466?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 8.35am BST

block-time published-time 8.30am BST

The Greens have welcomed Labor's commitment to crack down on multinational tax avoidance, touted in shadow treasurer Jim Chalmers' Press Club address today, but have urged the party to commit to a concrete policy.

In November the Greens outlined a [*plan*](https://media.greens.org.au/t/y-l-bijxtd-ikjrmhyz-r/) to crack down on multinational tax avoidance - assessed to bring in about $4.5bn. The Greens leader, Adam Bandt, said money could be redirected to help fund services like Medicare and affordable housing:

We can raise up to $342bn if Labor has the guts to join the Greens in taking on the big corporations and billionaires.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 8.32am BST

block-time published-time 8.17am BST

In the latest headache for the NSW government, Network 10 is reporting that Sydney bus drivers will launch industrial action for 24 hours next Monday just days after thousands of nurses took to the streets.

The transport workers union is warning many commuters are likely to be affected by about 1,000 drivers walking off the job across the city.

enltr [*#Exclusive*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/Exclusive?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) : Sydney bus drivers will go on strike for 24 hours on Monday in the latest industrial headache for the state government | [*@danielsutton10*](https://twitter.com/danielsutton10?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) [*#nswpol*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/nswpol?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) [*pic.twitter.com/MLdvUvbGE0*](https://t.co/MLdvUvbGE0)

- 10 News First Sydney (@10NewsFirstSyd) [*April 5, 2022*](https://twitter.com/10NewsFirstSyd/status/1511238957832548357?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

Related: [*More strikes 'inevitable' in NSW as government ramps up anti-union rhetoric*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/feb/22/more-strikes-inevitable-in-nsw-as-government-ramps-up-anti-union-rhetoric)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 8.19am BST

block-time published-time 8.00am BST

Four people have been charged following a [*Fireproof Australia*](https://fireproof.news/) climate change protest at Sydney's Brighton Le Sands this morning.

About 8.30am, emergency services were called to General Holmes Drive following reports four people had allegedly gathered on the roadway, blocking traffic in the north bound lanes.

New South Wales police said officers tried to speak to the protestors, who allegedly failed to comply with directions to move on. A short time later, they were arrested without incident.

All four protesters - a 48-year-old East Lismore woman, a 61-year-old ACT woman, a 46-year-old Queensland man and a 31-year-old Brighton Le Sands woman - were charged with "wilfully prevent free passage of person/vehicle/vessel", "refuse/fail to comply with direction under Part 14", and "fail or refuse to disclose identity as required".

They were refused bail and will appear in court later today.

Fireproof Australia spokesperson Bonnie Cassen said the group wasn't afraid of fines and arrests. Anti-protest legislation introduced in NSW last Friday threatens two years jail time and/or a $22,000 fine for protesting illegally in a range of public settings including roads, train stations, tunnels, bridges and industrial areas.

Cassen:

We're more scared of what will happen when the climate crisis causes the breakdown of law and order, than we are of fines and prison. The government is focusing on us rather than what's happening in Lismore and the devastation that's coming down the road. Flood refugees need homes to get back to their lives the government can't ignore reality forever.

We will stop when all flood and fire survivors are housed, when firefighters have the tools they need and smoke filters are installed for our kids, elderly and vulnerable.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 8.07am BST

block-time published-time 7.49am BST

Liberal MP Jason Falinski and Labor MP Peter Khalil just appeared on ABC's Afternoon Briefing, tiffing over climate targets.

First, though, Falinski was asked about accusations made by Liberal Senator Concetta Fierravanti-Wells following last week's Budget announcement, that the [*PM is a "bully"*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/mar/29/scott-morrison-labelled-an-autocrat-and-bully-with-no-moral-compass-by-liberal-senator-concetta-fierravanti-wells) :

Concetta lost a hard fought preselection and I understand she is disappointed. It is human nature to want to lash out at those people we hold responsible. She has done that to two previous Liberal party leaders and I understand that she is probably very disappointed at the moment.

Khalil retorted:

Malcolm Turnbull... Barnaby Joyce, New South Wales former premier Gladys, the French president Emmanuel Macron, Concetta Fierravanti-Wells, even Pauline Hanson has questioned Scott Morrison. [Last election] voters saw Scott Morrison kicking a couple of balls around... hitting a few tennis balls and saw him wearing a baseball cap and think he seems nice. And now they have seen what he is really like and government's failures over the last few years and that is what people are judging them on.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 7.50am BST

block-time published-time 7.39am BST

Australian unions have raised fears the Morrison government's trade deal with [*India*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/india) will fuel the growth of temporary, employer-sponsored migration - a trend they say leaves workers "highly vulnerable to exploitation".

The Australian Council of Trade Unions also criticised the failure to include a labour rights chapter in the pre-election agreement, arguing this "could contribute further to a race to the bottom on workers' rights, wages and conditions".

The Australian government [*signed an interim trade agreement*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/apr/01/australia-to-sign-trade-deal-with-india-as-coalition-clears-decks-for-election) with India on Saturday, with most of the initial focus on immediate tariff cuts for Australian exports of lamb, wool and rock lobster. The government said the deal "opens a big door into the world's fastest growing major economy".

But Australia has also offered to provide new access for young people from India to participate in working holidays in Australia, with places set at 1,000 a year.

Related: [*Morrison government's trade deal with India leaves workers at risk of exploitation, unions say*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/apr/05/morrison-governments-trade-deal-with-india-leaves-workers-at-risk-of-exploitation-unions-say)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 7.42am BST

block-time published-time 7.31am BST

Here's more on the Reserve Bank of Australia's decision to keep interest rates at 0.1% from AAP's Colin Brinsden.

The fall in petrol prices appears to have tamed concerns over the inflation outlook, but the RBA is yet to be convinced that price pressures have cooled.

While the RBA left the cash rate at a record low 0.1% following Tuesday's monthly board meeting, the word "patient" was notably missing from governor Philip Lowe's statement in terms of the interest rate outlook.

He noted the annual inflation rate is already running at 3.5% and the more policy-sensitive underlying ***measure*** is at 2.6%, compared to the RBA's 2 to 3% target:

Higher prices for petrol and other commodities will result in a further lift in inflation over coming quarters. The board will assess this and other incoming information as it sets policy to support full employment in Australia and inflation outcomes consistent with the target.

KPMG chief economist Brendan Rynne says an interest rate rise could come as soon as July, but when the rate rise did come, future rate increases could happen "quite quickly" afterwards to catch up.

Such warnings came as the prime minister, Scott Morrison, attempted to take credit for the drop in petrol prices after last week's budget temporarily cut fuel excise.

But economists say it's more to do with a fall in global oil prices.

The halving of fuel excise was part of an $8.6bn cost-of-living support package announced in the budget and came after petrol prices spiked above $2 a litre as global oil prices rose due to the war in Ukraine.

Labor has no intention of extending the cut in fuel excise beyond the legislated six months. Lowe made no mention of the budget in his statement.

The weekly ANZ-Roy Morgan consumer confidence index - a pointer to future household spending - rose 2.5% after several weeks of decline. Consumer inflation expectations also tumbled 0.6 percentage points to 5.8% after setting a 10-year high last week.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 7.36am BST

block-time published-time 7.23am BST

Steggall is asked how she compares the political "mood" now compared to three years ago, when she won the seat of Warringah from former PM Tony Abbott - with a string of independents in marginal seats campaigning this time around, in large part, on climate action.

I think it has progressed dramatically and what we have had is three years of climate disasters from floods to bushfires... and yet in this very last budget, both Scott Morrison and Josh Frydenberg have shown they have no desire to tackle the climate crisis and invest in our future and our transition.

So on the ground I think voters are very aware that this government has no desire to tackle the challenge and needs to look for viable alternatives. And for a number of electorates, they are looking for an independent voice to represent them and take those issues to Canberra and vote on the merits of legislation, not just because that's how the party room says to vote.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 7.27am BST

block-time published-time 7.17am BST

Member for Warringah, Zali Steggall, is speaking on Afternoon Briefing now in the wake of the court dismissal to a challenge of NSW Liberal preselections.

She says the Liberal party is "not the party of old" but is " Scott Morrison's party", and the outcome today is not a good one for political parties.

What this outcome shows is the Liberal party is not the Liberal party of old, it is not the party of the free vote. It is Scott Morrison's party, at the end of the day. And I think many voters will be very disenfranchised and impacted by this. It says locally whoever runs is Scott Morrison's pick, ultimately. It isn't somebody picked to represent the community but somebody to do Scott Morrison's bidding...

The question is, who does the Liberal party speak to anymore? They're clearly not there to represent the community, they are there to represent the views of their bosses, backroom deals that happen, and ultimately Scott Morrison - so I think it says a lot for the focus of the issues as a party. I think it says it is autocratic now, not elected. Preselection is not representative of local members.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 7.23am BST

block-time published-time 7.11am BST

Here's more on the incident. ABC Ballarat is reporting a man has been taken to hospital after a joint rescue between the CFA and FRV.

enltrMT ARAPILES: AV has confirmed one person is being assessed and is in a stable condition, following reports of a cliff fall in The Pharos climbing area just before midday. More to come.

- Lexie Jeuniewic (@LexieGJeuniewic) [*April 5, 2022*](https://twitter.com/LexieGJeuniewic/status/1511191315769618432?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

enltrA man has now been taken to hospital after a high-angle rescue involving CFA + FRV.

- Lexie Jeuniewic (@LexieGJeuniewic) [*April 5, 2022*](https://twitter.com/LexieGJeuniewic/status/1511217659811037185?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 7.12am BST

block-time published-time 7.09am BST

It is being reported that a rescue mission is under way in western Victoria after a 16-year-old boy fell at Mount Arapiles - a rock formation that rises 230 metres above the Wimmera plains in the Grampians. The site is a popular destination for rock climbers.

Two further boys are stranded on the cliff, 7 News reports.

enltrBREAKING: A rescue mission is underway in the state's west. A 16-year-old boy has fallen at Mount Arapiles, injuring himself. Another two boys are stranded on the cliff face. 7NEWS at 6pm. [*https://t.co/5zYfOfohG3*](https://t.co/5zYfOfohG3) [*#7NEWS*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/7NEWS?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) [*pic.twitter.com/slFnUfaOMA*](https://t.co/slFnUfaOMA)

- 7NEWS Melbourne (@7NewsMelbourne) [*April 5, 2022*](https://twitter.com/7NewsMelbourne/status/1511222991283113990?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 7.12am BST

block-time published-time 7.01am BST

Nearly 1,400 people in Afghanistan who were issued with emergency visas but never made it to Australia have had their visas lapse, a Senate report reveals.

The Senate's Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee - which was previously chaired by the late Labor senator Kimberley Kitching - today tabled its final report on Australia's engagement in Afghanistan.

The report sets out eight recommendations, including that the Department of Home Affairs "urgently improve its ***processes*** and communication in relation to Afghan visa applicants" including sending acknowledgments to all applicants.

The report includes this stark finding about emergency visas issued at the height of the evacuation operation from Afghanistan:

When asked how many people have had their subclass 499 visa lapse without being renewed, Home Affairs advised that, as at 31 December 2021, a total of 1,520 subclass 449 visas granted to evacuees from Afghanistan have ceased.Home Affairs noted that this includes:

\* 53 who are in Australia were determined to already hold a valid substantive visa, such as a Family visa, or who have been granted a longer term visa since arriving;

\* 1,398 who never entered Australia ; and

\* 69 who have now left Australia for New Zealand. Australia assisted these people with uplift from Afghanistan on behalf of New Zealand, and were granted a subclass 449 visa for the time they spent in Australia before they travelled onward to New Zealand.

It's understood the report was substantially drafted before Kitching's sudden death.

The main report is now in the name of the deputy chair, Liberal senator Eric Abetz. Abetz and the other committee members said they wished to acknowledge Kitching's "outstanding work" in overseeing the inquiry. We'll have a story on this later today.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 7.06am BST

block-time published-time 7.00am BST

Back in Victoria, there's no word on how long mask mandates for students in years three to six will continue. But the health minister, Martin Foley, said they had saved "thousands of infections" in schools.

There are 94,426 active cases in Victoria among 0 to 19-year-olds in the state, and 55,930 active Covid cases among 10 to 19-year-olds alone, the second highest age group behind 30 to 39-year-olds. Numbers are possibly more accurate among that age group due to the state's free rapid antigen test program in schools.

enltrWhen asked when the mask mandate for students in grades three to six would be scraped, Mr Foley said: "In short, the answer is for not a second longer than it needs to be, based on public health advice."

- Callum Godde (@calgodde) [*April 5, 2022*](https://twitter.com/calgodde/status/1511216651739406337?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

enltrHe said a CDC study, published this year, showed masks and other ***measures*** in junior schools contributed to a "23 and 28 per cent reduction in transmission". "If you multiple that out across their homes settings, (it) saves thousands of infections in those communities."

- Callum Godde (@calgodde) [*April 5, 2022*](https://twitter.com/calgodde/status/1511218040306020353?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 7.03am BST

block-time published-time 6.48am BST

Here's more on the opposition leader's courting of the regions today from AAP.

Anthony Albanese will set up a $500m fund to encourage investment in the farm sector and earmark $656m for a regional telecommunications package if he wins government.

Addressing a National Farmers Federation conference in Canberra, Albanese said the National Reconstruction Fund would set aside money specifically for the ***agriculture***, forestry, fisheries, food and fibre sectors.

The fund aims to provide loans, equity and guarantees to investors establishing new businesses or those recovering from the stress of the pandemic.

Albanese also announced a plan to improve mobile coverage throughout Australia, including a $400m fund to expand multi-carrier mobile coverage along with an audit of blackspots:

This is a comprehensive, targeted plan that will ensure better mobile coverage on roads, on farms, and across regional communities - and better broadband as well.

Asked if he would scrap the ***agriculture*** worker visa if he won government, Albanese told an audience of farmers and stakeholders he would provide a better system:

The ag visa is not real at the moment ... we will sit down with you and have an appropriate system.

Earlier, the ***agriculture*** minister, David Littleproud, criticised the Australian Workers' Union for campaigning against the visa.

Farmers have a list of five priority areas they say need to be addressed for ***agriculture*** to thrive, including a $5bn rural telecommunications fund to improve connectivity for remote Australia.

Launching the election wish list on Tuesday, NFF president, Fiona Simson, said the importance of the upcoming federal election for ***agriculture*** and the bush could not be understated.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 6.50am BST

block-time published-time 6.39am BST

enltrFull statement from Andrew Gee [*pic.twitter.com/4zfU405ZsJ*](https://t.co/4zfU405ZsJ)

- Tom McIlroy (@TomMcIlroy) [*April 5, 2022*](https://twitter.com/TomMcIlroy/status/1511215867392315394?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 6.32am BST

The federal government says former Liberal defence minister Brendan Nelson will replace media executive Kerry Stokes on the Australian War Memorial council, the latest in a raft of pre-election appointment announcements.

Andrew Gee, the minister for veterans' affairs and defence personnel, said in a statement issued this afternoon:

Dr Nelson fills the Council position vacated by outgoing member Mr Kerry Stokes AC, who is standing down after 15 years of ***exceptional*** and dedicated service, including as Chairman for more than six years.

The news comes amid ongoing controversy over the $500m expansion of the AWM. Critics have long argued the money would be better spent helping veterans.

Nelson is a former director of the AWM and is currently president of Boeing Australia, New Zealand and South Pacific.

Gee said the appointment "would allow him to continue to serve the Australian War Memorial through its historic redevelopment". He argued Nelson's "business acumen" would "also prove invaluable".

Gee also thanked Stokes "for his passion, leadership and vision".

In the same statement, Stokes said:

I have enjoyed every moment in working with the dedicated staff and council of the Memorial over the last 15 years and will continue to follow closely the progress of construction to expand the facility in Canberra over the next few years.

Although Nelson joins the council, it is unclear who will replace Stokes as chairman. The decision will be made by the AWM's council.

block-time published-time 6.31am BST

In unwelcome news, further rainfall has been forecast for New South Wales in the coming days, with flooding possible for the central and south coast.

An initial flood watch has been issued for [*Central and Southern Coastal Rivers and Macquarie and Queanbeyan Rivers*](http://www.bom.gov.au/nsw/warnings/flood/floodwatchl.shtml).

Seven further minor flood warnings are active across the state, with a severe weather warning to be issued this afternoon between Gosford and Bega - including Sydney and Wollongong - in anticipation of high rainfall in the next 24 hours.

Here's the latest from the Bureau of Meteorology, with falls of up to 150mm predicted in some areas:

enltrSevere Weather Update: Heavy rainfall with likely flooding for the central and south coast of NSW. Video current: 2.00pm AEST 4 April 2022. Know your weather. Know your risk. For the latest forecasts and warnings, go to [*https://t.co/4W35o8zIoh*](https://t.co/4W35o8zIoh) or the [*#BOMWeather*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/BOMWeather?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) app. [*pic.twitter.com/v4SVHYEoz8*](https://t.co/v4SVHYEoz8)

- Bureau of Meteorology, Australia (@BOM\_au) [*April 5, 2022*](https://twitter.com/BOM_au/status/1511213296002560003?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 6.34am BST

block-time published-time 6.25am BST

We will have more on this shortly.

enltr [*#breaking*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/BREAKING?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) Former Liberal Defence Minister and current Boeing Australia President Brendan Nelson appointed to [*@AWMemorial*](https://twitter.com/AWMemorial?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) Council where he was once Director, to replace Seven Network boss Kerry Stokes

- Andrew Greene (@AndrewBGreene) [*April 5, 2022*](https://twitter.com/AndrewBGreene/status/1511210916188106752?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 6.28am BST

block-time published-time 6.24am BST

Here is the full statement from Village Roadshow Theme Parks, provided to Guardian Australia:

This afternoon an ambulance was called to Movie World to attend to a guest following an incident on the carousel ride.

The guest received a laceration to his head and was attended to by Movie World's Nurse before being taken to hospital in a stable condition. Our thoughts are with the guest and his family and we wish him a speedy recovery.

We pride ourselves on our standards of care and quality and an investigation is being conducted as a matter of priority into the exact cause of the incident. In an abundance of caution the ride has been closed while we understand how the incident occurred.

The safety and wellbeing of guests and team members is our top priority at Village Roadshow Theme Parks and we are committed to providing guests with a fun and safe environment.

We will provide further updates when they are available.

block-time published-time 6.16am BST

Child sustains head injuries from Gold Coast theme park ride

A young boy has sustained significant head injuries after falling off a carousel ride at Movie World. Emergency services responded to the incident off the Pacific Motorway in Oxenford just after 1pm on Tuesday. The child was transported to the Gold Coast University Hospital where he remains in a serious but stable condition. Village Roadshow Theme Parks confirmed a boy in his pre-teens suffered a laceration to his head and was attended to by Movie World's Nurse before being taken to hospital. "Our thoughts are with the guest and his family and we wish him a speedy recovery," the company said in a statement. The company said the ride has been closed while an investigation is being conducted "into the exact cause of the incident." "The safety and wellbeing of guests and team members is our top priority at Village Roadshow Theme Parks and we are committed to providing guests with a fun and safe environment," they said. "We will provide further updates when they are available."

enltr [*#Breaking*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/BREAKING?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) A young boy has sustained a serious head injury on a Movie World ride with initial reports suggesting he fell from a carousel. [*pic.twitter.com/9V0Pbrvoju*](https://t.co/9V0Pbrvoju)

- 10 News First Queensland (@10NewsFirstQLD) [*April 5, 2022*](https://twitter.com/10NewsFirstQLD/status/1511209634635587584?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

enltrVillage Roadshow Theme Parks issued a statement this afternoon confirming the incident. "An ambulance was called to Movie World to attend to a guest following an incident on the carousel ride," it said.

- 10 News First Queensland (@10NewsFirstQLD) [*April 5, 2022*](https://twitter.com/10NewsFirstQLD/status/1511209740126539776?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 6.35am BST

block-time published-time 6.08am BST

Speaking of elective surgery:

enltrVictoria's COVID Catch-Up Plan has been designed to help Victorians catch up on deferred care. It's about moving more Victorians off the surgery waiting list and into hospital to receive the treatment they need. 1/4 [*pic.twitter.com/pNemFFB8nE*](https://t.co/pNemFFB8nE)

- VicGovDH (@VicGovDH) [*April 5, 2022*](https://twitter.com/VicGovDH/status/1511207791624540162?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

The Victorian government's Covid Catch-Up Plan, announced today, will inject $1.5bn to see 240,000 public patients receive surgery each year by 2024.

Frankston Private hospital will become a public surgery centre for Covid catch-up care with the capacity to support a maximum of 9,000 public patients a year once it is fully operational next year.

A $1.4bn funding package was announced by the state government in February in response to the ongoing pressures on Victoria's healthcare system.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 6.10am BST

block-time published-time 6.01am BST

In Victoria, the state government has been under fire today for elective surgery lists that have ballooned in the wake of pandemic-related shutdowns.

The health minister, Martin Foley, said the "mess" was inherited by Labor when it came into government eight years ago, and, once collated, an official figure on how long the waitlist is will be released.

enltrGuy opens the bowling. Foley is at the crease. He's asked how many people are in the elective surgery wait list as of March 31? Foley says the andrews gov is transparent

- Richard Willingham (@rwillingham) [*April 5, 2022*](https://twitter.com/rwillingham/status/1511192677936640002?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

enltrThe minister didn't give a figure, says once it's collated it will be released

- Richard Willingham (@rwillingham) [*April 5, 2022*](https://twitter.com/rwillingham/status/1511193290225332227?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 6.03am BST

block-time published-time 5.49am BST

In Queensland, a search and rescue operation is under way for a couple who went missing on a driving holiday in the state's western far north.

Police and local landholders have conducted extensive mobile and aerial patrols in search of 63-year-old Craig Ferguson and 59-year-old Donna-Lee Ferguson, who failed to check out of their Kowanyama accommodation on Monday.

Queensland police said:

The couple are believed to have gone sightseeing around Kowanyama and were last seen at the intersection of Shelfo and Chapman roads around 7am on Sunday morning driving a 2021 White Toyota Landcruiser with Queensland Registration 612BS4.

The couple only have access to smartphones, which are out of range where they're travelling.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 5.51am BST

block-time published-time 5.41am BST

RBA to keep interest rates at 0.1%

The Reserve Bank of Australia has today confirmed it will keep interest rates at the historically low rate of 0.1% despite concerns over living costs for Australians.

Australia's benchmark interest rate has hovered near zero since November 2020.

In a statement issued by the governor, Philip Lowe, the RBA says the board decided to maintain the cash rate target at 10 basis points and interest rates unchanged.

It says inflation has increased sharply "in many parts of the world" in part due to Russia's ***invasion*** of Ukraine and pandemic recovery, however the Australian economy remains "resilient" and spending is picking up following the Omicron outbreak.

The strength of the Australian economy is evident in the labour market, with the unemployment rate falling further to 4% in February. Underemployment is also at its lowest level in many years... the RBA's central forecast is for the unemployment rate to fall to below 4% this year and to remain below 4% next year.

Wages growth has picked up, but, at the aggregate level, is only around the relatively low rates prevailing before the pandemic... given the tightness of the labour market, a further pick-up in aggregate wages growth and broader ***measures*** of labour costs is in prospect. This pick-up is still expected to be only gradual, although there is uncertainty about the behaviour of labour costs at historically low levels of unemployment.

Inflation has picked up and a further increase is expected, but growth in labour costs has been below rates that are likely to be consistent with inflation being sustainably at target. Over coming months, important additional evidence will be available to the Board on both inflation and the evolution of labour costs. The Board will assess this and other incoming information as its sets policy to support full employment in Australia and inflation outcomes consistent with the target.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 5.46am BST

block-time published-time 5.32am BST

Morrison wins on NSW preselections

The NSW court of appeal has declined to overturn preselections for a raft of NSW seats, clearing the way for the prime minister's hand-picked candidates to contest the federal election.

The unsuccessful plaintiff, Matthew Camenzuli, a member of the NSW state executive, can appeal to the high court, but time is running out.

The election is expected to be called by this weekend and nominations close 10 days after the writs for the election are issued.

Scott Morrison, as part of a three-person committee appointed by the federal Liberal party, intervened in March and briefly took over the troubled NSW branch to confirm two ministers, Sussan Ley and Alex Hawke, as the candidates for Farrer and Mitchell. The committee also confirmed Trent Zimmerman, the sitting MP, as the candidate for North Sydney.

The court of appeal on Tuesday afternoon confirmed earlier precedent that the courts would not intervene in so-called "club cases" and said that internal matters of the Liberal party were "non-justiciable".

Any right to be the endorsed candidate under the Electoral Act only arose later when the registered officer of the party conveyed the names of candidates to the Australian Electoral Commission. They did not exist at the preselection stage.

Justice John Basten, who presided over the three-judge bench, said the court found that the federal constitution of the Liberal party gave it a broad power to intervene in the affairs of the divisions.

It means that a second intervention by the federal party last week to select and endorse a further nine candidates is valid too.

The decision likely brings to an end the chaos that has stemmed from the bitter factional war in NSW over preselections. But it will leave bitterness among branch members who have fought for a bigger say in preselection ***processes*** within the NSW Liberals.

Lawyer Jenny Ware will run in the winnable seat of Hughes where she is up against two independents and the former member, Craig Kelly, who defected to the United Australia party.

In Warringah, another lawyer, Katherine Deves, who has campaigned for only biological females to be recognised in women's sport, will run against independent Zali Steggall.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 5.36am BST

block-time published-time 5.23am BST

In other news, to risk sounding like a broken record, New South Wales residents are being warned to brace for further rainfall and possible flash flooding in the coming days.

Here is the latest from the Bureau of Meteorology, from a press conference earlier today:

We have a coastal trough developing from Wednesday, where we can expect to see widespread 50mm of rainfall falling... from Upper Hunter into Greater Sydney and including the Illawarra, South Coast areas of NSW.

We are really expecting to see this trough then intensify, on Thursday... and then we will continue to see rainfall on Friday where we have the potential for 50 to 150mm of widespread rainfall. We are then expecting the weakening of this rainfall over the weekend. I should highlight within this widespread rainfall, there is the potential for isolated heavier totals...

So what this means for the areas expecting this rainfall is that we will see the issuing of a flood watch later today which is a heads up for potential flooding. So catchments in the Upper Hunter, the Hawkesbury Nepean Valley, and the Colo Rivers there is the potential for minor to moderate flooding. In other catchments, the Illawarra, South Coast and Far South Coast, there is also the potential for minor flooding. In addition to this, there is the potential for flash flooding as we see these very heavy rainfall totals commencing from tomorrow.

enltrMEDIA RELEASE ???? The NSW State Emergency Service (NSW SES) is urging residents across the State to prepare for significant rainfall later this week. Read more: [*https://t.co/68WtlFwnsl*](https://t.co/68WtlFwnsl) [*pic.twitter.com/gzvZFuEIgW*](https://t.co/gzvZFuEIgW)

- NSW SES (@NSWSES) [*April 5, 2022*](https://twitter.com/NSWSES/status/1511183354846412801?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 5.26am BST

block-time published-time 5.18am BST

With that all tied up, there's one matter still to be resolved - the date of an election.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 5.21am BST

block-time published-time 5.11am BST

Legal challenge to Liberal preselections in NSW dismissed

Breaking now - the New South Wales supreme court has dismissed a legal challenge to Liberal preselections in the state, finding matters of the dispute are "not judicable".

The preselections of immigration minister Alex Hawke, environment minister Sussan Ley and North Sydney MP Trent Zimmerman have been upheld.

enltrNSW Supreme Court will uphold the pre-selection of NSW Liberal Party candidates - declining to rule on a challenge launched by Camenzuli - finding the dispute, as a matter of a political party, is not judicable.

- Michael Mazengarb (@MichaelM\_ACT) [*April 5, 2022*](https://twitter.com/MichaelM_ACT/status/1511194458129596418?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

enltrBreaking: State executive member Matt Camenzuli has lost his legal challenge in the NSW Court of Appeal. Court finds federal executive had power to endorse Scott Morrison's three sitting MPs. Other matters not judiciable

- Max Maddison (@maxmaddison) [*April 5, 2022*](https://twitter.com/maxmaddison/status/1511195112952713219?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 5.17am BST

block-time published-time 5.10am BST

While Jim Chalmers was doing his thing at the National Press Club, Anthony Albanese was at the National Farmers Federation, touting Labor's ambitions for better mobile and broadband coverage in regional and rural areas.

enltrToday at the [*@NationalFarmers*](https://twitter.com/NationalFarmers?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) Federation I announced Labor's plan for better mobile and broadband coverage for regional and rural Australia. Better coverage for roads, fields and farms. [*pic.twitter.com/QgFGWj2vJa*](https://t.co/QgFGWj2vJa)

- Anthony Albanese (@AlboMP) [*April 5, 2022*](https://twitter.com/AlboMP/status/1511193017591668736?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

The Coalition's budget includes "***unprecedented***" regional infrastructure spending in key electorates off the back of securing the National party's support for the Liberals' net zero emissions plan.

Related: [*'****Unprecedented****' regional infrastructure budget spend targets battleground seats*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/mar/29/australia-federal-budget-2022-infrastructure-regional-regions-barnaby-joyce-hunter-fitzgibbon-lingiari-durack)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 5.11am BST

block-time published-time 5.03am BST

Incoming...

enltr2 pm - time for the Supreme Court judgment on NSW Liberal Party preselections [*pic.twitter.com/axDoSjcRyh*](https://t.co/axDoSjcRyh)

- Samantha Maiden (@samanthamaiden) [*April 5, 2022*](https://twitter.com/samanthamaiden/status/1511192484533002245?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 5.04am BST

block-time published-time 4.58am BST

A search continues for a man who went missing after entering the Bremer River at Ipswich, Queensland early this morning.

enltrMISSING PERSON: A police search is underway to locate a man who has gone missing after he entered the [*#BremerRiver*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/BremerRiver?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) in [*#NorthIpswich*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/NorthIpswich?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) at 5.30am today and failed to resurface. The man is described as African in appearance, around 175cm tall and of a thin build. [*#9News*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/9News?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) [*pic.twitter.com/XRvHg7VoUK*](https://t.co/XRvHg7VoUK)

- 9News Queensland (@9NewsQueensland) [*April 5, 2022*](https://twitter.com/9NewsQueensland/status/1511188217965416449?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 4.57am BST

In a very \*eye roll\* fashion, the last question of the day at the Press Club presses on whether there will be any new tax changes should Labor win the election - particularly the [*proposed 50% cut to excise on tap beer*](https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/expected-beer-tax-cut-would-be-ineffective-and-gender-biased-report-20220327-p5a8at.html) supposedly under consideration by the Coalition.

The tax break would reportedly reduce the price of a keg of beer to [*approximately $35*](https://www1.racgp.org.au/newsgp/clinical/absolutely-devastating-health-professionals-slam-a) , cutting the cost of a pint by 40 cents.

Chalmers:

The answer to the last one is no, sorry to the beer drinkers of Australia; on the other question, it's the same answer as before... we're not proposing any tax changes beyond multinationals [and there is] potentially a conversation [to be had] with the states. And there's a lot of different ways to answer the question but our priority when it comes to repairing the budget, emphasis on quality, maybe multinationals, dealing with rorts... that's our priority.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 5.04am BST

block-time published-time 4.51am BST

David Crowe asked Chalmers to clarify Labor's intention to raise revenue via a tax on multinationals. The Coalition in last week's budget also had a revenue-raising ***measure*** tightening some rules on multinational tax. Have they stolen Labor's thunder?

Chalmers says Labor's ***measure*** will be "beyond" what the government proposed, however the party will not head into the election with a proposal on tax beyond multinationals.

What the government propose the budget was a compliance ***measure***, with the tax office as you rightly identified and that is something the government of both political persuasions have done at different times, I don't think that is hotly contested, our ***measures*** on multinational tasks will go beyond that.

In terms of other tax ***measures***, I think we've all made it clear, especially in the last couple of days that we're not going to this election with a proposal on tax beyond multinationals. We've said they might be a conversation with states, after the election but we're going the selection with a proposal on multinationals and beyond that.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.55am BST

block-time published-time 4.44am BST

South Australia records four Covid deaths

South Australia's case numbers are in, and there have been 5,068 new Covid cases overnight.

Sadly, there have been four further deaths.

enltrSouth Australian COVID-19 update 05/04/22. For more information, go to [*https://t.co/XkVcAmeZ6V*](https://t.co/XkVcAmeZ6V) or contact the South Australia COVID-19 Information Line on 1800 253 787. [*pic.twitter.com/nDpKX0VI2j*](https://t.co/nDpKX0VI2j)

- SA Health (@SAHealth) [*April 5, 2022*](https://twitter.com/SAHealth/status/1511169512007438336?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 4.42am BST

enltrJim Chalmers is asked whether Labor's plan to crackdown on multinationals will see the "big end of town" language used in 2019. "I don't see it in any way as a rerun of some of that language that we haven't used for some time." [*@SBSNews*](https://twitter.com/SBSNews?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

- Pablo Viñales (@pablovinales) [*April 5, 2022*](https://twitter.com/pablovinales/status/1511186856834084864?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

Chalmers continued:

You know, we want to be a pro-business, pro-employer, Labor party. Because we recognise that the challenges in our economy are so vast and so substantial that you cannot meet them without a working relationship with business, with unions, with the community sector, with the states and others, to get the job done.

But there is a global movement here, and I pay tribute to president Biden... and others, who say that we've got a challenge here. The playing field is not level. That disadvantages local businesses and disadvantages local communities. And so, we think that there is something ***measured*** and responsible that can be done here to fix this situation, to make it fairer. And that's not to diminish or dismiss the substantial amount of people who are employed here... I think that people understand, even the big employers, especially in some cases the big employers. They understand that if there is a global move afoot, Australia should be a part of it.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.47am BST

block-time published-time 4.39am BST

Back at the Press Club, Andrew Probyn raised the elephant in the room - closed borders and the impact that has had on the low unemployment rate.

What would be your approach to unemployment given that wages is one of your high priorities? And that having low unemployment is meant to spark wage increases when you have got pressures in say, aged care, that's going to need, as you've just said, tens of thousands of workers? Are you a big Australia man? Or are you something else?

Chalmers says as migration settings return to "something that looks a little bit more like normal", there's an opportunity to work out "the best mix" for the program.

I've always been a supporter of a decent-sized migration program. Overall, it is good for the economy. But what that requires is that you get the constituent parts of it right and that you build public support for it. And so, migration is a big part of the story. On unemployment more broadly, we want the unemployment rate to be as low as possible. And I said in my speech, it's falling in welcome ways, but it's not bringing with it that wages growth that you identified in your question. It's bringing skills shortage, but it's not bringing wages growth that keeps up with the cost of living. So real wages are falling and so the difference between our approach to unemployment and the government's... is the labour market is a broader story than the just the unemployment rate.

The labour market is about underemployment. It's about concentrated unemployment, in communities like the one that I represent, unfortunately. You know, it's about wages. It's about job security. And so, we take a much broader look at the labour market. We don't declare victory just because there's a forecast of an unemployment rate.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.44am BST

block-time published-time 4.36am BST

If you're watching Chalmers live, you can switch over to ABC News to continue.

enltrWe have run out of time on the ABC for the [*@JEChalmers*](https://twitter.com/JEChalmers?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) Post Budget Reply Address. Question time will continue on [*@abcnews*](https://twitter.com/abcnews?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw). Tune in now.

- National Press Club (@PressClubAust) [*April 5, 2022*](https://twitter.com/PressClubAust/status/1511184763305938948?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 4.32am BST

In Victoria, 16 million free rapid antigen tests will be distributed to schools for students and staff from this week as the state's RAT surveillance regime continues.

Doherty Institute modelling estimates 113,500 Covid infections have been prevented throughout the first term as a result of the program, assuming a 50% compliance rate with screening of students.

Testing recommendations will remain the same, with all primary and secondary school students and staff and early childhood education and care staff and children encouraged to test at home twice a week.

Those at special schools are encouraged to test five days each week due to the higher risk for medically vulnerable children. The testing system is still voluntary.

A further 60,000 air purifiers are also on their way to schools to add to some 51,000 delivered.

enltrVictoria's rapid testing surveillance regime in schools and early learning centres has been extended for at least the first four weeks of term two. Another 16 million RATs will start being distributed from this week, the state government says.

- Callum Godde (@calgodde) [*April 5, 2022*](https://twitter.com/calgodde/status/1511184418752237568?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.35am BST

block-time published-time 4.31am BST

It's a Twitter war! (of stats!)

enltrGiven you deleted this [*@JEChalmers*](https://twitter.com/JEChalmers?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) , we thought we'd put it back up. Unemployment is at 4.0 per cent which is the equal lowest level in 48 years, compared to 5.7 per cent when Labor left office. [*#auspol*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/auspol?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) [*pic.twitter.com/KJAsKEfKoX*](https://t.co/KJAsKEfKoX)

- Simon Birmingham (@Birmo) [*April 5, 2022*](https://twitter.com/Birmo/status/1511183670350323720?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

undltr [*pic.twitter.com/9kAuU7K6jH*](https://t.co/9kAuU7K6jH)

- Jim Chalmers MP (@JEChalmers) [*April 5, 2022*](https://twitter.com/JEChalmers/status/1511183456986087424?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 4.28am BST

Labor has committed to handing down a budget later this year if it wins government in May. Chalmers has also acknowledged the cost-of-living crisis and inflationary pressures will continue for some months. He is asked if the trajectory continues, will Labor commit to immediate cost-of-living relief, including cash handouts?

Chalmers keeps his cards close to his chest and says "We'll play the [ones] we're dealt":

We've said that it's hard to imagine a world where the cash handouts and the current budget continue indefinitely. You know, that's just being upfront about the pressures in budget... I'm just trying to be upfront and say that it won't continue forever. Having said that, you know, clearly, if we're putting a budget together, whenever it might be on the advice of Treasury, clearly we'll play the cards that we're dealt if there's a need for more support, clearly, we would look at that. But our starting point is that the support that passed through this parliament in the middle of last week is temporary.

Asked to confirm if the reduction to the fuel excise will need to be extended, Chalmers said:

If there is an incredibly compelling reason to leave it in, we would consider that. But to be upfront with Australians, no matter who wins government in May, it is likely that that petrol price relief will end.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.33am BST

block-time published-time 4.23am BST

enltrJim Chalmers tells the [*#npc*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/npc?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) that Labor's plans to use more public service capacity and to reduce outsourcing to the big consulting firms will save something in the "low billions." He calls the APS staffing cap under the Coalition "arbitrary".

- Tom McIlroy (@TomMcIlroy) [*April 5, 2022*](https://twitter.com/TomMcIlroy/status/1511181447977369604?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 4.23am BST

Chalmers was also asked about criticism that has been levelled towards his own and Albanese's relative inexperience.

He points out that no treasurer has handed down a budget before being in government, and says downplaying Albanese's role as infrastructure minister shows the Coalition doesn't see the portfolio as "key to economic growth":

I mean, if Josh Frydenberg's main critique of me is that I haven't handed down a budget before I've handed down a budget, that applies to him, too. And by the way, it applies to Peter Costello. It applies to Paul Keating. It applies to a whole heap of others. So, I don't, frankly, I don't pay much attention to that. I have a heap of experience in the portfolio. The lock-up was my 16th. I don't think that anyone in the parliament has done more than that but I wouldn't have thought so...

The other thing which I find extraordinary is when the prime minister opens up a similar critique of Anthony. And what it reveals is that they think that holding the infrastructure portfolio and being the deputy prime minister of Australia is not relevant to our economy. Which is a bizarre concession, but they don't see infrastructure as key to economic growth in our economy.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.25am BST

block-time published-time 4.19am BST

Guardian Australia's Sarah Martin is up at the Press Club. She presses Chalmers again on fiscal consolidation raised by Tingle and Coorey. Chalmers has been critical of the budget for wasteful spending. But what spending over forward estimates or medium term can Chalmers identify that Labor wouldn't go ahead with?

And you've obviously been very critical of discretionary grant spending. Why not abolish the discretionary grants all together?

Chalmers says Labor thinks "there is an opportunity" to trim some of the discretionary funds.

But it's difficult from opposition without full visibility. One of the reasons that we have estimates and other opportunities is because there's not a lot of visibility on what the government has committed to those funds or where some of that money is going to. So that is a ***process*** that we intend to engage in.

On the other issue about an example of spending that the government does that we wouldn't do - I think that there's a really clear example. The government, because they had for so long, this arbitrary staffing cap on the public service, meant that... so many billions of dollars were being spent on labour hire and contractors and consultants in areas traditionally performed by the APS... there is an opportunity, I think, to have a good look at the spending that goes into that part of budget, to work out whether we could do more with less.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.22am BST

block-time published-time 4.16am BST

Back to the Press Club.

Laura Tingle pointed out to Chalmers that, for all his criticism of the Coalition's budget, they waved through the tax cuts.

The big question, as you say, is what happens next... you say that it is not a budget for the future. The budget is forecasting a big gap between spending and revenue for 10 years now. You seem to be saying, as the treasurer is saying, that will be closed by growth, with the only difference being that you're going to have some slightly better-quality spending promises. Have you got any new set of fiscal rules about the size of revenue, the size of spending and how you'll be working out your budget strategy?

Chalmers replies:

First of all, you're judged not just about what's in them but what's not in them. And this is a budget with a shelf life of six or seven weeks. The absence is what's in it for the future. If you want to go to the specifics of budget repair, you know, there's a heap of spending, a heap of cash handouts in the very near-term. There's not much budget repair beyond that except for the $3bn that the prime minister doesn't want to talk about in terms of the secret cuts on page 49 of budget paper 2.

And so, there is, I think, a gap when it comes to budget repair in the future from the government. Now, we've said that there are at least four ways that you can improve the budget. The quantity of the debt matters to us, but the quality of the spending, I genuinely believe, matters as much, if not more... yes, we're looking for ways to make the budget more sustainable. But mostly, we're looking for ways to make the budget deliver a measurable economic improvement.

Shadow treasurer Jim Chalmers. Photograph: Mick Tsikas/AAP

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.18am BST

block-time published-time 4.13am BST

Jumping away from the Press Club for a minute, and Papua New Guinea's PM has weighed in on the [*Solomon Islands*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/05/tensions-are-high-between-china-and-australia-over-solomon-islands-but-its-in-everyones-interests-to-simmer-down) deal with China.

He says Solomon Islands is an independent state but as members of the Pacific Island Forum with shared interests PNG is "conscious" of what's occurring there.

enltrPNG's PM James Marape on the Solomon Islands-China security pact. Comment given to my colleague [*@Nat\_Whiting*](https://twitter.com/Nat_Whiting?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw). Unsurprisingly his language is pretty careful. He's "conscious" of events in SI. Emphasizes Pacific police cooperation, stresses cultural affinity between PNG cops/RSIPF [*pic.twitter.com/OPF1M4zRvd*](https://t.co/OPF1M4zRvd)

- Stephen Dziedzic (@stephendziedzic) [*April 5, 2022*](https://twitter.com/stephendziedzic/status/1511179310656229376?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

Related: [*Australia anxious to show it didn't 'drop the ball' on Pacific after China and Solomon Islands deal*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/04/australia-anxious-to-show-it-didnt-drop-the-ball-on-pacific-after-china-and-solomon-islands-deal)

block-time published-time 4.10am BST

This is what happens when you try to Tweet while delivering a speech, Jim!

enltr1. woops 2. Chalmers earlier posted a separate graphic with the numbers reversed (i.e. with a lower number under Labor) but 3. they've also used a version of the Liberal Party logo with the Australian flag (usually in the corner of the L symbol) removed? [*pic.twitter.com/ivGBBxc68K*](https://t.co/ivGBBxc68K)

- Josh Butler (@JoshButler) [*April 5, 2022*](https://twitter.com/JoshButler/status/1511178173329063936?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 4.09am BST

Phil Coorey asks Chalmers if Labor will take a tax cap to the election like the Coalition with a 23.9% tax-to-GDP ratio.

Are you going to be governed by a ratio of your own? And you were critical in your speech of the structural deficit hitting 0.7% of GDP in the medium term coming down from about 3% now. Are you going to try to do better? Are you going for a surplus by the end of the medium term? Can you give us any guidelines as to what will be governing your fiscal strategy between now and the election and not after the election?

Chalmers says it's been made "really clear" that it would be hard to anticipate surpluses for some time from the intergenerational report and the budget.

That's just the condition of the budget that we would inherit. When it comes to our fiscal strategy, you shouldn't lightly dismiss getting value for money. The absence of that has been a big part of not having enough to show for $1 trillion in debt in the last decade or so. We're not attracted to the government's tax cut, and the reason we're not attracted to it is because it seems to us like quite an arbitrary cap imposed for political reasons rather than good economic reasons.

And clearly, as the economic conditions evolve, we take advice from the Treasury and from elsewhere about the most appropriate settings but I think that we said really for some time now that the arbitrary tax cut that the government has imposed, which the government doesn't hit by the way in the forwards, from memory, is something that they say to try to have a political argument rather than to try to generate a genuine economic outcome.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.14am BST

block-time published-time 4.06am BST

Chalmers concludes:

We know that whoever wins government on the 14th or the 21st of May... real wages will be going backwards. Businesses will be short of staff. Industries will be short of skills. Childcare fees and healthcare costs will be too high for too many people. There will be conflict and tension in the world far away and closer to home. Our country will occupy a precarious place in global supply chains. There will be $1 trillion in debt and not enough to show for it. Petrol prices and interest rates will be about to rise again no matter who wins. A long rebuild ahead in places like Lismore and beyond.

But what I also know is that if people wake up with a new Labor government... for the first time in nine years, there will be a prime minister, a treasurer, a cabinet and a government with a determination and resolve and a sense of responsibility to actually start dealing with these challenges... a government that has the plans for a better future, for a stronger, more resilient, more inclusive, more sustainable economy that creates opportunities and puts those opportunities within the reach of more people. Because we want to run this country, its economy, in the interests of its people... the election will be tough and it will be close. And the path beyond that is challenging, too. So we're not here to muck around or muddle through. A better future depends on it.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.09am BST

block-time published-time 4.04am BST

Chalmers doubles down on debate challenge to Frydenberg

Chalmers repeats his challenge to the treasurer to debate at least three times during the election campaign.

He repeats the Coalition has been in government for almost a decade. The election will be "a referendum on the past 10 years", he says, and a choice for what the next 10 will look like:

I'll repeat my challenge to Josh Frydenberg to debate the budget and the economy and the future at least three times in this campaign here, in the west, anywhere that we can make it happen! You shouldn't hide behind scare campaign or dishonest advertising or try to fight the 2019 election all over again. The campaign needs to be better than that. Because before Australians choose what kind of government they want, we first need to choose what kind of campaign we want. And when the prime minister spoke to you here in January, he said it wouldn't be a referendum, it would be a choice.

But we know that it's both. A referendum on the past 10 years, which sifts through the rubble of the government's economic credibility and the shards of the prime minister's glass jaw. And the choice to be made about the next 10 years. The campaign to frame that decision can be a battle of one-liners or it can be a contest of substance. It can be spin and marketing, or it can be real talk about what's confronting this country and what's at stake.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.44am BST

block-time published-time 4.01am BST

Chalmers says Labor's fiscal strategy will be better than the Coalition's as it will "focus on quality and bang for buck", like investing in the aged care sector:

Grow the economy the right way, focus on quality and bang for buck, end the rorts and waste and work with other countries to make sure that multinationals pay their fair share of tax in Australia where they make their profits. And when it comes to value for money, it's hard to think of a better investment than in aged care. And for those of you who have been tempted to write off the blurred differences between the major parties I offer you this as an example of one of the defining distinctions between the big parties. It's been disappointing but not really surprising to see the lengths this government will go to to deny people decent care, decent food and decent wages.

Shadow treasurer Jim Chalmers speaks at the National Press Club in Canberra on Tuesday. Photograph: Mick Tsikas/AAP

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.04am BST

block-time published-time 3.59am BST

More future chat and a nod to Chalmers' Queenslander heritage:

To paraphrase another Queenslander - I say this to Scott Morrison and Josh Frydenberg - this reckless rorting and wasteful spending must stop. If it's not the time to flick the switch to austerity, it is the time to flick the switch to quality, to smart investments in our future. Because the best way to repair the budget is to get the economy growing in a broader, more sustainable, more inclusive way...

That's why we want to be judged on the quality of our spending to the extent that it delivers the right kind of growth. We will be investing where it counts to create more opportunities, unlock business investment and drive productivity. This has never been more important than right now where we know that our economic pressures lie on the supply side. That's why the quality of spending matters as much as the quantity.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.02am BST

block-time published-time 3.56am BST

Chalmers says Labor has a five-point-plan for economic growth united by the belief "an economy and a society stronger after Covid than before is within our reach".

Our plan for economic growth, investing in the future, targets cost-of-living pressures and supports sectors that will improve our lives, create more secure and new jobs and grow our economy. Each of our are designed for a generational dividend and not just a six- to seven-week political pay-off. Instead of a panicked, political pamphlet, we offer a plan and it has five parts.

To reduce energy costs and emissions while transitioning to newer sources of clean energy.Hundreds of thousands of "fee-free" Tafe places to address skill shortages.Cheaper, more accessible childcare.More modern infrastructure, including "key investments" in upgrading the NBN and the digital economy. A "made-in-Australia future" with co-investments in "crucial sectors" like manufacturing and the care economy to boost the resilience of small business.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.01am BST

block-time published-time 3.52am BST

Again, Chalmers says cost-of-living pressures predate the Ukraine ***invasion*** and are a consequence of stagnating wage growth:

Cost-of-living pressures haven't just shown up out of the blue. They aren't just a consequence of Russia invading Ukraine. They're a consequence of the Coalition attacking wages and job security. That's why the relief in this budget isn't even enough to make up for the more than $3,200 fall in real wages for the average worker these past two years. But of all the failures in this budget, all the drift and disappointment of the eight before it, the most glaring omission by far is the future. Again, the warnings were plain for all to see. This time in the government's own intergenerational report. It said if we do nothing to address our decline, we face an economy that's smaller than expected, growing slower than before and saddled with four more decades of debt and deficits and that's before we even factor in lower productivity growth at the most recent cycle under the Coalition.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 3.57am BST

block-time published-time 3.51am BST

Chalmers turns to the global supply chain hit by the Ukraine ***invasion*** and the pandemic. He warns interest rates are forecast to rise "no matter who" wins the election but continuing with the status quo is not the answer.

We know that prices for essentials like petrol, rent and childcare were already sky rocketing, even before Russia invaded Ukraine, while Australian real wages were going backwards. And we understand, of course, the ***invasion*** exacerbates this and it feeds into global investor uncertainty which had only just begun to recover in the aftermath of the pandemic and the recession. Rerecognise geopolitical risks aren't just rising in Europe, but closer to home as well. And as we consider the implications for our national security and for our economy from a Chinese leadership which is becoming not just more assertive in tone, but more aggressive in posture.

And just the other day, factory activity in China slumped at the sharpest pace in two years, reminding us that the global health uncertainty from the pandemic still isn't over. We've all heard the Reserve Bank governor warn that interest rates will rise before long no matter who wins the election. Driving up the cost of borrowing for families, businesses and governments. Now, the wrong and risky response to this uncertainty, to this context and this backdrop is to continue on the current course and cling to the status quo. The most damaging thing that Australia could do right now, the biggest economic and social harm we could inflict would be to accept flatlining wages, soaring prices, tepid investment and weak growth, as our best-case scenario - our new normal. That's not stability - that's stagnation.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 3.58am BST

block-time published-time 3.49am BST

Is "the future" going to be Labor's election tagline?

enltrOf all the failures in this Budget, all the drift and disappointment of the eight before it, the most glaring omission is the future. [*#auspol*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/auspol?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) [*#npc*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/npc?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

- Jim Chalmers MP (@JEChalmers) [*April 5, 2022*](https://twitter.com/JEChalmers/status/1511173122703372288?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

enltrWe can't have a better future if we double-down and double-back on the failed policies of the recent past. [*#auspol*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/auspol?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) [*#npc*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/npc?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

- Jim Chalmers MP (@JEChalmers) [*April 5, 2022*](https://twitter.com/JEChalmers/status/1511171147856900096?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

enltrThis was a Budget designed to shield a Government from the people. All about setting the Coalition up for a fourth term, not setting our country up for a better future. [*#auspol*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/auspol?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) [*#npc*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/npc?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

- Jim Chalmers MP (@JEChalmers) [*April 5, 2022*](https://twitter.com/JEChalmers/status/1511171425243402246?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 3.45am BST

What would a Labor budget look like? Chalmers runs through major election talking points - disaster support for communities, cheaper childcare, wages growth, an anti-corruption commission and greater investment in aged care:

If last week had seen a Labor budget handed down, it would have offered hope and support and resources to communities cleaning up floodwaters and rebuilding after bushfires. It would have delivered a plan for cheaper childcare and stronger wages growth, easing families off that punishing treadmill of rising prices and flatlining pay. It would have invested in Australian skills, small businesses and local supply chains, to grow self-reliance and resilience and make our future here in Australia.

It would have put an end to nine years of stupendous rorts, abuse and waste and funded and waste and funded a national Anti-Corruption Commission. It would have invested in productivity so we can grow the economy more strongly without runaway inflation. And, as Anthony made clear, in a way that we're all incredibly proud of, a Labor budget and a Labor government would fix the crisis in aged care.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 3.50am BST

block-time published-time 3.44am BST

Chalmers continues on his assessment of the the Coalition's budget, and how he expects their election campaign to be run - "no ambition" beyond staying in power:

We got a document that gloried in its shallowness and wallowed in its triviality. Deliberately, overtly, insultingly, conceived as a prop for the election. And celebrated by the Liberals and Nationals, not for what it would do for the country, but just for giving them something to say in their ads. Last week's budget showed exactly what sort of campaign Scott Morrison and Josh Frydenberg will run. Glib, incoherent, in denial of reality and completely silent on the future. No ambition beyond their own survival, no vision beyond election night.

Shadow treasurer Jim Chalmers. Photograph: Russell Freeman/AAP

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 3.48am BST

block-time published-time 3.42am BST

Chalmers says the Coalition's budget released last week was "riddled with rots and chock-full of wasteful spending".

A treasurer personally culpable for tens of billions of dollars of emergency support for businesses which didn't need it. Another $5.5bn wasted on subs that will never be built. Sports rorts, car park rorts, dodgy land deals - the list goes on! And when Josh Frydenberg said from this lectern five days ago that the focus was on winning the election, and when Scott Morrison talks about the budget being a shield, they gave the game away. This was a budget designed to shield a government from the people. All about setting the Coalition up for a fourth term - not setting our country up for a better future.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 3.45am BST

block-time published-time 3.39am BST

Amazing - Chalmers somehow live tweeting while simultaneously speaking to the National Press Club.

undltr [*pic.twitter.com/rGgrFUqnUj*](https://t.co/rGgrFUqnUj)

- Jim Chalmers MP (@JEChalmers) [*April 5, 2022*](https://twitter.com/JEChalmers/status/1511170740879790080?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

enltrFact after fact speaking to this one, disappointing truth: This has been a wasted decade of missed opportunities, of families falling further behind, weighed down by skyrocketing costs of living and falling real wages. [*#auspol*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/auspol?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) [*#npc*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/npc?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

- Jim Chalmers MP (@JEChalmers) [*April 5, 2022*](https://twitter.com/JEChalmers/status/1511170961311436800?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 3.43am BST

block-time published-time 3.38am BST

Chalmers turns to the economy. He says the nine years the Coalition has spent in government has amounted to a "wasted decade of missed opportunities".

On the face of it, the frantic last few days before an election is called might not seem an ideal time to take a step back for a moment to take stock of our economy, our country or our future. But with so much at stake, I think it's the perfect time. Because we have learnt so much about ourselves. We've learnt from the mediocrity we had before the pandemic, the catastrophe we had during it and the uncertainty we're experiencing now. From floods and fire, a pandemic, a war in Europe, before that from the first recession in 30 years and another deep and damaging downturn just last year. From the false starts and the false dawns of this recovery, marred by policy mistakes and missteps.

From a nation which rose to the occasion each time it needed to, and the government that fell back into old habits. A people who were there for each other at every single turn and a prime minister who went missing, taking credit but never taking responsibility. And now, after nine long years, three treasurers and three prime ministers, the verdict is in - average economic growth at 2.3 % under this Liberal-National government this year, lower than the 2.5% of the last Labor government. Average productivity growth at 1.1% a year under them versus 1.4% under us... multiplying debt and deficits as far as the eye can see.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 3.42am BST

block-time published-time 3.34am BST

Chalmers begins his address by, during the acknowledgement of country, highlighting Labor would implement the Uluru Statement of the Heart if the government were to be elected.

Thank you to the sponsors and the directors of the National Press Club for this opportunity to speak to the press club for the first time this parliamentary term... For the first but hopefully not the last time in this grand and auspicious great hall, recognising that the history of this place is just a tiny speck on tens of thousands of years of the world's oldest continuous culture; acknowledging the customs, elders and traditions of the Ngunnawal and Ngambri people and hoping that the Uluru Statement of the Heart is implemented in full.

enltrHeading in to hear [*@JEChalmers*](https://twitter.com/JEChalmers?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) outline Labor's plans for a better economy at the National Press Club in Parliament House. Tune in to [*@ABCTV*](https://twitter.com/ABCTV?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) from 12:30pm AEST. [*pic.twitter.com/KDperUipUD*](https://t.co/KDperUipUD)

- Anthony Albanese (@AlboMP) [*April 5, 2022*](https://twitter.com/AlboMP/status/1511168171037757442?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 3.38am BST

block-time published-time 3.31am BST

Many thanks to the wonderful Matilda Boseley. I'll be with you for the rest of the afternoon, starting with shadow treasurer Jim Chalmers, who is about to speak at today's National Press Club address.

block-time published-time 3.29am BST

With that, I shall hand you over to the amazing Caitlin Cassidy!

block-time published-time 3.26am BST

By the way, if you just can't get enough of Morrison, the prime minister is being interviewed on ABC's 7.30 program tonight.

enltrMy guest tonight is the Prime Minister [*@ScottMorrisonMP*](https://twitter.com/ScottMorrisonMP?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) [*#abc730*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/abc730?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

- Leigh Sales (@leighsales) [*April 4, 2022*](https://twitter.com/leighsales/status/1511123529298718723?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 3.22am BST

enltrExclusive pic of one of the first four Australian Bushmasters freshly repainted and refitted ahead of being flown to Europe on a C-17 - following last week's request from Ukraine ???? [*pic.twitter.com/vVYwQt5jWy*](https://t.co/vVYwQt5jWy)

- Andrew Greene (@AndrewBGreene) [*April 5, 2022*](https://twitter.com/AndrewBGreene/status/1511148955954184193?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 3.21am BST

enltrPix: Dominic Perrottet Floods Presser [*https://t.co/UgWdfxB4sq*](https://t.co/UgWdfxB4sq) [*pic.twitter.com/yYhNbkP65Z*](https://t.co/yYhNbkP65Z)

- AAP Photos (@aap\_photos) [*April 5, 2022*](https://twitter.com/aap_photos/status/1511164808430702593?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 3.18am BST

National Covid update

Here are the latest coronavirus numbers from around Australia today, as the country records at least 38 deaths from Covid-19:

ACT

Deaths: oneCases: 918In hospital: 41 (with five people in ICU)

NSW

Deaths: 12Cases: 19,183In hospital: 1,467 (with 56 people in ICU)

Queensland

Deaths: eightCases: 9,946In hospital: 479 (with 15 people in ICU)

South Australia

Deaths: fourCases: 5,068In hospital: 206 (with 11 people in ICU)

Victoria

Deaths: eightCases: 12,007In hospital: 339 (with 18 people in ICU)

Western Australia

Deaths: five (historical)Cases: 8,145In hospital: 242 (with six people in ICU)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.27am BST

block-time published-time 3.12am BST

WA records five historical Covid deaths and 8,145 new infections

Western Australia has just published its Covid-19 numbers for the latest reporting period.

The state recorded five deaths. However, according to the premier, these were historical cases that were reported to WA Health yesterday.

There are now 242 Covid-19 positive people in hospital in the state, including six in ICU.

enltrThis is our WA COVID-19 update for Tuesday, 5 April 2022. For official information on COVID-19 in WA, visit [*https://t.co/zTYXZD1B7R*](https://t.co/zTYXZD1B7R) [*https://t.co/c8OOhlx4SU*](https://t.co/c8OOhlx4SU) [*pic.twitter.com/VzT20CQp4s*](https://t.co/VzT20CQp4s)

- Mark McGowan (@MarkMcGowanMP) [*April 5, 2022*](https://twitter.com/MarkMcGowanMP/status/1511162260227780608?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 3.29am BST

block-time published-time 3.07am BST

Two dead in NSW helicopter crash

Two people have died in a helicopter crash in New South Wales overnight.

Just before midnight the wreckage of the helicopter was found about 200m away from the Snowy Mountains Highway at Kiandra Flats.

The pilot and passenger died at the scene. Police said in a statement:

Officers from Riverina police district have established a crime scene which will be examined by specialist police.The Australian Transport Safety Bureau has been informed and has commenced an investigation into the accident.

Police will provide more details at a press conference in Queanbeyan later today.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 3.10am BST

block-time published-time 2.51am BST

NBN Co has announced the next set of suburbs where people can apply to get an upgrade of their internet from fibre-to-the-node to fibre-to-the-premises (if they order a higher tier speed plan).

The company is planning to offer the upgrade to 1.7m homes by the end of next year, with the first 50,000 opening up late last month.

This month, another 90,000 homes can apply for the upgrades in the following locations:

NSW: Byron Bay, Albury, Berowra, Blue Haven, Calala, Cardiff South, Charlestown, Dubbo, East Ballina, Kanwal, Kincumber, Kingscliff, Macquarie Hills, Port Macquarie, Rutherford, Shellharbour, Suffolk Park, Watanobi, Wauchope, West Tamworth, Wyong

Victoria: Herne Hill, Highton, Horsham, Kyabram, Lara, Mildura, North Wonthaggi, Pakenham, Queenscliff, Roxburgh Park, Warragul, West Wodonga, Wodonga

Queensland: Glenvale, Newport, Norman Gardens, Palmwoods, Petrie, Wurtulla

South Australia: Littlehampton, Nairne

Western Australia: Attadale, Canning Vale, Halls Head, Wannanup NBN Co said it planned to enable 60,000 per month to order the service, with 230,000 eligible to upgrade by the end of June, and 600,000 eligible by the end of 2022.

In Senate estimates last week, NBN Co chief executive Stephen Rue said since the launch in late March, the company had received 350 orders for upgrades - 250 businesses and 100 homes.

The timing of future announcements during caretaker mode for the election is something the company is keeping a close eye on, with a caretaker review group set up in NBN Co to ensure compliance with caretaker expectations.

Rue said there would be no NBN Co advertising out during caretaker period, and he has pulled out of a speech scheduled during the expected caretaker period.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.58am BST

block-time published-time 2.50am BST

Given that this press conference is in Sydney, there is a lot of discussion about federal flood relief funding.

It's difficult to hear the question, but here is the prime minister's response.

(Reminder, the rules of the blog coffee game state that you must take a big sip every time the prime minister says "one-in-500-year flood".)

Morrison:

I've written to the premier again, stressing that we are very happy to share in the cost of the program for the one-in-500-year flood event, that's what we undertook to do...

We said we will go to those places that are impacted by the one-in-500-year flood event because the types of programs that they are pursuing, our programs that are done by state government, there are some things that governments do 100%, they are some things the commonwealth do 100%.

As I said, we are [doing] something the commonwealth does 100%. As I said, we've [supplied] $2.1 billion in support, which actually is far in excess of what the state government has responded to the floods, with a billion dollars of what we've committed already in people's pockets.

We were very clear that on that particular program, we were prepared to take half the cost of those places impacted by the one-in-500-year flood event.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 3.03am BST

block-time published-time 2.44am BST

Queensland vaccination rules to ease further from 14 April

The Queensland premier has confirmed that the state's Covid restrictions will once again ease from 1am on April 14.

Currently, most venues in the state are only open to those who are fully vaccinated or have a medical exemption, but once restrictions ease all patrons will be allowed to enter.

enltrBREAKING: Queensland COVID-19 restrictions are easing further from 1am Thursday 14 April. From then, most venues that have been open only to vaccinated staff and patrons will be open to everyone, regardless of vaccination status. [*pic.twitter.com/NrQblxOep6*](https://t.co/NrQblxOep6)

- Annastacia Palaszczuk (@AnnastaciaMP) [*April 5, 2022*](https://twitter.com/AnnastaciaMP/status/1511154930714701828?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.48am BST

block-time published-time 2.42am BST

Morrison has been asked, given he is taking credit for the lower fuel prices today, if he will also take responsibility for them if they rise between now and election day.

The prime minister said:

I can simply say that we have provided 22 cents a litre relief on fuel tax, that's come off to ensure that people can have lower prices. Prices will still move around but what I do know is that there will be 22 cents a litre less than what they would otherwise be...

I'm very pleased that the fuel industry has responded, we have seen the move quickly and we have seen the plus much quicker than we anticipated, and so I thank them for that. They want to give the motorist a good deal, they want to be able to pass on this cost-of-living relief and they are doing that and people can see that we have delivered that right here at the browser.

Reporter:

Is that why you selected this particular BP?

Morrison:

If you look at the prices around here, there are very similar levels. You see that in Melbourne, where I was yesterday...

In regional areas, when I was up in northern Tasmania on the weekend, it'll take a little while for it to filter through there, they are still a bit over $2... but we expect to see that come down in regional areas.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.52am BST

block-time published-time 2.39am BST

Foreign minister Marise Payne says she will be leaving tonight for a meeting of Nato foreign ministers in Europe to discuss the Ukraine situation.

Australia isn't actually a member of Nato, but as an "enhanced opportunities partner" it seems we still get an invitation to sit at the grown-up table.

Payne has reiterated her view that Russia's actions are in breach of international law:

Can I say that I am leaving this evening, as you have advised, for a meeting of Nato foreign ministers and close partners in Brussels, in relation to Russia's action in Ukraine.

The coordination in this meeting will strengthen and enable the global response to Russia's unlawful egregious and unprovoked actions.

They are also in breach of international law, and a breach of the UN charter, so the work that we have been doing in sanctions excluding over 500 people, identities in the last month, the support that we are provided through humanitarian aid - and that is being delivered through trusted partners on the ground in Ukraine and in neighbouring countries and through Australian aid organisations and the military support that we have provided - is key to our coordination with our international partners.

I look forward to meeting with the key members of Nato and those counterparts in the coming days in Brussels to reaffirm and reinforce Australia's engagement in this key international operation.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.46am BST

block-time published-time 2.35am BST

Morrison:

We kept disciplined about how we were spending. Yes, we had to invest to support the Australian economy but we've known when to get in and support, just like we're doing again now, and we also know when that support has been rounded out.

And as we've come to this pandemic, what we know is that our opponents, the Labor party, would have spent an [extra] $81 billion during the pandemic. Now we knew where we had to keep some of the ***measures*** we had before that helped our economy come through. But the Labor party wanted to keep on spending and spending and spending. And what that would have meant is that we would not have been in a position to harness the gains that we have been able to put in place, how we've come through this pandemic with the strongest economic rebound that we have seen in Australia in 70 years.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.54am BST

block-time published-time 2.33am BST

And yes I was right!

Scott Morrison:

I'm thrilled that here, the benefits of what we've done to cut fuel taxes to give people cost-of-living relief, as a result of this budget, have been felt right here at the browser and to see as prices go down to what we see here, 166.9c, we are seeing that right across the country.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.35am BST

block-time published-time 2.31am BST

The prime minister is speaking live now... in front of a petrol station. I assume to flex the effectiveness of the budget's centrepiece fuel excise reduction.

Let's have a listen in.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.54am BST

block-time published-time 2.16am BST

Human rights commission concedes it spent too much on staff

The Australian Human Rights Commission is up in Senate estimates and president Rosalind Croucher is being grilled about its financial management.

In March [*Guardian Australia revealed*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/mar/17/australian-human-rights-commission-to-slash-staff-after-budget-cuts-and-surge-in-workload) that from June 2021 the commission has slashed or is slashing one in three staff due to cashflow problems.

Croucher said:

We identified some issues in our financial management... [An] internal management issue: we overspent the budget we were given by the government on employee expenses. The financial management system was not fit for purpose. Our cash forecasting was inadequate.

Croucher says the AHRC is now financially back on track, thanks to work with the finance department and the attorney general's department, including a $16m equity injection.

Croucher says she was "very concerned" and actions have been taken to "ensure it doesn't happen again".

I accept that the buck does indeed stop with me.

Liberal Sarah Henderson said it was "absolutely shocking" the issue hadn't been identified before June.

Croucher accepted it "should've been picked up and addressed earlier" - but argues it is not just an internal budgeting issue, it's also a problem with the level of base government funding. Croucher said base government funding was $16.5m, while the rest was project-based.

Rosalind Croucher at a past Senate estimates hearing in Canberra. Photograph: Mick Tsikas/AAP

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.21am BST

block-time published-time 2.10am BST

enltr??Minor [*#Flood*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/Flood?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) Warning issued for the [*#Orara*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/Orara?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) River. Minor flooding is easing at [*#CouttsCrossing*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/CouttsCrossing?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) during Tuesday. See [*https://t.co/AdztI2rqg1*](https://t.co/AdztI2rqg1) for details and updates; follow advice from [*@NSWSES*](https://twitter.com/NSWSES?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw). [*#NSWFloods*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/NSWFloods?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) [*pic.twitter.com/SMy74rESTG*](https://t.co/SMy74rESTG)

- Bureau of Meteorology, New South Wales (@BOM\_NSW) [*April 5, 2022*](https://twitter.com/BOM_NSW/status/1511149022538567680?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 2.08am BST

Queensland records eight Covid deaths and 9,946 new infections

The Queensland numbers have also just been published. The state recorded 9,946 new Covid-19 infections and well as, tragically, eight deaths.

There are now 479 Covid-positive people in Queensland hospitals, including 15 in ICU.

enltrToday we have recorded 9,946 new COVID-19 cases. We have reported 8 deaths in the past 24 hours. Full details ?? [*https://t.co/2vvTmlzIil*](https://t.co/2vvTmlzIil) [*pic.twitter.com/LJRQQPNNA9*](https://t.co/LJRQQPNNA9)

- Queensland Health (@qldhealth) [*April 5, 2022*](https://twitter.com/qldhealth/status/1511146605755322368?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.12am BST

block-time published-time 1.58am BST

Two bodies recovered after Blue Mountains landslide

Two bodies have been recovered from the Blue Mountains after a family of five were caught in a freak landslide there on Monday.

Police say the bodies of a nine-year-old boy and his 49-year-old father were recovered near Wentworth Pass at around 9.30am.

It comes after a 50-year-old woman and a 14-year-old boy were winched out and taken to hospital yesterday afternoon. Police say they will undergo surgery today and remain in critical condition.

A fifth member of the family, a 15-year-old girl, was treated for shock but not injured and was able to walk away from the scene.

Police confirmed the family was from the UK, and were holidaying in Australia. An investigation is ongoing with a report to be filed for the coroner on the deaths of the man and boy.

A screenshot of rescue paramedics at Wentworth Falls yesterday following the landslide. Photograph: ABC

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.24am BST

block-time published-time 1.57am BST

ACT records one Covid death and 918 new infections

The Australian Capital Territory's daily Covid numbers are in and it has again recorded the death of someone diagnosed with Covid-19.

918 new infections were recorded in the latest reporting period, with 41 Covid-positive people in hospital including five in the ICU and two requiring ventilation.

enltrACT COVID-19 Update - 5 April 2022 ?? COVID-19 vaccinations ? Aged 5-11 years (1 dose): 80.4% ? Aged 5-11 years (2 doses): 56.8% ? Aged 5+ years (2 doses): 98.7% ? Aged 16+ years (3 doses): 73.6% [*pic.twitter.com/LNhlOGm7gZ*](https://t.co/LNhlOGm7gZ)

- ACT Health (@ACTHealth) [*April 5, 2022*](https://twitter.com/ACTHealth/status/1511144662534221829?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.09am BST

block-time published-time 1.52am BST

Hundreds of thousands of fish have died after recent flooding in northern [*New South Wales*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/new-south-wales) caused "severe deoxygenation" of rivers, with researchers alarmed at discovering carcasses of species that traditionally tolerate lower oxygen levels.

Scientists are still researching the full of extent of the destruction to marine life along the Richmond river, where multiple fish kill events occurred following [*flooding in late February and early March*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/apr/04/uninsured-flood-victims-can-receive-up-to-20000-payment-under-nsw-scheme). The flooding led to a total lack of oxygen in a 60km stretch of the waterway, between Coraki and Ballina on the northern NSW coast.

While data on the effects of the latest flood events at the end of March is not yet clear, Southern Cross University researchers who had been undertaking long-term monitoring of the Richmond river in a project with the NSW Department of Planning and Environment believe the final fish death toll will be in the hundreds of thousands.

You can read the full report below:

Related: [*Hundreds of thousands of fish dead after NSW floods*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/apr/05/hundreds-of-thousands-of-fish-dead-after-nsw-floods)

block-time published-time 1.37am BST

NSW premier Dominic Perrottet is discussing the need to get schools in flood-affected areas back open.

We know that our children have gone through a very difficult time when we have come through the pandemic, many days, many terms, of face-to-face learning our children have missed out on. Now in these flood-affected communities once again we've had many young children not be able to go to school.

So [with] the education minister, Sarah Mitchell, important work has happened to ensure we've been able to relocate those schools in those areas that have been flood-affected to get kids back to the classroom as quickly as possible.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.49am BST

block-time published-time 1.34am BST

The NSW premier is speaking now. Let's have a listen in.

enltrNSW Premier [*@Dom\_Perrottet*](https://twitter.com/Dom_Perrottet?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) remains in the Northern Rivers today, announcing $67M in funding for education flood recovery. [*@7NewsSydney*](https://twitter.com/7NewsSydney?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) [*pic.twitter.com/adT61nqN37*](https://t.co/adT61nqN37)

- Amelia Brace (@AmeliaBrace) [*April 5, 2022*](https://twitter.com/AmeliaBrace/status/1511140052419887104?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 1.30am BST

We have a bit more detail on Peter Dutton 's missile-related announcements this morning.

In the second of two press releases issued today, the defence minister said the government had approved the accelerated acquisition of improved weapon capabilities for the Australian defence force at a total cost of $3.5bn.

The accelerated acquisitions include the joint air-to-surface standoff missile extended range (JASSM-ER) for the Royal Australian Air Force three years earlier than planned. This is now expected by 2024.

Dutton said:

The JASSM-ER will enable the FA-18F Super Hornet, and in future the F-35A Lightning II, to engage targets at a range of 900km.

The government is also acquiring the Norwegian Kongsberg naval strike missile (NSM) for the Royal Australian Navy's surface fleet. This will replace the Harpoon anti-ship missile in the Anzac Class frigates and Hobart Class destroyers.

The frigates and destroyers will have this new capability installed from 2024 onwards. The government argues this will provide "a significant enhancement to Australia's maritime strike capability - more than doubling the current maritime strike range of our frigates and destroyers".

The government says it will also accelerate the acquisition of maritime mines "to secure Australia's ports and maritime approaches".

Dutton said:

With Australia's strategic environment becoming more complex and challenging, our ADF must be able to hold potential adversary forces and infrastructure at risk from a greater distance. These world-class strike weapon systems will equip our forces to better protect Australia's maritime approaches and, when necessary, contribute to coalition operations in our region.

The announcements come amid ongoing efforts by the government to focus on national security ahead of the election. As [*reported here earlier*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/live/2022/apr/05/australia-news-live-updates-scott-morrison-anthony-albanese-nsw-victoria-qld-covid-coronavirus-omicron-weather?page=with:block-624b5d938f08fd70369de02c#block-624b5d938f08fd70369de02c) , Dutton also named two large US weapons makers - Raytheon and Lockheed Martin - as "strategic partners" in Australia's own push to manufacture and maintain guided weapons.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.38am BST

block-time published-time 1.22am BST

Nine news is reporting the body of a man swept away in flood waters in Thomson in Victoria.

More details to come.

enltr [*#BREAKING*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/BREAKING?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) : The body of a 66-year-old Mirboo North man has been located at Sullivan Track in [*#Thomson*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/Thomson?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) after being swept away in flood waters. Search and Rescue Squad divers located the driver inside his submerged vehicle. [*#9News*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/9News?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) [*pic.twitter.com/vZCx7V6Zhs*](https://t.co/vZCx7V6Zhs)

- 9News Melbourne (@9NewsMelb) [*April 5, 2022*](https://twitter.com/9NewsMelb/status/1511136686721441794?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 1.12am BST

Victoria's premier, Daniel Andrews, says the state will scrap isolation requirements for close contacts of coronavirus cases when it is safe to do so.

The Australian health protection principal committee (AHPPC) told national cabinet last week that isolation and testing rules could be eased after the current wave of infections peaks.

Scott Morrison said on Monday he was "looking forward" to the rules being scrapped and that it was a matter for the states.

The prime minister said:

We don't make those decisions at the commonwealth level. It is premiers who decide to shut cities down or open them up, not the commonwealth government.

Andrews, however, noted national cabinet was chaired by Morrison:

He's asked a question [to AHPPC] on behalf of all of us ... he doesn't like the answer and that was apparently my fault. I don't think so.

If there's a quarrel between the prime minister and the chief medical officer, well I respectfully suggest that he sort that out. I'm in the business of following the advice of experts.

Andrews said he expected the latest Omicron BA.2 subvariant wave to peaked in the "next few weeks".

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.18am BST

block-time published-time 1.04am BST

The Liberals have attacked Labor's aged care policy after the shadow attorney general suggested a possible pause on its one-year deadline to have a registered nurse in every aged care facility at all times, AAP reports.

Mark Dreyfus admitted there may not be enough trained nurses to implement the plan and more would need to be trained.

"We're talking about setting the standard and if it is in fact true that there are not enough nurses in Australia to provide that level of care, we should train more," he told the ABC.

It might be that it turns out we've got to pause [the deadline]. But let's accept the royal commission's recommendation, let's say we need to have 24-hour nursing care in nursing homes, let's put the nurses back into nursing homes.

Aged care services minister Richard Colbeck has seized on the comments, saying Labor's policy had failed at its first test.

Mark Dreyfus has admitted Labor would have to pause its promise of an earlier rollout of 24/7 nurses in aged care... [and] conceded Labor couldn't do it if there are insufficient nurse numbers...

It has ignored the advice of the aged care royal commission and claimed they would introduce 24/7 nurses a year ahead of schedule.

Colbeck said the government supported having a nurse in aged care facilities at all times, but rolling out the royal commission's recommendations sooner than slated "risks the closure of aged care facilities with a serious risk to residents".

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.12am BST

block-time published-time 12.55am BST

enltrPremier Daniel Andrews was bemused at comments from the PM that he is responsible for scraping iso rules for close contacts. "He's asked a question (to the AHPPC) on behalf of all of us ... he doesn't like the answer and that was apparently my fault. I don't think so."

- Callum Godde (@calgodde) [*April 4, 2022*](https://twitter.com/calgodde/status/1511130242827517957?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 12.38am BST

Optus reports major outage

Optus customers have reported being unable to make outgoing voice calls on mobile on Tuesday.

enltr [*@Optus*](https://twitter.com/Optus?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) fix your service. Cannot make phone calls. People do not have home phones these days and need to use their mobiles to call. Seriously

- ?? (@bonesooo) [*April 4, 2022*](https://twitter.com/bonesooo/status/1511108942616666114?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

The company's website states the mobile network is suffering a major outage affecting voice calls. No further information has been provided at this stage.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.55am BST

block-time published-time 12.36am BST

Australia imposes new sanctions on Russia

Australia has imposed new sanctions on Russia over its ***invasion*** of Ukraine, banning the export of luxury goods including racehorses, wine and abalone.

The ban, which commences on Thursday, also covers crustaceans and molluscs (including lobster), truffles, tobacco products, perfume and makeup items, leather goods including handbags, furs, rugs and carpets, luxury clothing worth more than $500 an item, pearls, jewellery, collectible coins and banknotes, watches and clocks and sporting goods such as skiing and golfing equipment worth than $500 an item.

Video game consoles and coin-operated casino game machines worth more than $500 a unit are also on the banned list.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.41am BST

block-time published-time 12.34am BST

Victorian police would be required to notify the state's Department of Health of toxic batches of drugs under an amendment to the state's public health laws proposed by the Greens.

The Greens' changes to the public health and wellbeing amendment bill, which is set to be debated in the upper house this week, would see certain drugs, poisons and controlled substances declared as notifiable based on their potential serious risk to public health.

This would mean police officers would be required to notify the department within a specified timeframe if they encounter the substances during the performance of their duties.

The definition of "serious risk to public health" means that alcohol or illegal drugs such as heroin would not be listed as notifiable in normal circumstances despite their impact on public health.

You can read the full report below:

Related: [*Push to force Victorian police to alert health officials to toxic batches of drugs*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/apr/05/push-to-force-victorian-police-to-alert-health-officials-to-toxic-batches-of-drugs)

block-time published-time 12.21am BST

Victoria's Greens party has revamped its calls for a rent cap and the reintroduction of the government's proposed social housing levy ahead of the state budget next month, in a bid to reduce cost of living pressures.

In February, the Andrews government scrapped its plans to introduce a housing levy, estimated to raise $800m for social housing, following heavy backlash from key industry groups.

Ellen Sandell, deputy leader of the Greens, urged the state government to fund a rent cap and the 1.75% levy in the state budget:

The biggest cost of living pressure we have right now in Victoria is the complete unaffordability of housing ... young people simply cannot afford to buy a home and rents are now increasing.

The Greens also called for temporary free public transport, pointing to similar initiatives in New Zealand, California, NSW and Tasmania.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.25am BST

block-time published-time 12.19am BST

enltrPremier Daniel Andrews says there are more police in Victoria than ever. "We have more police by actual headcount than any other state, even states that are considerably bigger than us," he says. The Police Association says there's a need for a further 1500 over four years.

- Benita Kolovos (@benitakolovos) [*April 4, 2022*](https://twitter.com/benitakolovos/status/1511120199361380352?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 12.14am BST

enltr??Thunderstorm forecast for today and tomorrow: no severe thunderstorms expected. Afternoon thunderstorms are possible over northern [*#QLD*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/QLD?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) today and tomorrow, and returning to the southern interior from Wednesday. Radar: [*https://t.co/FBmpsInT9o*](https://t.co/FBmpsInT9o) [*pic.twitter.com/qd576HcqHC*](https://t.co/qd576HcqHC)

- Bureau of Meteorology, Queensland (@BOM\_Qld) [*April 4, 2022*](https://twitter.com/BOM_Qld/status/1511118604653187073?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 12.13am BST

Labor says it would develop a "standard package of support" for businesses to recover after fire or flood, as the opposition continues its attack on the Coalition over its response to recent natural disasters.

Deputy Labor leader Richard Marles will tell the COSBOA National Small Business Summit today that an Albanese government would change how the commonwealth responds to natural disasters. According to material distributed by Labor ahead of his speech, Marles will promise his party would "consider the specific needs of small businesses in times of crisis".

An Albanese Labor government will develop a standard package of support for businesses in times of crisis, so that business can have a sense of certainty about what support will be provided in any given circumstance.

Labor will also promise to change rules to ensure faster payment of invoices, and reduce administrative burden on small businesses to decrease the amount of time needed to complete tax obligations.

enltr. [*@RichardMarlesMP*](https://twitter.com/RichardMarlesMP?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) trying to clean up [*@AlboMP*](https://twitter.com/AlboMP?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) 's vanity show last week with a belated small biz speech today. Only the Morrison Govt has a plan to support and grow our small and family businesses, Labor are just trying to sneak into government. [*#COSBOA22*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/COSBOA22?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) [*https://t.co/guKgMgYBRP*](https://t.co/guKgMgYBRP)

- Stuart Robert MP (@stuartrobertmp) [*April 4, 2022*](https://twitter.com/stuartrobertmp/status/1511108507860598785?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

The Coalition's small business minister, Stuart Robert, tweeted that Marles' address was a "belated small biz speech".

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.21am BST

block-time published-time 12.03am BST

Victoria records eight Covid deaths and 12,007 new infections

enltrWe thank everyone who got vaccinated and tested yesterday. Our thoughts are with those in hospital, and the families of people who have lost their lives. More data soon: [*https://t.co/OCCFTAtS1P*](https://t.co/OCCFTAtS1P) [*#COVID19Vic*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/COVID19Vic?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) [*#COVID19VicData*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/COVID19VicData?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) [*pic.twitter.com/leMfotOoZI*](https://t.co/leMfotOoZI)

- VicGovDH (@VicGovDH) [*April 4, 2022*](https://twitter.com/VicGovDH/status/1511117048276946947?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 12.01am BST

NSW records 12 Covid deaths and 19,183 new infections

enltrCOVID-19 update - Tuesday 5 April 2022 In the 24-hour reporting period to 4pm yesterday: - 96% of people aged 16+ have had one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine - 94.6% of people aged 16+ have had two doses of a COVID-19 vaccine [*pic.twitter.com/nGNVZWc8Qt*](https://t.co/nGNVZWc8Qt)

- NSW Health (@NSWHealth) [*April 4, 2022*](https://twitter.com/NSWHealth/status/1511116417906921474?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 11.49pm BST

The world can still hope to stave off the worst ravages of climate breakdown but only through a "now or never" dash to a low-carbon economy and society, scientists have said in what is in effect a final warning for governments on the climate.

Greenhouse gas emissions must peak by 2025, and can be nearly halved this decade, according to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), to give the world a chance of limiting future heating to 1.5C above pre-industrial levels.

The final cost of doing so will be minimal, amounting to just a few percent of global GDP by mid-century, though it will require a massive effort by governments, businesses and individuals.

You can read the full report below:

Related: [*IPCC report: 'now or never' if world is to stave off climate disaster*](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/apr/04/ipcc-report-now-or-never-if-world-stave-off-climate-disaster)

block-time published-time 11.35pm BST

Foreign and defence ministers label Putin a 'war criminal'

Russian president Vladimir Putin is a "war criminal" who has presided over the "butchering" of Ukrainian citizens, according to Australia's foreign affairs minister Marise Payne and defence minister Peter Dutton, in their strongest comments yet on the conflict in Europe.

Payne, who travels to Brussels for a meeting of Nato foreign ministers to discuss Russia's ***invasion*** of Ukraine, excoriated Putin in an interview on Sunrise this morning.

As the disturbing [*situation in the city of Bucha*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/04/why-did-they-do-this-to-us-buchas-survivors-come-out-of-hiding) becomes known, the foreign affairs minister spoke of "the bombing of known civilian shelters", "the butchering of people in mass graves, murder and the use of rape as a weapon of war".

That is appalling, and it must be investigated in the context of the war crimes issues that have been raised...

It's horrific, it's obscene, and it's absolutely the work of the International Criminal Court.

enltr"As a government, we are absolutely focused on national security and our national interests" Foreign Minister [*@MarisePayne*](https://twitter.com/MarisePayne?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) speaks to Kochie abut the fast-tracking of a multi-billion investment in weapons and the unfolding situation in Ukraine. [*pic.twitter.com/Vj5CFYEHHP*](https://t.co/Vj5CFYEHHP)

- Sunrise (@sunriseon7) [*April 4, 2022*](https://twitter.com/sunriseon7/status/1511095514179465217?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

In his own interview with Sunrise, Dutton also took aim at Putin:

He's a brutal autocrat. The use of chemical weapons and the use of brutality against women and children doesn't phase him...

When you're seeing theatres bombed, when you're seeing residential areas bombed and the potential of mass graves or executions, that is straight up and down the act of a war criminal and this should be investigated as quickly as possible.

The world needs to unite and become even stronger in the sanctions that we're applying against Russia.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 11.38pm BST

block-time published-time 11.28pm BST

Foreign affairs minister Marise Payne has described [*Russian soldiers' alleged use of rape as a weapon of war*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/03/all-wars-are-like-this-used-as-a-weapon-of-war-in-ukraine) and the mass murder of civilians in Ukraine as "horrific beyond description".

She spoke with the Nine network earlier this morning.

What is important is that the international community does everything it can to hold Russia to account for their actions...

The strongest possible focus on ensuring that Russia pays a cost for these actions.

Purebred horses, truffles and wine are among a slate of new luxury goods that cannot be exported to Russia under the expansion of Australian sanctions, AAP reports.

The further sanctions come a day after Ukraine's ambassador to Australia called for a moratorium on all Russian goods entering the country as the Kremlin is accused of committing war crimes during its ***invasion***.

The new sanctions include everything from tobacco to leather and furs to musical instruments on top of an already announced export ban on aluminium ores.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 11.34pm BST

block-time published-time 11.16pm BST

enltrOver the next 4 days parts of [*#NSW*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/NSW?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) could see up to 150mm of rain, the wettest day being Thursday. Today sunny conditions for most parts, but surfaces and soils remain wet and flash flooding possible with heavy rainfall. Check forecast & Warnings: [*https://t.co/SPHgGeisGZ*](https://t.co/SPHgGeisGZ) [*pic.twitter.com/tJIzMedShl*](https://t.co/tJIzMedShl)

- Bureau of Meteorology, New South Wales (@BOM\_NSW) [*April 4, 2022*](https://twitter.com/BOM_NSW/status/1511102203443957764?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 11.04pm BST

Another senior Liberal has taken aim at [*Scott Morrison*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/scott-morrison) , accusing him of "self-serving ruthless bullying" and claiming he has "ruined" the Liberal party.

Catherine Cusack, a NSW Liberal who [*announced two weeks ago she would resign from the Legislative Council*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/mar/17/really-messed-this-up-government-mps-blast-flood-disaster-funding-as-one-prepares-to-quit) over her anger about flood relief, adds her voice to a growing chorus of critics of Morrison from within his own party in an opinion piece for Guardian Australia.

Cusack explicitly endorses Liberal senator Concetta Fierravanti-Wells's "character assessment of the prime minister" and reveals she will not vote for the Morrison government in the May election.

You can read the full report below:

Related: [*Liberal MP accuses Scott Morrison of 'ruthless bullying' and scheming at the expense of flood victims*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/apr/04/liberal-mp-catherine-cusack-scott-morrison-ruthless-bullying-flood-victims)

block-time published-time 11.03pm BST

enltr. [*@PatsKarvelas*](https://twitter.com/PatsKarvelas?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) asked how much of a priority wind power would be if Labor is elected? "offshore wind is something we have to play massive catch up on.. I spent a lot of last year lobbying and campaigning for it to be made lawful.. this is also very jobs rich" - [*@Bowenchris*](https://twitter.com/Bowenchris?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

- RN Breakfast (@RNBreakfast) [*April 4, 2022*](https://twitter.com/RNBreakfast/status/1511102057926696960?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 11.01pm BST

The shadow minister for climate change and energy, Chris Bowen, has also appeared on ABC radio this morning to discuss this offshore windfarm proposal by the government.

But first, let's hear what he has to say about the criticism of prime minister Scott Morrison including from those in the leader's own party.

The concerns over the prime minister's character are now well established, and they're well established not by the Labor party, but the people who know him best.

I mean his own deputy prime minister called him a liar and a hypocrite\*. These people know him best, they've served in cabinet with him, in the Liberal party with him over a period of many years...

This is not a political attack by the Labor party. This is a character assessment by the people who work with him very closely.

\* Barnaby Joyce has stated that he now regrets sending this text message while on the backbench and says he no longer believes this to be true.

The shadow minister for climate change and energy, Chris Bowen. Photograph: Mike Bowers/The Guardian

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 11.06pm BST

block-time published-time 10.53pm BST

enltrA trough over western [*#SouthAustralia*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/SouthAustralia?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) will move eastwards bringing showers to the ***agricultural*** area and west today, with storms possible in the west. Falls of 2-5mm over southern coasts, ranges, the Lower South East and with storms. Keep up to date at [*https://t.co/NZWuEwvO1h*](https://t.co/NZWuEwvO1h) [*pic.twitter.com/XJaDfyNdAC*](https://t.co/XJaDfyNdAC)

- Bureau of Meteorology, South Australia (@BOM\_SA) [*April 4, 2022*](https://twitter.com/BOM_SA/status/1511098121765408776?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 10.51pm BST

Tim Wilson responds to criticism of Scott Morrison

While speaking to ABC radio, Tim Wilson was asked about the parade of politicians coming forward to accuse prime minister Scott Morrison of being an unfit leader.

It's just not even remotely relatable to any experience I've had...

People make criticisms of politicians and public figures, all the time it's water off a duck's back for all of us. Because that's part of the test of being in public life is that unfortunately, people throw a lot of mud in your direction, and it comes to your character and your resilience about whether you're prepared to keep going.

Because you're in it to advance the interests of the nation, and I know that fortitude sits at the heart of Scott Morrison.

Liberal MP Tim Wilson during question time in the House of Representatives last year. Photograph: Mike Bowers/The Guardian

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 11.09pm BST

block-time published-time 10.46pm BST

enltrAre you confident in your seat of Goldstein? "i'm extremely confident.. [the campaign launch] has sent a clear message that our community isn't for sale to Simon Holmes à Court and their attempt to buy our communities voice" - [*@TimWilsonMP*](https://twitter.com/TimWilsonMP?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

- RN Breakfast (@RNBreakfast) [*April 4, 2022*](https://twitter.com/RNBreakfast/status/1511097179506548742?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 10.45pm BST

An area of the Bass Coast has been tapped for a possible offshore windfarm.

Assistant energy minister Tim Wilson has been asked on ABC radio why this wasn't done years ago.

Well, I can't answer to why it wasn't done in the past. But what I can say is within three weeks of being the minister responsible for this area, we passed laws to enable it to happen and now we're getting on with the job and this is a huge announcement to build not just Australia's offshore wind industry and same confidence to the market and to investors that there are opportunities...

Host Patricia Karvelas:

You're part of a government though. You've been in charge for a decade. Why didn't you use the last decade to do this?...

Wilson:

Passing laws takes times Patricia because we want to take the whole of the community with this. But this is the fundamental difference between our approach and so many other political parties that always want to make big announcements but don't do the hard work and the detail to make sure we get it right. We want to make sure that when we invest in offshore electricity infrastructure, particularly offshore wind, that we gain community confidence to minimise environmental impacts and build Australia's carbon-neutral industrial future.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 10.47pm BST

block-time published-time 10.38pm BST

Indonesians' trust in Australia down 20 points over past decade: poll

A survey of public opinion in Indonesia has found declining trust in Australia to act responsibly in the world over the past decade, according to a [*new report published overnight*](https://interactives.lowyinstitute.org/features/indonesia-poll-2021/).

The Lowy Institute said its polling had found mixed results, with Indonesians generally "optimistic about the future, increasingly sceptical of China and Chinese investment, unenthusiastic about the United States, and wary of great power competition".

The Sydney-based thinktank said it was based on a nationally representative sample of about 3,000 Indonesians aged 17 to 65 across 33 provinces of Indonesia between 29 November and 24 December 2021. Those polled were asked "How much do you trust the following countries to act responsibly in the world?"

The proportion saying they trusted Australia "a great deal" or "somewhat" was 55% - that's a drop of 20 points from the 75% recorded in 2011. The report attempts to place that fall in trust in perspective, noting there are some factors pulling in the other direction:

While Indonesians' trust in Australia has fallen dramatically in the past decade ... only a third of Indonesians (34%) say Australia poses a threat, and Australia receives a warm reading of 58° on the feelings thermometer.

Compared to 2011, there is also less concern on the questions of Australian foreign policy that have traditionally featured as irritants in the Australia-Indonesia relationship, and there is more positivity towards Australia. Answering on a scale from zero to ten, where zero means 'strongly disagree' and ten means 'strongly agree', a mean of 6.2 say that 'Indonesia benefits from having Australia as a stable and prosperous neighbour', a result of an upward trajectory over the past decade.

A similar number (6.1) agree that Australia has shown itself to be a reliable and long-term friend of Indonesia, and there is general agreement with the idea of Australia as an important security and aid partner for Indonesia.

Concern that "Australia has a tendency to try to interfere in Indonesia's affairs too much" has increased from a mean of 5.5 in 2011 to 6.0, but remains below the high level of 6.7 in 2006.

The Indonesian government has raised concerns over Australia's plans to acquire nuclear-propelled submarines under the Aukus partnership - but only one in 10 Indonesians polled (11%) said they had heard of those submarine plans.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 10.42pm BST

block-time published-time 10.32pm BST

Crews have worked into the night to retrieve the bodies of a British father and his son after five members of the same family were caught in a landslip in the [*New South Wales*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/new-south-wales) Blue Mountains.

The nine-year-old boy and his 49-year-old father died at the scene at Wentworth Pass, NSW police said.

A 50-year-old woman and a 14-year-old boy were winched from the scene and taken to hospital in critical conditions with significant head and abdominal injuries following the land slip on the walking track.

A fifth member of the same family, a 15-year-old girl, was treated for shock after the incident, which was reported to emergency services at about 1.40pm (AEST) on Monday.

You can read the full report below:

Related: [*Blue Mountains landslide: British father and son killed as two other family members in critical condition*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/apr/05/blue-mountains-landslide-british-father-and-son-killed-as-two-other-family-members-in-critical-condition)

block-time published-time 10.25pm BST

Peter Dutton names US weapons makers to help Australia build its own

Good morning everyone, it's Matilda Boseley here, ready to take you through the day's news.

But actually, first up I have some news brought to you by my esteemed colleague Daniel Hurst:

The defence minister, Peter Dutton, will today name two large US weapons makers as "strategic partners" in Australia's own push to manufacture and maintain guided weapons.

Dutton is also expected to open a new $96m maintenance facility for navy guided weapons at Orchard Hills in western Sydney this morning, as part of the government's continuing efforts to focus on national security ahead of the election.

The government's force structure plan, released in 2020, said one of the most important lessons from previous conflicts around the world had been "how quickly supplies of precision munitions can come under stress, especially for those nations that possess little domestic capacity to manufacture them".

Defence began exploring the potential for a new sovereign guided weapons and explosive ordnance production capability. The prime minister, Scott Morrison, subsequently said: "Through the $1bn Guided Weapons and Explosive Ordinance Enterprise, we will be able to make our own weapons on our own soil."

Today's announcement is that Raytheon Australia and Lockheed Martin Australia will be the strategic partners in that effort. (Lockheed Martin Australia, incidentally, was previously contracted to deliver the combat system for the French submarine project, which has now been abandoned.)

Dutton said in a statement:

These two companies, along with their US-based parent companies, are the largest suppliers of guided weapons to Defence. We will be working with them to rapidly increase our ability to maintain and manufacture guided weapons and their components in Australia.

We know we need to work closely with our partners to bolster our self-reliance and this is another major step in delivering that sovereign capability here in Australia.

Dutton said Australia's strategic environment was becoming "more complex and challenging" and the Indo-Pacific region "now sits at the epicentre of global strategic competition".

He said it was "imperative that we work closely with like-minded countries and industry partners to develop a more capable military force to defend Australia". He said the industry partners would work with a panel of local Australian-based providers "to deliver an array of necessary infrastructure to support this program into the future".

OK, with that in mind, why don't we jump right into the day!

15319 2022-04-04T21:25:30Z false false 2022-04-05T12:42:33Z false AUS theguardian.com [*https://www.theguardian.com/p/y7bzp*](https://www.theguardian.com/p/y7bzp) false true [*https://media.guim.co.uk/a7b4e00d79549351b7a90bb5b44ce7f3cec92472/0\_173\_5762\_3458/500.jpg*](https://media.guim.co.uk/a7b4e00d79549351b7a90bb5b44ce7f3cec92472/0_173_5762_3458/500.jpg) false en true With that, we will wrap up the blog for the evening. Stay safe and dry, wherever you are. Here are today's major developments: The New South Wales court of appeal has declined to overturn preselections for a raft of NSW seats, clearing the way for the prime minister's hand-picked candidates to contest the federal election. The Reserve Bank of Australia has today confirmed it will keep interest rates at the historically low rate of 0.1% despite concerns over living costs for Australians. It says inflation has increased sharply "in many parts of the world" in part due to Russia's ***invasion*** of Ukraine and pandemic recovery, however the Australian economy remains "resilient" and spending is picking up following the Omicron outbreak. Shadow treasurer Jim Chalmers has repeated his challenge to Josh Frydenberg to debate at least three times during the election campaign. At a National Press Club address, he said the election would be "a referendum on the past 10 years" and a choice for what the next 10 would look like. The Queensland premier has confirmed the state's Covid restrictions will again ease from 14 April, allowing unvaccinated residents to enter most venues in the state. A young boy has sustained significant head injuries after falling off a carousel ride at Movie World. He is in a serious but stable condition in hospital. Two bodies have been recovered from the Blue Mountains after a family of five were caught in a freak landslide there on Monday. The national park is set to close from 9am tomorrow in anticipation of further heavy rainfall. Two people died in a helicopter crash in NSW overnight. A climber has been rescued after falling and becoming stuck on a cliff in the Grampians, west of Melbourne. A Country Fire Authority spokesperson confirmed rescue crews were called just before midday on Tuesday and found the climber on a rock ledge five to eight metres from the ground at Mt Arapiles. The CFA worked with Fire Rescue Victoria and the State Emergency Service to bring the climber down from the ledge using "high angle rescue crews". The climber was stretchered from the ledge before being transported to hospital. Ambulance Victoria has been contacted for comment. New South Wales National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) has confirmed the Blue Mountains national park, excluding Evans lookout and Govetts Leap lookout, will be closed from tomorrow morning with heavy rainfall predicted in the coming days. It follows a rockslide yesterday afternoon that resulted in the death of two people. In a statement, NPWS extended heartfelt sympathies to the family and those affected. The site is currently closed and a comprehensive review will be undertaken. NPWS has a world class program in place to assess geotechnical risks and maintain the safety of walking tracks and other infrastructure to the greatest extent practicable. Unfortunately it is not possible to predict and eliminate all natural risks such as rockslides, which can occasionally occur around the state. The walking track where this incident occurred was inspected in the days before the rockslide as part of a routine track assessment program. The tracks in the Wentworth Falls precinct of the Blue Mountains national park are closed until further notice. A significant rainfall event is predicted later this week. As a result, Blue Mountains national park will be closed, except for Evans lookout and Govetts Leap lookouts, from 9am tomorrow. We are so close to a federal election now that the distinction between the faux campaign and the real one is basically nonexistent. But as the real contest creeps closer to being officially called, there's a thorny problem for the Liberal campaign to navigate - how do you win an election when, for some voters, Scott Morrison is the problem? Bad news for Tasmanian friends. Intense rainfall is currently hitting the state, with flash flooding possible this evening, especially in Devonport and surrounding coastal areas. From the Bureau of Meteorology: Heavy to locally intense rainfall which may lead to dangerous and life-threatening flash flooding is currently occurring across northern Tasmania this afternoon and evening. Six-hourly rainfall totals between 50mm and 80mm are possible. Rainfall rates are expected to gradually ease later this evening. Locations which may be affected include Devonport, Ulverstone and George Town. The Australian Electoral Commission has confirmed a report from the ABC's Antony Green that a loophole will allow the Liberal Democrats to contest the upcoming election with their current name. Last year Labor and the Morrison government teamed up to pass a law giving older registered parties an effective monopoly over use of certain words in their name on the ballot paper. The Liberal Democrats challenged the law in the high court but lost, with a majority of four justices upholding the validity of the effective naming rights veto. Served with a notice of an intention to deregister the Liberal Democrats, the party changed their name to Liberty and Democracy, but when objections to that name were lodged, withdrew the application - reverting back to the name they wanted all along: Liberal Democrats. On 1 April, the AEC again served a notice it will deregister that name - but given it has to give the party three months to respond, it is now too late for that decision to bite before the May election. Labor's Tim Ayres said the party appeared to have "taken advantage of a loophole not anticipated by drafters of the legislation". The AEC commissioner, Tom Rogers, told Senate Estimates: "I'm aware of what the intent of parliament was and... it doesn't appear to have been met in this case." Rogers blamed "some side routes in this legislation [that were] a bit too generous". Here's the latest from the Bureau of Meteorology, with minor to moderate flooding expected in New South Wales in the coming days as the wet weather returns (how brief our relief). Heavy rain is expected to develop along the NSW south coast during Wednesday due to the combination of a low pressure trough and an onshore airstream. Heavy rain is expected to increase and extend to the south-east of NSW during Thursday and Friday. Minor to moderate flooding is possible for central and southern coastal rivers from Wednesday into Thursday. Catchments in the flood watch areas are wet from recent rainfall. The Greens have welcomed Labor's commitment to crack down on multinational tax avoidance, touted in shadow treasurer Jim Chalmers' Press Club address today, but have urged the party to commit to a concrete policy. In November the Greens outlined a plan to crack down on multinational tax avoidance - assessed to bring in about $4.5bn. The Greens leader, Adam Bandt, said money could be redirected to help fund services like Medicare and affordable housing: We can raise up to $342bn if Labor has the guts to join the Greens in taking on the big corporations and billionaires. In the latest headache for the NSW government, Network 10 is reporting that Sydney bus drivers will launch industrial action for 24 hours next Monday just days after thousands of nurses took to the streets. The transport workers union is warning many commuters are likely to be affected by about 1,000 drivers walking off the job across the city. Four people have been charged following a Fireproof Australia climate change protest at Sydney's Brighton Le Sands this morning. About 8.30am, emergency services were called to General Holmes Drive following reports four people had allegedly gathered on the roadway, blocking traffic in the north bound lanes. New South Wales police said officers tried to speak to the protestors, who allegedly failed to comply with directions to move on. A short time later, they were arrested without incident. All four protesters - a 48-year-old East Lismore woman, a 61-year-old ACT woman, a 46-year-old Queensland man and a 31-year-old Brighton Le Sands woman - were charged with "wilfully prevent free passage of person/vehicle/vessel", "refuse/fail to comply with direction under Part 14", and "fail or refuse to disclose identity as required". They were refused bail and will appear in court later today. Fireproof Australia spokesperson Bonnie Cassen said the group wasn't afraid of fines and arrests. Anti-protest legislation introduced in NSW last Friday threatens two years jail time and/or a $22,000 fine for protesting illegally in a range of public settings including roads, train stations, tunnels, bridges and industrial areas. Cassen: We're more scared of what will happen when the climate crisis causes the breakdown of law and order, than we are of fines and prison. The government is focusing on us rather than what's happening in Lismore and the devastation that's coming down the road. Flood refugees need homes to get back to their lives the government can't ignore reality forever. We will stop when all flood and fire survivors are housed, when firefighters have the tools they need and smoke filters are installed for our kids, elderly and vulnerable. Liberal MP Jason Falinski and Labor MP Peter Khalil just appeared on ABC's Afternoon Briefing, tiffing over climate targets. First, though, Falinski was asked about accusations made by Liberal Senator Concetta Fierravanti-Wells following last week's Budget announcement, that the PM is a "bully": Concetta lost a hard fought preselection and I understand she is disappointed. It is human nature to want to lash out at those people we hold responsible. She has done that to two previous Liberal party leaders and I understand that she is probably very disappointed at the moment. Khalil retorted: Malcolm Turnbull... Barnaby Joyce, New South Wales former premier Gladys, the French president Emmanuel Macron, Concetta Fierravanti-Wells, even Pauline Hanson has questioned Scott Morrison. [Last election] voters saw Scott Morrison kicking a couple of balls around... hitting a few tennis balls and saw him wearing a baseball cap and think he seems nice. And now they have seen what he is really like and government's failures over the last few years and that is what people are judging them on. Australian unions have raised fears the Morrison government's trade deal with India will fuel the growth of temporary, employer-sponsored migration - a trend they say leaves workers "highly vulnerable to exploitation". The Australian Council of Trade Unions also criticised the failure to include a labour rights chapter in the pre-election agreement, arguing this "could contribute further to a race to the bottom on workers' rights, wages and conditions". The Australian government signed an interim trade agreement with India on Saturday, with most of the initial focus on immediate tariff cuts for Australian exports of lamb, wool and rock lobster. The government said the deal "opens a big door into the world's fastest growing major economy". But Australia has also offered to provide new access for young people from India to participate in working holidays in Australia, with places set at 1,000 a year. Here's more on the Reserve Bank of Australia's decision to keep interest rates at 0.1% from AAP's Colin Brinsden. The fall in petrol prices appears to have tamed concerns over the inflation outlook, but the RBA is yet to be convinced that price pressures have cooled. While the RBA left the cash rate at a record low 0.1% following Tuesday's monthly board meeting, the word "patient" was notably missing from governor Philip Lowe's statement in terms of the interest rate outlook. He noted the annual inflation rate is already running at 3.5% and the more policy-sensitive underlying ***measure*** is at 2.6%, compared to the RBA's 2 to 3% target: Higher prices for petrol and other commodities will result in a further lift in inflation over coming quarters. The board will assess this and other incoming information as it sets policy to support full employment in Australia and inflation outcomes consistent with the target. KPMG chief economist Brendan Rynne says an interest rate rise could come as soon as July, but when the rate rise did come, future rate increases could happen "quite quickly" afterwards to catch up. Such warnings came as the prime minister, Scott Morrison, attempted to take credit for the drop in petrol prices after last week's budget temporarily cut fuel excise. But economists say it's more to do with a fall in global oil prices. The halving of fuel excise was part of an $8.6bn cost-of-living support package announced in the budget and came after petrol prices spiked above $2 a litre as global oil prices rose due to the war in Ukraine. Labor has no intention of extending the cut in fuel excise beyond the legislated six months. Lowe made no mention of the budget in his statement. The weekly ANZ-Roy Morgan consumer confidence index - a pointer to future household spending - rose 2.5% after several weeks of decline. Consumer inflation expectations also tumbled 0.6 percentage points to 5.8% after setting a 10-year high last week. Steggall is asked how she compares the political "mood" now compared to three years ago, when she won the seat of Warringah from former PM Tony Abbott - with a string of independents in marginal seats campaigning this time around, in large part, on climate action. I think it has progressed dramatically and what we have had is three years of climate disasters from floods to bushfires... and yet in this very last budget, both Scott Morrison and Josh Frydenberg have shown they have no desire to tackle the climate crisis and invest in our future and our transition. So on the ground I think voters are very aware that this government has no desire to tackle the challenge and needs to look for viable alternatives. And for a number of electorates, they are looking for an independent voice to represent them and take those issues to Canberra and vote on the merits of legislation, not just because that's how the party room says to vote. Member for Warringah, Zali Steggall, is speaking on Afternoon Briefing now in the wake of the court dismissal to a challenge of NSW Liberal preselections. She says the Liberal party is "not the party of old" but is "Scott Morrison's party", and the outcome today is not a good one for political parties. What this outcome shows is the Liberal party is not the Liberal party of old, it is not the party of the free vote. It is Scott Morrison's party, at the end of the day. And I think many voters will be very disenfranchised and impacted by this. It says locally whoever runs is Scott Morrison's pick, ultimately. It isn't somebody picked to represent the community but somebody to do Scott Morrison's bidding... The question is, who does the Liberal party speak to anymore? They're clearly not there to represent the community, they are there to represent the views of their bosses, backroom deals that happen, and ultimately Scott Morrison - so I think it says a lot for the focus of the issues as a party. I think it says it is autocratic now, not elected. Preselection is not representative of local members. Here's more on the incident. ABC Ballarat is reporting a man has been taken to hospital after a joint rescue between the CFA and FRV. It is being reported that a rescue mission is under way in western Victoria after a 16-year-old boy fell at Mount Arapiles - a rock formation that rises 230 metres above the Wimmera plains in the Grampians. The site is a popular destination for rock climbers. Two further boys are stranded on the cliff, 7 News reports. Nearly 1,400 people in Afghanistan who were issued with emergency visas but never made it to Australia have had their visas lapse, a Senate report reveals. The Senate's Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee - which was previously chaired by the late Labor senator Kimberley Kitching - today tabled its final report on Australia's engagement in Afghanistan. The report sets out eight recommendations, including that the Department of Home Affairs "urgently improve its ***processes*** and communication in relation to Afghan visa applicants" including sending acknowledgments to all applicants. The report includes this stark finding about emergency visas issued at the height of the evacuation operation from Afghanistan: When asked how many people have had their subclass 499 visa lapse without being renewed, Home Affairs advised that, as at 31 December 2021, a total of 1,520 subclass 449 visas granted to evacuees from Afghanistan have ceased. Home Affairs noted that this includes: \* 53 who are in Australia were determined to already hold a valid substantive visa, such as a Family visa, or who have been granted a longer term visa since arriving; \* 1,398 who never entered Australia; and \* 69 who have now left Australia for New Zealand. Australia assisted these people with uplift from Afghanistan on behalf of New Zealand, and were granted a subclass 449 visa for the time they spent in Australia before they travelled onward to New Zealand. It's understood the report was substantially drafted before Kitching's sudden death. The main report is now in the name of the deputy chair, Liberal senator Eric Abetz. Abetz and the other committee members said they wished to acknowledge Kitching's "outstanding work" in overseeing the inquiry. We'll have a story on this later today. Back in Victoria, there's no word on how long mask mandates for students in years three to six will continue. But the health minister, Martin Foley, said they had saved "thousands of infections" in schools. There are 94,426 active cases in Victoria among 0 to 19-year-olds in the state, and 55,930 active Covid cases among 10 to 19-year-olds alone, the second highest age group behind 30 to 39-year-olds. Numbers are possibly more accurate among that age group due to the state's free rapid antigen test program in schools. Here's more on the opposition leader's courting of the regions today from AAP. Anthony Albanese will set up a $500m fund to encourage investment in the farm sector and earmark $656m for a regional telecommunications package if he wins government. Addressing a National Farmers Federation conference in Canberra, Albanese said the National Reconstruction Fund would set aside money specifically for the ***agriculture***, forestry, fisheries, food and fibre sectors. The fund aims to provide loans, equity and guarantees to investors establishing new businesses or those recovering from the stress of the pandemic. Albanese also announced a plan to improve mobile coverage throughout Australia, including a $400m fund to expand multi-carrier mobile coverage along with an audit of blackspots: This is a comprehensive, targeted plan that will ensure better mobile coverage on roads, on farms, and across regional communities - and better broadband as well. Asked if he would scrap the ***agriculture*** worker visa if he won government, Albanese told an audience of farmers and stakeholders he would provide a better system: The ag visa is not real at the moment ... we will sit down with you and have an appropriate system. Earlier, the ***agriculture*** minister, David Littleproud, criticised the Australian Workers' Union for campaigning against the visa. Farmers have a list of five priority areas they say need to be addressed for ***agriculture*** to thrive, including a $5bn rural telecommunications fund to improve connectivity for remote Australia. Launching the election wish list on Tuesday, NFF president, Fiona Simson, said the importance of the upcoming federal election for ***agriculture*** and the bush could not be understated. The federal government says former Liberal defence minister Brendan Nelson will replace media executive Kerry Stokes on the Australian War Memorial council, the latest in a raft of pre-election appointment announcements. Andrew Gee, the minister for veterans' affairs and defence personnel, said in a statement issued this afternoon: Dr Nelson fills the Council position vacated by outgoing member Mr Kerry Stokes AC, who is standing down after 15 years of ***exceptional*** and dedicated service, including as Chairman for more than six years. The news comes amid ongoing controversy over the $500m expansion of the AWM. Critics have long argued the money would be better spent helping veterans. Nelson is a former director of the AWM and is currently president of Boeing Australia, New Zealand and South Pacific. Gee said the appointment "would allow him to continue to serve the Australian War Memorial through its historic redevelopment". He argued Nelson's "business acumen" would "also prove invaluable". Gee also thanked Stokes "for his passion, leadership and vision". In the same statement, Stokes said: I have enjoyed every moment in working with the dedicated staff and council of the Memorial over the last 15 years and will continue to follow closely the progress of construction to expand the facility in Canberra over the next few years. Although Nelson joins the council, it is unclear who will replace Stokes as chairman. The decision will be made by the AWM's council. In unwelcome news, further rainfall has been forecast for New South Wales in the coming days, with flooding possible for the central and south coast. An initial flood watch has been issued for Central and Southern Coastal Rivers and Macquarie and Queanbeyan Rivers. Seven further minor flood warnings are active across the state, with a severe weather warning to be issued this afternoon between Gosford and Bega - including Sydney and Wollongong - in anticipation of high rainfall in the next 24 hours. Here's the latest from the Bureau of Meteorology, with falls of up to 150mm predicted in some areas: We will have more on this shortly. Here is the full statement from Village Roadshow Theme Parks, provided to Guardian Australia: This afternoon an ambulance was called to Movie World to attend to a guest following an incident on the carousel ride. The guest received a laceration to his head and was attended to by Movie World's Nurse before being taken to hospital in a stable condition. Our thoughts are with the guest and his family and we wish him a speedy recovery. We pride ourselves on our standards of care and quality and an investigation is being conducted as a matter of priority into the exact cause of the incident. In an abundance of caution the ride has been closed while we understand how the incident occurred. The safety and wellbeing of guests and team members is our top priority at Village Roadshow Theme Parks and we are committed to providing guests with a fun and safe environment. We will provide further updates when they are available. A young boy has sustained significant head injuries after falling off a carousel ride at Movie World. Emergency services responded to the incident off the Pacific Motorway in Oxenford just after 1pm on Tuesday. The child was transported to the Gold Coast University Hospital where he remains in a serious but stable condition. Village Roadshow Theme Parks confirmed a boy in his pre-teens suffered a laceration to his head and was attended to by Movie World's Nurse before being taken to hospital. "Our thoughts are with the guest and his family and we wish him a speedy recovery," the company said in a statement. The company said the ride has been closed while an investigation is being conducted "into the exact cause of the incident." "The safety and wellbeing of guests and team members is our top priority at Village Roadshow Theme Parks and we are committed to providing guests with a fun and safe environment," they said. "We will provide further updates when they are available." Speaking of elective surgery: The Victorian government's Covid Catch-Up Plan, announced today, will inject $1.5bn to see 240,000 public patients receive surgery each year by 2024. Frankston Private hospital will become a public surgery centre for Covid catch-up care with the capacity to support a maximum of 9,000 public patients a year once it is fully operational next year. A $1.4bn funding package was announced by the state government in February in response to the ongoing pressures on Victoria's healthcare system. In Victoria, the state government has been under fire today for elective surgery lists that have ballooned in the wake of pandemic-related shutdowns. The health minister, Martin Foley, said the "mess" was inherited by Labor when it came into government eight years ago, and, once collated, an official figure on how long the waitlist is will be released. In Queensland, a search and rescue operation is under way for a couple who went missing on a driving holiday in the state's western far north. Police and local landholders have conducted extensive mobile and aerial patrols in search of 63-year-old Craig Ferguson and 59-year-old Donna-Lee Ferguson, who failed to check out of their Kowanyama accommodation on Monday. Queensland police said: The couple are believed to have gone sightseeing around Kowanyama and were last seen at the intersection of Shelfo and Chapman roads around 7am on Sunday morning driving a 2021 White Toyota Landcruiser with Queensland Registration 612BS4. The couple only have access to smartphones, which are out of range where they're travelling. The Reserve Bank of Australia has today confirmed it will keep interest rates at the historically low rate of 0.1% despite concerns over living costs for Australians. Australia's benchmark interest rate has hovered near zero since November 2020. In a statement issued by the governor, Philip Lowe, the RBA says the board decided to maintain the cash rate target at 10 basis points and interest rates unchanged. It says inflation has increased sharply "in many parts of the world" in part due to Russia's ***invasion*** of Ukraine and pandemic recovery, however the Australian economy remains "resilient" and spending is picking up following the Omicron outbreak. The strength of the Australian economy is evident in the labour market, with the unemployment rate falling further to 4% in February. Underemployment is also at its lowest level in many years... the RBA's central forecast is for the unemployment rate to fall to below 4% this year and to remain below 4% next year. Wages growth has picked up, but, at the aggregate level, is only around the relatively low rates prevailing before the pandemic... given the tightness of the labour market, a further pick-up in aggregate wages growth and broader ***measures*** of labour costs is in prospect. This pick-up is still expected to be only gradual, although there is uncertainty about the behaviour of labour costs at historically low levels of unemployment. Inflation has picked up and a further increase is expected, but growth in labour costs has been below rates that are likely to be consistent with inflation being sustainably at target. Over coming months, important additional evidence will be available to the Board on both inflation and the evolution of labour costs. The Board will assess this and other incoming information as its sets policy to support full employment in Australia and inflation outcomes consistent with the target. The NSW court of appeal has declined to overturn preselections for a raft of NSW seats, clearing the way for the prime minister's hand-picked candidates to contest the federal election. The unsuccessful plaintiff, Matthew Camenzuli, a member of the NSW state executive, can appeal to the high court, but time is running out. The election is expected to be called by this weekend and nominations close 10 days after the writs for the election are issued. Scott Morrison, as part of a three-person committee appointed by the federal Liberal party, intervened in March and briefly took over the troubled NSW branch to confirm two ministers, Sussan Ley and Alex Hawke, as the candidates for Farrer and Mitchell. The committee also confirmed Trent Zimmerman, the sitting MP, as the candidate for North Sydney. The court of appeal on Tuesday afternoon confirmed earlier precedent that the courts would not intervene in so-called "club cases" and said that internal matters of the Liberal party were "non-justiciable". Any right to be the endorsed candidate under the Electoral Act only arose later when the registered officer of the party conveyed the names of candidates to the Australian Electoral Commission. They did not exist at the preselection stage. Justice John Basten, who presided over the three-judge bench, said the court found that the federal constitution of the Liberal party gave it a broad power to intervene in the affairs of the divisions. It means that a second intervention by the federal party last week to select and endorse a further nine candidates is valid too. The decision likely brings to an end the chaos that has stemmed from the bitter factional war in NSW over preselections. But it will leave bitterness among branch members who have fought for a bigger say in preselection ***processes*** within the NSW Liberals. Lawyer Jenny Ware will run in the winnable seat of Hughes where she is up against two independents and the former member, Craig Kelly, who defected to the United Australia party. In Warringah, another lawyer, Katherine Deves, who has campaigned for only biological females to be recognised in women's sport, will run against independent Zali Steggall. In other news, to risk sounding like a broken record, New South Wales residents are being warned to brace for further rainfall and possible flash flooding in the coming days. Here is the latest from the Bureau of Meteorology, from a press conference earlier today: We have a coastal trough developing from Wednesday, where we can expect to see widespread 50mm of rainfall falling... from Upper Hunter into Greater Sydney and including the Illawarra, South Coast areas of NSW. We are really expecting to see this trough then intensify, on Thursday... and then we will continue to see rainfall on Friday where we have the potential for 50 to 150mm of widespread rainfall. We are then expecting the weakening of this rainfall over the weekend. I should highlight within this widespread rainfall, there is the potential for isolated heavier totals... So what this means for the areas expecting this rainfall is that we will see the issuing of a flood watch later today which is a heads up for potential flooding. So catchments in the Upper Hunter, the Hawkesbury Nepean Valley, and the Colo Rivers there is the potential for minor to moderate flooding. In other catchments, the Illawarra, South Coast and Far South Coast, there is also the potential for minor flooding. In addition to this, there is the potential for flash flooding as we see these very heavy rainfall totals commencing from tomorrow. With that all tied up, there's one matter still to be resolved - the date of an election. Breaking now - the New South Wales supreme court has dismissed a legal challenge to Liberal preselections in the state, finding matters of the dispute are "not judicable". The preselections of immigration minister Alex Hawke, environment minister Sussan Ley and North Sydney MP Trent Zimmerman have been upheld. While Jim Chalmers was doing his thing at the National Press Club, Anthony Albanese was at the National Farmers Federation, touting Labor's ambitions for better mobile and broadband coverage in regional and rural areas. The Coalition's budget includes "***unprecedented***" regional infrastructure spending in key electorates off the back of securing the National party's support for the Liberals' net zero emissions plan. Incoming... A search continues for a man who went missing after entering the Bremer River at Ipswich, Queensland early this morning. In a very \*eye roll\* fashion, the last question of the day at the Press Club presses on whether there will be any new tax changes should Labor win the election - particularly the proposed 50% cut to excise on tap beer supposedly under consideration by the Coalition. The tax break would reportedly reduce the price of a keg of beer to approximately $35, cutting the cost of a pint by 40 cents. Chalmers: The answer to the last one is no, sorry to the beer drinkers of Australia; on the other question, it's the same answer as before... we're not proposing any tax changes beyond multinationals [and there is] potentially a conversation [to be had] with the states. And there's a lot of different ways to answer the question but our priority when it comes to repairing the budget, emphasis on quality, maybe multinationals, dealing with rorts... that's our priority. David Crowe asked Chalmers to clarify Labor's intention to raise revenue via a tax on multinationals. The Coalition in last week's budget also had a revenue-raising ***measure*** tightening some rules on multinational tax. Have they stolen Labor's thunder? Chalmers says Labor's ***measure*** will be "beyond" what the government proposed, however the party will not head into the election with a proposal on tax beyond multinationals. What the government propose the budget was a compliance ***measure***, with the tax office as you rightly identified and that is something the government of both political persuasions have done at different times, I don't think that is hotly contested, our ***measures*** on multinational tasks will go beyond that. In terms of other tax ***measures***, I think we've all made it clear, especially in the last couple of days that we're not going to this election with a proposal on tax beyond multinationals. We've said they might be a conversation with states, after the election but we're going the selection with a proposal on multinationals and beyond that. South Australia's case numbers are in, and there have been 5,068 new Covid cases overnight. Sadly, there have been four further deaths. Chalmers continued: You know, we want to be a pro-business, pro-employer, Labor party. Because we recognise that the challenges in our economy are so vast and so substantial that you cannot meet them without a working relationship with business, with unions, with the community sector, with the states and others, to get the job done. But there is a global movement here, and I pay tribute to president Biden... and others, who say that we've got a challenge here. The playing field is not level. That disadvantages local businesses and disadvantages local communities. And so, we think that there is something ***measured*** and responsible that can be done here to fix this situation, to make it fairer. And that's not to diminish or dismiss the substantial amount of people who are employed here... I think that people understand, even the big employers, especially in some cases the big employers. They understand that if there is a global move afoot, Australia should be a part of it. Back at the Press Club, Andrew Probyn raised the elephant in the room - closed borders and the impact that has had on the low unemployment rate. What would be your approach to unemployment given that wages is one of your high priorities? And that having low unemployment is meant to spark wage increases when you have got pressures in say, aged care, that's going to need, as you've just said, tens of thousands of workers? Are you a big Australia man? Or are you something else? Chalmers says as migration settings return to "something that looks a little bit more like normal", there's an opportunity to work out "the best mix" for the program. I've always been a supporter of a decent-sized migration program. Overall, it is good for the economy. But what that requires is that you get the constituent parts of it right and that you build public support for it. And so, migration is a big part of the story. On unemployment more broadly, we want the unemployment rate to be as low as possible. And I said in my speech, it's falling in welcome ways, but it's not bringing with it that wages growth that you identified in your question. It's bringing skills shortage, but it's not bringing wages growth that keeps up with the cost of living. So real wages are falling and so the difference between our approach to unemployment and the government's... is the labour market is a broader story than the just the unemployment rate. The labour market is about underemployment. It's about concentrated unemployment, in communities like the one that I represent, unfortunately. You know, it's about wages. It's about job security. And so, we take a much broader look at the labour market. We don't declare victory just because there's a forecast of an unemployment rate. If you're watching Chalmers live, you can switch over to ABC News to continue. In Victoria, 16 million free rapid antigen tests will be distributed to schools for students and staff from this week as the state's RAT surveillance regime continues. Doherty Institute modelling estimates 113,500 Covid infections have been prevented throughout the first term as a result of the program, assuming a 50% compliance rate with screening of students. Testing recommendations will remain the same, with all primary and secondary school students and staff and early childhood education and care staff and children encouraged to test at home twice a week. Those at special schools are encouraged to test five days each week due to the higher risk for medically vulnerable children. The testing system is still voluntary. A further 60,000 air purifiers are also on their way to schools to add to some 51,000 delivered. It's a Twitter war! (of stats!) Labor has committed to handing down a budget later this year if it wins government in May. Chalmers has also acknowledged the cost-of-living crisis and inflationary pressures will continue for some months. He is asked if the trajectory continues, will Labor commit to immediate cost-of-living relief, including cash handouts? Chalmers keeps his cards close to his chest and says "We'll play the [ones] we're dealt": We've said that it's hard to imagine a world where the cash handouts and the current budget continue indefinitely. You know, that's just being upfront about the pressures in budget... I'm just trying to be upfront and say that it won't continue forever. Having said that, you know, clearly, if we're putting a budget together, whenever it might be on the advice of Treasury, clearly we'll play the cards that we're dealt if there's a need for more support, clearly, we would look at that. But our starting point is that the support that passed through this parliament in the middle of last week is temporary. Asked to confirm if the reduction to the fuel excise will need to be extended, Chalmers said: If there is an incredibly compelling reason to leave it in, we would consider that. But to be upfront with Australians, no matter who wins government in May, it is likely that that petrol price relief will end. Chalmers was also asked about criticism that has been levelled towards his own and Albanese's relative inexperience. He points out that no treasurer has handed down a budget before being in government, and says downplaying Albanese's role as infrastructure minister shows the Coalition doesn't see the portfolio as "key to economic growth": I mean, if Josh Frydenberg's main critique of me is that I haven't handed down a budget before I've handed down a budget, that applies to him, too. And by the way, it applies to Peter Costello. It applies to Paul Keating. It applies to a whole heap of others. So, I don't, frankly, I don't pay much attention to that. I have a heap of experience in the portfolio. The lock-up was my 16th. I don't think that anyone in the parliament has done more than that but I wouldn't have thought so... The other thing which I find extraordinary is when the prime minister opens up a similar critique of Anthony. And what it reveals is that they think that holding the infrastructure portfolio and being the deputy prime minister of Australia is not relevant to our economy. Which is a bizarre concession, but they don't see infrastructure as key to economic growth in our economy. Guardian Australia's Sarah Martin is up at the Press Club. She presses Chalmers again on fiscal consolidation raised by Tingle and Coorey. Chalmers has been critical of the budget for wasteful spending. But what spending over forward estimates or medium term can Chalmers identify that Labor wouldn't go ahead with? And you've obviously been very critical of discretionary grant spending. Why not abolish the discretionary grants all together? Chalmers says Labor thinks "there is an opportunity" to trim some of the discretionary funds. But it's difficult from opposition without full visibility. One of the reasons that we have estimates and other opportunities is because there's not a lot of visibility on what the government has committed to those funds or where some of that money is going to. So that is a ***process*** that we intend to engage in. On the other issue about an example of spending that the government does that we wouldn't do - I think that there's a really clear example. The government, because they had for so long, this arbitrary staffing cap on the public service, meant that... so many billions of dollars were being spent on labour hire and contractors and consultants in areas traditionally performed by the APS... there is an opportunity, I think, to have a good look at the spending that goes into that part of budget, to work out whether we could do more with less. Back to the Press Club. Laura Tingle pointed out to Chalmers that, for all his criticism of the Coalition's budget, they waved through the tax cuts. The big question, as you say, is what happens next... you say that it is not a budget for the future. The budget is forecasting a big gap between spending and revenue for 10 years now. You seem to be saying, as the treasurer is saying, that will be closed by growth, with the only difference being that you're going to have some slightly better-quality spending promises. Have you got any new set of fiscal rules about the size of revenue, the size of spending and how you'll be working out your budget strategy? Chalmers replies: First of all, you're judged not just about what's in them but what's not in them. And this is a budget with a shelf life of six or seven weeks. The absence is what's in it for the future. If you want to go to the specifics of budget repair, you know, there's a heap of spending, a heap of cash handouts in the very near-term. There's not much budget repair beyond that except for the $3bn that the prime minister doesn't want to talk about in terms of the secret cuts on page 49 of budget paper 2. And so, there is, I think, a gap when it comes to budget repair in the future from the government. Now, we've said that there are at least four ways that you can improve the budget. The quantity of the debt matters to us, but the quality of the spending, I genuinely believe, matters as much, if not more... yes, we're looking for ways to make the budget more sustainable. But mostly, we're looking for ways to make the budget deliver a measurable economic improvement. Jumping away from the Press Club for a minute, and Papua New Guinea's PM has weighed in on the Solomon Islands deal with China. He says Solomon Islands is an independent state but as members of the Pacific Island Forum with shared interests PNG is "conscious" of what's occurring there. This is what happens when you try to Tweet while delivering a speech, Jim! Phil Coorey asks Chalmers if Labor will take a tax cap to the election like the Coalition with a 23.9% tax-to-GDP ratio. Are you going to be governed by a ratio of your own? And you were critical in your speech of the structural deficit hitting 0.7% of GDP in the medium term coming down from about 3% now. Are you going to try to do better? Are you going for a surplus by the end of the medium term? Can you give us any guidelines as to what will be governing your fiscal strategy between now and the election and not after the election? Chalmers says it's been made "really clear" that it would be hard to anticipate surpluses for some time from the intergenerational report and the budget. That's just the condition of the budget that we would inherit. When it comes to our fiscal strategy, you shouldn't lightly dismiss getting value for money. The absence of that has been a big part of not having enough to show for $1 trillion in debt in the last decade or so. We're not attracted to the government's tax cut, and the reason we're not attracted to it is because it seems to us like quite an arbitrary cap imposed for political reasons rather than good economic reasons. And clearly, as the economic conditions evolve, we take advice from the Treasury and from elsewhere about the most appropriate settings but I think that we said really for some time now that the arbitrary tax cut that the government has imposed, which the government doesn't hit by the way in the forwards, from memory, is something that they say to try to have a political argument rather than to try to generate a genuine economic outcome. Chalmers concludes: We know that whoever wins government on the 14th or the 21st of May... real wages will be going backwards. Businesses will be short of staff. Industries will be short of skills. Childcare fees and healthcare costs will be too high for too many people. There will be conflict and tension in the world far away and closer to home. Our country will occupy a precarious place in global supply chains. There will be $1 trillion in debt and not enough to show for it. Petrol prices and interest rates will be about to rise again no matter who wins. A long rebuild ahead in places like Lismore and beyond. But what I also know is that if people wake up with a new Labor government... for the first time in nine years, there will be a prime minister, a treasurer, a cabinet and a government with a determination and resolve and a sense of responsibility to actually start dealing with these challenges... a government that has the plans for a better future, for a stronger, more resilient, more inclusive, more sustainable economy that creates opportunities and puts those opportunities within the reach of more people. Because we want to run this country, its economy, in the interests of its people... the election will be tough and it will be close. And the path beyond that is challenging, too. So we're not here to muck around or muddle through. A better future depends on it. Chalmers repeats his challenge to the treasurer to debate at least three times during the election campaign. He repeats the Coalition has been in government for almost a decade. The election will be "a referendum on the past 10 years", he says, and a choice for what the next 10 will look like: I'll repeat my challenge to Josh Frydenberg to debate the budget and the economy and the future at least three times in this campaign here, in the west, anywhere that we can make it happen! You shouldn't hide behind scare campaign or dishonest advertising or try to fight the 2019 election all over again. The campaign needs to be better than that. Because before Australians choose what kind of government they want, we first need to choose what kind of campaign we want. And when the prime minister spoke to you here in January, he said it wouldn't be a referendum, it would be a choice. But we know that it's both. A referendum on the past 10 years, which sifts through the rubble of the government's economic credibility and the shards of the prime minister's glass jaw. And the choice to be made about the next 10 years. The campaign to frame that decision can be a battle of one-liners or it can be a contest of substance. It can be spin and marketing, or it can be real talk about what's confronting this country and what's at stake. Chalmers says Labor's fiscal strategy will be better than the Coalition's as it will "focus on quality and bang for buck", like investing in the aged care sector: Grow the economy the right way, focus on quality and bang for buck, end the rorts and waste and work with other countries to make sure that multinationals pay their fair share of tax in Australia where they make their profits. And when it comes to value for money, it's hard to think of a better investment than in aged care. And for those of you who have been tempted to write off the blurred differences between the major parties I offer you this as an example of one of the defining distinctions between the big parties. It's been disappointing but not really surprising to see the lengths this government will go to to deny people decent care, decent food and decent wages. More future chat and a nod to Chalmers' Queenslander heritage: To paraphrase another Queenslander - I say this to Scott Morrison and Josh Frydenberg - this reckless rorting and wasteful spending must stop. If it's not the time to flick the switch to austerity, it is the time to flick the switch to quality, to smart investments in our future. Because the best way to repair the budget is to get the economy growing in a broader, more sustainable, more inclusive way... That's why we want to be judged on the quality of our spending to the extent that it delivers the right kind of growth. We will be investing where it counts to create more opportunities, unlock business investment and drive productivity. This has never been more important than right now where we know that our economic pressures lie on the supply side. That's why the quality of spending matters as much as the quantity. Chalmers says Labor has a five-point-plan for economic growth united by the belief "an economy and a society stronger after Covid than before is within our reach". Our plan for economic growth, investing in the future, targets cost-of-living pressures and supports sectors that will improve our lives, create more secure and new jobs and grow our economy. Each of our are designed for a generational dividend and not just a six- to seven-week political pay-off. Instead of a panicked, political pamphlet, we offer a plan and it has five parts. To reduce energy costs and emissions while transitioning to newer sources of clean energy. Hundreds of thousands of "fee-free" Tafe places to address skill shortages. Cheaper, more accessible childcare. More modern infrastructure, including "key investments" in upgrading the NBN and the digital economy. A "made-in-Australia future" with co-investments in "crucial sectors" like manufacturing and the care economy to boost the resilience of small business. Again, Chalmers says cost-of-living pressures predate the Ukraine ***invasion*** and are a consequence of stagnating wage growth: Cost-of-living pressures haven't just shown up out of the blue. They aren't just a consequence of Russia invading Ukraine. They're a consequence of the Coalition attacking wages and job security. That's why the relief in this budget isn't even enough to make up for the more than $3,200 fall in real wages for the average worker these past two years. But of all the failures in this budget, all the drift and disappointment of the eight before it, the most glaring omission by far is the future. Again, the warnings were plain for all to see. This time in the government's own intergenerational report. It said if we do nothing to address our decline, we face an economy that's smaller than expected, growing slower than before and saddled with four more decades of debt and deficits and that's before we even factor in lower productivity growth at the most recent cycle under the Coalition. Chalmers turns to the global supply chain hit by the Ukraine ***invasion*** and the pandemic. He warns interest rates are forecast to rise "no matter who" wins the election but continuing with the status quo is not the answer. We know that prices for essentials like petrol, rent and childcare were already sky rocketing, even before Russia invaded Ukraine, while Australian real wages were going backwards. And we understand, of course, the ***invasion*** exacerbates this and it feeds into global investor uncertainty which had only just begun to recover in the aftermath of the pandemic and the recession. Rerecognise geopolitical risks aren't just rising in Europe, but closer to home as well. And as we consider the implications for our national security and for our economy from a Chinese leadership which is becoming not just more assertive in tone, but more aggressive in posture. And just the other day, factory activity in China slumped at the sharpest pace in two years, reminding us that the global health uncertainty from the pandemic still isn't over. We've all heard the Reserve Bank governor warn that interest rates will rise before long no matter who wins the election. Driving up the cost of borrowing for families, businesses and governments. Now, the wrong and risky response to this uncertainty, to this context and this backdrop is to continue on the current course and cling to the status quo. The most damaging thing that Australia could do right now, the biggest economic and social harm we could inflict would be to accept flatlining wages, soaring prices, tepid investment and weak growth, as our best-case scenario - our new normal. That's not stability - that's stagnation. Is "the future" going to be Labor's election tagline? What would a Labor budget look like? Chalmers runs through major election talking points - disaster support for communities, cheaper childcare, wages growth, an anti-corruption commission and greater investment in aged care: If last week had seen a Labor budget handed down, it would have offered hope and support and resources to communities cleaning up floodwaters and rebuilding after bushfires. It would have delivered a plan for cheaper childcare and stronger wages growth, easing families off that punishing treadmill of rising prices and flatlining pay. It would have invested in Australian skills, small businesses and local supply chains, to grow self-reliance and resilience and make our future here in Australia. It would have put an end to nine years of stupendous rorts, abuse and waste and funded and waste and funded a national Anti-Corruption Commission. It would have invested in productivity so we can grow the economy more strongly without runaway inflation. And, as Anthony made clear, in a way that we're all incredibly proud of, a Labor budget and a Labor government would fix the crisis in aged care. Chalmers continues on his assessment of the the Coalition's budget, and how he expects their election campaign to be run - "no ambition" beyond staying in power: We got a document that gloried in its shallowness and wallowed in its triviality. Deliberately, overtly, insultingly, conceived as a prop for the election. And celebrated by the Liberals and Nationals, not for what it would do for the country, but just for giving them something to say in their ads. Last week's budget showed exactly what sort of campaign Scott Morrison and Josh Frydenberg will run. Glib, incoherent, in denial of reality and completely silent on the future. No ambition beyond their own survival, no vision beyond election night. Chalmers says the Coalition's budget released last week was "riddled with rots and chock-full of wasteful spending". A treasurer personally culpable for tens of billions of dollars of emergency support for businesses which didn't need it. Another $5.5bn wasted on subs that will never be built. Sports rorts, car park rorts, dodgy land deals - the list goes on! And when Josh Frydenberg said from this lectern five days ago that the focus was on winning the election, and when Scott Morrison talks about the budget being a shield, they gave the game away. This was a budget designed to shield a government from the people. All about setting the Coalition up for a fourth term - not setting our country up for a better future. Amazing - Chalmers somehow live tweeting while simultaneously speaking to the National Press Club. Chalmers turns to the economy. He says the nine years the Coalition has spent in government has amounted to a "wasted decade of missed opportunities". On the face of it, the frantic last few days before an election is called might not seem an ideal time to take a step back for a moment to take stock of our economy, our country or our future. But with so much at stake, I think it's the perfect time. Because we have learnt so much about ourselves. We've learnt from the mediocrity we had before the pandemic, the catastrophe we had during it and the uncertainty we're experiencing now. From floods and fire, a pandemic, a war in Europe, before that from the first recession in 30 years and another deep and damaging downturn just last year. From the false starts and the false dawns of this recovery, marred by policy mistakes and missteps. From a nation which rose to the occasion each time it needed to, and the government that fell back into old habits. A people who were there for each other at every single turn and a prime minister who went missing, taking credit but never taking responsibility. And now, after nine long years, three treasurers and three prime ministers, the verdict is in - average economic growth at 2.3 % under this Liberal-National government this year, lower than the 2.5% of the last Labor government. Average productivity growth at 1.1% a year under them versus 1.4% under us... multiplying debt and deficits as far as the eye can see. Chalmers begins his address by, during the acknowledgement of country, highlighting Labor would implement the Uluru Statement of the Heart if the government were to be elected. Thank you to the sponsors and the directors of the National Press Club for this opportunity to speak to the press club for the first time this parliamentary term... For the first but hopefully not the last time in this grand and auspicious great hall, recognising that the history of this place is just a tiny speck on tens of thousands of years of the world's oldest continuous culture; acknowledging the customs, elders and traditions of the Ngunnawal and Ngambri people and hoping that the Uluru Statement of the Heart is implemented in full. Many thanks to the wonderful Matilda Boseley. I'll be with you for the rest of the afternoon, starting with shadow treasurer Jim Chalmers, who is about to speak at today's National Press Club address. With that, I shall hand you over to the amazing Caitlin Cassidy! By the way, if you just can't get enough of Morrison, the prime minister is being interviewed on ABC's 7.30 program tonight. Here are the latest coronavirus numbers from around Australia today, as the country records at least 38 deaths from Covid-19: ACT Deaths: one Cases: 918 In hospital: 41 (with five people in ICU) NSW Deaths: 12 Cases: 19,183 In hospital: 1,467 (with 56 people in ICU) Queensland Deaths: eight Cases: 9,946 In hospital: 479 (with 15 people in ICU) South Australia Deaths: four Cases: 5,068 In hospital: 206 (with 11 people in ICU) Victoria Deaths: eight Cases: 12,007 In hospital: 339 (with 18 people in ICU) Western Australia Deaths: five (historical) Cases: 8,145 In hospital: 242 (with six people in ICU) Western Australia has just published its Covid-19 numbers for the latest reporting period. The state recorded five deaths. However, according to the premier, these were historical cases that were reported to WA Health yesterday. There are now 242 Covid-19 positive people in hospital in the state, including six in ICU. Two people have died in a helicopter crash in New South Wales overnight. Just before midnight the wreckage of the helicopter was found about 200m away from the Snowy Mountains Highway at Kiandra Flats. The pilot and passenger died at the scene. Police said in a statement: Officers from Riverina police district have established a crime scene which will be examined by specialist police. The Australian Transport Safety Bureau has been informed and has commenced an investigation into the accident. Police will provide more details at a press conference in Queanbeyan later today. NBN Co has announced the next set of suburbs where people can apply to get an upgrade of their internet from fibre-to-the-node to fibre-to-the-premises (if they order a higher tier speed plan). The company is planning to offer the upgrade to 1.7m homes by the end of next year, with the first 50,000 opening up late last month. This month, another 90,000 homes can apply for the upgrades in the following locations: NSW: Byron Bay, Albury, Berowra, Blue Haven, Calala, Cardiff South, Charlestown, Dubbo, East Ballina, Kanwal, Kincumber, Kingscliff, Macquarie Hills, Port Macquarie, Rutherford, Shellharbour, Suffolk Park, Watanobi, Wauchope, West Tamworth, Wyong Victoria: Herne Hill, Highton, Horsham, Kyabram, Lara, Mildura, North Wonthaggi, Pakenham, Queenscliff, Roxburgh Park, Warragul, West Wodonga, Wodonga Queensland: Glenvale, Newport, Norman Gardens, Palmwoods, Petrie, Wurtulla South Australia: Littlehampton, Nairne Western Australia: Attadale, Canning Vale, Halls Head, Wannanup NBN Co said it planned to enable 60,000 per month to order the service, with 230,000 eligible to upgrade by the end of June, and 600,000 eligible by the end of 2022. In Senate estimates last week, NBN Co chief executive Stephen Rue said since the launch in late March, the company had received 350 orders for upgrades - 250 businesses and 100 homes. The timing of future announcements during caretaker mode for the election is something the company is keeping a close eye on, with a caretaker review group set up in NBN Co to ensure compliance with caretaker expectations. Rue said there would be no NBN Co advertising out during caretaker period, and he has pulled out of a speech scheduled during the expected caretaker period. Given that this press conference is in Sydney, there is a lot of discussion about federal flood relief funding. It's difficult to hear the question, but here is the prime minister's response. (Reminder, the rules of the blog coffee game state that you must take a big sip every time the prime minister says "one-in-500-year flood".) Morrison: I've written to the premier again, stressing that we are very happy to share in the cost of the program for the one-in-500-year flood event, that's what we undertook to do... We said we will go to those places that are impacted by the one-in-500-year flood event because the types of programs that they are pursuing, our programs that are done by state government, there are some things that governments do 100%, they are some things the commonwealth do 100%. As I said, we are [doing] something the commonwealth does 100%. As I said, we've [supplied] $2.1 billion in support, which actually is far in excess of what the state government has responded to the floods, with a billion dollars of what we've committed already in people's pockets. We were very clear that on that particular program, we were prepared to take half the cost of those places impacted by the one-in-500-year flood event. The Queensland premier has confirmed that the state's Covid restrictions will once again ease from 1am on April 14. Currently, most venues in the state are only open to those who are fully vaccinated or have a medical exemption, but once restrictions ease all patrons will be allowed to enter. Morrison has been asked, given he is taking credit for the lower fuel prices today, if he will also take responsibility for them if they rise between now and election day. The prime minister said: I can simply say that we have provided 22 cents a litre relief on fuel tax, that's come off to ensure that people can have lower prices. Prices will still move around but what I do know is that there will be 22 cents a litre less than what they would otherwise be... I'm very pleased that the fuel industry has responded, we have seen the move quickly and we have seen the plus much quicker than we anticipated, and so I thank them for that. They want to give the motorist a good deal, they want to be able to pass on this cost-of-living relief and they are doing that and people can see that we have delivered that right here at the browser. Reporter: Is that why you selected this particular BP? Morrison: If you look at the prices around here, there are very similar levels. You see that in Melbourne, where I was yesterday... In regional areas, when I was up in northern Tasmania on the weekend, it'll take a little while for it to filter through there, they are still a bit over $2... but we expect to see that come down in regional areas. Foreign minister Marise Payne says she will be leaving tonight for a meeting of Nato foreign ministers in Europe to discuss the Ukraine situation. Australia isn't actually a member of Nato, but as an "enhanced opportunities partner" it seems we still get an invitation to sit at the grown-up table. Payne has reiterated her view that Russia's actions are in breach of international law: Can I say that I am leaving this evening, as you have advised, for a meeting of Nato foreign ministers and close partners in Brussels, in relation to Russia's action in Ukraine. The coordination in this meeting will strengthen and enable the global response to Russia's unlawful egregious and unprovoked actions. They are also in breach of international law, and a breach of the UN charter, so the work that we have been doing in sanctions excluding over 500 people, identities in the last month, the support that we are provided through humanitarian aid - and that is being delivered through trusted partners on the ground in Ukraine and in neighbouring countries and through Australian aid organisations and the military support that we have provided - is key to our coordination with our international partners. I look forward to meeting with the key members of Nato and those counterparts in the coming days in Brussels to reaffirm and reinforce Australia's engagement in this key international operation. Morrison: We kept disciplined about how we were spending. Yes, we had to invest to support the Australian economy but we've known when to get in and support, just like we're doing again now, and we also know when that support has been rounded out. And as we've come to this pandemic, what we know is that our opponents, the Labor party, would have spent an [extra] $81 billion during the pandemic. Now we knew where we had to keep some of the ***measures*** we had before that helped our economy come through. But the Labor party wanted to keep on spending and spending and spending. And what that would have meant is that we would not have been in a position to harness the gains that we have been able to put in place, how we've come through this pandemic with the strongest economic rebound that we have seen in Australia in 70 years. And yes I was right! Scott Morrison: I'm thrilled that here, the benefits of what we've done to cut fuel taxes to give people cost-of-living relief, as a result of this budget, have been felt right here at the browser and to see as prices go down to what we see here, 166.9c, we are seeing that right across the country. The prime minister is speaking live now... in front of a petrol station. I assume to flex the effectiveness of the budget's centrepiece fuel excise reduction. Let's have a listen in. The Australian Human Rights Commission is up in Senate estimates and president Rosalind Croucher is being grilled about its financial management. In March Guardian Australia revealed that from June 2021 the commission has slashed or is slashing one in three staff due to cashflow problems. Croucher said: We identified some issues in our financial management... [An] internal management issue: we overspent the budget we were given by the government on employee expenses. The financial management system was not fit for purpose. Our cash forecasting was inadequate. Croucher says the AHRC is now financially back on track, thanks to work with the finance department and the attorney general's department, including a $16m equity injection. Croucher says she was "very concerned" and actions have been taken to "ensure it doesn't happen again". I accept that the buck does indeed stop with me. Liberal Sarah Henderson said it was "absolutely shocking" the issue hadn't been identified before June. Croucher accepted it "should've been picked up and addressed earlier" - but argues it is not just an internal budgeting issue, it's also a problem with the level of base government funding. Croucher said base government funding was $16.5m, while the rest was project-based. The Queensland numbers have also just been published. The state recorded 9,946 new Covid-19 infections and well as, tragically, eight deaths. There are now 479 Covid-positive people in Queensland hospitals, including 15 in ICU. Two bodies have been recovered from the Blue Mountains after a family of five were caught in a freak landslide there on Monday. Police say the bodies of a nine-year-old boy and his 49-year-old father were recovered near Wentworth Pass at around 9.30am. It comes after a 50-year-old woman and a 14-year-old boy were winched out and taken to hospital yesterday afternoon. Police say they will undergo surgery today and remain in critical condition. A fifth member of the family, a 15-year-old girl, was treated for shock but not injured and was able to walk away from the scene. Police confirmed the family was from the UK, and were holidaying in Australia. An investigation is ongoing with a report to be filed for the coroner on the deaths of the man and boy. The Australian Capital Territory's daily Covid numbers are in and it has again recorded the death of someone diagnosed with Covid-19. 918 new infections were recorded in the latest reporting period, with 41 Covid-positive people in hospital including five in the ICU and two requiring ventilation. Hundreds of thousands of fish have died after recent flooding in northern New South Wales caused "severe deoxygenation" of rivers, with researchers alarmed at discovering carcasses of species that traditionally tolerate lower oxygen levels. Scientists are still researching the full of extent of the destruction to marine life along the Richmond river, where multiple fish kill events occurred following flooding in late February and early March. The flooding led to a total lack of oxygen in a 60km stretch of the waterway, between Coraki and Ballina on the northern NSW coast. While data on the effects of the latest flood events at the end of March is not yet clear, Southern Cross University researchers who had been undertaking long-term monitoring of the Richmond river in a project with the NSW Department of Planning and Environment believe the final fish death toll will be in the hundreds of thousands. You can read the full report below: NSW premier Dominic Perrottet is discussing the need to get schools in flood-affected areas back open. We know that our children have gone through a very difficult time when we have come through the pandemic, many days, many terms, of face-to-face learning our children have missed out on. Now in these flood-affected communities once again we've had many young children not be able to go to school. So [with] the education minister, Sarah Mitchell, important work has happened to ensure we've been able to relocate those schools in those areas that have been flood-affected to get kids back to the classroom as quickly as possible. The NSW premier is speaking now. Let's have a listen in. We have a bit more detail on Peter Dutton's missile-related announcements this morning. In the second of two press releases issued today, the defence minister said the government had approved the accelerated acquisition of improved weapon capabilities for the Australian defence force at a total cost of $3.5bn. The accelerated acquisitions include the joint air-to-surface standoff missile extended range (JASSM-ER) for the Royal Australian Air Force three years earlier than planned. This is now expected by 2024. Dutton said: The JASSM-ER will enable the FA-18F Super Hornet, and in future the F-35A Lightning II, to engage targets at a range of 900km. The government is also acquiring the Norwegian Kongsberg naval strike missile (NSM) for the Royal Australian Navy's surface fleet. This will replace the Harpoon anti-ship missile in the Anzac Class frigates and Hobart Class destroyers. The frigates and destroyers will have this new capability installed from 2024 onwards. The government argues this will provide "a significant enhancement to Australia's maritime strike capability - more than doubling the current maritime strike range of our frigates and destroyers". The government says it will also accelerate the acquisition of maritime mines "to secure Australia's ports and maritime approaches". Dutton said: With Australia's strategic environment becoming more complex and challenging, our ADF must be able to hold potential adversary forces and infrastructure at risk from a greater distance. These world-class strike weapon systems will equip our forces to better protect Australia's maritime approaches and, when necessary, contribute to coalition operations in our region. The announcements come amid ongoing efforts by the government to focus on national security ahead of the election. As reported here earlier, Dutton also named two large US weapons makers - Raytheon and Lockheed Martin - as "strategic partners" in Australia's own push to manufacture and maintain guided weapons. Nine news is reporting the body of a man swept away in flood waters in Thomson in Victoria. More details to come. Victoria's premier, Daniel Andrews, says the state will scrap isolation requirements for close contacts of coronavirus cases when it is safe to do so. The Australian health protection principal committee (AHPPC) told national cabinet last week that isolation and testing rules could be eased after the current wave of infections peaks. Scott Morrison said on Monday he was "looking forward" to the rules being scrapped and that it was a matter for the states. The prime minister said: We don't make those decisions at the commonwealth level. It is premiers who decide to shut cities down or open them up, not the commonwealth government. Andrews, however, noted national cabinet was chaired by Morrison: He's asked a question [to AHPPC] on behalf of all of us ... he doesn't like the answer and that was apparently my fault. I don't think so. If there's a quarrel between the prime minister and the chief medical officer, well I respectfully suggest that he sort that out. I'm in the business of following the advice of experts. Andrews said he expected the latest Omicron BA.2 subvariant wave to peaked in the "next few weeks". The Liberals have attacked Labor's aged care policy after the shadow attorney general suggested a possible pause on its one-year deadline to have a registered nurse in every aged care facility at all times, AAP reports. Mark Dreyfus admitted there may not be enough trained nurses to implement the plan and more would need to be trained. "We're talking about setting the standard and if it is in fact true that there are not enough nurses in Australia to provide that level of care, we should train more," he told the ABC. It might be that it turns out we've got to pause [the deadline]. But let's accept the royal commission's recommendation, let's say we need to have 24-hour nursing care in nursing homes, let's put the nurses back into nursing homes. Aged care services minister Richard Colbeck has seized on the comments, saying Labor's policy had failed at its first test. Mark Dreyfus has admitted Labor would have to pause its promise of an earlier rollout of 24/7 nurses in aged care... [and] conceded Labor couldn't do it if there are insufficient nurse numbers... It has ignored the advice of the aged care royal commission and claimed they would introduce 24/7 nurses a year ahead of schedule. Colbeck said the government supported having a nurse in aged care facilities at all times, but rolling out the royal commission's recommendations sooner than slated "risks the closure of aged care facilities with a serious risk to residents". Optus customers have reported being unable to make outgoing voice calls on mobile on Tuesday. The company's website states the mobile network is suffering a major outage affecting voice calls. No further information has been provided at this stage. Australia has imposed new sanctions on Russia over its ***invasion*** of Ukraine, banning the export of luxury goods including racehorses, wine and abalone. The ban, which commences on Thursday, also covers crustaceans and molluscs (including lobster), truffles, tobacco products, perfume and makeup items, leather goods including handbags, furs, rugs and carpets, luxury clothing worth more than $500 an item, pearls, jewellery, collectible coins and banknotes, watches and clocks and sporting goods such as skiing and golfing equipment worth than $500 an item. Video game consoles and coin-operated casino game machines worth more than $500 a unit are also on the banned list. Victorian police would be required to notify the state's Department of Health of toxic batches of drugs under an amendment to the state's public health laws proposed by the Greens. The Greens' changes to the public health and wellbeing amendment bill, which is set to be debated in the upper house this week, would see certain drugs, poisons and controlled substances declared as notifiable based on their potential serious risk to public health. This would mean police officers would be required to notify the department within a specified timeframe if they encounter the substances during the performance of their duties. The definition of "serious risk to public health" means that alcohol or illegal drugs such as heroin would not be listed as notifiable in normal circumstances despite their impact on public health. You can read the full report below: Victoria's Greens party has revamped its calls for a rent cap and the reintroduction of the government's proposed social housing levy ahead of the state budget next month, in a bid to reduce cost of living pressures. In February, the Andrews government scrapped its plans to introduce a housing levy, estimated to raise $800m for social housing, following heavy backlash from key industry groups. Ellen Sandell, deputy leader of the Greens, urged the state government to fund a rent cap and the 1.75% levy in the state budget: The biggest cost of living pressure we have right now in Victoria is the complete unaffordability of housing ... young people simply cannot afford to buy a home and rents are now increasing. The Greens also called for temporary free public transport, pointing to similar initiatives in New Zealand, California, NSW and Tasmania. Labor says it would develop a "standard package of support" for businesses to recover after fire or flood, as the opposition continues its attack on the Coalition over its response to recent natural disasters. Deputy Labor leader Richard Marles will tell the COSBOA National Small Business Summit today that an Albanese government would change how the commonwealth responds to natural disasters. According to material distributed by Labor ahead of his speech, Marles will promise his party would "consider the specific needs of small businesses in times of crisis". An Albanese Labor government will develop a standard package of support for businesses in times of crisis, so that business can have a sense of certainty about what support will be provided in any given circumstance. Labor will also promise to change rules to ensure faster payment of invoices, and reduce administrative burden on small businesses to decrease the amount of time needed to complete tax obligations. The Coalition's small business minister, Stuart Robert, tweeted that Marles' address was a "belated small biz speech". The world can still hope to stave off the worst ravages of climate breakdown but only through a "now or never" dash to a low-carbon economy and society, scientists have said in what is in effect a final warning for governments on the climate. Greenhouse gas emissions must peak by 2025, and can be nearly halved this decade, according to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), to give the world a chance of limiting future heating to 1.5C above pre-industrial levels. The final cost of doing so will be minimal, amounting to just a few percent of global GDP by mid-century, though it will require a massive effort by governments, businesses and individuals. You can read the full report below: Russian president Vladimir Putin is a "war criminal" who has presided over the "butchering" of Ukrainian citizens, according to Australia's foreign affairs minister Marise Payne and defence minister Peter Dutton, in their strongest comments yet on the conflict in Europe. Payne, who travels to Brussels for a meeting of Nato foreign ministers to discuss Russia's ***invasion*** of Ukraine, excoriated Putin in an interview on Sunrise this morning. As the disturbing situation in the city of Bucha becomes known, the foreign affairs minister spoke of "the bombing of known civilian shelters", "the butchering of people in mass graves, murder and the use of rape as a weapon of war". That is appalling, and it must be investigated in the context of the war crimes issues that have been raised... It's horrific, it's obscene, and it's absolutely the work of the International Criminal Court. In his own interview with Sunrise, Dutton also took aim at Putin: He's a brutal autocrat. The use of chemical weapons and the use of brutality against women and children doesn't phase him... When you're seeing theatres bombed, when you're seeing residential areas bombed and the potential of mass graves or executions, that is straight up and down the act of a war criminal and this should be investigated as quickly as possible. The world needs to unite and become even stronger in the sanctions that we're applying against Russia. Foreign affairs minister Marise Payne has described Russian soldiers' alleged use of rape as a weapon of war and the mass murder of civilians in Ukraine as "horrific beyond description". She spoke with the Nine network earlier this morning. What is important is that the international community does everything it can to hold Russia to account for their actions... The strongest possible focus on ensuring that Russia pays a cost for these actions. Purebred horses, truffles and wine are among a slate of new luxury goods that cannot be exported to Russia under the expansion of Australian sanctions, AAP reports. The further sanctions come a day after Ukraine's ambassador to Australia called for a moratorium on all Russian goods entering the country as the Kremlin is accused of committing war crimes during its ***invasion***. The new sanctions include everything from tobacco to leather and furs to musical instruments on top of an already announced export ban on aluminium ores. Another senior Liberal has taken aim at Scott Morrison, accusing him of "self-serving ruthless bullying" and claiming he has "ruined" the Liberal party. Catherine Cusack, a NSW Liberal who announced two weeks ago she would resign from the Legislative Council over her anger about flood relief, adds her voice to a growing chorus of critics of Morrison from within his own party in an opinion piece for Guardian Australia. Cusack explicitly endorses Liberal senator Concetta Fierravanti-Wells's "character assessment of the prime minister" and reveals she will not vote for the Morrison government in the May election. You can read the full report below: The shadow minister for climate change and energy, Chris Bowen, has also appeared on ABC radio this morning to discuss this offshore windfarm proposal by the government. But first, let's hear what he has to say about the criticism of prime minister Scott Morrison including from those in the leader's own party. The concerns over the prime minister's character are now well established, and they're well established not by the Labor party, but the people who know him best. I mean his own deputy prime minister called him a liar and a hypocrite\*. These people know him best, they've served in cabinet with him, in the Liberal party with him over a period of many years... This is not a political attack by the Labor party. This is a character assessment by the people who work with him very closely. \*Barnaby Joyce has stated that he now regrets sending this text message while on the backbench and says he no longer believes this to be true. While speaking to ABC radio, Tim Wilson was asked about the parade of politicians coming forward to accuse prime minister Scott Morrison of being an unfit leader. It's just not even remotely relatable to any experience I've had... People make criticisms of politicians and public figures, all the time it's water off a duck's back for all of us. Because that's part of the test of being in public life is that unfortunately, people throw a lot of mud in your direction, and it comes to your character and your resilience about whether you're prepared to keep going. Because you're in it to advance the interests of the nation, and I know that fortitude sits at the heart of Scott Morrison. An area of the Bass Coast has been tapped for a possible offshore windfarm. Assistant energy minister Tim Wilson has been asked on ABC radio why this wasn't done years ago. Well, I can't answer to why it wasn't done in the past. But what I can say is within three weeks of being the minister responsible for this area, we passed laws to enable it to happen and now we're getting on with the job and this is a huge announcement to build not just Australia's offshore wind industry and same confidence to the market and to investors that there are opportunities... Host Patricia Karvelas: You're part of a government though. You've been in charge for a decade. Why didn't you use the last decade to do this?... Wilson: Passing laws takes times Patricia because we want to take the whole of the community with this. But this is the fundamental difference between our approach and so many other political parties that always want to make big announcements but don't do the hard work and the detail to make sure we get it right. We want to make sure that when we invest in offshore electricity infrastructure, particularly offshore wind, that we gain community confidence to minimise environmental impacts and build Australia's carbon-neutral industrial future. A survey of public opinion in Indonesia has found declining trust in Australia to act responsibly in the world over the past decade, according to a new report published overnight. The Lowy Institute said its polling had found mixed results, with Indonesians generally "optimistic about the future, increasingly sceptical of China and Chinese investment, unenthusiastic about the United States, and wary of great power competition". The Sydney-based thinktank said it was based on a nationally representative sample of about 3,000 Indonesians aged 17 to 65 across 33 provinces of Indonesia between 29 November and 24 December 2021. Those polled were asked "How much do you trust the following countries to act responsibly in the world?" The proportion saying they trusted Australia "a great deal" or "somewhat" was 55% - that's a drop of 20 points from the 75% recorded in 2011. The report attempts to place that fall in trust in perspective, noting there are some factors pulling in the other direction: While Indonesians' trust in Australia has fallen dramatically in the past decade ... only a third of Indonesians (34%) say Australia poses a threat, and Australia receives a warm reading of 58° on the feelings thermometer. Compared to 2011, there is also less concern on the questions of Australian foreign policy that have traditionally featured as irritants in the Australia-Indonesia relationship, and there is more positivity towards Australia. Answering on a scale from zero to ten, where zero means 'strongly disagree' and ten means 'strongly agree', a mean of 6.2 say that 'Indonesia benefits from having Australia as a stable and prosperous neighbour', a result of an upward trajectory over the past decade. A similar number (6.1) agree that Australia has shown itself to be a reliable and long-term friend of Indonesia, and there is general agreement with the idea of Australia as an important security and aid partner for Indonesia. Concern that "Australia has a tendency to try to interfere in Indonesia's affairs too much" has increased from a mean of 5.5 in 2011 to 6.0, but remains below the high level of 6.7 in 2006. The Indonesian government has raised concerns over Australia's plans to acquire nuclear-propelled submarines under the Aukus partnership - but only one in 10 Indonesians polled (11%) said they had heard of those submarine plans. Crews have worked into the night to retrieve the bodies of a British father and his son after five members of the same family were caught in a landslip in the New South Wales Blue Mountains. The nine-year-old boy and his 49-year-old father died at the scene at Wentworth Pass, NSW police said. A 50-year-old woman and a 14-year-old boy were winched from the scene and taken to hospital in critical conditions with significant head and abdominal injuries following the land slip on the walking track. A fifth member of the same family, a 15-year-old girl, was treated for shock after the incident, which was reported to emergency services at about 1.40pm (AEST) on Monday. You can read the full report below: Good morning everyone, it's Matilda Boseley here, ready to take you through the day's news. But actually, first up I have some news brought to you by my esteemed colleague Daniel Hurst: The defence minister, Peter Dutton, will today name two large US weapons makers as "strategic partners" in Australia's own push to manufacture and maintain guided weapons. Dutton is also expected to open a new $96m maintenance facility for navy guided weapons at Orchard Hills in western Sydney this morning, as part of the government's continuing efforts to focus on national security ahead of the election. The government's force structure plan, released in 2020, said one of the most important lessons from previous conflicts around the world had been "how quickly supplies of precision munitions can come under stress, especially for those nations that possess little domestic capacity to manufacture them". Defence began exploring the potential for a new sovereign guided weapons and explosive ordnance production capability. The prime minister, Scott Morrison, subsequently said: "Through the $1bn Guided Weapons and Explosive Ordinance Enterprise, we will be able to make our own weapons on our own soil." Today's announcement is that Raytheon Australia and Lockheed Martin Australia will be the strategic partners in that effort. (Lockheed Martin Australia, incidentally, was previously contracted to deliver the combat system for the French submarine project, which has now been abandoned.) Dutton said in a statement: These two companies, along with their US-based parent companies, are the largest suppliers of guided weapons to Defence. We will be working with them to rapidly increase our ability to maintain and manufacture guided weapons and their components in Australia. We know we need to work closely with our partners to bolster our self-reliance and this is another major step in delivering that sovereign capability here in Australia. Dutton said Australia's strategic environment was becoming "more complex and challenging" and the Indo-Pacific region "now sits at the epicentre of global strategic competition". He said it was "imperative that we work closely with like-minded countries and industry partners to develop a more capable military force to defend Australia". He said the industry partners would work with a panel of local Australian-based providers "to deliver an array of necessary infrastructure to support this program into the future". OK, with that in mind, why don't we jump right into the day! 92085 false false Caitlin Cassidy and Matilda Boseley (earlier) The Reserve Bank of Australia will keep interest rates at the historically low rate of 0.1% despite concerns over living costs for Australians. Shadow treasurer Jim Chalmers. Shadow treasurer Jim Chalmers speaks at the National Press Club in Canberra on Tuesday. Shadow treasurer Jim Chalmers. Rosalind Croucher at a past Senate estimates hearing in Canberra. A screenshot of rescue paramedics at Wentworth Falls yesterday following the landslide. The shadow minister for climate change and energy, Chris Bowen. Liberal MP Tim Wilson during question time in the House of Representatives last year.

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HINA Digest

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**Body**

Zagreb,Hrvatska28 February 2022 (Hina) - Plenkovic: Ruling coalition, opposition united in support for Ukraine ZAGREB, 28 Feb (Hina) - The Croatian ruling coalition and parliamentary opposition parties have taken a united view in condemning the Russian military ***invasion*** of Ukraine, Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic said on Monday. After the adoption by consensus of the Declaration on Ukraine in the Croatian Parliament, the leaders of the parliamentary opposition have been presented with ***measures*** of aid and solidarity with Ukraine and plans to accommodate refugees, implement restrictive ***measures***, ensure energy supply and financial stability in Croatia, Plenkovic wrote on Twitter. Coalition partners support government ***measures*** against Russia, aid for Ukraine ZAGREB, 28 Feb (Hina) - Stjepan Curaj, leader of the Croatian People's Party (HNS), a junior member of the ruling coalition, said the coalition partners supported the government at a meeting on Monday regarding sanctions against Russia and sending aid to Ukraine. The prime minister informed the coalition partners about the government's plans regarding sanctions against Russia and received their support, Curaj told reporters after the meeting. Aid for Ukraine, both humanitarian and other, will be discussed in a closed cabinet session, Curaj said, without specifying what Croatia intends to send to Ukraine.

"We will send everything they have asked for and what we can send while taking account of the capabilities of our own armed forces," he said. Commenting on the situation with Sberbank, Curaj said that the bank was absolutely stable and liquid and that the most important thing for citizens was that their deposits were insured. The withdrawal of deposits has dealt a blow to the bank's liquidity, which is why a moratorium of two days has been declared so that the issue can be resolved. "Sberbank has around a 2.3% share in the Croatian market, which is about HRK 11 billion in assets. We think that an agreement with the Single Resolution Board could ensure a bailout to minimise the consequences," said Curaj, adding that he was convinced the European Commission would approve the proposed bailout plan. Curaj added that exporters would feel the consequences of the sanctions against Russia, noting that without gas, Croatian exports to Russia accounted for about two per cent of total exports. "We cannot go on as if it were business as usual, these are extraordinary ***measures*** and unfortunately, we will feel the consequences," he said. He went on to say that an interdepartmental task force would be established to deal with the issue of refugees, adding that he proposed that families who take in refugees should be given some sort of welfare assistance. Curaj also raised the question of the spring sowing season, suggesting that as much land be cultivated and the sale of produce secured. There was no talk of a new construction minister at the meeting, and the coalition partners would meet again this week to discuss the matter, Curaj said. Croatian government calls on Russia to end "this insane war campaign" ZAGREB, 28 Feb (Hina) - Croatian Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic has reiterated support for Ukraine, which has been defending itself against the Russian military ***invasion*** for the fifth day on Monday, and called on Russia and the Russian people to stop "this insane war campaign". "The Croatian people know very well what it means to fight for democracy and decide on their own destiny by themselves. They know very well what it means to be the victim of territorial claims and to defend their country from a superior aggressor," Plenkovic said in his opening remarks at a cabinet meeting on Monday. "That's why Croatia has no doubts. Croatia can only be on the side of the democratic, sovereign and attacked Ukraine, on the side of justice, peace and freedom. We call on Russia and the Russian people to end this insane war campaign, which has already claimed too many innocent victims and caused huge destruction, and return to a policy of reason and dialogue," the Croatian PM said. He said that Croatia had sided with "freedom and democracy and with the Ukrainian people, which is the only right way." Plenkovic noted that during Croatia's struggle for international recognition in the early 1990s the reaction of the international community was "below expectations", while today "we are seeing a united and resolute reaction from the European Union which has learned from its own mistakes." The prime minister stressed it was important that the government and the opposition had unanimously condemned Russia's aggression on Ukraine. "We are also seeing great enthusiasm in the solidarity of the Croatian people with the brotherly Ukrainian people and that fills us with pride, because Croatia has once again shown its big heart, its principles, and will not be impressed when human values, humanity, solidarity, justice and defence of freedom are in question," Plenkovic said. He said that today the government would adopt an aid package for Ukraine, ***measures*** for the possible acceptance of refugees, including provision of healthcare, ***measures*** for gas supply, and a ban on the use of Croatian airspace by Russian airlines and Russian aircraft. Croatia will support Ukraine with protective military equipment and infantry weapons worth HRK 124 million ((EURO)16.5m) in total, the prime minister said. Croatia shuts airspace to Russian planes ZAGREB, 28 Feb (Hina) - The Croatian government on Monday decided to ban flights of Russian-owned, Russian-registered or Russian-controlled aircraft in Croatia's airspace. Transport Minister Oleg Butkovic said that the ban refers to arrivals and departures and overflights by planes of the Russian Federation's air companies and planes owned, rented or operated by citizens of the Russian Federation in Croatia's airspace. Exceptions from the ban are humanitarian flights, flights for rescue operations with special permits as well as flights in extraordinary circumstances such as repatriation flights. The government set up a crisis management team for the implementation of the intervention plan for the security of gas supplies as well as a task force for monitoring the security of the provision of oil and petroleum products on the Croatian market. In this context, Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic recalled the importance of the construction of the LNG terminal on the island of Krk, with the capacity of 2.6 billion cubic metres, which, he said, was a sufficient amount for households and the enterprise sector. Croatia sending infantry weapons for four brigades in Ukraine ZAGREB, 28 Feb (Hina) - Croatia has decided to grant Ukraine's request for weaponry and will send infantry weapons and protective equipment in the amount sufficient for four brigades, Defence Minister Mario Banozic told the press on Monday. "We are talking about rifles and machine guns with the calibres requested by the Ukrainian side," said the minister after the government held a meeting at which military aid to Ukraine was discussed. The value of the weapons is HRK 124 million ((EURO)16.5 million). Croatia also plans to declare up to 10 soldiers for NATO's rapid response force. Banozic declined to reveal more information about the soldiers for that mission. He said that the authorities were monitoring the situation in the region, and that following intelligence collected, the protection of military facilities had been raised to a higher level. Minister says war in Ukraine violates international law, European security ZAGREB, 28 Feb (Hina) - The Croatian government's decision on equipment for Ukraine is support to that country which expressed support to Croatia when it had a difficult time in the 1990s, Defence Minister Mario Banozic told the Croatian Radio-Television (HRT) on Monday. The minister added that international law and European security had been violated in Ukraine. As for support to Ukraine, he recalled it included infantry weapons -- machine guns, assault rifles, ammunition and protective equipment, worth a total of HRK 124 million, which is enough to arm up to four brigades. All this comes from Croatian supplies, Banozic said. The minister said consultations were held with Ukrainian representatives to see what their needs were in defence against Russian aggression. "For every action we take, we communicate with our allies within NATO, and this operation will be carried out accordingly. Regarding the quantity, there are over 40 trucks of goods, there will be certain dynamics, we must pay attention to discretion and security when it comes to delivery, everything is already ready today," he said. We know how much the arms are needed, so we are acting fast, all countries have supported this action today and I believe we will help Ukraine to set right this injustice they feel today as a people and to which they are exposed, Banozic said. He explained that under the NATO defence plan there are certain ***measures*** which Croatia as a member had to implement. NATO has its defence system, which implies the unity of all members, but also strong national resilience and security. Four Croatian officers are currently in Poland, and in that way, partnership with Poland has been demonstrated, the minister said. The intention is to go there with a Panzerhaubitze artillery battery in 2023, and for now there is no plan to act extraordinarily, he added. "All member states hold the same position, not only has international law been violated, but also the security which European countries enjoyed, and we are doing everything to end this situation in Ukraine, not only because of the Ukrainian people, but for the sake of the entire Europe. All decisions by our government and at the level of the European Union and NATO are geared towards that goal," Minister Banozic said. PM says level of Croatian army's preparedness raised ZAGREB, 28 Feb (Hina) - Prime Minister and Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) leader Andrej Plenkovic said on Monday that the Croatian Armed Forces had raised the level of preparedness from the usual state considering the current global circumstances. "The Croatian army has increased its level of preparedness from the usual state considering the current global circumstances. We are following attentively all the developments in our neighbourhood, southeast Europe. We do not want at all that any destabilisation of the situation occurs in any of the neighbouring countries," Plenkovic told the press after a meeting of the HDZ leadership that discussed Russia's ***invasion*** of Ukraine. We are engaged both politically and diplomatically. Regarding the preparedness of all of our services and intensity of our activities, we have stepped up our engagement, the premier said. Asked by the press about Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban's statement that Budapest would not dispatch arms to Ukraine nor would it allow the transport of arms deliveries across its territory, Plenkovic answered that each country acted the way it believed to be good. He said that Croatia had consulted Hungary over this topic. "We have made our decisions, we understand Ukraine's needs, we know how it was in the early 1990s in Croatia, and everybody stands behind their choices and decisions," said Plenkovic, adding that Hungary should explain its decisions. PM Plenkovic expressed satisfaction with the parliamentary opposition's clear and firm support to the government's ***measures*** in connection with the Ukrainian crisis. Opposition unanimously supports gov't ***measures*** regarding Ukraine crisis ZAGREB, 28 Feb (Hina) - The parliamentary Opposition, which held a meeting with PM Andrej Plenkovic on Monday, supported the government's ***measures*** regarding the Ukraine crisis, expressing satisfaction that he agreed to address the parliament on Wednesday to inform it about the crisis, thus informing the public. "The public should know the real state of affairs and ways to resolve it. I believe it will be neither quick nor painless, but we need to prepare for it," said GLAS MP Anka Mrak Taritas. Ukrainian refugees should be accepted, integrated The Opposition supports the sending of humanitarian and military aid to Ukraine, the reception of refugees and their social integration. "The children should be integrated in the school system and the adults in the labour market," said Marijan Pavlicek of the Croatian Sovereignists, noting that Ukrainian refugees must not be left in refugee centres without contact with the local population. Sandra Bencic of the Green-Left Bloc said her group also advocated the establishment of humanitarian corridors to help civilians leave cities affected by conflicts, issuing all Ukrainian refugees with work permits and launching preparations for the integration of school children and young people in the education system. Bencic also proposed that the government use money from the Refugees Fund to furnish state and city-owned flats to serve for the long-term accommodation of all Ukrainian refugees planning to stay in Croatia rather than use it to pay the rent to private providers of accommodation. A part of the Opposition warned that Croatia has a very unstable neighbourhood and that its army should be on alert. Serbia's army has been put on alert, we know that Serbia, as well as Republika Srpska, are of interest to the Russian Federation, it is very important to take a stand to prevent the crisis spilling over to the neighbouring countries because we will all be in trouble then, said Pavlicek. Kreso Beljak of the Croatian Peasant Party (HSS), too, warned that some neighbouring countries had not taken a clear stand on the nature of the war in Ukraine or said that it was an act of aggression by Russia. Young people should be warned against Ukraine adventure "This is potentially also a big problem for us, I put that question to the prime minister and his deputy Tomo Medved," said Beljak, recalling that Croatia borders the Bosnian Serb entity of Republika Srpska, Serbia, as well as Montenegro, a NATO member that is very much divided and currently politically unstable, which, Beljak said, is an ideal situation for a future conflict or the expansion of the current one. Beljak also called for advising young people wishing to leave to fight in Ukraine as volunteers against such plans. "I think that it's complete adventurism and that statements like the one by General (Ivan) Cermak, that he would take up arms and go defend Ukraine if only he were younger, are very irresponsible towards young men leaving for unfamiliar territory," said Beljak. Bridge party leader Bozo Petrov said Serbia would not be able to "sit on two chairs" for long, calling on it to "stand on the right side of history, morality and society, and show solidarity with the Ukrainian people." Social Democratic Party (SDP) leader Peda Grbin said the meeting also discussed the economic repercussions of the Ukraine crisis for Croatia, the situation regarding Sberbank, and a new energy blow. Gov't should promptly prepare ***measures*** to alleviate impact of crisis We expect the government to already start preparing a set of ***measures*** to help alleviate the consequences of this crisis for the economic situation in Croatia, for households and the business sector alike, said Grbin. Bencic warned about possible disruptions in the import of food products from Ukraine, Russia as well as Poland, calling on the government to start thinking about investments in the farm sector for next year. Also, some of the funds under the National Recovery and Resilience Plan should be urgently reallocated and used to secure the food and energy security of all member states, it was said. Grlic Radman: Between 30 and 50 Croatian citizens still in Ukraine ZAGREB, 28 Feb (Hina) - By keeping its ambassador in Ukraine Croatia has shown its solidarity, Minister of Foreign and European Affairs Gordan Grlic Radman said on Monday, adding that about 30 to 50 Croatian citizens may still be in Ukraine whereas prior to the aggression there were 114. "By keeping the ambassador, Croatia has shown solidarity and it recalls that it, too, was grateful to every country that recognised it and had empathy, with Ukraine being the first UN country to recognise Croatia's independence," Grlic Radman said during a cabinet meeting. The ministry is continually monitoring developments, the ministry and the ambassador are in constant contact with Croatian citizens who are accessible, the minister underscored. According to the latest information, most of the Croatian citizens in Ukraine are located in Kyiv while some are in Poltava and Lviv. "We have their phone numbers, addresses, and they have been accessible, however, their number is constantly changing considering that some of them manage to cross the border to the EU. We are in contact 24 hours a day if any problem occurs," the minister said. Helping other nationals along with Croatians A task force set up by the ministry will contact everyone on the list and determine their exact location. Croatian embassies in Poland, Hungary and Slovakia have been contacted to help our citizens and their Ukrainian relatives cross the border, he said. Grlic Radman said that the ministry has contacted crisis centres in the foreign ministries of countries like Germany, France, Italy, Romania and Greece to obtain information about any possible evacuation plans they are carrying out or plan to carry out in Ukraine. He commended Croatia's embassies, saying that when they manage to arrange for Croatians to leave Ukraine, often citizens of other countries are included, and "we are being commended for that." Opening the cabinet meeting on Monday, Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic said that Croatia's Ambassador to Ukraine, Anica Djamic, would remain in Ukraine as long as necessary to be at the service of Croatian citizens but also to send a strong political message to Ukraine that Croatia is among the seven remaining EU member states that still have their ambassadors in Kyiv. Nearly 200 Ukrainian refugees have arrived in Croatia so far ZAGREB, 28 Feb (Hina) - Minister of the Interior Davor Bozinovic said on Monday that since the start of Russia's ***invasion*** of Ukraine, 190 refugees had arrived in Croatia, and 11 of them are now accommodated in the Plitvice Motel near Zagreb, while others have been received by their friends and relatives. Croatia is making preparations for the reception of a larger number of refugees, and to this end, the Plitvice motel and the sports hall in Osijek have been repurposed as reception centres. Also, another reception centre will be set up in the Varazdinske Toplice spa, the minister told the press after the government held an extraordinary meeting at which it established a task force for the reception and accommodation of refugees from Ukraine. According to UNHCR estimates, between three and five million refugees can be expected in Europe, Bozinovic told the press. On Sunday, the European Union's Home Affairs Ministers held an extraordinary meeting to discuss the response to the situation in Ukraine, with focus notably on humanitarian support to Ukraine, reception of refugees, management of external borders and related security challenges, visa ***measures*** and how to respond in case of hybrid threats. Temporary Protection Directive They proposed the activation of the Temporary Protection Directive for Ukrainians fleeing the country. Temporary protection is an ***exceptional*** ***measure*** to provide immediate and temporary protection to displaced persons from non-EU countries and those unable to return to their country of origin. Bozinovic today explained that the activation of temporary protection means lifting the restriction of the maximum 90-day stay for refugees from Ukraine in the EU to enable them to stay between one and three years. The directive foresees rights for the beneficiaries of temporary protection, including: a residence permit for the entire duration of the protection (which can last from one year to three years), access to employment, access to accommodation or housing, access to social welfare or means of subsistence, access to medical treatment and access to education for minors. During the government's meeting on Monday afternoon, Bozinovic said that so far 18 EU member-states, including Croatia, had provided humanitarian and technical support to Ukraine. They are also considering assistance to Moldova, which has so far accommodated 50,000 Ukrainians fleeing the war in their country. The European Commission has okayed an initial support of (EURO)5 million for them, Bozinovic told the cabinet. Beros says Croatia will provide health care for wounded, refugees from Ukraine ZAGREB, 28 Feb (Hina) - Health Minister Vili Beros said on Monday that Croatia would provide health care for refugees from Ukraine, as well as all necessary medical assistance for the wounded if the need should arise. Croatia already helped treat the wounded from Ukraine in 2014 during the annexation of Crimea. At that time, we offered help with taking care of a total of 10 wounded persons, and eight of them were treated at Zagreb's KB Dubrava hospital, mostly persons with gunshot wounds to arms and legs, who arrived in Croatia in the final phase when treatment had to be completed and rehabilitation carried out, the minister recalled. The manner of caring for the wounded will be agreed at the European level, and Croatia is willing to participate because Croatian doctors have extensive surgical experience in treating such patients, Beros told Hina, adding that he also talked about it with the Ukrainian ambassador to Croatia. Beros considers that it would be more functional to establish a health centre for the wounded near the Ukrainian border, for example in Poland, and have medical staff, including Croatian doctors, participate in the treatment at that centre. As for health care for Ukrainian refugees coming to Croatia, it will be provided to everyone from the place of entry in Croatia to the place where they will stay for a longer period of time. Medical triage at points of entry into Croatia Therefore, in addition to the government's interdepartmental working group for the reception of refugees, an expert working group was established at the level of the Health Ministry to provide specific health care to those people. Beros said that medical emergency teams would provide medical triage at points of entry into Croatia. These will include county institutes of emergency medicine and public health institutes since the COVID crisis has not ended yet, refugees have to be tested and their vaccination status has to be recorded, he said. Ukrainian refugees fill out a questionnaire from the Croatian Red Cross upon entry, answering also questions about recovering from COVID, vaccination and chronic diseases, so that they can receive all the necessary care. HDZ whip says 193 Ukrainian refugees registered in Croatia ZAGREB, 28 Feb (Hina) - Ruling HDZ party whip Branko Bacic said on Monday that there were currently 193 Ukrainian refugees in Croatia and that 3.5 million refugees from that country were expected in the EU if the Russian aggression against Ukraine continued. The Croatian government will send humanitarian and technical aid to Ukraine, and its health system is preparing for the reception of the wounded, he said. A special task force will be formed at today's government session to be in charge of the reception of refugees, Bacic told reporters in the parliament after a meeting of the inner cabinet with representatives of the parliamentary majority and opposition parties on the topic of the Russian military aggression against Ukraine. The meeting, held on Monday morning, was attended by representatives of all opposition parties and there was no dissonance regarding the sending of aid to Ukraine, he said. The broadest possible consensus was reached by all parliamentary parties on the government's position regarding the Russian military aggression and full support was expressed for Ukraine's struggle for territorial sovereignty and integrity, Bacic said. Further joint meetings at the level of the ruling coalition for the duration of the aggression were agreed, as were meetings at the level of representatives of opposition parties and the ruling coalition. It was agreed that PM Andrej Plenkovic would address MPs in the coming days on the steps taken by the government. According to information available to Croatia's Ambassador to Ukraine, Ankica Djamic, there are still 35 Croatian nationals in Ukraine and they have been in touch with the embassy the whole time, said Bacic. Vote on new construction minister possible on Friday Bacic also said that a special task force would be monitoring Croatia's supply with energy products. Around 43% of gas for consumption in EU member states comes from Russia and in Croatia the share of Russian gas is 22%. "The HDZ has welcomed the fact that given the LNG terminal on Krk island, Croatia will not have supply problems either until the end of or after the heating season," said Bacic. Finance Minister Zdravko Maric informed participants in today's meetings that Fortenova Grupa was not suffering any consequences of the current situation, and that more than 90% of depositors at Sberbank d.d. were protected by the deposit insurance system. Maric added that the government was closely monitoring the possibility of the crisis spilling over to the southeast, noting that since 1939 there had been no event in Europe that could be compared with the Russian aggression on Ukraine. As for the appointment of the new construction minister, Maric said that the decision was being prepared and that the parliament might vote on the new minister already on Friday. Maric declined to comment on potential candidates, saying only that the prime minister had interviewed them. HNB: Two-day moratorium imposed on Sberbank ZAGREB, 28 Feb (Hina) - A two-day moratorium has been imposed on Sberbank, during which Croatian depositors will be allowed to draw up to HRK 7,280 ((EURO)970) a day from their accounts with the Russian bank, the Croatian National Bank (HNB) announced on Monday. Regardless of further steps regarding the bank, deposits of Sberbank's clients are protected up to (EURO)100,000 in accordance with the Deposit Insurance Act, and more than 90 per cent of depositors are insured in that regard, the central bank said. Following the Russian military ***invasion*** of Ukraine on 24 February, the European Union and the United States have adopted a package of sanctions that have also affected Sberbank's operations and liquidity. As a result, the European Central Bank said today that Sberbank, which is under its direct supervision, "is failing or is likely to fail" and has imposed a moratorium on its operations, after which the HNB also took action. The moratorium will be in force until midnight on Tuesday. Before the expiry of the moratorium, the European Banking Union's Single Resolution Board will decide on further steps taking into account financial stability and public interest. Sberbank's clients in Croatia are insured regardless of the Single Resolution Board's decision, the HNB said. HNB: Situation surrounding Sberbank Croatia back to normal as of Wednesday ZAGREB, 28 Feb (Hina) - As of Wednesday, we will have a clean and stable situation regarding Sberbank in Croatia, Croatian National Bank (HNB) vice-governor Roman Subic said on Monday referring to a decision by the Single Resolution Board (SRB) for a two-day moratorium on the bank's business. The SRB is expected to make a final decision in the meantime regarding the bank's future business operations. Earlier on Monday morning, the HNB said that the European Central Bank (ECB) has assessed that Sberbank Europe AG and its two subsidiaries in the banking union, Sberbank d.d. in Croatia and Sberbank banka d.d. in Slovenia, are failing or likely to fail owing to a deterioration of their liquidity situation. The HNB recalls that after Russia invaded Ukraine, the European Union and USA adopted a package of sanctions that had a fast and significant impact on Sberbank d.d.'s business. As a result, Croatian deposit holders of that lender lined up in front of Sberbank's offices on Thursday and Friday wanting to withdraw their money, all of which led to a significant outflow of liquid funds. "Given the situation, we launched a series of activities to retain the financial stability of institutions and the finance system in order to secure the stability of deposits by Croatian citizens and enterprises," Subic told reporters on Monday. He recalled that deposits are protected through the system for amounts of up to (EURO)100,000, which refers to more than 90% of Sberbank Croatia clients. Subic said that it was necessary to reassure the general public that there is no reason for panic, because the deposit insurance scheme would ensure clients' deposits and enable them to withdraw money from their accounts within the legally prescribed period, regardless of how the situation develops. Waiting for final decision by Single Resolution Board Subic explained that during the weekend the ECB adopted a decision on failing, which means that added caution exists due to the risks to liquidity and the outflow of deposits from the bank and that the bank could eventually fail. The ECB accordingly informed the SRB of its assessment and the SRB established that the bank is failing or would probably fail and as such, adopted a decision to introduce a moratorium on Sberbank d.d.'s business operations with the HNB following suit. The moratorium will last for two days as of Sunday midnight until midnight Tuesday, 1 March. "During that time the Single Resolution Board will adopt a final decision that should give rise to some confidence and lead to a final decision regarding Sberbank Croatia's continuation of business," Subic said. During the moratorium, retail depositors and enterprises will be allowed to withdraw up to HRK 7,280 a day, which is the amount of the average wage according to the Croatian Bureau of Statistics (DZS) for December 2021. HRK 2,000 of that can be withdrawn at ATMs a day and up to HRK 4,000 in the bank's branches while the remaining HRK 1,280 can be used for POS purchases, Subic said. He underscored that after that period the moratorium will create normal conditions and by then a final decision by the SRB should be known. The situation will be stabilised as of Wednesday already, after the SRB makes its decision which the HNB will apply in Croatia, said Subic. "After that period the situation will be back under control with regard to all existing debts and dues (...) as of Wednesday we will have a clean and stable situation for Sberbank Croatia to continue doing business," underscored Subic. Gov't reassures Sberbank Croatia clients there is enough money to cover deposits ZAGREB, 28 Feb (Hina) - The government will insist before European agencies for a consent for the rehabilitation of the Sberbank Croatia bank rather than its liquidation after the ECB assessed that Sberbank Europe AG and its subsidiaries in Croatia and Slovenia are failing or likely to fail. "We will insist that Croatia should be given an opportunity to rehabilitate Sberbank Croatia," Finance Minister Zdravko Maric said at the government's meeting on Monday after the European Central Bank issued a press release reading that the ECB has assessed that "Sberbank Europe AG and its two subsidiaries in the banking union, Sberbank d.d. in Croatia and Sberbank banka d.d. in Slovenia, are failing or likely to fail owing to a deterioration of their liquidity situation." The Austrian parent bank Sberbank Europe AG is fully owned by Public Joint-Stock Company Sberbank of Russia, whose majority shareholder is the Russian Federation (50% plus one voting share). The ECB took the decision after determining that, in the near future, the bank is likely to be unable to pay its debts or other liabilities as they fall due. Sberbank Europe AG and its subsidiaries experienced significant deposit outflows as a result of the reputational impact of geopolitical tensions. This led to a deterioration of its liquidity position, the ECB says. Concerning Sberbank Croatia, Maric informed the government that before the outbreak of the crisis, there were almost 70,000 deposit holders in that commercial lender, and most of them are covered by the scheme protecting up to (EURO)100,000 per depositor per bank in the European Union. The Croatian Deposit Insurance Agency (HAOD), that is the state budget, has enough funds at its disposal to pay the protected deposits within seven to 10 days, said the minister. These deposits reach HRK 3.82 billion, the finance minister said. As for SWIFT system, currently only the Russian central bank has been excluded as part of the sanctions against Russia, the minister said, adding that the sanctions could be expanded to cover other banks, too. Slovenia: Sberbank offices closed, services limited to card transactions ZAGREB, 28 Feb (Hina) - Following Russia's military attack on Ukraine, the branch offices of the Russian bank Sberbank in Slovenia are closed as of Monday and the bank's services are temporarily limited to card transactions, the Slovenian central bank announced. Other services of Sberbank Slovenia will be unavailable until Wednesday morning, and withdrawals and payments are limited to (EURO)400 a day. The central bank recalled that Sberbank was the only Russian-owned bank in Slovenia and that all other banks in the country were operating normally. Sberbank Slovenia said on Monday morning that "in light of recent geopolitical developments" it had experienced a significant outflow of deposits within a short period of time and was looking for solutions to ensure the unimpeded functioning of all its clients. Croatian FinMin promises to help exporters ZAGREB, 28 Feb (Hina) - Finance Minister Zdravko Maric said on Monday a solution was being sought to help exporters operating in Ukraine and Russia. Asked about Croatian exporters at a press conference, since the Russian rouble was dropping to a record low, and exporters would not be able to export to Russia due to sanctions, Maric said that the Croatian Bank for Reconstruction and Development (HBOR) had been giving support to all exporters who had operated in Russia and Ukraine in recent years. "Everything is being analysed and taken into consideration and stress tests are being conducted so that we could see how to ameliorate this situation," Maric said. He didn't answer the question which Russian banks would be removed from SWIFT since the discussion on that is still ongoing, nor what would happen with the HRK 18 million from the humanitarian campaign for a girl called Chiara, which are in Sberbank. He thinks that Fortenova had addressed the public in a timely manner and that it was doing well in terms of liquidity. He reiterated that the government was doing everything to get an opportunity for the resolution of Sberbank Hrvatska. Last night, the European Central Bank made a decision which is signal that the preconditions had been created for the start of the rehabilitation of Sberbank Croatia, said Maric. According to him, Croatia is doing everything to ensure the conditions and get an opportunity to carry out the resolution of Sberbank Hrvatska. Maric thinks it could be done and said Croatia was "in close communication with the European Central Bank". Fortenova Group: Sberbank Russia is our owner, not Sberbank Europe ZAGREB, 28 Feb (Hina) - Sberbank Europe is not the owner of the Fortenova Group and the situation with Sberbank Europe has no impact on Sberbank Russia's ownership share in the Fortenova Group or the company's business, the Fortenova Group said on its website on Monday. "In reply to the questions about the possible impact that the situation with Sberbank Europe, which has along with its branch offices got under the management of the European Central Bank or the central banks of the countries in which it operates, may have on the operations of Fortenova Group as well as the ownership share of Sberbank at Fortenova Group, from Fortenova Group we would herewith once again like to set straight that the shares in the company are held by Sberbank Russia and hence any developments regarding Sberbank Europe shall have no impact whatsoever on the operations of Fortenova Group," the Zagreb-headquartered retail and food group says on its website. "With regard to the impact of the ownership in general on the company's operations, as already pointed out several times in the context of the sanctions over the last few days, the ownership of Fortenova Group does not affect the company's day-to-day operations." "Fortenova Group's capital structure and liquidity are stable, its financing is headed by the US investment company HPS Investment Partners, and the operating business is run through the respective domestic, local banks on the markets where Fortenova Group operates." Podravka Group posts net profit of HRK 309.2M ZAGREB, 28 Feb (Hina) - The Podravka Group netted a profit of HRK 309.2 million in 2021, which is a 24.2% rise compared to 2020, while sales revenue increased by 2.8% to HRK 4.6 billion, the Koprivnica-based food and pharmaceutical company said in its financial report on Monday. During 2021, a year marked by the continuation of the COVID-19 pandemic and disruptions in supply chains as well as a strong growth of input costs, Podravka managed to generate sales revenues in the amount of HRK 4.6 billion and a net profit of 309.2 million, which are the best results in the company's history, reads a press release issued by Podravka. The Food segment generated 3.6 billion kuna in sales revenues, a growth of 2.1% (HRK 74.2 million) on the year, and the Pharmaceuticals segment (Belupo) registered 1.03 billion kuna in sales revenues, up 5.5%. Podravka following developments in Ukrainian and Russian markets The company is following the situation in Ukrainian and Russian markets, and analysing possible risks and possibilities to alleviate them, the company says in response to Hina's inquires about the impact of the war in Ukraine on the group's business operations. It is difficult to forecast how the situation will unfold, the company says, noting that impaired business operations and rising prices of raw materials and energy pose the biggest challenges. We take care of our employees, Croatian nationals, who have returned to Croatia as well as of our employees in Ukraine, who are safe for the time being, Podravka says. Markets of Russia and Ukraine contribute to Podravka Group's annual sales revenues with less than 6.5%. ((EURO) 1 = HRK 7.5) AD Plastik says certain risks visible in business of Russian companies ZAGREB, 28 Feb (Hina) - Production in all factories of the AD Plastik Group is going smoothly, the company reported on Monday in response to a query from the Zagreb Stock Exchange about the impact of the Russia-Ukraine crisis and the sanctions imposed on their operation. "Certain risks can be seen in the operation of Russian companies which it is, given the uncertainty and the accelerated change of circumstances, impossible to precisely quantify," the Group said. It also said that "the sanctions imposed and announced to date do not have a direct impact on business, but indirect effects can be noticed, such as disruptions to logistic flows, the rouble exchange rate weakening, the reference interest rate growing etc". "Unfortunately, this is a situation we cannot influence, but being aware of the complexity and uncertainty we are intensively monitoring the development of the situation. We are focused on our business activities and managing the crisis as much as possible," AD Plastik said. Last year, AD Plastik generated HRK 305.3 million in operating revenue on the Russian market, up 13% from 2020, which accounted for 27% of the Group's total revenue. Russian companies of AD Plastik fully generate their revenues on the Russian market. ZSE indices drop 2% under pressure from Ukraine war and sanctions against Russia ZAGREB, 28 Feb (Hina) - The main Zagreb Stock Exchange (ZSE) indices dropped by about 2% on Monday, following a decline on European stock markets which are under pressure due to the war in Ukraine and the uncertainty about the West's new sanctions against Russia. The Crobex sank by 2.08% to 1,999 points, and the Crobex10 fell by 1.98% to 1,207 points, after having dropped by 3.7% and 4.5% respectively last week. The Crobex indices thus followed the decline of European stock indices. The STOXX 600 index of leading European stocks was almost 2% in the red in the afternoon, but it recovered partly and it was 0.43% in the red at 4.30 p.m. European stock markets are under pressure due to the war in Ukraine. The share prices of banks decreased the most. Since geopolitical events are in the foreground, financial statements of companies went unnoticed, even though this is the last day to release them. Most sector indices were in the red, and the construction index saw the biggest drop, of 8.5%. Only the transport index registered an increase, of 2.23%. Regular turnover was HRK 21 million, or about a million kuna more than on Friday. Another HRK 3.67 million was generated by a block transaction with the HT telecom stock at HRK 183.5 per share. In regular trading, the most traded stock was that of the Podravka food company, which turned over HRK 3.35 million, closing at HRK 592 per share, down 2.95%. The company today reported that the group last year had a net profit of HRK 309.2 million, which is 24.2% more than in 2020, and sales revenues were HRK 4.6 billion or 2.8%. The stock of the Atlantic Group generated a turnover of HRK 3.2 million, closing at HRK 1,590, down 1.85%. The Valamar Riviera stock turned over HRK 2.5 million, closing at HRK 31.6 per share, down 1.86%. A turnover of HRK 2.4 million was generated by the HT telecom stock, which closed at HRK 184, remaining stable in price. The largest drop in price among the more liquid stocks was recorded by the AD Plastik stock, of 14.4% to HRK 119. It turned over HRK 1.9 million. A total of 54 stocks traded on the ZSE today, with 12 gaining and 30 losing in price, while 12 were stable. ((EURO)1 = HRK 7.543095) PM: 10.4% GDP growth great signal of recovery, state played its part ZAGREB, 28 Feb (Hina) - Prime Minister and HDZ party leader Andrej Plenkovic said that at a meeting held on Monday the party leadership expressed satisfaction with the fact that the national statistical office last Friday published data showing that Croatia's GDP grew by 10.4% in 2021. The party considers this a great signal of recovery of the national economy, proof of the agility of businesses, of the timely and very strong ***measures*** taken by the government during the coronavirus pandemic to keep jobs in the private sector, support employers, etc, Plenkovic said. "The state has played its inevitable and unique role, it backed Croatian workers, business people and the entire system," he said. The PM said Croatia's quick rebound last year was also owing to an excellent tourist season and a huge contribution by exporters, which he described as the backbone of the national economy. EU set to synchronise Ukraine's power grid with European grid ZAGREB, 28 Feb (Hina) - The European power supply system will soon be integrated with Ukraine's, after such a request was made by the Ukrainian government, Croatian Economy and Sustainable Development Minister Tomislav Coric said in Brussels on Monday. The European Commissioner for Energy, Kadri Simson, tweeted before the EU energy ministers' meeting in Brussels that "the most important point on the agenda is of course our support to Ukraine. I will ask the ministers to support the emergency synchronisation of the Ukrainian power grid with the European grid as soon as possible." After the meeting, the Croatian minister said that in the coming period the European power supply network would be connected with the Ukrainian system and that this would be carried out in the manner that would not undermine the stability and security of the European grid. Coric said that all the member-states expressed the highest level of solidarity with Ukraine and the Ukrainian people and wish to help them. The minister said that the current energy crisis with energy price hikes encouraged the member-states to be more and more oriented to the further decarbonisation and transition to renewables. German Minister for Economic Affairs and Climate Action Robert Habeck said that Berlin supports a proposal made by the European Commission to activate an emergency procedure to synchronise the Union's power grid with that of Ukraine, however, the syncronisation must be conducted in line with European standards so as to avoid scenarios of electricity blackouts for Europe in the event that the Russian army takes over Ukrainian power plants. Croatian Olympic Committee: Sports federations will take care of Ukrainian athletes ZAGREB, 28 Feb (Hina) - President of the Croatian Olympic Committee (HOO) Zlatko Matesa has informed members of the HOO assembly about the decision to allow Ukrainian athletes to continue training and playing sports in any member state of the European Olympic Committees (EOC). Every national sports federation will take care of Ukrainian athletes, in coordination with the HOO, and the person in charge of these issues at the HOO will be advisor to secretary general, Mia Bacic. It was also said that a group of Ukrainian sailors had been temporarily stationed in Kastel Luksic and that they were in need of more permanent accommodation and training conditions. The Programme and Financial Report of the Croatian Olympic Committee for 2021 was accepted, with a revenue of HRK 194.3 million and an expenditure of HRK 197.4 million, and according to the report, the HOO also took care of 512 athletes in development programmes, co-financed the work of 121 trainers and implemented 272 programmes of local sports last year. ((EURO)1 = HRK 7.5) Ljubljana preparing rally of support for Ukraine, no more Russian 'honorary' consuls ZAGREB, 28 Feb (Hina) - Slovenia's Prime Minister Janez Jansa on Monday called on citizens to attend a rally against Russia's aggression on Ukraine, set for Wednesday in Ljubljana, as other expressions of dissatisfaction and support for Ukraine continue, with five honorary consuls renouncing their titles. Slovenia's media have reported that Jansa told the Euractiv media network that the West has to stop Putin now because if "Kyiv was to fall now, that would have repercussions for all of eastern Europe" and his next targets could be Moldova and Georgia, followed by the Balkans and then the Baltic countries. Slovenia's foreign ministry issued a press release on Monday advising its citizens to cancel any plans of travel to Russia and Belarus in the wake of "Russia's military aggression on Ukraine." Slovenia's Foreign Minister Anze Logar said that Russia no longer has any honorary consuls in the country after all five renounced their titles in response to Russia's aggression on Ukraine and the ministry revoked its earlier decision on their appointment. In a sign of protest, former social policy minister Anja Kopac on Friday returned a decoration she was awarded in 2017 by Russian President Vladimir Putin, saying this was her personal protest against the Russian aggression and grave violation of international and humanitarian law. EU expects Bosnia to join in sanctions against Russia ZAGREB, 28 Feb (Hina) - The head of the European Union Delegation to Bosnia and Herzegovina, Johann Sattler, has called on the country's authorities to follow the Union's policy on the Ukraine crisis and support the sanctions against Russia. Speaking in an interview with the Nezavisne Novine daily on Monday, Sattler recalled that Bosnia and Herzegovina had an obligation stemming from its EU membership application to align with the EU's foreign policy. Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia are the only Western Balkan countries that have not imposed sanctions against Russia similar to those imposed by the EU member states. Unlike the government in Belgrade, which considered the possibility of imposing sanctions but decided against it citing the need to protect its own national interests, Sarajevo has not even discussed the option because the three members of the state presidency have opposed views on the Russian military ***invasion*** of Ukraine. While the presidency chairman, Zeljko Komsic, a Croat, and the Bosniak member of the presidency, Sefik Dzaferovic, immediately strongly condemned the ***invasion***, the Serb member Milorad Dodik avoided any criticism of Moscow insisting that Bosnia and Herzegovina should remain neutral in this situation. Dodik said he would vote against imposing sanctions on Russia should this matter be put on the agenda of the presidency, which is the only body responsible for Bosnia and Herzegovina's foreign policy. Bosnia and Herzegovina's diplomats appointed by Dodik pursue his policy of silence, while others support the West. The country's ambassador to the United Nations, Sven Alkalaj, supported the UN declaration condemning Russia's military aggression against Ukraine, and the ambassador to the Council of Europe, Ivan Orlic, voted in favour of suspension of Russia's membership in this organisation. Sattler said that for now there were no indications of a possible spillover of the Ukraine crisis to Bosnia and Herzegovina, but stressed that contingency plans should be made for any possible development. That's why the number of EUFOR personnel has been virtually doubled from 600 to 1,100, as a precaution, he said. Speaking of internal problems in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Sattler called on Bosnian Serb officials to stop their blockade of the state institutions and return to talks on the reform of electoral legislation because this issue has to be resolved as soon as possible. Borrell: Russia could trigger BiH's destabilisation ZAGREB, 28 Feb (Hina) - The EU's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep Borrell, warned on Monday that Russia could launch destabilising actions in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Western Balkans. Speaking at a news conference after a meeting of the EU defence ministers, Borrell said that his decision last Friday to reinforce the Althea mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina with an additional 500 troops was a cautious and proportional sign of the EU's determination to protect the stability of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which may be faced with Russia's destabilising activities in the Western Balkans. Borrell also warned that Russia's pressure on Moldova and Georgia could increase in the coming days and announced that he would soon visit Moldova. Borrell announced even greater support to Ukraine, which has been putting up strong resistance to the Russian aggression. The EU official said that the European Union Satellite Centre in Madrid had been requested to provide intelligence on the movement of Russian units in Ukraine and that member states were willing to increase bilateral military assistance to Ukraine. Borrell also announced stronger sanctions against the Belarusian regime of Alexander Lukashenko and anyone collaborating with Russian President Vladimir Putin in the aggression against Ukraine. Borrell stressed that the EU should reduce its dependence on Russian oil and gas as soon as possible. He welcomed Switzerland's decision to join financial sanctions against Russia, describing the fact that Russian oligarchs would no longer be able to transfer money to Switzerland as really good news. Komsic asks that BiH follow EU policy of sanctions, Dodik praises Putin ZAGREB, 28 Feb (Hina) - Bosnia and Herzegovina Presidency Chair Zeljko Komsic on Monday asked that BiH's diplomatic network act in line with international law regarding the Ukraine crisis and support sanctions, which was opposed by the Presidency's Serb member, Milorad Dodik, who praised Russian President Vladimir Putin. "I know Putin, he is a very responsible and great statesman," Dodik told reporters in Banja Luka in a comment on a message sent earlier in the day to the BiH authorities by the head of the EU Delegation, Johann Sattler, who said that as a country wishing to join the EU, Bosnia and Herzegovina must follow the EU's foreign policy, including compliance with sanctions imposed against Russia. Immediately after that Komsic sent Foreign Minister Bisera Turkovic an instruction to comply, in implementing foreign policy, with the UN Charter which bans hostilities against an internationally recognised state, as well as with obligations arising from the country's Stabilisation and Association Agreement with the EU. Under that document, Bosnia and Herzegovina should take steps to promote common positions on security and stability in Europe, including cooperation in areas covered by the EU's common foreign and security policy. "I believe that it is therefore unnecessary for the BiH Presidency to vote on whether international obligations should be complied with," Komsic said in the instruction carried by the local media. Meanwhile Dodik was telling reporters in Banja Luka that Bosnia and Herzegovina actually does not have a position on the Ukraine crisis as there was no formal discussion about it. He said that he personally supported the territorial integrity of all states, including Ukraine, but was resolutely against sanctions against Russia, noting that one should not take sides in the current conflict. "We will remain completely neutral, we will not join the EU or anyone else's sanctions," Dodik said, claiming that there is no document compelling BiH to fully follow the EU policy. He also attacked the EU's High Representative for Foreign Affairs, Josep Borrell, for warning that the current conflict could also spill over to the Western Balkans, claiming that Borrell was only spreading anti-Russian propaganda. At the end of his address to reporters, Dodik told Ukrainian refugees not to come to Bosnia and Herzegovina as they would be worse off there than in their own country. Lavrov, Dodik talk on phone, one of topics implementation of "agreements with Putin" ZAGREB, 28 Feb (Hina) - Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov on Monday talked on the telephone with Bosnian Serb leader Milorad Dodik, and one of the topics was the implementation of agreements reached between Dodik and Russian President Vladimir Putin in December 2021, the Russian Embassy in Sarajevo confirmed. A post on the embassy's official Facebook page said the conversation took place at Dodik's request. "Opinions were exchanged on the implementation of agreements made after the meeting between the President of the Russian Federation, Vladimir Putin, and Milorad Dodik in Moscow in December 2021. Steps were defined to intensify efforts in that direction," reads the post without specifying what exactly Dodik, a member of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the Russian president had agreed two months ago. Dodik visited Moscow in early December and met with Putin, and upon his return he said that the Russian president was very well informed of the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, that he inquired about details regarding the conduct of international actors, the status of the entity of Republika Srpska, constitutional solutions and development of joint economic projects. The Russian embassy post of Monday added that Lavrov and Dodik today confirmed commitment to the strict implementation of the Dayton Agreement and the need to prevent attempts to remodel it to suit the interests of the EU and NATO, which, according to the Russian embassy's interpretation, would be contrary to the interests of the people of Republika Srpska. It was also said that Dodik received "with understanding" Lavrov's explanations regarding the reasons for Russia's attack on Ukraine. Vucic says some countries attacking Serbia because they resent its success ZAGREB, 28 Feb (Hina) - Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic said on Monday it was unbelievable that in the current "terribly serious crisis and difficult situation in Ukraine" some countries in the region were dealing with Serbia and attacking it, a reference to criticism of Serbia's refusal to impose sanctions on Russia. "At least three neighbouring countries are dealing only with that and nothing else," Vucic said during a visit to Kragujevac, answering questions from the press. He went on to say that lies against Serbia "go beyond what is normal", noting that the conduct of some countries in the region is logical because they cannot tolerate Serbia's success. Asked by a reporter about an alleged hybrid war that is being waged by many media outlets in the region against Serbia regarding the Ukraine crisis and sanctions against Russia, Vucic asked: "Do you think that everyone is happy about Serbia's success, why would they be, why would they want somebody else to be more successful?" Without naming any of the countries in the region, Vucic said that they believed "they were done with Serbia, having joined the EU and NATO and having crushed Serbia, because it had an incapable leadership that destroyed the country with privatisation plunder, letting the Serbian army disappear." "Now all of a sudden Serbia is growing twice as fast as they are, it has overtaken them in terms of absolute GDP, and it has been strengthening its army dramatically," Vucic said, adding ironically that every lie against Serbia is allowed. Serbia is for respect for international law and cannot support the attack on Ukraine, aware of what the country is going through, said the Serbian president. In the current crisis, Serbia is struggling for better prices of energy products, fertiliser, food and for the best possible supply for its citizens, Vucic said. "There will be bread and everything else in Serbia, and you'll see what the situation will be like in Europe and the rest of the world in four-five months," he said. Serbia said on Friday that it considered as very wrong the violation of the territorial integrity of any country, including Ukraine, and it supported Ukraine's integrity, however, it stressed that due to its state and national interests, it would not introduce sanctions against Russia, contrary to what the EU has done. Ukrainian ambassador to Serbia says every occupier can expect bullet to their head ZAGREB, 28 Feb (Hina) - Every occupier can expect a bullet to their head, and Ukraine has no alternative but to defend itself, Ukrainian Ambassador to Serbia Olexander Alexandrovich told the TV Prva commercial broadcaster in Serbia on Monday. Giving up on defence would mean genocide against the Ukrainian people, the Ukrainian diplomat said. Asked if Ukraine has been left on its own, Alexandrovich said that the longer Ukraine fights, the stronger the support of the international community will be. Ukrainians feel the solidarity of the whole world, however, they cannot count on NATO's military engagement, he said. The ambassador recalled that Ukraine was not a member of NATO and that it had wanted to remain neutral in the military sense, however, the policy pursued by Russian President Vladimir Putin had made it turn to the North Atlantic Alliance. "Russia has been waging a war against us for eight years," the ambassador said referring to the Russian aggression of eight years ago, when some eastern Ukrainian regions broke away from the Ukrainian government. Croatia logs 198 new COVID cases, 39 deaths ZAGREB, 28 Feb (Hina) - In the past 24 hours, 198 new coronavirus cases and 39 COVID-related deaths have been recorded in Croatia, the national coronavirus response team reported on Monday. The number of active cases currently stands at 11,904. Among them are 1,363 infected people being treated in hospitals, including 98 placed on ventilators, while 8,577 people are self-isolating. Since 25 February 2020, when the first case was confirmed in Croatia, 1,054,794 cases of the infection with the new SARS-CoV-2 virus have been registered, while 15,069 people have died as a consequence and 1,027,821 have recovered, including 2,770 in the past 24 hours. A total of 4,513,946 tests for the virus have been conducted to date, including 1,489 in the past 24 hours. By Saturday, 5,194,258 COVID-19 vaccine doses had been administered, with 56.84 per cent of the total population, or 67.61 per cent of adults, having been vaccinated. A total of 2,306,572 people have received at least one dose and 2,229,537 of them have been fully inoculated, which is 65.48 per cent of the adult population. Bozinovic: Restrictions on public gatherings to be relaxed ZAGREB, 28 Feb (Hina) - Deputy Prime Minister Davor Bozinovic said on Monday that the national COVID-19 response team had adopted six new decisions relaxing restrictions on indoor and outdoor gatherings and abolishing mandatory testing and presentation of COVID certificates when entering public administration offices. The ***measures*** relating to public transport, stores, wearing masks and crossing the border will remain in force until 31 March, Bozinovic told reporters after a cabinet meeting. The ***measure*** restricting gatherings has been relaxed and as of 1 March, up to 100 people will be able to gather outdoors instead of the current 50, while the number of people allowed to gather indoors will be limited to 50 instead of 25 as is now the case. Restrictions on indoor and outdoor gatherings have also been amended regarding the requirement to present a COVID certificate. As of Tuesday, it will no longer be necessary to obtain permission from the local COVID response team to organise such gatherings, said Bozinovic. There will also no longer be any restrictions on the number of spectators at outdoor sports events and indoor events can have up to 50% occupancy instead of the current 20%. As of Tuesday it will no longer be necessary to present COVID certificates or proof of testing or recovery from COVID to enter public administration buildings given the level of immunity in the population and the relatively brief period clients spent in those premises, Bozinovic said. He added that COVID certificates were still required in welfare and health institutions, whereas they will no longer be required to enter post offices. Hunter shoots at group of Indian migrants in east Croatia, wounds one ZAGREB, 28 Feb (Hina) - A 42-year-old man from Borovo has been placed in custody for opening fire from his hunting rifle at a group of migrants he spotted while on a hunting ground near Borovo and wounding a 24-year-old migrant, who was later provided with medical care in Vukovar. The police in the eastern Vukovar-Srijem County said on Monday that while patrolling the border by the Danube River at Borovo on Saturday, they found a group of Indians who had previously illegally entered Croatia, including a 24-year-old with a wound on his leg. An examination at the Vukovar Hospital showed that the man had been wounded from a firearm, after which the police launched an investigation that led them to the 42-year-old resident of Borovo. The police established that the man had opened fire at the migrants from his hunting rifle while hunting with the intent to scare them off, seriously injuring one. The Borovo man was placed in custody and the Indian migrants were taken to the reception centre for foreigners at Tovarnik, where they will stay until their readmission to Serbia, police said. JANAF generates HRK 266.4 m net profit ZAGREB, 28 Feb (Hina) - Oil pipeline operator JANAF generated a net profit of HRK 266.4 million in 2021, a decrease of 7.5% on the previous year, while total revenue rose by 0.5% to HRK 793.6 million, which is 11.4% more than planned, the company said in a press release on Monday. JANAF said these were its best results since its incorporation. Revenue from the core business (oil transport and storage) was HRK 762.1 million, increasing by 0.6% from 2020 and 8.5% more than planned. Over 63% of the core business revenue was generated by transactions with foreign clients, amounting to HRK 481.3 million, down 3.4% year-on-year but 8.1% more than planned. Revenue from its core business on the domestic market amounted to HRK 280.8 million, up 8.2% y-o-y and 9.2% more than planned. Last year the company invested almost HRK 110 million of its own funds, mostly in the oil storage facility and other infrastructure, as well as systems for surveillance, administration, safety and digitising business ***processes***. JANAF's total expenditure amounted to HRK 467.8 million, up 6.7% on the year, mostly due to increased depreciation costs resulting from completed investment projects in the preceding period. CEO Stjepan Adanic was quoted as saying he was very pleased with the results achieved in 2021. Adanic added that once again JANAF has shown to be the backbone of Croatia's energy independence and an unavoidable factor on the EU energy market and in countries in the neighbourhood. In the near future JANAF will become a leader in the transition to a low carbon economy and one of the larger energy suppliers from renewables in Croatia, he added. ((EURO)1 = HRK 7.5) Duro Dakovic Group's losses increase to HRK 103 million ZAGREB, 28 Feb (Hina) - The Duro Dakovic metal and mechanical engineering group generated a loss of HRK 103.2 million in 2021, which is 58 per cent more than in 2020, when its loss amounted to HRK 65.3 million, shows the group's consolidated financial statement, released on Monday. The group's total consolidated revenue amounted to HRK 289.9 million, which is 26.4% less year-on-year while total expenditure decreased by 14.4% to HRK 393.2 million. Sales revenue on the domestic market amounted to HRK 78.5 million, accounting for 27.33% of total sales revenue. Sales revenue on foreign markets totalled HRK 208.7 million, accounting for 72.67% of total sales revenue. Normalised EBITDA amounted to HRK 16.1 million. Contracts have decreased, however, they are still satisfactory and amount to HRK 271.7 million, the group's financial statement says. After the European Commission and government agreed a bailout of HRK 300 million, the group managed to stabilise its liquidity, the statement says. Production ***processes*** have been optimised and operating revenue has been increasing, primarily from exports. A strategic partner is expected to eventually enter the group's ownership structure, the company said. "The European Commission approved the group's restructuring plan in December 2021 and the competent authorities are expected to make the necessary decisions in line with the plan. Its success should ensure the long-term sustainability and stable development of the entire group," the financial statement notes. Adris Group posts net profit of HRK 403m ZAGREB, 28 Feb (Hina) - Adris Group generated a net profit of HRK 403 million in 2021, up from 44.6 million in 2020, with revenues growing by 20% to HRK 5.73 billion, the tourism and insurance group reported on Monday. Sales revenue increased by 23% from 2020 to HRK 5.3 billion, while earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation and amortisation (EBITDA) reached HRK 1.02 billion, down 5% from the pre-pandemic 2019. Adris said that all companies operating within the group had undertaken business transformation programmes, including digitalisation, to increase their operational excellence and gain a competitive edge. Strategically, the present crisis has confirmed that Adris has a well-balanced portfolio. The HRK 400 million of its investment in 2021 and preparations for a number of new projects show that the continuity of development has been maintained even in times of high business uncertainty, the group said. The group's tourism segment posted a sales revenue of HRK 1.36 billion, accounting for 78% of the revenue generated in the record-breaking 2019. Croatia's leading insurer Croatia Osiguranje earned a consolidated net profit of HRK 363 million, an increase of 11%. Its total gross written premium increased by 5% to HRK 2.8 billion, while consolidated gross written premium, including regional branch offices, amounted to HRK 3.4 billion, increasing by 6% from 2020. Cromaris, specialised in production and ***processing*** of high quality Mediterranean fish, saw a 14% rise in EBIDTA which reached HRK 67 million, and its net profit skyrocketed 40% to HRK 13 million. ((EURO)1 = HRK 7.5) HPB wraps up 2021 with record high net profit of HRK 202M ZAGREB, 28 Feb (Hina) - The Croatian Postal Bank (HPB) netted a profit of HRK 202 million in 2021, up 11% from 2020, according to the financial report which the bank published on Monday. The report published on the Zagreb Stock Exchange reads that the bank's operating profit of 312 million kuna, 8% more on the year, was the main component of the record high net profit. The net interest revenues dropped 2.5% to HRK 529 million. The bank's assets totalled HRK 27.9 billion on 31 December 2021, or 2.4 billion kuna more than at the end of 2020. HPB's business network consists of 58 branch offices and 12 regional centers and it is available to clients throughout Croatia. The HPB group, which includes the bank as well as HPB Invest and HPB Nekretnine, reported a net profit of HRK 202.6 million in 2021. ((EURO)1 = HRK 7.543095) Croatia's 2021 ***agricultural*** product prices up 12.6% ZAGREB, 28 Feb (Hina) - Prices of ***agricultural*** products in Croatia rose by 12.6% in 2021 compared with the previous year, according to the National Bureau of Statistics (DZS). Prices of plant products increased by 20.7%, while those of livestock and livestock products decreased by 0.5%. Prices of wheat went up by 39.3%, of industrial crops by 45.8%, vegetables by 12.5%, wine by 7.4, fruit by 5.0% and olive oil by 7.2%, while potato prices fell by 3.3%. Prices of cattle rose by 4.1%, of milk by 0.5%, poultry by 2.7%, and eggs by 1.7%, while prices of pigs dropped by 15.1%. Prices of goods and services for day-to-day use in ***agricultural*** production increased by 20.4% year on year. Fertiliser prices rose by 66.4%, prices of energy and lubricants by 19.9%, farm animal feed by 28.5%, seed and propagating material by 6.9%, plant protection products by 7.7%, veterinarian services by 1.9%, building maintenance by 5.0% and equipment maintenance by 3.9%. Public broadcaster HRT fined HRK 100,000 for covert advertising ZAGREB, 28 Feb (Hina) - The Croatian public broadcaster HRT has been fined HRK 100,000 ((EURO)13,300) by the Electronic Media Council over product placement featuring a betting shop during an interview with national football team player Ivan Rakitic, Hina learned on Monday. HRT director-general Robert Sveb has been fined HRK 10,000 ((EURO)1,300) as the responsible person. The Electronic Media Council made the decision unanimously at its meeting in late January. This was the first fine imposed this year for an omission in programming. HRT confirmed to Hina that the fine has been paid and that the management will no longer tolerate such programming omissions. Ex-Zagreb zoning office head found guilty in bus and tram shelters scandal ZAGREB, 28 Feb (Hina) - The former head of the zoning office of the City of Zagreb, Davor Jelavic, and four more indictees were on Monday found guilty by Zagreb County Court of concluding deals detrimental to the city, thus embezzling several million kuna of the city's funds. Jelavic was given 3.5 years, and his former assistant, Vesna Lubin, was also sentenced to 3.5 years. The detrimental contracts referred to the construction of 600 bus and tram shelters. The ruling can be appealed. Jelsa designated first International Dark Sky Community in Croatia, Southern Europe ZAGREB, 28 Feb (Hina) - The municipality of Jelsa on the island of Hvar has been desiganted International Dark Sky Community (IDSC), thus becoming the first IDSC not only in Croatia but also in Southern Europe, as well as the 37th in the world. The Croatian Astronomical Union on Monday said that the title was given to Jelsa by the International Dark Sky Association (IDA). Jelsa so becomes one of more than 195 protected places in the world that have demonstrated ***exceptional*** contribution to the protection of the dark sky from light pollution. An International Dark Sky Community is a municipality, city or similar political entity that has demonstrated ***exceptional*** commitment to the protection of the dark sky through implementing quality lighting policies, education on protecting the dark sky and citizens' support for the ideal of protecting the dark sky. "The Municipality of Jelsa is setting a high standard for other communities in this country and region of the world to follow," said IDA Director of Conservation Ashley Wilson in a press release. "We are pleased to recognize Jelsa as a distinguished leader in demonstrating that proper use of lighting can benefit both human wellbeing and the nocturnal environment within and outside our communities," said Wilson. The procedure to designate Jelsa as an IDSC was launched on the initiative of Director of Jelsa Tourist Board Marija Marjan, and the ***process*** was led by the Croatian Astronomical Union. Croatian-Czech Friendship Association celebrates 30th anniversary ZAGREB, 28 Feb (Hina) - The Croatian-Czech Friendship Association on Sunday celebrated the 30th anniversary of its existence with a concert at the Croatian National Theatre and the 30th anniversary of the international recognition of Croatia and establishment of diplomatic relations with what then was the Czech and Slovak Federative Republic. The concert was held under the aegis of the Czech Embassy with the support of the Croatian Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs and the AZD Zagreb company, and featured Czech violinist Jan Talich and Croatian musicians Goran Koncar (violin), Aleksandar Milosev (viola) and Petra Gilming (piano). The concert was dedicated to Zlatko Stahuljak (1933-2021), the first president of the Croatian-Czech Friendship Association and Croatia's first ambassador to the Czech Republic, as well as a violinist and music teacher. The recognition of Croatia by the Czech and Slovak federation opened a new chapter in the history of Croatian-Czech relations, which began in the late 11th century with the arrival of the Czech Duh to serve as the first bishop of Zagreb, the association's president Marijan Lipovac said. Croatian-Czech relations had thrived in all areas of life, notably in business, tourism, politics, sports and through marriages, and what was missing was official diplomatic relations between the two countries, a Croatian embassy in Prague and a Czech embassy in Zagreb, which came to pass 30 years ago, he added. "It is with pride and satisfaction that we share this community with the friendly people of Croatia. Yes, Czechs and Croats are natural and friendly partners, and so it was only logical that Czechs, together with Slovaks, were part of the ***process*** and active advocates of the international recognition of Croatia. I am pleased to see that relations between our two countries are being built on the most natural foundations - on a civic principle and interpersonal contacts," Czech Ambassador Milan Hovorka said. The Croatian-Czech Friendship Association has about 100 members and branches in the southern coastal town of Omis and the eastern town of Daruvar. In its work it most often cooperates with Czech minority associations in Croatia, in particular with Ceska Beseda in Zagreb. THIS BULLETIN INCLUDES ITEMS RELEASED BY 2125 HRS MONDAY. (Hina) rml Masthead Brief News Bulletin is published by the Croatian News Agency HINA Marulicev trg 1610 000 ZagrebCroatia web:[*www.hina.hr*](http://www.hina.hr) mail: [*hina@hina.hr*](mailto:hina@hina.hr) phone: (+385 1) 48 08 660; fax (+385 1) 48 08 822 Publisher: Branka Gabriela Valentic, DirectorEditor in Chief: Serdo Obratov Bulletin Editor: Marija Sestan

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[***Pupils across Gloucestershire receive A-level results***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:63BF-K641-JD39-X34R-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Length:** 4192 words

**Byline:** [*Huw Mabe*](http://Huw Mabe)

**Body**

5:15pm

That's it from us today. Well done to everyone who received their results.

We'll be back on Thursday to do it all again for GCSEs.

Have a good evening.

5:12pm

Students at The Cotswold School today received their A Level results and focused on their plans for the future.

Head of Sixth Form and Deputy Headteacher, Phil White, said,

"It is hard to articulate how proud I am of the achievements of these students. To have coped with the trials and uncertainties of the last 18 months is so impressive and a testament to their determination and hard work.

"They have received amazing teaching and support from staff at The Cotswold School. One of the greatest strengths of our community is the excellent teamwork between staff, students and their parents and carers. This year in particular, parents have been instrumental in supporting their children at home and providing the environment they needed to continue their learning. I wish the students who are leaving us to go to university or into employment all the very best."

Most Year 13 leavers have been at The Cotswold School since Year 7. With the benefit of an outstanding education behind them, they now take the next steps into further study, travel, training and employment.

Those going to university will soon begin degrees in subjects including Natural Sciences, Politics, Mathematics, Sport and Exercise Science, Economics, Chemistry, Psychology, Philosophy, Veterinary Science, Criminology and English. Their destinations include the Universities of Bath, Bristol, Cambridge, Durham, Exeter, Cardiff, Liverpool, Manchester, Oxford and York.

Lucas Blessley-Smart achieved two A\* grades (Mathematics and Further Mathematics) and two A grades (Physics and Computer Science). Along with Robert Dobson, who was awarded four A\* grades (Mathematics, Further Mathematics, Computer Science and Physics), he will study Computer Science (with a work placement) at The University of Bath. Laurie Dale achieved three A\*s in Economics, Mathematics and Physics. He also got an A in his Extended Project Qualification (EPQ) which was entitled 'Why has celebrity endorsement changed over time?'. He will read Economics at The University of Bath. Nell Fithen was awarded two A\* grades (English Literature and Fine Art) and an A in History. She will read for a degree in English at The University of York. George Gresley will read History at The University of Oxford, having achieved A\* grades in History, English Literature and Psychology at A level, and a grade A in his EPQ, which was an analysis of the post-Brexit referendum novels of seven British writers. Barney Hotten achieved four A\*s in Economics, Maths, Further Maths and Physics. Barney will study Economics (with a placement year) at University College London. Ed Parker, outgoing Deputy Head Boy, gained three A\*s (Economics, History and English Literature) and an A in German. In his EPQ, Ed focused on the extent to which economic inequality can be successfully tackled by government policy and was awarded an A. Beth Powell, who was Head Girl 2020-21, achieved A\* grades in all three of her A levels - Biology, Chemistry and Mathematics - and will be going to The University of Cambridge to study Natural Sciences. Hattie Price and Layla Reed are each beginning a prestigious course in veterinary medicine after achieving three grade A's apiece. Hattie will study Veterinary Medicine and Surgery at Harper and Keele and Layla will go to the University of Bristol to study Veterinary Science. Emilie Welstead was awarded two A\* grades (Psychology, Biology) and an A (Chemistry) and is now looking forward to studying Biological Sciences at Durham University Sara Zamir, who has achieved A\* in both Economics and Mathematics and an A in Geography, now goes on to study Economics at The University of Exeter.

4:29pm

Students have also been collecting their results at Malmesbury School today.

Headteacher Rupert Moreton said: "We would like to congratulate all the students who have received their A level results today at Malmesbury School and commend their excellent attitude throughout this disrupted couple of years.

"Their resilience and positivity, coupled with hard work both in school and at home, have resulted in these very well-deserved set of results.

"Although the government will not be publishing performance data this year due to the cancellation of exams, the grades awarded to students today are the culmination of seven years of study and dedication and students should be very proud of their achievements.

"It was fantastic to see so many students in school today looking to the future and discussing their plans of university, apprenticeships and gap years.

"We would also like to thank all the staff that have been involved in this ***process*** - completing the internal assessments, moderation and grading on top of their existing responsibilities, has ensured that our students obtained the grades they deserve."

3:49pm

This talented group of students from Brimsham Green School achieved seven A\*s, six As and seven Bs between them.

Congratulations to George Jones, Nicole Freeman, Esme Littlechild, Sarah Friis, Iona Jardine and Eleanor Lord.

For more information about results from Cotswold Edge Sixth Form (Chippining Sodbury School, Yate Academy and Brimsham Green School) click here.

3:49pm

Top achieving A-level and vocational students from Cirencester celebrate outstanding results

Congratulations to top achieving student Luke Pennington, formerly of Cirencester Deer Park School who gained four A\*s in A-level Maths, Further Maths, Chemistry and Physics. Luke is now off to the University of Manchester to further his studies in Maths.

Harvey Smith formerly of Kingshill School achieved triple distinction star in Level 3 Uniformed Public Services, and is going on to a career in the Royal Air Force.

Luke and Harvey are two of many Cirencester College students who will be celebrating another year of fantastic results.

Principal Jim Grant said "This group of young people had their whole 6th form experience disrupted by Covid.  We are extremely proud of how they coped with lockdowns and their enthusiasm and hard work when they returned.

They have really earned their grades and we wish them the best of luck as they move on to university, apprenticeship or begin their chosen career.  We wish all of our students the best of luck on their chosen pathways.

I am also very proud of our lecturers and support staff who worked extraordinarily hard to support our students during this ***unprecedented*** time. "

According to the 2020 Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) report, 89% of Cirencester College students who graduate from University achieve either a First Class or Upper-Second class degrees which is well above benchmark for all sectors.

This year, among the many success stories are 10 Vets and Meds students with confirmed places at top universities, as well as 8 students with confirmed places at either Oxford or Cambridge University.

Harvey Smith

Luke Pennington

3:07pm

UTC students delighted by results

Berkeley Green UTC is a STEM specialist school offering traditional academic subjects alongside technical qualifications in Engineering, Digital Technologies and Cyber Security.

This morning, year 13 students have been celebrating an outstanding set of results.  Half the year group applied to study STEM subjects at university and all were successful in securing their first choice places.  The remaining half are continuing into apprenticeships and employment, with many students gaining coveted higher and degree level apprenticeships with world-leading organisations.

Headteacher Louise Davies said, 'We are so proud of our students, their resilience, determination and enthusiasm.  They are leaving us not only with fantastic qualifications but also with the personal qualities necessary for success.  As a UTC, our ***measure*** of achievement is enabling young people to flourish professionally and personally.'  She added, 'If anybody reading this knows a young person who is keen to follow a technical route for GCSE or post-16 study, it's not too late to apply for entry this September.  These results show they'll be in expert hands.'

3:02pm

Students at Farmor's sixth form celebrating after picking up their results this morning.

Head teacher Matthew Evans said: "Despite a rollercoaster year, there is much for Farmor's Sixth Form students to celebrate as A Level results are released today.

"This cohort have shown resilience and determination and we are so proud of their achievements.

"We are pleased that the vast majority of students were able to access their first-choice destination for next year. As always, there are a variety of destinations, from those who have confirmed their apprenticeship places to those who can now start packing for university.

"We wish every one of our students success for the future and are proud of all you have achieved, and the way you have conducted yourselves throughout."

2:42pm

Students at Archway School celebrated their results this morning.

Head teacher Kieron Smith said: "At Archway School, we were delighted to meet our students this morning and to celebrate their achievements in gaining well-earned, excellent A Level and BTEC grades.

"As school-based assessments were used this year, students' potential was assessed through portfolios of evidence gathered over a period of time and the students and teachers should be commended for their efforts putting these together.

"Our Year 13 students this year have achieved record success rates in gaining places at the top 'Russell Group' universities.  Wherever their futures lie, we would like to wish all of our 'Class of 2021' the very best as they move on to further studies or the world of work."

2:00pm

REDNOCK School is celebrating a set of positive results despite challenging circumstances.

Head teacher David Alexander said: "After a year of lockdown, Covid testing and online learning , today has brought a joyous celebration of achievement!

"Overall we are delighted with the fantastic set of grades which truly reflect the students' hard work, dedication and resilience through a turbulent 6th form experience.

"We are so pleased that the majority of students have been able to progress to their first choice university places, onto apprenticeships or employment.

"This is crucial for the students and is at the cornerstone of the school's vision that everyone gets to their next level through hard work at Rednock School. 'Everyone matters' and the results demonstrate that.

"Special mention to Thomas Greenwood, Anna Langdon, Tilly Hurrell, Rebecca Jones,  Meg Kent, Ashleigh Hutchinson, Oscar Hinson and Sam Denning for their ***exceptional*** performances. We never fail to be impressed by Rednock students."

1:30pm

Sarah Ockenden, head of sixth form, said: "There is something very special about this cohort of students.

"Not only did they adapt to the changing circumstances with determination and good will, demonstrating resilience and flexibility, but they showed so much care for each other.

"It has been a genuine privilege to have worked with them, and I wish them all the very best for their futures."

Headteacher Joe Docherty said: "Don't let anyone suggest that the lack of external exams meant that these students have had it easier - it's quite the opposite.

"These students did very well in their GCSEs at Castle or Marlwood, and since then they have had to adapt and develop a wider set of skills than any of their predecessors; so I think they are probably better prepared for higher-level study and training as a result.

"My thanks go to all the staff who have taught and supported them, to parents and family members for supporting them - but today is mainly about congratulating these young people and wishing them well for their next steps."

1:28pm

Students have also been receiving grades for their vocational courses.

At Castle School Sixth Form this includes the likes of healthcare and childcare.

There are students moving on from this to training in nursing, midwifery and as a Norland Nanny. There are also students planning to move into careers such as ***agriculture***, events management, and apprentice teaching assistant.

1:23pm

There have been some very impressive results at the Castle School Sixth Form in Thornbury.

The highest achievers were Annabel McLaren, who obtained 4 A\* grades, plus a 5th A\* for her EPQ, and Dennis Kiselev for his 4 A\* grades. Annabel has a place at Oxford University to study Law, while Denis has a place at Manchester University to study Computer Science.

Annabel is one of four students going to study at Oxford University, along with Jemima Barnes (History), Rosie Culverhouse (French) and Theo Jordan (Law).

Two students have places to study Medicine - Angus Chan (Leicester) and Sidra Muhammad (Birmingham), while Taya Green will be studying Veterinary Science at Bristol.

George Bazzone, James Harrod, Josiah Hendy and Jemima Whiteway were other very high achievers, all gaining at least 3 A\* grades, and there are 25 students with grades equal or better to 3As at A-level - over 20 per cent of the year group.

Congratulations everyone!

12:26pm

Stroud High School student Jacob - pictured (far right) with his family receiving his results.

Jacob achieved: Politics A\*; Maths A, and Chemistry A\*.

He said: "I am just so very happy - I am off to UCL- to study European Social and Political Studies."

12:23pm

Marling students Isabelle Bristow, Crystal Hulls and Daisy gained 8A\*s and As between them. Isabelle now plans to study English Literature at Durham University and Crystal is going to study Life Sciences at University of Sussex

11:59am

Marling School students Jonathan Bacarri and Joe Hill achieved  5 A\*s and A grades between them.

Jon is now going on to study Computer Science and Mathematics at Lancaster University, while Joe will study Economics at Bath University

Jon said: "I am so delighted with my results"

11:56am

Marling School students James Mathieson and Sam Cruise are delighted with their results.

James, who achieved 4 A\*s, now plans to study mathematics at Warwick University.

Sam will now study marine biology at Bangor University.

He said: "It was a tough year but I'm so happy with how it has turned out."

11:47am

Stroud High School student Isla is pictured here with her mum and her history teachers, Robbie Brewster and Neil Lambert

Isla gained 3 A\*s, in politics, English literature and history

She is now going on to study history at Cambridge.

Isla said: "Amazing - I was so  surprised given circumstances. My history teachers have been truly inspirational."

11:44am

Stroud High School students, twins Phoebe and Clara Smith achieved 5 A\*s and 1 A between them.

Phoebe achieved: A\* Spanish; A English; A\* music

She said: "I am having a gap year, and then I will be going on to study Spanish and Music at Bristol University. It has been such a rollercoaster"

Clara achieved: 3 A\*s, in politics, Spanish and music

She said: "I am going to music college. I would like to thank all my teachers who have helped through such a challenging year."

11:36am

Rendcomb students Jacob, Mason and Nathan are delighted with their results

11:35am

Rencomb College student Millie Butler gets her results

11:32am

Rendcomb College's Sixth Form students celebrate their results

A spokesman for the college said: "A little over 19 months ago the world had not heard of COVID-19. Sixth Formers at Rendcomb College were looking forward to the start of the Lent term and finishing off their first year of A-Level studies with great enthusiasm.

"Come March 2020 however, schools across the UK had to close their doors and unusual phrases like "Lockdown", "Remote Learning" and "Lateral Flow Tests" were becoming the normal vocabulary in a new, online school environment. With 3 national lockdowns, online classes, their normal social lives hugely reduced, additional pressures to ensure that "every piece of work counts", uncertainty over examinations, worry over the pandemic and on top of all that, juggling an intensified home life and post A-Level planning, it has been a very hard year for young people across the UK.

"It is fantastic then, that with everything they have had to cope with during their A-Level studies, our Rendcomb College Sixth Formers have accomplished a truly brilliant set of results.

"With 56% achieving A\*-A and 84% achieving A\*-B they have an awful lot to be proud of.

"Of particular note are 3 of our international students, who were in their home country for most of their A-Level course, which makes their achievements even more impressive.

Chak Tin Cheng: 3 A\* and 1 A

Lo Hoi Ching: 3 A

Yuval Kay: 4 A\*

"Additionally our Head Boy, Jacob Matthews gained 3 A\* and an A\* in his Extended Project Qualification (EPQ).

"Mia Endicott, Head Girl, achieved A\*, A, B and is taking up her place at drama college in London to study Musical Theatre.

"The results this year have also been very good for those taking BTEC courses. With over three quarters of pupils achieving D\*, the equivalent of an A\* at A-Level, BTEC's have been a great success at Rendcomb College.

"Nathan Roberts secured 2 A at A-Level, a D\* in Business Studies and an A\* for his EPQ. Delilah Vincent, who has been at Rendcomb since the Junior School, achieved D\* in Business Studies and 2 B's at A-Level and Millie Butler, who also joined Rendcomb College in the Junior School, secured D\* in Business Studies, and an A and B at A-Level."

"These results are a real testament to the teachers, pupils and everyone that kept Rendcomb College operating during lockdown" says Rob Jones, Head of College.

Rob continues: "When it became apparent that lockdown was inevitable, we immediately put in place our online learning provision, switching overnight to a remote learning platform that enabled teachers and pupils to continue on syllabus, without missing a step.

"Our pupils showed incredible resilience in adapting to this new way of learning, and their energy and enthusiasm to carry on as normal was an example to all of us.

"Our robust teaching and continual monitoring of pupils performance throughout their time at Rendcomb College means we ensure that every pupil gets the support they require to be the best they can be, and this is absolutely reflected in these well-earned grades. I am very proud of every single one of them, and wish them all the very best in their future endeavours"

11:23am

At Westonbirt 46 per cent of students achieved Grade A - A\*, with highlights including 75 per cent of students achieving A\* - B in maths and chemistry, 82 per cent of students achieving A\* - B in art and 57 per cent of students gaining A\* - A in English.

The majority of students have gained a place at their first choice university.

Deputy head academic, Simon Balderson, said: "We are delighted with these results, arrived at through a rigorous assessment and moderation ***process***, to ensure that they properly reflect the abilities of this high-achieving year group.

"Given the disruption of the past two years, these students have shown real resilience in continuing to study effectively and produce excellent academic outcomes. As a school, we were able to quickly adapt to online learning from the very first week of lockdown, and are delighted that the hard work of students and staff has paid off."

11:19am

This is the final all-girl cohort at Westonbirt after the school recently made the switch to co-ed. Hattie from Tetbury will be studying architecture at Edinburgh after getting her results this morning.

11:12am

Jasmine from Minchinhampton is among the Westonbirt pupils to receive their A-level results this morning. She is off to study psychology at Exeter. Congratulations!

10:16am

Katharine Lady Berkeley students Archie Gent and Jodie Palmer are delighted with their results.

Archie will now go to Cambridge University to read Law and Jodie is going to Exeter University to read Medical Sciences

10:13am

Lots of smiles at Katharine Lady Berkeley School

10:11am

Katharine Lady Berkeley students and twin brothers Giles and Toby Dakin got the results they wanted for their university courses.

Giles is now headed to Southampton University to study Geography, while Toby is going to Aberystwyth to study History

10:08am

Students and staff at KLB School are delighted with the outstanding A level results achieved this year.

Tim Rand, Headteacher, said: "Our Year 13s have worked tremendously hard and overcome great challenges to achieve results of which they should be immensely proud. This group of individuals have adapted so well to new ways of learning during the pandemic, developing great resilience and independence but also showing much togetherness and community spirit. They are an ***exceptional*** year group and fully deserve their fantastic grades; we wish them all the best for the future. I would also like to thank the outstanding KLB staff who have gone above and beyond over the difficult last 18 months to make today's celebrations possible."

Hannah Khan, Deputy Headteacher Head of Sixth Form at Katharine Lady Berkeley's School

"We are thrilled with the excellent grades achieved by our Year 13 students. They have overcome the many obstacles of the last 18 months with an ***exceptional*** work ethic and a positive approach to their learning. I have very much enjoyed seeing them grow and develop into fine young adults ready for the next stage of their lives. I am sure they will have much success in the future.

9:31am

Here are the main figures in this year's A-level results:

- The proportion of candidates receiving top grades is the highest on record. A total of 44.8% of entrants were awarded either an A or A\*, up from 38.5% in 2020.

- Nearly one in five (19.1%) entrants received an A\*. This is another record high, and is up from around one in seven (14.3%) last year.

- The overall pass rate (grades A\* to E) was 99.5%. This is down very slightly from 99.7% in 2020.

- Some 88.5% received a C or above, up from 88.0% in 2020 and the highest since at least 2000.

- Girls have extended their lead over boys in the top grades. The proportion of girls who got A or higher was 46.9%, 4.8 percentage points higher than boys (42.1%). Last year, girls led boys by 3.2 percentage points (39.9% girls, 36.7% boys). Boys briefly took the lead in 2017 and 2018, following a long period in which girls had been ahead.

- Girls have also extended their lead in the highest grade, A\*. The proportion of girls who got A\* was 19.7%, 1.3 percentage points highest than boys (18.4%). Last year the gap was just 0.2 points (14.4% girls, 14.2% boys).

- The most popular subject this year was maths. It was taken by 97,690 entrants, up 3.6% on 2020.

- Psychology remains the second most popular subject. It was taken by 71,235 entrants, up 9.2% on 2020. Biology was once again the third most popular subject, taken by 70,055 entrants, a rise of 7.6%.

- Chinese saw the biggest percentage drop in candidates for a single subject with more than 1,000 entrants, falling by 18.9% from 1,617 to 1,312.

- Geography saw the biggest percentage jump in candidates of any subject with more than 1,000 entrants, rising by 16.8% from 30,203 to 35,268.

- There were 824,718 A-levels awarded, up 5.1% on last year's total (784,959).

9:30am

Wycliffe's outstanding A Level and BTEC results have seen their Year 13 pupils secure places at a varied range of university destinations.

As well as those heading for three universities - Oxford, Harvard, Berkeley - listed in the world's top seven (Times Higher Education, 2021), Wycliffe's newest crop of alumni will be taking their places at a wide range of institutions including the Russell Group's Bristol, Exeter, and Durham, plus courses as far afield as Germany, Switzerland and Canada.

Others have secured places on courses such as Film at Bournemouth, Graphic Design at Falmouth, and Comic and Concept Art at Leeds Arts. And Creative Arts such as these are balanced with multiple types of Engineering (Automotive, Civil, Electrical, Mechanical), alongside Marine Biology, Environmental Science, and Architecture.

At an individual level, Maddy Palmer (2020/21 Head of School) is heading for St Anne's, Oxford to study Biochemistry whilst two sports stars have won scholarships to Ivy League schools in the USA: Tate Harms heads off to Harvard to study Liberal Arts whilst playing Squash, and Grace Dening-Smitherman joins top Rowing establishment University of California, Berkeley to study English Literature.

Nick Gregory, Headmaster of Wycliffe College in Stonehouse, commented: "With getting on for three-quarters of all A Levels graded at A\*, A or B (plus some outstanding results across our three BTECs in Sport, Digital Media, and Business), this year's Year 13 leavers at Wycliffe College have an enormous amount of which to be proud."

9:29am

A reminder that there have been no exams again this year as a result of the pandemic.

Students will instead receive grades based on recommendations from their teachers.

Best of luck to everyone getting their results today.

9:18am

Welcome to our coverage of A-level results day.

We'll be bringing you the latest news from schools in Gloucestershire, South Gloucestershire and North Wiltshire as pupils find out their grades.

**Load-Date:** August 11, 2021

**End of Document**



[***More than 260 troops evacuated from steelworks - as it happened***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:65FX-TC81-DY4H-K1X6-00000-00&context=1516831)

The Guardian (London)

May 16, 2022 Monday 5:07 AM GMT

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**Section:** WORLD NEWS; Version:43

**Length:** 27443 words

**Byline:** Dani Anguiano (now) and Joanna Walters Nicola Slawson, Rachel Hall and Calla Wahlquist (earlier)

**Highlight:** This blog is now closed, you can find our our new live blog here

**Body**

block-time published-time 12.06am BST

We're going to wrap things up for the day. Thanks for reading. We'll be back in a few hours with a fresh liveblog, bringing you all the news.

Our story about Turkey's announcement that it would not approve Sweden and Finland joining it as Nato members is [*here*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/may/16/russia-finland-sweden-nato-ukraine-war) and you can read Daniel Boffey's moving account [*here*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/may/16/when-will-it-all-end-kharkiv-counts-the-cost-as-russians-pull-back) of the battle for Kharkiv, as the fight over Ukraine's second city nears its end.

block-time published-time 11.31pm BST

Summary

Here are some of the key developments of the day:

The evacuation of wounded Ukrainian troops from the Azovstal steelworks in Mariupol is under way, Volodomyr Zelenskiy confirmed, with more than 260 fighters transported out of the plant. The troops have fulfilled their combat mission, the general staff of the armed forces said. Ukraine's deputy defense minister has said an "exchange procedure will take place" to bring evacuees home. Ukraine's Joint Forces Task Force said on Monday that 20 civilians, including a child, were killed in Russian shelling in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions. Western military sources say that Vladimir Putin is involved in the war in Ukraine "at the level of a colonel or brigadier". The Russian leader is reportedly so personally involved he is helping determine the movement of forces in the Donbas.[*Ukrainian officials claimed*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2022/may/16/russia-ukraine-war-latest-news-swedish-pm-to-seek-parliaments-support-for-joining-nato-live?page=with:block-628217ad8f08e6ce3a77fe4d#block-628217ad8f08e6ce3a77fe4d) that troops counter-attacking against Russian forces in the country's north-east had pushed them back from the city of Kharkiv and advanced as far as the border with [*Russia*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/russia). Russian forces have shelled frontline positions in Ukraine's eastern Donbas area as fighting becomes increasingly focused on Severodonetsk, the easternmost city still held by Ukrainian forces after more than 11 weeks of war.After Sweden and Finland yesterday confirmed plans to join Nato, Sweden is seeking to quell Turkish opposition by [*sending diplomats to the country*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2022/may/16/russia-ukraine-war-latest-news-swedish-pm-to-seek-parliaments-support-for-joining-nato-live?page=with:block-6281fda28f08e6ce3a77fd7b#block-6281fda28f08e6ce3a77fd7b). Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan has said Turkey will not approve the bids, and that delegations from the countries should not bother coming. Vladimir Putin said Russia had no issue with Finland and Sweden, but that the expansion of military infrastructure on their territory would demand a reaction from Moscow, as the Nordic countries move closer to joining Nato, which [*Russia has branded*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2022/may/16/russia-ukraine-war-latest-news-swedish-pm-to-seek-parliaments-support-for-joining-nato-live?page=with:block-628219978f08e6ce3a77fe63#block-628219978f08e6ce3a77fe63) a [*mistake with far-reaching consequences*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2022/may/16/russia-ukraine-war-latest-news-swedish-pm-to-seek-parliaments-support-for-joining-nato-live?page=with:block-6281f45c8f083b856379b592#block-6281f45c8f083b856379b592). Hungary has been accused of "holding the EU hostage" over its refusal to agree an oil embargo against Russia, as the bloc struggles to reach consensus on its latest sanctions aimed at eroding the Kremlin's ability to wage war.American fast-food giant McDonald's will exit the Russian market and sell its business in the increasingly isolated country, [*the company said on Monday*](https://www.theguardian.com/business/2022/may/16/mcdonalds-to-sell-russia-business--invasion-ukraine). Meanwhile, the Moscow city government is to take over a factory belonging to the French carmaker Renault and use it to revive the Soviet-era Moskvitch in Russia's first major nationalization of a foreign company during its war in [*Ukraine*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/ukraine).

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 11.59pm BST

block-time published-time 11.15pm BST

The Ukrainian troops defending the Azovstal steel plant have fulfilled their combat mission, the country's general staff of armed forces said.

"The supreme military command ordered the commanders of the units stationed at Azovstal to save the lives of the personnel," Reuters reported the general staff said in a statement on Facebook. "Efforts to rescue defenders who remain on the territory of Azovstal continue."

In his nightly video address, Volodomyr Zelenskiy said Ukraine would fight to save the lives of the Azovstal fighters. "There are severely wounded ones among them. They're receiving care. Ukraine needs Ukrainian heroes alive," he said.

Ukraine's deputy defence minister has said an "exchange procedure will take place" to bring evacuees home.

A wounded service member of Ukrainian forces from the besieged Azovstal steel mill in Mariupol is transported on a stretcher out of a bus. Photograph: Alexander Ermochenko/Reuters

Outgunned and surrounded, troops at the plant became a symbol of Ukrainian resistance as they continued to fight even after Mariupol fell to Russian forces. [*Last week*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/may/09/last-wave-azovstal-steel-plant-evacuees-mariupol-reach-safety-zaporizhzhia-ukraine) , the last civilians rescued from the plant reached safety in Ukrainian held territory after two months of sheltering in the besieged city.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 8.39am BST

block-time published-time 10.38pm BST

Zelenskiy confirms evacuation of wounded troops from Azovstal steelworks

The evacuation of wounded Ukrainian troops from the Azovstal steelworks in Mariupol is under way, V olodomyr Zelenskiy confirmed, with more than 260 fighters transported out of the plant.

" We hope that we will be able to save the lives of our guys," the Ukrainian president said of the evacuation.

enltrPresident [*@ZelenskyyUa*](https://twitter.com/ZelenskyyUa?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) : "A difficult day. But this day, like all others, is aimed at saving our country & our people. I want to emphasize that Ukraine needs Ukrainian heroes alive." The leader who values human life. 266 Ukrainian servicemen were evacuated from Azovstal as of now [*pic.twitter.com/XlO9usWo4W*](https://t.co/XlO9usWo4W)

- Hanna Liubakova (@HannaLiubakova) [*May 16, 2022*](https://twitter.com/HannaLiubakova/status/1526312579144028161?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

Hanna Malyar, Ukraine's deputy defense minister, said that 53 injured troops have been taken to a hospital in the Russian-controlled town of Novoazovsk and that more than 200 others were transported through a corridor to Olenivka. All evacuees will be returned home through exchanges, Malyar said.

Related: [*Hundreds of Ukrainian troops evacuated from Azovstal steelworks after 82-day assault*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/may/16/hundreds-of-ukrainian-troops-evacuated-from-azovstal-steelworks-after-82-day-assault)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.34am BST

block-time published-time 10.02pm BST

Putin involved in war 'at level of colonel or brigadier', say western sources

Vladimir Putin has become so personally involved in the Ukraine war that he is making operational and tactical decisions "at the level of a colonel or brigadier", according to western military sources.

The Russian president is helping determine the movement of forces in the Donbas, they added, where last week the invaders suffered a bloody defeat as they tried on multiple occasions to cross a strategic river in the east of [*Ukraine*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/ukraine).

The sources added that Putin is still working closely with General Valery Gerasimov, the commander of the Russian armed forces, in contrast to claims made by Ukraine last week that the military chief had been sidelined.

"We think Putin and Gerasimov are involved in tactical decision making at a level we would normally expect to be taken by a colonel or a brigadier," the military source said, referring to the ongoing battle in the east of Ukraine.

Moscow's armies have so far failed to achieve a breakthrough in the Donbas, where they have been mounting an offensive for a month that has failed several times encircle the smaller Ukrainian forces.

No further detail to back up the statement was provided, although it was implied the assessment about Putin's close personal involvement was based on intelligence that had been received.

Read more here:

Related: [*Putin involved in war 'at level of colonel or brigadier', say western sources*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/may/16/putin-involved-russia-ukraine-war-western-sources)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 10.09pm BST

block-time published-time 9.44pm BST

Reuters is reporting that Ukrainian soldiers from the Azovstal steel plant in Mariupol have arrived in the Russian-controlled town of Novoazovsk.

A witness told the news agency that evacuees, some wounded and carried out of buses on stretchers, arrived late on Monday.

Russia had said it would use a "humanitarian corridor" it established to evacuate wounded Ukrainian soldiers to a medical facility in the town, about 45km east of Mariupol. Moscow claims to have reached a ceasefire with the last-stand Ukrainian troops at the steel plant, but Ukrainian officials have not confirmed this and it's unclear exactly what is happening inside the plant.

I'm Dani Anguiano and I'll be taking over the Guardian's live coverage of the war in Ukraine for the next few hours.

block-time published-time 9.13pm BST

There is every expectation that Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelenzkiy will make a public address from Kyiv before long and give us his update on the situation at the Azovstal steel works.

The huge plant has served for weeks as the last, desperate stand for a group of Ukrainians - military and civilian, now just soldiers - after the fall of the city of Mariupol to Russia.

enltrZelensky will have an address on what has happened to the Azovstal. They have fulfilled the order...

- Illia Ponomarenko ???? (@IAPonomarenko) [*May 16, 2022*](https://twitter.com/IAPonomarenko/status/1526272236528750593?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

It appears that wounded Ukrainian soldiers have been evacuated by Russian forces but the exact situation is far from clear.

enltrSeriously wounded Azov fighters were evacuated from [*#Azovstal*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/Azovstal?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) and taken to [*#Donetsk*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/Donetsk?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) occupied by Russia. Azov commander Denys Prokopenko asked the public not to blame them for this decision. I don't know what kind of human one should be to blame them for this very humane decision.

- katerina sergatskova (@KSergatskova) [*May 16, 2022*](https://twitter.com/KSergatskova/status/1526269171343949826?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

Civilians trapped with the soldiers were evacuated earlier this month. Despite calls for action by pro-Ukrainian protesters in some parts of Europe in recent days, hope that some sort of Ukrainian special forces rescue mission could be mounted to save the troops besieged in the huge factory have proved entirely unrealistic. The soldiers there are understood to number around 600, according to Reuters.

It's not known if a ceasefire to evacuate the wounded is the beginning of the end of the siege of the Azovstal plant and the final domino going down in Mariupol.

We await more news. The New York team is handing over to California now, where my colleague [*Dani Anguiano*](https://www.theguardian.com/profile/dani-anguiano) will keep you up to date on developments.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 9.17pm BST

block-time published-time 8.40pm BST

Ukraine's Joint Forces Task Force said on Monday that 20 civilians, including a child, were killed in Russian shelling in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, Reuters reports.

The military task force said in a statement on its Facebook page that 25 communities in the regions were fired at, with 42 residential buildings and a school among locations hit.

Reuters was not able to independently verify the report. There was no immediate response from Russia to the report.

Related: [*Russia shells frontline positions as fighting focuses on Donbas city*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/may/16/russians-and-ukrainians-battle-around-izium-as-sweden-joins-finland-in-nato-bid)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 8.41pm BST

block-time published-time 8.29pm BST

About a dozen buses carrying Ukrainian servicemen who were holed up in the Azovstal steel plant in Ukraine's south-east, which was besieged by Russia, left the plant on Monday, a Reuters witness said.

It was not possible to determine how many servicemen were aboard the buses.

It was also unclear whether those on board were all among the 40 wounded fighters Ukrainian officers said to have been beneath the plant, the news agency reports.

Some 600 servicemen were said to have been inside.

A screengrab from a video shows a shower of burning munitions hitting Azovstal steel works in the Ukrainian port city of Mariupol, Ukraine. Video obtained by Reuters on May 15, 2022. Photograph: Reuters Tv/Reuters

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 8.43pm BST

block-time published-time 8.12pm BST

Some Mariupol steelworks defenders appear to be under evacuation by Russians

The Ukrainian unit holed up beneath the Azovstal steelworks in Mariupol said on Monday its garrison was fulfilling orders to save the lives of troops, an apparent indication that the long siege has reached an important new stage.

It is not clear if this is the beginning of the end of the siege or whether the last stand continues by those Ukrainian troops not wounded.

The fighting at Azovstal in ruined Mariupol has symbolized Ukrainian resistance throughout Russia's nearly three-month ***invasion***. Most civilians who had sought shelter at the vast Soviet-era plant were evacuated earlier this month, Reuters reports.

The besieged Iron and Steel Works in Mariupol, during the Russian ***invasion*** of Ukraine, May 15, 2022. Photograph: Alexander Ermochenko/Reuters

In order to save lives, the entire Mariupol garrison is implementing the approved decision of the Supreme Military Command and hopes for the support of the Ukrainian people," the Azov Regiment said in a social media post.

Here's a little more from the accompanying video that one of the unit's senior commanders, Denys Prokopenko, posted.

The main thing is to realise all the risks, is there a plan B, are you fully committed to that plan which must allow for fulfilling the assigned tasks and preserve the lives and health of personnel?

This is the highest level of overseeing troops. All the more so when your decision is endorsed by the highest military command."

Prokopenko did not spell out what action the defenders were taking. The video was released hours after Russia said it had agreed to evacuate wounded Ukrainian soldiers to a medical facility in the Russian-controlled town of Novoazovsk.

Ukraine estimates tens of thousands of civilians died in Mariupol during months of siege by Russian forces who destroyed the Sea of Azov port, a city of around 400,000 people.

The last defenders, including many who were wounded, had been holding out for weeks in bunkers beneath Azovstal, one of the largest metallurgical plants in Europe.

The Russian defense ministry said it established a "humanitarian corridor" to evacuate wounded Ukrainian troops to Novoazovsk, about 45kms east of Mariupol in an area under Russian control.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 8.43pm BST

block-time published-time 7.58pm BST

Russia says a ceasefire has been reached with the last-stand Ukrainian troops at the Azovstal steel plant in Mariupol, in order to evacuate [*the wounded*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/gallery/2022/may/11/inside-the-azovstal-steelworks-in-pictures) , although there has been no confirmation of this from Ukrainian officials, Agence France-Presse reports.

Russia's defence ministry said moments ago that an agreement has been reached to evacuate injured soldiers from the plant.

An agreement was reached with representatives of the Ukrainian military blocked at Azovstal in Mariupol to evacuate the wounded," the ministry said.

It added that a "regime of silence" was introduced for the duration of the evacuation and that the Ukrainian soldiers would be taken to a hospital in the nearby town of Novoazovsk.

There was no immediate confirmation from Ukrainian officials.

Hundreds of Ukrainian soldiers remained holed up in the underground tunnels of the huge Azovstal steel factory that has been besieged by Russian forces for weeks after Moscow claimed control of Mariupol.

Ukraine's Azov battalion, which has led the defense of Mariupol, has posted desperate videos from the plant, saying soldiers are dying from their wounds there.

Here is [*a report*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/gallery/2022/may/11/inside-the-azovstal-steelworks-in-pictures) from the Guardian with glimpses of what the besieged troops have been withstanding.

Related: [*Inside the Azovstal steelworks - in pictures*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/gallery/2022/may/11/inside-the-azovstal-steelworks-in-pictures)

The last of hundreds of civilians who had been sheltering in the labyrinthine steel works, after the Russians overran Mariupol, in its deeper layers underground, were [*brought out*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/may/09/what-liberation-mariupol-survivors-rescued-from-last-bunker-describe-horrors-of-siege) earlier this month.

Related: [*'What liberation?': Mariupol survivors rescued from last civilian bunker describe horrors of siege*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/may/09/what-liberation-mariupol-survivors-rescued-from-last-bunker-describe-horrors-of-siege)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 8.22pm BST

block-time published-time 7.37pm BST

There are significant developments at the besieged Azovstal steel plant in Mariupol, the last stand of a nub of Ukrainian soldiers in the defeated south-eastern port city.

It's not yet entirely clear what is going on, whether the soldiers surrounded there in dire straits are giving up or are negotiating to have the severely wounded evacuated by occupying Russians. We'll keep following closely.

A senior commander of Ukrainian forces holed up beneath the Azovstal steel mill besieged by Russian forces said he was carrying out a decision by the military high command to save the lives of service personnel, but made no mention of surrendering, Reuters writes.

Commander Denys Prokopenko has posted a video on social media.

The main thing is to realise all the risks, is there a plan B, are you fully committed to that plan which must allow for fulfilling the assigned tasks and preserve the lives and health of personnel.

This is the highest level of overseeing troops. All the more so when your decision is endorsed by the highest military command," he said.

Here it is with subtitles:

enltrAbout the situation at the [*#Azovstal*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/Azovstal?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) plant from Denys Prokopenko, commander of the [*#AZOV*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/AZOV?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) regiment. For military reasons, we can not add anything more to his words. Stay tuned for updates on our page. [*#UkraineRussiaWar*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/UkraineRussiaWar?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) [*pic.twitter.com/mIWGCGrRm3*](https://t.co/mIWGCGrRm3)

- Ukrainian Struggle Centre ???? (@UA\_struggle) [*May 16, 2022*](https://twitter.com/UA_struggle/status/1526264297780912128?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

Here's a tweet from BBC journalists:

enltrBoth a significant moment and reflection of just how bad things must be getting down there. [*https://t.co/pcWgJfpS5M*](https://t.co/pcWgJfpS5M)

- James Waterhouse (@JamWaterhouse) [*May 16, 2022*](https://twitter.com/JamWaterhouse/status/1526265230044676097?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

The Guardian US team has taken the blog baton now and will keep you updated for the next few hours. This is Joanna Walters in New York and I'll be handing over a little later to our colleagues in California.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 7.44pm BST

block-time published-time 7.03pm BST

Summary

Here's a roundup of the key developments from the day:

[*Ukrainian officials claimed*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2022/may/16/russia-ukraine-war-latest-news-swedish-pm-to-seek-parliaments-support-for-joining-nato-live?page=with:block-628217ad8f08e6ce3a77fe4d#block-628217ad8f08e6ce3a77fe4d) that Ukrainian troops counter-attacking against Russian forces in the country's north-east had pushed them back from the city of Kharkiv and advanced as far as the border with [*Russia*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/russia). [*Russia said*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2022/may/16/russia-ukraine-war-latest-news-swedish-pm-to-seek-parliaments-support-for-joining-nato-live?page=with:block-628210418f08493b6168da63#block-628210418f08493b6168da63) its forces had shot down three fighter jets.Russian forces have shelled frontline positions in Ukraine's eastern Donbas area as fighting becomes increasingly focused on Severodonetsk, the easternmost city still held by Ukrainian forces after more than 11 weeks of war.Following a meeting, the EU foreign ministers failed reached an agreement on the sixth package of sansctions against [*Russia*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/russia) , EU's foreign policy chief Josep Borrell confirmed.After Sweden and Finland yesterday confirmed plans to join Nato, Sweden is seeking to quell Turkish opposition by [*sending diplomats to the country*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2022/may/16/russia-ukraine-war-latest-news-swedish-pm-to-seek-parliaments-support-for-joining-nato-live?page=with:block-6281fda28f08e6ce3a77fd7b#block-6281fda28f08e6ce3a77fd7b). Meanwhile, [*Russia branded the move*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2022/may/16/russia-ukraine-war-latest-news-swedish-pm-to-seek-parliaments-support-for-joining-nato-live?page=with:block-628219978f08e6ce3a77fe63#block-628219978f08e6ce3a77fe63) a [*mistake with far-reaching consequences*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2022/may/16/russia-ukraine-war-latest-news-swedish-pm-to-seek-parliaments-support-for-joining-nato-live?page=with:block-6281f45c8f083b856379b592#block-6281f45c8f083b856379b592). Estonia [*welcomed the decision*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2022/may/16/russia-ukraine-war-latest-news-swedish-pm-to-seek-parliaments-support-for-joining-nato-live?page=with:block-6281ed288f08493b6168d94a#block-6281ed288f08493b6168d94a) as a boon for Nordic nations' security.Vladimir Putin said Russia had no issue with Finland and Sweden, but that the expansion of military infrastructure on their territory would demand a reaction from Moscow, as the Nordic countries move closer to joining Nato.Norway, Denmark and Iceland have issued a joint statement offering their support to Finland and Sweden in case the two Nordic nations were to come under attack during their Nato applications.The Turkish president, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, has said he will not approve Finland and Sweden joining Nato. He said Swedish and Finnish delegrations should not bother coming to Turkey to convince Turkey to approve their Nato bids.Hungary has been accused of "holding the EU hostage" over its refusal to agree an oil embargo against Russia, as the bloc struggles to reach consensus on its latest sanctions aimed at eroding the Kremlin's ability to wage war.The Ukrainian foreign minister, Dmytro Kuleba, has ruled out potential concessions to Russia that could lead to a ceasefire in the war and said the European Union faces "moral failure" if it doesn't approve the nation's candidacy for membership by June.American fast-food giant McDonald's will exit the Russian market and sell its business in the increasingly isolated country, [*the company said on Monday*](https://www.theguardian.com/business/2022/may/16/mcdonalds-to-sell-russia-business--invasion-ukraine). Meanwhile, The Moscow city government is to take over a factory belonging to the French carmaker Renault and use it to revive the Soviet-era Moskvitch in Russia's first major nationalisation of a foreign company during its war in [*Ukraine*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/ukraine). The European Union and the United States have agreed closer cooperation to counter disrupted supply of commodities and food caused by Russia's ***invasion*** of [*Ukraine*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/ukraine) and to combat disinformation from Moscow.

Thanks so much for joining me. I'm handing over to my colleague Joanna Walters now.

block-time published-time 6.44pm BST

EU foreign affairs chief Josep Borrell says that Hungary is maintaining that its block on the EU oil embargo against Russia is for economic reasons rather than political ones.

He said:

The discussion will continue to see when and how much cost each member state will have to bear.

He also said:

The EU considers it unacceptable for the Balkan countries to maintain a neutral position towards Russia.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 6.48pm BST

block-time published-time 6.42pm BST

The EU will not recognize any part of Ukraine being claimed as part of Russia, EU's foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said.

Borrell is speaking at a press conference following a meeting of EU foreign ministers in Brussels.

He also added that the EU will help Ukraine to export grain from storage to Europe, including by sea, in order to make room for a new crop.

block-time published-time 6.38pm BST

The Turkish president Tayyip Erdogan said on Monday that Swedish and Finnish delegations should not bother coming to Ankara to convince it to approve their NATO bid because they harbour terrorists.

In a news conference, Erdogan said Turkey would not approve their bids to join NATO, calling Sweden a "hatchery" for terrorist organisations, and adding they had terrorists in their parliament.

Ankara says Sweden and Finland harbour people it says are linked to groups it deems terrorists, namely the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) militant group and followers of Fethullah Gulen, whom Ankara accuses of orchestrating the 2016 coup attempt.

block-time published-time 6.30pm BST

The EU Foreign Ministers have not reached an agreement on the sixth package of sansctions against Russia, EU's foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said during a press conference happening now.

Speaking following a meeting of EU foreign ministers in Brussels he said they had "failed to agree"

The allocation of another 500 million euros to Ukraine for the purchase of weapons, bringing the total amount to 2 billion euros, was approved by the ministers, however.

block-time published-time 6.25pm BST

Erdogan says Turkey will not approve Finnish and Swedish membership of Nato

The Turkish president, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, has said he will not approve Finland and Sweden joining Nato.

Reuters is reporting he has said Swedish and Finnish delegrations should not bother coming to Turkey to convince Turkey to approve their Nato bids.

Finland and Sweden, while both Nato partners, have long viewed membership as an unnecessary provocation of Russia, their powerful eastern neighbour. Moscow's ***invasion*** of Ukraine, however, has led to a radical rethink of their security policies.

Membership of Nato would require ratification by all existing members.

Turkey has been a Nato member since 1952 and its membership remains a cornerstone of its foreign policy towards western countries.

block-time published-time 6.05pm BST

The Moscow city government is to take over a factory belonging to the French carmaker Renault and use it to revive the Soviet-era Moskvitch in Russia's first major nationalisation of a foreign company during its war in [*Ukraine*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/ukraine).

The development, which was met with ridicule by Russians with long memories, follows Renault's decision to join the wave of western companies such as McDonald's and Siemens leaving the Russian market as the war in Ukraine nears its fourth month.

Renault has ceded its 68% stake in Russia's biggest carmaker, AvtoVAZ, with an option to buy it back within six years. According to media reports, the company's Russian assets were sold for one rouble, meaning the city of Moscow has effectively taken control of the factory free.

Renault's CEO, Luca de Meo, said in statement that the company was protecting its future business in Russia.

Today we have taken a difficult but necessary decision, and we are making a responsible choice towards our 45,000 employees in Russia while preserving the group's performance and our ability to return to the country in the future.

Hawkish commentators such as the head of Russia Today, Margarita Simonyan, have said foreign companies that leave the Russian market should have their local assets seized. Moscow's mayor, Sergei Sobyanin, appeared to defend Renault's decision and said the city would take over the factory to prevent unemployment.

Sobyanin said:

The foreign owner decided to close the Moscow Renault plant. This is its right, but we cannot allow thousands of workers to be left without work. Therefore, I decided to take the plant under control of the city and resume the production of passenger cars under the historical Moskvitch brand. We will try to keep most of the team working directly at the plant and its associates.

Read more here:

Related: [*Russia to take over Renault's Moscow factory to revive Soviet-era car*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/may/16/russia-renault-moscow-factory-revive-soviet-era-moskvitch-car)

block-time published-time 5.36pm BST

Zelenskiy praises soldiers pushing back Russian forces from Kharkiv

Ukrainian forces have continued to push Russian forces back from Kharkiv, the country's second biggest city, with Volodomyr Zelenskiy congratulating soldiers who erected a new border post on Russia's border.

He said in a video message:

I'm very grateful to you, on behalf of all Ukrainians, on my behalf and on behalf of my family. I'm very grateful to all the fighters like you.

Russia's withdrawal is a fighting retreat, however, with the outlying northern villages around Kharkiv being peppered with shelling on Monday, with one person confirmed killed in Tsyrkuny, 17 miles from the city centre and four injured in the districts of Shevchenkivskyi and Saltivka.

Ukrainian officials said that Russian forces were concentrating on "maintaining positions and preventing the advance of our troops toward the border".

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 6.12pm BST

block-time published-time 5.35pm BST

Ukraine's Kalush Orchestra gave an impromptu rendition of their Eurovision-winning song, Stefania, at the Polish border as they made their way home on Monday.

The band, whose music blends traditional folk and hip-hop, were presented with blue and yellow flowers as they were greeted at the border by servicemen and women, before breaking into song.

Kalush Orchestra were welcomed by members of Ukraine's state border guard service at the Ukraine-Poland border. Photograph: Mykola Tys/AP

Stefania had been among the favourites to win the Eurovision song contest in the northern Italian city of Turin, but decisive victory came from the public, with 439 points from the public vote putting the band in first place among the 25 finalists.

The song, which includes the lyrics: "I'll always find my way home, even if all roads are destroyed", was written by frontman Oleh Psiuk as a tribute to his mother, before finding new resonance among Ukrainians as it became an anthem in their war-torn country.

Ukraine's Kalush Orchestra, winners of the Eurovision Song Contest, perform for fans in Krakovets, at the Ukraine border with Poland. Photograph: Mykola Tys/AP

In an interview on Italian TV on Sunday night, Psiuk, who turned 28 on Monday, became emotional when talking about his mother: "She stayed up until 3am to cheer us on," he said. "In our city, Kalush, the sirens go off four times a day, nothing like in other places."

Please read more:

Related: [*Eurovision winners sing at Polish border on way back to Ukraine*](https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2022/may/16/eurovision-winners-sing-at-polish-border-on-way-back-to-ukraine)

block-time published-time 4.46pm BST

The outspoken Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny has tweeted praise of the UK's latest sanctions against Vladimir Putin's relatives and his mistress.

The jailed anti-corruption activist said Boris Johnson and Liz Truss were "showing remarkable leadership on the issue of Putin's war with Ukraine in general, and on sanctions in particular".

He continued:

Individual sanctions, asset freezing and confiscation, visa bans and seizure of yachts and accounts of officials are very popular among Russian citizens. Even the most dormant Russian voter is in solidarity with and more radical than the west on this issue.

The whole thread can be read here:

enltr1/9 Why have I waited until today to write about the sanctions ???? imposed against Kabayeva and Putin's "wallets"? Well, because they are not talking about it on TV!

- Alexey Navalny (@navalny) [*May 16, 2022*](https://twitter.com/navalny/status/1526215436383166464?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.49pm BST

block-time published-time 4.36pm BST

The Russian president, Vladimir Putin, has warned that Moscow will respond if Nato bolsters the military infrastructure of Sweden and Finland, which have both decided to join the alliance after the ***invasion*** of Ukraine. Putin has repeatedly cited the post-Soviet enlargement of Nato eastwards towards Russia's borders as a reason for the ***invasion*** of Ukraine.

Speaking to the leaders of a Russian-dominated military alliance of former Soviet states, Putin said the enlargement of Nato was being used by the US in an "aggressive" way to aggravate an already difficult global security situation. Russia, Putin said, had no problem with Finland or Sweden, so there was no direct threat from Nato enlargement to include those countries.

"But the expansion of military infrastructure into this territory would certainly provoke our response," Putin said.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.46pm BST

block-time published-time 4.34pm BST

Questions raised about UK arts donations of Leonard Blavatnik

It did not take long for the tremors from Vladimir Putin's tanks rolling into [*Ukraine*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/ukraine) to reach the British arts sector, long a beneficiary of Russian money. Institutions including the Tate and Royal Academy ended ties with Russian oligarchs and donors, including Petr Aven and Viktor Vekselberg.

But it appears the war has also led to questions about the role of Sir Leonard Blavatnik - listed by the [*Sunday Times*](https://www.theguardian.com/business/2021/may/21/sir-len-blavatnik-is-britains-richest-man-after-wealth-boost-during-pandemic) as Britain's richest man. While not on any sanctions list, the Ukrainian-born billionaire's links to sanctioned Russian oligarchs were the focus of discussion among officials involved in a multimillion-pound donation by him that helped ensure a trove of literary treasures were saved for the nation.

Blavatnik's gift last year - the largest given by an individual to the UK for a literary treasure - [*amounted to half of the £15m raised by a national libraries charity*](https://www.theguardian.com/books/2021/dec/16/lost-library-of-literary-treasures-saved-for-uk-after-charity-raises-15m) , which saved the collection known as the Honresfield Library from being sold abroad. It is being shared with major UK cultural institutions, including the British Library.

However, correspondence released under the Freedom of Information Act shows that his Russian links were the subject of discussions at the National Library of [*Scotland*](https://www.theguardian.com/uk/scotland) (NLS) in the days after the ***invasion*** of Ukraine.

"Do we know if the Blavatnik money has been paid for the Honresfield yet?" a senior official at the NLS wrote to the chief executive of the library, Amina Shah, on 28 February.

The official, the NLS director of business support, Anthony Gillespie, added:

Blavatnik is a longtime friend and business partner of Ukrainian-born Russian oligarch Viktor Vekselberg, one of Russia's richest men, who is close to the Russian president, Vladimir Putin, and some other Russian-associated oligarchs under western sanctions for support of totalitarian regimes and criminal activities.

The NLS has since responded that Gillespie's query to Shah "was of a procedural nature regarding whether there was a risk to the sale going through during a time when sanctions were being considered by the UK and other governments". There is no suggestion Blavatnik is actively being considered for sanction.

Blavatnik's name has become a near-omnipresent fixture at major British cultural sites as a result of his philanthropy.

After he made a £50m donation towards the new extension at Tate Modern, it was [*renamed the Blavatnik Building in 2017*](https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2017/may/04/tate-modern-names-extension-after-oligarch-donor-len-blavatnik).

But his philanthropy has not gone without comment. Criticism has often followed his donations, especially when it involves institutions naming buildings after him.

Read the full story here:

Related: [*Questions raised about UK arts donations of Leonard Blavatnik*](https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2022/may/16/questions-raised-about-uk-arts-donations-of-leonard-blavatnik)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.40pm BST

block-time published-time 4.07pm BST

Full story: Russia shells frontline positions as fighting focuses on Donbas city

Russian forces have shelled frontline positions in Ukraine's eastern Donbas area as fighting becomes increasingly focused on Severodonetsk, the easternmost city still held by Ukrainian forces after more than 11 weeks of war.

Serhiy Haidai, the governor of the Luhansk region, of which Severodonetsk is part, said on Monday that Russian strikes had hit a hospital in the city over the weekend, killing two and injuring nine, including a child, and that several other locations had been targeted.

Ukrainian forces repelled 17 attacks on Sunday, he said, and destroyed 11 Russian armoured vehicles. The air force command said Ukrainians downed two helicopters, two cruise missiles and seven drones.

The Russians are gradually mounting an assault on Severodonetsk, an industrial city that had a population of 100,000 before the war, as the effort to complete a wider encirclement of Ukraine's defending forces in the Donbas appears to have failed.

Overnight, the US Institute for the Study of War said it believed "Russian forces have likely abandoned the objective of completing a large-scale encirclement of Ukrainian units from Donetsk City to Izium" in favour of capturing the remainder of the Luhansk region.

A smaller-scale encirclement of Severodonetsk also failed last week after Russian forces were defeated with heavy losses in [*a series of unsuccessful attempts*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/may/13/ukraine-has-repelled-russias-attempt-to-cross-donbas-river-uk-confirms) to cross the Siverskyi Donets River at Bilohorivka. The river is increasingly becoming a dividing line between the two sides in the Donbas - the name given collectively to the Donetsk and Luhansk regions - and around Kharkiv to the north.

Read the full story here:

Related: [*Russia shells frontline positions as fighting focuses on Donbas city*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/may/16/russians-and-ukrainians-battle-around-izium-as-sweden-joins-finland-in-nato-bid)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.20pm BST

block-time published-time 4.04pm BST

The Ukrainian president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, said on Monday he had discussed the need for financial support for Ukraine's economy with the International Monetary Fund's managing director, Kristalina Georgieva.

Zelenskiy wrote on Twitter:

The IMF is our important partner. We look forward to further fruitful joint work in maintaining financial stability of Ukraine.

enltrContinued the dialogue with IMF Managing Director [*@KGeorgieva*](https://twitter.com/KGeorgieva?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw). Discussed the need for financial support of ???? economy. The IMF is our important partner. We look forward to further fruitful joint work in maintaining financial stability of ????.

- ????????? ?????????? (@ZelenskyyUa) [*May 16, 2022*](https://twitter.com/ZelenskyyUa/status/1526211224744124416?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.14pm BST

block-time published-time 4.02pm BST

Ukraine could get loans, grants and possibly the proceeds of seized Russian oligarch property to help pay the multibillion-euro bill of rebuilding its country after the ruinous war launched by Moscow, according to a leaked EU reconstruction plan.

Under the Rebuild Ukraine plan drafted in Brussels, the European Commission spells out that the Ukrainian government would have to take out loans to pay some of the costs of rebuilding destroyed infrastructure. Part of the reconstruction bill would be paid for by EU member states in the form of non-repayable grants to Kyiv.

The commission has also proposed borrowing money on international capital markets to finance loans to Kyiv to fund the "substantial" cost of rebuilding.

If agreed, it would be only the second time in its history that the EU has borrowed money as a collective, rather than as individual member states, following [*the agreement of the landmark 750bn Covid recovery plan in 2020*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jul/20/macron-seeks-end-acrimony-eu-summit-enters-fourth-day).

The idea is floated in a Ukraine relief and reconstruction paper seen by the Guardian that the commission is expected to publish on Wednesday.

However, the amount of the EU's proposed loans to Ukraine is left blank in the document, pending further discussions in Brussels.

Instead, the paper notes that the financial needs "are expected to be substantial" and the reconstruction effort would span more than a decade. It notes estimates that the overall damage caused by Russia runs to hundreds of billions of euros, with more than 100bn damage to physical infrastructure alone.

To pay the bill, the commission proposes a mix of grants and cheap loans for Ukraine. EU member states and non-EU countries could make contributions to Ukraine that would be channelled via the EU reconstruction programme, it is proposed. EU officials also suggest exploring the feasibility of using proceeds of Russian assets seized through sanctions.

Ukraine will need "significant short-term financial relief to sustain basic services", provide humanitarian aid and fix essential infrastructure, the EU document states. To meet these urgent needs, the commission proposes loans at low interest rates with long repayment deadlines.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.13pm BST

block-time published-time 3.43pm BST

Full story: Sweden follows Finland in confirming it will apply to join Nato

The Swedish government has confirmed it intends to apply for membership of Nato, joining neighbouring Finland in a dramatic decision that marks one of the biggest strategic consequences of Russia's ***invasion*** of [*Ukraine*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/ukraine) to date.

"There is a broad majority in Sweden's parliament for [*Sweden*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/sweden) to join Nato," said the prime minister, Magdalena Andersson. "This is the best thing for the security of Sweden and its people. We will inform Nato we want to become a member of the alliance."

Andersson told reporters after a parliamentary debate on Monday that Sweden would be "in a vulnerable position" while the application was ***processed***, but that ministers saw no direct military threat from [*Russia*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/russia) at present. She said she felt "confident there is support for this among the Swedish people".

The [*Finnish government confirmed its intention to join Nato on Sunday*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/may/15/finland-formally-confirms-intention-to-join-nato-russia) , shortly before Andersson's ruling Social Democrats abandoned decades of opposition to back a Swedish bid for membership, making Monday's debate in the Riksdag a formality.

Andersson said Sweden's Nato ambassador would formally hand over Stockholm's request to the alliance headquarters in Brussels "within the next few days", adding that the application would be submitted simultaneously with Finland's.

The opposition Moderate party leader, Ulf Kristersson, told the same press conference that the decision was "historic - not about party politics, but taking joint responsibility for the country's security interests. We will take responsibility jointly for this ***process***."

The decisions by the two governments, both of which have remained neutral or non-aligned since the end of the second world war, drew a sharp initial response from Russia, which described it as a serious mistake with far-reaching consequences.

Read more here:

Related: [*Sweden follows Finland in confirming it will apply to join Nato*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/may/16/russia-finland-sweden-nato-ukraine-war)

block-time published-time 3.37pm BST

The Russian president, Vladimir Putin, attends a meeting of the leaders of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) at the Kremlin in Moscow. Photograph: Alexander Nemenov/AP

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 3.39pm BST

block-time published-time 3.13pm BST

Greenpeace protesters have blocked the entry of a Greek tanker into a southern English port due to its Russian fuel cargo, with police making arrests, the green group said on Monday, drawing condemnation from the British government. Reuters reports:

Britain and the European Union have separately banned Russian-flagged vessels from their ports, with exemptions, following Russia's ***invasion*** of Ukraine which the Kremlin describes as a "special military operation".

The United Kingdom has said it will phase out imports of Russian oil by the end of the year, which has meant that foreign-flagged vessels carrying Russian cargoes are still able to call at ports for the time being.

Greenpeace said 12 activists occupied a jetty on Sunday evening in Navigator Terminals' Thames site in Essex, where the Greek-flagged Andromeda oil products tanker was expected to discharge its cargo.

"Ministers have kicked a ban on Russian oil imports to the end of the year despite strong public support for it," said Georgia Whitaker, oil and gas campaigner with Greenpeace UK.

A British government spokesperson said: "There is absolutely no excuse for Greenpeace\*s disruptive actions, which are wholly unacceptable."

In recent weeks, a number of ships carrying Russian cargoes have changed course after protests at both UK and EU ports.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 3.26pm BST

block-time published-time 3.09pm BST

The European Union and the United States have agreed closer cooperation to counter disrupted supply of commodities and food caused by Russia's ***invasion*** of Ukraine and to combat disinformation from Moscow. Reuters reports:

EU and US officials convened at Paris-Saclay University on the outskirts of the French capital for the second trade and technology council, a forum initially seen as a transatlantic counterweight to China, but now also with a clear focus on Russia.

In a joint statement, the two allies said they would work to reduce over-reliance on certain trading partners for ***agricultural*** commodities and inputs to increase resilience of global food production.

Reduced grain shipments from Ukraine have led to price spikes, exacerbated now by India suspending wheat exports.

The European Union and the United States also condemned the Russian government's undermining of freedom of expression, saying it had "repeatedly used the veil of disinformation" to obscure war crimes.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 3.10pm BST

block-time published-time 2.59pm BST

The Ukrainian foreign minister, Dmytro Kuleba, has ruled out potential concessions to Russia that could lead to a ceasefire in the war and said the European Union faces "moral failure" if it doesn't approve the nation's candidacy for membership by June.

Speaking to [*Bloomberg Television in an interview*](https://www.bloomberg.com/news/videos/2022-05-16/ask-russia-about-ceasefire-terms-not-ukraine-fm-kuleba-video) in Brussels on Monday, Kuleba declined to comment on whether the French president, Emmanuel Macron, urged his Ukrainian counterpart, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, to accept Kremlin demands if it meant achieving peace. But he dismissed any push to make an offer to Vladimir Putin in exchange for ending his ***invasion*** of Ukraine.

Kuleba said:

Looking for face-saving options for Putin is simply a false approach.

Let Putin himself find a face-saving option.

Ukraine's ambition remained to restore full territorial integrity, Kuleba said. That would include areas of the eastern Donbas region controlled by Russian-backed forces before the ***invasion*** as well as the Crimean peninsula seized by Russia in 2014. The foreign minister, in Brussels to meet EU counterparts, expressed confidence that Ukraine would eventually win the war against Russia. "We want everything that belongs to us to be ours," he said.

The diplomat also pushed wavering EU leaders on Ukraine's bid to secure candidacy status next month, saying public opinion in the 27-member bloc was moving in his country's favour and that this would send a message that the country was "one of us". Some EU leaders have expressed concern that a fast-track route to membership could create false expectations for Kyiv. Asked about the prospect of Ukraine's candidacy being rejected, he said:

It will be a moral failure, which will be judged by history. In between candidacy and membership, there is a long ***process*** of accession talks, reforms, transitions - many, many things can happen and they can be blocked at any stage.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 3.29pm BST

block-time published-time 2.43pm BST

Norway, Denmark and Iceland have issued a joint statement offering their support to Finland and Sweden in case the two Nordic nations were to come under attack during their Nato applications.

Norway's prime minister, Jonas Gahr Støre, said:

Together with Denmark and Iceland, Norway stands ready to assist its Nordic neighbours by all means necessary should they be the victim of aggression on their territory before obtaining Nato membership.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 3.30pm BST

block-time published-time 2.37pm BST

There are some lines from Reuters on European responses to Finland and Sweden's decision to join Nato, and Russia's tense reaction.

The Élysée presidential office says that France's president, Emmanuel Macron, fully supports Sweden's decision.The Danish prime ministry also welcomes Sweden and Finland's decision and that Nordic Nato members, Iceland, Denmark and Norway are ready to support Sweden and Finland if they come under attack, by any means necessary. Preparations are now under way to be able to fulfil these assurances.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 3.32pm BST

block-time published-time 1.50pm BST

Speaking to the leaders of a Russian-dominated military alliance of former Soviet states, Vladimir Putin said the enlargement of Nato was being used by the United States in an "aggressive" way to aggravate an already difficult global security situation.

Russia, Putin said, had no problem with Finland or Sweden, so there was no direct threat from Nato enlargement which included those countries, Reuters reports.

Putin told the leaders of the Collective Security Treaty Organization, which includes Belarus, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan:

But the expansion of military infrastructure into this territory would certainly provoke our response.

What that (response) will be - we will see what threats are created for us.

Problems are being created for no reason at all. We shall react accordingly.

Russia has given few specific clues about what it will do in response to the Nordic enlargement of Nato, the biggest strategic consequence of Russia's ***invasion*** of Ukraine to date.

One of Putin's closest allies, former president Dmitry Medvedev, said last month that Russia could deploy nuclear weapons and hypersonic missiles in the Russian exclave of Kaliningrad if Finland and Sweden joined Nato.

Nato, founded in 1949 to provide European security against the Soviet Union, ultimately outguns Russia in almost every military ***measure*** apart from nuclear weapons, though the backbone of the alliance's military power is the US - whose forces are mostly deployed far from Europe

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.59pm BST

block-time published-time 1.26pm BST

China on Monday gave a vague response to Finland's accession into Nato, saying the move would inject a "new factor" into Chinese-Finnish relations.

Zhao Lijian, said at a regular press briefing:

China has noticed Finland's proposal to join the Nato. Sino-Finnish relationship has always been friendly. Finland's application to join the Nato will of course add new factor in the bilateral relations.

Zhao did not elaborate what he meant by "new factor". But when pushed by a Finnish journalist to say more, Zhao added that China has been "very clear on Nato and Nato's eastward expansion". Beijing has consistently criticised Nato in recent years.

China's Global Times, [*in a separate editorial*](https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202205/1265536.shtml) , last week warned that Nato's expansion "risks turning Europe into a new powder keg".

Citing analysis, it wrote:

The move will result in, most directly, a boom in Nato's power, forming a new acute challenge to Europe's security order.

The sound of disapproval is almost audible in Beijing. Russia's state-owned news agency, Tass, last week spoke to [*Zhang Guoqing*](https://tass.com/world/1450699?utm_source=google.com&utm_medium=organic&utm_campaign=google.com&utm_referrer=google.com) , a research fellow of the Institute of American Studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. Zhang warned that Finland and Sweden's move would "fuel tensions in region".

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.54pm BST

block-time published-time 1.19pm BST

Putin warns Finland and Sweden any military expansion 'would demand a reaction'

Vladimir Putin said Russia had no issue with Finland and Sweden, but that the expansion of military infrastructure on their territory would demand a reaction from Moscow, as the Nordic countries move closer to joining Nato.

Putin, speaking in Moscow at a summit of the Russian-led Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO), said Nato's expansion was a problem for Russia and that it must look closely at what he said were the US-led military alliance's plans to increase its global influence.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.23pm BST

block-time published-time 12.52pm BST

The Belarusian leader Alexander Lukashenko has urged other members of a Russian-dominated military alliance to stand united, and accused the west of hoping to prolong the conflict in Ukraine to try to weaken Russia as much as possible, Reuters reports.

Lukashenko, speaking at a summit of the leaders of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) in Moscow, said "hellish sanctions" against his country and Russia could have been avoided if the group had spoken with one voice.

Addressing the Russian president, Vladimir Putin, and the leaders of Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, Lukashenko said in televised opening remarks:

Without a united front, the collective west will build up pressure on the post-Soviet space.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.55pm BST

block-time published-time 12.49pm BST

McDonald's has initiated a ***process*** to sell its business in Russia after 30 years of operating its restaurants there, after Moscow's ***invasion*** of [*Ukraine*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/ukraine).

In March, McDonald's [*closed its 850 restaurants in Russia*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/08/mcdonalds-bows-to-pressure-and-closes-all-its-russian-restaurants) including its site in Pushkin Square in the capital, which was the first in the country.

The Chicago-based company owns 84% of its restaurants in [*Russia*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/russia) , and has said its restaurants there and in Ukraine contributed 9% of its annual revenue, or around $2bn (£1.6bn).

As part of the exit, the company expects to record a non-cash charge of between $1.2bn (£980m) and $1.4bn.

More to follow here:

Related: [*McDonald's to sell its business in Russia after 30 years*](https://www.theguardian.com/business/2022/may/16/mcdonalds-to-sell-russia-business--invasion-ukraine)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.57pm BST

block-time published-time 12.20pm BST

The European Commission is set to propose a new package of financial aid to Ukraine on Wednesday, including new loans to provide immediate liquidity to Kyiv and commitments for the long-term financing of the country's reconstruction, officials said.

The size of the short-term financial support is still being defined but two officials familiar with the discussions told Reuters they expected it to roughly cover Ukraine's financial needs for two months, largely through loans, Reuters reports.

A third official said the money would come from the EU budget and from EU governments, dismissing earlier talk that the funds could be raised in the market with the issuance of joint bonds backed by the EU budget.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) estimated in April that Ukraine needed around $5bn a month for at least three months to plug the immediate financial shortfall caused by Russia's ***invasion***.

The fund's chief, Kristalina Georgieva, has called for this support to come in the form of grants rather than loans.

The scale of EU support will depend also on how much G7 countries are willing to contribute. A meeting of finance ministers of the Group of Seven major economies is scheduled in the second half of this week, just after the commission is expected to unveil its proposals.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.47pm BST

block-time published-time 11.58am BST

McDonald's to exit Russia and sell its portfolio of restaurants in the country

American fast-food giant McDonald's will exit the Russian market and sell its business in the increasingly isolated country, the company said on Monday.

Many western businesses have pulled out of Russia since its ***invasion*** of Ukraine in February.

Earlier on Monday, the French automaker Renault announced it had handed over its Russian assets to the government in Moscow, marking the first major nationalisation of the economic disentanglement.

McDonald's closed all of its 850 restaurants in the country, where it says it employs 62,000 people, in March.

But the company decided to take a step further, saying in a statement:

After more than 30 years of operations in the country, McDonald's Corporation announced it will exit the Russian market and has initiated a ***process*** to sell its Russian business.

The humanitarian crisis caused by the war in Ukraine, and the precipitating unpredictable operating environment, have led McDonald's to conclude that continued ownership of the business in Russia is no longer tenable, nor is it consistent with McDonald's values.

It said it was looking to sell "its entire portfolio of McDonald's restaurants in Russia to a local buyer".

The company added that after the sale, the restaurants would no longer be able to use the McDonald's name, logo, branding or menu.

Russia, where McDonald's directly manages more than 80% of the restaurants bearing its name, accounts for 9% of the company's revenue and 3% of its operating profit.

The McDonald's chief executive, Chris Kempczinski, said in a statement:

We're ***exceptionally*** proud of the 62,000 employees who work in our restaurants, along with the hundreds of Russian suppliers who support our business, and our local franchisees. Their dedication and loyalty to McDonald's make today's announcement extremely difficult.

However, we have a commitment to our global community and must remain steadfast in our values. And our commitment to our values means that we can no longer keep the Arches shining there.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.14pm BST

block-time published-time 11.55am BST

Hungary has been accused of "holding the EU hostage" over its refusal to agree an oil embargo against Russia, as the bloc struggles to reach consensus on its latest sanctions aimed at eroding the Kremlin's ability to wage war.

Lithuania's foreign minister, Gabrielius Landsbergis, said:

Unfortunately the whole union is being held hostage by one member state.

He was referring to Hungary, which continues to block the oil embargo, despite being offered an extension on phasing out Russian crude until the end of 2024.

"Everybody expected this will be enough," Landsbergis told reporters, reflecting the widespread view that Budapest would fall into line if it got more time to convert its energy system to accommodate non-Russian oil.

The EU's top diplomat, Josep Borrell, said there were no guarantees the issue would be resolved at a meeting of EU foreign ministers on Monday.

He said:

We will do our best to unblock the situation. I cannot ensure this is going to happen because positions are quite strong.

Johanna Sumuvuori, Finland's junior foreign minister, who said she would update her counterparts on Helsinki's bid to join Nato, said on the oil ban:

It's very important to do our utmost, so that we can make a strong statement as an EU.

block-time published-time 11.46am BST

Full story: Russia warns Finland and Sweden joining Nato would be 'grave mistake'

Russia has told [*Finland*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/finland) and Sweden that their decision to join the Nato military alliance is a serious mistake with far-reaching consequences and that they should not assume that Moscow will not respond.

The [*Finnish government on Sunday*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/may/15/finland-formally-confirms-intention-to-join-nato-russia) confirmed its intention to join Nato while Sweden's ruling party [*agreed to drop its longstanding opposition*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/may/15/finland-formally-confirms-intention-to-join-nato-russia) to the idea, paving the way for a joint membership application within days.

The decisions by the two governments, both of which have remained neutral or non-aligned since the end of the second world war, herald a historic redrawing of Europe's security map prompted by Russia's ***invasion*** of [*Ukraine*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/ukraine) on 24 February.

"The situation is, of course, changing radically in light of what is happening," Russia's deputy foreign minister, Sergei Ryabkov, said on Monday. "The fact that Finland and Sweden's security will not be strengthened as a result of this is very clear to us."

Ryabkov added that the two Nordic nations "should have no illusions that we will simply put up with it", warning that the move was "another grave mistake with far-reaching consequences" and the "general level of military tension will increase".

Russia has repeatedly warned both countries against joining Nato, saying such a move would oblige it to [*"restore military balance"*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/25/sweden-and-finland-agree-to-submit-nato-applications) by strengthening its defences in the Baltic Sea region, including by deploying nuclear weapons.

Finland shares an 810-mile (1,300km) land border with Russia and [*Sweden*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/sweden) a maritime border. Both countries have for decades considered that joining the 30-member, US-led Nato alliance would represent an unnecessary provocation of Moscow.

However, Putin's ***invasion*** of Ukraine on 24 February has led to a profound change in Nordic thinking, with public support for [*Nato*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/nato) accession in Finland more than trebling to about 75% and rising to between 50% and 60% in Sweden.

The Swedish and Finnish parliaments on Monday began debating the issue, with the session in Helsinki likely to last several days. While 85% of Finland's 200 MPs back membership, 150 have requested to speak and a vote was not expected on Monday.

"Our security environment has fundamentally changed," the prime minister, Sanna Marin, told parliament as she opened the debate on Monday. "The only country that threatens European security, and is now openly waging a war of aggression, is Russia."

Read the full story from my colleagues Jon Henley and Jennifer Rankin here:

Related: [*Russia warns Finland and Sweden joining Nato would be 'grave mistake'*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/may/16/russia-finland-sweden-nato-ukraine-war)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 11.46am BST

block-time published-time 11.13am BST

Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov has said Russia was closely following Finland and Sweden's bids to join the US-led Nato military alliance, and was convinced that their accession would in no way strengthen Europe's security architecture, Reuters reports.

Earlier today, Russian deputy foreign minister Sergei Ryabkov was quoted as saying the west should not think Moscow would simply put up with the expansion of Nato, casting it as a mistake that would stoke military tension.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 11.15am BST

block-time published-time 11.04am BST

Summary

Here are the main developments in the Ukraine conflict from the past few hours:

[*Ukrainian officials claimed*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2022/may/16/russia-ukraine-war-latest-news-swedish-pm-to-seek-parliaments-support-for-joining-nato-live?page=with:block-628217ad8f08e6ce3a77fe4d#block-628217ad8f08e6ce3a77fe4d) that Ukrainian troops counter-attacking against Russian forces in the country's north-east had pushed them back from the city of Kharkiv and advanced as far as the border with [*Russia*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/russia). [*Russia said*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2022/may/16/russia-ukraine-war-latest-news-swedish-pm-to-seek-parliaments-support-for-joining-nato-live?page=with:block-628210418f08493b6168da63#block-628210418f08493b6168da63) its forces had shot down three fighter jets.Ahead of an EU meeting, foreign ministers sought to publicly pressure Hungary to [*lift its veto*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2022/may/16/russia-ukraine-war-latest-news-swedish-pm-to-seek-parliaments-support-for-joining-nato-live?page=with:block-628213af8f08e6ce3a77fe2c#block-628213af8f08e6ce3a77fe2c) on a proposed oil embargo on Russia and [*confirmed that a sixth package*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2022/may/16/russia-ukraine-war-latest-news-swedish-pm-to-seek-parliaments-support-for-joining-nato-live?page=with:block-628200f38f08493b6168d9dd#block-628200f38f08493b6168d9dd) of sanctions would arrive shortly. After Sweden and Finland yesterday confirmed plans to join Nato, Sweden is seeking to quell Turkish opposition by [*sending diplomats to the country*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2022/may/16/russia-ukraine-war-latest-news-swedish-pm-to-seek-parliaments-support-for-joining-nato-live?page=with:block-6281fda28f08e6ce3a77fd7b#block-6281fda28f08e6ce3a77fd7b). Meanwhile, [*Russia branded the move*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2022/may/16/russia-ukraine-war-latest-news-swedish-pm-to-seek-parliaments-support-for-joining-nato-live?page=with:block-628219978f08e6ce3a77fe63#block-628219978f08e6ce3a77fe63) a [*mistake with far-reaching consequences*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2022/may/16/russia-ukraine-war-latest-news-swedish-pm-to-seek-parliaments-support-for-joining-nato-live?page=with:block-6281f45c8f083b856379b592#block-6281f45c8f083b856379b592). Estonia [*welcomed the decision*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2022/may/16/russia-ukraine-war-latest-news-swedish-pm-to-seek-parliaments-support-for-joining-nato-live?page=with:block-6281ed288f08493b6168d94a#block-6281ed288f08493b6168d94a) as a boon for Nordic nations' security.

Thanks for following, I'm handing over the blog to my colleague Nicola Slawson for the rest of the day.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 11.23am BST

block-time published-time 10.57am BST

Ukraine and Japan have signed an agreement on a $100m (£82m) loan intended primarily to help support vulnerable people in Ukraine following Russia's ***invasion***, the Ukrainian finance ministry said on Monday. It said the loan was for 30 years and included a grace period of 10 years.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 11.15am BST

block-time published-time 10.32am BST

Reuters has some quotes from Russia's deputy foreign minister, Sergei Ryabkov, on Russia's response to the Nordic Nato expansion: Ryabkov told the state RIA news agency:

They should have no illusions that we will simply put up with it - and nor should Brussels, Washington and other Nato capitals.

The general level of military tension will rise, predictability in this sphere will decrease. It is a shame that common sense is being sacrificed to some phantom provision about what should be done in this unfolding situation.

Russia has given few clues about what it will do in response to the Nordic enlargement of Nato, saying merely that there would be a "military-technical response". One of Putin's closest allies said last month that Russia could deploy nuclear weapons and hypersonic missiles in the Russian exclave of Kaliningrad if Finland and Sweden joined Nato.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 10.50am BST

block-time published-time 10.25am BST

Some analysis from Reuters on Ukrainian officials' claim that Ukrainian troops counterattacking against Russian forces in the country's north-east have pushed them back from the city of Kharkiv and advanced as far as the border with Russia. Reuters reports:

The developments, if confirmed, would signal a further shift in momentum in favour of Ukrainian forces nearly three months into a conflict that began when Russia sent tens of thousands of troops over the border into Ukraine on 24 February.

Fighting was reported near Kharkiv, Ukraine's second-largest city, on Monday in what interior ministry adviser Vadym Denisenko said was "our counter-offensive".

"It can no longer be stopped ...Thanks to this, we can go to the rear of the Russian group of forces," he said. Kharkiv, lying about 30 miles (50km) from the border with Russia, had endured weeks of heavy bombardments from Russian artillery. The Russians' routing from there follows their failure to capture the capital Kyiv in the early stages of the war.

Ukraine's defence ministry said on Monday the 227th Battalion of the 127th Brigade of Ukraine's Territorial Defence Forces had reached the border with Russia

"Together to victory!" it said.

Kharkiv region governor Oleh Sinegubov said the troops had restored a sign on the border.

"We thank everyone who, risking their lives, liberates Ukraine from Russian invaders," Sinegubov said. Reuters could not immediately verify Ukraine's battlefield account and it was not clear how many troops had reached the Russian border or where.

If confirmed, it would suggest a Ukrainian counter-offensive is having increasing success in pushing back Russian forces in the north-east after western military agencies said Moscow's offensive in two eastern provinces known as the Donbas had stalled.

Nonetheless, the governor of the Luhansk region in Donbas, Serhiy Gaidai, said the situation "remains difficult", with Russian forces trying to capture the town of Sieverodonetsk.

He said leaders of the Lugansk People's Republic, the territory in Luhansk controlled by Russian-backed separatists, declared a general mobilisation, adding it was "either fight or get shot, there is no other choice".

In the south, fighting was raging around the city of Kherson and Russian missiles struck residential areas of Mykolayiv, the presidential office in Kyiv said. Reuters was unable to verify the reports.

Nato secretary general Jens Stoltenberg said on Sunday Ukraine could win the war, an outcome few military analysts predicted when Russia invaded Ukraine.

Updated at 10.52am BST

10.07am BST

EU foreign ministers sought to publicly pressure Hungary to lift its veto on a proposed oil embargo on Russia, with Lithuania saying the bloc was being "held hostage by one member state". Reuters reports:

The embargo proposed by the European Commission in early May would be the harshest sanction yet and includes carve-outs for EU states most dependent on Russian oil.

But Hungary, Moscow's closest ally in the EU, has said it wants hundreds of millions of euros from the bloc to mitigate the cost of ditching Russian crude. The EU needs all 27 states to agree to the embargo for it to go ahead.

Hungarian foreign minister Peter Szijjarto said on his Facebook page on 11 May that there was no solution in sight.

However, EU ministers ranging from Austria to Estonia said there would still be an oil embargo, even if it took longer to come to an agreement.

An oil embargo, already imposed by the United States and Britain and which would follow five rounds of earlier EU sanctions, is seen as the best way to reduce Russian income for its war in Ukraine.

The EU's foreign policy chief, Josep Borrell, last week signalled that Monday's meeting might have been the moment for a breakthrough. On Monday, he said he was doing his utmost to unblock the situation.

Some diplomats now point to a 30-31May summit as the moment for agreement on a phased ban on Russian oil, probably over six months, with a longer transition period for Hungary, Slovakia and the Czech Republic.

Updated at 10.20am BST

9.51am BST

Russia has said its forces shot down three Ukrainian fighter jets, one near Snake Island in the Black Sea and the others in the Mykolaiv and Kharkiv regions, while its missiles continued to pound targets in the east of the country. Reuters reports:

Russia's defence ministry said its forces shot down Su-25 aircraft near the settlements of Yevhenivka in the Mykolaiv region and Velyka Komyshuvakha in Kharkiv, and a Su-24 near Snake Island, which achieved worldwide fame in the conflict's first hours when Ukrainian border guards stationed there rejected a Russian warship's demand for their surrender.

High-precision Russian missiles hit two command posts in Ukraine's Kharkiv region, the ministry said, and also struck other targets including weapons depots and places where Ukrainian troops and equipment were concentrated.

The ministry said it made similar strikes in the pro-Russian self-proclaimed republics of Donetsk and Luhansk, also taking out drones.

The reports from the Russian defence ministry could not be independently confirmed.

9.44am BST

A tweet in Ukrainian from Hromadske Radio, meaning public radio in Ukrainian, quotes the head of the Sumy region, Dmytro Zhyvytskyi, as saying:

Russian fighters tried to break through the border into the territory of Sumy region. The enemy opened fire on the border area with mortars, grenade launchers, machine guns and submachine guns. Border guards battled with the Russians, who retreated beyond the border.

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- ?????????? ????? (@HromadskeRadio) [*May 16, 2022*](https://twitter.com/HromadskeRadio/status/1526120147307700225?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

9.40am BST

The Kastus Kalinouski Battalion, comprising Belarusian volunteers fighting for Ukraine, has suffered its third loss, according to a tweet from Nexta, a Belarussian news channel.

Next quotes a tweet from the battalion, which said:

Today our Battalion suffered a huge loss. During the liberation of the Ukrainian village from Russian occupation, the commander of the detachment, a soldier of our Battalion Pavel "Volat", was mortally wounded. He was taken to the hospital in critical condition, but it was [too] late.

The Kastus Kalinouski Battalion, consisting of [*#Belarusian*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/Belarusian?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) volunteers fighting for [*#Ukraine*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/Ukraine?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) , suffered its third loss. In March two other members of the Battalion, Aliaksiej Skoblia and Dzmitry Apanasovich, were killed by [*#Russian*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/Russian?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) occupation forces. [*https://t.co/6DOsQuldUx*](https://t.co/6DOsQuldUx)

- NEXTA (@nexta\_tv) [*May 16, 2022*](https://twitter.com/nexta_tv/status/1526112657392029696?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

Updated at 9.46am BST

9.20am BST

A missile strike by Russian strategic aircraft in the Odesa region has damaged the region's tourist infrastructure and injured two adults and a child, Interfax news agency in Ukraine reports. The report cites Odesa city council's Telegram channel as its source. The message reads:

The enemy continues to attack the damaged and non-functioning bridge across the Dniester estuary. But it hits civilians. Previously, two adults were injured and a small child was seriously injured. Other information is being clarified.

Updated at 9.47am BST

9.14am BST

Many forgotten women in Ukraine are living alone in dire conditions or are unable to care for themselves, and are among those least able to escape, writes Angelina Kariakina in Kyiv and Luba Kassova.

Related: [*Alone under siege: how older women are being left behind in Ukraine*](https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2022/may/16/alone-under-siege-how-older-women-are-being-left-behind-in-ukraine)

8.49am BST

The Institute for the Study of War in the US has some analysis on Russia's movements in Ukraine. Forces have probably abandoned the objective to encircle Ukrainian units in Donetsk and Izium, and are shifting focus to completing the seizure of Luhansk province, the institute writes.

[*#Russian*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/Russian?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) forces have likely abandoned the objective of completing a large-scale encirclement of [*#Ukrainian*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/Ukrainian?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) units from [*#Donetsk*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/Donetsk?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) City to [*#Izyum*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/Izyum?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) in favor of completing the seizure of [*#Luhansk*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/Luhansk?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) Oblast. Read the full report and see the maps: [*https://t.co/Sd8HoGtJhD*](https://t.co/Sd8HoGtJhD) [*pic.twitter.com/3ocYqX2B0O*](https://t.co/3ocYqX2B0O)

- ISW (@TheStudyofWar) [*May 16, 2022*](https://twitter.com/TheStudyofWar/status/1525994936012783618?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

The report adds:

Russian forces have likely run out of combat-ready reservists, forcing the Russian military command to amalgamate soldiers from many different elements, including private military companies and proxy militias, into ostensibly regular army units and naval infantry.

Russian forces are likely fortifying occupied settlements in southern Ukraine, indicating that the Russians are seeking to establish permanent control in the region.

Updated at 9.47am BST

8.45am BST

The EU will impose a sixth sanctions package on Russia, but the bloc will need more time to find agreement.

Luxembourg's foreign minister, Jean Asselborn, told reporters on Monday ahead of a meeting with his counterparts in Brussels.

There really is no excuse not to get the package done.

Meanwhile, Austria's foreign minister, Alexander Schallenberg, said:

I am confident that we will manage to get the sixth sanctions package done in the next days.

It is clear that there still is a certain need for discussion but I believe we should aim to have these discussions where they belong, at the council, in order not give an image of disaccord in public. Russia is watching us.

Updated at 9.48am BST

8.33am BST

Sweden is sending diplomats to Turkey to try to overcome Ankara's objections to its plan to join Nato, defence minister Peter Hultqvist has said. Turkey has surprised its Nato allies by saying it would not view applications by Finland and Sweden positively, with President Tayyip Erdogan saying: "Scandinavian countries are guesthouses for terrorist organisations."

Defence minister Peter Hultqvist told public service broadcaster SVT:

We will send a group of diplomats to hold discussions and have a dialogue with Turkey so we can see how this can be resolved and what this is really about.

Turkey said it wanted the Nordic countries to halt support for Kurdish militant groups present on their territory, and lift bans on sales of some weapons to Turkey. Nato and the US said they were confident Turkey would not hold up membership of Finland and Sweden. Any decision on Nato enlargement requires approval by all 30 members of the alliance and their parliaments, but diplomats said Erdogan would be under pressure to yield as Finland and Sweden would greatly strengthen Nato in the Baltic Sea.

Sweden's parliament will hold a debate on its membership application on Monday, a formality as there is already a broad majority in favour. The government will take the formal decision to apply later in the day, Hultqvist said.

Updated at 8.42am BST

8.20am BST

Turkey must maintain a delicate diplomatic balance following Russia's ***invasion*** of Ukraine so that it remains able to help facilitate an eventual negotiated end to the war, President Tayyip Erdogan's spokesperson said in an interview.

Ibrahim Kalin, who is also Erdogan's chief foreign policy adviser, said that while Ankara has criticised Moscow's ***invasion*** and actions on the battlefield it would do no good to take a more punitive stance against Russia.

Nato member Turkey, a Black Sea neighbour of both Russia and Ukraine, has good ties with both and has opposed western sanctions on Moscow. It has seen tens of thousands of Russians - and some oligarchs' sanctioned yachts - arrive since war began. Yet it has also supplied Kyiv with armed drones and blocked some Russian naval passage to the Black Sea, and stands alone as having hosted talks between the Russian and Ukrainian foreign ministers and separately between their teams. "We have opposed this war from the beginning" but also maintained contact with Moscow, Kalin said at the weekend. Kalin told Reuters:

They need someone - a trusted partner, negotiator, facilitator, moderator - someone in some position to be able to speak to the Russian side as well as to the Ukrainian side.

We have been able to maintain this position since the beginning of the war and I think it is really in everybody's shared interest that everybody maintains a balanced position.

Updated at 8.28am BST

7.54am BST

There are some lines from Russia's foreign ministry coming out on Sweden and Finland's decision to join Nato, which is one of today's big stories.

The deputy foreign minister, Sergei Ryabko, said the decision was a mistake with far-reaching consequences, which will radically change the global situation. The Guardian's full report on the Nordic nations' decision, which represents a radical shift in foreign policy, is here:

Related: [*Finland and Sweden confirm intention to join Nato*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/may/15/finland-formally-confirms-intention-to-join-nato-russia)

Updated at 8.13am BST

7.34am BST

Ukraine's Kharkiv governor says Ukrainian troops have reached Russian border

The governor of Ukraine's Kharkiv region has said that Ukrainian troops defending Kharkiv have reached the state border with Russia. Reuters said it could not independently verify the comments made by Kharkiv region governor Oleh Sinegubov on the Telegram messaging service. It was not immediately clear how many troops had reached the Russian border and where.

Kharkiv region governor Oleh Sinegubov wrote on the Telegram messaging app that troops of the 227th Battalion had restored a sign on the state border.

"We thank everyone who, risking their lives, liberates Ukraine from Russian invaders," Sinegubov said.

If confirmed, it would suggest a Ukrainian counter-offensive is having increasing success in pushing back Russian forces in the northeast after Western military agencies said Moscow's offensive in the Donbas region had stalled.

Ukraine has been retaking territory in its north-east, driving Russian forces away from Kharkiv, the second-largest Ukrainian city.

Ukraine's defence ministry said in a Facebook post that the 227th Battalion of the 127th Brigade of Ukraine's armed forces had reached the border with Russia, adding: "Together to victory!"

Updated at 8.30am BST

7.21am BST

Estonia's foreign minister has said that Sweden and Finland joining Nato would increase the security of the Baltic region. Eva-Maria Liimets told Reuters ahead of a Nato meeting in Berlin:

When we see that in our neighbourhood also other democratic countries belong to Nato, it would mean that we could have broader joint exercises and also ... more defence cooperation.

We have seen some differences, but we have also seen a willingness of those countries to overcome the differences.

Liimets said she hoped Sweden, Finland and Turkey would overcome differences on the Nordic states joining the alliance, adding that the Berlin meeting atmosphere was very supportive.

Estonia appreciates Nato enforcing its presence in the Baltic region but would like the allies to move from enhancing their presence to enhancing their defence. "It would mean that we would have more robust presence of land forces, but also air and maritime defence," she added. Sweden and Finland's decision to join Nato has been promoted by Russia's ***invasion*** of Ukraine. Finland shares a 1,300km land border with Russia, while Sweden shares a maritime border.

Rachel Hall here taking over the blog for the morning. Please do send over any thoughts or tips to [*rachel.hall@theguardian.com*](mailto:%20rachel.hall@theguardian.com).

Updated at 7.38am BST

7.03am BST

I'll hand over now to my UK-based colleague Rachel Hall, who will take you through the rest of the day.

6.51am BST

Large-scale Nato drills, in planning months before the Russian ***invasion*** of Ukraine, are scheduled to begin in Estonia today.

One of the largest drills, codenamed Hedgehog, will take place in Estonia and involve 15,000 troops from 14 countries. It's one of the largest military drills in the country since 1991.

There is also operation "Defender Europe" and "Swift Response", which will involve 18,000 troops from 20 countries, and will take place in Poland and eight other countries.

In Lithuania, another drill codenamed Iron Wolf will involve 3,000 allied troops and 1,00 vehicles.

Nato spokesperson Oana Lungescu [*said on Friday*](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_195250.htm) :

Exercises like these show that Nato stands strong and ready to protect our nations and defend against any threat.

These are regular exercises, planned well before Russia's brutal and unjustified ***invasion*** of Ukraine, but they help to remove any room for miscalculation or misunderstanding about our resolve to protect and defend every inch of allied territory. Nato exercises are defensive, transparent, and in line with our international commitments.

Updated at 6.56am BST

6.38am BST

Global wheat prices have risen to their highest level in two months after [*India banned the export of the crop*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/may/14/india-bans-all-wheat-exports-food-security-risk).

India, the second largest producer of wheat in the world, announced the ban on Friday in an effort to control rising domestic prices, after a heatwave affected the local crop.

A notice in the government gazette by the directorate of foreign trade that a rise in global prices for wheat was threatening the food security of India and neighbouring and vulnerable countries.

Wheat prices have soared 60% this year, driven in part by the drop in wheat exports from Ukraine. Ukraine is the sixth biggest exporters of wheat but war has affected the harvest, with [*grain production forecast to be at least a third lower this year.*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/may/06/ukraine-wheat-harvest-may-fall-by-35-percent-satellite-images-suggest)

Updated at 6.57am BST

6.09am BST

More on the Russian push for Donbas, via AFP.

Ukraine was preparing Monday for a new Russian push in the eastern Donbas region, as Kyiv said its army's counterattack around Kharkiv had gained momentum.

Since failing to take the capital at the beginning of the ***invasion*** in late February, control of Donbas has become one of Moscow's primary objectives - but western intelligence has predicted its campaign will stall amid heavy losses and fierce resistance.

"We are preparing for new attempts by Russia to attack in Donbas, to somehow intensify its movement in the south of Ukraine," President Volodymyr Zelensky said in his nightly address.

"The occupiers still do not want to admit that they are in a dead-end and their so-called 'special operation' has already gone bankrupt," he added.

Presidential adviser Oleksiy Arestovich told local television that Russian troops were being transferred in the direction of Donbas after withdrawing from Kharkiv following the Ukrainian counteroffensive.

Kyiv's troops have made so much progress in the northern region that they have almost reached the border with Russia, according to interior ministry adviser Vadim Denisenko, although air raid sirens still sounded in Kharkiv city early Monday.

Arestovich said the retreating Russian forces were being sent towards Lugansk.

"Their task is to take Severodonetsk," he said. "Well, something is not working for them."

Severodonetsk is the easternmost city still held by Ukraine, and its fall would grant the Kremlin de facto control of Lugansk, one of two regions - along with Donetsk - that comprise Donbas.

But Russia's attempt to cross a river to encircle it had been repelled with heavy losses of equipment, according to Lugansk governor Sergiy Gaiday.

To further deter the attack, Russian-occupied railway bridges leading to Severodonetsk were blown up, the Ukrainian army said on its Facebook page late Sunday, posting a video of a huge explosion taken from above.

For its part, Russia's defence ministry claimed it had struck four artillery munitions depots in neighbouring Donetsk.

Air strikes had also destroyed two missile-launching systems and radar, while 15 Ukrainian drones were downed around Donetsk and Lugansk, it added.

Updated at 7.35am BST

5.44am BST

Here is a map via US thinktank the Institute for the Study of War showing Russian advances, particularly around Izium, Konstiantynivka and Donbas.

[*Ukraine map*](https://interactive.guim.co.uk/uploader/embed/2022/05/archive-2-zip/giv-656246GBqHTz4Cnq/)

The institute's latest summary, published on Sunday night, says that Russian forces have " likely abandoned the objective of completing a large-scale encirclement of Ukrainian units from Donetsk City to Izyum in favor of completing the seizure of Luhansk Oblast".

Per [*@TheStudyofWar*](https://twitter.com/TheStudyofWar?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) - "Russian forces have likely abandoned the objective of completing a large-scale encirclement of Ukrainian units from Donetsk City to Izyum in favor of completing the seizure of Luhansk Oblast... Russian forces have likely run out of combat-ready reservists... [*pic.twitter.com/rDiQP8Nvwm*](https://t.co/rDiQP8Nvwm)

- OSINTtechnical (@Osinttechnical) [*May 16, 2022*](https://twitter.com/Osinttechnical/status/1526057124689858560?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

Updated at 6.59am BST

5.27am BST

Russia attacked positions in eastern Ukraine as it tries to encircle Ukrainian forces in the Donbas and fend off a counteroffensive around the city of Izium, Reuters has reported.

The most intense fighting appeared to be around the eastern Russian-held city of Izium, where Russia said it had struck Ukrainian positions with missiles.

Ukraine's Joint Forces Task Force said its troops had repelled 17 attacks on Sunday and destroyed 11 pieces of Russian equipment. The command of Ukraine's air force said Ukrainian forces downed two helicopters, two cruise missiles, and seven drones.

Russia continued to target civilian areas along the entire front line in the Luhansk and Donetsk regions, firing at 23 villages and towns, the task force added.

Reuters was not able to independently confirm the reports. Russia denies targeting civilians.

If Ukraine can sustain pressure on Izium and Russian supply lines, it will be harder for Moscow to encircle Ukrainian troops in the Donbas.

Ukraine's military also acknowledged setbacks, saying Russian forces "continue to advance" in several areas in the Donbas region.

In western Ukraine near Poland, missiles destroyed military infrastructure overnight on Saturday and were fired at the Lviv region from the Black Sea, Ukrainian officials said.

Another 10 civilians were wounded in the southern region of Mykolaiv, the regional council said, without providing details.

There was also no letup on Sunday in Russia's bombardment of the steelworks in the southern port of Mariupol, where a few hundred Ukrainian fighters are holding out weeks after the city fell into Russian hands, the Ukrainian military said.

Brightly burning munitions were shown cascading down on the steel works in a video posted by a pro-Russian separatist commander.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy said "very difficult and delicate negotiations" were going on to save Ukrainians in Mariupol and Azovstal.

In port city, some residents ate and talked outside their burnt out apartment building, which was shelled and caught fire in early April.

"I was in the kitchen when the smoke appeared," one resident named Natalya said. "I started carrying out my belongings, saving what I could."

She said three neighbours had died in the fighting.

"We could not bury them because of the shelling. Each day we've been putting a person into a grave, but we could not cover it up with soil because of the shelling."

5.14am BST

'Russia's war in Ukraine is not going as Moscow had planned', says Nato

Nato secretary-general Jens Stoltenberg said Russia's offensive in Donbas had stalled and Ukraine could win the war, an outcome few military analysts predicted at the outset of the conflict.

Stolenberg told reporters on Sunday:

Russia's war in Ukraine is not going as Moscow had planned.

It follows moves by Finland and Sweden to apply to join Nato. Both countries have maintained strict policies of neutrality then non-alignment since the end of the second world war, viewing Nato membership as a provocation of Moscow.

Nato and the United States said they were confident both countries would be accepted into the alliance and that reservations from Turkey, which wants the Nordic countries to halt support for Kurdish militant groups present on their territory, could be overcome.

5.07am BST

Hello and welcome to the Guardian's live coverage of the war in [*Ukraine*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/ukraine). I'm Calla Wahlquist and I'll be with you for the next few hours.

Here are some of the key developments overnight, including Sweden announcing its intention to [*follow Finland in applying to join Nato*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/may/15/finland-formally-confirms-intention-to-join-nato-russia). Nato's security chief, Jens Stolenberg, has said the alliance would look to provide both countries with interim security guarantees while the applications are ***processed***.

Sweden has indicated it will follow Finland in applying for Nato membership. The two countries' move abandons decades of military non-alignment triggered by Russia's ***invasion*** of [*Ukraine*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/ukraine) and would redraw the security map of Europe. In apparent retaliation, the Kremlin has pulled the plug on electricity supplies to Finland, with which it shares a 1,300km (800 mile) border. Nato pledged open-ended military support for Ukraine on Sunday. At a meeting of alliance foreign ministers in Berlin, Germany's Annalena Baerbock said it would provide military assistance "for as long as Ukraine needs this support for the self-defence of its country".British intelligence revealed that [*Russia may have lost as much as*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/may/15/russia-likely-to-have-lost-third-of-its-ukraine-invasion-force-says-uk) [*a third of the* ***invasion*** *force*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/may/15/russia-likely-to-have-lost-third-of-its-ukraine-invasion-force-says-uk) , as more than 400 Russian soldiers [*were estimated*](https://twitter.com/NatashaBertrand/status/1525909187708043266?s=20&t=WuzF9gYZ3qgm6XwA9ClWlA) to have been killed or wounded last week trying to cross the Donets river. Ukraine's joint forces task force said its troops repelled 17 attacks on Sunday and destroyed 11 pieces of Russian equipment. They reported the most intense fighting around the eastern Russian-held city of Izium. Ukraine also said Russia fired on 23 villages and towns in the Luhansk and Donetsk regions. Russia denies targeting the villages.Ukraine's president Volodymr Zelensky has warned that the military situation in Ukraine's south-eastern Donbas region is "very difficult" as analysts say Russian president Vladimir Putin has his sights on annexing southern and eastern Ukraine in the months ahead. Russia's defence ministry claimed it had carried out "high-precision" missile strikes on four artillery munitions depots in the Donetsk area in the east of Ukraine. The ministry also claimed airstrikes had destroyed two missile-launching systems and radar, and 15 Ukrainian drones around Donetsk and Lugansk. The first Ukrainian battalion reached the Russian border in the Kharkhiv region on Sunday. Ukrainian authorities are conducting at least 10 active rape investigations involving Russian troops, and are calling for other victims to come forward. Kalush Orchestra, the band that won Eurovision last night for Ukraine, is auctioning off the statuette to raise funds for the Ukrainian army and Ukraine. The win has lifted spirits around Ukraine.Zelenskiy has warned that the war in his country risks triggering global food shortages and has urged international intervention to prevent global famine. Before the ***invasion***, Ukraine supplied 12% of the planet's wheat, 15% of its corn and half of its sunflower oil.A cyberattack on the Lviv city council website resulted in stolen data that ended up published in Telegram channels linked to Russia. This happened the same weekend Italian police thwarted hacker attacks by pro-Russian groups on the Eurovision song contest.122532022-05-16T04:07:05Zfalsefalse2022-05-17T07:39:17ZfalseAUStheguardian.com[*https://www.theguardian.com/p/yetd7truetruehttps://media.guim.co.uk/1bdc311ff1865f30124ff8e4876933cef815091c/0\_0\_3238\_1943/500.jpgfalseentrueWe're*](https://www.theguardian.com/p/yetd7truetruehttps://media.guim.co.uk/1bdc311ff1865f30124ff8e4876933cef815091c/0_0_3238_1943/500.jpgfalseentrueWe're) going to wrap things up for the day. Thanks for reading. We'll be back in a few hours with a fresh liveblog, bringing you all the news. Our story about Turkey's announcement that it would not approve Sweden and Finland joining it as Nato members is here and you can read Daniel Boffey's moving account here of the battle for Kharkiv, as the fight over Ukraine's second city nears its end. Here are some of the key developments of the day: The evacuation of wounded Ukrainian troops from the Azovstal steelworks in Mariupol is under way, Volodomyr Zelenskiy confirmed, with more than 260 fighters transported out of the plant. The troops have fulfilled their combat mission, the general staff of the armed forces said. Ukraine's deputy defense minister has said an "exchange procedure will take place" to bring evacuees home. Ukraine's Joint Forces Task Force said on Monday that 20 civilians, including a child, were killed in Russian shelling in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions. Western military sources say that Vladimir Putin is involved in the war in Ukraine "at the level of a colonel or brigadier". The Russian leader is reportedly so personally involved he is helping determine the movement of forces in the Donbas. Ukrainian officials claimed that troops counter-attacking against Russian forces in the country's north-east had pushed them back from the city of Kharkiv and advanced as far as the border with Russia. Russian forces have shelled frontline positions in Ukraine's eastern Donbas area as fighting becomes increasingly focused on Severodonetsk, the easternmost city still held by Ukrainian forces after more than 11 weeks of war. After Sweden and Finland yesterday confirmed plans to join Nato, Sweden is seeking to quell Turkish opposition by sending diplomats to the country. Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan has said Turkey will not approve the bids, and that delegations from the countries should not bother coming. Vladimir Putin said Russia had no issue with Finland and Sweden, but that the expansion of military infrastructure on their territory would demand a reaction from Moscow, as the Nordic countries move closer to joining Nato, which Russia has branded a mistake with far-reaching consequences. Hungary has been accused of "holding the EU hostage" over its refusal to agree an oil embargo against Russia, as the bloc struggles to reach consensus on its latest sanctions aimed at eroding the Kremlin's ability to wage war. American fast-food giant McDonald's will exit the Russian market and sell its business in the increasingly isolated country, the company said on Monday. Meanwhile, the Moscow city government is to take over a factory belonging to the French carmaker Renault and use it to revive the Soviet-era Moskvitch in Russia's first major nationalization of a foreign company during its war in Ukraine. The Ukrainian troops defending the Azovstal steel plant have fulfilled their combat mission, the country's general staff of armed forces said. "The supreme military command ordered the commanders of the units stationed at Azovstal to save the lives of the personnel," Reuters reported the general staff said in a statement on Facebook. "Efforts to rescue defenders who remain on the territory of Azovstal continue." In his nightly video address, Volodomyr Zelenskiy said Ukraine would fight to save the lives of the Azovstal fighters. "There are severely wounded ones among them. They're receiving care. Ukraine needs Ukrainian heroes alive," he said. Ukraine's deputy defence minister has said an "exchange procedure will take place" to bring evacuees home. Outgunned and surrounded, troops at the plant became a symbol of Ukrainian resistance as they continued to fight even after Mariupol fell to Russian forces. Last week, the last civilians rescued from the plant reached safety in Ukrainian held territory after two months of sheltering in the besieged city. The evacuation of wounded Ukrainian troops from the Azovstal steelworks in Mariupol is under way, Volodomyr Zelenskiy confirmed, with more than 260 fighters transported out of the plant. "We hope that we will be able to save the lives of our guys," the Ukrainian president said of the evacuation. Hanna Malyar, Ukraine's deputy defense minister, said that 53 injured troops have been taken to a hospital in the Russian-controlled town of Novoazovsk and that more than 200 others were transported through a corridor to Olenivka. All evacuees will be returned home through exchanges, Malyar said. Putin involved in war 'at level of colonel or brigadier', say western sources Vladimir Putin has become so personally involved in the Ukraine war that he is making operational and tactical decisions "at the level of a colonel or brigadier", according to western military sources. The Russian president is helping determine the movement of forces in the Donbas, they added, where last week the invaders suffered a bloody defeat as they tried on multiple occasions to cross a strategic river in the east of Ukraine. The sources added that Putin is still working closely with General Valery Gerasimov, the commander of the Russian armed forces, in contrast to claims made by Ukraine last week that the military chief had been sidelined. "We think Putin and Gerasimov are involved in tactical decision making at a level we would normally expect to be taken by a colonel or a brigadier," the military source said, referring to the ongoing battle in the east of Ukraine. Moscow's armies have so far failed to achieve a breakthrough in the Donbas, where they have been mounting an offensive for a month that has failed several times encircle the smaller Ukrainian forces. No further detail to back up the statement was provided, although it was implied the assessment about Putin's close personal involvement was based on intelligence that had been received. Read more here: Reuters is reporting that Ukrainian soldiers from the Azovstal steel plant in Mariupol have arrived in the Russian-controlled town of Novoazovsk. A witness told the news agency that evacuees, some wounded and carried out of buses on stretchers, arrived late on Monday. Russia had said it would use a "humanitarian corridor" it established to evacuate wounded Ukrainian soldiers to a medical facility in the town, about 45km east of Mariupol. Moscow claims to have reached a ceasefire with the last-stand Ukrainian troops at the steel plant, but Ukrainian officials have not confirmed this and it's unclear exactly what is happening inside the plant. I'm Dani Anguiano and I'll be taking over the Guardian's live coverage of the war in Ukraine for the next few hours. There is every expectation that Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelenzkiy will make a public address from Kyiv before long and give us his update on the situation at the Azovstal steel works. The huge plant has served for weeks as the last, desperate stand for a group of Ukrainians - military and civilian, now just soldiers - after the fall of the city of Mariupol to Russia. It appears that wounded Ukrainian soldiers have been evacuated by Russian forces but the exact situation is far from clear. Civilians trapped with the soldiers were evacuated earlier this month. Despite calls for action by pro-Ukrainian protesters in some parts of Europe in recent days, hope that some sort of Ukrainian special forces rescue mission could be mounted to save the troops besieged in the huge factory have proved entirely unrealistic. The soldiers there are understood to number around 600, according to Reuters. It's not known if a ceasefire to evacuate the wounded is the beginning of the end of the siege of the Azovstal plant and the final domino going down in Mariupol. We await more news. The New York team is handing over to California now, where my colleague Dani Anguiano will keep you up to date on developments. Ukraine's Joint Forces Task Force said on Monday that 20 civilians, including a child, were killed in Russian shelling in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, Reuters reports. The military task force said in a statement on its Facebook page that 25 communities in the regions were fired at, with 42 residential buildings and a school among locations hit. Reuters was not able to independently verify the report. There was no immediate response from Russia to the report. About a dozen buses carrying Ukrainian servicemen who were holed up in the Azovstal steel plant in Ukraine's south-east, which was besieged by Russia, left the plant on Monday, a Reuters witness said. It was not possible to determine how many servicemen were aboard the buses. It was also unclear whether those on board were all among the 40 wounded fighters Ukrainian officers said to have been beneath the plant, the news agency reports. Some 600 servicemen were said to have been inside. The Ukrainian unit holed up beneath the Azovstal steelworks in Mariupol said on Monday its garrison was fulfilling orders to save the lives of troops, an apparent indication that the long siege has reached an important new stage. It is not clear if this is the beginning of the end of the siege or whether the last stand continues by those Ukrainian troops not wounded. The fighting at Azovstal in ruined Mariupol has symbolized Ukrainian resistance throughout Russia's nearly three-month ***invasion***. Most civilians who had sought shelter at the vast Soviet-era plant were evacuated earlier this month, Reuters reports. In order to save lives, the entire Mariupol garrison is implementing the approved decision of the Supreme Military Command and hopes for the support of the Ukrainian people," the Azov Regiment said in a social media post. Here's a little more from the accompanying video that one of the unit's senior commanders, Denys Prokopenko, posted. The main thing is to realise all the risks, is there a plan B, are you fully committed to that plan which must allow for fulfilling the assigned tasks and preserve the lives and health of personnel? This is the highest level of overseeing troops. All the more so when your decision is endorsed by the highest military command." Prokopenko did not spell out what action the defenders were taking. The video was released hours after Russia said it had agreed to evacuate wounded Ukrainian soldiers to a medical facility in the Russian-controlled town of Novoazovsk. Ukraine estimates tens of thousands of civilians died in Mariupol during months of siege by Russian forces who destroyed the Sea of Azov port, a city of around 400,000 people. The last defenders, including many who were wounded, had been holding out for weeks in bunkers beneath Azovstal, one of the largest metallurgical plants in Europe. The Russian defense ministry said it established a "humanitarian corridor" to evacuate wounded Ukrainian troops to Novoazovsk, about 45kms east of Mariupol in an area under Russian control. Russia says a ceasefire has been reached with the last-stand Ukrainian troops at the Azovstal steel plant in Mariupol, in order to evacuate the wounded, although there has been no confirmation of this from Ukrainian officials, Agence France-Presse reports. Russia's defence ministry said moments ago that an agreement has been reached to evacuate injured soldiers from the plant. An agreement was reached with representatives of the Ukrainian military blocked at Azovstal in Mariupol to evacuate the wounded," the ministry said. It added that a "regime of silence" was introduced for the duration of the evacuation and that the Ukrainian soldiers would be taken to a hospital in the nearby town of Novoazovsk. There was no immediate confirmation from Ukrainian officials. Hundreds of Ukrainian soldiers remained holed up in the underground tunnels of the huge Azovstal steel factory that has been besieged by Russian forces for weeks after Moscow claimed control of Mariupol. Ukraine's Azov battalion, which has led the defense of Mariupol, has posted desperate videos from the plant, saying soldiers are dying from their wounds there. Here is a report from the Guardian with glimpses of what the besieged troops have been withstanding. The last of hundreds of civilians who had been sheltering in the labyrinthine steel works, after the Russians overran Mariupol, in its deeper layers underground, were brought out earlier this month. There are significant developments at the besieged Azovstal steel plant in Mariupol, the last stand of a nub of Ukrainian soldiers in the defeated south-eastern port city. It's not yet entirely clear what is going on, whether the soldiers surrounded there in dire straits are giving up or are negotiating to have the severely wounded evacuated by occupying Russians. We'll keep following closely. A senior commander of Ukrainian forces holed up beneath the Azovstal steel mill besieged by Russian forces said he was carrying out a decision by the military high command to save the lives of service personnel, but made no mention of surrendering, Reuters writes. Commander Denys Prokopenko has posted a video on social media. The main thing is to realise all the risks, is there a plan B, are you fully committed to that plan which must allow for fulfilling the assigned tasks and preserve the lives and health of personnel. This is the highest level of overseeing troops. All the more so when your decision is endorsed by the highest military command," he said. Here it is with subtitles: Here's a tweet from BBC journalists: The Guardian US team has taken the blog baton now and will keep you updated for the next few hours. This is Joanna Walters in New York and I'll be handing over a little later to our colleagues in California. Here's a roundup of the key developments from the day: Ukrainian officials claimed that Ukrainian troops counter-attacking against Russian forces in the country's north-east had pushed them back from the city of Kharkiv and advanced as far as the border with Russia. Russia said its forces had shot down three fighter jets. Russian forces have shelled frontline positions in Ukraine's eastern Donbas area as fighting becomes increasingly focused on Severodonetsk, the easternmost city still held by Ukrainian forces after more than 11 weeks of war. Following a meeting, the EU foreign ministers failed reached an agreement on the sixth package of sansctions against Russia, EU's foreign policy chief Josep Borrell confirmed. After Sweden and Finland yesterday confirmed plans to join Nato, Sweden is seeking to quell Turkish opposition by sending diplomats to the country. Meanwhile, Russia branded the move a mistake with far-reaching consequences. Estonia welcomed the decision as a boon for Nordic nations' security. Vladimir Putin said Russia had no issue with Finland and Sweden, but that the expansion of military infrastructure on their territory would demand a reaction from Moscow, as the Nordic countries move closer to joining Nato. Norway, Denmark and Iceland have issued a joint statement offering their support to Finland and Sweden in case the two Nordic nations were to come under attack during their Nato applications. The Turkish president, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, has said he will not approve Finland and Sweden joining Nato. He said Swedish and Finnish delegrations should not bother coming to Turkey to convince Turkey to approve their Nato bids. Hungary has been accused of "holding the EU hostage" over its refusal to agree an oil embargo against Russia, as the bloc struggles to reach consensus on its latest sanctions aimed at eroding the Kremlin's ability to wage war. The Ukrainian foreign minister, Dmytro Kuleba, has ruled out potential concessions to Russia that could lead to a ceasefire in the war and said the European Union faces "moral failure" if it doesn't approve the nation's candidacy for membership by June. American fast-food giant McDonald's will exit the Russian market and sell its business in the increasingly isolated country, the company said on Monday. Meanwhile, The Moscow city government is to take over a factory belonging to the French carmaker Renault and use it to revive the Soviet-era Moskvitch in Russia's first major nationalisation of a foreign company during its war in Ukraine. The European Union and the United States have agreed closer cooperation to counter disrupted supply of commodities and food caused by Russia's ***invasion*** of Ukraine and to combat disinformation from Moscow. Thanks so much for joining me. I'm handing over to my colleague Joanna Walters now. EU foreign affairs chief Josep Borrell says that Hungary is maintaining that its block on the EU oil embargo against Russia is for economic reasons rather than political ones. He said: The discussion will continue to see when and how much cost each member state will have to bear. He also said: The EU considers it unacceptable for the Balkan countries to maintain a neutral position towards Russia. The EU will not recognize any part of Ukraine being claimed as part of Russia, EU's foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said. Borrell is speaking at a press conference following a meeting of EU foreign ministers in Brussels. He also added that the EU will help Ukraine to export grain from storage to Europe, including by sea, in order to make room for a new crop. The Turkish president Tayyip Erdogan said on Monday that Swedish and Finnish delegations should not bother coming to Ankara to convince it to approve their NATO bid because they harbour terrorists. In a news conference, Erdogan said Turkey would not approve their bids to join NATO, calling Sweden a "hatchery" for terrorist organisations, and adding they had terrorists in their parliament. Ankara says Sweden and Finland harbour people it says are linked to groups it deems terrorists, namely the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) militant group and followers of Fethullah Gulen, whom Ankara accuses of orchestrating the 2016 coup attempt. The EU Foreign Ministers have not reached an agreement on the sixth package of sansctions against Russia, EU's foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said during a press conference happening now. Speaking following a meeting of EU foreign ministers in Brussels he said they had "failed to agree" The allocation of another 500 million euros to Ukraine for the purchase of weapons, bringing the total amount to 2 billion euros, was approved by the ministers, however. The Turkish president, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, has said he will not approve Finland and Sweden joining Nato. Reuters is reporting he has said Swedish and Finnish delegrations should not bother coming to Turkey to convince Turkey to approve their Nato bids. Finland and Sweden, while both Nato partners, have long viewed membership as an unnecessary provocation of Russia, their powerful eastern neighbour. Moscow's ***invasion*** of Ukraine, however, has led to a radical rethink of their security policies. Membership of Nato would require ratification by all existing members. Turkey has been a Nato member since 1952 and its membership remains a cornerstone of its foreign policy towards western countries. The Moscow city government is to take over a factory belonging to the French carmaker Renault and use it to revive the Soviet-era Moskvitch in Russia's first major nationalisation of a foreign company during its war in Ukraine. The development, which was met with ridicule by Russians with long memories, follows Renault's decision to join the wave of western companies such as McDonald's and Siemens leaving the Russian market as the war in Ukraine nears its fourth month. Renault has ceded its 68% stake in Russia's biggest carmaker, AvtoVAZ, with an option to buy it back within six years. According to media reports, the company's Russian assets were sold for one rouble, meaning the city of Moscow has effectively taken control of the factory free. Renault's CEO, Luca de Meo, said in statement that the company was protecting its future business in Russia. Today we have taken a difficult but necessary decision, and we are making a responsible choice towards our 45,000 employees in Russia while preserving the group's performance and our ability to return to the country in the future. Hawkish commentators such as the head of Russia Today, Margarita Simonyan, have said foreign companies that leave the Russian market should have their local assets seized. Moscow's mayor, Sergei Sobyanin, appeared to defend Renault's decision and said the city would take over the factory to prevent unemployment. Sobyanin said: The foreign owner decided to close the Moscow Renault plant. This is its right, but we cannot allow thousands of workers to be left without work. Therefore, I decided to take the plant under control of the city and resume the production of passenger cars under the historical Moskvitch brand. We will try to keep most of the team working directly at the plant and its associates. Read more here: Ukrainian forces have continued to push Russian forces back from Kharkiv, the country's second biggest city, with Volodomyr Zelenskiy congratulating soldiers who erected a new border post on Russia's border. He said in a video message: I'm very grateful to you, on behalf of all Ukrainians, on my behalf and on behalf of my family. I'm very grateful to all the fighters like you. Russia's withdrawal is a fighting retreat, however, with the outlying northern villages around Kharkiv being peppered with shelling on Monday, with one person confirmed killed in Tsyrkuny, 17 miles from the city centre and four injured in the districts of Shevchenkivskyi and Saltivka. Ukrainian officials said that Russian forces were concentrating on "maintaining positions and preventing the advance of our troops toward the border". Ukraine's Kalush Orchestra gave an impromptu rendition of their Eurovision-winning song, Stefania, at the Polish border as they made their way home on Monday. The band, whose music blends traditional folk and hip-hop, were presented with blue and yellow flowers as they were greeted at the border by servicemen and women, before breaking into song. Stefania had been among the favourites to win the Eurovision song contest in the northern Italian city of Turin, but decisive victory came from the public, with 439 points from the public vote putting the band in first place among the 25 finalists. The song, which includes the lyrics: "I'll always find my way home, even if all roads are destroyed", was written by frontman Oleh Psiuk as a tribute to his mother, before finding new resonance among Ukrainians as it became an anthem in their war-torn country. In an interview on Italian TV on Sunday night, Psiuk, who turned 28 on Monday, became emotional when talking about his mother: "She stayed up until 3am to cheer us on," he said. "In our city, Kalush, the sirens go off four times a day, nothing like in other places." Please read more: The outspoken Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny has tweeted praise of the UK's latest sanctions against Vladimir Putin's relatives and his mistress. The jailed anti-corruption activist said Boris Johnson and Liz Truss were "showing remarkable leadership on the issue of Putin's war with Ukraine in general, and on sanctions in particular". He continued: Individual sanctions, asset freezing and confiscation, visa bans and seizure of yachts and accounts of officials are very popular among Russian citizens. Even the most dormant Russian voter is in solidarity with and more radical than the west on this issue. The whole thread can be read here: The Russian president, Vladimir Putin, has warned that Moscow will respond if Nato bolsters the military infrastructure of Sweden and Finland, which have both decided to join the alliance after the ***invasion*** of Ukraine. Putin has repeatedly cited the post-Soviet enlargement of Nato eastwards towards Russia's borders as a reason for the ***invasion*** of Ukraine. Speaking to the leaders of a Russian-dominated military alliance of former Soviet states, Putin said the enlargement of Nato was being used by the US in an "aggressive" way to aggravate an already difficult global security situation. Russia, Putin said, had no problem with Finland or Sweden, so there was no direct threat from Nato enlargement to include those countries. "But the expansion of military infrastructure into this territory would certainly provoke our response," Putin said. It did not take long for the tremors from Vladimir Putin's tanks rolling into Ukraine to reach the British arts sector, long a beneficiary of Russian money. Institutions including the Tate and Royal Academy ended ties with Russian oligarchs and donors, including Petr Aven and Viktor Vekselberg. But it appears the war has also led to questions about the role of Sir Leonard Blavatnik - listed by the Sunday Times as Britain's richest man. While not on any sanctions list, the Ukrainian-born billionaire's links to sanctioned Russian oligarchs were the focus of discussion among officials involved in a multimillion-pound donation by him that helped ensure a trove of literary treasures were saved for the nation. Blavatnik's gift last year - the largest given by an individual to the UK for a literary treasure - amounted to half of the £15m raised by a national libraries charity, which saved the collection known as the Honresfield Library from being sold abroad. It is being shared with major UK cultural institutions, including the British Library. However, correspondence released under the Freedom of Information Act shows that his Russian links were the subject of discussions at the National Library of Scotland (NLS) in the days after the ***invasion*** of Ukraine. "Do we know if the Blavatnik money has been paid for the Honresfield yet?" a senior official at the NLS wrote to the chief executive of the library, Amina Shah, on 28 February. The official, the NLS director of business support, Anthony Gillespie, added: Blavatnik is a longtime friend and business partner of Ukrainian-born Russian oligarch Viktor Vekselberg, one of Russia's richest men, who is close to the Russian president, Vladimir Putin, and some other Russian-associated oligarchs under western sanctions for support of totalitarian regimes and criminal activities. The NLS has since responded that Gillespie's query to Shah "was of a procedural nature regarding whether there was a risk to the sale going through during a time when sanctions were being considered by the UK and other governments". There is no suggestion Blavatnik is actively being considered for sanction. Blavatnik's name has become a near-omnipresent fixture at major British cultural sites as a result of his philanthropy. After he made a £50m donation towards the new extension at Tate Modern, it was renamed the Blavatnik Building in 2017. But his philanthropy has not gone without comment. Criticism has often followed his donations, especially when it involves institutions naming buildings after him. Read the full story here: Russian forces have shelled frontline positions in Ukraine's eastern Donbas area as fighting becomes increasingly focused on Severodonetsk, the easternmost city still held by Ukrainian forces after more than 11 weeks of war. Serhiy Haidai, the governor of the Luhansk region, of which Severodonetsk is part, said on Monday that Russian strikes had hit a hospital in the city over the weekend, killing two and injuring nine, including a child, and that several other locations had been targeted. Ukrainian forces repelled 17 attacks on Sunday, he said, and destroyed 11 Russian armoured vehicles. The air force command said Ukrainians downed two helicopters, two cruise missiles and seven drones. The Russians are gradually mounting an assault on Severodonetsk, an industrial city that had a population of 100,000 before the war, as the effort to complete a wider encirclement of Ukraine's defending forces in the Donbas appears to have failed. Overnight, the US Institute for the Study of War said it believed "Russian forces have likely abandoned the objective of completing a large-scale encirclement of Ukrainian units from Donetsk City to Izium" in favour of capturing the remainder of the Luhansk region. A smaller-scale encirclement of Severodonetsk also failed last week after Russian forces were defeated with heavy losses in a series of unsuccessful attempts to cross the Siverskyi Donets River at Bilohorivka. The river is increasingly becoming a dividing line between the two sides in the Donbas - the name given collectively to the Donetsk and Luhansk regions - and around Kharkiv to the north. Read the full story here: The Ukrainian president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, said on Monday he had discussed the need for financial support for Ukraine's economy with the International Monetary Fund's managing director, Kristalina Georgieva. Zelenskiy wrote on Twitter: The IMF is our important partner. We look forward to further fruitful joint work in maintaining financial stability of Ukraine. Ukraine could get loans, grants and possibly the proceeds of seized Russian oligarch property to help pay the multibillion-euro bill of rebuilding its country after the ruinous war launched by Moscow, according to a leaked EU reconstruction plan. Under the Rebuild Ukraine plan drafted in Brussels, the European Commission spells out that the Ukrainian government would have to take out loans to pay some of the costs of rebuilding destroyed infrastructure. Part of the reconstruction bill would be paid for by EU member states in the form of non-repayable grants to Kyiv. The commission has also proposed borrowing money on international capital markets to finance loans to Kyiv to fund the "substantial" cost of rebuilding. If agreed, it would be only the second time in its history that the EU has borrowed money as a collective, rather than as individual member states, following the agreement of the landmark 750bn Covid recovery plan in 2020. The idea is floated in a Ukraine relief and reconstruction paper seen by the Guardian that the commission is expected to publish on Wednesday. However, the amount of the EU's proposed loans to Ukraine is left blank in the document, pending further discussions in Brussels. Instead, the paper notes that the financial needs "are expected to be substantial" and the reconstruction effort would span more than a decade. It notes estimates that the overall damage caused by Russia runs to hundreds of billions of euros, with more than 100bn damage to physical infrastructure alone. To pay the bill, the commission proposes a mix of grants and cheap loans for Ukraine. EU member states and non-EU countries could make contributions to Ukraine that would be channelled via the EU reconstruction programme, it is proposed. EU officials also suggest exploring the feasibility of using proceeds of Russian assets seized through sanctions. Ukraine will need "significant short-term financial relief to sustain basic services", provide humanitarian aid and fix essential infrastructure, the EU document states. To meet these urgent needs, the commission proposes loans at low interest rates with long repayment deadlines. The Swedish government has confirmed it intends to apply for membership of Nato, joining neighbouring Finland in a dramatic decision that marks one of the biggest strategic consequences of Russia's ***invasion*** of Ukraine to date. "There is a broad majority in Sweden's parliament for Sweden to join Nato," said the prime minister, Magdalena Andersson. "This is the best thing for the security of Sweden and its people. We will inform Nato we want to become a member of the alliance." Andersson told reporters after a parliamentary debate on Monday that Sweden would be "in a vulnerable position" while the application was ***processed***, but that ministers saw no direct military threat from Russia at present. She said she felt "confident there is support for this among the Swedish people". The Finnish government confirmed its intention to join Nato on Sunday, shortly before Andersson's ruling Social Democrats abandoned decades of opposition to back a Swedish bid for membership, making Monday's debate in the Riksdag a formality. Andersson said Sweden's Nato ambassador would formally hand over Stockholm's request to the alliance headquarters in Brussels "within the next few days", adding that the application would be submitted simultaneously with Finland's. The opposition Moderate party leader, Ulf Kristersson, told the same press conference that the decision was "historic - not about party politics, but taking joint responsibility for the country's security interests. We will take responsibility jointly for this ***process***." The decisions by the two governments, both of which have remained neutral or non-aligned since the end of the second world war, drew a sharp initial response from Russia, which described it as a serious mistake with far-reaching consequences. Read more here: Greenpeace protesters have blocked the entry of a Greek tanker into a southern English port due to its Russian fuel cargo, with police making arrests, the green group said on Monday, drawing condemnation from the British government. Reuters reports: Britain and the European Union have separately banned Russian-flagged vessels from their ports, with exemptions, following Russia's ***invasion*** of Ukraine which the Kremlin describes as a "special military operation". The United Kingdom has said it will phase out imports of Russian oil by the end of the year, which has meant that foreign-flagged vessels carrying Russian cargoes are still able to call at ports for the time being. Greenpeace said 12 activists occupied a jetty on Sunday evening in Navigator Terminals' Thames site in Essex, where the Greek-flagged Andromeda oil products tanker was expected to discharge its cargo. "Ministers have kicked a ban on Russian oil imports to the end of the year despite strong public support for it," said Georgia Whitaker, oil and gas campaigner with Greenpeace UK. A British government spokesperson said: "There is absolutely no excuse for Greenpeace\*s disruptive actions, which are wholly unacceptable." In recent weeks, a number of ships carrying Russian cargoes have changed course after protests at both UK and EU ports. The European Union and the United States have agreed closer cooperation to counter disrupted supply of commodities and food caused by Russia's ***invasion*** of Ukraine and to combat disinformation from Moscow. Reuters reports: EU and US officials convened at Paris-Saclay University on the outskirts of the French capital for the second trade and technology council, a forum initially seen as a transatlantic counterweight to China, but now also with a clear focus on Russia. In a joint statement, the two allies said they would work to reduce over-reliance on certain trading partners for ***agricultural*** commodities and inputs to increase resilience of global food production. Reduced grain shipments from Ukraine have led to price spikes, exacerbated now by India suspending wheat exports. The European Union and the United States also condemned the Russian government's undermining of freedom of expression, saying it had "repeatedly used the veil of disinformation" to obscure war crimes. The Ukrainian foreign minister, Dmytro Kuleba, has ruled out potential concessions to Russia that could lead to a ceasefire in the war and said the European Union faces "moral failure" if it doesn't approve the nation's candidacy for membership by June. Speaking to Bloomberg Television in an interview in Brussels on Monday, Kuleba declined to comment on whether the French president, Emmanuel Macron, urged his Ukrainian counterpart, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, to accept Kremlin demands if it meant achieving peace. But he dismissed any push to make an offer to Vladimir Putin in exchange for ending his ***invasion*** of Ukraine. Kuleba said: Looking for face-saving options for Putin is simply a false approach. Let Putin himself find a face-saving option. Ukraine's ambition remained to restore full territorial integrity, Kuleba said. That would include areas of the eastern Donbas region controlled by Russian-backed forces before the ***invasion*** as well as the Crimean peninsula seized by Russia in 2014. The foreign minister, in Brussels to meet EU counterparts, expressed confidence that Ukraine would eventually win the war against Russia. "We want everything that belongs to us to be ours," he said. The diplomat also pushed wavering EU leaders on Ukraine's bid to secure candidacy status next month, saying public opinion in the 27-member bloc was moving in his country's favour and that this would send a message that the country was "one of us". Some EU leaders have expressed concern that a fast-track route to membership could create false expectations for Kyiv. Asked about the prospect of Ukraine's candidacy being rejected, he said: It will be a moral failure, which will be judged by history. In between candidacy and membership, there is a long ***process*** of accession talks, reforms, transitions - many, many things can happen and they can be blocked at any stage. Norway, Denmark and Iceland have issued a joint statement offering their support to Finland and Sweden in case the two Nordic nations were to come under attack during their Nato applications. Norway's prime minister, Jonas Gahr Støre, said: Together with Denmark and Iceland, Norway stands ready to assist its Nordic neighbours by all means necessary should they be the victim of aggression on their territory before obtaining Nato membership. There are some lines from Reuters on European responses to Finland and Sweden's decision to join Nato, and Russia's tense reaction. The Élysée presidential office says that France's president, Emmanuel Macron, fully supports Sweden's decision. The Danish prime ministry also welcomes Sweden and Finland's decision and that Nordic Nato members, Iceland, Denmark and Norway are ready to support Sweden and Finland if they come under attack, by any means necessary. Preparations are now under way to be able to fulfil these assurances. Speaking to the leaders of a Russian-dominated military alliance of former Soviet states, Vladimir Putin said the enlargement of Nato was being used by the United States in an "aggressive" way to aggravate an already difficult global security situation. Russia, Putin said, had no problem with Finland or Sweden, so there was no direct threat from Nato enlargement which included those countries, Reuters reports. Putin told the leaders of the Collective Security Treaty Organization, which includes Belarus, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan: But the expansion of military infrastructure into this territory would certainly provoke our response. What that (response) will be - we will see what threats are created for us. Problems are being created for no reason at all. We shall react accordingly. Russia has given few specific clues about what it will do in response to the Nordic enlargement of Nato, the biggest strategic consequence of Russia's ***invasion*** of Ukraine to date. One of Putin's closest allies, former president Dmitry Medvedev, said last month that Russia could deploy nuclear weapons and hypersonic missiles in the Russian exclave of Kaliningrad if Finland and Sweden joined Nato. Nato, founded in 1949 to provide European security against the Soviet Union, ultimately outguns Russia in almost every military ***measure*** apart from nuclear weapons, though the backbone of the alliance's military power is the US - whose forces are mostly deployed far from Europe China on Monday gave a vague response to Finland's accession into Nato, saying the move would inject a "new factor" into Chinese-Finnish relations. Zhao Lijian, said at a regular press briefing: China has noticed Finland's proposal to join the Nato. Sino-Finnish relationship has always been friendly. Finland's application to join the Nato will of course add new factor in the bilateral relations. Zhao did not elaborate what he meant by "new factor". But when pushed by a Finnish journalist to say more, Zhao added that China has been "very clear on Nato and Nato's eastward expansion". Beijing has consistently criticised Nato in recent years. China's Global Times, in a separate editorial, last week warned that Nato's expansion "risks turning Europe into a new powder keg". Citing analysis, it wrote: The move will result in, most directly, a boom in Nato's power, forming a new acute challenge to Europe's security order. The sound of disapproval is almost audible in Beijing. Russia's state-owned news agency, Tass, last week spoke to Zhang Guoqing, a research fellow of the Institute of American Studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. Zhang warned that Finland and Sweden's move would "fuel tensions in region". Vladimir Putin said Russia had no issue with Finland and Sweden, but that the expansion of military infrastructure on their territory would demand a reaction from Moscow, as the Nordic countries move closer to joining Nato. Putin, speaking in Moscow at a summit of the Russian-led Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO), said Nato's expansion was a problem for Russia and that it must look closely at what he said were the US-led military alliance's plans to increase its global influence. The Belarusian leader Alexander Lukashenko has urged other members of a Russian-dominated military alliance to stand united, and accused the west of hoping to prolong the conflict in Ukraine to try to weaken Russia as much as possible, Reuters reports. Lukashenko, speaking at a summit of the leaders of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) in Moscow, said "hellish sanctions" against his country and Russia could have been avoided if the group had spoken with one voice. Addressing the Russian president, Vladimir Putin, and the leaders of Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, Lukashenko said in televised opening remarks: Without a united front, the collective west will build up pressure on the post-Soviet space. McDonald's has initiated a ***process*** to sell its business in Russia after 30 years of operating its restaurants there, after Moscow's ***invasion*** of Ukraine. In March, McDonald's closed its 850 restaurants in Russia including its site in Pushkin Square in the capital, which was the first in the country. The Chicago-based company owns 84% of its restaurants in Russia, and has said its restaurants there and in Ukraine contributed 9% of its annual revenue, or around $2bn (£1.6bn). As part of the exit, the company expects to record a non-cash charge of between $1.2bn (£980m) and $1.4bn. More to follow here: The European Commission is set to propose a new package of financial aid to Ukraine on Wednesday, including new loans to provide immediate liquidity to Kyiv and commitments for the long-term financing of the country's reconstruction, officials said. The size of the short-term financial support is still being defined but two officials familiar with the discussions told Reuters they expected it to roughly cover Ukraine's financial needs for two months, largely through loans, Reuters reports. A third official said the money would come from the EU budget and from EU governments, dismissing earlier talk that the funds could be raised in the market with the issuance of joint bonds backed by the EU budget. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) estimated in April that Ukraine needed around $5bn a month for at least three months to plug the immediate financial shortfall caused by Russia's ***invasion***. The fund's chief, Kristalina Georgieva, has called for this support to come in the form of grants rather than loans. The scale of EU support will depend also on how much G7 countries are willing to contribute. A meeting of finance ministers of the Group of Seven major economies is scheduled in the second half of this week, just after the commission is expected to unveil its proposals. American fast-food giant McDonald's will exit the Russian market and sell its business in the increasingly isolated country, the company said on Monday. Many western businesses have pulled out of Russia since its ***invasion*** of Ukraine in February. Earlier on Monday, the French automaker Renault announced it had handed over its Russian assets to the government in Moscow, marking the first major nationalisation of the economic disentanglement. McDonald's closed all of its 850 restaurants in the country, where it says it employs 62,000 people, in March. But the company decided to take a step further, saying in a statement: After more than 30 years of operations in the country, McDonald's Corporation announced it will exit the Russian market and has initiated a ***process*** to sell its Russian business. The humanitarian crisis caused by the war in Ukraine, and the precipitating unpredictable operating environment, have led McDonald's to conclude that continued ownership of the business in Russia is no longer tenable, nor is it consistent with McDonald's values. It said it was looking to sell "its entire portfolio of McDonald's restaurants in Russia to a local buyer". The company added that after the sale, the restaurants would no longer be able to use the McDonald's name, logo, branding or menu. Russia, where McDonald's directly manages more than 80% of the restaurants bearing its name, accounts for 9% of the company's revenue and 3% of its operating profit. The McDonald's chief executive, Chris Kempczinski, said in a statement: We're ***exceptionally*** proud of the 62,000 employees who work in our restaurants, along with the hundreds of Russian suppliers who support our business, and our local franchisees. Their dedication and loyalty to McDonald's make today's announcement extremely difficult. However, we have a commitment to our global community and must remain steadfast in our values. And our commitment to our values means that we can no longer keep the Arches shining there. Hungary has been accused of "holding the EU hostage" over its refusal to agree an oil embargo against Russia, as the bloc struggles to reach consensus on its latest sanctions aimed at eroding the Kremlin's ability to wage war. Lithuania's foreign minister, Gabrielius Landsbergis, said: Unfortunately the whole union is being held hostage by one member state. He was referring to Hungary, which continues to block the oil embargo, despite being offered an extension on phasing out Russian crude until the end of 2024. "Everybody expected this will be enough," Landsbergis told reporters, reflecting the widespread view that Budapest would fall into line if it got more time to convert its energy system to accommodate non-Russian oil. The EU's top diplomat, Josep Borrell, said there were no guarantees the issue would be resolved at a meeting of EU foreign ministers on Monday. He said: We will do our best to unblock the situation. I cannot ensure this is going to happen because positions are quite strong. Johanna Sumuvuori, Finland's junior foreign minister, who said she would update her counterparts on Helsinki's bid to join Nato, said on the oil ban: It's very important to do our utmost, so that we can make a strong statement as an EU. Russia has told Finland and Sweden that their decision to join the Nato military alliance is a serious mistake with far-reaching consequences and that they should not assume that Moscow will not respond. The Finnish government on Sunday confirmed its intention to join Nato while Sweden's ruling party agreed to drop its longstanding opposition to the idea, paving the way for a joint membership application within days. The decisions by the two governments, both of which have remained neutral or non-aligned since the end of the second world war, herald a historic redrawing of Europe's security map prompted by Russia's ***invasion*** of Ukraine on 24 February. "The situation is, of course, changing radically in light of what is happening," Russia's deputy foreign minister, Sergei Ryabkov, said on Monday. "The fact that Finland and Sweden's security will not be strengthened as a result of this is very clear to us." Ryabkov added that the two Nordic nations "should have no illusions that we will simply put up with it", warning that the move was "another grave mistake with far-reaching consequences" and the "general level of military tension will increase". Russia has repeatedly warned both countries against joining Nato, saying such a move would oblige it to "restore military balance" by strengthening its defences in the Baltic Sea region, including by deploying nuclear weapons. Finland shares an 810-mile (1,300km) land border with Russia and Sweden a maritime border. Both countries have for decades considered that joining the 30-member, US-led Nato alliance would represent an unnecessary provocation of Moscow. However, Putin's ***invasion*** of Ukraine on 24 February has led to a profound change in Nordic thinking, with public support for Nato accession in Finland more than trebling to about 75% and rising to between 50% and 60% in Sweden. The Swedish and Finnish parliaments on Monday began debating the issue, with the session in Helsinki likely to last several days. While 85% of Finland's 200 MPs back membership, 150 have requested to speak and a vote was not expected on Monday. "Our security environment has fundamentally changed," the prime minister, Sanna Marin, told parliament as she opened the debate on Monday. "The only country that threatens European security, and is now openly waging a war of aggression, is Russia." Read the full story from my colleagues Jon Henley and Jennifer Rankin here: Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov has said Russia was closely following Finland and Sweden's bids to join the US-led Nato military alliance, and was convinced that their accession would in no way strengthen Europe's security architecture, Reuters reports. Earlier today, Russian deputy foreign minister Sergei Ryabkov was quoted as saying the west should not think Moscow would simply put up with the expansion of Nato, casting it as a mistake that would stoke military tension. Here are the main developments in the Ukraine conflict from the past few hours: Ukrainian officials claimed that Ukrainian troops counter-attacking against Russian forces in the country's north-east had pushed them back from the city of Kharkiv and advanced as far as the border with Russia. Russia said its forces had shot down three fighter jets. Ahead of an EU meeting, foreign ministers sought to publicly pressure Hungary to lift its veto on a proposed oil embargo on Russia and confirmed that a sixth package of sanctions would arrive shortly. After Sweden and Finland yesterday confirmed plans to join Nato, Sweden is seeking to quell Turkish opposition by sending diplomats to the country. Meanwhile, Russia branded the move a mistake with far-reaching consequences. Estonia welcomed the decision as a boon for Nordic nations' security. Thanks for following, I'm handing over the blog to my colleague Nicola Slawson for the rest of the day. Ukraine and Japan have signed an agreement on a $100m (£82m) loan intended primarily to help support vulnerable people in Ukraine following Russia's ***invasion***, the Ukrainian finance ministry said on Monday. It said the loan was for 30 years and included a grace period of 10 years. Reuters has some quotes from Russia's deputy foreign minister, Sergei Ryabkov, on Russia's response to the Nordic Nato expansion: Ryabkov told the state RIA news agency: They should have no illusions that we will simply put up with it - and nor should Brussels, Washington and other Nato capitals. The general level of military tension will rise, predictability in this sphere will decrease. It is a shame that common sense is being sacrificed to some phantom provision about what should be done in this unfolding situation. Russia has given few clues about what it will do in response to the Nordic enlargement of Nato, saying merely that there would be a "military-technical response". One of Putin's closest allies said last month that Russia could deploy nuclear weapons and hypersonic missiles in the Russian exclave of Kaliningrad if Finland and Sweden joined Nato. Some analysis from Reuters on Ukrainian officials' claim that Ukrainian troops counterattacking against Russian forces in the country's north-east have pushed them back from the city of Kharkiv and advanced as far as the border with Russia. Reuters reports: The developments, if confirmed, would signal a further shift in momentum in favour of Ukrainian forces nearly three months into a conflict that began when Russia sent tens of thousands of troops over the border into Ukraine on 24 February. Fighting was reported near Kharkiv, Ukraine's second-largest city, on Monday in what interior ministry adviser Vadym Denisenko said was "our counter-offensive". "It can no longer be stopped ...Thanks to this, we can go to the rear of the Russian group of forces," he said. Kharkiv, lying about 30 miles (50km) from the border with Russia, had endured weeks of heavy bombardments from Russian artillery. The Russians' routing from there follows their failure to capture the capital Kyiv in the early stages of the war. Ukraine's defence ministry said on Monday the 227th Battalion of the 127th Brigade of Ukraine's Territorial Defence Forces had reached the border with Russia "Together to victory!" it said. Kharkiv region governor Oleh Sinegubov said the troops had restored a sign on the border. "We thank everyone who, risking their lives, liberates Ukraine from Russian invaders," Sinegubov said. Reuters could not immediately verify Ukraine's battlefield account and it was not clear how many troops had reached the Russian border or where. If confirmed, it would suggest a Ukrainian counter-offensive is having increasing success in pushing back Russian forces in the north-east after western military agencies said Moscow's offensive in two eastern provinces known as the Donbas had stalled. Nonetheless, the governor of the Luhansk region in Donbas, Serhiy Gaidai, said the situation "remains difficult", with Russian forces trying to capture the town of Sieverodonetsk. He said leaders of the Lugansk People's Republic, the territory in Luhansk controlled by Russian-backed separatists, declared a general mobilisation, adding it was "either fight or get shot, there is no other choice". In the south, fighting was raging around the city of Kherson and Russian missiles struck residential areas of Mykolayiv, the presidential office in Kyiv said. Reuters was unable to verify the reports. Nato secretary general Jens Stoltenberg said on Sunday Ukraine could win the war, an outcome few military analysts predicted when Russia invaded Ukraine. EU foreign ministers sought to publicly pressure Hungary to lift its veto on a proposed oil embargo on Russia, with Lithuania saying the bloc was being "held hostage by one member state". Reuters reports: The embargo proposed by the European Commission in early May would be the harshest sanction yet and includes carve-outs for EU states most dependent on Russian oil. But Hungary, Moscow's closest ally in the EU, has said it wants hundreds of millions of euros from the bloc to mitigate the cost of ditching Russian crude. The EU needs all 27 states to agree to the embargo for it to go ahead. Hungarian foreign minister Peter Szijjarto said on his Facebook page on 11 May that there was no solution in sight. However, EU ministers ranging from Austria to Estonia said there would still be an oil embargo, even if it took longer to come to an agreement. An oil embargo, already imposed by the United States and Britain and which would follow five rounds of earlier EU sanctions, is seen as the best way to reduce Russian income for its war in Ukraine. The EU's foreign policy chief, Josep Borrell, last week signalled that Monday's meeting might have been the moment for a breakthrough. On Monday, he said he was doing his utmost to unblock the situation. Some diplomats now point to a 30-31 May summit as the moment for agreement on a phased ban on Russian oil, probably over six months, with a longer transition period for Hungary, Slovakia and the Czech Republic. Russia has said its forces shot down three Ukrainian fighter jets, one near Snake Island in the Black Sea and the others in the Mykolaiv and Kharkiv regions, while its missiles continued to pound targets in the east of the country. Reuters reports: Russia's defence ministry said its forces shot down Su-25 aircraft near the settlements of Yevhenivka in the Mykolaiv region and Velyka Komyshuvakha in Kharkiv, and a Su-24 near Snake Island, which achieved worldwide fame in the conflict's first hours when Ukrainian border guards stationed there rejected a Russian warship's demand for their surrender. High-precision Russian missiles hit two command posts in Ukraine's Kharkiv region, the ministry said, and also struck other targets including weapons depots and places where Ukrainian troops and equipment were concentrated. The ministry said it made similar strikes in the pro-Russian self-proclaimed republics of Donetsk and Luhansk, also taking out drones. The reports from the Russian defence ministry could not be independently confirmed. A tweet in Ukrainian from Hromadske Radio, meaning public radio in Ukrainian, quotes the head of the Sumy region, Dmytro Zhyvytskyi, as saying: Russian fighters tried to break through the border into the territory of Sumy region. The enemy opened fire on the border area with mortars, grenade launchers, machine guns and submachine guns. Border guards battled with the Russians, who retreated beyond the border. The Kastus Kalinouski Battalion, comprising Belarusian volunteers fighting for Ukraine, has suffered its third loss, according to a tweet from Nexta, a Belarussian news channel. Next quotes a tweet from the battalion, which said: Today our Battalion suffered a huge loss. During the liberation of the Ukrainian village from Russian occupation, the commander of the detachment, a soldier of our Battalion Pavel "Volat", was mortally wounded. He was taken to the hospital in critical condition, but it was [too] late. A missile strike by Russian strategic aircraft in the Odesa region has damaged the region's tourist infrastructure and injured two adults and a child, Interfax news agency in Ukraine reports. The report cites Odesa city council's Telegram channel as its source. The message reads: The enemy continues to attack the damaged and non-functioning bridge across the Dniester estuary. But it hits civilians. Previously, two adults were injured and a small child was seriously injured. Other information is being clarified. Many forgotten women in Ukraine are living alone in dire conditions or are unable to care for themselves, and are among those least able to escape, writes Angelina Kariakina in Kyiv and Luba Kassova. The Institute for the Study of War in the US has some analysis on Russia's movements in Ukraine. Forces have probably abandoned the objective to encircle Ukrainian units in Donetsk and Izium, and are shifting focus to completing the seizure of Luhansk province, the institute writes. The report adds: Russian forces have likely run out of combat-ready reservists, forcing the Russian military command to amalgamate soldiers from many different elements, including private military companies and proxy militias, into ostensibly regular army units and naval infantry. Russian forces are likely fortifying occupied settlements in southern Ukraine, indicating that the Russians are seeking to establish permanent control in the region. The EU will impose a sixth sanctions package on Russia, but the bloc will need more time to find agreement. Luxembourg's foreign minister, Jean Asselborn, told reporters on Monday ahead of a meeting with his counterparts in Brussels. There really is no excuse not to get the package done. Meanwhile, Austria's foreign minister, Alexander Schallenberg, said: I am confident that we will manage to get the sixth sanctions package done in the next days. It is clear that there still is a certain need for discussion but I believe we should aim to have these discussions where they belong, at the council, in order not give an image of disaccord in public. Russia is watching us. Sweden is sending diplomats to Turkey to try to overcome Ankara's objections to its plan to join Nato, defence minister Peter Hultqvist has said. Turkey has surprised its Nato allies by saying it would not view applications by Finland and Sweden positively, with President Tayyip Erdogan saying: "Scandinavian countries are guesthouses for terrorist organisations." Defence minister Peter Hultqvist told public service broadcaster SVT: We will send a group of diplomats to hold discussions and have a dialogue with Turkey so we can see how this can be resolved and what this is really about. Turkey said it wanted the Nordic countries to halt support for Kurdish militant groups present on their territory, and lift bans on sales of some weapons to Turkey. Nato and the US said they were confident Turkey would not hold up membership of Finland and Sweden. Any decision on Nato enlargement requires approval by all 30 members of the alliance and their parliaments, but diplomats said Erdogan would be under pressure to yield as Finland and Sweden would greatly strengthen Nato in the Baltic Sea. Sweden's parliament will hold a debate on its membership application on Monday, a formality as there is already a broad majority in favour. The government will take the formal decision to apply later in the day, Hultqvist said. Turkey must maintain a delicate diplomatic balance following Russia's ***invasion*** of Ukraine so that it remains able to help facilitate an eventual negotiated end to the war, President Tayyip Erdogan's spokesperson said in an interview. Ibrahim Kalin, who is also Erdogan's chief foreign policy adviser, said that while Ankara has criticised Moscow's ***invasion*** and actions on the battlefield it would do no good to take a more punitive stance against Russia. Nato member Turkey, a Black Sea neighbour of both Russia and Ukraine, has good ties with both and has opposed western sanctions on Moscow. It has seen tens of thousands of Russians - and some oligarchs' sanctioned yachts - arrive since war began. Yet it has also supplied Kyiv with armed drones and blocked some Russian naval passage to the Black Sea, and stands alone as having hosted talks between the Russian and Ukrainian foreign ministers and separately between their teams. "We have opposed this war from the beginning" but also maintained contact with Moscow, Kalin said at the weekend. Kalin told Reuters: They need someone - a trusted partner, negotiator, facilitator, moderator - someone in some position to be able to speak to the Russian side as well as to the Ukrainian side. We have been able to maintain this position since the beginning of the war and I think it is really in everybody's shared interest that everybody maintains a balanced position. There are some lines from Russia's foreign ministry coming out on Sweden and Finland's decision to join Nato, which is one of today's big stories. The deputy foreign minister, Sergei Ryabko, said the decision was a mistake with far-reaching consequences, which will radically change the global situation. The Guardian's full report on the Nordic nations' decision, which represents a radical shift in foreign policy, is here: The governor of Ukraine's Kharkiv region has said that Ukrainian troops defending Kharkiv have reached the state border with Russia. Reuters said it could not independently verify the comments made by Kharkiv region governor Oleh Sinegubov on the Telegram messaging service. It was not immediately clear how many troops had reached the Russian border and where. Kharkiv region governor Oleh Sinegubov wrote on the Telegram messaging app that troops of the 227th Battalion had restored a sign on the state border. "We thank everyone who, risking their lives, liberates Ukraine from Russian invaders," Sinegubov said. If confirmed, it would suggest a Ukrainian counter-offensive is having increasing success in pushing back Russian forces in the northeast after Western military agencies said Moscow's offensive in the Donbas region had stalled. Ukraine has been retaking territory in its north-east, driving Russian forces away from Kharkiv, the second-largest Ukrainian city. Ukraine's defence ministry said in a Facebook post that the 227th Battalion of the 127th Brigade of Ukraine's armed forces had reached the border with Russia, adding: "Together to victory!" Estonia's foreign minister has said that Sweden and Finland joining Nato would increase the security of the Baltic region. Eva-Maria Liimets told Reuters ahead of a Nato meeting in Berlin: When we see that in our neighbourhood also other democratic countries belong to Nato, it would mean that we could have broader joint exercises and also ... more defence cooperation. We have seen some differences, but we have also seen a willingness of those countries to overcome the differences. Liimets said she hoped Sweden, Finland and Turkey would overcome differences on the Nordic states joining the alliance, adding that the Berlin meeting atmosphere was very supportive. Estonia appreciates Nato enforcing its presence in the Baltic region but would like the allies to move from enhancing their presence to enhancing their defence. "It would mean that we would have more robust presence of land forces, but also air and maritime defence," she added. Sweden and Finland's decision to join Nato has been promoted by Russia's ***invasion*** of Ukraine. Finland shares a 1,300km land border with Russia, while Sweden shares a maritime border. Rachel Hall here taking over the blog for the morning. Please do send over any thoughts or tips to [*rachel.hall@theguardian.com*](mailto:rachel.hall@theguardian.com) I'll hand over now to my UK-based colleague Rachel Hall, who will take you through the rest of the day. Large-scale Nato drills, in planning months before the Russian ***invasion*** of Ukraine, are scheduled to begin in Estonia today. One of the largest drills, codenamed Hedgehog, will take place in Estonia and involve 15,000 troops from 14 countries. It's one of the largest military drills in the country since 1991. There is also operation "Defender Europe" and "Swift Response", which will involve 18,000 troops from 20 countries, and will take place in Poland and eight other countries. In Lithuania, another drill codenamed Iron Wolf will involve 3,000 allied troops and 1,00 vehicles. Nato spokesperson Oana Lungescu said on Friday: Exercises like these show that Nato stands strong and ready to protect our nations and defend against any threat. These are regular exercises, planned well before Russia's brutal and unjustified ***invasion*** of Ukraine, but they help to remove any room for miscalculation or misunderstanding about our resolve to protect and defend every inch of allied territory. Nato exercises are defensive, transparent, and in line with our international commitments. Global wheat prices have risen to their highest level in two months after India banned the export of the crop. India, the second largest producer of wheat in the world, announced the ban on Friday in an effort to control rising domestic prices, after a heatwave affected the local crop. A notice in the government gazette by the directorate of foreign trade that a rise in global prices for wheat was threatening the food security of India and neighbouring and vulnerable countries. Wheat prices have soared 60% this year, driven in part by the drop in wheat exports from Ukraine. Ukraine is the sixth biggest exporters of wheat but war has affected the harvest, with grain production forecast to be at least a third lower this year. More on the Russian push for Donbas, via AFP. Ukraine was preparing Monday for a new Russian push in the eastern Donbas region, as Kyiv said its army's counterattack around Kharkiv had gained momentum. Since failing to take the capital at the beginning of the ***invasion*** in late February, control of Donbas has become one of Moscow's primary objectives - but western intelligence has predicted its campaign will stall amid heavy losses and fierce resistance. "We are preparing for new attempts by Russia to attack in Donbas, to somehow intensify its movement in the south of Ukraine," President Volodymyr Zelensky said in his nightly address. "The occupiers still do not want to admit that they are in a dead-end and their so-called 'special operation' has already gone bankrupt," he added. Presidential adviser Oleksiy Arestovich told local television that Russian troops were being transferred in the direction of Donbas after withdrawing from Kharkiv following the Ukrainian counteroffensive. Kyiv's troops have made so much progress in the northern region that they have almost reached the border with Russia, according to interior ministry adviser Vadim Denisenko, although air raid sirens still sounded in Kharkiv city early Monday. Arestovich said the retreating Russian forces were being sent towards Lugansk. "Their task is to take Severodonetsk," he said. "Well, something is not working for them." Severodonetsk is the easternmost city still held by Ukraine, and its fall would grant the Kremlin de facto control of Lugansk, one of two regions - along with Donetsk - that comprise Donbas. But Russia's attempt to cross a river to encircle it had been repelled with heavy losses of equipment, according to Lugansk governor Sergiy Gaiday. To further deter the attack, Russian-occupied railway bridges leading to Severodonetsk were blown up, the Ukrainian army said on its Facebook page late Sunday, posting a video of a huge explosion taken from above. For its part, Russia's defence ministry claimed it had struck four artillery munitions depots in neighbouring Donetsk. Air strikes had also destroyed two missile-launching systems and radar, while 15 Ukrainian drones were downed around Donetsk and Lugansk, it added. Here is a map via US thinktank the Institute for the Study of War showing Russian advances, particularly around Izium, Konstiantynivka and Donbas. The institute's latest summary, published on Sunday night, says that Russian forces have "likely abandoned the objective of completing a large-scale encirclement of Ukrainian units from Donetsk City to Izyum in favor of completing the seizure of Luhansk Oblast". Russia attacked positions in eastern Ukraine as it tries to encircle Ukrainian forces in the Donbas and fend off a counteroffensive around the city of Izium, Reuters has reported. The most intense fighting appeared to be around the eastern Russian-held city of Izium, where Russia said it had struck Ukrainian positions with missiles. Ukraine's Joint Forces Task Force said its troops had repelled 17 attacks on Sunday and destroyed 11 pieces of Russian equipment. The command of Ukraine's air force said Ukrainian forces downed two helicopters, two cruise missiles, and seven drones. Russia continued to target civilian areas along the entire front line in the Luhansk and Donetsk regions, firing at 23 villages and towns, the task force added. Reuters was not able to independently confirm the reports. Russia denies targeting civilians. If Ukraine can sustain pressure on Izium and Russian supply lines, it will be harder for Moscow to encircle Ukrainian troops in the Donbas. Ukraine's military also acknowledged setbacks, saying Russian forces "continue to advance" in several areas in the Donbas region. In western Ukraine near Poland, missiles destroyed military infrastructure overnight on Saturday and were fired at the Lviv region from the Black Sea, Ukrainian officials said. Another 10 civilians were wounded in the southern region of Mykolaiv, the regional council said, without providing details. There was also no letup on Sunday in Russia's bombardment of the steelworks in the southern port of Mariupol, where a few hundred Ukrainian fighters are holding out weeks after the city fell into Russian hands, the Ukrainian military said. Brightly burning munitions were shown cascading down on the steel works in a video posted by a pro-Russian separatist commander. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy said "very difficult and delicate negotiations" were going on to save Ukrainians in Mariupol and Azovstal. In port city, some residents ate and talked outside their burnt out apartment building, which was shelled and caught fire in early April. "I was in the kitchen when the smoke appeared," one resident named Natalya said. "I started carrying out my belongings, saving what I could." She said three neighbours had died in the fighting. "We could not bury them because of the shelling. Each day we've been putting a person into a grave, but we could not cover it up with soil because of the shelling." Nato secretary-general Jens Stoltenberg said Russia's offensive in Donbas had stalled and Ukraine could win the war, an outcome few military analysts predicted at the outset of the conflict. Stolenberg told reporters on Sunday: Russia's war in Ukraine is not going as Moscow had planned. It follows moves by Finland and Sweden to apply to join Nato. Both countries have maintained strict policies of neutrality then non-alignment since the end of the second world war, viewing Nato membership as a provocation of Moscow. Nato and the United States said they were confident both countries would be accepted into the alliance and that reservations from Turkey, which wants the Nordic countries to halt support for Kurdish militant groups present on their territory, could be overcome. Hello and welcome to the Guardian's live coverage of the war in Ukraine. I'm Calla Wahlquist and I'll be with you for the next few hours. Here are some of the key developments overnight, including Sweden announcing its intention to follow Finland in applying to join Nato. Nato's security chief, Jens Stolenberg, has said the alliance would look to provide both countries with interim security guarantees while the applications are ***processed***. Sweden has indicated it will follow Finland in applying for Nato membership. The two countries' move abandons decades of military non-alignment triggered by Russia's ***invasion*** of Ukraine and would redraw the security map of Europe. In apparent retaliation, the Kremlin has pulled the plug on electricity supplies to Finland, with which it shares a 1,300km (800 mile) border. Nato pledged open-ended military support for Ukraine on Sunday. At a meeting of alliance foreign ministers in Berlin, Germany's Annalena Baerbock said it would provide military assistance "for as long as Ukraine needs this support for the self-defence of its country". British intelligence revealed that Russia may have lost as much as a third of the ***invasion*** force, as more than 400 Russian soldiers were estimated to have been killed or wounded last week trying to cross the Donets river. Ukraine's joint forces task force said its troops repelled 17 attacks on Sunday and destroyed 11 pieces of Russian equipment. They reported the most intense fighting around the eastern Russian-held city of Izium. Ukraine also said Russia fired on 23 villages and towns in the Luhansk and Donetsk regions. Russia denies targeting the villages. Ukraine's president Volodymr Zelensky has warned that the military situation in Ukraine's south-eastern Donbas region is "very difficult" as analysts say Russian president Vladimir Putin has his sights on annexing southern and eastern Ukraine in the months ahead. Russia's defence ministry claimed it had carried out "high-precision" missile strikes on four artillery munitions depots in the Donetsk area in the east of Ukraine. The ministry also claimed airstrikes had destroyed two missile-launching systems and radar, and 15 Ukrainian drones around Donetsk and Lugansk. The first Ukrainian battalion reached the Russian border in the Kharkhiv region on Sunday. Ukrainian authorities are conducting at least 10 active rape investigations involving Russian troops, and are calling for other victims to come forward. Kalush Orchestra, the band that won Eurovision last night for Ukraine, is auctioning off the statuette to raise funds for the Ukrainian army and Ukraine. The win has lifted spirits around Ukraine. Zelenskiy has warned that the war in his country risks triggering global food shortages and has urged international intervention to prevent global famine. Before the ***invasion***, Ukraine supplied 12% of the planet's wheat, 15% of its corn and half of its sunflower oil. A cyberattack on the Lviv city council website resulted in stolen data that ended up published in Telegram channels linked to Russia. This happened the same weekend Italian police thwarted hacker attacks by pro-Russian groups on the Eurovision song contest.76779falsefalseDani Anguiano (now) and Joanna WaltersNicola Slawson, Rachel Hall and Calla Wahlquist (earlier)A wounded service member of Ukrainian forces from the besieged Azovstal steel mill in Mariupol is transported on a stretcher out of a bus.A screengrab from a video shows a shower of burning munitions hitting Azovstal steel works in the Ukrainian port city of Mariupol, Ukraine. Video obtained by Reuters on May 15, 2022.The besieged Iron and Steel Works in Mariupol, during the Russian ***invasion*** of Ukraine, May 15, 2022.Kalush Orchestra were welcomed by members of Ukraine's state border guard service at the Ukraine-Poland border.Ukraine's Kalush Orchestra, winners of the Eurovision Song Contest, perform for fans in Krakovets, at the Ukraine border with Poland.The Russian president, Vladimir Putin, attends a meeting of the leaders of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) at the Kremlin in Moscow.

**Load-Date:** May 17, 2022

**End of Document**



[***DANONE: A solid set of Full-Year 2021 results; A strong finish to the year***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:64VG-GP31-JDPT-Y4XW-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

**2021Full-YearResults**Press release - Paris, February 23, 2022

**Asolid set ofFull-Year 2021resultsA strong finish to the year**

All references in this document to Like-for-like (LFL) changes, Recurring operating income and margin, Recurring net income, Recurring income tax rate, Recurring EPS, Carbon-adjusted recurring EPS, Free cash-flow, and net financial debt, correspond to financial indicators not defined in IFRS. Their definitions, as well as their reconciliation with financial statements, are listed on pages 6 to 9.

**Antoine de Saint-Affrique:CEOstatement**

"With Q4 sales up +6.7% on a like-for-like basis and volumes at +0.4%, we ended the year on a strong note. This led to FY growth of +3.4% on a like-for-like basis, underpinned by a sound mix component. All categories contributed to this solid performance.

We delivered on our commitment to return to profitable growth in H2, with recurring operating margin at 13.7% in 2021. This was enabled by a strong focus on execution and a step-up in productivity, a pro-active approach to pricing and the disciplined implementation of Local First.

I am grateful to all Danone employees, who have brought in these results in ***unprecedented*** and challenging circumstances. Their passion and commitment are, together with the strength of our brands and the relevance of our purpose, at the heart of our resilience.

We have, over the last months, moved forward with determination on our transformation agenda, deploying Local First pragmatically and strengthening key capabilities, with the addition of globally recognized professionals in HR, Operations and R&I to Danone's leadership team. We still have much more to do, and I look forward to our CME on March 8 when we will be in a position to share more on the next steps in our growth and renewal journey".**I.FOURTH QUARTER AND FULL-YEAR RESULTS**

**Fourthquarter andfull-year sales**

**In 2021**, consolidated sales stood at (EURO)24.3 bn, up +3.4% on a like-for-like basis, led by +4.0% in value and -0.6% in volume. On a reported basis, sales increased by +2.8%, penalized by the negative impact of exchange rates that resulted from the depreciation of currencies against the euro in Latin America, Indonesia, Turkey, Japan and Russia (-2.0%). On the other hand, reported sales benefited from the +0.7% organic contribution to growth of hyperinflation geographies, as well as a slightly positive scope effect (+0.4%), mainly resulting from the combined effects of the integration of Harmless Harvest and Follow Your Heart, as well as the disposal of Vega.

**In thefourthquarter**, sales increased by +6.7% on a like-for-like basis, with volume back in positive territory (+0.4%), and value up +6.3%. Reported sales rose by +10.9%, benefiting from the positive effect of exchange rates (+2.6%), and the positive organic contribution of hyperinflation geographies (+1.0%). In terms of regional dynamics, growth was broad-based in the fourth quarter. Europe and North America grew +4.3% on a like-for-like basis, led by the continued recovery in Waters and a sustained solid momentum for EDP. Sales in the Rest of the World increased by +10.0% on a like-for-like basis, driven by the expected sequential improvement in Specialized Nutrition from the third quarter, by strong growth in EDP, and by the Mizone and Aqua brands' return to positive growth.

1North America (Noram): United States and Canada

**Recurring Operating Margin**

Danone's recurring operating income reached (EURO)3.3 bn in 2021. Recurring operating margin stood at**13.7%**, down -30 basis points (bps) on a reported basis and -9 bps on a like-for-like basis. The margin from operations decreased by -81 bps: input cost inflation, which had a negative impact of around -480 bps, was partially offset by the positive impact of around +120 bps from topline acceleration, led by mix and price, and a step-up in productivities and other mitigation plans (around +280 bps).

A&P investments were in line with last year in absolute value, in a context where the company maintained a dynamic and selective resource allocation, while the positive impact of overheads on margin was mostly driven by the first wave of savings from Local First.

In addition to the like-for-like effects, reported margin also includes the impacts of changes in scope (-12 bps), Forex and others (-14 bps) and organic contribution from hyperinflation geographies (+5 bps).

1North America (Noram): United States and Canada**Performance by reporting entity**

**ESSENTIAL DAIRY AND PLANT-BASED (EDP)**

**Essential Dairy & Plant-based**posted sales growth of +3.7% in 2021 on a like-for-like basis, and recurring operating margin decreased by -33 bps to 9.8%.

**In thefourthquarter**, sales rose by +4.3% on a like-for-like basis, reflecting a slight decline in volume (-0.4%), and an increase of +4.7% in value. The dairy portfolio delivered sustained solid growth while the plant-based portfolio registered solid mid-single-digit growth amid supply challenges.**Europe&Noram**posted another quarter of solid sales growth, with positive volumes. In Europe, sales were sustained by the plant-based, probiotics and protein platforms, with Alpro, Actimel and Yopro continuing to deliver ***exceptional*** growth. In Noram, sales were driven by Oikos and Two Good in Greek yogurt, continued momentum in Activia, and International Delight in Creamers. Plant-based sales improved sequentially, supported by tight management of supply and demand in a challenging environment. Platforms in the**Rest of theWorld**posted strong sales growth, led by price and mix, while volumes were down. Latin America and Africa showed further sales recovery, while in CIS, growth was low-single-digits, led by pricing, in a still challenging macroeconomic context.

**SPECIALIZED NUTRITION**

**Specialized Nutrition**sales increased by +1.0% in 2021 on a like-for-like basis and recurring operating margin decreased by -105 bps to 23.5%.

**In thefourthquarter**, sales improved sequentially, reaching +6.4% on a like-for-like basis, with volume and value up +0.1% and +6.3% respectively.**Infant Nutrition**posted very strong growth this quarter, driven by China and the Rest of the World. China delivered growth in the mid-teens, with resilient market shares. Domestic labels and International Labels sold through cross-border platforms maintained their growth and competitiveness momentum, with notably an outstanding performance for the Aptamil brand at 11:11, an online sales event in China. Sales of International Labels sold through indirect cross-border platforms (daigous, friends and family) were slightly negative on a low base, with travel and trade with mainland China still very limited. In Europe, category dynamics remained soft, while in the Rest of the World sales were back to strong mid-single-digit growth, driven by both volume and value. Sales in**Adult Nutrition**were penalized in the fourth quarter by inventory management amid supply challenges, notably in Europe.

**WATERS**

**Waters**sales increased by +7.2% in 2021 on a like-for-like basis and recurring operating margin was up +194 bps to 8.9% despite the strong inflationary environment, notably driven by volume recovery, improved product mix and record-high productivity.

**In thefourthquarter**, sales were up +17.3% on a like-for-like basis, led by volumes up +4.3% and value +13.0%.**Europe**posted sales growth in the mid-teens on a like-for-like basis, closing the quarter above 2019 levels. Growth was led by France, the United Kingdom, Germany, Spain and Poland, where Danone brands have been gaining market shares. In the**Rest of the World**, Mizone was back in positive territory, with stable market shares. Latin America registered another quarter of recovery, led by plain water and HOD, while South-East Asia posted low-single-digit growth, with mobility still under pressure but improving sequentially compared to the third quarter.

**Net income and Earnings per share**

**Other operating income and expense**reached -(EURO)1,080 million vs -(EURO)519 million in the prior year, mostly driven by the one-off implementation costs of the Local First project and by the investments related to the transformation of Danone's operations. As a result, reported operating margin was down -255 bps from 11.8% to 9.3%.

**Net financial costs**were down by (EURO)49 million to -(EURO)261 million, resulting from the issuance of bond in June 2021 at 0% coupon and from the decrease in the cost of net debt driven by two bond reimbursements in 2020 issued at higher interest rates. The**Recurring income tax rate**stood at 27.4%, in line with the prior year.**Recurring net income from associates**decreased significantly from (EURO)85 million to (EURO)7 million, reflecting the disposal of Danone's stakes in Mengniu and Yakult. Danone is also engaged in a disposal ***process*** of its 20% stake in the Fresh Dairy JV with Mengniu, which is thus classified as an asset held for sale under IFRS 5 as of December 31, 2021.**Recurring minorityinterests**stood at (EURO)70 million, broadly in line with the prior year.

As a result,**Recurring EPS**was down -1.1% to (EURO)3.31, and Reported EPS decreased by -1.7% to (EURO)2.94.

**Cash flow and Debt**

Capex stood at (EURO)1,043 million, up +8.4% compared to last year while Working Capital improved to -4.8% of Net Sales in a context of progressive and sequential normalization of channel mix and payment terms.**Free cash flow**reached (EURO)2,489 million in 2021, up +21.3% from the prior year. The delivery in Free Cash Flow was also positively impacted by the rephasing of one-off cash flows related to Local First from 2021 to 2022 and 2023.

As of December 31, 2021,**Danone's net debt stood at (EURO)10.5billion**, down (EURO)1.4 billion from December 31, 2020.

**Dividend**

At the Annual Shareholders' Meeting on April 26, 2022, Danone's Board of Directors will propose a dividend of (EURO)1.94 per share in cash in respect of the 2021 fiscal year, in line with last year. Assuming this proposal is approved, the ex-dividend date will be May 10, 2022 and dividends will be payable on May 12, 2022.

**II.CAPITAL MARKET EVENT**

On the occasion of a Capital Market Event hosted on March 8, 2022, Danone will share its vision, strategy and priorities. The company will also take this opportunity to unveil guidance for 2022 and for the mid-term.

**III. SUSTAINABILITYFOOTPRINT**

In 2021, Danone maintained its leadership position in ESG by reaching top scores for several ratings and rankings, with continued progress in each sustainability dimension. Today, 62% of Danone's revenue is covered by B CorpTMcertification, vs. approximately 50% last year, and the company is fully on track to meet its 2025 goal of becoming a global B CorpTM.

In line with its mission to bring health through food to as many people as possible, Danone placed first in the Product Profile ranking of the Access To Nutrition Index. This reflects the 90% of its volume sold in healthy categories1(for the third year in a row) and the 83% of volumes sold without added sugar2.

The company has been awarded a AAA score by CDP for the third consecutive year, highlighting its progress in the fight against climate change, in forest preservation and in water security. In its journey to reach Net-Zero across its full value chain in 2050, Danone reduced its GreenHouse Gas (GHG) emissions by 0.8 million tons CO2 eq. compared to 2020 on a like-for-like basis, totaling in 2021 24.7 million tons CO2 eq., with more than 0.35 million tons CO2 eq. reduction linked to the roll-out of regenerative ***agriculture*** initiatives within Danone's supply-chain. Overall and on a like-for-like basis, Danone has reduced its full scope GHG emission intensity3by 27.1%4since 2015.

Danone continues to disclose a carbon-adjusted recurring EPS evolution that takes into account an estimated financial cost for absolute GHG emissions across its entire value chain5. Carbon-adjusted recurring EPS grew by +2% to reach (EURO)1.97 in 2021.

As regards the circular economy, 84% of Danone's packaging is now recyclable, reusable or compostable, vs. 81% in 2020.

On inclusive diversity, Danone was recognized for the fourth time in a row as one of the 418 companies in the 2022 Bloomberg Gender-Equality Index, which recognizes companies committed to transparency in gender reporting and advancing women's equality. Danone is also committed to supporting employees who need to acquire new skills. In 2020, the Company worked with the IUF to develop an innovative approach called "FutureSkills", designed to better prepare employees who need new skills for the jobs of tomorrow. In 2021, the program was fully deployed6.

**IV.SHARE BUYBACK**

Danone has terminated its existing share buyback program announced on July 29, 2021. The Company repurchased an aggregate market value of (EURO)800 million in the second half of 2021.

**V.MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS OVER THE PERIOD**

**Governance and leadership changes**

**December10, 2021**: Valérie Chapoulaud-Floquet was appointed to join Danone's Board of Directors from March 1, 2022, replacing Isabelle Seillier who decided to step down for personal reasons from December 31, 2021. This was a first step in Danone's overhaul of its Board of Directors, which will lead the Company to renew the totality of its Board of Directors by 2023 - except for the positions held by the Chairman, the Chief Executive Officer and the two Directors representing Employees.**January 6, 2022:**Danone completed its leadership team with three appointments at Executive Committee level: a Chief Operations Officer (Vikram Agarwal, starting in January 2022); a Chief Research, Innovation, Quality and Food Safety Officer (Isabelle Esser, starting in April 2022); and a Chief Sustainability and Strategic Business Development Officer (Henri Bruxelles, starting in January 2022). These three globally recognized professionals - two from outside Danone and one internal - complete the leadership team and represent an important step in strengthening Danone's execution and innovation, over the short and long-term.

**Major financial transactions**

**November2, 2021**: Danone successfully issued a (EURO)700 million bond with a 9-year maturity and a 0.52% coupon. The settlement took place on November 9, 2021 and the bonds are listed on Euronext Paris.**November 16, 2021:**Danone announced it has agreed to sell Aqua d'Or, its Water and Beverage business in Denmark, to Royal Unibrew, a Denmark-based brewing and beverage company. This sale was part of Danone's strategic portfolio review and the continuous optimization of its capital allocation.

**VI. FINANCIALSTATEMENTS**

At its meeting on February 22, 2022, the Board of Directors closed statutory and consolidated financial statements for the 2021 fiscal year. Regarding the audit ***process***, the statutory auditors have substantially completed their examination of financial statements as of today.

**VII. IFRS STANDARDS AND FINANCIAL INDICATORS NOT DEFINED IN IFRS**

**IAS29: impact on reported data**

Danone has been applying IAS 29 in hyperinflation countries as defined in IFRS. Adoption of IAS 29 in these hyperinflationary countries requires its non-monetary assets and liabilities and its income statement to be restated to reflect the changes in the general pricing power of its functional currency, leading to a gain or loss on the net monetary position included in the net income. Moreover, its financial statements are converted into euros using the closing exchange rate of the relevant period.

Breakdown by quarter of 2021 sales after application of IAS 29FY 2021 sales correspond to the addition of:

Q4 2021 reported sales;Q1, Q2 and Q3 2021 sales resulting from the application of IAS 29 until December 31, 2021 to sales of entities of hyperinflation countries (application of the inflation rate until December 31, 2021 and translation into euros using December 31, 2021 closing rate) and provided in the table below for information (unaudited data).

1Results from the application of IAS29 until December 31, 2021 to Q1 sales of entities of hyperinflation countries.2Results from the application of IAS29 until December 31, 2021 to Q2 sales of entities of hyperinflation countries.3Results from the application of IAS29 until December 31, 2021 to Q3 sales of entities of hyperinflation countries.

**Financial indicators not defined in IFRS**

Due to rounding, the sum of values presented may differ from totals as reported. Such differences are not material.

**Like-for-like changes**in sales, recurring operating income and recurring operating margin reflect Danone's organic performance and essentially exclude the impact of:

changes in consolidation scope, with indicators related to a given fiscal year calculated on the basis of previous-year scope, both previous-year and current-year scopes excluding entities in countries under hyperinflation according to IAS 29 during the previous year (as for Argentinian entities since January 1st, 2019);changes in applicable accounting principles;changes in exchange rates with both previous-year and current-year indicators calculated using the same exchange rates (the exchange rate used is a projected annual rate determined by Danone for the current year and applied to both previous and current years).

**Bridge from reported data to like-for-like data**

**Recurring operating income**is defined as Danone's operating income excluding Other operating income and expenses. Other operating income and expenses comprise items that, because of their significant or unusual nature, cannot be viewed as inherent to Danone's recurring activity and have limited predictive value, thus distorting the assessment of its recurring operating performance and its evolution. These mainly include:

capital gains and losses on disposals of fully consolidated companies;impairment charges on intangible assets with indefinite useful lives;costs related to strategic restructurings or transformation plans;costs related to major external growth transactions;costs related to major crisis and major litigations;in connection with of IFRS 3 (Revised) and IAS 27 (Revised) relating to business combinations, (i) acquisition costs related to business combinations, (ii) revaluation profit or loss accounted for following a loss of control, and (iii) changes in earn-outs relating to business combinations and subsequent to acquisition date.

**Recurring operating margin**is defined as Recurring operating income over Sales ratio.

**Other non-recurring financial income and expense**corresponds to financial income and expense items that, in view of their significant or unusual nature, cannot be considered as inherent to Danone's recurring financial management. These mainly include changes in value of non-consolidated interests.

**Non-recurring income tax**corresponds to income tax on non-recurring items as well as tax income and expense items that, in view of their significant or unusual nature, cannot be considered as inherent to Danone's recurring performance.

**Recurring effective tax rate*measures*** the effective tax rate of Danone's recurring performance and is computed as the ratio income tax related to recurring items over recurring net income before tax.

**Non-recurring results from associates**include items that, because of their significant or unusual nature, cannot be viewed as inherent to the recurring activity of those companies and thus distort the assessment of their recurring performance and its evolution. These mainly include (i) capital gains and losses on disposal and impairment of Investments in associates, and (ii) non-recurring items, as defined by Danone, included in the net income from associates.

**Recurring net income**(or Recurring net income - Group Share) corresponds to the Group share of the consolidated Recurring net income. The Recurring net income excludes items that, because of their significant or unusual nature, cannot be viewed as inherent to Danone's recurring activity and have limited predictive value, thus distorting the assessment of its recurring performance and its evolution. Such non-recurring income and expenses correspond to Other operating income and expenses, Other non-recurring financial income and expenses, Non-recurring income tax, and Non-recurring income from associates. Such income and expenses, excluded from Net income, represent Non-recurring net income.

**Recurring EPS**(or Recurring net income - Group Share, per share after dilution) is defined as the ratio of Recurring net income adjusted for hybrid financing over Diluted number of shares. In compliance with IFRS, income used to calculate EPS is adjusted for the coupon related to the hybrid financing accrued for the period and presented net of tax.

**Carbon-adjusted recurring EPS**is defined in the methodological note in the chapter 5.8 of the Universal Registration Document.

**Free cash flow**represents cash flows provided or used by operating activities less capital expenditure net of disposals and, in connection with IFRS 3 (Revised), relating to business combinations, excluding (i) acquisition costs related to business combinations, and (ii) earn-outs related to business combinations and paid subsequently to acquisition date.

1Represents acquisition costs related to business combinations paid during the period.

**Net financial debt**represents the net debt portion bearing interest. It corresponds to current and non-current financial debt (i) excluding Liabilities related to put options granted to non-controlling interests and earn-outs on acquisitions resulting in control and (ii) net of Cash and cash equivalents, Short term investments and Derivatives - assets managing net debt.

1Managing net debt only

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FORWARD-LOOKING STATEMENTS

This press release contains certain forward-looking statements concerning Danone. In some cases, you can identify these forward-looking statements by forward-looking words, such as "estimate", "expect", "anticipate", "project", "plan", "intend", "objective", "believe", "forecast", "guidance", "foresee", "likely", "may", "should", "goal", "target", "might", "will", "could", "predict", "continue", "convinced" and "confident," the negative or plural of these words and other comparable terminology. Forward looking statements in this document include, but are not limited to, predictions of future activities, operations, direction, performance and results of Danone.

Although Danone believes its expectations are based on reasonable assumptions, these forward-looking statements are subject to numerous risks and uncertainties, which could cause actual results to differ materially from those anticipated in these forward-looking statements. For a detailed description of these risks and uncertainties, please refer to the "Risk Factor" section of Danone's Universal Registration Document (the current version of which is available at[*www.danone.com*](https://www.globenewswire.com/Tracker?data=KRJzo1xRo2m2NW22vuO4L3FEe6dDaIg_fLlvDY-WvlEs9HHA9R-nu28StJgtlqH3NHk79n0vUwCSt9UOP_0gdQ==)).

Subject to regulatory requirements, Danone does not undertake to publicly update or revise any of these forward-looking statements. This document does not constitute an offer to sell, or a solicitation of an offer to buy Danone securities

**The presentation to analysts and investors will be broadcast live today from 9:00 a.m. (Paris time)on Danone's website (**[*www.danone.com*](https://www.globenewswire.com/Tracker?data=KRJzo1xRo2m2NW22vuO4L7h7O2o4TgRu3hUKS_wSsRVcj5jzpSi8teMyvL8lYjOBszBM8dXdYep25YDNc_ZYog==)**).Related slides will also be available on the website in the Investors section.**

**APPENDIX - Sales by reporting entity and by geographical area (in (EURO) million)**

1North America (Noram): United States and Canada

1In operational terms, 'healthy product categories' for Danone refers to packaged water, yogurts, milks and other daily dairy products, daily plant-based products, beverages with 0% sugar, and specialized nutrition products (except the following early life nutrition products: foods for children over 3 years old as well as biscuits and beverages for children under 3 years old).The remaining categories are mainly low sugar beverages and indulgent products.2All volumes in the One Health Scorecard, only excluding plant-based products and adult medical nutrition.3 Grams of CO2 equivalent per kilo of products sold

4 The data is based on a constant consolidation scope and a constant methodology. The GreenHouse Gas protocol defines three scopes for carbon footprint assessment: Scope 1 covers direct emissions from equipment that is company-owned or under the operational control of Danone, scope 2 refers to indirect energy emissions related to the generation of electricity, steam, heat or cold purchased and consumed by Danone and scope 3 covers all indirect emissions due to Danone's activities, including emissions from raw materials used, the transport and distribution of products, the use and the end-of-life of products. For more information, please refer to the chapter 5 of Danone Universal Registration Document.5 Carbon-adjusted recurring EPS is equal to the recurring EPS less an estimate financial cost for carbon / number of shares after dilution. Please refer to the methodological note in the chapter 5.8 of the Universal Registration Document for more details on the calculation of the carbon-adjusted recurring EPS.6 All subsidiairies with eligible people have proposed the program to our social partners, or directly to employees.

**Attachment**

[*PR\_Danone\_FY\_2021*](https://ml-eu.globenewswire.com/Resource/Download/8473284c-8d81-4392-a4cf-325d9d867820)

**Load-Date:** February 23, 2022

**End of Document**



[***Federal Register: Endangered and Threatened Wildlife and Plants; Review of Species That Are Candidates for Listing as Endangered or Threatened; Annual Notification of Findings on Resubmitted Petitions; Annual Description of Progress on Listing Actions Pages 26152 - 26178 [FR DOC #2022-09376]***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:65D1-KHP1-JDG9-Y1JH-00000-00&context=1516831)

Impact News Service

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**Body**

Washington: Office of the Federal Register has issued the following notice:DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIORFish and Wildlife Service50 CFR Part 17[Docket No. FWS-HQ-ES-2021-0156; FF09E21000 FXES1111090FEDR223]Endangered and Threatened Wildlife and Plants; Review of Species That Are Candidates for Listing as Endangered or Threatened; Annual Notification of Findings on Resubmitted Petitions; Annual Description of Progress on Listing ActionsAGENCY: Fish and Wildlife Service, Interior.ACTION: Notification of review.-----------------------------------------------------------------------SUMMARY: In this candidate notification of review (CNOR), we, the U.S Fish and Wildlife Service (Service), present an updated list of plant and animal species that we regard as candidates for or have proposed for addition to the Lists of Endangered and Threatened Wildlife and Plants under the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended. This document also includes our findings on resubmitted petitions and describes our progress in revising the Lists of Endangered and Threatened Wildlife and Plants (Lists) during the period October 1, 2020, through September 30, 2021. Combined with other decisions for individual species that were published separately from this CNOR in the past year, the current number of species that are candidates for listing is 27 (as of September 30, 2021). Identification of candidate species can assist environmental planning efforts by providing advance notice of potential listings, and by allowing landowners, resource managers, States, Tribes, range countries, and other stakeholders to take actions to alleviate threats and thereby possibly remove the need to list species as endangered or threatened. Even if we subsequently list a candidate species, the early notice provided here could result in more options for species management and recovery by prompting earlier candidate conservation ***measures*** to alleviate threats to the species.DATES: We will accept information on any of the species in this document at any time.ADDRESSES: This document is available on the internet at [*https://www.regulations.gov*](https://www.regulations.gov) and [*https://www.fws.gov/endangered/what-we-do/cnor.html*](https://www.fws.gov/endangered/what-we-do/cnor.html). Species assessment forms with information and references on a particular candidate species' range, status, habitat needs, and listing priority assignment are available for review on our website ([*https://ecos.fws.gov/tess\_public/reports/candidate-species-report*](https://ecos.fws.gov/tess_public/reports/candidate-species-report)). Please submit any new information, materials, comments, or questions of a general nature on this document to the address listed under FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT. Please submit any new information, materials, comments, or questions pertaining to a particular species to the address of the Regional Director or Branch Chief in the appropriate office listed under Request for Information in SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION.FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Chief, Branch of Domestic Listing, U.S Fish and Wildlife Service, MS: ES, 5275 Leesburg Pike, Falls Church, VA 22041-3803 (telephone 703-358-2673). Individuals in the United States who are deaf, deafblind, hard of hearing, or have a speech disability may dial 711 (TTY, TDD, or TeleBraille) to access telecommunications relay services. Individuals outside the United States should use the relay services offered within their country to make international calls to the point-of-contact in the United States.SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:Background The Endangered Species Act of 1973 (Act; 16 U.S.C 1531 et seq.), as amended, requires that we identify species of wildlife and plants that are endangered or threatened based solely on the best scientific and commercial data available. As defined in section 3 of the Act, an endangered species is any species that is in danger of extinction throughout all or a significant portion of its range, and a threatened species is any species that is likely to become an endangered species within the foreseeable future throughout all or a significant portion of its range. Through the Federal rulemaking ***process***, we add species that meet these definitions to the List of Endangered and Threatened Wildlife in title 50 of the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) at Sec. 17.11 (50 CFR 17.11) or the List of Endangered and Threatened Plants at 50 CFR 17.12 As part of this ***process***, we maintain a list of species that we regard as candidates for listing. A candidate species is one for which we have on file sufficient information on biological vulnerability and threats to support a proposal for listing as endangered or threatened, but for which preparation and publication of a proposal is precluded by higher priority listing actions. We may identify a species as a candidate for listing after we have conducted an evaluation of its status--either on our own initiative, or in response to a petition we have received. If we have made a finding on a petition to list a species, and have found that listing is warranted, but precluded by other higher priority listing actions, we will add the species to our list of candidates. We maintain this list of candidates for a variety of reasons: (1) To notify the public that these species are facing threats to their survival; (2) to provide advance knowledge of potential listings that could affect decisions of environmental planners and developers; (3) to provide information that may stimulate and guide conservation efforts that will remove or reduce threats to these species and possibly make listing unnecessary; (4) to request input from interested parties to help us identify those candidate species that may not require protection under the Act, as well as additional species that may require the Act's protections; and (5) to request necessary information for setting priorities for preparing listing proposals. We encourage collaborative conservation efforts for candidate species and offer technical and financial assistance to facilitate such efforts. For additional information regarding such[[Page 26153]]assistance, please contact the appropriate Office listed under Request for Information, below, or visit our website at: [*https://www.fws.gov/endangered/what-we-do/index.html.Previous*](https://www.fws.gov/endangered/what-we-do/index.html.Previous) CNORs We have been publishing CNORs since 1975. The most recent CNOR addressing species domestic to the United States was published on November 16, 2020 (85 FR 73164). The most recent CNOR addressing foreign species was published on August 9, 2021 (86 FR 43470). CNORs published since 1994 are available on our website at [*https://www.fws.gov/endangered/what-we-do/cnor.html*](https://www.fws.gov/endangered/what-we-do/cnor.html). For copies of CNORs published prior to 1994, please contact the Branch of Domestic Listing (see FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT, above). On September 21, 1983, we published guidance for assigning a listing priority number (LPN) for each candidate species (48 FR 43098). Using this guidance, we assign each candidate an LPN of 1 to 12, depending on the magnitude of threats, immediacy of threats, and taxonomic status; the lower the LPN, the higher the listing priority (that is, a species with an LPN of 1 would have the highest listing priority). Section 4(h)(3) of the Act (16 U.S.C 1533(h)(3)) requires the Secretary to establish guidelines for such a priority-ranking system. As explained below, in using this system, we first categorize based on the magnitude of the threat(s), then by the immediacy of the threat(s), and finally by taxonomic status. Under this priority-ranking system, magnitude of threat can be either ``high'' or ``moderate to low.'' This criterion helps ensure that the species facing the greatest threats to their continued existence receive the highest listing priority. All candidate species face threats to their continued existence, so the magnitude of threats is in relative terms. For all candidate species, the threats are of sufficiently high magnitude to put them in danger of extinction or make them likely to become in danger of extinction in the foreseeable future. However, for species with higher magnitude threats, the threats have a greater likelihood of bringing about extinction or are expected to bring about extinction on a shorter timescale (once the threats are imminent) than for species with lower-magnitude threats. Because we do not routinely quantify how likely or how soon extinction would be expected to occur absent listing, we must evaluate factors that contribute to the likelihood and time scale for extinction. We therefore consider information such as: (1) The number of populations or extent of range of the species affected by the threat(s), or both; (2) the biological significance of the affected population(s), taking into consideration the life-history characteristics of the species and its current abundance and distribution; (3) whether the threats affect the species in only a portion of its range, and, if so, the likelihood of persistence of the species in the unaffected portions; (4) the severity of the effects and the rapidity with which they have caused or are likely to cause mortality to individuals and accompanying declines in population levels; (5) whether the effects are likely to be permanent; and (6) the extent to which any ongoing conservation efforts reduce the severity of the threat(s). As used in our priority-ranking system, immediacy of threat is categorized as either ``imminent'' or ``nonimminent,'' and is based on when the threats will begin. If a threat is currently occurring or likely to occur in the very near future, we classify the threat as imminent. Determining the immediacy of threats helps ensure that species facing actual, identifiable threats are given priority for listing proposals over species for which threats are only potential or species that are intrinsically vulnerable to certain types of threats but are not known to be presently facing such threats. Our priority-ranking system has three categories for taxonomic status: Species that are the sole members of a genus; full species (in genera that have more than one species); and subspecies and distinct population segments of vertebrate species (DPSs). The result of the ranking system is that we assign each candidate a listing priority number of 1 to 12. For example, if the threats are of high magnitude, with immediacy classified as imminent, the listable entity is assigned an LPN of 1, 2, or 3 based on its taxonomic status (i.e , a species that is the only member of its genus would be assigned to the LPN 1 category, a full species to LPN 2, and a subspecies or DPS would be assigned to LPN 3). In summary, the LPN ranking system provides a basis for making decisions about the relative priority for preparing a proposed rule to list a given species. No matter which LPN we assign to a species, each species included in this document as a candidate is one for which we have concluded that we have sufficient information to prepare a proposed rule for listing because it is in danger of extinction or likely to become endangered within the foreseeable future throughout all or a significant portion of its range. For more information on the ***process*** and standards used in assigning LPNs, a copy of the 1983 guidance is available on our website at: [*http://www.fws.gov/endangered/esa-library/pdf/1983\_LPN\_Policy\_FR\_pub.pdf*](http://www.fws.gov/endangered/esa-library/pdf/1983_LPN_Policy_FR_pub.pdf). Information on the LPN assigned to a particular species is summarized in this CNOR, and the species assessment and listing priority assignment form for each candidate contains the LPN chart and a more-detailed explanation--including citations to, and more-detailed analyses of, the best scientific and commercial data available--for our determination of the magnitude and immediacy of threat(s) and assignment of the LPN.Summary of This CNOR Since publication of the previous CNORs on November 16, 2020 (domestic), and August 9, 2021 (foreign), we reviewed the available information on candidate species to ensure that a proposed listing is justified for each species, and reevaluated the relative LPN assigned to each species. We also evaluated the need to emergency list any of these species, particularly species with higher priorities (i.e , species with LPNs of 1, 2, or 3). This review and reevaluation ensures that we focus conservation efforts on those species at greatest risk. After a thorough review of the available scientific and commercial information, we are changing the listing priority number of the San Francisco Bay-Delta DPS of longfin smelt (Spirinchus thaleichthys). In addition, we find that grizzly bears (Ursus arctos horribilis) in the Cabinet-Yaak Ecosystem (CYE) and the Pariette cactus (Sclerocactus brevispinus) no longer meet the definition of an endangered species throughout all or a significant portion of their range, and are no longer warranted for uplisting. In addition to reviewing candidate species since publication of the last domestic and foreign CNORs, we have worked on findings in response to petitions to list species, on proposed rules to list species under the Act, and on final listing determinations. Some of these findings and determinations have been completed and published in the Federal Register, while work on others is still under way (see Preclusion and Expeditious Progress, below, for details). Combined with other findings and determinations published separately from this CNOR, 27 species are now candidates awaiting preparation of a proposed listing rule or ``not-warranted'' finding. Table 5 identifies these 27 candidate species, along with the 31[[Page 26154]]species proposed for listing as of September 30, 2021. Table 6 lists the changes for species identified in the previous CNORs and includes 13 species identified in the previous CNORs as either proposed for listing or classified as candidates that are no longer in those categories. This includes twelve species for which we published a final listing rule and one species for which we published a withdrawal of the proposed listing rule.Petition Findings The Act provides two mechanisms for considering species for listing. One method allows the Secretary, on the Secretary's own initiative, to identify species for listing under the standards of section 4(a)(1). The second method provides a mechanism for the public to petition us to add a species to the Lists. As described further in the paragraphs that follow, the CNOR serves several purposes as part of the petition ***process***: (1) In some instances (in particular, for petitions to list species that the Service has already identified as candidates on its own initiative), it serves as the initial petition finding; (2) for candidate species for which the Service has made a warranted-but-precluded petition finding, it serves as a ``resubmitted'' petition finding that the Act requires the Service to make each year; and (3) it documents the Service's compliance with the statutory requirement to monitor the status of species for which listing is warranted but precluded, and to ascertain if they need emergency listing. First, the CNOR serves as an initial 12-month finding in some instances. Under section 4(b)(3)(A) of the Act, when we receive a petition to list a species, we must determine within 90 days, to the maximum extent practicable, whether the petition presents substantial information indicating that listing may be warranted (a ``90-day finding''). If we make a positive 90-day finding, we must promptly commence a status review of the species under section 4(b)(3)(A); we must then make, within 12 months of the receipt of the petition, one of the following three possible findings (a ``12-month finding''): (1) The petitioned action is not warranted, in which case we must promptly publish the finding in the Federal Register; (2) The petitioned action is warranted (in which case we must promptly publish a proposed regulation to implement the petitioned action; once we publish a proposed rule for a species, sections 4(b)(5) and 4(b)(6) of the Act govern further procedures, regardless of whether or not we issued the proposal in response to a petition); or (3) The petitioned action is warranted, but (a) the immediate proposal of a regulation and final promulgation of a regulation implementing the petitioned action is precluded by pending proposals to determine whether any species is endangered or threatened, and (b) expeditious progress is being made to add qualified species to the Lists and to remove from the Lists species for which the protections of the Act are no longer necessary. We refer to this third option as a ``warranted-but-precluded finding,'' and after making such a finding, we must promptly publish it in the Federal Register. We define ``candidate species'' to mean those species for which the Service has on file sufficient information on biological vulnerability and threats to support issuance of a proposed rule to list, but for which issuance of the proposed rule is precluded (61 FR 64481; December 5, 1996). The standard for making a species a candidate through our own initiative is identical to the standard for making a warranted-but-precluded 12-month petition finding on a petition to list. Therefore, all candidate species identified through our own initiative already have received the equivalent of substantial 90-day and warranted-but-precluded 12-month findings. Nevertheless, if we receive a petition to list a species that we have already identified as a candidate, we review the status of the newly petitioned candidate species and in a CNOR publish specific section 4(b)(3) findings (i.e , substantial 90-day and warranted-but-precluded 12-month findings) in response to the petitions to list these candidate species. We publish these findings as part of the first CNOR following receipt of the petition. Second, the CNOR serves as a ``resubmitted'' petition finding. Section 4(b)(3)(C)(i) of the Act requires that when we make a warranted-but-precluded finding on a petition, we treat the petition as one that is resubmitted on the date of the finding. Thus, we must make a 12-month petition finding for each such species at least once a year in compliance with section 4(b)(3)(B) of the Act, until we publish a proposal to list the species or make a final not-warranted finding. We make these annual resubmitted petition findings through the CNOR. To the extent these annual findings differ from the initial 12-month warranted-but-precluded finding or any of the resubmitted petition findings in previous CNORs, they supersede the earlier findings, although all previous findings are part of the administrative record for the new finding, and in the new finding, we may rely upon them or incorporate them by reference as appropriate, in addition to explaining why the finding has changed. We have identified the candidate species for which we received petitions and made a continued warranted-but-precluded finding on a resubmitted petition by the code ``C\*'' in the category column on the left side of Table 5, below. Third, through undertaking the analysis required to complete the CNOR, the Service determines if any candidate species needs emergency listing. Section 4(b)(3)(C)(iii) of the Act requires us to implement a system to monitor effectively the status of all species for which we have made a warranted-but-precluded 12-month finding and to make prompt use of the emergency listing authority under section 4(b)(7) to prevent a significant risk to the well-being of any such species. The CNOR plays a crucial role in the monitoring system that we have implemented for all candidate species by providing notice that we are actively seeking information regarding the status of those species. We review all new information on candidate species as it becomes available, prepare an annual species assessment form that reflects monitoring results and other new information, and identify any species for which emergency listing may be appropriate. If we determine that emergency listing is appropriate for any candidate, we will make prompt use of the emergency listing authority under section 4(b)(7) of the Act. A number of court decisions have elaborated on the nature and specificity of information that we must consider in making and describing the petition findings in the CNOR. The CNOR that published on November 9, 2009 (74 FR 57804), describes these court decisions in further detail. As with previous CNORs, we continue to incorporate information of the nature and specificity required by the courts. For example, we include a description of the reasons why the listing of every petitioned candidate species is both warranted and precluded at this time. We make our determinations of preclusion on a nationwide basis to ensure that the species most in need of listing will be addressed first and also because we allocate our listing budget on a nationwide basis. Our preclusion determinations are further based upon our budget for listing activities for non-listed species only, and we explain the priority system and why the work we[[Page 26155]]have accomplished has precluded action on listing candidate species. In preparing this CNOR, we reviewed the current status of, and threats to, the 27 candidates for which we have received a petition to list and the 4 listed species for which we have received a petition to reclassify from threatened to endangered, where we found the petitioned action to be warranted but precluded. We find that the immediate issuance of a proposed rule and timely promulgation of a final rule for each of these species has been, for the preceding months, and continues to be, precluded by higher priority listing actions. However, for six of these candidate species, we are currently engaged in a thorough review of all available data to determine whether to proceed with a proposed listing rule; as a result of this review, we may conclude that listing is no longer warranted. For the North Cascades grizzly bear ecosystem population, we are engaged in a thorough review of all available data to determine the appropriate status for this entity (see Petitions To Reclassify Species Already Listed, below). For the remaining candidates and two listed species--delta smelt, and northern spotted owl, which are candidates for reclassification from threatened to endangered--we are providing updated species assessment forms and a summary of those assessments in this document (see Petitions to Reclassify Species Already Listed, below). Additional information that is the basis for this finding is found in the species assessment forms and our decision file for each species. The immediate publication of proposed rules to list these species was precluded by our work on higher priority listing actions, listed below, during the period from October 1, 2020, through September 30, 2021. Below we describe the actions that continue to preclude the immediate proposal and final promulgation of a regulation implementing each of the petitioned actions for which we have made a warranted-but-precluded finding, and we describe the expeditious progress we are making to add qualified species to, and remove species from, the Lists. We will continue to monitor the status of all candidate species, including petitioned species, as new information becomes available to determine if a change in status is warranted, including the need to emergency list a species under section 4(b)(7) of the Act. As described above, under section 4 of the Act, we identify and propose species for listing based on the factors identified in section 4(a)(1)--either on our own initiative or through the mechanism that section 4 provides for the public to petition us to add species to the Lists of Endangered or Threatened Wildlife and Plants.Preclusion and Expeditious Progress To make a finding that a particular action is warranted but precluded, the Service must make two determinations: (1) That the immediate proposal and timely promulgation of a final regulation is precluded by pending proposals to determine whether any species is endangered or threatened; and (2) that expeditious progress is being made to add qualified species to either of the Lists and to remove species from the Lists (16 U.S.C 1533(b)(3)(B)(iii)).Preclusion A listing proposal is precluded if the Service does not have sufficient resources available to complete the proposal because there are competing demands for those resources and the relative priority of those competing demands is higher. Thus, in any given fiscal year (FY), multiple factors dictate whether it will be possible to undertake work on a proposed listing regulation or whether promulgation of a proposal is precluded by higher priority listing actions--(1) the amount of resources available for completing the listing-related function, (2) the estimated cost of completing the proposed listing regulation, and (3) the Service's workload, along with the Service's prioritization of the proposed listing regulation, in relation to other actions in its workload.Available Resources The resources available for listing-related actions are determined through the annual Congressional appropriations ***process***. In FY 1998 and for each fiscal year since then, Congress has placed a statutory cap on funds that may be expended for the Listing Program (spending cap). This spending cap was designed to prevent the listing function from depleting funds needed for other functions under the Act (for example, recovery functions, such as removing species from the Lists), or for other Service programs (see House Report 105-163, 105th Congress, 1st Session, July 1, 1997). The funds within the spending cap are available to support work involving the following listing actions: Proposed and final rules to add species to the Lists or to change the status of species from threatened to endangered; 90-day and 12-month findings on petitions to add species to the Lists or to change the status of a species from threatened to endangered; annual ``resubmitted'' petition findings on prior warranted-but-precluded petition findings as required under section 4(b)(3)(C)(i) of the Act; critical habitat petition findings; proposed rules designating critical habitat or final critical habitat determinations; and litigation-related, administrative, and program-management functions (including preparing and allocating budgets, responding to Congressional and public inquiries, and conducting public outreach regarding listing and critical habitat). For more than two decades, the size and cost of the workload in these categories of actions have far exceeded the amount of funding available to the Service under the spending cap for completing listing and critical habitat actions under the Act. As we cannot exceed the spending cap without violating the Anti-Deficiency Act (31 U.S.C 1341(a)(1)(A)), each year we have been compelled to determine that work on at least some actions was precluded by work on higher-priority actions. We make our determinations of preclusion on a nationwide basis to ensure that the species most in need of listing will be addressed first, and because we allocate our listing budget on a nationwide basis. Through the listing cap and the amount of funds needed to complete court-mandated actions within the cap, Congress and the courts have in effect determined the amount of money remaining (after completing court-mandated actions) for listing activities nationwide. Therefore, the funds that remain within the listing cap--after paying for work needed to comply with court orders or court-approved settlement agreements--set the framework within which we make our determinations of preclusion and expeditious progress. For FY 2021, through the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021 (Pub. L. 116-260, December 27, 2020), Congress appropriated $20,767,000 for all domestic and foreign listing work. The amount of funding Congress will appropriate in future years is uncertain.Costs of Listing Actions The work involved in preparing various listing documents can be extensive, and may include, but is not limited to: Gathering and assessing the best scientific and commercial data available and conducting analyses used as the basis for our decisions; requesting peer and partner review on our analyses that support listing decisions and incorporating those comments, as appropriate; writing and publishing documents; and obtaining, reviewing, and evaluating public comments on proposed rules and incorporating relevant information from those[[Page 26156]]comments into final rules. The number of listing actions that we can undertake in a given year also is influenced by the complexity of those listing actions; that is, more complex actions generally are more costly. Our practice of proposing to designate critical habitat concurrently with listing domestic species requires additional coordination and an analysis of the economic impacts of the designation, and thus adds to the complexity and cost of our work. Completing all of the outstanding listing and critical habitat actions has for so long required more funding than is available within the spending cap that the Service has developed several ways to prioritize its workload actions and to identify the work it can complete with the available funding for listing and critical habitat actions each year.Prioritizing Listing Actions The Service's Listing Program workload is broadly composed of four types of actions, which the Service prioritizes as follows: (1) Compliance with court orders and court-approved settlement agreements requiring that petition findings or listing determinations or critical habitat designations be completed by a specific date; (2) essential litigation-related, administrative, and listing program-management functions; (3) section 4 (of the Act) listing and critical habitat actions with absolute statutory deadlines; and (4) section 4 listing actions that do not have absolute statutory deadlines. In previous years, the Service received many new petitions, including multiple petitions to list numerous species--in one example, a single petition sought to list 404 domestic species. The emphasis that petitioners placed on seeking listing for hundreds of species at a time through the petition ***process*** significantly increased the number of actions within the third category of our workload--actions that have absolute statutory deadlines for making findings on those petitions. In addition, the necessity of dedicating all of the Listing Program funding towards determining the status of 251 candidate species and complying with other court-ordered requirements between 2011 and 2016 added to the number of petition findings awaiting action. Because we are not able to work on all of these at once, the Service's most recent effort to prioritize its workload focuses on addressing the backlog in petition findings that has resulted from the influx of large multi-species petitions and the 5-year period in which the Service was compelled to suspend making 12-month findings for most of those petitions. The number of petitions awaiting status reviews and accompanying 12-month findings illustrates the considerable extent of this backlog. As a result of the outstanding petitions to list hundreds of species, and our efforts to make initial petition findings within 90 days of receiving the petition to the maximum extent practicable, at the beginning of FY 2021 we had 408 12-month petition findings yet to be initiated and completed. To determine the relative priorities of the outstanding 12-month petition findings, the Service developed a prioritization methodology (methodology) (81 FR 49248; July 27, 2016), after providing the public with notice and an opportunity to comment on the draft methodology (81 FR 2229; January 15, 2016). Under the methodology, we assign each 12-month finding to one of five priority bins: (1) The species is critically imperiled; (2) strong data are already available about the status of the species; (3) new science is underway that would inform key uncertainties about the status of the species; (4) conservation efforts are in development or underway and likely to address the status of the species; or (5) the available data on the species are limited. As a general matter, 12-month findings with a lower bin number have a higher priority than, and are scheduled before, 12-month findings with a higher bin number. However, we make some limited exceptions--for example, we may schedule a lower-priority finding earlier if batching it with a higher-priority finding would generate efficiencies. We may also consider whether there are any special circumstances whereby an action should be moved up (or down) in scheduling. For example, one limitation that might result in divergence from priority order is when the current highest priorities are clustered in a geographic area, such that our scientific expertise at the field office level is fully occupied with their existing workload. We recognize that the geographic distribution of our scientific expertise will in some cases require us to balance workload across geographic areas. Since before Congress first established the spending cap for the Listing Program in 1998, the Listing Program workload has required considerably more resources than the amount of funds Congress has allowed for the Listing Program. Therefore, it is important that we be as efficient as possible in our listing ***process***. After finalizing the prioritization methodology, we then applied that methodology to develop a multi-year workplans for domestic and foreign species for completing the outstanding status assessments and accompanying 12-month findings, along with other outstanding work such as designating critical habitat and acting on the status of candidate species.Domestic Species Workplan The purpose of the National Listing Workplan (Workplan) is to provide transparency and predictability to the public about when the Service anticipates completing specific 12-month findings for domestic species while allowing for flexibility to update the Workplan when new information changes the priorities. In January 2021, the Service released its updated Workplan for addressing the Act's domestic listing and critical habitat decisions over the subsequent 5 years. The updated Workplan identified the Service's schedule for addressing all domestic species on the candidate list and conducting 265 status reviews and accompanying 12-month findings by FY 2025 for domestic species that have been petitioned for Federal protections under the Act. The National Listing Workplan is available online at: [*https://www.fws.gov/endangered/what-we-do/listing-workplan.html.Foreign*](https://www.fws.gov/endangered/what-we-do/listing-workplan.html.Foreign) Species Workplan Similar to the National Listing Workplan, the Foreign Species Workplan provides the Service's multi-year schedule for addressing our listing workload. The Foreign Species Workplan provides transparency and predictability to the public about when the Service anticipates completing specific 12-month findings and candidate species while allowing for flexibility to update the Foreign Species Workplan when new information changes the priorities. In September 2021, the Service released its most recent Foreign Species Workplan for addressing the Act's foreign listing decisions over the subsequent 5 years. The Foreign Species Workplan identifies the Service's prioritization for addressing all foreign species on the candidate list and 46 status reviews and accompanying 12-month findings for petitioned species, and identifies which actions we plan to complete by FY 2026. As we implement our Foreign Species Workplan and work on 12-month findings and proposed rules for the highest-priority species, we increase efficiency by preparing multi-species proposals when appropriate, and these may include species with lower priority if they overlap geographically or have the same threats as one of the highest-priority species. The Foreign Species Workplan is available online at: https://[[Page 26157]][*www.fws.gov/endangered/what-we-do/foreign-listing-workplan.html*](http://www.fws.gov/endangered/what-we-do/foreign-listing-workplan.html) For the 12-month findings, consistent with our prioritization methodology, within the five priority bins we determine the relative timing of foreign species actions using sub-ranking considerations, i.e , as tie-breakers for determining relative timing within each of the five bins (see the August 9, 2021 CNOR (86 FR 43474-43476) for a detailed description of tie-breakers). We consider the extent to which the protections of the Act would be able to improve conditions for that species and its habitat relative to the other species within the same bin, and in doing so, we give weight to the following considerations, in order from greater weight to lesser weight.1. FWS Office of Law Enforcement (OLE) enforcement capacity2. Species in trade to or from the United States3. Species in trade through U.S ports (i.e , in-transit or transshipment)4. Within the United States, interstate trade5. CITES status6. IUCN Red List statusPrioritization of Domestic and Foreign Species An additional way in which we determine relative priorities of outstanding actions for species in the section 4 program is application of the listing priority guidelines (48 FR 43098; September 21, 1983; see Previous CNORs above). Proposed rules for listing foreign species, including foreign candidate species, are generally lower in priority than domestic listings because we generally have more resources and authorities to achieve higher conservation outcomes when listing domestic species. The Service has a responsibility to conserve both domestic and foreign species; however, our choice to dedicate the bulk of our funding cap to domestic actions is a rational one given the likelihood of obtaining better conservation outcomes for domestic species versus foreign species under the Act. The Act makes no distinction between foreign species and domestic species in listing species as threatened or endangered. The protections of the Act generally apply to both listed foreign species and domestic species, and section 8 of the Act provides authorities for international cooperation on foreign species. However, some significant differences in the Service's authorities result in differences in our ability to affect conservation for foreign and domestic species under the Act. The major differences are that the Service has no regulatory jurisdiction over take of a listed species in a foreign country, or of trade in listed species outside the United States by persons not subject to the jurisdiction of the United States. 50 CFR 17.21 The Service also does not designate critical habitat within foreign countries or in other areas outside of the jurisdiction of the United States. 50 CFR 424.12(g). Additionally, section 7 of the Act in part requires Federal agencies to ensure that activities they authorize, fund, or carry out are not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of the species or destroy or adversely modify its critical habitat, and to enter into consultation with the Service if a Federal action may affect a listed species or its critical habitat. An ``action'' that is subject to the consultation provisions of section 7(a)(2) is defined in our implementing regulations at 50 CFR 402.02 as ``all activities or programs of any kind authorized, funded, or carried out, in whole or in part, by Federal agencies in the United States or upon the high seas.'' In view of this regulatory definition, foreign species are rarely subject to section 7 consultation, apart from consultations for permits issued under the Act. This differs from the considerable benefits section 7 affords to domestic species whose life cycle occurs in whole or in part in the United States, and for which we do designate critical habitat, which are routinely subject to section 7 consultations and the conservation benefits that result from those. These differences in the Service's authorities for foreign and domestic species under the Act, including relating to take, critical habitat, and section 7 consultation, means that listing foreign species is likely to have relatively less conservation effect than for domestic species. The protections of the Act through listing are likely to have their greatest conservation effect for foreign species that are in trade to, from, through, or within the United States. The majority (likely 15 out of the 19) of current foreign candidate species are not known to be in trade. Therefore, we made a rational decision to dedicate more resources to listing domestic species. Additionally, proposed rules for reclassification of threatened species status to endangered species status (uplisting) are generally lower in priority because, as listed species, they are already afforded the protections of the Act and implementing regulations. However, for efficiency reasons, we may choose to work on a proposed rule to reclassify a species to endangered species status if we can combine this with higher-priority work.Listing Program Workload The National Listing Workplan that the Service released in 2021 outlined work for domestic species over the period from FY 2021 to FY 2025. The Foreign Species Workplan that the Service released in 2021 outlined work for foreign species over the period from FY 2020 to FY 2026. Tables 1 and 2 under Expeditious Progress, below, identify the higher-priority listing actions that we completed through FY 2021 (September 30, 2021), as well as those we have been working on in FY 2021 but have not yet completed. For FY 2021, our workload includes 49 12-month findings or proposed listing actions that are at various stages of completion at the time of this finding. In addition to the actions scheduled in the National Listing Workplan and the Foreign Species Workplan (``Workplans''), the overall Listing Program workload also includes development and revision of regulations required by new court orders or settlement agreements to address the repercussions of any new court decisions, and proposed and final critical habitat designations or revisions for species that have already been listed. The Service's highest priorities for spending its funding in FY 2021 are actions included in the Workplans and actions required to address court decisions.Expeditious Progress As explained above, a determination that listing is warranted but precluded must also demonstrate that expeditious progress is being made to add and remove qualified species to and from the Lists. Please note that in the Code of Federal Regulations, the ``Lists'' are grouped as one list of endangered and threatened wildlife (see 50 CFR 17.11(h)) and one list of endangered and threatened plants (see 50 CFR 17.12(h)). However, the ``Lists'' referred to in the Act mean one list of endangered species (wildlife and plants) and one list of threatened species (wildlife and plants). For the purposes of evaluating our expeditious progress, when we refer to the ``Lists,'' we mean this latter grouping of one list of endangered species and one list of threatened species. As with our ``precluded'' finding, the evaluation of whether expeditious progress is being made is a function of the resources available and the competing demands for those funds. As discussed earlier, the FY 2021 appropriations law appropriated[[Page 26158]]$20,767,000 for all domestic and foreign listing activities. As discussed below, given the limited resources available for listing, the competing demands for those funds, and the completed work catalogued in the tables below, we find that we are making expeditious progress to add qualified species to the Lists and to remove from the Lists species for which the protections of the Act are no longer necessary. The work of the Service's domestic listing and foreign listing programs in FY 2021 (as of September 30, 2021) includes all three of the steps necessary for adding species to the Lists: (1) Identifying species that may warrant listing (including 90-day petition findings); (2) undertaking an evaluation of the best available scientific data about those species and the threats they face to determine whether or not listing is warranted (a status review and, for petitioned species, an accompanying 12-month finding); and (3) adding qualified species to the Lists (by publishing proposed and final listing rules). We explain in more detail how we are making expeditious progress in all three of the steps necessary for adding qualified species to the Lists (identifying, evaluating, and adding species). Subsequent to discussing our expeditious progress in adding qualified species to the Lists, we explain our expeditious progress in removing from the Lists species that no longer require the protections of the Act. First, we are making expeditious progress in identifying species that may warrant listing. In FY 2021 (as of September 30, 2021), we completed 90-day findings on petitions to list 19 domestic species. For foreign species, we did not receive petitions to list species in FY 2021 and do not have any petitions pending for which a 90-day finding has not been made (as of September 30, 2021). Second, we are making expeditious progress in evaluating the best scientific and commercial data available about species and threats they face (status reviews) to determine whether or not listing is warranted. In FY 2021 (as of September 30, 2021), we completed 12-month findings for 68 domestic species and 23 foreign species. In addition, we funded and initiated 12-month findings for 36 domestic species and 5 foreign species and proposed listing determinations for 3 candidates. Although we did not complete those actions during FY 2021 (as of September 30, 2021), we made expeditious progress towards doing so by initiating and making progress on the status reviews to determine whether adding the species to the Lists is warranted. Third, we are making expeditious progress in adding qualified species to the Lists. In FY 2021 (as of September 30, 2021), we published final listing rules for 10 domestic species and 1 foreign species, including final critical habitat designations for 4 of those domestic species and final protective regulations under the Act's section 4(d) for 4 of those domestic species. In addition, we published proposed rules to list an additional 21 domestic species and 3 foreign species (including concurrent proposed critical habitat designations for 13 domestic species and concurrent protective regulations under the Act's section 4(d) for 10 domestic species and 2 foreign species). Fourth, we are also making expeditious progress in removing (delisting) species, as well as reclassifying endangered species to threatened species status (downlisting). Delisting and downlisting actions are funded through the recovery line item in the budget of the Endangered Species Program. Thus, delisting and downlisting actions do not factor into our assessment of preclusion; that is, work on recovery actions does not preclude the availability of resources for completing new listing work. However, work on recovery actions does count towards our assessment of making expeditious progress because the Act states that expeditious progress includes both adding qualified species to, and removing qualified species from, the Lists of Endangered and Threatened Wildlife and Plants. In FY 2021 (as of September 30, 2021), we finalized downlisting rules for 2 domestic species with concurrent final protective regulations under the Act's section 4(d), finalized delisting rules for 8 domestic species, proposed downlisting rules for 8 domestic species (including concurrent protective regulations under the Act's section 4(d) for 7 domestic species), and proposed delisting rules for 34 domestic species. The rate at which the Service has completed delisting and downlisting actions in FY 2021 (as of September 30, 2021) is higher than any point in the history of the Act, which underscores the expeditious progress we are making.Preclusion and Expeditious Progress The tables below catalog the Service's progress in FY 2021 (as of September 30, 2021) as it pertains to our evaluation of preclusion and expeditious progress. Table 1 includes completed and published domestic and foreign listing actions; Table 2 includes domestic and foreign listing actions funded and initiated in previous fiscal years and in FY 2021 that were not yet complete as of September 30, 2021; and Table 3 includes completed and published proposed and final downlisting and delisting actions for domestic and foreign species. Table 1--Completed Domestic and Foreign Listing Actions (Proposed and Final Listing and Uplisting Rules) in FY 2021 as of September 30, 2021---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------- Publication date Title Action(s) Federal Register citation----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------10/8/2020................... Threatened Species Final Listing-- 85 FR 63806-63831 Status for Coastal Threatened with Distinct Population Section 4(d) Rule. Segment of the Pacific Marten With a Section 4(d) Rule.10/8/2020................... Threatened Species Final Listing-- 85 FR 63764-63803 Status for Eastern Threatened with Black Rail With a Section 4(d) Rule. Section 4(d) Rule.10/13/2020.................. Threatened Species Proposed Listing-- 85 FR 64908-64937 Status With Section Threatened with 4(d) Rule for Puerto Section 4(d) Rule and Rican Harlequin Critical Habitat and Butterfly and 12-Month Petition Designation of Finding. Critical Habitat.11/3/2020................... Endangered Species Proposed Listing-- 85 FR 69540-69563 Status for the Canoe Endangered with Creek Clubshell and Critical Habitat and Designation of 12-Month Petition Critical Habitat. Finding.11/12/2020.................. Threatened Species Proposed Listing-- 85 FR 71859-71873 Status With Section Threatened with a 4(d) Rule for Sickle Section 4(d) Rule and Darter. 12-Month Petition Finding.[[Page 26159]] 11/16/2020.................. Review of Domestic CNOR and 12-Month 85 FR 73164-73179 Species That Are Petition Findings. Candidates for Listing as Endangered or Threatened; Annual Notification of Findings on Resubmitted Petitions; Annual Description of Progress on Listing Actions.11/19/2020.................. Threatened Species Proposed Listing-- 85 FR 74050-74088 Status With Section Threatened with a 4(d) Rule for the Section 4(d) Rule and Upper Coosa River Critical Habitat and Distinct Population 12-Month Petition Segment of Finding. Frecklebelly Madtom and Designation of Critical Habitat.12/1/2020................... Endangered Species Proposed Listing-- 85 FR 77108-77138 Status for the Endangered with Peppered Chub and Critical Habitat and Designation of 12-Month Petition Critical Habitat. Finding.12/2/2020................... Threatened Species Proposed Listing-- 85 FR 77408-77424 Status for Pinus Threatened with a albicaulis (Whitebark Section 4(d) Rule. Pine) With Section 4(d) Rule.12/3/2020................... Eleven Species Not 12-Month Petition 85 FR 78029-78038 Warranted for Listing Findings. as Endangered or Threatened Species \*.12/15/2020.................. 12-Month Finding for 12-Month Petition 85 FR 81144-81152 the Northern Spotted Finding. Owl.12/17/2020.................. 12-Month Finding for 12-Month Petition 85 FR 81813-81822 the Monarch Butterfly. Finding.3/4/2021.................... Endangered Species Proposed Listing-- 86 FR 12563-12591 Status for Arizona Endangered with Eryngo and Designation Critical Habitat. of Critical Habitat.3/9/2021.................... Endangered Species Final Listing-- 86 FR 13465-13475 Status for the Endangered. Missouri Distinct Population Segment of Eastern Hellbender.3/24/2021................... 90-Day Findings for 90-Day Petition 86 FR 15637-15639 Three Species. Findings.4/7/2021.................... 12-Month Petition Proposed Listing-- 86 FR 18014-18034 Finding and Threatened Threatened with a Species Status With Section 4(d) Rule and Section 4(d) Rule for 12-Month Petition Suwannee Alligator Finding. Snapping Turtle.4/13/2021................... Threatened Species Proposed Listing-- 86 FR 19186-19207 Status for Streaked Threatened with a Horned Lark With Section 4(d) Rule. Section 4(d) Rule.4/26/2021................... Listing the Yangtze Final Listing-- 86 FR 21950-21961 Sturgeon as an Endangered. Endangered Species.5/5/2021.................... Three Salamander 12-Month Petition 86 FR 23869-23872 Species Not Warranted Findings. for Listing as Endangered or Threatened Species.5/11/2021................... 90-Day Findings for 90-Day Petition 86 FR 25833-25836 Three Species. Findings.5/11/2021................... Two Species Not 12-Month Petition 86 FR 25806-25808 Warranted for Listing Findings. as Endangered or Threatened Species \*.6/1/2021.................... Lesser Prairie-Chicken; Proposed Listing-- 86 FR 29432-29482 Threatened Status With Endangered; Section 4(d) Rule for Threatened with a the Northern Distinct Section 4(d) Rule. Population Segment and Endangered Status for the Southern Distinct Population Segment.6/4/2021.................... Finding on a Petition 12-Month Petition 86 FR 29975-29977 To List the Tiehm's Finding. Buckwheat as Threatened or Endangered.6/9/2021.................... Threatened Species Final Listing-- 86 FR 30688-30751 Status With Section Threatened with 4(d) Rule for Neuse Section 4(d) Rule and River Waterdog, Critical Habitat; Endangered Species Endangered and Status for Carolina Critical Habitat. Madtom, and Designations of Critical Habitat.6/15/2021................... Threatened Species Proposed Listing-- 86 FR 31668-31692 Status for Mount Threatened with a Rainier White-Tailed Section 4(d) Rule. Ptarmigan With a Section 4(d) Rule.6/15/2021................... Endangered Status for Final Listing-- 86 FR 31830-31868 the Beardless Endangered with Chinchweed and Critical Habitat. Designation of Critical Habitat.6/17/2021................... 90-Day Findings for Two 90-Day Petition 86 FR 32241-32243 Species. Findings.7/15/2021................... Designation of Critical Proposed Critical 86 FR 37410-37668 Habitat for Rufa Red Habitat. Knot (Calidris canutus rufa).7/27/2021................... 90-Day Findings for 90-Day Petition 86 FR 40186-40189 Three Species. Findings.8/3/2021.................... Endangered Species Final Listing-- 86 FR 41743-41758 Status for the Sierra Endangered. Nevada Distinct Population Segment of the Sierra Nevada Red Fox.8/4/2021.................... Threatened Species Proposed Listing-- 86 FR 41917-41934 Status With Section Threatened with 4(d) Rule for Emperor Section 4(d) Rule. Penguin.8/9/2021.................... Review of Foreign CNOR and 12-Month 86 FR 43470-43490 Species That Are Petition Findings. Candidates for Listing as Endangered or Threatened; Annual Description of Progress on Listing Actions.8/24/2021................... Endangered Species Final Listing-- 86 FR 47221-47238 Status for Franklin's Endangered. Bumble Bee.8/25/2021................... Endangered Species Proposed Listing-- 86 FR 47457-47468 Status for Amur Endangered. Sturgeon.[[Page 26160]] 8/26/2021................... Endangered and Proposed Listing-- 86 FR 47916-48011 Threatened Wildlife Endangered with and Plants; Endangered Critical Habitat; Species Status With Threatened with Critical Habitat for Section 4(d) Rule and Guadalupe Fatmucket, Critical Habitat and Texas Fatmucket, 12-Month Petition Guadalupe Orb, Texas Findings. Pimpleback, and False Spike, and Threatened Species Status With Section 4(d) Rule and Critical Habitat for Texas Fawnsfoot.8/31/2021................... Threatened Status With Proposed Listing-- 86 FR 48619-48649 Section 4(d) Rule for Threatened with the Dolphin and Union Section 4(d) Rule and Caribou and 12-Month 12-Month Petition Finding for the Peary Findings. Caribou.8/31/2021................... Threatened Species Final Listing-- 86 FR 48545-48569 Status for Bartram's Threatened with Stonecrop With a Section 4(d) Rule. Section 4(d) Rule.9/7/2021.................... 90-Day Finding on a 90-Day Petition 86 FR 49985-49989 Petition To Revise Finding. Critical Habitat for the Jaguar.9/7/2021.................... Threatened Species Proposed Listing-- 86 FR 49989-50011 Status With Section Threatened with 4(d) Rule for Pyramid Section 4(d) Rule. Pigtoe.9/8/2021.................... Endangered Species Final Listing-- 86 FR 50264-50287 Status for Slenderclaw Endangered with Crayfish and Critical Habitat. Designation of Critical Habitat.9/17/2021................... 90-Day Finding for Two 90-Day Petition 86 FR 51857-51859 Petitions To List the Findings. Gray Wolf in the Western United States.9/27/2021................... 17 Species Not 12-Month Petition 86 FR 53255-53261 Warranted for Listing Findings. as Endangered or Threatened Species \*.9/28/2021................... Endangered Species Proposed Listing-- 86 FR 53583-53609 Status for the Endangered with Pe[ntilde]asco Least Critical Habitat and Chipmunk and 12-Month Petition Designation of Finding. Critical Habitat.9/28/2021................... Endangered Status for Proposed Listing-- 86 FR 53609-53627 South Llano Springs Endangered with Moss and Designation Critical Habitat and of Critical Habitat. 12-Month Petition Finding.9/29/2021................... 90-Day Findings for 90-Day Petition 86 FR 53937-53941 Five Species. Findings.9/29/2021................... Two Species Not 12-Month Petition 86 FR 53933-53937 Warranted for Listing Findings. as Endangered or Threatened Species \*.----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------\* Batched 12-month findings may include findings regarding listing and delisting petitions. The total number of 12-month findings reported in this assessment of preclusion and expeditious progress pertains to listing petitions only. Table 2--Domestic and Foreign Listing Actions (Proposed and Final Listings and Uplistings) Funded and Initiated in Previous FYs and in FY 2021 That Are Not Yet Complete as of September 30, 2021---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------- Species Action----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------``Ouachita'' fanshell............ Proposed listing determination.alligator snapping turtle \*...... 12-month finding.blanco blind salamander.......... 12-month finding.bog buckmoth \*................... Proposed listing determination.bracted twistflower \*............ Proposed listing determination or not-warranted finding.bushy whitlow-wort............... 12-month finding.cactus ferruginous pygmy-owl \*... 12-month finding.Chowanoke crayfish............... 12-month finding.Cooper's cave amphipod........... 12-month finding.Cumberland moccasinshell......... 12-month finding.Egyptian tortoise \*.............. 12-month finding.Georgia bully (swamp buckhorn)... 12-month finding.glowing indian-paintbrush........ 12-month finding.Great Basin silverspot........... 12-month finding.green floater.................... 12-month finding.Key ring-necked snake............ 12-month finding.Lassics lupine................... 12-month finding.longfin smelt (San Francisco Bay- Proposed listing determination or not-warranted finding. Delta DPS).Louisiana pigtoe................. 12-month finding.magnificent ramshorn............. Proposed listing determination or not-warranted finding.minute cave amphipod............. 12-month finding.Morrison's cave amphipod......... 12-month finding.Navasota false foxglove.......... 12-month finding.oblong rocksnail................. 12-month finding.Ocmulgee skullcap................ 12-month finding.Persian sturgeon................. 12-month finding.prostrate milkweed............... 12-month finding.rim rock crowned snake........... 12-month finding.Rio Grande cooter................ 12-month finding.Russian sturgeon................. 12-month finding.Shasta salamander................ 12-month finding.[[Page 26161]] Siberian sturgeon................ 12-month finding.ship sturgeon.................... 12-month finding.southern elktoe.................. 12-month finding.stellate sturgeon................ 12-month finding.Tennessee clubshell.............. 12-month finding.Tennessee pigtoe................. 12-month finding.Texas heelsplitter............... 12-month finding.Texas kangaroo rat............... 12-month finding.Tharp's blue-star................ 12-month finding.toothless blindcat............... 12-month finding.western fanshell................. 12-month finding.western spadefoot................ 12-month finding.widemouth blindcat............... 12-month finding.----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------\* Denotes species for which a 12-month finding or proposed listing determination has published subsequent to the end of FY 2021 (after September 30, 2021). Table 3--Completed Domestic and Foreign Recovery Actions (Proposed and Final Downlistings and Delistings) in FY 2021 as of September 30, 2021-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------- Publication date Title Action(s) Federal Register citation--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------10/8/2020.................... Reclassification of the Proposed Rule--Downlisting with Section 4(d) Rule.......... 85 FR 63474-63499 Red-Cockaded Woodpecker From Endangered to Threatened With a Section 4(d) Rule.10/15/2020................... Reclassification of the Final Rule--Downlisting with Section 4(d) Rule............. 85 FR 65241-65261 American Burying Beetle From Endangered to Threatened With a Section 4(d) Rule.10/21/2020................... Reclassification of Proposed Rule--Downlisting with Section 4(d) Rule.......... 85 FR 66906-66925 Eugenia woodburyana as Threatened and Section 4(d) Rule.11/3/2020.................... Removing the Gray Wolf Final Rule--Delisting and 90-Day Petition Finding.......... 85 FR 69778-69895 (Canis lupus) From the List of Endangered and Threatened Wildlife.1/4/2021..................... Reclassification of the Final Rule--Downlisting with Section 4(d) Rule............. 86 FR 192-212 Endangered June Sucker to Threatened With a Section 4(d) Rule.1/13/2021.................... Removal of the Interior Final Rule--Delisting...................................... 86 FR 2564-2581 Least Tern From the Federal List of Endangered and Threatened Wildlife.1/15/2021.................... Reclassifying Furbish's Proposed Rule--Downlisting with Section 4(d) Rule.......... 86 FR 3976-3986 Lousewort (Pedicularis furbishiae) From Endangered to Threatened Status With a Section 4(d) Rule.3/8/2021..................... Removing Bradshaw's Final Rule--Delisting...................................... 86 FR 13200-13215 Lomatium (Lomatium bradshawii) From the Federal List of Endangered and Threatened Plants.3/25/2021.................... Reclassification of the Proposed Rule--Downlisting with Section 4(d) Rule.......... 86 FR 15855-15876 Hawaiian Stilt From Endangered to Threatened With a Section 4(d) Rule.4/26/2021.................... Removal of the Dwarf- Proposed Rule--Delisting................................... 86 FR 21994-22005 Flowered Heartleaf From the Federal List of Endangered and Threatened Plants.5/5/2021..................... Removing Five Species Proposed Rule--Delisting................................... 86 FR 23882-23913 From San Clemente Island From the Federal Lists of Endangered and Threatened Wildlife and Plants.6/16/2021.................... Removal of Lepanthes Final Rule--Delisting...................................... 86 FR 31972-31986 eltoroensis From the Federal List of Endangered and Threatened Plants.6/16/2021.................... Removing the Water Final Rule--Delisting...................................... 86 FR 31955-31972 Howellia From the List of Endangered and Threatened Plants.6/23/2021.................... Reclassifying the Proposed Rule--Downlisting with Section 4(d) Rule.......... 86 FR 32859-32878 Fender's Blue Butterfly From Endangered to Threatened With a Section 4(d) Rule.6/24/2021.................... Reclassifying Smooth Proposed Rule--Downlisting with Section 4(d) Rule.......... 86 FR 33159-33176 Coneflower as Threatened With Section 4(d) Rule.6/24/2021.................... Removal of Chrysopsis Proposed Rule--Delisting................................... 86 FR 33177-33191 floridana (Florida Golden Aster) From the Federal List of Endangered and Threatened Plants.6/24/2021.................... Removing the Kanab Final Rule--Delisting...................................... 86 FR 33137-33142 Ambersnail From the List of Endangered and Threatened Wildlife.6/30/2021.................... Removing Golden Proposed Rule--Delisting................................... 86 FR 34695-34711 Paintbrush From the Federal List of Endangered and Threatened Plants.7/7/2021..................... Reclassification of the Proposed Rule--Downlisting with Section 4(d) Rule.......... 86 FR 35708-35728 Razorback Sucker From Endangered to Threatened With a Section 4(d) Rule.7/14/2021.................... Reclassification of the Proposed Rule--Downlisting with Section 4(d) Rule.......... 86 FR 37091-37113 Palo de Rosa From Endangered to Threatened With Section 4(d) Rule.7/30/2021.................... Removing Adiantum Proposed Rule--Delisting................................... 86 FR 40996-41000 vivesii From the Federal List of Endangered and Threatened Plants.[[Page 26162]] 8/6/2021..................... Removing Trifolium Final Rule--Delisting...................................... 86 FR 43102-43117 Stoloniferum (Running Buffalo Clover) From the Federal List of Endangered and Threatened Plants.8/16/2021.................... Removing Arenaria Final Rule--Delisting...................................... 86 FR 45685-45698 cumberlandensis (Cumberland Sandwort) From the Federal List of Endangered and Threatened Plants.9/1/2021..................... Removing the Snail Proposed Rule--Delisting and 12-Month Petition Finding..... 86 FR 48953-48968 Darter From the List of Endangered and Threatened Wildlife.9/30/2021.................... Removal of 23 Extinct Proposed Rule--Delisting................................... 86 FR 54298-54338 Species From the Lists of Endangered and Threatened Wildlife and Plants.9/30/2021.................... Removing the Braken Bat Proposed Rule--Delisting................................... 86 FR 54145-54148 Cave Meshweaver From the List of Endangered and Threatened Wildlife.-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------- Another way that we have been expeditious in making progress in adding and removing qualified species to and from the Lists is that we have made our actions as efficient and timely as possible, given the requirements of the Act and regulations and constraints relating to workload and personnel. We are continually seeking ways to streamline ***processes*** or achieve economies of scale, such as batching related actions together for publication. For example, in FY 2021, we published a single proposed delisting rule for 23 species due to extinction (86 FR 54298). Given our limited budget for implementing section 4 of the Act, these efforts also contribute toward our expeditious progress in adding and removing qualified species to and from the Lists.Findings for Petitioned Candidate Species For all 27 candidates, we continue to find that listing is warranted but precluded as of the date of publication of this document. However, we are working on thorough reviews of all available data regarding 6 of these species and expect to publish either proposed listing rules or 12-month not-warranted findings prior to making the next annual CNOR. In the course of preparing proposed listing rules or not-warranted petition findings, we continue to monitor new information about these species' status so that we can make prompt use of our authority under section 4(b)(7) of the Act in the case of an emergency posing a significant risk to any of these species. Below are updated summaries for the 21 petitioned candidates for which we published findings under section 4(b)(3)(B) of the Act and did not change the LPN. We changed the LPN for one petitioned candidate species for which we published findings under 4(b)(3)(B) of the Act; an updated summary is included under Listing Priority Changes in Candidates, below. In accordance with section 4(b)(3)(C)(i), we treat any petitions for which we made warranted-but-precluded 12-month findings within the past year as having been resubmitted on the date of the warranted-but-precluded finding. We are making continued warranted-but-precluded 12-month findings on the petitions for these species.BirdsBlack-Backed Tanager The black-backed tanager is a vibrant and distinct color-patterned bird endemic to the coastal Atlantic Forest region of southeastern Brazil. The extent of the historical range is not known; however, early records for the species are available from the coastal states of Rio de Janeiro, S[atilde]o Paulo, Paran[agrave], and Santa Catarina, Brazil. The black-backed tanager is generally restricted in range and is associated with sand forest ``restinga'' habitat, which is a coastal component habitat of the greater Atlantic Forest complex of Brazil. Restingas are herbaceous, shrubby coastal sand-dune habitats with characteristic vegetation including shrublands and forests up to 15 meters (49 feet) tall. The species is described as a regional migrant and is one of just a few tanagers known to migrate seasonally within the coastal Atlantic Forest region of Brazil. At present, the range is approximately 316,000 km\2\ (122,008 mi\2\) and decreasing. Small portions of the species' range occur in six protected areas, but enforcement of protection laws in these areas is not effective. As of 2000, the population size was estimated between 2,500 and 9,999 mature adults and decreasing; no additional population estimates have been conducted since 2000. The primary factor affecting this species is the rapid and widespread loss and fragmentation of habitat, mainly due to urban expansion and beachfront development. Much of the species suitable habitat in Rio de Janeiro and Paran[aacute] has been destroyed. As much as 88 to 95 percent of the area historically covered by tropical forests within the Atlantic Forest biome has been lost or severely degraded as the result of human activities. Intact lowland forest, restinga, and mangrove habitat used by resident black-backed tanagers on the northern part of Santa Catarina Island (in the state of Santa Catarina) is unprotected, making the species vulnerable to extirpation on the island as development looms. Sea-level rise may alter the regional vegetation and structure. Habitat loss from sea-level rise could exacerbate the threat of habitat loss from ongoing coastal development. The black-backed tanager is classified as vulnerable by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN). The species is also listed as vulnerable in Brazil and protected by law. It is not included in the Appendices to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), although it has infrequently been illegally sold in the pet trade. In our August 9, 2021, CNOR (86 FR 43470), the black-backed tanager was assigned an LPN of 8. After reevaluating the available information, we have determined that no change in its LPN of 8 is warranted. The species may have some flexibility in its diet and habitat suitability, given its fairly large range. Small portions of the species' range occur in six protected areas, but these areas are not effectively protected, and loss of the species habitat is widespread and ongoing. Therefore, an LPN of 8 is valid for this species to reflect imminent threats of moderate magnitude.[[Page 26163]]Bogot[aacute] Rail The Bogot[aacute] rail (Rallus semiplumbeus) is a medium-sized, nonmigratory bird that occurs in the eastern Andean mountain range of Colombia at elevations from 2,500-4,000 meters (8,202-13,123 feet) above sea level. The rail is found in savanna and p[aacute]ramo (high-elevation habitats above tree line) marshes surrounding Bogot[aacute], Colombia, on the Ubat[eacute]-Bogot[aacute] Plateau. The Bogot[aacute] rail is secretive and difficult to observe. As of 2016, the population was estimated between 1,000 and 2,500 individuals, and the estimated extent of the resident/breeding habitat was 11,200 km\2\ (4,324 mi\2\) and shrinking. The primary threat to the rail is habitat loss and degradation of wetlands. Suitable habitat for the Bogot[aacute] rail occurs around the most populated area in Colombia with approximately 11 million people in the greater Bogot[aacute] metropolitan area. Wetlands in the area only cover approximately 3 percent of their historical extent. Although portions of the Bogot[aacute] rail's range occur in protected areas such as Chingaza National Park and Carpanta Biological Reserve, most savanna wetlands are virtually unprotected. Ongoing threats to remaining major wetlands include encroachment of human infrastructure and ***agriculture*** that causes loss of habitat and altered water levels, soil erosion, eutrophication caused by untreated effluent and agrochemicals, hunting, wildfire, and incidental spread of invasive species. The Bogot[aacute] rail is listed as endangered by IUCN. The species is not known to be in international trade, and is not included in the Appendices to CITES. In our August 9, 2021, CNOR (86 FR 43470), the Bogot[aacute] rail was assigned an LPN of 2. After reevaluating the threats to this species, we have determined that no change in the LPN for the species is warranted. The species' range is very small, fragmented, and rapidly contracting because of ongoing widespread habitat loss and degradation of wetlands. Therefore, an LPN of 2 remains valid for this species to reflect imminent threats of high magnitude.Bras[iacute]lia Tapaculo The Bras[iacute]lia tapaculo (Scytalopus novacapitalis) is a small, gray, ground-dwelling bird with limited flight ability. It is endemic to the Cerrado, the largest, most diverse, and possibly most threatened tropical savanna in the world with a mosaic of habitats composed mostly of savannas and patches of dry forests. Within the Cerrado, the Bras[iacute]lia tapaculo is resident in its core habitat of dense, narrow strips of swampy gallery forests that occur on the edges of rivers and streams in narrow fringes, which are usually no wider than 200 meters (m) (656 feet (ft)) and occur at elevations of approximately 800-1,000 m (2,625-3,281 ft). The range of the Bras[iacute]lia tapaculo is in six protected areas within the Cerrado. In the early 2000s, only 1.2 percent of the Cerrado was in protected areas; however, more recent estimates are 6.5 percent. The Bras[iacute]lia tapaculo is described as rare, and the population size is unknown. However, the population is assumed to be declining because of the continued decline of the gallery-forest habitat. The primary threat to Bras[iacute]lia tapaculo is ongoing habitat loss and fragmentation. Land in the Cerrado is converted for intensive grazing and mechanized ***agriculture***, mostly for soybean production. ***Agriculture*** causes direct effects to gallery forests from wetland drainage and diversion of water for irrigation, as well as burning to create space. The Bras[iacute]lia tapaculo's gallery-forest habitat has been less affected by clearing for ***agriculture*** than the surrounding Cerrado. However, it is unclear how much core gallery forest has been destroyed because of habitat conversion. Additionally, effects from climate change may also be negatively altering the Cerrado and reducing the amount of specialized habitat for the species. The IUCN lists the species as endangered, and the Brazilian Red List assessed the species as endangered, because of the species' small, fragmented range and the continuing decline in area and quality of habitat. International trade is not a significant threat to the species, and the species is not included in the Appendices to CITES. In our August 9, 2021, CNOR (86 FR 43470), we assigned the Bras[iacute]lia tapaculo an LPN of 2. After reevaluating the available information, we have determined that no change to an LPN is warranted. The species only occurs in a handful of small, protected areas, and is reported as rare. Habitat conversion is ongoing. Therefore, an LPN of 2 remains valid for this species to reflect imminent threats of high magnitude.Chatham Oystercatcher Chatham oystercatcher (Haematopus chathamensis) is the rarest oystercatcher in the world. The population is approximately 300 individuals, and the bird breeds along the coastline of four islands in the Chatham Island group: Chatham, Pitt, South East, and Mangere. Chatham and Pitt Islands are inhabited by humans, while South East and Mangere are uninhabited nature reserves. There was one report of individuals on Star Keys, east of Pitt Island, but this observation was unconfirmed. Isolated pairs may breed on other smaller islands in the group. Predation of eggs and chicks (and to a lesser extent, predation of adults) is likely the main impediment to Chatham oystercatcher population growth. Mangere and South East Islands are free of all mammalian predators; nonnative mammalian predators inhabit Chatham and Pitt Islands. Feral cats are the most common predator of oystercatcher eggs. Nest destruction by farm animals (sheep and cattle) and humans has been noted on beaches. Additionally, nonnative Marram grass (Ammophila arenaria) has altered the sand dunes and leaves few open nesting sites. Consequently, the Chatham oystercatcher is forced to nest closer to shore where nests are vulnerable to high tides and storm surges. Up to 50 percent of eggs have been lost because of storms or high tides. Projected rise in sea levels associated with climate change will likely increase storm frequency and severity, putting at risk the majority of shorelines that the Chatham oystercatcher relies on for nesting habitat. The species has experienced a three-fold increase in its population since the first reliable census was conducted in 1987. Most of this increase occurred during a period of intensive management, especially predator control, from 1998 through 2004. The Chatham Island Oystercatcher Recovery Plan guides conservation actions for the species. The New Zealand Department of Conservation (NZDOC) lists the Chatham oystercatcher as nationally critical, and it is protected under New Zealand's Wildlife Act. It is classified as endangered on the IUCN Red List, and the species is not included in the Appendices to CITES and not known to be in international trade. In our August 9, 2021, CNOR (86 FR 43470), the Chatham oystercatcher was assigned an LPN of 8. After reevaluating the available information, we have determined that no change in the LPN is warranted. Although the population appears to have stabilized, it remains very small (approximately 300 individuals), and occupied breeding habitat is also small (fewer than 800 hectares (1,977 acres)). Active management has been instrumental in maintaining stable population levels, but the species continues to face threats to its nests and habitat. Therefore, an LPN of 8 is valid for this species to[[Page 26164]]reflect imminent threats of moderate magnitude.Gizo White-Eye The Gizo white-eye (Zosterops luteirostris) is a passerine (perching) bird described as ``warbler-like.'' It is endemic to the small island of Ghizo in the Solomon Islands in the South Pacific Ocean, east of Papua New Guinea. Population size of the Gizo white-eye is approximately 250 and 999 mature individuals in an estimated area of 35 square kilometers (km \2\) (14 square miles (mi \2\)). Within this area, the Gizo white-eye is found primarily in old-growth forest patches that account for approximately 1 km \2\ (0.39 mi \2\) of Ghizo Island. While the species has been observed in a variety of habitat types, it is unknown whether sustainable populations can exist outside of forested habitats. Habitat loss is the primary threat to the species. The loss of old-growth forested areas and less suitable secondary-growth forests is because of logging, conversion to ***agricultural*** areas, and local resource extraction for firewood. The dense human population and prolific human growth of the Solomon Islands is contributing to the loss of habitat on Ghizo Island, mainly in the form of temporary housing. Additionally, natural events like a 2007 tsunami degraded forested areas that were found less likely to support the species even 5 years later in 2012. Sea-level rise and an increase in storms could result in coastal flooding and erosion, saltwater intrusion, and damage to inland habitats. The IUCN Red List classifies this species as endangered. It is not included in the Appendices to CITES, and this species is not known to be in international trade. In our August 9, 2021, CNOR (86 FR 43470), the Gizo white-eye was assigned an LPN of 2. After reevaluating the available information, we find that no change in the LPN is warranted. The species has a small population size and suitable habitat is declining. Therefore, an LPN of 2 remains valid for this species to reflect imminent threats of high magnitude.Helmeted Woodpecker We are updating the candidate list to reflect a change in the scientific name for helmeted woodpecker (Celeus galeatus). The genus has been reclassified to Celeus (BLI 2021, unpaginated; ITIS 2021, unpaginated; Cornell Lab 2021, unpaginated). The helmeted woodpecker is a small, nonmigratory woodpecker native to regions of southern Brazil, eastern Paraguay, and northeastern Argentina. It is one of the rarest woodpeckers in the Americas. Helmeted woodpeckers prefer mature (old-growth) trees in tropical and subtropical semi-deciduous forests as well as in mixed deciduous coniferous forests in the southern Atlantic Forest up to elevations of 1,000 m (3,280 ft). The species occurs in subpopulations in suitable habitat within its range, and the total population is estimated to be between 700 and 21,000 mature individuals. However, a precautionary best estimate is around 3,600 mature individuals. The primary threat to the species is habitat loss, degradation, and fragmentation, which includes loss of nesting cavities. The Atlantic Forest biome has lost 88 to 95 percent of its tropical forests because of human activities. Currently, less than 1 percent of the remaining Atlantic Forest is primary forest preferred by the helmeted woodpecker. The species occurs in 17 protected areas throughout its range, although selective logging and other activities degrade the habitat. Rates of deforestation in the helmeted woodpecker's range may decrease in certain years, but habitat degradation continues and the population is assumed to be declining. The helmeted woodpecker is listed as endangered in Brazil and as vulnerable by the IUCN. The species is not included in the Appendices to CITES and not known to be in international trade. In our August 9, 2021, CNOR (86 FR 43470), we assigned the helmeted woodpecker an LPN of 8. After reevaluating the available information, we find that no change in the LPN for the species is warranted. The species is rare, and although the species may have a wider distribution, loss of primary Atlantic Forest habitat is ongoing. Therefore, an LPN of 8 remains valid to reflect imminent threats of moderate magnitude.Lord Howe Island Pied Currawong The Lord Howe Island pied currawong (Strepera graculina crissalis) is a fairly large, crow-like bird that is endemic to Lord Howe Island, New South Wales, Australia. The Lord Howe Island pied currawong occurs throughout the island but is most numerous in mountainous regions, breeds in rainforests and palm forests, and descends to foraging areas in lowlands. The best current population estimate is approximately 200 individuals. Most, if not all, available habitat on Lord Howe Island is occupied based on the estimate of 200 individuals and estimates of the extent of available breeding habitat. The primary threats to the subspecies are the introduction of nonnative rodents to this island ecosystem and the effects of climate change. The Lord Howe Island pied currawong has persisted among invasive black rats. However, because the currawong often preys on small rodents, it may be subject to non-target poisoning during ongoing rat-baiting programs. A study is underway focusing on how the species has been affected by the poison-bait applications. The effects of climate change may affect the cloud layer on the island's mountaintops, resulting in drying of the forest where the subspecies gets about half of its food, and creating a food shortage. The small, isolated population of currawongs is at risk from loss of genetic diversity and stochastic (random) environmental events. However, this population may have always been small and may not have the capacity for additional growth. The Australian Government owns and manages all the land on Lord Howe Island. Approximately 75 percent of the island, plus all outlying islets and rocks within the Lord Howe Island group, is protected under the Permanent Park Preserve. The Lord Howe Island Biodiversity Management Plan is the formal recovery plan for threatened species and communities of the Lord Howe Island Group. Following the removal of poison-bait traps in 2020, monitoring is underway across the island to see if it has become rat-free. The New South Wales Threatened Species Conservation Act of 1995 lists the Lord Howe Island pied currawong as vulnerable, as does Australia's Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act List of Threatened Fauna. The subspecies is not listed on the IUCN Red List, is not included in the Appendices to CITES, and is not known to be in international trade. In our August 9, 2021, CNOR (86 FR 43470), the Lord Howe Island pied currawong was assigned an LPN of 6. After reevaluating the threats to the Lord Howe Island pied currawong, we have determined that no change in the LPN for the subspecies is warranted. The subspecies' small population size faces risks from non-target poisoning from rodent control. Significant conservation efforts have been implemented. Therefore, based on the best information available, an LPN of 6 remains valid to reflect non-imminent threats of high magnitude.[[Page 26165]]Okinawa Woodpecker The Okinawa woodpecker (Dendrocopos noguchii; syn. Sapheopipo noguchii) is a relatively large woodpecker found on Okinawa Island, Japan, and one of the world's rarest woodpeckers. The species prefers subtropical evergreen broadleaf forests that are undisturbed and mature. Okinawa woodpecker's main breeding areas occur in the forested areas in the northern part of the island, and in well-forested coastal areas of Yambaru, an area of approximately 300 km\2\, or 116 mi\2\. Most of the older forests that support the species are within the Jungle Warfare Training Center (formerly known as the Northern Training Area or Camp Gonsalves), part of the U.S Marine Corps installation on Okinawa Island. The primary threat to the Okinawa woodpecker is deforestation in the Yambaru region. As of the mid 1990s, only 40 km\2\ (15 mi\2\) of suitable habitat was available for the Okinawa woodpecker, with most of it part of the Jungle Warfare Training Center that is relatively undisturbed. This situation makes it vulnerable to extinction from disease and natural disasters such as typhoons. Additionally, the species is vulnerable to introduced predators such as feral dogs and cats, Javan mongoose (Herpestes javanicus), and Japanese weasel (Mustela itatsi). The Japanese Government established Yambaru National Park in 2016. In July 2021, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) added Amami-Oshima Island, Tokunoshima Island, the northern part of the main Okinawa Island (which contains Yambaru National Park), and Iriomote Island to the list of natural World Heritage sites. The species is listed as critically endangered in the Red List of Threatened Birds in Japan and protected from acquisition and transfer under Japan's wildlife-protection system. Okinawa woodpecker is not included in the Appendices to CITES, and is not known to be in international trade. In our August 9, 2021, CNOR (86 FR 43470), the Okinawa woodpecker was assigned an LPN of 2. After reevaluating the available information, we find that no change in the LPN is warranted. Threats to the species are high in magnitude due to the scarcity of its old-growth habitat. The population is very small and is likely declining. Although new protected areas have been established that will likely benefit the Okinawa woodpecker, it is not yet clear that these areas will be fully protected from logging and other anthropogenic development and nonnative predators. Even though threats from logging have been reduced, it will take many years for secondary and clear-cut forest habitat to mature such that it is suitable for the woodpecker. The threats to the species are ongoing, imminent, and high in magnitude due to its restricted range, small population size, past habitat loss, and endemism. Therefore, an LPN of 2 remains valid for this species to reflect imminent threats of high magnitude.Orange-Fronted Parakeet The orange-fronted parakeet (Cyanoramphus malherbi) is the rarest parakeet in New Zealand, and the three remaining naturally occurring colonies are restricted to a small area on South Island. Beginning in 2005, captive-bred orange-fronted parakeets were translocated to four predator-free islands and bred successfully. The population size of the orange-fronted parakeet is approximately 350 individuals, with the offshore population around 100 individuals and the mainland population around 250 individuals. In 2019, the orange-fronted parakeet had one of its best breeding seasons in decades, with more than three times as many nests compared to previous years, and produced at least 150 wild-born chicks, almost doubling the population. We do not have information on the current size of the population after the 2019 breeding season. The primary threats affecting the species on the mainland are predation by nonnative mammals, as well as habitat destruction because of deforestation. Habitat loss and degradation has historically affected large areas of native forest on the mainland. The orange-fronted parakeet nests in beech forests (Nothofagus spp.), and removal of mature trees with nest cavities has increased competition with other native parakeets for nest sites. The New Zealand Department of Conservation (NZDOC) initiated a captive-breeding program and established small, self-sustaining populations on four predator-free islands. The species was uplisted from nationally endangered to nationally critical by the NZDOC in 2016; it is protected under New Zealand's Wildlife Act, and is listed as critically endangered on the IUCN's Red List. The orange-fronted parakeet is included in Appendix II to CITES. In our August 9, 2021, CNOR (86 FR 43470), the orange-fronted parakeet was assigned an LPN of 8. After reevaluating the threats to the orange-fronted parakeet, we have determined that no change in LPN for the species is warranted. The current population is small, and the species' distribution is limited. Nonnative predators and loss of suitable habitat continue to threaten the species. The NZDOC is actively aiding the recovery of the species. Therefore, an LPN of 8 remains valid to reflect imminent threats of moderate magnitude.Sira Curassow The Sira curassow (Pauxi keopckeae) is a large game bird that is similar in size and coloration to the southern helmeted curassow, but their ranges are separated by approximately 2,000 kilometers (1,243 miles), and the Sira curassow has a shorter and rounder pale-blue casque that is flattened against the head. The Sira curassow is known only from the Cerros del Sira region of Peru, which is an isolated mountain outcrop of the Peruvian Andes. The Sira curassow inhabits cloud-forest habitat (a type of rainforest that occurs on high mountains in the tropics) at elevations of at least 1,100-1,450 m (3,609-4,757 ft). Most of the species' range is in El Sira Communal Reserve and is limited and declining. The population is estimated at fewer than 250 adults. Primary threats to the species are hunting by local indigenous communities and habitat loss and degradation because of subsistence ***agriculture***, forest clearing, road building, and associated rural development. Although the Sira curassow is legally protected in a large portion of its range within the El Sira Communal Reserve, illegal hunting and deforestation continues. The species is classified as critically endangered on the IUCN Red List. Sira curassow is not known to be in international trade, and is not included in the Appendices to CITES. The Sira curassow is also not included in the European Union Wildlife Trade Regulations. In our August 9, 2021, CNOR (86 FR 43470), the Sira curassow was assigned an LPN of 2. After reevaluating the threats to the species, we have determined that no change in the LPN is warranted. It faces threats that are high in magnitude based on its very small estimated population and limited range. The protected area where the species occurs continues to face pressure from hunting and habitat loss, and the very small population and its habitat will likely continue to decline in the future. Therefore, an LPN of 2 remains valid to reflect imminent threats of high magnitude.[[Page 26166]]Southern Helmeted Curassow The southern helmeted curassow (Pauxi unicornis), also known as the helmeted or horned curassow, is a game bird with a distinctive pale-blue, horn-like appendage (called a ``casque'') above its bill. The southern helmeted curassow only occurs in central Bolivia on the eastern slope of the Andes, where it has been found in the neighboring Ambor[oacute] and Carrasco National Parks. The southern helmeted curassow strongly resembles the Sira curassow (Pauxi koepckeae) from Peru, although their ranges are separated by more than 1,000 kilometers (621 miles). Casque shape and size are a good distinguishing feature. The southern helmeted curassow inhabits dense, humid, foothill and lower montane forest and adjacent evergreen forest at altitudes between 450 and 1,500 m (1,476 and 4,921 ft). The estimated extent of the resident/breeding area is 10,700 km\2\ (4,131 mi\2\) and declining. Population size is estimated to be between 1,000 and 4,999 mature individuals, the equivalent of 1,500 to 7,500 individuals. Primary threats to the species are hunting and habitat loss. Although the national parks have been important for the preservation of the species, financial and human resources needed to protect park resources are limited. Within the parks, there are human settlements and ongoing encroachment, including illegal logging operations and forest clearing for farming. Rural development and road building limit the species' ability to disperse. Range reductions due to effects from climate change are also predicted for the southern helmeted curassow, when warming temperatures may cause the species to shift its distribution upslope and outside of protected national parks. The southern helmeted curassow is classified as critically endangered on the IUCN Red List. Trade has not been noted internationally, and the species is not included in the Appendices to CITES. The species is listed on Annex D of the European Union Wildlife Trade Regulations; species listed on Annex D require the importer to complete an import-notification form. In our August 9, 2021, CNOR (86 FR 43470), the southern helmeted curassow was assigned an LPN of 2. After reevaluating the threats to the species, we have determined that no change in the LPN is warranted. The species faces threats that are high in magnitude based on its small, limited range. The few protected areas where it exists continue to face pressure from hunting and from habitat loss and destruction, and the population will likely continue to decline. Therefore, an LPN of 2 remains valid for this species to reflect imminent threats of high magnitude.Takahe Takahe (Porphyrio hochstetteri) is the largest extant rail in the world. The species is flightless, native to New Zealand's South Island, and present on North Island and some offshore islands because of reintroduction and conservation efforts. The takah[emacr] was once widespread in the forest and grassland ecosystems of the South Island of New Zealand. Since the mid-1990s, the species was present in a relatively small area of the Murchison and Stuart Mountains, inhabiting approximately 650 km\2\ (251 mi\2\). New Zealand classified 530 km\2\ (205 mi\2\) as a ``special area'' with restricted access. The population of takah[emacr] remains very small; it is estimated to be 50 to 250 adults and decreasing. Primary threats to the takah[emacr] include hunting, competition from nonnative species, and predators such as weasels and the weka (Gallirallus australis hectori), a flightless woodhen that is endemic to New Zealand. Currently, weasel predation appears to be the most significant of these threats. Weasel trapping is ongoing and is an effective tool to increase takah[emacr]'s breeding success; however, the threat of weasel predation continues. New Zealand considers the takah[emacr] a nationally vulnerable species, and it is protected under New Zealand's Wildlife Act. The takah[emacr] is listed as endangered on the IUCN Red List. The species is not known to be in international trade, and the species is not included in the Appendices to CITES. The NZDOC is actively managing populations through conservation efforts that include captive-rearing and reintroductions, predator control, management of grassland habitats, and research. Population numbers appear to be slowly increasing due to intensive management of these populations In our August 9, 2021, CNOR (86 FR 43470), the takah[emacr] was assigned an LPN of 8. After reevaluating the threats to the takah[emacr], we have determined that no change in LPN for the species is warranted. The takah[emacr] has a small population size and limited range. The NZDOC is actively managing threats to aid in the recovery of the species. Therefore, the LPN remains at 8 to reflect imminent threats of moderate magnitude.Yellow-Browed Toucanet The yellow-browed toucanet (Aulacorhynchus huallagae) is a rare bird of the toucan family that occurs in the Andes Mountains of north-central Peru. The species currently occupies three small locations in humid montane forests on the eastern slope of the Andes in north-central Peru at elevations of 2,000-2,600 m (6,562-8,530 ft) above sea level. The population status is not well known because of the inaccessibility of its habitat, but is estimated at 600 to 1,500 mature individuals. Deforestation for livestock, ***agriculture***, timber, and gold mining are the primary threat. Habitat loss and destruction from deforestation for ***agriculture*** have been widespread in the region. Population declines resulting from habitat loss are assumed. Given the inherent threats to small populations (e.g , loss of genetic diversity via genetic drift, stochastic environmental events), continued habitat loss and degradation will exacerbate the risk to the species. Part of the species' range is within protected national parks, with R[iacute]o Abiseo National Park a target for World Wide Fund for Nature's top Andean conservation priorities. The yellow-browed toucanet is classified as endangered on the IUCN Red List. The species is not included in the Appendices to CITES and is not known to be in international trade. In our August 9, 2021, CNOR (86 FR 43470), the yellow-browed toucanet was assigned an LPN of 2. After reevaluating the available information, we find that no change in the LPN is warranted. The estimated population is small within a restricted range. The magnitude of threats to the habitat remains high, and its population is likely declining. Therefore, an LPN of 2 remains valid for this species to reflect imminent threats of high magnitude.FishRio Grande Cutthroat Trout Rio Grande cutthroat trout (Oncorhynchus clarkii virginalis) is one of 14 subspecies of cutthroat trout found in the western United States. Populations of this subspecies are in New Mexico and Colorado in drainages of the Rio Grande, Pecos, and Canadian Rivers. Although once widely distributed in connected stream networks, Rio Grande cutthroat trout populations now occupy approximately 11 percent of historical habitat, and the populations are fragmented and isolated from one another. The majority of populations occur in high-elevation streams. We were petitioned to list Rio Grande cutthroat trout as an endangered or threatened species under the Act in 1998. On May 14, 2008, we found that listing the subspecies was warranted but[[Page 26167]]precluded by higher priority actions, and the entity was added to our list of candidate species (73 FR 27900). After completing a species status assessment (SSA), we published a 12-month petition finding, which determined that the Rio Grande cutthroat trout was not warranted for listing as endangered or threatened under the Act (79 FR 59140; October 1, 2014). On July 29, 2016, the Center for Biological Diversity (CBD) and Taylor McKinnon filed a complaint in the Colorado District Court challenging the merits of our October 1, 2014, ``not warranted'' finding (79 FR 59140); see CBD, et al. v. Bernhardt, et al., No. 1:16-cv-01932-MSK-STV (D. Colo.). On September 26, 2019, the court partially vacated and remanded the October 1, 2014, 12-month finding; We have added the Rio Grande cutthroat trout to our workplan for FY 2025. Because the magnitude of threats is moderate to low and those threats are imminent, we assigned an LPN of 9 to the Rio Grande cutthroat trout.ClamsColorado Delta Clam The Colorado Delta clam (Mulinia modesta) is a relatively large, light-colored estuarine bivalve that was once very abundant at the head of the Gulf of California in the Colorado River estuary. The species inhabits shallow, muddy waters of the coast and requires adequate substrate and water salinity to successfully breed and develop. The Colorado Delta clam currently occurs in the upper, northern, and central portions of the Gulf of California, and is capable of living in salinities ranging from brackish (mixture of salt and fresh water) to full seawater. The extent of the species is relatively large, although densities are significantly lower than they were historically. The historical population of the Colorado Delta clam in the upper Gulf was estimated to be at least 5 billion individuals, accounting for 84-95 percent of all bivalve mollusks in the upper Gulf. However, after decades of dam building on the Colorado River and its tributaries, the Colorado Delta clam is estimated to be 6 percent as abundant in the upper Gulf as it was before dam construction began. While the clam has declined dramatically in the upper Gulf where it was historically most abundant, we are not aware of total population estimates covering the entire species' range. The decline of the clam in the upper Gulf of California region is likely a consequence of dam building. From the 1990s until 2017, 0 percent of the Colorado River's flow reached the Gulf. Since 2017, 2 percent of the river's flow has reached the Gulf of California. Environmental changes to the estuary associated with reduced river flow include increased salinity, decreased sediment load, decreased input of naturally derived nutrients, and elimination of the spring/summer flood. Low flows are expected to continue and worsen as climate-change-induced drought reduces river flow. A binational agreement with Mexico requires the United States to invest in water conservation, habitat restoration, and scientific monitoring projects in the delta and release approximately 2 percent of natural flow through 2026. Portions of the species' range occur within two protected areas that are part of the UNESCO Biosphere Reserve Program and are owned and managed by the Mexican Government. In our August 9, 2021, CNOR (86 FR 43470), the Colorado Delta clam was assigned an LPN of 8. After reevaluating the threats to this species, we have determined that no change in its LPN of 8 is warranted. The threat of habitat loss and degradation in the Colorado delta region is ongoing. However, this threat appears to be affecting the clam in the upper Gulf of California and not throughout the remainder of its range. Therefore, an LPN of 8 remains valid to reflect imminent threats of moderate magnitude.InsectsFluminense Swallowtail The Fluminense swallowtail (Parides ascanius) butterfly is a black, white, and red swallowtail. The species may be confused with the Harris' mimic swallowtail (Mimoides (syn. Eurytides) lysithous harrisianus), but the Harris' mimic swallowtail has a red streak on the underside of its wings. Fluminense swallowtail is endemic to sand forests (or ``restingas'') of the Atlantic Forest in coastal Brazil. The species currently occupies an estimated 116 km\2\ (45 mi\2\) in sparse habitat fragments across the swampy coastal forests in the State of Rio de Janeiro. Fluminense swallowtail occupies at least eight sites between which there is movement of individuals. A study at Biological Reserve of Po[ccedil]o das Antas estimated that the subpopulation ranged from about 10 to 50 individuals. The best available information does not provide estimates for butterfly numbers in the remaining subpopulations. Habitat loss caused by road and building construction is the main threat affecting Fluminense swallowtail. Sea-level rise may result in further habitat loss as humans continue to develop suitable habitat further inland as they relocate to avoid coastal flooding. Eighty-eight to 95 percent of the area historically covered by tropical forests within the Atlantic Forest biome has been converted or severely degraded because of human activities. Additionally, illegal collection is likely occurring and ongoing. The species is located near urban areas and is easy to capture. The impact of illegal collection is difficult to assess, but removal of individuals from the remaining populations with decreasing habitat could contribute to local extirpations. While several of the populations occur in protected areas (including the Po[ccedil]o das Antas Biological Reserve, Tr[ecirc]s Picos State Park, and Guapia[ccedil]u Ecological Reserve), only one of the subpopulations occurs within a highly protected area (Po[ccedil]o das Antas Biological Reserve). The majority of the remaining populations are on smaller, fragmented parcels with limited or no protections. Between 2001 and 2006, biological corridors were planned or created to connect existing protected areas to 13 privately protected forests by restoring habitat to assist the habitat connectivity for the species, but this effort has not yet been evaluated. Management plans for the Restinga National Park of Jurubatiba and Po[ccedil]o das Antas Biological Reserve address conservation of Fluminense swallowtail. Fluminense swallowtail was the first invertebrate to officially be noted on the list of Brazilian animals threatened with extinction in 1973. The species is categorized by Brazil as endangered, and has been classified as vulnerable by the IUCN Red List since 1983. Fluminense swallowtail is not included in the Appendices to CITES. However, the European Commission listed the species on Annex B of the European Union Wildlife Trade Regulations; species listed on Annex B require a permit for import. In our August 9, 2021, CNOR (86 FR 43470), Fluminense swallowtail was assigned an LPN of 2. After reevaluating the stressors to this species, we have determined that no change to the LPN is warranted. The overall number of subpopulations recorded for the species has declined from previous records of fewer than 20 colonies to approximately 8 to 12, and the species continues to decline. Despite the conservation ***measures*** in place, the species continues to face stressors (e.g , habitat loss and destruction, and illegal collection and trade). Therefore, an LPN of 2 remains valid to reflect imminent threats of high magnitude.[[Page 26168]]Hahnel's Amazonian Swallowtail Hahnel's Amazonian swallowtail (Parides hahneli) is a large black and yellow butterfly endemic to Brazil. The species is known to occur in six locations in central Brazil in the states of Amazonas and Par[aacute]. However, the species is very rare, and there is little recent data to confirm that the species still occurs in these areas. Hahnel's Amazonian swallowtail occurs in remote regions along the tributaries of the middle and lower Amazon River basin in sandy riparian areas with dense scrub vegetation or forest. The species likely feeds on only one larval host plant species. Although the host plant species has not been identified, it is suspected to be in the genus Aristolochia. Population size and trends are not known for this species. Loss of habitat from deforestation is the primary threat to the species. The States of Par[aacute] and Amazonas experienced high rates of deforestation over the past 30 years, with deforestation continuing within the range of the species. The butterfly has been collected for commercial trade and may also be reared for trade. Locations in the wild have deliberately been kept secret given the high value of this butterfly to collectors. Hahnel's Amazonian swallowtail is listed as endangered on the State of Par[aacute]'s list of threatened species, but it is not listed by the State of Amazonas or by Brazil. The species is classified as data deficient on the IUCN Red List, and is not included in the Appendices to CITES. The species is listed on Annex B of the European Union Wildlife Trade Regulations; therefore, a permit is required for import of the species. In our August 9, 2021, CNOR (86 FR 43470), Hahnel's Amazonian swallowtail was assigned an LPN of 2. After reevaluating the threats to Hahnel's Amazonian swallowtail, we have determined that no change in the LPN is warranted. The species has a small endemic population, and its highly specialized habitat is limited and habitat alteration and destruction are ongoing in Par[aacute] and Amazonas and is likely to continue. Potential impacts from collection are unknown but, in combination with habitat loss, could contribute to local extirpations. Therefore, an LPN of 2 remains valid to reflect imminent threats of high magnitude.Harris' Mimic Swallowtail Harris' mimic swallowtail (Mimoides (syn. Eurytides) lysithous harrisianus) is a medium-sized black, white, and red swallowtail. This butterfly is a mimic (looks like other species); lower portions of the hindwing have large red spots that mimic the rose-red markings on the Fluminense swallowtail, a toxic butterfly that most predators avoid. Harris' mimic swallowtail occupies coastal habitats of the Atlantic forest, specifically restinga habitats (sandy, coastal forest) with lowland swamps and sandy flats above the tidal margins of the coast. Harris' mimic swallowtail historically occurred in southern Espirito Santo State and along the coast of the State of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Records indicated that the butterfly occupied five sites in the State of Rio de Janeiro. Two areas are within protected areas, and the other sites appear to be under municipal conservation with uncertain protected status. The best-studied site at Barra de S[atilde]o Jo[atilde]o has maintained a stable and viable size for nearly two decades, but since 2004 limited information exists on its status. The best available data do not indicate recent population numbers in any of the other colonies or locations. Habitat destruction has been the main threat and is ongoing. Eighty-eight to 95 percent of the area historically covered by tropical forests within the Atlantic Forest biome has been converted or severely degraded as the result of human activities. Remaining tracts of the subspecies' habitat are severely fragmented, and coastal Atlantic Forest ecoregions are at risk from proposed development, climate change, wildfire, and sea-level rise. Additionally, specimens of Harris' mimic swallowtail are routinely advertised online, ranging from $1,000 to $2,200 (U.S dollars), indicating that illegal collection and trade may be occurring. The effect of illegal collection to Harris' mimic swallowtail likely contributes to population decline and local extirpations. Harris' mimic swallowtail benefits from the Po[ccedil]o das Antas Biological Reserve, which was established to protect the golden lion tamarin (Leontopithecus rosalia). The Reserve's purpose is solely for protection, research, and environmental education and its management plan has an objective to identify possible occurrences of the butterfly. Harris' mimic swallowtail is categorized on the list of Brazilian fauna threatened with extinction. The subspecies is not currently on the IUCN Red list, although it was identified as a threatened or extinct subspecies in the family Papilionidae in the 1994 IUCN Red List. The subspecies is not included in the Appendices to CITES, and is not regulated on the annexes to European Union Wildlife Trade Regulations. In our August 9, 2021, CNOR (86 FR 43470), Harris' mimic swallowtail was assigned an LPN of 3. Threats are high in magnitude and imminent because the butterfly only occurs in a few small, fragmented colonies, habitat loss and degradation is ongoing, and the potential for catastrophic events such as fire remains. Additionally, although the subspecies is protected by Brazilian law and several of the colonies are located within protected areas, the high price advertised online for specimens indicates demand for the subspecies, likely from illegal collection. Despite the conservation ***measures*** in place, the species continues to face stressors (e.g , habitat loss and destruction, and illegal collection and trade). Therefore, an LPN of 3 remains valid to reflect imminent threats of high magnitude.Jamaican Kite Swallowtail The Jamaican kite swallowtail (Protographium (syn. Eurytides) marcellinus) is a small, blue-green and black butterfly endemic to Jamaica. This butterfly is regarded as Jamaica's most endangered butterfly. The Jamaican kite swallowtail is restricted to limestone forests; breeding populations only occur in rare, dense stands of its only known larval host plant, black lancewood (Oxandra lanceolata). Five known sites have supported colonies of the Jamaican kite swallowtail. Two of the sites may be extirpated, the status of one site is uncertain, and two sites are viable with strong numbers in some years. There is no known estimate of population size, and numbers of mature adults are low in most years; however, occasionally there are strong flight seasons in which adult densities are relatively higher. The primary threat to the Jamaican kite swallowtail is habitat loss and fragmentation. Forests were cleared for ***agriculture*** and timber extraction, and more recently for sapling cutting for yam sticks, fish pots, or charcoal. Additional threats include mining for limestone (used for roadbuilding) and bauxite (for aluminum production, an important economic activity), and human-caused fires from slash-and-burn ***agriculture*** and charcoal-making. Only around 8 percent of the total land area of Jamaica is natural forest with minimal human disturbance. Collection and trade of the species occurred in the past. Currently, this threat may be negligible because of heavy fines under the Jamaican Wildlife Protection Act. Predation from native predators, including spiders, the Jamaican tody (Todus todus), and praying mantis (Mantis religiosa), may be adversely affecting the Jamaican kite swallowtail, especially in the smaller[[Page 26169]]subpopulations. In years with large populations of spiders, very few swallowtail larvae survive. Additionally, this species may be at greater risk of extinction due to natural events such as hurricanes and effects from climate change. Since 2001, the Jamaican kite swallowtail has been protected under the Jamaican Wildlife Protection Act. The species is also included in their National Strategy and Action Plan on Biological Diversity. The two strongest subpopulations occur in protected areas, although habitat destruction within these areas continues. Since 1985, the Jamaican kite swallowtail has been categorized on IUCN's Red List as vulnerable, but the assessment is marked as needs updating. This species is not included in the Appendices to CITES or the European Union Wildlife Trade Regulations. In our August 9, 2021, CNOR (86 FR 43470), the Jamaican kite swallowtail was assigned an LPN of 2. After reevaluating the factors affecting the Jamaican kite swallowtail, we have determined that no change in LPN is warranted. Only five small subpopulations of the species are known, and as few as two of these subpopulations may presently be viable. Although Jamaica has taken regulatory steps to preserve native swallowtail habitat, plans for conservation of vital areas for the butterfly have not been implemented. Therefore, an LPN of 2 remains valid to reflect imminent threats of high magnitude.Kaiser-i-Hind Swallowtail Kaiser-i-Hind swallowtail (Teinopalpus imperialis) is a large, ornate and colorful swallowtail butterfly that displays sexual dimorphism (sexes differ in size and coloration). The species is native to the Himalayan regions of Bhutan, China, India, Laos, Myanmar, Nepal, Thailand, and Vietnam. Although the Kaiser-i-Hind butterfly has a large range and was likely more widespread historically, it is currently restricted to higher elevations above sea level (1,500 to 3,050 m (4,921 to 10,000 ft)) in the mountain foothills and other mountainous regions. The species prefers undisturbed (primary) broad-leaved-evergreen forests or montane deciduous forests. Specific details on locations or population status are not readily available, and despite widespread distribution, populations are described as being local and never abundant. Habitat destruction negatively affects this species. In China and India, the Kaiser-i-Hind swallowtail populations are affected by habitat modification and destruction due to commercial and illegal logging, as well as clearing for ***agriculture*** in India. In Nepal, the species is affected by habitat disturbance and destruction resulting from mining, wood collection for use as fuel, deforestation, collection of fodders and fiber plants, forest fires, ***invasion*** of bamboo species into the oak forests, ***agriculture***, and grazing animals. In Vietnam, the forest habitat is reportedly declining. Comprehensive information on the rate of degradation of Himalayan forests containing the Kaiser-i-Hind swallowtail is not available, but ongoing habitat loss is reported consistently as one of the primary threats to the species. Collection for commercial trade is also regarded as a threat to the species. The Kaiser-i-Hind swallowtail is highly valued and has been collected and traded despite various prohibitions. Although it is difficult to assess the potential impacts from collection, the removal of individuals from the wild in combination with other stressors could contribute to local extirpations. In China, the species is protected by the Law of the People's Republic of China on the Protection of Wildlife. In India, the species is listed on Schedule II of the Indian Wildlife Protection Act. In Thailand, all butterflies in the genus Teinopalpus, including the Kaiser-i-Hind swallowtail, are listed under Thailand's Wild Animal Reservation and Protection Act. In Vietnam, the species is listed as ``Vulnerable'' in the 2007 Vietnam Red Data Book and is reported to be the most valuable of all butterflies in Vietnam. In 2006, the species was listed on Vietnam's Schedule IIB of Decree No. 32 on management of endangered, precious, and rare forest plants and animals. Since 1996, the Kaiser-i-Hind swallowtail has been categorized on the IUCN Red List as lower risk/near threatened, but IUCN indicates that this assessment needs updating. The Kaiser-i-Hind swallowtail has been included in CITES Appendix II since 1987. Additionally, the Kaiser-i-Hind swallowtail is listed on Annex B of the European Union Wildlife Trade Regulations; species listed on Annex B require an import permit. In our August 9, 2021, CNOR (86 FR 43470), the Kaiser-i-Hind swallowtail was assigned an LPN of 8. After reevaluating the threats to this species, we have determined that no change in its LPN of 8 is warranted. The species has a wide distribution, although populations are local and never abundant. Threats from habitat destruction and illegal collection are moderate in magnitude due to the species' wide distribution and to various protections in place within each country. The threats are imminent due to ongoing habitat destruction and high market value for specimens. Therefore, an LPN of 8 remains valid to reflect imminent threats of moderate magnitude.Monarch Butterfly The petition that the Service received in 2014 was for listing a subspecies of the monarch butterfly (Danaus plexippus plexippus). After careful examination of the literature and consultation with experts, there is no clearly agreed-upon definition of potential subspecies of Danaus plexippus or where the geographic borders between these subspecies might exist. In our December 17, 2020, 12-month finding (85 FR 81813), we determined that the monarch butterfly (Danaus plexippus) warranted listing as an endangered or threatened species under the Act, but that listing was precluded by higher priority listing actions. Adults of the monarch butterfly are large and conspicuous, with bright orange wings surrounded by a black border and covered with black veins. Monarch butterflies in eastern and western North America represent the ancestral origin for the species worldwide. They exhibit long-distance migration and overwinter as adults at forested locations in Mexico and California. These overwintering sites provide protection from the elements and moderate temperatures, as well as nectar and clean water sources located nearby. Adult monarch butterflies feed on nectar from a wide variety of flowers. Reproduction is dependent on the presence of milkweed, the sole food source for larvae. Monarch butterflies are found in 90 countries, islands, or island groups. Monarch butterflies have become naturalized at most of these locations outside of North America since 1840. The populations outside of eastern and western North America (including southern Florida) do not exhibit long-distance migratory behavior. The primary threats to the monarch's biological status include loss and degradation of habitat from conversion of grasslands to ***agriculture***, widespread use of herbicides, logging/thinning at overwintering sites in Mexico, senescence and incompatible management of overwintering sites in California, urban development, drought, exposure to insecticides, and effects of climate change. Conservation efforts are addressing some of the threats from loss of milkweed and nectar resources across eastern and western North America and[[Page 26170]]management at overwintering sites in California; however, these efforts and the existing regulatory mechanisms are not sufficient to protect the species from all of the threats. The North American migratory populations are the largest relative to the other rangewide populations, accounting for more than 90 percent of the worldwide number of monarch butterflies. Based on the past annual censuses, the eastern and western North American migratory populations have been generally declining over the last 20 years. The western North American population has a much higher risk of extinction due to current threats than the eastern North American population. At the current and projected population numbers, both the eastern and western populations become more vulnerable to catastrophic events (for example, extreme storms at the overwintering habitat). Also, under different climate-change scenarios, the number of days and the area in which monarch butterflies will be exposed to unsuitably high temperatures within their migration and breeding habitats will increase markedly. We know little about population sizes or trends of most of the populations outside of the eastern and western North American populations (except for Australia, which has an estimate of just over 1 million monarch butterflies). However, the potential loss of the North American migratory populations from these identified threats would substantially reduce the species' resiliency, representation, and redundancy. Because the magnitude of threats is moderate to low and those threats are imminent, we assigned an LPN of 8 to the monarch butterfly. This LPN also reflects that we are evaluating the monarch butterfly at the species level.Listing Priority Changes in Candidates We reviewed the LPNs for all candidate species and are changing the LPN for the longfin smelt.Longfin Smelt Longfin smelt, Bay-Delta DPS--The following summary is based on our information contained in our files and the April 2, 2012, 12-month finding published in the Federal Register (77 FR 19756). In our 12-month finding, we determined that the longfin smelt San Francisco Bay-Delta distinct vertebrate population segment (Bay-Delta DPS) warranted listing as an endangered or threatened species under the Act, but that listing was precluded by higher priority listing actions. Longfin smelt ***measure*** 9 to 11 centimeters (3.5 to 4.3 inches) in length. Longfin smelt are considered pelagic and anadromous, although anadromy in longfin smelt is not fully understood and certain populations in other parts of the species' range are not anadromous and complete their entire life cycle in freshwater lakes and streams. Longfin smelt usually live for 2 years, spawn, and then die, although some individuals may spawn as 1- or 3-year-old fish before dying. In the San Francisco Bay-Delta, longfin smelt are believed to spawn primarily in freshwater in the lower reaches of the Sacramento River and San Joaquin River, in South Bay tributaries such as Alviso Creek and Coyote Creek, and in North Bay tributaries such as the Napa River and Petaluma River. Longfin smelt numbers in the San Francisco Bay-Delta have declined significantly since the 1980s. Abundance indices derived from the Fall Midwater Trawl, Bay Study Midwater Trawl, and Bay Study Otter Trawl all show marked declines in Bay-Delta longfin smelt populations from 2002 to 2020. Longfin smelt abundance over the last decade is the lowest recorded in the 40-year history of the Fall Midwater Trawl and Bay Study monitoring surveys of the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (formerly the California Department of Fish and Game). The primary threats to the Bay-Delta DPS of longfin smelt are reduced freshwater flows, competition from introduced species, climate change, and potential contaminants. Freshwater flows, especially winter-spring flows, are significantly correlated with longfin smelt abundance (i.e , longfin smelt abundance is lower when winter-spring flows are lower). Reductions in food availability and disruptions of the Bay-Delta food web caused by establishment of the nonnative overbite clam (Corbula amurensis) and ammonium released into the system have also likely attributed to declines in the species' abundance within the San Francisco Bay-Delta. Even with recent upgrades to the Sacramento Regional Wastewater Treatment Plant that could reduce ammonium release (the Plant is the largest discharger of the contaminant ammonium in the Delta), the primary threats remain high in magnitude, as they pose a significant risk to the Bay-Delta DPS throughout its range. Delta outflow is the predominant driver of the Bay-Delta DPS's abundance, and the recent drought and the consecutive dry years of 2020 and 2021 have reduced freshwater flow into the estuary, which is identified as a primary threat. The establishment and proliferation of the nonnative overbite clam is also an imminent threat to the food web and the species' food source. As the species is at the southernmost portion of its range and may already be experiencing water temperatures beyond its physiological threshold, even modest increases in temperature resulting from climate change is likely an imminent threat. In our 2020 CNOR (85 FR 73164), the longfin smelt was assigned an LPN of 6. In 2019 we revised the LPN from 3 to 6 in part because the imminence of threats was partially ameliorated by high winter-spring flows in 2017 and 2019 (84 FR 54735). Since that time, however, it appears that the observed population rebound from higher-than-average flows was both not substantial, as well as temporary, and the population is again near record lows. Recent water conditions are extremely poor as California is experiencing a significant drought, resulting in negative impacts to freshwater flows in the Estuary. It is generally accepted that freshwater flows in the Estuary are a driver of population resilience, therefore, the high magnitude threats discussed above are ongoing and likely to continue into the future, and expected to worsen with climate change. We therefore consider threats to be imminent. The magnitude of threats is high for a number of reasons. These threats include insufficient freshwater flow, the invasive species overbite clam, and climate change. After reevaluating the imminence and magnitude of extant threats to the San Francisco Bay-Delta DPS of the longfin smelt, we have determined that a change to an LPN of 3 is warranted.Candidates in Review The roundtail chub, magnificent ramshorn, gopher tortoise, and longfin smelt are candidates for which we have initiated the analysis regarding the threats to the species and status of the species, but the proposed listing rule or not-warranted finding for these species was not yet completed as of September 30, 2021. We have funded these actions and intend to complete our classification decision in FY 2022 according to our National Listing Workplan. A proposed listing rule for the bracted twistflower (Streptanthus bracteatus) was published on November 10, 2021 (86 FR 62668) and a 12-month not-warranted finding for the Sonoran Desert (Gopherus morafkai) tortoise was published on February 8, 2022 (87 FR 7077), subsequent to the end of FY 2021; we do not discuss these species in this document; please refer to the proposed listing rule for information on the status of and threats to the bracted twistflower and the 12-month finding[[Page 26171]]for information on the status of and threats to the Sonoran Desert tortoise.Petitions To Reclassify Species Already Listed We previously made warranted-but-precluded findings on petitions seeking to reclassify threatened species to endangered status for four species. The taxa involved in the reclassification petitions are two populations of the grizzly bear (Ursus arctos horribilis), delta smelt (Hypomesus transpacificus), northern spotted owl (Strix occidentalis caurina), and Pariette cactus (Sclerocactus brevispinus). Because these species are already listed under the Act, they are not candidates for listing and are not included in Table 5. This document and associated species assessment forms constitute the findings for the resubmitted petitions to reclassify the North Cascades grizzly bear population, delta smelt, northern spotted owl, and Pariette cactus. Our updated assessments for these species are provided below. We find that reclassification to endangered status for the North Cascades grizzly bear population, delta smelt, and northern spotted owl are currently warranted but precluded by work identified above (see Findings for Petitioned Candidate Species, above). One of the primary reasons that the work identified above is considered to have higher priority is that these species are currently listed as threatened, and therefore already receive certain protections under the Act. For the grizzly bear, delta smelt, and northern spotted owl, those protections are set forth in our regulations at 50 CFR 17.31 and, by reference, 50 CFR 17.21 It is therefore unlawful for any person, among other prohibited acts, to take (i.e , to harass, harm, pursue, hunt, shoot, wound, kill, trap, capture, or collect, or attempt to engage in such activity) a grizzly bear, delta smelt, or northern spotted owl, subject to applicable exceptions. Other protections that currently apply to these threatened species include those under section 7(a)(2) of the Act, whereby Federal agencies must insure that any action they authorize, fund, or carry out is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of any endangered or threatened species. This document and associated species assessment form also constitute the finding for the resubmitted petition to reclassify the Cabinet-Yaak grizzly bear population. This document also constitutes the finding for the resubmitted petition to reclassify the Pariette cactus. For a thorough review of the Cabinet-Yaak grizzly bear population's biology and life history, please see the species' USFWS 5-Year Status Review ([*https://ecos.fws.gov/docs/tess/species\_nonpublish/942.pdf*](https://ecos.fws.gov/docs/tess/species_nonpublish/942.pdf)). For a thorough review of the Pariette cactus' biology and life history, please see the species' USFWS 5-Year Status Review ([*https://ecos.fws.gov/docs/tess/species\_nonpublish/3017.pdf*](https://ecos.fws.gov/docs/tess/species_nonpublish/3017.pdf)). We find that reclassification from threatened status to endangered status for Cabinet-Yaak grizzly bear population and Pariette cactus is not warranted at this time.Two Populations of Grizzly Bear Grizzly bear (Ursus arctos horribilis), North Cascades ecosystem population--Since 1990, we have received and reviewed five petitions requesting a change in status for the North Cascades grizzly bear population (55 FR 32103, August 7, 1990; 56 FR 33892, July 24, 1991; 57 FR 14372, April 20, 1992; 58 FR 43856, August 18, 1993; 63 FR 30453, June 4, 1998). In response to these petitions, we determined that grizzly bears in the North Cascades ecosystem warrant a change to endangered status. We have continued to find that these petitions are warranted but precluded through our annual CNOR ***process***. However, based on a limited number of grizzly bear observations in this ecosystem in the past few decades, the North Cascades ecosystem may no longer contain a population. In addition, this ecosystem is isolated from other grizzly bear populations in British Columbia and the United States, meaning that it is unlikely grizzly bears will reoccupy the ecosystem on their own. We are currently deliberating over whether to designate grizzly bears in this ecosystem as an experimental population to facilitate their reintroduction. Until we complete those deliberations, we continue to find that reclassifying grizzly bears in this ecosystem as endangered is warranted but precluded, and we continue to assign an LPN of 3 for the uplisting of the North Cascades population based on high-magnitude threats, including human-caused mortality due to incomplete habitat-protection ***measures*** (motorized-access management), the limited number of bears, and genetic and demographic isolation from other populations. The threats are high in magnitude because the limiting factors for grizzly bears in this recovery zone are human-caused mortality and the limited number of individuals remaining. These threats are ongoing and imminent. However, higher-priority listing actions, including court-approved settlements, court-ordered and statutory deadlines for petition findings and listing determinations, emergency listing determinations, and responses to litigation, continue to preclude reclassifying grizzly bears in this ecosystem. Furthermore, proposed rules to reclassify threatened species to endangered are a lower priority than listing currently unprotected species, as species currently listed as threatened are already afforded protection under the Act and its implementing regulations. Grizzly bear (Ursus arctos horribilis), Cabinet-Yaak ecosystem (CYE) population--Since 1992, we have received and reviewed six petitions requesting a change in status for the Cabinet-Yaak grizzly bear population (57 FR 14372, April 20, 1992; 58 FR 8250, February 12, 1993; 58 FR 43856, August 18, 1993; 63 FR 30453, June 4, 1998; 64 FR 26725, May 17, 1999; 81 FR 1368, January 12, 2016). In response to these petitions, in 1993, we determined that grizzly bears in the CYE warranted a change to endangered status (58 FR 8250; February 12, 1993). However, in the 2014 CNOR (79 FR 72450; December 5, 2014), we determined that threatened status was appropriate and that uplisting to endangered status was no longer warranted. In 2017, in Alliance for the Wild Rockies v. Ryan Zinke, 265 F. Supp. 3d 1161 (D. Mont. 2017), the District Court of Montana remanded the determination back to the Service for further consideration. Therefore, the CYE reverted back to the status of ``warranted but precluded'' for uplisting to endangered; this CNOR announces the result of our reevaluation of the CYE's status. Since 2017, the Service completed an SSA of the grizzly bear in the lower 48 States, including the CYE, which provides a comprehensive biological status review. Scientific experts contributed to our analysis, and the draft SSA was independently peer reviewed and reviewed by partners, including those from State wildlife agencies, Federal agencies, and Tribal wildlife agencies. Although the CYE is still slowly recovering from being close to historical extirpation, it has experienced over a decade of positive population trends and high female survival. It has also significantly benefited from an augmentation program. Although levels of connectivity are still low, in recent years movement of male bears has been observed between the Yaak and Cabinet portions of the CYE, and males have immigrated into the Yaak portion of the CYE from British Columbia and subsequently bred. Therefore, we find that reclassifying grizzly bears in this ecosystem as endangered is no longer[[Page 26172]]warranted. For an in depth review of the species' biology and an analysis of its' current and future conditions, refer to the SSA (Service 2021, entire). However, the CYE grizzly bear population continues to face several threats, including human-caused mortality and motorized access, and continues to have low numbers of bears. In addition, our analysis of future conditions in the SSA showed that within 30 to 45 years in the future, the resiliency of the CYE could range from very low to high, depending on levels of future conservation efforts. Given these future projections, the grizzly bear in the CYE could experience increased risk of extinction under one out of the five future scenarios. Although all scenarios represent plausible future outcomes for the grizzly bear in the CYE, there is enough future uncertainty associated with conservation efforts such that we determined that the grizzly bear in the CYE remains likely to become in danger of extinction within the foreseeable future throughout all of its range. Therefore, grizzly bears in the Cabinet Yaak will retain their current status as threatened.Delta Smelt Delta smelt (Hypomesus transpacificus)--The following summary is based on information contained in our files and the April 7, 2010, 12-month finding published in the Federal Register (75 FR 17667); see that 12-month finding for additional information on why reclassification to endangered is warranted but precluded. In our 12-month finding, we determined that a change in status of the delta smelt from threatened to endangered was warranted, although precluded by other high-priority listings. The primary rationale for reclassifying delta smelt from threatened to endangered was the significant declines in species abundance that have occurred since 2001, and the continuing and unabated downward trend in all delta smelt cohorts after 2011 supports that finding. Results from 2015-2020 from all four of the surveys analyzed in this review have been the lowest ever recorded for the delta smelt, frequently returning zero or incalculable abundance index values. Delta smelt abundance, as indicated by the Fall Midwater Trawl (FMWT) survey, was ***exceptionally*** low between 2004 and 2010, increased during the wet year of 2011, and decreased again to very low levels at present. The last three FMWT surveys (2018-2020) have returned abundance indices of 0. The latest index of adult abundance, the 2021 Spring Kodiak Trawl (SKT) survey, resulted in an abundance index of 0. Abundance estimates for this year's adult spawning stock based on the SKT and the Enhanced Delta Smelt Monitoring surveys were the lowest estimates on record with 0 and 267 fish, respectively. The primary threats to the delta smelt are direct entrainment by State and Federal water-export facilities, reduction of suitable habitat through summer and fall increases in salinity and water clarity that result from decreases in freshwater flow into the estuary, and effects from introduced species. Ammonia in the form of ammonium may also be a significant threat to the survival of the delta smelt. Additional potential threats are predation by striped bass, largemouth bass, and inland silversides; contaminants; climate change; and small population size. We have identified a number of existing regulatory mechanisms that provide protective ***measures*** that affect the stressors acting on the delta smelt. Despite these existing regulatory mechanisms and other conservations efforts, the stressors continue to act on the species such that it is warranted for uplisting under the Act. As a result of our analysis of the best scientific and commercial data available, we have retained the recommendation of uplisting the delta smelt to an endangered species. We have assigned an LPN of 2, based on the high magnitude and high imminence of threats faced by the species. The magnitude of the threats is high because the threats occur rangewide and result in mortality or significantly reduce the reproductive capacity of the species. Threats are imminent because they are ongoing and, in some cases (e.g , nonnative species), are considered irreversible and worsening. Thus, we are maintaining an LPN of 2 for this species. We note that an LPN of 2 does not connote that uplisting the species to endangered is a high priority for the Service. Because the delta smelt's current classification as threatened and the blanket section 4(d) rule that has prescribed protections for the species since it was listed already provide the species the full protections afforded by the Act, uplisting the species to endangered status will not substantively increase protections for the delta smelt, but would more accurately classify the species given its current status.Pariette Cactus Pariette cactus (Sclerocactus brevispinus) is restricted to clay badlands of the Uinta geologic formation in the Uinta Basin of northeastern Utah. The species is known from several subpopulations that comprise a single metapopulation with an overall range of approximately 20 miles by 14 miles in extent. The species' entire range is within a developed and expanding oil and gas field. The location of the species' habitat exposes it to destruction from road, pipeline, and well-site construction in connection with oil and gas development. The entire range is leased as rangeland for grazing of domestic livestock, and also heavily used by feral horses. Trampling from domestic, wild, and feral animals exposes the species to damage and death from trampling. The species may be illegally collected as a specimen plant for horticultural use. Recreational use of off-road vehicles poses an additional threat through crushing of individuals and habitat degradation. The species is currently federally listed as threatened (44 FR 58868, October 11, 1979; 74 FR 47112, September 15, 2009). In 2007, the Service determined that Pariette cactus was ``warranted but precluded'' for uplisting to endangered status, based on the current and future impacts to the species from energy development (72 FR 53211; September 18, 2007). On August 11, 2020, the Service completed a 5-year status review for Pariette cactus (Service 2020), which is available at [*https://ecos.fws.gov/docs/five\_year\_review/doc6501.pdf*](https://ecos.fws.gov/docs/five_year_review/doc6501.pdf). The 5-year review evaluated the best available information regarding the biology, status, and threats affecting the species, and found that since 2007, significant ***measures*** have been taken to reduce the impact of energy development on the species. These efforts have included the identification of core areas for protection with disturbance limits, the adoption of standard conservation ***measures*** by the primary land mangers (the Bureau of Land Management and Northern Ute Tribe) and operators, and the development of an energy-specific species management plan by the Northern Ute Tribe. For our full analysis of the status of Pariette cactus, see our 5-year status review (Service 2020). Based on this new information and updated analysis, the 5-year review found that Pariette cactus is not in danger of extinction but is likely to become so in the foreseeable future, and therefore recommended that the species' status should remain as threatened. Therefore, we find that Pariette cactus is no longer warranted for uplisting to endangered status. The species remains listed as threatened.[[Page 26173]]Northern Spotted Owl On June 26, 1990, we published in the Federal Register (55 FR 26114) a final rule listing the northern spotted owl (Strix occidentalis caurina) as a threatened species. On August 21, 2012, we received a petition dated August 15, 2012, from the Environmental Protection Information Center requesting that the northern spotted owl be listed as an endangered species pursuant to the Act. On April 10, 2015, we published a 90-day finding (80 FR 19259), in which we announced that the petition presented substantial information indicating that reclassification may be warranted for the northern spotted owl and that our status review would also constitute our 5-year status review for the species. On December 15, 2020, we published a 12-month finding in the Federal Register (85 FR 81144) in which we stated that reclassification of the northern spotted owl from threatened to endangered was warranted but precluded by higher priority actions. The northern spotted owl is the largest of three subspecies of spotted owls, and inhabits structurally complex forests from southwestern British Columbia through Washington, Oregon, and into northern California. The historical range of the northern spotted owl included most mature forests or stands throughout the Pacific Northwest, from southwestern British Columbia to as far south as Marin County, California. The current range of the northern spotted owl is smaller than the historical range, as the northern spotted owl is extirpated or very uncommon in certain areas such as southwestern Washington and British Columbia. Northern spotted owls rely on older forested habitats because such forests contain the structures and characteristics required for nesting, roosting, and foraging. The northern spotted owl is relatively long-lived, has a long reproductive life span (6 to 9 years; Loschl 2008, p. 107), invests significantly in parental care, and exhibits high adult survivorship relative to other North American owls (Forsman et al. 1984, entire; Guti[eacute]rrez et al. 1995, p. 5). Northern spotted owl diets vary across owl territories, years, seasons, geographical regions, and forest type (Forsman et al. 2001, pp. 146-148; 2004, pp. 217-220). Home-range sizes of the northern spotted owl vary geographically, generally increasing from south to north, which is likely a response to differences in habitat quality including structural complexity of forest conditions and availability of prey (55 FR 26114; June 26, 1990). Within the home range, there is typically a smaller area of concentrated activity (approximately 20 percent of the home range), often referred to as the core area (Bingham and Noon 1997, pp. 133-135). Successful juvenile dispersal may depend on locating unoccupied suitable habitat in close proximity to other occupied sites (LaHaye et al. 2001, pp. 697-698). Habitat requirements for nesting and roosting are nearly identical. However, nesting habitat is most often associated with a high incidence of large trees with various deformities or large snags suitable for nest placement. Foraging habitat is the most variable of all habitats used by territorial northern spotted owls, and is closely tied to the prey base. Foraging habitat generally has attributes similar to those of nesting/roosting habitat, but foraging habitat may not always support successful nesting pairs (USDI 1992, pp. 22-25). Dispersal habitat is essential to maintaining stable populations by providing connectivity for owls filling territorial vacancies when resident northern spotted owls die or leave their territories, and by providing adequate gene flow across the range of the subspecies. We have carefully assessed the best scientific and commercial information available regarding the past, present, and future threats to the northern spotted owl, and we evaluated all relevant factors under the five listing factors, including any regulatory mechanisms and conservation ***measures*** addressing these stressors. The primary stressors affecting the northern spotted owl's biological status include lag effects of past habitat loss, continued timber harvest, wildfire, and incursion of the nonnative barred owl, which is currently the stressor with the largest negative impact on northern spotted owls. On non-Federal lands, State regulatory mechanisms have not prevented the continued decline of nesting/roosting and foraging habitat; the amount of northern spotted owl habitat on these lands has decreased considerably over the past two decades, including in geographic areas where Federal lands are lacking. On Federal lands, the Northwest Forest Plan has reduced habitat loss and allowed for the development of new northern spotted owl habitat, and the 2016 revised Resource Management Plans for the Bureau of Land Management's lands in western Oregon are expected to do the same; however, the combined effects of climate change, high-severity wildfire, and past management practices are changing forest ecosystem ***processes*** and dynamics, and the expansion of barred owl populations is altering the capacity of intact habitat to support northern spotted owls. Therefore, we find that reclassification of the northern spotted owl as an endangered species under the Act is warranted and assign the species an LPN of 3. A detailed discussion of the basis for this finding can be found in our northern spotted owl SSA, as well as in our 12-month finding published on December 15, 2020 (85 FR 81144), in which we found that reclassification of the northern spotted owl from threatened to endangered was warranted but precluded by higher priority actions. Because the northern spotted owl's current classification as threatened and the blanket section 4(d) rule that has prescribed protections for the species since it was listed already provide the species the full protections afforded by the Act, uplisting the species to endangered status will not substantively increase protections for the northern spotted owl, but would more accurately classify the species given its current status.Current Notice of Review We gather data on plants and animals, both native and foreign to the United States, that appear to merit consideration for addition to the Lists of Endangered and Threatened Wildlife and Plants (Lists). This document identifies those species that we currently regard as candidates for addition to the Lists. These candidates include species and subspecies of fish, wildlife, or plants, and DPSs of vertebrate animals. This compilation relies on information from status surveys conducted for candidate assessment and on information from Tribes, State Natural Heritage Programs, other State and Federal agencies, foreign countries, knowledgeable scientists, public and private natural resource interests, and comments received in response to previous CNORs. Tables 5 and 6, below, list animals arranged alphabetically by common names under the major group headings, and list plants alphabetically by names of genera, species, and relevant subspecies and varieties. Animals are grouped by class or order. Useful synonyms and subgeneric scientific names appear in parentheses with the synonyms preceded by an ``equals'' sign. We sort plants by scientific name due to the inconsistencies in common names, the inclusion of vernacular and composite subspecific names, and the fact that many plants still lack a standardized common name.[[Page 26174]] Table 5 lists all candidate species, plus species currently proposed for listing under the Act (as of September 30, 2021). We emphasize that in this document that we are not proposing to list any of the candidate species; rather, we will develop and publish proposed listing rules for these species in the future. We encourage Tribes, State agencies, other Federal agencies, foreign countries and other parties to consider these species in environmental planning. In Table 5, the ``category'' column on the left side of the table identifies the status of each species according to the following codes (not all of these codes may have been used in this CNOR): PE--Species proposed for listing as endangered. This category, as well as PT and PSAT (below), does not include species for which we have withdrawn or finalized the proposed rule. PT--Species proposed for listing as threatened. PSAE--Species proposed for listing as endangered due to similarity of appearance. PSAT--Species proposed for listing as threatened due to similarity of appearance. C--Candidates: Species for which we have on file sufficient information on biological vulnerability and threats to support proposals to list them as endangered or threatened. Issuance of proposed rules for these species is precluded at present by other higher priority listing actions. This category includes species for which we made a 12-month warranted-but-precluded finding on a petition to list. Our analysis for this document included making new findings on all petitions for which we previously made ``warranted-but-precluded'' findings. We identify the species for which we made a continued warranted-but-precluded finding on a resubmitted petition by the code ``C\*'' in the category column (see Findings for Petitioned Candidate Species, above, for additional information). The ``Priority'' column indicates the LPN for each candidate species, which we use to determine the most appropriate use of our available resources. The lowest numbers have the highest priority. We assign LPNs based on the immediacy and magnitude of threats, as well as on taxonomic status. We published a complete description of our listing priority system in the Federal Register (48 FR 43098; September 21, 1983). Following the scientific name (third column) and the family designation (fourth column) is the common name (fifth column). The sixth column provides the known historical range for the species or vertebrate population (for vertebrate populations, this is the historical range for the entire species or subspecies and not just the historical range for the distinct population segment), indicated by postal code abbreviations for States and U.S territories or by country for foreign species. Many species no longer occur in all of the areas listed. Species in Table 6 of this document are those species that we included either as proposed species or as candidates in the previous CNORs (domestic published November 16, 2020 (85 FR 73164); foreign published August 9, 2021 (86 FR 43470)) that are no longer proposed species or candidates for listing (as of September 30, 2021). In FY 2021, we listed nine species, and we removed one species from the candidate list by withdrawing a proposed rule. The first column indicates the present status of each species, using the following codes (not all of these codes may have been used in this CNOR): E--Species we listed as endangered. T--Species we listed as threatened. SAT--Species we listed as threatened due to similarity of appearance. Rc--Species we removed from the candidate list, because currently available information does not support a proposed listing. Rp--Species we removed from the candidate list, because we have withdrawn the proposed listing. The second column indicates why the species is no longer a candidate species or proposed for listing, using the following codes (not all of these codes may have been used in this CNOR): A--Species that are more abundant or widespread than previously believed and species that are not subject to the degree of threats sufficient that the species is a candidate for listing (for reasons other than that conservation efforts have removed or reduced the threats to the species). I--Species for which the best available information on biological vulnerability and threats is insufficient to support a conclusion that the species is an endangered species or a threatened species. L--Species we added to the Lists of Endangered and Threatened Wildlife and Plants. M--Species we mistakenly included as candidates or proposed species in the last notice of review. N--Species that are not listable entities based on the Act's definition of ``species'' and current taxonomic understanding. U--Species that are not subject to the degree of threats sufficient to warrant issuance of a proposed listing and therefore are not candidates for listing, due, in part or totally, to conservation efforts that remove or reduce the threats to the species. X--Species we believe to be extinct. The columns describing scientific name, family, common name, and historical range include information as previously described for Table 5.Request for Information We request additional status information that may be available for any of the candidate species identified in this CNOR. We will consider this information to monitor changes in the status or LPN of candidate species and to manage candidates as we prepare listing documents and future revisions to the CNOR. We also request information on additional species to consider including as candidates as we prepare future updates of this CNOR. We request you submit any further information on the species named in this document as soon as possible or whenever it becomes available. We are particularly interested in any information: (1) Indicating that we should add a species to the list of candidate species; (2) Indicating that we should remove a species from candidate status; (3) Recommending areas that we should designate as critical habitat, or indicating that designation of critical habitat would not be prudent; (4) Documenting threats to any of the included species; (5) Describing the immediacy or magnitude of threats facing candidate species; (6) Pointing out taxonomic or nomenclature changes for any of the species; (7) Suggesting appropriate common names; and (8) Noting any mistakes, such as errors in the indicated historical ranges. We will consider all information provided in response to this CNOR in deciding whether to propose species for listing and when to undertake necessary listing actions (including whether emergency listing under section 4(b)(7) of the Act is appropriate). Submit information, materials, or comments regarding the species to the person identified as having the lead responsibility for the species in table 4 below.[[Page 26175]] Table 4--Contacts for Candidate Species and Species Proposed for Listing---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------- Species Contact name Address and telephone----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------Dolly varden trout, Mt. Rainier white- Robyn Thorson............................. Regional Director, U.S tailed ptarmigan, and northern spotted Fish and Wildlife owl. Service, Eastside Federal Complex, 911 NE 11th Avenue, Portland, OR 97232-4181; telephone: 503-231-6158.Arizona eryngo, false spike, Guadalupe Amy Lueders............................... Regional Director, U.S fatmucket, Guadalupe orb, lesser Fish and Wildlife prairie-chicken (northern and southern Service, 500 Gold Avenue DPSs), peppered chub, South Llano SW, Room 4012, Springs moss, Texas fatmucket, Texas Albuquerque, NM 87102; fawnsfoot, Texas pimpleback, Wright's telephone: 505-248-6920. marsh thistle, roundtail chub, Rio Grande cutthroat trout, bracted twistflower, Pe[ntilde]asco least chipmunk, and Sonoran desert tortoise.Big Creek crayfish, round hickorynut, Charlie Wooley............................ Regional Director, U.S St. Francis River crayfish, and monarch Fish and Wildlife butterfly. Service, 5600 American Blvd. West, Suite 990, Bloomington, MN 55437- 1458; telephone: 612-713- 5334.Atlantic pigtoe \*, black-capped petrel, Leo Miranda-Castro........................ Regional Director, U.S Canoe Creek clubshell, frecklebelly Fish and Wildlife madtom (Upper Coosa River DPS), Service, 1875 Century longsolid, marron bacora, Panama City Boulevard, Suite 200, crayfish \*, pink pigtoe, Puerto Rico Atlanta, GA 30345; harlequin butterfly, sickle darter, telephone: 404-679-4156. Suwannee alligator snapping turtle, gopher tortoise, and magnificent ramshorn.bog buck moth........................... Wendi Weber............................... Regional Director, U.S Fish and Wildlife Service, 300 Westgate Center Dr., Hadley, MA 01035; telephone: 413-253- 8200.Chapin Mesa milkvetch, grizzly bear, Matt Hogan................................ Acting Regional Director, Pariette cactus, and whitebark pine. U.S Fish and Wildlife Service, P.O Box 25486, Denver Federal Center, Denver, CO 80225-0486; telephone: 303-236-7400.Delta smelt, Hermes copper butterfly \*, Paul Souza................................ Regional Director, U.S Tiehm's buckwheat, and longfin smelt. Fish and Wildlife Service, 2800 Cottage Way, Suite W2606, Sacramento, CA 95825; telephone: 916-414-6464.Amur sturgeon, Dolphin-Union caribou, Gary Frazer............................... Assistant Director, emperor penguin, Egyptian tortoise, Ecological Services, U.S Sira curassow, southern helmeted Fish and Wildlife curassow, Lord Howe Island pied Service, 5275 Leesburg currawong, Chatham oystercatcher, Pike, MS: ES, Falls orange-fronted parakeet, Bogota rail, Church, VA 22041; Takah[emacr], black-backed tanager, telephone: 202-208-4646. Bras[iacute]lia tapaculo, yellow-browed toucanet, Gizo white-eye, helmeted woodpecker, Okinawa woodpecker, Colorado Delta clam, fluminense swallowtail butterfly, Hahnel's Amazonian swallowtail butterfly, Harris' mimic swallowtail butterfly, Jamaican kite swallowtail butterfly, and Kaiser-i-Hind swallowtail butterfly.----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------\* Denotes species for which a final listing determination has published subsequent to the end of FY 2021 (after September 30, 2021). We will provide information we receive to the office having lead responsibility for each candidate species mentioned in the submission, and information and comments we receive will become part of the administrative record for the species, which we maintain at the appropriate office.Public Availability of Comments Before including your address, phone number, email address, or other personal identifying information in your submission, be advised that your entire submission--including your personal identifying information--may be made publicly available at any time. Although you can ask us in your submission to withhold from public review your personal identifying information, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so.Authority This document is published under the authority of the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended (16 U.S.C 1531 et seq.).Martha Williams,Director, U.S Fish and Wildlife Service. Table 5--Candidate Notice of Review (Animals and Plants) [Note: See end of SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION for an explanation of symbols used in this table.]---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------- Status---------------------------- Scientific name Family Common name Historical range Category Priority---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------- MAMMALS----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------PE.............. ......... Neotamias minimus Sciuridae.............. Chipmunk, U.S.A (NM). atristriatus. Pe[ntilde]asco least.PT.............. ......... Rangifer tarandus Cervidae............... Caribou, Dolphin- Canada. groenlandicus x Union. pearyi.----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------[[Page 26176]] BIRDS----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------PT.............. ......... Lagopus leucura Phasianidae............ Ptarmigan, Mt. U.S.A (WA), rainierensis. Rainier white- Canada (BC). tailed.PT.............. ......... Tympanuchus Phasianidae............ Prairie-chicken, U.S.A (CO, KS, pallidicinctus. lesser (northern NM, OK, TX). DPS).PE.............. ......... Tympanuchus Phasianidae............ Prairie-chicken, U.S.A (CO, KS, pallidicinctus. lesser (southern NM, OK, TX). DPS).PT.............. ......... Pterodroma Procellariidae......... Petrel, black- Dominican hasitata. capped. Republic, Haiti, U.S.A (GA, NC, SC).PT.............. ......... Aptenodytes Spheniscidae........... Penguin, emperor.. Antarctica. forsteri.C \*............. 2 Pauxi koepckeae... Cracidae............... Curassow, Sira.... Peru.C \*............. 2 Pauxi unicornis... Cracidae............... Curassow, southern Bolivia. helmeted.C \*............. 6 Strepera graculina Cracticidae............ Currawong, Lord Lord Howe Island, crissalis. Howe Island pied. New South Wales.C \*............. 8 Haematopus Haematopodidae......... Oystercatcher, Chatham Islands, chathamensis. Chatham. New Zealand.C \*............. 8 Cyanoramphus Psittacidae............ Parakeet, orange- New Zealand. malherbi. fronted.C \*............. 2 Rallus Rallidae............... Rail, Bogota...... Colombia. semiplumbeus.C \*............. 8 Porphyrio Rallidae............... Takah[emacr]...... New Zealand. hochstetteri.C \*............. 8 Tangara peruviana. Thraupidae............. Tanager, black- Brazil. backed.C \*............. 2 Scytalopus Rhinocryptidae......... Tapaculo, Brasilia Brazil. novacapitalis.C \*............. 2 Aulacorhynchus Ramphastidae........... Toucanet, yellow- Peru. huallagae. browed.C \*............. 2 Zosterops Zosteropidae........... White-eye, Gizo... Solomon Islands. luteirostris.C \*............. 8 Celeus galeatus... Picidae................ Woodpecker, Argentina, Brazil, helmeted. Paraguay.C \*............. 2 Dendrocopos Picidae................ Woodpecker, Okinawa Island, noguchii. Okinawa. Japan.---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------- REPTILES----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------PT.............. ......... Macrochelys Chelydridae............ Turtle, Suwannee U.S.A (GA, FL). suwanniensis. alligator snapping.PT.............. ......... Testudo kleinmanni Testudinidae........... Tortoise, Egyptian Egypt, Libya, Israel.C \*............. 5 Gopherus morafkai. Testudinidae........... Tortoise, Sonoran U.S.A (AZ), desert. Mexico.C \*............. 8 Gopherus Testudinidae........... Tortoise, gopher U.S.A (AL, FL, polyphemus. (eastern GA, LA, MS, SC). population).---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------- FISHES----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------PE.............. ......... Acipenser Acipenseridae.......... Sturgeon, Amur.... China, Russia. schrenckii.PSAT............ ......... Salvelinus malma.. Salmonidae............. Trout, Dolly U.S.A (AK, WA), Varden. Canada, East Asia.PE.............. ......... Macrhybopsis Cyprinidae............. Chub, peppered.... U.S.A (CO, KS, tetranema. NM, OK, TX).PT.............. ......... Noturus munitus... Ictaluridae............ Madtom, U.S.A (AL, GA, frecklebelly LA, MS, TN). (Upper Coosa River DPS).PT.............. ......... Percina williamsi. Percidae............... Darter, sickle.... U.S.A (NC, TN, VA).C \*............. ......... Gila robusta...... Cyprinoidea............ Chub, roundtail... U.S.A (AZ, CA, NV, NM).C \*............. ......... Oncorhynchus Salmonidae............. Trout, Rio Grande U.S.A (CO, NM, clarkii cutthroat. TX). virginalis.C \*............. 3 Spirinchus Osmeridae.............. Smelt, longfin U.S.A (CA). thaleichthys. (San Francisco Bay-Delta DPS).---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------- CLAMS----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------PE.............. ......... Pleurobema Unionidae.............. Clubshell, Canoe U.S.A (AL). athearni. Creek.PE.............. ......... Fusconaia Unionidae.............. Spike, false...... U.S.A (TX). mitchelli.PE.............. ......... Lampsilis Unionidae.............. Fatmucket, U.S.A (TX). bergmanni. Guadalupe.PE.............. ......... Cyclonaias necki.. Unionidae.............. Orb, Guadalupe.... U.S.A (TX).PE.............. ......... Lampsilis Unionidae.............. Fatmucket, Texas.. U.S.A (TX). bracteata.PT.............. ......... Truncilla macrodon Unionidae.............. Fawnsfoot, Texas.. U.S.A (TX).PE.............. ......... Cyclonaias petrina Unionidae.............. Pimpleback, Texas. U.S.A (TX).PT.............. ......... Obovaria Unionidae.............. Hickorynut, round. U.S.A (AL, GA, subrotunda. IL, IN, KY, MI, MS, NY, OH, PA, TN, WV), Canada.PT.............. ......... Fusconaia Unionidae.............. Longsolid......... U.S.A (AL, GA, subrotunda. IL, IN, KY, MS, MO, NY, NC, OH, PA, SC, TN, VA, WV).PT.............. ......... Pleurobema rubrum. Unionidae.............. Pigtoe, pyramid... U.S.A (AL, KY, TN).C \*............. 8 Mulinia modesta... Mactridae.............. Clam, Colorado Mexico. Delta.----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------[[Page 26177]] SNAILS----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------C \*............. 2 Planorbella Planorbidae............ Ramshorn, U.S.A (NC). magnifica. magnificent.---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------- INSECTS----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------PT.............. ......... Atlantea tulita... Nymphalidae............ Puerto Rico U.S.A (PR). harlequin butterfly.C............... 8 Danaus plexippus.. Nymphalidae............ Butterfly, monarch U.S.A + 90 Countries.C \*............. 2 Parides Papilionidae........... Butterfly, Brazil. ascaniusAscanius. Fluminense swallowtail.C \*............. 2 Parides hahneli... Papilionidae........... Butterfly, Brazil. Hahnel's Amazonian swallowtail.C \*............. 3 Mimoides (= Papilionidae........... Butterfly, Harris' Brazil. Eurytides) mimic swallowtail. lysithous harrisianus.C \*............. 2 (Protographium (= Papilionidae........... Butterfly, Jamaica. Eurytides) Jamaican kite marcellinus). swallowtail.C \*............. 8 Teinopalpus Papilionidae........... Butterfly, Kaiser- Bhutan, China, imperialis. i-Hind India, Loas, swallowtail. Myanmar, Nepal, Thailand, Vietnam.---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------- FLOWERING PLANTS----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------PE.............. ......... Eryngium Apiaceae............... Eryngo, Arizona... U.S.A (AZ). sparganophyllum.PT.............. ......... Cirsium wrightii.. Asteraceae............. Thistle, Wright's U.S.A (AZ, NM), marsh. Mexico.PE.............. ......... Solanum conocarpum Solanaceae............. Bacora, marron.... U.S.A (PR).PT.............. ......... Astragalus Fabaceae............... Milkvetch, Chapin U.S.A (CO). schmolliae. Mesa.C \*............. 8 Streptanthus Brassicaceae........... Bracted U.S.A (TX). bracteatus. twistflower.---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------- CONIFERS AND CYCADS----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------PT.............. ......... Pinus albicaulis.. Pinaceae............... Pine, whitebark... U.S.A (CA, ID, MT, NV, OR, WA, WY), Canada (AB, BC).---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------- LICHENS----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------PE.............. ......... Donrichardsia Brachytheciaceae....... Moss, South Llano U.S.A (TX). macroneuron. Springs.---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------- Table 6--Animals and Plants Formerly Candidates or Formerly Proposed for Listing [Note: See end of SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION for an explanation of symbols used in this table.]---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------- Status---------------------------- Scientific name Family Common name Historical range Code Expl.---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------- MAMMALS----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------E............... L Vulpes vulpes Canidae................ Fox, Sierra Nevada U.S.A (CA, OR). necator. red (Sierra Nevada DPS).T............... L Martes caurina.... Mustelidae............. Marten, Pacific U.S.A (CA). (coastal DPS).Rp.............. N Gulo gulo luscus.. Mustelidae............. Wolverine, North U.S.A (CA, CO, American ID, MT, OR, UT, (Contiguous U.S WA, WY). DPS).---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------- BIRDS----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------T............... L Laterallus Rallidae............... Rail, eastern U.S.A (AL, AK, jamaicensis black. CO, CT, DE, FL, jamaicensis. GA, IL, IN, IA, KN, KT, LA, MD, MA, MI, MN, MS, MO, NE, NH, NJ, NM, NY, NC, OH, OK, PA, PR, RI, SC, TN, TX, VT, VA, VI, WV, WI).---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------- AMPHIBIANS----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------E............... L Cryptobranchus Cryptobranchidae....... Hellbender, U.S.A (MO). alleganiensis eastern (Missouri alleganiensis. DPS).T............... L Necturus lewisi... Proteidae.............. Waterdog, Neuse U.S.A (NC). River.----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------[[Page 26178]] FISHES----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------E............... L Noturus furiosus.. Ictaluridae............ Madtom, Carolina.. U.S.A (NC).E............... L Acipenser Acipenseridae.......... Sturgeon, Yangtze. China. dabryanus.---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------- CLAMS----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------T............... L Fusconaia masoni.. Unionidae.............. Pigtoe, Atlantic.. U.S.A (GA, NC, VA). INSECTS----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------E............... L Bombus franklini.. Apidae................. Bumble bee, U.S.A (CA, OR). Franklin's.T............... L Lycaena hermes.... Lycaenidae............. Butterfly, Hermes U.S.A (CA). copper.---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------- CRUSTACEANS----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------E............... L Cambarus cracens.. Cambaridae............. Crayfish, U.S.A (AL). slenderclaw.T............... L Procambarus Cambaridae............. Crayfish, Panama U.S.A (FL). econfinae. City.----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------[FR Doc. 2022-09376 Filed 5-2-22; 8:45 am]BILLING CODE 4333-15-P

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[***Jacob Rees-Mogg warns Cabinet colleagues against 'never-ending' restrictions***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:62XK-CR91-DY4H-K21N-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

[*It's definitely a July 19 unlocking ... unless it's not*](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2021/06/14/definitely-july-19-unlocking-unless-not/) [*Sherelle Jacobs: This isn't a delay, but a disastrous trap for the PM and the country*](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2021/06/14/isnt-delay-disastrous-trap-pm-country/) [*Government modellers unsure about next wave*](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2021/06/14/government-modellers-admit-huge-uncertainty-impact-lifting-covid/) [*Fear over freedom: Here's what the doom-laded government graphs don't show us*](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2021/06/15/fear-freedom-doom-laded-government-graphs-dont-show-us/) [*Charles Moore: This extension makes no sense*](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2021/06/15/supported-previous-lockdowns-extension-makes-no-sense/?li_source=LI&li_medium=liftigniter-rhr) [*Coronavirus latest news: Scotland 'highly likely' to delay unlocking until July 19*](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/global-health/science-and-disease/coronavirus-news-covid-new-lockdown-rules-roadmap-stage-4/)

Jacob Rees-Mogg has warned his Cabinet colleagues against restrictions that "never end", as fears build among Tory backbenchers that the "terminus date" will slip.

The Commons leader told ComHome it would be "odd" to maintain restrictions until all adults are double-vaccinated, because only the top nine cohorts are vulnerable to serious illness. If that were the case, he warned, restrictions would "never end".

He added: "You can't run society just to stop hospitals being full, otherwise you'd never let us get in our cars and drive anywhere... there has to be some proportionality.

"The Government doesn't have the right to take charge of people's lives purely to prevent them seeing the doctor."

Mark Harper, chairman of the Covid Recovery Group, this morning noted that Boris Johnson's used "exactly the same words as he was using about June 21, so some of us, I'm afraid, are a bit worried that we're not going to actually move forward on July 19".

But Michael Gove insisted he was "as confident as confident can be" that restrictions would not be further extended, noting that July 19 would coincide with the start of the school holidays, which should cut transmission further.

Nicola Sturgeon has told Holyrood that a three week delay to Scotland's expected lifting of restrictions on June 28 is "likely", in order to buy more time to vaccinate people, meaning both nations could unlock on the same day.

15 Jun 2021-04:11PM BST

And that's it for another day...

The pressure is on over Boris Johnson's decision to delay his roadmap by four weeks, with Tory backbenchers-and a member of his own Cabinet-warning against any further restrictions.

MPs will get to vote on the ***measures*** tomorrow. While a rebellion at this stage seems unlikely to prevent it, Parliamentarians will want guarantees that the rug will not be pulled from under them once again.

And it seems our readers are a pessimistic bunch: 50 per cent believe restrictions are here to stay, while a further 29 per cent expect annual ***measures***. Just 21 per cent say there will be no restrictions after July 19.

The Prime Minister was due to meet Sir Lindsay Hoyle today, after the Speaker accused him of misleading the Commons yesterday. If Sir Lindsay doesn't get sufficient assurances, he has already made it clear he will seek alternative solutions to the repeat disrespect he says Downing Street has shown him.

Mr Johnson might have been proudly trumpeting the UK-Australia trade deal as proof of post-Brexit Britain's prowess, but it seems highly likely to face significant scrutiny from hostile MPs-including several from his own party.

The lack of detail on food standards could be cause for concern among many Tories-as well as the opposition-amid fears it will undermine domestic farmers. It also looks to be at odds with his vocal support of animal welfare.

And MPs were united in calling out the hounding of BBC journalist Nick Watt, with the Prime Minister saying it was "disgraceful".

For all that and more of today's news, carry on reading below.

15 Jun 2021-03:55PM BST

Biden my time: US President arrives for meeting with Vladimir Putin

US President Joe Biden has arrived in Genevaahead of his first summit with Vladimir Putin, as tensions between Moscow and Washington stand at their highest in years.

Mr Biden arrived for the last leg of his first foreign trip as President this afternoon, after mending relations with Washington's closest allies during G7 and NATO summits in Britain and Brussels.

He was greeted on the Geneva Airport tarmac by Swiss President Guy Parmelin, flanked by the heads of the Geneva cantonal and city authorities and US diplomats based in the city.

Boris Johnson said yesterday that Mr Biden would "be taking some pretty tough messages" to his Russian counterpart.

15 Jun 2021-03:45PM BST

Boris Johnson attacks 'disgraceful' hounding of BBC journalist

Boris Johnson has weighed in personally after footage emerged today of the BBC journalist Nick Watt being hounded by anti-lockdown protesters.

"Disgraceful to see the hounding of Nick Watt doing his job," the Prime Minister said.

"The media must be able to report the facts without fear or favour-they are the lifeblood of our democracy."

See 2:06pm and 11:36am for more.

15 Jun 2021-03:31PM BST

No 10 afraid to 'live with Covid', senior Tory warns, as concerns mount over lockdown delay

Ministers are not really willing to live with Covid, despite their claims to the contrary, a senior Tory has said.

Mark Harper, chairman of the Covid Recovery Group and a former chief whip, said the country "could have moved ahead perfectly safely on June 21", arguing that "we don't know anything today that we didn't know when the Prime Minister was telling us he was happy to move ahead".

The Forest of Dean MP told LBC: "We've reduced the risk of this disease hugely by our fantastic vaccination programme, and, as the Government says, we've got to learn to live with it, but the problem is every time we get to that point, ministers seem to not actually want to live with it and keep restrictions in place."

The public understood that "you can't get to zero risk... that's what we want to see from the Government".

15 Jun 2021-03:30PM BST

Lib Dems continue their by-election push in Chesham and Amersham

Sir Ed Davey is campaigning in Chesham and Amersham today-again-as the Liberal Democrats make one last push ahead of this week's by-election.

The party has been making its presence known in the Tory stronghold for several days, in the hope they can make headway among voters who are anti-HS2 and ambivalent (at best) about Brexit.

Tories have told me they are nervous-but feel they should be able to hold onto the seat, which was Dame Cheryl Gillam's until her death earlier this year.

15 Jun 2021-03:22PM BST

Rishi Sunak has 'questions to answer' over lack of education funding

The Chancellor has "questions to answer" over the "shameful decision to block a proper plan" for children's catch-up learning amid the pandemic, Labour has claimed.

Shadow Treasury minister Bridget Phillipson told the Commons: "It's the Cabinet's answer to Macavity, the Chancellor of the Exchequer who has questions to answer here. It is the Treasury which took the shameful decision to block a proper plan for our children's future, the minister knows it, we all know it.

"Comprehensive plans for the recovery of our children's education were developed and circulated within Government and then of course they were stopped in their tracks by the Treasury... but the sheer gravity of this issue, the lives of a generation and the strength of our future economy means that it is crucial that we understand the Treasury's position."

She warned of the social, emotional and academic damage to children caused by the disruption of Covid, adding: "A generation who missed out on their education and who are not given the support they need to catch up would be a generation betrayed."

15 Jun 2021-03:07PM BST

Have your say: Is the Government going to let the country 'live with Covid'?

For many months now, ministers have said the world will have to learn to 'live with Covid' as we do the flu, including annual vaccination programmes and seasonal peaks in cases-and deaths.

MPs including Mark Harper have repeatedly sought clarity on what level of fatalities the Government would be comfortable accepting. The severe 2017/18 flu season resulted in around 22,000 deaths.

A study presented to Sage last week offered a central estimate of 43,500 deaths caused by the current wave, even with a delay to the final stage of the roadmap, demonstrating the severity of the disease despite the success of the vaccine.

So is the Government going to let us 'live with Covid'-or are ministers too afraid of the consequences?

Have your say in the poll below:

15 Jun 2021-02:51PM BST

Advice on booster vaccine programme to be received in 'weeks', says Nicola Sturgeon

The Scottish Government is planning for the possibility of booster vaccines against Covid-19 in the autumn, the First Minister has said.

Nicola Sturgeon told MSPs that guidance was expected soon from the Joint Committee on Vaccinations and Immunisations (JCVI).

"We also expect advice from the JCVI in the coming weeks about whether or not booster vaccinations will be needed during the autumn-so plans are also under way to deliver these if necessary," she said.

The First Minister also said moves were being made to vaccinate 12 to 17-year-olds, in case the JCVI recommend it as a course of action.

15 Jun 2021-02:42PM BST

Change to Scottish restrictions on June 28 'unlikely', says Nicola Sturgeon

Nicola Sturgeon says she remains "hopeful that the vaccine is changing the game" but the evidence needs further analysis-and they need time to get people vaccinated with both doses.

"We are increasingly confident the vaccine will win the race, but we mustn't allow the virus to get too far ahead of it" she tells MSPs. The "biggest vulnerability" is people not being fully vaccinated "and that is a reason for caution to be exercised at this juncture", she says.

No changes will be made to any levels in the country. The next full review will take place next week to consider whether any changes will take place from June 28.

A decision will be confirmed next week "however given the current situation... it is reasonable to indicate now that it is unlikely that any part of the country will move down a level", she says. Things are likely to remain where they are for another three weeks to boost vaccination numbers.

15 Jun 2021-02:37PM BST

Vaccines weakening, but not breaking link between cases and hospitalisations

Nicola Sturgeon says "early data" on the link between cases and hospitalisations is "encouraging".

The First Minister says a recent study shows that while the Delta variant has a higher risk of hospitalisations, the vaccines are offering "extremely strong protection".

Vaccination "is weakening the link" between cases and severe illness but it is not "completely broken", she says.

Highest admissions are among people in their 30s and 40s, which is lower than before the vaccination programme began.

That "may mean fewer of the people being admitted to hospital are becoming seriously ill," she adds.

15 Jun 2021-02:34PM BST

Scotland's cases 'more than five times higher' than in May

Nicola Sturgeon is now updating MSPs about "the general course of the pandemic", ahead of any change to Scotland's roadmap.

There are 137 people in hospital, 17 of which are in intensive care. Two further deaths were reported yesterday. Cases have risen by more than a fifth on last week, and are more than five times higher than in early May, because of "the faster-transmitting Delta variant".

The First Minister says a "technical issue" is affecting the vaccine figures.

"We should never be complacent about a rising curve... however as I have indicated before, we do hope that vaccination is increasingly protecting people against serious illness," she says.

15 Jun 2021-02:22PM BST

UK trade deal agreed in 'haste', says trade committee chairman

The UK's trade deal with Australia has been agreed in "haste" and must be properly scrutinised by Parliament before coming into being, the chairman of the Commons' international trade committee has said.

Angus MacNeil, the SNP MP, said: "The thing this trade deal is needing is scrutiny, done properly in Parliament-beforehand... not like the oven-ready deal."

He told the BBC there was "haste around this", adding: "The EU is negotiating at the same time, but they don't have the same haste.... We are wanting to do things in a hurry".

Mr MacNeil was critical of the impact it would have on the economy, saying "any way you cut this, it's not really matching up to what the UK had before Brexit".

15 Jun 2021-02:10PM BST

Lobby latest: All over-18s will be offered Covid vaccine this week

Downing Street has confirmed that over-18s will be offered their first dose of a coronavirus vaccine at the end of this week, after it was announced by chief executive of NHS England Sir Simon Stevens.

The Prime Minister's official spokesman told a Westminster briefing: "From the end of this week, over-18s will be able to get their jab."

See 10:21am for more.

15 Jun 2021-02:06PM BST

Lobby latest: Protesters chasing journalist 'deeply disturbing', says No 10

The footage of BBC journalist Nick Watt being chased by anti-lockdown protesters calling him a "traitor" and "w-----" is "deeply disturbing", Downing Street has said.

Boris Johnson has seen the footage of Newsnight's political editor being harassed and chased by anti-lockdown protesters in Westminster.

The Prime Minister's official spokesman told a lobby briefing: "This footage is deeply disturbing and journalists should never face that kind of behaviour.

"The right to protest may be fundamental in our democracy but violence, threats and intimidation like this is never acceptable."

See 11:36am for more.

15 Jun 2021-02:00PM BST

Lobby latest: Boris Johnson has confidence in Cressida Dick

Boris Johnson still has confidence in the Metropolitan Police Commissioner following the publication of the Daniel Morgan report, according to Downing Street.

Asked if the Prime Minister still had full confidence in Dame Cressida Dick during a Westminster briefing, his official spokesman simply replied: "Yes."

At a press conference following publication of the report, which found the Met was institutionally corrupt, Daniel's brother Alastair was asked whether Ms Dick should consider resigning. He responded: "Absolutely she should."

The family's solicitor Raju Bhatt added: "You heard from the panel that the institutionalised corruption that they found is a current problem in the present tense. The current leadership in the Met has to take responsibility for that continuing."

15 Jun 2021-01:56PM BST

Tory challenger for 1922 Committee steps aside to ensure 'change at the top'

One of the Tory MPs looking to challenge Sir Graham Brady as chairman of the 1922 Committee has dropped out to give another rival a "clear run".

Robert Goodwill, MP for Scarborough and Whitby, has sent a letter to colleagues informing them he had "reluctantly decided to stand aside" to give Heather Wheeler the best possible chance of ushering in "change at the top".

In the letter, seen by The Telegraph, he said he was disappointed that the executive had decided to run the contest as first-past-the-post meaning that if multiple candidates were to stand "the winner could come in with substantially less than an overall majority".

By standing aside "whoever finally wins will command the support of a majority of colleagues", he added.

15 Jun 2021-01:33PM BST

Roadmap delay will boost understanding of Covid passport app

Michael Gove said the four-week delay to England's roadmap will offer more time to establish whether the NHS app should be used for Covid vaccine passports.

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, who has been overseeing the work on vaccine passports, said pilots are still being run and work is ongoing with organisations such as the Football Association (FA) and England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) "to provide people with reassurance that venues are safer than they otherwise would be".

Delaying the lifting of restrictions from June 21 to July 19 would "enable us to be in a stronger position to judge what the utility of the app might be", he added.

"Ultimately we want to be in a position where people can use the app for international travel and where domestically we can open up completely, but these trials, pilots will help us to understand what the risks and benefits are even more keenly."

15 Jun 2021-01:19PM BST

Telegraph readers on the freedom day delay: 'When will it end?'

Cabinet minister Michael Gove has insisted that the revised July 19 date for freedom day is "terminus", adding that something "***unprecedented*** and remarkable" would have to happen for the new roadmap to be extended further.

Despite pledges from both Mr Gove and the Prime Minister that they are confident lockdown restrictions will end on July 19, there are already concerns that Britain could be stuck in a dangerous trap of indefinite restrictions as the Delta variant continues to spread.

What do you think about the freedom day delay?

[*Read the best discussion points from our readers here-and join the discussion in the comments.*](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2021/06/15/telegraph-readers-freedom-day-delaythere-no-way-now/)

15 Jun 2021-01:16PM BST

Priti Patel: Daniel Morgan report 'deeply alarming'

The Metropolitan Police has been accused of "a form of institutional corruption" for concealing or denying failings over the unsolved murder of private investigator Daniel Morgan.

A report by an independent panel said the force's first objective was to "protect itself" for failing to acknowledge its many failings since Mr Morgan's 1987 murder, the panel's chairman Baroness Nuala O'Loan said.

Responding to the report, Priti Patel told MPs: "It's devastating that 34 years after he was murdered, nobody has been brought to justice... The report itself is deeply alarming and finds examples of corrupt behaviour-corrupt behaviour was not limited to the first investigation."

The Home Secretary said the Metropolitan Police had "made a litany of mistakes and that this irreparably damaged the chances of successful prosecution of Daniel Morgan's murder."

here.

15 Jun 2021-01:12PM BST

Speaker and Prime Minister to meet today amid accusations of misleading Parliament

Speaker Sir Lindsay Hoyle and Boris Johnson will meet today, following criticism of the Government's handling of the road map announcement, MPs have heard.

Commons Leader Jacob Rees-Mogg confirmed the meeting as he confirmed MPs will vote on the delay to the roadmap on Wednesday.

Mr Rees-Mogg said: "I understand that Mr Speaker you are seeing the Prime Minister later on today to discuss this and to ensure everything is done as it ought to be done. I am confident the Prime Minister follows the ministerial code in all his doings."

Yesterday the Speaker accused Mr Johnson of having "misled" him-watch below.

"The prime minister should be here... I was told he was in Brussels"Commons Speaker Sir Lindsay Hoyle criticises PM Boris Johnson's absence from Parliament to inform MPs of delay to full unlocking in England, warning him "you are on my watch"[*https://t.co/smDUGOa1hd*](https://t.co/smDUGOa1hd) [*pic.twitter.com/Ov0D5t7DS4*](https://t.co/Ov0D5t7DS4) - BBC Politics (@BBCPolitics) [*June 14, 2021*](https://twitter.com/BBCPolitics/status/1404525176616853509?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) 15 Jun 2021-12:50PM BST Trade deals mean 'significant increase in competition' for British farmers, warns NFU The Government "must step up and work with" British farming to improve its competitiveness in a global market, according to the National Farmers' Union (NFU).President Minette Batters said she was hopeful that the UK-Australia and "and those that follow it" would provide domestic farmers with the opportunity to export more produce abroad, "although we should be realistic about the extent of those prospects with large net-exporters such as Australia"."We should also be clear about the likelihood that these deals will mean a significant increase in competition in our domestic ***agricultural*** markets," she added. "The UK Government must step up and work with the industry in improving its competitiveness, through domestic policies that support productivity and sustainable farming, and through export policies that upscale our ability to open and maintain overseas markets, something the UK has been poor at in recent years compared to foreign competitors."15 Jun 2021-12:48PM BST'No mention' of food standards in UK-Australia deal, says NFUThe National Farmers' Union (NFU) has raised concerns over the UK-Australia free trade deal, saying there was "no mention" of animal welfare, which threatens to undermine domestic farming.NFU president Minette Batters said in a statement: "While the Government has previously been keen to highlight how our Free Trade Agreements will uphold our high standards of food production, there has always been a question mark over how this can be achieved while opening up our markets to food produced to different standards."We will need to know more about any provisions on animal welfare and the environment to ensure our high standards of production are not undermined by the terms of this deal."The ultimate test of this trade deal will be whether it contributes to moving farming across the world onto a more sustainable footing, or whether it instead undermines UK farming and merely exports the environmental and animal welfare impact of the food we eat."15 Jun 2021-12:43PM BSTBlackburn with Darwen surge stabilises, analysis suggestsThe surge in Covid-19 cases in Blackburn with Darwen looks to have peaked, with case rates stabilising for the first time in over a month, new figures suggest.A total of 897 coronavirus cases were recorded in the local authority in the seven days to June 10-the equivalent of 599.2 cases per 100,000 people. Although this is up week-on-week from 548.4, it is below the figure of 666.7 recorded for the seven days to June 7, which was the highest for the area since the middle of January.Since June 7, the seven-day rate of new cases has dropped on each successive day.The figures have been calculated by the PA news agency from Public Health England data. Additional ***measures*** such as surge testing and surge vaccinations appear to be having an impact-as happened in Bolton, which is currently recording 308.8 cases per 100,000 people, down from a peak of 452.8 in mid-May.15 Jun 2021-12:37PM BSTOverseas aid cut could kill as many as 'medium-sized war', claims Tory MPThe UK Government's cut in overseas aid spending could have "the fatal consequences of a medium-sized war", a former Cabinet minister has warned.David Davis, the Conservative MP for Haltemprice and Howden, said the policy was being imposed by "an unintelligent Treasury edict", but would result in thousands of deaths."On Ethiopia, where the UN tells us 350,000 faced imminent starvation, the minister for Africa yesterday could not tell the House the size of the cut in our aid," he said. "I understand from impeccable sources we propose to cut that aid by £58 million, more than half. Can the Foreign Secretary confirm the size of that cut and tell the House what we intend to do to reduce the hundreds of thousands of deaths arising from our policy?"Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab replied: "I don't accept the proposition he's put forward, as a global leader in ODA, and we continue to be a global leader in ODA, we stretch to put as much in as we possibly can. "Of course we've got temporary financial ***exceptional*** circumstances, but we will get back to 0.7 per cent as soon as we can."15 Jun 2021-12:19PM BSTMichael Gove backs footballers taking the kneeMichael Gove has said he backs footballers taking the knee, after his Cabinet colleague Priti Patel branded the act of footballers taking the knee as "gesture politics".The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster said he would be "lustily" supporting his native Scotland on Friday when they take on England in the Euros. Players will take the knee in solidarity with their England counterparts when they meet at Wembley in a group match.Asked if he would be supporting the protest, he told Times Radio: "I think that people who want to show their strength of feeling against prejudice should have the opportunity to do so."Predicting a 3-0 victory, he said he would be cheering Scotland "as lustily and in as Covid-secure a way as possible".15 Jun 2021-11:59AM BSTDelay beyond July 19 would require '***unprecedented*** and remarkable' change in Covid, says Michael GoveSomething "***unprecedented*** and remarkable" would have to happen to delay the new roadmap date of July 19 further, Michael Gove has said. The Cabinet Office minister reiterated Boris Johnson's phrase from last night's press conference, saying July 19 would be "the terminus date", but appeared to go further in his insistence that this was the last gasp for lockdown. He told Sky News: "It is regrettable that we have this pause, but ... the worst thing for any of us would be to open up and then find we have to quickly reimpose restrictions."Asked what would have to happen in order for restrictions to be rolled over again, he said: "It would require an ***unprecedented*** and remarkable alteration in the progress of the disease."The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster also rejected Labour's argument that the Government delayed adding India to the red list so he could meet President Narendra Modi as "total rubbish", adding: "The idea the Prime Minister would put the health of the nation at risk for a photo opportunity is for the birds."But Jon Ashworth, shadow health secretary, told Radio 4's Today programme concerns about the Indian variant had been raised as early as March 25, but instead of "red listing this variant, we gave it the red carpet" for another month. "That essentially seeded this variant across the country," he added. 15 Jun 2021-11:51AM BSTFarmers 'sold down the river' by Australia trade deal, claims Liberal DemocratsThe Government's trade deal with Australia has sold British farmers down the river, the Liberal Democrats have claimed. Trade spokesperson Sarah Olney said Boris Johnson and Liz Truss "have serious questions to answer about how this agreement will prevent cheaper and lower quality food products flooding the UK market, threatening our ***agriculture*** and food safety".The Richmond Park MP added: "For a deal with such few economic benefits to the UK, the Government should have at least ensured that UK standards on animal welfare are maintained, protecting farmers and consumers, but it seems that they have been sold down the river."Ministers must urgently explain what steps they will take to limit the damage from this deal. And they must finally start paying attention to the thousands of small businesses that are struggling to trade with our European neighbours."15 Jun 2021-11:40AM BSTFear over freedom: Here's what the doom-laded government graphs don't show usAs ever at Downing Street press conferences, Boris Johnson's scientific advisers deployed their graphs skillfully to back up the warnings of potential catastrophe.The by now all-too-familiar vertiginous lines were intended to leave the public in no doubt about the consequences of not delaying freedom until July 19.But take a closer look and the choice of graphs is arguably disingenuous: the slides are most revealing for what they failed to include.[*Read our analysis of the data here.*](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2021/06/15/fear-freedom-doom-laded-government-graphs-dont-show-us/) 15 Jun 2021-11:36AM BSTMPs condemn protesters for hounding BBC journalistMPs on both sides of the House have condemned scenes in which a senior political journalist at the BBC was hounded by anti-lockdown protesters. Newsnight's political editor Nick Watt can bee seen being chased by people taking part in yesterday's demonstration outside Downing Street, with people chanting "traitor" and "w-----" while the police looked on. Tory MP Alicia Keanes said: "This is just so utterly wrong. Shame, shame on all those in this video behaving appalling. A baying mob. Nick Watt deserves better. Society deserves better."Labour's deputy leader Angela Rayner said: "I am horrified by the video of him being abused for doing his job. A free press is integral to our democracy."SNP MP Gavin Newlands said they were "utter scumbags". [*You can read more here.*](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2021/06/15/bbc-journalist-nicholas-watt-chased-streets-anti-lockdown-protesters/) What utter scumbags. Protest peacefully if u must, but do not use threats or intimidation. Besides what has [*@nicholaswatt*](https://twitter.com/nicholaswatt?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) got to do with it? He hasn't made any decisions on any Gov't [*#COVID19*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/COVID19?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) regulations whatever.Hope he is OK.[*#COVIDIOTS*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/COVIDIOTS?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) [*https://t.co/s4FGClDwPu*](https://t.co/s4FGClDwPu) - Gavin Newlands MP (@GavNewlandsSNP) [*June 15, 2021*](https://twitter.com/GavNewlandsSNP/status/1404749866245529602?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) 15 Jun 2021-11:25AM BSTUK-Australia trade deal 'protects against sudden influx of goods', Boris Johnson insistsThe trade agreement with Australia will include "protections against sudden influxes of goods" into the UK, Boris Johnson has said. Asked what the agreement will mean for farmers, the Prime Minister said: "We're opening up to Australia, but we're doing it in a staggered way and we're doing it over 15 years."We're retaining safeguards, making sure we have protections against sudden influxes of goods and also making sure we adhere to the strongest possible standards for animal welfare."As you can imagine, that is what the British consumer is going to want." See more at 10:39am, 9:17am, 8:07am and 7:54am.15 Jun 2021-11:18AM BSTEU will 'react firmly' over sausage wars action, says EU commissionerThe EU will "react firmly" if the UK takes further unilateral action over the Northern Ireland Protocol in the coming weeks, the EU financial services commissioner has warned.Mairead McGuinness told an Irish parliamentary meeting that the EU has "the tools" to deal with any breach of the treaty "and if the UK were to take further unilateral action over the coming weeks, the EU would react firmly to ensure that the UK abides by its obligations under international law".She added: "There comes a point in a relationship if you're not being fairly treated or treated with respect, there is a need to respond."She told TDs and senators trust needs to be restored, saying: "To have trust we need to know that the UK will meet the commitments it made under the arrangement. But I do believe with goodwill and with a practical approach, we can resolve those issues."The protocol was the "best and only possible solution" to ensure peace and prosperity in Northern Ireland, she stressed. "The protocol was a UK choice."15 Jun 2021-11:14AM BSTIreland doubles quarantine period for unvaccinated BritonsIreland is doubling the quarantine period for British travellers who have had one or no Covid vaccine doses in response to the rise in the Delta/Indian variant, transport minister Eamon Ryan said.Unvaccinated arrivals must currently present a negative test and self-quarantine for five days until they take a second post-arrival test. Travellers from Britain will now have to take an additional test after quarantining for 10 days."It is just to reflect concern about the Delta variant and to try and hold back the development of that variant here as much as we can and give us time to get vaccines out to give us cover against it," Mr Ryan said today. The new ***measures*** will only apply until July 19, he added. 15 Jun 2021-10:50AM BSTUrsula von der Leyen: Post-Brexit trade issues can be overcomeUrsula von der Leyen has appeared to offer an olive branch to avert a full-blown sausage trade war with the UK, ahead of a meeting with US President Joe Biden today. The European Commission boss told a Brussels press conference: "I have always said I want a new beginning with old friends where the UK is concerned. We see that at the beginning now, there are difficulties, and there are serious issues that have to be solved."I'm deeply convinced that, with a constructive approach, and with the notion that we know it's a long term relationship we are building here, these issues can be overcome," she added. "We know that the Withdrawal Agreement and the protocol are the best we could have got in a complicated situation. It is very good that we have the TCA, and now it's our duty on both sides to make sure that it works, and to implement it."I think this is our responsibility, to our people on both sides."15 Jun 2021-10:46AM BSTBosses face home working clash with staff as new divide emergesBosses are on a collision course with staff over a shift to permanent home working as official figures indicate huge numbers of employees want to stay away from the office. Figures from the Office for National Statistics released yesterday found that 85 per cent of adults who are currently working from home want to adopt a "hybrid" approach after the pandemic by splitting their time between home and the office.However, almost two in five firms expect more than three-quarters of staff to be in their normal workplace post-Covid. Just 14 per cent of businesses expect more than half of their staff to work remotely after restrictions are eased.Some experts have warned of a resignation boom looming amid the biggest shift in working patterns for decades. [*on that story here.*](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/business/2021/06/14/bosses-face-home-working-clash-staff-divide-emerges/) 15 Jun 2021-10:39AM BSTUK-Australia deal 'will benefit British farmers', claims Boris JohnsonBoris Johnson has said his team "had to negotiate very hard" to secure the trade deal with Australia, stressing it will "benefit British farmers".Speaking at Downing Street, the Prime Minister said: "It will be good news for British car manufacturers, it will be good news for British services, for British financial services and it will be good news for the ***agricultural*** sector on both sides."We had to negotiate very hard and I want everybody to understand that this is a sensitive sector for both sides and we've got a deal that runs over 15 years and contains the strongest possible provisions for animal welfare."But I think it is a good deal and I think it's one that will benefit British farmers and British consumers as well. It will also make it easier for British people, for young people to go and work in Australia."See 9:17am, 8:07am and 7:54am for more.15 Jun 2021-10:33AM BSTSnap poll: Roadmap delay gets thumbs up from publicBoris Johnson might be getting a bit of a kicking from Tory backbenchers-but it seems the majority of the country back his decision to delay the final stage of lockdown. A snap poll by Savanta ComRes has found that 43 per cent of English adults think the Government wait until after the new "'terminus date" of July 19 to lift the remaining restrictions. A third back the new deadline, while a further 13 per cent say the restrictions should lift on 21 June as originally planned.Despite this, more than half (56 per cent) of English adults are concerned that somerestrictions may stay in place indefinitely.Chris Hopkins, political research director, said: "Public support for the decision to push the lifting of restrictions back is not in the least bit surprising, with the public continually appearing more cautious - at least in what they tell pollsters - than the Government's own plans."15 Jun 2021-10:21AM BSTAll adults to get Covid vaccine this week, says NHS bossAll adults in England should be able to book their Covid-19 jab "by the end of this week", the chief executive of the NHS in England has said. Sir Simon Stevens told the NHS Confederation annual conference that the NHS would "finish the job" of the Covid-19 vaccination programme to the "greatest extent possible" over the next four weeks."I expect that by the end of this week, we'll be able to open up the National Booking Service to all adults age 18 and above," he said, noting that it had opened up to over-23-year olds this morning (see 9:45am). "Of course, vaccine supply continues to be constrained, so we're pacing ourselves at precisely the rate of which we're getting that extra vaccine supply between now and July 19."15 Jun 2021-10:19AM BSTRyanair boss: Belarus plane diversion was 'state-sponsored hijacking'Ryanair boss Michael O'Leary has said the diversion of a flight carrying opposition critic Roman Protasevich and his girlfriend Sofia Sapega was "state-sponsored hijacking". Flight FR4978 was travelling from Athens, to Vilnius in Lithuania on May 23 when Minsk air traffic control said they had a "credible threat" of a bomb that would be detonated if it entered Lithuanian airspace. Mr O'Leary said: "In my personal opinion, this was a state-sponsored hijacking, there's no other way to explain it."He told the transport select committee the captain of the aircraft "repeatedly" asked Minsk to be connected with Ryanair's operations control centre in Warsaw but "various excuses" were made including that "Ryanair weren't answering the phone, all of which was completely untrue"."The pilot was put under, I would say, considerable pressure, not overtly but covertly, with the suggestion that he really should divert and land in Minsk. He wasn't instructed to do so, but he wasn't left with any great alternatives."15 Jun 2021-10:04AM BSTPub chiefs warn staff cannot control customers after reopening delayBeleaguered pub workers cannot be expected to force customers to obey lockdown rules after Boris Johnson delayed the final step of reopening, bosses have said.Patrick Dardis, chief executive of Young's, said: "People have got used to the idea of having some of their liberty back, and they want the rest of it back now. We have the Euros and people are getting very excited about a summer of sport, so it will be extremely difficult for the Government to keep putting a lid on it." Clive Watson, executive chairman of the City Pub Group which has sites across Wales and the south of England, said: "The British public have been amazingly compliant, but during the football tournament, it will be very difficult. If England, or Scotland or Wales progresses through the Euros, then it's inevitable that people will want to celebrate standing up or in big groups."Rob Pitcher, chief executive of Revolution Bars, added: "It is becoming increasingly more difficult to police it. People are behaving themselves but it's about a personal choice. If you're young and have your life ahead of you, you're largely not at risk of the virus and therefore people will feel like they've done their bit."15 Jun 2021-10:01AM BSTChildren 'may need to get Covid jabs to avoid disruption to education'This morning Michael Gove gave nothing away about the prospect of giving the Covid vaccine to children, telling Sky News only that it was "ultimately a matter for the JCVI to advise us on".Last night Professor Chris Whitty suggested it may be necessary to ensure their education can continue without disruption.Speaking at a Downing Street press conference on Monday evening, Prof Whitty said the key consideration when it comes to vaccinating children is safety, stressing that Covid risks are "much, much lower" than for adults. "But the wider question is around the effect on children's education and the multiple disruptions that might happen and are going to have a very negative impact on their life chances, including the effect it will have on long-term risk of physical and mental ill-health," he added. [*You can read more about that story here.*](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2021/06/14/children-may-need-get-covid-jabs-avoid-disruption-education/) 15 Jun 2021-09:57AM BSTBelarusian ambassador tells MPs to be 'careful and impartial' on flight diversion reportBelarusian ambassador to the UK Maxim Yermalovich has urged the Commons' transport select committee to give "careful and impartial consideration" to information released by Belarus in relation to the diversion of a Ryanair flight which allowed a prominent critic to be arrested.In a letter read by Tory MP Huw Merriman at an evidence session, Mr Yermalovich insisted that "the authorities of Belarus took all necessary ***measures*** to ensure the safety of the passengers of flight FR4978 in full compliance with the international aviation law".He added: "The Belarusian side is concerned about the unfortunate decision of the British authorities to suspend Belavia's permit to operate commercial services from and to the UK. Sanctions against the air company go far beyond the spirit of co-operation and mutual assistance."Mr Yermalovich was invited to attend the session, but wrote that "all relevant information regarding the emergency landing" was provided to the UK Government and aviation authorities "right after the incident".15 Jun 2021-09:47AM BSTWatch live: Former BBC bosses called to answer MPs over Martin Bashir's Diana interviewFormer BBC director-generals Lord Tony Hall and Lord John Birt will be questioned by MPs today about events leading up to Martin Bashir's Panorama interview with Diana, Princess of Wales.They will also face questions on the broadcaster's handling of investigations into how Bashir obtained the world exclusive.A recent report by Lord Dyson criticised the methods the journalist used to secure his bombshell interview in 1995, including using fake bank statements.[*See more here.*](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2021/06/15/watch-live-former-bbc-bosses-called-answer-mps-martin-bashirs/) 15 Jun 2021-09:45AM BSTCovid vaccine opened up to over-23 year oldsThe age band to receive a Covid vaccine has dropped further, enabling 23 and 24-year olds to secure an appointment, Matt Hancock has announced.Only last week he opened up the ***process*** to over-25 year-olds. Yesterday it was announced that the gap between appointments was being cut to eight weeks for over-40s, as the Government kicks its race against the virus up a gear. From today, 23 & 24-year-olds can now book their Covid-19 vaccine.To help protect yourself, your loved ones & our country from this virus, come forward & get the jab.[*https://t.co/ryhlOLPJ9a*](https://t.co/ryhlOLPJ9a) [*pic.twitter.com/9XDntOpqkC*](https://t.co/9XDntOpqkC) - Matt Hancock (@MattHancock) [*June 15, 2021*](https://twitter.com/MattHancock/status/1404688045404737558?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) 15 Jun 2021-09:40AM BST'Part Jeremy Corbyn': New DUP leader creating 'toxic legacy', says former adviserThe election of the DUP's new leader is creating a "toxic legacy" with voters, a former special adviser to Arlene Foster has warned.Former Belfast councillor Lee Reynolds, who is among those to quit his role in the wake of Ms Foster's ousting by Edwin Poots, said the party's brand had been "damaged" by the events of the past two months.Writing in the Irish News, Mr Reynolds said: "Arlene Foster's popularity had dropped but not as much as the DUP's. The events of the past two months will have harmed the brand further."The 'Poots putsch' of Foster will have a toxic legacy, especially amongst women voters." Referring to new party leader Mr Poots, Mr Reynolds said: "In the public mind, he is part Jeremy Corbyn, part Tom Elliott (former Ulster Unionist leader). This is not a recipe to keep voters, attract new first preferences nor transfers in an Assembly election."15 Jun 2021-09:35AM BSTSketch: Boris Johnson studiously ignored the Indian elephant in the roomThe four-week delay to the end of restrictions, aka "Freedom Day", was officially confirmed by Boris Johnson at a Downing Street press conference last night, writes Michael Deacon.The reason, he explained, was the alarming spread of the Indian variant. Of course, he didn't actually call it "the Indian variant" - in line with recent advice from the World Health Organisation, he instead called it "the Delta variant". And very sensible of him, too, because if you call it "the Indian variant", it reminds people where it came from, which in turn reminds them that ministers knew at the start of April that it had arrived in this country, and yet didn't stop people arriving from India until three weeks later.And it wouldn't do to remind people of that, because, again, they might get angry about it. Best to draw a veil and move on. Which the Prime Minister wisely did. Indeed, he made no mention of that unfortunate episode at all.[*Read the rest of Michael's sketch here.*](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2021/06/14/confirmed-bad-news-boris-johnson-studiously-ignored-indian-elephant/) 15 Jun 2021-09:26AM BSTMore roadmap delays? Michael Gove admits 'none of us can predict future' Michael Gove said the Government is "as confident as confident can be" about July 19 being the date for the end of England's coronavirus restrictions, as he appeared to row back from his more explicit position earlier this morning.The Cabinet Office minister told ITV's Good Morning Britain: "The data shows that we should be in a position to have vaccinated so many people by that date in July that we will be able to lift restrictions."Now, you know, none of us can predict the future with 100 per cent certainty-there could be something bizarre and ***unprecedented*** that occurs."But, on the basis of all the information that we have, then we will have successfully protected such a large section of population, and of course children will be facing summer holidays and that brings the infection rate down. So we're as confident as confident can be about that date."That appears to be slightly different to what he told Sky News, when he said a further delay would "require an ***unprecedented*** and remarkable alteration in the progress of the disease."15 Jun 2021-09:17AM BSTBritish farmers get 15 year import cover in UK-Australia trade dealBritish farmers will be protected from cheap produce entering the country from Australia with a cap on tariff-free imports lasting 15 years, Downing Street has confirmed. The first full-blown post-Brexit trade deal covers British products like cars, Scotch whisky, biscuits and ceramics. People under the age of 35 will be able to live and work in Australia "more freely". Both sides have also agreed to "intensify cooperation" on security, climate change and science and tech. The UK-Australia trade relationship was worth £13.9 billion last year. The new deal will boost GDP by £500m over 15 years. Boris Johnson said: "Today marks a new dawn in the UK's relationship with Australia, underpinned by our shared history and common values. Our new free-trade agreement opens fantastic opportunities for British businesses and consumers, as well as young people wanting the chance to work and live on the other side of the world. "This is global Britain at its best."15 Jun 2021-09:08AM BSTDUP warns against UK Government 'interfering' in Irish language lawsThe DUP has warned the Government against intervening in Stormont affairs to pass Irish language laws at Westminster.The laws are an unfulfilled commitment within the 2020 deal that restored powersharing at Stormont, and have come to the fore following the formal resignation of Arlene Foster as First Minister yesterday.The joint nature of the office Mrs Foster shared with Sinn Fein deputy First Minister Michelle O'Neill, meant Ms O'Neill was automatically removed from her post. Both must be nominated with seven days to maintain the Executive, but Sinn Fein has said it will only engage if Irish language protections are brought forward. Mary Lou McDonald, president of Sinn Fein, called on Northern Ireland Secretary Brandon Lewis to take on responsibility for passing the legislation at Parliament.That prompted Sammy Wilson to respond, saying: "The Government must not interfere in devolved issues at the behest of Sinn Fein." 15 Jun 2021-08:58AM BSTBoris Johnson welcomes Australian Prime Minister to Downing StreetAustralian Prime Minister Scott Morrison has arrived in Downing Street ahead of a meeting with Boris Johnson to formally announce a trade deal with the UK.It will be the UK's first trade deal negotiated fully since leaving the European Union.The Prime Minister greeted his Australian counterpart just before 9am before the pair entered Number 10.15 Jun 2021-08:57AM BSTGovernment may have to backtrack on irreversible pledge, says Sage scientistThe Government might have to go back on its promise that the roadmap is irreversible, a Sage scientist has warned.Asked about whether there could be a need for future ***measures***, Professor Graham Medley told the Today programme it hinged on the vaccine effect, noting that "uncertainty" was changing to become "solidified in terms of being good news."But he warned that ministers "may well have to make decisions that are against what they would much prefer... which is to make the changes that we've got irreversible".Prof Medley added: "It is possible we could end up with a situation whereby the numbers of people going to hospital, really mean that the Government have to take some kind of action that they don't want to."15 Jun 2021-08:49AM BSTWorking from home likely to remain after restrictions lift, says Michael GoveSome workplaces could see a continued working from home pattern into the future, Michael Gove has indicated.Asked if restrictions could continue in some form until spring next year, he told BBC Radio 4's Today programme: "We want to make sure that we get rid of every possible restriction. We particularly want to get rid of the restriction on social distancing, the one-metre rule, so that people can lead their lives as normally as possible."Now, I suspect-and I'm not advocating this, I'm just thinking of the future-I suspect it may be the case that we may see different workplaces allowing people to work from home at certain points as well as coming into the office. I think there may be changes to the way that we live."15 Jun 2021-08:41AM BSTDelay to final reopening 'bitterly disappointing', says Culture SecretaryThe Culture Secretary has said the delay to reopening theatres, nightclubs and mass events is "bitterly disappointing".Oliver Dowden said: "We face very difficult headwinds with the Delta variant and want a reopening to be permanent."He highlighted support on offer for affected businesses. Yesterday's news was bitterly disappointing. We face very difficult headwinds with the Delta variant and want a reopening to be permanent. Our £2bn Culture Recovery Fund has supported over 5000 orgs. We'll shortly be setting out details for how they can apply for the next £300m- Oliver Dowden (@OliverDowden) [*June 15, 2021*](https://twitter.com/OliverDowden/status/1404701717707595776?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

15 Jun 2021-08:37AM BST

Tory MPs fear delay to July 19, says Mark Harper

The chairman of the Covid Recovery Group has said several Tory MPs are "a bit worried that we're not going to actually move forward" on the new unlock date of July 19.

Mark Harper, Forest of Dean MP and former chief whip, told LBC radio that "we don't know anything today that we didn't know when the Prime Minister was telling us he was happy to move ahead on June 21."

He went on: "Ultimately we've reduced the risk of this disease hugely by our fantastic vaccination programme, and, as the Government says, we've got to learn to live with it, but the problem is every time we get to that point, ministers seem to not actually want to live with it and keep restrictions in place."

Mr Harper added: "The public needs to understand there's risk involved, you can't get zero risk-we know that because every time we do anything in our lives, we take a calculated risk based on the benefits we get. That's how we've got to now deal with Covid, now that we've vaccinated people. That's what we want to see from the Government."

15 Jun 2021-08:31AM BST

Liz Truss won't 'roll over' in other trade deals, says Michael Gove

Michael Gove has stressed that "the bulk of Australian produce will still go to Asia", despite the new trade deal the UK is signing today.

The Cabinet Office minister said it was "also the case" that the UK would be able to sell more into the country as a result of the deal.

He told Radio 4's Today programme: "Each trade deal is bespoke... Australia is a country with so many aligned interests between ourselves, that a trade deal with Australia would be different to one we might do with other jurisdictions."

Asked about the risk of having set a precedent that other countries will demand, he said Liz Truss would not "roll over" and do whatever was asked.

"She is a tough, principled and shrewd negotiator. I don't think anyone would mistake Liz for a patsy."

15 Jun 2021-08:27AM BST

Michael Gove side-steps question about winter restrictions

Michael Gove has side-stepped questions about the prospects of restrictions lasting into next spring, if they cannot be fully lifted in the middle of summer.

During an interview with BBC Radio 4's Today programme that prospect was put to him, and he responded: "I agree with you.

"I agree with the proposition you put... that as we go into summer, as schools break up, as we get to the maximum level of vaccination, that is the moment when we can restore people's freedom.

"Even though we were making fantastistic progress in the vaccine programme.. the Delta variant was, as we say in Scotland, a right scunner.

"We are now making sure we can get to level of vaccination which will provide appropriate protection."

15 Jun 2021-08:22AM BST

Michael Gove: This is not coercion or imprisonment

Michael Gove has said the world will "have to learn to live with Covid", as he likened it to flu.

"What we can do is use the time we have to improve the quality of protection", the Cabinet Office minister said.

Stressing he was not an epidemiologist, and could not forecast the number of deaths the Indian variant would cause, a sniffing Mr Gove said: "The key thought is how we provide the maximum level of protection to all.

"None of us can predict with perfect foresight the circulation rate or potential new variations. What we can do is be confident, on the basis of everything we know, that the vaccination programme, the whole of the adult population being vaccinated, will provide us with the highest level of protection come what may."

Asked if some restrictions could be reimposed in order to dampen the spread of cases further, he stressed it was "not the imposition of further restrictions-it is the maintenance of where we are now, with some additional flexibility."

It was not "coercion or imprisonment", he added.

15 Jun 2021-08:17AM BST

Michael Gove: July 19 date picked to coincide with school holidays

Michael Gove has said he is "confident" that July 19 will be the terminus date, as promised by Boris Johnson yesterday.

He told Radio 4's Today programme he was "confident we will be able to move to stage four on that date, on the basis of everything we know. we can be pretty certain."

The Cabinet Office minister stressed that the original roadmap date had always been "no earlier than June 21", and that the extra month would ensure the vaccine programme could protect many more people.

"As well as the increased protection that vaccination will provide, it is also the case that greater opening up will coincide with the beginning of school holidays, which we are assured will bring down the R-rate anyway."

15 Jun 2021-08:14AM BST

Michael Gove hints at mask-wearing this winter

Michael Gove has said he wants "as few restrictions as possible" this winter, but did not rule out mask-wearing and other ***measures***.

The Cabinet Office minister told BBC Breakfast: "I'm not an epidemiologist, so I can't predict with confidence what the likely level of the circulation of the virus will be and what the public health impact will be. But what I do know is that the best way of minimising the number of people who go into hospital, and who face terrible consequences as a result, the best way of reducing that number is by increasing vaccination.

"So I don't think we're at all blase or shoulder-shrugging about anyone dying, but the best way that we can ensure that we protect everyone, including the vulnerable is by all of us getting the jab."

Asked if mask-wearing will be used over winter, Mr Gove said: "I want as few restrictions as possible, but I'm not an epidemiologist or a virologist and I will listen to those who are and weigh their advice in the balance."

15 Jun 2021-08:09AM BST

Chancellor has 'gone long' on Covid support, says Michael Gove

Michael Gove has defended the decision not to extend financial support for individuals and businesses, despite the month-long delay in lifting the final set of restrictions.

Asked about the fact that furlough would begin tapering off at the end of this month, the Cabinet Office minister told Sky News: "We are asking employers to pay a bigger role... the system we have is more generous than most similar countries.

"Furlough support will last until end of September, but we are asking employers to pay a little bit of that support," Mr Gove said.

"The Chancellor decided deliberately to go long... that is why furlough and other support is there until autumn.

"He has calculated will help support the economy.

15 Jun 2021-08:07AM BST

UK farmers should be 'more concerned about what comes next', says trade expert

UK farmers should be "far more concerned about what comes next", rather than the deal being signed off today, a former trade negotiator for the Australian government has said.

Dmitry Grozoubinski said he thought there would be "champagne being popped" in Canberra, but noted the UK has been "very close-lipped indeed" about what the upsides were.

"It's getting a little bit worrying that the Government won't tell us," he told Radio 4's Today programme.

However, in terms of food welfare Mr Grozoubinski said the two countries were so different it was hard to compare standards, noting that there were "farms the size of Belgium" for cows to graze "because it's a really dry place with not a lot of grass".

But he added: "Your Scottish farming guest should probably be far more concerned about what comes next, in terms of precedent this establishes for future trade deals, instead of Australia specifically."

15 Jun 2021-07:59AM BST

Indian variant 'would have ended up in UK' even with closed borders, claims Sage scientist

The Delta/Indian variant "would have ended up in the UK at some point" even if the borders had been closed sooner, a Sage scientist has said.

Asked whether it would have made a difference if Britain had stopped people coming from India in early April, Professor Graham Medley, from the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, told the Today programme: "Potentially, I mean it's speculation.

"The newer Delta variant is now quite common around the globe so it would have ended up in the United Kingdom at some point but perhaps it would have been delayed.

"It's really the competition between the virus and the vaccine so had the variant arrived in the country when we'd had more people vaccinated, then it may well not have grown in the same way that it has."

15 Jun 2021-07:54AM BST

UK-Australia deal will lead to 'investment in countryside', claims Michael Gove

The UK-Australia trade deal will give "our farmers the opportunity to show on the world stage their amazing produce", and will lead to "investment in the countryside", Michael Gove has said.

Boris Johnson and his counterpart Scott Morrison last night agreed the "broad terms" of a free-trade agreement-the first negotiated from scratch since Brexit. The details will be formally announced this morning following a bilateral between the two.

The Cabinet Office minister this morning claimed there had been "one or two points made about Australia that mischaracterises how Australian farmers operate".

[*One of the chief critics of the deal is George Eustice, the Environment Secretary.*](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2021/05/18/ministers-split-ukaustralia-trade-deal-farmers-union-chief-warns/)

Mr Gove added: "We support farmers and do so not just by providing them direct financial support but also giving them the opportunity to export their produce on the world stage."

15 Jun 2021-07:39AM BST

It's definitely a July 19 unlocking ... unless it's not

Boris Johnson called his new July 19 reopening date "a terminus" on Monday - but did not rule out further delays as he pushed back the full end of lockdown by four weeks.

The Prime Minister said pausing the final step of reopening in England, originally due to happen on June 21, would avoid thousands of deaths from Covid, with cases surging.

Attempting to provide reassurance of no further slippage in the schedule, Mr Johnson repeatedly said at a Downing Street press conference that he was confident full reopening would happen on July 19.

But he acknowledged that the emergence of a new Covid variant could throw the plan off course as his top scientific advisers stressed the danger would not fully disappear after the delay.

**Load-Date:** June 15, 2021

**End of Document**



[***Leaders face off in final debate - as it happened***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:65DR-TSJ1-DY4H-K34Y-00000-00&context=1516831)

The Guardian (London)

May 10, 2022 Tuesday 10:41 PM GMT

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**Section:** AUSTRALIA NEWS; Version:33

**Length:** 28974 words

**Byline:** Tory Shepherd (now), Stephanie Convery and Amy Remeikis (earlier)

**Highlight:** Prime minister says wage increase would put jobs at risk as leaders meet for third time during campaign on Channel Seven; Barnaby Joyce discusses China threat in National Press Club address ; at least 53 Covid deaths across nation with WA cases hitting new daily high. This blog is now closed'Over-the-top alarmism': economists dismiss concerns wage rises cause inflationFactcheck: is Albanese's backing of a 5.1% minimum wage rise an '***unprecedented***' intervention?Read our latest election briefing and listen to today's campaign catchup podcastElection 2022 seat explorer ; Pork-o-meter election promises trackerGuardian Australia's full federal election coverageGet our free news app ; get our morning email briefing

**Body**

block-time published-time 2.29pm BST

What we learned from the final leaders' debate of the election campaign

The main point is that you should stay tuned for Sarah Martin and Katharine Murphy 's takes. See you here tomorrow for more considered news and analysis.

We did learn, though, that:

It's possible to have a more considered, civil conversation. The main contrast between prime minister Scott Morrison and Labor leader Anthony Albanese 's perspectives is that Morrison says Australians are the answer, while government is the "shield". Albanese says "we can do better". Morrison says government can't pay for everything, where Albanese says childcare (for example) is an investment, not a payout. Both leaders ruled out carbon and mining taxes (Morrison insists Labor's strengthening of a Coalition policy is a stealth tax). Morrison will stick with his exposure draft for an integrity commission - Labor says it will have one with more teeth. Albanese says "disillusionment" is what's turning voters towards independents; Morrison says it's been a tough couple of years. Stopping the boats is still an issue. And on cost of living issues, Morrison says a strong economy will fix it, while Albanese says lifting wages and productivity is the answer. Morrison says you can't mess with the Fair Work Commission on minimum wages; Albanese says you can suggest they lift them. Albanese wants a guaranteed minimum wage; Morrison says sure, but not for people in small businesses.

Again, tomorrow will bring less tired brains to the conversation. See you then! Amy Remeikis will bring you all the news you need to know.

Good night!

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.31pm BST

block-time published-time 2.16pm BST

From eminent psephologist Kevin Bonham :

enltrAlbanese wins Seven "pub test" debate verdict from "undecided voters" 50-34, 16% undecided Macquarie 50-25 Chisholm 52-35 Lilley 54-41 Boothby 52-32 Hasluck 44-44 Solomon 50-25 Bass 52-32

- Kevin Bonham (@kevinbonham) [*May 11, 2022*](https://twitter.com/kevinbonham/status/1524374870607351808?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 2.06pm BST

Scarr says the polling in the West Australian tomorrow shows 53% to 47% of voters see Albanese as a better economic manager.

block-time published-time 2.05pm BST

The states varied quite wildly in how they voted - but to be honest, the small number in each pub makes such an analysis about as scientific as... well, listening to Bazza in Boothby.

block-time published-time 2.03pm BST

Albanese wins the 'pub test'

Labor leader Anthony Albanese is the overall winner of the "pub test". 34% for prime minister Scott Morrison, 50% for Albanese, with 16% left undecided.

enltrBreaking: the results are in! Landslide win for Labor after The Final Showdown on the 7 Network. [*@7NewsAustralia*](https://twitter.com/7NewsAustralia?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) [*#auspol*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/auspol?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) [*#LeadersDebate*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/LeadersDebate?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) [*pic.twitter.com/1pSfMYsozy*](https://t.co/1pSfMYsozy)

- Rob Scott (@Rob7Scott) [*May 11, 2022*](https://twitter.com/Rob7Scott/status/1524374991814668289?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.07pm BST

block-time published-time 1.53pm BST

I endorse this.

enltrWho decided to call them "undecided voters" and not "loose units".

- Madura McCormack (@MaduraMcCormack) [*May 11, 2022*](https://twitter.com/MaduraMcCormack/status/1524370537304444928?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 1.52pm BST

They're doing some individual pub results now, but it seems a little pointless to bombard you with numbers from the tiny ballot boxes. We'll get an overall result soon. I hope.

block-time published-time 1.47pm BST

Samantha Maiden from news.com.au points out that Morrison's new favourite phrase is "loose unit". He's walking a fine line to not look like a "nasty pastie", she says.

For me, the favourite stand-out moment was when [Morrison] was asked to say something nice about Anthony Albanese. He started recounting the little log cabin story and then he pivoted to say he was a flaming idiot.

NB: I originally wrote "nasty pasty", then changed it to "nasty pastie". Now I am an undecided voter on the spelling.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.56pm BST

block-time published-time 1.44pm BST

After another little break we're set to hear the results of the "pub test". Always love hearing people talk about "who came out on top". Just me?

block-time published-time 1.38pm BST

Up to the Northern Territory now, and the Labor-held seat of Solomon.

Oh wait, we've whooshed to Boothby, the Liberal-held marginal seat in South Australia. Not sure what happened there.

Alex says he hasn't "necessarily" changed his mind. There are issues that weren't addressed, like housing, he says. If pushed, though, he'd say Albanese won the debate. "It was a character issue," he says. "He seemed more in touch."

James was more swayed by Labor on climate change and a federal integrity commission. He's not ruling out a vote for an independent though.

Jeanette says she wasn't convinced by other side on cost of living.

block-time published-time 1.33pm BST

THIS IS THE FASTEST PUB CRAWL I'VE EVER BEEN ON. My head is spinning.

Also the most sober. Also a bit like speed dating.

We're in WA now, in Liberal MP Ken Wyatt 's seat - Hasluck.

Ron is still undecided. He thinks Albanese came across as "genuine", and was disappointed with Morrison for taking any opportunity to have "a dig". Actually he is "a bit clearer". He also reflects on the "issues" with the former attorney general Christian Porter.

Kirsty likes Albanese. "I like how he said 'we can do better'," she says.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.35pm BST

block-time published-time 1.29pm BST

To Lilley in Brisbane. Oh, they actually have little Final Showdown ballot boxes!

Simon 's made up his mind (but doesn't say who). Chery l 's equally coy.

Kurt, though, is more explicit. He's on Team Albo. "He used the word 'we'," he says.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.30pm BST

block-time published-time 1.26pm BST

To Chisholm in Victoria, a marginal Liberal seat.

Taylor doesn't really like either of them. If she had to choose, it would be Albanese because of his focus on the "working class". Morrison belittles people, she says, and she'd like more emphasis on climate change. She'll probably vote Greens, she says.

Pep (I think that was his name) is still undecided because the "devil is in the detail".

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.31pm BST

block-time published-time 1.22pm BST

The people in the pubs speak

Seven's Michael Usher is now giving us a glimpse of the "pub test", where undecided voters are set up in pubs across the country.

To the Labor-held seat of Macquarie, first, in Sydney.

Susan says she'll go for "Albo" over "Scotty from marketing".

"He dodged questions," she says.

Dave is still undecided, but leaning towards Morrison because, he says, Labor's policies are uncosted and "we know" what Morrison has done.

Sarah is also heading more towards Morrison. Again, because of funding questions.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.46pm BST

block-time published-time 1.18pm BST

We can do better, Albanese says:

I have a plan for a better future, a plan to make sure we can grow the economy in a sustainable way by investing in infrastructure, by investing in climate policy, by making sure that no one is left behind and no one is held back.

We can do better. We have a range of challenges facing us as a nation. We have childcare costs that are spiralling, that stop women working that fourth or fifth day. We can do better than that. We have had 22 attempts at climate policy and we have issues, floods and bushfires, we have seen the impact. We can do better than just continuing to drift there. We have pressure where so many people can't see a doctor when they need one. We can do better than that. We have young Australians who can't get the skills and training that they need for the jobs of the future. And we can do better than that. This election is a choice.

It's a choice over whether we seize the opportunities which are before us. We have a government that's asking for three more years of more of the same. They don't really have a plan or a policy for the future, because they struggle with the present. That's why at this election we have got constructive plans and ***processes*** in place that we are putting forward to the Australian people. If we don't elect a new government we will miss out on the opportunity to increase women's economic participation through cheaper childcare. We will miss out on the opportunity to end the climate wars. We will miss out on the opportunity to deal with cost of living and stop everything going up except for people's wages.

If we can't even get consensus here about a $1 increase for the minimum wage then I think that this country isn't able to go forward. I firmly believe that we have a great future but in order to do that we need a better government.

Anthony Albanese and Scott Morrison shake hands. Photograph: Reuters

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.51pm BST

block-time published-time 1.16pm BST

Leaders deliver closing statements

We're on to closing statements now. Morrison sneaks in a plug for having "called" for the aged care commission. He says:

There are great opportunities ahead, Australia, and I'm really excited about them. Over the last couple of years we have come through the most difficult times that we could have ever imagined and couldn't have contemplated through years ago, but here we are. We have stuck together.

As a government we have backed you in. This is one of the big differences, I think, in what we have heard tonight. We believe in you, we believe a strong economy is based on you. We don't believe the government is the answer, we believe you are the answer and that's what our policies are designed to do. That's why we believe a strong economy is the best way to enable you to fulfil your aspirations for you and your family. To shield you against the pressures that are going to come in the years ahead on our economy, putting upward pressure on interest rates and the cost of living. To shield that job, to shield that income and that business and that retirement saving that you have. It's also going to guarantee those essential services so we can tackle the big problems in aged care.

$19.1bn dollars to support our response to the aged care royal commission that I called. These are tough challenges. Continuing to support Medicare at record levels. Bulk billing at 88.8%, it's up from 82.2% when we first came to government. To ensure we keep building those roads and infrastructure that keep you safer and get you home safe and on time to be with your family or to get to work. And to ensure that we continue to invest in our defence forces as we go forward, and our security and intelligence agencies. This election is a choice about who can manage and deliver that strong economy, because that's what your future depends on.

And now is not a time to risk that on an unproven opposition and Labor leader who don't have a plan for our economy and haven't got the experience with the challenges that we face. A vote for the Liberals and the Nationals on May 21 is the strong, responsible and safe choice for a strong economy, for a stronger future.

Morrison spruiks Coalition response to aged care royal commission in closing statement. Photograph: Maskot/Getty Images

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.58pm BST

block-time published-time 1.14pm BST

The two leaders are asked to nominate something they respect about the other, and a weakness. (The exact wording is "What is the one strength [that you find in your opponent] that you admire but that also worries you?")

Morrison says:

The thing about Anthony I've always admired he has never forgot where he has come from. He grew up in housing commission and I have no doubt that the other day on Mother's Day is always probably the toughest day of each year, it is for him.

And he has shown the ability to rise to be the leader of one of the oldest parties in this country, and he should be commended for that. He has shown a great deal of determination over that period of determination over that period of time to rise from very humble beginnings. I admire that in Australians and I admire that in Anthony. That's great.

But Morrison reckons Albanese isn't across the detail.

Morrison says something nice about Albanese. Photograph: Mick Tsikas/AAP

Albanese doesn't bring up any negatives. He says:

The job of prime minister is one that is obviously a difficult one to do. Scott's absolutely committed to his nation. And I admire that. And on a range of issues, to name one, mental health in terms of young people. We have seen increased funding for mental health but in particular increased funding for Headspace and those issues.

Mental health is something that when we were all a bit younger wasn't spoken about. It's a good thing it's being spoken about, it's a good thing the prime minister speaks about it as well.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.20pm BST

block-time published-time 1.12pm BST

From Scarr, to Morrison:

It has been reported that an MP in your party room suggested that childcare and women accessing childcare was outsourcing parenting. Do you agree, and is this an issue you ever talk to Jenny about?

( [*Here's the story on that*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2021/jun/23/female-coalition-mps-fire-up-after-party-room-told-working-women-are-outsourcing-parenting). )

Morrison says:

It's not something I agree with. And we talk about childcare and many issues all the time. Our children themselves went through childcare and we went through that with other parents and their families. We have a responsible and affordable policy on childcare. What we don't do is go and promise the world when you know you can't pay for it. If you go to 90% childcare for everybody that is a policy that all Australians are going to have to pay for.

Albanese says:

Where Scott, I think, is wrong on this issue is to see it as just a cost. It is an investment in women, it's an investment in families, it's an investment in our economy because it will grow, all the analysis shows that every time you spend a dollar on childcare more than $2 comes back.

block-time published-time 1.09pm BST

Albanese: childcare is economic reform, not welfare

Scarr asks both leaders about the possibility of free childcare.

Albanese says:

We have a plan for more affordable childcare where 96% of families will be better off and 4% will be the same. We have also said that what we will do is have the Productivity Commission in our first term look towards whether you would move to a universal system of affordable childcare. What are the economic implications of that?

Why do we do cheaper childcare? It's not welfare, it's economic reform. It will boost productivity, help business, help women's retirement incomes. That's just one element that we have.

We also want to make gender pay equity an objective of the Fair Work Act. We want to make sure that we deliver on safe workplaces as well, which is why we will adopt all 55 recommendations of the Jenkins Review into safety in the workplace, including the obligations on employers to do what they can to make every workplace safe.

Anthony Albanese is offered a cupcake during a meeting with advocacy group the Parenthood earlier today. Photograph: Lukas Coch/AAP

Morrison says things have got better for women:

The gender pay gap has fallen from 17.4% under Labor to 13.8% where it is now, and it even went down to 13.4%. What does that mean? It means women today because of the closing of the gender pay gap under our government are better off. There are 1.1 million more women in work than when we came to government. Female participation in the workforce is at record levels

Opportunities have been provided for women into get into the workforce and we have been championing women's entrepreneurship and championing women in non-traditional trades and skills...

We have got $3.8 billion invested in the skills of our country providing record numbers of apprenticeships right now and women are taking up more and more of those jobs.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.54pm BST

block-time published-time 1.06pm BST

Albanese says renewables are the cheapest way to provide electricity. Morrison says you invest in businesses to make changes. There's more to and fro, I'll check later if there was anything new in it.

block-time published-time 1.05pm BST

Scarr points out that economists say putting a price on carbon is the way to go to meet emissions targets.

Albanese says:

We have got a better system. We are using the Abbott government system that it created, the safeguard mechanism, but also what we have is a plan to fix transmission, what that's about is making sure that renewables can plug into the grid. At the moment that's one of the weaknesses that will stabilise the grid. We also have a plan for electric vehicles. At the last campaign Scott Morrison said that electric vehicles would end the weekend. We want to encourage the take-up by reducing taxes on electric vehicles.

Morrison says Labor wants a stealth carbon tax (through that previously mentioned Abbott government initiative) and that Labor will drive up electricity prices (he brings up some debunked modelling - [*check out our factcheck*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/video/2022/may/03/factcheck-is-labor-introducing-a-sneaky-carbon-tax-video) ).

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.06pm BST

block-time published-time 1.02pm BST

Both leaders rule out carbon tax

We're back. Riley is joined by the West Australian's political editor, Lanai Scarr. She asks both sides to categorically rule out a carbon or a mining tax. (Is this the question that Riley said could stump them both?)

Both rule them out. And now it's all about the battle for WA seats.

Morrison says:

We never have, never will have a mining or a carbon tax. Under our government our taxes will always be lower, because right now if you're earning $90,000 at home there today, you are paying $50 a week less in tax every single week because of the tax cuts we have already legislated and delivered, and there's more to follow in the next term, where between $45,000 and $200,000 you will pay no more than 30 cents in the dollar. We are the party of lower taxes. We have always delivered lower taxes.

One of the reasons WA was able to achieve that surplus was the GST deal that we were able to ensure that WA got their fair share of the GST. As treasurer and as prime minister I fought for it, I delivered it, and Western Australia has got the benefit of that. Their fair share because it was in the national interest.

Scott Morrison after visiting the Melt Prototyping and Innovation Accelerator earlier today. Photograph: Mick Tsikas/AAP

Albanese says:

Yes, we will certainly rule them out and have done so. But when we talk about the success of Western Australia, one of the things I'll be doing is working with Mark McGowan. Scott Morrison when he had a choice between Mark McGowan and Clive Palmer he chose Clive Palmer. He went to court as part of that, with the solicitor general, he spent taxpayers' money backing up Clive Palmer's legal case to open up WA's borders.

Now, WA has been successful under Mark McGowan because they have made tough decisions, which has helped tough decisions, which has helped to boost not just the WA economy but our entire national economy.

Anthony Albanese with Dan Andrews yesterday on the campaign trail. Photograph: Lukas Coch/AAP

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.00pm BST

block-time published-time 12.55pm BST

That was quite polite, Riley says, and now we're having a short break.

block-time published-time 12.55pm BST

Riley says the previous discussion shows we need an independent integrity commission.

Morrison says he has a bill for one, and has hundreds of pages to prove it. (He's talking about an exposure draft, which he never put to parliament). He says:

A body of this nature is important and you've got to get the design right and it can't be driven by the whims of politics. It needs to be developed by good design where the rule of law applies.

It applies to criminal conduct and we don't see a situation where we have agencies that can go and convict people, before they have even heard the case, in the media. That is not a good way to run a country. That is not a good way to uphold integrity. I think it only undermines the ***process***.

(It sounds like he's continuing his critique of the NSW Icac).

Albanese says:

We do need to clean up politics and we need a national anti-corruption commission and one with teeth. Under the model put forward by Mr Morrison, ministers would decide - have a decision to make - whether something was referred to an anti-corruption commission.

It needs to be independent of politics. That's the whole point of an independent national anti-corruption commission.

The idea that somehow the opposition's responsible for the government not even introducing legislation... that, taken to its logical conclusion, why would you vote for Scott Morrison on Saturday week? Because what he says is, unless the opposition supports legislation, it won't even come before the parliament.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.58pm BST

block-time published-time 12.51pm BST

Albanese says the structure the Labor party has in place is that there would be an investigation if any complaint was made. Morrison says he didn't wait for anyone to write to him to start an inquiry. "I acted swiftly," he says.

block-time published-time 12.50pm BST

Riley asks about a reported payout to education minister Alan Tudge 's former press secretary. He asks: "Haven't taxpayers got a right to know why they have paid half a million dollars in this?"

Morrison says he held an independent inquiry into the matter, and adds that he's been advised the matter hasn't even been settled. He tries to switch the conversation to bullying allegations raised after the death of Labor senator Kimberley Kitching.

block-time published-time 12.47pm BST

Disillusionment with major parties leaving door open for independents, Albanese says

We're on to why the independents are proving so popular this election. Albanese says there's disillusionment with both major parties, in part because of the leadership "revolving doors". He says:

The level of corrupt practices that we have seen in recent times has led to that as well. That's one of the reasons why we need a strong national anti-corruption commission. We need to restore faith in politics.

The people who are putting themselves forward at this election, regardless of what party [they do it] for all the right reasons. But the truth is there is a lack of faith out there... we need to restore faith in politics.

Anthony Albanese: 'We need to restore faith in politics.' Photograph: Lukas Coch/AFP/Getty Images

Morrison says it was the pandemic what done it, and:

Because the challenges that we face are very real and who can best run that economy, who best understands that economy? That is what will impact on your life and the ambitions you have for you and your family.

I say to those thinking about independents, Australia doesn't need a weak government that has to negotiate for its existence every single day. It needs a strong government like we have been over the last three years where we could make the strong decisions to get Australia through this difficult time. A vote for the independents may be well-meaning, but it would be a vote to weaken or parliament and weaken Australia.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.01pm BST

block-time published-time 12.44pm BST

Riley says the difference is that Labor will abolish temporary protection visas. (You can [*read a factcheck on that here*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/apr/19/factcheck-is-labors-policy-on-asylum-seekers-and-refugees-any-different-to-the-coalitions) ).

Morrison says Albanese doesn't know what it'll be like if he gets into government:

I just don't believe he has got the stomach for it if he were to become prime minister.

Albanese says:

I believe Australia can do better. I believe we must do better.

block-time published-time 12.41pm BST

Albanese says that where Labor sees a good idea, they will support it. He says:

The key to keeping our borders strong are the elements of the plan that would turn back boats, which we support, offshore ***processing*** which we support, and settlement in third countries, which we support. Anyone who comes by boat will not get any visa here in Australia, they won't be allowed to settle here in Australia. We have the same position on all of those issues.

block-time published-time 12.40pm BST

Riley asks Morrison about boat turnbacks, and asks him to justify claims that under Labor the boats will start arriving again. Morrison says:

We have fixed that with three clear policies. Turn the boats back where it's safe to do so, offshore ***processing***, and temporary protection visas. Mr Albanese has said if he is elected he will abolish temporary protection visas, that means permanent visas for people who have come on a boat.

"I know how to keep them stopped, because I stopped them," Morrison says.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.43pm BST

block-time published-time 12.39pm BST

Morrison accuses Albanese of being an "armchair critic", who is "wise in hindsight".

He says he's not saying he's always got things right but (in summary), we've done all right.

block-time published-time 12.38pm BST

Riley opens the floor for character assassinations on both sides. Morrison says:

This is a Labor leader who comes from the far left of the party and has been very loose, he is a loose unit when it comes to the economy. He makes things up as he goes along.

Albanese gets a chance to rebut that, and outlines his experience. Then he gets his own chance to have a crack:

All we see from this government, that is now seeking a fourth term in office, they don't have an agenda for today, let alone an agenda for the next term. All they have is abuse and scare campaigns and fear campaigns, no policies for the future. We can do better than that.

And he brings up the "I don't hold a hose" comment, and criticises the vaccine strollout, and so on.

block-time published-time 12.35pm BST

Quite the skirmish over submarines. Albanese has a crack at the $5-odd billion spent on the cancelled French contract. Morrison asks if he doesn't support the submarines.

You don't either, Albanese says, you tore it up. The Aukus deal, Morrison says.

So Albanese goes at him on waste on rorts.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.36pm BST

block-time published-time 12.33pm BST

Albanese's turn. He says:

The truth is that people are just doing it really tough out there. Our ***measures*** on childcare, for example, will make it - how crazy is it, that in 2022, that some women, if they want to work a fourth or fifth day, it costs their family money. Everyone knows out there that when your youngest child goes into kindergarten all of a sudden families are better off.

That makes no sense. No makes no sense. It's a disincentive to work and to participate in the work force that really penalises families for having children. We need to do much better. Our energy policy will reduce electricity prices by $275 for households by 2025. We will have cheaper medicines, lowering the cost to $30. These are all practical steps that we will make.

Riley asks about making sport available on free to air channel. Morrison takes the non sequitur as an opportunity to start the first barney of the debate.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.35pm BST

block-time published-time 12.31pm BST

What can you do to turn things around for families, Mark Riley asks.

Morrison says "we got the budget back into balance" before spending on the pandemic stimulus ***measures***. He says:

We didn't want Australians to get hit down by the rising costs of living caused by the war in Europe, and issues in China, and the floods pushing up fruit and vegetable prices. So we cut fuel tax in half, [gave] $250 to pensioners and others on fixed incomes from the government and increased tax relief from 1 July, where families up to $126,000 a year will get an extra $420 they will keep of money they earned. But the tax cuts we provided continue into the future because they should keep more of what they earn and we have always delivered lower taxes.

Geez, you're smashing out the talking points, Riley says.

Scott Morrison smashes out the talking points. Photograph: Mick Tsikas/AAP

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.47pm BST

block-time published-time 12.30pm BST

Albanese says the AAA credit rating was achieved under Labor, and that Labor's policies will boost productivity (he mentions child care, renewable energy, etc.).

Morrison says increasing productivity is about investing in skills, and building infrastructure.

Albanese says that's just coming back from cuts, and that "we've seen infrastructure prioritised based upon colour-coded spreadsheets, not based upon productivity".

block-time published-time 12.27pm BST

On those rising interest rates, Morrison says his government have kept "downward pressure" on them, and compares Australia to international examples. He says:

We have got employment outcomes that are 50% better. That's what a good economic plan looks like. That's what good economic management looks like... Now, we know that Australians through the pandemic have been taking good decisions, they have switched to fixed interest rates, they've got ahead of their mortgage. As a government, we've been showing the same responsibility.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.30pm BST

block-time published-time 12.25pm BST

Wage increase would put jobs at risk, Morrison says

Riley says a dollar an hour seems "pretty reasonable". Morrison says a wage increase would put jobs at risk:

If Mr Albanese thinks small businesses around the country can have a 5% increase in their wages bill on top of all the other things they're facing, and see their ability to come through, then people won't be worrying about what their wages are, they will be worrying about whether they have a job.

Albanese refers to the last debate, where Morrison prevaricated on the idea that everyone should get the minimum wage. Morrison distinguishes between employees and small business owners. He says:

People who run small businesses, Anthony, they don't get guaranteed anything. They risk their businesses and their own incomes and their houses every single day, and they need the support to help employ Australians.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.38pm BST

block-time published-time 12.23pm BST

Morrison says it's the FWC that will make the decision. And he says a rise would feed into inflation, and interest rates, and therefore affect cost of living. He says you can't "jawbone" the FWC:

That's why we think the most sensible way is to look at all of the evidence, not just run off at the mouth and come up with things on the run, but to consider these sorts of economic questions very carefully.

Albanese says the minimum wage is $20.33 an hour or "two cups of coffee a day". The idea that would damage the economy is "not the case", he says.

block-time published-time 12.21pm BST

Riley is grilling Albanese on whether he can actually influence what the Fair Work Commission does. Albanese says:

We are advocating publicly that people not get left behind.

block-time published-time 12.20pm BST

Morrison says (and this may come as a surprise to some) that wages have gone up. He says the minimum wage has increased by 7% over the course of his government (this needs a comparison to inflation). He says:

Small businesses are doing it incredibly tough. They're the ones who employ people and we want to ensure that they can keep employing people. And by having a sensible approach to wages policy they can employ people and pay them better wages.

block-time published-time 12.19pm BST

'People are doing it tough': Albanese supports 5.1% wage increase

The first question is on Albanese's promise to support a 5.1% wage increase. He says it's up to the Fair Work Commission, which "makes a decision independent of government". But he'd welcome a rise, because "people are doing it tough out there". He says:

The idea that those heroes of the pandemic, those low-wage workers - people on the minimum wage are cleaners, they're people working in the care sector, they're people who work in retail, they are people who helped get us through the pandemic. They deserve more than our thanks. They don't deserve a wage cut.

Aged care workers and others on the minimum wage 'deserve more than our thanks', Albanese says. Photograph: Mick Tsikas/AAP

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.15pm BST

block-time published-time 12.17pm BST

Albanese is talking up the opportunities that dealing with climate change offers, along with child care and aged care improvements. He says people have "conflict fatigue" and that he wants to bring them together:

I want a better future where we deal with the cost of living crisis where everything is going up except for people's wages. A better future where people, if they need to see a doctor, can see one; where we make Medicare better; where childcare is more affordable and women can participate in the economy and we can build productivity at the same time.

A better future where dealing with climate change means taking up the opportunity to grow the economy with renewables and new industries, training people for those jobs with fee-free Tafe and additional university places, and a better future where we deal with the aged care crisis. Older Australians deserve to live in dignity and with respect in their later years. But it's also important how they get there.

I want us to bring together big business and unions, to bring together small business and their employees, to bring together the commonwealth, states and territories to work on a common interest. Australians have conflict fatigue. They want solutions, not arguments, and that's what I want to deliver in delivering a better future, one where no-one is held back and no-one is left behind.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.20pm BST

block-time published-time 12.16pm BST

We have "big challenges and uncertainties" to face, Morrison says, adding that a strong economy will make everything possible, and a weaker economy will make it harder.

Now it's Albanese's turn. He begins with:

I believe that good government can change people's lives for the better.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.18pm BST

block-time published-time 12.14pm BST

The economic "shield" gets an early airing from Morrison:

As we all know the last few years have been very tough for Australians and I've never been more proud of my fellow Australians. As a government we have sought to back Australians every step of the way through the most difficult time we have seen since the second world war.

Of course we haven't got everything right but we have stood there with Australians, and right now Australia is one of the most successful economies to come out of this pandemic amongst the advanced economies of the world. We know that a strong economy is so important to everything that we hope to achieve as a nation, and will be into the future with the challenges and the uncertainties we face.

A strong economy provides that economic shield for jobs, for incomes, for the businesses you run, to keep taxes low and to put downward pressure on the global forces that are pushing up interest rates and cost of living.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.16pm BST

block-time published-time 12.13pm BST

Labor leader Anthony Albanese won the coin toss, and chose to go second, so prime minister Scott Morrison is up first. Cue stump speech.

block-time published-time 12.13pm BST

The final leaders' debate begins

We're off!

"We won't cut the mics," Riley says, which may turn out to be a mistake. But he's promised to wield a whip if the leaders bang on.

Anthony Albanese and Scott Morrison shake hands during the third leaders' debate at Seven Network Studios. Photograph: Lukas Coch/AAP

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.25pm BST

block-time published-time 12.05pm BST

A small group of protestors has gathered at Seven's network studios in Sydney:

Protesters wait outside for Scott Morrison and Anthony Albanese to start the third leaders' debate at Seven Network Studios. Photograph: Mick Tsikas/AAP

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.06pm BST

block-time published-time 12.04pm BST

For Sunday's debate, some of us were treated to our first taste of Lego Masters while we waited for it to begin. Tonight it's Big Brother... I'm watching online from Adelaide and all I have for now is a still of a woman with an enormous deep fried chicken drumstick in her mouth.

It appears to be frozen (the feed, not the drumstick).

block-time published-time 12.00pm BST

Today has all been about wages: about whether a government can do anything to increase your wages, and [*whether a wage increase will just fuel the inflation*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/may/11/over-the-top-alarmism-economists-dismiss-concerns-wage-rises-cause-inflation) that we kinda got a bit used to having at very low levels.

Wages are, of course, a key part of tackling the cost-of-living pressures that so many voters are worried about. But expect Albanese to talk about other factors, including childcare and Medicare. And Morrison will spruik his government's handling of the economy through the pandemic. Housing could be a flashpoint, too.

But there are so many other policy fronts that are important for the politicians to discuss, because they're important to our lives. Will climate change feature? It hasn't been a large part of the to-and-fro so far.

National security almost certainly will, after the Solomon Islands - China security debate introduced new, and more immediate, uncertainty. Defence spending will tie into this.

An integrity commission is front of mind for many, particularly as the "teal" candidates are focussing on it. Morrison will insist he's got a good plan, Labor will say theirs will have more teeth.

Personally, I'm hoping for a few curveballs as well.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.02pm BST

block-time published-time 11.52am BST

Albanese and Morrison prepare to square off in third election debate

The countdown is on. Ten days left until the election - although people have been voting in rather large numbers since Monday.

Prime minister Scott Morrison and Labor leader Anthony Albanese are set to go another few rounds - and we all hope it will be less shouty and more intelligible. And intelligent.

As I mentioned below, the Seven News political editor, Mark Riley, will moderate. There'll be a "pub test" with undecided voters in so-called battleground electorates, having their say on how it's going.

Watch it live on Seven, or don't - follow it here. It all kicks off at 9.10pm AEST.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.06pm BST

block-time published-time 10.52am BST

Team, let's take a break before the leaders' debate begins.

It's a chance for you (and me) to take a nap, pop the corn, don the slippers, pour the whiskey... or scrub up on the economics of inflation (not really).

Tonight's Great Debate: The Final Showdown begins at 9.10pm, but I'll be back before that to get things rolling.

Amanda Meade wrote today that Seven News political editor, Mark Riley, says he'll use "a chair and a whip" to control prime minister Scott Morrison and Labor leader Anthony Albanese in the third and final leaders' debate - and that he will avoid a repeat of Sunday night's "spectacle".

Here are all the details of tonight's shenanigans, including how to watch:

Related: [*Mark Riley wants Seven's election debate to be better than Nine's Sunday night 'spectacle'*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/may/11/mark-riley-wants-sevens-election-debate-to-be-better-than-nines-sunday-night-spectacle)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 10.58am BST

block-time published-time 10.51am BST

AAP reports that a Melbourne hospital will be reviewed after an eight-year-old girl reportedly died 21 hours after attending the emergency department with stomach pain.

Amrita Varshini Lanka attended the Monash Children's hospital on 29 April after initially seeing a GP for symptoms including vomiting and a fever, according to the ABC.

Initial assessments ruled out appendicitis with nurses instead believing Amrita had gastroenteritis. She developed breathing issues and went into cardiac arrest a few hours later, the ABC reported.

The eight-year-old died on the morning of 30 April about 21 hours after she initially presented.

Amrita's death will be examined by the coroner and Safe Care Victoria, the Victorian health minister, Martin Foley, said on Wednesday. Foley said:

Until that ***process*** is complete it would be terrible for me to say more, other than our deepest sympathies to the family and all those who are involved in what is really a tragic set of circumstances.

The premier, Daniel Andrews, said there would also be a full review of Monash Health.

Monash Health said it was common practice for a facility to be reviewed if a person dies while in the hospital's care. It has contacted Amrita's family to provide support, with her exact cause of death still unknown. A Monash Health official said:

This is a very upsetting time for the family, and we offer our sincere condolences to the child's family and friends.

block-time published-time 10.38am BST

Embattled Liberal MP Fiona Martin (the one who [*denies mixing up Asian-Australian Labor candidates*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/may/11/liberal-mp-fiona-martin-denies-mixing-up-asian-australian-candidates-in-debate-with-sally-sitou) ) is in more strife. [*According to the ABC*](https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-05-11/liberal-fiona-martin-called-to-pull-down-reelection-ad/101058738?utm_campaign=abc_news_web&utm_content=twitter&utm_medium=content_shared&utm_source=abc_news_web) , mental health advocate professor Patrick McGorry says she used him for an "endorsement" without his permission. The former Australian of the Year says Martin selectively used some words from an email he sent her before the election.

block-time published-time 10.19am BST

Some more context on that polling from The Australian, from Katharine Murphy :

enltrSome background on that MRP polling I've just shared. Has been used in the UK, track record is mixed [*https://t.co/a0VJ4axVik*](https://t.co/a0VJ4axVik) [*#auspol*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/auspol?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

- Katharine Murphy (@murpharoo) [*May 11, 2022*](https://twitter.com/murpharoo/status/1524312477991075841?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 10.07am BST

The former partner of swimming champion Ian Thorpe, Ryan Channing, has died in Bali.

The Sydney Morning Herald reports the Sydney-based 32-year-old, who dated Thorpe for four years to 2019, [*had Covid eight weeks ago*](https://www.smh.com.au/culture/celebrity/ian-thorpe-s-former-partner-ryan-channing-dies-in-bali-20220511-p5akgv.html). The paper quotes a Department of Foreign Affairs spokesperson, who said they were "providing consular assistance to the family of an Australian citizen who died in Bali".

News Corp papers [*are reporting*](https://www.adelaidenow.com.au/entertainment/former-fiance-of-olympic-swimmer-ian-thorpe-ryan-channing-dies-suddenly-in-bali/news-story/15ee73f749abe38b31d10e1b140b7937) Channing had been "battling health issues" for some time.

block-time published-time 9.56am BST

Call for fresh restrictions as WA Covid cases surge

"It scares me greatly," Australian Medical Association WA president, Mark Duncan-Smith, says of the latest surge in Covid infections.

AAP reports that the surge in Western Australia has prompted calls for the reintroduction of restrictions amid fears the state's health system "may get smashed".

WA reported 17,033 new cases on Wednesday, easily the highest number in any state or territory, and a jump of more than 4,600 on the 12,390 reported on Tuesday.

Mark McGowan says case numbers in Western Australia are expected to climb but 'they are way below what was predicted'. Photograph: Trevor Collens/AAP

It took active cases across the state to almost 69,000, although the number of people in hospital actually fell slightly to 275.

Duncan-Smith said the state's current infection rates were the equivalent of NSW having more than 50,000 cases a day.

He also warned that hospital numbers were likely to rise, given they generally lagged a week behind any spike in infections:

Just as it has taken a week for the numbers to go up significantly following the reduced restrictions and dropping the mask mandate, any new public health initiatives will take a week before they have any effect.

In that week there is a danger that our medical system may get smashed.

"I can see where this is going and it scares me greatly.

The AMA boss said the government should reverse its decision to drop indoor mask mandates and should reimpose other restrictions which could flatten the curve.

It should also consider delays to elective surgery.

Premier Mark McGowan said the government was monitoring the situation:

At the moment we have a high case load, but the reality is since yesterday our hospitalisation and intensive care numbers went down," he told reporters.

"We are expecting they will climb, but they are way below what was predicted.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 10.46am BST

block-time published-time 9.46am BST

Because too many polls are barely enough... A YouGov poll predicts Labor will win 80 seats, [*according to The Australian*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/may/11/australian-election-briefing-albanese-kicks-into-the-wind-while-morrison-is-called-a-mongrel-plus-barnabys-nosebleed).

The Australian calls it "the most sophisticated poll conducted across Australia", based on a sample size of almost 19,000 voters.

The results, if replicated, would mean Labor governing with a majority of five seats, the Coalition left with 63 seats, and one Greens and seven independents making up the rest of the 151 House of Representatives seats.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 10.13am BST

block-time published-time 9.35am BST

From the nosebleed section at deputy prime minister Barnaby Joyce 's National Press Club speech, to the barney over wages, and a guy called Gugu Plan. J osh Butler brings you today's election briefing :

Related: [*Australian election briefing: Albanese kicks into the wind while Morrison is called a mongrel - plus Barnaby's nosebleed*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/may/11/australian-election-briefing-albanese-kicks-into-the-wind-while-morrison-is-called-a-mongrel-plus-barnabys-nosebleed)

block-time published-time 9.24am BST

Peter Hannam also took a look at wages - and at the idea paying people a bit more will fuel inflation:

Related: [*'Over-the-top alarmism': economists dismiss concerns wage rises cause inflation*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/may/11/over-the-top-alarmism-economists-dismiss-concerns-wage-rises-cause-inflation)

block-time published-time 9.11am BST

Football Australia has deleted a Facebook post that appeared to endorse the Liberal party, after numerous critical comments.

On Wednesday the sport's national governing body uncritically shared a Facebook post from ACT Liberal senator Zed Seselja promoting a $4.5m pledge of funding for sporting infrastructure in Canberra. The post, a verbatim reproduction of Seselja's [*original post*](https://www.facebook.com/zed.seselja/posts/542655600593354) said:

A re-elected Liberal Government will deliver $4.5 million to support Capital Football - Official's Home of Football. The Home of Football in Throsby will support Canberra's 30,000 strong football community, as well as indoor courts for futsal and basketball.

The post was deleted just after 5pm on Wednesday, after attracting more than 80 comments that described it as - among other things - "shocking political advertising", "deeply disappointing" and "disgraceful".

Football Australia declined to comment.

block-time published-time 8.57am BST

There have been 7,613 Covid deaths in Australia:

enltrThis daily ?? infographic provides a quick view of the current coronavirus ( [*#COVID19*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/COVID19?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) ) situation in Australia ???? Find out more here ?? [*https://t.co/YcsPBOC6B3*](https://t.co/YcsPBOC6B3) [*pic.twitter.com/EifORWsulA*](https://t.co/EifORWsulA)

- Australian Government Department of Health (@healthgovau) [*May 11, 2022*](https://twitter.com/healthgovau/status/1524294924979474434?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 8.49am BST

Seeing even more footage of prime minister Scott Morrison saying "not my job" might not work the way the Liberal Party would like it to:

enltrDear political twitter with a memory - have you ever seen a more desperate political ad than this? [*https://t.co/GJFNpP9cew*](https://t.co/GJFNpP9cew)

- Possum Comitatus (@Pollytics) [*May 10, 2022*](https://twitter.com/Pollytics/status/1524022052772061188?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 8.37am BST

Idea goes up. Idea comes down. Royce Kurmelovs on the congestion tax that was not to be (not right now, anyway):

Related: [*Dominic Perrottet rules out Sydney congestion tax after confidential plans leaked*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/may/11/dominic-perrottet-rules-out-sydney-congestion-tax-after-confidential-plans-leaked)

block-time published-time 8.22am BST

Seven's moderator for tonight's debate, Mark Riley, says he'll use "a chair and a whip" to control Labor leader Anthony Albanese and prime minister Scott Morrison. Amanda Meade has the run down:

Related: [*Mark Riley wants Seven's election debate to be better than Nine's Sunday night 'spectacle'*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/may/11/mark-riley-wants-sevens-election-debate-to-be-better-than-nines-sunday-night-spectacle)

block-time published-time 8.11am BST

Wages are set to be a chunky part of tonight's leaders' debate. Paul Karp digs deep to explain to Jane Lee (and us) what will happen if the minimum wage is increased in the latest Campaign catchup :

Related: [*Campaign catchup: will increasing the minimum wage lead to higher inflation?*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/audio/2022/may/11/campaign-catchup-will-increasing-the-minimum-wage-lead-to-higher-inflation)

block-time published-time 8.02am BST

Another crash on Melbourne's Montague Street Bridge :

enltrDEVELOPING: A truck has smashed into the Montague Street Bridge. The driver has been taken to hospital in a stable condition with upper body injuries. [*https://t.co/5zYfOfGqUb*](https://t.co/5zYfOfGqUb) [*#7NEWS*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/7NEWS?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) [*pic.twitter.com/PapthNjK8X*](https://t.co/PapthNjK8X)

- 7NEWS Melbourne (@7NewsMelbourne) [*May 11, 2022*](https://twitter.com/7NewsMelbourne/status/1524282083149246464?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 7.56am BST

Sneaky First Dog on the Moon 's been sniffing around the government's secrets (here's [*the original story*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/may/10/peter-duttons-department-confirms-defence-minister-has-six-brereton-oversight-reports) , in case you missed it):

Related: [*So many unreleased 'secret' government reports! How much worse could everything be? | First Dog on the Moon*](https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/may/11/so-many-unreleased-secret-government-reports-how-much-worse-could-everything-be)

block-time published-time 7.35am BST

Disability advocates have ranked major parties and independents on their election commitments. The Greens and independent MP Andrew Wilkie are leading the pack. AAP reports:

Peak rights and advocacy organisation People with Disability Australia scored them on their election pledges, after sending its election platform a month ago and asking participants to clarify policy positions across seven issues affecting Australians living with disability.

The Liberal-National coalition, Labor, the Greens, One Nation, Centre Alliance and independent candidates Andrew Wilkie and Zali Steggall responded.

The responses have been used to develop a survey report and scorecard intended to be an easy reference guide for voters.

People with Disability Australia has given independent MP Andrew Wilkie and the Greens the 'thumbs up' as they have 'demonstrated clear and worthwhile support of pretty much all the issues'. Photograph: Lukas Coch/AAP

PWDA president, Samantha Connor, says the Greens and independent Andrew Wilkie "get the most thumbs up from us" as they have "demonstrated clear and worthwhile support of pretty much all the issues". She said:

Their positions in relation to increasing financial security for people with disability and extending the NDIS to people over 65 years of age are of key interest.

Labor and independent MP for Mayo, Rebekah Sharkie, came in second.

PWDA will continue to advocate on a range of issues affecting people with disability in the lead-up to the election on May 21.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 10.50am BST

block-time published-time 7.25am BST

Jennett points out that even the government's own numbers show inflation will keep rising, and asks Ruston is that makes a pay increase of about 4% "almost inevitable".

Ruston says it's up to the Fair Work Commission to make an informed and independent decision.

block-time published-time 7.21am BST

The Liberal campaign spokesperson, Anne Ruston, is on the ABC now.

Greg Jennett asks her if she'd be comfortable having some of the lowest paid workers get an effective wage cut. She says:

Well, of course we want to see all Australian workers get fair pay and we also are happy to see and would like to see Australian - some of our lowest paid workers paid more. But what we won't do is interfere with the independent ***processes*** through which those wage levels are determined.

She's now criticising Albanese for talking about that wage rise, at which point I'll direct you (again) to Paul Karp 's factcheck on whether it's "***unprecedented***" for governments to make submissions to the Fair Work Commission:

Related: [*Factcheck: is Albanese's backing of a 5.1% minimum wage rise an '****unprecedented****' intervention?*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/may/11/factcheck-is-albaneses-backing-of-a-51-minimum-wage-rise-an-unprecedented-intervention)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 7.23am BST

block-time published-time 7.16am BST

Kelly asks: When does a wage rise become inflationary?

Chalmers says: "What matters here is how much productivity you get with these wage increases." Growing the economy without inflationary pressures and getting the economy going again is the aim, he says.

He says businesses who say they'll have to pass on costs to customers is not good for the local economy.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 7.18am BST

block-time published-time 7.13am BST

The ABC's Fran Kelly is quizzing Chalmers on why that wages figure won't be put in a formal position. Chalmers says Labor's position is clear:

We made that clear and what that means is $1 an hour for Australia's lowest paid workers. That's not too much to ask.

Many of the workers are the heroes of the pandemic, it's not too much to ask they get a $1 an hour extra. If the prime minister wants to say an extra $1 an hour for Australia's low paid workers will break the economy, then the economy is not in the condition he pretends it to be.

block-time published-time 7.09am BST

Labor's treasury spokesperson, Jim Chalmers, is talking about leader Anthony Albanese 's pledge to support a 5.1% pay rise. He supports it, he says:

That's because it's entirely consistent with what we have been arguing for some time now. Which is [that] Australian workers, lowest paid workers in our economy shouldn't be going backwards during Scott Morrison 's cost-of-living crisis.

But he says Labor hasn't determined a "final position" and won't commit to putting the figure in a submission to the Fair Work Commission.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 7.12am BST

block-time published-time 7.02am BST

The latest from Labor candidate Sally Sitou, in relation to [*this story from Paul Karp*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/may/11/liberal-mp-fiona-martin-denies-mixing-up-asian-australian-candidates-in-debate-with-sally-sitou) about Liberal MP Fiona Martin :

enltrI'm disappointed that Fiona Martin is doubling down on her accusations about me. Campaigns are stressful and she made a mistake. I'd just like her to apologise for mistaking me for a different person. The people of Reid deserve better than this.

- Sally Sitou ??? - Labor for Reid (@SallySitou) [*May 11, 2022*](https://twitter.com/SallySitou/status/1524261049981042688?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 6.46am BST

Donna Lu reports on new research into our car-centric cities - including Sydney, Melbourne, and Adelaide :

Related: [*Australian cities among worst performing on walkability and public transport access*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/may/11/australian-cities-among-worst-performing-on-walkability-and-public-transport-access)

block-time published-time 6.33am BST

Queensland Nationals senator Matt Canavan has been asked on Sky News if he stands by his previous comments that [*the net zero emissions target is "dead"*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/apr/26/scott-morrison-forced-to-clarify-net-zero-commitment-amid-coalition-division). He says he doesn't support the Morrison government's target but that he was speaking about the target being "dead" on a global scale:

I've repeated that a number of times, I'm happy to repeat it again.

block-time published-time 6.29am BST

The independent MP for Kennedy, Bob Katter, warns Labor not to ban the live animal trade, AAP reports.

Katter said:

I warn the ALP that the last time they closed the live animal trade I got rid of their leader Julia Gillard.

(Not quite how I remember it, Bob.)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 6.31am BST

block-time published-time 6.22am BST

Dr Kirstin Ferguson, from the Queensland University of Technology's business school, has analysed Labor leader Anthony Albanese and prime minister Scott Morrison 's words over the past month. Here's just one of the things she found:

enltrClimate change has been mentioned by one leader more than the other PM has said "climate change" 13 times (0.01%) OL has said "climate change" 87 times (0.36%) PM has said "environment" 17 times (0.02%) OL has said "environment" 5 times (0.02%) [*#ausvotes*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/ausvotes?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) [*#auspol*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/auspol?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) /12

- Dr Kirstin Ferguson (@kirstinferguson) [*May 11, 2022*](https://twitter.com/kirstinferguson/status/1524230512705150976?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 6.14am BST

Here's Paul Karp 's report on Liberal MP Fiona Martin denying she had mixed up her Labor opponent, Sally Sitou, with another candidate:

Related: [*Liberal MP Fiona Martin denies mixing up Asian Australian candidates in debate with Sally Sitou*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/may/11/liberal-mp-fiona-martin-denies-mixing-up-asian-australian-candidates-in-debate-with-sally-sitou)

block-time published-time 6.00am BST

The Australia Institute's chief economist, Richard Denniss, says:

There are no easy choices facing Australian policy makers at the moment, but cutting the real wages of millions of Australians would have to be one of the worse ones.

Related: [*With falling real incomes and rising prices many people don't believe the story of prosperity Scott Morrison is preaching | Richard Denniss*](https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/may/11/with-falling-real-incomes-and-rising-prices-many-people-dont-believe-the-story-of-prosperity-scott-morrison-is-preaching)

block-time published-time 5.54am BST

Does this mean I have to catch up on Nationals leader Barnaby Joyce 's performance at the National Press Club? I will, I promise, when I find the time.

Hello all, welcome to the part of the afternoon where we try to imagine the two leaders limbering up for tonight's debate, while their staffers fire practice questions at them:

Forget the lettuce! How much is the wage rise they want?

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 5.56am BST

block-time published-time 5.51am BST

And now I'll hand you over to the fantastic Tory Shepherd for the remainder of your afternoon.

block-time published-time 5.49am BST

NSW premier, Dominic Perrottet, has ruled out a London-style congestion tax for drivers in Sydney's city centre, AAP reports.

He was responding to a confidential leaked draft transport strategy from February, advising that transport pricing needs to reflect the true cost of using the state's roads.

"Charging for road use at certain locations or times can encourage customers who have flexibility to choose other options," the document, reported by Nine, says.

Perrottet dismissed suggestions of such a tax. He said on Wednesday:

There is no plan for a congestion tax and and we can rule it out completely.

A congestion tax was introduced in London in 2003, with drivers paying about $25 over a 20km sq radius of the city.

Perrottet said the government encouraged its public servants to come up with new ideas and think broadly and ambitiously.

Another suggestion was to change public transport fares, which are subsidised, to reflect "the true cost of trips".

The government receives advice yearly from the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal on public transport fares.

The premier said:

We weigh that up and we make the decision, but I'm a big believer in subsidised public transport... it's a great social good.

The opposition leader, Chris Minns, is not convinced. He said:

I don't believe that for a second. When it comes to this government's track record on privatisation, user pays and toll roads you should never believe it when they suggest a congestion charge is not on the way.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 5.51am BST

block-time published-time 5.39am BST

Labor has been arguing for months that the price of everything has been going up, except your wages.

But the debate over the minimum wage really took off on Tuesday when Anthony Albanese [*endorsed a specific pay rise*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/may/10/election-2022-anthony-albanese-backs-51-minimum-wage-rise-to-keep-pace-with-inflation) : 5.1%, to keep up with inflation.

Now the government is accusing Labor of policy on the run and an "***unprecedented***" intervention in an independent wage-setting ***process***. Is that true?

Find the answers here:

Related: [*Factcheck: is Albanese's backing of a 5.1% minimum wage rise an '****unprecedented****' intervention?*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/may/11/factcheck-is-albaneses-backing-of-a-51-minimum-wage-rise-an-unprecedented-intervention)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 5.40am BST

block-time published-time 5.30am BST

Some nasty weather involving lots of water in NSW and risk of flooding rising in Queensland. Please look after yourselves if you're in any of these regions and keep an eye on conditions.

enltr?? Minor to Major [*#Flood*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/Flood?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) Warning issued for the [*#Culgoa*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/Culgoa?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) and [*#BokharaRivers*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/BokharaRivers?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) at [*#Weilmoringle*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/Weilmoringle?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) , [*#Kenebree*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/Kenebree?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) and [*#Goodwins*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/Goodwins?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw). Major [*#flooding*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/flooding?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) possible at [*#weilmoringle*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/Weilmoringle?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) from Thursday. See [*https://t.co/AdztI2rqg1*](https://t.co/AdztI2rqg1) for details and updates; follow advice from [*@NSWSES*](https://twitter.com/NSWSES?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw). [*#NSWFloods*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/NSWFloods?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) [*pic.twitter.com/IqAG2e33cn*](https://t.co/IqAG2e33cn)

- Bureau of Meteorology, New South Wales (@BOM\_NSW) [*May 11, 2022*](https://twitter.com/BOM_NSW/status/1524235102817067010?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

enltr???? The risk of flooding is rising for many parts of Qld as rain continues to fall on already soaked grounds & swollen waterways. If possible, reconsider the need to travel. The easiest way to stay safe is to just stay home. ?? Esk Kilcoy Road (Jenni Robinson) [*pic.twitter.com/JANplv0qvG*](https://t.co/JANplv0qvG)

- Qld Fire & Emergency (@QldFES) [*May 11, 2022*](https://twitter.com/QldFES/status/1524233373547659264?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 5.32am BST

block-time published-time 5.24am BST

Hello mates, it's Stephanie Convery here to take care of all your mid-afternoon blogging needs. Thank you Amy Remeikis for your tireless efforts this morning!

block-time published-time 5.15am BST

And on that note, I shall hand the blog over for the afternoon - I'll back early tomorrow morning (if I survive watching tonight's debate) - take care of you Ax

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 5.16am BST

block-time published-time 5.08am BST

Maritime Industry Australia Limited has welcomed the announcement in the deputy prime minister's speech, with chief executive, Teresa Lloyd, noting there is now "bipartisan support":

Ms Lloyd said for first time in Australian shipping history, we now have bi-partisan support on adjusting tax settings equal to those in other countries which will mean a level playing field for Australian ship owners.

This finally makes it commercially viable for local ship owners to own and operate Australian flagged ships. It means more jobs, a stronger economy, and a safer Australia.

The changes announced are equally beneficial for both the primary and international shipping registers. This combination is critical for a country like Australia who is utterly reliant on maritime trade. Maximising the number of Australian ships is in our national interest to ensure we survive and thrive.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 5.10am BST

block-time published-time 4.58am BST

Labor's Catherine King was paying attention to Barnaby Joyce's speech:

enltrIs this guy kidding? They've been in office for almost a decade and have only realised the importance of a strategic fleet with 10 days to go to the election? You can't trust this government.

- Catherine King MP (@CatherineKingMP) [*May 11, 2022*](https://twitter.com/CatherineKingMP/status/1524224323007172608?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

enltrHere's the transcript of our announcement back in January. Maybe Barnaby just got around to reading it? [*https://t.co/e7TFxGCMNT*](https://t.co/e7TFxGCMNT)

- Catherine King MP (@CatherineKingMP) [*May 11, 2022*](https://twitter.com/CatherineKingMP/status/1524224324735238144?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 4.49am BST

National Covid summary

Here are the latest coronavirus numbers from around Australia today, as the country records at least 53 deaths from Covid-19:

ACT

Deaths: 2Cases: 1,242In hospital: 76 (with 4 people in ICU)

NSW

Deaths: 11Cases: 12,265In hospital: 1,452 (with 48 people in ICU)

Northern Territory

Deaths: 0Cases: 340In hospital: 27 (with no people in ICU)

Queensland

Deaths: 10Cases: 7,427In hospital: 459 (with 14 people in ICU)

South Australia

Deaths: 8Cases: 4,299In hospital: 232 (with 7 people in ICU)

Tasmania

Deaths: 0Cases: 1,058In hospital: 48 (with 1 person in ICU)

Victoria

Deaths: 17Cases: 13,973In hospital: 533 (with 33 people in ICU)

Western Australia

Deaths: 3Cases: 17,033In hospital: 275 (with 7 people in ICU)

block-time published-time 4.44am BST

Thoughts and prayers to anyone who has to make sense of the points the deputy prime minister was attempting to make.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.44am BST

block-time published-time 4.42am BST

Barnaby Joyce finishes on wages, but there are a lot of words and not all of them seem to be in an easily understood order, so the short version is; he is against Anthony Albanese's argument.

The deputy prime minister, Barnaby Joyce, wraps up his press club address in Canberra Photograph: Mike Bowers/The Guardian

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.47am BST

block-time published-time 4.38am BST

Joyce says China will respect strength

Q: On the wages increase we know that regional seats incomes are much lower, you probably have more - people more reliant on minimum and award wages in those environments. What is a reasonable wage increase for those people to expect this year, particularly given cost pressures in regional Australia through housing?

And secondly, just in your speech you've said about China wanting to encircle Australia being the biggest issue, its militarisation being the biggest issue on the ballot paper. You also say we need to understand as a nation how we generate wealth in this country. We do that by selling a heap of iron ore to China. Which gets turned into things like... warships, submarines. How do you reconcile the tension there between on one hand effectively taking Chinese money for our goods, at the same time potentially arming China, helping arm China?

Barnaby Joyce:

Well, it's a vexed issue isn't it. The thing is, what China will respect is strength. That's why I say we have to become as strong as possible as quickly as possible. And respecting strength means you have to be strong across all facets of what you do.

You have to be strong in ***agriculture***, you have to be strong in mining. You have to be strong in education.

You have to understand that people are going to assess the strength of Australia in a holistic form, not just your military. That's just one section of it. You can't have a strong military if you don't have a strong economy.

... You can't pay for it. So yeah, this is something and that is we believed in the past in a rules based order, we believed in the past that countries just didn't arbitrarily invade other countries. We believed in the past that people were basically peaceful and won't be a threat to one another...

And right now - I remember talking to one of the large miners, this goes to show you, the salutary lesson about what's happening in the world, we were talking about iron ore exports and China, I said we have a big new customer. Big new customer. And I was trying to pick it. I went, Germany. Germany is a big new customer. And I imagine Germany is using the iron ore for a whole range of things and of course one the other Germany is redoing, rearming. That's the world we live in. Who thought we will be standing in a podium in a press club and talk about this is such as that.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.48am BST

block-time published-time 4.34am BST

Q: The Coalition is said to have a woman problem not just a lack of female representation but a slew of incidents involving Coalition men. Why should the women of Australia vote for the Coalition?

Barnaby Joyce:

Let's look at our party. If we had a quota system in the Senate we would need more blokes because it's 80% women.

I'm looking at Kay Hull president of our party and she's a woman.

In the positions that we have - like government positions that we go through the ***process*** of selection at cabinet - it's about 50-50 now in women. We are making sure all the time we do a better job.

We had the Jenkins review, to look into these issues regards women and regards bullying. And we have seen issues that all of us can be better.

Obviously we have had some unsavoury incidents, and they have to be dealt with. So they don't happen again. And the Labor party got theirs too. With the Kimberley Kitching issues and things that surround them.

All these things, all of us can do better. But we did - and I've for my part and trying to make sure we fought so that - so people who had some serious issues in the Parliament could get access to a proper ***process*** of investigation of records, so they could prosecute their case.

And doing that quietly from the backbench, and then having that unfortunate thing that one of my emails got - one of my emails was leaked by a third person. I can never work out why that's been utilised for a political point when it was done for such a personal reason to try to help a person.

These issues we will continue to work on. And right now with going around with candidates such as Jacinta Price, you know, brilliant Indigenous woman who will add so much to bring forward issues, especially from bush communities, and how we can do a better job there and how we can - we haven't reached any point where we stop. We have further to go and we continue on.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.41am BST

block-time published-time 4.32am BST

Q: Following a similar theme, would reserve the right to renege on a coalition deal with the Liberal party depending of what guarantees have to be given in a hung parliament, or alternatively, would you seek to have in that coalition agreement a veto over those deals with the crossbench?

Barnaby Joyce:

These things are hypothetical and I think you open a can of worms when you go down that ***process***. The Nationals obviously, because we are a different party, we negotiate our Coalition agreement with the Liberal, if - and other negotiations I don't know of, I have no party to, and I will let other people make the decision about it.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.39am BST

block-time published-time 4.31am BST

Q: I want to pick you up on negotiating with independents because the idea put forward is that would lead to chaos in the parliament. I want to go back to February when your own aside were holding up the government's agenda because of vaccine mandates and your own side, basically, toppled at the religious discrimination bill, so when you are talking about chaos in a parliament, I mean, we have already got it.

Barnaby Joyce:

No, we have not.

Q: You have not been able to get your own agenda three.

Joyce:

What you are talking about is a singular issue, one issue. If you have got independents, you are going to happen every day.

You will not have small iterations, from time to rare and infrequent. It will be a daily thing... If independents are the way to go, if that is the righteous, proper ***process*** for the government of our nation, then let's have 151 of them. It will be total and utter chaos.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.38am BST

block-time published-time 4.30am BST

Q: Just to follow on that, they don't know the policy, you mentioned Labor's housing policy but some of that was incorrect... You still have outspoken senators voting how they say they are going to vote so what is the difference between negotiating with a teal independent and negotiating with a coalition backbencher?

Barnaby Joyce:

Well, the difference is the coalition backbencher has said they support a coalition government. When they went to the people, they said, "If you vote for me, I will be supporting the Nationals and the Liberals on supply and confidence and by doing so giving them the capacity that the prime minister elect - to go to the governor general and say, 'I have got the numbers'. That is a big difference. What teal people do is they say, 'I am not going to tell you the...'

And then you say: 'Hang on... Who am I voting for? I don't get it. And am I voting for Mr Albanese or Mr Morrison?'

No coalition backbencher has gone to their people before an election and said: 'Well, although I am in the National party it might be up for grabs.'

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.37am BST

block-time published-time 4.28am BST

Barnaby Joyce:

I am getting a sense you are not voting for me. There is a whole range of your question I just don't agree with, and I think I will deal with... them one at a time.

We have made massive investments in health. We actually negotiated for the Murray Darling Basin medical school.

That goes right back to John Andersen when we started expending a capacity in Newcastle.

I have been up to Darwin and talking about the expansion of what we are doing a Charles Darwin University.

I was in Shepparton in two weeks ago and it was investment in allied health. We have got a doctor in David Gillespie. As I said, we have a regional health minister. The Labor party have a minister for the republic so when we take you to a hospital, our idea is to get your blood pressure down. Theirs is to take a photo of the Queen down.

So, this health policy, it is about the movement of doctors in urban areas where we say to you if you work in a regional area, we will take a year off your HECS. If it is a very remote, we will take two years of your HECS. They are not Labor policies...

... The telehealth ***process*** - I spoke to Doctor McPhee who looked after the people of Emerald for in excess of 30 years, making sure that people get access... Gabby, we put in our negotiations with the Liberal party in excess of about $66m to get new magnetic resonance machines into regional areas so that if someone has cancer we can find out about it soon and get them the treatment and I can go on and on and on, Gabby.

We can go and show you how - the expansion of our prescriptions, so when you get prescriptions, you pay less amount of money if you are a pensioner. These are all part of our health policy. Do we have a challenge as we go forward? Yes, we do. I'll be trying to address it? Yes, we are.

Do we have a regional health minister? Yes, we do. Have we seen an alternative from the Labor party or the Greens? No, we have not.

On the next issue, we say these things make people unpopular - so many times I read in the paper when I know the polling and I hear something and I go, 'someone has been fed like a Chook'.

They have given them something and they have swallowed it whole. I know the polling of what they have said is not right.

Q: So, the polling is wrong?

Joyce:

What I acknowledge is that, yes, in certain areas where there is a soft vote, especially in urban areas, they want to understand that we have made - the Nationals - have made a commitment with the prime minister and we are sticking to it, right? And that is your answer.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.34am BST

block-time published-time 4.26am BST

Q: It is estimated that is about $4bn that Australia is missing out because of the lack of services and stuff. It is hard to get a GP in rural Australia right now. People are starting to regular book every couple of months to collect their ailments because they can't get there when they are sick. Telecommunications has been dodgy for a long time and notwithstanding the bit of money that was thrown out in this campaign in response to the regional - rural telecommunications review there has not been a lot of that has been done over the last decade since you have been in government.

We are going into an inflationary environment, and people have high exposure to debt because it regional housing prices are running through the roof, rentals are short. I think in one of your local towns, Tamworth, it is about 0.7% is the rental vacancy.

Barnaby Joyce:

I am with you, Gabrielle. So, a health question and a rental question?

Q: No, no. We have got those conditions, right? In the meantime, the thing that you are known for most, right across the country...

Joyce:

Johnny Depp's dogs

Q: Well, no. There is something more than that. It is the $100 roast and it is the prosecution of the climate wars, and so, while you have been off on the kind of climate frolic, these traditional services that we need in rural Australia are lost. So, given the recent intervention by your senator Matt Canavan on net zero being...

Joyce:

A long question... I have got a bleeding nose.

Q: I have got so many questions. I am told that if the Nats went backwards in all of their seats after Senator can advance intervention. So, haven't you given those conditions failed on your key KPIs in terms of representing the bush.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.31am BST

block-time published-time 4.24am BST

Q: Can I just pull you... up, Labor is matching your safeguard mechanism but effectively, lowering the threshold. Isn't it the fact that at the moment, you are not actually enforcing the safeguard mechanism so the companies involved with this?

Barnaby Joyce:

There are ***exceptional*** circumstances defining how the baseline works. There are a number of ways you can define how the baseline lease with the point of the ceiling is that it was precisely a ceiling. To stop emissions being let off the hook and going through the roof. That is what it was about. What they have brought in is not a ceiling.

They have brought in a cave with a low roof, and this - they are going to keep winding it down and they have not put forward a policy of an alternate industry. We want to develop and alternate industry so that in the future people can make a choice.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.29am BST

block-time published-time 4.23am BST

Q: Mr Joyce, I don't think it's remarkable to say your job as National party leader is to win National party seats first, and government second. Some of your Liberal colleagues say they are paying a very high price for the perception that you're not ambitious enough on climate change. What would you say to those Liberal colleagues and the Coalition voters who vote for them if they end up losing will you be overseeing a Pyrrhic defeat?

Barnaby Joyce:

A Pyrrhic defeat. No, let's have a look, our nation is an honourable nation. Why? Because we make agreements and we stick to them\*. We have honoured every agreement, right now, Boris Johnson says he wants to take a break from his 2050 target.

(\*The French would probably say something different.)

Germany, Italy are firing up the coal-fired power stations again. There was $35 billion in fossil fuels that the - 35bn euro, sorry, that the European Union bought off Russia in the first week - in the first month of the Ukraine crisis. They only euros of aid into the Ukraine.

This is the reality of the world.

... China, which produces half the coal in the world, their last two quarters were records amount. Record. Record production in coal.

What our nation does, and what's so good about us, this is why we are so diligent we make promises and keep to them. We are doing that. So when we do this, we make sure that we nutted out as how we are going to get there, how we keep our economy stable, and right now you are seeing it. We developing an alternate industry. Not a transition, alternate. Our alternate is hydrogen. We invested more or hydrogen through the campaign than the Labor party has. They haven't even got - our investment in renewables is massively ahead of theirs.

So, when it the truth is understood, we are a noble nation who abides by their agreements when other nations are stepping away, and through this campaign, we have invested more in an alternative industry, in the hydrogen industry than at the Labor party which, to be quite honest, I don't know what alternative industry they are investing in.

What they have talked about is in transition and in regional areas transition is read as unemployment. The policy is to reduce the safeguard mechanism. We have a safeguard mechanism. It is like the ceiling on this. It is out of the way but it stopped going through the roof.

They are going to bring the ceiling down to about head level for tall people and that is going to be around 213, 215 of them will bolt their heads on the fans and the lights and they will be a new tax placed on them and we can't have that. We have an honorable position and a logical position.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.26am BST

block-time published-time 4.19am BST

There is a brief interlude while Barnaby Joyce's nose bleed is addressed.

I know you are going to get 1,001 photos of me with a Kleenex to my nose, congratulations. So the alternative is I leave.

Barnaby Joyce suffers from a bleeding nose during his address to the National Press Club in Canberra. Photograph: Dean Lewins/AAP

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.31am BST

block-time published-time 4.17am BST

Q: The company says it needs an extra $2.5m. To finish that.

Barnaby Joyce:

That's the question. You are saying are you going to allocate more money to a business case for a coal-fired power station, not whether you agree with a business case for a coal-fired pow station because there a business case that partially done on a coal-fired power station for Collinsville, now we have to come to the question do we allocate more money to that and that's a realm much other things we need to consider.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.22am BST

block-time published-time 4.17am BST

Q: Mr Joyce in your speech you said that Labor was being deceitful for saying something in the Hunter Valley, different...

Joyce: I'm still listening. Hold on yes. Keep going...

(His nose is still bleeding.)

Q: To what it was saying in the cities - but what we are seeing at the moment is Nationals MPs saying that they support a coal-fired power station in central Queensland, Liberal MPs saying it is never going to happen. We are seeing you say you want more coalmines in the Galilee Basin, Scott Morrison has refused to say that when he was asked at a press conference in this campaign. And we have seen your candidates say that next zero emissions is flexible. Nationals candidates and Liberal MPs say that's not right. So isn't it the Coalition being more egregious talking out of both sides of your mouth, given the issues with Liberal MPs facing more climate conscious constituents, does that make the Coalition agreement between the Liberals and Nationals more vulnerable?

Joyce:

No, don't you love you get a bleeding nose in a press club. Anyway. No, it doesn't. Because what we are doing is both the Labor party and ourselves are talking about if there is - we have got to make sure our nation earns as much money as possible. We can't do that if we shut down coal exports.

So what they are saying is completely in line where our policy is. We are saying you have to understand global demand, global demand for coal is a sign that the world is still buying it. If the world doesn't buy it we won't be selling in I but they are buying it and buying it in record amounts record prices.

Q: Your MPs are saying they support a coal-fired power station in central Queensland, Liberals are saying it is never going to happen. How is that an honest conversation?

Joyce:

We are undertaken the business case for a coal-fired power station in con That's the ***process*** at foot. Now, whether in how that comes to a conclusion or whether it comes to a conclusion, by reason that we have basically used the money we was allocated to do it, is the discussion, so when you say are we going through the assessment of coal-fired power station and Collinsville, that is actual policy. There is a business case that will be undertaken on that.

Barnaby Joyce answers questions from journalists at the Press Club in Canberra this afternoon. Photograph: Mike Bowers/The Guardian

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.22am BST

block-time published-time 4.13am BST

Barnaby Joyce then starts choking on water.

No actually, I think his nose is bleeding.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.15am BST

block-time published-time 4.12am BST

Q: Your government criticised the so-called teal independents for not declaring who they would vote for or support. But if there is a hung Parliament and the teal independents are involved in negotiations with the Coalition, they might call for the Coalition agreement to be made public. Under what circumstances would the Nationals agree to such a request and shouldn't that agreement be transparent so Australians know what's in it?

Barnaby Joyce:

No. Because why?

Because in my discussions to get the best deal for regional Australia I don't want to have to ventilate every iteration, every nuance, day by day within the media. Which go to bat for regional Australia on behalf of the party I'm part of, the Nationals, I'm going to make sure that I don't sort of fulfil other people's desires and getting the best outcome for regional people. And so that ***process*** - and a lot of the times you find the document rather unremarkable.

Q: Why not produce it?

Joyce:

Well because that's fulfilling your desire not regional Australia's desire. So you want a straight answer, the answer is no, I won't.

Q: You have called for teal independents to be transparent.

Joyce:

I tell what you you will know from me, I am going to support Mr Morrison and the Liberal party to form a government. 100%. I say to the Australian people, if you vote for the Nationals we will work with the Liberals to form government and keep this nation in safe hands. That wasn't too hard. That was quite easy. So what happens to these independents these righteous people it's so ridiculous, it's so implausible, actually it's the only thing they can tell you that they will do, because they are not actually a minister so they can't really tell you about policy. They will announce policies but it's patently absurd for anybody to understand the machinery of government.

They are not in cabinet, they are not in the policy construction, they are not in the expenditure review that comes for the money they are not responsible for getting access to the Parliament in how it's debated in the agenda. So saying these things in the street which they will be doing, you know, I'm going to do this and that and something else, the reality is people got to ask them - how are you going to do that? When are you a cabinet minister, I didn't know that.

You are not even elected and you are already a cabinet minister, congratulations, well done. Feat of brilliance. Then the obvious thing they actually can answer, the one question they can answer, people say, if there was a hung Parliament, I want to know because it's my vote, am I voting for the Labor Party, which probably has to go to business with the Greens.

The Greens are open about it, everyone knows exactly who they are supporting. Or voting with the Nationals and Liberals. You have a right to know that. It's the most fundamental question you should answer but they don't.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.16am BST

block-time published-time 4.10am BST

Q: But by making the dentist analogy you are conceding that Scott Morrison's personal standing is an issue, like everybody's repeating this dentist analogy and I get it but I'm wondering what's changed, why do people not like Scott Morrison after electing him three years ago? What's happened in the past in your view?

Barnaby Joyce:

It is kind of irrelevant. The premise - the premise is that you say it sways votes in an ***exceptional*** manner and I don't concur with the premise, I don't believe it does. I believe the Australian people are smarter than that... If it's a popularity contest I think you will find politicians in Canberra who are more popular than the prime minister, most certainly more popular than me, more popular than Mr Albanese, more popular than Senator Penny Wong or Katy Gallagher. I don't know who will be the prime minister, I'm trying to work it out. It could be anybody, it could be George Christensen but he's gone.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.14am BST

block-time published-time 4.08am BST

Q: I want to ask about popularity. You said it's not an important attribute for a political leader but I would argue in an election - we are having right now, it's a contest about character. So what voters think or voters perceive of a leader is important in this contest and it seems a lot of voters have made up their mind about Scott Morrison, the prime minister, and they don't like him. As a person who studies the polls and gets the polls to the electorate, I'm wondering why do people not like Scott Morrison? What has changed since that miracle victory in 2019, when voters endorsed him as prime minister?

Barnaby Joyce:

I must be endowed with the gift of proficiency because I actually put that in my speech. I came up with the analogy that you don't have to like your dentist\*. It's not important. You just have to believe they are competent.

(\*Katie Allen and numerous Coalition MPs have been using this line for more than a month.)

Because when they have got that drill in your mouth, you want to make sure they hit the right tooth. You don't want it through your tongue or cheek, because they are your mate, competency is what matters. As an accountant I didn't try to be mates with my clients.

I tried to be competent so they could get the best outcome and pay the least amount of tax. When I go to eye mechanic I don't find out if he's on one of my besties. I just want them to be able to fix the car and running a nation is more complicated than all those jobs. So the people of Australia, they are not fools. They are making a decision about competency.

They are make a decision about vision. They are making a decision about where this nation goes and it is precarious times. We are not making that up. See it on the television, Ukraine, China, inflation, cost of living pressures.

You know, people if it's a popularity contest it will be married at first sight, or my kitchen rules or I'm a celebrity get me out of here, right. It's not. As far as my relationship with the prime minister goes, every agreement he has honoured. Every one. We are in a business relationship and I'm an accountant. I say when I deal this man, every agreement he honours. I never have to go and relitigate it or say, you know, you are slipping away there it. And that's what matters to me. So I say that back to the Australian people, that's what matters to me and that's what must matter to you.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.13am BST

block-time published-time 3.58am BST

And here is the chaser:

enltrSounds quite similar to the following Labor policy announced on 3 January: [*pic.twitter.com/T4Zm1V3Olo*](https://t.co/T4Zm1V3Olo)

- Daniel Hurst (@danielhurstbne) [*May 11, 2022*](https://twitter.com/danielhurstbne/status/1524222084960124928?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 3.55am BST

Gabby Chan is at the Barnaby Joyce speech, but Daniel Hurst has your defence mentions covered:

enltrBarnaby Joyce says Australia "must regain sovereignty" by regaining capacity for "an Australian maritime fleet that can sustain our imports and exports into our nation". Within six months, a re-elected Coalition government would review arrangements including tax and red tape

- Daniel Hurst (@danielhurstbne) [*May 11, 2022*](https://twitter.com/danielhurstbne/status/1524220869496963072?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 3.57am BST

block-time published-time 3.53am BST

While Barnaby Joyce is talking about the dangers of "populism" (this from Australia's "best" retail politician, who made an artform of the $100 lamb roast [*and claimed Australia would default on its debt*](https://www.abc.net.au/news/2010-02-09/australia-close-to-defaulting-on-debts-joyce/325254) ) it is worth pointing out where he wants his preferences to go:

Related: [*Barnaby Joyce directs New England preferences to One Nation candidate living in Brisbane*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/may/10/barnaby-joyce-directs-new-england-preferences-to-one-nation-candidate-living-in-brisbane)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 3.54am BST

block-time published-time 3.37am BST

What a difference a week or so makes. Before the Reserve Bank of Australia made its decision to raise the official interest rate on 3 May, it was fine for the treasurer, Josh Frydenberg, to opine that the central bank should wait to see how wages were faring (on 18 May) before lifting rates. ("Disappointing" was the view of the shadow treasurer, Jim Chalmers.)

But today, it's "reckless" according to Scott Morrison for Anthony Albanese to make known his preference that the Fair Work Commission lift the minimum wage (now $20.33 an hour) by the inflation rate (5.1% for March CPI, heading higher) to ensure workers don't go backwards.

The seven-member panel (three of which are fair work commissioners) will release its verdict on how much it will lift the minimum wage by late May or early June.

Typically, they take into account the [*five minimum wage objectives*](http://classic.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/cth/consol_act/fwa2009114/s284.html#:~:text=What%20is%20the%20minimum%20wages%20objective%3F&text=(e)%20providing%20a%20comprehensive%20range,is%20the%20minimum%20wages%20objective%20.) of the act, and critically, both the headline and underlying inflation rate. (The latter was running at an annual 3.7% in the March quarter.)

For this fiscal year, the FWC raised the minimum wage 2.5% at a time when Covid disruptions were sending odd economic signals. Both the headline and underlying inflation figures were running at an annual rate of 1.1% for the March 2021 quarter that were the most recent figures that the FWC panel had in front of it.

Business groups such as the AiGroup and the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry are asking for 2.5% to 3% only for the minimum wage increase, saying that a 0.5 percentage point increase in superannuation contributions should be taken into account, and also the benefits of the extended low and middle-income tax offset (LMITO).

Jim Stanford, an economist and director of the Centre for Future Work, notes that you can't use super increases to pay the bills, and also that the LMITO is due to run out after this year.

Will businesses call for a wage rise when that offset ends, he asks, adding: "Do we actually think it is the government's responsibility to subsidise the failure of business to pay a living wage by handing out tax year after year."

And it's worth noting, from a recent [*ACTU report*](https://www.australianunions.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Morrison-Missing-in-Action-on-Wages.pdf) , that our minimum wage compared with the median wage has been falling steadily. Australia now back in the pack, OECD-wise:

enltrAnd, from a recent ACTU, how Australia's minimum wages have been tracking compared with median wages, and relative to other OECD members. [*#auspol*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/auspol?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) [*#AusVotes2022*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/AusVotes2022?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) [*#ausvotes*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/ausvotes?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) [*pic.twitter.com/HSQ1t9lWTR*](https://t.co/HSQ1t9lWTR)

- Peter Hannam (@p\_hannam) [*May 11, 2022*](https://twitter.com/p_hannam/status/1524208507704471553?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

The Australia Institute, by happenstance, has also released [*a timely report*](https://australiainstitute.org.au/report/the-wages-crisis-revisited/) that looks at the key wage trends in the economy.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 3.43am BST

block-time published-time 3.36am BST

Barnaby Joyce speaks at the National Press Club

Barnaby Joyce:

We know that popularity is not necessarily an attribute of good political leadership. And populism most certainly is not.

Popularity is not even indicator who people will vote for. According to the 2019 morning consult survey, Senator Mitch McConnell, a republican from Kentucky had a 15% disapproval rating with registered voters. It's the second highest under Senator Susan Collins but Senator McConnell won his race by a margin of 20 independence points.

The reason was given people prioritise state interests over candidate favourability. Senator McConnell's democratic challenger campaign was based around not being Senator McConnell and was said to be ineffective because it lacked a clear policy agenda.

I think it's fair to say this election we don't want people to vote for the Coalition because they think we are popular or I am popular. Instead we want people to vote for us because we are strong, know where we are going, can make hard decisions to get there and we can back hard decisions by showing you how we are going to pay for it.

The deputy prime minister, Barnaby Joyce, at the National Press Club in Canberra this afternoon. Photograph: Mike Bowers/The Guardian

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.00am BST

block-time published-time 3.33am BST

Independents Zali Steggall and Helen Haines say establishing an integrity commission that can retrospectively look at corruption is an "incredibly important" issue for them ahead of any negotiations with the major parties in a hung parliament.

Steggall and Haines have just concluded a panel discussion organised by the Australia Institute specifically on integrity matters.

Both outlined the key features they want from a federal integrity commission - public hearings, public reporting, the ability to take public referrals, a broader definition of corrupt conduct, and retrospectivity.

All of those features were contained in the integrity commission bill Haines previously put to parliament.

Asked about whether she would insist on retrospectivity in any post-election negotiations with the major parties, Steggall said:

I think retrospectivity is incredibly important because we have to be realistic. Over the past four years there's been some $55bn worth of public funds that have not been allocated on best public interest priorities. So I think retrospectivity has to happen if we want to raise the bar and increase trust in government. That will impact all sides, but it also creates a deterrence again for future governments so they don't always think this is a problem for the future, that their past conduct is never up for review.

On retrospectivity, Haines said:

If we're trying to shine a light on possible corruption, then we need to be able to look backwards, as well as forwards, to find patterns of behaviour. So it is incredibly important. Again, if we're going to design an integrity commission, we need to design one that works, and one that has the features required.

Both independents hit out at Scott Morrison's criticisms of the New South Wales independent commission against corruption. Haines said Morrison was in "dangerous territory" and behaving recklessly in his criticisms of the body. Both Steggall and Haines also called for Labor to give more detail on their proposal for an integrity commission, saying the two-page set of principles released so far is not enough.

Haines said she would need to see "detailed legislation" before offering support to Labor.

I don't make decisions on a set of broad principles. Any piece of legislation, I need to see the detail and understand that and work closely with whomever is the attorney-general to ensure its model is fit for purpose.

Steggall said she was "very disappointed" with Anthony Albanese's approach and recent comments about how Labor would proceed with an integrity commission.

In opposition, they have sided with the crossbench and they have relied on I would say Helen and I on a number of issues to really push the government to do better. Now, what he's saying is look, 'whilst we've supported those models in the past... if we form government we might just look at it and see how else we'll do it'. With respect, it's just not good enough. We have models ready to go.

The Australia Institute also released polling showing three in four Australians believe integrity issues are more important or equally important as they were at the last election.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 3.37am BST

block-time published-time 3.32am BST

Barnaby Joyce is delivering the National Press Club today.

Marise Payne and Penny Wong will debate each other this Friday.

Anthony Albanese will appear next Wednesday.

Scott Morrison has not accepted an invitation as yet.

block-time published-time 3.30am BST

The view from Murph

Hello good people. If you are plugged in to the hustings today you'll know the conversation is about wages. Yesterday, Anthony Albanese said he would support a wage increase for Australia's lowest paid workers that would keep pace with inflation.

It's a simple message, Labor favours real wage increases, not real wage cuts - although it was strange that the Labor leader seemed to suggest in an early radio interview on Tuesday the level of increase was broadly up to the ACTU but then warmed up to an increase of 5% at a press conference later in the day.

Scott Morrison has a more complicated position on this issue.

Sorry - I should be clearer, the prime minister has a very simple political message, which is that Albanese is an idiot who will crash the economy, a message that is shared on high rotation regardless of the specifics or merits of any proposal.

But back to the substance of the thing.

Morrison says the political class shouldn't have views about wage fixation because the Fair Work Commission (FWC) is independent from government and that independence must be respected.

But in the same breath, he also suggests a 5% increase will make the sky fall in - a point that very obviously undercuts his first argument.

If the PM genuinely believes politicians should have no views about wages and leave this all to the FWC, then best to maintain that view, lest one be seen as trying to influence a ***process*** Morrison says politicians shouldn't influence.

Scott Morrison has a simple message, that Anthony Albanese will crash the economy, regardless of the merits of any proposal. Photograph: Mick Tsikas/EPA

Just a couple of general observations. I am old enough to remember the inflationary pressure that existed in the economy before the inflation dragon was allegedly slain.

So I remember the old debates where business and other institutional interests in the economy screamed blue murder about giving employees a wage increase because that would feed inflation and help jack up interest rates - which was a narrative Australians became conditioned to accept.

I even remember the Accord - a compact between the Hawke government and the union movement where trade unions agreed to temper wage demands in return for a full court press by the government to control inflation.

I studied these developments in high school economics, before spending the opening years of my journalism career at the Australian Financial Review, where these issues were covered minutely.

But given inflation has not been a risk for governments or central banks to manage for years, there will be many Australians who don't remember the olden times and will not have been conditioned by those debates in the way that GenXers like myself, and the Boomers before us, were.

It's very obvious Morrison is trying to summon an old school debate on this question, and his efforts will be backed in by the same business groups that have always preferred higher profits and dividends than employee compensation. And of course, substantively, it is important to factor in the inflationary pressure associated with wage increases otherwise better compensation becomes zero sum - what goes in one pocket comes out the other.

But I wonder whether Morrison's political pearl-clutching about inflation has the same potency for a generation that has never experienced inflation, subsists in a gig economy with next to no employment certainty, and has zero prospect of ever owning their own home unless they have access to the bank of mum and dad. The workers of the present generation have only ever known sluggish wages growth.

I suspect a simpler Albanese message, that we favour real wages growth, is both salient, and easier to communicate.

But Morrison cranking up the inflation dragon, backed by his amplifiers and institutional interests, is obviously a real and present threat for the Labor campaign to manage.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 3.35am BST

block-time published-time 3.20am BST

Queensland reports 10 Covid deaths and 7,427 cases

Queensland Health has reported 10 people have died from Covid in the last 24 hours, along with 7,427 new cases in the state.

enltrToday we have recorded 7,427 new COVID-19 cases. Sadly, we have reported 10 deaths in the past 24 hours. Full details?? [*https://t.co/2vvTmli7qN*](https://t.co/2vvTmli7qN) [*pic.twitter.com/lTsRL0ufwS*](https://t.co/lTsRL0ufwS)

- Queensland Health (@qldhealth) [*May 11, 2022*](https://twitter.com/qldhealth/status/1524192816838098948?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 3.27am BST

block-time published-time 3.19am BST

The high court has upheld a decision by immigration authorities to cancel a South Sudanese refugee 's humanitarian visa, despite fears he could be killed if sent back, AAP reports.

His global special humanitarian visa was revoked in 2017 after he was convicted of assault in Victoria. He is now on Christmas Island seeking to avoid deportation. His lawyers argued he should not be sent back to South Sudan because he belongs to a minority tribe that killed his father and he would be tortured or killed if he had to return. Australia has international obligations not to endanger refugees by sending them back to countries where they could face persecution, torture or death. Despite the refugee's appeals, in 2018 immigration authorities refused to revoke his visa cancellation. They ruled that he could apply for a protection visa, at which time Australia's international obligations to refugees could be fully considered. In a judgment on Wednesday, the high court found immigration authorities had evaluated the refugee's concerns about being sent back to South Sudan and he had not been denied procedural fairness.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 3.22am BST

block-time published-time 2.58am BST

The press conference ends.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 3.02am BST

block-time published-time 2.57am BST

Q: On that, on that point the prime minister says you are a loose unit and that your head flips open and stuff just falls out. What do you say to that?

Anthony Albanese:

Well, this prime minister is loose with the truth. He's loose with the truth about his analysis of his opponents, but he's loose with the truth for those people who have worked closely with him as well.

This is a guy who the deputy prime minister said, the more you get to know him the less trustworthy, and the more he bends the truth.

The fact is that he thinks that - so does the former prime minister, Malcolm Turnbull.

So do so many - so many people who have worked closely with him. I tell you the difference between me and I will conclude with this - the difference between me and Scott Morrison is that those people who have worked with me the closest for the longest are my closest friends and strongest supporters.

This guy - this guy cuts people loose, is what he does.

Which is why we are here in the electorate of North Sydney, during a federal election campaign - because people who have values, who have traditionally supported the Liberal party, are walking away from the most divisive prime minister in modern history.

This is a guy who never looks to bring people together, who never looks for unity, is always just looking for wedges and always looking for division.

Australia can be better. I want to bring business and unions together, large businesses and unions.

I want to bring small business and their employees together. I want to work with all of the state premiers and chief ministers and bring them together. Australians have conflict fatigue. They have been through two really tough years and we have a prime minister whose incapable of doing what's needed to take Australia forward. Thanks very much.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 3.04am BST

block-time published-time 2.53am BST

Q: Further on that question, are you saying - in response to your answer yesterday - you are saying that logically, wage increases should be tied to inflation? Because that's what you seem to be suggesting.

Anthony Albanese:

No, I'm not saying that. I'm saying that people on the minimum wage right now, right now - and I gave a speech last Thursday, I know some of you were at the lunch, but if you go back and have a look at the speech, what it spoke about was productivity as being the key.

What it spoke about was bringing unions and business together for common interest to work together on that common interest.

To grow productivity... you can have wages increase and profits increase whilst not putting inflationary pressure [on]...

And that was the centre of my speech to the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry last Thursday, that's my position.

But... when people at the moment, when there is no childcare relief, when there's nothing happening on the social wage, when there's nothing happening at all to alleviate people's concerns at a time when - if the Fair Work Commission, which makes these decisions independently of government, makes that decision, that people shouldn't get a real wage cut, would I welcome it? Absolutely.

Q: But Mr Albanese, on that logic you are suggesting that OK, people right now are suffering, they are not seeing their wages increase, if there was an increase of 5.1% you would welcome that. By that logic if inflation goes up to 6% next year...

Albanese:

That's not logic.

Q:... isn't that the same situation.

Albanese:

No, we have a - I have just gone through and it I don't think you were there last Thursday but I encourage you to go read the speech.

Q: I watched it in the office, it was a great speech.

Albanese:

Thank you very much. Thank you for that endorsement.

I'm glad you watched. But what it spoke about was how you get wage growth and profit growth, it is something that without putting inflationary pressure on.

And we did that - this isn't in the absence of debates and discussions I've had with the business community, with the union movement, I've said we will convene a full employment summit.

A full employment summit. And that - part of that agenda will be about how we improve economic growth, how about we improve it in a way that deals with inflationary pressures which is there, and we get win-wins.

It's been possible in the past. The problem for this government is they don't have plans, all they have is arguments and criticisms.

And at the moment we have a circumstance whereby this debate specifically is about whether people who are on far less than anyone in this press conference, far less.

These are people who are earning $20.33 an hour, whether they should get $1 more.

... I'm the Labor leader but I'm amazed that this is not a bipartisan issue because this is a government that had been prepared to go back, did a budget just a short while ago, whereby they made changes to petrol, they gave a $250 handout, they did all of this cost of living relief, saying there was a cost of living crisis.

Well, there is a cost of living crisis, people are doing it tough and that is why there needs to be action.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 3.05am BST

block-time published-time 2.50am BST

Q: What do you think the rate of inflation will be in a year's time under Labor?

Anthony Albanese:

That's a question for economists. The idea that...

Q: It's a question for a prime minister.

Albanese:

No, the idea that anyone could predict what the rate of inflation was a year ago now is of course a triumph of hope over experience.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.55am BST

block-time published-time 2.48am BST

Albanese says Labor is 'underpromising, so that we overdeliver'

Q: Is it wrong to link... minimum wage rises to CPI? And there was a question you were asked before by one of the women chatting about parenthood, why won't Labor take adding superannuation to Paid Parental Leave to this election?

Anthony Albanese:

Because I have said I would like to do that, it's something that would be a positive move.

But one of the things we are doing at this election is underpromising, so that we overdeliver.

We are in a position whereby we have a trillion dollars of debt, so we are not promising to do everything that we would like to do in our first term. And so I have made it clear would that be a good thing? Yes.

Are we in a position to promise things that might be difficult to deliver, no. We are being very clear and very up front. One of the things I've done during this campaign is that I speak about polling day, which we now know is May 21 but I also speak about the next election in three years time.

And I want to be in a position whereby I say, we said we will deliver cheaper childcare, and it's happen we said we would address cost of living and we are doing that.

We said we would make more things here and it's happening. We said we would be addressing climate change, and it's happening. We are seeing that private sector investment in renewables. In renewables.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 3.08am BST

block-time published-time 2.47am BST

Q: On the conversation we are having right now, yesterday the question to you was would you support wage hikes of at least 5.1%. To which you said "absolutely". So, is that - were you saying absolutely to minimum...

Anthony Albanese:

That wasn't what the question said. No, the question was - it went to, you don't want people to go backwards, does that mean you would support a wage hike of 5% [5.1%] just to keep up with inflation. My answer... was absolutely, and I stand by it.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.50am BST

block-time published-time 2.46am BST

Q: On the debate if I can. Are you looking forward to it? What can we expect? Do we need a whip and a chair?

Anthony Albanese:

I am looking forward to it.

The last debate was pretty rigorous. It's fair to say. And it should, of course - there should be some rigour because we are talking about important issues.

It's an opportunity for me tonight to further outline our plan for a better future. The big issue in this election campaign is cost of living. Is cost of living.

And whether people are left behind or whether people are held back.

But it's about other things as well. It's about a plan for the future. On Sunday night the prime minister put forward no plan for the present let alone one for future. We have plans like childcare reform that will boost the economy, that will boost productivity.

And I want to talk about that tonight. I want to talk about a future made here in Australia. I want to talk about more secure work. I want to talk about addressing the cost of living challenges. I want to talk about the opportunity that's there from acting on climate change. We need more than just three more years of the same. That is what we need.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.49am BST

block-time published-time 2.43am BST

Q: On the detail of the Fair Work Commission ***process***, you still have time to put in a submission, you said yesterday Labor won't do that.

Anthony Albanese:

I think the Fair Work Commission are probably clear about what our view is on those issues.

Q: I haven't finished. I just want to ask the -

Albanese:

You want a second question.

Other journalists chime in, saying: "She hasn't finished her question."

Q: On the detail will you put forward explicitly 5.1% in Labor's proposal.

Albanese:

Well, if I was doing that, then that would be an announcement. But I think it's very clear.

... No, it's very clear what our view is. And I think the Commission probably have heard that.

Q: Absolutely, that was the word you used.

Albanese:

Yes, and I stand by that.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.47am BST

block-time published-time 2.41am BST

Q: In the last election Labor made a virtue of the fact that you announced your final costings earlier in the campaign. Didn't keep it to the last minute. This time you appear to be doing the opposite.

Isn't that treating voters like mugs? No detail until the very end of the campaign when a lot of people probably don't have time to think it through carefully.

Anthony Albanese:

We are - we will announce all of our costings in the usual way like oppositions always have.

Q: Last time you criticised the government for leaving it too late.

Albanese:

Did I?

Q: Labor did.

Albanese:

Did I?

Q: Labor did. Why won't you answer the question?

Albanese:

Well, I've answered the question. We will release our costing in the usual way as oppositions have.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.45am BST

block-time published-time 2.39am BST

Q: You said earlier today it was nonsense that a wage hike to the minimum wage to 5.1% would be inflationary or drive up interest rates. How can you make that promise, given interest rates are set by the RBA? And can you guarantee that homeowners across Australia will not be paying more on their mortgage rate?

Anthony Albanese:

The Reserve Bank had been saying for a long period of time that one of the handbrakes on our economy has been wages. The Reserve Bank governor has been talking about this for just about every major speech that he has been giving. For a long period of time. And my comments are perfectly consistent with that.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.44am BST

block-time published-time 2.38am BST

Q: Just on increasing the minimum wage by 5.1%, do you accept there will broader implications with that? It applies not just to those earning the lowest wages in the country, but also those on EBAs, it applies to penalty rates and could wind up costing employers a whole lot more.

Anthony Albanese:

Enterprise bargaining agreements of course are separate from the minimum wage. There are linkages - we do not have centralised wage fixation in country. What we have is a series of wage cases, including the minimum wage case which is under way at the moment.

Q: You say that you don't want people going backwards, would you say that you want wages to be pinned to CPI?

Albanese:

When I was asked would I welcome wages for minimum wages, keeping up with the cost of living, I answered yes.

Because I would. Because that is what we've been arguing on. We have ads on the TV.

We have ads on the TV at the moment talking about this, we've had them throughout the campaign and you know what, I find it astonishing, I find it astonishing that a prime minister... is presiding over a circumstance whereby punters who go up to the local shops here are paying extra for their meat and veggies, they are paying extra for petrol and extra for childcare, they are paying extra for all costs of living, all the costs of living.

... Those people on the minimum wage, what we are talking about here? Who are we talking about? We are talking about cleaners, we are talking about retail workers. We are talking about people really struggling to get by.

It's not enough. It is not enough to say - it is not enough to say "thank you for what you did getting us through the pandemic", and then saying "we want to cut your real wage". That is what Scott Morrison is saying.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.52am BST

block-time published-time 2.36am BST

Anthony Albanese calls for order with the press pack when everyone starts talking at once.

Order! When you finish I will give someone the call.

Q: Next year, if inflation rises by 7% would you advocate for a wage hike of 7%?

Albanese:

What we are talking about here is a circumstance whereby people have been going backwards. During this campaign we have made it very clear that people are being left behind on this government's watch, that the cost of everything is going up.

The cost of everything is going up but people's wages aren't.

Q: If you are in government will your submission to the Fair Work Commission recommend a 5.1% wage increase, and if not, have you jumped the gun on this?

Albanese:

Not at all. We have been running... a campaign every day of this campaign about cost of living. And one of the themes of our campaign including at the campaign launch was - no one left behind.

What we are talking about here is the circumstances right now where people are doing it really tough, they are on $20.33 an hour. $20.33 an hour.

Those people will not benefit from any of the tax cuts that will come in. They are on $20.33 an hour.

The cost of everything that they buy is going up but their wages aren't. Scott Morrison - Scott Morrison says that that's OK. And when I raised - when I raised it in the debate on Channel Nine on Sunday night, I got two questions to the prime minister, I prioritised. The issue of, should Australians be paid at least the minimum wage? He couldn't even agree to that.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.41am BST

block-time published-time 2.33am BST

Last year, the Fair Work Commission's decision to raise the minimum wage by 2.5% meant an increase of $0.49 an hour.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.35am BST

block-time published-time 2.32am BST

Anthony Albanese pushes back against Scott Morrison wage attack

Anthony Albanese is talking childcare with Amanda Rishworth in North Sydney - but he really wants to talk about Scott Morrison's attacks on wage growth:

I note that Scott Morrison is once again being loose with the truth. What we are talking about here is the lowest paid workers in Australia.

Those people who are really struggling with cost of living increases.

What Scott Morrison says is that it is OK to find $30 million for a block of land that is worth $3 million.

It is OK his government can always find money for sports rorts, for commuter car park rorts, for all of this activity, but he is OK to waste those billions of dollars.

A billion dollars literally on advertising of the government itself. But backing a $1 an hour pay increase is not OK. Workers who are paid $20.33 an hour to be paid $1 extra - that is what this debate is about.

Scott Morrison has made a conscious decision over the last decade of driving down wages. They say it is a key feature of their economic architecture and they have indeed achieved that.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.33am BST

block-time published-time 2.26am BST

Childcare is the focus of Labor's campaign this morning:

enltrAnthony Albanese visiting a family home in North Sydney. Georgie Dent from The Parenthood thanking the Labor leader for talking about childcare and family challenges during the election campaign. [*pic.twitter.com/kmbIPijyvq*](https://t.co/kmbIPijyvq)

- Tom McIlroy (@TomMcIlroy) [*May 11, 2022*](https://twitter.com/TomMcIlroy/status/1524193662443290624?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 2.25am BST

It's not just home loan interest rates increasing - the rates on bonds are going up too:

enltrThe (long term) debt is getting dearer. Govt just sold $400m, to be repaid in 2051, at an interest rate 3.83%. A month ago, the interest rate on 2051 was 3.21%. That's a 19% increase in cost in six weeks...

- Shane Wright (@swrighteconomy) [*May 11, 2022*](https://twitter.com/swrighteconomy/status/1524194935049637889?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 2.08am BST

Earlier this week we had ANZ 's weekly snapshot of consumer sentiment showing a modest drop. The Westpac-Melbourne Institute 's monthly survey, though, is revealing a sharper dive in shoppers' moods.

The latter survey collected the views of 1200 respondents over five days that took in the RBA's first rate rise (a surprisingly big one) in 11 years, and also the shock annual 5.1% CPI rise during the March quarter.

The WMI index slumped 5.6% to 90.4 for the month, and is at the lowest level since August 2020. Excluding the Covid distortions - which seem to have evaporated - the dive is the most since June 2015. That coincided with global market turmoil, which seems to be creeping back in now too.

enltr [*@Westpac*](https://twitter.com/Westpac?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) -Melbourne Institute's monthly Index of Consumer Sentiment dived 5.6% to 90.4 in May to the lowest level in 21 months. Excluding Covid, it's the biggest drop in 7 years, with rates, cost of living rises to blame. [*#auspol*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/auspol?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) [*#ausvotes*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/ausvotes?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) [*#ausvotes2022*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/AusVotes2022?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) [*pic.twitter.com/bxgQBOlmUi*](https://t.co/bxgQBOlmUi)

- Peter Hannam (@p\_hannam) [*May 11, 2022*](https://twitter.com/p_hannam/status/1524189693319184384?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

Westpac blamed the recent drop on the combination of rising cost of living pressures and the prospect of rising interest rates. Still, actual spending is much more buoyant over 2022 to date, as households respond to the reopening of the economy.

While headline inflation pressures may ease from this point, consumers are aware that the Reserve Bank plans to continue increasing the cash rate for some time.

Our May survey found 77% of respondents expect mortgage interest rates to rise over the next 12 months, up from 70% last month. But it is even more significant that 52% expect rates to rise by more than 1%, up from just 34% only one month ago.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.19am BST

block-time published-time 2.06am BST

Labor's candidate for Reid, Sally Sitou, has asked for an apology from the Liberal member for Reid, Dr Fiona Martin, over an assertion Martin made during a radio debate between the pair:

enltrEarlier today in a candidates' debate, my opponent Fiona Martin accused me of having previously contested preselection in Fowler. I have never sought to run for Fowler. I live in Reid, my son goes to school in Reid, and I am excited by the opportunity to represent my community.

- Sally Sitou ??? - Labor for Reid (@SallySitou) [*May 11, 2022*](https://twitter.com/SallySitou/status/1524191462795386880?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

enltrMy opponent either has me confused for a different Asian-Australian, or she is deliberately misleading people. Either way, she should apologise.

- Sally Sitou ??? - Labor for Reid (@SallySitou) [*May 11, 2022*](https://twitter.com/SallySitou/status/1524191553639825409?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.16am BST

block-time published-time 1.56am BST

Scott Morrison has spent most of this campaign poo-pooing Anthony Albanese's " increase wages" line by saying he "doesn't have a magic pen/wand" to raise wages, and is making a promise he has no influence over.

Since the RBA lifted the official cash rate, Morrison has made it clear he does not believe the government has any impact on interest rate rises.

Governments make submissions to the Fair Work Commission as part of the ***process***, about what it believes needs to happen with the minimum wage. Last year, the government submitted the FWC should "take a cautious approach" to raising the minimum wage.

According to Morrison this week, not only does Albanese's opinion have the power to influence things Albanese writing a letter as prime minister apparently didn't have any influence over, it will also lead to higher interest rates.

But at the same time, Morrison does not have an opinion on an independent ***process***. Except his opinion on what Albanese's opinion could do.

enltrThe PM is prepared to say a 5% wage rise is too high (ie: an increase that keeps pace with inflation) but he's not prepared to specify what his preferred number is [*#auspol*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/auspol?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

- Katharine Murphy (@murpharoo) [*May 11, 2022*](https://twitter.com/murpharoo/status/1524185290214047746?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

enltrThe PM says there's an independent FWC ***process*** to respect. Well.. if you respect an independent ***process***, best not to have a view on any number, right?

- Katharine Murphy (@murpharoo) [*May 11, 2022*](https://twitter.com/murpharoo/status/1524185291740774401?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

enltrOf course this is logic. Not politics [*#auspol*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/auspol?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

- Katharine Murphy (@murpharoo) [*May 11, 2022*](https://twitter.com/murpharoo/status/1524185293225484288?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.04am BST

block-time published-time 1.47am BST

The press conference ends.

block-time published-time 1.46am BST

Q: Why haven't you disendorsed your candidate for Lilley?

Scott Morrison:

Those matters are - sorry, did you say the candidate for Labor? Sorry, I thought you said the candidate for Labor. I was going to say that has nothing to do with me.

Those matters are working their way through with the relevant authorities there and people are cooperating fully with those matters and I would expect them to do that.

But ultimately - and I will leave you on this - this is a choice, as I say every single day. And it's the responsible choice, the responsible choice at a time of great upheaval globally, with our economy, with international security, the responsible choice is for the Liberals and the Nationals - I'm just finishing up - The Liberals and Nationals is the responsible choice when it comes to the economy, and national security.

With Labor you just don't know what's going to pop into Anthony Albanese's head any day and what he will blurt out and what that will mean for your interest rates, for your cost of living, and indeed Australia's national security. Thanks very much everyone.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.49am BST

block-time published-time 1.45am BST

Q: If you win government but Josh Frydenberg loses his seat, who will be the next treasurer?

Scott Morrison:

That's not something I'm speculating on because I know Josh will be returned.

Q: Isn't it hypocritical you attack Labor for not confirming who the defence minister will be but, if the polls are accurate, Josh Frydenberg will not be treasurer [after the election]?

Morrison:

You know my view about the polls. Josh Frydenberg will the treasurer. I still don't know who Anthony Albanese's defence minister is going to be, I don't know who his home affairs minister is going to be.

[Do you know who will be your treasurer?]

Morrison:

Yes, it is Josh Frydenberg.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.49am BST

block-time published-time 1.43am BST

Q : What personal would you be comfortable with then given all of the fact that you have just mentioned, or is it just no dice on a real wage rise.

Scott Morrison:

The figure I have always been comfortable with, and that is what is calmly determined, sensibly, by the independent ***process*** that looks at all of these factors.

That's - that's what discipline is. That's what financial discipline works. Now, as you know, we have...

Q: [ The government makes a submission to FWC, so how can ou say it is wrong for any politician to suggest any increase when you go to fair work.]

Morrison:

As you know that's never been our government's policy and nor was it the previous government's policy as you recall.

Because what...

Q: If Fair Work come up with 5.1% are they wrong?

Morrison:

I'm not speculating about what Fair Work is going to say. Anthony Albanese is the one who was recklessly making comments in this area, and he doesn't seem to understand. So you know, when you've been a Treasurer for three years and a prime Minister for four years, you understand that careless speculation can lead to real world impacts in the economy. You don't get - you don't get the latitude to be loose like Mr Albanese was yesterday.

And that shows that he's not up to the job, the job is bigger than him, he doesn't understand the economy and if that's not true he is seeking to take you for a ride.

block-time published-time 1.40am BST

Q: The RBA has said that real wages won't increase until the end of 2023, with unemployment reaching almost full employment in that time and businesses only just starting to offer wage rises, what are Australians supposed to do in the next 18 months when the RBA is saying that real wages won't increase in that time, how do they pay for things?

Scott Morrison:

They won't be able to pay for things if inflation goes even higher and interest rates go even higher. That is why what Anthony Albanese is speculating on and running off at the mouth on, would only make that situation worse. It would only make it worse.

Labor would make the very issues you're highlighting worse under what they are proposing.

(A journalist repeats the question.)

Q: Is it correct to say then that you - any workers will not see a real wage increase until that inflation number comes down? And would your government do anything to... look at trying to ease those global factors that you keep saying are causing Australia's higher inflation level, particularly around supply chains?

enltrIf you say there's an independent wage setting ***process***, and you want to respect that, perhaps you are a loose unit if you nominate any particular number as being too high. Almost like you might be seeking to influence an independent ***process*** [*#auspol*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/auspol?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

- Katharine Murphy (@murpharoo) [*May 11, 2022*](https://twitter.com/murpharoo/status/1524186437582696448?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

Morrison:

... There are two things driving those inflation numbers at the moment. One is, of course, what's happening with the - there's a range of immediate factors. Let's call them that. There is the war in the Ukraine, there is the shutdown in China because of Covid, and also we will continue to see, particularly this quarter, and perhaps the next quarter, the impact of the floods in Australia and what that means for fruit and veg prices and we have seen that when there is cyclones and other disasters in parts of the country in the past.

That will put pressure on prices. And they are things that occur well outside Australia's control. The structural factors that are driving inflation are about those supply chain pressures that we are seeing which is a lag and a direct consequence of the pandemic.

And that's why what we are talking about here, advanced manufacturing, linking up supply chain in Australia, critical supply chain work, whether it be in the critical rare earth minerals and so on - that's what helps moving the supply chain efficiently.

On top of that, it's ensuring that we keep getting people into jobs, keep that pressure in the system, which leads to sustainable wage rises, supported by businesses that stay in business.

I mean, this is one of the most difficult times with the pressures that are on the global economy and hence the Australian economy, that we have seen in a very long time.

And how we manage that must be sensitive, must be responsible, must be disciplined.

Now, what we saw yesterday from Mr Anthony Albanese, what we saw yesterday from Mr Albanese was loose. It was ill-considered.

It showed a lack of understanding of the relationship between wages and inflation, and interest rates. If you want your interest rates to be skyrocketing, as a result of what Anthony Albanese is suggesting, well, he's your guy.

But what I'm saying, is Anthony Albanese will make it worse.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.47am BST

block-time published-time 1.35am BST

Q: Prime Minister, today you are quoted as saying that it is economic vandalism...

Scott Morrison:

I didn't say that.

Q: I want to confirm that, do you think it is vandalism...

Morrison:

I didn't say that.

Q: You are not calling him a vandal?

Morrison:

I didn't. That is a misquote in the paper. They were not my words.

Q: What is wrong with asking for a pay rise?

Morrison:

There is nothing wrong with asking for a pay rise but, obviously, it - and the Reserve Bank governor has said very clearly, that is what we are seeing in our economy, and the reason we are seeing that is because unemployment is coming down and businesses are growing and becoming stronger. That is where pay rises come from.

They come from businesses doing well\*, not being shut down by reckless policy, by a Labor party that would see not only your interest rates go up more than they might otherwise do, or your cost of living go up even more, getting into a vicious spiral, going up and up and up.

What is he next proposing, if it goes to 6% they have to go by that and when that pushes it up to 7%, they go by that? That is how we ended up with 18% interest rates in this country under Labor.

That is what causes the worst of all outcomes, which is a crash in the economy. That is not responsible.

\*Wage growth was stagnant before the pandemic in Australia.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.36am BST

block-time published-time 1.32am BST

Q: If you say that 5.1% for the minimum wage is a crazy pay rise and you think is a terrible idea - given the government has said it wants to see people earn more, what would be a more sensible minimum pay rise? And please don't say the Fair Work Commission decides this or businesses determine wages. We have heard that from you before.

You are attacking Albanese for what he is saying, what is your alternative, sensible solution and that you propose is 5.1% is too high?

Scott Morrison:

An independent ***process*** that carefully calibrates and considers all the things in the economy that is sustainable.

Q: You are attacking Anthony Albanese...

Morrison:

I am attacking him for being thoughtless and not having a clue about the economy and not understanding how the economy works and not respecting the ***process*** of an independent setting of minimum wage conditions in this country and I will tell you why that is important, small businesses, businesses around the country have to make decisions about how they invest, how many people they employ.

They don't want these things set by some erratic statement of a politician. They want this stuff to be carefully considered. Mr Albanese showed yesterday that he is a complete loose unit on this stuff.

He just runs off at the mouth. It is like he just unzips his head and lets everything fall on the table. That is no way to run an economy because that only leads, if you vote Labor, to having a leader who can make interest rates worse, who can make inflation worse.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.35am BST

block-time published-time 1.30am BST

Q: If you don't support a wage increase of 5.1%, are you OK, comfortable with some of Australia's lowest paid workers essentially getting a real wage cut?

Scott Morrison:

The Fair Work Commission is the appropriate body to look at all of the economic implications for where they set the minimum wage. If we wanted politicians to make this up, that is what we would have done. That is not wise.

In the same way the Reserve Bank goes and works out what interest rates should be and looks at all the various information and all the implications for the decisions they have to make, this is a very similar ***process***.

It provides certainty, it provides stability in the management of our economy.

It is not a place where you will see the thought bubbles we saw from Anthony Albanese yesterday and they will think through because this is the end game of what Anthony Albanese says. He will say "Here is a 5.1% increase in your wages", but then "Here is the interest rates you have to pay", and "Here is the cost of living that it causes". He pretends to give with one hand and then he sees interest rates and cost of living rises take it all back from you.

Q: You are comfortable with some of Australia's lowest paid workers getting a real wage cut?

Morrison:

What I am saying is you need to balance all these things very carefully. That is what responsible economic management is. These are complex issues. What is the point of allowing someone to be put in a position where they are paying more and more, even more as a result of the inflationary impacts of what he was saying yesterday, let alone the impacts on interest rates which already have great pressure on them. This would only see interest rates rise even higher.

Is there any wonder that why, when Labor gets into power, that we see a deterioration around these things because they just don't think about it. There is a reason why Anthony Albanese was never given a financial portfolio by...

Q: But...

Morrison:

I haven't finished. Hasn't been given a financial portfolio by any of the Labor leaders in the past. They knew he couldn't be trusted with money. He is like someone working in a small business who they won't let near the till, and the Australian people shouldn't let him near the till.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.34am BST

block-time published-time 1.25am BST

It was only Monday that Scott Morrison was saying:

There's no magic pen from Anthony Albanese that makes your wages go up.

But today apparently, Morrison believes Albanese has the power to destroy the economy with just an opinion on what the minimum wage rise should be.

block-time published-time 1.22am BST

We will hear a lot more about this in the answers:

Scott Morrison:

What he said yesterday puts a chain reaction in place - dominoes fall that lead to higher interest rates and higher cost of living.

If he doesn't understand that... that tells you everything you need to know about what he doesn't understand about the Australian economy. If he does understand it, he's playing you for a mug.

He thinks he can run around at this election saying he can increase peoples' wages and at the same time, see cost of living pressures fall and pressure on interest rates to remain down.

It just doesn't work like that, you either don't know what you are talking about and you are not up to the job, or you are taking the Australian people for a ride and I have called you out, Anthony.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.23am BST

block-time published-time 1.20am BST

'What we saw from Anthony Albanese yesterday was reckless,' says Scott Morrison

But Scott Morrison really wants to talk about Anthony Albanese :

What we saw from Anthony Albanese yesterday was reckless.

It was incredibly reckless. We all want to see wages go up, and indeed, the Reserve Bank governor has made it very clear that we are seeing wages starting to go up, but the way you engage in economic policy is not in the loose way we saw from Anthony Albanese yesterday.

Anthony Albanese is a loose unit on the economy. We saw that right at the start of the campaign.

He didn't know what unemployment was. He didn't know what the cash rate was. He says his policies are costed but they're not costed.

When it comes to what he said yesterday, ill thought through, not understanding the potential consequences of what he was saying.

Yesterday, in what he said yesterday, it is like throwing fuel on the fire of rising interest rates and rising cost of living. He has had a lot to say about cost of living.

He has got no solutions or policies to put downward pressure on it and what he did yesterday would only exacerbate it, it would only make the problem worse.

Anthony Albanese's intervention yesterday and his thoughtlessness on this would actually make inflation worse, it would make interest rates rise even higher, it would threaten the strong growth we have had in employment and, ultimately, it would force small businesses, potentially out of business altogether.

Related: [*Industry warns 'small business can't afford it' after Albanese backs 5.1% minimum wage rise*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/may/11/industry-warns-small-business-cant-afford-it-after-albanese-backs-51-minimum-wage-rise)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.51am BST

block-time published-time 1.18am BST

Scott Morrison announces 'new technology' manufacturing program

We have another pamphlet - this time on manufacturing.

This is a government, in our government, that is investing in the things that ensures the Australian economy can grow, and it is investing in the people, it is investing in their ideas, it is investing in their collaboration and their partnerships because that is what turns things around, that's what creates the opportunity.

Australia is coming out of this pandemic stronger than all of the advanced economies in the world and the G7.

We have stronger economic growth, we have an outstanding world class health system, an outstanding world class education system - and what we're building in the collaboration here between our universities and our companies will enable them to take advantage of the economic opportunities that Australia has in the years ahead. One of the biggest beneficiaries of that will be regional Australia - regions like right here in the Hunter.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.19am BST

block-time published-time 1.09am BST

Three weeks ago, [*we looked here*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/apr/18/aec-looks-to-recruit-more-than-100000-workers-for-election-day-amid-australia-wide-staff-shortages) at the challenges facing the Australian Electoral Commission in trying to recruit more than 100,000 employees at a time when the jobless rate was at about a 50-year low.

We'll get the ABS's April labour figures on 19 May, two days before the polls close, and a day after the March quarter wage price index data drops. That will tell us a bit more about how tight the jobs market is.

The AEC tells us the recruitment for AEC temporary election staff across the country "is going extremely well". A spokesperson said:

With approximately 105,000 staffing positions we've had more than 200,000 people who've registered their interest which is fantastic.

That said, in some regional centres the AEC is competing against other industries such as mining and presumably seasonal farm workers. And there's the challenge of ensuring some back-up recruits are on hand in case Covid disrupts sites at the last minute:

We expect and have planned for the furloughing of some staff, but with the scale and complexity of the election in a pandemic across Australia's vast geography, some venues could be impacted at short notice.

Anyway, if you're interested, there are still jobs going, and [*you can sign up here*](https://www.aec.gov.au/employment/working-at-elections/).

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.15am BST

block-time published-time 12.52am BST

Queensland woman dies in flood waters

A woman has died in flood waters in north Queensland, premier Annastacia Palaszczuk told parliament on Wednesday.

Emergency crews were frantically searching for a woman after a car washed away in Mount Ossa, north of Mackay.

"I'm advised they have recovered the body ... I offer my heartfelt condolences to the family and I sincerely hope that this is the last tragedy," Palaszczuk said.

A Queensland Fire and Emergency Service spokesperson said they received a call around 5am on Wednesday about a missing woman and a vehicle washed into flood waters at Seaforth Rd and Surprise Creek Rd.

A police spokesperson told Guardian Australia they believed two people had managed to escape the vehicle.

Palaszczuk said the incident was "a stark reminder" of the dangers of weather events.

She said the SES has responded to more than 110 requests for assistance since 3pm on Tuesday.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.56am BST

block-time published-time 12.52am BST

Authorities have confirmed a woman has died in Queensland flood waters.

AAP reports:

A woman has died after the car she was in became submerged in flood waters triggered by days of torrential rain in north Queensland.

The woman became trapped in the vehicle with two other people on Surprise Creek Rd at Mount Ossa, north of Mackay, about 5am on Wednesday.

The two others escaped from the car, but the woman's body was found a short time later.

The Queensland Ambulance Service said one of the people who survived was treated for a cut to their head.

Queensland Fire and Emergency Services received more than 90 calls for help in the state's north as six-hour rainfall totals reached 240mm in some areas by 1am on Wednesday.

"Although rain is expected to move off the coast in the state's north today, a large number of roads remain flooded," QFES said in a statement.

"Please avoid unnecessary travel and don't risk it on flooded roads and causeways.

"If it's flooded, forget it."

Rainfall records tumbled at the Hughenden, Richmond and Cloncurry airports on Tuesday as those inland regions recorded their highest May totals ever.

Townsville is set for totals up to 250mm on Wednesday and Thursday with the severe weather warning indicating up to 200mm in a six-hour period.

"That whole area under the severe weather warning could see flash and riverine flooding," Bureau of Meteorology senior forecaster Laura Boekel said on Tuesday.

A flood watch is current for dozens of river and creek catchments across Queensland and almost 300 roads have been cut by flood waters.

In the south-east, heavy rain hit the Sunshine Coast and northern Brisbane, with 135mm falling at Mapleton and 113mm at Maleny.

"If you are on the road this morning take extra care and plan your drive. If you come across flood water, back it up and find an alternate route," QFES said in a Facebook post on Wednesday.

"With the ground already saturated and further heavy rainfall possible, there is a risk of flash flooding today and over the coming days."

Seqwater has alerted Moreton Bay region residents it has started flood releases from North Pine Dam, with releases also set to start from Wivenhoe and Somerset Dams into the Brisbane River from 10am.

The utility expects the releases to flood Savages Crossing, Colleges Crossing, Burtons Bridge and Kholo Bridge downstream, but not Fernvale Bridge.

"If you are downstream of the dam, stay away from fast flowing or deep water near waterways and floodplains," Seqwater said.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.58am BST

block-time published-time 12.47am BST

Scott Morrison is campaigning in Newcastle (Labor MP Pat Conroy's seat of Shortland) this morning.

Both Morrison and Anthony Albanese will be keeping close to NSW, given the debate in Seven's Sydney studios tonight.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.50am BST

block-time published-time 12.43am BST

Victoria to become first state to ban Nazi symbol

The Victorian government is set to become the first Australia state or territory to ban the Nazi symbol, with legislation to be introduced to state parliament today.

The Summary Offences Amendment (Nazi Symbol Prohibition) Bill 2022 will make it a criminal offence for a person to intentionally display the Nazi swastika, the Hakenkreuz, in public.

Once passed, anyone who intentionally displays the symbol in public faces penalties of up to almost $22,000, 12 months imprisonment or both.

The bill also recognises the cultural and historical significance of the swastika for the Buddhist, Hindu and Jain faiths and does not prohibit its display in such contexts.

It comes after a parliamentary inquiry last year recommended the ban, citing a recent rise in neo-Nazi activity.

NSW is also working on similar legislation.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.47am BST

block-time published-time 12.42am BST

And in Tasmania, things are getting heated over preference suggestions.

enltrLooks like Jacqui Lambie's candidate in Bass isn't thrilled with the preference decision to support Bridget Archer ahead of the Labor candidate Ross Hart ?? [*#auspol*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/auspol?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) [*pic.twitter.com/IINuuGD2vb*](https://t.co/IINuuGD2vb)

- Katharine Murphy (@murpharoo) [*May 10, 2022*](https://twitter.com/murpharoo/status/1524148800071569413?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

Murph had an in-depth look at the battle for Tasmania a little earlier in the campaign:

Related: [*Bass and Braddon in the balance as Tasmanian voters excoriate Scott Morrison*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/apr/19/bass-and-braddon-in-the-balance-as-tasmanian-voters-excoriate-scott-morrison)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.43am BST

block-time published-time 12.35am BST

Liberal MP Fiona Martin has denied confusing her opponent, Sally Sitou, for unsuccessful Labor aspirant in Fowler, Tu Le.

This morning, Martin accused Sitou of running in Reid because she "found an opportunity". "And you couldn't run in Fowler... Kristina Keneally kicked you out of Fowler too." Martin told Guardian Australia:

Sally grew up in Fowler. Keneally reportedly declined Reid and went for Fowler. I think it makes sense to want to represent the area you grew up in or where you have a long association. Sally's association with Reid is less than three years total.

So, on Martin's version, she didn't confuse Sitou and Tu Le, she was just speculating that Sitou might also have wanted to run in Fowler and also have been displaced by Keneally.

Earlier, Sitou told 2GB Radio:

I didn't want to raise this, but I chose to live in this electorate because I love the community... Now [Martin is] just making things up. That's how ridiculous this debate has gotten. I'm sorry your listeners have had to listen to that.

Keneally only made a lower house tilt in 2021 after losing the battle for a winnable senate spot on the NSW Labor senate ticket to Deborah O'Neil.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.49am BST

block-time published-time 12.33am BST

In state news:

enltrThe Victorian government is set to become the first Australia state or territory to ban the public display of the Nazi symbol. Statement from Attorney-General Jaclyn Symes: [*pic.twitter.com/N4WoVQz5O5*](https://t.co/N4WoVQz5O5)

- Benita Kolovos (@benitakolovos) [*May 10, 2022*](https://twitter.com/benitakolovos/status/1524170310115037185?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 12.25am BST

Liberal MP, Dr Fiona Martin, who is fighting to hold on to the Sydney electorate of Reid, debated her Labor challenger, Sally Sitou, on [*Sydney radio 2GB this morning.*](https://www.2gb.com/fiery-debate-the-live-on-air-battle-for-reid/)

Sitou, whose Chinese parents fled Laos after the Vietnam war, was preselected for the seat of Reid in October last year.

The debate got heated, particularly when it came to Martin not living in the electorate (she grew up in it, Sitou lives in it, but grew up in Fowler).

That led to this exchange:

Martin:

You found an opportunity and you couldn't run in Fowler. Kristina Keneally kicked you out of Fowler too.

Sitou:

Now she's just making things up. I mean, that's how ridiculous this debate has gotten. And I'm really sorry that your listeners have had to listen to that.

Tu Le, a lawyer with Vietnamese heritage, had been backed by retiring member Chris Hayes to replace him as Labor's candidate for Fowler, but had her preselection over-ruled by the NSW Labor branch, who parachuted in Keneally.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.31am BST

block-time published-time 12.04am BST

Prepolls have only been open since Monday and more than 600,000 people have already lodged their vote.

And for those asking, yes, prepolls are counted on election night.

enltrDay two of the pre-poll period is behind us, and so far more than 650,000 Australians have visited an early voting centre. On the chart we can see that the number of pre-poll voters for this point in the election campaign has now surpassed 2016. [*#Auspol*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/auspol?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) [*#AusVotes2022*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/AusVotes2022?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) [*pic.twitter.com/RBfOqbgfeb*](https://t.co/RBfOqbgfeb)

- AEC ?? (@AusElectoralCom) [*May 10, 2022*](https://twitter.com/AusElectoralCom/status/1524163113750528000?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.07am BST

block-time published-time 12.02am BST

28 lives lost to Covid in NSW and Victoria

It has been another tragic 24 hours in Victoria in terms of the impact of Covid, with 17 lives lost.

enltrWe thank everyone who got vaccinated and tested yesterday. Our thoughts are with those in hospital, and the families of people who have lost their lives. More data soon: [*https://t.co/OCCFTAtS1P*](https://t.co/OCCFTAtS1P) [*#COVID19Vic*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/COVID19Vic?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) [*#COVID19VicData*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/COVID19VicData?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) [*pic.twitter.com/bzMUeobDTF*](https://t.co/bzMUeobDTF)

- VicGovDH (@VicGovDH) [*May 10, 2022*](https://twitter.com/VicGovDH/status/1524162399229554688?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

NSW Health has reported 11 deaths.

enltrCOVID-19 update - Wednesday 11 May 2022 In the 24-hour reporting period to 4pm yesterday: - 96.3% of people aged 16+ have had one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine - 94.8% of people aged 16+ have had two doses of a COVID-19 vaccine [*pic.twitter.com/ZPzT1NfPJA*](https://t.co/ZPzT1NfPJA)

- NSW Health (@NSWHealth) [*May 10, 2022*](https://twitter.com/NSWHealth/status/1524162389322903552?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.06am BST

block-time published-time 12.00am BST

The Liberal campaign have a new social media ad, aimed at putting the prime minister saying "that's not my job" into context.

Peter Dutton has been sharing it this morning.

enltrLabor's campaign is a lie. [*pic.twitter.com/yNtic9Dqlm*](https://t.co/yNtic9Dqlm)

- Liberal Party (@LiberalAus) [*May 10, 2022*](https://twitter.com/LiberalAus/status/1524158129856184320?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.06am BST

block-time published-time 11.50pm BST

Tony Burke says Anthony Albanese was not making policy on the fly when he backed a figure for a minimum wage increase:

Q: Up until Anthony Albanese responded to that question at a media conference yesterday, Labor's position on the Fair Work Commission case was it wasn't going to back any figure. Was Anthony Albanese freelancing in responding that way?

Burke:

Not at all. You heard all of us on many occasions for a long time now say people can't keep going backward.

Q: Not backing a particular figure is what I'm saying.

Burke:

No, the figure yesterday is the figure that, if you fall below, people are going backwards. Like, for a long time, we have been saying people can't keep going backwards and as I say, yesterday the question was put as to the figure, which if you fall below people are - would start going backwards.

It's unsurprising that Labor wants to make sure that wages can keep pace with the cost of living.

But as I say, he wasn't questioned on it yesterday because he didn't face the media scrum again after Anthony Albanese had answered that question.

But today, it's on Scott Morrison to explain why he believes Australian workers should go backwards, because let's not forget, in the debate the other night, it wasn't only this - we know now his position is that real wages should fall.

When he was asked directly whether Australians should even be at least paid the minimum wage, his response was, "It depends."

We have a prime minister here whose not only refusing to support wages keeping pace with the cost of living, he's also refusing to back in their being a safety net for a whole lot of workers.

Q: The prime minister has responded through the Australian late yesterday where he described Anthony Albanese's comments as "economic vandalism". You should factor - surely you factor in any increase of that magnitude by the Fair Work Commission would have clear flow-on effects to inflation and then interest rates?

Burke:

Well, have a look at both what the Treasury secretary and the RBA have said with respect to inflationary pressures where both of them have made clear that you can go to inflation plus productivity, productivity is currently running at 1%, and if wage increases are in line with inflation plus productivity, then you should not be having inflationary pressures.

Last year, for example, when inflation was forecast to run with a number with a 1 in front of it, the annual wage review still put forward a wage increase of 2.5%. It's not unheard of at all for the annual wage review to go in front of inflation so long as you don't go inflation plus productivity, it doesn't have an inflationary impact.

What's happening now is when people are finding it harder than ever; when the cost of living is, in fact, going backwards for a whole lot of wage earners across the country, it's at this moment that Mr Morrison is refusing to say that wages should even keep up.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 11.59pm BST

block-time published-time 11.45pm BST

Q: A lot of business operators, a lot of business owners, also thought it was extraordinary as well, Tony Burke, in the sense they're now worried how they'll pay a potential 5.1% increase.

Burke:

Look, I have got a good relationship with a lot of those business organisations that have been in the media and there's different issues in terms of productivity that we have had very constructive conversations about.

But in terms of the annual wage review, I do have to say - some of those commentators, most of them actually, for nearly a decade have been saying, "We can't have wage increases because inflation is low." And now they're saying we can't have wage increases because inflation is high. The reality is...

Q: They're saying - they want wage increases, for instance, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry is making it 3% wage rise for minimum wage earners, it argues that is more realistic?

Burke:

Sorry, that's a pay cut. If, inflation is running at 5.1%, then the figure you have just nominated there is a pay cut.

The people who are most reliant on the annual wage review are the people on the lowest wages. The minimum wage in Australia is $20.33 an hour, these are the people who are the heroes of the pandemic, who have kept the economy running during a time where a whole lot of us on higher incomes were able to work from laptops, but they weren't, turned up, put themselves in harm's way in different ways, particularly in the early stages of the pandemic, and they're the people who find it the hardest to make ends meet.

They're the people who are in the least capacity to draw down on savings and they're the people who, more than anyone, need to make sure that wages can keep up with the cost of living and they don't keep going backward.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 11.51pm BST

block-time published-time 11.44pm BST

Labor's Tony Burke was on the same program responding to criticisms of Anthony Albanese's support for a minimum wage increase in line with inflation:

For nearly a decade, this government has had low wages as a deliberate design feature of their economic management.

They wanted to deliberately keep wages low and they have. Labor wants to get wages moving again and we will.

We cannot have a situation when everything is going up except wages and people keep going backwards.

And that's what Anthony Albanese made clear yesterday.

The extraordinary thing about this story is not that Labor wants to make sure that wages keep pace with the cost of living, the extraordinary thing about this story is Scott Morrison doesn't.

He - the outrage we're seeing from him and his ministers at the moment as though somehow it would be a terrible thing for Australians to stop going backwards really says it all, that he doesn't understand anything about what's happening in the household budget at the moment.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 11.52pm BST

block-time published-time 11.42pm BST

Jane Hume then seemingly defends Scott Morrison's criticism of barristers and lawyers yesterday as being taken out of context:

Q: Where have we become, as a nation, when the Prime Minister of Australia yesterday said that he has no truck with barristers and lawyers?

Hume:

Well, I don't think he said that he has no truck with the legal system.

Q: No, no. No. He said - I'm going to read the quote here. "They disagree with me all the time. I have never had much truck with them - bars and lawyers - over the course of my entire political career."

Hume:

I'm not entirely sure of the context of that comment but I can assure you the Prime Minister upholds the rule of law and respects the legal profession.

Q: The Bar Association is very angry about this. Matt Collins QC, who you probably know, a prominent silk in Melbourne, said this is an attack on Australia's hard-working 6,500 barristers, making the point - which really doesn't have to be made - barristers and lawyers are a key part of the system in Australia in terms of administering justice. Again, where are we at in a country with the Prime Minister saying he has no truck with barristers and lawyers.

Hume:

I don't think this is a comment worth taking out of context.

Q: Well, the context is he was asked about the ICAC, his criticisms of the New South Wales ICAC, which he stood behind and then he pivoted to this. I'll read the quote again. "They disagree with me all the time" - this is barristers and former judges who criticised the Prime Minister for criticising the New South Wales ICAC - "they disagree with me all the time. I've never had much truck with them over the course of my political career".

Hume:

In the context of the Icac, the Government wants to make sure there is a Commonwealth integrity commission introduced in the life this parliament but we want to make sure that it's one that presumes innocence, not guilt, that it doesn't turn into a show trial, that it isn't simply Icac on 24/7TV. We want to make sure it delivers integrity.

Q: Do you agree that ICAC is kangaroo court?

Hume:

I didn't say that. The Prime Minister said that.

Q: What do you think of the Prime Minister describing it as a kangaroo court?

Hume:

We want to make sure - I do, as the Prime Minister, and the Coalition Government - that any Commonwealth integrity commission delivers justice, it delivers a presumption of innocence and it doesn't deliver a show trial which is exactly what the Prime Minister is objecting too.

block-time published-time 11.39pm BST

Talking points on Katherine Deves have obviously been sent out to Coalition MPs - compare this interview with Jane Hume to the earlier post on Stuart Robert talking on the same subject.

Q: The Liberal candidate for Warringah says transgender people who transition are surgically mutilated. The prime minister has defended those comments. Do you defend those comments?

Hume:

I think that Katherine Deves is fighting for an important cause, which is fairness for women in sport...

(There are already rules in place for most sporting codes to handle trans people in sport.)

Q: Yeah, she is fighting that cause, but I will stick to the question. This has to do with her assertion that transgender people are mutilated - mutilated - when they transition. Do you, like the prime minister did yesterday, defend those comments?

Hume:

I would not use those words. I wouldn't use them on social media, and I wouldn't use them in conversation with you or anyone. That said, Katherine Deves is fighting for an important cause.

Q: Should that have been what the prime minister said yesterday?

Hume:

I'm not going to pass judgement on what the prime minister did or didn't say. But the most important thing is Katherine Deves is fighting for an important cause, which is fairness for women being able to play in sport fairly and equally.

Q: She's making that argument but again she goes back to her assertions on transgender people. How do you think that will play - and you've been campaigning in seats under threat from teal independents in Melbourne - how will that play with the campaigns of Tim Wilson in Goldstein, Josh Frydenberg in Kooyong?

Hume:

I think there's an awful lot of women in those seats that want to make sure that they and their daughters can play fairly and equally in sport. In sport.

Q: How would parents of [trans children], for argument's sake, feel about the comments of Katherine Deves?

Hume:

I'm not going to second-guess how people would feel about those comments. Suffice to say...

Q: You don't think they'd be, at the very least, upset?

Hume:

These are sensitive issues and should be approached cautiously, making sure our language is not insensitive in the way it's expressed, because these are important issues and we know that particularly transgender children are some of the most vulnerable people in our society.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 11.45pm BST

block-time published-time 11.34pm BST

On the issue of wage growth, Paul Karp has taken a look at some of the issues:

Jim Stanford, the director of the Centre for Future Work, told Guardian Australia that 'wages didn't cause the current inflation', which he blamed on "supply chains, the oil price spike, and an initial surge in post-pandemic spending".

'Telling workers they need to just swallow a permanent reduction in earnings, as a result of inflation they didn't cause, in order to prevent future inflation, is neither fair nor economically justified,' he said.

Stanford is a co-author of a report titled The Wages Crisis: Revisited that finds that since 2013, nominal wages have become locked into a trajectory of about 2% growth a year, about half the rate of before 2013.

Scott Morrison has argued during the election campaign that there is no 'magic pen' that can drive wages higher, and only low unemployment can do that.

But the report, also co-authored by professor Andrew Stewart and associate professor Tess Hardy, finds there is no systematic relationship between wage growth and labour demand and that Australia has had among the weakest wage growth in the OECD despite stronger macro conditions.

Related: [*Industry warns 'small business can't afford it' after Albanese backs 5.1% minimum wage rise*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/may/11/industry-warns-small-business-cant-afford-it-after-albanese-backs-51-minimum-wage-rise)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 11.37pm BST

block-time published-time 11.28pm BST

Q: What does it say to you - and what should voters read from the fact that you've been in power for eight and a half years and real wages have been anaemic at best?

Jane Hume:

We know this is not just an issue in Australia. I wouldn't say anaemic. In fact, real wages have grown.

Q: Not by much, though.

Hume:

They haven't grown at the rate we would like to see, but that's because of a number of issues, and it's not just Australia that has experienced [them].

Q: But you've had eight and a half years in power to address this problem. Surely voters can look back at that and ask serious questions as to, what has the Coalition done to improve my lot?

Hume:

I think the most important statistic that Australian voters should take to this election is that unemployment is so ***exceptionally*** low. It's at 4% and looks like heading below that.

Of course, when there is low unemployment, employers think differently. They think what can I do to attract and retain the best employees? What do I pay them? What are my workplace standards? What is going to bring the best and the brightest to my business?

That changes the dial. We haven't included the fact - and the RBA did in its decision-making around interest rates - that around a million people last year, and just in the last couple of months of last year, changed jobs, and they changed jobs for a pay increase of somewhere between 8% and 10%. That only happens when unemployment is ***exceptionally*** low.

That's why the Coalition is committed to another 1.3 million jobs over the next five years, keeping that unemployment rate low - 450,000 of those in the regions as well.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 11.33pm BST

block-time published-time 11.25pm BST

But what does the Coalition think should happen, given inflation? Hume says:

The Fair Work Commission will make its decision based on all sorts of information - the cost of living and making sure wage rises are sustainable, fair and appropriate in the future, that they won't necessarily throw the economy so out of whack that interest rates end up rising and inflation ends up rising as well.

We want to make sure the economy is sustained at a steady growth rate. Too high wage rises would disrupt that.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 11.30pm BST

block-time published-time 11.24pm BST

Jane Hume was on ABC News Breakfast making the government's case against Anthony Albanese 's support for a minimum wage increase in line with inflation:

What's wrong is Anthony Albanese weighing in on the independent Fair Work Commission's decision as to what it should do with minimum wages.

That would be ***unprecedented***. No government should weigh in on the Fair Work Commission's decision.

The government, of course, provides the Fair Work Commission with information and data around how to make that decision, but it certainly doesn't weigh in with a position.

The Fair Work Commission is independent, just like the RBA is independent on interest rates.

The Fair Work Commission should always remain independent on minimum wages.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 11.26pm BST

block-time published-time 11.14pm BST

Patricia Karvelas asks Stuart Robert if the government is "using trans people as political footballs".

Robert:

No, not at all. I just want people to have respectful conversations and let the words be seasoned with grace.

Some conversations are difficult, and we should just be respectful.

We should have them - we should talk through the issues as a society because they are important.

PK: 10 days out from polling day, do you really think this is a top-order issue for Australians?

Robert:

My personal view is not, but it seems to be a top order issue for many journalists.

PK: You're blaming journalists for your own candidate in Warringah?

Robert:

There's no blame. But I'm happy to have a conversation, as is anyone standing for office, that the Australian people may may raise.

If I look at my own electorate, the biggest issue that people raise is cost of living, but I won't shy away from any other conversation that people may seek to raise.

And I'd simply say to other Australians to echo the prime minister's words, let's have a graceful conversation.

Robert adopted exactly the same vocal tone as the prime minister as he discussed these issues, almost down to the same vocal inflections.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 11.22pm BST

block-time published-time 11.10pm BST

Stuart Robert and RN Breakfast host Patricia Karvelas have had a circular conversation about Katherine Deve's comments about trans people and Scott Morrison's ongoing support for his handpicked candidate.

Q: The prime minister has doubled down on his defence of Katherine Deves's comments about transgender mutilation. Do you accept that that can't be helping these MPs, including your own treasurer, in these seats that are being challenged [by teal independents]?

Robert:

It is a difficult topic. They're not words that I would use. The prime minister made this point yesterday they are not words that he would use. The issue is about girls and sport and there are some families struggling with some real issues and identity, we understand that.

We'd like to have a civil, a gentle conversation. I think seasoned with grace would be a good way to explain it because it is a difficult issue. It is an emotive issue, but a bit more graceful words I think would go a long way.

PK : Okay, so the prime minister said gender reversal\* surgery for young adolescents, you know, is something that it's you can't go back on but there's no gender reversal surgery for young adolescents. That's what the doctors have told us. They're the facts minister. Why did the prime minister get it wrong?

[\*It is gender confirmation or affirmation surgery.]

Robert:

I don't believe the prime minister did get it wrong.

PK: But there is no gender [confirmation] surgery for people under 18. Do you accept that?

Robert:

I'll leave that to the medical experts because I'm not the health minister, so I can't comment on something I'm not across in terms of the health advice in that respect.

The key issue here is if there's to be a national conversation, and there should be on all issues that are difficult, let's do it respectfully, let's use language that is gracious. Let's lift people up, not tear them down. It's difficult for families. So we should talk about the issues. We should talk about girls and sport. We should talk about...

PK: You say that. You talk about this as if this kind of approach should be taken. But isn't it your own candidate and your own government, that's been fuelling a very, very divisive debate on this?

Robert:

And again, I'll go back to the prime minister's comments yesterday that they're not words he would use and certainly not words...

PK: But he's stood by her and she's using them.

Robert:

Well, we should stand by people who stand up for what they believe in. Ms Deves is a strong...

PK: Even if what you believe in is using divisive language, when just a moment ago, you told me that divisive language shouldn't be used?

Robert:

It shouldn't be used.

PK: So why stand by her?

Robert:

Because she's a strong passionate woman who's got something to say. Now, I may disagree with some of the words and terms she uses. But she is trying to stand up for something she's passionate about and have a conversation about it.

PK: What's the conversation you're trying to have?

Robert:

The conversation she seeking to have is about girls playing girls in sport.

PK: No - she's made comments about mutilation, trans people being mutilated, that's not about playing sport, minister.

Robert :

And again, they're not words that we would use.

PK: And yet she's been backed by the prime minister.

Robert:

Because it's an important issue she's raising about girls in sport.

PK : What is the issue?

Robert:

That when it comes to sport, girls play against girls, and those that were ostensibly biologically male, who then make a choice to become a girl, that that becomes uncompetitive in sport.

That's the conversation she's having. That's what she's stood up for. That's her sense of belief. So let's have the conversation. But we'd encourage everyone to do it gracefully.

[It should be noted that there are already rules in place to deal with trans people playing sport.]

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 11.19pm BST

block-time published-time 10.48pm BST

Stuart Robert is outraged over Anthony Albanese's stated support for a 5.1% minimum wage increase, as he speaks to ABC radio's RN Breakfast.

The last thing you want is political leaders providing commentary on what the independent umpire should do.

But when asked about the inflationary pressure of the government's own spending, Robert says that is completely different.

Treasury makes the point that the cost of living adjustment package in the budget did not have a deleterious effect in terms of of inflation, and the budgetary supports we provided were designed to assist Australians because we could see the external inflationary pressures coming upon our shores.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 10.51pm BST

block-time published-time 10.41pm BST

Good morning

It's the 31st day of the election campaign and we are still talking about all the things which dominated day one - it's all just more intense now.

The third and final debate, this time hosted by the Seven Network, will be held tonight (after Big Brother) and comes at a time when both leaders are increasingly desperate to paint the other one as the risky desperado.

Scott Morrison thinks he has an in with Anthony Albanese's assertion yesterday he "absolutely" would support a minimum wage increase of 5.1% to match inflation. Morrison is going with the "economic vandal" line - despite inflation expected to rise to about 6%.

Stagnant wage growth over the last few years (in real terms) has meant people have less money to spend as prices increase, and without a wage increase, they'll have even less income. Keeping wages at pace with the cost of living means people can continue to buy the same amount of goods. If prices keep going up and wages don't, cuts have to be made somewhere, meaning businesses lose out.

Morrison has seized on the line that a wage increase in line with inflation would only increase inflationary pressures, meaning rates would continue to rise and the cycle continues. But a 5.1% pay increase in a 5.1% inflation increase world wouldn't mean people would have extra money - they would just be able to buy the same amount as they would have before inflation rose. You'll be hearing more and more on that, though, over the next 10 days.

Meanwhile, Albanese will continue to push Morrison on a federal integrity commission, as the prime minister triples down on his attacks on NSW's Icac. There's also the not small issue of a new report showing 91% of the Great Barrier Reef's coral reefs have been impacted by bleaching.

(We haven't heard a huge amount from the environment minister this campaign.)

enltr'Devastating': 90% of reefs surveyed on Great Barrier Reef affected by coral bleaching in 2022 [*https://t.co/bUOsowtcHe*](https://t.co/bUOsowtcHe) [*@adamlmorton*](https://twitter.com/adamlmorton?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) [*@\_LisaMCox*](https://twitter.com/_LisaMCox?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) [*#auspol*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/auspol?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

- Katharine Murphy (@murpharoo) [*May 10, 2022*](https://twitter.com/murpharoo/status/1524137936383463426?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

We will bring you all the day's events. It's a five-coffee minimum these days. I'm on my second and it's barely hitting the sides.

Ready? I know the feeling. My left eye won't stop twitching, but alas, we all have work to do.

Let's get into it.

**Load-Date:** May 11, 2022

**End of Document**



[***Federal Register: Extension and Redesignation of South Sudan for Temporary Protected Status Pages 12190 - 12201 [FR DOC #2022-04573]***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:64XS-XNS1-JDG9-Y3NG-00000-00&context=1516831)

Impact News Service

March 5, 2022 Saturday

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**Length:** 14930 words

**Body**

Washington: Office of the Federal Register has issued the following notice:DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITYU.S Citizenship and Immigration Services[CIS No. 2712-22; DHS Docket No. USCIS-2014-004]RIN 1615-ZB79Extension and Redesignation of South Sudan for Temporary Protected StatusAGENCY: U.S Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), Department of Homeland Security (DHS).ACTION: Notice.-----------------------------------------------------------------------SUMMARY: Through this notice, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) announces that the Secretary of Homeland Security (Secretary) is extending the designation of South Sudan for Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for 18 months, from May 3, 2022, through November 3, 2023, and redesignating South Sudan for 18 months, effective May 3, 2022, through November 3, 2023. The extension allows currently eligible TPS beneficiaries to retain TPS through November 3, 2023, so long as they otherwise continue to meet the eligibility requirements for TPS. The redesignation of South Sudan allows additional individuals who have been continuously residing in the United States since March 1, 2022, to obtain TPS, if otherwise eligible.DATES: Extension of Designation of South Sudan for TPS: The 18-month extension of the TPS designation of South Sudan is effective May 3, 2022, and will remain in effect through November 3, 2023. The 60-day re-registration period for existing beneficiaries runs from March 3, 2022, through May 2, 2022. (Note: It is important for re-registrants to timely re-register during this 60-day period and not to wait until their Employment Authorization Documents (EADs) expire, which could result in their having gaps in their employment authorization documentation.) Redesignation of South Sudan for TPS: The 18-month redesignation of South Sudan for TPS is effective May 3, 2022, and will remain in effect through November 3, 2023. The initial registration period for new applicants under the South Sudan TPS redesignation begins on March 3, 2022, and will remain in effect through November 3, 2023.FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: You may contact Ren[aacute] Cutlip-Mason, Chief, Humanitarian Affairs Division, Office of Policy and Strategy, U.S Citizenship and Immigration Services, U.S Department of Homeland Security, by mail at 5900 Capital Gateway Drive, Camp Springs, MD 20746, or by phone at 800-375-5283. For further information on TPS, including guidance on the registration and re-registration ***process*** and additional information on eligibility, please visit the USCIS TPS web page at [*https://www.uscis.gov/tps*](https://www.uscis.gov/tps). You can find specific information about this extension of South Sudan's TPS designation by selecting ``South Sudan'' from the menu on the left side of the TPS web page. If you have additional questions about TPS, please visit uscis.gov/tools. Our online virtual assistant, Emma, can answer many of your questions and point you to additional information on our website. If you are unable to find your answers there, you may also call our USCIS Contact Center at 800-375-5283 (TTY 800-767-1833). Applicants seeking information about the status of their individual cases may check Case Status Online, available on the USCIS website at [*https://www.uscis.gov*](https://www.uscis.gov), or visit the USCIS Contact Center at uscis.gov/contactcenter. Further information will also be available at local USCIS offices upon publication of this notice.SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:Table of AbbreviationsBIA--Board of Immigration AppealsCFR--Code of Federal RegulationsDHS--U.S Department of Homeland SecurityDOS--U.S Department of StateEAD--Employment Authorization DocumentFNC--Final NonconfirmationForm I-765--Application for Employment AuthorizationForm I-797--Notice of ActionForm I-821--Application for Temporary Protected StatusForm I-9--Employment Eligibility VerificationForm I-912--Request for Fee WaiverForm I-94--Arrival/Departure RecordFR--Federal RegisterGovernment--U.S GovernmentIER--U.S Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division, Immigrant and Employee Rights SectionIJ--Immigration JudgeINA--Immigration and Nationality ActSAVE--USCIS Systematic Alien Verification for Entitlements ProgramSecretary--Secretary of Homeland SecurityTNC--Tentative NonconfirmationTPS--Temporary Protected StatusTTY--Text TelephoneUSCIS--U.S Citizenship and Immigration ServicesU.S.C --United States Code Through this notice, DHS sets forth procedures necessary for eligible nationals of South Sudan (or individuals having no nationality who last habitually resided in South Sudan) to (1) re-register for TPS and to apply for renewal of their EADs with USCIS or (2) submit an initial registration application under the redesignation and apply for an EAD. Re-registration is limited to individuals who have previously registered for TPS under a prior designation of South Sudan and whose applications have been granted. Failure to re-register properly may result in the withdrawal of your TPS following appropriate procedures. See 8 CFR 244.14 For individuals who have already been granted TPS under South Sudan's designation, the 60-day re-registration period runs from March 3, 2022, through May 2, 2022. USCIS will issue new EADs with a November 3, 2023, expiration date to eligible South Sudanese TPS beneficiaries who timely re-register and apply for EADs. Given the time frames involved with ***processing*** TPS re-registration applications, DHS recognizes that not all re-registrants may receive new EADs before their current EADs expire on May 2, 2022. Accordingly, through this Federal Register notice, DHS automatically extends the validity of EADs previously issued under the TPS designation of South Sudan for 180 days, through November 1, 2022. Therefore, TPS beneficiaries can show their EADs with: (1) A May 2, 2022, expiration date on the face of the card and (2) an A-12 or C-19 category code as proof of continued employment authorization through November 1, 2022. This notice explains how TPS beneficiaries and their employers may determine which EADs are automatically extended and how this affects the Form I-9, Employment Eligibility Verification, E-Verify, and USCIS Systematic Alien Verification for Entitlements (SAVE) ***processes***. Individuals who have a South Sudan TPS application (Form I-821) and/or Application for Employment Authorization (Form I-765) that was still pending as of March 3, 2022, do not need to file either application again. If USCIS approves an individual's Form I-821, USCIS will grant the individual TPS through November 3, 2023. Similarly, if USCIS approves a pending TPS-related Form I-765, USCIS will issue the individual a new EAD that will be valid through the same date. There are currently approximately 97 beneficiaries under South Sudan's TPS designation. Under the redesignation, individuals who currently do not have TPS may[[Page 12191]]submit an initial application during the initial registration period that runs from March 3, 2022, and runs through the full length of the redesignation period ending November 3, 2023.\1\ In addition to demonstrating continuous residence in the United States since March 1, 2022 and meeting other eligibility criteria, initial applicants for TPS under this redesignation must demonstrate that they have been continuously physically present in the United States since March 3, 2022, the effective date of this redesignation of South Sudan, before USCIS may grant them TPS. The DHS Office of Immigration Statistics has estimated that approximately 235 individuals may become newly eligible for TPS under the redesignation of South Sudan.--------------------------------------------------------------------------- \1\ In general, individuals must be given an initial registration period of no less than 180 days to register for TPS, but the Secretary has discretion to provide for a longer registration period. See 8 U.S.C 1254a(c)(1)(A)(iv). Historically, the length of the initial registration period has varied. Compare 66 FR 14214 (March 9, 2001) (18 months initial registration period for applicants under TPS designation for El Salvador) with 80 FR 36346 (June 24, 2015) (180-day initial registration period for applicants under TPS designation for Nepal). In recent years, this period has generally been limited to the statutory minimum of 180 days, although later extensions of the initial registration period have also been announced for some countries. See, e.g , 81 FR 4051 (Jan. 25, 2016) (setting 180-day initial registration period during extension and redesignation of South Sudan for TPS); 78 FR 1866 (Jan. 9, 2013) (setting 180-day initial registration period during extension and redesignation of Sudan for TPS); 75 FR 39957 (July 13, 2010) (extension of previously announced initial 180-day registration period for Haiti TPS applicants to allow more time for individuals to apply). After evaluating whether to limit the initial registration period for TPS under this new designation of South Sudan to the statutory minimum of 180 days, DHS has determined that it will provide the full 18 months of this designation for applicants to file their initial registration Form I-821 and, if desired, Form I-765 to obtain employment authorization documentation. Limiting the initial registration period to 180 days may place a burden on applicants who may be otherwise eligible for TPS. In addition, permitting registration throughout the entirety of the designation period could reduce the operational burden on USCIS, as incoming applications may be spread out over a longer period of time. This extended registration period is both in keeping with the humanitarian purpose of TPS and will better advance the goal of ensuring ``the Federal Government eliminates sources of fear and other barriers that prevent immigrants from accessing government services available to them.'' See Executive Order 14012, Restoring Faith in Our Legal Immigration Systems and Strengthening Integration and Inclusion Efforts for New Americans, 86 FR 8277 (Feb. 5, 2021).---------------------------------------------------------------------------What is temporary protected status (TPS)? TPS is a temporary immigration status granted to eligible nationals of a country designated for TPS under the INA, or to eligible individuals without nationality who last habitually resided in the designated country. During the TPS designation period, TPS beneficiaries are eligible to remain in the United States, may not be removed, and are authorized to obtain EADs so long as they continue to meet the requirements of TPS. TPS beneficiaries may also apply for and be granted travel authorization as a matter of discretion. Upon return from such authorized travel, TPS beneficiaries retain the same immigration status they had prior to the travel. To qualify for TPS, beneficiaries must meet the eligibility standards at INA section 244(c)(1)-(2), 8 U.S.C 1254a(c)(1)-(2). When the Secretary terminates a country's TPS designation, beneficiaries return to one of the following: [cir] The same immigration status or category that they maintained before TPS, if any (unless that status or category has since expired or been terminated); or [cir] Any other lawfully obtained immigration status or category they received while registered for TPS, as long as it is still valid beyond the date TPS terminates.When was South Sudan designated for TPS? South Sudan was initially designated on October 13, 2011, on the dual bases of ongoing armed conflict and extraordinary and temporary conditions in South Sudan that prevented nationals of South Sudan from safely returning. See Designation of Republic of South Sudan for Temporary Protected Status, 76 FR 63629 (Oct. 13, 2011). Following the initial designation, the Secretary extended and redesignated South Sudan for TPS in 2013, 2014, and 2016. See Extension and Redesignation of South Sudan for Temporary Protected Status, 78 FR 1866 (Jan. 9, 2013); Extension and Redesignation of South Sudan for Temporary Protected Status, 79 FR 52019 (Sept. 2, 2014); Extension and Redesignation of South Sudan for Temporary Protected Status, 81 FR 4051 (Jan. 25, 2016). In 2017 and 2019, DHS extended TPS for South Sudan, based on ongoing armed conflict and extraordinary and temporary conditions. See Extension of South Sudan for Temporary Protected Status, 82 FR 44205 (Sept. 21, 2017); Extension of the Designation of South Sudan for Temporary Protected Status, 84 FR 13688 (Apr. 5, 2019). Most recently, in 2020, DHS extended South Sudan's TPS designation for 18 months, based on ongoing armed conflict and extraordinary and temporary conditions. See Extension of the Designation of South Sudan for Temporary Protected Status, 85 FR 69344 (Nov. 2, 2020).What authority does the Secretary have to extend the designation of South Sudan for TPS? Section 244(b)(1) of the INA, 8 U.S.C 1254a(b)(1), authorizes the Secretary, after consultation with appropriate agencies of the U.S Government (Government), to designate a foreign state (or part thereof) for TPS if the Secretary determines that certain country conditions exist.\2\ The decision to designate any foreign state (or part thereof) is a discretionary decision, and the TPS statute states that there is no judicial review of any determination with respect to the designation, extension, or termination of a designation.\3\ The Secretary, in their discretion, may then grant TPS to eligible nationals of that foreign state (or individuals having no nationality who last habitually resided in the designated country). See INA section 244(a)(1)(A), 8 U.S.C 1254a(a)(1)(A).--------------------------------------------------------------------------- \2\ As of March 1, 2003, in accordance with section 1517 of title XV of the Homeland Security Act of 2002, Public Law 107-296, 116 Stat. 2135, any reference to the Attorney General in a provision of the INA describing functions transferred from the Department of Justice to DHS ``shall be deemed to refer to the Secretary'' of Homeland Security. See 6 U.S.C 557 (codifying the Homeland Security Act of 2002, tit. XV, section 1517). \3\ See INA, section 244(b)(5)(A). This issue of judicial review is the subject of litigation. See, e.g , Ramos v. Wolf, 975 F.3d 872 (9th Cir. 2020), petition for en banc rehearing filed Nov. 30, 2020 (No. 18-16981); Saget v. Trump, 375 F. Supp. 3d 280 (E.D.N.Y 2019).--------------------------------------------------------------------------- At least 60 days before the expiration of a country's TPS designation or extension, the Secretary, after consultation with appropriate Government agencies, must review the conditions in the foreign state designated for TPS to determine whether the conditions for the TPS designation continue to be met. See INA section 244(b)(3)(A), 8 U.S.C 1254a(b)(3)(A). If the Secretary does not determine that the foreign state no longer meets the conditions for TPS designation, the designation will be extended for an additional period of 6 months or, in the Secretary's discretion, 12 or 18 months. See INA section 244(b)(3)(A), (C), 8 U.S.C 1254a(b)(3)(A), (C). If the Secretary determines that the foreign state no longer meets the conditions for TPS designation, the Secretary must terminate the designation. See INA section 244(b)(3)(B), 8 U.S.C 1254a(b)(3)(B).[[Page 12192]]What is the Secretary's authority to redesignate South Sudan for TPS? In addition to extending an existing TPS designation, the Secretary, after consultation with appropriate Government agencies, may redesignate a country (or part thereof) for TPS. See section 244(b)(1) of the Act, 8 U.S.C 1254a(b)(1); see also section 244(c)(1)(A)(i) of the Act, 8 U.S.C 1254a(c)(1)(A)(i) (requiring that ``the alien has been continuously physically present since the effective date of the most recent designation of the state'') (emphasis added).\4\--------------------------------------------------------------------------- \4\ The extension and redesignation of TPS for South Sudan is one of several instances in which the Secretary and, prior to the establishment of DHS, the Attorney General, have simultaneously extended a country's TPS designation and redesignated the country for TPS. See, e.g , 76 FR 29000 (May 19, 2011) (extension and redesignation for Haiti); 69 FR 60168 (Oct. 7, 2004) (extension and redesignation for Sudan); 62 FR 16608 (Apr. 7, 1997) (extension and redesignation for Liberia).--------------------------------------------------------------------------- When the Secretary designates or redesignates a country for TPS, the Secretary also has the discretion to establish the date from which TPS applicants must demonstrate that they have been ``continuously resid[ing]'' in the United States. See section 244(c)(1)(A)(ii) of the Act, 8 U.S.C 1254a(c)(1)(A)(ii). The Secretary has determined that the ``continuous residence'' date for applicants for TPS under the redesignation of South Sudan shall be March 1, 2022. Initial applicants for TPS under this redesignation must also show they have been ``continuously physically present'' in the United States since March 3, 2022, which is the effective date of the Secretary's redesignation, of South Sudan. See section 244(c)(1)(A)(i) of the Act, 8 U.S.C 1254a(c)(1)(A)(i). For each initial TPS application filed under the redesignation, the final determination of whether the applicant has met the ``continuous physical presence'' requirement cannot be made until March 3, 2022. USCIS, however, will issue employment authorization documentation, as appropriate, during the registration period in accordance with 8 CFR 244.5(b).Why is the Secretary extending the TPS designation for South Sudan and simultaneously redesignating South Sudan for TPS through November 3, 2023? DHS has reviewed country conditions in South Sudan. Based on the review, including consultation with the Department of State (DOS), the Secretary has determined that an 18-month extension is warranted because the ongoing armed conflict and extraordinary and temporary conditions supporting South Sudan's TPS designation persist. The Secretary has further determined that the conditions support redesignating South Sudan for TPS under section 244(b)(1)(A) and (C) of the Act and is changing the ``continuous residence'' and ``continuous physical presence'' dates that applicants must meet to be eligible for TPS. Armed conflict and extraordinary and temporary conditions in South Sudan persist. Armed conflict poses a serious threat to the safety of returning nationals in South Sudan. Despite a 2018 ceasefire of South Sudan's civil war, ongoing fighting between the major armed groups continue to result in violence against civilians, including civilian casualties and gender-based violence, in several large areas of the country. Extraordinary and temporary conditions that further prevent South Sudanese nationals from returning in safety include an ***exceptional*** level of intercommunal violence, a humanitarian crisis involving severe food insecurity, record-setting flooding, and large-scale displacement of civilians. Since February 2020, limited implementation of the September 2018 Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS) \5\ ``has hindered improvements in the protection of civilians and prospects for long-term peace'' in South Sudan.\6\ Moreover, ongoing political disputes and disagreements between the two main signatories--the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM), led by President Salva Kiir Mayardit, and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-Army in Opposition (SPLM/A-IO), led by the First Vice-President, Riek Machar Teny, ``has widened existing political, military and ethnic divisions in the country and has led to multiple incidents of violence'' between the two parties.\7\ Political divisions among the non-signatories \8\ to the R-ARCSS have also not been resolved.\9\ Moreover, the SPLM/A-IO has begun to break apart and new splinter groups have formed,\10\ resulting in increased violence.\11\--------------------------------------------------------------------------- \5\ The Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS) was signed on September 12, 2018 by President Kiir, current First Vice President Riek Machar Teny, and other representatives of certain opposition groups. A prior peace agreement was signed in 2015 and a unity government was formed; however, fighting ensued between the parties in July 2016 and Machar left South Sudan shortly thereafter. The R-ARCSS addresses various political, security, and transitional justice issues, including the establishment of a unity government. However, not all of South Sudan's opposition leaders signed the agreement, including a key opposition group, the National Salvation Front (NAS). South Sudan Security Situation, EASO, April 24, 2020, pg. 3, available at: [*https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2028851/2020\_04\_Q8\_COI\_South\_Sudan\_Security\_Situation.pdf*](https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2028851/2020_04_Q8_COI_South_Sudan_Security_Situation.pdf). \6\ Panel of Experts on South Sudan, United Nations (UN) Security Council, April 15, 2021, pg. 2, available at: [*https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/final-report-panel-experts-south-sudan-submitted-pursuant-resolution-2521-2020*](https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/final-report-panel-experts-south-sudan-submitted-pursuant-resolution-2521-2020). \7\ Panel of Experts on South Sudan, UN Security Council, April 15, 2021, pg. 2, available at: [*https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/final-report-panel-experts-south-sudan-submitted-pursuant-resolution-2521-2020*](https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/final-report-panel-experts-south-sudan-submitted-pursuant-resolution-2521-2020). \8\ Previously united under one umbrella group--the South Sudan Opposition Movements Alliance--non-signatories of the R-ARCSS have divided into two factions, one led by General Thomas Cirillo Swaka, the leader of the National Salvation Front (``NAS''), and another led by General Pagan Amum and General Paul Malong Awan Anei. Panel of Experts on South Sudan, UN Security Council, April 15 2021, pg. 9, available at: [*https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/final-report-panel-experts-south-sudan-submitted-pursuant-resolution-2521-2020*](https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/final-report-panel-experts-south-sudan-submitted-pursuant-resolution-2521-2020). \9\ Panel of Experts on South Sudan, UN Security Council, April 15, 2021, pg. 9, available at: [*https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/final-report-panel-experts-south-sudan-submitted-pursuant-resolution-2521-2020*](https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/final-report-panel-experts-south-sudan-submitted-pursuant-resolution-2521-2020). \10\ See id. \11\ SURFACE TENSION: `COMMUNAL' VIOLENCE AND ELITE AMBITIONS IN SOUTH SUDAN, ACLED, August 19, 2021, available at: [*https://acleddata.com/2021/08/19/surface-tension-communal-violence-and-elite-ambitions-in-south-sudan/.---------------------------------------------------------------------------*](https://acleddata.com/2021/08/19/surface-tension-communal-violence-and-elite-ambitions-in-south-sudan/.---------------------------------------------------------------------------) Thus, South Sudan faces increasing violence \12\ from both government security forces and armed groups.\13\ In 2020, the United Nations (UN) and international organizations reported on ``widespread killings, mutilations, and sexual violence, disproportionately committed by government forces but also by the National Salvation Front \14\ (NAS), a key opposition group.'' \15\ In March 2021, the UN Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan noted that armed clashes at the local level also resulted in the mass displacement of the civilian population, particularly women and girls.\16\ Children are among those[[Page 12193]]feeling the greatest impact of this violence, which--along with other factors--is exposing them to protection risks and life-threatening diseases.\17\ Moreover, sexual violence--including rape, gang rape, abduction, sexual slavery, and sexual mutilation remain ``consistent features of the conflict in South Sudan since 2013, and are now being replicated in conflict at the local level.'' \18\--------------------------------------------------------------------------- \12\ See id. \13\ Panel of Experts on South Sudan, UN Security Council, April 15, 2021, pg. 15, available at: [*https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/final-report-panel-experts-south-sudan-submitted-pursuant-resolution-2521-2020*](https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/final-report-panel-experts-south-sudan-submitted-pursuant-resolution-2521-2020). \14\ The opposition group NAS is led by General Thomas Cirillo Swaka, and has maintained a significant security presence and support in Central Equatoria. NAS is not a signatory to the R-ARCSS, maintaining that the root causes of the conflict in South Sudan have not been addressed in the peace agreement. See Final report of the Panel of Experts on South Sudan, UN Security Council, April 28, 2020, pg. 16, available at: [*https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/final-report-panel-experts-south-sudan-submitted-pursuant-resolution-2521-2020*](https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/final-report-panel-experts-south-sudan-submitted-pursuant-resolution-2521-2020). \15\ 2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: South Sudan, U.S Department of State, March 31, 2021, section 1, available at: [*https://www.state.gov/reports/2020-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/south-sudan/*](https://www.state.gov/reports/2020-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/south-sudan/). \16\ Report of the Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan, UN Human Rights Council, February 4, 2021, pg. 14, available at: [*https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2046934/A\_HRC\_46\_53\_E.pdf*](https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2046934/A_HRC_46_53_E.pdf). \17\ South Sudan Humanitarian Situation Report, UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), December 30, 2021, pg. 2, available at: [*https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/unicef-south-sudan-humanitarian-situation-report-no-163-1-30-november-2021*](https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/unicef-south-sudan-humanitarian-situation-report-no-163-1-30-november-2021). \18\ Report of the Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan, UN Human Rights Council, February 4, 2021, pg. 14; available at: [*https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2046934/A\_HRC\_46\_53\_E.pdf.---------------------------------------------------------------------------*](https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2046934/A_HRC_46_53_E.pdf.---------------------------------------------------------------------------) Humanitarian organizations in South Sudan continue to face security and bureaucratic barriers that affect the delivery of and access to humanitarian aid and pose ``serious personal risks to aid workers.'' \19\--------------------------------------------------------------------------- \19\ Panel of Experts on South Sudan, UN Security Council, April 15, 2021, pg. 16, available at: [*https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/final-report-panel-experts-south-sudan-submitted-pursuant-resolution-2521-2020.---------------------------------------------------------------------------*](https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/final-report-panel-experts-south-sudan-submitted-pursuant-resolution-2521-2020.---------------------------------------------------------------------------) Moreover, in 2021, ``widespread flooding, ongoing violence, and subsequent displacement continued to deepen humanitarian needs in South Sudan.'' \20\ As a result, South Sudan is also facing ``one of the direst food crises the country has faced since its independence in 2011.'' \21\ Chronic food shortages, a deepening economic crisis, insecurity, and limited ***agricultural*** production have led to high levels of acute malnutrition.\22\ South Sudan's health care infrastructure also remains inadequate.\23\ Facilities are limited, often inaccessible, and facing staffing shortages amongst ongoing insecurity and violence.\24\--------------------------------------------------------------------------- \20\ Situation in South Sudan; Report of the Secretary-General, UN Security Council, December 7, 2021 pg. 5, available at: [*https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2065323/S\_2021\_1015\_E.pdf*](https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2065323/S_2021_1015_E.pdf). \21\ Panel of Experts on South Sudan, UN Security Council, April 15, 2021, pg. 15, available at: [*https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/final-report-panel-experts-south-sudan-submitted-pursuant-resolution-2521-2020*](https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/final-report-panel-experts-south-sudan-submitted-pursuant-resolution-2521-2020). \22\ South Sudan Humanitarian Fund Annual Report 2020, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), July 6, 2021, pg. 7, available at: [*https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/south-sudan-humanitarian-fund-annual-report-2020*](https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/south-sudan-humanitarian-fund-annual-report-2020). \23\ South Sudan--Strengthening primary health care in fragile settings, World Health Organization, May 20, 2021, available at: [*https://www.who.int/news-room/feature-stories/detail/south-sudan-2021*](https://www.who.int/news-room/feature-stories/detail/south-sudan-2021). \24\ South Sudan--Strengthening primary health care in fragile settings, World Health Organization, May 20, 2021, available at: [*https://www.who.int/news-room/feature-stories/detail/south-sudan-2021.---------------------------------------------------------------------------Numbers*](https://www.who.int/news-room/feature-stories/detail/south-sudan-2021.---------------------------------------------------------------------------Numbers) at a Glance The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) provided the following key statistics for South Sudan in a January 19, 2022 Fact Sheet: \25\--------------------------------------------------------------------------- \25\ South Sudan--Crisis, Fact Sheet #2 Fiscal Year 2022, U.S Agency for International Development (USAID), January 19, 2022, available at: [*https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/south-sudan-complex-emergency-fact-sheet-2-fiscal-year-fy-2022*](https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/south-sudan-complex-emergency-fact-sheet-2-fiscal-year-fy-2022). Number of people in need of Humanitarian Assistance: 8,300,000 \26\ (per UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) as of March 2021)--------------------------------------------------------------------------- \26\ According to UNOCHA, as of January 2021 the total population of South Sudan is 12.1 million. South Sudan--Crisis, Fact Sheet #2 Fiscal Year 2022, USAID, January 19, 2022, available at: [*https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/south-sudan-complex-emergency-fact-sheet-2-fiscal-year-fy-2022.---------------------------------------------------------------------------*](https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/south-sudan-complex-emergency-fact-sheet-2-fiscal-year-fy-2022.---------------------------------------------------------------------------) Number of estimated internally displaced persons (IDPs): 2,000,000 (per UNOCHA as of January 2022) Number of people affected by ongoing floods since May 2021: 835,000 (per UNOCHA as of January 2022) Estimated number of refugees from South Sudan in neighboring countries: 2,300,000 (per Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) as of November 2021)Security Situation In June 2021, the UN reported that ``the overall implementation of the R-ARCSS is progressing slowly.'' \27\ Political gridlock over implementation of the political and security aspects of the R-ARCSS have also contributed to insecurity in South Sudan.\28\ The UN further assessed that weak or absent State governance has allowed ``perennial communal and ethnic cleavages,'' while entrenched insecurity contributes to a vicious cycle of livestock raiding and subsequent food insecurity. A weakened rule of law and flagging economic conditions have resulted in increased criminality and the targeting of humanitarian workers.\29\--------------------------------------------------------------------------- \27\ Marking a Decade of Independence, South Sudan Faces Slow Progress, Lingering Violence, Secretary-General's Special Representative Tells Security Council, UN Security Council, June 22, 2021, available at: [*https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/marking-decade-independence-south-sudan-faces-slow-progress-lingering-violence*](https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/marking-decade-independence-south-sudan-faces-slow-progress-lingering-violence). \28\ Panel of Experts on South Sudan, UN Security Council, April 15, 2021, pg. 2, available at: [*https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/final-report-panel-experts-south-sudan-submitted-pursuant-resolution-2521-2020*](https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/final-report-panel-experts-south-sudan-submitted-pursuant-resolution-2521-2020). \29\ Marking a Decade of Independence, South Sudan Faces Slow Progress, Lingering Violence, Secretary-General's Special Representative Tells Security Council, UN Security Council, June 22, 2021, available at: [*https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/marking-decade-independence-south-sudan-faces-slow-progress-lingering-violence.---------------------------------------------------------------------------*](https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/marking-decade-independence-south-sudan-faces-slow-progress-lingering-violence.---------------------------------------------------------------------------) The lack of adequate financial resources and logistical support for the unification, training, and deployment of the South Sudan armed forces, as outlined in the R-ARCSS, remains a significant security challenge.\30\ A key component of the R-ARCSS is the long-term garrisoning (cantonment), registration, screening, selection, training and redeployment of opposition forces and the creation of a unified army of 83,000 soldiers. South Sudanese military cantonment sites and training centers \31\ have made little progress in establishing a unified force, further contributing to a security vacuum in the country.\32\ Security forces in the few cantonment sites often lack access to basic services, such as food, water, sanitation and health care.\33\ In addition, the proliferation and availability of small amounts of ammunition across South Sudan \34\ has ``enabled armed groups not associated with government security forces, such as local militias and cattle-raiding groups, to perpetuate instability'' in the country.\35\--------------------------------------------------------------------------- \30\ Report of the Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan, UN Human Rights Council, March 4, 2021, pg. 4, available at: [*https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2046934/A\_HRC\_46\_53\_E.pdf*](https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2046934/A_HRC_46_53_E.pdf). \31\ Report of the Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan, United Nations General Assembly, January 31, 2020, pg. 6, available at: [*https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2025863/A\_HRC\_43\_56\_E.pdf*](https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2025863/A_HRC_43_56_E.pdf). \32\ Report of the Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan, UN Human Right Council, March 4, 2021, pg. 13, available at: [*https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2046934/A\_HRC\_46\_53\_E.pdf*](https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2046934/A_HRC_46_53_E.pdf). \33\ Report of the Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan [A/HRC/46/53] UN Human Rights Council, March 4, 2021, pg. 4, available at: [*https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2046934/A\_HRC\_46\_53\_E.pdf*](https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2046934/A_HRC_46_53_E.pdf). \34\ Panel of Experts on South Sudan, UN Security Council, April 15, 2021, pg. 21, available at: [*https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/final-report-panel-experts-south-sudan-submitted-pursuant-resolution-2521-2020*](https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/final-report-panel-experts-south-sudan-submitted-pursuant-resolution-2521-2020). \35\ Panel of Experts on South Sudan, UN Security Council, April 15, 2021, pg. 21, available at: [*https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/final-report-panel-experts-south-sudan-submitted-pursuant-resolution-2521-2020.---------------------------------------------------------------------------*](https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/final-report-panel-experts-south-sudan-submitted-pursuant-resolution-2521-2020.---------------------------------------------------------------------------) The U.S Department of State noted in its 2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for South Sudan that: The United Nations, international cease-fire monitors, human rights organizations, and media reported the government, or its agents, committed numerous arbitrary or unlawful killings. Security forces, opposition forces, armed militias affiliated with the government and the opposition, and ethnically based groups were also responsible for widespread extrajudicial killings.\36\--------------------------------------------------------------------------- \36\ 2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: South Sudan, U.S Department of State, March 31, 2021, section 1, available at: [*https://www.state.gov/reports/2020-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/south-sudan/*](https://www.state.gov/reports/2020-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/south-sudan/). Moreover, in 2020, ongoing violence in Jonglei and the Greater Pibor Administration Area was ``the worst[[Page 12194]]recorded since the outbreak of the national conflict in South Sudan in December 2013, with waves of attacks and reprisals that left hundreds of South Sudanese women, men and children dead, maimed or destitute.'' \37\ In March 2021, the UN Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan assessed that ``gross human rightsviolations and abuses amounting to serious violations of international humanitarian law were committed in the context of localized conflicts by armed militias affiliated to the primary parties in conflict--the South Sudan People's Defence Forces (SSPDF) and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement--In Opposition (SPLA-IO).'' \38\ These acts included those'':--------------------------------------------------------------------------- \37\ Report of the Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan UN Human Rights Council, March 4, 2021, pg. 7, available at: [*https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2046934/A\_HRC\_46\_53\_E.pdf*](https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2046934/A_HRC_46_53_E.pdf). \38\ Report of the Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan, UN Human Rights Council, March 4, 2021, pg. 9, available at: [*https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2046934/A\_HRC\_46\_53\_E.pdf.perpetrated*](https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2046934/A_HRC_46_53_E.pdf.perpetrated) against civilians, includ[ing] abductions, forced recruitment (including of children), murder, sexual violence, ill-treatment, looting and the unnecessary destruction of property. Many of these attacks revealed a shocking disregard for civilian lives.\39\--------------------------------------------------------------------------- \39\ Id. In 2021, Upper Nile, Warrap, Lakes, Central Equatoria, and Western Equatoria states were particularly affected by violence ``resulting in displacement, increased protection risks and rights violations, as well as diminished humanitarian access.'' \40\--------------------------------------------------------------------------- \40\ Situation in South Sudan, UN Security Council, September 9, 2021, pg. 4, available at: [*https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2060682/S\_2021\_784\_E.pdf.---------------------------------------------------------------------------Violence*](https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2060682/S_2021_784_E.pdf.---------------------------------------------------------------------------Violence) Against Children Children in South Sudan continued to be victims of what the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary General for Children and Armed Conflict refers to as ``grave violations'' against children.\41\ According to the UN Security Council's 2021 Children and Armed Conflict in South Sudan report, children were recruited by the SPLM/A-IO and the SSPDF.\42\ In addition, hundreds of girls and boys continue to be abducted.\43\ Perpetrators of child abduction included the NAS, SPLM/A-IO, and SSPDF.\44\ Child abuse, including sexual abuse, was reportedly also widespread in South Sudan.\45\--------------------------------------------------------------------------- \41\ To better monitor, prevent, and end these attacks, the United Nations Security Council hasidentified and condemned six grave violations against children in times of war: Killing and maiming of children; recruitment or use of children in armed forces and armed groups; attacks on schools or hospitals; rape or other grave sexual violence; abduction of children; and denial of humanitarian access for children, The Six Grave Violations, Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary General for Children and Armed Conflict, [*https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/six-grave-violations*](https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/six-grave-violations)/ (last visited on January 13, 2022). \42\ Id. \43\ Report of the Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan, United Nations General Assembly, February 4, 2021, pg. 7, available at: [*https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/report-commission-human-rights-south-sudan-ahrc4653*](https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/report-commission-human-rights-south-sudan-ahrc4653). \44\ Children and armed conflict in South Sudan, United Nations Security Council, May 6, 2021, pg. 21, available at: [*https://www.un.org/ga/search/view\_doc.asp?symbol=S/2021/437&Lang=E&Area=UNDOC*](https://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2021/437&Lang=E&Area=UNDOC). \45\ 2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: South Sudan, U.S Department of State, March 31, 2021, section 5, available at: [*https://www.state.gov/reports/2020-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/south-sudan/.---------------------------------------------------------------------------Sexual*](https://www.state.gov/reports/2020-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/south-sudan/.---------------------------------------------------------------------------Sexual) and Gender-Based Violence Sexual and gender-based violence remains a ``hallmark of the conflict in South Sudan.'' \46\ In February 2021, the UN Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan reported that:--------------------------------------------------------------------------- \46\ Report of the Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan, UN Human Rights Council, February 4, 2021, pg. 13, [*https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2046934/A\_HRC\_46\_53\_E.pdf*](https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2046934/A_HRC_46_53_E.pdf). As of September 2020, South Sudan had seen an estimated 88 percent increase in the number of women victims of conflict-related sexual violence since the previous quarter and a 119 percent rise in the number of abductions since the previous quarter. The upsurge in localized conflict in Central Equatoria (Yei and surrounding areas), Jonglei and the Greater Pibor Administrative Area and Warrap (Tonj West and North) saw women and girls targeted by all sides.\47\--------------------------------------------------------------------------- \47\ Id. In addition, rural communities often abducted women and children during cattle raids.\48\ Girls who are abducted have been reportedly ``forced into sexual slavery, tortured and repeatedly gang raped.'' \49\ According to credible reports, perpetrators of forced marriage and sexual violence include security forces, community-based militias, civil defense groups, and other armed groups.\50\--------------------------------------------------------------------------- \48\ 2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: South Sudan, U.S Department of State, March 31, 2021, section 5, available at: [*https://www.state.gov/reports/2020-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/south-sudan/*](https://www.state.gov/reports/2020-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/south-sudan/). \49\ Report of the Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan, United Nations General Assembly, February 4, 2021, pg. 7, [*https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/report-commission-human-rights-south-sudan-ahrc4653*](https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/report-commission-human-rights-south-sudan-ahrc4653). \50\ UNHCR Position on Returns to South Sudan, UNHCR, October 2021, pg. 7, [*https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/617676f04.pdf.---------------------------------------------------------------------------Humanitarian*](https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/617676f04.pdf.---------------------------------------------------------------------------Humanitarian) Situation In 2020, continued violence, particularly in Jonglei, Warrap, and the Greater Equatoria region resulted in ``sustained mass population displacement, both within the country and into neighboring countries, and high levels of humanitarian and protection needs.'' \51\ Insecurity and COVID-related restrictions also further hampered humanitarian organizations' ability to deploy and respond to medical and other emergency needs in the area.\52\--------------------------------------------------------------------------- \51\ 2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: South Sudan, U.S Department of State, March 31, 2021, section 5, available at: [*https://www.state.gov/reports/2020-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/south-sudan/*](https://www.state.gov/reports/2020-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/south-sudan/). \52\ South Sudan--Violence, floods, displacement in Jonglei, European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations, August 11, 2020, available at: [*https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/south-sudan-violence-floods-displacement-jonglei-dg-echo-ocha-media-echo-daily.---------------------------------------------------------------------------*](https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/south-sudan-violence-floods-displacement-jonglei-dg-echo-ocha-media-echo-daily.---------------------------------------------------------------------------) In January 2021, UNOCHA assessed that ``more people in South Sudan than ever are in need of humanitarian assistance,'' resulting in an ``estimated 8.5 million people, over two thirds of the population, in need of humanitarian assistance, compared to 7.5 million in 2020 and 7.1 million in 2019.'' \53\ South Sudan is also facing high levels of food insecurity and violence, coupled with flooding and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.\54\--------------------------------------------------------------------------- \53\ Panel of Experts on South Sudan, UN Security Council, April 15, 2021, pg. 16, [*https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/final-report-panel-experts-south-sudan-submitted-pursuant-resolution-2521-2020*](https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/final-report-panel-experts-south-sudan-submitted-pursuant-resolution-2521-2020). \54\ Situation in South Sudan, UN Security Council, September 9, 2021, pg. 6, [*https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2060682/S\_2021\_784\_E.pdf.---------------------------------------------------------------------------Displacement*](https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2060682/S_2021_784_E.pdf.---------------------------------------------------------------------------Displacement) Civilians faced significant conflict-related forced displacement in South Sudan.\55\ In August 2020, UNOCHA estimated that since February 2020, 157,000 people had been displaced in several counties in Jonglei state, as a result of the ongoing violence and revenge attacks among the warring parties.\56\ In 2021, fighting between armed forces, ongoing violence, and cattle raids in Central and Western Equatoria, Jonglei, the Greater Pibor Administrative Area and Upper Nile states ``uprooted people and disrupted humanitarian activities.'' \57\ In Western Equatoria, an estimated 80,000 people[[Page 12195]]were displaced in Tambura country.\58\ In early July 2021, fighting in Warrap state displaced around 10,000 people and left hundreds without any shelter.\59\ In Upper Nile, in August 2021, fighting among factions of SPLM/A-IO displaced some 2,000 people.\60\--------------------------------------------------------------------------- \55\ Panel of Experts on South Sudan, UN Security Council, April 15, 2021, pg. 25, [*https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/final-report-panel-experts-south-sudan-submitted-pursuant-resolution-2521-2020*](https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/final-report-panel-experts-south-sudan-submitted-pursuant-resolution-2521-2020). \56\ South Sudan--Violence, floods, displacement in Jonglei, European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations, August 11, 2020, [*https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/south-sudan-violence-floods-displacement-jonglei-dg-echo-ocha-media-echo-daily*](https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/south-sudan-violence-floods-displacement-jonglei-dg-echo-ocha-media-echo-daily). \57\ Situation in South Sudan, UN Security Council, September 9, 2021, pg. 6-7, [*https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2060682/S\_2021\_784\_E.pdf*](https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2060682/S_2021_784_E.pdf). \58\ Situation in South Sudan; Report of the Secretary-General, UN Security Council, December 7, 2021, pg. 5, [*https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2065323/S\_2021\_1015\_E.pdf*](https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2065323/S_2021_1015_E.pdf). \59\ Situation in South Sudan, UN Security Council, September 9, 2021, pg. 6, [*https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2060682/S\_2021\_784\_E.pdf*](https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2060682/S_2021_784_E.pdf). \60\ Id. at pg. 7.---------------------------------------------------------------------------Food Insecurity \61\ and Floods--------------------------------------------------------------------------- \61\ According to the Food and ***Agriculture*** Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the lack of ``regular access to enough safe and nutritious food for normal growth and development and an active and healthy life. This may be due to unavailability of food and/or lack of resources to obtain food. Food insecurity can be experienced at different levels of severity.'' Hunger and food security, Food and ***Agriculture*** Organization of the United Nations (FAO), [*https://www.fao.org/hunger/glossary*](https://www.fao.org/hunger/glossary) (last visited January 13, 2022).--------------------------------------------------------------------------- South Sudan remains one of the most food-insecure countries in the world.\62\ The overall food security situation deteriorated towards the end of 2020.\63\ Between April and July 2021, an estimated 7.2 million people, 60 percent of the population, faced high levels of acute food insecurity.\64\ Malnutrition in particular remains a pressing issue in South Sudan, with approximately 1.9 million women and children acutely malnourished.\65\ Malnutrition levels among children under five years of age are above emergency thresholds in many parts of the country, and 1.4 million children are estimated to be acutely malnourished.\66\ The main factors driving food insecurity and malnourishment are the ongoing conflicts, flooding, and COVID-19.\67\ Moreover, COVID-19 mitigation efforts also disrupted access to supply chains for commercial and humanitarian assistance, further contributing to food insecurity.\68\--------------------------------------------------------------------------- \62\ South Sudan Humanitarian Fund Annual Report 2020, UNOCHA, July 6, 2021, pg. 7, available at [*https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/south-sudan-humanitarian-fund-annual-report-2020*](https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/south-sudan-humanitarian-fund-annual-report-2020). \63\ South Sudan Humanitarian Fund Annual Report 2020, UNOCHA, July 6, 2021, pg. 7, available at [*https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/south-sudan-humanitarian-fund-annual-report-2020*](https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/south-sudan-humanitarian-fund-annual-report-2020). \64\ Situation in South Sudan, UN Security Council, September 9, 2021, pg. 6, available at [*https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2060682/S\_2021\_784\_E.pdf*](https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2060682/S_2021_784_E.pdf). \65\ South Sudan Situation Report, World Food Programme, October 29, 2021, pg.1, available at [*https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/wfp-south-sudan-situation-report-296-29-october-2021*](https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/wfp-south-sudan-situation-report-296-29-october-2021). \66\ Situation in South Sudan, UN Security Council, September 9, 2021, pg. 6, available at [*https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2060682/S\_2021\_784\_E.pdf*](https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2060682/S_2021_784_E.pdf). \67\ South Sudan Humanitarian Fund Annual Report 2020, UNOCHA, July 6, 2021, pg. 7, available at [*https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/south-sudan-humanitarian-fund-annual-report-2020*](https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/south-sudan-humanitarian-fund-annual-report-2020). \68\ Id.--------------------------------------------------------------------------- In October 2021, the World Food Programme (WFP) reported that South Sudan faced a third year of ***unprecedented*** flooding.\69\ The flooding was exacerbated by standing water from major floods in the previous two years, most of which had not fully receded.\70\ The most recent flooding has led to ``widespread displacement, destruction of livelihoods and contamination of water sources, compounding existing insecurity issues in many regions.'' \71\ In its December 2021 report, UNOCHA reported that the number of people affected by floods since May 2021 was 835,000,\72\ up from the 380,000 reported in August 2021.\73\ In its February 2021 report, the UN Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan reported that ``since the onset of the floods in July 2020, more than one million South Sudanese have been affected by the flooding and more than 856,000 people were displaced and forced to seek refuge on higher ground.'' \74\ The Commission further noted that:--------------------------------------------------------------------------- \69\ South Sudan Situation Report, World Food Programme, October 29, 2021, pg.1, available at [*https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/wfp-south-sudan-situation-report-296-29-october-2021*](https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/wfp-south-sudan-situation-report-296-29-october-2021). \70\ South Sudan Situation Report, REACH, December 2021, pg. 2, available at [*https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/south-sudan-flooding-trends-counties-particular-concern-food-insecurity-december*](https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/south-sudan-flooding-trends-counties-particular-concern-food-insecurity-december). \71\ Id. at pg. 1. \72\ South Sudan Situation Report, UNOCHA, December 2021, pg. 1, available at [*https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/south-sudan-humanitarian-snapshot-december-2021*](https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/south-sudan-humanitarian-snapshot-december-2021). \73\ South Sudan Humanitarian Snapshot, UNOCHA, August 2021, pg. 1, available at [*https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/south-sudan-humanitarian-snapshot-august-2021*](https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/south-sudan-humanitarian-snapshot-august-2021). \74\ Report of the Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan, United Nations General Assembly, February 4, 2021, pg. 10, available at [*https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/report-commission-human-rights-south-sudan-ahrc4653*](https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/report-commission-human-rights-south-sudan-ahrc4653). The floods also destroyed hectares of crops and led to the loss of livestock indispensable to the survival of local populations. Moreover, vital water sources became heavily contaminated, rendering vulnerable communities unable to flee at severe risk of contracting life-threatening waterborne diseases, including typhoid and cholera.\75\--------------------------------------------------------------------------- \75\ Report of the Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan, United Nations General Assembly, February 4, 2021, pg. 11, available at [*https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/report-commission-human-rights-south-sudan-ahrc4653.1*](https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/report-commission-human-rights-south-sudan-ahrc4653.1) ---------------------------------------------------------------------------Access to Humanitarian Assistance Insecurity continued to affect access to humanitarian assistance, particularly in parts of Central and Western Equatoria, Jonglei, and the Greater Pibor Administrative Area.\76\ In addition, in 2021 humanitarian workers and facilities continued to be targeted and at risk of attack,\77\ resulting in the disruption and suspension of humanitarian action.\78\ In December 2021, the UN assessed that between September and November 2021, ``89 humanitarian access incidents were reported, including 13 ambushes and 5 lootings, a 47 percent increase compared with the previous reporting period [published in June 2021].'' \79\ In Western Equatoria, health facilities were looted and destroyed; since the beginning of 2021, more than 911 metric tons of food items and nutritional supplements have been looted or destroyed.\80\ Moreover, recurring violence in Jonglei and Greater Pibor Administrative Area affected the delivery of critical humanitarian assistance to highly food-insecure people.\81\ In addition, poor road conditions, compounded by heavy rain and ongoing floods, have led to access challenges and slowed the response in the flood-affected areas.\82\ The government of South Sudan also has limited access to humanitarian aid by establishing:--------------------------------------------------------------------------- \76\ Situation in South Sudan, UN Security Council, September 9, 2021, pg. 7, available at [*https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2060682/S\_2021\_784\_E.pdf*](https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2060682/S_2021_784_E.pdf). \77\ Situation in South Sudan, UN Security Council, September 9, 2021, pg. 7, available at [*https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2060682/S\_2021\_784\_E.pdf*](https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2060682/S_2021_784_E.pdf). \78\ Situation in South Sudan; Report of the Secretary-General, UN Security Council, December 7, 2021, pg. 7, available at [*https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2065323/S\_2021\_1015\_E.pdf*](https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2065323/S_2021_1015_E.pdf). \79\ Situation in South Sudan; Report of the Secretary-General, UN Security Council, December 7, 2021, pg. 5-6, available at [*https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2065323/S\_2021\_1015\_E.pdf*](https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2065323/S_2021_1015_E.pdf). \80\ Situation in South Sudan, UN Security Council, September 9, 2021. pg. 7, available at [*https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2060682/S\_2021\_784\_E.pdf*](https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2060682/S_2021_784_E.pdf). \81\ Situation in South Sudan, UN Security Council, September 9, 2021, pg. 6-7, available at [*https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2060682/S\_2021\_784\_E.pdf*](https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2060682/S_2021_784_E.pdf). \82\ Situation in South Sudan; Report of the Secretary-General [S/2021/1015], UN Security Council, December 7, 2021, pg. 5-6, available at [*https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2065323/S\_2021\_1015\_E.pdf.an*](https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2065323/S_2021_1015_E.pdf.an) intentionally complex bureaucratic system for the delivery of aid and has failed to guarantee the safe delivery of humanitarian aid. In particular, multiple sources raised serious concerns about the Government's deliberate policy of denying or delaying the issuance of visas for hundreds of international humanitarian staff who had been evacuated from South Sudan owing to COVID-19.\83\--------------------------------------------------------------------------- \83\ Panel of Experts on South Sudan, UN Security Council, April 15, 2021, pg. 16-17, available at [*https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/final-report-panel-experts-south-sudan-submitted-pursuant-resolution-2521-2020*](https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/final-report-panel-experts-south-sudan-submitted-pursuant-resolution-2521-2020).[[Page 12196]]---------------------------------------------------------------------------Healthcare and COVID-19 In August 2020, UNHCR reported that ``about 56 percent of South Sudan's population does not have access to primary healthcare services.'' \84\ In addition, less than 2 percent of South Sudan's national budget is spent on healthcare,\85\ resulting in poorly equipped health facilities with limited staff.\86\ In January 2021, UNOCHA reported that ``out of approximately 2,300 health facilities, more than 1,300 are non-functional. Of the functioning health facilities, 57 percent are supported by humanitarian and development partners and many remain in areas that are not easily accessible by the communities.'' \87\ South Sudan also continues to face ``regular outbreaks of infectious diseases like measles, water-borne diseases such as diarrhea and Hepatitis E virus, and vector-borne diseases like malaria and yellow fever,'' in addition to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.\88\ According to the WFP, the ``COVID-19 pandemic continues to present serious risks to an already fragile situation, threatening to further exacerbate acute food insecurity.'' \89\ As of January 3, 2022, 16,607 people had contracted COVID-19, including 136 associated deaths.\90\--------------------------------------------------------------------------- \84\ Renewed violence and delayed implementation of the peace agreement severely threaten peace and stability in South Sudan, UN experts note, UNHCR, August 14, 2020, available at [*https://www.ecoi.net/en/document/2036539.html*](https://www.ecoi.net/en/document/2036539.html). \85\ South Sudan--Strengthening primary health care in fragile settings, World Health Organization, May 20, 2021, available at [*https://www.who.int/news-room/feature-stories/detail/south-sudan-2021*](https://www.who.int/news-room/feature-stories/detail/south-sudan-2021). \86\ South Sudan Humanitarian Needs Overview 2021 (January 2021), UNOCHA, January 2021, pg. 12, available at [*https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2045425/south\_sudan\_2021\_humanitarian\_needs\_overview.pdf*](https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2045425/south_sudan_2021_humanitarian_needs_overview.pdf). \87\ South Sudan Humanitarian Needs Overview 2021 (January 2021), UNOCHA, January 2021, pg. 12, available at [*https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2045425/south\_sudan\_2021\_humanitarian\_needs\_overview.pdf*](https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2045425/south_sudan_2021_humanitarian_needs_overview.pdf). \88\ Strengthening public health surveillance and response using the third Edition Integrated Disease Surveillance and Response guidelines in South Sudan, World Health Organization, November 27, 2021, available at [*https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/strengthening-public-health-surveillance-and-response-using-third-edition*](https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/strengthening-public-health-surveillance-and-response-using-third-edition). \89\ South Sudan Country Brief, World Food Programme, November 2021, pg. 1, available at [*https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/wfp-south-sudan-country-brief-november-2021*](https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/wfp-south-sudan-country-brief-november-2021). \90\ South Sudan COVID-19 Dashboard, World Health Organization, [*https://covid19.who.int/region/emro/country/sd*](https://covid19.who.int/region/emro/country/sd) (last visited on January 19, 2022).---------------------------------------------------------------------------Economic Situation According to the World Bank, South Sudan is facing ``concurrent setbacks in the economy'' due to rising poverty, food insecurity and a resurgence of conflict.\91\ Moreover, falling global oil prices have also affected South Sudan's oil revenues.\92\ South Sudan's economy is heavily oil-dependent, with oil accounting for 90 percent of government revenue and nearly all exports.\93\ This situation has caused a ``great percentage of South Sudanese people to lose their sources of livelihood and has left some communities facing catastrophic needs.'' \94\ Moreover, urgent and essentials ***measures*** to manage the COVID-19 pandemic, ``worsened economic conditions, disrupting livelihoods and affecting vulnerable households' access to markets, food and adequate income.'' \95\--------------------------------------------------------------------------- \91\ South Sudan Economic Update, June 2021: Pathways to Sustainable Food Security, The World Bank, July 2, 2021, available at [*https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/south-sudan-economic-update-june-2021-pathways-sustainable-food-security*](https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/south-sudan-economic-update-june-2021-pathways-sustainable-food-security). \92\ South Sudan Economic Update, June 2021: Pathways to Sustainable Food Security, The World Bank, July 2, 2021, available at [*https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/south-sudan-economic-update-june-2021-pathways-sustainable-food-security*](https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/south-sudan-economic-update-june-2021-pathways-sustainable-food-security). \93\ South Sudan Humanitarian Needs Overview 2021 (January 2021), UNOCHA, January 2021, pg. 12, available at [*https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2045425/south\_sudan\_2021\_humanitarian\_needs\_overview.pdf*](https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2045425/south_sudan_2021_humanitarian_needs_overview.pdf). \94\ South Sudan Economic Update, June 2021: Pathways to Sustainable Food Security, The World Bank, July 2, 2021, available at [*https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/south-sudan-economic-update-june-2021-pathways-sustainable-food-security*](https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/south-sudan-economic-update-june-2021-pathways-sustainable-food-security). \95\ South Sudan Humanitarian Response Plan, FAO, May 2021, pg. 2, available at [*https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/south-sudan-humanitarian-response-plan-2021.---------------------------------------------------------------------------*](https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/south-sudan-humanitarian-response-plan-2021.---------------------------------------------------------------------------) Based upon this review and after consultation with appropriate U.S Government agencies, the Secretary has determined that: The conditions supporting South Sudan's designation for TPS continue to be met. See INA section 244(b)(3)(A) and (C), 8 U.S.C 1254a(b)(3)(A) and (C). There continues to be an ongoing armed conflict in South Sudan and, due to such conflict, requiring the return to South Sudan of South Sudanese nationals (or individuals having no nationality who last habitually resided in South Sudan) would pose a serious threat to their personal safety. See INA section 244(b)(1)(A), 8 U.S.C 1254a(b)(1)(A). There continue to be extraordinary and temporary conditions in South Sudan that prevent South Sudanese nationals (or individuals having no nationality who last habitually resided in South Sudan) from returning to South Sudan in safety, and it is not contrary to the national interest of the United States to permit South Sudanese TPS beneficiaries to remain in the United States temporarily. See INA section 244(b)(1)(C), 8 U.S.C 1254a(b)(1)(C). The designation of South Sudan for TPS should be extended for an 18-month period, from May 3, 2022, through November 3, 2023. See INA section 244(b)(3)(C), 8 U.S.C 1254a(b)(3)(C). Due to the conditions described above, South Sudan should be simultaneously extended and redesignated for TPS effective May 3, 2022, through November 3, 2023. See section 244(b)(1)(A) and (C) and (b)(2) of the Act, 8 U.S.C 1254a(b)(1)(A) and (C) and (b)(2). For the redesignation, the Secretary has determined that TPS applicants must demonstrate that they have continuously resided in the United States since March 1, 2022. Initial TPS applicants under the redesignation must demonstrate that they have been continuously physically present in the United States since March 3, 2022, the effective date of the redesignation of South Sudan for TPS. There are approximately 97 current South Sudanese TPS beneficiaries who are expected to be eligible to re-register for TPS under the extension. It is estimated that approximately 235 additional individuals may be eligible for TPS under the redesignation of South Sudan. This population includes South Sudanese nationals in the United States in nonimmigrant status or without immigration status.Notice of Extension of the TPS Designation and Redesignation of South Sudan for TPS By the authority vested in me as Secretary under INA section 244, 8 U.S.C 1254a, I have determined, after consultation with the appropriate Government agencies, the conditions supporting South Sudan's designation for TPS continue to be met. See INA section 244(b)(3)(A), 8 U.S.C 1254a(b)(3)(A). On the basis of this determination, I am simultaneously extending the existing designation of TPS for South Sudan for 18 months, from May 3, 2022, through November 3, 2023, and redesignating South Sudan for TPS for the same 18-month period. See INA section 244(b)(1)(A), (b)(1)(C) and (b)(2); 8 U.S.C 1254a(b)(1)(A), (b)(1)(C), and (b)(2).Alejandro N. Mayorkas,Secretary, U.S Department of Homeland Security.Required Application Forms and Application Fees To Register or Re-Register for TPS To register or re-register for TPS based on the designation of South Sudan, you must submit an Application for[[Page 12197]]Temporary Protected Status (Form I-821). If you are filing an initial application, you must pay the fee for the Form I-821 or request a fee waiver. If you are filing an application for re-registration, you do not need to pay the fee for the Form I-821. There is no Form I-821 fee for re-registration. See 8 CFR 244.17 You may be required to pay the biometric services fee. If you can demonstrate an inability to pay the biometric services fee, you may request to have the fee waived. Please see additional information under the ``Biometric Services Fee'' section of this notice. Through this Federal Register notice, your existing EAD issued under the TPS designation of South Sudan with the expiration date of May 2, 2022, is automatically extended for 180 days, through November 1, 2022. If you want to obtain a new EAD valid through November 3, 2023, you must file an Application for Employment Authorization (Form I-765) and pay the Form I-765 fee (or request a fee waiver). If you do not want a new EAD, you do not have to file Form I-765 and pay the Form I-765 fee. If you do not want to request a new EAD now, you may also file Form I-765 at a later date and pay the fee (or request a fee waiver), provided that you still have TPS or a pending TPS application. However, you are strongly encouraged to file your application for a new EAD as early as possible to avoid gaps in the validity of your employment authorization documentation and to ensure that you receive your new EAD by November 1, 2022. If you are applying for initial registration and want an EAD, you must file and pay the fee for the Form I-765 (or request a fee waiver). If you do not want to request an EAD now, you may also file Form I-765 at a later date and pay the fee (or request a fee waiver), provided that you still have TPS or a pending TPS application. You may file the application for a new EAD either prior to or after your current EAD has expired. Everyone must provide their employer with documentation showing that they have the legal right to work in the United States. In general, TPS beneficiaries, including those who are not employed, are not required to have an EAD. But they can obtain one and if they work, the EAD is an acceptable document that proves their legal right to work. If you have a Form I-821 or Form I-765 that was still pending as of March 3, 2022, then you do not need to file either application again. If USCIS approves your pending TPS application, USCIS will grant you TPS through November 3, 2023. Similarly, if USCIS approves your pending TPS-related Form I-765, it will be valid through the same date. For more information on the application forms and fees for TPS, please visit the USCIS TPS web page at [*https://www.uscis.gov/tps*](https://www.uscis.gov/tps). Fees for the Form I-821, the Form I-765, and biometric services are also described in 8 CFR 103.7(b)(1)(i).Biometric Services Fee Biometrics (such as fingerprints) are required for all applicants 14 years of age and older. Those applicants must generally submit a biometric services fee. As previously stated, if you can demonstrate an inability to pay the biometric services fee, you may be able to have the fee waived. You may request a fee waiver by submitting a Request for Fee Waiver (Form I-912). For more information on the application forms and fees for TPS, please visit the USCIS TPS web page at [*www.uscis.gov/tps*](http://www.uscis.gov/tps). USCIS may require you to visit an Application Support Center so we can capture your biometrics. For additional information on the USCIS biometrics screening ***process***, please see the USCIS Customer Profile Management Service Privacy Impact Assessment, available at [*www.dhs.gov/privacy.Refiling*](http://www.dhs.gov/privacy.Refiling) a TPS Initial Registration Application After Receiving Notice That USCIS Did Not Grant the Fee Waiver Request You should file as soon as possible so USCIS can ***process*** your application and issue any EAD promptly, if you requested one. If USCIS denies your fee waiver request related to your initial TPS application, you must refile your Form I-821 for TPS along with the required fees no later than November 3, 2023, to continue seeking initial TPS. If USCIS does not grant your fee waiver request, you may also refile your Form I-765, with fee, either with your Form I-821 or at a later time as long as it is within the period that South Sudan is designated for TPS, if you choose. Note: Unless USCIS grants a fee waiver, an initial applicant for TPS must pay the Form I-821 filing fee and applicants age 14 or older must also pay the biometric services fee. However, if you decide to wait to request an EAD, you do not have to file the Form I-765 or pay the associated Form I-765 fee (or request a fee waiver) at the time of registration. You may wait to seek an EAD until after USCIS has approved your TPS registration application or at any later date you decide you want to request an EAD as long as TPS for South Sudan continues. To register for TPS, you only need to file the Form I-821 with the $50 filing fee and the biometric services fee, if applicable (or request a fee waiver).Refiling a TPS Re-Registration Application After Receiving Notice That the Fee Waiver Request Was Not Granted You should file as soon as possible within the 60-day re-registration period so USCIS can ***process*** your application and issue any EAD promptly, if you requested one. Properly filing early will also give you time to refile your application before the deadline, if USCIS does not grant your fee waiver request. If you receive a notice that USCIS did not grant your fee waiver request, and you are unable to refile by the re-registration deadline, you may still refile your Form I-821 with the biometrics fee. USCIS will review this situation to determine whether you established good cause for late TPS re-registration. However, if possible, we urge you to refile within 45 days of the date on any USCIS notice that we did not grant you a fee waiver. See INA section 244(c)(3)(C); 8 U.S.C 1254a(c)(3)(C); 8 CFR 244.17(b). For more information on good cause for late re-registration, visit the USCIS TPS web page at [*https://www.uscis.gov/tps*](https://www.uscis.gov/tps). If USCIS does not grant your fee waiver request, you may also refile your Form I-765 with the fee either with your Form I-821 or at a later time, if you choose. Note: A re-registering TPS beneficiary age 14 and older must pay the biometric services fee (but not the Form I-821 filing fee), or request a fee waiver, when filing a TPS re-registration application. However, if you decide to wait to request an EAD, you do not have to file the Form I-765 or pay the associated Form I-765 fee (or request a fee waiver) at the time of re-registration. You may wait to seek an EAD until after USCIS has approved your TPS re-registration application or at any later date you decide you want to request an EAD. To re-register for TPS, you only need to file the Form I-821 with the biometric services fee, if applicable (or request a fee waiver).Filing Information USCIS offers the option to applicants for TPS under South Sudan's designation to file Form I-821 and related requests for EADs online or by mail. When filing a TPS application, applicants can also request an EAD by submitting a completed Form I-765, Application for Employment Authorization, with their Form I-821. Online filing: Form I-821 and I-765 are available for concurrent filing[[Page 12198]]online.\96\ To file these forms online, you must first create a USCIS online account.\97\ Online filing is not available for applicants requesting a fee waiver. Such applications should be completed by mail.--------------------------------------------------------------------------- \96\ Find information about online filing at Forms Available to File Online, [*https://www.uscis.gov/file-online/forms-available-to-file-online*](https://www.uscis.gov/file-online/forms-available-to-file-online). \97\ [*https://myaccount.uscis.gov/users/sign\_up.---------------------------------------------------------------------------*](https://myaccount.uscis.gov/users/sign_up.---------------------------------------------------------------------------) Mail filing: Mail your application for TPS to the proper address in Table 1.Table 1--Mailing Addresses Mail your completed Application for Temporary Protected Status (Form I-821) and Application for Employment Authorization (Form I-765), Request for Fee Waiver (Form I-912) (if applicable) and supporting documentation to the proper address in Table 1. Table 1--Mailing Addresses------------------------------------------------------------------------ If you would like to send your application by: Then, mail your application to:------------------------------------------------------------------------U.S Postal Service.................. USCIS, Attn: TPS South Sudan, P.O Box 6943, Chicago, IL 60680- 6943.FedEx, UPS, or DHL................... USCIS, Attn: TPS South Sudan (Box 6943), 131 S Dearborn St. 3rd Floor, Chicago, IL 60603-5517.------------------------------------------------------------------------ If you were granted TPS by an Immigration Judge (IJ) or the Board of Immigration Appeals (BIA) and you wish to request an EAD or are re-registering for the first time following a grant of TPS by an IJ or the BIA, please mail your application to the appropriate mailing address in Table 1. When you are re-registering and requesting an EAD based on an IJ/BIA grant of TPS, please include a copy of the IJ or BIA order granting you TPS with your application. This will help us to verify your grant of TPS and ***process*** your application.Supporting Documents The filing instructions on the Form I-821 list all the documents needed to establish eligibility for TPS. You may also find information on the acceptable documentation and other requirements for applying or registering for TPS on the USCIS website at [*www.uscis.gov/tps*](http://www.uscis.gov/tps) under ``South Sudan.''Travel TPS beneficiaries may also apply for and be granted travel authorization as a matter of discretion. You must file an application for advance parole if you wish to travel outside the United States. Advance parole gives you permission to leave the United States and return during a specific period. TPS beneficiaries retain the same immigration status they had prior to the travel. To request advance parole, you must file Form I-131, Application for Travel Document, available at [*www.uscis.gov/i-131*](http://www.uscis.gov/i-131). You may file Form I-131 together with your Form I-821 or separately. When filing the Form I-131, you must: Select Item Number 1.d in Part 2 on the Form I-131; and Submit the fee for the Form I-131, or request a fee waiver, which may be submitted on Request for Fee Waiver (Form I-912) If you are filing Form I-131 together with Form I-821, send your forms to the address listed in Table 1 above. If you are filing Form I-131 separately based on a pending or approved Form I-821, send your form to the address listed in Table 2 below and include a copy of Form I-797 for the approved or pending Form I-821. Table 2--Mailing Addresses------------------------------------------------------------------------ If you . . . Mail to . . .------------------------------------------------------------------------Are filing Form I-131 together with a U.S Postal Service (USPS): Form I-821, Application for Temporary USCIS, Attn: TPS South Sudan, Protected Status. P.O Box 6943, Chicago, IL 60680-6943. FedEx, UPS, or DHL: USCIS, Attn: TPS South Sudan (Box 6943), 131 S Dearborn St. 3rd Floor, Chicago, IL 60603-5517.Are filing Form I-131 based on a U.S Postal Service (USPS): pending or approved Form I-821. USCIS, Attn: I-131 TPS, P.O You must include a copy of the receipt Box 660167, Dallas, TX 75266- notice (Form I-797C) showing we 0867. accepted or approved your Form I-821. FedEx, UPS, or DHL: USCIS, Attn: I-131 TPS, 2501 S State Hwy. 121 Business, Ste. 400, Lewisville, TX 75067.------------------------------------------------------------------------General Employment-Related Information for TPS Applicants and Their EmployersHow can I obtain information on the status of my TPS application and EAD request? To get case status information about your TPS application, including the status of an EAD request, you can check Case Status Online at [*https://www.uscis.gov*](https://www.uscis.gov), or visit the USCIS Contact Center at uscis.gov/contactcenter. If your Form I-765 has been pending for more than 90 days, and you still need assistance, you may ask a question about your case online at egov.uscis.gov/e-request/Intro.do or call the USCIS Contact Center at 800-375-5283 (TTY 800-767-1833).Am I eligible to receive an automatic 180-day extension of my current EAD through November 1, 2022, using this Federal Register notice? Yes. Regardless of your country of birth, provided that you currently have a South Sudan TPS-based EAD with an expiration date of September 17, 2021, on the face of the card, bearing the notation A-12 or C-19 under Category, this notice automatically extends your EAD through November 1, 2022. Although this Federal Register notice automatically extends your EAD through November 1, 2022, you must re-register timely for TPS in accordance with the procedures described in this Federal Register notice to maintain your TPS and employment authorization.[[Page 12199]]When hired, what documentation may I show to my employer as evidence of employment authorization and identity when completing Form I-9? You can find the Lists of Acceptable Documents on the third page of Form I-9 as well as the Acceptable Documents web page at [*https://www.uscis.gov/i-9-central/acceptable-documents*](https://www.uscis.gov/i-9-central/acceptable-documents). Employers must complete Form I-9 to verify the identity and employment authorization of all new employees. Within three days of hire, employees must present acceptable documents to their employers as evidence of identity and employment authorization to satisfy Form I-9 requirements. You may present any document from List A (which provides evidence of both identity and employment authorization), or one document from List B (which provides evidence of your identity) together with one document from List C (which provides evidence of employment authorization), or you may present an acceptable receipt for List A, List B, or List C documents as described in the Form I-9 instructions. Employers may not reject a document based on a future expiration date. You can find additional information about Form I-9 on the I-9 Central web page at [*https://www.uscis.gov/I-9Central*](https://www.uscis.gov/I-9Central). An EAD is an acceptable document under List A. See the section ``How do my employer and I complete Form I-9 using my automatically extended EAD for a new job?'' of this Federal Register notice for further information. If your EAD has an expiration date of May 2, 2022, and states A-12 or C-19 under Category, it has been extended automatically by virtue of this Federal Register notice and you may choose to present your EAD to your employer as proof of identity and employment eligibility for Form I-9 through November 1, 2022, unless your TPS has been withdrawn or your request for TPS has been denied.What documentation may I present to my employer for Form I-9 if I am already employed but my current TPS-related EAD is set to expire? Even though we have automatically extended your EAD, your employer is required by law to ask you about your continued employment authorization. Your employer may need to re-inspect your automatically extended EAD to check the Card Expires date and Category code if your employer did not keep a copy of your EAD when you initially presented it. Once your employer has reviewed the Card Expiration date and Category code, your employer should update the EAD expiration date in Section 2 of Form I-9. See the section ``What updates should my current employer make to Form I-9 if my EAD has been automatically extended?'' of this Federal Register notice for further information. You may show this Federal Register notice to your employer to explain what to do for Form I-9 and to show that USCIS has automatically extended your EAD through November 1, 2022, but you are not required to do so. The last day of the automatic EAD extension is November 1, 2022. Before you start work on November 2, 2022, your employer is required by law to reverify your employment authorization on Form I-9. By that time, you must present any document from List A or any document from List C on Form I-9 Lists of Acceptable Documents, or an acceptable List A or List C receipt described in the Form I-9 instructions to reverify employment authorization. Your employer may not specify which List A or List C document you must present and cannot reject an acceptable receipt.Can my employer require that I provide any other documentation to prove my status, such as proof of my South Sudanese citizenship or a Form I-797C showing I re-registered for TPS? No. When completing Form I-9, including reverifying employment authorization, employers must accept any documentation that appears on the Form I-9 Lists of Acceptable Documents that reasonably appears to be genuine and that relates to you, or an acceptable List A, List B, or List C receipt. Employers do not need to reverify List B identity documents. Therefore, employers may not request proof of South Sudanese citizenship or proof of re-registration for TPS when completing Form I-9 for new hires or reverifying the employment authorization of current employees. If you present an EAD that USCIS has automatically extended, employers should accept it as a valid List A document so long as the EAD reasonably appears to be genuine and relates to you. Refer to the Note to Employees section of this Federal Register notice for important information about your rights if your employer rejects lawful documentation, requires additional documentation, or otherwise discriminates against you based on your citizenship or immigration status, or your national origin.How do my employer and I complete Form I-9 using my automatically extended EAD for a new job? 1. When using an automatically extended EAD to complete Form I-9 for a new job before November 2, 2022, for Section 1, you should: a. Check ``An alien authorized to work until'' and enter November 1, 2022, as the ``expiration date''; and b. Enter your Alien Number/USCIS number or A-Number where indicated. (Your EAD or other document from DHS will have your USCIS number or A-Number printed on it; the USCIS number is the same as your A-Number without the A prefix.) 2. For Section 2, employers should: a. Determine if the EAD is auto-extended by ensuring it is in category A-12 or C-19 and has a Card Expires date of May 2, 2022; b. Write in the document title; c. Enter the issuing authority; d. Provide the document number; and e. Write November 1, 2022, as the expiration date. Before the start of work on November 2, 2022, employers must reverify the employee's employment authorization on Form I-9.What updates should my current employer make to Form I-9 if my EAD has been automatically extended? If you presented a TPS-related EAD that was valid when you first started your job and USCIS has now automatically extended your EAD, your employer may need to re-inspect your current EAD if they do not have a copy of the EAD on file. Your employer should determine if your EAD is automatically extended by ensuring that it contains Category A-12 or C-19 and has a Card Expires date of May 2, 2022, on the front of the card. If your employer determines that USCIS has automatically extended your EAD, your employer should update Section 2 of your previously completed Form I-9 as follows: 1. Write EAD EXT and November 1, 2022, as the last day of the automatic extension in the Additional Information field; and 2. Initial and date the correction. Note: This is not considered a reverification. Employers do not reverify the employee until either the 180-day automatic extension has ended, or the employee presents a new document to show continued employment authorization, whichever is sooner. By November 2, 2022, when the employee's automatically extended EAD has expired, employers are required by law to reverify the employee's employment authorization on Form I-9.[[Page 12200]]If I am an employer enrolled in E-Verify, how do I verify a new employee whose EAD has been automatically extended? Employers may create a case in E-Verify for a new employee by entering the number from the Document Number field on Form I-9 into the document number field in E-Verify. Employers should enter November 1, 2022, as the expiration date for an EAD that has been extended under this Federal Register notice.If I am an employer enrolled in E-Verify, what do I do when I receive a ``Work Authorization Documents Expiring'' alert for an automatically extended EAD? E-Verify automated the verification ***process*** for TPS-related EADs that are automatically extended. If you have employees who provided a TPS-related EAD when they first started working for you, you will receive a ``Work Authorization Documents Expiring'' case alert when the auto-extension period for this EAD is about to expire. Before this employee starts work on November 2, 2022, you must reverify their employment authorization on Form I-9. Employers may not use E-Verify for reverification.Note to All Employers Employers are reminded that the laws requiring proper employment eligibility verification and prohibiting unfair immigration-related employment practices remain in full force. This Federal Register notice does not supersede or in any way limit applicable employment verification rules and policy guidance, including those rules setting forth reverification requirements. For general questions about the employment eligibility verification ***process***, employers may call USCIS at 888-464-4218 (TTY 877-875-6028) or email USCIS at [*I-9Central@uscis.dhs.gov*](mailto:I-9Central@uscis.dhs.gov) USCIS accepts calls and emails in English and many other languages. For questions about avoiding discrimination during the employment eligibility verification ***process*** (Form I-9 and E-Verify), employers may call the U.S Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division, Immigrant and Employee Rights Section (IER) Employer Hotline at 800-255-8155 (TTY 800-237-2515). IER offers language interpretation in numerous languages. Employers may also email IER at [*IER@usdoj.gov.Note*](mailto:IER@usdoj.gov.Note) to Employees For general questions about the employment eligibility verification ***process***, employees may call USCIS at 888-897-7781 (TTY 877-875-6028) or email USCIS at [*I-9Central@uscis.dhs.gov*](mailto:I-9Central@uscis.dhs.gov) Calls are accepted in English, Spanish, and many other languages. Employees or applicants may also call the IER Worker Hotline at 800-255-7688 (TTY 800-237-2515) for information regarding employment discrimination based upon citizenship, immigration status, or national origin, including discrimination related to Form I-9 and E-Verify. The IER Worker Hotline provides language interpretation in numerous languages. To comply with the law, employers must accept any document or combination of documents from the Lists of Acceptable Documents if the documentation reasonably appears to be genuine and to relate to the employee, or an acceptable List A, List B, or List C receipt as described in the Form I-9 Instructions. Employers may not require extra or additional documentation beyond what is required for Form I-9 completion. Further, employers participating in E-Verify who receive an E-Verify case result of Tentative Nonconfirmation (TNC) must promptly inform employees of the TNC and give such employees an opportunity to contest the TNC. A TNC case result means that the information entered into E-Verify from an employee's Form I-9 differs from Federal or state government records. Employers may not terminate, suspend, delay training, withhold or lower pay, or take any adverse action against an employee because of the TNC while the case is still pending with E-Verify. A Final Nonconfirmation (FNC) case result is received when E-Verify cannot verify an employee's employment eligibility. An employer may terminate employment based on a case result of FNC. Work-authorized employees who receive an FNC may call USCIS for assistance at 888-897-7781 (TTY 877-875-6028). For more information about E-Verify-related discrimination or to report an employer for discrimination in the E-Verify ***process*** based on citizenship, immigration status, or national origin, contact IER's Worker Hotline at 800-255-7688 (TTY 800-237-2515). Additional information about proper nondiscriminatory Form I-9 and E-Verify procedures is available on the IER website at [*https://www.justice.gov/ier*](https://www.justice.gov/ier) and on the USCIS and E-Verify websites at [*https://www.uscis.gov/i-9-central*](https://www.uscis.gov/i-9-central) and [*https://www.e-verify.gov.Note*](https://www.e-verify.gov.Note) Regarding Federal, State, and Local Government Agencies (Such as Departments of Motor Vehicles) For Federal purposes, TPS beneficiaries presenting an automatically extended EAD referenced in this Federal Register notice do not need to show any other document, such as an I-797C Notice of Action or this Federal Register notice, to prove that they qualify for this extension. However, while Federal Government agencies must follow the guidelines laid out by the Federal Government, state and local government agencies establish their own rules and guidelines when granting certain benefits. Each state may have different laws, requirements, and determinations about what documents you need to provide to prove eligibility for certain benefits. Whether you are applying for a Federal, state, or local government benefit, you may need to provide the government agency with documents that show you are a TPS beneficiary, show you are authorized to work based on TPS or other status, or that may be used by DHS to determine whether you have TPS or other immigration status. Examples of such documents are: Your current EAD with a TPS category code of A-12 or C-19; Your Form I-94, Arrival/Departure Record; Your Form I-797, Notice of Action, reflecting approval of your Form I-765; or Your Form I-797, the notice of approval, for a past or current Form I-821, if you received one from USCIS. Check with the government agency regarding which document(s) the agency will accept. Some benefit-granting agencies use USCIS' Systematic Alien Verification for Entitlements (SAVE) program to confirm the current immigration status of applicants for public benefits. While SAVE can verify when an individual has TPS, each agency's procedures govern whether they will accept an unexpired EAD, Form I-797, or Form I-94, Arrival/Departure Record. If an agency accepts the type of TPS-related document you are presenting, such as an EAD, the agency should accept your automatically extended EAD, regardless of the country of birth listed on the EAD. It may assist the agency if you: a. Present the agency with a copy of the relevant Federal Register notice showing the extension of TPS-related documentation in addition to your recent TPS-related document with your A-number, USCIS number or Form I-94 number; b. Explain that SAVE will be able to verify the continuation of your TPS using this information; and c. Ask the agency to initiate a SAVE query with your information and follow through with additional verification steps, if necessary, to get a final SAVE response verifying your TPS.[[Page 12201]] You can also ask the agency to look for SAVE notices or contact SAVE if they have any questions about your immigration status or automatic extension of TPS-related documentation. In most cases, SAVE provides an automated electronic response to benefit-granting agencies within seconds, but, occasionally, verification can be delayed. You can check the status of your SAVE verification by using CaseCheck at save.uscis.gov/casecheck/. CaseCheck is a free service that lets you follow the progress of your SAVE verification case using your date of birth and one immigration identifier number (A-number, USCIS number or Form I-94 number) or Verification Case Number. If an agency has denied your application based solely or in part on a SAVE response, the agency must offer you the opportunity to appeal the decision in accordance with the agency's procedures. If the agency has received and acted upon or will act upon a SAVE verification and you do not believe the SAVE response is correct, the SAVE website, [*www.uscis.gov/save*](http://www.uscis.gov/save), has detailed information on how to make corrections or update your immigration record, make an appointment, or submit a written request to correct records.[FR Doc. 2022-04573 Filed 3-2-22; 8:45 am]BILLING CODE 9111-97-P

**Load-Date:** March 6, 2022

**End of Document**



[***Nation records highest death toll for the pandemic following grim two weeks of rising numbers - as it happened***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:64K8-NXJ1-JBNF-W4H0-00000-00&context=1516831)

The Guardian (London)

January 20, 2022 Thursday 8:28 PM GMT

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**Section:** AUSTRALIA NEWS; Version:25

**Length:** 19495 words

**Byline:** Stephanie Convery (now) and Matilda Boseley (earlier)

**Highlight:** Twitter apologises to politicians who experienced abuse on the platform ; Pauline Hanson calls for royal commission into Covid response; Australia records its deadliest day of the pandemic with 88 deaths; AFP begins investigations into RAT price gouging ; 'If not now, when?' asks Frydenberg on WA border. This blog is now closedWA suspends border reopening indefinitely amid Omicron spreadOmicron wave has likely peaked in NSW and Victoria, some experts sayFree rapid tests won't be available for millions, Australian pharmacists warnCovid vaccine rollout trackerGet our free news app ; get our morning email briefing

**Body**

block-time published-time 7.38am GMT

That's all for us today, folks. It's been another awful day in the pandemic, with Australia recording [*its highest death toll for the pandemic*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/datablog/2022/jan/21/australia-has-had-its-deadliest-day-yet-covid-omicron-heres-what-we-know-about-who-is-dying) so far, following a grim two weeks of escalating numbers. That included an infant who died with Covid in NSW, and Tasmania's first casualty of the disease for nearly two years - a woman in her 90s. You can find all the daily Covid statistics in the summary post pinned at the top of the blog.

Other things that rounded off this week of news:

Queensland has reduced its booster interval from four to three months, following NSW, Victoria, ACT and South Australia.

The Australian federal police have launched an investigation into price gouging of rapid antigen tests.

Western Australia announced that its border would stay closed, but had to fend off concerns that its hospital system wasn't ready for a Covid surge despite a long preparation time.

Peter Dutton has said there will be more visits from UK and US submarines as part of the defence deals being discussed in the annual AUKMIN talks in Sydney this week.

The federal government announced 15,000 humanitarian visas would be provided for Afghan nationals, after a senate inquiry delivered a scathing report into Australia's treatment of former Afghan interpreters and other colleagues left behind after the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan. The announcement has also come under fire for not actually adding any new places to the humanitarian visa program.

Health experts have warned that delaying elective surgeries in Victoria will see blown-out waiting lists spiral into a "massive healthcare crisis".

Australian naval ship HMAS Adelaide loaded with critical humanitarian supplies departed for Tonga as part of disaster relief efforts in the Pacific island nation following the devastating volcano eruption and tsunami, but an Australian aid flight was turned back from the Covid-free nation after a positive case was detected on board.

Thanks for coming along for the ride this week. I hope you have a lovely weekend, stay cool and hydrated, wear sunscreen, and I'll see you again soon!

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 7.45am GMT

block-time published-time 7.18am GMT

Tonga has turned back an aid flight from Australia due to a positive Covid case on board, despite assurances from the Morrison government that humanitarian relief from the volcanic eruption and tsunami could be offered in a Covid-safe way.

Tonga is Covid-free and has a strict border control policy, requiring contactless delivery of aid that began arriving by plane on Thursday.

The Australian aid flight left Brisbane on Thursday afternoon but was turned around mid-flight after being notified of the positive Covid case, an Australian defence spokesperson said.

All crew had returned negative rapid antigen tests before departure, but PCR tests later showed the positive result. The supplies were moved to another flight that took off on Friday.

Read more:

Related: [*Tonga turns back aid flight from Australia after positive Covid case discovered*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jan/21/tonga-turns-back-aid-flight-from-australia-after-positive-covid-case-discovered)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 7.21am GMT

block-time published-time 7.05am GMT

Health minister Greg Hunt and home affairs minister Karen Andrews have released their official statement on the changes that mean negative rapid antigen tests will now be accepted for international arrivals, saying the changes will provide more flexibility.

Interestingly, they've also reduced wait times between receiving a positive Covid diagnosis and being cleared to travel here.

Here's what the release says:

Under the Biosecurity Act 2015 the Government will change the requirements for a pre-departure test of any nucleic acid amplification test (such as PCR tests) within three days, to allow the flexibility for passengers to instead show a negative test result through a rapid antigen test (RAT) within 24 hours of the flight departure time.

These changes will come into effect from 1am Sunday 23 January 2022.

While PCR tests remain the gold standard test, a RAT within 24 hours is an acceptable indicator of whether a traveller has COVID-19 before flying to Australia.

This is consistent with moves within Australia to accept RATs for diagnostic purposes.

In addition to this, the time between receiving a positive test result and being able to be cleared for travel to Australia will be reduced from 14 to seven days. This will reduce wait times for travellers who contract COVID-19 overseas to return to Australia in line with the new domestic isolation requirements.

The pre-departure testing requirements will continue to be reviewed regularly, taking into account the domestic and international epidemiology.

Travellers to Australia must still wear a mask during their flight and follow the directions of state and territory governments regarding quarantine and on-arrival testing.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 7.13am GMT

block-time published-time 6.55am GMT

And from the SA Metro fire brigade:

enltrWe are saddened by the heartbreaking news from the Coles bushfire in South Australia, and offer our support and condolences to all impacted by this tragedy, including our [*@CFSTalk*](https://twitter.com/CFSTalk?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) colleagues.???? [*https://t.co/9CE37FzfOs*](https://t.co/9CE37FzfOs)

- SA Metropolitan Fire (@SA\_MFS) [*January 21, 2022*](https://twitter.com/SA_MFS/status/1484418898816802820?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 6.54am GMT

Victorian CFA chief officer, Jason Heffernan, has offered his solidarity and condolences to SA firefighters on behalf of Victoria:

CFA is devastated by the tragic death of a South Australian Country Fire Service (CFS) firefighter and injury to another CFS member on the Coles fireground.

We extend our deepest condolences and sympathies to the family, friends and colleagues of the firefighters.

Five CFA strike teams are assisting firefighting efforts in South Australia. No CFA members were injured in the incident.

Firefighting is an inherently dangerous activity and I am grateful and proud of the commitment and sacrifices that Australian firefighters make every day.

CFA stands with our CFS colleagues on the fireground, and in grief.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 6.57am GMT

block-time published-time 6.47am GMT

A firefighter has died and another injured fighting a bushfire in South Australia

A volunteer firefighter has died and another was seriously injured when a tree fell on a truck on the fireground at Coles in South Australia. The injured firefighter was taken to hospital.

The incident occurred near Lucindale, where the blaze is running uncontrolled through blue gum plantations, scrub and grassland, a Country Fire Service (CFS) spokesperson confirmed to AAP.

In a statement, the CFS said:

Family and other personnel have been informed and are being offered support at this time.

The safety and wellbeing of our people is our highest priority and our thoughts are with our CFS family at this time.

We are obtaining more information and will provide another update shortly.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 6.57am GMT

block-time published-time 6.35am GMT

TikTok wrote to Australian political parties in November last year warning them against attempting to pay influencers or engage in any other sort of advertising on its platform, Guardian Australia can reveal.

Just months out from the next federal election, the letters were sent after [*Crikey*](https://www.crikey.com.au/2021/11/18/tiktok-users-anti-scott-morrison-content/) reported a US-based marketing agency had emailed a campaign brief to a TikTok user offering $300 for the user to make and post a video on the theme of "Scott Morrison is too slow and always late".

When the Labor leader, [*Anthony Albanese*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/anthony-albanese) , was asked on Thursday about the November report, he told radio station 6PR he wasn't familiar with it.

"Well, it is the first I've heard of it. But it wouldn't be too hard for people to post TikTok videos along that theme. Because that is a theme that is characterised by this government. That is what we hear back," he said.

Read the full story here:

Related: [*TikTok warned Australian political parties against advertising on its platform*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/jan/21/tiktok-warned-australian-political-parties-against-advertising-on-its-platform)

block-time published-time 6.19am GMT

Pivoting to federal politics again for a minute: Julian Hill, a Labor MP and a member of the joint standing committee on migration, has blasted the government's Afghan visa announcement today:

Hill said:

As of today Scott Morrison has ***processed*** zero out of 3,000 visa promised, yet is trying to trick people with another rubbish announcement.

5,000 of the 15,000 places announced today are simply family visas in the existing program. Afghan-Australians have been waiting for years as the government has actively discriminated against them, failing to ***process*** their family visas. These people have never met their own children, or [have] missed their kids growing up, yet are supposed to be grateful that Scott Morrison now says he might give them the same rights as every other Australian.

Not one extra refugee place has been allocated to the program. Afghans will comprise just 18% of the refugee program over 4 years - while the Taliban are hunting people down right now. Australia was more generous to Syria and Iraq, countries with which we have relatively little relationship.

The government's announcement on Afghanistan is insulting and offensive to Afghan Australians who have been here since 1860, to Afghans who risked their lives for our country who've been abandoned, and for Aussie veterans.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 6.23am GMT

block-time published-time 6.15am GMT

enltrFair to say Serbian media is enjoying Rio Tinto losing its mining licence [*pic.twitter.com/l5YFafi9RC*](https://t.co/l5YFafi9RC)

- Dan Gocher (@justdanfornow) [*January 21, 2022*](https://twitter.com/justdanfornow/status/1484403170428481540?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

For context:

Related: [*Serbia scraps plans for Rio Tinto lithium mine after protests*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jan/20/serbia-scraps-plans-for-rio-tinto-lithium-mine-after-protests)

block-time published-time 6.10am GMT

On the decision to retain the hard border, and the dismay from many that they won't be able to return due to the quarantine requirements and other restrictions on who can enter, McGowan says that he did it to "protect our state from the worst excesses of what is going on in the eastern states":

And what is going on over there with massive death rates, huge hospitalisations, massive economic dislocation, businesses and all sorts of trouble, people staying home from work, kids not going to school, the army being called out, is pretty serious. Now here, we are not going through that. So what we're trying to do is put in place the ***measures*** that will protect us as we can from that when the virus eventually has community spread here.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 6.12am GMT

block-time published-time 6.05am GMT

Reporter:

You say the hospital system is as ready as it can be. But not all the hospital beds will be ready until October. That point, it will be as ready. Right now you're still playing catch-up.

McGowan:

We've had 300 additional beds we put in place. Obviously more roll out. Putting in place the equivalent of a new tertiary hospital in the course of 18 months is a big exercise. Normally a new hospital takes about 10 years to build.

block-time published-time 6.04am GMT

I want to go back to WA for a moment because there are prevailing concerns about the preparedness of the state's hospitals, and McGowan is being pressed again on it from reporters on the floor.

Reporter:

You've changed quite dramatically from when it was all about... we were facing a pandemic and we had to have our hospital system ready. You kept repeating that mantra, 'getting us time', 'sorry about this', 'it won't be for forever', 'we need to get our hospitals ready and our health system ready'. Here we are in the third year, sure, with another variant, but it's still sending a message to the public that we're not ready.

McGowan:

Our hospitals are as ready as they can be... Last year we announced $3.2bn of additional spends on beds, doctors, nurses, and the like. But the hospital system has to deal with the staffing issues. Getting people in. I mean, a lot of our recruitment is overseas and always has been. That's been difficult because all countries around the world are trying to do the same thing. There's all sorts of restrictions on people coming and all those sort of things.

We're putting in place 520 additional beds. We're having all the arrangements ready so at a certain point in time, we start to wind down elective surgery to cater for the growth in Covid cases in hospitals. That's what every state has done. Every state is doing similar things to cope with the growth in numbers.

... it won't be perfect. Nothing is perfect. We don't have like in Yes Minister, hospitals sitting there with no patients, just waiting.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 6.18am GMT

block-time published-time 5.58am GMT

Australia to accept negative rapid antigen tests for international arrivals

Just to take you away from WA for a minute: Australia will now accept negative rapid antigen tests instead of PCR tests for arrivals to Australia, according to new instruments made by the health minister, Greg Hunt, under the Biosecurity Act on Friday.

According to the new rules, incoming passengers can meet entry requirements with:

a certificate provided by a medical practitioner that... the person was tested for the coronavirus known as Covid-19 using a rapid antigen test... and... the result of the test was negative.

The test will have to be conducted under the supervision of a medical practitioner. The certificate must state:

the date and time of the testthe name of the person testedthe type of test conductedthe brand and make of the testthat the specimen for the test was collected, and the test was carried out, by or under the supervision of a medical practitionerthe result of the testthe signature of the medical practitioner providing the certificate.

The determination states that providing misleading information could be an offence or breach a civil penalty provision of the Act.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 6.03am GMT

block-time published-time 5.55am GMT

On rapid antigen tests, the argument from McGowan seems to be that a large supply of RATs is something that was required for Omicron but not for Delta, thanks to PCR being the gold standard for Delta testing:

Omicron arrived in Australia on December 8. [ Note: this is not correct - [*it was November*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2021/nov/28/covid-update-nsw-chief-health-officer-says-omicron-may-already-be-here). ] Prior to that, it was the Delta strain. The Delta strain testing arrangements required PCR testing, which is the swab up the nose, and it's highly accurate.

The advice with Delta was that you didn't want to use rapid antigen testing because it's less accurate. And PCR testing could manage the transmission rates and the number of people acquiring Delta and that was the best way of having very accurate results with Delta with low rates of transmission, comparably.

When Omicron arrived - and it didn't exist, really, before that - we had to reconsider, because the transmissibility rates of Omicron are so much higher than Delta. That's where rapid antigen testing comes in.

This all seems a bit roundabout to me, frankly - rapid antigen tests have been widely available in other countries for a long time, well before Omicron emerged, and were worked into systems as a way of managing Covid in a circumstance of limited restrictions.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 5.59am GMT

block-time published-time 5.48am GMT

Reporter:

Aside from pushing the third dose vaccination, what is your government going to do with this extra time to avoid the catastrophe, as you describe it, that we have seen in the eastern states? What will you do in this extra time?

McGowan:

As time goes on, we'll get children vaccinated. It's the third dose for over 18s but also... children have only have the opportunity to get vaccinated from 10 December. I've been contacted with lots of parents who want the opportunity to get their kids vaccinated. Our clinics are very full. The state is bearing most of the load of the vaccination rollout in Western Australia, contrary to other states. That provides that opportunity as well. As time passes, we'll have more rapid antigen tests come in, more hospital beds roll out.

Reporter:

Shouldn't we have those things in place already, and do you admit vaccination isn't enough?

McGowan:

Vaccination is very important. In terms of hospital beds, as you know, we made significant commitments last year to roll them out, including some modular beds at four hospitals. The advice I have is the hospital system is ready... all of those things make a difference.

It feels like he's staying two things simultaneously here - that they need more time for hospital beds to roll out, but also the hospital system is ready. Those things can't both be true, surely.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 5.55am GMT

block-time published-time 5.44am GMT

McGowan says that they are reviewing "what is going on over east" so he can't give a timeline on the border reopening.

Reporter:

A lot of people did what they were told. They went and got vaccinated. They have become eligible for their third dose more recently. The announcement yesterday... they are concerned if the border doesn't open for months their immunity will be weakened. What kind of assurance can you give that the borders will open at any point this year?

McGowan:

We will have a review and obviously Western Australia will open at some point in time subject to the results of that review. As I said yesterday, it is not fair for a bunch of people who are not eligible for the third dose if we open on 5 February when they are not eligible. To be frank with you, I have been contacted by many people who are very happy with the announcement we have made, I mean many people, because it gives them the opportunity to get vaccinated and it gives them the opportunity to protect the health of themselves and their loved ones.

When we made the announcement in December, I said... that it would open on 5 February unless there was an emergency or catastrophe. And deliberately seeding thousands of cases here in the first day or week, into Western Australia, would mean we just follow the exact same route of New South Wales.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 5.50am GMT

block-time published-time 5.39am GMT

The WA premier is taking questions now, and he's being asked if there will be a policy to allow overseas students in?

McGowan:

Not at this point in time. The unfortunate reality is we are trying to limit the spread of the virus into Western Australia. We are providing compassionate entry points for returning Western Australia, for people who are coming to visit sick relatives and the like. We will have a range of categories and ways for people to return home, subject to quarantine. All that involves some risk but we are doing our best [to allow relatives of WA residents and WA residents themselves to come back].

I know there has been a lot of commentary over the course of the last couple of days, perhaps, that we have been locked out or people have been locked up for two years. That is not actually true. Over the course of the last two years, as you will all remember, at various points in time all of the borders across Australia were open and people had the opportunity to come to Western Australia.

block-time published-time 5.34am GMT

McGowan says the state has had 151 cases of Omicron. He also goes through some of the national covid numbers - hard not to feel like he is pointing to these numbers like this by way of supporting his decision to keep the border closed:

There are currently 5,147 Australians in hospital today with Covid. Fortunately none of those people are in Western Australia. There are 424 Australians in intensive care with Covid. Thankfully, none of those people are in Western Australia. And sadly, today, Australia has reported 88 deaths across the country, including 46 in New South Wales alone.

This is absolutely devastating news for so many families across the country. Our thoughts are with them, it is a heartbreaking time. For some perspective, Omicron is dangerous and serious. We need to take every precaution we can and we know the third dose vaccination is key to all of this.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 5.39am GMT

block-time published-time 5.31am GMT

Western Australia records 10 new Covid cases

WA premier Mark McGowan is speaking now. As usual, WA are distinguishing between "local" cases and "travel-related" cases: the total includes 7 new local cases and 3 travel cases.

There are no Covid patients in hospital in WA.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 5.39am GMT

block-time published-time 5.24am GMT

Australia will export its first load of liquefied hydrogen made from coal in an engineering milestone which researchers say could also lock in a new fossil fuel industry and increase the country's carbon emissions.

Under the $500m Hydrogen [*Energy*](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/energy) Supply Chain (HESC) pilot project, hydrogen will be made in Victoria's LaTrobe valley from brown coal and transported aboard a purpose-built ship to Japan, where it will be burned in coal-fired power plants.

[*Carbon capture and storage*](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/commentisfree/2021/nov/11/do-angus-taylors-carbon-capture-and-storage-claims-stack-up) will be used in an attempt to reduce the carbon emissions associated with making the hydrogen and supercooling the gas until it forms a liquid before it is loaded aboard the Suiso Frontier vessel. The first shipment is due to depart from Hastings in the coming days.

Read the full story here:

Related: [*'Just a new fossil fuel industry': Australia to send first shipment of liquefied hydrogen to Japan*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/jan/21/just-a-new-fossil-fuel-industry-australia-to-send-first-shipment-of-liquefied-hydrogen-to-japan)

block-time published-time 5.12am GMT

While we wait for WA premier Mark McGowan to give us the state's Covid update after his bombshell border announcement last night, let's take a look at the record-breaking heatwave currently sweeping that state:

The heatwave has days to run before it shifts eastwards, Peter Hannam reports, combining with moisture leftover from ex-tropical cyclone Tiffany to create some clammy days and nights for southern cities.

Perth on Friday reached 40C for a fourth consecutive day, matching the record sequence reached in the WA capital on only three previous occasions, including around last Christmas. The Bureau of Meteorology was predicting a fifth 40C-day for Saturday.

Thursday's top of 40.5C was the eighth day above 40C this summer, beating the previous record of seven for the season in Perth and with more days like it likely, said a senior meteorologist at Weatherzone, Ben Domensino. Just after noon, local time, the temperature hit 40C for the ninth time this summer.

"It could get to 10 [days] by the end of this week, and then we're staring down the barrel of another five weeks of summer," said Domensino.

Read the full story here:

Related: [*Record-breaking Western Australia heatwave has days to run before it moves east*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/jan/21/record-breaking-western-australia-heatwave-has-days-to-run-before-it-moves-east)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 5.20am GMT

block-time published-time 5.00am GMT

enltrThis is a big first. As a Covid ***measure***, all voters at the four NSW by-elections will be sent postal vote packs. Voters can either use them or vote pre-poll or in polling places on the day. Interesting experiment. My guide to the by-elections here [*https://t.co/FPcDRpYaQj*](https://t.co/FPcDRpYaQj) [*#nswpol*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/nswpol?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

- Antony Green - elections (@AntonyGreenElec) [*January 21, 2022*](https://twitter.com/AntonyGreenElec/status/1484389160148676612?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 4.58am GMT

Some reaction to that announcement from the federal government about Afghanistan: Greens senator Nick McKim is saying it's "smoke and mirrors" - and won't create a single new place in the humanitarian visa program:

Australia has a moral responsibility to do far more than this given our culpability in the ***invasion*** and occupation of Afghanistan.

Of course more people from Afghanistan need protection, but this announcement means that for every person from Afghanistan who is granted a humanitarian visa, someone from elsewhere who desperately needs protection misses out.

This government has drastically cut Australia's humanitarian intake in recent years. Failing to create additional places for Afghan nationals simply adds insult to injury.

The minister has left open the door for further increases and we urge him to offer at least 20,000 places to people from Afghanistan in addition to our annual humanitarian intake.

The minister should also confirm that everyone from Afghanistan who was issued a 449 visa during and after the evacuation of Kabul will be granted permanent protection in Australia.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 5.01am GMT

block-time published-time 4.53am GMT

enltrHeavy rain and [*#thunderstorms*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/thunderstorms?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) are forecast across large parts of northern and central Australia over the coming days. Flash [*#flooding*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/flooding?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) is possible with the storms, especially through central Australia. Latest forecasts: [*https://t.co/0NXgulUuRg*](https://t.co/0NXgulUuRg). [*pic.twitter.com/ynmr16cED7*](https://t.co/ynmr16cED7)

- Bureau of Meteorology, Australia (@BOM\_au) [*January 21, 2022*](https://twitter.com/BOM_au/status/1484388214429290497?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 4.45am GMT

We're still waiting for the WA Covid update this afternoon but hearing that the premier, Mark McGowan, is going to pop up to give it himself very soon. We'll keep you posted.

block-time published-time 4.32am GMT

It's important to note that this announcement about an increase in the allocation of our humanitarian visas to Afghan nationals has been made after a damning Senate report was tabled in parliament, which found that former Afghan interpreters and other colleagues left behind by the Australian government after the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan now face a high risk of brutal reprisals.

As my colleague Daniel Hurst reported earlier today, the damning new consensus report said Australia had asked Afghan nationals to "stand in harm's way with Australian personnel" but had "left them standing in harm's way".

"It is dishonourable," said the inquiry's interim report, which was written by the Labor chair, Kimberley Kitching, and not opposed by government members of the committee.

Australia's last-ditch evacuation mission - launched on 18 August days after Kabul fell to the Taliban - lifted 4,168 people out of the Afghan capital over the course of nine days. Those carried on the 32 Australian flights included 167 Australian citizens and 2,984 Afghans with approved visas.

Read more about the report here:

Related: [*'Dishonourable': report says Afghans left behind 'at high risk of brutal reprisals' due to links with Australia*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jan/21/dishonourable-report-says-afghans-left-behind-at-high-risk-of-brutal-reprisals-due-to-links-with-australia)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 5.19am GMT

block-time published-time 4.25am GMT

The government says they will give priority in the humanitarian program to:

former Locally Engaged Employees (LEE) and their immediate family members;subclass 449 holders (current and former) and their immediate family members;those with enduring links to Australia, such as Afghans who were employed by Australian non-government organisations or who worked on Australian Government funded projects, and Coalition partner LEE and their immediate family; andWomen and girls, ethnic minorities, LGBTQI+ and other identified minority groups.

Hawke says:

These priorities recognise the dangerous and volatile nature of the situation in Afghanistan, acknowledge those at greatest risk, and recognise the unique and ***exceptional*** contributions made by individuals and their families to the Australian and Coalition missions in Afghanistan.

I have directed the Department of Home Affairs to give priority ***processing*** to the Afghan cohort in the Humanitarian Program and to give priority ***processing*** to all Afghan nationals within the Family Program.

It also says that the Hawke will conduct a series of roundtables with the Afghan-Australian community in the coming weeks.

block-time published-time 4.22am GMT

Government announces 15,000 humanitarian visas to be provided for Afghan nationals

OK, I've got the media release from immigration minister Alex Hawke on the increase to Australia's humanitarian visas for Afghan nationals now.

The details: Australia will provide at least 15,000 places for Afghan nationals through the Humanitarian and Family Visa Program over four years. This increased allocation includes 10,000 places for Afghan nationals within Australia's existing Humanitarian Program and at least 5,000 visas within the Family stream. It follows the initial allocation of 3,000 places in August 2021.

Hawke said the statement:

The War in Afghanistan was Australia's longest, and a humanitarian intake of this size reflects this. Our commitment to Afghan refugees will be second only in scale to our humanitarian intake from Syria and Iraq.

Today's announcement of 15,000 places follows our initial allocation of 3,000 places to Afghanistan in August 2021, which as we indicated then, was a floor and not a ceiling. This continues to be the case. The Government will continue to monitor ***processing*** numbers and reserves the right to increase the program in future years.

Since evacuations commenced from Kabul in August, more than 4,300 Afghan evacuees have been brought to Australia and are in the ***process*** of securing permanent visas over coming months, as they establish their lives in their new home.

There has been an ***unprecedented*** level of visa applications from Afghanistan for our Humanitarian and Migration visa programs. In recognition of this demand, and in support of this specific visa commitment, dedicated teams within the Department of Home Affairs have been established to undertake priority ***processing***.

Not to put too fine a point on it though - the Department of Home Affairs says it has received more than 32,500 applicatio ns for the Humanitarian program from Afghan nationals, on behalf of more than 145,000 individuals.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 5.20am GMT

block-time published-time 4.15am GMT

Some important context to that humanitarian visa allocation increase:

enltrBUT critically the government is yet to issue any humanitarian visas. There are 145,000 applicants. [*@SBSNews*](https://twitter.com/SBSNews?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

- Anna Henderson (@annajhenderson) [*January 21, 2022*](https://twitter.com/annajhenderson/status/1484378572068655106?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 4.10am GMT

enltrImmigration Minister Alex Hawke says Australia will provide at least 15,000 visa places for Afghan nationals - including 10,000 in the existing humanitarian program and at least 5000 visas from family visas An allocation of at least 3000 visas was announced in August

- Tom McIlroy (@TomMcIlroy) [*January 21, 2022*](https://twitter.com/TomMcIlroy/status/1484377284538933248?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 4.04am GMT

The Northern Territory government is under fire after a group of people taken into quarantine 10 days ago from a remote Aboriginal community were sent home on Sunday "unexpectedly" and subsequently tested positive for Covid-19.

The remote central Australian community of Yuendumu has asked NT Health to explain why the community members - who had been evacuated to the Alice Springs quarantine facility as close contacts - were flown home on 16 January and sent back to their homes without being tested on arrival, with local authorities saying they had not been informed of their return. A number of the group were Covid-positive when later tested by local health workers in the following two days.

Johanna Ward, the CEO of the Warlpiri Youth Development Aboriginal Corporation (WYDAC), said:

The people got off the plane and were able to go to their respective homes, and then tested positive once the emergency response team realised they were here... There were a number of people who were positive. We haven't been provided with that number. So the community is very angry.

Read the full story here:

Related: [*NT Aboriginal community demands answers after residents sent home from quarantine test positive for Covid*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/jan/21/nt-aboriginal-community-demands-answers-after-residents-sent-home-from-quarantine-test-positive-for-covid)

block-time published-time 3.51am GMT

ACT records 2 Covid deaths, 826 new cases

There are 62 people in hospital, with two in intensive care and one ventilated.

enltrACT COVID-19 update (21 Jan 2022) ??Vaccinations ? Aged 5-11 (1 dose): 41.7% ? Aged 12+ (2 doses) 98.6% ? Aged 18+ (3 doses): 36.4% ? New cases today: 826 (259 PCR & 567 RAT) ? Active cases: 5,647 (1463 PCR & 4,184 RAT) ? Total cases: 29,245 (23,296 PCR & 5,949 RAT) [*pic.twitter.com/8UON5hlWFw*](https://t.co/8UON5hlWFw)

- ACT Health (@ACTHealth) [*January 21, 2022*](https://twitter.com/ACTHealth/status/1484353348799451137?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 3.38am GMT

South Australia records 6 Covid deaths and 3,023 new cases

Premier Steven Marshall has been giving a press conference in Adelaide. He says there are 298 people in hospital. 33 people are in intensive care and 7 are on ventilators.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 3.40am GMT

block-time published-time 3.34am GMT

Twitter apologises to politicians who experienced abuse on the platform

Twitter officials apologised to politicians who have experienced abuse on its platform, and said more was being done to prevent female politicians and journalists from being subject to abuse on the service in a hearing on social media and online safety on Friday.

Committee chair, Liberal MP Lucy Wicks, asked Twitter officials how the company's hateful content policy aligned with her own experience on Twitter and that experienced by ABC journalist Leigh Sales:

On the one hand, I think this is wonderful that you have got a hateful content policy. But then I look at some of the tweets that are directed at me that don't get taken down or I look at some of the other tweets that I'm going to read out to you that I know have been the subject of very public conversation. And I guess I wonder how hateful content and your hateful content policy is actually policed and managed. And what's the words that regulators moderated? Given that so much harmful content seems to remain on Twitter and stay on for the directed individuals?

Twitter's director of public policy in Australia, Kara Hinesley, apologised to Wicks for "any harm that might have come across Twitter that might still be there":

I know that it can be horrific and having worked with a lot of victims of abuse, or victims survivors in my time here at Twitter, it's something that we care very deeply about. And I understand that this is something that is a lived experience for you. And so I appreciate you sharing this information with us and helping us think through where we need to continue to make strides in terms of abuse.

Hinesley pointed to recent changes to Twitter, including allowing users to limit who can reply to tweets and a new safety mode currently in a beta trial, as ways the company had been responding to people being abused on the site.

When taken to specific tweets, including several about Sales, Hinesley said she couldn't comment on the individual tweets, but was aware that female journalists and politicians had been specifically targeted:

I wouldn't be able to comment on the specifics at this stage. But I would assure you that our teams would be reviewing this against our terms of service and the Twitter rules and we'd be taking enforcement actions that would be consistent with what they find violative. You had mentioned Leigh Sales and we've worked with the ABC in a number of regards being very cognisant and aware and alive to the fact that we are seeing trends that are attacking both female journalists but also female politicians.

We know that this is something that is quite complex and we have dedicated teams that are working on how these interactions with individual targeting or again scale targeting, how it can be managed and how we can ensure that we're taking action to actually look at the behaviours that would cause harm in the short term and the long term - so in acute and chronic settings.

I just want to reassure you that this is something that we are getting better at with the scaled enforcement and we're working very hard to also ensure that we're alive to any situations that come up, especially around current events.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 3.41am GMT

block-time published-time 3.29am GMT

The rogue National MP, George Christensen, has confirmed that although he is exiting parliament at the next election he will still be involved in politics - as a journalist.

Christensen, speaking at online event Prayer and Pushback, said:

I'm not leaving politics - I'm leaving parliament - we're all involved in politics as citizens. I'm going to be in the fray. I was a journalist before I was in politics ... I'll probably step back into that in the future, in some way, shape or form.

Christensen continued his crusade against the children's Covid-19 vaccination program, arguing that "one death" from adverse reactions is too many (although he conceded his evidence of this in Australia is "anecdotal and not verified"). "Healthy children don't die of Covid-19," he said.

He said:

Labor are saying I should be booted out of parliament, for expressing a view about safety. They're not going to see the end of me.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 3.34am GMT

block-time published-time 3.23am GMT

Northern Territory records 432 new Covid cases

62 people are in hospital, five currently requiring oxygen. There are two patients in critical condition in ICU. Gunner says they are both unvaccinated.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 3.24am GMT

block-time published-time 3.22am GMT

Phew, OK, so while we were over at submarines in the Indo-Pacific, the Northern Territory chief minister Michael Gunner was giving a presser on their Covid numbers and back-to-school plans.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 3.24am GMT

block-time published-time 3.18am GMT

Dutton, though, aims straight for China:

The United Kingdom has, as I said before, a proud history and heritage of standing up for good against bad and if you look at what is happening between China and Lithuania at the moment, or between China and Thailand, between China and India, between China and Australia, other countries, where there has been economic coercion or activities otherwise... it takes, I think, many countries to come together to call out that behaviour. And I think the principal of sunlight or sunshine and exposing the conduct and being frank about where red lines are and where conduct is unacceptable is the only way in which we can address such behaviour.

Nobody, as I've said repeatedly, nobody in our country, in our region, across the world wants to see conflict of any nature. The Chinese government has been very clear about their intent with Taiwan and they've been on a course of conduct with other countries, as I say, including Lithuania. It is all well documented and it is all freely spoken about now, and it should be, because they have the questions to answer and they should answer them. I think there is nothing strange at all, and in fact I think it is to be applauded, that the United Kingdom has fought for and continues to fight for freedom in the Indo-Pacific, that's their history and I think it will continue to be their future.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 3.23am GMT

block-time published-time 3.15am GMT

There's a question about what the UK would contribute to security in the Indo-Pacific in the face of pressure from China, and whether Australia would be expected to offer concrete support to European security in return. Almost everyone had a go at answering this in some form, but these comments from Truss are quite pointed:

We are seeing increased economic coercion from China, we are seeing increased aggression from Russia, we are seeing Iran in danger of obtaining nuclear capability and we need to work with all of our friends and partners around the world, and Australia is an absolutely crucial ally and friend.

Whether it is in trade - and I believe trade and investment are very, very important - between allies to build up capability and reduce strategic dependence on countries like China, and whether it is on defensive support, which we are achieving through the AUKUS agreement, as well as through other agreements we have...

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 3.19am GMT

block-time published-time 3.09am GMT

Truss takes a question on Boris Johnson 's leadership, which has been on the rocks since the revelations of parties at Downing St during widespread lockdowns. Truss has been tipped as a frontrunner for the leadership if he goes down.

Reporter:

Foreign Secretary, you're here in Australia at a very challenging time back home, especially with the leadership crisis of Boris Johnson. Does he have your 100% support without reservation? In your view, is his leadership tenable?

Truss:

The Prime Minister has my 100% support. He is doing an excellent job. Britain was one of the first countries to roll out the Covid vaccine. We've had a very successful booster program. We're now able to open up our economy again in Britain and we've got one of the fastest-growing economies in the G7.

And the reason that we are here in Australia is working with our very close partners, to advance freedom and democracy around the world, and to protect our country. I want the Prime Minister to continue as long as possible in his job. He is doing a fantastic job. There is no leadership election.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 3.11am GMT

block-time published-time 3.07am GMT

Reporter:

On Ukraine, and in particular to Minister Payne, can you give us a sense... of what assistance Australia is willing to contemplate giving to Ukraine?

Payne:

In relation to the Ukraine, I had a very good conversation with the Ukranian foreign minister on 19 January, so a day-and-a-half ago, and very clearly reaffirmed Australia's support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. I indicated that Australia would be prepared to consider requests in areas in which we could assist to Ukraine and no formal requests have been made.

To be clear, that is not about direct military support. That is not on the table from Australia's perspective. But we will work closely with Ukraine in the coming days and weeks in terms of challenges that they are deal with and continue to affirm our views on their... sovereignty and territorial integrity.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 3.10am GMT

block-time published-time 3.05am GMT

More visits from US and UK nuclear subs

Reporter:

Can I ask, have you discussed UK submarines or other assets either making more regular visits to Australia, or potentially temporary basing arrangements for those assets in Australia - any light you can shed on that from discussions today would be appreciated.

Dutton :

We've been able to work incredibly well together. So in terms of additional visits, yes, that's been part of that working group discussion but also part of the discussion we've had hear in Sydney as well and we will see greater rotations, as we've already seen from the strike carrier group and from the nuclear sub visit out of the UK. We will see more, not just from the UK, but from the United States.

We're seeing greater interest, of course, from even the Germans and other European nations, more people that understand what is happening in terms of the coercion and bullying taking place within the Indo-Pacific. There are many countries who have that interest in making sure that they have a presence and that they express their own view about freedom and the continuation of what we know in the Indo-Pacific at the moment.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 3.11am GMT

block-time published-time 3.00am GMT

Wallace continues, with direct reference - not for the first time in this press conference - to Russia:

If globalisation has been a reality for the economy, it's also been a realisation for threat and with the internet comes a turbo boost that means young men in Sydney can be and radicalised by people from Syria. It means that nations can interrupt and corrupt our democratic and free and open societies from as far away as countries such as Russia and therefore we have to work together to strengthen those alliances.

There's a phrase in English and I'm sure it's the same in Australia which is 'by your friends, will be judged'. I'm proud that Australia is our closest friend.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 3.02am GMT

block-time published-time 2.58am GMT

UK Defence Secretary Ben Wallace takes the mic. He invokes the second world war, too:

81 years ago to the day, the men of the Australian 6th Division and the British 7th Division captured Tobruk from the Nazis, on this day. We fought side by side then against authoritarian and totalitarian regimes and we won not just because of the bravery of those men, who died, many of them, for the sake of freedom, but because we have an alliance and we are alliances.

Our strength is through alliances and that's why AUKMIN is such an important tool for us to stand up the values that we believe in. The stronger we are together, the stronger our values will be protected around the world. And it was great to have a comprehensive meeting today where we covered all the subjects that was mentioned - cybersecurity, misinformation, better, deeper military coordination and exercising and a recognition that today's world, unlike 1941, is more global than ever.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 3.01am GMT

block-time published-time 2.55am GMT

More from Dutton:

As we demonstrated in Kabul only a few months ago, Australia was able to bring out over 4,000 people but only because of the assistance of the United Kingdom and the UK, United States. And the security overlay they provided, the integration with our own Defence Force personnel on the ground, resulted in a positive, significant, tangible outcome for us and we're seeing at the moment in the Indo-Pacific with the greater presence of the strike carrier group, of the recent visit from the Astute and many more visits that will follow as a result of the agreement under AUKUS, a strengthening and a necessary strengthening of the relationship between the United Kingdom and Australia...

AUKUS represents an enormous opportunity for us, not just in relation to the acquisition of nuclear-powered submarines but also, rightly, as Marise point out, other capabilities which will deter acts of aggression.

Basically, again to state the bleeding obvious, we need the defence support of the UK and the US in the case of "acts of aggression".

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.58am GMT

block-time published-time 2.52am GMT

Now we're hearing from defence minister Peter Dutton :

We know as a world today that we would be in a very different situation if, during the 1930s and 1940s the United Kingdom had not stood up to malign forces and had not represented the values that they adhere to even to this very day. And we have a lot in common with the United Kingdom, a shared heritage, a shared set of values, and they must endure into the future.

And the Prime Minister and I and others have spoken about this period in the Indo-Pacific being not dissimilar to the 1930s. And so it is incredibly important that countries that share values like the United Kingdom and Australia stand up once again and we will work together in the Indo-Pacific and right around the world to deliver on those values, to give them meaning.

Let's just state the absolute obvious here so this doesn't get lost: the 1930s led up to devastating world war. This is not a benign, throwaway comment.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.58am GMT

block-time published-time 2.49am GMT

Truss :

Thirdly, we're strengthening our security ties. We're proud to work together in the Five Eyes and on the five power defence arrangements.

I'm looking forward to travelling to Adelaide tomorrow to see the Hunter class frigates being built. Our carrier strike group exercised with Australia and other partners last year.

AUKUS will help make our defence and security ties even stronger by helping Australia acquire nuclear-powered submarine capability. It will also deepen our cooperation on advanced capabilities like cyber, AI and quantum. This will help protect trade routes and the widest ability of the Indo-Pacific.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.57am GMT

block-time published-time 2.48am GMT

Truss moves on to the cyber and technology partnership:

Secondly, we're boosting our cooperation on technology. Technology has enabled incredible freedoms, but it is also being used to promote fear, and we can't allow the technologies of the future to be exploited for malign ends. Global tech standards must be shaped by the free world, not by authoritarian regimes, and that is why yesterday Marise and I signed a new cyber and critical technology partnership focused on tackling malign actors.

block-time published-time 2.47am GMT

Truss continues:

Today, we've agreed to work even more closely in our response together with our friends and allies around the world, focusing on three key areas - first of all, strengthening our economic security. We're deepening economic ties to strengthen our supply chains and reduce strategic dependence.

Our new trade agreement will completely remove tariffs between our two nations and it will pave the way for the UK to join the Trans-Pacific Partnership, reinforcing that reliability of supply. We're working together on joint infrastructure investment into the Pacific region.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.50am GMT

block-time published-time 2.46am GMT

We're now hearing from UK Foreign Secretary Liz Truss :

We have no better friends than Australia and it has been an incredibly productive day of talks. We are modernising our partnership for a new age. The reality is that threats are rising across the world. Russia is threatening Ukraine, amassing troops on the border. Iran is striving for a nuclear weapon and China is using its economic muscle against Australia and other allies like Lithuania.

What we have shown today is that we are completely united in our response. We're standing shoulder to shoulder in defence of freedom and democracy, and we're determined to face down these growing threats.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.50am GMT

block-time published-time 2.45am GMT

Payne :

I think it's important to emphasise the inclusiveness of our approach. The UK and Australia have a vital relationship. We're forming new structures of cooperation through arrangements such as AUKUS with the United States. All of these promote peace and contribute to the resilience of nations in the Indo-Pacific, but there is strong value in flexibility. The quad grouping between Australia, India, Japan and the United States for example aligns well with UK priorities in the Indo-Pacific.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.55am GMT

block-time published-time 2.44am GMT

Payne:

Secretary Truss and I share a strong appreciation for the importance of developing the infrastructure in the Pacific that is sustainable and climate-adapted, that drives economic growth and achieves genuine development goals.

Yesterday we signed an infrastructure investment MoU [memorandum of understanding] and a cyber and technology partnership, perfect examples of cementing that practical cooperation. We have today also discussed at length dangerous disinformation. And how we can work more closely together in countering the narratives of authoritarian actors who seek to undermine our efforts to promote openness and stability.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.53am GMT

block-time published-time 2.43am GMT

Payne:

We have agreed today that the way we meet such an array of challenges is by working more closely together. Even more closely together. As liberal democracies, we are natural partners in countering the influence of malign authoritarianism, in standing up for human rights, in maintaining the international rules-based order. Certainly our values accommodate working with different political systems, for all of whom, though, the sovereignty of their own country is fundamental, but they don't allow for assertiveness or aggression by authoritarian states who would deny others that sovereignty or their own strategic choices.

That's not something that can be tolerated by democracies looking to maintain an international system that is open and stable and prosperous, by standing clearly on our values, our interests and sovereignty, we can give confidence to others, which is a matter Australia considers to be very important and something we have discussed today. We've talked about how we achieve this practically. In particular we can support the resilience of those countries in fields in which they might be vulnerable to malign influence or coercion, areas such as cybersecurity and technical infrastructure, trade, economics and defence.

block-time published-time 2.42am GMT

Payne is beginning with the usual kind of preamble - thanking lots of people etc. She also says:

It's fitting that the first two plus two ministerial meeting in person in Australia since COVID began has been with such close and long-standing partners. It's also been invaluable, coming at a time when we all face numerous strategic challenges. Whether that is the rising assertiveness in the Indo-Pacific, or whether it is Russian aggression on the Ukraine border.

At the same time, as governments, we are also managing the ongoing Covid pandemic. Here in the Pacific, we are responding to unforeseen disasters, such as the volcanic eruption and tsunami that has devastated Tonga, with whom Australia is supporting, in cooperation with others, including the United Kingdom. And I do want to take a moment here to acknowledge the Tongan Government's efforts in the face of this catastrophic event and the devastation that it has caused.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.45am GMT

block-time published-time 2.39am GMT

Foreign Minister Marise Payne is speaking live now from Sydney on the AUKMIN (Australia-United Kingdom Ministerial Consultations) talks.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.42am GMT

block-time published-time 2.29am GMT

You can also get a free icecream if you get your booster at state run clinics in Victoria on the weekend. Pallas says the cost of this is "a drop in the ocean" of what the state has spent on pandemic ***measures*** to date and it's important everyone keep cool while getting vaccinated on this forthcoming hot weekend.

enltrFree Golden Gaytimes!! Ice creams available If you get booster at Royal Exh, sunshine hospital, Latrobe Bundoora this weekend. Treasurer says the "cost is a drop in the ocean." [*@VictorianCHO*](https://twitter.com/VictorianCHO?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) expects "ice cream stampedes," [*@10NewsFirstMelb*](https://twitter.com/10NewsFirstMelb?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) [*#springst*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/springst?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

- Simon Love (@SimoLove) [*January 21, 2022*](https://twitter.com/SimoLove/status/1484350042471546881?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 2.18am GMT

The Victorian treasurer Tim Pallas and health officials are speaking at the moment in Melbourne, and they've just announced that they'll give paid time off to public sector workers to get their third dose of the Covid vaccine:

Today we are also taking another important step to supporting our public sector workforce by providing paid time off for workers to be vaccinated with a third dose of the Covid vaccine. We are doing this because the health and safety of our public service and public sector employees and the whole community is vitally important to us.

We recognise that, as an employer, we have a duty of care to our public servants. They also have a responsibility to the community at large to make sure that they are not a source of infection in those interactions. That is why, as an employer, we are taking this vital step.

The change, in conjunction with the vaccination blitz at sites like this, makes getting your third dose earlier and easier than ever before. Our expanded policy will take effect immediately to help encourage and support Victorian workers to do the right thing, by themselves, by their family and their community and get the third vaccine as quickly as possible.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.24am GMT

block-time published-time 2.10am GMT

The state environmental approval for a controversial uranium project that received the green light from the federal government on the eve of the 2019 election has expired.

Canadian company Cameco planned to develop its Yeelirrie uranium mine 500km north of Kalgoorlie in Western Australia.

It was approved by the Barnett government in 2017 and received its federal environmental approval from the Morrison government the day before the 2019 federal election was called, despite the risk the project posed to 12 stygofauna, which are tiny groundwater species.

Related: [*Melissa Price approved uranium mine knowing it could lead to extinction of 12 species*](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/jul/04/melissa-price-approved-uranium-mine-knowing-it-could-lead-to-extinction-of-12-species)

Under the conditions of its state approval, the company had five years to demonstrate the project had substantially commenced or its environmental authority would expire.

That deadline was reached on Thursday and a spokesperson for WA's environment minister, Reece Whitby, has confirmed the project had not substantially commenced.

He said Cameco had applied for an extension of its approval and the government was waiting for advice from the department of water and environmental regulation.

The Conservation Council of Western Australia and the Australian Conservation Foundation welcomed news the Yeelirrie mine's deadline had not been met.

Dave Sweeney of the ACF said it was "increasingly clear" there was no economic case for uranium mining in WA.

The organisations said rather than granting an extension, they hoped the government would choose to permanently protect the site.

Mia Pepper from the CCWA said:

After 50 years of tireless campaigning to protect Yeelirrie we are now looking forward to the introduction of lasting protections against uranium mining in WA.

It is not the first approval for a uranium mine that has lapsed in recent times.

Toro Energy's approval for a proposed uranium mine at Wiluna in the northern Goldfields expired earlier this month and Whitby's spokesman said the company had not sought an extension.

The approval for another Cameco project at Kintyre in the eastern Pilbara expired in March 2020 and an application for an extension was rejected.

The McGowan government was elected on a platform of opposing uranium mining but had said it would honour projects that were already under way.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.25am GMT

block-time published-time 1.53am GMT

enltrNo one in WA wants to follow NSW/Vic carnage. But closed border won't protect us for ever. We need honest conversation about how to manage COVID in a vaccinated community- that includes restrictions. Vaccines are very effective but not enough to prevent spread of Omicron.

- AMA President (@amapresident) [*January 21, 2022*](https://twitter.com/amapresident/status/1484338298378399744?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 1.45am GMT

Health experts warn delaying elective surgeries in Victoria, including gender affirmation procedures, will see blown-out waiting lists spiral into a "massive healthcare crisis".

On 5 January, the Victorian government announced elective surgery - except for "emergency and urgent" procedures - would be temporarily suspended to ease pressure on public and private hospitals amid the Omicron wave.

The changes came into effect from 6 January across Melbourne and major regional cities for a three-month period to help hospitals manage record Covid-19 patients.

But on Thursday, IVF procedures were exempted from the restrictions following a social media backlash, with hospitals scaling up to resume procedures from 25 January.

But it's not just IVF that falls under this banner - the current national definition for elective surgery is care that can be delayed for at least 24 hours - used to distinguish between emergency care which requires action within that timeframe.

The banner includes a wide range of procedures from cataract extractions and endometrial procedures to coronary artery bypass grafts, full hip and knee replacements and some cancer procedures.

Read more:

Related: [*Delaying elective surgery could spark 'massive healthcare crisis' in Victoria, experts warn*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/jan/21/delaying-elective-surgery-could-spark-massive-healthcare-crisis-in-victoria-experts-warn)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.47am GMT

block-time published-time 1.38am GMT

Happy Friday, all! Thanks Matilda Boseley for all your work. I'll be with you for the rest of the afternoon, bringing you all the end-of-the-week madness as it comes to hand.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.40am GMT

block-time published-time 1.34am GMT

Okay all, that's it for this week. The inimitable Stephanie Convery is taking over and will be with you for the rest of the afternoon.

See you all bright and early on Monday.

block-time published-time 1.27am GMT

More than a year after a December 2020 deadline, [*30% of major irrigators*](https://www.dpie.nsw.gov.au/nrar/how-to-comply/metering/compliance-state-of-play) in the northern basin of NSW are yet to install accurate water meters and connect them to government monitoring via telecommunications networks.

But the Natural Resources Access Regulator chief executive, Grant Barnes, says he is heartened that 90% overall have now installed modern pumps, with the main problem being black spots that limit the final stage of connecting to the government network.

In 2017 [*Four Corners aired allegations*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2017/jul/25/murray-darling-basin-allegations-of-water-theft-spark-calls-for-judicial-inquiry) of substantial water theft and meter tampering in the Barwon Darling region, prompting a major overhaul of NSW water rules.

Unlike Victorian irrigators, who had been using pumps that used telemetry to report real-time water use, many major NSW cotton farms were running outdated meters on pumps that were able to take large quantities of water.

But progress has been glacially slow in getting new meters installed in northern NSW.

Independent NSW MP Justin Field said it was time for the NSW water minister, Kevin Anderson, to take action against corporate irrigators who continued to flout NSW water metering rules.

It is unacceptable that after the Four Corners report into water theft and Icac findings of systemic failures in water management in NSW, we are still in a situation where over 30% of the biggest water users are still breaking the rules.

Barnes said that NRAR would soon start prosecuting non-compliant operators unless they had sought an exemption from the minister.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.30am GMT

block-time published-time 1.26am GMT

When the La Trobe University lecturer Dr Yves Rees was told their gender affirmation surgery would be cancelled, they were devastated. "It was impossible to contemplate," they said.

Rees' procedure was scheduled for November, during the Delta wave, and was later reinstated when elective surgery was reintroduced in [*Victoria*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/victoria). But at the time, Rees was told there would be an eight-month wait for the procedure.

"There can be a perception gender affirmation surgeries are a choice, something people would prefer to do rather than not," they said.

"That's not correct; the reality is these are very much medically necessary surgeries ...this can be the difference between a life of constant gender dysphoria and acute stress and anxiety, and a life of feeling good."

You can read the full report below:

Related: [*Delaying elective surgery could spark 'massive healthcare crisis' in Victoria, experts warn*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/jan/21/delaying-elective-surgery-could-spark-massive-healthcare-crisis-in-victoria-experts-warn)

block-time published-time 1.14am GMT

Pauline Hanson calls for royal commission into Covid response

The One Nation leader, Pauline Hanson, has revealed her party will stand on a platform of demanding a royal commission into the Covid response, claiming that Australians have been "lied to" about the number of deaths from Covid.

Hanson confirmed that the Senate strike will continue when parliament resumes, telling Prayer and Pushback:

"[Liberal senators] Alex Antic and Gerard Rennick stood their ground against their party's politics - they're still continuing with that stance as I am and Malcolm Roberts - we're not going to vote for government legislation until they deal with the states, the way they're dealing with Covid and keeping families apart."

Hanson said Novak Djokovic should have been let into Australia if he tested negative to Covid, labelling it a "weak excuse" to claim his presence would help spread anti-vax views.

To kick someone out because they don't believe in the vaccine - it's pathetic.

Earlier, Antic spoke about voting with One Nation against vaccine mandates:

The One Nation bill was similar to one Craig Kelly had put when he was a government member. It related to discrimination, to people having a choice. People should have a choice over their own medical autonomy...We had to make a stand on this issue...

It's not easy - I don't relish crossing the floor against my own party. Many shared the same view, there were five of us: me, Gerard Rennick, Matt Canavan, Sam McMahon and Concetta Fierravanti-Wells.It's an important issue, a real line in the sand.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.23am GMT

block-time published-time 1.09am GMT

enltr [*#AUKMIN*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/AUKMIN?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) 2022 has commenced in Sydney. We are resolutely focused on deepening foreign and defence policy cooperation in the Indo-Pacific and globally. ???????? [*pic.twitter.com/bv31n1TzuK*](https://t.co/bv31n1TzuK)

- Marise Payne (@MarisePayne) [*January 21, 2022*](https://twitter.com/MarisePayne/status/1484330230269739016?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 1.04am GMT

Queensland records 16,031 Covid cases and 13 deaths

Apologies, the Queensland premier said there were 6,031 new Covid-19 cases today in the state, but it seems she maybe have misspoken as Queensland health now says it is in fact 16,031.

Interestingly, this means that Queensland is now getting close to overtaking Victoria in terms of daily cases.

enltrToday we have recorded 16,031 new COVID-19 cases. Sadly, we have reported 13 deaths in the past 24 hours. Full details ? [*https://t.co/2vvTmli7qN*](https://t.co/2vvTmli7qN) [*pic.twitter.com/WS99kO3L89*](https://t.co/WS99kO3L89)

- Queensland Health (@qldhealth) [*January 21, 2022*](https://twitter.com/qldhealth/status/1484329909250150400?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.07am GMT

block-time published-time 12.59am GMT

enltr?? [*#Flood*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/Flood?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) Warning issued for [*#Parro*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/Parro?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) River (NSW). Minor flooding may occur along the Paroo River at [*#Willara*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/Willara?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) Crossing from Saturday. See [*https://t.co/Ss766fadjj*](https://t.co/Ss766fadjj) for details and updates; follow advice from [*@NSWSES*](https://twitter.com/NSWSES?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw). [*#NSWFloods*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/NSWFloods?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) [*pic.twitter.com/PJltV7ncs9*](https://t.co/PJltV7ncs9)

- Bureau of Meteorology, New South Wales (@BOM\_NSW) [*January 21, 2022*](https://twitter.com/BOM_NSW/status/1484329432252698624?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 12.49am GMT

The Queensland premier, Annastacia Palaszczuk, says she does not regret opening up the state's borders despite the surge of Omicron cases now sweeping the state.

No, I don't, because I said very clearly at the time that the federal government had all the information in relation to the Omicron variant, and they said it was safe to do so.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.50am GMT

block-time published-time 12.47am GMT

enltr. [*@AnnastaciaMP*](https://twitter.com/AnnastaciaMP?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) bristles when asked by a journalist if she regrets opening the border before most of the population had had a covid booster vaccine. "You was screaming at me to open the border, I find it ironic that you asked me that question."

- @MartySilk (@MartySilkHack) [*January 21, 2022*](https://twitter.com/MartySilkHack/status/1484326580042473478?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 12.46am GMT

Queensland's chief health officer, Dr John Gerrard, has gone through the details of the state's Covid deaths.

Sadly today, we have 13 deaths to report, two people in their 60s, five in their 70s, five in their 80s, one person in their 90s.

Of those, two were unvaccinated, one received a single dose of vaccine, eight received two doses and one had received a booster, and we don't have a confirmation on one of those patients.

Our thoughts are very much with their families today. We have a total of 855 people in hospital with Covid-19, that's up by a small amount from yesterday from 850.

That includes 54 patients in hospital intensive care units, 22 of whom were are ventilated. That's a bit up from 48 yesterday.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.49am GMT

block-time published-time 12.44am GMT

Palaszczuk has spoken a bit more about her plans to bring rapid antigen test manufacturing to Australia after she raised the idea at national cabinet yesterday.

She says the federal government is happy to help the state fast track this ***process*** to get a manufacturer approved by the TGA.

I want to talk briefly about rapid antigen tests... We've got 2 million that are coming over the next couple of weeks, and these are going out, of course, to our health services and our health testing centres for the public and for our staff.

We've also got a new distribution centre... which is under construction and [there are a] couple of companies that we hope to get approval soon so we can do local manufacturing right here in Queensland.

At national cabinet yesterday, I raised this issue, and can I thank the prime minister, he said that the TGA will work closely with the state government to iron out any issues that those companies may have to facilitate their accreditation as quickly as possible and to go through the normal ***processes***.

... If there's any issues that either party needs [resolved] then we will fast-track those issues and work with the federal government to really accelerate the approvals of those companies and I thank them for that.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.47am GMT

block-time published-time 12.38am GMT

OK, we will be hearing from the Victorian leaders at 1pm AEDT today.

enltrTreasurer, Tim Pallas, and the Chief Health Officer, Brett Sutton, will make an announcement and visit a vaccination blitz site, 1pm Melbourne [*#springst*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/springst?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

- Political Alert (@political\_alert) [*January 21, 2022*](https://twitter.com/political_alert/status/1484324100709359617?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.42am GMT

block-time published-time 12.37am GMT

One Nation senator Malcolm Roberts, is speaking at the Prayer and Pushback online conference - which is a jamboree of anti-lockdown anti-vaccination sentiment. Roberts said:

Pauline Hanson and I will continue to oppose government legislation the moment parliament resumes in February - we will continue until we get our freedoms back... We will be opposing every piece of government legislation until the government wakes up to itself.

In November One Nation did side with the government in some procedural votes, but [*its refusal to vote for government legislation*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2021/nov/22/one-nation-anti-vaccine-mandate-bill-rejected-despite-support-from-five-coalition-senators) until the Coalition overturns state-based vaccine mandates has been a major headache.

Roberts accused Scott Morrison of a "lie" for saying there are "no injection mandates" in Australia. He urged voters to put the major parties last: the Greens last, Labor second last and the Coalition third last. That means, despite all the bluster, One Nation voters would be helping to re-elect the Morrison government if they followed this suggestion.

Roberts claimed that Covid-19 vaccines are "plummeting in effectiveness" and "can kill [people] and is killing them". In fact, after 43m doses given since the start of the rollout the TGA has found that just 11 deaths were linked to the vaccine. The TGA said:

Vaccination against Covid-19 is the most effective way to reduce deaths and severe illness from infection. The protective benefits of vaccination continue to far outweigh the potential risks.

Roberts made an unsubstantiated claim that the government's digital identity legislation was drawn in part from "World Economic Forum documents... under UN direction".

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.41am GMT

block-time published-time 12.36am GMT

enltr????Thunderstorm Forecast Friday: Severe thunderstorms possible for far southwest border regions, likely to continue overnight. Heavy rainfall & lower risk of damaging wind gusts. Non severe thunderstorms broadly possible for west and far north. Warnings: [*https://t.co/mBBPfJPap5*](https://t.co/mBBPfJPap5) [*pic.twitter.com/a4APlXjKWe*](https://t.co/a4APlXjKWe)

- Bureau of Meteorology, Queensland (@BOM\_Qld) [*January 21, 2022*](https://twitter.com/BOM_Qld/status/1484322049539526663?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 12.35am GMT

enltrQueensland CHO John Gerrard said there are now: 855 people are being treated for covid in hospital 54 are in intensive care 22 are on ventilators

- @MartySilk (@MartySilkHack) [*January 21, 2022*](https://twitter.com/MartySilkHack/status/1484323578342682624?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 12.35am GMT

Queensland premier Annastacia Palaszczuk has also confirmed that Queensland will reduce the time period between people's second and third vaccine shots to three months.

This will come into effect from Monday 24 January.

enltrAnother 13 deaths in Qld - 62% of those eligible have received a booster. From Monday, Qlders can get their third shot after 3 months [*@10NewsFirstQLD*](https://twitter.com/10NewsFirstQLD?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) [*pic.twitter.com/ANhlC3Vk5*](https://t.co/ANhlC3Vk5)

- Clare Barnes (@ClareBarnes\_10) [*January 21, 2022*](https://twitter.com/ClareBarnes_10/status/1484322201419776001?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.37am GMT

block-time published-time 12.33am GMT

Australia records its deadliest day of the pandemic with 80 deaths, 13 from QLD

Queensland has recorded another 13 Covid deaths, taking the national death toll on Friday to 80, beating the grim record of 77 set on Tuesday.

Queensland has also recorded an additional 16,031 cases in the latest reporting period, a significant dip from the rest of the week's infection numbers.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.04am GMT

block-time published-time 12.30am GMT

National Covid summary

Australia has again recorded its deadliest day of the pandemic with 88 deaths on Friday. Here is a summary of the daily numbers so far:

NSW Deaths - 46 Cases - 25,168 Hospitalisations - 2,743 (209 in ICU)

Victoria Deaths - 20 Cases - 18,167 Hospitalisations - 1,096 (121 in ICU)

Queensland Deaths - 13 Cases - 16,031 Hospitalisations - 855 (54 in ICU)

Tasmania Deaths - 1 Cases - 866 Hospitalisations - 31 (three in ICU)

South Australia Deaths - 6 Cases - 3,023 Hospitalisations - 298 (33 in ICU)

ACT Deaths - 2 Cases - 826 Hospitalisations - 62 (2 in ICU)

Northern Territory Deaths - 0 Cases - 432 Hospitalisations - 62 (2 in ICU)

Western Australia Deaths - 0 Cases - 10 Hospitalisations - 0

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 7.40am GMT

block-time published-time 12.25am GMT

We should be hearing from the Queensland premier and health minister soon when they step up and confirm the state's death toll and case numbers.

Australia has already recorded 67 Covid-19 deaths today. Tuesday was our deadliest ever day so far, with 77 deaths overall.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.26am GMT

block-time published-time 12.15am GMT

I've been speaking with holders of bridging visas who are still effectively barred from entering the country, trapping people in, and out of, Australia.

Bridging visa holders have watched as the federal government announced eased travel restrictions for the vast majority of other temporary visa holders, including this week when the government called for working holidaymakers and students to come to Australia to fill the workforce shortage.

Many of those on bridging visas are skilled migrants and graduates waiting on permanent residency or a decision on their more substantive visa. ***Processing*** times for making those decisions have blown out massively.

That has left many, including skilled migrants waiting for permanent residency, in despair. Unable to see their families for years and with no end in sight, many are considering leaving Australia permanently.

Muhammad, who was raised in the United Arab Emirates, was invited to Australia on the promise of a regional work visa as an engineer in the construction sector.

He has not seen his family for three-and-a-half years, and was meant to get married abroad this year, but has been separated from his fiancee by the border restrictions.

The very first reason why my parents moved to Australia ... is they were moving to a better place for their family. But it's not a better place if you are not even getting your basic rights to see your family.

Emma Cochrane, originally from the United Kingdom, has been separated from her family for years. She is still trapped due to her bridging visa, and has applied for a travel exemption 14 times. Each application was denied.

We're literally stuck in this limbo-land.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.19am GMT

block-time published-time 12.13am GMT

Man arrested following an explosion in Perth CBD

Police in WA are investigating what they suspect was a homemade explosive device that detonated in Newcastle St in Leederville, Perth yesterday, with one man taken into custody.

They were called to the vicinity of two restaurants on the busy inner-city street after the device exploded, causing shrapnel and debris to spray out around 10 meters in every direction.

WA police say no one was injured.

The item appeared to be a homemade, makeshift device that had been ignited. The remnants of the device were seized by police for forensic examination.

Later that night they got a call about someone allegedly in possession of a second, similar device.

About 10.20pm last night police were called to a location near the intersection of Wellington Street and King Street, Perth after a person reported they were in possession of a similar improvised explosive device.

They had [allegedly] taken the device from a vehicle belonging to a person known to them.

Police and emergency services cordoned off the area while the tactical response group's bomb response unit attended and "rendered the item safe".

The item was confirmed to be a homemade, makeshift device similar to the one detonated in Leederville earlier in the day.

As a result of investigations, Perth Detectives attended a residence in Lansing Street, Queens Park in the early hours of this morning and executed a search warrant with the assistance of the Tactical Response Group. A 29-year-old man was taken into custody without incident and is assisting detectives with the investigation.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.17am GMT

block-time published-time 12.01am GMT

The opposition leader, Anthony Albanese, has thrown his support behind Western Australian premier, Mark McGowan 's, decision to indefinitely enforce hardline border ***measures***.

Albanese said while some may have been disappointed by the border decision, the WA premier made the right call, reports AAP.

I told [Mark McGowan on Thursday night] I respected and supported the decision... People were keen to visit loved ones, but the first priority of Mark McGowan has been to keep WA safe. People in WA enjoy life almost as normal, certainly compared with NSW.

McGowan said the border delay would allow for more people to receive booster doses and for children to get fully vaccinated against Covid.

He initially said the state would reopen the border at 90% fully vaccinated. WA is now at 89%.

Albanese said the booster rollout would be critical to providing Covid protection.

Mark McGowan has done the right thing by WA which is keeping their health OK, which is a precondition for keeping their economy OK.

The border decision has meant neither the opposition leader nor the prime minister, Scott Morrison, has been able to get into WA for campaigning ahead of the federal election, due to be held by 21 May at the latest.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.04am GMT

block-time published-time 11.58pm GMT

The Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras have been forced to cancel their 2022 "Party" event as Covid cases surge in NSW.

The Party is one of the central events of the LGBTQ+ festival, when 10,000 or more people gather at the Hordern Pavilion to dance to live music and DJ sets.

Luckily, the parade and other events in the festival are going ahead, however.

Here is what the festival organisers had to say in a statement this morning:

This phase of the pandemic remains volatile, and the health and safety of our community will always remain our top priority. The nature of this event being mostly indoors with dancing, plus with an attendance of more than 10,000 people means it is high risk for Covid transmission.

Although March 5th is still several weeks away, due to Party's large scale, sadly we have had to make the very tough call now, not only for the sustainability of the event in future years but also for the organisation, and so that artists and partygoers can make alternate plans.

There will be other opportunities for us to come together this Mardi Gras Festival. We have approved Covid-Safe plans and procedures in place to ensure other key events, including community favourites Fair Day and Parade, can still go ahead as planned. Most of our events are outdoor and/or seated, meaning they fit under the Health Order and are deemed lower risk.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 11.59pm GMT

block-time published-time 11.48pm GMT

Tasmania record 866 new cases of Covid-19 and one death

Okay, let's jump back to Tasmania where the premier, Peter Gutwein, is speaking after the state recorded its first Covid-19 death in nearly two years.

This brings the state's total death toll since the start of the pandemic to 14.

[There are] 31 people in hospital with Covid. Of these 31 patients, 13 of these people in hospital with Covid are been treated specifically for Covid. Of these 13 patients being treated for Covid, three are being cared for in the ICU with two of these people being ventilated.

Gutwein says the death of the 90-year-old woman, who passed away with Covid-19 on 17 January, is being investigated by a coroner to establish how much of an impact the infection had.

Today, however, sadly, I do need to speak about our first death associated with Covid since 2020. The person deceased is a 90-year-old woman who was a resident at [a] nursing home in Newtown, Hobart. And our thoughts are with her family and friends at this difficult time.

I understand that she had a range of medical issues, she was diagnosed as part of the initial testing that took place across that facility which was undertaken on Wednesday this week, following an outbreak of Covid which was first identified with the facility on Monday, 17 January.

Her death was not recorded on the death certificate as being directly from Covid... In the 24 hours prior, although asymptomatic, she tested positive for Covid and therefore Covid cannot be ruled out as a contributing factor to this death. In the interest of transparency, we are reporting it.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 11.52pm GMT

block-time published-time 11.43pm GMT

enltrNSW and Victoria working in lockstep on school plan, indicates Prerrottet. "We are obviously seeking alignment with the Victorian government.. We're in very similar positions of the pandemic." [*#springst*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/springst?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) [*#nswpol*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/nswpol?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

- Tamsin Rose (@tamsinroses) [*January 20, 2022*](https://twitter.com/tamsinroses/status/1484309369869471744?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 11.39pm GMT

NSW Health deputy secretary, Susan Pearce, has taken a bit of a hose to hopes that elective surgeries will restart in the state in the middle of February, telling reporters it will very much be a wait-and-see situation.

Obviously, it is highly dependent on... hospitalisations, so the next week or two will be critical in terms of making a decision. Clearly, as I said at the time, it is never the thing we want to do, to suspend surgery and make people wait.

We have demonstrated before, after we've come through these waves, that we get back into it and do the best we can to catch up as fast as we can...

I will make the point that for urgent surgery, and during the Delta wave, 100% of surgery was complete on time and we continue to operate on people each and every day, and the thing we've kept going is day surgery procedures.

There is a balance there, but we will absolutely be turning surgery back on as soon as we possibly can... we can't make a call on that yet.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 11.45pm GMT

block-time published-time 11.37pm GMT

Perrottet says NSW views rapid antigen tests as playing a "short term role" in the return to school ***process***, rather than becoming a staple of the education system during Omicron.

We have made very clear that we expect rapid antigen tests to play a role, and I understand health's view in relation to that, but you are balancing a number of things here: the educational outcome and the health outcome, and we want to provide confidence to parents and two teachers.

We are working closely with the teacher's federation to provide comfort to teachers, and we want to provide comfort to parents - and as a parent I know that many mums and dads across our state are anxious about the return to school and therefore we want to provide as much confidence as possible.

We don't see rapid antigen tests playing a long-term role, we see them playing a short-term role in instilling confidence in our parents and in our teachers to get kids back in the classroom on day one.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 11.40pm GMT

block-time published-time 11.33pm GMT

enltrPolice divers have just recovered the body of a fisherman from the Broadwater at Labrador. He had been yabbying with his son on Wavebreak Island. His boat came adrift and he went swimming after it but never came up. ? [*@9NewsGoldCoast*](https://twitter.com/9NewsGoldCoast?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) ? ? [*@9NewsQueensland*](https://twitter.com/9NewsQueensland?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) ? [*pic.twitter.com/WkebtKJFRE*](https://t.co/WkebtKJFRE)

- Mackenzie Colahan (@maccolahan9) [*January 20, 2022*](https://twitter.com/maccolahan9/status/1484307286000824322?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 11.31pm GMT

Okay, no return to school plan for NSW to be announced today, Perrottet says.

He says the announcement will be made in the coming days (which is starting to cut it quite close to the start of the school year!).

block-time published-time 11.30pm GMT

Well, this is... interesting. Perrottet now seems to argue that NSW actually had tighter Covid-19 restrictions than other states, including Victoria.

We actually had higher restrictions in place than Victoria. For one week we moved from highly recommending masks to mandating masks, and the majority of people, right across the state, followed that recommendation, just like they are following the recommendation today to minimise household gatherings, and to have most of the activities that you undergo outside rather than inside.

That's the efforts that people have made, the social distancing, continuing to hand sanitise, those types of efforts have been the ones that have got us through.

New South Wales actually led the other states when it's come to imposing certain restrictions. We were the ones that put in [the] two square metres [rule] first, Victoria followed. We were the ones that - even though it was an unpopular decision - to stop singing and dancing. Victoria then followed. There are no dancing limits in Queensland.

The approach that we have taken is in line with the national plan to open up once we have a fully vaccinated population and that is exactly what we have done.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 11.33pm GMT

block-time published-time 11.27pm GMT

Perrottet has been asked if he has any regrets about his handling of the pandemic, given today's record-high death toll:

I think if you look right here across the country, we have all taken this approach and there are different approaches obviously, [such as] in Western Australia, but we have taken the approach that... we learn to live alongside the virus and the challenges will come our way.

Ultimately the key is being vaccinated and being boosted. We have to live in the world as it is, not as we want it to be, and that creates difficulties in a global pandemic, but over the last two years our people have stood strong.

The alternative is lockdown and that is not the right approach. It is not the right approach at all for where we sit currently in this pandemic.

That doesn't mean it is an easy road. It is a hard road, a difficult and challenging one. But it is the right road as we move through this next phase.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 11.31pm GMT

block-time published-time 11.22pm GMT

Chant has given additional information about the types of underlying health conditions that several of those who died from Covid-19 had.

We've looked at the underlying health conditions of those 28 [people under 65 who died between 15 and 21 January] and I would like to say that many had multiple health conditions.

Four of the 28 did not have significant underlying health conditions and three of those were unvaccinated and one had had two doses, so again confirming very much the importance of vaccination.

But of the 24 that had underlying health conditions, 10 had significant heart or valvular disease, six had obesity, six had chronic lung disease, seven had diabetes, six had significant kidney disease, two had significant rheumatological diseases, three had other autoimmune diseases, four had severe liver disease, four had cancer, five were significantly immunocompromised.

One had a significant mental health illness. Four had chronic neurological disorders and one was on a palliative care pathway pre-Covid diagnosis.

So my key message is this data and all available scientific evidence that I have seen - and new data emerges every day - confirms the critical importance of a booster dose and getting that booster quickly and promptly to afford the maximum protection against the Omicron.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 11.49pm GMT

block-time published-time 11.19pm GMT

Chant:

So if we now go to the 46 people who we are reporting have died in this 24-hour reporting period, or as I said, those coronial investigations where the deaths related to the period 29 December through 13 January.

There was one person aged in their 30s, one was in their 40s, four were in their 50s, eight people were in their 60s, 12 people were in their 70s and 13 people were in their 80s and seven people were in their 90s.

One person had received three doses of the Covid vaccine. Twenty-nine had received two doses... two people had received one dose and 14 were not vaccinated.

And of the seven people who died under the age of 65, all were men. Two had received two doses of the Covid vaccine and five men were not vaccinated including the men in their 30s and 40s. And both of the men who were vaccinated had significant underlying health conditions and three of the five men who were not vaccinated also had significant underlying health conditions.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 11.45pm GMT

block-time published-time 11.18pm GMT

Infant dies while infected with Covid-19 in NSW

Chant has confirmed that an infant in the Hunter-New England area has died while infected with Covid-19. A coronial inquest is now underway to establish if Covid contributed to the child's death.

You will have noted in the media today that the media has reported on the death of an infant in Hunter New England. Can I also take a moment to express my condolences to that family for their loss.

... That infant had Covid, and the cause of death has been referred to the coroner.

I have spoken with the family and the family are very keen for their privacy to be protected. You can imagine that this is one of the most difficult times a family could ever go through, and they just ask the media to respect the privacy of this family.

The coroner and the forensic pathologist that has supported the coroner are working very hard to get the answers that most importantly, the family wants... in terms of this child and the contribution that Covid may or may not have made to its death.

Clearly, there is strong public interest in this and we are very committed to sharing, to making known the outcome of the coronial [inquest], but can I just be clear, our priority will be that the ***process*** will be that the coroner will inform the family, the family will have the time to talk to the clinicians about the implications of the findings and then we will release it publicly.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 11.28pm GMT

block-time published-time 11.15pm GMT

Chant says deaths will continue to rise, despite cases potentially having already peaked in NSW.

There is a significant lag between cases being identified to when we see them get hospitalised, and then also flow through tragically, a small number, into deaths. That is the cycle and therefore in this outbreak as in previous outbreaks, we expect to see a lag of two or three weeks.

So unfortunately, the death numbers will likely remain high, but my message is that we can turn that around by boosting, and getting that booster in with a real sense of urgency.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 11.17pm GMT

block-time published-time 11.14pm GMT

Chant has confirmed that seven of NSW's 46 deaths recorded today are historical cases that have been added to the death toll following a coronial investigation.

block-time published-time 11.13pm GMT

The NSW chief health officer, Dr Kerry Chant, says there are multiple signs that the spread of Covid-19 is slowing in the NSW community.

It is pleasing to see that a variety of indicators demonstrate that the spread of Covid is slowing in the community. One single indicator doesn't tell the whole. We look at the hospitalisations, the, staff furloughing, staff absenteeism. Data from industry, our testing data, our case positivity.

That all gives us a sense that the spread of Covid is slowing and it is pleasing to see, and we want to thank the community and acknowledge the actions of everyone in contributing to that.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 11.15pm GMT

block-time published-time 11.10pm GMT

Okay, jumping back to NSW and Perrottet is urging people to get their booster vaccine doses.

I note the change we made very recently... of moving the interval between your second dose vaccination and your booster shot vaccination from four months to three months. That has ensured that many people across New South Wales are now eligible for their booster shot.

We have 40 centres right around New South Wales in addition to the GPs and pharmacists where you can get that booster shot.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 11.11pm GMT

block-time published-time 11.08pm GMT

Tasmania records first Covid death in nearly two years

I'll get some more information on this for you soon, but we have just heard that Tasmania has recorded its first Covid-19 death since April 2020.

The woman was a 90-year-old aged care resident from Hobart who was not vaccinated. There has been an outbreak at her facility with 18 residents and five staff infected.

enltr [*#BREAKING*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/BREAKING?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) : Tasmania has recorded its first COVID-related death since April in 2020 [*#covid19tas*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/covid19tas?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

- Monte Bovill (@MonteBovill) [*January 20, 2022*](https://twitter.com/MonteBovill/status/1484300945337241600?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 11.09pm GMT

block-time published-time 11.05pm GMT

The NSW premier, Dominic Perrottet, is speaking now, as the state records its deadliest ever day of the pandemic.

Sadly today, we are reporting the deaths of 46 people in New South Wales who have died with Covid.

On behalf of people right across New South Wales, can I extend our deepest condolences to all the families, and our thoughts and prayers and hearts are with you at this difficult time.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 11.06pm GMT

block-time published-time 11.00pm GMT

I'm obsessed with the mystery of this notice going around Twitter this morning. Do you ever see a sign that raises so many more questions than it answers?

enltrThere has to be a story behind this sign in Townsville, QLD. [*https://t.co/YgNEy3SCLI*](https://t.co/YgNEy3SCLI)

- Dr Eric Levi (@DrEricLevi) [*January 20, 2022*](https://twitter.com/DrEricLevi/status/1484289996555456514?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 10.53pm GMT

Today is NSW's deadliest day of the pandemic so far, and, as such, we will be hearing from the leaders of the state at 10am.

enltrNSW Premier Dominic Perrottet, NSW Chief Health Officer Dr Kerry Chant and NSW Health Deputy Secretary Susan Pearce will provide a COVID-19 update, 10am, Sydney [*#nswpol*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/nswpol?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

- Political Alert (@political\_alert) [*January 20, 2022*](https://twitter.com/political_alert/status/1484285890780229632?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 10.51pm GMT

Naval ship departs for Tonga relief effort

An Australian naval ship loaded with critical humanitarian supplies has departed for Tonga as part of disaster relief efforts in the Pacific island nation following the devastating tsunami, reports AAP.

HMAS Adelaide left Brisbane just after midnight on Friday, and will take five days to reach Tonga.

It has been loaded with humanitarian and disaster relief supplies, along with critical equipment to help with recovery efforts, including three Chinook helicopters.

The HMAS Adelaide will serve as a base for relief work in Tonga in the wake of the underwater volcanic eruption and following tsunami.

The defence minister, Peter Dutton, said Australia would be sending more planes to help with recovery efforts.

"We are working closely with the Tongan government to understand their needs," he told the Seven network on Friday.

They need support on the ground to help them rebuild as quickly as possible, in particular their communication system which has been done. That is a real problem.

An Australian C-17 plane landed in Tonga on Thursday afternoon with shelters, hygiene kits, along with water containers.

Air supplies had been delayed in getting into the country due to large amounts of volcanic ash being on the runway.

A New Zealand plane also landed in the country on Thursday.

The foreign minister, Marise Payne, said she spoke to her Tongan counterpart and indicated further financial aid would be on its way.

Australia had initially offered $1m in aid in the wake of the tsunami, but Payne said it was likely to increase.

"There was $1m for emergency supplies in the immediate aftermath, and there are further commitments to be made," she told ABC radio.

It's very difficult to estimate (the future cost) before those assessments are made by engineers and by the Tongan government itself in terms of what is needed.

Payne said Australia would be standing with Tonga and providing as much support as needed.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 10.55pm GMT

block-time published-time 10.41pm GMT

enltr?? Updated Minor [*#Flood*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/Flood?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) Warning issued for the [*#OraraRiver*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/OraraRiver?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) at [*#Glenreagh*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/Glenreagh?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) and Coutts Crossing. See [*https://t.co/AdztI2rqg1*](https://t.co/AdztI2rqg1) for details and updates; follow advice from [*@NSWSES*](https://twitter.com/NSWSES?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw). [*#NSWFloods*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/NSWFloods?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) [*pic.twitter.com/8Awd94QoAy*](https://t.co/8Awd94QoAy)

- Bureau of Meteorology, New South Wales (@BOM\_NSW) [*January 20, 2022*](https://twitter.com/BOM_NSW/status/1484294322271002624?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 10.35pm GMT

Armadas of alien-like sea creatures have been washing up on Australian beaches thanks to the warm weather but experts warn people should look but not touch.

Jellyfish expert Dr Lisa-ann Gershwin said bluebottles had been washing up on beaches across New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia and Tasmania in "gobsmacking numbers" over the last few months thanks to the warmer weather.

"They're having a really fun time this year and they're definitely terrorising us this year," Gershwin said. "They're really strange alien creatures. There's no two ways about it.

"It doesn't have any equal to people, or animals, or corals, or things we understand intuitively. It's just their own brand of weirdness in such a cool way."

You can read the full report below:

Related: [*'Terrorising us': bluebottles wash up on Australian beaches in 'gobsmacking numbers'*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/jan/20/terrorising-us-bluebottles-wash-up-on-australian-beaches-in-gobsmacking-numbers)

block-time published-time 10.26pm GMT

enltrTwo consecutive days with a drop in cases in hospital in NSW [*pic.twitter.com/qJQWufolLH*](https://t.co/qJQWufolLH)

- Ed Jegasothy (@edjegasothy) [*January 20, 2022*](https://twitter.com/edjegasothy/status/1484286843273486341?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 10.22pm GMT

We shall be hearing from the Tasmanian premier at 10am (AEDT).

enltrThere will be a COVID-19 update from the Tasmanian Premier and Public Health at 10am [*#covid19tas*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/covid19tas?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

- Monte Bovill (@MonteBovill) [*January 20, 2022*](https://twitter.com/MonteBovill/status/1484289385495666689?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 10.12pm GMT

Victoria records 20 Covid deaths and 18,167 new cases

Victoria's numbers are out and the state has recorded a significant drop in hospitalisation, from 1,206 to 1,096, with ICU cases also going down from 122 to 121.

Sadly 20 Covid positive people died in Victoria in the last 24 hours and 18,167 new infections were recorded.

enltrWe thank everyone who got vaccinated and tested yesterday. Our thoughts are with those in hospital, and the families of people who have lost their lives. More data soon: [*https://t.co/OCCFTAcOZP*](https://t.co/OCCFTAcOZP) [*#COVID19Vic*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/COVID19Vic?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) [*#COVID19VicData*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/COVID19VicData?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) [*pic.twitter.com/f9lgjv1yz2*](https://t.co/f9lgjv1yz2)

- VicGovDH (@VicGovDH) [*January 20, 2022*](https://twitter.com/VicGovDH/status/1484286490117304322?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 10.21pm GMT

block-time published-time 10.07pm GMT

NSW has once again recorded a small drop in hospitalisations, with 2,743 today compared to 2,781 yesterday.

Unfortunately, it's possible that the deaths recorded this morning account for some of that drop.

enltr- 2,743 hospitalisations - 209 people in ICU - 46 lives lost - 25,168 positive tests: 10,015 RAT & 15,153 PCR \*Includes both immunocompromised people who have received a third dose and all people aged 18+ who have received a booster.

- NSW Health (@NSWHealth) [*January 20, 2022*](https://twitter.com/NSWHealth/status/1484284648394211328?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 10.10pm GMT

block-time published-time 10.03pm GMT

enltrA record number of daily [*#Covid*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/Covid?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) deaths in NSW, while ICU and hospitalisations both dropped just over 1%. [*https://t.co/wD9jncvbq5*](https://t.co/wD9jncvbq5)

- Peter Hannam (@p\_hannam) [*January 20, 2022*](https://twitter.com/p_hannam/status/1484285361069395969?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 10.03pm GMT

NSW records 46 Covid deaths and 25,168 new cases on deadliest pandemic day

NSW has recorded its deadliest day of the Covid-19 with 46 people sadly dying in the latest reporting period.

The state also recorded 25,168 new coronavirus infections.

enltrNSW COVID-19 update - Friday 21 January 2022 In the 24-hour reporting period to 8pm last night: - 95.3% of people aged 16+ have had one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine - 93.9% of people aged 16+ have had two doses of a COVID-19 vaccine [*pic.twitter.com/WLGJ9BZy5e*](https://t.co/WLGJ9BZy5e)

- NSW Health (@NSWHealth) [*January 20, 2022*](https://twitter.com/NSWHealth/status/1484284644724211714?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 10.08pm GMT

block-time published-time 9.54pm GMT

By the way, we are just standing by now for the NSW and Victorian Covid-19 numbers to come through at 9am.

block-time published-time 9.50pm GMT

Climate change could soon force baby sharks out of their shallow coastal nurseries in what could prove to be a profound threat to the apex predators, reports AAP.

Scientists who have been studying such nurseries in French Polynesia have suggested baby sharks are right at the edge of what they can tolerate.

Mangroves and other protected habitats baby sharks rely on to grow and learn to hunt have always been extreme places, says James Cook University marine biologist Jodie Rummer.

Because they are shallow, baby sharks have always had to cope with the strain of high temperatures.

But with climate change driving up sea temperatures and fuelling heatwaves that are more frequent, severe and longer lasting, Dr Rummer says things are about to get worse.

"Adaptation - changes in DNA over generations to accommodate new conditions - may not be possible," she says.

This is because sharks are slow to reach sexual maturity compared to most other fishes and do not reproduce as often or have as many babies.

Therefore, not enough generations can go by fast enough to keep pace with the rate at which we humans are changing their habitats.

Rummer says studies of nurseries in French Polynesia since 2013 indicate baby sharks are getting by, for now, but could ultimately face an adapt, move or die scenario.

"They are able to cope with the conditions they are experiencing right now, but they are very much at their limits."

Scientists have suggested baby sharks are right at the edge of what they can tolerate. Photograph: Patrice Lapoirie/EPA

It's possible newborns might move to cooler nursery-like areas but it's also possible that some shark populations would disappear.

"This is a real risk. We know sharks are tolerating a lot already. The oceans, their habitats, are getting warmer, lower in oxygen, and lower in pH with climate change" Dr Rummer says.

She says limiting other threats, such as habitat loss, will be crucial in the face of climate change. But like so many other species, the real answer is dumping fossil fuels as quickly as possible.

Even if we try to protect habitat, yep the water is still warming. Even if we protect the sharks from fishing, yep the water is still warming.

"Even if we watch the ***agricultural*** runoff, and make sure the chemicals aren't going into the water, yep the water is still warming.

We can keep putting those bandaids on, but at the end of the day we have to do the surgery and reduce our reliance on fossil fuels and move towards 100 per cent renewables.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 9.57pm GMT

block-time published-time 9.35pm GMT

The Omicron outbreak of Covid cases appears to have peaked in [*New South Wales*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/new-south-wales) , Victoria and other parts of Australia, epidemiologists believe.

Prof Adrian Esterman, an epidemiologist and biostatistician at the University of South Australia, said the Omicron wave had "absolutely certainly" peaked in NSW and [*Victoria*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/victoria).

The Reff - the effective reproduction number, which ***measures*** how many other people someone with Covid will infect, on average - had dropped below 1 in both states, Esterman said.

"We know that the peak has been reached when the Reff gets below 1."

On Thursday, Esterman calculated the Reff to be 0.83 in NSW and 0.8 in Victoria.

You can read the full report from [*Donna Lu*](https://www.theguardian.com/profile/donna-lu) and [*Nick Evershed*](https://www.theguardian.com/profile/nick-evershed) below:

Related: [*Australia's Omicron wave has likely peaked in NSW and Victoria, some experts say*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jan/21/australias-omicron-wave-has-likely-peaked-in-nsw-and-victoria-some-experts-say)

block-time published-time 9.23pm GMT

The West Australian paper certainly isn't mincing words with their views on the indefinite border closure this morning.

enltrThe front page of tomorrow's The West Australian [*#auspol*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/auspol?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) [*pic.twitter.com/bc21hlYdBG*](https://t.co/bc21hlYdBG)

- Anthony De Ceglie (@AnthDeCeglie) [*January 20, 2022*](https://twitter.com/AnthDeCeglie/status/1484149426784698372?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 9.16pm GMT

AFP begins investigations into RAT price gouging

The Australian federal police have launched an investigation into price gouging rapid antigen tests, warning people that re-selling them for "more than 20 per cent of the original retail purchase price" is a crime punishable with up to five years in prison.

Here is what they had to say:

Two investigations have begun in Queensland and NSW after referrals from the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission.

More referrals are expected and will be coordinated under the AFP's Taskforce LOTUS, which was established in 2021 as a targeted and scalable response to potential criminal threats to the COVID-19 vaccine rollout.

Taskforce LOTUS will refer allegations of RAT price gouging to Australia-wide AFP strike teams, which have access to the AFP's world-leading technical and forensic capabilities.

The strike teams have the powers to force individuals or businesses engaged in price gouging to surrender the RATs, which will be sent to the National Medical Stockpile.

To date, the AFP has not seized or surrendered any RATs, PPE or other relevant medical supplies to the National Medical Stockpile.

You can read their full statement below:

enltrAFP begins investigations into RAT price gouging [*https://t.co/2uOQ58azTn*](https://t.co/2uOQ58azTn) [*#auspol*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/auspol?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) [*pic.twitter.com/QDKS3NasJi*](https://t.co/QDKS3NasJi)

- Political Alert (@political\_alert) [*January 20, 2022*](https://twitter.com/political_alert/status/1484268125084274690?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 9.23pm GMT

block-time published-time 9.07pm GMT

Former coalition treasurer Joe Hockey has slammed as "absurd" the Morrison government's failure to take up an offer by Brisbane-based company [*Ellume*](https://www.ellumehealth.com/) to supply rapid antigen tests.

Hockey told 2GB's Ben Fordham this morning:

It's very frustrating for Australia because Ellume are now are exporting 100,000 tests every day to the United States because the US government backed them and the Australian government didn't.

Hockey, who was appointed Australia's ambassador to the US and has lately become a business consultant, said Ellume first approached him in August 2020 saying they had a rapid test for the flu that could send results to the digital cloud within 15 minutes.

He said they should test for Covid, knowing that, for instance, the US navy wouldn't send a ship to sea if there was a case on board and so there would be demand for such a quick resulting test.

"The US government gave emergency approval to Ellume... and then backed it up with more than $US260m (A$360m)," Hockey said, with a plant built in the US state of Maryland producing 500,000 tests a day.

"I felt it was absurd. It was the Department of Industry, not the Department of Health or TGA, but the Department of Industry that wasn't prepared to back Ellume at that time but the United States government did.

"When you have an incredible technology in an emergency situation, you've got to do what is in the best interest of the country and that there was a ***process*** and the Department of Industry basically walked away."

Former treasurer Joe Hockey. Photograph: Daniel Munoz/Getty Images

It's a little hard to keep up with which minister was responsible for industry in the past few years of turmoil in that portfolio, but in mid-2020 [*it looks like Karen Andrews held the reins*](https://www.aph.gov.au/Senators_and_Members/Parliamentarian?MPID=230886). And where does that leave Australia?

Fundamentally, the supply chain relies almost entirely on China to Australia now, which is a risky issue if China suddenly decides that it needs to domesticate all of its testing because of an outbreak there.

Or perhaps some bright spark within the Morrison government thinks now is a good time to poke China because that might play out well in a "khaki election" (although it should be those naval camos of blue, white and grey). Better stockpile those RATs now, I suppose.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 11.28pm GMT

block-time published-time 9.00pm GMT

Energy minister Angus Taylor was primarily chatting on the radio this morning about hydrogen, specifically about how "clean" it is and Australia's plans to export its first shipment of liquefied hydrogen to Japan.

It's very significant and not just for Australia. It's significant globally.

The beginning of a trade which will be crucial for the world in bringing down emissions... We can create green energy in many different places in Australia, including the La Trobe Valley, but we can also use sequestration to produce 'blue hydrogen'.

We're not going to get ideological about it - we want clean hydrogen.

The debate can get very ideological. People like one sort of energy and dislike another sort.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 9.12pm GMT

block-time published-time 8.57pm GMT

Well, it seems "if not now, when" is a popular phrase among federal ministers this morning when it comes to WA, with Angus Taylor busting it out when speaking to ABC RN just a second ago.

Well, WA has done well to keep Australians safe and keep the economy moving... I can understand why Western Australians would be disappointed with the situation. I think it's reasonable to ask, if not now, when ?

I can understand the frustration of Western Australians on this but we'll continue to support them to open up as the rest of the country is doing and to get ourselves back to where we need to be as quickly as possible.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 9.09pm GMT

block-time published-time 8.53pm GMT

'If not now, when?': Frydenberg on WA border remaining closed

Now the federal coalition government has gone slightly harder in criticising WA's decision to keep their borders closed indefinitely, although they are still somewhat reserved on the topic.

Here is treasurer Josh Frydenberg speaking to Sunrise on the topic:

This is a decision that the Western Australian government themselves have taken and one for them to explain. But obviously many people in Western Australia would be disappointed with the decision. And they will be asking if not now, when?

It's not a federal-state issue, this one. It's a decision of the Western Australia government and the Western Australia people have been fantastic through this whole pandemic and the Morrison government has provided them with an ***unprecedented*** amount of economic support. It's really pleasing to see the double-dose vaccination rate now in WA approach 90% but as you know we are in a new phase of the virus.

Treasurer Josh Frydenberg says many people in WA would be 'disappointed' the border reopening has been delayed. Photograph: Mick Tsikas/AAP

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 9.11pm GMT

block-time published-time 8.41pm GMT

Hundreds of childcare centres closed across Australia amid Covid

Hundreds of Australia's early education centres are closed as the Omicron variant of Covid-19 washes over the country, and there are calls for more financial support for the struggling sector, AAP reports.

Some 286 centres were on Thursday closed temporarily due to a health emergency, according to data published by the Australian Children's Education & Care Quality Authority.

Those numbers were even higher a week ago. On Thursday last week, 295 centres were temporarily closed in NSW, with 93 closed in Victoria and 51 in South Australia.

Lisa Bryant, a consultant in the early education and care sector, told AAP that Covid-19 is "ripping through" childcare centres.

She says the sector feels overlooked and needs more financial support to survive.

While centres that close due to Covid-19 are allowed to waive families' gap fees and continue to receive the government subsidy, "that isn't enough money to keep those services operating," Ms Bryant says.

New government data reveals more than 100 centres closed their doors permanently over four months during the Delta wave in 2021.

Between July 1 and November 1 2021, 104 centres closed permanently, the senate estimates data reveals. That's almost one per day.

Some 1,405 centres closed temporarily due to Covid-19 in that time, on average for nine days.

Greens senator Mehreen Faruqi says the data shows the need for more financial support.

I'm really worried that without adequate support for early learning during the Omicron wave, more centres will close their doors permanently, just as they did during Delta.

Time and again, the government has been too slow to support early childhood education and care.

Greens Senator Mehreen Faruqi has called for more federal support for childcare centres. Photograph: Dan Himbrechts/EPA

Under new rules agreed by national cabinet last week, educators who are close contacts can now continue to go to work as long as they're asymptomatic.

A spokesperson for the federal education department said the change was enabling more services to stay open.

But Bryant says it's putting people at risk, with workers' fears heightened because small children aren't eligible for vaccination.

Prime minister Scott Morrison on Thursday announced that the federal government would split the costs of rapid tests with states and territories that decide to do surveillance testing in early learning centres, though it's not clear which jurisdictions those are.

Related: [*'A lot of anxiety': childcare centres and parents warn of trouble ahead as Covid spreads*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/jan/20/a-lot-of-anxiety-childcare-centres-and-parents-warn-of-trouble-ahead-as-covid-spreads)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 9.07pm GMT

block-time published-time 8.38pm GMT

Chalmers is dedicated to somehow finding a way to make the WA situation Scott Morrison's fault.

Presenter:

The AMA have been scathing in their immediate assessment, saying this is not necessarily the right move and also in an economic sense businesses and the tourism sector are upset by it. If you were Mark McGowan, would you have made the same move?

Chalmers:

We haven't been second-guessing premiers of either political persuasion if they have taken difficult decisions based on health advice.

I want to pick up something you said about the economy. In the last few weeks, we have seen there are economic consequences to opening up before the federal government's done its job on things like rapid testing and boosters.

We shouldn't assume that opening up is necessarily on its own good for the economy, versus the alternative. We have seen, with our empty supermarket shelves, we have seen with the Hunger Games\* in the pharmacies, we have seen people unable to get back to work safely because of this rapid testing debacle.

We all want the economy to recover. We all want Australia to open up when it is responsible to do that. In order for that to happen, we need the prime minister to do his job for once because we have seen the economic carnage when he fails to take responsibility.

\*What is it with politicians not understanding what the Hunger Games is! Has no one in all of Australian politics actually read this book?

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 8.57pm GMT

block-time published-time 8.31pm GMT

Now, the WA premier's decision not to open the border has no doubt put federal Labor in a bit of an awkward position, so let's see how the shadow treasurer Jim Chalmers handled being asked about the decision on ABC News Breakfast.

This is a big decision, a difficult decision that premier McGowan has had to take. Clearly, he has looked east and seen what are the costs and consequences to the economy and to communities when the virus is running rampant, without the prime minister having done his job on rapid tests and boosters and all the rest of it.

That is what played out here. What we have tried to do throughout this pandemic is, when premiers of either political persuasion have taken difficult decisions, based on health advice, is to not second guess that advice.

The most important thing we need to see is for Scott Morrison to fix the mess that he's made of rapid testing and boosters, to take responsibility for that failure, so the whole country can open up safely when it is responsible to do that.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 8.45pm GMT

block-time published-time 8.28pm GMT

Good morning

Good morning everyone and welcome to Friday (finally!). It's Matilda Boseley here with you again this morning and of course, we are going to kick off the day talking about Western Australia.

WA premier Mark McGowan has abandoned his state's reopening date of 5 February, claiming it would be "reckless and irresponsible" to bring down the borders then given the surge in Omicron Covid-19 cases across the country.

The premier originally stated that borders would reopen once the state's double-dose vaccination rate reached 90%. It is currently at 89%.

McGowan stated that there would be an increased "focus on both safety and compassion" when it comes to border exemptions after 5 February.

Unfortunately, the world changed in December, Omicron arrived.

It would be irresponsible and reckless for the state government to ignore the facts and ignore the reality of the situation playing out on the east coast.

Allowing hundreds or thousands of Omicron-infected people to fly straight into [*Perth*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/perth-news) from 5 February with no testing, no quarantine and no public health ***measures*** would cause a flood of Covid across our state. It would cause a surge in cases, a surge in hospitalisations, and result in thousands of people not being able to work or go to school. We know that bad health outcomes lead to economic pain.

The premier did not give a new reopening date, instead suggesting that the state's health authorities would watch the eastern states closely over the next few weeks, waiting to see how their respective peaks play out.

There will no doubt be plenty of updates on this - and other things, such states announcing their return to school plans - this morning, and I will bring you all the updates here on the blog.

So let's jump into the day!

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 8.43pm GMT

**Load-Date:** January 21, 2022

**End of Document**



[***Russia-Ukraine war: Zelenskiy vows to 'punish atrocities' as family dies trying to evacuate Irpin - live***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:64XV-1MB1-JBNF-W1MH-00000-00&context=1516831)

The Guardian (London)

March 6, 2022 Sunday 5:04 AM GMT

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**Section:** WORLD NEWS; Version:45

**Length:** 44295 words

**Byline:** Samantha Lock (now) Sam Levin , Jessica Murray and Tom Ambrose (earlier)

**Highlight:** Hopes of establishing a humanitarian corridor out of besieged city of Mariupol dashed for second day runningRussia-Ukraine war: what we know on day 11 of the Russian invasionBoris Johnson to send more defensive equipment and $100m to UkraineMore than 4,300 people arrested at anti-war protests across RussiaEvacuation of Mariupol postponed as Russia fails to respect ceasefireConcern as Ukraine Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant under Russian ordersMastercard and Visa block in Russia does not stop domestic purchases

**Body**

block-time published-time 3.29am GMT

The Ukrainian military is reporting that Russia is planning on storming the Ukrainian capital of Kyiv.

Russian troops have "began to accumulate resources to storm Kyiv," according to a [*report*](https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/266469205666165) recently released by the general staff of the armed forces of Ukraine.

In city of Irpin on the western outskirts of Kyiv, Russian troops are making an advance towards the capital with tank and motorised infantry units as well as attempting to reach the eastern outskirts of Kyiv through the districts of Brovarsky and Boryspil, the military says.

Ukrainian officials also noted Russian forces are attempting to establish control over the cities of Chernihiv and Sumy but have "suffered significant losses" and needed to redeploy additional forces to "replenish manpower and equipment".

block-time published-time 3.22am GMT

The US has provided Ukraine's president Zelenskiy with encrypted communications equipment and a direct line with US president Joe Biden, the [*New York Times*](https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/06/us/politics/us-ukraine-weapons.html?referringSource=articleShare) reports.

According to the Times, intelligence officials in Washington and Germany are sending satellite photographs and electronic intercepts of Russian military units to Ukrainian military units "within an hour or two".

"As he tries to stay out of the hands of Russian forces in Kyiv, President Volodymyr Zelenskiy of Ukraine travels with encrypted communications equipment, provided by the Americans, that can put him into a secure call with President Biden," the publication writes.

It was through this equipment that Zelenskiy was able to make a 35-minute call with his American counterpart on Saturday night.

block-time published-time 2.58am GMT

US House of Representatives Speaker Nancy Pelosi has said the chamber is "exploring" legislation to ban imports of Russian oil and that Congress intends to enact this week $10 billion in aid for Ukraine.

A [*letter*](https://www.speaker.gov/newsroom/3622) published to the speaker of the house official website reads:

The Biden Administration has requested $10 billion in humanitarian, military and economic support for Ukraine.

The Congress intends to enact this emergency funding this week as part of our omnibus government funding legislation. And an urgent request from President Zelensky is to help ensure air support for the Ukrainian armed forces.

In addition, the House is currently exploring strong legislation that will further isolate Russia from the global economy.

Our bill would ban the import of Russian oil and energy products into the United States, repeal normal trade relations with Russia and Belarus, and take the first step to deny Russia access to the World Trade Organization. We would also empower the Executive branch to raise tariffs on Russian imports."

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi speaking at her weekly press conference. Photograph: Michael Brochstein/SOPA Images/REX/Shutterstock

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 3.26am GMT

block-time published-time 2.29am GMT

Russian gymnast Ivan Kuliak, who [*sported an insignia linked to the* ***invasion*** *of Ukraine*](https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2022/mar/07/shocking-behaviour-russian-gymnast-shows-z-symbol-on-podium-next-to-ukrainian-winner) on a medals podium alongside a Ukrainian competitor, has been called out for his "shocking behaviour".

Kuliak's shirt had the letter "Z" prominently placed as he stood next to Ukraine's Kovtun Illia, the gold medallist at a [*Gymnastics*](https://www.theguardian.com/sport/gymnastics) World Cup event in Doha.

The "Z" has been seen daubed on Russian tanks and vehicles in Ukraine and has come to symbolise support for the ***invasion***.

Ivan Kuliak wore a 'Z' taped across the front of his shirt, a symbol that has come to symbolise support for the Russian ***invasion*** of Ukraine. Photograph: Claro Sports

Related: [*'Shocking behaviour': Russian gymnast shows 'Z' symbol on podium next to Ukrainian winner*](https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2022/mar/07/shocking-behaviour-russian-gymnast-shows-z-symbol-on-podium-next-to-ukrainian-winner)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.45am GMT

block-time published-time 2.23am GMT

Russian forces made 'minimal ground advances', British intelligence says

The UK's ministry of defence has just released its latest intelligence [*report*](https://twitter.com/DefenceHQ/status/1500598902042542080) , speculating that Russian forces made "minimal ground advances" over the weekend.

Russian forces probably made minimal ground advances over the weekend. It is highly unlikely that Russia has successfully achieved its planned objectives to date."

The ministry notes a "high level of Russian air and artillery strikes" have continued to hit military and civilian sites in Ukrainian cities over the past 24 hours.

"Recent strikes have targeted Kharkiv, Mykolaiv and Chernihiv, and been particularly heavy in Mariupol," the report added.

enltrLatest Defence Intelligence update on the situation in Ukraine - 06 March 2022 Find out more about the UK government's response: [*https://t.co/eiocXaCcoT*](https://t.co/eiocXaCcoT) ???? [*#StandWithUkraine*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/StandwithUkraine?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) ???? [*pic.twitter.com/MOPCAhea6i*](https://t.co/MOPCAhea6i)

- Ministry of Defence ???? (@DefenceHQ) [*March 6, 2022*](https://twitter.com/DefenceHQ/status/1500598902042542080?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 2.06am GMT

Interim summary

Here is a quick rundown of what you may have missed over the past few hours. For an even more detailed account you can view our earlier summary [*here*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2022/mar/06/russia-ukraine-war-biden-and-zelenskiy-discuss-more-support-for-ukraine-as-visa-mastercard-pull-out-of-russia-live?page=with:block-62252e818f08d07f5d1c9b0f#block-62252e818f08d07f5d1c9b0f).

Ukraine's president Volodymyr Zelenskiy delivered an impassioned address to his nation on Sunday night, warning Russian troops he will punish those who committed atrocities in [*Ukraine*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/ukraine) while the "only quiet place" that awaits them is the grave. "We will not forgive. We will not forget. We will punish everyone who committed atrocities in this war on our land," he said. Zelenskiy also spoke of the death of a family attempting to flee the Ukrainian city of Irpin, near Kyiv in northern [*Ukraine*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/ukraine) , in an emotional plea to honour humanitarian corridors that Russian forces appear to have ignored.The Ukrainian president criticised western leaders for failing to respond to the Russian defence ministry's announcement that it would strike Ukraine's military-industrial complex. "I didn't hear even a single world leader react to this. The audacity of the aggressor is a clear signal to the west that the sanctions imposed on [*Russia*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/russia) are not sufficient," he said. Two major American accounting firms, KPMG and PricewaterhouseCoopers, have also announced they will stop doing business in [*Russia*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/russia). A plane carrying Russian diplomats expelled by the United States has left New York 's John F Kennedy International Airport en route to Moscow about 7.30pm EST, according to Flight Radar24 [*data*](https://www.flightradar24.com/RSD088/2b0cbcda). Moscow is recruiting Syrians to fight in Ukraine, according to US officials who spoke with the [*Wall Street Journal.*](https://www.wsj.com/articles/russia-recruiting-syrians-for-urban-combat-in-ukraine-u-s-officials-say-11646606234) The US does not believe a Russian amphibious assault in or near the Ukrainian city of Odesa is imminent, a senior US defence official said, [*according to Reuters*](https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/us-does-not-see-imminent-russian-amphibious-assault-odessa-us-official-2022-03-06/). There have been growing concerns about a possible attack on the city.[*Russia*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/russia) has instructed all state-owned websites and services to switch to the Russian domain name system by 11 March, according to Russian state media outlets. Many fear the move is a sign that Russia is beginning active preparations for disconnection from the global internet.Meanwhile, hacking collective Anonymous claimed to have hacked into the Russian streaming services Wink and Ivi and live TV channels Russia 24, Channel One, Moscow 24 to broadcast footage from [*Ukraine*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/ukraine). Ukraine will ask the United Nations ' top court on Monday to issue an emergency ruling requiring [*Russia*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/russia) to stop its ***invasion***, arguing that Moscow's justification for the attack is based on a faulty interpretation of genocide law, Reuters reports. British prime minister Boris Johnson has pledged to send more defensive equipment and $100m to [*Ukraine*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/ukraine) to hold off Russian troops and mitigate financial pressures facing the country, but was accused of moving too slowly and timidly to clamp down on oligarchs' dirty money in the UK.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.15am GMT

block-time published-time 1.57am GMT

A plane carrying Russian diplomats expelled by the United States has left New York 's John F Kennedy International Airport en route to Moscow about 7.30pm EST, according to Flight Radar24 [*data*](https://www.flightradar24.com/RSD088/2b0cbcda).

"The flight carrying Russian government personnel expelled by the United States has just departed New York for Moscow," the flight tracking service said.

Russian foreign ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova also confirmed on her Telegram channel on Saturday that the diplomats would be returning to Russia.

"This plane will return to their homeland [the] Russian diplomats, whom the US Government has declared persona non grata," she said.

A statement from the US Mission to the UN in late February called the 12 Russian diplomats "intelligence operatives... who have abused their privileges of residency in the US by engaging in espionage activities that are adverse to our national security."

enltrThe flight carrying Russian government personnel expelled by the United States has just departed New York for Moscow. [*https://t.co/I2TMsV0nKp*](https://t.co/I2TMsV0nKp) [*pic.twitter.com/vgMRvXCbnk*](https://t.co/vgMRvXCbnk)

- Flightradar24 (@flightradar24) [*March 7, 2022*](https://twitter.com/flightradar24/status/1500633029995384832?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 1.50am GMT

As the exodus of western businesses to leave Russia continues, two major American accounting firms, KPMG and PricewaterhouseCoopers, have also announced they will stop doing business in Russia.

In a statement, KPMG International said it was cutting ties with about 4,500 employees in Russia and Belarus. "We believe we have a responsibility, along with other global businesses, to respond to the Russian government's ongoing military attack on Ukraine."

PricewaterhouseCoopers also said in a [*press release*](https://www.pwc.ru/en/press-center/2022/o-planakh-pwc-v-rossii.html) that PwC Russia, which has about 3,700 employees across 11 cities, would leave the network of member firms but "continue cooperation."

Meanwhile, Deloitte said the firm "unequivocally" stood by the people of Ukraine and was reviewing its Russian business but cited its ongoing "professional obligations".

"Everyone knows the game is up in terms of being able to retain a network firm in Russia," an insider at one Big Four firm told the [*Financial Times.*](https://www.ft.com/content/be3d59a3-d9b2-4303-946d-d61d32c2ff08)

The logo of KPMG. Photograph: Charles Platiau/Reuters

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.15am GMT

block-time published-time 1.44am GMT

Zelenskiy spoke of the death of a family attempting to flee the Ukrainian city of Irpin, near Kyiv in northern Ukraine, in an emotional plea to honour humanitarian corridors that Russian forces appear to have ignored.

There was a lot of talk about humanitarian corridors. There were talks every day about the opportunity for people to leave the cities...

And we heard the promise that there would be humanitarian corridors. But there are no humanitarian corridors.

Instead of humanitarian corridors, they can only make bloody ones.

A family was killed in Irpin today. A man, a woman and two children. Right on the road when they were just trying to get out of town to escape. The whole family.

How many such families have died in Ukraine?"

Ukrainian soldiers help people trying to leave the city amid the collapsed structures and debris on March 6, 2022 in Irpin, Ukraine. Photograph: Dia Images/Getty Images

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.19am GMT

block-time published-time 1.31am GMT

Moscow is recruiting Syrians to fight in Ukraine, according to US officials who spoke with the [*Wall Street Journal.*](https://www.wsj.com/articles/russia-recruiting-syrians-for-urban-combat-in-ukraine-u-s-officials-say-11646606234)

The publication cites four American officials who believe Russia has in recent days been recruiting fighters from Syria in the hope that their expertise in urban combat can help take Kyiv and deal a devastating blow to the Ukraine government.

Russia has been operating inside Syria since formally entering the country's civil war in 2015.

block-time published-time 1.21am GMT

When Russian state TV announced the ***invasion*** of Ukraine last week, it did not use the words "attack", "***invasion***" or "war". Instead it reported on a "special military operation" in the neighbouring country designed to liberate a nation that would welcome Russia's forces to free it from fascism.

The Guardian's Moscow correspondent, Andrew Roth, provides an insight as to what Russians are being told about the war in Ukraine. He tells Michael Safi that this initial distortion of the facts did not last the week. Instead, as the war grew more intensive and Russian forces met with fierce resistance, there was a subtle change in what Russians were told was going on. Yes, casualties were being taken, major cities were being targeted, but it was a necessary sanction against a government propped up by an imperialist west, determined to humiliate Russia.

Now, as the attacks get increasingly deadly and cities are transformed by bombing campaigns, Russian propagandists are having to adapt their message again. Meanwhile, an economic crunch unlike any other most Russians have faced before is hitting them in their wallets, and many are looking for who's to blame. As Andrew Roth explains, it's not necessarily their own government led by Vladimir Putin.

Related: [*What Russians are being told about the war in Ukraine*](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/audio/2022/mar/07/what-russians-are-being-told-about-the-war-in-ukraine)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.26am GMT

block-time published-time 1.17am GMT

Powerful snippets from Zelenskiy's national address can be viewed in the video below.

The Ukrainian president called on the west to do more as he spoke of the destruction across Ukraine and the suffering faced by his people.

"We will not forgive. We will not forget. We will punish everyone who committed atrocities in this war on our land."

block-time published-time 1.12am GMT

'We will find every bastard', Zelenskiy warns

Ukraine's president Volodymyr Zelenskiy delivered an impassioned nightly address to his nation, warning Russian troops he will punish those who committed atrocities in Ukraine while the "only quiet place" that awaits them is the grave.

"Today is Forgiveness Sunday. But we will not forgive hundreds and hundreds of victims. Thousands and thousands of sufferings. And God will not forgive. Not today. Not tomorrow. Never. And instead of Forgiveness, there will be a Day of Judgment," Zelenskiy [*said*](https://www.facebook.com/zelenskiy.official/posts/3025418967708459).

An excerpt of his speech, as translated by Ukrainian broadcaster [*Ukrinform*](https://www.ukrinform.net/rubric-ato/3422294-president-volodymyr-zelenskys-address-on-situation-in-ukraine.html) , reads:

We will not forgive the destroyed houses. We will not forgive the missile that our air defence shot down over Okhmatdyt today. And more than five hundred other such missiles that hit our land. All over Ukraine.. hit our people and children.

We will not forgive the shooting of unarmed people. Destruction of our infrastructure.

We will not forgive.

Hundreds and hundreds of victims. Thousands and thousands of sufferings.

And God will not forgive. Not today. Not tomorrow. Never.

And instead of Forgiveness, there will be a Day of Judgment. I'm sure of it."

Zelenskiy warned Russian forces they would face "a day of judgement" for the "deliberate murder" inflicted on his country.

How many such families have died in Ukraine?

We will not forgive. We will not forget. We will punish everyone who committed atrocities in this war on our land.

We will find every bastard who shot at our cities, our people, who bombed our land, who launched rockets.

There will be no quiet place on this earth for you. Except for the grave."

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.13am GMT

block-time published-time 12.35am GMT

Russia has instructed all state-owned websites and services to switch to the Russian domain name system by 11 March, according to Russian state media outlets.

"This is necessary to protect resources from cyber attacks and the possibility of disconnection from the outside," the [*Kommersant*](https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/5249500) Russian newspaper reports.

Citing the ministry of digital development, the publication said there are no plans to disconnect Russia from the global internet.

The ministry of digital development told Kommersant that these ***measures*** are necessary to protect against cyberattacks:

We are preparing for various scenarios to ensure that Russian resources are available to citizens. The telegram for government agencies outlines a set of simple cyber hygiene recommendations that will help to organise work more effectively to protect our resources from malicious traffic, keep services running and control over domain names."

Russia managed to disconnect itself from the global internet during tests in June and July last year, the RBC media group reported at the time, citing documents from the working group tasked with improving Russia's internet security, according to [*Reuters*](https://www.reuters.com/technology/russia-disconnected-global-internet-tests-rbc-daily-2021-07-22/).

Russia adopted legislation, known as the "sovereign internet" law, in late 2019 that seeks to shield the country from being cut off from foreign infrastructure, in answer to what Russia called the "aggressive nature" of the United States' national cyber security strategy.

The move would strengthen the Russian government's oversight of cyberspace.

enltr [*#Russia*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/Russia?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) began active preparations for disconnection from the global Internet No later than March 11, all servers and domains must be transferred to the [*#Russian*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/Russian?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) zone. In addition, detailed data on the network infrastructure of the sites is being collected. [*pic.twitter.com/wOCdRqOJej*](https://t.co/wOCdRqOJej)

- NEXTA (@nexta\_tv) [*March 6, 2022*](https://twitter.com/nexta_tv/status/1500553480548892679?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 12.16am GMT

Cyber resistance against Russia's ***invasion*** of Ukraine continues, with hacking collective Anonymous claiming to have hacked into the Russian streaming services Wink and Ivi and live TV channels Russia 24, Channel One, Moscow 24 to broadcast footage from Ukraine.

The group added that activists are also broadcasting troll faces on Russian military radio.

enltrThe hacking collective [*#Anonymous*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/Anonymous?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) hacked into the Russian streaming services Wink and Ivi (like Netflix) and live TV channels Russia 24, Channel One, Moscow 24 to broadcast war footage from Ukraine [today] [*pic.twitter.com/hzqcXT1xRU*](https://t.co/hzqcXT1xRU)

- Anonymous (@YourAnonNews) [*March 6, 2022*](https://twitter.com/YourAnonNews/status/1500613013510008836?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

enltrActivists are broadcasting troll faces on Russian military radio [*pic.twitter.com/lovN3WNVa2*](https://t.co/lovN3WNVa2)

- Anonymous (@YourAnonNews) [*March 6, 2022*](https://twitter.com/YourAnonNews/status/1500614084965847046?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 12.01am GMT

Russian forces stepped up overnight shelling of Ukrainian cities in the centre, north and south of the country on Sunday night, presidential adviser Oleksiy Arestovich has said.

"The latest wave of missile strikes came as darkness fell," he told a Ukrainian broadcaster.

Arestovich said Ukraine's second-largest city of Kharkiv in the north-east was still battling to fend off a Russian attack while all regions of Chernihiv in the north were coming under missile attack.

The official described a "catastrophic" situation in the Kyiv suburbs of Bucha, Hostomel and Irpin, where efforts to evacuate residents on Sunday failed. He said the government was doing all it could to resume evacuations, the Associated Press reports.

A factory and a store burn after having been bombarded in Irpin. Photograph: Emilio Morenatti/AP Residents run for cover as they escape from Irpin after heavy shelling on the only escape route used by locals. Photograph: Carlos Barría/Reuters

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.08am GMT

block-time published-time 11.46pm GMT

Ukraine and Russia to face off at World Court over genocide claim

Ukraine will ask the United Nations ' top court on Monday to issue an emergency ruling requiring Russia to stop its ***invasion***, arguing that Moscow's justification for the attack is based on a faulty interpretation of genocide law, Reuters reports.

Although the court's rulings are binding and countries generally follow them, it has no direct means of enforcing them.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has said Russia's "special military action" is needed "to protect people who have been subjected to bullying and genocide" - meaning those whose first or only language is Russian - in eastern Ukraine.

Ukraine's suit argues that the claim of genocide is untrue, and in any case does not provide legal justification for ***invasion***.

The case it has lodged at the World Court, officially known as the International Court of Justice (ICJ), centres on the interpretation of a 1948 treaty on the prevention of genocide, signed by both countries. The treaty names the ICJ as the forum for resolving disputes between signatories.

Last week, the executive board of the International Association of Genocide Scholars issued a statement saying that Putin was "misappropriating and misusing the term 'genocide'".

"There is absolutely no evidence that there is genocide going on in Ukraine," the association's president, Melanie O'Brien, told Reuters.

The hearings are set to start at 10am (9am GMT) with Ukraine presenting its case. Russia is due to respond on Tuesday.

block-time published-time 11.44pm GMT

Hello it's Samantha Lock with you as we continue to monitor the crisis unfolding in [*Ukraine*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/ukraine).

Russia's war on its neighbour continues for its eleventh day and well into its second week. It is 1.40am in [*Ukraine*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/ukraine) and the UN estimates more than 1.5 million people have fled the country to seek safety in neighbouring countries.

For any tips and feedback please contact me through [*Twitter*](https://twitter.com/Samantha__Lock) or at [*samantha.lock@theguardian.com*](mailto:samantha.lock@theguardian.com)

Civilians cross the rubble of a damaged bridge in Irpin near Kyiv. Photograph: Oleksandr Ratushniak/EPA

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.12am GMT

block-time published-time 11.22pm GMT

The full story on Boris Johnson's pledge to send more defensive equipment and aid to Ukraine:

Boris Johnson has pledged to send more defensive equipment and $100m to Ukraine to hold off Russian troops and mitigate financial pressures facing the country, but was accused of moving too slowly and timidly to clamp down on oligarchs' dirty money in the UK.

Emergency legislation is due to be rushed through the House of Commons on Monday, intended to create a register of overseas ownership of UK land and property, reform unexplained wealth orders and make it easier to prosecute those involved in breaking sanctions.

The economic crime bill will be supported by opposition parties, but ministers were warned it would still give those suspected of money laundering a "get out of London free card" and contained loopholes that could let people disguise or liquidate their assets before the new powers come into effect.

Keir Starmer, the Labour leader, said he was frustrated ministers were "going slowly" and that there were "echoes of Afghanistan", claiming the government "really only begins to get its act together and respond in the heat of the situation rather than preparing for it beforehand".

Dominic Raab, the deputy prime minister, said on Sunday it could take months or even years for the Russian president, Vladimir Putin, to be defeated in his ambition to conquer [*Ukraine*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/ukraine).

Related: [*Johnson steps up Ukraine support but is accused of slowness on Russian dirty money*](https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2022/mar/06/johnson-steps-up-ukraine-support-but-is-accused-of-slowness-on-russian-dirty-money)

block-time published-time 11.15pm GMT

Britain to provide $100m to Ukraine through the World Bank

Prime minister Boris Johnson's office said Britain will provide $100 million to Ukraine (75.6 million pounds) through the World Bank, [*Reuters reports*](https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/britain-pledges-100-mln-help-keep-ukrainian-state-running-2022-03-06/) :

The UK is seeking to keep core state functions running and mitigate financial pressures caused by Russia's ***invasion***, Johnson's office said.

Britain has sought a central role in the international response to Russia's ***invasion*** of Ukraine by providing defensive military aid, arguing for tougher sanctions again the Kremlin and offering financial support.

Nevertheless, Johnson's government has faced criticism that its sanctions have been too slow and its refugee programme underwhelming.

The latest round of cash, which is in addition to $290.95 million (220 million pounds) pledged already, could be used to pay public-sector workers in Ukraine or fund pension and social security payments, British authorities said.

The UK is also [*pushing new legislation on Monday*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2022/mar/06/russia-ukraine-war-biden-and-zelenskiy-discuss-more-support-for-ukraine-as-visa-mastercard-pull-out-of-russia-live?page=with:block-6225274b8f08d07f5d1c9acb#block-6225274b8f08d07f5d1c9acb) that aims to speed up the sanctions ***process***.

block-time published-time 11.05pm GMT

In his evening [*video address*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2022/mar/06/russia-ukraine-war-biden-and-zelenskiy-discuss-more-support-for-ukraine-as-visa-mastercard-pull-out-of-russia-live?page=with:block-622532528f0885faa96ca899-pinned#block-622532528f0885faa96ca899-pinned) , Ukraine's president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, also criticized western leaders for failing to respond to the Russian Defense Ministry's announcement that it would strike Ukraine's military-industrial complex and that employees of the plants should not show up to work, the AP reports. Zelenskiy said:

I didn't hear even a single world leader react to this. The audacity of the aggressor is a clear signal to the west that the sanctions imposed on Russia are not sufficient...

Think about the sense of impunity of the occupiers that they can announce such planned atrocities."

Zelsnkiy urged for a "tribunal" to hold accountable people who have committed atrocities.

The Russian Defense Ministry said earlier on Sunday that its forces were planning to strike Ukraine's military-industrial complex with "precision weapons", with ministry spokesman Igor Konashenkov (in a statement carried by the state news agency Tass), saying, "We urge all personnel of Ukrainian defense industry plants ... to leave the territory of their enterprises," the AP reported.

More from Zelsnkiy's speech, via [*CNN*](https://www.cnn.com/europe/live-news/ukraine-russia-putin-news-03-06-22/index.html) :

For tomorrow Russia has officially announced the shelling of our territory. Our enterprises of the defense complex. Most were built decades ago by the Soviet government, built in cities. And now they are in the middle of an ordinary urban environment. Thousands of people work there. Hundreds of thousands live nearby... This is murder. Deliberate murder."

block-time published-time 10.49pm GMT

Here are some images from protests against the Russian ***invasion***, from around the globe this weekend.

Santiago:

Demonstrators in Chile Photograph: Alberto Valdés/EPA

Cardiff:

Demonstration in Cardiff, Wales Photograph: Matthew Horwood/Getty Images

Argentina:

enltrLIVE: Ukrainians in Argentina protest the conflict in Ukraine [*https://t.co/O68rI8d4BS*](https://t.co/O68rI8d4BS)

- Reuters (@Reuters) [*March 6, 2022*](https://twitter.com/Reuters/status/1500574890650337280?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

New York:

Protest in New York Photograph: Milo Hess/ZUMA Press Wire/REX/Shutterstock

Paris:

Demonstration in Paris Photograph: Jerome Gilles/NurPhoto/REX/Shutterstock

Mexico City:

Demonstrators in Mexico City. Photograph: Gustavo Graf Maldonado/Reuters

block-time published-time 10.24pm GMT

Zelenskiy: 'We will punish everyone who committed atrocities'

In an address this evening, Ukraine's president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy said, "We will not forgive. We will not forget. We will punish everyone who committed atrocities in this war."

More quotes from his remarks:

enltr??Zelensky: "Today, a family of four, parents and two children, were killed in Irpin as they were trying to leave the city. We will not forgive. We will not forget."

- The Kyiv Independent (@KyivIndependent) [*March 6, 2022*](https://twitter.com/KyivIndependent/status/1500583540739694598?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

enltr??Zelensky: "The audacity of the aggressor is a clear signal for the West that the imposed sanctions aren't enough." "You can't hide from this reality. You can't hide from the new killings in Ukraine."

- The Kyiv Independent (@KyivIndependent) [*March 6, 2022*](https://twitter.com/KyivIndependent/status/1500582360093540360?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

enltrWritten down like this Zelenskiy's address tonight reads like a powerful poem. [*pic.twitter.com/R915iHzc0v*](https://t.co/R915iHzc0v)

- Shaun Walker (@shaunwalker7) [*March 6, 2022*](https://twitter.com/shaunwalker7/status/1500589274420420618?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 10.13pm GMT

US official says a Russian attack on Odesa does not appear imminent

The US does not believe a Russian amphibious assault in or near the Ukrainian city of Odesa is imminent, a senior US defence official said, [*according to Reuters*](https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/us-does-not-see-imminent-russian-amphibious-assault-odessa-us-official-2022-03-06/). There have been growing concerns about a possible attack on the city:

The US official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, estimated that Russia had launched about 600 missiles since the start of the ***invasion*** and deployed into Ukraine about 95% of combat forces it had pre-staged outside of the country.

Russian forces continued to try to advance and isolate Kyiv, Kharkhiv and Chernihiv and were meeting "strong Ukrainian resistance", the official said.

Earlier, Odesa's mayor said, "I don't know what kind of bastard you have to be to press the button to drop bombs on Odesa," the Guardian's Shaun Walker reported.

enltrOdessa mayor Gennady Trukhanov, generally known as pro-Russian, has come down firmly on the side of Kyiv in recent days. "I don't know what kind of bastard you have to be to press the button to drop bombs on Odessa" [*pic.twitter.com/NtwNAIGTas*](https://t.co/NtwNAIGTas)

- Shaun Walker (@shaunwalker7) [*March 6, 2022*](https://twitter.com/shaunwalker7/status/1500496768160743428?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 10.20pm GMT

block-time published-time 10.04pm GMT

Summary

Staff at Ukraine's Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant are being told what to do by the Russian military commander who seized the site last week, in [*violation of international safety protocols*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/06/ukraine-zaporizhzhia-nuclear-plant-staff-under-russian-orders). Emmanuel Macron [*implored Putin to let civilians flee Ukraine's besieged cities*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/06/mariupol-residents-prepare-to-leave-second-ceasefire-russia-ukraine) during a marathon call of nearly two hours as a second attempt to evacuate the port city of Mariupol ended under Russia bombardment.A Texas congresswoman has [*called for Russia to release Brittney Griner*](https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2022/mar/06/brittney-griner-arrest-russia-drugs-charges-wnba-basketball-wnba-ukraine) as fears grow Putin could use the US basketball star as a pawn during the war in Ukraine.US Secretary of State Antony Blinken says the US and its allies are engaged in a "very active discussion" about [*banning the import of Russian oil and natural gas*](https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/mar/06/us-allies-discuss-russian-oil-imports-ban). More than [*4,300 people have been arrested*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/06/4300-people-arrested-anti-war-protests-across-russia-decounce-vladimir-putin-war-ukraine) after demonstrators took to the streets in 21 Russian cities to condemn Vladimir Putin's ***invasion*** of Ukraine.[*Eight civilians were killed*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2022/mar/06/russia-ukraine-war-biden-and-zelenskiy-discuss-more-support-for-ukraine-as-visa-mastercard-pull-out-of-russia-live?filterKeyEvents=false&page=with:block-622517218f08c9a6402f96e5#block-622517218f08c9a6402f96e5) in Irpin as evacuations were underway, according to the mayor.Netflix, TikTok, Ikea, Apple, Microsoft, TikTok, Mastercard and Visa, Boeing, Nike, Volkswagen and other companies have [*suspended or restricted operations in Russia*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2022/mar/06/russia-ukraine-war-biden-and-zelenskiy-discuss-more-support-for-ukraine-as-visa-mastercard-pull-out-of-russia-live?filterKeyEvents=false&page=with:block-622521508f08d07f5d1c9a7c#block-622521508f08d07f5d1c9a7c). A Ukrainian volunteer fighter helps carry a child for local residents as they evacuate Irpin on foot as Russian forces advance and continue to bombard the area with artillery. Photograph: Marcus Yam/LOS ANGELES TIMES/REX/Shutterstock

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 10.20pm GMT

block-time published-time 9.36pm GMT

UK aims to speed up sanctions ***process***

The UK is pushing new legislation on Monday that aims to speed up the sanctions ***process*** by allowing ministers to tighten restrictions on Russian businesses and individuals, Reuters [*reports*](https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/uk-seeks-quicken-sanctions-process-increase-pressure-russia-2022-03-06/) :

The Economic Crime (Transparency and Enforcement) Bill is being pushed through parliament next week as Britain tries to punish those with links to Russian President Vladimir Putin in response to his ***invasion*** of Ukraine.

"Punishing sanctions are meaningless until properly implemented, and these changes will allow us to pursue Putin's allies in the UK with the full backing of the law, beyond doubt or legal challenge," Prime Minister Boris Johnson said.

Britain has already sanctioned some banks, firms and individuals, but has faced calls to ramp up its sanctions and move faster on Russian oligarchs and companies.

enltrUK seeks to quicken sanctions ***process*** to increase pressure on Russia [*https://t.co/lUnZ3MTxJ8*](https://t.co/lUnZ3MTxJ8) [*pic.twitter.com/OdZXNz3v2f*](https://t.co/OdZXNz3v2f)

- Reuters (@Reuters) [*March 6, 2022*](https://twitter.com/Reuters/status/1500570717938724870?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

For more reading on the subject:

Related: [*Russian oligarchs in UK face new laws tackling 'dirty money'*](https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2022/feb/28/russian-oligarchs-in-uk-face-new-laws-tackling-dirty-money)

Related: [*Register of offshore owners of UK properties full of loopholes, say experts*](https://www.theguardian.com/money/2022/mar/01/register-of-offshore-owners-of-uk-properties-full-of-loopholes-say-experts)

Related: [*Oligarch money is embedded in London. Beware the big talk of a 'crackdown' | John Harris*](https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/mar/06/oligarch-money-is-embedded-in-london-beware-the-big-talk-of-a-crackdown)

block-time published-time 9.15pm GMT

Netflix shuts down service in Russia

Netflix is suspending all of its services in Russian in response to the Russian ***invasion*** of Ukraine, the company said in a statement, [*Variety reports*](https://variety.com/2022/digital/news/netflix-suspends-service-russia-ukraine-invasion-1235197390/).

"Given the circumstances on the ground, we have decided to suspend our service in Russia," a spokesperson told the publication.

Netflix has more than 1m customers in Russia, and no new customers will be able to sign up, though it's unclear what impact this move may have on existing accounts, [*according to Bloomberg*](https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-03-06/netflix-is-shutting-all-services-in-russia-after-ukraine-war?utm_medium=social&cmpid=socialflow-twitter-business&utm_source=twitter&utm_content=business&utm_campaign=socialflow-organic). Netflix had already announced that it would be temporarily pausing future projects and acquisitions from Russia, Variety reported, noting that the streaming service had four Russian original projects in the works.

Other companies that have suspended or limited operations or sales in Russia include: [*Ikea*](https://about.ikea.com/en/newsroom/2022/03/03/ikea-pauses-operations-in-russia-and-belarus) , [*Apple*](https://www.cnbc.com/2022/03/03/apples-decision-to-halt-russia-sales-puts-pressure-on-samsung-google.html) , [*Microsoft*](https://www.cnet.com/news/apple-microsoft-and-other-tech-companies-stop-sales-in-russia/) , [*TikTok*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2022/mar/06/russia-ukraine-war-biden-and-zelenskiy-discuss-more-support-for-ukraine-as-visa-mastercard-pull-out-of-russia-live?filterKeyEvents=false&page=with:block-62250b5c8f08c9a6402f9662#block-62250b5c8f08c9a6402f9662) , [*Mastercard and Visa*](https://twitter.com/ap/status/1500247378279997444) , [*Boeing*](https://www.wsj.com/articles/what-companies-have-pulled-back-from-russia-11646425481) , [*Nike*](https://www.reuters.com/business/retail-consumer/nike-temporarily-close-all-stores-russia-2022-03-03/) and [*Volkswagen*](https://www.wsj.com/articles/what-companies-have-pulled-back-from-russia-11646425481).

The Netflix logo is seen on top of their office building in Hollywood, California. Photograph: Chris Delmas/AFP/Getty Images

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 9.29pm GMT

block-time published-time 9.01pm GMT

The US efforts to isolate Russia have intensified this weekend, with discussions of a possible [*ban on the import of Russian oil and natural gas*](https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/mar/06/us-allies-discuss-russian-oil-imports-ban) , and senior US officials traveling to Venezuela for rare talks with Nicols Maduro's government.

Secretary of State [*Antony Blinken*](https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/antony-blinken) said earlier today that the US and its allies were engaged in a "very active discussion" about prohibiting the import of Russian oil and natural gas, which would mark a significant escalation of the ongoing sanctions. [*Blinken told CNN*](https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/mar/06/us-allies-discuss-russian-oil-imports-ban) :

"We are now talking to our European partners and allies to look in a coordinated way at the prospect of banning the import of Russian oil while making sure that there is still an appropriate supply of oil on world market. That's a very active discussion as we speak."

House speaker Nancy Pelosi has also backed the idea of a Russian oil import ban, arguing at a press briefing earlier this week that Russia's exports are funding Putin's war efforts.

This weekend, White House and state department negotiators also met Maduro representatives in Caracas, Venezuela's capital, the first meeting of its kind in years, as the Guardian's Latin America correspondent, Tom Phillips, [*reported*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/06/us-officials-venezuela-talks-apparent-bid-further-isolate-russia) :

Citing anonymous US officials, the New York Times [*claimed*](https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/05/world/americas/venezuela-russia-usa.html) the Biden administration was motivated partly by concern that Russia's Latin American allies - which include the authoritarian regimes in Cuba, Nicaragua and Venezuela - could become "security threats" if the geopolitical clash with Putin escalated.

Others speculated that the US saw Venezuelan oil as a potential substitute for Russian imports were it to slap sanctions on Moscow as a result of Putin's ***invasion*** of [*Ukraine*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/ukraine).

Venezuela has the world's largest oil reserves and [*its output is currently growing*](https://www.argusmedia.com/en/news/2270123-venezuela-adapts-to-us-sanctions-with-rising-oil-flow) despite US sanctions imposed at the height of the 2019 attempt to topple Maduro.

Denmark's prime minister also [*said*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2022/mar/06/russia-ukraine-war-biden-and-zelenskiy-discuss-more-support-for-ukraine-as-visa-mastercard-pull-out-of-russia-live?page=with:block-622512c38f0885faa96ca758#block-622512c38f0885faa96ca758) today that the country was aiming to become independent of Russian natural gas in the wake of Russia's ***invasion*** of Ukraine.

Related: [*US in 'very active discussion' with allies to ban import of Russian oil*](https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/mar/06/us-allies-discuss-russian-oil-imports-ban)

Related: [*US officials fly to Venezuela for talks in apparent bid to further isolate Russia*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/06/us-officials-venezuela-talks-apparent-bid-further-isolate-russia)

block-time published-time 8.32pm GMT

Eight civilians killed in Irpin, mayor says

Eight civilians were killed in Irpin as evacuations were underway, according to the mayor, who said he witnessed four people die:

enltrIrpin's mayor Oleksandr Markushyn said he saw 4 people die today: 2 adults and 2 children, who were trying to evacuate. He said in total 8 died. He says part of the city is under Russian control but 'Irpin has not surrendered, Irpin is fighting' [*pic.twitter.com/5qvxBpn99b*](https://t.co/5qvxBpn99b)

- Isobel Koshiw (@IKoshiw) [*March 6, 2022*](https://twitter.com/IKoshiw/status/1500524389430964230?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

Residents fleeing Irpin, just outside of Kyiv, were caught in shelling by Russian forces earlier today and forced to dive for cover, Reuters reported.

A policeman and a civilian take cover from shelling, in Irpin, Ukraine. Photograph: Europa Press News/Europa Press/Getty Images

"A family died," Irpin mayor Oleksandr Markushyn [*said*](https://twitter.com/MarquardtA/status/1500551992405594112) , according to [*CNN*](https://www.cnn.com/europe/live-news/ukraine-russia-putin-news-03-06-22/index.html) , "in front of my eyes two small children and two adults died... Irpin is at war, Irpin has not surrendered. Part of Irpin was indeed captured by Russian invaders, but part of Irpin is fighting and not surrendering."

block-time published-time 8.16pm GMT

The Ukrainian town of Volnovakha was almost completely destroyed in the first days of the war, with intense shelling targeting civilian homes. About 90% of buildings have been damaged or reduced to rubble, and the dead lie unburied in the street, residents say.

Hundreds if not thousands of people are still sheltering in basements without heat or electricity, and dwindling supplies of food and water. Russia has not made good on offers of a ceasefire and humanitarian corridor to allow evacuations.

Marina, 38, an economist and mother of three, tells the story of her family's hellish week under fire - and their terrifying escape:

My life is split into before and after these events happening in my country. I couldn't hold back my tears about all the destruction.

When we heard the news that the Russian federation was planning to 'liberate' some territories, we didn't believe it, we didn't even think it was possible in the modern world. That's why we decided to stay in the place we live.

If we had imagined for even a second what was coming, we would have risked trying to escape the very first moment the shelling started. Our children, who are five, six and 13, have got psychological trauma from this that will last all their lives.

Related: [*'Nowhere to go and nowhere to go back to': Life under fire in Ukraine*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/06/nowhere-to-go-back-to-ukraine-volnovakha)

block-time published-time 8.08pm GMT

Denmark aims to become independent of Russian natural gas in the wake of Russia's ***invasion*** of Ukraine, Danish prime minister Mette Frederiksen said, [*according to Reuters*](https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/denmark-vote-joining-eus-defence-policy-this-year-danish-media-2022-03-06/). Denmark will also significantly increase its defence budget in response to the conflict, Frederiksen said.

Denmark's Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen speaks during a press conference in Copenhagen, Denmark. Photograph: Emil Helms/EPA

From Reuters:

The Nordic country will increase its defence spending gradually to reach 2% of GDP by 2033, equivalent to an increase in annual defence spending of around 18 billion Danish crowns ($2.65 billion) under an agreement between the main parliamentary parties.

The parties also agreed to set aside 7 billion crowns over the next two years to strengthen Danish defence, diplomacy and humanitarian efforts.

"Historic times call for historic decisions," Frederiksen said at a press briefing in Copenhagen, adding that this was "the largest investment in Danish defence in recent times".

The prime minister also said that the main parliamentary parties were in agreement that Denmark should become independent of Russian gas "as soon as possible", but Frederiksen did not offer a specific timeline at a press conference in Copenhagen on Sunday.

block-time published-time 7.53pm GMT

Some Ukrainians have reported that their loved ones in Russia refuse to believe that Russian soldiers could bomb innocent people, or even that a war is occurring, according to a [*new report from a New York Times journalist in Lviv*](https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/06/world/europe/ukraine-russia-families.html).

enltrAcross Ukraine, I have been meeting people w close relatives in Russia who refuse to believe the extent of the violence their state is perpetrating. Cities suffer missile attacks, mothers fear for sons, but fathers, sisters, brothers respond w denial. ?? [*https://t.co/GLdl2BKAid*](https://t.co/GLdl2BKAid)

- Valerie Hopkins (@VALERIEinNYT) [*March 6, 2022*](https://twitter.com/VALERIEinNYT/status/1500549198701383684?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

Across Ukraine, residents reported that their close family members in Russia were repeating the official Kremlin position to them, denying the attacks and the extent of the violence, reporter Valerie Hopkins wrote. Some examples:

enltrRelatives parrot the official Kremlin position: that Putin's army is conducting a limited "special military operation" to "de-Nazify" Ukraine. Putin has called Pres Zelensky, a native Russian speaker w Jewish background, a "drug-addled Nazi" in an attempt to justify the ***invasion***.

- Valerie Hopkins (@VALERIEinNYT) [*March 6, 2022*](https://twitter.com/VALERIEinNYT/status/1500549202723713031?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

enltrSvetlana from Cherkasy sends her relatives in Belarus and Tomsk "necessary information" every day. "The response is that 'This is some kind of fake information that this cannot be the case at all, that no one can or will shoot at civilians,'" she said.

- Valerie Hopkins (@VALERIEinNYT) [*March 6, 2022*](https://twitter.com/VALERIEinNYT/status/1500549208365056005?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

Some more on the disinformation, misinformation and propaganda from Russian-backed outlets that has been spreading over the last week:

Related: [*Flood of Russian misinformation puts tech companies in the hot seat*](https://www.theguardian.com/media/2022/feb/28/facebook-twitter-ukraine-russia-misinformation)

block-time published-time 7.38pm GMT

TikTok suspends livestreaming in Russia

TikTok has announced that it is suspending livestreaming in Russia and restricting the uploading of new videos, in response to Russia's new law that [*threatens jail sentences*](https://www.theguardian.com/media/2022/mar/04/bbc-temporarily-suspending-work-all-news-journalists-russia) of up to 15 years for spreading "fake news".

enltr1/ TikTok is an outlet for creativity and entertainment that can provide a source of relief and human connection during a time of war when people are facing immense tragedy and isolation. However, the safety of our employees and our users remain our highest priority.

- TikTokComms (@TikTokComms)

[*March 6, 2022*](https://twitter.com/TikTokComms/status/1500535434610368518?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

TikTok [*said in a statement*](https://newsroom.tiktok.com/en-us/bringing-more-context-to-content-on-tiktok?utm_source=COMMSTWITTER&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=030622) :

Our highest priority is the safety of our employees and our users, and in light of Russia's new 'fake news' law, we have no choice but to suspend livestreaming and new content to our video service in Russia while we review the safety implications of this law. Our in-app messaging service will not be affected. We will continue to evaluate the evolving circumstances in Russia to determine when we might fully resume our services with safety as our top priority.

The "fake news" law has already had widespread consequences. The BBC, the Canadian Broadcasting Company and Bloomberg News all said on Friday that their journalists were pausing work. CNN, CBS News and ABC News stopped broadcasting in Russia, and other news organizations have temporarily stopped publishing bylines of their journalists in Russia, the [*Guardian reported*](https://www.theguardian.com/media/2022/mar/04/bbc-temporarily-suspending-work-all-news-journalists-russia).

Russia also [*entirely blocked Facebook on Friday*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/04/russia-completely-blocks-access-to-facebook-and-twitter) in retaliation for the platform restricting content from state-owned media.

More details here:

Related: [*BBC, CNN and other global news outlets suspend reporting in Russia*](https://www.theguardian.com/media/2022/mar/04/bbc-temporarily-suspending-work-all-news-journalists-russia)

block-time published-time 7.15pm GMT

Retired army general David Petraeus, former head of US central command during the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, said he did not accept military assumptions that Kyiv will inevitably fall to Russia.

Russian forces have a [*40-mile-long convoy*](https://viewer.gutools.co.uk/world/2022/mar/03/concern-mounting-huge-russian-military-convoy-outside-kyiv-ukraine) of military vehicles stalled on the approach to the Ukrainian capital and Petraeus said it appeared "they cannot keep their columns fueled" and praised Ukrainian resilience so far.

"They've taken down road signs or pointed "Welcome to Hell" and stuff like that," Petraeus, who is also former director of the CIA, told CNN:

This is going to be a very long fight in Kyiv. The locals there have been stockpiling food, there is going to be an enormously fierce resistance. I don't accept assumptions that it will fall."

Petraeus also noted Kyiv's extensive surface area as a major obstacle for the Russian military, pointing out that the capital is spread across around 320 square miles, larger than New York City and a little over half the size of London's sprawl. CNN host Jake Tapper asked Petraeus about the vulnerability of other countries near Russia, notably non-Nato places, even as Nato moves to strengthen its boundaries with military might along members' borders with Russia and its neighbor Belarus, from the Baltic states to Romania.

"The one to be worried about is Moldova," said Petraeus, referring to the small country lodged between Nato-member Romania and the south-western flank of Ukraine, where US secretary of state Antony Blinken was on Sunday. "We need to be shoring that up substantially."

Petraeus added that that should occur even as the US and its western allies "work to get these MiGs out of Poland and into Ukraine to be flown by Ukrainian pilots," he said.

Earlier, Blinken [*had talked*](https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/mar/06/antony-blinken-russia-sanctions-ukraine-invasion) about sending US fighter jets to Poland so that that country can send supplies of used MiGs and Sukhoi military planes to Ukraine, where the military is familiar with those Russian-style jets rather than western-made fighters.

Related: [*Blinken vows to escalate sanctions on Russia but warns war could last 'some time'*](https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/mar/06/antony-blinken-russia-sanctions-ukraine-invasion)

block-time published-time 7.09pm GMT

Vladimir Putin has reiterated his demands in Ukraine in a further telephone conversation with French President Emmanuel Macron and said Ukraine must meet them or the war continues.

In a briefing with journalists, the Elysée said Macron had spoken to Putin for an hour and 45 minutes on Sunday morning to reiterate the international communities demands to halt hostilities but also guarantee the safety of civilians and allow humanitarian organisations to operate.

"President Putin has again expressed his termination to obtain all his objectives by negotiation or by war. The President of the Republic expressed his determination to obtain negotiations and peace," the Elysée spokesperson said.

enltrFrench president Emmanuel Macron spoke again to Russian president Vladimir Putin today. Was a 1hr45min call made by Macron. Putin reiterated his demands for: 1. The "de-Nazification" of Ukraine 2. The "neutralisation" of Ukraine (ie no joining Nato and no weapons). [*#Ukraine*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/Ukraine?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) 1/n

- Kim Willsher (@kimwillsher1)

[*March 6, 2022*](https://twitter.com/kimwillsher1/status/1500507765671870467?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

More from the spokesperson:

If Ukraine refuses to agree to this there will be a pursuing of military operations. This is unacceptable to Ukraine... The President of the Republic has reiterated the demand, a demand with the quasi unanimous support of the international community, for the halting of the military operation. It is also necessary that international humanitarian rights are absolutely respected."

block-time published-time 6.45pm GMT

War crimes investigators begin collecting evidence

Ukrainians fleeing the scenes of destruction and carnage in Ukraine are already being interviewed by investigators in anticipation of a future war crimes trial of [*Vladimir Putin*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/vladimir-putin) , along with his top officials and generals.

With well over a million refugees crossing the border, there is an abundance of eyewitness testimony, while the flow of video footage through social media has provided an ***unprecedented*** amount of evidence which is being subjected to forensic analysis.

However, the sheer quantity of evidence is not necessarily a guarantee of a successful trial, and experienced war crimes investigators warn there is a long war to go before Putin and his regime are in the dock, in person or in absentia.

enltrWar crimes investigators have already started work collecting evidence from Ukraine, but it will be a long road from survivor interviews to putting Putin and his regime in the dock. I spoke to some veteran investigators [*https://t.co/JKNtFj58OE*](https://t.co/JKNtFj58OE)

- Julian Borger (@julianborger) [*March 6, 2022*](https://twitter.com/julianborger/status/1500537307144888329?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

Multiple investigations have been launched at the same time, and it is not clear to what extent they are coordinated, if at all.

The prosecutor of the international criminal court (ICC) in The Hague has [*opened an investigation*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/28/ukraine-russia-belarus-war-crimes-investigation-the-hague) , after a petition by an ***unprecedented*** 39 member states, and will almost certainly receive the most governmental support.

Related: [*'Leave no stone unturned': how investigators gather evidence of war crimes in Ukraine*](https://www.theguardian.com/law/2022/mar/06/leave-no-stone-unturned-how-investigators-gather-evidence-of-war-crimes-in-ukraine)

block-time published-time 6.38pm GMT

American Express is suspending all operations in Russia and Belarus, [*Reuters reports*](https://www.reuters.com/business/american-express-suspends-operations-russia-belarus-2022-03-06/).

Visa and Mastercard have [*taken similar steps*](https://www.axios.com/visa-mastercard-russia-suspend-e300c30f-404d-4dc4-adcc-c3b03adec289.html?utm_source=twitter&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=editorial&utm_content=economy-business-russiaukraine) , with a block that [*allows for continued domestic transactions in Russia*](https://www.theguardian.com/business/2022/mar/06/russians-visa-mastercard-ban-domestic-purchases-mir). The Guardian's banking correspondent, [*Kalyeena Makortoff*](https://www.theguardian.com/profile/kalyeena-makortoff) , explained earlier that the Mastercard and Visa suspension largely targets foreign payments, so that local consumers will no longer be able to use their Russian cards abroad or for online international payments.

Our earlier coverage:

Related: [*Mastercard and Visa block in Russia does not stop domestic purchases*](https://www.theguardian.com/business/2022/mar/06/russians-visa-mastercard-ban-domestic-purchases-mir)

block-time published-time 6.27pm GMT

Summary

A summary of some of the latest developments in the Russian ***invasion*** of Ukraine:

The US has seen " [*very credible reports*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2022/mar/06/russia-ukraine-war-biden-and-zelenskiy-discuss-more-support-for-ukraine-as-visa-mastercard-pull-out-of-russia-live?page=with:block-6224c5298f0885faa96ca386#block-6224c5298f0885faa96ca386) " of deliberate attacks on civilians in Ukraine, US secretary of state Antony Blinken said.Police detained more than 4,300 people on Sunday at protests across Russia against Putin's ***invasion*** of Ukraine, an independent protest monitoring group [*reported*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2022/mar/06/russia-ukraine-war-biden-and-zelenskiy-discuss-more-support-for-ukraine-as-visa-mastercard-pull-out-of-russia-live?page=with:block-6224c93b8f08c9a6402f930c#block-6224c93b8f08c9a6402f930c). BBC World News has been [*taken off air in Russia*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2022/mar/06/russia-ukraine-war-biden-and-zelenskiy-discuss-more-support-for-ukraine-as-visa-mastercard-pull-out-of-russia-live?filterKeyEvents=false&page=with:block-6224c77e8f08c9a6402f92de#block-6224c77e8f08c9a6402f92de) , the broadcaster said.Ukraine is is open to discussing "non- NATO models" for its future, [*one of its negotiators said*](https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/ukraine-open-discussing-non-nato-models-negotiator-tells-fox-news-2022-03-06/). The safe passage of civilians from Ukraine's besieged eastern port city of Mariupol was [*halted again on Sunday*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2022/mar/06/russia-ukraine-war-biden-and-zelenskiy-discuss-more-support-for-ukraine-as-visa-mastercard-pull-out-of-russia-live?page=with:block-6224bb5f8f08c9a6402f9230#block-6224bb5f8f08c9a6402f9230). A UN nuclear watchdog said that staff at Ukraine's Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant continue to operate it, but that management is now under the orders of the [*commander of the Russian forces*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2022/mar/06/russia-ukraine-war-biden-and-zelenskiy-discuss-more-support-for-ukraine-as-visa-mastercard-pull-out-of-russia-live?filterKeyEvents=false&page=with:block-6224eccf8f08c9a6402f94da#block-6224eccf8f08c9a6402f94da).

block-time published-time 6.12pm GMT

Pakistan's prime minister, [*Imran Khan*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/imran-khan) , has responded to a joint letter from the heads of diplomatic missions urging Pakistan to condemn Russia, [*saying*](https://www.reuters.com/article/us-ukraine-crisis-pakistan/pakistani-premier-hits-out-at-western-envoys-joint-letter-on-russia-idUSKBN2L30LQ) , "What do you think of us? Are we your slaves... that whatever you say, we will do?"

On 1 March, the heads of 22 diplomatic missions had publicised a joint letter calling on Pakistan to support a resolution in the United Nations general assembly to condemn Russia's aggression against Ukraine, [*Reuters reports*](https://www.reuters.com/article/us-ukraine-crisis-pakistan/pakistani-premier-hits-out-at-western-envoys-joint-letter-on-russia-idUSKBN2L30LQ) , noting that the move to release the letter was rare:

In the event, Pakistan, a traditional ally of the west, abstained from voting as the UN general assembly overwhelmingly reprimanded Russia for invading Ukraine.

"I want to ask the European Union ambassadors: Did you write such a letter to India?" Khan said at a political rally on Sunday, noting that Pakistan's arch-rival had also abstained. Khan also said European countries had not censured India for its actions in Kashmir, a mountainous region over which Pakistan and India have fought two wars.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 6.24pm GMT

block-time published-time 5.58pm GMT

The Bolshoi Theatre's music director and principal conductor, Tugan Sokhiev, has announced his resignation, saying he felt under pressure due to calls to take a position on the Ukraine conflict.

The Russian said in a statement he was resigning "with immediate effect" from his post at the Moscow theatre, as well as his equivalent position at France's Orchestre National du Capitole de Toulouse.

Russian conductor Tugan Sokhiev rehearsing with the Orchestre national du Capitole of Toulouse at the Halle aux Grains venue in Toulouse, south-western France. Photograph: Eric Cabanis/AFP/Getty Images

Sokhiev was appointed by the Bolshoi in 2014. He was brought in as part of moves to improve the theatre's image after scandals including the 2013 acid attack on its then-artistic director Sergei Filin.

He comes from the same North Ossetia region of Russia as star conductor Valery Gergiev and is considered to be his protege. Kremlin loyalist Gergiev has been stripped of his role at the Munich Philharmonic for failing to denounce Russia's actions.

Sokhiev said in a lengthy statement that "many people were waiting for me to express myself and to hear from me my position on what's happening at the moment," referring to Russia's military action in Ukraine.

He said he decided to resign after "being forced to face the impossible option of choosing between my beloved Russian and beloved French musicians".

He cited opposition from authorities in Toulouse to his planned staging of a Franco-Russian music festival there, saying they "want me to express myself for peace".

Sokhiev became music director of the Toulouse orchestra in 2008 and continued to work with the orchestra after joining the Bolshoi.

Sokhiev did not say explicitly whether he backs or opposes Russia's actions in Ukraine while he said that "I have never supported and I will always be against any conflicts in any shape and form".

He said musicians are becoming "victims of so called 'cancel culture'" and suggested Russian music could come under threat. "I will be soon asked to choose between Tchaikovsky, Stravinsky, Shostakovich and Beethoven, Brahms, Debussy," he warned.

The Bolshoi general director, Vladimir Urin, told TASS state news agency he was saddened by Sokhiev's decision. "I'm very sorry. His departure is a serious problem for the Bolshoi Theatre. It's unclear how the situation will develop from now," he said.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 6.25pm GMT

block-time published-time 5.46pm GMT

Ukraine is not willing to compromise on its territorial integrity in talks with Russia but is open to discussing "non- Nato models" for its future, one of its negotiators told Fox News.

Ukraine has pursued membership of the European Union and Nato, both opposed by Moscow. Vladimir Putin has cited Ukraine's potential membership of Nato as evidence of what he portrays as Nato aggression toward Russia.

"The response that we are getting from the Nato countries is that they are not ready to even discuss having us in Nato, not for the next period of five or 10 years," negotiator David Arakhamia said in remarks published by Fox News late on Saturday.

"We are ready to discuss some non-Nato models. For example, there could be direct guarantees by different countries like the US, China, UK, maybe Germany and France. We are open to discussing such things in a broader circle, not only in bilateral discussions with Russia but also with other partners."

Delegations from Ukraine and Russia have had two rounds of talks since Russia launched an ***invasion*** of its neighbour on 24 February.

On Thursday, the sides agreed to open humanitarian corridors to allow civilians out of some combat zones, although there have been delays in implementing them. The next round of talks is due on Monday, according to the Ukrainian side.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 6.26pm GMT

block-time published-time 5.33pm GMT

Earlier on Sunday, the Ukrainian president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, said Russian rockets had completely destroyed the civilian airport in the central-western region of Vinnytsia on Sunday.

Footage appears to show columns of smoke and fire billowing from the airport.

block-time published-time 5.29pm GMT

A German-flagged ship carrying Russian oil that had been moored in the UK has moved on after workers made it clear they would not unload the cargo.

Unions have urged the government to close what they believe is a loophole following a ban on Russian vessels docking in the UK, saying cargo is not covered.

The German-flagged Seacod was moored near the Stanlow Oil Refinery in the north-west but moved away on Sunday, heading north. Unite said because the vessel is German flagged it doesn't fall under the UK's ban on Russian shipping.

It was not clear if the oil was unloaded before unions became aware it was Russian.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 6.27pm GMT

block-time published-time 5.19pm GMT

Staff at Ukraine's Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant under Russian orders, IAEA says

Staff at Ukraine's Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant continue to operate it, but management is now under the orders of the commander of the Russian forces that seized it last week, the UN nuclear watchdog said.

"I'm extremely concerned," International Atomic Energy Agency chief, Rafael Grossi, said in a statement, adding that Russian forces had cut off some mobile networks and the internet, complicating communications with the plant.

"Management and staff must be allowed to carry out their vital duties in stable conditions without undue external interference or pressure."

block-time published-time 4.59pm GMT

Senior US officials have flown to Venezuela for rare talks with Nicols Maduro's government in an apparent bid to prise the South American country away from its Russian backers after Vladimir Putin's ***invasion*** of Ukraine.

White House and state department negotiators met Maduro representatives in Venezuela's capital, Caracas, on Saturday in what was the first such encounter in years.

Related: [*US officials fly to Venezuela for talks in apparent bid to further isolate Russia*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/06/us-officials-venezuela-talks-apparent-bid-further-isolate-russia)

block-time published-time 4.52pm GMT

Ukrainians fleeing the town of Irpin just outside Kyiv were caught in shelling by Russian forces on Sunday and forced to dive for cover, Reuters witnesses said.

Civilians evacuate during a Russian attacks on the city of Irpin, northwest of Kyiv. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

Irpin, 16 miles (25km) north-west of the capital, has seen intense fighting in recent days. Russia's military is closing in on Kyiv, home to around 3.4 million people before the ***invasion*** sparked a mass exodus of civilians.

Irpin residents scurried along pavements clutching children, luggage and pets as they made their way to waiting buses and cars that would take them further from the clashes.

Soldiers and fellow residents helped elderly men and women who were falling behind. Some people crouched down when explosions went off nearby, apparently from mortar rounds.

A blast hit just a few metres away during a civilian evacuation in Irpin, Ukraine Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

Reuters reporters said they did not witness casualties in the shelling, but several news outlets said that at least three people - a woman and two children - were killed.

The New York Times [*published a photograph*](https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/06/world/europe/ukraine-irpin-civilian-death.html) of four members of a family - a mother, father and two children - lying on the ground in Irpin.

The caption said they were trying to flee when a mortar struck, and that the father, being tended to by Ukrainian soldiers in the image, was the only one still with a pulse.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 5.05pm GMT

block-time published-time 4.36pm GMT

A Texas congresswoman has called for Russia to release Brittney Griner as fears grow Vladimir Putin could use the US basketball star as a pawn during the war in Ukraine.

The two-time Olympic champion [*has been detained by Russian customs authorities*](https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2022/mar/05/brittney-griner-reportedly-detained-russia) , who claim they discovered vape cartridges containing hashish oil in her luggage at an airport near Moscow. The arrest took place last month and the 31-year-old faces up to 10 years in prison if found guilty of bringing drugs into Russia.

Related: [*Fears grow Russia could use US basketball star Brittney Griner as 'hostage'*](https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2022/mar/06/brittney-griner-arrest-russia-drugs-charges-wnba-basketball-wnba-ukraine)

block-time published-time 4.14pm GMT

While Boris Johnson and his cabinet scramble to deliver ***measures*** that will give Vladimir Putin pause for thought in his assault on Ukraine, another - lesser known - Briton is poised to have a potentially more significant impact.

Less than nine months into his tenure as the international criminal court (ICC) prosecutor, Karim Khan, a senior English barrister, [*announced this week*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/28/ukraine-russia-belarus-war-crimes-investigation-the-hague) that he had launched an investigation into the situation in Ukraine as there was "a reasonable basis" to believe that both alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity had been committed there.

There is no guarantee charges will be brought against Putin and his acolytes but some cling to the hope that the prospect of potentially having to stand trial in the future and of being arrested in countries signed up to the ICC may make some of them think again.

Related: [*Karim Khan: the 'very modern British barrister' heading ICC's Russia inquiry*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/06/karim-khan-british-barrister-icc-russia-war-crimes-inquiry)

block-time published-time 4.11pm GMT

The French president, Emmanuel Macron, told Vladimir Putin, during a phone call on Sunday, of his concerns about a possible imminent attack on the Ukrainian city of Odesa, according to a statement from Macron's office.

Macron also stated the importance of finding a negotiated settlement to the Ukraine crisis, and of protecting Ukraine's nuclear facilities.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.12pm GMT

block-time published-time 4.07pm GMT

A Maidenhead rabbi who is attempting to set up a "Ukrainetransport" for families fleeing the Russian ***invasion*** says he has been overwhelmed by offers of help in the UK.

Jonathan Romain, whose mother fled Nazi Germany on the Kindertransport during the second world war, has been contacted by more than 240 people offering rooms for refugees.

Explaining the initiative, he [*tweeted*](https://twitter.com/RabbiRomain/status/1499673468677275649) : "I have always wondered how I could repay the debt I owe to the Kindertransport, who saved my then 11-year-old mother. Now is the time, which is why I am helping to co-ordinate Ukrainetransport."

Related: [*Rabbi in UK wants a 'Ukrainetransport' for families fleeing the Russian* ***invasion***](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/06/rabbi-in-uk-wants-a-ukrainetransport-for-families-fleeing-the-russian-invasion)

block-time published-time 4.06pm GMT

Anastasia Lapatina, a journalist at the Kyiv Independent, tells how Polish people are hosting Ukrainians in their apartments, driving them to places, or simply giving them money to cover basic needs.

When I hopped on a train from Krakow to Przemysl, a small Polish town near the Ukrainian border, I expected to be confronted with a humanitarian catastrophe, produced by a million people fleeing their homes due to war. But what I saw was instead the best of humanity.

As Russia has launched a bloody full-scale war against my country, thousands of Ukrainians have escaped by train to this railway station.

There, they are met by an enormous banner in front of its entrance that reads, in bothPolish and Ukrainian: "You are safe here."

Inside, dozens of Polish volunteers provide Ukrainian refugees with "everything for free", as another sign says - food, water, clothes, phones with prepaid plans, accommodation, legal advice.

Related: [*Here at the Polish-Ukrainian border, I see nothing but humanity towards refugees | Anastasia Lapatina*](https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/mar/06/polish-ukrainian-border-humanity-refugees)

block-time published-time 4.06pm GMT

A resident passing a house on fire after heavy shelling on the only escape route used by locals to leave the town of Irpin, while Russian troops advance towards the capital Photograph: Carlos Barría/Reuters An Ukrainian serviceman looks through binoculars towards the town of Stoyanka at a checkpoint before the last bridge on the road that connects Stoyanka with Kyiv Photograph: Aris Messinis/AFP/Getty Images Demonstrators hold placard and flags during a demonstration in support of Ukraine in Parliament Square, in London Photograph: Alberto Pezzali/AP A woman fleeing the Russian ***invasion*** of Ukraine warms her hands at a fireplace after crossing the border from Ukraine to Poland, at the border checkpoint in Medyka Photograph: Fabrizio Bensch/Reuters

block-time published-time 4.04pm GMT

Ukraine's prime minister, Denys Shmyhal, said he had signed a formal request to foreign governments, including the United States, for termination of Russia and Belarus's memberships of the International Monetary Fund and World Bank.

"These two countries violated their obligations and directed their policies towards war," he said in a statement.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.16pm GMT

block-time published-time 4.03pm GMT

British prime minister Boris Johnson told Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelenskiy he would work with international allies to obtain more defensive military equipment to help with the conflict in Ukraine.

"The leaders discussed the urgent needs of the Ukrainian Armed Forces and the prime minister undertook to work with partners to provide further defensive equipment," said a readout of a call between the two leaders provided by Johnson's office.

block-time published-time 3.58pm GMT

How can we expect the Tory party to wean Britain off Russian wealth and power, when they got us hooked in the first place, writes Guardian columnist John Harris.

In some of London's most exclusive neighbourhoods, you can suddenly sense the kind of unease that wealth usually keeps at bay. As the government talks up its determination to crack down on Russian oligarchs, a much wider shift may be afoot.

On Friday the Financial Times [*quoted*](https://www.ft.com/content/5b356eb8-3cd6-4b24-a7d3-b02c6c60f55f) the chair of Aylesford International, a Chelsea estate agent whose current offerings include a four-bedroom apartment in Cadogan Square, SW3, going for the best part of £12m.

"The severity of these sanctions is the beginning of a new world, a new market," he said. "I don't think you can hide any more."

Related: [*Oligarch money is embedded in London. Beware the big talk of a 'crackdown' | John Harris*](https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/mar/06/oligarch-money-is-embedded-in-london-beware-the-big-talk-of-a-crackdown)

block-time published-time 3.56pm GMT

Explosions can be heard as journalists and Ukrainians are filmed amid heavy shelling in town of Irpin, near Kyiv. The Ukrainian military helped residents escape as Russian troops advanced towards the capital.

block-time published-time 3.55pm GMT

British MPs are urging major banks to shut their Moscow offices, after campaigners accused them of "quietly profiting" off their Russian operations while [*other industries*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/02/sanctions-boycotts-west-response-russian-invasion-ukraine) sever ties with the country.

Some of the City's largest lenders including JP Morgan, Deutsche Bank, HSBC and Credit Suisse collectively employ thousands of staff who offer banking services to large companies and wealthy clients doing business in Russia.

While banks have had to drop services for Russian businesses and oligarchs in line with EU, US and UK sanctions, MPs said lenders had a moral duty to exit the country to put further financial pressure on Moscow as the [*Russian military continues to assault Ukraine.*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/ukraine)

Related: [*British MPs urge global banks to close Russian offices 'without delay'*](https://www.theguardian.com/business/2022/mar/06/campaigners-british-mps-banks-moral-duty-exit-russia-moscow-offices-hsbc-jp-morgan-deutsche-bank)

block-time published-time 3.54pm GMT

In conflict, where information is everything, what is striking about the war in Ukraine is not what is known but the very large areas of unknowns.

And even as commentators have picked over and analysed everything that is known about the Russian military's operations and performance in Ukraine in an effort to predict the trajectory of the conflict, it's what is poorly understood that may yet be more significant still.

One issue that has come under the spotlight is the rate of losses of soldiers and equipment on the Russian side in the week and a half so far of fighting.

In that period, images of dead and captured Russian soldiers and destroyed or abandoned equipment have become commonplace as it has become clear that Russian forces have lost everything from aircraft to main battle tanks and even whole convoys.

But attrition is not a one way street, and what is far less clear is the level of losses sustained by Ukrainian forces, with no equivalent social media avalanche from the Russian side parading this, and Ukraine understandably not wanting to advertise its losses.

Related: [*Clear picture of war in Ukraine clouded by large areas of unknowns*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/06/clear-picture-russian-war-ukraine-clouded-unknowns-lack-reliable-information)

block-time published-time 3.47pm GMT

Ukrainian engineers were scrambled to repair a gas pipeline damaged by Russian forces, halting supplies to parts of south-eastern Ukraine, the Donetsk region governor Pavlo Kyrylenko said.

Engineers had shut down the pipe to prevent gas from leaking, he said, adding that gas flow downstream was now dropping and would stop completely later in the day.

Kyrylenko said that every location between the town of Vuhledar in the Donetsk region and the port of Berdyansk would be left without gas while the damage was repaired. The distance between the two towns is 117 km (73 miles).

"We are working hard to remove this problem as quickly as possible," Kyrylenko said.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.06pm GMT

block-time published-time 3.44pm GMT

Russian forces have opened fire at a protest against their occupation of the southern Ukrainian city of Nova Kakhovka, wounding five people, Ukrainian news agency Interfax Ukraine said, citing eyewitnesses.

Around 2,000 people had taken to the streets of Nova Kakhovka to show their opposition to the ***invasion*** by waving Ukrainian flags and calling on Russian forces to leave, the agency reported. Similar protests were staged in other occupied areas, it said.

block-time published-time 3.40pm GMT

Images have emerged showing two Ukrainian fighters getting married at a checkpoint near Kyiv.

Members of the Ukrainian Territorial Defence Forces, Lesia Ivashchenko and Valerii Fylymonov, are pictured during their wedding ceremony on 6 March.

Lesia Ivashchenko and Valerii Fylymonov kiss at their wedding at a checkpoint in Kyiv, Ukraine Photograph: Mykola Tymchenko/Reuters Two Ukrainian territorial defence fighters tied the knot amid Russian's ***invasion*** of their country Photograph: Sergey Dolzhenko/EPA A helmet is placed on top of Lesia's head after she married a fellow Ukrainian fighter. Photograph: Sergey Dolzhenko/EPA

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.07pm GMT

block-time published-time 3.28pm GMT

A prominent member of the Brazilian right is facing calls to resign after he was exposed in leaked audio messages making a succession of callous and misogynistic remarks about Ukrainian refugees during a purportedly humanitarian mission to the recently invaded country.

Arthur do Val, a São Paulo congressman and former supporter of Brazil's rightwing president, Jair Bolsonaro, made a three-day trip to the region last week, supposedly to raise awareness of the human cost of Vladimir Putin's attack.

On Friday, Brazilian media published [*audio messages*](https://oglobo.globo.com/politica/ouca-os-audios-de-conteudo-sexista-que-levaram-arthur-do-val-desistir-de-campanha-em-sp-1-25420632) in which Do Val spoke in highly offensive terms about Ukrainian refugees.

In one recording, the politician says: "I've just crossed the border on foot between Ukraine and Slovakia. Bro, I swear to you ... I've never seen anything like it in terms of beautiful girls. The refugee queue ... it's like 200 metres long or more of just total goddesses ... It's some incredible shit ... The queue outside Brazil's best nightclub ... doesn't come close to the refugee queue here."

In a second excerpt Do Val says: "Let me tell you, they're easy because they're poor."

Related: [*Brazilian politician's sexist remarks about Ukraine refugees spark outrage*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/06/brazilian-politician-arthur-do-val-sexist-remarks-ukraine-refugees-outrage)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.08pm GMT

block-time published-time 3.25pm GMT

Consumers will still be able to use Mastercard and Visa-branded cards for domestic transactions in Russia, the country's state-backed payments network has said, reducing the impact of the US firms' [*decision to pull services*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/05/visa-and-mastercard-will-both-suspend-operations-in-russia) over the ***invasion*** of Ukraine.

Russia's homegrown payments system Mir said the cardholders would [*still be able to access their funds*](https://mironline.ru/press-center/press-releases/06-03-2022-nspk-karty-visa-i-mastercard-vsekh-rossiyskikh-bankov-prodolzhat-rabo/) , make withdrawals and domestic transfers - at least until their bank cards expire.

Mir has ***processed*** most domestic payments in Russia since 2015, while foreign operators such as Visa and Mastercard continued to run international transactions.

The operator - which is 100% owned by the country's central bank - was established on government orders to protect the economy against sanctions imposed over Moscow's annexation of Crimea in 2014.

Related: [*Russians can still use Visa and Mastercard for domestic purchases, authorities say*](https://www.theguardian.com/business/2022/mar/06/russians-visa-mastercard-ban-domestic-purchases-mir)

block-time published-time 3.24pm GMT

Tens of thousands of people have demonstrated in cities including Santiago, Vancouver, Paris and New York in support of Ukraine, demanding an end to Russia's ***invasion***.

The protesters rallied on Saturday against Russian president Vladimir Putin's attack, which began on 24 February and appeared to be [*entering a new phase*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/05/zelenskiy-lashes-out-at-nato-over-no-fly-zone-as-russian-attacks-intensify) with escalating bombardment.

block-time published-time 2.59pm GMT

At least 364 civilians are confirmed to have been killed in Ukraine since Russian troops invaded on 24 February, and another 759 wounded, although the true numbers are probably "considerably higher", a UN monitoring mission has said.

The updated figures, relating to casualties up to 5 March, added a further 13 deaths and 52 injuries to the casualties that the monitors from the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) reported on Saturday.

block-time published-time 2.55pm GMT

More than 4,300 detained at anti-war protests in Russia

Police detained more than 4,300 people on Sunday at Russia-wide protests against president Vladimir Putin's ***invasion*** of Ukraine, according to an independent protest monitoring group.

Thousands of protesters chanted "No to war!" and "Shame on you!", according to videos posted on social media by opposition activists and bloggers.

Dozens of protesters in the Urals city of Yekaterinburg were shown being detained. One protester there was shown being beaten on the ground by police in riot gear. A mural in the city showing President Vladimir Putin was defaced.

Russia's interior ministry said earlier that police had detained around 3,500 people, including 1,700 in Moscow, 750 in St Petersburg and 1,061 in other cities.

Russian police detain a participant at an anti-war rally in Moscow on 6 March. Photograph: Yuri Kochetkov/EPA

The OVD-Info protest monitoring group said it had documented the detention of at least 4,366 people in 56 different cities.

"The screws are being fully tightened - essentially we are witnessing military censorship," Maria Kuznetsova, OVD-Info's spokeswoman, said by telephone from Tbilisi.

"We are seeing rather big protests today, even in Siberian cities where we only rarely saw such numbers of arrests."

The group said police had used electric shockers on protesters and posted witness photos and videos on Telegram messenger service showing riot police beating protesters with batons and demonstrators with blood running down their faces.

Memorial, Russia's most prominent human rights group, said that one of its leading activists, Oleg Orlov, was detained on the capital's Manezhnaya Square as he held a placard.

Svetlana Gannushkina, another veteran rights campaigner who has been tipped as a potential Nobel prize winner, was detained in Moscow on her 80th birthday.

A police van carrying a group of detainees to a police station overturned in a road traffic accident, injuring nine, six of them members of the public, city police said.

The protests came after hundreds were detained at demonstrations further east, including the Siberian city of Novosibirsk and in Yekaterinburg in the Urals.

A protester is detained by police at a demonstration in St Petersburg on 6 March. Photograph: Anatoly Maltsev/EPA

Russian police on Friday said all attempts to hold demonstrations on Sunday would be "immediately suppressed", and organisers and participants would face charges.

The latest detentions brought the total number of demonstrators held to more than 10,000 since 24 February, when the president, Vladimir Putin, launched an ***invasion*** of Ukraine.

Despite the official crackdown on demonstrations, and protesters facing jail terms, there have been daily protests since then.

On Friday, jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny urged supporters to stage protests on Sunday "on all the central squares of Russia and all the world".

He has called for Russians to hold daily protests, saying they should not become a "nation of frightened cowards".

A protester is detained by police at a demonstration in St Petersburg on 6 March. Photograph: Anatoly Maltsev/EPA

Related: [*More than 4,300 people arrested at anti-war protests across Russia*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/06/4300-people-arrested-anti-war-protests-across-russia-decounce-vladimir-putin-war-ukraine)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 5.17pm GMT

block-time published-time 2.44pm GMT

BBC World News taken off air in Russia

BBC World News has been taken off air in Russia, the broadcaster has said.

Russian authorities have been restricting access to foreign and independent media outlets, including the main BBC websites, in recent days as the ***invasion*** of Ukraine continues.

On Friday, its parliament approved a law making it a criminal offence, punishable by up to 15 years in prison, to spread "fake" or "false" news about the Kremlin's war in Ukraine, prompting the BBC to [*temporarily suspend the work of all its news journalists and support staff in Russia*](https://www.theguardian.com/media/2022/mar/04/bbc-temporarily-suspending-work-all-news-journalists-russia).

BBC World News presenter Victoria Derbyshire was the first to announce the channel's suspension.

She told viewers shortly before midday on Sunday: "BBC World News, the channel you are watching if you are outside the UK right now, and which is the BBC's global television news channel, has just been taken off air in Russia."

A BBC spokesperson later said BBC World News had not been available in Russia since Saturday.

The spokesperson added: "We regret that our Russian audiences are being denied access to trusted and impartial news at a time when they need it most."

Since the Russian ***invasion*** began last month, the broadcaster has made efforts to ensure people inside Russia and Ukraine have access to its news output.

Both its Ukrainian and Russian language services are available on the dark web through the Tor network, a privacy-focused software, and the corporation has also brought back its shortwave radio service in a bid to thwart censorship attempts.

The Russian foreign ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova previously accused the BBC of playing "a determined role in undermining the Russian stability and security".

In the UK, broadcasting watchdog Ofcom has opened 27 investigations into the "due impartiality" of programmes broadcast on the Kremlin-backed RT news channel, formerly known as Russia Today.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.12pm GMT

block-time published-time 2.38pm GMT

Summary

Here is a quick summary of the latest developments in the Russian ***invasion*** of Ukraine:

The evacuation of civilians from besieged Mariupol was "halted" on Sunday [*for a second consecutive day*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/06/mariupol-residents-prepare-to-leave-second-ceasefire-russia-ukraine). The Red Cross confirmed attempts to evacuate an estimated 200,000 people out of the city came to a halt, "underscoring the absence of a detailed and functioning agreement between the parties to the conflict". Ukraine's national guard accused Russia of continuing to shell the humanitarian corridors.The exodus from Ukraine is the fastest-growing refugee crisis in Europe since the second world war, [*the United Nations said*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/06/ukraine-fastest-growing-refugee-crisis-since-second-world-war). More than 1.5 million refugees have fled Ukraine in the past 10 days, and data showed Polish border guards cleared as many as 129,000 people at border crossings on Saturday, the most in a single day since the war started.Ukraine's president said Russian rockets have completely destroyed Vinnytsia regional airport. He said in a video update that eight missiles were launched against "our peaceful Vinnytsia, a town that never threatened Russia in any way", and renewed his demand that western powers enforce a no-fly zone over Ukraine to prevent more Russian attacks.Putin said the conflict will only stop if Ukraine stops fighting and Russia's demands are met. In a phone conversation with the Turkish president, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Putin also said Ukraine's negotiators should take a more "constructive" approach in talks with Moscow to take into account the reality on the ground. France has accused the UK of a "lack of humanity" over Ukrainian refugees. The French interior minister, Gérald Darmanin, said 150 Ukrainian refugees have been turned away at Calais border crossings in recent days and told to obtain visas at UK consulates in Paris. He called on the British government to set up a proper consular service in Calais, adding that its response so far was "completely unsuitable".Britain's deputy prime minister, Dominic Raab, [*said it may take years for Putin to be defeated in Ukraine*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/06/ukraine-putin-dominic-raab-nato-sanctions) and people who thought the crisis could be resolved in days were "deluding themselves".Pope Francis said the Ukraine conflict is "not a military operation but a war" in his weekly address to crowds gathered in St Peter's Square. However, he did not publicly condemn Russia by name for its ***invasion***.One of the last remaining independent media outlets in Russia, Mediazona, said it has been blocked by authorities for its reporting on the ***invasion*** of Ukraine. Earlier this week, Ekho Moskvy radio station and the Dozhd TV channel - two of Russia's landmark liberal media outlets - were either dissolved or suspended operations.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.43pm GMT

block-time published-time 2.32pm GMT

The Russian president, Vladimir Putin, has accused Ukrainian radicals for [*an incident on 3 March at the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/04/ukraine-nuclear-power-plant-fire-zaporizhzhia-russian-shelling) in Ukraine.

"Vladimir Putin informed about the provocation by Ukrainian radicals in the area of the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant," the Kremlin said. "The radiation levels are normal."

Putin also accused Ukraine of preventing civilians from leaving Mariupol.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.46pm GMT

block-time published-time 2.31pm GMT

Ukraine's envoy to the United States has called on president Joe Biden's administration to impose tougher sanctions on Moscow and to step up arms supplies to Kyiv, saying Russia should be treated "as a terrorist state."

Ambassador Oksana Markarova, in an interview on Fox News on Sunday, repeated charges that Russia is committing war crimes by targeting civilians, hospitals and schools, and said Ukraine is working with the US and other countries to collect evidence.

"This is a terrorist state and we should treat Russia as a terrorist state," Markarova said.

She renewed a plea for the US to intensify sanctions against Russia, including imposing a full embargo on imports of Russian oil and gas, and to increase shipments of anti-aircraft systems and other weaponry to Ukraine.

"We are thankful for the sanctions that have been implemented by the United States," she said. "But since Russia is not changing their behaviour, they escalated actually, they are killing us more and more, the sanctions should toughen up."

The White House is weighing cutting imports of Russian oil and gas, but is wary about a spike in gasoline prices that would fuel decades-high inflation.

Halting Russia's ***invasion*** is vital to preventing the conflict from spreading beyond Ukraine, Markarova said.

"Every large war in the past started locally," she said. "We know from the past that all of them could have been stopped locally." Ukraine, Markarova said, will respond "to any peace talks."

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.02pm GMT

block-time published-time 2.30pm GMT

US has seen "very credible reports" of deliberate attacks on civilians in Ukraine

The United States has seen "very credible reports" of deliberate attacks on civilians in Ukraine, US secretary of state Antony Blinken has said, adding that Washington was documenting these reports to support appropriate organisations in their potential war crimes investigation.

Blinken told CNN's State of the Union show:

We've seen very credible reports of deliberate attacks on civilians which would constitute a war crime.

We've seen very credible reports about the use of certain weapons.

What we're doing right now is documenting all of this, putting this all together, looking at it and making sure that as people and the appropriate organisations and institutions investigate whether war crimes have been or are being committed that we can support whatever they are doing.

On Friday, the US embassy in Ukraine said in a tweet that attacking a nuclear plant is a war crime. after Russian ***invasion*** forces seized Europe's biggest nuclear power plant in heavy fighting in southeastern Ukraine, triggering global alarm.

The State Department sent a message to all US embassies in Europe telling them not to retweet the post, according to CNN, which said it reviewed the message.

Blinken did not address the embassy's tweet and the State Department declined to comment on whether the tweet reflects the overall position of the US government on the issue, Reuters reported.

Images of cluster bombs and artillery strikes on Ukrainian cities this week have prompted the world's top war crimes prosecutor to launch an investigation, with the support of dozens of nations opposed to Russia's ***invasion***.

In an CNN interview, European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen said an investigation is needed into whether Russia is committing war crimes in Ukraine.

"I think there needs to be a strong and clear investigation on this question," von der Leyen said.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.25pm GMT

block-time published-time 2.11pm GMT

Ukraine's state-run railway operator is ready to organise ***agricultural*** exports by rail as a matter of urgency, it said on Sunday, after closure of the country's Black Sea ports because of the military ***invasion*** by Russia.

A major global ***agricultural*** producer and exporter, Ukraine has historically exported its grain, vegetable oils and other food products by ship.

"This situation causes problems not only for Ukraine. The share of Ukrainian grain on the world market is 11%, the share of sunflower oil is 55%," Ukrainian Railways said on social media.

"To prevent the global food crisis and save Ukrainian exports, Ukrainian Railways is ready to organise ***agricultural*** products delivery by rail urgently."

Ukrainian Railways said that it may deliver grain to borders with Romania, Hungary, Slovakia and Poland, from where the grain can be delivered to ports and logistics hubs of European countries.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.44pm GMT

block-time published-time 1.51pm GMT

Planned evacuation of Mariupol halted for second day

The safe passage of civilians from Ukraine's besieged eastern port city of Mariupol was "halted" on Sunday for a second consecutive day, the International Committee of the Red Cross said.

In a statement, the ICRS said:

Amid devastating scenes of human suffering in Mariupol, a second attempt today to start evacuating an estimated 200,000 people out of the city came to a halt.

The failed attempts yesterday and today underscore the absence of a detailed and functioning agreement between the parties to the conflict.

"The ICRC is not and cannot in any way be the guarantor of a ceasefire agreement between the parties or of its implementation," the body added, criticising the lack of a proper agreement between the warring parties to protect civilian lives amid ceasefire violations.

"For the safe passage of civilians to happen with the required levels of trust, the parties should agree between themselves not just in principle but also on the details and parameters" of an evacuation accord, the ICRC added, stressing its neutrality.

It underlined its readiness "to help facilitate further attempts if the parties reach a detailed agreement, which is for the parties alone to implement and respect".

Mariupol city council said the evacuation was not possible due to Russian shelling. "It is extremely dangerous to take people out under such conditions," the city council said in an online statement.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.18pm GMT

block-time published-time 1.12pm GMT

The UK's chief of the defence staff has slapped down Liz Truss's suggestion that Britons could travel to Ukraine to take up arms in the war against Russia, saying doing so would be illegal.

Sir Tony Radakin urged people not to rush towards "the sound of gunfire" and stressed there were many other ways that people in the UK could support those resisting the advancement of Vladimir Putin's troops.

The unusually direct comment will be viewed as a strict admonishment of the foreign secretary's suggestion, which had already been rejected by the defence secretary, Ben Wallace.

Last week, Truss was quizzed about the Ukrainian president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy's call for anyone who wanted to "join the defence of security in Europe" to "stand shoulder to shoulder with Ukrainians against the invaders".

Asked whether Britons should venture out to fight, she said: "I do support that, and of course that is something that people can make their own decisions about."

Related: [*Defence chief contradicts Liz Truss over idea of Britons going to fight in Ukraine*](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/mar/06/britons-ukraine-fight-defence-chief-contradicts-liz-truss)

block-time published-time 1.10pm GMT

The exiled Belarus opposition leader, Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, said the country's leader had in effect ceded control of Belarus to the Kremlin.

President Alexander Lukashenko [*denies that his armed forces are operating in Ukraine*](https://www.reuters.com/world/belarusian-forces-will-not-take-part-ukraine-war-lukashenko-says-2022-03-04/) or that he plans to enter the war on Russia's side. But Belarus's military is now indirectly under Kremlin control, Tsikhanouskaya said in an interview with the Guardian.

"It seems to us that Lukashenko is not controlling our military any more, the only thing he is controlling is repression against the Belarusian people," she said. "We see signs of the military occupation of Belarus."

Related: [*Belarus has effectively ceded control to Kremlin, says opposition leader*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/06/belarus-has-effectively-ceded-control-to-kremlin-says-opposition-leader-sviatlana-tsikhanouskaya)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.33pm GMT

block-time published-time 1.01pm GMT

Ukraine president says Russian rockets have completely destroyed Vinnytsia regional airport

The Ukrainian president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, said Russian rockets had completely destroyed the civilian airport of the central-western region capital of Vinnytsia on Sunday.

He said in a video update that eight missiles were launched against "our peaceful Vinnytsia, a town that never threatened Russia in any way".

He described the attack as "brutal and cynical" and said it has left the airport "completely destroyed". Russian attacks "continue to destroy our infrastructure - our lives", he said.

Several cities and airbases in Ukraine have been bombed, shelled or hit with ballistic missiles since Russia launched its ***invasion***. But Vinnytsia is in the western area of central Ukraine, far from the Russia and Belarus borders, in an area that has seen fewer such strikes.

Zelensky took the opportunity to renew his demand that Western powers enforce a no-fly zone over Ukraine to prevent more Russian attacks.

"We repeat every day: close the sky over Ukraine. Close for all Russian missiles, for Russian combat aircraft, for all their terrorists," he said.

"If you don't, if you don't give us at least planes so we can protect ourselves, there's only one thing to conclude; you want us to be killed very slowly."

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.25pm GMT

block-time published-time 12.21pm GMT

One of the last remaining independent media outlets in Russia, Mediazona, said it has been blocked by authorities for its reporting on Moscow's ***invasion*** of Ukraine.

"Roskomnadzor began blocking Mediazona," the outlet said in a statement, referring to Russia's communications regulator.

"Because we cover honestly what is happening in Ukraine and call the ***invasion*** an ***invasion***, and the war a war," it said.

The statement added that Russia has in recent days introduced "military censorship and there are almost no independent media left in the country."

The outlet's publisher, Pyotr Verzilov, said they would "continue to work anyway and tell you about the war".

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- ???? ???????? (@gruppa\_voina)

[*March 6, 2022*](https://twitter.com/gruppa_voina/status/1500428069236051969?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

Since president Vladimir Putin's ***invasion*** of Ukraine, authorities have ramped up an ***unprecedented*** crackdown on the already embattled media.

Earlier this week, Ekho Moskvy radio station and the Dozhd TV channel - two of Russia's landmark liberal media outlets - were either dissolved or suspended operations.

Dozens of media workers and independent outlets - including Dozhd - have already been designated "foreign agents" by authorities, and many reporters and editors have been forced to leave the country.

The independent newspaper Novaya Gazeta, whose editor-in-chief, Dmitry Muratov, was awarded the Nobel peace prize in 2021, said it would not cover the conflict, citing new legislation on reporting on the military.

Mediazona is an independent online publication which writes about court cases and abuses of prisoners' rights, among other subjects.

The outlet was founded in 2014 by Pussy Riot members Nadezhda Tolokonnikova and Maria Alyokhina after they served prison time for mocking Putin in church.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.35pm GMT

block-time published-time 12.11pm GMT

Russia and Ukraine blame each other as Mariupol evacuation fails again

Pro-Russian separatists and Ukraine's national guard accused each other of failing to establish a humanitarian corridor out of the Ukrainian city of Mariupol on Sunday, the second time the sides have attempted to arrange it.

Ukraine 24 television showed a fighter of the Azov Regiment (a grouping which uses Nazi-linked symbols and has had many members who have professed far-right extremist views) of the national guard who said Russian and pro-Russian forces that had encircled the port city of about 400,000 continued shelling the areas that were meant to be safe.

The Interfax news agency cited an official of the Donetsk separatist administration who accused the Ukrainian forces of failing to observe the limited ceasefire.

The separatist official said only about 300 people have left the city. Ukrainian authorities have earlier said they planned to evacuate over 200,000 people from Mariupol.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 3.05pm GMT

block-time published-time 12.10pm GMT

It may take years for Vladimir Putin to be defeated in his conquest of Ukraine, Britain's deputy prime minister has admitted, as Labour accused the government of moving too slowly over sanctions.

Dominic Raab said people who thought the crisis could be resolved in days were "deluding themselves" and that Nato would need to "show some strategic stamina" in its bid to force the Russian army to retreat.

Raab said Putin was resorting to "ever more brutal tactics to try and wrest back the initiative" given the military campaign run from Moscow had "stuttered".

Raab, who is also the justice secretary, told the BBC's Sunday Morning programme:

I think the bottom line is none of the major cities have yet fallen.

But I think we ought to be under no doubt that our mission with our allies is to ensure Putin fails in Ukraine, and it's going to take some time.

We're talking about months if not years, and therefore we'll have to show some strategic stamina because this is not going to be over in days.

Related: [*Defeating Putin in Ukraine may take years, says Dominic Raab*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/06/ukraine-putin-dominic-raab-nato-sanctions)

block-time published-time 12.07pm GMT

Putin says conflict will only stop if Ukraine stops fighting and Russia's demands are met - Kremlin

Vladimir Putin has said Russia's military operation would only be halted if Kyiv stopped resisting and fulfilled all of the Kremlin's demands.

Putin told Turkish president Tayyip Erdogan by telephone that Ukraine's negotiators should take a more "constructive" approach in talks with Moscow to take into account the reality on the ground.

Putin, whose comments were published in a Kremlin readout of the call, said his "special operation" in Ukraine was going according to plan and to schedule.

"It was underlined that the suspension of the special operation is only possible if Kyiv stops military operations and carries out well-known Russian demands," the Kremlin said.

Russia calls its actions in its former Soviet neighbour a "special operation" that seeks to destroy Ukraine's military capabilities, purge the country of what it says are nationalists and make it a neutral state.

The Kremlin leader told Erdogan that Moscow was open to dialogue with the Ukrainian authorities, but that he hoped Ukrainian negotiators would take a more constructive approach at the next round of talks.

"Attention was drawn to the futility of any attempts to drag out the negotiation ***process***, which is being used by the Ukrainian security forces to regroup their forces and resources," the Kremlin said

"It is hoped that during the planned next round of negotiations, Ukraine's representatives will show a more constructive approach, fully taking into account the emerging realities."

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.46pm GMT

block-time published-time 12.04pm GMT

Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelenskiy has appealed directly to Russians to take to the streets in protest against the Kremlin's ***invasion*** of his country or risk their own poverty and repression.

Since last week, thousands of people in Russia have been detained for protesting against the ***invasion*** of Ukraine, what the Russian authorities call a "special military operation", that began on 24 February.

Russians are now bracing for an uncertain and isolated future after international sanctions plunged the economy into crisis and authorities cracked down on independent media and restricted access to Facebook and other social media sites.

"Citizens of Russia - for you, this is a struggle not only for peace in Ukraine, this is a fight for your country," Zelenskiy said in a televised address, switching from Ukrainian to Russian.

"If you keep silent now, only your poverty will speak for you later. And only repression will answer," he said.

All forms of protest in Russia have essentially become illegal since the onset of the coronavirus pandemic for what authorities say are safety reasons.

Like the Ukrainian people, Russians now face a choice "between life and slavery," Zelenskiy said.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.12pm GMT

block-time published-time 12.00pm GMT

Turkish president Tayyip Erdogan urged his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin to declare a ceasefire in Ukraine, open humanitarian corridors and sign a peace agreement, his office said.

NATO member Turkey shares a maritime border with Russia and Ukraine in the Black Sea and has good ties with both. Ankara has called Russia's ***invasion*** unacceptable and offered to host talks, but has opposed sanctions on Moscow.

In a statement after a one-hour phone call, the Turkish presidency said Erdogan told Putin that Turkey was ready to contribute to a peaceful resolution of the conflict.

"President Erdogan, who said an immediate ceasefire will not only ease humanitarian concerns in the region but also give the search for a political solution an opportunity, renewed his call of 'let's pave the way for peace together'," his office said.

"Erdogan emphasised the importance of taking urgent steps to achieve a ceasefire, open humanitarian corridors and sign a peace agreement."

The two leaders also discussed bilateral ties, it said.

Erdogan, who has called Putin a "friend", had last spoken to the Russian leader on 23 February, a day before Russia launched its ***invasion***. The call makes Erdogan the third NATO leader to speak to Putin since his offensive, following the leaders of Germany and France.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.28pm GMT

block-time published-time 11.48am GMT

Staff at an independent Russian TV station, Dozhd (TV Rain), walked out live on air while declaring 'No to war' after being shut down over their coverage of the Ukraine ***invasion***.

The decade-long defiance of Dozhd was silenced, at least for a while, by a [*brutal new law*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/26/propaganda-filters-truth-ukraine-war-russian-media) , passed unanimously in the Russian parliament, which bans news organisations from reporting anything about the war except state-approved press releases.

Journalists and media owners who contravene the new legislation could be jailed for up to 15 years.

block-time published-time 11.47am GMT

Italian luxury label Prada has announced it is suspending retail sales in Russia following the ***invasion*** of Ukraine.

Prada is following in the footsteps of other multinationals and luxury brands, including the French giants LVMH, Hermes and Chanel.

"The Prada Group suspends its retail operations in Russia," the firm said on its Linkedin page, adding that the move was effective from Saturday.

"Our primary concern is for all colleagues and their families affected by the tragedy in Ukraine, and we will continue to support them," Prada said.

block-time published-time 11.45am GMT

Volunteers in Ukraine are in the ***process*** of removing, covering and wrapping statues and windows on many of the country's historically important buildings for fear of damage.

Kyiv Post reports this statue of Jesus Christ is being stored in a bunker for safety, for the first time since the second world war.

enltrJesus Christ statue being taken out of Armenian Cathedral of Lviv, [*#Ukraine*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/Ukraine?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) , to be stored in a bunker for protection. The last time it was taken out was during WWII. [*pic.twitter.com/mx2YCB4gAT*](https://t.co/mx2YCB4gAT)

- KyivPost (@KyivPost) [*March 6, 2022*](https://twitter.com/KyivPost/status/1500397538482044931?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 11.41am GMT

More than 430,000 people trapped in the port city of Mariupol by encircling Russian forces are nervously preparing to evacuate after a ceasefire was announced, a day after a similar plan fell apart amid accusations that Moscow had failed to respect the agreement.

Local authorities in the south-eastern Ukrainian city said an evacuation supervised by the Red Cross would begin at noon local time (10am GMT) during a nine-hour cessation in Russian attacks.

Attempts to get residents out of the city failed on Saturday after Ukrainian authorities claimed the Russians reneged on an agreement to stop their shelling. The city council was forced to tell residents to return to shelters in the city.

The head of the military in the Russian-controlled territory Donetsk in eastern Ukraine said safe-passage corridors for residents in the besieged city of Volnovakha would also reopen Sunday.

He did not say for how long nor whether a ceasefire would accompany that evacuation.

Ukraine's deputy prime minister, Olha Stefanishyna, said she did not trust Russia's word but hoped that the Red Cross would step up to secure the safety of Ukrainian citizens.

Related: [*Nervous residents of Mariupol prepare to leave during second ceasefire*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/06/mariupol-residents-prepare-to-leave-second-ceasefire-russia-ukraine)

block-time published-time 11.39am GMT

Pope Francis says Ukraine conflict is "not military operation but a war"

Pope Francis has rejected Russia's assertion that it is carrying out a "a special military operation" in Ukraine, saying the country was being battered by a war.

"In Ukraine rivers of blood and tears are flowing. This is not only a military operation but a war which is leading to death, destruction and misery," the pope said in his weekly address to crowds gathered in St. Peter's Square.

However, as has been the case throughout the 11-day conflict, the pope did not publicly condemn Russia by name for its ***invasion***.

Instead, he repeated his appeal for peace, the creation of humanitarian corridors and a return to negotiations.

"In that martyred country the need for humanitarian assistance is growing by the hour," the pope said. "Let common sense prevail, let us return to the respect of international law."

There were many more people than normal gathered in front of St. Peter's Basilica for the pope's Sunday appearance, with some holding aloft multi-coloured peace flags as well as the blue and yellow flag of Ukraine.

"The Holy See is willing to do all everything to put itself at the service of peace," the pope said, adding that two Roman Catholic cardinals had gone to Ukraine to help those in need. "War is madness, please stop," the pope said.

The crowd gathered outside St. Peter's Basilica on Sunday to hear Pope Francis speak. Photograph: Vatican Media Handout/EPA

Andriy Yurash, Ukraine's ambassador to the Vatican, praised the pope for calling the conflict a war.

"I am very, very happy that he said that," he told Reuters in St. Peter's Square shortly after the pope ended his address. "Even if the pope did not say the word 'Russia', everyone in the world knows who the aggressor that invaded us is and who started this unprovoked war."

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.15pm GMT

block-time published-time 11.38am GMT

Israel will continue trying to mediate between Russia and Ukraine even if success seems unlikely, prime minister Naftali Bennett said on Sunday after returning from surprise talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Ukraine has requested that Israel serve as intermediary, citing the Bennett government's good relations with both Kyiv and Moscow. Bennett's office said he spoke three times over the weekend with Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelenskiy.

In televised remarks to his cabinet, Bennett gave no details on his three-hour Kremlin meeting with Putin on Saturday, saying only that it had "the blessing and encouragement of all parties" - an allusion to the United States, among other powers. Bennett and Putin had discussed the mediation idea by phone last week.

Bennett said:

We will continue to assist wherever this is requested, even if the chances are not great. The moment there is even a small opening, and we have the access to all sides and the capability, I see it as a moral duty to make every attempt.

Israel has condemned the Russian ***invasion*** of Ukraine, expressed solidarity with Kyiv and sent humanitarian aid. But Bennett has not met Ukrainian requests for military assistance and has kept channels open to Russia, with which Israel coordinates operations against Iranian deployments in Syria.

Israeli communications minister, Yoaz Hendel, said he had declined Ukrainian requests to ban nine Russian media outlets on the grounds they were propagandising.

"These (broadcasters) did not meet any kind of threshold that would necessitate their blocking. I would like to remind you that, in a democracy, blocking media channels is a very dramatic event," Hendel told reporters.

Interior minister Ayelet Shaked said Israel was bracing for a "very, very big wave" of immigration sparked by the conflict.

This could entail taking in more than 200,000 Ukrainians who are Jewish or have Jewish family links and more than 600,000 Russians in the same categories, she said.

In what local media have cast as a bid to prevent Russian oligarchs from fleeing to Israel to evade sanctions, the Israel Airports Authority said it had received instructions not to allow private jets to park for more than 24 hours.

block-time published-time 11.23am GMT

UK universities say that although their priority must be supporting their Ukrainian students, they are also reaching out to Russian students who may be feeling alone but unable to ask for help.

Paul Nightingale, professor of strategy at Sussex's University's Science Policy Research Unit, and formerly head of special projects at the government's Economic and Social Research Council, said all universities should "certainly be kicking out the children of oligarchs and their extended families".

But, he said: "It is stupid to say we should expel all Russian students. The ones in the UK are mostly anti-Putin. We have to support the people who will turn Russia around in the future."

Related: [*Russians at UK universities 'lonely and guilty' as they fear for the future*](https://www.theguardian.com/education/2022/mar/06/russians-at-uk-universities-lonely-and-guilty-as-they-fear-for-the-future)

block-time published-time 10.59am GMT

Sanctions will take time and 'Ukraine fatigue' could blunt the west's resolve as the cost of living crisis deepens, writes the Guardian's economics editor, Larry Elliott.

Sanctions can inflict pain without leading to a change of leadership or a policy shift. Iran suffered a 20% reduction in potential output in the two years following the introduction of sanctions over its nuclear programme but didn't buckle.

So, 10 days into the ***invasion***, the west has a big decision to make. Does it deploy the biggest economic weapon it has left: adding Russia's [*oil and gas*](https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/eu-sanctions-would-gradually-deplete-russias-oil-revenues-eu-energy-chief-2022-03-03/) exports to the sanctions list?

Related: [*Russia's economy is under siege, but will the west break first?*](https://www.theguardian.com/business/2022/mar/06/russia-economy-sanctions-ukraine-west-cost-of-living-crisis)

block-time published-time 10.56am GMT

France accuses UK of 'lack of humanity' over Ukrainian refugees

France's interior minister has accused the British government of showing a "lack of humanity" when it comes to helping the Ukrainian refugees who have fled the Russian ***invasion*** and are now waiting in Calais for permission to join their families in the UK.

Hundreds of Ukrainians have come to the northern French port in the last few days in the hope of crossing the Channel so they can be with relatives who are already established in the UK.

According to the French interior minister, Gérald Darmanin, 400 Ukrainian refugees have presented themselves at Calais border crossings in recent days - only for 150 of them to be [*told to go away and obtain visas at UK consulates in Paris*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/28/ukrainians-denied-entry-to-uk-despite-being-eligible-for-visa) or Brussels.

In a letter to the UK home secretary, Priti Patel, Darmanin called on the British government to set up a proper consular service in Calais, adding that its response so far was "completely unsuitable" and showed a "lack of humanity" towards refugees who were often "in distress".

In the letter, seen by the Agence France-Presse news agency, Darmanin wrote: "It is imperative that your consular representation - ***exceptionally*** and for the duration of this crisis - is able to issue visas for family reunification on the spot in Calais."

The minister said it was "incomprehensible" that the UK was able to provide such services on the ground in Poland on the Ukrainian border but could not do so in the its closest neighbour, France. Darmanin told French radio he had contacted Patel twice requesting that the UK set up a consulate in Calais.

Related: [*France accuses UK of 'lack of humanity' over Ukrainian refugees*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/06/france-accuse-uk-lack-humanity-over-ukrainian-refugees-consular-services-calais)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.39pm GMT

block-time published-time 10.48am GMT

The United States is considering sending planes to Poland if Warsaw decided to send fighter jets to Ukraine, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on a visit to Moldova on Sunday.

He said:

We are looking actively now at the question of airplanes that Poland may provide to Ukraine and looking at how we might be able to backfill should Poland decide to supply those planes.

I can't speak to a timeline but I can just say we're looking at it very, very actively.

The visit came after Blinken visited NATO-member Poland on Saturday as the alliance bolsters its eastern flank in response to Russia's ***invasion*** of Ukraine.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken speaks during a press conference with Moldovan President at The Presidential Palace in Chisinau Photograph: Olivier Douliery/AFP/Getty Images

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 11.54am GMT

block-time published-time 10.43am GMT

Here is a first-hand account of the ***invasion*** of the Ukrainian city last week, as witnessed by two female journalists.

Tuesday 1 March

The first day of spring. It is snowing. We are sleeping in our clothes with our anxiety backpacks nearby. At night there was bombing again in the suburbs. I sleep only four hours.

Wednesday 2 March

Total silence. Everyone is staying at home, reading the news. The city council building was shelled at night. Some areas are without electricity and water. Nineteen civilians were killed.

Related: [*Kherson diary: 'The Russians fire a warning shot. But people are not afraid'*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/06/kherson-diary-the-russians-fire-a-warning-shot-but-people-are-not-afraid)

block-time published-time 10.39am GMT

Exodus from Ukraine is fastest-growing refugee crisis in Europe since World War Two - UNHCR

More than 1.5m refugees have fled Ukraine in the past 10 days in the fastest-growing refugee crisis in Europe since the second world war, the United Nations has said.

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi, tweeted: "More than 1.5 million refugees from Ukraine have crossed into neighbouring countries in 10 days - the fastest growing refugee crisis in Europe since World War II."

enltrMore than 1.5 million refugees from Ukraine have crossed into neighbouring countries in 10 days - the fastest growing refugee crisis in Europe since World War II.

- Filippo Grandi (@FilippoGrandi) [*March 6, 2022*](https://twitter.com/FilippoGrandi/status/1500395166624010249?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

Record numbers of refugees headed into Poland from Ukraine with the total number expected to surpass one million people later on Sunday.

Fresh data shows Polish border guards cleared as many as 129,000 people at border crossings on Saturday, the most in a single day since the war started, bringing the total to 922,400.

At the Medyka crossing, the busiest along Poland's roughly 500km (310 mile) border with Ukraine, refugees streamed past boxes of clothes laid out along a path from the border crossing while Scouts handed out hot tea, food and toiletries.

Refugees, mostly women with children, arriving at the border crossing in Medyka, Poland on Sunday. Photograph: Visar Kryeziu/AP

Some carried babies, others dogs and cats wrapped in blankets. Many joined a queue for buses to the nearby town Przemysl where friends, relatives and volunteers waited to take them to other cities in Poland and beyond.

Poland's Ukrainian community of around 1.5m is the region's largest and makes the country a major destination point for refugees, though fleeing Ukrainians also cross to safety through Slovakia, Hungary and northern Romania.

Officials said many of the refugees who have arrived so far had friends and places to go to but the head of the UN refugee agency told Reuters a growing tide of refugees would put pressure on governments to absorb them.

"Frankly these governments have done very well in their initial response," Grandi said. "They were well prepared. But if the numbers continue to grow it will be a problem."

Romania has taken in 227,446 Ukrainians, including 31,628 who arrived on Saturday, border police data showed. More than 163,000 entered Hungary since 24 February.

Related: [*Ukraine has fastest-growing refugee crisis since second world war, says UN*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/06/ukraine-fastest-growing-refugee-crisis-since-second-world-war)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.10pm GMT

block-time published-time 10.39am GMT

Here is a selection of new images coming in to our picture desk this morning.

Local residents look for cover as they escape from the town of Irpin, after heavy shelling landed on the only escape route used by locals near Kyiv Photograph: Carlos Barría/Reuters Refugees from Ukraine rest in the main train station of Krakow, as they wait to be relocated to other temporary acommodations in Poland or abroad Photograph: Louisa Gouliamaki/AFP/Getty Images Demonstrators with Ukrainian national flags and posters reading "No war!" gather to protest against the Russian military ***invasion*** in Ukraine, in Almaty, Kazakhstan Photograph: Vladimir Tretyakov/AP Servicemen of the Ukrainian Military Forces prepare their equipment to repel a tank attack on a position in the Lugansk region Photograph: Anatolii Stepanov/AFP/Getty Images

block-time published-time 10.31am GMT

Ukraine president says Russian forces are preparing to bombard Odessa city

Ukraine's president Volodymyr Zelensky has said Russian forces are preparing to shell Odessa, a historic port city on the Black Sea coast.

"They are preparing to bomb Odessa. Odessa!" he said in a video address.

Russians have always come to Odessa. They have always felt only warmth in Odessa. Only sincerity. And now what? Bombs against Odessa? Artillery against Odessa? Missiles against Odessa?

It will be a war crime. It will be a historical crime.

Russian forces have made progress in southern Ukraine since their 24 February ***invasion***, overrunning the city of Kherson and besieging the port of Mariupol, but Odessa has so far been largely spared.

Almost a million people live in Odessa, a cosmopolitan harbour on Ukraine's southern coast with both Ukrainian and Russian speakers and Bulgarian and Jewish minorities.

The Russian advance from occupied Crimea has in part turned east to link up with Russian-backed separatists and to seize the Azov Sea port of Mariupol.

But another part of the force has also headed west to Kherson, on the road towards Odessa. The city is also close to the Moldovan border and the Russian-occupied region of Transnistria.

During the first 11 days of the conflict, Russian forces from Belarus have also advanced on the capital Kyiv from the northwest and northeast, while another group bombarded the northern city of Kharkiv.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 11.51am GMT

block-time published-time 10.14am GMT

Labour leader Keir Starmer said he was "very concerned" about reports surrounding the appointment of media mogul Lord Evgeny Lebedev to the House of Lords.

[*The Sunday Times reported*](https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/boris-johnsons-russian-crony-evgeny-lebedev-got-peerage-after-spies-dropped-warning-3dp6sw29x) [paywall] British intelligence officials withdrew their assessment that giving a peerage to Lord Lebedev posed a national security risk after Boris Johnson intervened.

Starmer told the BBC's Sunday Morning programme:

I'm very concerned about that story, because it goes to the heart of national security and there's at least the suggestion that the government and the prime minister were warned that there was a national security risk in this particular appointment.

I think, in the circumstances, what the appropriate thing is for the Intelligence and Security Committee, which is a cross-party committee in Parliament that can have access to confidential material - I think this case should be referred to that committee so they can look into this story.

This allegation - which is very serious because, of course, it's a matter of national security - I hope the Government will answer it today.

block-time published-time 9.56am GMT

The US secretary of state Antony Blinken briefly crossed into Ukraine after meeting with the country's foreign minister, Dmytro Kuleba.

The pair met at the border with Poland to discuss western efforts to support Ukraine after Russia invaded 10 days ago.

block-time published-time 9.47am GMT

Olha Stefanishyna said despite agreements over ceasefires, Ukrainians would "never trust" what the Russians say.

The Ukrainian Deputy Prime Minister told the BBC's Sunday Morning programme every Ukrainian citizen and politician "knows the Russian playbook by heart".

Stefanishyna hit out at Western leaders who refused to impose a no-fly zone over her country, PA Media reported.

She said:

My president was as precise as it is possible and we absolutely support from the bottom of his, of our, hearts [in] everything he says because this is what we feel.

It is very upsetting when the group of 30 leaders or ministers or even ambassadors are... gathering itself in a fancy cabinet, with the fancy furniture, and talking about the fancy thing, knowing that Ukraine was over this table for all of [these] years sitting in this fancy offices.

But now knowing that we can't be there because we are operating under the bombarding of [the] Russian Federation and knowing that their intelligence also confirms that further severe attacks on the civil population - including carpet bombarding of the cities, which are basically happening these days already in some cities - will be taking place.

Deputy Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration of Ukraine Olha Stefanishyna. Photograph: Ukrinform/REX/Shutterstock

block-time published-time 9.35am GMT

Volunteers at a railway station in Lviv in western Ukraine are doing all they can to help refugees flee the violence of Putin's ***invasion*** and reach safety.

Lviv is less than 50 miles from the Polish border and thousands of people have been arriving daily from the rest of country.

The Guardian spent the day with one volunteer, Sergyi Mykolaiv.

block-time published-time 9.22am GMT

British deputy prime minister Dominic Raab described talk of an increased threat of Russia using nuclear weapons in its ***invasion*** of Ukraine as rhetoric and brinkmanship.

"I think its rhetoric and brinkmanship," he told Sky News when asked about a possible nuclear escalation by the Kremlin.

"[Putin's] got a track record as long as anyone's arm of misinformation and propaganda... this is a distraction from what the real issues are at hand - which is that it's an illegal ***invasion*** and it is not going according to plan."

He also again ruled out imposing a no-fly zone over Ukraine, saying this would lead to a "massive escalation" and would feed into the Russian president's narrative.

Dominic Raab in Westminster. Photograph: Tayfun Salci/ZUMA Press Wire/REX/Shutterstock

He said:

We're not going to get ourselves into a direct military conflict with Putin because that would be a massive escalation, but also that feeds Putin's narrative.

Putin wants to say that he's actually in a struggle with the west - he's not.

He called no-fly zones "very difficult, very challenging" and said "we will do everything short of that to support Ukrainians".

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 9.23am GMT

block-time published-time 9.04am GMT

More than 2,034 people were detained at anti-war protests on Sunday in cities across Russia, according to an independent Russian-based protest monitor.

The OVD-Info protest monitoring group said people were detained at protests including in the Russian Pacific port city of Vladivostok and the Siberian city of Irkutsk.

Opposition activists posted videos showing protests in other cities.

Reuters was not able to independently verify the information. Reuters was unable to reach spokespeople for the police in either city, or Russia's interior ministry

Security forces take anti-war protesters into custody at Manege Square in Moscow, Russia on 3 March 2022. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

The interior ministry warned on Saturday that any attempt to hold unauthorised protests would be prevented and the organisers held to account.

A video posted on social media showed a protester on a square in the far eastern city of Khabarovsk shouting: "No to war - how are you not ashamed" before two policemen detained him.

Police used loudspeakers to tell a small group of protesters in Khabarovsk: "Respected citizens, you are taking part in an unsanctioned public event. We demand you disperse." Reuters was not able to independently verify the post.

Jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny had called for protests on Sunday across Russia and the rest of the world against Russia's ***invasion*** of Ukraine.

About 2,000 people attended an anti-war protest in Kazakhstan's biggest city Almaty, videos posted on social media showed. Reuters was unable to independently verify the posts.

Demonstrators take part in an anti-war protest in support of Ukraine in front of the monument to Soviet state founder Vladimir Lenin in Almaty, Kazakhstan on 6 March 2022. Photograph: Pavel Mikheyev/Reuters

The crowd shouted slogans such as "No to war" and "Putin is a dickhead", while waving Ukrainian flags. Activists put blue and yellow balloons in the hand of a Lenin statue towering over the small square where the rally took place.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.26pm GMT

block-time published-time 8.54am GMT

Second ceasefire attempt in Mariupol for evacuations

The city council of Mariupol has said a ceasefire will be observed between 10am and 9pm local time today.

However, the evacuation of civilians was postponed yesterday because Russian forces encircling the city were not respecting an agreed ceasefire.

In a statement, the city council had asked residents to return to shelters in the city and await further information on evacuation.

In a televised broadcast, Ukrainian presidential adviser Oleksiy Arestovych said Russia was not observing an agreed ceasefire in some areas, preventing a joint plan to allow civilians to evacuate.

Smoke rises after shelling by Russian forces in Mariupol, Ukraine, Friday, March 4, 2022. Photograph: Evgeniy Maloletka/AP

It comes as the landmine clearance charity The HALO Trust tweeted that it had restored communications with one of its supervisors today.

They said:

No communication, no water, no electricity, no food in stores.#

Ships, artillery, planes are shooting.

The population is already on the edge. But we're holding on.

I have no words, this is a living hell.

enltrWe briefly regained communications with one of our team on the ground in Mariupol. We continue to hope and pray for their safety. [*https://t.co/Q7b0eOy0SH*](https://t.co/Q7b0eOy0SH) [*pic.twitter.com/8fNyRwzlKp*](https://t.co/8fNyRwzlKp)

- The HALO Trust (@TheHALOTrust)

[*March 6, 2022*](https://twitter.com/TheHALOTrust/status/1500355721380216832?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 9.11am GMT

block-time published-time 8.38am GMT

In an address to Ukrainians on Sunday morning, President Volodymyr Zelenskiy praised the many forms of resistance people have chosen to oppose the Russian ***invasion*** and called his country "a superpower of spirit."

The country, he said, was performing at "the maximum of possibilities," with soldiers fighting but also ordinary people defending towns, hospitals and fire departments. He encouraged residents of occupied areas to protest, if possible.

Ten days into the war, he said, Ukraine had united with "millions of people, which became one whole."

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy makes a statement in Kyiv, in Ukraine. Photograph: Ukrainian Presidential Press Service/Reuters

Meanwhile, the Associated Press reported that he made a "desperate" plea to American lawmakers yesterday for the United States to help get more warplanes to his military.

Zelenskiy opened the private video call with US lawmakers by telling them this may be the last time they see him alive. "President Zelenskiy made a desperate plea," said Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer.

He said Zelenskiy wants the US to facilitate the transfer of planes from Eastern European allies. "I will do all I can to help the administration to facilitate their transfer," Schumer said.

The US is considering sending American-made F-16s as backfill to former Soviet bloc countries in Eastern Europe that are now members of NATO. They, in turn, would send Ukraine their own Soviet-era MiGs, which Ukrainian pilots are trained to fly.

block-time published-time 8.20am GMT

Russia struck and disabled Ukraine's Starokostiantyniv military air base with long-range high-precision weapons, Russia's defence ministry claimed on Sunday.

"The Russia armed forces continue to strike the military infrastructure of Ukraine," Russian defence ministry spokesman Igor Konashenkov said.

"On the morning of 6 March, strikes were carried out by high-precision long-range weapons. The Ukrainian air force base near Starokostiantyniv was disabled."

He said a Ukrainian-controlled S-300 missile system had also been destroyed by Russian rocket forces. He added that Russia had downed 10 Ukrainian planes and helicopters over the past 24 hours.

I'm Tom Ambrose and I'll be bringing you all the latest news over the next two hours.

block-time published-time 8.06am GMT

Before I hand over to my colleague, Tom Ambrose, here is a quick snap of events from the past few hours. A more detailed summary of events can be found [*here*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2022/mar/06/russia-ukraine-war-biden-and-zelenskiy-discuss-more-support-for-ukraine-as-visa-mastercard-pull-out-of-russia-live?page=with:block-6224359f8f084225869781f8#block-6224359f8f084225869781f8).

An anti-war rally appears to be underway in Almaty, Kazakhstan according to a slew of social media posts this morning. The World Health Organization has confirmed "several" attacks on health care centres in [*Ukraine*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/ukraine) which resulted in multiple deaths and injuries, the agency's chief has said. South Korea will implement export controls against Belarus for "effectively supporting the Russian ***invasion*** of Ukraine", Seoul's foreign ministry said on Sunday, Reuters reports. The Ukrainian military is reporting that Russia has lost more than 11,000 military personnel since the ***invasion*** began. Russian forces are targeting populated areas in [*Ukraine*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/ukraine) but the strength of resistance has slowed the Russian advance, British military intelligence reveals.Ukraine's emergency services are reporting casualties from a Russian missile strike which hit residential homes in the Zhytomyr region, about 140km north-west of Kyiv. The Ukrainian military released its operational [*report*](https://www.facebook.com/100069073844828/posts/270038475308612/?d=n) as of 6am local time, noting its forces have been " fighting fierce battles to maintain certain borders".

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 9.33am GMT

block-time published-time 8.00am GMT

An anti-war rally appears to be underway in Almaty, Kazakhstan according to a slew of social media posts this morning.

Almaty-based journalist for The Economist, Joanna Lillis, posted a series of photos from the protest alongside the caption: "Lenin decked out in blue and yellow at anti-war rally in Almaty Kazakhstan - 'no to bloody dictators' reads the placard."

enltrIn [*#Almaty*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/Almaty?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) , [*#Kazakhstan*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/Kazakhstan?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) , locals joined a [*#protest*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/protest?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) rally in support of [*#Ukraine*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/Ukraine?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw). Kazakhstan is formally a political and military ally of [*#Russia*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/Russia?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw). And yet, its people are weary of Russian chauvinism and imperialism which are driving forces of Putin's barbaric war on Ukraine. [*pic.twitter.com/qYKDwezsaX*](https://t.co/qYKDwezsaX)

- Alex Kokcharov (@AlexKokcharov) [*March 6, 2022*](https://twitter.com/AlexKokcharov/status/1500367346543861763?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

enltrLenin decked out in blue and yellow at anti-war rally in Almaty [*#Kazakhstan*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/Kazakhstan?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) - "no to bloody dictators" reads the placard [*#Russia*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/Russia?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) [*#Ukraine*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/Ukraine?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) [*pic.twitter.com/T93F9Le1ES*](https://t.co/T93F9Le1ES)

- Joanna Lillis (@joannalillis) [*March 6, 2022*](https://twitter.com/joannalillis/status/1500376150018863105?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 7.52am GMT

The World Health Organization has co nfirmed "several" attacks on health care centres in Ukraine which resulted in multiple deaths and injuries, the agency's chief has said.

Additional reports are being investigated, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said in a post to Twitter on Sunday.

"Attacks on healthcare facilities or workers breach medical neutrality and are violations of international humanitarian law," he added.

enltr. [*@WHO*](https://twitter.com/WHO?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) has confirmed several attacks on health care in [*#Ukraine*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/Ukraine?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) , causing multiple deaths and injuries. Additional reports are being investigated. Attacks on healthcare facilities or workers breach medical neutrality and are violations of international humanitarian law. [*#NotATarget*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/NotATarget?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) [*https://t.co/Wdc2jeoHIB*](https://t.co/Wdc2jeoHIB)

- Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus (@DrTedros) [*March 6, 2022*](https://twitter.com/DrTedros/status/1500372569425387522?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 7.41am GMT

South Korea will implement export controls against Belarus for "effectively supporting the Russian ***invasion*** of Ukraine", Seoul's foreign ministry said on Sunday.

The ministry did not detail what ***measures*** would be taken, but said they will be applied in a similar way to moves already taken by South Korea against Russia, Reuters reports.

It condemned Moscow as having launched an "armed ***invasion***" of Ukraine.

South Korea said last month it would tighten export controls against Russia by banning shipments of strategic items and join Western countries' moves to block some Russian banks from the Swift international payments system.

"The Korean government decided today to implement export control ***measures*** against Belarus as well, judging that Belarus is effectively supporting the Russian ***invasion*** of Ukraine," the ministry said in a statement.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 7.43am GMT

block-time published-time 7.32am GMT

The Ukrainian military is reporting that Russia has suffered losses of more than 11,000 military personnel since the ***invasion*** began.

A total of 285 Russian tanks and 985 armoured combat vehicles were also reported to have been destroyed as well as 109 artillery systems, 44 aircraft and 48 helicopters, according to a [*report*](https://www.mil.gov.ua/news/2022/03/06/vtrati-rosijskih-okupantiv-stanovlyat-ponad-11-000-osib-znishheno-bilshe-2000-odinicz-vorozhogo-ozbroennya-i-vijskovoi-tehniki-%E2%80%93-generalnij-shtab-zs-ukraini/) by the general staff of the armed forces of Ukraine and published to the website of the Ukrainian ministry of defence.

"Just yesterday, more than 650 wounded members of the Russian occupation forces were taken to the central city hospital in the village of Bryanka, Luhansk region," the report adds.

"All of them are mostly in serious condition... after providing first aid, they were escorted by an armed convoy from the regular forces of the Russian armed forces to the line of combat to introduce further hostilities as 'cannon fodder'. It is known that the personnel of the 6th separate motorised rifle regiment is frightened and demoralised, looking for ways to desertion."

undltr???? ???????? ?????? ?????? ?????????? ? 24.02 ?? 06.03 ?????????? ??????????: ???? Total combat losses of the enemy From 24.02 to 06.03 are approximately: [*pic.twitter.com/e3lbBNo9o7*](https://t.co/e3lbBNo9o7)

- Defence intelligence of Ukraine (@DI\_Ukraine) [*March 6, 2022*](https://twitter.com/DI_Ukraine/status/1500382365050454021?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 9.34am GMT

block-time published-time 7.08am GMT

Strength of Ukraine resistance 'continues to surprise' Russia - British intelligence report

Russian forces are targeting populated areas in Ukraine but the strength of resistance has slowed the Russian advance, British military intelligence reveals.

[*In its daily intelligence report*](https://twitter.com/DefenceHQ/status/1500357239428763649?s=20&t=45keqm1qzRfT_E_lSR7bGw) , the UK's ministry of defence said the strength of Ukraine's resistance continues to surprise Russia, which has responded by targeting cities including Kharkiv, Chirnihiv and Mariupol.

The scale and strength of Ukrainian resistance continue to surprise Russia.

[Russia] has responded by targeting populated areas in multiple locations, including Kharkiv, Chernihiv and Mariupol.

This is likely to represent an effort to break Ukrainian morale.

Russia has previously used similar tactics in Chechnya in 1999 and Syria in 2016, employing both air and ground-based munitions.

Russia's supply lines reportedly continue to be targeted, slowing the rate of the advance of their ground forces."

Russia has repeatedly denied that it is targeting civilian areas.

The intelligence report also says there is a "realistic possibility" that Russia is now "attempting to conceal fuel trucks as regular support trucks in an effort to conceal losses".

enltrLatest Defence Intelligence update on the situation in Ukraine - 06 March 2022 Find out more about the UK government's response: [*https://t.co/xXx8qpSqRp*](https://t.co/xXx8qpSqRp) ???? [*#StandWithUkraine*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/StandwithUkraine?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) ???? [*pic.twitter.com/nJjcTJTDtX*](https://t.co/nJjcTJTDtX)

- Ministry of Defence ???? (@DefenceHQ) [*March 6, 2022*](https://twitter.com/DefenceHQ/status/1500357239428763649?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 7.12am GMT

block-time published-time 6.52am GMT

Ukraine's emergency services are reporting casualties from a Russian missile strike which hit residential homes in the Zhytomyr region, about 140km north-west of Kyiv.

Some 15 private houses were destroyed in the assault in the city of Ovruch, Ukraine's the state emergency service said in an [*update*](https://t.me/s/dsns_telegram) on its official Telegram account this morning.

In a seperate attack in Korosten, a town just south of Ovruch, one person was reportedly killed and two injured in an overnight rocket attack, according to the agency.

Ten private houses were said to have been destroyed and one building was burnt down. Five children were rescued from the basement.

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- DSNS.GOV.UA (@SESU\_UA)

[*March 6, 2022*](https://twitter.com/SESU_UA/status/1500363261740527619?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 6.35am GMT

The Ukrainian military has just released its operational [*report*](https://www.facebook.com/100069073844828/posts/270038475308612/?d=n) as of 6am local time, noting its forces have been " fighting fierce battles to maintain certain borders".

A defence operation in the eastern part of the Donetsk operational district is underway while efforts are focused on defending the city of Mariupol, the military said.

According to the report, Russian forces were stopped from an advance towards the Dnipropetrovsk region from Balaklia and an operation to defend the city of Chernihiv is underway.

The report references the "heavy losses in weapons, equipment and personnel" alongside the losses of 88 Russian aircraft and helicopters.

"Some enemy pilots who catapulted and survived were found by Ukrainian soldiers. They have received medical treatment and are already testifying about the Putin regime's crimes against humanity," the report read.

Due to the resistance of the entire Ukrainian people, Russian troops have been "demoralised" with "extremely low moral and psychological state... due to awareness of the real state of affairs" Ukraine's general staff of the armed forces said.

Local residents help clear the rubble of a home that was destroyed by a suspected Russian airstrike which killed at least six people in Markhalivka, Ukraine, on Saturday, 5 March. Photograph: Marcus Yam/LOS ANGELES TIMES/REX/Shutterstock

block-time published-time 6.03am GMT

Biden and Zelenskiy discuss more support for Ukraine

US President Joe Biden spoke with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy on Saturday to discuss ongoing efforts to impose sanctions on Russia and speed up US military, humanitarian and economic assistance.

A White House [*statement*](https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/03/05/readout-of-president-bidens-call-with-president-zelenskyy-of-ukraine-6/) of a readout of the call reads:

President Biden highlighted the ongoing actions undertaken by the United States, its Allies and partners, and private industry to raise the costs on Russia for its aggression in Ukraine.

In particular, he [Biden] welcomed the decision this evening by Visa and Mastercard to suspend service in Russia.

President Biden noted his administration is surging security, humanitarian, and economic assistance to [*Ukraine*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/ukraine) and is working closely with Congress to secure additional funding."

Zelenskiy confirmed the call, writing over Twitter early Sunday morning:

As part of the constant dialogue, I had another conversation with @POTUS. The agenda included the issues of security, financial support for Ukraine and the continuation of sanctions against Russia."

enltrAs part of the constant dialogue, I had another conversation with [*@POTUS*](https://twitter.com/POTUS?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw). The agenda included the issues of security, financial support for Ukraine and the continuation of sanctions against Russia.

- ????????? ?????????? (@ZelenskyyUa) [*March 6, 2022*](https://twitter.com/ZelenskyyUa/status/1500261389935517700?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 6.05am GMT

block-time published-time 6.02am GMT

Thousands of Ukrainian refugees continue to flee their homeland seeking safety in neighbouring countries.

[*More than 1.3 million Ukrainians*](https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine) have crossed borders since [*the Russian* ***invasion***](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/05/zelenskiy-lashes-out-at-nato-over-no-fly-zone-as-russian-attacks-intensify) started on the 24 February in what the United Nations is now calling Europe's fastest-moving refugee crisis since the end of the second world war. The figure is expected to reach 1.5 million later today.

"This is the fastest-moving refugee crisis we have seen in [*Europe*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/europe-news) since the end of the second world war," UNHCR head Filippo Grandi said.

A policeman helps Ukrainians to carry their bag at the border in Kroscienko, Poland, on 5 March. Photograph: Enrico Mattia Del Punta/NurPhoto/REX/Shutterstock An exhausted refugee is seen inside the train station at the Polish border town of Przemysl. Photograph: Hesther Ng/SOPA Images/REX/Shutterstock More than 1.3 million Ukrainians have crossed borders since the Russian ***invasion*** started on the 24 February, the UN estimates. Photograph: Sachelle Babbar/ZUMA Press Wire/REX/Shutterstock A Ukrainian mother takes her son into her arms to keep him warm, inside a Warsaw refugee centre in Poland. Photograph: Daniel Ceng Shou-Yi/ZUMA Press Wire/REX/Shutterstock

block-time published-time 5.52am GMT

A representative of the Ukrainian Embassy in Washington has said 3,000 US volunteers responded to the Ukraine's appeal for foreigners to join the "international legion" to help fight the war.

The official said the 3,000 volunteers answered the call in an interview with the [*Voice of America*](https://www.voanews.com/a/american-veterans-volunteer-to-fight-in-ukraine-/6470781.html) news service.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy announced he would be forming an official legion of foreign volunteers, adding just days ago that an estimates 16,000 foreigners had signed up, mostly from other post-Soviet states such as Georgia and Belarus.

block-time published-time 5.39am GMT

Senior US officials traveled to Venezuela on Saturday to meet with President Nicolas Maduro's government, seeking to determine whether Caracas is prepared to back away from its close ties to Russia amid its ***invasion*** of Ukraine, according to a person familiar with the matter, Reuters reports.

The trip is the highest-level US visit to Venezuela in years after the two countries broke diplomatic relations amid a campaign of US sanctions and diplomatic pressure aimed at ousting Maduro, a longtime ally of Russian President Vladimir Putin.

block-time published-time 5.37am GMT

China opposes any move that adds 'fuel to the flames'

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken spoke earlier by phone with Chinese foreign minister Wang Yi, who said Beijing opposes any moves that "add fuel to the flames" in Ukraine, according to the Chinese Foreign Ministry and as reported by the Associated Press.

Yi said the "evolution" of the situation in Ukraine is "something China does not want to see," adding that the Ukraine crisis should be solved through "dialogue and negotiation" and called on the United States, Nato, and the European Union to engage in "equal dialogue" with Russia. He said they should "pay attention to the negative impact of Nato's continuous eastward expansion on Russia's security."

"China supports all efforts conducive to de-escalation and political settlement of the situation, while opposing any moves which are adverse to promoting a diplomatic solution and add fuel to the flames," Wang said.

With international outrage and sanctions mounting against Russia, Beijing is scrambling to avoid being tainted by association with Moscow while also maintaining their increasingly close ties.

Russia's President Vladimir Putin seen with Chinese President Xi Jinping. Photograph: Greg Baker/AP

Once Cold War rivals, China and Russia have moved increasingly closer since Xi Jinping took power nearly a decade ago, driven by their shared desire to confront US power.

According to Agence France-Presse, China seems to have been "caught flat-footed" by Russia's military offensive, fierce Ukrainian resistance, and the volume of the resulting international anti-Kremlin backlash.

The situation has effectively paralysed China, according to Richard Ghiasy, an expert at the Hague Centre for Strategic Studies.

"Security interests virtually always trump economic interests" in China's calculus, and it will not fundamentally shift toward a more pro-Ukraine stance, he told AFP.

Russia is "a giant, nuclear-armed and resource-rich neighbour" that China won't risk agitating, Ghiasy said.

Beijing, which has long demanded respect for territorial integrity in border disputes with its own neighbours, has been forced into rhetorical contortions on Ukraine to avoid upsetting Russia.

While maintaining lip service to national sovereignty, China has insisted that Moscow's security concerns regarding Ukraine and the broader expansion of the US-led North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (Nato) are valid.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 5.42am GMT

block-time published-time 5.04am GMT

Summary

Hello it's Samantha Lock with you as we continue to monitor the crisis unfolding in Ukraine.

Russia's war on its neighbour continues for its tenth day and well into its second week. It is 7am in [*Ukraine*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/ukraine) and here is where the situation currently stands:

US president Joe Biden spoke with Ukrainian president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, to discuss ongoing efforts to impose sanctions on Russia and speed up US military, humanitarian and economic assistance. The White House said during the call the pair also discussed talks between Russia andUkraine, but offered no additional details.Britain's prime ministerBoris Johnson issued a six-point plan in reaction to Russia's ***invasion*** of [*Ukraine*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/ukraine) and is urging other leaders to endorse it in efforts to ensure Russia fails in its apparent attempt to take over its democratic neighbour.Zelenskiy also said he spoke to SpaceX and Tesla boss Elon Musk, announcing the country will [*receive more of its Starlink satellite internet terminals*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/video/2022/mar/06/zelenskiy-invites-elon-musk-to-ukraine-after-war-following-starlink-commitment-video) this coming week. US-based credit card giants Visa and Mastercard announced they will [*suspend their Russian business operations.*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/05/visa-and-mastercard-will-both-suspend-operations-in-russia) The Ukrainian military said Russian forces continue to focus on Kyiv while moving ahead with assaults on Kharkiv, Mykolaiv and the creation of a land corridor with Crimea, in its latest operational [*report*](https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/265782555734830). The report said aircraft from airports in Belarusian territory were involved in air strikes on military and civilian infrastructure in Kyiv and Zhytomyr. US-based think tank and policy research organisation, the Institute for the Study of War, released a [*report*](https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-march-5) saying Russian forces in [*Ukraine*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/ukraine) may have entered a possibly brief operational pause as they prepare to resume operations against Kyiv, Kharkiv, Mykolayiv, and possibly Odesa in the next 24-48 hours.The relief effort to distribute humanitarian aid to Ukraine has stepped up as volunteers across the country work tirelessly to gather basic necessities to give to refugees and prepare food supplies for the army to be sent to the frontline.The humanitarian situation in the southern Ukrainian port of Mariupol is "catastrophic" and it is vital that civilians be evacuated, a senior official from the NGO Doctors Without Borders warned.The International Monetary Fund announced it could [*approve*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2022/mar/05/russia-ukraine-war-latest-news-nato-gives-green-light-to-bombing-with-lack-of-no-fly-zone-says-zelenskiy?page=with:block-62239b398f08422586977c21#block-62239b398f08422586977c21) $1.4 billion emergency funding as early as next week as the body warns of war's "severe impact" on the global economy. Western sanctions on Russia are a stumbling block to revived Iran nuclear deal, Russian foreign minister Sergei Lavrov said.Ukrainian foreign minister Dmytro Kuleba met with US secretary of state Antony Blinken, saying Ukraine "will win this war" but needs more help from Nato.Ukraine's foreign minister, Dymtro Kuleba, appealed for more military assistance while Reuters reports Zelenskiy[*made*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2022/mar/05/russia-ukraine-war-latest-news-nato-gives-green-light-to-bombing-with-lack-of-no-fly-zone-says-zelenskiy?filterKeyEvents=false&page=with:block-62238b9a8f08d4a3a989fb2d#block-62238b9a8f08d4a3a989fb2d) a "desperate plea" for eastern Europe to provide Russian-made aircraft to Ukraine. In a call with US senators, he is also understood to have called for a no-fly zone, lethal aid, a ban on Russian oil and a suspension of Visa and Mastercard in Russia.The US is reportedly in discussions with Poland on the possibility of Poland providing more fighter jets to Ukraine with the US potentially agreeing to backfill Poland's fleet of fighter planes if Warsaw decides to transfer its used MiG-29s to Ukraine, four US officials told [*POLITICO*](https://www.politico.com/news/2022/03/05/white-house-deal-fighter-jets-ukraine-00014424). Russia and Ukraine [*plan*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2022/mar/05/russia-ukraine-war-latest-news-nato-gives-green-light-to-bombing-with-lack-of-no-fly-zone-says-zelenskiy?filterKeyEvents=false&page=with:block-622398bc8f08d4a3a989fbd7#block-622398bc8f08d4a3a989fbd7) another round of talks on Monday, even though previous talks that produced an agreement to a limited ceasefire in order to protect corridors for civilian have not been honoured by Russia. The United Nations recorded 351 civilians killed and 707 injured in [*Ukraine*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/ukraine) , [*according*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2022/mar/05/russia-ukraine-war-latest-news-nato-gives-green-light-to-bombing-with-lack-of-no-fly-zone-says-zelenskiy?filterKeyEvents=false&page=with:block-62239b1e8f08422586977c1d#block-62239b1e8f08422586977c1d) to the UN high commissioner for human rights.Tens of thousands joined rallies around the world in support of Ukraine over the weekend, [*gathering in cities across Europe, the US and South America*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/06/tens-of-thousands-join-rallies-around-the-world-in-support-of-ukraine) to demand an end to Russia's ***invasion***.

For any tips and feedback please contact me through [*Twitter*](https://twitter.com/Samantha__Lock) or at [*samantha.lock@theguardian.com*](mailto:samantha.lock@theguardian.com)

18798 2022-03-06T05:04:35Z false false 2022-03-07T03:29:52Z true AUS theguardian.com [*https://www.theguardian.com/p/yvdgx*](https://www.theguardian.com/p/yvdgx) true true [*https://media.guim.co.uk/e0750680f5b2285da919737bba4b38500dae0881/219\_0\_3281\_1969/500.jpg*](https://media.guim.co.uk/e0750680f5b2285da919737bba4b38500dae0881/219_0_3281_1969/500.jpg) false en true The Ukrainian military is reporting that Russia is planning on storming the Ukrainian capital of Kyiv. Russian troops have "began to accumulate resources to storm Kyiv," according to a report recently released by the general staff of the armed forces of Ukraine. In city of Irpin on the western outskirts of Kyiv, Russian troops are making an advance towards the capital with tank and motorised infantry units as well as attempting to reach the eastern outskirts of Kyiv through the districts of Brovarsky and Boryspil, the military says. Ukrainian officials also noted Russian forces are attempting to establish control over the cities of Chernihiv and Sumy but have "suffered significant losses" and needed to redeploy additional forces to "replenish manpower and equipment". The US has provided Ukraine's president Zelenskiy with encrypted communications equipment and a direct line with US president Joe Biden, the New York Times reports. According to the Times, intelligence officials in Washington and Germany are sending satellite photographs and electronic intercepts of Russian military units to Ukrainian military units "within an hour or two". "As he tries to stay out of the hands of Russian forces in Kyiv, President Volodymyr Zelenskiy of Ukraine travels with encrypted communications equipment, provided by the Americans, that can put him into a secure call with President Biden," the publication writes. It was through this equipment that Zelenskiy was able to make a 35-minute call with his American counterpart on Saturday night. US House of Representatives Speaker Nancy Pelosi has said the chamber is "exploring" legislation to ban imports of Russian oil and that Congress intends to enact this week $10 billion in aid for Ukraine. A letter published to the speaker of the house official website reads: The Biden Administration has requested $10 billion in humanitarian, military and economic support for Ukraine. The Congress intends to enact this emergency funding this week as part of our omnibus government funding legislation. And an urgent request from President Zelensky is to help ensure air support for the Ukrainian armed forces. In addition, the House is currently exploring strong legislation that will further isolate Russia from the global economy. Our bill would ban the import of Russian oil and energy products into the United States, repeal normal trade relations with Russia and Belarus, and take the first step to deny Russia access to the World Trade Organization. We would also empower the Executive branch to raise tariffs on Russian imports." Russian gymnast Ivan Kuliak, who sported an insignia linked to the ***invasion*** of Ukraine on a medals podium alongside a Ukrainian competitor, has been called out for his "shocking behaviour". Kuliak's shirt had the letter "Z" prominently placed as he stood next to Ukraine's Kovtun Illia, the gold medallist at a Gymnastics World Cup event in Doha. The "Z" has been seen daubed on Russian tanks and vehicles in Ukraine and has come to symbolise support for the ***invasion***. The UK's ministry of defence has just released its latest intelligence report, speculating that Russian forces made "minimal ground advances" over the weekend. Russian forces probably made minimal ground advances over the weekend. It is highly unlikely that Russia has successfully achieved its planned objectives to date." The ministry notes a "high level of Russian air and artillery strikes" have continued to hit military and civilian sites in Ukrainian cities over the past 24 hours. "Recent strikes have targeted Kharkiv, Mykolaiv and Chernihiv, and been particularly heavy in Mariupol," the report added. Here is a quick rundown of what you may have missed over the past few hours. For an even more detailed account you can view our earlier summary here. Ukraine's president Volodymyr Zelenskiy delivered an impassioned address to his nation on Sunday night, warning Russian troops he will punish those who committed atrocities in Ukraine while the "only quiet place" that awaits them is the grave. "We will not forgive. We will not forget. We will punish everyone who committed atrocities in this war on our land," he said. Zelenskiy also spoke of the death of a family attempting to flee the Ukrainian city of Irpin, near Kyiv in northern Ukraine, in an emotional plea to honour humanitarian corridors that Russian forces appear to have ignored. The Ukrainian president criticised western leaders for failing to respond to the Russian defence ministry's announcement that it would strike Ukraine's military-industrial complex. "I didn't hear even a single world leader react to this. The audacity of the aggressor is a clear signal to the west that the sanctions imposed on Russia are not sufficient," he said. Two major American accounting firms, KPMG and PricewaterhouseCoopers, have also announced they will stop doing business in Russia. A plane carrying Russian diplomats expelled by the United States has left New York's John F Kennedy International Airport en route to Moscow about 7.30pm EST, according to Flight Radar24 data. Moscow is recruiting Syrians to fight in Ukraine, according to US officials who spoke with the Wall Street Journal. The US does not believe a Russian amphibious assault in or near the Ukrainian city of Odesa is imminent, a senior US defence official said, according to Reuters. There have been growing concerns about a possible attack on the city. Russia has instructed all state-owned websites and services to switch to the Russian domain name system by 11 March, according to Russian state media outlets. Many fear the move is a sign that Russia is beginning active preparations for disconnection from the global internet. Meanwhile, hacking collective Anonymous claimed to have hacked into the Russian streaming services Wink and Ivi and live TV channels Russia 24, Channel One, Moscow 24 to broadcast footage from Ukraine. Ukraine will ask the United Nations' top court on Monday to issue an emergency ruling requiring Russia to stop its ***invasion***, arguing that Moscow's justification for the attack is based on a faulty interpretation of genocide law, Reuters reports. British prime minister Boris Johnson has pledged to send more defensive equipment and $100m to Ukraine to hold off Russian troops and mitigate financial pressures facing the country, but was accused of moving too slowly and timidly to clamp down on oligarchs' dirty money in the UK. A plane carrying Russian diplomats expelled by the United States has left New York's John F Kennedy International Airport en route to Moscow about 7.30pm EST, according to Flight Radar24 data. "The flight carrying Russian government personnel expelled by the United States has just departed New York for Moscow," the flight tracking service said. Russian foreign ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova also confirmed on her Telegram channel on Saturday that the diplomats would be returning to Russia. "This plane will return to their homeland [the] Russian diplomats, whom the US Government has declared persona non grata," she said. A statement from the US Mission to the UN in late February called the 12 Russian diplomats "intelligence operatives... who have abused their privileges of residency in the US by engaging in espionage activities that are adverse to our national security." As the exodus of western businesses to leave Russia continues, two major American accounting firms, KPMG and PricewaterhouseCoopers, have also announced they will stop doing business in Russia. In a statement, KPMG International said it was cutting ties with about 4,500 employees in Russia and Belarus. "We believe we have a responsibility, along with other global businesses, to respond to the Russian government's ongoing military attack on Ukraine." PricewaterhouseCoopers also said in a press release that PwC Russia, which has about 3,700 employees across 11 cities, would leave the network of member firms but "continue cooperation." Meanwhile, Deloitte said the firm "unequivocally" stood by the people of Ukraine and was reviewing its Russian business but cited its ongoing "professional obligations". "Everyone knows the game is up in terms of being able to retain a network firm in Russia," an insider at one Big Four firm told the Financial Times. Zelenskiy spoke of the death of a family attempting to flee the Ukrainian city of Irpin, near Kyiv in northern Ukraine, in an emotional plea to honour humanitarian corridors that Russian forces appear to have ignored. There was a lot of talk about humanitarian corridors. There were talks every day about the opportunity for people to leave the cities... And we heard the promise that there would be humanitarian corridors. But there are no humanitarian corridors. Instead of humanitarian corridors, they can only make bloody ones. A family was killed in Irpin today. A man, a woman and two children. Right on the road when they were just trying to get out of town to escape. The whole family. How many such families have died in Ukraine?" Moscow is recruiting Syrians to fight in Ukraine, according to US officials who spoke with the Wall Street Journal. The publication cites four American officials who believe Russia has in recent days been recruiting fighters from Syria in the hope that their expertise in urban combat can help take Kyiv and deal a devastating blow to the Ukraine government. Russia has been operating inside Syria since formally entering the country's civil war in 2015. When Russian state TV announced the ***invasion*** of Ukraine last week, it did not use the words "attack", "***invasion***" or "war". Instead it reported on a "special military operation" in the neighbouring country designed to liberate a nation that would welcome Russia's forces to free it from fascism. The Guardian's Moscow correspondent, Andrew Roth, provides an insight as to what Russians are being told about the war in Ukraine. He tells Michael Safi that this initial distortion of the facts did not last the week. Instead, as the war grew more intensive and Russian forces met with fierce resistance, there was a subtle change in what Russians were told was going on. Yes, casualties were being taken, major cities were being targeted, but it was a necessary sanction against a government propped up by an imperialist west, determined to humiliate Russia. Now, as the attacks get increasingly deadly and cities are transformed by bombing campaigns, Russian propagandists are having to adapt their message again. Meanwhile, an economic crunch unlike any other most Russians have faced before is hitting them in their wallets, and many are looking for who's to blame. As Andrew Roth explains, it's not necessarily their own government led by Vladimir Putin. Powerful snippets from Zelenskiy's national address can be viewed in the video below. The Ukrainian president called on the west to do more as he spoke of the destruction across Ukraine and the suffering faced by his people. "We will not forgive. We will not forget. We will punish everyone who committed atrocities in this war on our land." Ukraine's president Volodymyr Zelenskiy delivered an impassioned nightly address to his nation, warning Russian troops he will punish those who committed atrocities in Ukraine while the "only quiet place" that awaits them is the grave. "Today is Forgiveness Sunday. But we will not forgive hundreds and hundreds of victims. Thousands and thousands of sufferings. And God will not forgive. Not today. Not tomorrow. Never. And instead of Forgiveness, there will be a Day of Judgment," Zelenskiy said. An excerpt of his speech, as translated by Ukrainian broadcaster Ukrinform, reads: We will not forgive the destroyed houses. We will not forgive the missile that our air defence shot down over Okhmatdyt today. And more than five hundred other such missiles that hit our land. All over Ukraine.. hit our people and children. We will not forgive the shooting of unarmed people. Destruction of our infrastructure. We will not forgive. Hundreds and hundreds of victims. Thousands and thousands of sufferings. And God will not forgive. Not today. Not tomorrow. Never. And instead of Forgiveness, there will be a Day of Judgment. I'm sure of it." Zelenskiy warned Russian forces they would face "a day of judgement" for the "deliberate murder" inflicted on his country. How many such families have died in Ukraine? We will not forgive. We will not forget. We will punish everyone who committed atrocities in this war on our land. We will find every bastard who shot at our cities, our people, who bombed our land, who launched rockets. There will be no quiet place on this earth for you. Except for the grave." Russia has instructed all state-owned websites and services to switch to the Russian domain name system by 11 March, according to Russian state media outlets. "This is necessary to protect resources from cyber attacks and the possibility of disconnection from the outside," the Kommersant Russian newspaper reports. Citing the ministry of digital development, the publication said there are no plans to disconnect Russia from the global internet. The ministry of digital development told Kommersant that these ***measures*** are necessary to protect against cyberattacks: We are preparing for various scenarios to ensure that Russian resources are available to citizens. The telegram for government agencies outlines a set of simple cyber hygiene recommendations that will help to organise work more effectively to protect our resources from malicious traffic, keep services running and control over domain names." Russia managed to disconnect itself from the global internet during tests in June and July last year, the RBC media group reported at the time, citing documents from the working group tasked with improving Russia's internet security, according to Reuters. Russia adopted legislation, known as the "sovereign internet" law, in late 2019 that seeks to shield the country from being cut off from foreign infrastructure, in answer to what Russia called the "aggressive nature" of the United States' national cyber security strategy. The move would strengthen the Russian government's oversight of cyberspace. Cyber resistance against Russia's ***invasion*** of Ukraine continues, with hacking collective Anonymous claiming to have hacked into the Russian streaming services Wink and Ivi and live TV channels Russia 24, Channel One, Moscow 24 to broadcast footage from Ukraine. The group added that activists are also broadcasting troll faces on Russian military radio. Russian forces stepped up overnight shelling of Ukrainian cities in the centre, north and south of the country on Sunday night, presidential adviser Oleksiy Arestovich has said. "The latest wave of missile strikes came as darkness fell," he told a Ukrainian broadcaster. Arestovich said Ukraine's second-largest city of Kharkiv in the north-east was still battling to fend off a Russian attack while all regions of Chernihiv in the north were coming under missile attack. The official described a "catastrophic" situation in the Kyiv suburbs of Bucha, Hostomel and Irpin, where efforts to evacuate residents on Sunday failed. He said the government was doing all it could to resume evacuations, the Associated Press reports. Ukraine will ask the United Nations' top court on Monday to issue an emergency ruling requiring Russia to stop its ***invasion***, arguing that Moscow's justification for the attack is based on a faulty interpretation of genocide law, Reuters reports. Although the court's rulings are binding and countries generally follow them, it has no direct means of enforcing them. Russian President Vladimir Putin has said Russia's "special military action" is needed "to protect people who have been subjected to bullying and genocide" - meaning those whose first or only language is Russian - in eastern Ukraine. Ukraine's suit argues that the claim of genocide is untrue, and in any case does not provide legal justification for ***invasion***. The case it has lodged at the World Court, officially known as the International Court of Justice (ICJ), centres on the interpretation of a 1948 treaty on the prevention of genocide, signed by both countries. The treaty names the ICJ as the forum for resolving disputes between signatories. Last week, the executive board of the International Association of Genocide Scholars issued a statement saying that Putin was "misappropriating and misusing the term 'genocide'". "There is absolutely no evidence that there is genocide going on in Ukraine," the association's president, Melanie O'Brien, told Reuters. The hearings are set to start at 10am (9am GMT) with Ukraine presenting its case. Russia is due to respond on Tuesday. Hello it's Samantha Lock with you as we continue to monitor the crisis unfolding in Ukraine. Russia's war on its neighbour continues for its eleventh day and well into its second week. It is 1.40am in Ukraine and the UN estimates more than 1.5 million people have fled the country to seek safety in neighbouring countries. For any tips and feedback please contact me through Twitter or at [*samantha.lock@theguardian.com*](mailto:samantha.lock@theguardian.com) The full story on Boris Johnson's pledge to send more defensive equipment and aid to Ukraine: Boris Johnson has pledged to send more defensive equipment and $100m to Ukraine to hold off Russian troops and mitigate financial pressures facing the country, but was accused of moving too slowly and timidly to clamp down on oligarchs' dirty money in the UK. Emergency legislation is due to be rushed through the House of Commons on Monday, intended to create a register of overseas ownership of UK land and property, reform unexplained wealth orders and make it easier to prosecute those involved in breaking sanctions. The economic crime bill will be supported by opposition parties, but ministers were warned it would still give those suspected of money laundering a "get out of London free card" and contained loopholes that could let people disguise or liquidate their assets before the new powers come into effect. Keir Starmer, the Labour leader, said he was frustrated ministers were "going slowly" and that there were "echoes of Afghanistan", claiming the government "really only begins to get its act together and respond in the heat of the situation rather than preparing for it beforehand". Dominic Raab, the deputy prime minister, said on Sunday it could take months or even years for the Russian president, Vladimir Putin, to be defeated in his ambition to conquer Ukraine. Prime minister Boris Johnson's office said Britain will provide $100 million to Ukraine (75.6 million pounds) through the World Bank, Reuters reports: The UK is seeking to keep core state functions running and mitigate financial pressures caused by Russia's ***invasion***, Johnson's office said. Britain has sought a central role in the international response to Russia's ***invasion*** of Ukraine by providing defensive military aid, arguing for tougher sanctions again the Kremlin and offering financial support. Nevertheless, Johnson's government has faced criticism that its sanctions have been too slow and its refugee programme underwhelming. The latest round of cash, which is in addition to $290.95 million (220 million pounds) pledged already, could be used to pay public-sector workers in Ukraine or fund pension and social security payments, British authorities said. The UK is also pushing new legislation on Monday that aims to speed up the sanctions ***process***. In his evening video address, Ukraine's president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, also criticized western leaders for failing to respond to the Russian Defense Ministry's announcement that it would strike Ukraine's military-industrial complex and that employees of the plants should not show up to work, the AP reports. Zelenskiy said: I didn't hear even a single world leader react to this. The audacity of the aggressor is a clear signal to the west that the sanctions imposed on Russia are not sufficient... Think about the sense of impunity of the occupiers that they can announce such planned atrocities." Zelsnkiy urged for a "tribunal" to hold accountable people who have committed atrocities. The Russian Defense Ministry said earlier on Sunday that its forces were planning to strike Ukraine's military-industrial complex with "precision weapons", with ministry spokesman Igor Konashenkov (in a statement carried by the state news agency Tass), saying, "We urge all personnel of Ukrainian defense industry plants ... to leave the territory of their enterprises," the AP reported. More from Zelsnkiy's speech, via CNN: For tomorrow Russia has officially announced the shelling of our territory. Our enterprises of the defense complex. Most were built decades ago by the Soviet government, built in cities. And now they are in the middle of an ordinary urban environment. Thousands of people work there. Hundreds of thousands live nearby... This is murder. Deliberate murder." Here are some images from protests against the Russian ***invasion***, from around the globe this weekend. Santiago: Cardiff: Argentina: New York: Paris: Mexico City: In an address this evening, Ukraine's president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy said, "We will not forgive. We will not forget. We will punish everyone who committed atrocities in this war." More quotes from his remarks: The US does not believe a Russian amphibious assault in or near the Ukrainian city of Odesa is imminent, a senior US defence official said, according to Reuters. There have been growing concerns about a possible attack on the city: The US official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, estimated that Russia had launched about 600 missiles since the start of the ***invasion*** and deployed into Ukraine about 95% of combat forces it had pre-staged outside of the country. Russian forces continued to try to advance and isolate Kyiv, Kharkhiv and Chernihiv and were meeting "strong Ukrainian resistance", the official said. Earlier, Odesa's mayor said, "I don't know what kind of bastard you have to be to press the button to drop bombs on Odesa," the Guardian's Shaun Walker reported. Staff at Ukraine's Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant are being told what to do by the Russian military commander who seized the site last week, in violation of international safety protocols. Emmanuel Macron implored Putin to let civilians flee Ukraine's besieged cities during a marathon call of nearly two hours as a second attempt to evacuate the port city of Mariupol ended under Russia bombardment. A Texas congresswoman has called for Russia to release Brittney Griner as fears grow Putin could use the US basketball star as a pawn during the war in Ukraine. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken says the US and its allies are engaged in a "very active discussion" about banning the import of Russian oil and natural gas. More than 4,300 people have been arrested after demonstrators took to the streets in 21 Russian cities to condemn Vladimir Putin's ***invasion*** of Ukraine. Eight civilians were killed in Irpin as evacuations were underway, according to the mayor. Netflix, TikTok, Ikea, Apple, Microsoft, TikTok, Mastercard and Visa, Boeing, Nike, Volkswagen and other companies have suspended or restricted operations in Russia. The UK is pushing new legislation on Monday that aims to speed up the sanctions ***process*** by allowing ministers to tighten restrictions on Russian businesses and individuals, Reuters reports: The Economic Crime (Transparency and Enforcement) Bill is being pushed through parliament next week as Britain tries to punish those with links to Russian President Vladimir Putin in response to his ***invasion*** of Ukraine. "Punishing sanctions are meaningless until properly implemented, and these changes will allow us to pursue Putin's allies in the UK with the full backing of the law, beyond doubt or legal challenge," Prime Minister Boris Johnson said. Britain has already sanctioned some banks, firms and individuals, but has faced calls to ramp up its sanctions and move faster on Russian oligarchs and companies. For more reading on the subject: Netflix is suspending all of its services in Russian in response to the Russian ***invasion*** of Ukraine, the company said in a statement, Variety reports. "Given the circumstances on the ground, we have decided to suspend our service in Russia," a spokesperson told the publication. Netflix has more than 1m customers in Russia, and no new customers will be able to sign up, though it's unclear what impact this move may have on existing accounts, according to Bloomberg. Netflix had already announced that it would be temporarily pausing future projects and acquisitions from Russia, Variety reported, noting that the streaming service had four Russian original projects in the works. Other companies that have suspended or limited operations or sales in Russia include: Ikea, Apple, Microsoft, TikTok, Mastercard and Visa, Boeing, Nike and Volkswagen. The US efforts to isolate Russia have intensified this weekend, with discussions of a possible ban on the import of Russian oil and natural gas, and senior US officials traveling to Venezuela for rare talks with Nicols Maduro's government. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said earlier today that the US and its allies were engaged in a "very active discussion" about prohibiting the import of Russian oil and natural gas, which would mark a significant escalation of the ongoing sanctions. Blinken told CNN: "We are now talking to our European partners and allies to look in a coordinated way at the prospect of banning the import of Russian oil while making sure that there is still an appropriate supply of oil on world market. That's a very active discussion as we speak." House speaker Nancy Pelosi has also backed the idea of a Russian oil import ban, arguing at a press briefing earlier this week that Russia's exports are funding Putin's war efforts. This weekend, White House and state department negotiators also met Maduro representatives in Caracas, Venezuela's capital, the first meeting of its kind in years, as the Guardian's Latin America correspondent, Tom Phillips, reported: Citing anonymous US officials, the New York Times claimed the Biden administration was motivated partly by concern that Russia's Latin American allies - which include the authoritarian regimes in Cuba, Nicaragua and Venezuela - could become "security threats" if the geopolitical clash with Putin escalated. Others speculated that the US saw Venezuelan oil as a potential substitute for Russian imports were it to slap sanctions on Moscow as a result of Putin's ***invasion*** of Ukraine. Venezuela has the world's largest oil reserves and its output is currently growing despite US sanctions imposed at the height of the 2019 attempt to topple Maduro. Denmark's prime minister also said today that the country was aiming to become independent of Russian natural gas in the wake of Russia's ***invasion*** of Ukraine. Eight civilians were killed in Irpin as evacuations were underway, according to the mayor, who said he witnessed four people die: Residents fleeing Irpin, just outside of Kyiv, were caught in shelling by Russian forces earlier today and forced to dive for cover, Reuters reported. "A family died," Irpin mayor Oleksandr Markushyn said, according to CNN, "in front of my eyes two small children and two adults died... Irpin is at war, Irpin has not surrendered. Part of Irpin was indeed captured by Russian invaders, but part of Irpin is fighting and not surrendering." The Ukrainian town of Volnovakha was almost completely destroyed in the first days of the war, with intense shelling targeting civilian homes. About 90% of buildings have been damaged or reduced to rubble, and the dead lie unburied in the street, residents say. Hundreds if not thousands of people are still sheltering in basements without heat or electricity, and dwindling supplies of food and water. Russia has not made good on offers of a ceasefire and humanitarian corridor to allow evacuations. Marina, 38, an economist and mother of three, tells the story of her family's hellish week under fire - and their terrifying escape: My life is split into before and after these events happening in my country. I couldn't hold back my tears about all the destruction. When we heard the news that the Russian federation was planning to 'liberate' some territories, we didn't believe it, we didn't even think it was possible in the modern world. That's why we decided to stay in the place we live. If we had imagined for even a second what was coming, we would have risked trying to escape the very first moment the shelling started. Our children, who are five, six and 13, have got psychological trauma from this that will last all their lives. Denmark aims to become independent of Russian natural gas in the wake of Russia's ***invasion*** of Ukraine, Danish prime minister Mette Frederiksen said, according to Reuters. Denmark will also significantly increase its defence budget in response to the conflict, Frederiksen said. From Reuters: The Nordic country will increase its defence spending gradually to reach 2% of GDP by 2033, equivalent to an increase in annual defence spending of around 18 billion Danish crowns ($2.65 billion) under an agreement between the main parliamentary parties. The parties also agreed to set aside 7 billion crowns over the next two years to strengthen Danish defence, diplomacy and humanitarian efforts. "Historic times call for historic decisions," Frederiksen said at a press briefing in Copenhagen, adding that this was "the largest investment in Danish defence in recent times". The prime minister also said that the main parliamentary parties were in agreement that Denmark should become independent of Russian gas "as soon as possible", but Frederiksen did not offer a specific timeline at a press conference in Copenhagen on Sunday. Some Ukrainians have reported that their loved ones in Russia refuse to believe that Russian soldiers could bomb innocent people, or even that a war is occurring, according to a new report from a New York Times journalist in Lviv. Across Ukraine, residents reported that their close family members in Russia were repeating the official Kremlin position to them, denying the attacks and the extent of the violence, reporter Valerie Hopkins wrote. Some examples: Some more on the disinformation, misinformation and propaganda from Russian-backed outlets that has been spreading over the last week: TikTok has announced that it is suspending livestreaming in Russia and restricting the uploading of new videos, in response to Russia's new law that threatens jail sentences of up to 15 years for spreading "fake news". TikTok said in a statement: Our highest priority is the safety of our employees and our users, and in light of Russia's new 'fake news' law, we have no choice but to suspend livestreaming and new content to our video service in Russia while we review the safety implications of this law. Our in-app messaging service will not be affected. We will continue to evaluate the evolving circumstances in Russia to determine when we might fully resume our services with safety as our top priority. The "fake news" law has already had widespread consequences. The BBC, the Canadian Broadcasting Company and Bloomberg News all said on Friday that their journalists were pausing work. CNN, CBS News and ABC News stopped broadcasting in Russia, and other news organizations have temporarily stopped publishing bylines of their journalists in Russia, the Guardian reported. Russia also entirely blocked Facebook on Friday in retaliation for the platform restricting content from state-owned media. More details here: Retired army general David Petraeus, former head of US central command during the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, said he did not accept military assumptions that Kyiv will inevitably fall to Russia. Russian forces have a 40-mile-long convoy of military vehicles stalled on the approach to the Ukrainian capital and Petraeus said it appeared "they cannot keep their columns fueled" and praised Ukrainian resilience so far. "They've taken down road signs or pointed "Welcome to Hell" and stuff like that," Petraeus, who is also former director of the CIA, told CNN: This is going to be a very long fight in Kyiv. The locals there have been stockpiling food, there is going to be an enormously fierce resistance. I don't accept assumptions that it will fall." Petraeus also noted Kyiv's extensive surface area as a major obstacle for the Russian military, pointing out that the capital is spread across around 320 square miles, larger than New York City and a little over half the size of London's sprawl. CNN host Jake Tapper asked Petraeus about the vulnerability of other countries near Russia, notably non-Nato places, even as Nato moves to strengthen its boundaries with military might along members' borders with Russia and its neighbor Belarus, from the Baltic states to Romania. "The one to be worried about is Moldova," said Petraeus, referring to the small country lodged between Nato-member Romania and the south-western flank of Ukraine, where US secretary of state Antony Blinken was on Sunday. "We need to be shoring that up substantially." Petraeus added that that should occur even as the US and its western allies "work to get these MiGs out of Poland and into Ukraine to be flown by Ukrainian pilots," he said. Earlier, Blinken had talked about sending US fighter jets to Poland so that that country can send supplies of used MiGs and Sukhoi military planes to Ukraine, where the military is familiar with those Russian-style jets rather than western-made fighters. Vladimir Putin has reiterated his demands in Ukraine in a further telephone conversation with French President Emmanuel Macron and said Ukraine must meet them or the war continues. In a briefing with journalists, the Elysée said Macron had spoken to Putin for an hour and 45 minutes on Sunday morning to reiterate the international communities demands to halt hostilities but also guarantee the safety of civilians and allow humanitarian organisations to operate. "President Putin has again expressed his termination to obtain all his objectives by negotiation or by war. The President of the Republic expressed his determination to obtain negotiations and peace," the Elysée spokesperson said. More from the spokesperson: If Ukraine refuses to agree to this there will be a pursuing of military operations. This is unacceptable to Ukraine... The President of the Republic has reiterated the demand, a demand with the quasi unanimous support of the international community, for the halting of the military operation. It is also necessary that international humanitarian rights are absolutely respected." Ukrainians fleeing the scenes of destruction and carnage in Ukraine are already being interviewed by investigators in anticipation of a future war crimes trial of Vladimir Putin, along with his top officials and generals. With well over a million refugees crossing the border, there is an abundance of eyewitness testimony, while the flow of video footage through social media has provided an ***unprecedented*** amount of evidence which is being subjected to forensic analysis. However, the sheer quantity of evidence is not necessarily a guarantee of a successful trial, and experienced war crimes investigators warn there is a long war to go before Putin and his regime are in the dock, in person or in absentia. Multiple investigations have been launched at the same time, and it is not clear to what extent they are coordinated, if at all. The prosecutor of the international criminal court (ICC) in The Hague has opened an investigation, after a petition by an ***unprecedented*** 39 member states, and will almost certainly receive the most governmental support. American Express is suspending all operations in Russia and Belarus, Reuters reports. Visa and Mastercard have taken similar steps, with a block that allows for continued domestic transactions in Russia. The Guardian's banking correspondent, Kalyeena Makortoff, explained earlier that the Mastercard and Visa suspension largely targets foreign payments, so that local consumers will no longer be able to use their Russian cards abroad or for online international payments. Our earlier coverage: A summary of some of the latest developments in the Russian ***invasion*** of Ukraine: The US has seen "very credible reports" of deliberate attacks on civilians in Ukraine, US secretary of state Antony Blinken said. Police detained more than 4,300 people on Sunday at protests across Russia against Putin's ***invasion*** of Ukraine, an independent protest monitoring group reported. BBC World News has been taken off air in Russia, the broadcaster said. Ukraine is is open to discussing "non- NATO models" for its future, one of its negotiators said. The safe passage of civilians from Ukraine's besieged eastern port city of Mariupol was halted again on Sunday. A UN nuclear watchdog said that staff at Ukraine's Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant continue to operate it, but that management is now under the orders of the commander of the Russian forces. Pakistan's prime minister, Imran Khan, has responded to a joint letter from the heads of diplomatic missions urging Pakistan to condemn Russia, saying, "What do you think of us? Are we your slaves... that whatever you say, we will do?" On 1 March, the heads of 22 diplomatic missions had publicised a joint letter calling on Pakistan to support a resolution in the United Nations general assembly to condemn Russia's aggression against Ukraine, Reuters reports, noting that the move to release the letter was rare: In the event, Pakistan, a traditional ally of the west, abstained from voting as the UN general assembly overwhelmingly reprimanded Russia for invading Ukraine. "I want to ask the European Union ambassadors: Did you write such a letter to India?" Khan said at a political rally on Sunday, noting that Pakistan's arch-rival had also abstained. Khan also said European countries had not censured India for its actions in Kashmir, a mountainous region over which Pakistan and India have fought two wars. The Bolshoi Theatre's music director and principal conductor, Tugan Sokhiev, has announced his resignation, saying he felt under pressure due to calls to take a position on the Ukraine conflict. The Russian said in a statement he was resigning "with immediate effect" from his post at the Moscow theatre, as well as his equivalent position at France's Orchestre National du Capitole de Toulouse. Sokhiev was appointed by the Bolshoi in 2014. He was brought in as part of moves to improve the theatre's image after scandals including the 2013 acid attack on its then-artistic director Sergei Filin. He comes from the same North Ossetia region of Russia as star conductor Valery Gergiev and is considered to be his protege. Kremlin loyalist Gergiev has been stripped of his role at the Munich Philharmonic for failing to denounce Russia's actions. Sokhiev said in a lengthy statement that "many people were waiting for me to express myself and to hear from me my position on what's happening at the moment," referring to Russia's military action in Ukraine. He said he decided to resign after "being forced to face the impossible option of choosing between my beloved Russian and beloved French musicians". He cited opposition from authorities in Toulouse to his planned staging of a Franco-Russian music festival there, saying they "want me to express myself for peace". Sokhiev became music director of the Toulouse orchestra in 2008 and continued to work with the orchestra after joining the Bolshoi. Sokhiev did not say explicitly whether he backs or opposes Russia's actions in Ukraine while he said that "I have never supported and I will always be against any conflicts in any shape and form". He said musicians are becoming "victims of so called 'cancel culture'" and suggested Russian music could come under threat. "I will be soon asked to choose between Tchaikovsky, Stravinsky, Shostakovich and Beethoven, Brahms, Debussy," he warned. The Bolshoi general director, Vladimir Urin, told TASS state news agency he was saddened by Sokhiev's decision. "I'm very sorry. His departure is a serious problem for the Bolshoi Theatre. It's unclear how the situation will develop from now," he said. Ukraine is not willing to compromise on its territorial integrity in talks with Russia but is open to discussing "non- Nato models" for its future, one of its negotiators told Fox News. Ukraine has pursued membership of the European Union and Nato, both opposed by Moscow. Vladimir Putin has cited Ukraine's potential membership of Nato as evidence of what he portrays as Nato aggression toward Russia. "The response that we are getting from the Nato countries is that they are not ready to even discuss having us in Nato, not for the next period of five or 10 years," negotiator David Arakhamia said in remarks published by Fox News late on Saturday. "We are ready to discuss some non-Nato models. For example, there could be direct guarantees by different countries like the US, China, UK, maybe Germany and France. We are open to discussing such things in a broader circle, not only in bilateral discussions with Russia but also with other partners." Delegations from Ukraine and Russia have had two rounds of talks since Russia launched an ***invasion*** of its neighbour on 24 February. On Thursday, the sides agreed to open humanitarian corridors to allow civilians out of some combat zones, although there have been delays in implementing them. The next round of talks is due on Monday, according to the Ukrainian side. Earlier on Sunday, the Ukrainian president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, said Russian rockets had completely destroyed the civilian airport in the central-western region of Vinnytsia on Sunday. Footage appears to show columns of smoke and fire billowing from the airport. A German-flagged ship carrying Russian oil that had been moored in the UK has moved on after workers made it clear they would not unload the cargo. Unions have urged the government to close what they believe is a loophole following a ban on Russian vessels docking in the UK, saying cargo is not covered. The German-flagged Seacod was moored near the Stanlow Oil Refinery in the north-west but moved away on Sunday, heading north. Unite said because the vessel is German flagged it doesn't fall under the UK's ban on Russian shipping. It was not clear if the oil was unloaded before unions became aware it was Russian. Staff at Ukraine's Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant continue to operate it, but management is now under the orders of the commander of the Russian forces that seized it last week, the UN nuclear watchdog said. "I'm extremely concerned," International Atomic Energy Agency chief, Rafael Grossi, said in a statement, adding that Russian forces had cut off some mobile networks and the internet, complicating communications with the plant. "Management and staff must be allowed to carry out their vital duties in stable conditions without undue external interference or pressure." Senior US officials have flown to Venezuela for rare talks with Nicols Maduro's government in an apparent bid to prise the South American country away from its Russian backers after Vladimir Putin's ***invasion*** of Ukraine. White House and state department negotiators met Maduro representatives in Venezuela's capital, Caracas, on Saturday in what was the first such encounter in years. Ukrainians fleeing the town of Irpin just outside Kyiv were caught in shelling by Russian forces on Sunday and forced to dive for cover, Reuters witnesses said. Irpin, 16 miles (25km) north-west of the capital, has seen intense fighting in recent days. Russia's military is closing in on Kyiv, home to around 3.4 million people before the ***invasion*** sparked a mass exodus of civilians. Irpin residents scurried along pavements clutching children, luggage and pets as they made their way to waiting buses and cars that would take them further from the clashes. Soldiers and fellow residents helped elderly men and women who were falling behind. Some people crouched down when explosions went off nearby, apparently from mortar rounds. Reuters reporters said they did not witness casualties in the shelling, but several news outlets said that at least three people - a woman and two children - were killed. The New York Times published a photograph of four members of a family - a mother, father and two children - lying on the ground in Irpin. The caption said they were trying to flee when a mortar struck, and that the father, being tended to by Ukrainian soldiers in the image, was the only one still with a pulse. A Texas congresswoman has called for Russia to release Brittney Griner as fears grow Vladimir Putin could use the US basketball star as a pawn during the war in Ukraine. The two-time Olympic champion has been detained by Russian customs authorities, who claim they discovered vape cartridges containing hashish oil in her luggage at an airport near Moscow. The arrest took place last month and the 31-year-old faces up to 10 years in prison if found guilty of bringing drugs into Russia. While Boris Johnson and his cabinet scramble to deliver ***measures*** that will give Vladimir Putin pause for thought in his assault on Ukraine, another - lesser known - Briton is poised to have a potentially more significant impact. Less than nine months into his tenure as the international criminal court (ICC) prosecutor, Karim Khan, a senior English barrister, announced this week that he had launched an investigation into the situation in Ukraine as there was "a reasonable basis" to believe that both alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity had been committed there. There is no guarantee charges will be brought against Putin and his acolytes but some cling to the hope that the prospect of potentially having to stand trial in the future and of being arrested in countries signed up to the ICC may make some of them think again. The French president, Emmanuel Macron, told Vladimir Putin, during a phone call on Sunday, of his concerns about a possible imminent attack on the Ukrainian city of Odesa, according to a statement from Macron's office. Macron also stated the importance of finding a negotiated settlement to the Ukraine crisis, and of protecting Ukraine's nuclear facilities. A Maidenhead rabbi who is attempting to set up a "Ukrainetransport" for families fleeing the Russian ***invasion*** says he has been overwhelmed by offers of help in the UK. Jonathan Romain, whose mother fled Nazi Germany on the Kindertransport during the second world war, has been contacted by more than 240 people offering rooms for refugees. Explaining the initiative, he tweeted: "I have always wondered how I could repay the debt I owe to the Kindertransport, who saved my then 11-year-old mother. Now is the time, which is why I am helping to co-ordinate Ukrainetransport." Anastasia Lapatina, a journalist at the Kyiv Independent, tells how Polish people are hosting Ukrainians in their apartments, driving them to places, or simply giving them money to cover basic needs. When I hopped on a train from Krakow to Przemysl, a small Polish town near the Ukrainian border, I expected to be confronted with a humanitarian catastrophe, produced by a million people fleeing their homes due to war. But what I saw was instead the best of humanity. As Russia has launched a bloody full-scale war against my country, thousands of Ukrainians have escaped by train to this railway station. There, they are met by an enormous banner in front of its entrance that reads, in bothPolish and Ukrainian: "You are safe here." Inside, dozens of Polish volunteers provide Ukrainian refugees with "everything for free", as another sign says - food, water, clothes, phones with prepaid plans, accommodation, legal advice. Ukraine's prime minister, Denys Shmyhal, said he had signed a formal request to foreign governments, including the United States, for termination of Russia and Belarus's memberships of the International Monetary Fund and World Bank. "These two countries violated their obligations and directed their policies towards war," he said in a statement. British prime minister Boris Johnson told Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelenskiy he would work with international allies to obtain more defensive military equipment to help with the conflict in Ukraine. "The leaders discussed the urgent needs of the Ukrainian Armed Forces and the prime minister undertook to work with partners to provide further defensive equipment," said a readout of a call between the two leaders provided by Johnson's office. How can we expect the Tory party to wean Britain off Russian wealth and power, when they got us hooked in the first place, writes Guardian columnist John Harris. In some of London's most exclusive neighbourhoods, you can suddenly sense the kind of unease that wealth usually keeps at bay. As the government talks up its determination to crack down on Russian oligarchs, a much wider shift may be afoot. On Friday the Financial Times quoted the chair of Aylesford International, a Chelsea estate agent whose current offerings include a four-bedroom apartment in Cadogan Square, SW3, going for the best part of £12m. "The severity of these sanctions is the beginning of a new world, a new market," he said. "I don't think you can hide any more." Explosions can be heard as journalists and Ukrainians are filmed amid heavy shelling in town of Irpin, near Kyiv. The Ukrainian military helped residents escape as Russian troops advanced towards the capital. British MPs are urging major banks to shut their Moscow offices, after campaigners accused them of "quietly profiting" off their Russian operations while other industries sever ties with the country. Some of the City's largest lenders including JP Morgan, Deutsche Bank, HSBC and Credit Suisse collectively employ thousands of staff who offer banking services to large companies and wealthy clients doing business in Russia. While banks have had to drop services for Russian businesses and oligarchs in line with EU, US and UK sanctions, MPs said lenders had a moral duty to exit the country to put further financial pressure on Moscow as the Russian military continues to assault Ukraine. In conflict, where information is everything, what is striking about the war in Ukraine is not what is known but the very large areas of unknowns. And even as commentators have picked over and analysed everything that is known about the Russian military's operations and performance in Ukraine in an effort to predict the trajectory of the conflict, it's what is poorly understood that may yet be more significant still. One issue that has come under the spotlight is the rate of losses of soldiers and equipment on the Russian side in the week and a half so far of fighting. In that period, images of dead and captured Russian soldiers and destroyed or abandoned equipment have become commonplace as it has become clear that Russian forces have lost everything from aircraft to main battle tanks and even whole convoys. But attrition is not a one way street, and what is far less clear is the level of losses sustained by Ukrainian forces, with no equivalent social media avalanche from the Russian side parading this, and Ukraine understandably not wanting to advertise its losses. Ukrainian engineers were scrambled to repair a gas pipeline damaged by Russian forces, halting supplies to parts of south-eastern Ukraine, the Donetsk region governor Pavlo Kyrylenko said. Engineers had shut down the pipe to prevent gas from leaking, he said, adding that gas flow downstream was now dropping and would stop completely later in the day. Kyrylenko said that every location between the town of Vuhledar in the Donetsk region and the port of Berdyansk would be left without gas while the damage was repaired. The distance between the two towns is 117 km (73 miles). "We are working hard to remove this problem as quickly as possible," Kyrylenko said. Russian forces have opened fire at a protest against their occupation of the southern Ukrainian city of Nova Kakhovka, wounding five people, Ukrainian news agency Interfax Ukraine said, citing eyewitnesses. Around 2,000 people had taken to the streets of Nova Kakhovka to show their opposition to the ***invasion*** by waving Ukrainian flags and calling on Russian forces to leave, the agency reported. Similar protests were staged in other occupied areas, it said. Images have emerged showing two Ukrainian fighters getting married at a checkpoint near Kyiv. Members of the Ukrainian Territorial Defence Forces, Lesia Ivashchenko and Valerii Fylymonov, are pictured during their wedding ceremony on 6 March. A prominent member of the Brazilian right is facing calls to resign after he was exposed in leaked audio messages making a succession of callous and misogynistic remarks about Ukrainian refugees during a purportedly humanitarian mission to the recently invaded country. Arthur do Val, a São Paulo congressman and former supporter of Brazil's rightwing president, Jair Bolsonaro, made a three-day trip to the region last week, supposedly to raise awareness of the human cost of Vladimir Putin's attack. On Friday, Brazilian media published audio messages in which Do Val spoke in highly offensive terms about Ukrainian refugees. In one recording, the politician says: "I've just crossed the border on foot between Ukraine and Slovakia. Bro, I swear to you ... I've never seen anything like it in terms of beautiful girls. The refugee queue ... it's like 200 metres long or more of just total goddesses ... It's some incredible shit ... The queue outside Brazil's best nightclub ... doesn't come close to the refugee queue here." In a second excerpt Do Val says: "Let me tell you, they're easy because they're poor." Consumers will still be able to use Mastercard and Visa-branded cards for domestic transactions in Russia, the country's state-backed payments network has said, reducing the impact of the US firms' decision to pull services over the ***invasion*** of Ukraine. Russia's homegrown payments system Mir said the cardholders would still be able to access their funds, make withdrawals and domestic transfers - at least until their bank cards expire. Mir has ***processed*** most domestic payments in Russia since 2015, while foreign operators such as Visa and Mastercard continued to run international transactions. The operator - which is 100% owned by the country's central bank - was established on government orders to protect the economy against sanctions imposed over Moscow's annexation of Crimea in 2014. Tens of thousands of people have demonstrated in cities including Santiago, Vancouver, Paris and New York in support of Ukraine, demanding an end to Russia's ***invasion***. The protesters rallied on Saturday against Russian president Vladimir Putin's attack, which began on 24 February and appeared to be entering a new phase with escalating bombardment. At least 364 civilians are confirmed to have been killed in Ukraine since Russian troops invaded on 24 February, and another 759 wounded, although the true numbers are probably "considerably higher", a UN monitoring mission has said. The updated figures, relating to casualties up to 5 March, added a further 13 deaths and 52 injuries to the casualties that the monitors from the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) reported on Saturday. Police detained more than 4,300 people on Sunday at Russia-wide protests against president Vladimir Putin's ***invasion*** of Ukraine, according to an independent protest monitoring group. Thousands of protesters chanted "No to war!" and "Shame on you!", according to videos posted on social media by opposition activists and bloggers. Dozens of protesters in the Urals city of Yekaterinburg were shown being detained. One protester there was shown being beaten on the ground by police in riot gear. A mural in the city showing President Vladimir Putin was defaced. Russia's interior ministry said earlier that police had detained around 3,500 people, including 1,700 in Moscow, 750 in St Petersburg and 1,061 in other cities. The OVD-Info protest monitoring group said it had documented the detention of at least 4,366 people in 56 different cities. "The screws are being fully tightened - essentially we are witnessing military censorship," Maria Kuznetsova, OVD-Info's spokeswoman, said by telephone from Tbilisi. "We are seeing rather big protests today, even in Siberian cities where we only rarely saw such numbers of arrests." The group said police had used electric shockers on protesters and posted witness photos and videos on Telegram messenger service showing riot police beating protesters with batons and demonstrators with blood running down their faces. Memorial, Russia's most prominent human rights group, said that one of its leading activists, Oleg Orlov, was detained on the capital's Manezhnaya Square as he held a placard. Svetlana Gannushkina, another veteran rights campaigner who has been tipped as a potential Nobel prize winner, was detained in Moscow on her 80th birthday. A police van carrying a group of detainees to a police station overturned in a road traffic accident, injuring nine, six of them members of the public, city police said. The protests came after hundreds were detained at demonstrations further east, including the Siberian city of Novosibirsk and in Yekaterinburg in the Urals. Russian police on Friday said all attempts to hold demonstrations on Sunday would be "immediately suppressed", and organisers and participants would face charges. The latest detentions brought the total number of demonstrators held to more than 10,000 since 24 February, when the president, Vladimir Putin, launched an ***invasion*** of Ukraine. Despite the official crackdown on demonstrations, and protesters facing jail terms, there have been daily protests since then. On Friday, jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny urged supporters to stage protests on Sunday "on all the central squares of Russia and all the world". He has called for Russians to hold daily protests, saying they should not become a "nation of frightened cowards". BBC World News has been taken off air in Russia, the broadcaster has said. Russian authorities have been restricting access to foreign and independent media outlets, including the main BBC websites, in recent days as the ***invasion*** of Ukraine continues. On Friday, its parliament approved a law making it a criminal offence, punishable by up to 15 years in prison, to spread "fake" or "false" news about the Kremlin's war in Ukraine, prompting the BBC to temporarily suspend the work of all its news journalists and support staff in Russia. BBC World News presenter Victoria Derbyshire was the first to announce the channel's suspension. She told viewers shortly before midday on Sunday: "BBC World News, the channel you are watching if you are outside the UK right now, and which is the BBC's global television news channel, has just been taken off air in Russia." A BBC spokesperson later said BBC World News had not been available in Russia since Saturday. The spokesperson added: "We regret that our Russian audiences are being denied access to trusted and impartial news at a time when they need it most." Since the Russian ***invasion*** began last month, the broadcaster has made efforts to ensure people inside Russia and Ukraine have access to its news output. Both its Ukrainian and Russian language services are available on the dark web through the Tor network, a privacy-focused software, and the corporation has also brought back its shortwave radio service in a bid to thwart censorship attempts. The Russian foreign ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova previously accused the BBC of playing "a determined role in undermining the Russian stability and security". In the UK, broadcasting watchdog Ofcom has opened 27 investigations into the "due impartiality" of programmes broadcast on the Kremlin-backed RT news channel, formerly known as Russia Today. Here is a quick summary of the latest developments in the Russian ***invasion*** of Ukraine: The evacuation of civilians from besieged Mariupol was "halted" on Sunday for a second consecutive day. The Red Cross confirmed attempts to evacuate an estimated 200,000 people out of the city came to a halt, "underscoring the absence of a detailed and functioning agreement between the parties to the conflict". Ukraine's national guard accused Russia of continuing to shell the humanitarian corridors. The exodus from Ukraine is the fastest-growing refugee crisis in Europe since the second world war, the United Nations said. More than 1.5 million refugees have fled Ukraine in the past 10 days, and data showed Polish border guards cleared as many as 129,000 people at border crossings on Saturday, the most in a single day since the war started. Ukraine's president said Russian rockets have completely destroyed Vinnytsia regional airport. He said in a video update that eight missiles were launched against "our peaceful Vinnytsia, a town that never threatened Russia in any way", and renewed his demand that western powers enforce a no-fly zone over Ukraine to prevent more Russian attacks. Putin said the conflict will only stop if Ukraine stops fighting and Russia's demands are met. In a phone conversation with the Turkish president, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Putin also said Ukraine's negotiators should take a more "constructive" approach in talks with Moscow to take into account the reality on the ground. France has accused the UK of a "lack of humanity" over Ukrainian refugees. The French interior minister, Gérald Darmanin, said 150 Ukrainian refugees have been turned away at Calais border crossings in recent days and told to obtain visas at UK consulates in Paris. He called on the British government to set up a proper consular service in Calais, adding that its response so far was "completely unsuitable". Britain's deputy prime minister, Dominic Raab, said it may take years for Putin to be defeated in Ukraine and people who thought the crisis could be resolved in days were "deluding themselves". Pope Francis said the Ukraine conflict is "not a military operation but a war" in his weekly address to crowds gathered in St Peter's Square. However, he did not publicly condemn Russia by name for its ***invasion***. One of the last remaining independent media outlets in Russia, Mediazona, said it has been blocked by authorities for its reporting on the ***invasion*** of Ukraine. Earlier this week, Ekho Moskvy radio station and the Dozhd TV channel - two of Russia's landmark liberal media outlets - were either dissolved or suspended operations. The Russian president, Vladimir Putin, has accused Ukrainian radicals for an incident on 3 March at the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant in Ukraine. "Vladimir Putin informed about the provocation by Ukrainian radicals in the area of the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant," the Kremlin said. "The radiation levels are normal." Putin also accused Ukraine of preventing civilians from leaving Mariupol. Ukraine's envoy to the United States has called on president Joe Biden's administration to impose tougher sanctions on Moscow and to step up arms supplies to Kyiv, saying Russia should be treated "as a terrorist state." Ambassador Oksana Markarova, in an interview on Fox News on Sunday, repeated charges that Russia is committing war crimes by targeting civilians, hospitals and schools, and said Ukraine is working with the US and other countries to collect evidence. "This is a terrorist state and we should treat Russia as a terrorist state," Markarova said. She renewed a plea for the US to intensify sanctions against Russia, including imposing a full embargo on imports of Russian oil and gas, and to increase shipments of anti-aircraft systems and other weaponry to Ukraine. "We are thankful for the sanctions that have been implemented by the United States," she said. "But since Russia is not changing their behaviour, they escalated actually, they are killing us more and more, the sanctions should toughen up." The White House is weighing cutting imports of Russian oil and gas, but is wary about a spike in gasoline prices that would fuel decades-high inflation. Halting Russia's ***invasion*** is vital to preventing the conflict from spreading beyond Ukraine, Markarova said. "Every large war in the past started locally," she said. "We know from the past that all of them could have been stopped locally." Ukraine, Markarova said, will respond "to any peace talks." The United States has seen "very credible reports" of deliberate attacks on civilians in Ukraine, US secretary of state Antony Blinken has said, adding that Washington was documenting these reports to support appropriate organisations in their potential war crimes investigation. Blinken told CNN's State of the Union show: We've seen very credible reports of deliberate attacks on civilians which would constitute a war crime. We've seen very credible reports about the use of certain weapons. What we're doing right now is documenting all of this, putting this all together, looking at it and making sure that as people and the appropriate organisations and institutions investigate whether war crimes have been or are being committed that we can support whatever they are doing. On Friday, the US embassy in Ukraine said in a tweet that attacking a nuclear plant is a war crime. after Russian ***invasion*** forces seized Europe's biggest nuclear power plant in heavy fighting in southeastern Ukraine, triggering global alarm. The State Department sent a message to all US embassies in Europe telling them not to retweet the post, according to CNN, which said it reviewed the message. Blinken did not address the embassy's tweet and the State Department declined to comment on whether the tweet reflects the overall position of the US government on the issue, Reuters reported. Images of cluster bombs and artillery strikes on Ukrainian cities this week have prompted the world's top war crimes prosecutor to launch an investigation, with the support of dozens of nations opposed to Russia's ***invasion***. In an CNN interview, European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen said an investigation is needed into whether Russia is committing war crimes in Ukraine. "I think there needs to be a strong and clear investigation on this question," von der Leyen said. Ukraine's state-run railway operator is ready to organise ***agricultural*** exports by rail as a matter of urgency, it said on Sunday, after closure of the country's Black Sea ports because of the military ***invasion*** by Russia. A major global ***agricultural*** producer and exporter, Ukraine has historically exported its grain, vegetable oils and other food products by ship. "This situation causes problems not only for Ukraine. The share of Ukrainian grain on the world market is 11%, the share of sunflower oil is 55%," Ukrainian Railways said on social media. "To prevent the global food crisis and save Ukrainian exports, Ukrainian Railways is ready to organise ***agricultural*** products delivery by rail urgently." Ukrainian Railways said that it may deliver grain to borders with Romania, Hungary, Slovakia and Poland, from where the grain can be delivered to ports and logistics hubs of European countries. The safe passage of civilians from Ukraine's besieged eastern port city of Mariupol was "halted" on Sunday for a second consecutive day, the International Committee of the Red Cross said. In a statement, the ICRS said: Amid devastating scenes of human suffering in Mariupol, a second attempt today to start evacuating an estimated 200,000 people out of the city came to a halt. The failed attempts yesterday and today underscore the absence of a detailed and functioning agreement between the parties to the conflict. "The ICRC is not and cannot in any way be the guarantor of a ceasefire agreement between the parties or of its implementation," the body added, criticising the lack of a proper agreement between the warring parties to protect civilian lives amid ceasefire violations. "For the safe passage of civilians to happen with the required levels of trust, the parties should agree between themselves not just in principle but also on the details and parameters" of an evacuation accord, the ICRC added, stressing its neutrality. It underlined its readiness "to help facilitate further attempts if the parties reach a detailed agreement, which is for the parties alone to implement and respect". Mariupol city council said the evacuation was not possible due to Russian shelling. "It is extremely dangerous to take people out under such conditions," the city council said in an online statement. The UK's chief of the defence staff has slapped down Liz Truss's suggestion that Britons could travel to Ukraine to take up arms in the war against Russia, saying doing so would be illegal. Sir Tony Radakin urged people not to rush towards "the sound of gunfire" and stressed there were many other ways that people in the UK could support those resisting the advancement of Vladimir Putin's troops. The unusually direct comment will be viewed as a strict admonishment of the foreign secretary's suggestion, which had already been rejected by the defence secretary, Ben Wallace. Last week, Truss was quizzed about the Ukrainian president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy's call for anyone who wanted to "join the defence of security in Europe" to "stand shoulder to shoulder with Ukrainians against the invaders". Asked whether Britons should venture out to fight, she said: "I do support that, and of course that is something that people can make their own decisions about." The exiled Belarus opposition leader, Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, said the country's leader had in effect ceded control of Belarus to the Kremlin. President Alexander Lukashenko denies that his armed forces are operating in Ukraine or that he plans to enter the war on Russia's side. But Belarus's military is now indirectly under Kremlin control, Tsikhanouskaya said in an interview with the Guardian. "It seems to us that Lukashenko is not controlling our military any more, the only thing he is controlling is repression against the Belarusian people," she said. "We see signs of the military occupation of Belarus." The Ukrainian president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, said Russian rockets had completely destroyed the civilian airport of the central-western region capital of Vinnytsia on Sunday. He said in a video update that eight missiles were launched against "our peaceful Vinnytsia, a town that never threatened Russia in any way". He described the attack as "brutal and cynical" and said it has left the airport "completely destroyed". Russian attacks "continue to destroy our infrastructure - our lives", he said. Several cities and airbases in Ukraine have been bombed, shelled or hit with ballistic missiles since Russia launched its ***invasion***. But Vinnytsia is in the western area of central Ukraine, far from the Russia and Belarus borders, in an area that has seen fewer such strikes. Zelensky took the opportunity to renew his demand that Western powers enforce a no-fly zone over Ukraine to prevent more Russian attacks. "We repeat every day: close the sky over Ukraine. Close for all Russian missiles, for Russian combat aircraft, for all their terrorists," he said. "If you don't, if you don't give us at least planes so we can protect ourselves, there's only one thing to conclude; you want us to be killed very slowly." One of the last remaining independent media outlets in Russia, Mediazona, said it has been blocked by authorities for its reporting on Moscow's ***invasion*** of Ukraine. "Roskomnadzor began blocking Mediazona," the outlet said in a statement, referring to Russia's communications regulator. "Because we cover honestly what is happening in Ukraine and call the ***invasion*** an ***invasion***, and the war a war," it said. The statement added that Russia has in recent days introduced "military censorship and there are almost no independent media left in the country." The outlet's publisher, Pyotr Verzilov, said they would "continue to work anyway and tell you about the war". Since president Vladimir Putin's ***invasion*** of Ukraine, authorities have ramped up an ***unprecedented*** crackdown on the already embattled media. Earlier this week, Ekho Moskvy radio station and the Dozhd TV channel - two of Russia's landmark liberal media outlets - were either dissolved or suspended operations. Dozens of media workers and independent outlets - including Dozhd - have already been designated "foreign agents" by authorities, and many reporters and editors have been forced to leave the country. The independent newspaper Novaya Gazeta, whose editor-in-chief, Dmitry Muratov, was awarded the Nobel peace prize in 2021, said it would not cover the conflict, citing new legislation on reporting on the military. Mediazona is an independent online publication which writes about court cases and abuses of prisoners' rights, among other subjects. The outlet was founded in 2014 by Pussy Riot members Nadezhda Tolokonnikova and Maria Alyokhina after they served prison time for mocking Putin in church. Pro-Russian separatists and Ukraine's national guard accused each other of failing to establish a humanitarian corridor out of the Ukrainian city of Mariupol on Sunday, the second time the sides have attempted to arrange it. Ukraine 24 television showed a fighter of the Azov Regiment (a grouping which uses Nazi-linked symbols and has had many members who have professed far-right extremist views) of the national guard who said Russian and pro-Russian forces that had encircled the port city of about 400,000 continued shelling the areas that were meant to be safe. The Interfax news agency cited an official of the Donetsk separatist administration who accused the Ukrainian forces of failing to observe the limited ceasefire. The separatist official said only about 300 people have left the city. Ukrainian authorities have earlier said they planned to evacuate over 200,000 people from Mariupol. It may take years for Vladimir Putin to be defeated in his conquest of Ukraine, Britain's deputy prime minister has admitted, as Labour accused the government of moving too slowly over sanctions. Dominic Raab said people who thought the crisis could be resolved in days were "deluding themselves" and that Nato would need to "show some strategic stamina" in its bid to force the Russian army to retreat. Raab said Putin was resorting to "ever more brutal tactics to try and wrest back the initiative" given the military campaign run from Moscow had "stuttered". Raab, who is also the justice secretary, told the BBC's Sunday Morning programme: I think the bottom line is none of the major cities have yet fallen. But I think we ought to be under no doubt that our mission with our allies is to ensure Putin fails in Ukraine, and it's going to take some time. We're talking about months if not years, and therefore we'll have to show some strategic stamina because this is not going to be over in days. Vladimir Putin has said Russia's military operation would only be halted if Kyiv stopped resisting and fulfilled all of the Kremlin's demands. Putin told Turkish president Tayyip Erdogan by telephone that Ukraine's negotiators should take a more "constructive" approach in talks with Moscow to take into account the reality on the ground. Putin, whose comments were published in a Kremlin readout of the call, said his "special operation" in Ukraine was going according to plan and to schedule. "It was underlined that the suspension of the special operation is only possible if Kyiv stops military operations and carries out well-known Russian demands," the Kremlin said. Russia calls its actions in its former Soviet neighbour a "special operation" that seeks to destroy Ukraine's military capabilities, purge the country of what it says are nationalists and make it a neutral state. The Kremlin leader told Erdogan that Moscow was open to dialogue with the Ukrainian authorities, but that he hoped Ukrainian negotiators would take a more constructive approach at the next round of talks. "Attention was drawn to the futility of any attempts to drag out the negotiation ***process***, which is being used by the Ukrainian security forces to regroup their forces and resources," the Kremlin said "It is hoped that during the planned next round of negotiations, Ukraine's representatives will show a more constructive approach, fully taking into account the emerging realities." Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelenskiy has appealed directly to Russians to take to the streets in protest against the Kremlin's ***invasion*** of his country or risk their own poverty and repression. Since last week, thousands of people in Russia have been detained for protesting against the ***invasion*** of Ukraine, what the Russian authorities call a "special military operation", that began on 24 February. Russians are now bracing for an uncertain and isolated future after international sanctions plunged the economy into crisis and authorities cracked down on independent media and restricted access to Facebook and other social media sites. "Citizens of Russia - for you, this is a struggle not only for peace in Ukraine, this is a fight for your country," Zelenskiy said in a televised address, switching from Ukrainian to Russian. "If you keep silent now, only your poverty will speak for you later. And only repression will answer," he said. All forms of protest in Russia have essentially become illegal since the onset of the coronavirus pandemic for what authorities say are safety reasons. Like the Ukrainian people, Russians now face a choice "between life and slavery," Zelenskiy said. Turkish president Tayyip Erdogan urged his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin to declare a ceasefire in Ukraine, open humanitarian corridors and sign a peace agreement, his office said. NATO member Turkey shares a maritime border with Russia and Ukraine in the Black Sea and has good ties with both. Ankara has called Russia's ***invasion*** unacceptable and offered to host talks, but has opposed sanctions on Moscow. In a statement after a one-hour phone call, the Turkish presidency said Erdogan told Putin that Turkey was ready to contribute to a peaceful resolution of the conflict. "President Erdogan, who said an immediate ceasefire will not only ease humanitarian concerns in the region but also give the search for a political solution an opportunity, renewed his call of 'let's pave the way for peace together'," his office said. "Erdogan emphasised the importance of taking urgent steps to achieve a ceasefire, open humanitarian corridors and sign a peace agreement." The two leaders also discussed bilateral ties, it said. Erdogan, who has called Putin a "friend", had last spoken to the Russian leader on 23 February, a day before Russia launched its ***invasion***. The call makes Erdogan the third NATO leader to speak to Putin since his offensive, following the leaders of Germany and France. Staff at an independent Russian TV station, Dozhd (TV Rain), walked out live on air while declaring 'No to war' after being shut down over their coverage of the Ukraine ***invasion***. The decade-long defiance of Dozhd was silenced, at least for a while, by a brutal new law, passed unanimously in the Russian parliament, which bans news organisations from reporting anything about the war except state-approved press releases. Journalists and media owners who contravene the new legislation could be jailed for up to 15 years. Italian luxury label Prada has announced it is suspending retail sales in Russia following the ***invasion*** of Ukraine. Prada is following in the footsteps of other multinationals and luxury brands, including the French giants LVMH, Hermes and Chanel. "The Prada Group suspends its retail operations in Russia," the firm said on its Linkedin page, adding that the move was effective from Saturday. "Our primary concern is for all colleagues and their families affected by the tragedy in Ukraine, and we will continue to support them," Prada said. Volunteers in Ukraine are in the ***process*** of removing, covering and wrapping statues and windows on many of the country's historically important buildings for fear of damage. Kyiv Post reports this statue of Jesus Christ is being stored in a bunker for safety, for the first time since the second world war. More than 430,000 people trapped in the port city of Mariupol by encircling Russian forces are nervously preparing to evacuate after a ceasefire was announced, a day after a similar plan fell apart amid accusations that Moscow had failed to respect the agreement. Local authorities in the south-eastern Ukrainian city said an evacuation supervised by the Red Cross would begin at noon local time (10am GMT) during a nine-hour cessation in Russian attacks. Attempts to get residents out of the city failed on Saturday after Ukrainian authorities claimed the Russians reneged on an agreement to stop their shelling. The city council was forced to tell residents to return to shelters in the city. The head of the military in the Russian-controlled territory Donetsk in eastern Ukraine said safe-passage corridors for residents in the besieged city of Volnovakha would also reopen Sunday. He did not say for how long nor whether a ceasefire would accompany that evacuation. Ukraine's deputy prime minister, Olha Stefanishyna, said she did not trust Russia's word but hoped that the Red Cross would step up to secure the safety of Ukrainian citizens. Pope Francis has rejected Russia's assertion that it is carrying out a "a special military operation" in Ukraine, saying the country was being battered by a war. "In Ukraine rivers of blood and tears are flowing. This is not only a military operation but a war which is leading to death, destruction and misery," the pope said in his weekly address to crowds gathered in St. Peter's Square. However, as has been the case throughout the 11-day conflict, the pope did not publicly condemn Russia by name for its ***invasion***. Instead, he repeated his appeal for peace, the creation of humanitarian corridors and a return to negotiations. "In that martyred country the need for humanitarian assistance is growing by the hour," the pope said. "Let common sense prevail, let us return to the respect of international law." There were many more people than normal gathered in front of St. Peter's Basilica for the pope's Sunday appearance, with some holding aloft multi-coloured peace flags as well as the blue and yellow flag of Ukraine. "The Holy See is willing to do all everything to put itself at the service of peace," the pope said, adding that two Roman Catholic cardinals had gone to Ukraine to help those in need. "War is madness, please stop," the pope said. Andriy Yurash, Ukraine's ambassador to the Vatican, praised the pope for calling the conflict a war. "I am very, very happy that he said that," he told Reuters in St. Peter's Square shortly after the pope ended his address. "Even if the pope did not say the word 'Russia', everyone in the world knows who the aggressor that invaded us is and who started this unprovoked war." Israel will continue trying to mediate between Russia and Ukraine even if success seems unlikely, prime minister Naftali Bennett said on Sunday after returning from surprise talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin. Ukraine has requested that Israel serve as intermediary, citing the Bennett government's good relations with both Kyiv and Moscow. Bennett's office said he spoke three times over the weekend with Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelenskiy. In televised remarks to his cabinet, Bennett gave no details on his three-hour Kremlin meeting with Putin on Saturday, saying only that it had "the blessing and encouragement of all parties" - an allusion to the United States, among other powers. Bennett and Putin had discussed the mediation idea by phone last week. Bennett said: We will continue to assist wherever this is requested, even if the chances are not great. The moment there is even a small opening, and we have the access to all sides and the capability, I see it as a moral duty to make every attempt. Israel has condemned the Russian ***invasion*** of Ukraine, expressed solidarity with Kyiv and sent humanitarian aid. But Bennett has not met Ukrainian requests for military assistance and has kept channels open to Russia, with which Israel coordinates operations against Iranian deployments in Syria. Israeli communications minister, Yoaz Hendel, said he had declined Ukrainian requests to ban nine Russian media outlets on the grounds they were propagandising. "These (broadcasters) did not meet any kind of threshold that would necessitate their blocking. I would like to remind you that, in a democracy, blocking media channels is a very dramatic event," Hendel told reporters. Interior minister Ayelet Shaked said Israel was bracing for a "very, very big wave" of immigration sparked by the conflict. This could entail taking in more than 200,000 Ukrainians who are Jewish or have Jewish family links and more than 600,000 Russians in the same categories, she said. In what local media have cast as a bid to prevent Russian oligarchs from fleeing to Israel to evade sanctions, the Israel Airports Authority said it had received instructions not to allow private jets to park for more than 24 hours. UK universities say that although their priority must be supporting their Ukrainian students, they are also reaching out to Russian students who may be feeling alone but unable to ask for help. Paul Nightingale, professor of strategy at Sussex's University's Science Policy Research Unit, and formerly head of special projects at the government's Economic and Social Research Council, said all universities should "certainly be kicking out the children of oligarchs and their extended families". But, he said: "It is stupid to say we should expel all Russian students. The ones in the UK are mostly anti-Putin. We have to support the people who will turn Russia around in the future." Sanctions will take time and 'Ukraine fatigue' could blunt the west's resolve as the cost of living crisis deepens, writes the Guardian's economics editor, Larry Elliott. Sanctions can inflict pain without leading to a change of leadership or a policy shift. Iran suffered a 20% reduction in potential output in the two years following the introduction of sanctions over its nuclear programme but didn't buckle. So, 10 days into the ***invasion***, the west has a big decision to make. Does it deploy the biggest economic weapon it has left: adding Russia's oil and gas exports to the sanctions list? France's interior minister has accused the British government of showing a "lack of humanity" when it comes to helping the Ukrainian refugees who have fled the Russian ***invasion*** and are now waiting in Calais for permission to join their families in the UK. Hundreds of Ukrainians have come to the northern French port in the last few days in the hope of crossing the Channel so they can be with relatives who are already established in the UK. According to the French interior minister, Gérald Darmanin, 400 Ukrainian refugees have presented themselves at Calais border crossings in recent days - only for 150 of them to be told to go away and obtain visas at UK consulates in Paris or Brussels. In a letter to the UK home secretary, Priti Patel, Darmanin called on the British government to set up a proper consular service in Calais, adding that its response so far was "completely unsuitable" and showed a "lack of humanity" towards refugees who were often "in distress". In the letter, seen by the Agence France-Presse news agency, Darmanin wrote: "It is imperative that your consular representation - ***exceptionally*** and for the duration of this crisis - is able to issue visas for family reunification on the spot in Calais." The minister said it was "incomprehensible" that the UK was able to provide such services on the ground in Poland on the Ukrainian border but could not do so in the its closest neighbour, France. Darmanin told French radio he had contacted Patel twice requesting that the UK set up a consulate in Calais. The United States is considering sending planes to Poland if Warsaw decided to send fighter jets to Ukraine, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on a visit to Moldova on Sunday. He said: We are looking actively now at the question of airplanes that Poland may provide to Ukraine and looking at how we might be able to backfill should Poland decide to supply those planes. I can't speak to a timeline but I can just say we're looking at it very, very actively. The visit came after Blinken visited NATO-member Poland on Saturday as the alliance bolsters its eastern flank in response to Russia's ***invasion*** of Ukraine. Here is a first-hand account of the ***invasion*** of the Ukrainian city last week, as witnessed by two female journalists. Tuesday 1 March The first day of spring. It is snowing. We are sleeping in our clothes with our anxiety backpacks nearby. At night there was bombing again in the suburbs. I sleep only four hours. Wednesday 2 March Total silence. Everyone is staying at home, reading the news. The city council building was shelled at night. Some areas are without electricity and water. Nineteen civilians were killed. More than 1.5m refugees have fled Ukraine in the past 10 days in the fastest-growing refugee crisis in Europe since the second world war, the United Nations has said. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi, tweeted: "More than 1.5 million refugees from Ukraine have crossed into neighbouring countries in 10 days - the fastest growing refugee crisis in Europe since World War II." Record numbers of refugees headed into Poland from Ukraine with the total number expected to surpass one million people later on Sunday. Fresh data shows Polish border guards cleared as many as 129,000 people at border crossings on Saturday, the most in a single day since the war started, bringing the total to 922,400. At the Medyka crossing, the busiest along Poland's roughly 500km (310 mile) border with Ukraine, refugees streamed past boxes of clothes laid out along a path from the border crossing while Scouts handed out hot tea, food and toiletries. Some carried babies, others dogs and cats wrapped in blankets. Many joined a queue for buses to the nearby town Przemysl where friends, relatives and volunteers waited to take them to other cities in Poland and beyond. Poland's Ukrainian community of around 1.5m is the region's largest and makes the country a major destination point for refugees, though fleeing Ukrainians also cross to safety through Slovakia, Hungary and northern Romania. Officials said many of the refugees who have arrived so far had friends and places to go to but the head of the UN refugee agency told Reuters a growing tide of refugees would put pressure on governments to absorb them. "Frankly these governments have done very well in their initial response," Grandi said. "They were well prepared. But if the numbers continue to grow it will be a problem." Romania has taken in 227,446 Ukrainians, including 31,628 who arrived on Saturday, border police data showed. More than 163,000 entered Hungary since 24 February. Here is a selection of new images coming in to our picture desk this morning. Ukraine's president Volodymyr Zelensky has said Russian forces are preparing to shell Odessa, a historic port city on the Black Sea coast. "They are preparing to bomb Odessa. Odessa!" he said in a video address. Russians have always come to Odessa. They have always felt only warmth in Odessa. Only sincerity. And now what? Bombs against Odessa? Artillery against Odessa? Missiles against Odessa? It will be a war crime. It will be a historical crime. Russian forces have made progress in southern Ukraine since their 24 February ***invasion***, overrunning the city of Kherson and besieging the port of Mariupol, but Odessa has so far been largely spared. Almost a million people live in Odessa, a cosmopolitan harbour on Ukraine's southern coast with both Ukrainian and Russian speakers and Bulgarian and Jewish minorities. The Russian advance from occupied Crimea has in part turned east to link up with Russian-backed separatists and to seize the Azov Sea port of Mariupol. But another part of the force has also headed west to Kherson, on the road towards Odessa. The city is also close to the Moldovan border and the Russian-occupied region of Transnistria. During the first 11 days of the conflict, Russian forces from Belarus have also advanced on the capital Kyiv from the northwest and northeast, while another group bombarded the northern city of Kharkiv. Labour leader Keir Starmer said he was "very concerned" about reports surrounding the appointment of media mogul Lord Evgeny Lebedev to the House of Lords. The Sunday Times reported [paywall] British intelligence officials withdrew their assessment that giving a peerage to Lord Lebedev posed a national security risk after Boris Johnson intervened. Starmer told the BBC's Sunday Morning programme: I'm very concerned about that story, because it goes to the heart of national security and there's at least the suggestion that the government and the prime minister were warned that there was a national security risk in this particular appointment. I think, in the circumstances, what the appropriate thing is for the Intelligence and Security Committee, which is a cross-party committee in Parliament that can have access to confidential material - I think this case should be referred to that committee so they can look into this story. This allegation - which is very serious because, of course, it's a matter of national security - I hope the Government will answer it today. The US secretary of state Antony Blinken briefly crossed into Ukraine after meeting with the country's foreign minister, Dmytro Kuleba. The pair met at the border with Poland to discuss western efforts to support Ukraine after Russia invaded 10 days ago. Olha Stefanishyna said despite agreements over ceasefires, Ukrainians would "never trust" what the Russians say. The Ukrainian Deputy Prime Minister told the BBC's Sunday Morning programme every Ukrainian citizen and politician "knows the Russian playbook by heart". Stefanishyna hit out at Western leaders who refused to impose a no-fly zone over her country, PA Media reported. She said: My president was as precise as it is possible and we absolutely support from the bottom of his, of our, hearts [in] everything he says because this is what we feel. It is very upsetting when the group of 30 leaders or ministers or even ambassadors are... gathering itself in a fancy cabinet, with the fancy furniture, and talking about the fancy thing, knowing that Ukraine was over this table for all of [these] years sitting in this fancy offices. But now knowing that we can't be there because we are operating under the bombarding of [the] Russian Federation and knowing that their intelligence also confirms that further severe attacks on the civil population - including carpet bombarding of the cities, which are basically happening these days already in some cities - will be taking place. Volunteers at a railway station in Lviv in western Ukraine are doing all they can to help refugees flee the violence of Putin's ***invasion*** and reach safety. Lviv is less than 50 miles from the Polish border and thousands of people have been arriving daily from the rest of country. The Guardian spent the day with one volunteer, Sergyi Mykolaiv. British deputy prime minister Dominic Raab described talk of an increased threat of Russia using nuclear weapons in its ***invasion*** of Ukraine as rhetoric and brinkmanship. "I think its rhetoric and brinkmanship," he told Sky News when asked about a possible nuclear escalation by the Kremlin. "[Putin's] got a track record as long as anyone's arm of misinformation and propaganda... this is a distraction from what the real issues are at hand - which is that it's an illegal ***invasion*** and it is not going according to plan." He also again ruled out imposing a no-fly zone over Ukraine, saying this would lead to a "massive escalation" and would feed into the Russian president's narrative. He said: We're not going to get ourselves into a direct military conflict with Putin because that would be a massive escalation, but also that feeds Putin's narrative. Putin wants to say that he's actually in a struggle with the west - he's not. He called no-fly zones "very difficult, very challenging" and said "we will do everything short of that to support Ukrainians". More than 2,034 people were detained at anti-war protests on Sunday in cities across Russia, according to an independent Russian-based protest monitor. The OVD-Info protest monitoring group said people were detained at protests including in the Russian Pacific port city of Vladivostok and the Siberian city of Irkutsk. Opposition activists posted videos showing protests in other cities. Reuters was not able to independently verify the information. Reuters was unable to reach spokespeople for the police in either city, or Russia's interior ministry The interior ministry warned on Saturday that any attempt to hold unauthorised protests would be prevented and the organisers held to account. A video posted on social media showed a protester on a square in the far eastern city of Khabarovsk shouting: "No to war - how are you not ashamed" before two policemen detained him. Police used loudspeakers to tell a small group of protesters in Khabarovsk: "Respected citizens, you are taking part in an unsanctioned public event. We demand you disperse." Reuters was not able to independently verify the post. Jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny had called for protests on Sunday across Russia and the rest of the world against Russia's ***invasion*** of Ukraine. About 2,000 people attended an anti-war protest in Kazakhstan's biggest city Almaty, videos posted on social media showed. Reuters was unable to independently verify the posts. The crowd shouted slogans such as "No to war" and "Putin is a dickhead", while waving Ukrainian flags. Activists put blue and yellow balloons in the hand of a Lenin statue towering over the small square where the rally took place. The city council of Mariupol has said a ceasefire will be observed between 10am and 9pm local time today. However, the evacuation of civilians was postponed yesterday because Russian forces encircling the city were not respecting an agreed ceasefire. In a statement, the city council had asked residents to return to shelters in the city and await further information on evacuation. In a televised broadcast, Ukrainian presidential adviser Oleksiy Arestovych said Russia was not observing an agreed ceasefire in some areas, preventing a joint plan to allow civilians to evacuate. It comes as the landmine clearance charity The HALO Trust tweeted that it had restored communications with one of its supervisors today. They said: No communication, no water, no electricity, no food in stores.# Ships, artillery, planes are shooting. The population is already on the edge. But we're holding on. I have no words, this is a living hell. In an address to Ukrainians on Sunday morning, President Volodymyr Zelenskiy praised the many forms of resistance people have chosen to oppose the Russian ***invasion*** and called his country "a superpower of spirit." The country, he said, was performing at "the maximum of possibilities," with soldiers fighting but also ordinary people defending towns, hospitals and fire departments. He encouraged residents of occupied areas to protest, if possible. Ten days into the war, he said, Ukraine had united with "millions of people, which became one whole." Meanwhile, the Associated Press reported that he made a "desperate" plea to American lawmakers yesterday for the United States to help get more warplanes to his military. Zelenskiy opened the private video call with US lawmakers by telling them this may be the last time they see him alive. "President Zelenskiy made a desperate plea," said Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer. He said Zelenskiy wants the US to facilitate the transfer of planes from Eastern European allies. "I will do all I can to help the administration to facilitate their transfer," Schumer said. The US is considering sending American-made F-16s as backfill to former Soviet bloc countries in Eastern Europe that are now members of NATO. They, in turn, would send Ukraine their own Soviet-era MiGs, which Ukrainian pilots are trained to fly. Russia struck and disabled Ukraine's Starokostiantyniv military air base with long-range high-precision weapons, Russia's defence ministry claimed on Sunday. "The Russia armed forces continue to strike the military infrastructure of Ukraine," Russian defence ministry spokesman Igor Konashenkov said. "On the morning of 6 March, strikes were carried out by high-precision long-range weapons. The Ukrainian air force base near Starokostiantyniv was disabled." He said a Ukrainian-controlled S-300 missile system had also been destroyed by Russian rocket forces. He added that Russia had downed 10 Ukrainian planes and helicopters over the past 24 hours. I'm Tom Ambrose and I'll be bringing you all the latest news over the next two hours. Before I hand over to my colleague, Tom Ambrose, here is a quick snap of events from the past few hours. A more detailed summary of events can be found here. An anti-war rally appears to be underway in Almaty, Kazakhstan according to a slew of social media posts this morning. The World Health Organization has confirmed "several" attacks on health care centres in Ukraine which resulted in multiple deaths and injuries, the agency's chief has said. South Korea will implement export controls against Belarus for "effectively supporting the Russian ***invasion*** of Ukraine", Seoul's foreign ministry said on Sunday, Reuters reports. The Ukrainian military is reporting that Russia has lost more than 11,000 military personnel since the ***invasion*** began. Russian forces are targeting populated areas in Ukraine but the strength of resistance has slowed the Russian advance, British military intelligence reveals. Ukraine's emergency services are reporting casualties from a Russian missile strike which hit residential homes in the Zhytomyr region, about 140km north-west of Kyiv. The Ukrainian military released its operational report as of 6am local time, noting its forces have been "fighting fierce battles to maintain certain borders". An anti-war rally appears to be underway in Almaty, Kazakhstan according to a slew of social media posts this morning. Almaty-based journalist for The Economist, Joanna Lillis, posted a series of photos from the protest alongside the caption: "Lenin decked out in blue and yellow at anti-war rally in Almaty Kazakhstan - 'no to bloody dictators' reads the placard." The World Health Organization has confirmed "several" attacks on health care centres in Ukraine which resulted in multiple deaths and injuries, the agency's chief has said. Additional reports are being investigated, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said in a post to Twitter on Sunday. "Attacks on healthcare facilities or workers breach medical neutrality and are violations of international humanitarian law," he added. South Korea will implement export controls against Belarus for "effectively supporting the Russian ***invasion*** of Ukraine", Seoul's foreign ministry said on Sunday. The ministry did not detail what ***measures*** would be taken, but said they will be applied in a similar way to moves already taken by South Korea against Russia, Reuters reports. It condemned Moscow as having launched an "armed ***invasion***" of Ukraine. South Korea said last month it would tighten export controls against Russia by banning shipments of strategic items and join Western countries' moves to block some Russian banks from the Swift international payments system. "The Korean government decided today to implement export control ***measures*** against Belarus as well, judging that Belarus is effectively supporting the Russian ***invasion*** of Ukraine," the ministry said in a statement. The Ukrainian military is reporting that Russia has suffered losses of more than 11,000 military personnel since the ***invasion*** began. A total of 285 Russian tanks and 985 armoured combat vehicles were also reported to have been destroyed as well as 109 artillery systems, 44 aircraft and 48 helicopters, according to a report by the general staff of the armed forces of Ukraine and published to the website of the Ukrainian ministry of defence. "Just yesterday, more than 650 wounded members of the Russian occupation forces were taken to the central city hospital in the village of Bryanka, Luhansk region," the report adds. "All of them are mostly in serious condition... after providing first aid, they were escorted by an armed convoy from the regular forces of the Russian armed forces to the line of combat to introduce further hostilities as 'cannon fodder'. It is known that the personnel of the 6th separate motorised rifle regiment is frightened and demoralised, looking for ways to desertion." Russian forces are targeting populated areas in Ukraine but the strength of resistance has slowed the Russian advance, British military intelligence reveals. In its daily intelligence report, the UK's ministry of defence said the strength of Ukraine's resistance continues to surprise Russia, which has responded by targeting cities including Kharkiv, Chirnihiv and Mariupol. The scale and strength of Ukrainian resistance continue to surprise Russia. [Russia] has responded by targeting populated areas in multiple locations, including Kharkiv, Chernihiv and Mariupol. This is likely to represent an effort to break Ukrainian morale. Russia has previously used similar tactics in Chechnya in 1999 and Syria in 2016, employing both air and ground-based munitions. Russia's supply lines reportedly continue to be targeted, slowing the rate of the advance of their ground forces." Russia has repeatedly denied that it is targeting civilian areas. The intelligence report also says there is a "realistic possibility" that Russia is now "attempting to conceal fuel trucks as regular support trucks in an effort to conceal losses". Ukraine's emergency services are reporting casualties from a Russian missile strike which hit residential homes in the Zhytomyr region, about 140km north-west of Kyiv. Some 15 private houses were destroyed in the assault in the city of Ovruch, Ukraine's the state emergency service said in an update on its official Telegram account this morning. In a seperate attack in Korosten, a town just south of Ovruch, one person was reportedly killed and two injured in an overnight rocket attack, according to the agency. Ten private houses were said to have been destroyed and one building was burnt down. Five children were rescued from the basement. The Ukrainian military has just released its operational report as of 6am local time, noting its forces have been "fighting fierce battles to maintain certain borders". A defence operation in the eastern part of the Donetsk operational district is underway while efforts are focused on defending the city of Mariupol, the military said. According to the report, Russian forces were stopped from an advance towards the Dnipropetrovsk region from Balaklia and an operation to defend the city of Chernihiv is underway. The report references the "heavy losses in weapons, equipment and personnel" alongside the losses of 88 Russian aircraft and helicopters. "Some enemy pilots who catapulted and survived were found by Ukrainian soldiers. They have received medical treatment and are already testifying about the Putin regime's crimes against humanity," the report read. Due to the resistance of the entire Ukrainian people, Russian troops have been "demoralised" with "extremely low moral and psychological state... due to awareness of the real state of affairs" Ukraine's general staff of the armed forces said. US President Joe Biden spoke with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy on Saturday to discuss ongoing efforts to impose sanctions on Russia and speed up US military, humanitarian and economic assistance. A White House statement of a readout of the call reads: President Biden highlighted the ongoing actions undertaken by the United States, its Allies and partners, and private industry to raise the costs on Russia for its aggression in Ukraine. In particular, he [Biden] welcomed the decision this evening by Visa and Mastercard to suspend service in Russia. President Biden noted his administration is surging security, humanitarian, and economic assistance to Ukraine and is working closely with Congress to secure additional funding." Zelenskiy confirmed the call, writing over Twitter early Sunday morning: As part of the constant dialogue, I had another conversation with @POTUS. The agenda included the issues of security, financial support for Ukraine and the continuation of sanctions against Russia." Thousands of Ukrainian refugees continue to flee their homeland seeking safety in neighbouring countries. More than 1.3 million Ukrainians have crossed borders since the Russian ***invasion*** started on the 24 February in what the United Nations is now calling Europe's fastest-moving refugee crisis since the end of the second world war. The figure is expected to reach 1.5 million later today. "This is the fastest-moving refugee crisis we have seen in Europe since the end of the second world war," UNHCR head Filippo Grandi said. A representative of the Ukrainian Embassy in Washington has said 3,000 US volunteers responded to the Ukraine's appeal for foreigners to join the "international legion" to help fight the war. The official said the 3,000 volunteers answered the call in an interview with the Voice of America news service. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy announced he would be forming an official legion of foreign volunteers, adding just days ago that an estimates 16,000 foreigners had signed up, mostly from other post-Soviet states such as Georgia and Belarus. Senior US officials traveled to Venezuela on Saturday to meet with President Nicolas Maduro's government, seeking to determine whether Caracas is prepared to back away from its close ties to Russia amid its ***invasion*** of Ukraine, according to a person familiar with the matter, Reuters reports. The trip is the highest-level US visit to Venezuela in years after the two countries broke diplomatic relations amid a campaign of US sanctions and diplomatic pressure aimed at ousting Maduro, a longtime ally of Russian President Vladimir Putin. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken spoke earlier by phone with Chinese foreign minister Wang Yi, who said Beijing opposes any moves that "add fuel to the flames" in Ukraine, according to the Chinese Foreign Ministry and as reported by the Associated Press. Yi said the "evolution" of the situation in Ukraine is "something China does not want to see," adding that the Ukraine crisis should be solved through "dialogue and negotiation" and called on the United States, Nato, and the European Union to engage in "equal dialogue" with Russia. He said they should "pay attention to the negative impact of Nato's continuous eastward expansion on Russia's security." "China supports all efforts conducive to de-escalation and political settlement of the situation, while opposing any moves which are adverse to promoting a diplomatic solution and add fuel to the flames," Wang said. With international outrage and sanctions mounting against Russia, Beijing is scrambling to avoid being tainted by association with Moscow while also maintaining their increasingly close ties. Once Cold War rivals, China and Russia have moved increasingly closer since Xi Jinping took power nearly a decade ago, driven by their shared desire to confront US power. According to Agence France-Presse, China seems to have been "caught flat-footed" by Russia's military offensive, fierce Ukrainian resistance, and the volume of the resulting international anti-Kremlin backlash. The situation has effectively paralysed China, according to Richard Ghiasy, an expert at the Hague Centre for Strategic Studies. "Security interests virtually always trump economic interests" in China's calculus, and it will not fundamentally shift toward a more pro-Ukraine stance, he told AFP. Russia is "a giant, nuclear-armed and resource-rich neighbour" that China won't risk agitating, Ghiasy said. Beijing, which has long demanded respect for territorial integrity in border disputes with its own neighbours, has been forced into rhetorical contortions on Ukraine to avoid upsetting Russia. While maintaining lip service to national sovereignty, China has insisted that Moscow's security concerns regarding Ukraine and the broader expansion of the US-led North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (Nato) are valid. Hello it's Samantha Lock with you as we continue to monitor the crisis unfolding in Ukraine. Russia's war on its neighbour continues for its tenth day and well into its second week. It is 7am in Ukraine and here is where the situation currently stands: US president Joe Biden spoke with Ukrainian president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, to discuss ongoing efforts to impose sanctions on Russia and speed up US military, humanitarian and economic assistance. The White House said during the call the pair also discussed talks between Russia and Ukraine, but offered no additional details. Britain's prime minister Boris Johnson issued a six-point plan in reaction to Russia's ***invasion*** of Ukraine and is urging other leaders to endorse it in efforts to ensure Russia fails in its apparent attempt to take over its democratic neighbour. Zelenskiy also said he spoke to SpaceX and Tesla boss Elon Musk, announcing the country will receive more of its Starlink satellite internet terminals this coming week. US-based credit card giants Visa and Mastercard announced they will suspend their Russian business operations. The Ukrainian military said Russian forces continue to focus on Kyiv while moving ahead with assaults on Kharkiv, Mykolaiv and the creation of a land corridor with Crimea, in its latest operational report. The report said aircraft from airports in Belarusian territory were involved in air strikes on military and civilian infrastructure in Kyiv and Zhytomyr. US-based think tank and policy research organisation, the Institute for the Study of War, released a report saying Russian forces in Ukraine may have entered a possibly brief operational pause as they prepare to resume operations against Kyiv, Kharkiv, Mykolayiv, and possibly Odesa in the next 24-48 hours. The relief effort to distribute humanitarian aid to Ukraine has stepped up as volunteers across the country work tirelessly to gather basic necessities to give to refugees and prepare food supplies for the army to be sent to the frontline. The humanitarian situation in the southern Ukrainian port of Mariupol is "catastrophic" and it is vital that civilians be evacuated, a senior official from the NGO Doctors Without Borders warned. The International Monetary Fund announced it could approve $1.4 billion emergency funding as early as next week as the body warns of war's "severe impact" on the global economy. Western sanctions on Russia are a stumbling block to revived Iran nuclear deal, Russian foreign minister Sergei Lavrov said. Ukrainian foreign minister Dmytro Kuleba met with US secretary of state Antony Blinken, saying Ukraine "will win this war" but needs more help from Nato. Ukraine's foreign minister, Dymtro Kuleba, appealed for more military assistance while Reuters reports Zelenskiy made a "desperate plea" for eastern Europe to provide Russian-made aircraft to Ukraine. In a call with US senators, he is also understood to have called for a no-fly zone, lethal aid, a ban on Russian oil and a suspension of Visa and Mastercard in Russia. The US is reportedly in discussions with Poland on the possibility of Poland providing more fighter jets to Ukraine with the US potentially agreeing to backfill Poland's fleet of fighter planes if Warsaw decides to transfer its used MiG-29s to Ukraine, four US officials told POLITICO. Russia and Ukraine plan another round of talks on Monday, even though previous talks that produced an agreement to a limited ceasefire in order to protect corridors for civilian have not been honoured by Russia. The United Nations recorded 351 civilians killed and 707 injured in Ukraine, according to the UN high commissioner for human rights. Tens of thousands joined rallies around the world in support of Ukraine over the weekend, gathering in cities across Europe, the US and South America to demand an end to Russia's ***invasion***. For any tips and feedback please contact me through Twitter or at [*samantha.lock@theguardian.com*](mailto:samantha.lock@theguardian.com) 117222 false false Samantha Lock (now)

Sam Levin ,

Jessica Murray and Tom Ambrose (earlier) House Speaker Nancy Pelosi speaking at her weekly press conference. Ivan Kuliak wore a 'Z' taped across the front of his shirt, a symbol that has come to symbolise support for the Russian ***invasion*** of Ukraine. The logo of KPMG. Ukrainian soldiers help people trying to leave the city amid the collapsed structures and debris on March 6, 2022 in Irpin, Ukraine. A factory and a store burn after having been bombarded in Irpin. Residents run for cover as they escape from Irpin after heavy shelling on the only escape route used by locals. Civilians cross the rubble of a damaged bridge in Irpin near Kyiv. Demonstrators in Chile Demonstration in Cardiff, Wales Protest in New York Demonstration in Paris Demonstrators in Mexico City. A Ukrainian volunteer fighter helps carry a child for local residents as they evacuate Irpin on foot as Russian forces advance and continue to bombard the area with artillery. The Netflix logo is seen on top of their office building in Hollywood, California. A policeman and a civilian take cover from shelling, in Irpin, Ukraine. Denmark's Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen speaks during a press conference in Copenhagen, Denmark. Russian conductor Tugan Sokhiev rehearsing with the Orchestre national du Capitole of Toulouse at the Halle aux Grains venue in Toulouse, south-western France. Civilians evacuate during a Russian attacks on the city of Irpin, northwest of Kyiv. A blast hit just a few metres away during a civilian evacuation in Irpin, Ukraine A resident passing a house on fire after heavy shelling on the only escape route used by locals to leave the town of Irpin, while Russian troops advance towards the capital An Ukrainian serviceman looks through binoculars towards the town of Stoyanka at a checkpoint before the last bridge on the road that connects Stoyanka with Kyiv Demonstrators hold placard and flags during a demonstration in support of Ukraine in Parliament Square, in London A woman fleeing the Russian ***invasion*** of Ukraine warms her hands at a fireplace after crossing the border from Ukraine to Poland, at the border checkpoint in Medyka Lesia Ivashchenko and Valerii Fylymonov kiss at their wedding at a checkpoint in Kyiv, Ukraine Two Ukrainian territorial defence fighters tied the knot amid Russian's ***invasion*** of their country A helmet is placed on top of Lesia's head after she married a fellow Ukrainian fighter. Russian police detain a participant at an anti-war rally in Moscow on 6 March. A protester is detained by police at a demonstration in St Petersburg on 6 March. A protester is detained by police at a demonstration in St Petersburg on 6 March. The crowd gathered outside St. Peter's Basilica on Sunday to hear Pope Francis speak. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken speaks during a press conference with Moldovan President at The Presidential Palace in Chisinau Refugees, mostly women with children, arriving at the border crossing in Medyka, Poland on Sunday. Local residents look for cover as they escape from the town of Irpin, after heavy shelling landed on the only escape route used by locals near Kyiv Refugees from Ukraine rest in the main train station of Krakow, as they wait to be relocated to other temporary acommodations in Poland or abroad Demonstrators with Ukrainian national flags and posters reading "No war!" gather to protest against the Russian military ***invasion*** in Ukraine, in Almaty, Kazakhstan Servicemen of the Ukrainian Military Forces prepare their equipment to repel a tank attack on a position in the Lugansk region Deputy Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration of Ukraine Olha Stefanishyna. Dominic Raab in Westminster. Security forces take anti-war protesters into custody at Manege Square in Moscow, Russia on 3 March 2022. Demonstrators take part in an anti-war protest in support of Ukraine in front of the monument to Soviet state founder Vladimir Lenin in Almaty, Kazakhstan on 6 March 2022. Smoke rises after shelling by Russian forces in Mariupol, Ukraine, Friday, March 4, 2022. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy makes a statement in Kyiv, in Ukraine. Local residents help clear the rubble of a home that was destroyed by a suspected Russian airstrike which killed at least six people in Markhalivka, Ukraine, on Saturday, 5 March. A policeman helps Ukrainians to carry their bag at the border in Kroscienko, Poland, on 5 March. An exhausted refugee is seen inside the train station at the Polish border town of Przemysl. More than 1.3 million Ukrainians have crossed borders since the Russian ***invasion*** started on the 24 February, the UN estimates. A Ukrainian mother takes her son into her arms to keep him warm, inside a Warsaw refugee centre in Poland. Russia's President Vladimir Putin seen with Chinese President Xi Jinping.

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[***War and strange non-death of neoliberalism: The military foundations of modern economic ideologies***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:62RJ-F4K1-JBMY-H1WT-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

**ABSTRACT**

This essay provides a hypothesis about how geopolitical environments significantly affect the rise and fall of modern economic ideologies. First, it articulates how the two world wars transformed political, social and ideological conditions into those favourable for the rise of Keynesianism. Second, it theoretically identifies the political and social foundations of Keynesianism with expanded state capacity, social cohesion and social equality, all of which were by-products of major wars. Third, it shows how the transformation of geopolitical environments and the change of the nature of warfare since the late 1960s undermined the political and social foundations of Keynesianism and paved the way for the rise and dominance of neoliberalism. By shedding light on military and geopolitical dimensions of international environments, our hypothesis well explains the sudden fall of Keynesianism in the 1970s and the current robustness of neoliberal dominance.

**FULL TEXT**

**Introduction**

The global financial crisis of 2007 and 2008 and the following recession seemed to undermine public confidence in neoliberalism, the economic ideology that had been dominant in the Western world since the late 1970s and in many other regions since the end of the Cold War. There are several variations of ideas and practices of neoliberalism, but they share the view that free markets in which individuals seek their own self-interests are the best means for advancing human well-being and that the role of politics and particularly of the state should be limited to creating and maintaining an institutional framework appropriate to free markets.

The global financial crisis shook these neoliberal beliefs because financial markets, the purest form of the free market, melted down. Nonetheless, neoliberalism has not yet lost its powerful influence over political-economic practices and thinking. The global financial crisis certainly paved the way for the sudden and global return of Keynesianism, which neoliberals strongly oppose. Major countries such as the United States, China, Japan, and even Germany stimulated their economies to avoid depression. However, this return of Keynesian fiscal policy did not last more than twelve months.1

One might argue that the EU referendum in Britain and Donald Trump’s victory in the U.S. presidential election in 2016 were signs of a turning tide. Britain’s decision to leave the EU arguably reflected the majority of Britain’s neoliberal fatigue. However, Theresa May, who became the Prime Minister after the referendum, followed Tory austerity policies. It is also true that Trump won the election owing to his populist rhetoric against market-led globalisation. However, in spite of his assaults on the TPP (the Trans-Pacific Partnership) and NAFTA (the North America Free Trade Agreement), Trump consistently proposes massive tax cuts and deregulation for big business and the financial industry. He is far more neoliberal than his supporters would believe.2 As Colin Crouch says, ‘What we have to understand today is, therefore, the strange non-death of neoliberalism’.3

Why does neoliberalism die hard? Crouch argues that the social power of global corporations, especially in the financial sector, is strong enough to capture politics and maintain the neoliberal policies that are most beneficial for their economic interests, while the working class of Western industrial society has been in decline and losing its social power since the 1970s.4 David Harvey also sees neoliberalism as a political project for ruling classes to restore and enforce their power. After World War II, advanced capitalist countries built the consensus that the economic power of ruling classes should be restrained. However, when low growth and high inflation in the 1970s seriously threatened their economic interests, they had to move decisively to maintain their economic and political power. Neoliberal policies, justified and legitimised by neoliberal theories, have remarkably succeeded in restoring and even enforcing their class power.5 Once the state was highjacked by financial classes, financial crises could never undermine neoliberal dominance.

These political-economic approaches seem to persuasively explain the surprising robustness of neoliberal dominance by highlighting the role of politics. Because it is the political will of the state that takes a neoliberal stance to build and protect the neoliberal economic order, it is appropriate to explore whose particular interests and class powers operate and in what ways they work in the organisation of the state. However, as Otto Hintze once emphasised, ‘we must direct our attention particularly to two phenomena, which conditioned the real organisation of the state. There are, first, the structure of social classes, and second, the external ordering of the states – their position relative to each other, and their over-all position in the world’.6 Crouch and Harvey approach the first, the domestic aspect of the neoliberal state. In turn, this essay will discuss the second, the international aspect. In particular, it will shed light on military and geopolitical rather than economic dimensions of international environments.

In the past four decades, there have been several significant works of state theory which draw on the Hintzean approach, especially in the field of historical sociology.7 In particular, there have been many empirical studies on the impact of war on the development of welfare state.8 In a similar vein, this essay will present a hypothesis about how geopolitical conflicts are significantly related to the strange non-death of neoliberalism.

It is important to note at the outset that ultimately all the arguments presented here are underdetermining. The historical reality is too complex to sustain the reductionism involved in tracing outcomes back to one factor. Various possible explanations for neoliberal dominance have already been proposed. This essay aims to add one such explanation from a different angle, that is, by highlighting how geopolitical environments and wars affect particular forms of economic ideology, which is distinct from the approach most commonly seen in contemporary international relations theory.

In the following discussion, we will first articulate how wars influenced the development of Keynesianism, the opposed predecessor of neoliberalism. The nexus between war and Keynesianism has been conventionally associated with so-called ‘Military Keynesianism’ – the claim that military spending can boost economic growth. However, Military Keynesianism as such is not our concern. Rather, we will discuss how the two world wars transformed political, social and ideological conditions into those favourable for the rise of Keynesianism. The present analysis will focus on the case of the United States, because the United States after World War II was a superpower working as a powerhouse of economic ideology, and therefore, a legitimate economic ideology of the United States was arguably shared among the capitalist countries.

Second, we will theoretically explore the nexus between geopolitical conflicts and the Keynesian state. The political and social foundations of Keynesianism will be identified: expanded state capacity, social cohesion and social equality. Relying on insights of the war-welfare state nexus literature, we will argue that these are by-products of major wars. We will also present the hypothesis that Keynesianism is a ‘civilianisation’ of mass mobilisation. Third, we will show how the transformation of geopolitical environments since the late 1960s undermined the political and social foundations of Keynesianism and contributed to the rise and dominance of neoliberalism. We will also argue that the change of the nature of warfare from ‘old wars’ to ‘new wars’ destroyed the war-Keynesian state nexus. Finally, we will conclude and discuss the agenda of future research.

**Keynesianism as an economic consequence of wars**

Conventional wisdom has identified the origins of the Keynesian Revolution in the 1930s with the New Deal and the publication of Keynes’s *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money*. However, this section will trace its origin back to World War I and its aftermath.

The first point to notice is that the war economy during World War I included the *de facto* Keynesian style of a managed economy. Between 1913 and 1918, government expenditures as a percentage of gross domestic product (GDP) rose from approximately 10 to between 50 and 53 in France and Germany and from 8 to 35 in the United Kingdom.9 The massive and prolonged mobilisation of mass armies in the battlefield led to shortages of foodstuff, commodities, raw materials and labour. Confronted with economic scarcity, significant state interventions in markets and business activities were required, including price controls, wage regulations, rationing, currency controls, the nationalisation of enterprises in strategically important industries and so forth.10

In spite of the short period of active U.S. involvement in the war, its impact on the U.S. economy was remarkable. By January 1917, 3 months before the U.S. entry, federal spending was approximately 2.22% of GDP, but it jumped up to approximately 32.43% of GDP in January of 1919. Between 1914 and 1918, the United States added nearly 3 million people to the military, more than half a million to the civilian government, and nearly 3 and 1/3 million labours to the workforce in the nonfarm sector. To manage these ***unprecedented***, large-scale resource allocations, the government agencies, such as the War Industries Board, the Food Administration and the Fuel Administration, were established to regulate economic activities through centralised price and production controls. Financing the war was also a major challenge. The sources of war finance comprised taxation, borrowing and money creation. War bonds were issued and advertised using patriotic rhetoric, while an excess profits tax, corporate and personal income taxes were raised by the War Revenue Act of 1917 and 1918. The Federal Reserve, newly established at the end of 1913, monetised a significant portion of the debt being issued. Money supply to the public approximately doubled during the war.11

The total war and resource mobilisations for it demonstrated dramatic Keynesian effects on the U.S. economy. The United States before the war had been in a recession, but the outbreak of the war in 1914 induced European purchases of goods for the war, which created a lasting economic boom. The duration of the economic expansion was 44 months. Unemployment declined from 7.9% in 1914 to 5.1% in 1916 and then to 1.4% in 1918. Nominal wages in manufacturing increased 38.3% between 1916 and 1918, greater than the increase in the cost of living of 32.2%.12 We may say that the economic management in World War I was an unintentional proto-Keynesianism.

Some American progressives noticed the potential effectiveness of state interventions in markets during the wartime. For example, John Dewey indicated, ‘War, whatever else its qualities and traits, at all events represents a necessity of unity of action, of organised, cooperative action, for a public, general, and common purpose and end’.13 Other progressives including Wesley C. Mitchell and Rexford Tugwell, who later became members of Franklin D. Roosevelt’s ‘brain-trust’, also thought that the war paved the way to a fulfilment of their hopes of a rationally planned economy.14

However, these views were still ***exceptional***. The expanded role of government in the economy during the wartime was widely seen as a temporary and ***exceptional*** experiment suitable only to war. Though ideological resistance against state interventions in markets was partially eroded, the end of the war brought a revival of orthodoxy in fiscal and financial policies and economic ideas, that is, economic liberalism.15 It is important to note that the political initiative to restore the pre-1914 liberal economic order was led by the groups of private and central bankers in major countries, above all, those in the City of London and Wall Street. In numerous international monetary conferences in the 1920s, they called for a return to balanced budgets, independent central banks, free capital movements and the gold standard and offered large loans to governments willing to accept these policy changes.16

The revival of the gold standard was particularly significant for the return to economic liberalism. Indeed, it was an internationally institutional and ideological scaffolding of economic liberalism. It was firmly believed that the maintenance of the gold standard was the primary prerequisite for prosperity. The gold standard is characterised by the free flow of gold between individuals and countries and the fixed exchange rate, and therefore, its adjustment mechanism for a deficit country must be so-called internal devaluation, that is, deflation. Expansionary fiscal and monetary policy and devaluation in recessions are hardly possible within the regime of the gold standard. World War I itself led to the suspension of the gold standard, but after the end of the war, it was soon restored.

Breaking with the orthodoxy of economic liberalism could not be completed without abandoning the gold standard. It was not a geopolitical conflict but the Great Depression that destroyed the system and ideology of the gold standard. However, Peter Temin argues that the impulse that led to the Great Depression came from World War I. More precisely, an unchanging system of the gold standard in the interwar period, in spite of its structural instability brought by the war, generated the Great Depression. Temin argues that the gold standard was revived after its temporary suspension during the war, though the condition that had sustained it had disappeared. On the one hand, the pound was so overvalued that the British economy had to be depressed to maintain gold payment. On the other hand, because the franc was undervalued, France did not have to expand the economy. The United States and Germany were embarked on a deflationary policy to combat speculation. Consequently, all economic policies in major countries were contractionary, pushing the world economy downward towards the Great Depression.17

World War I encouraged not only economic but also political transformation in the Atlantic world to undermine the gold standard. As the war-welfare state nexus literature shows, mass wars had a significant effect of promoting democratisation and strengthening the bargaining power of labour. Mobilising man-power for waging the total war, governments were aware of the fact that the political support of the people, particularly the working class, was necessary. In addition, the war that sustained enormous casualties made it difficult to neglect the people’s voice. This in turn increased political pressure for democratisation. In many European countries, suffrage reforms were introduced as the result of World War I. For example, the British Parliament passed the Representation of the People Act, which raised the number of qualified voters from 8 million to 21 million. In 1918, the Weimar Republic proclaimed universal and equal suffrage. Austria, Belgium and other states of Central Europe also broadened the franchise.18 In the United States, Theda Skocpol finds that large civic associations remarkably developed during and immediately after World War I along with the Civil War and World War II. The government in wartime did not necessarily suppress the voluntary activities of civic associations. On the contrary, the national government created and encouraged such civic associations from the national to the state and local levels because they were useful for mobilising civilians for war. Wars nurtured civil society as the basis of liberal democracy.19

In addition, the serious labour shortage of the war enabled trade unions to expand their membership and increase their bargaining powers.20 Even in the United States, union membership increased rapidly during the war. In 1919, 4450 strikes were recorded and posed a serious threat to the war mobilisation. The Wilson government gave organised labour representation in the war agencies including the Food Administration, the Railroad Administration and the War Industries Board. The government also established the National War Labor Board, which proclaimed its support of union rights and provided mediation and conciliation in labour disputes.21

Owing to the war, the working class had a political power strong enough to refuse to be patient with wage deflation and mass unemployment. It was therefore no longer possible to sacrifice the working class for deflationary adjustment under the gold standard. To put it another way, the war democratised economic policy, and as Dani Rodrik says, ‘Democracy was incompatible with absolute priority for the gold standard’.22

Releasing governments from the fetter of the gold standard was a necessary but not sufficient condition for Keynesianism. A source of inspiration for the New Deal was World War I. According to William E. Leuchtenburg, when the Great Depression had broken out, many in the United States conceived it to be a calamity like war and then associated fighting it with fighting World War I. He articulates that the acts, agencies or ideas of the New Deal rested heavily upon the experience of the economic mobilisation of the war. For example, President Herbert Hoover’s creation of the Reconstruction Finance Corporation was modelled on the War Finance Corporation.23 When President Roosevelt proclaimed a national bank holiday, he used the authority of the Trading with the Enemy Act of 1917. Under the terms of the Act, he also issued Executive Order 6102 to leave the gold standard in 1933.24 The National Recovery Administration, the keystone of the early New Deal, was based on the War Industries Board example. The Tennessee Valley Authority was modelled on a government-operated nitrate and electric power project at Muscle Shoals during and after the war.25 The ***Agricultural*** Adjustment Act (AAA) of 1933 owed something to the wartime experience of the Food Administration. The AAA is significant for not only ***agriculture*** but also financial policy because the Thomas amendment to the AAA conferred on the president powers of monetary expansion by issuing greenbacks, remonetising silver and reducing the gold content of the dollar.26 As Leuchtenburg says, ‘There was scarcely a New Deal act or agency that did not owe something to the experience of World War I’.27

Interestingly, the metaphor of war was occasionally used to explain the meaning of deficit spending.28 For example, Marriner Eccles, the leader of the circle of Roosevelt’s advisors advocating larger public spending and then Chairman of the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System, insisted, ‘There is no more limitation upon a government’s ability to fight a depression than there is to fight a war. Both depend upon our human and material resources, brains and courage – and upon nothing else’.29 In ‘an Open Letter to President Roosevelt’, Keynes tried to persuade Roosevelt to begin deficit spending by referring to the war, though his impact on Roosevelt and his advisors was very small: ‘But in a slump governmental Loan expenditure is the only sure means of securing quickly a rising output at rising prices. That is why a war has always caused intense industrial activity. In the past orthodox finance has regarded a war as the only legitimate excuse for creating employment by governmental expenditure. You, Mr President, having cast off such fetters, are free to engage in the interests of peace and prosperity the technique which hitherto has only been allowed to serve the purposes of war and destruction’.30

Temin argues that the new interventionist idea of the New Deal in the early 1930s was derived from socialism because it was the dominant intellectual alternative to economic liberalism.31 However, the more likely explanation is that the experiences and institutional legacies of the managed economy during World War I were the main source of inspiration of the proto-Keynesian idea of the New Deal because the idea associated with the victorious war was obviously more acceptable and widely comprehensible for most U.S. officials and citizens than socialism. In addition, the drastic transformation of policy regime and the redirection of the economy would need a strong power to stimulate the people’s emotion and mobilise them for a common goal. Nationalism encouraged by the reminiscence of the war could be more likely than socialism to exert such a strong power.

However, the impacts of World War I and the Great Depression were not enough for completing the conversion to Keynesianism. In the earlier period of the Great Depression, the Roosevelt administration certainly stimulated the economy by spending heavily on public works and other things. However, as unemployment continued to fall after the election of 1936, Roosevelt went back to the idea of balanced budgets, raised taxes and cut the cost of federal government. The result was remarkable: the very steep economic contraction of 1937–1938. Keynes regretfully commented, ‘It seems politically impossible for capitalistic democracy to organize expenditure on the scale necessary to make the grand experiment which would prove my case – *except in war condition* (my italics)’.32

Theoretically speaking (at least from the Keynesian viewpoint), the Roosevelt administration could have certainly achieved full employment through the greater and longer deficit spending on public works and social programmes. However, Theda Skocpol argues, ‘Without the timely arrival of the war, the basic reforms of the New Deal might not have survived – and they might not have proved so “functional” for U.S. capitalism’,33 because the existing political structure of the U.S. government and political parties of the 1930s, in which conservatives of business and rural interests strongly blocked progressive reforms, limited the possibilities for greater spending for social programmes.

World War II contributed to the post-war acceptance of Keynesian ideas and policies in the following manners. First, like World War I, World War II removed political obstacles to the Keynesian economy through large-scale war mobilisation of resources so as to expand public expenditures for war preparedness and participation. Second, the war provided crucial experience with Keynesian aggregate demand management for policy makers and economists. Though the main purpose of economic management during the war was fighting inflation caused by sky-rocketing military demand rather than deflation, the war proved the effectiveness of the Keynesian macroeconomic demand management. Finally, the war shifted the tectonic plates of the geopolitical order of the world and made the United States a hegemonic power, which worked as an ideological powerhouse of spreading Keynesian ideas across the Western capitalist world. More importantly, the United States led the post-war reconstruction of the international economic order, called the Bretton Woods System, which was designed to allow some room for the national autonomy of Keynesian policies by introducing capital controls.34

Demonstrating the effectiveness of exchange controls and financial regulations, the war encouraged a decisive shift from liberal financial orthodoxy to Keynesian interventionism in the federal government, particularly in the Treasury Department. Henry Morgenthau, the Head of the U.S. Treasury, was ambitious to move the central power of finance from Wall Street to the Treasury by initiating economic planning. Then, he appointed Harry Dexter White, a sceptic of orthodox financial thinking, to oversee economic planning. A similar political shift took over in the United Kingdom. The Treasury remained stuck to financial orthodoxy even in the 1930s, but the war drastically changed its view on supporting exchange controls and financial regulations. As in the United States, the Treasury attempted to deprive private and central bankers in the City of London of the initiative of monetary affairs. White and Keynes, representatives respectively of the United States and the United Kingdom at the Bretton Woods Conference, strongly agreed on the endorsement of capital controls and allied against the opposition of the New York bankers, though their opinions sharply conflicted with one another in many other respects. This reflected the fact that the war achieved the political dominance of Keynesian-minded elites within the governments of the United States and the United Kingdom, while it weakened the political power of the bankers of New York and London. Thus, the Bretton Woods System, which was the international, institutional foundation of post-war Keynesianism just as the gold standard was that of economic liberalism, was a product of the war.35

To sum up, the origins and accomplishments of the so-called the ‘Keynesian Revolution’ were significantly due to large-scale geopolitical forces – the two world wars.36 The ideas, practices and institutions of the proto-Keynesian economic management emerged during World War I because the old regime of economic liberalism in the Western states since the 19th century made it impossible for them to wage a total war. After the war, the old regime of economic liberalism came back. However, it failed to meet the exigency of the Great Depression triggered by the structural instability of the gold standard system that the war had engendered. Although Keynes’s intellectual influence on contemporary U.S. officials was small, the new and Keynesian regime of the New Deal emerged, inspired by the experiences and institutional legacies of the managed economy during the war. World War II accomplished and consolidated the ideological and institutional transformation from economic liberalism to Keynesianism in the United States, and the post-war U.S. hegemon as its result contributed to the spread of the Keynesian Revolution in the Western world.

**The War-Keynesian state nexus**

The previous section has traced how the two world wars played a significant role in the rise of Keynesianism in the history of the early 20th century. This section will turn to theoretically exploring how geopolitical conflicts contributed to the ideological dominance of Keynesianism over the three decades after World War II. Its actual ***processes*** were complicated. However, referring to some significant achievements in the war-welfare state nexus literature, we may identify at least three long-lasting effects of geopolitical rivalry for developing Keynesianism: the expansion of state capacity, social cohesion and equality.

First, major wars could have significant effects on the post-war trajectory of the expansion of state capacity.37 The most famous one is what Alan T. Peacock and Jack Wiseman call the ‘displacement effect’ on the scale of government. The displacement effect argument is the hypothesis that governmental expenditures, which increased during wartime, will remain higher than the pre-war expenditure level, for war would change the people’s perception of a tolerable level of taxation and enable governments to more easily raise tax rates or widen tax bases. As a result, public revenues and expenditures are larger after the war than before.38

Governments during wartime had also learnt plenty of lessons of economic planning for their national purposes and had opportunities for remarkably increasing policy ***measures*** and administrative capacities.39 Post-war governments would be unlikely to shift the scale and scope of their activities back to the pre-war levels after the war because they could exploit expanded state capacity for the post-war social needs. Moreover, the accumulated experiences and knowledge of policy makers through the actual economic management would accelerate the development of state capacity and enable the scale and scope of governmental activities to expand further. Robert Higgs calls this irreversible tendency towards big government after the war the ‘Ratchet effect’ or ‘path dependency’.40

Keynesianism has been associated with a big government because the Keynesian macroeconomic management requires large fiscal resources and a powerful, effective and deliberative administration. The effectiveness of Keynesian policy arguably depends on the level of state capacity. As we have seen in the previous section, the experience of war mobilisation and managed economy during the two world wars inspired policy makers and economists with the idea of the Keynesian economic management. Policy makers relied heavily on policy ***measures***, institutions and projects that had been already implemented or proposed during World War I and World War II, respectively for the New Deal in the 1930s and the post-war Keynesian economic management. Thus, it can be said that Keynesianism is a ‘civilianisation’ of mass mobilisation, to use Charles Tilly’s term.41 Just as the military state mobilises resources to fight a war, the Keynesian state mobilises investors, industrialists and workers to fight a recession through the manipulation of fiscal and monetary policies.

In this respect, the origin of gross national product (GNP) statistics, the predecessor of the current gross domestic product (GDP) statistics, is noteworthy. In 1942, the U.S. Department of Commerce launched the first in the series of U.S. GNP statistics to meet the need to assess the economic feasibility of President Roosevelt’s World War II war mobilisation programme. The GNP statistic was civilianised after the war as the most fundamental statistic of macroeconomic policy. It not only demonstrated how the income generated from national production was being spent but also highlighted how the government played a preponderant role in the economy as a purchaser for final uses.

The second effect of war is strengthening social cohesion. Social cohesion is in fact one of the prerequisites for the Keynesian macroeconomic management, though this point has been largely neglected. The demand stimulus of Keynesian policy consists of deficit spending and monetary easing. Both its benefits and burdens, whether taxation or inflation, are shared by the people beyond the boundaries of class, ethnicity, race and other social groups. Precisely because such a policy must be based on the idea that various groups in society share a common fate, regardless of their social and economic status, the effective fulfilment of Keynesian policy would be hardly possible without social cohesion.42

Geopolitical conflict moulds the social unity and social cohesion of the people within the state,43 as Georg Simmel argued for an ‘intensified cohesive function of conflict’.44 In the modern world, the most usual form of intensified social cohesion among the people beyond class boundaries is the nation. As is well known, geopolitical rivalry is likely to stimulate nationalism.45 Keynesian policy is rooted in nationalism because it needs to be justified on the idea that members of a community share a fate.46

Not only war but Keynesian policy itself could nurture stronger social cohesion and national consciousness. As we have argued, the benefits and costs of Keynesian policy are shared among the people beyond the boundaries of social and economic status. The whole economic life of the people is affected by spending for public works or manipulating the national currency. This in turn enhances the people’s communal consciousness of a shared fate and encourages social cohesion and national consciousness.47 Here, we can observe a self-reinforcing mechanism: Keynesian policy is based on social cohesion, and social cohesion is encouraged by Keynesian full employment policy. This self-reinforcing mechanism could partially explain the path dependency of Keynesianism after the end of the war.

Next, let us consider the relationship between Keynesianism and equality, the third effect of geopolitical rivalry. The first point to notice is this: the Keynesian demand stimulus and full employment policy are inflationary, which means that the value of money is falling. Keynesian policy is therefore more disadvantageous to those who already possess a larger amount of money and credit – the wealthy financial or rentier interests.48 In addition, the full employment and shortage of labour powers caused by Keynesian deficit spending could strengthen the political and social positions of the working class. That is why the wealthy class, particularly that which is based on financial sectors and usually has stronger political power, is likely to resist Keynesian expansionary ***measures*** and adhere to the discipline of balanced budgets. The implementation of effective Keynesian policy would be impossible without curbing the political resistance of this class and subordinating its interests to the national purpose of activating the productive economy at full capacity. In addition, by adversely affecting the aggregate propensity to consume, income inequality has a substantial negative impact on effective demand.49 Therefore, the Keynesian macroeconomic management needs to be based on a reasonably equal and non-plutocratic society.

The literature on the war-welfare state nexus shows that mass war demonstrates an effect of social levelling.50 In particular, the two world wars generated a historically high level of equality.51 Progressive taxation, which is arguably a decisive policy ***measure*** for reducing inequality,52 has its origin in mass war mobilisation in the 20th century in most countries. Empirical studies show that the periods of mass war mobilisation in the two world wars obviously coincide with significant rises in the top income tax rates among OECD countries, while no country except Japan and Sweden had high income taxes on the rich before World War I.53 Kenneth Scheve and David Stasavage suggest that mass war mobilisation changed public attitudes to demand progressive taxation as a means of ensuring the more equal burden of war. Just as military conscription was the device for forcing individuals to supply their labour, progressive taxation was seen as a ‘conscription of wealth’.54 Although progressive taxation itself is not a necessary component of Keynesian economic management, it prepares a social and political environment favourable for Keynesianism by reducing inequality to strengthen social cohesion.

Here, we can again observe a self-reinforcing mechanism: Keynesian policy itself has the effect of income redistribution to reduce inequality by inducing inflation, and an equal society is favourable for the effective fulfilment of Keynesian policy. This self-reinforcing mechanism or path dependency is arguably one reason why the Keynesian managed economy remained after the end of the war. As we have seen, each effect of war on politics and society – the expansion of state capacity, social cohesion and equality – has its own path dependency, and at the beginning of each stand the two world wars.

However, we should not overlook another significant reason why the managed economy in the Western world was not abandoned with the end of World War II – the beginning of the Cold War. The presence of a powerful external threat helped develop state capacity, maintain social cohesion and reduce inequality in the capitalist countries.55 As Michael C. Desch argues, ‘the cold war was the “perfect type of threat”’ because it brought long-term, frequent threats and conflicts but never actually led to a major war destructive enough to engender a breakdown of national cohesion.56 Thus, it was global geopolitical rivalries – the two world wars and the Cold War – that prepared social and political conditions favourable for the post-war Keynesian managed economy.

**The geopolitical origins of neoliberalism**

Keeping the history and theory of the war-Keynesian state nexus in mind, this section will turn to exploring how geopolitical events and structural changes led to the fall of Keynesianism and the rise of neoliberalism.

According to conventional wisdom, Keynesianism was discredited because the Keynesian macroeconomic management failed to keep inflation under control in the 1970s. Neoliberals aggressively claimed that a spiral of inflation was attributed to the inherent, inflationary tendencies of the Keynesian demand management, and the neoliberal campaign against Keynesianism was influential enough to undermine the post-war Keynesian consensus. It is true that Keynesian policy makers of that time were partially responsible for high inflation in the early 1970s. However, its main causes were arguably the inflationary financing of the Vietnam War and the oil price shock of 1973–1974 triggered by the OPEC oil embargo as a sanction against the United States for supporting Israel in the Yom Kippur War. Keynesian demand management itself was least responsible for war-led inflation. Therefore, it was wars that escalated inflation and consequently led to the fallen credibility of Keynesianism.

The collapse of the Bretton Woods System played a more decisive role in the decline of Keynesianism because the fixed exchange rates and capital controls of the system were internationally institutional scaffolding of the post-war Keynesian economic management. It is important to note that the Bretton Woods System was based on a tacit deal covering not only economic but also national security concerns shared by the United States and its allies, West European states and Japan. As long as allied governments were willing to hold dollars, U.S. external deficits could be financed without necessarily adjusting domestic economic policies, especially austerity, for the obligations of maintaining a fixed value for the dollar in terms of gold. Allied states were actually willing to finance U.S. troops stationed on their territories with the dollars their central banks held because they needed the U.S. commitment to guarantee their security. In addition, the dollars held by their central banks enabled them to maintain undervalued currencies, which they used to encourage exports to the large U.S. market.

However, as Robert Triffin famously pointed out, the Bretton Woods System was in a fundamental dilemma: the United States needed to run payment deficits large enough to provide adequate liquidity to the world economy, while it also needed to avoid an international crisis of confidence in the dollar caused by large external deficits.57 This dilemma became acute in the late 1960s, when escalation of the Vietnam War and the simultaneous launching of the Great Society Program by the Johnson Administration had worsened the U.S. balance of payments and caused deterioration in international confidence in the value of the dollar. The foundation of the Bretton Woods System began to erode.

Here, we should notice the relationships between war and the Great Society Program. First, the path dependency of the war-welfare state nexus after World War II arguably remained. In particular, the policy planners of the Johnson Administration had been so convinced of American invincibility since 1945 as to be confident of building the Great Society. Second, at least in the early years of the Vietnam War, particularly from 1965 to 1966, high public and congressional support for the war strengthened the executive power of the Johnson Administration to push the welfare reforms of the Great Society.58 In short, the Vietnam War and the Great Society Program associated with wars made the Bretton Woods System come to a deadlock by 1968.

The succeeding Nixon Administration unilaterally decided in August 1971 to close the gold window and force U.S. allies to accept devaluation of the dollar, instead of painfully adjusting the priorities of its own domestic economic policies. Such an egoistic decision was possible because the United States enjoyed a geopolitical leverage for making its allies bear adjustment costs. U.S. allies of that time feared that the U.S. balance of payments problem and its painful adjustment on the U.S. domestic economy, combined with the debacle in Vietnam and détente with the Soviet Union, could jeopardise the U.S. defence commitment.59 The Bretton Woods System was in a sense a casualty of the change of geopolitical environments in the 1960s.

In the Nixon and Ford Administrations, advocates of neoliberal thought, such as Gottfried Haberler, George Schultz and Paul Volcker, had strong influences on the making of international financial policy. This sudden prominence of neoliberals partially reflected a change of U.S. domestic politics. Along with the growing international financial markets in the 1960s, U.S. multinational industrialists had become frustrated with capital controls on foreign direct investment. They joined financial interests in strongly supporting the neoliberal financial policies of the Nixon and Ford Administrations.60

The two world wars had given impetus to Keynesianism, curbing the political and economic power of financial interests. However, the Vietnam War did not necessarily do so, though the public support for the war at an early stage had encouraged Johnson’s project of the Great Society. The Vietnam War was a limited war rather than a total war with a high degree of mass mobilisation. The Johnson Administration financed the war not by raising taxes but by allowing the expansion of dollar holdings by foreign central banks to hide the true costs from the public, taking advantage of the privilege of the dollar as a primary reserve currency. Moreover, the devastating results of the war seriously damaged Johnson’s prestige and American national self-confidence, weakening the executive power of the Administration.61 It also divided the public opinion and undermined the social unity of the people, which was one of the prerequisites for the Keynesian economic management as the previous section has shown. Thus, the Vietnam War did not work the mechanism of war-Keynesian state nexus. In contrast, the war, along with its economic by-products such as high inflation and large external deficits, destroyed the political and economic foundations of the post-war Keynesian consensus.

In the late 20th century, the nature and form of warfare were transformed to weaken the war-Keynesian state nexus. First, large-scale warfare could bring about persistent impacts on the expansion of state capacity and the enhancement of social cohesion, but global wars or total wars between major powers seemed unthinkable because of the existence of nuclear weapons.62 Second, nuclear weapons made the national defence budget relatively small because they were much cheaper than conventional fire power.63 A ‘conscription of wealth’ as a mechanism of social levelling became less likely. Finally, military conscription worked as a leverage of enhancing the political voice of the working class calling for employment and of repressing the power of the financial interests, but the United States in 1973 and the United Kingdom in 1960 halted military conscription and adopted all-volunteer armed forces, while other NATO member states except Canada and Luxemburg maintained conscription during the Cold War. It is interesting that the United States and the United Kingdom played a role in leading the displacement of Keynesianism with neoliberalism in the 1980s.

However, theorists of Gramscian historical materialism might argue that the mode of production rather than that of warfare is far more associated with the rise of neoliberalism. Referring to Antonio Gramsci’s analytical concept of ‘hegemony’, they argue that major transformations at all three, interlinked levels – that of the mode of production, of social relations and of ideology – have shifted global hegemony towards a specific neoliberal form. The first level is the transformation of the mode of production. Since the late 1960s, when growth rates and profits started to decline, Fordism, characterised by the system of mass production, fell into a deep crisis. The crisis of Fordism paved the way for the emergence of post-Fordism, that is, the system of flexible production. At the second level of social relations, this ***process*** engendered the structural power of transnational capital, particularly financial capital. The transition of the mode of production and the emergence of the power of transnational capital were interlinked with a major shift at the third level of ideology from Keynesianism to neoliberalism.64

To examine in detail the Gramscian approach is beyond the scope of this paper. However, it is important here to point out the hidden role of wars in this historical materialist narrative. First, while there is no consensus in the literature on what exactly provoked the decrease in growth rates and profit rates engendering the crisis of Fordism in the late 1960s and 1970s, it seems undeniable that one of the causes of economic stagnation in the 1970s was geopolitical conflict: the Vietnam War led to the collapse of the Bretton Woods System and the Yom Kippur War caused a spike in oil prices. Second, as we have discussed, unlike global wars and total wars, limited wars under nuclear deterrence in the late 20th century were not enough to curb the power of transnational capital. Finally, the role of military technology in shaping the mode of production cannot be overemphasised. The form of mass production first came with its application in arms manufacturing at the U.S. Army Springfield and Harpers Ferry armouries in the 20th century, and Ford engineers adopted what they found useful from armoury practices for automobile production. It is also important to note that the U.S. Defence department and defence-related agencies were the dominant supporters of research and development and the primary markets for computer and information technology,65 which the post-Fordist system of flexible production significantly exploited. In addition, information technology is remarkably useful for encouraging financial activities, market transactions and globalisation. Thus, as David Harvey says, ‘information technology is the privileged technology of neoliberalism’.66

These geopolitical factors largely escape the purview of the Gramscian account of neoliberal hegemony. Contingencies such as wars and innovations in military technology may not be appropriately revealed by the materialist theoretical mode of reasoning. However, since the historical reality is full of contingencies, they have to be studied in relation to the main preoccupations of Gramscian historical materialism such as the mode of production and the power of transnational capital.

The end of the Cold War was obviously a turning point. The victory in the struggle against communism reinforced the neoliberal belief among the policy makers of the United States and its allies. Unipolarity in the post-Cold War era strongly motivated U.S. officials to seek the ideal of the global neoliberal order with less compromise than during the Cold War. During the 1990s, the Clinton Administration attempted to promote globalisation and pressured not only advanced but also developing countries to liberalise the domestic markets, using international organisations such as the World Trade Organisation, International Monetary Fund and World Bank.67

By the time of the collapse of the Soviet Union, the constant menace that had provided a legitimate reason for mobilisation and had driven Western states to maintain the state capacity, social cohesion and social equality finally disappeared. Since the end of the Cold War, NATO’s member states have suspended compulsory military services or greatly reduced the number of conscripts and relied increasingly on volunteer forces.68 The end of military conscription implies that the source of political power of the working class calling for employment and resisting neoliberal reforms advantageous to the wealthy financial class was lost. This was reflected by growing income inequality after the end of the Cold War, especially in the United States.69 Greater income inequality rendered the financial sector more politically powerful.70

It is true that the world in the post-Cold War era has been far from peaceful. The end of the Cold War weakened what Simmel calls an ‘intensified cohesive function of conflict’, and states with deep ethnic, religious or linguistic cleavages must find it harder to maintain social cohesion facing the internal conflicts of identity politics, that is, the claim to power on a particular identity within the state.71 However, the nature of warfare has been significantly transformed to what Mary Kaldor calls ‘new wars’.72 In contrast with ‘old wars’ such as the two world wars, which encouraged social unity, new wars driven by identity politics in the post-Cold War era tend towards fragmentation. While the mode of old wars is a battle between vertically organised regular armies, the strategies of new wars draw heavily on guerrilla warfare, counter-insurgency and terrorism, aiming to control the population by sowing fear and hatred.73 As Stephan Walt points out, while terrorism is serious but not necessarily an existential threat, the problem is its effect of spreading xenophobia, poisoning the political climate in an intolerant and extremist manner, and destroying national unity. Referring to Michael Desch’s argument, Walt comments, ‘if the U.S.-Soviet Cold War was the “perfect” threat for generating national unity, terrorism is perhaps the *worst* type of danger for holding the United States together’.74

New wars rely much less on large-scale mass mobilisation than old wars because wars against guerrilla forces or terrorism are conducted by a small number of highly specialised professional military forces. Moreover, the role of private security companies (PSCs) in conflicts has recently become greater. For example, PSCs working for the United States supplied one out of every ten people deployed in the Iraq War in 2003. Using PSCs reduces governmental transparency and erodes the nexus between citizenship and military services, because the executive branch’s contracting with PSCs for a war is less open to public view than deploying the regular army.75 New wars no longer generate pressure for democratisation, social cohesion, equality, and consequently Keynesianism. A *new wars*-Keynesian state nexus would be hardly possible. For example, in response to September 11, 2001, President Bush Jr. certainly called for national unity, mobilised for War on Terror and dramatically expanded federal expenditures for war and homeland security. However, the new wars after September 11 hardly redirected the path of capitalism from neoliberal to Keynesian or social democratic form. In contrast, the Bush Administration lowered taxes on the rich and weakened the social cohesion of the United States.76

When the mass mobilisation in the old wars has faded away, Keynesianism as a civilianised form of mass mobilisation has also come to an end. Thomas Piketty asks, ‘Can we imagine a 21st century in which capitalism will be transcended in a more peaceful and more lasting way, or must we simply await the next crisis or the next war (this time truly global)?’77 However, fortunately or unfortunately, it seems difficult to imagine within the foreseeable future that the awaited next war, which would be a ‘new war’, could transform the neoliberal structure of capitalism and revive the Keynesian managed economy.

**Conclusion**

This essay has presented a hypothesis concerning the significant influence of international conflicts and geopolitical structures on the current dominance of neoliberalism. The reality of neoliberal dominance is arguably multidimensional, and our Hintzean approach throws light on its military and geopolitical dimensions. Various scholars including Crouch, Harvey and Gramscian historical materialists have already developed plausible approaches to neoliberal dominance, but little attention has been given to the impact of wars on it.78 Our approach and these other approaches may not be exclusive but mutually complementary.

One of the strengths of our analysis is that it could well explain the timing of paradigm shifts of economic ideologies. For example, the Keynesian Revolution began in the 1930s and was completed in the 1960s because it was significantly associated with the two world wars and the peak of the Cold War. The decline of Keynesianism and the rise of neoliberalism in the 1970s were also related to geopolitical factors such as the Vietnam War, the Yom Kippur War, nuclear deterrence and the U.S. hegemony under the Cold War. The global spread of neoliberalism following the 1990s was associated with the end of the Cold War.

Crouch is surprised at the extraordinary speed with which Keynesianism was displaced in dominant economic thinking by neoliberalism in the 1970s.79 The present analysis has provided a possible explanation for this speed: the huge and sudden shocks of geopolitical conflicts in the late 1960s and the early 1970s radically destroyed the social, institutional and political foundations of Keynesianism, especially the Bretton Woods System that had curbed the political power of neoliberal-minded financial interests. The robustness of neoliberalism today also supports our hypothesis that a revolutionary paradigm shift to Keynesianism would be difficult without large-scale geopolitical conflicts involving mass mobilisation, which we now hardly expect to occur.

Needless to say, further investigations are necessary for confirming our hypothesis. First, this essay has focused on the transition of dominant economic thinking in the United States from World War I to today, but we need more empirical, historical and comparative studies on the role of geopolitical factors in shaping and maintaining economic ideologies. Second, we have examined how wars influence economic ideologies, dealing with wars as an exogenous and contingent factor. However, reverse causality may also be worthy to explore: an economic ideology induces a war.80 Finally, the most interesting agenda for future research is how the ongoing transformation of geopolitical structures such as the end of the *Pax Americana* and the rise of China will affect our economic thinking.

**Notes**

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Because the conservative government led Sweden to pro-German neutrality in 1914, Britain blockaded the country, causing privation. As a result, popular discontent paved the way for the Liberal-Social Democrat coalition government in 1917, which started to take tentative steps in a more progressive direction. The Social Democrats appointed a committee of Inquiry into Unemployment in 1926. Young economists in the committee, later known as the Stockholm School, developed new economic ideas, which led to Keynesian-style policies in the 1930s. However, their effects remained limited until after World War II. Despite Sweden’s neutrality, the war impelled a high degree of social mobilization because of the threat from Germany, giving the country the expansion of state capacity necessary for Keynesian policies. 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**Body**

**ABSTRACT**

***The foreign affairs ministry announces that international flights will resume as Morocco becomes the first country in the Arab world to launch a vaccine passport amid declining Covid-19 cases. Forbes Middle East projects Morocco to emerge as the fifth largest economy in Africa in 2021 with an expected GDP of MAD 1.1 trillion ($124 billion). The European Parliament adopts resolution 2021/2747 on the human rights situation at the Moroccan-Spanish border in Ceuta, condemning Morocco for breaching the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of the Child and for the use of minors by Moroccan authorities in the crisis. The resolution further complicates the diplomatic situation between Morocco and Spain. The Forces Armées Royales (FAR) (Royal Moroccan Armed Forces) participate in the United States (US)-led African Lion 2021 joint military exercise***.

**FULL TEXT**

**Morocco reopens as vaccine passport launches...**

**Morocco** became the first country in the **Arab** world to launch a vaccine passport on 7 June following a trend of declining **Covid-19** cases and full vaccination of over 8 million, 22%, of its population of 36.4 million. While **Saudi Arabia** and **Qatar** have launched apps to facilitate the tracking of virus transmission, Morocco is the first to grant citizens more freedom upon attaining *"fully vaccinated"* status.[[91]](#footnote-92)1 This includes free movement after curfew hours and fewer restrictions for both domestic and international travel.[[92]](#footnote-93)2

The government on 20 May announced a shortening of the night curfew from 11pm to 4.30am, which is expected to remain in place until further notice. By 1 June Morocco had reopened public spaces including movie theatres, beaches and swimming pools and permitted large gatherings such as weddings.[[93]](#footnote-94)3 Countrywide, some business and services, such as restaurants, hotels and intercity transport, can operate subject to certain operating capacity limitations. Restaurants, cafes and stores are allowed to operate until 11pm daily. Domestic flights and public transport, including bus and train operations, are in service. On 3 June, the government extended the existing health state of emergency (SoE) by a month to 10 July in order to combat Covid-19 and its variants. The SoE allows government to impose swift and proactive ***measures*** including travel restrictions and curfew.[[94]](#footnote-95)4 The kingdom also announced the resumption of international flights under special conditions on 15 June.

Other Arab countries are lagging behind in vaccination and digitisation of their pandemic management response. In a 15 June report, local news publication **Morocco World News**, with data sourced from **Our World in Data**, showed Morocco leading the **Middle East and North Africa (MENA)** region in vaccination, with a total of 16.69 million administered doses of Covid-19 vaccines.[[95]](#footnote-96)5 The **United Arab Emirates (UAE)** has fully vaccinated nearly 40% of its population, while **Egypt** is in sixth place with 1.35 million fully vaccinated, representing 0.4% of its population. **Algeria** has not published data on administered doses.[[96]](#footnote-97)6

**... and international flights resume**

International flights to and from Morocco resumed on 15 June under special conditions, although borders remain closed.[[97]](#footnote-98)7 The foreign affairs ministry said the decision to resume flights takes into account the positive indicators of Morocco's epidemiological situation, including a decrease in the number of recorded Covid-19 cases.[[98]](#footnote-99)8 Resumption of flights is part of the government's plan, under **Operation Marhaba**, to facilitate the return of Moroccans residing abroad **(Marocains Résident a l'Etranger) (MREs)** for the year's summer vacation.[[99]](#footnote-100)9 King **Mohammed VI** on 13 June instructed all authorities involved in the field of transportation to facilitate the Moroccan diaspora's summer holiday in Morocco by offering air, sea, and land trips at "*affordable prices*".[[100]](#footnote-101)10 The majority of MREs could not visit their home country last year due to the pandemic. In response, national carrier airline **Royal Air Maroc (RAM)** announced an *"****exceptional****"* and *"historic"* system to facilitate the return of MREs to Morocco for the summer holidays.[[101]](#footnote-102)11

Countries that will be allowed to resume flights into Morocco will be classified in two lists, according to health ministry recommendations and official epidemiological data from the **World Health Organization (WHO)**. List A includes countries with positive indicators regarding their control of the Covid-19 epidemiological situation. Travellers from such countries, whether Moroccan or foreigners living there, can enter Morocco subject to providing a vaccination certificate or a negative polymerase chain reaction (PCR) test taken 48 hours before departure.[[102]](#footnote-103)12 List B includes countries experiencing a spread of variants or lacking precise Covid-19 case statistics.[[103]](#footnote-104)13 Travellers from these countries must obtain ***exceptional*** authorisation prior to travel, present a negative PCR test result taken less than 48 hours prior to arrival, and undergo a mandatory ten-day quarantine on arrival.[[104]](#footnote-105)14 Both lists will be published regularly on websites of the ministries of foreign affairs, tourism and health.[[105]](#footnote-106)15 The lists and policy will remain under constant review, and will be adapted should the epidemiological situation change locally or internationally.[[106]](#footnote-107)16 Policies are therefore subject to change on short notice.

**L'Office National Marocain de Tourisme (ONMT)** (national tourism office) director **Adel El Fakir** announced on 14 June that 42 airlines serving 43 countries will resume internal flights to and from Morocco, including four new ones.[[107]](#footnote-108)17 These include **Russia**'s **S7 Airlines** and **Aeroflot**, as well as **Israel**'s **Israir Airlines**, which announced it will launch direct flights from **Tel Aviv** to **Marrakech** from 19 July. In April, Morocco's **Direction des Études et des Prévisions Financières (DEPF)** (directorate of financial studies and forecasts) announced a 65% decline in the country's tourism revenue in January and February, compared to a 14.9% increase recorded during the same period in 2020.[[108]](#footnote-109)18 The DEPF also noted that the covid-19 pandemic caused an 81% decrease in tourist arrivals.

**Forbes ranks Morocco as Africa's fifth strongest economy...**

Financial publication **Forbes Middle East** projects Morocco to emerge as the fifth largest economy in **Africa** in 2021. In its report published on 24 May, Forbes predicted that Morocco's GDP will reach MAD 1.1 trillion ($124 billion) in 2021, seeing real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) grow by 4.5%, compared to a contraction of 7% in 2020.[[109]](#footnote-110)19 Forbes based its ranking on April 2021 GDP data released by the **International Monetary Fund (IMF)** and **World Bank**. The World Bank notes that Morocco descended into a deep recession in 2020, citing the combination of Covid-19 and an ***agricultural*** shock in the local economy as reasons for its economic decline. However, the World Bank notes that Morocco's economic outlook remains positive given its successful crisis response and ambitious reforms, as demonstrated by the unveiling of a new development model on 25 May.[[110]](#footnote-111)20 The humancentered approach will usher in serious reforms in health, education, ***agriculture***, investment and taxation.[[111]](#footnote-112)21 The IMF expects Morocco's GDP, at current prices, to grow by 9.2% in 2021 to approximately MAD 1.1 trillion ($124 billion), in comparison to MAD 1 trillion ($113.55 billion) in 2020.[[112]](#footnote-113)22**Nigeria**, Egypt, **South Africa** and Algeria respectively rank in the top four spots in Forbes' analysis.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Projected 2021 Real Gross Domestic Product (GDP)**[[113]](#footnote-114)23 | | |
|  | **MAD** | **USD** |
| **Nigeria** | 4.5 trillion | $514.05 billion |
| **Egypt** | 3.5 trillion | $394.28 billion |
| **South Africa** | 2.9 trillion | $329.53 billion |
| **Algeria** | 1.3 trillion | $151.46 billion |
| **Morocco** | 1.1 trillion | $124 billion |
| **Top 5 total** | 13.3 trillion | $1.5 trillion |
| **Africa total** | 23 trillion | $2.6 trillion |

The IMF expects the total GDP of the top five African countries to grow by 11.8% in 2021 to MAD 13.3 trillion ($1.5 trillion), compared to MAD 12 trillion ($1.35 trillion) in 2020. The IMF noted in its April **World Economic Outlook** that rising numbers of deaths and millions remaining unemployed worldwide are *"grim indicators"* of the extreme social and economic strain on the global economy. However,

"... *even with high uncertainty about the path of the pandemic, a way out of this health and economic crisis is increasingly visible*".[[114]](#footnote-115)24

**EU blames Morocco for Spanish migrant crisis ...**

Diplomatic relations between Morocco and **Spain** have deteriorated further with the **European Parliament** (**EP**) adopting **Resolution 2021/2747** on the human rights situation at the Moroccan- Spanish border in **Ceuta** on 10 June. The resolution, with 395 votes in favour, 85 against and 196 abstentions, condemns Morocco for breaching the **United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of the Child** and for the use of minors by Moroccan authorities in the crisis.[[115]](#footnote-116)25 Spanish authorities accuse Morocco of easing its border controls in retaliation for **Madrid**'s decision to allow **Western Sahara** independence movement **Polisario** leader **Brahim Ghali** to be treated for Covid-19 in Spain. At least 2,000 minors have crossed into Cueta since the migration crisis started on 17 May. Spain's foreign minister, **Arancha González Layab**, claims Morocco is deliberately risking the lives of children and babies in the diplomatic row:

"*It tears our hearts out to see our neighbours sending children, even babies [because] they reject a humanitarian gesture on our part*."[[116]](#footnote-117)26

The resolution created tensions in the European parliament where more than half of its members boycotted the vote claiming it inappropriate and ill-considered to antagonise a partner as important to the **European Union (EU)** as Morocco.[[117]](#footnote-118)27

Morocco's diplomatic rift with Spain began when Morocco's foreign affairs ministry summoned the Spanish ambassador in **Rabat** on 25 April to *"clarify"* reports that Spain had decided to host Ghali for medical treatment after he tested positive for Covid-19 (see *ARC Briefing Morocco May 2021)*.[[118]](#footnote-119)28 Foreign affairs minister **Nasser Bourita** addressed the Spanish government on 1 May, asking whether it was ready to sacrifice strategic ties between Rabat and Madrid for Ghali.[[119]](#footnote-120)29 Spain said Ghali's hospitalisation was for *"humanitarian reasons"* and that the situation should not affect ties between Madrid and Rabat.

The EU resolution notes that from 17 May, an ***unprecedented*** surge of around 9,000 migrants entered, swum or walked into the autonomous city of Ceuta after Moroccan authorities eased border controls, opened their gates and took no action to prevent the illegal entry. The European parliament says the crisis was triggered by diplomatic tensions between the two countries:

*"Parliament rejects Morocco's use of border control and migration, and unaccompanied minors in particular, as political pressure against Spain. [Members of the European Parliament] MEPs particularly deplore the participation of children, unaccompanied minors and families in the recent mass crossings of the border from Morocco to the Spanish city of Ceuta, putting their lives and safety in clear danger*."[[120]](#footnote-121)30

The resolution calls on Spain to allow for the repatriation of Moroccan children to their families *"which must be guided by the best interests of the child and carried out in compliance with national and international law"*, particularly the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.[[121]](#footnote-122)31

Bourita called the EP resolution *"out of step"* and says the issue is a bilateral concern between Spain and Morocco.[[122]](#footnote-123)32 On 11 June, during an emergency meeting, the bureau of Morocco's house of representatives expressed regret for the disregard on display of the important partnership between Morocco and the EU. The foreign affairs ministry reiterated the importance of shared responsibility to tackle Europe's migration crisis and says Morocco is only contributing to the management of irregular migration as a partner and not as a *"gendarme for Europe"*.[[123]](#footnote-124)33

**US military conducts largest ever exercise in Africa...**

Morocco's **Forces Armées Royales (FAR)** (royal Moroccan armed forces) participated in the **United States (US)**-led **African Lion 2021** joint military exercise across Morocco from 7-18 June. The African Lion, the largest annual military exercise organised by the US **Africa Command**, was held for the 17th year amidst the bicentennial celebration of US-Morocco relations and construction of the American diplomatic office in **Tangier**.[[124]](#footnote-125)34 The US decision to hold the military exercise follows the historic recognition by former president **Donald Trump** (2017-2021) in December of Morocco's sovereignty over the **Western Sahara** despite rulings by the **United Nations (UN)** that its people had a right to self-determination.[[125]](#footnote-126)35

The FAR noted that the military exercise would train 7,800 military members and "*consolidate interoperability between participants*" as the multinational partners work to share techniques on land, air and sea strategy.[[126]](#footnote-127)36 Participating nations also trained to respond to global conflicts such as cyber warfare, terrorism and chemical attacks. Military exercises took place in **Agadir, Tifnit**, **Tan Tan, Mahbes, Tafraout**, **Ben Guerir** and **Kenitra**.

The large-scale military exercise take place weeks after the FAR participated in the **Phoenix Express** naval training in **Tunisia**.[[127]](#footnote-128)37 Morocco and the US military were joined by service members from nine countries, including **Brazil, Canada**, the **United Kingdom, Italy**, the **Netherlands, Senegal**, and Tunisia. Spain withdrew its participation in the joint-military exercise, with Spanish outlet **El Pais** reporting that Madrid did not wish to "*legitimise the occupation of the Sahara*" and cancelled on learning that military exercises would be staged in the Western Sahara, a former Spanish colony.[[128]](#footnote-129)38 Military observers from 30 countries were also present.

The FAR highlighted the inclusion of Mahbes in the military exercises, where the 1985 battle over the Western Sahara took place. The town of Mahbes is less than 50 kilometres from the Algerian border, and 100 kilometres from **Tindouf**, which serves as the headquarters of the Algeria-backed Polisario Front military forces.[[129]](#footnote-130)39 All Polisario military incursions into Morocco are launched from Tindouf.

Critics of the African Lion military exercises describe them as *"a waste of taxpayers' money"* and *"simply propaganda"*:

*"Morocco's military ranks 53rd in the 2021* ***Global Fire Power*** *rankings and is not as powerful as its neighbours ? the joint exercise will not make the country strong."*[[130]](#footnote-131)40

**Planner**

Sep 2021 **(Morocco)** General elections

2021 **(Morocco)** Scheduled construction of five new dams;

2021 **Oued Zem (Morocco)** Scheduled opening of automotive testing centre;

Q4 2021 **Marrakech (Morocco)** 24th **General Assembly of the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO)**

2022 **Marrakech (Morocco) International Monetary Fund** and **World Bank** annual meetings to take place in Morocco;

**Chronology**

15 Jun 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***News.in-24*. **National Tourist Office (MNTO)** director general **Adel El Faki** announces that 42 airlines serving 43 countries will resume international flights in Morocco on 15 June, including **Russian** carriers **S7 Airlines** and **Aeroflot**;

15 Jun 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***Morocco World News*. Morocco leads the **Middle East and North Africa (MENA)** region's Covid-19vaccination campaign having administered 16.69 million doses;

15 Jun 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***Royal Air Maroc*. National airline **Royal Air Maroc (RAM)** announces that all tickets issued before 13 June will benefit from ***exceptional*** commercial offers;

15 Jun 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***Morocco World News*. **Nigerian Petroleum Corporation** has launches initial phases of construction of $25 billion Nigeria-Morocco gas pipeline;

15 Jun 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***Morocco Telegraph*. The **Arab Inter-parliamentary Union** joins **Pan-African Parliament (PAP)** and the **Arab Parliament (AP)** in condemning the **European Union (EU)** resolution against Morocco over the recent migration crisis in **Ceuta**;

15 Jun 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***Royal Air Maroc*. National airline **Royal Air Maroc (RAM)** announces it recorded 120,000 flight reservations in under 24 hours due to the special prices it adopted to facilitate Moroccan summer plans for Moroccans residing abroad;

14 Jun 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***Morocco World News*. State-owned phosphate and fertilizer group **OCP Group** announces it has carried out a bond issue worth $1.5 billion;

14 Jun 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***Morocco World News*. National airline **Royal Air Maroc (RAM)** introduces new prices to facilitate the travel of Moroccans living abroad during the summer period;

13 Jun 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***El Mundo*. Morocco is reportedly halting negotiations for the renewal of the **Maghreb-Europe** gas pipeline concession;

13 Jun 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***Maroc*. The secretariat general of the **Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC)** calls on the **European Parliament** to play a positive role and *"avoid exacerbating"* the bilateral crisis between Morocco and **Spain**;

13 Jun 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***Morocco World News*. King **Mohammed VI** instructs all authorities involved in the field of transportation to facilitate the Moroccan diaspora's summer holiday in Morocco by offering air, sea, and land trips at *"affordable prices"*;

11 Jun 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***World Bank*. The **World Bank** approves $100m in funding to boost Morocco's climate resilience, particularly for the **Integrated Disaster Risk Management (DRM)** and **Resilience** programme;

11 Jun 2021 **Madrid (Spain)***Morocco World News*. **Spain**'s foreign minister, **Arancha González Laya**, asks **United States (US)** secretary of state **Antony Blinken** to reverse the US position on the **Western Sahara**, blaming former US president **Donald Trump** for **Spain**'s current diplomatic standoff with Morocco;

11 Jun 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***Morocco World News*. The **German** consulate in Rabat issues a statement warning its expatriates not to overstay their authorised time in Morocco;

11 Jun 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***Morocco World News*. Foreign minister **Nasser Bourita** calls the recent **European Union (EU)** resolution *"out of step"* and highlights the issue as a bilateral concern between **Spain** and Morocco;

11 Jun 2021 **Manama (Bahrain)***Bahrain News Agency*. The **Bahraini Consultative Council**, upper house of the **Bahrain** national assembly, expresses regret over the **European Parliament**'s decision to adopt a resolution that blames Morocco for a sudden influx of irregular migrants in the **Spanish** enclave of **Ceuta** in May;

11 Jun 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***Air Arabia Maroc*. Low cost airline **Air Arabia Maroc** announces it will resume international flights on 15 June, in accordance with the government's lockdown easing, and will launch new air routes linking Morocco to Europe;

11 Jun 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***Xinhua*. Foreign minister **Nasser Bourita** meets with **Libya**'s foreign affairs minister, **Najla Al-Manqoush**, to discuss the Libyan crisis and efforts to achieve reconciliation, while preparing for the second meeting of the **Berlin Conference** to be held on 23 June;

11 Jun 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***Morocco World News*. Both the **Arab** and **African Parliaments** release separate statements in support of Morocco in its diplomatic crisis with **Spain**, urging the **European Union (EU)** not to get involved;

11 Jun 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***Morocco World News*. The foreign affairs ministry reiterates the importance of shared responsibility to tackle **Europe**'s migration crisis and says Morocco is only contributing to the management of irregular migration as a partner and not as a gendarme for Europe;

10 Jun 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***Global Tribune India*. Morocco and **India** act as co-chairs for the virtually held inaugural meeting of the **Arab-India Energy Forum**, launching dialogue on energy collaboration;

10 Jun 2021 **Atlanta (United States)***CNN*. The **United States (US) Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)** updates its international travel guide listing Morocco as low-risk for travel but advises travellers to fully vaccinate before traveling to the country;

9 Jun 2021 **Atlanta (United States)***Morocco World News*. The **United States (US) Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)** has used an integral map of Morocco that includes the **Western Sahara** region, following the example of **BBC Arabic** in featuring an undivided map of Morocco in its coverage of the **African Lion** joint military exercise;

9 Jun 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***Algeria Press Service*. In an interview with **al Jazeera, Algeria**'s President **Abdelmadjid Tebboune** "*says we have no problem with Morocco. Morocco has a problem with us*";

9 Jun 2021 **Tetouan (Morocco)***Africa Inc*. **IKEA** parent company **INGKA Holding** announces plans to launch a second department store in **Tetouan**, following success of its new store in **Casablanca**, a MAD 400m ($45.4m) investment in the **Tangier-Tetouan-Al Hoceima** region's economy;

9 Jun 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***Morocco World News*. Parliament passes **Bill No. 13.21**, regarding the commercialisation and legal use of cannabis in Morocco, with 41 voting for and 11 against;

8 Jun 2021 **Madrid (Spain)***Morocco World News*. Spanish news publication **La Razon** says over 3.2 million Moroccans from all over **Europe** traditionally cross Spanish ports such as **Tarifa, Algeciras**, and **Almeria** to reach Morocco for the summer holiday and claims Morocco's decision to exclude Spanish ports will cost Spain ?1.15 billion ($1.39 billion);

8 Jun 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***Morocco World News*. Morocco announces it will be opening its border with **Spain** for a short period of time, to facilitate the return of 12,000 seasonal farmworkers currently stuck in the city of **Huelva**;

8 Jun 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***Morocco World News*. **United States (US)** embassy charge d'Affaires **David Greene** says bilateral trade between Morocco and the US increased fivefold from 2005 to 2019, reaching MAD 44.1 billion ($5 billion);

7 Jun 2021 **Paris (France)***News.in-24*. **France** puts Morocco on the orange list of its traffic light system that determines which countries' travellers are eligible to visit France as it prepares to re-open borders on 9 June;

7 Jun 2021 **Agadir (Morocco)***Morocco World News*. **African Lion** military exercise, organised by the **United States (US) Africa Command**, begins;

7 Jun 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***High Commission for Planning*. According to the **High Commission for Planning**, national disposable income fell by 5% to MAD 1.1 billion ($124m) in 2020 as the national economy shrank by 6.3%;

6 Jun 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***Morocco World News*. **Spain** is reportedly under pressure following Morocco's decision to exclude several of its ports, including **Melilla, Ceuta**, and **Almeria**, from the 2021 **Marhaba Operation**, a programme that welcomes Moroccans residing abroad annually;

6 Jun 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***Garda*. Government announces the resumption of flights from and to Morocco starting 15 June;

5 Jun 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***Morocco World News*. State-owned phosphate and fertilizer company **OCP Group** files an appeal against a recent decision that imposes duties on its exports to the **United States (US)**;

5 Jun 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***Morocco World News*. Government announces it will launch its vaccine passport starting 7 June;

5 Jun 2021 **Khartoum (Sudan)***Khartoum-Today*. **Sudan** reconfirms support for Morocco's **Western Sahara** peace proposal;

4 Jun 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***Yahoo Finance*. Morocco signs an agreement with **Portuguese** innovation consultancy group **GrowIN Portugal** to increase cooperation between the two nations in the development of start-up companies;

4 Jun 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***Arab World News*. Foreign affairs minister **Nasser Bourita** holds talks in Rabat with the Speaker of **Libya**'s house of representatives **Aguila Saleh** and Libyan **High Council of State** president **Khaled Al-Mashri**;

4 Jun 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***Morocco World News*. Prime minister **Saad Eddine El Othmani** relays a directive from King **Mohammed VI** requiring certain members of the Moroccan legislative body to continue working as the current government's term comes to an end ahead of the general election scheduled to take place in September;

3 Jun 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***Morocco World News*. Morocco sees a 45.3% increase in remittances in Q1 2021, with the Moroccan diaspora sending almost MAD 29 billion ($3.2 billion) in remittances, between January and April;

3 Jun 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***Morocco World News*. **France**'s foreign minister, **Jean-Yves Le Drian**, has reportedly held talks with his Moroccan and Spanish counterparts in a bid to calm tensions between **Spain** and Morocco;

3 Jun 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***Khaleej Times*. Morocco extends the state of emergency for another month until 10 July, allowing government to implement ***measures*** if the epidemiological situation changes;

3 Jun 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***Morocco World News*. In an interview with French newspaper **Le Point, Algeria**'s President **Abdelmadjid Tebboune** says given the choice between independence and integration within Morocco, Moroccans living in **Western Sahara** will vote for independence "*because they will no longer want to be the subjects of Morocco's King*";

2 Jun 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***The Telecompaper*. The **Moroccan National Telecommunications Regulatory Agency (ANRT)** says Morocco is set to become the first country in **Africa** to adopt 6GHz frequencies to improve Wi-Fi connectivity speeds as improvements to the current telecommunications framework "*will allow a 40% increase in throughput compared to its predecessor thanks to higher data transfer and more powerful processors*";

2 Jun 2021 **Madrid (Spain)***Atalayar*. **Algeria**'s President **Abdelmadjid Tebboune** and **National People's Army (ANP)** chief of staff **Said Chanegriha** visit **Polisario** leader **Brahim Ghali** at a hospital in **Algiers**;

2 Jun 2021 **Madrid (Spain)***Morocco World News*. **Polisario** leader **Brahim Ghali** set to leave **Spain** for **Algeria** after a Spanish judge rules that he is not guilty of numerous war crimes amidst rising tensions between Morocco and Spain;

1 Jun 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***The Washington Post*. **German** diplomats invite Morocco to participate in the **International Conference on Libya** on 23 June in a bid to heal a diplomatic rift between Germany and Morocco;

1 Jun 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***Morocco World News*. The health ministry reports over 8.7 million Moroccans have received at least one dose of a **Covid-19** vaccine, and about 5.5 million people have been fully vaccinated;

1 Jun 2021 **Tel Aviv (Israel)***Times of Israel*. **Israel**'s **Israir Airlines** announces it will launch direct flights from **Tel Aviv** to **Marrakech** (**Morocco**) from 19 July, with flights between the two destinations operating five times a week;

31 May 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***North Africa Post*. **Agency for Development of Investment and Export (AMDIE)** and **France**-based consulting firm **Mazars** report estimates Morocco's investments in **Africa** at around $4 billion;

31 May 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***Atalayar*. Morocco blocks a green hydrogen deal with **Germany** amidst tensions over the **Western Sahara**, temporarily halting Germany's energy neutrality plans;

31 May 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***Morocco World News*. Foreign affairs minister expresses *"surprise"* at **Spain**'s prime minister **Pedro Sanchez** accusing Morocco of allowing waves of irregular migrants to enter the Spanish enclave of **Ceuta**;

30 May 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***Morocco World News*. Morocco donates 200,000 doses of the **China**-manufactured **Sinopharm Covid-19** vaccine to **Mauritania**;

30 May 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***El Pais*. **Spain** withdraws from participating in the **African Lion 2021** joint-military exercise saying it does not wish to "*legitimise the occupation of the Sahara*";

30 May 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***Morocco World News*. The **National Office of Airports** announces the latest requirements for foreign tourists to enter Morocco, signalling the country's readiness to ease travel restrictions;

28 May 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***Morocco World News*. Morocco receives 1.5 million doses of the **China**-manufactured **Sinopharm Covid-19** vaccine, adding to the 10 million doses that **National People's Congress of China** president **Li Zhanshu** promised by the end of May; Morocco expects a total of 40 million doses of the Sinopharm vaccine from China;

26 May 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***North Africa Post*. **Special Commission for the Development Model (CSMD)** chairman **Chakib Benmoussa** concludes the commission's two-year consultative ***process*** by presenting its report on the much-delayed 15-year economic plan to King **Mohammed VI**;

26 May 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***Morocco World News*. The house of representatives adopts **Bill 13.21** on the commercialisation and legal use of cannabis for medical purposes;

25 May 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***Morocco World News*. **Israel**'s Charge d'Affaires in **Rabat, David Govrin**, deletes a strongly-worded Tweet criticising Morocco's prime minister, **Saad Eddine El Othmani**, for congratulating **Hamas** on its **Palestinian** election victory;

24 May 2021 **Abu Dhabi (United Arab Emirates)***Morocco World News*. **Forbes Middle East** ranks **Morocco** as the fifth-strongest economy in **Africa**, noting that while the country experienced a deep recession in 2020, all signs point towards a successful economic recovery;

20 May 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***Reuters*. Foreign minister **Nasser Bourita** blames **Spain** for the diplomatic spat between the two countries over mass migrant crossings from Morocco into Spain;

**FOOTNOTES**

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[***-University of Bristol: Palaeontologist, infectious disease mathematical modeller, anaesthetist and ecologist receive Queen's Birthday Honours***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:62X9-RRC1-JD3Y-Y1HX-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

University of Bristol academics Professor Mike Benton, Dr Ellen Brooks Pollock, Professor Tim Cook and Professor Jane Memmott have all received awards in this year's Queen's Birthday Honours list which recognises the achievements and service of people across the UK.

Mike Benton, Professor of Vertebrate Palaeontology, from the School of Earth Sciences has been awarded an OBE for services to palaeontology and to community engagement, including leadership of the Bristol Dinosaur Project, which has reached thousands of children in Bristol in the past 12 years. His programme At the Feet of the Dinosaurs has built links with the City Museum and trained many undergraduates in research skills.

Professor Benton has always been passionate about communicating science. His current research focuses on biodiversity, extinctions and palaeobiology, and he leads a group of 20 young researchers exploring all these themes.

He has led field work, both in the UK and around the world, and has collaborated with colleagues throughout Europe and North America, but also Tunisia, Romania, Russia and China to research the life and times of dinosaurs and other extinct animals, often using state-of-the-art imaging and computational tools.

A special focus has been the end-Permian mass extinction, the greatest mass extinction of all time, and especially its effects on terrestrial organisms. New evidence from China and Russia from field-based projects has helped to identify how the crisis was driven by rapid global warming and acidification, and then how life recovered, and modern ecosystems were put in place.

He has also worked on the colour of dinosaur feathers, showing how palaeobiologists use the latest methods to discover new facts about the life of the past.

His current work uses large computing resources to explore patterns and ***processes*** of macroevolution of species-rich groups such as lizards, birds and mammals. He has written more than 600 scientific papers and more than 50 books on a broad range of topics.

He has supervised more than 70 PhD students, and was founder of the Bristol MSc in Palaeobiology, which has welcomed 450 students since its foundation in 1996.

Professor Benton said: 'I'm amazed to receive this, and am very grateful to the kind people who must have sent letters of support.'

Dr Ellen Brooks Pollock, Senior Lecturer in Infectious Disease Mathematical Modelling, from the Bristol Veterinary School, the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) Health Protection Research Unit in Behavioural Science and Evaluation in Population Health Sciences has been awarded an OBE for her services to the Scientific Pandemic Influenza Group on Modelling (SPI-M) and the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) during the COVID-19 response.

Dr Brooks Pollock has worked in infectious disease modelling for 15 years. During the COVID-19 pandemic, she has been a regular contributor to SPI-M, a subgroup of SAGE that provides modelling evidence to the UK government.

She developed a methodology for condensing multiple policy options into a single figure that was used by the highest levels of government to manage and plan the easing of lockdown, including for the partial re-opening of schools in June 2020, the full re-opening of schools in September 2020 and vaccination rollout.

Her current work to support the UK's COVID-19 response during the pandemic includes quantifying the role of groups and gatherings on COVID-19 transmission, demonstrating that single-person households could safely form a bubble with other households, the impact of temporarily easing restrictions during the Christmas period, modelling the spread of COVID-19 in universities and ***measuring*** the increased mortality associated with the B.1.1.7 (Alpha) variant.

She is the Bristol co-lead for the JUNIPER (Joint UNIversities Pandemic and Epidemiological Research) consortium and last month she guest edited the Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B Special Issue on 'Modelling that shaped the early COVID-19 pandemic response in the UK'.

She leads the University's Scientific Advisory Group modelling subgroup, which has supported the University's COVID-19 response. Last year [June 2020], she established CON-QUEST, an online survey of University of Bristol staff and students, which has fed into University of Bristol and national decision-making.

She is passionate about communicating mathematical modelling in non-technical ways and has been on the editorial board of Mathematics Today since 2017. In 2011, she was jointly awarded the Institute of Mathematics Catherine Richards prize for the article 'Pigs didn't fly, but Swine flu' about modelling the H1N1 influenza pandemic.

Dr Brooks Pollock said: 'I am one of many modellers and scientists supporting the COVID-19 response in the UK and worldwide. I have been studying infectious diseases for 15 years and COVID-19 has tested our knowledge of epidemics and how to control them.

'It's been a privilege and a unique experience to work with fantastic scientists from all over the UK - mostly without leaving home. I am delighted to receive this award and plan to continue to disease modelling for many years to come.'

Professor Tim Cook, Honorary Professor in Anaesthesia, from the Bristol Medical School: Translational Health Sciences (THS) has been awarded an OBE for his services to anaesthesia during COVID-19.

Professor Cook works at the Royal United Hospitals Bath NHS Foundation Trust and is a full time District General Hospital consultant in Anaesthesia and Intensive Care Medicine.

His overall interest is in improving safety and quality in anaesthesia and intensive care using a bottom-up approach. He was awarded the Royal College of Anaesthetists (RCoA) Macintosh Professorship in 2012-13 and in 2014 the Difficult Airway Society Professorship.

In January 2020, he became aware of the pandemic risk of COVID-19 and spent the next two months highlighting the risk and raising the alarm that the pandemic was coming to colleagues locally and nationally working with the Royal College of Anaesthetists and Association of Anaesthetists to disseminate information to allow for early preparedness. Clinically, he spent several months working from home and has since returned to Anaesthesia and Intensive Care medicine in Bath. In advisory and academic roles, he has worked with colleagues in Bath, at the Health Service Research Centre at the Royal College of Anaesthetists and with Bristol's AERATOR research group.

He has collaborated on numerous research papers in the last 18 months work that includes:

rates of deaths among healthcare workers from COVID-19 and the impact on ethnic minorities and staff working on the frontline. This work was quoted in parliament and in inquiry work on the topic and has been widely influential.

provided the first guidance for UK anaesthetists on how to anaesthetise patients with COVID-19 and prepare them for ICU treatment, which was the first global guidance and has been widely used internationally.

first to systematically document the mortality globally, of patients admitted to ICU with COVID-19. Showing a reduction as the first surge progressed and how this plateaued in autumn 2020.

reviewed the relative risk of different groups of healthcare workers for infection, hospital admission and death and this was used to emphasise the importance of early vaccination of healthcare workers.

collaborated on one of the first research studies to show that procedures undertaken during anaesthesia such as intubation and oxygen treatments are lower risk for aerosol spread than coughing.

modelled the impact of vaccinations on deaths, hospital and ICU admissions in the spring of 2021.

Professor Tim Cook said: 'It is very humbling to receive this honour. Staff throughout the hospital have worked tirelessly to provide high-quality compassionate care for patients with COVID-19. This has led to outstanding care, many lives saved, and innumerable families supported. In Bath this has required teamwork at all levels across the hospitals and this will be mirrored across the whole NHS.

'I would like to pay tribute to all members of both clinical and academic teams I have been part of. Colleagues have worked with skill, self-sacrifice and dedication in ***exceptionally*** difficult times. I would also like to thank my family for the constant support they have provided.'

Jane Memmott, Professor of Ecology, from the School of Biological Sciences and Director of the University's Botanic Garden has been awarded an OBE for her services to insect pollinators and ecology.

Professor Memmott Hon FRES is an ecologist and entomologist and in 2020 was made President of the British Ecological Society. Her research focuses on community ecology, and she is an expert on the interactions between insect pollinators and plants.

She studies a wide range of areas in ecology including pollination ecology, ***invasion*** ecology, agro-ecology, biological control, urban ecology, and restoration ecology.

Her research group uses a wide variety of techniques to answer environmental questions, such as whether ecosystem services are affected by farming approach and how alien species integrate into ecological networks. She works as both a pure and an applied ecologist and is keen on working at the interface between the two disciplines.

She has shown that urban habitats can be excellent for pollinators and host more bee species than the surrounding farmland. She is an advocate for increasing the flower resources available to pollinators in urban areas, an approach which has the bonus of being enjoyed by people as well as pollinators.

She has also studied the way in which resources available to insect pollinators have changed over the past century. In her research of long-term vegetation surveys, she found that nectar resources in the UK declined by nearly a third up to the 1970s, likely due to ***agricultural*** intensification, since then resources have increased slightly though not to the point of recovery.

She also researches agroecosystems. Her research has shown that there are significant gaps seasonally in resources for pollinators from plants, such as pollen and nectar, in early spring and late summer; this knowledge could be used to alter the species mix of wildflower strips as part of agri-environment schemes.

Professor Memmott said: 'I'm delighted to receive this award and would like to thank the people who made it possible - particularly all the amazing early career scientists who have worked with me on these research projects, along with some wonderful collaborators.'

Further information

Professor Benton's latest books include the standard textbooks in palaeontology, Cowen's History of Life (Wiley, 2019) and Introduction to Paleobiology and the Fossil Record (with David Harper, Wiley, 2020), as well as a presentation on the transition of palaeobiology from speculation to science over the past 30 years, Dinosaurs Rediscovered (Thames Hudson, 2020). His latest book, The Dinosaurs: New Visions of a Lost World (Thames Hudson, 2021) shows startling new images of what dinosaurs really looked like for the first time, and based on hard scientific evidence.

Dr Ellen Brooks Pollock obtained a first-class degree in Mathematics from University College London, and a PhD in Mathematical Epidemiology from the University of Warwick. She gained postdoctoral experience at Harvard University, the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and the University of Cambridge before moving to Bristol in 2015.

Professor Tim Cook has academically, over the last 15 years, been involved in leading and guiding five Royal College of Anaesthetists (RCoA) National Audit Projects learning from major complications of anaesthesia: as clinical lead for epidurals/spinal anaesthesia and airway management and as co-lead and director of the program for accidental awareness during general anaesthesia, perioperative anaphylaxis and perioperative cardiac arrest, which will launch next week. These projects involve the nation's anaesthetists collaborating to shine a light on patient-centred aspects of anaesthetic practice and safety. They are a form of professional-citizen science and are recognised to have changed the landscape of UK anaesthesia clinical practice and anaesthesia research engagement.

[Editorial queries for this story should be sent to [*newswire@enpublishing.co.uk*](mailto:newswire@enpublishing.co.uk) ]

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[***LEGISLATIVE SESSION; Congressional Record Vol. 168, No. 50 (Senate - March 21, 2022)***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:652D-90F1-F0YC-N4WT-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

Washington: The Library of Congress, The Government of USA has issued the following house proceeding:

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of the motion to proceed to H.R 4521, which the clerk will report. The legislative clerk read as follows: Motion to proceed to Calendar No. 282, H.R 4521, a bill to provide for a coordinated Federal research initiative to ensure continued United States leadership in engineering biology. Recognition of the Minority Leader The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Republican leader is recognized. Honoring Corporal Jacob M. Moore Mr. McCONNELL. Madam President, over the weekend, we learned that four U.S marines were tragically killed Friday night. Their training aircraft crashed during joint NATO exercises in Norway. One of those marines, Corporal Moore, was born and raised in Catlettsburg, KY. I want to take a moment to mourn this great loss and salute Corporal Moore's service to our country. Corporal Moore joined the Marines in 2018. At only 24 years old, he had spent 4 years honorably serving our country all around the world. He was serving as an MV-22B Osprey crew chief based out of New River, NC. Corporal Moore was in Norway along with 30,000 other soldiers from 27 countries for NATO's Cold Response exercises. Every 2 years, NATO servicemembers travel to the edge of the Arctic Circle to train in northern Scandinavia's frozen wilderness. This long-scheduled exercise is not directly related to Russia's ***invasion*** of Ukraine, but the events of recent weeks have only reminded us of the incredible importance of the NATO alliance to America's security and to world peace. Corporal Moore's service was hugely and directly important to our Nation, to our allies, and to the world. So we will never forget Corporal Moore's service and sacrifice in defense of America's safety and freedom. We are thinking of and praying for his family at this terribly, terribly difficult time. Nomination of Ketanji Brown Jackson Madam President, on an entirely different matter, this week, the Senate will turn to a crucial constitutional duty: deciding whether to provide or withhold consent to a lifetime appointment to the Supreme Court of the United States. President Biden's nominee for this incredibly consequential position is Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson. Judge Jackson is currently a DC Circuit judge of less than a year. In 9 months as an appellate judge, she has offered only two opinions, both after the Supreme Court vacancy opened up. So this time, unlike Gorsuch, Kavanaugh, and Barrett, there is no meaningful sample size of appellate [[Page S1262]] opinions for Senators to consult. We know a lot about the time Judge Jackson spent applying precedent as a trial judge on the district court but very little about her independent views of larger constitutional and legal questions. This makes the Judiciary Committee's work this week all the more important. The country needs a respectful, dignified but vigorous and exhaustive hearing. This is especially true in light of the curious disconnect between the thinness of Judge Jackson's appellate record and the white-hot intensity with which our country's farthest left activists wanted her and nobody else for this vacancy. Fringe groups that attack the Court's legitimacy and want Court packing spent a great deal of time and money promoting Judge Jackson for this nomination, and, once nominated, prominent, soft-on-crime activists and open-borders pressure groups quickly rallied to her side. The Senate needs to understand why. I enjoyed meeting with Judge Jackson recently. She is a likeable person. More to the point, she has obviously reached impressive heights in the legal profession. But I voted against confirming Judge Jackson to her current post last year, and our meeting the other week did not resolve my questions and concerns. So here is what I will be especially watching and listening for as our colleagues question the nominee this week. First, at the most basic level, I want to hear whether Judge Jackson agrees that the job of a judge is to follow the law as it is written. This is a simple, straightforward proposition. But the same liberals who have spent decades imploring Justices to approach their jobs as activist superlegislators are now eager to see this nominee confirmed. Judge Jackson suggested to me in our meeting that she does not really view herself as having any judicial philosophy whatsoever, but meanwhile, in the press, boosters of her nomination say she does have a philosophy and assures us that it is mainstream. So which is it? I hope the committee can clear up any confusion. It is also the case that President Biden has repeatedly declared that any judge he appoints will pass certain litmus tests. He said they would have ``an expansive view of the Constitution'' that includes the ``penumbras'' and non-textually-based rights that activist judges favor. The President has even made explicit promises about specific cases. For example, ``They will, in fact, support Roe v. Wade.'' We need to know whether Judge Jackson passed President Biden's policy litmus test explicitly or just implicitly. We also need to understand more about Judge Jackson's so-called empathy for particular parties in cases over others. This is not an accusation that Republicans invented; it is a trait that Judge Jackson's supporters happily ascribe to her. One law professor has explained that Judge Jackson would ``bring a ***measure*** of empathy to the criminal defense cases, the Fourth and Fifth Amendment cases.'' I guess a judge entering a case with special preexisting empathy would be a great deal for the party with whom she empathizes, but it would certainly be a raw deal for the opposite party. A judge's job is to bring neutrality, not an agenda. And yet, even as America grapples with a historic crime wave, the President has chosen a nominee whose own supporters say her work as a criminal defense lawyer and on the U.S Sentencing Commission will tilt her judgment in favor of convicts. Even as illegal border crossings are setting alltime records, political groups that support amnesty and functionally open borders are cheering that, if confirmed, Judge Jackson will ``shape the realities of millions'' of people who have come into our country. These confident policy assertions are not selling points; they are actually red flags. The Supreme Court sits atop one of the three pillars of American Government. It is the ultimate backstop for the endurance of our Constitution and the rule of law. And we rightly entrust the Justices who lead it with life tenure. So any nominee to this highest Bench ought to welcome close scrutiny, tough questions, and a rigorous review of their record. The country deserves nothing less, and this is what Senate Republicans will provide this week. I suggest the absence of a quorum. The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll. The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll. Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded. The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered. Recognition of the Majority Leader The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Democratic leader is recognized. Remembering Don Young Mr. SCHUMER. First, Madam President, I want to offer condolences to the family of Don Young, the dean of the House and longest serving Republican in history, who passed away last Friday at the age of 88. The State of Alaska has lost a titan, the House of Representatives has lost a legend, and my thoughts are with his family in this difficult time. Nomination of Ketanji Brown Jackson Madam President, now on SCOTUS, earlier today, the Senate Judiciary Committee commenced their hearings on Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson's historic nomination to the U.S Supreme Court. The daughter of public educators, the pride of Miami Palmetto Senior High School, and a Federal judge for nearly a decade, Judge Jackson began her testimony by returning to what matters most: her family, her upbringing, her qualifications, and, most of all, her fidelity to the Constitution. Over the course of the week, I expect the American people will finally see for themselves why Judge Jackson is one of the most qualified individuals ever to be nominated to the Supreme Court of the United States. They will see, for instance, why the American Bar Association unanimously rated Judge Jackson as ``well qualified'' for the Supreme Court, their highest rating possible. They will see why the president of the Fraternal Order of Police said there is ``little doubt that [Judge Jackson] has the temperament, intellect, legal experience, and family background to earn this appointment.'' They will see why even conservative judges, like retired DC Circuit Judge Thomas Griffith, who introduced Judge Jackson today, wrote that ``Judge Jackson is immensely qualified to serve on the Supreme Court and should be confirmed by the Senate.'' And I also trust that Americans will see right through the misleading and desperate broadsides that a few Members of the other side have launched against the judge in recent weeks. We need not pretend that wild accusations from self-interested actors deserve to be taken seriously, so color me skeptical that the American people will give them much weight. Finally, as these hearings begin, I want to thank Chairman Durbin for organizing a speedy and fair confirmation ***process***. His work has been outstanding. Every member of the Senate Judiciary Committee has met with the judge, which will allow for thoughtful and thorough hearings, just as the chairman had promised. I, thus, remain confident that as these hearings begin, the Senate is on track to confirm Judge Jackson as the 116th Justice of the Supreme Court by the end of this work period. Business Before the Senate Madam President, now on Senate business, as the Judiciary Committee begins a busy week of hearings, the Senate, likewise, begins a busy week here on the floor. Later this afternoon, the Senate will vote to invoke cloture on the motion to proceed to the House-passed America COMPETES Act, the next important step toward enacting major jobs and competitiveness legislation that both Republicans and Democrats widely support. Over the past year, the House and Senate have acted independently to pass their own versions of competitiveness legislation. To reconcile the differences between these bills, both Chambers must enter a conference before we send the final product to the President's desk. In order to go to conference, the Senate needs to amend the House- passed COMPETES bill with the Senate- [[Page S1263]] passed U.S Innovation and Competition Act and then send it back to the House. That is what we are working toward starting today. It is of the highest urgency we move forward on competitiveness legislation. It will lower costs--the words of the day are ``lowering costs stop inflation.'' This bill will do a lot in that regard. The competitiveness legislation will lower costs by bringing manufacturing jobs back to America, by fixing bottlenecks in our supply chains, and by fueling scientific research. Importantly, this bill would also help ensure that the United States has a long-term and resilient supply of chips--crucial for our military, our auto industry, our tech industry, and for American families who feel the sting through price hikes and maddening delays in available goods. As the war in Europe reminds us, our country is vulnerable when we import too many goods from a single country, particularly semiconductors so needed in so many sectors of the economy. We need to make more of these products here in America instead of overseas to shore up our supply chains, preserve our national security. For that reason alone, let's not tarry any longer. Let's pass this important bill--no more delay. I want to thank my Republican colleagues, especially Senators Cornyn and Young, for continuing to work in good faith in this ***process***. Most of us want to see a conference happen soon, and I believe we can reach that goal in the coming weeks. Now, as important as Judge Jackson's hearings are, I urge everyone not to sleep on a handful of other hearings happening this week that are crucial for our country's agenda and, frankly, our Democratic agenda. In the Senate HELP Committee, Chairman Murray will hold a hearing tomorrow on something Democrats have pushed for months: cutting the cost of childcare and preschool for American families. The Senate Committee on Aging, meanwhile, will hold a hearing this Wednesday on increasing home care services to seniors, something I strongly support. And I thank Chairman Casey for organizing this hearing. And, finally, the Committee on Environment and Public Works will also meet Wednesday for a hearing on clean energy, combating climate change, and increasing America's energy independence in the 21st century. All these issues--fighting climate change, lowering the costs of childcare, taking care of our seniors--remain at the top of our caucus's priorities. These hearings will inform us immensely as our caucus continues working on legislation that will lower costs and expand opportunity for the American people. russia Madam President, finally on PNTR, last week, the House acted in near- unanimous fashion to pass legislation revoking Permanent Normal Trade Relations with Russia. This legislation is very much needed for fighting Russia and holding Putin accountable for the carnage--the despicable, nasty, devilish carnage--he has waged, he has levied upon the Ukrainian people. This bill is one way to make sure he continues to pay a heavy price for starting this bloody and savage war. We need this legislation passed without delay. It got overwhelming support from Republicans in the House, including from Leader McCarthy. There is no reason to hold it up. Let's move it forward. Let's move it forward. No nation has so thoroughly soaked the blood of innocent civilians as Russia. No nation like that deserves to have any kind of normal trade relations with the United States. I call on my Republican colleagues to work with us to pass this legislation quickly. There is no reason--absolutely no reason--to delay its passage. I yield the floor. I suggest the absence of a quorum. The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll. The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll. Ms. CANTWELL. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded. The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. Hirono). Without objection, it is so ordered. USICA Ms. CANTWELL. Madam President, I come to the floor to talk about supply chain issues because we all know that supply chain issues are plaguing us on a variety of fronts, and Congress needs to act to help consumers, to help our industries, and to make sure that supply chains work very well. I want to start by thanking the Biden administration for their fast action, along with ***Agricultural*** Secretary Vilsack, for creating popup space at our ports to make sure that U.S growers and shippers can get their products to market. We have seen exorbitant rates now charged in shipping; that is, rates that used to be $1,300 a container have now gone up to either $5,000 a container or $11,000 a container, just depending on where you are talking about products being shipped. So ***agricultural*** products are being left on the docks because ships are actually returning empty and not taking our products with them. Tomorrow, we will try to address this issue in the Senate Commerce Committee, but for now, as I said, last Friday, the administration announced a very innovative plan to make sure that there was dock space at U.S ports to make sure that U.S shipments--***agriculture*** specifically--can be waiting and ready on the docks and get out the door. This is so important because there were industry officials there from the lentil association, from the dairy association--they said they had lost billions last year from the impact of not being able to get their products to market. We know for a fact that there were 24 percent fewer containers that left full last year, and some people say that number has risen to 30 percent this year. So it means that instead of being filled with our U.S exports to Asia, these containers are being left empty, and they are hurrying back to be filled up with more imports and then running back here to the United States. We can't allow this cost to impact our growers. Not only does it impact them in not getting the product to market, but what happens is, they actually lose shelf space. No one is going to wait forever for the U.S product to come; they will just go to another country and give them the shelf space. So the Biden administration is taking quick action to create this space at our ports to make sure that U.S products are well positioned to get back to these markets as quickly as possible. Congestion has been part of the problem. We have seen a huge increase in imports coming into the United States. That has caused uncertainty and congestion at these ports, and we need to do--that is why many of us supported the infrastructure bill, to also build more capacity at our ports. We know that we are going to continue to do everything we can in this area of shipping reform to make sure that U.S farm ***agricultural*** products get to their destination in a timely fashion. I will have more to say about that tomorrow after we get legislation through our committee, but today, I really wanted to speak to our colleagues and ask them to support moving forward on going to conference on the United States Innovation and Competition Act. It has been 286 days since the U.S Senate passed this legislation, and we have an opportunity to help establish on a continued basis American leadership in technology, to employ more people, to help our country compete in the economy of the future. But we can't do that if we don't get legislation passed, and we can't continue to wait for people who don't want to go to conference. Our colleagues on the other side of the aisle have to help us get to conference. This is so important because by 2030, there could be more than 10 million new jobs in clean energy, advanced manufacturing, communication, and in computing. All of those--guess what--depend on us making sure we do the right amount of R&D and making sure that we help bring U.S manufacturing back to the United States. This is so critical as Americans are feeling the pinch from products that they can't get. We all know that we have to help small manufacturers who struggle with the supply chain themselves. That is why this bill invests in the National Institute for Technology to help companies strengthen their supply chain and fend off the threats of [[Page S1264]] cyber security attacks. We also know that there is money in here to help educate a STEM workforce so that we can train and skill the number of people in STEM jobs that we need. But let's talk specifically about one supply chain crisis that is crippling America's economy right now because we don't have enough semiconductors. Semiconductors are an integral part of our system in communication, in defense, in healthcare, in transportation. Yet there are zero semiconductor fabrication facilities in the United States that produce the most advanced chips. That is what we are after--the most advanced chips. The United States must keep its leadership in this area of advanced technology. In fact, over 90 percent of these chips are manufactured in the Pacific, in Taiwan. The rest are made in South Korea. So this is an economic and national security issue. Chip shortages drive up costs, and they also make us less safe. We know, thanks to a report from the Senate Armed Services Committee 10 years ago, that more than 1 million counterfeit components have been made and made their way into our national security system. So we have been fighting hard to fix that problem. Just this month, Europol reported that counterfeiters are trying to exploit the semiconductor shortage by introducing fake chips into the market, raising the chances that critical infrastructure like our defense system or other kinds of communication systems could be compromised. We have also been working hard to ``rip and replace''--a term that has been used--to try to get foreign telecommunication electronics that could be compromised and used as a backdoor to try to make sure that we lower this threat. According to the telecommunications industry, this effort is compromised by what? Our chip shortage, which now we know that waiting times for some network equipment is now at 50 weeks--50 weeks for something that is so important to our national security. The cost of some networking equipment has risen by as much as 12 percent. You hear about the cost of everything. We certainly hear about the cost of cars. So 12 percent, and people are selling chips for 100 times their regular price. That is no way to help us build out secure broadband access. When it comes to clean energy, which requires chips, the prices of solar panels are up 18 percent because of the chip shortage. The cost of a used car has gone up 41 percent and 12 percent for new cars. So a lot is due to this semiconductor shortage. Yet our colleagues don't know if we want to hurry after 286 days, go to conference, and fix this problem. I am asking my colleagues to vote to help us proceed to conference. Let's not take another 3\1/2\, 4 weeks to figure it out. If you don't like the House bill--I know a lot of my colleagues don't-- let's get a better bill, but let's go to conference to get that done. We know right now depending on one country largely for chip fabrication is not the best idea, particularly when there are numerous issues. It has just been over 18 months since security researchers found a hacking campaign that compromised at least seven Taiwanese chip manufacturers to steal semiconductor chip designs. So do we want to continue to rely on these other countries or do we want to manufacture here in the United States of America something so critical to what is critical to the industries of the future and help us by making sure that we have a plan never to have these kinds of price spikes impact us because of shortages? So I ask my colleagues this. These R&D bills are going to help us with U.S manufacturing. They are so important. In addition to the semiconductor manufacturing incentives that are in these bills, it specifically has resources for the Department of Defense to secure microelectronic supply chains and help our national security mission. That is what is at stake here. Why are we delaying? If you don't like these ideas, at least let's get on the bill and offer some ideas in conference that you would like to see. We are more than happy to have that discussion. Industry is taking action to try to resolve the shortages, but investing in semiconductor manufacturing technology will actually help us increase the productivity that is so essential and needed for our foundries. Our current shortages--some people might think: Well, in a few years, we will catch up, and it will be a thing of the past. I will tell you, if we don't act, more shortages are to follow. The world needed 1 trillion chips per year by 2018. In 2021, it was nearly 1.2 trillion chips per year. That is how our economy has changed, and everything relies on these semiconductors. In 2031, if total sales match the revenue projection, we will need 2 trillion chips per year. That is why we need to act quickly on something that is impacting, practically every day, parts of our lives. Current projections show that demand for chips will grow in all sectors--especially the automotive sector, where semiconductor content in vehicles could double. Now, I don't know--I heard a lot of talk as I went home to hear about these issues. Some people are saying that maybe people are even taking semiconductors out of the current designs of automobiles just so they can get the product ready, so they can get it to ship. Now, why do we want that? We don't want that. We want America to have a full supply of semiconductors, produce the best intelligent product that the market wants, and compete internationally. But to do that, we have to get this bill moving, and we have to get support. That is why on Wednesday we are having members of the semiconductor industry testify before the Senate Commerce Committee--so we can hear about how the United States can have next-generation technology and lead in this critical area. We do not want to rely on someone else to make sure that we have a secure nation, secure communication, and the next generation that is going to move our industry--particularly manufacturers--to be competitive in a global economy. So the choice in front of us is whether we want the United States to have a leading role in chip fabrication and in R&D and whether we are going to meet that demand. If you are ready to take that, please help us get to conference. It can take 3 to 5 years from when a foundry is built to when production begins, and every day that we don't move to pass USICA is just another day that U.S manufacturers are waiting. This bill means investment in our future, it means investment in securing the supply chain, and it means investments that will protect us from these kinds of price spikes in the future. It is an investment well worth meeting if Congress will act, and I encourage my colleagues to do so. I thank the President, and I yield the floor. I suggest the absence of a quorum. The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll. The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll. Mr. CARDIN. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded. The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered. Cloture Motion Pursuant to rule XXII, the Chair lays before the Senate the pending cloture motion, which the clerk will state. The legislative clerk read as follows: Cloture Motion We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close debate on the motion to proceed to Calendar No. 282, H.R 4521, a bill to provide for a coordinated Federal research initiative to ensure continued United States leadership in engineering biology. Charles E. Schumer, Patty Murray, Benjamin L. Cardin, Tammy Duckworth, Mark R. Warner, Robert P. Casey, Jr., Jack Reed, Tina Smith, Brian Schatz, Christopher Murphy, Mazie K. Hirono, Mark Kelly, Tammy Baldwin, Jacky Rosen, Ron Wyden, Margaret Wood Hassan, Maria Cantwell. The PRESIDING OFFICER. By unanimous consent, the mandatory quorum call has been waived. The question is, Is it the sense of the Senate that debate on the motion to proceed to H.R 4521, a bill to provide for a coordinated Federal research initiative to ensure continued United States leadership in engineering biology, shall be brought to a close? The yeas and nays are mandatory under the rule. [[Page S1265]] The clerk will call the roll. The legislative clerk called the roll. Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from New Hampshire (Mrs. Shaheen) is necessarily absent.- Mr. THUNE. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from Missouri (Mr. Blunt), the Senator from Alaska (Ms. Murkowski), the Senator from Alaska (Mr. Sullivan), and the Senator from Pennsylvania (Mr. Toomey). The yeas and nays resulted--yeas 66, nays 29, as follows: [Rollcall Vote No. 97 Leg.] YEAS--66 Baldwin Bennet Blumenthal Booker Brown Cantwell Capito Cardin Carper Casey Cassidy Collins Coons Cornyn Cortez Masto Crapo Daines Duckworth Durbin Feinstein Gillibrand Graham Grassley Hassan Heinrich Hickenlooper Hirono Kaine Kelly King Klobuchar Leahy Lujan Manchin Markey McConnell Menendez Merkley Moran Murphy Murray Ossoff Padilla Peters Portman Reed Risch Romney Rosen Rounds Sasse Schatz Schumer Sinema Smith Stabenow Tester Tillis Van Hollen Warner Warnock Warren Whitehouse Wicker Wyden Young NAYS--29 Barrasso Blackburn Boozman Braun Burr Cotton Cramer Cruz Ernst Fischer Hagerty Hawley Hoeven Hyde-Smith Inhofe Johnson Kennedy Lankford Lee Lummis Marshall Paul Rubio Sanders Scott (FL) Scott (SC) Shelby Thune Tuberville NOT VOTING--5 Blunt Murkowski Shaheen Sullivan Toomey The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. Padilla). On this vote, the yeas are 66, the nays are 29. Three-fifths of the Senators duly chosen and sworn having voted in the affirmative, the motion is agreed to. The Senator from Illinois. Unanimous Consent Request--Executive Calendar Ms. DUCKWORTH. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to executive session to consider the following nomination: Nani A. Coloretti, of California, to be Deputy Director of the Office of Management and Budget; that the Senate vote on the nomination without intervening action or debate; that the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table with no intervening action or debate; that any statements related to the nomination be printed in the Record; and that the President be immediately notified of the Senate's action. The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there any objection? Mr. LANKFORD. Mr. President. The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oklahoma. Mr. LANKFORD. Reserving the right to object. The PRESIDING OFFICER. Proceed. Mr. LANKFORD. Mr. President, I do object to this nomination moving at this point to be able to do a unanimous consent on this. The reason for that is, at OMB, we have consistently gone back to them and asked for just basic information, and OMB continues to be the spot where things are held up, and they are not turning the information over to us. We have been ***exceptionally*** patient with OMB. Let me give you a couple of examples on this. We worked with DHS to try to get some additional information on some of the detention beds and to be able to ask about this. We submitted specific questions for the record to DHS in July of last year and then again in November of last year. We still do not have the answers to those. It is our understanding DHS has turned those over to OMB to be able to evaluate. OMB still is not turning those over to anyone else so they are locked up into the system. I have had numerous conversations with OMB and with the White House on trying to get the information on how they are handling religious exemptions and religious accommodations for the vaccine mandates. This is an entirely new ***process*** that they have created for all of the Agencies and an entirely different ***process*** that is running through the U.S military right now. There are around 23,000 people who have made a request in the military for religious accommodation, about 23 of them have actually been given an answer. Most of them are just getting no answer. Across the Federal Agencies and all the Federal families, they are asking the questions about what do we do on a religious accommodation. They are just not getting an answer at all or they are getting answers that are different. We have asked OMB specifically for the information, just how are you handling it? How are decisions being made? What is the timing on it? We are not getting answers on that. We have gone to the task force. We have gone to OMB. We have gone to the White House. We have gone to Agencies. They all point back to OMB, saying they are the ones that are going to actually release that. We are not getting it, basic clarity of information. I can go on and on and on. I have got pages of questions that we put in that we are either not getting an answer at all or they have released to us something that is publicly available but not the actual information on it. We are not asking for unreasonable things. We are just asking for an answer. So, yes, I do object, but I would really like to be able to get this information from OMB. If this was a nominee on the other side, Democrats would certainly be asking for information and saying: Why did we make a request in July and it is now March and we can't get an answer because OMB won't release the answer that has been submitted by the Agency? So I do object. Ms. DUCKWORTH. Mr. President. The PRESIDING OFFICER. The objection is heard. The Senator from Illinois. Ms. DUCKWORTH. Mr. President, it makes no sense to say that we are not getting answers so we are not going to confirm anybody to this position of Deputy Director of OMB. We only just confirmed the Director last week. It is like saying: I am going to the emergency room because I have an emergency, and there are no doctors working there to solve my problem so we are not going to let any more doctors in to work there. It makes no sense. I am deeply disappointed the Republicans are objecting to the swift confirmation of the Honorable Nani Coloretti to be Deputy Director of the Office of Management and Budget. She came through committee; she was reported out of committee; and if there were any questions of her, they should have been asked in committee. But, again, we are holding up the nomination of someone to lead an Agency that you are complaining isn't answering your questions. Well, there is no leadership there to make sure that those questions get answered. So this is a circular logic that does not make any sense. In fact, Ms. Coloretti is eminently qualified to hold this position of Deputy Director of OMB. Like many members of our Nation's diverse Asian-American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander community, Ms. Coloretti and her family lived the American dream of countless immigrants who came to the Nation in search of a better life. Her late parents instilled in her the value of education and hard work and, perhaps more importantly, fostered a sense of empathy and curiosity that helped lead Ms. Coloretti to choose a life of public service. And make no mistake, she is a true public servant who is devoted to serving her country. Her nomination should not be controversial. After all, a bipartisan supermajority coalition of Senators already confirmed her to serve as Deputy Secretary of Housing and Urban Development. Of course, this overwhelming support was not surprising, given Ms. Coloretti's impressive experience in the public and private sectors, including serving as a program examiner at OMB. During her time in public service, Ms. Coloretti dedicated herself to making government work better for the people it serves. At the U.S Department of Treasury, she pushed to enhance decision-making ***processes*** through better use of data and evidence. At the U.S Department of Housing and Urban Development, where she served as a Chief Operating Officer of a Department with a $45 billion budget and approximately 8,000 employees, Ms. [[Page S1266]] Coloretti focused on strengthening management practices to improve program delivery and ultimately achieve better results. Look, there is no question that Nani Coloretti is eminently qualified to be Deputy Director of the OMB, nor is there any question that the President deserves to have his full leadership slate in place to formulate and finalize his fiscal year 2023 budget proposal. As the President often notes, a budget truly reveals what one values, and that is why it was so important that the Senate confirmed the Honorable Shalanda Young to be OMB Director last week. Now, my question is, If you want to fix the problem and get answers, let's get somebody like Nani Coloretti in there who has got a background and a track record of getting Departments and Agencies working correctly, working again efficiently for the American people. That is why it is critical that we move swiftly to confirm Nani Coloretti now. I yield the floor. I suggest the absence of a quorum. The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll. The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll. Mr. PORTMAN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded. The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered. Ukraine Mr. PORTMAN. Mr. President, I come to the Senate floor today to stand in solidarity with the people of Ukraine as they suffer through the brutal and cowardly Russian assault. I have spoken on the floor each of the last 6 weeks about the horrific events we have all watched unfold and what role the United States should play. Simply put, we need to do more, and we need to do it more quickly, as do our allies. As we talk this evening, the shelling and killing of innocent civilians continues in the dark of night in places like Kyiv and Kharkiv and Mariupol, a beautiful port city being reduced to rubble by a frustrated Vladimir Putin. He seems intent on destroying what he can't have because of the brave, outgunned Ukrainians, who refuse to surrender and refuse to live under his despotic rule. Those heroic Ukrainian defenders of their homeland deserve our support. Even if they didn't, this bloody war launched by an authoritarian regime against a peaceful, democratic neighbor matters to world freedom, to our own national security. It must not stand, or else all of us in freedom-loving countries are at risk. As we talk this evening, the ruthless bombing continues. Something else is happening. President Biden is getting ready to cross the Atlantic to meet with our NATO partners to talk about next steps. Although nothing has done more to solidify the West than the ruthless Russian attacks, I commend President Biden for the important role he has played in helping keep the alliance together. Now, I call on him to lead that alliance to redouble their efforts to stop the madness, to ensure that Russia is not rewarded for its war crimes. It is one thing to keep the alliance together; it is another to lead the alliance out of its comfort zone to a more aggressive stance to actually win this war. I believe moving leaders to do more is possible because of all the deadly Russian escalation that we have seen but also because free citizens all around the world are shocked by the death and destruction that they see online and on TV every day, and they are speaking up. I see this at home in Ohio, but I see it all around the globe. I think leaders can be persuaded to do more. Over the past month, the administration itself has changed its mind and ratcheted up some sanctions and military assistance that we have advocated from both sides of the aisle from this Senate floor. To their credit, the administration reversed themselves and agreed to implement the Nord Stream 2 sanctions, to allow U.S Stinger missiles to go to Ukraine directly from us, to impose the SWIFT banking sanctions, to ban oil from Russia, and to take away Russia's most favored nation trading status with us. Now, with Russia ramping up its brutal assault, targeting and killing thousands of innocent civilians, America and the free world must do more--as they bomb maternity hospitals and schools and a shopping center in Kyiv last night and bomb shelters filled with children. Last week, I led a bipartisan group of Senators to Poland and to the Ukrainian border, where we witnessed firsthand the pain that Russia is inflicting on innocent civilians. We talked to dozens of refugees-- almost always Ukrainian women and children, sometimes grandmothers and grandchildren. They came to Poland with only a backpack or a suitcase and nothing else, leaving everything else behind. In tears, they begged us to close the skies so the bombing would stop. They told of apartments or homes being destroyed, of the heartbreak of leaving their husbands or sons or fathers behind to fight the invaders. So what more can we and our allies do to help Ukraine win this war? Note, I say ``win this war.'' If we act swiftly, I think we can still defeat the Russians and keep Ukraine as a viable democracy. If we do too little, thousands will die, as will the dream of Ukrainian democracy. The forces of evil will win, and all of us will pay a price. Let me talk about five areas where I think we could do more to assist Ukraine. First, on the military side, we must redouble our efforts with urgency to provide Ukraine with the equipment and munitions and, where necessary, the immediate training to improve their air defenses and give them better offensive air capabilities. The decision whether to facilitate providing more MiG-29s from Poland and perhaps other allies in the region who have these Soviet-era airplanes has been hotly debated. In my view, we should have done it a long time ago, when we got the initial green light from the administration a few weeks ago. The Ukrainians have asked for them, and I do not believe they are any more escalatory than, certainly, the escalation that Russians are engaged in virtually every day. We now have reports of cluster bombs being used. We have reports of vacuum bombs being used against civilians. It is also no different than what we have done and continue to do with other weapon transfers, whether it is Stingers or Javelins or others. Remember, the Ukrainians are on defense here. They are just trying to protect their country. Give them what they say they need to defend themselves. I would hope that at least we could immediately facilitate spare parts and other assistance to keep the current Ukrainian planes flying. The Ukrainians have made it desperately clear that they need more air defense. We just learned today from public sources that the United States is providing SA8s, an older Soviet-era defense system, to Ukraine. Apparently, this is equipment that we got years ago--because it was the Soviet system--to be able to study it. We now have that system, and as of today, we have decided to send it to Ukraine. However, the same reporting also said that the more capable S-300 Soviet-era systems that we have are not being sent. Look, I am very glad these systems are going to protect innocent civilians, but, to me, this shows the lack of urgency that I was talking about earlier. Here we are on day 25 of this all-out war-- people dying every single day--and, finally, we have looked into the closet, and we have in the inventory these incredibly important air defense systems, and we are providing them? Where were they on day 5 or day 10 or day 15 or even day 20, with people dying every one of those 25 days? And why are we not sending the A300s? I don't know the answer to that. There may be an answer. There may be a reason I can't know what that answer is. But again, to me, this is an example of us having to have the urgency to respond and doing more and doing it more quickly. The United States can and should facilitate the transfer of former Warsaw bloc anti-aircraft systems that Ukrainians know how to operate, like the S-300, like the SA8s, the SA10s, and others. There are regional partners in the area, Eastern European countries, that have these systems, without going into detail. We should also provide extra munitions to replenish existing anti-air batteries. Our partners in the region say they are willing. Let's facilitate. Let's [[Page S1267]] make it happen. Let's get the NATO countries that can help to help more. Over the weekend, there were reports, as an example, that Slovakia and Turkey were willing to take such action. We have got to be sure that we are ensuring these transfers take place immediately. Of course, we must also keep sending Stinger missiles, which are effective in shooting down Russian helicopters and the lower-flying jets. We must find ways to quickly provide Ukraine with more armed drones, such as the Turkish TB2, which has been very effective, apparently, and even one-use loitering munitions, which the Ukrainians know how to use and have been very effective with on the battlefield. Last week, it was announced that the United States was sending 100 of these loitering munitions, one-use munitions, called the Switchblade. One hundred will go very quickly. We should increase that number. Let's get the hundred there first, and let's increase that number to give the Ukrainians more to be able to defend themselves. To our Israeli friends--I know this is controversial--but I would ask them to consider selling us or other countries--and we should agree to buy--their Harop drones, which Ukraine could use right now. The bottom line is we need to flood the zone when it comes to providing Ukraine with military assistance. We are not being asked to fight this fight for them. They just want the tools to be able to defend themselves and have a chance--a fighting chance--to be able to win. There should be no gaps in our weapon transfers, and we need to lead our NATO allies and others when it comes to providing and coordinating support. Second, we need more sanctions. We need to implement them faster. The sanctions have to bite now, not 2 weeks from now or 2 months from now. We need to remove all Russian banks' access to the global financial system. Russia must be financially cut off from the rest of the world if we are to have the effect that we want to have. Even without using our full sanctions authority, we have already seen some of the pain that we can inflict. However, there are loopholes in these sanctions. It is not enough to go after individual banks, such as VTB and Sberbank. We are told that the Kremlin has already transitioned payments from these banks through Rosbank, UniCredit, and Raiffeisen. We need blocking sanctions on all of Russia's finance and defense industry as long as Russian forces are in Ukraine. We need to exert maximum pressure to ensure no money can be sent to Russia to fund its war effort. We must implement full blocking sanctions on all Russian banks and ensure energy transactions are not exempt from these transactions. Russia should not be allowed to use its oil and gas profits to kill innocent Ukrainians. We can also target the way Russia, including individuals close to President Putin, currently evade sanctions. In 2020, when I was chair of the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, we published a bipartisan report showing how sanctioned oligarchs continued to have access to the U.S financial system, in this case, through the purchase of high-value art. The two oligarchs we investigated were sanctioned in 2014 following Russia's ***invasion*** of Crimea. You have heard that those sanctions weren't particularly effective. This is one reason. They laundered their money through art. They continued to purchase millions in art through auction houses and dealers in New York after they were sanctioned. In that report, we recommended Congress should amend the Bank Secrecy Act to require art dealers to confirm the identity of buyers and sellers in transactions to ensure they are not using the art purchases to launder money or evade sanctions. These are the same requirements we place on financial institutions. Those changes are now more urgently needed than ever. The European Union and the United Kingdom recently closed this loophole by requiring businesses handling art transactions valued at 10,000 pounds or more to comply with anti-money laundering laws, including verifying the identity of the seller, buyer, and ultimate beneficial owner of the art so that the purchase isn't being used to evade sanctions. Since the EU and UK have tightened compliance, the United States, which has the largest art market in the world, becomes now the main target for sanctioned Russians to continue to evade sanctions and launder money through high-value art purchases. If the administration doesn't move on this, we are currently drafting legislation to close this loophole in the U.S Senate. Third, on tax treatment, we should suspend our tax treaty with Moscow and explore options to remove other tax benefits from Russian businesses. The United States has income tax treaties with a number of foreign countries to facilitate investment and prevent double taxation of residents and businesses which operate in both countries. Under these tax treaties, residents, not necessarily citizens, of foreign countries are generally taxed at a reduced rate or exempt on certain items of income. It is important to note that these treaties reduce U.S taxes on Russian residents and businesses, but they generally don't reduce the taxes of U.S citizens or U.S treaty residents. Instead, they would reduce Russian taxes for U.S citizens. President Biden has the constitutional authority to suspend our tax treaty between the United States and the Russian Federation. We need to pursue all options to isolate Russia and make it clear that there are consequences for their actions. The tax treaty is one more way to do that. We should also follow the UK and suspend the exchange and sharing of tax information with Russia and Belarus. With Russia's hostile actions toward Ukraine, we should no longer incentivize U.S investment in Russia or provide preferential tax treatment for Russian investment in the United States. Fourth, on trade, there are two additional things we can do to bring pressure on President Putin and his allies. Access to our market is a privilege, not a right, and we should not give Russia the normal access. The House passed a law to suspend what is called ``most favored nation,'' or PNTR, for Russia last week, which some in the Senate oppose because it does not contain a statutory ban on Russian energy imports. Currently, the energy import ban can be undone at the whim of a President, rather than the legislative criteria about the restoration of Ukrainian sovereignty and the cessation of hostilities. So I agree with putting it in statute. I think that would be a good idea. But I also believe the urgency of the moment means that we have to find a way to stop preferred access to our market. Let's do it this week. The International Trade Commission should also bring the full might of U.S trade remedy law to bear on Russian companies which trade unfairly, similar to how we treat Chinese companies. Last week, I sent a bipartisan letter with Senator Brown to the ITC on this topic. The Commission is required by law to consider ``all relevant economic factors which have a bearing on the state of the industry in the United States.'' Given Russia's behavior, including its manipulation of trade flows in pursuit of malign strategic objectives and ***exceptional*** involvement of the state in the domestic economy, we ask the Commission to take these into account in cases involving Russia when they violate our trade laws. The Commerce Department should reclassify Russia as a nonmarket economy, making it easier to bring unfair trade cases against them. It is appropriate to reclassify them because up to 77 percent of their economy is now run by the government. Commerce was asked to reclassify in the fall but retained Russia as a market economy, allegedly after a Russian delegation pressured the Biden administration. In light of the ***invasion***, Commerce should reconsider that decision and ensure that Russia is reclassified as a nonmarket economy. Now a handful of countries, like China and Belarus, are in that category. This means these countries don't have a free market. Instead, they have policies that restrict the flow of capital, involve government in the running of the economy, and don't allow wages to be set by free bargaining between labor and management. When a country is a nonmarket economy, it means our trade enforcers have an easier time of being tougher on those countries when they sell products here that are unfairly priced. It is time to do it. [[Page S1268]] Fifth, and maybe most important and most difficult, we need to lead our European allies on fully sanctioning Russia's energy sector. Russia's war machine is funded primarily through energy sales, including natural gas and oil to Europe. Probably the best way to persuade those persuadable in Russia is to cut off those resources, as we are doing here in the United States. It is going to be a lot more difficult for our allies in Europe to do that because many are dependent on Russian energy. But there are many steps the United States and other allies, like Qatar, can take to expand energy production here at home and help our allies abroad. LNG export contracts need to be finalized now and the export and import terminals quickly expanded. And that can be done. Further, the Treasury Department's announcement that sanctions against Russia's biggest banks, including VTB Bank, do not apply to energy transactions until June 24--June 24 may be too late. That is unacceptable. We need to change that Treasury Department approach to sanctions against those biggest banks and ensure that we are applying them to energy transactions as soon as possible. I would advocate for a similar approach in how we designated Iranian entities in 2018 when we left JCPOA. We did not issue sanctions waivers to European companies that continued to do business with Iran's economy, and that forced those companies to leave Iran's market, even though European governments weren't particularly supportive of that. That is what happened. Some countries in Europe have not done enough to diversify their energy future in light of this ***invasion***, which they are now financing, again, through the purchase of Russian gas. It can't be business as usual. We need to figure out a way to stop that revenue. By the way, there is a connection between the Iran deal and Ukraine. Under the new Iran deal, secondary sanctions will be lifted on the Central Bank of Iran and all other Iranian financial institutions, enabling transactions between Russia and Iran, to include the Central Bank of Russia, Sberbank, and others. In other words, the Iran nuclear deal guarantees that Russia can use a sanctions-free Iran as a sanctions-evasion oasis. This should not stand. The administration needs to reverse course here. Sanctioning Russia because of the barbaric war in Ukraine and then giving them a pass when it comes to the Iran nuclear deal is contradictory to our foreign policy interests. At the very least, this proposed treaty needs to be submitted to Congress as is required by law so that we can analyze that issue and make a decision. We need to do more, and we need to do it quickly. I have outlined some of the actions we can take, and we should act fast to let the people of Ukraine know we stand with them. The popular Ukrainian rallying cry ``Slava Ukraini,'' when translated into English, is ``Glory to Ukraine.'' ``Slava Ukraini,'' to which the response is ``Glory to the Heroes,'' ``Heroyam Slava.'' In the midst of this atrocity, there are so many heroes to glorify in Ukraine: the soldiers, professionals, and civilians, alike, doctors and nurses and firefighters and the volunteers who are providing food and water and blankets. We pray for them all. We pray for their families. Godspeed to the people of Ukraine in their simple and profound quest, a battle for a free and independent Ukraine. We must show the world that America supports that simple quest, that we stand with Ukraine. I yield the floor.

**Load-Date:** March 23, 2022

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[***Russia-Ukraine war: Zelenskiy 'ready to speak to Putin'; Russia to cut electricity supply to Finland after Nato decision - live***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:65F8-X371-DY4H-K2TR-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Byline:** Helen Livingstone (now); Sam Levin, Adam Gabbatt, Léonie Chao-Fong, and Martin Belam (earlier)

**Highlight:** Ukraine president ready to speak to Putin 'but only to him'; electricity supplier RAO Nordic says decision to suspend Finnish supply is '***exceptional***'First Russian soldier goes on trial in Ukraine for war crimesUkraine has repelled Russia attempt to cross Donbas, UK confirmsThe Ukrainian who walked 225km to safety from Mariupol'They were furious': the Russian soldiers refusing to fightRussia-Ukraine war: what we know on day 80 of the ***invasion***

**Body**

block-time published-time 3.13am BST

Washington is "working to clarify Turkey's position" after president Recep Tayyip Erdogan expressed opposition to Finland and Sweden joining Nato , White House spokeswoman Jen Psaki has said according to Reuters.

The idea of the two nations becoming members of the transatlantic alliance had received "broad support from NATO member countries," Psaki said.

Pentagon spokesman John Kirby likewise said the United States is working to "better understand" Ankara's stance.

Turkey is a valued NATO ally; that has not changed. They have been involved and helpful in trying to get dialogue going between Russia and Ukraine ,and they have provided assistance to Ukraine. So nothing changes about their standing in the NATO alliance.

Erdogan told journalists on Friday that "we do not have a positive opinion" about the two countries joining the alliance, and said they shelter "terrorist organizations."

Turkey has long accused Nordic countries, in particular Sweden, which has a strong Turkish immigrant community, of harbouring extremist Kurdish groups as well as supporters of Fethullah Gulen, the US-based preacher wanted over the failed 2016 coup.

block-time published-time 2.50am BST

The leaders of the US and the 10-country Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) have called for an "immediate cessation of hostilities" in Ukraine and the creation of "an enabling environment for peaceful resolution", following a summit in Washington.

US officials including US vice president Kamala Harris at a working lunch with the leaders of ASEAN countries in Washington. Photograph: Olivier Douliery/AFP/Getty Images

"We continue to reaffirm our respect for sovereignty, political independence, and territorial integrity. We reiterate our call for compliance with the UN Charter and international law," the group said [*in a statement*](https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Final-ASEAN-US-Special-Summit-2022-Joint-Vision-Statement.pdf).

We support the efforts of the UN Secretary-General in the search for a peaceful solution.

We also call for the facilitation of rapid, safe and unhindered access to humanitarian assistance for those in need in Ukraine, and for the protection of civilians, humanitarian personnel, and persons in vulnerable situations.

block-time published-time 2.26am BST

Russian president Vladimir Putin is likely to annex the occupied parts of southern and eastern Ukraine into Russia "in the coming months", [*according to Katherine Lawlor and Mason Clark*](https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-annexation-occupied-ukraine-putin%E2%80%99s-unacceptable-%E2%80%9C-ramp%E2%80%9D) , analysts at the Institute for the Study of War, warning that the move could then be used to threaten Ukraine and its allies with nuclear attack.

After annexation,

He [Putin] will likely then state, directly or obliquely, that Russian doctrine permitting the use of nuclear weapons to defend Russian territory applies to those newly annexed territories.

Such actions would threaten Ukraine and its partners with nuclear attack if Ukrainian counteroffensives to liberate Russian-occupied territory continue. Putin may believe that the threat or use of nuclear weapons would restore Russian deterrence after his disastrous ***invasion*** shattered Russia's conventional deterrent capabilities.

Putin's timeline for annexation is likely contingent on the extent to which he understands the degraded state of the Russian military in Ukraine.

The Russian military has not yet achieved Putin's stated territorial objectives of securing all of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts and is unlikely to do so.

If Putin understands his military weakness, he will likely rush annexation and introduce the nuclear deterrent quickly in an attempt to retain control of the Ukrainian territory that Russia currently occupies.

If Putin believes that Russian forces are capable of additional advances, he will likely delay the annexation in hopes of covering more territory with it.

In that case, his poor leadership and Ukrainian counteroffensives could drive the Russian military toward a state of collapse.

Putin could also attempt to maintain Russian attacks while mobilizing additional forces. He might delay announcing annexation for far longer in this case, waiting until reinforcements could arrive to gain more territory to annex.

Ukraine and its allies therefore "likely have a narrow window of opportunity to support a Ukrainian counteroffensive into occupied Ukrainian territory before the Kremlin annexes that territory,"Lawlor and Clark write.

block-time published-time 2.02am BST

As reports suggest that Ukrainian forces have successfully pushed back Russian forces from around the country's second largest city, Kharkiv, near the country's north-eastern border with Russia, here are some images showing the destruction left behind:

A local man with his destroyed tractor on a farm in the village of Mala Rohan, near Kharkiv. Photograph: Sergey Kozlov/EPA A Ukrainian soldier walks past a burning natural gas terminal on the northern outskirts of Kharkiv. Photograph: John Moore/Getty Images A destroyed vehicle lies in the middle of a road in north Kharkiv. Photograph: Bernat Armangué/AP Goats cross a street between burned vehicles in the village of Vilkhivka near Kharkiv. Photograph: Dimitar Dilkoff/AFP/Getty Images A Ukrainian policeman stands inside a school sport hall in the village of Vilkhivka, where, according to residents, Russian soldiers were based, after it was retaken by Ukrainian army. Photograph: Dimitar Dilkoff/AFP/Getty Images A man tries to collect usable wares from his house which was destroyed by Russian attacks on Kharkiv. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images A destroyed Russian helicopter near the village of Mala Rohan, near Kharkiv, Ukraine. Photograph: Sergey Kozlov/EPA

block-time published-time 1.18am BST

An interesting thread here on Russia's failed Donbas river crossing from retired Australian major general Mick Ryan.

In it, he notes that:

This Russian river crossing has gained attention because it resulted in the loss of (probably) a battalion tactical group and some critical engineer equipment. The reality is, it is worse than that.

He also says:

An important aspect of assault river crossings is that they are only undertaken if absolutely necessary. The resources needed - engineers, bridges, artillery - are closely husbanded by commanders. As I already mentioned, they are really hard, especially when being shot at.

Therefore, such operations normally only occur on an axis of advance that is a main effort (or about to become the main effort). This has been missed by many commentators - the Russians clearly intended to invest in this axis and throw a lot of combat power down it.

enltrI was going to do a thread today on the implications of Ukraine's offensive around Kharkiv. Instead, I have pushed that to tomorrow in order to discuss the Russian river crossing operation over the Severskyi Donets this week in [*#Ukraine*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/Ukraine?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw). 1/ [*https://t.co/NPSQdN98WG*](https://t.co/NPSQdN98WG)

- Mick Ryan, AM (@WarintheFuture) [*May 13, 2022*](https://twitter.com/WarintheFuture/status/1525252736757153792?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 12.46am BST

Ukraine has "likely won the battle of Kharkiv", the country's second largest city, the Institute for the Study of War has said in its [*latest assessment*](https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-may-13) of the conflict.

Ukrainian forces prevented Russian troops from encircling, let alone seizing Kharkiv, and then expelled them from around the city, as they did to Russian forces attempting to seize Kyiv.

Russian units had "generally not attempted to hold ground against counterattacking Ukrainian forces over the past several days, with a few exceptions."

Reports from Western officials and a video from an officer of the Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) indicate that Moscow is focused on conducting an orderly withdrawal and prioritizing getting Russians back home before allowing proxy forces to enter Russia rather than trying to hold its positions near the city.

The US-based think tank said Ukraine would now likely "attempt to disrupt ground lines of communication (GLOCs) between Belgorod [in Russia] and Russian forces concentrated around [the Russian-occupied city of] Izyum, although Russia is using several GLOCs, including some further away from current Ukrainian positions than any Ukrainian counteroffensive is likely to reach soon."

Russian troops had "made no progress" with an attempted ground offensive from Izyum, it continued, adding: "We had previously hypothesized that Russia might give up on attempts to advance from Izyum, but the Russians have either not made such a decision or have not fully committed to it yet."

Meanwhile, it said, the main Russian effort was aimed at encircling the cities of Severodonetsk and Lysychansk in Luhansk.

Russian troops attacking from Popasna to the north made no significant progress in the last 24 hours. Russian forces coming north-to-south have failed to cross the Siverskyi Donets River and taken devastating losses in their attempts.

The Russians may not have enough additional fresh combat power to offset those losses and continue the offensive on a large enough scale to complete the encirclement, although they will likely continue to try to do so.

Other key takeaways included:

Russian forces have likely secured the highway near the western entrance to the Azovstal Steel Plant but fighting for the facility continues.Russian forces in Zaporizhia Oblast are likely attempting to reach artillery range outside Zaporizhia City.Ukrainian forces are reportedly attempting to regain control of Snake Island off the Romanian coast or at least disrupt Russia's ability to use it.

block-time published-time 12.20am BST

Hello, this is Helen Livingstone taking over from my colleague Sam Levin.

First, a bit more from Zelenskiy 's [*latest nightly address*](https://www.president.gov.ua/en/news/kozhnogo-dnya-pracyuvati-tak-shob-vijna-bula-korotshoyu-v-co-75049) , in which he warned that the war and Russia's blockade of Ukraine's ports were "provoking a large-scale food crisis".

Russian officials are also openly threatening the world that there will be famine in dozens of countries. And what could be the consequences of such a famine? What political instability and migration flows will this lead to? How much will you have to spend then to overcome the consequences?

These are the questions that need to be answered by those who are delaying sanctions on Russia or trying to postpone aid to Ukraine.

His warning came as [*G7 foreign and* ***agriculture*** *ministers were meeting*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/may/12/russian-blockade-grain-exports-ukraine-ports-g7) in Germany to discuss ways of breaking the Russian blockade of grain exports.

Zelenskiy also claimed that Russia had lost almost 27,000 soldiers, "many of them young conscripts", and that Ukraine had downed a 200th Russian military aircraft.

Russia had also "lost more than three thousand tanks, armored combat vehicles, a large number of conventional military vehicles, helicopters, drones and all its prospects as a state."

And why all this? For a monument to Lenin to stand in the temporarily occupied Henichesk for a little longer? There is no other result for Russia and there will not be any.

The Guardian is not able to verify Ukraine's claims regarding Russian losses and Moscow has provided very little detail.

block-time published-time 12.00am BST

Summary

Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan [*said*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2022/may/13/russia-ukraine-war-latest-kyiv-to-hear-first-war-crimes-trial-putin-humiliating-himself-on-world-stage-truss-says-live?page=with:block-627e581b8f08e6ce3a77e641#block-627e581b8f08e6ce3a77e641) on Friday that Turkey would not welcome either Sweden or Finland joining the Nato.Ukraine's defence minister, Oleksii Reznikov, said Kyiv hopes to [*arm a million people*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2022/may/13/russia-ukraine-war-latest-kyiv-to-hear-first-war-crimes-trial-putin-humiliating-himself-on-world-stage-truss-says-live?page=with:block-627e92478f083b856379a24d#block-627e92478f083b856379a24d) as the country prepares for a "new, long phase of war".Russia will [*suspend electricity supplies to Finland*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2022/may/13/russia-ukraine-war-latest-kyiv-to-hear-first-war-crimes-trial-putin-humiliating-himself-on-world-stage-truss-says-live?page=with:block-627e84038f08e6ce3a77e8c7#block-627e84038f08e6ce3a77e8c7) from 1am on Saturday the supplier, RAO Nordic, said, amid rising tensions over Helsinki's bid to join Nato.The US is [*sending 10,500 new troops to Europe*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2022/may/13/russia-ukraine-war-latest-kyiv-to-hear-first-war-crimes-trial-putin-humiliating-himself-on-world-stage-truss-says-live?page=with:block-627ecc768f083b856379a3e8#block-627ecc768f083b856379a3e8) to replace soldiers who were earlier deployed, the Pentagon said on Friday. Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelenskiy said talks with Russia on getting wounded defenders out of the Azovstal plant in Mariupol were very complex and that [*negotiations were underway*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2022/may/13/russia-ukraine-war-latest-kyiv-to-hear-first-war-crimes-trial-putin-humiliating-himself-on-world-stage-truss-says-live?page=with:block-627edddd8f08e6ce3a77eb86#block-627edddd8f08e6ce3a77eb86). Ukrainians have [*repelled multiple attempts by the Russians*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/may/13/ukraine-has-repelled-russias-attempt-to-cross-donbas-river-uk-confirms) to cross a strategically significant river in the Donbas, inflicting heavy losses in the ***process***, according to local officials and British intelligence.Georgia's breakaway region of South Ossetia will [*hold a referendum on joining Russia*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/may/13/breakaway-region-of-georgia-to-hold-referendum-on-joining-russia) on 17 July, the region's leader announced on Friday.

block-time published-time 11.44pm BST

Zelenskiy: negotiations underway for evacuations from Azovstal plant

Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelenskiy said talks with Russia on getting wounded defenders out of the Azovstal plant in Mariupol were very complex, adding Kyiv was using influential intermediaries, Reuters reported, citing his late night address:

Russian forces have been constantly bombarding the steelworks in the southern port of Mariupol, the last bastion of hundreds of Ukrainian defenders in a city almost completely controlled by Russia after more than two months of a siege.

Ukraine, saying there is no military solution to the standoff, has proposed evacuating 38 of the most severely wounded defenders. If Moscow allows them out, Kyiv says it will release a number of Russian prisoners of war.

"At the moment very complex negotiations are under way on the next phase of the evacuation mission - the removal of the badly wounded, medics. We are talking about a large number of people," Zelenskiy said in his address. "Of course, we are doing everything to evacuate all the others, every one of our defenders. We've already involved everyone around the world who could be the most influential intermediaries," he added, without giving details.

block-time published-time 11.28pm BST

Oleksandra Ustinova, a member of the Ukrainian parliament, spoke to reporters in Washington DC today and said the crisis on the battlefield was now "far worse" than it was at the start of the war, [*CNN reports*](https://www.cnn.com/europe/live-news/russia-ukraine-war-news-05-13-22/index.html).

Ustinova said "it is hell" on the frontlines, the news network reported: "We keep losing many more men now than it was at the beginning of the war." She was speaking at a German Marshall Fund roundtable.

She also called on the US to supply fighter jets and air defense systems, saying, according to CNN:

If we had howitzers two months ago, Mariupol would not happen because they wouldn't be able to surround like they did, to surround the city and literally destroy it... For us, time means lives, thousands of lives. We've been hearing that it has been ***unprecedented*** how fast everything is moving and how fast the decisions are taking. But there has never been a war since World War Two like that. And unfortunately, we keep asking here to take the decisions faster."

enltr. [*@SashaUstinovaUA*](https://twitter.com/SashaUstinovaUA?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) called on the US to provide air defense systems and fighter jets to Ukraine, telling reporters at a [*@gmfus*](https://twitter.com/gmfus?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) roundtable that the situation on the battlefield is far worse than it was at the beginning of the war. "It is hell" on the frontlines right now, she said

- Jennifer Hansler (@jmhansler) [*May 13, 2022*](https://twitter.com/jmhansler/status/1525226550752337921?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 11.02pm BST

Reuters has a dispatch from Dergachi, on the outskirts of Kharkiv, where firefighters were dousing smoldering wreckage after, according to local officials, a Russian missile attack hit the House of Culture, which was used to distribute aid supplies.

Volunteers inside were attempting to salvage packages of baby diapers and formula, the news agency [*reported on Friday*](https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/ukraine-says-it-damaged-russian-ship-seeks-evacuation-wounded-mariupol-fighters-2022-05-13/). The mayor, Vyacheslav Zadorenko, told Reuters:

I can't call it anything but a terrorist act. They wanted to hit the base where we store provisions and create a humanitarian catastrophe."

The mayor also said that another missile had slammed into the building on Thursday and wounded a clinic staff member and killed a young couple in their home.

Some more on the latest developments:

Related: [*Ukraine has repelled Russia's attempt to cross Donbas river, UK confirms*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/may/13/ukraine-has-repelled-russias-attempt-to-cross-donbas-river-uk-confirms)

block-time published-time 10.39pm BST

US sending 10,500 new troops to Europe for new rotation

The US is sending 10,500 new troops to Europe to replace soldiers who were earlier deployed, the Pentagon's spokesperson John Kirby also [*announced*](https://www.c-span.org/video/?520263-1/pentagon-urges-senate-pass-ukraine-aid-package-19) in his briefing today. He said the deployments were "one for one unit replacements" and that the turnovers would happen in the coming weeks and into the summer: "It will be a rotation over time."

enltrPentagon chief orders 10,500 troops to replaces forces in Europe [*https://t.co/xYC9t74E4H*](https://t.co/xYC9t74E4H) [*pic.twitter.com/VbJvqxD5sM*](https://t.co/VbJvqxD5sM)

- The Hill (@thehill) [*May 13, 2022*](https://twitter.com/thehill/status/1525224647482134529?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

Kirby explained:

These are not permanent moves. These moves are designed to respond to the current security environment. Moreover these forces are not going to fight in Ukraine. They are going to support the robust defense of Nato allies.

Still, as the New York Times [*noted*](https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/05/13/world/russia-ukraine-war-news) , the move suggests that the temporary expansion of troops is likely becoming more permanent.

block-time published-time 9.48pm BST

Ukrainian military authorities loaded the bodies of Russian soldiers onto refrigerated rail cars on Friday, saying they were prepared to return the bodies to Russia in accordance with international law, [*Reuters reports*](https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/ukrainian-servicemen-load-bodies-russian-soldiers-onto-refrigerated-rail-cars-2022-05-13/). The authorities loaded the bodies after fighting in the Kyiv and Chernihiv regions. From the news agency:

Volodymr Lyamzin, the head of Ukraine's civil-military cooperation, said his country was acting in accordance with international law and was ready to return the bodies to Russia.

"According to the norms of international humanitarian law, and Ukraine is strictly following them, after the active phase of the conflict is over, sides have to return the bodies of the military of another country, "Ukraine is ready to return the bodies to the aggressor", he said.

Lyamzin said there were several refrigerator trains stationed in different regions across Ukraine where the bodies of Russian soldiers were being kept.

Several hundred bodies were being stored at a facility on the outskirts of Kyiv filmed by Reuters.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 10.24pm BST

block-time published-time 9.28pm BST

The Russian army has continued its strategic offensive in the country's east, attacking new villages and towns, the Ukrainian army said in its daily operational statement today, the Associated Press reports:

Russian troops were engaging their Ukrainian opponents with live fire near the Rubezhnoye settlement, near the strategic city of Severodonetsk in Ukraine's Donbas, the Ukrainian military's general staff said in a Facebook post.

Analysts say that fighting in the Sevedononetsk area is critical to securing control over the Donbas, Ukraine's eastern industrial heartland, which is made up of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions.

On Friday, Russian troops unsuccessfully stormed the towns of Zolote and Kamyshevakha, the Ukrainian military said. It added that Moscow's forces were firing artillery at the strategically important settlements of Kamenka and Novoselivka. The military also said that Russia continued shelling Ukrainian positions in Mariupol, near the Azovstal steel plant where Kyiv's troops continue to hold out.

The accuracy of the claims could not be immediately verified, the AP noted.

block-time published-time 9.11pm BST

The Pentagon spokesperson, John Kirby, urged Congress to pass the $40bn supplemental aid package for Ukraine [*during a briefing on Friday*](https://www.c-span.org/video/?520263-1/pentagon-urges-senate-pass-ukraine-aid-package-19).

He said 19 May was a critical deadline, [*CNN reported*](https://www.cnn.com/europe/live-news/russia-ukraine-war-news-05-13-22/index.html) :

19 May is the day we really, without additional authorities, we begin to not have the ability to send new stuff in. By the 19th of May, it'll start impacting our ability to provide aid uninterrupted."

Kirby said: "We continue to urge the Senate to act as quickly as possible so that we don't get to the end of May and not have any additional authorities to draw upon... We've been moving at a fairly fast clip here both in terms of the individual packages that have been approved and how fast that stuff is getting into Ukrainian hands... We'd like to be able to continue that pace for as long as we can."

Democrats and Republicans had both supported the aid package this week, but Rand Paul, the GOP senator and libertarian from Kentucky, [*single-handedly blocked its approval*](https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/may/12/us-ukraine-aid-rand-paul-senate) :

Related: [*Senator Rand Paul single-handedly holds up $40bn US aid for Ukraine*](https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/may/12/us-ukraine-aid-rand-paul-senate)

block-time published-time 8.51pm BST

The United States accused Russia of using the UN Security Council to spout disinformation and conspiracy theories about biological weapons in Ukraine, to distract from its ***invasion*** of the country, the Associated Press reported.

US deputy ambassador Richard Mills called the Russian claims of alleged US involvement in a biological weapons program "categorically false and ludicrous".

He warned the council Friday that Moscow's actions follow a pattern of accusing others of violations it has perpetrated or intends to perpetrate, adding that they need to be watched closely "for the possibility of a false flag chemical or biological attack by Russia's forces".

UN deputy disarmament chief Thomas Markram reiterated to the council what his boss said at council meetings on 11 March and 18 March on similar Russian allegations: the United Nations is not aware of any biological weapons program in Ukraine.

Russia's UN Ambassador Vassily Nebenzia had earlier said in the meeting that he had called for a third council meeting because his government continues to receive "very worrying documentary evidence" that the US defense department is directly involved in carrying out "dangerous biological projects that look like a secret biological military program" in Ukraine.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 8.53pm BST

block-time published-time 8.17pm BST

Lloyd Austin, the US defense secretary, [*held a call*](https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/live/2022/may/13/mike-pence-trump-brian-kemp-georgia-biden-us-politics-live) with Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu on Friday in which he called for an immediate ceasefire in [*Ukraine*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/ukraine) , the Pentagon said.

During the call Austin also "emphasized the importance of maintaining lines of communication", the Pentagon said. It was the first time Austin had spoken with Shoigu since 18 February, six days before [*Russia*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/russia) invaded Ukraine.

The New York Times [*reported*](https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/05/13/world/russia-ukraine-war-news/the-pentagon-chief-spoke-to-his-russian-counterpart-for-the-first-time-since-ukraines-war-began?smid=url-copy) that the call came "at the initiative of the American side".

"What motivated them to change their mind and be open to it, I don't think we know for sure," a senior Pentagon official told the Times. The hourlong conversation was "professional", the Times reported, but broke no new ground.

"The call itself didn't specifically solve any acute issues or lead to a direct change in what the Russians are doing or saying," the official told the Times. He said Austin hoped the call would "serve as a springboard for future conversations".

The call came after Republican US senator Rand Paul [*blocked the passage of a $40bn aid bill*](https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/may/12/us-ukraine-aid-rand-paul-senate) for Ukraine on Thursday. The bill will be taken up again next week.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 8.36pm BST

block-time published-time 7.48pm BST

"Difficult negotiations" are taking place to remove Ukrainian defenders holed up under the Azovstal steelworks in besieged Mariupol, [*CNN reported*](https://www.cnn.com/europe/live-news/russia-ukraine-war-news-05-13-22/h_d17839a159ce2f9d6457cae9e82832d7).

Pavlo Kyrylenko, head of Donetsk region military administration, told CNN that attempts to save the fighters were ongoing.

"Difficult negotiations are underway, and they are still going on at this time, in order to save the defenders - gradually - because the Russian Federation is trying to dictate its conditions and requirements as much as possible. Therefore, in the first place, it will be seriously wounded fighters," he said.

Kyrylenko said that Russians continue to bombard Avozstal. "These are heavy, vacuum, high-explosive bombs," he said.

"We have to talk about it only when people will be safe. Only then we shall give any comments. Negotiations are ongoing and they are really very difficult. Because, first, the Russian Federation always changes them [the conditions]. And even those agreements that are reached are not a 100% agreement with Russia," Kyrylenko said.

Related: [*Inside the Azovstal steelworks - in pictures*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/gallery/2022/may/11/inside-the-azovstal-steelworks-in-pictures)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 8.02pm BST

block-time published-time 7.29pm BST

Consumer inflation in Russia accelerated in April to 17.83% in year-on-year terms, its highest level since January 2002, [*Reuters reported*](https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russian-inflation-jumps-1783-april-highest-since-early-2002-2022-05-13/).

Data released showed inflation was boosted by the volatile rouble and ***unprecedented*** western sanctions, which have disrupted logistics chains.

But monthly inflation slowed to 1.56% in April from 7.61% in March, when it staged the biggest month-on-month increase since January 1999, data from the federal statistics service Rosstat showed.

Inflation in Russia has accelerated sharply after Russia invaded Ukraine on 24 February.

High inflation has been the key concern among households for years as it dents living standards, a fall which this year will be aggravated by a steep economic contraction.

block-time published-time 7.00pm BST

Summary

It is 9pm in Kyiv. Here's where we stand:

Ukrainians have repelled multiple attempts by the Russians to cross a strategically significant river in the Donbas, inflicting heavy losses in the ***process***, according to local officials and British intelligence. Serhiy Haidai, the governor of the Luhansk region, said Russian forces [*had been repulsed three times as they tried to cross the Siversky Donets River,*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/may/13/ukraine-has-repelled-russias-attempt-to-cross-donbas-river-uk-confirms) 12 miles (20km) west of Severodonetsk, losing armour and bridging equipment.Ukraine's defence minister, Oleksii Reznikov, said Kyiv hopes to arm a million people as the country prepares for a "new, long phase of war". He warned that [*"extremely tough weeks are ahead"*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2022/may/13/russia-ukraine-war-latest-kyiv-to-hear-first-war-crimes-trial-putin-humiliating-himself-on-world-stage-truss-says-live?page=with:block-627e92478f083b856379a24d#block-627e92478f083b856379a24d) and that Ukraine needed "unity, cohesion, will and patience" during this difficult period.Russia will suspend electricity supplies to Finland from 1am on Saturday the supplier, RAO Nordic, said, amid rising tensions over Helsinki's bid to join Nato. The Finnish grid company, Fingrid, said trade in electricity imported from Russia would be suspended "for the time being" [*due to difficulties in receiving payments for electricity sold on the market,*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2022/may/13/russia-ukraine-war-latest-kyiv-to-hear-first-war-crimes-trial-putin-humiliating-himself-on-world-stage-truss-says-live?page=with:block-627e84038f08e6ce3a77e8c7#block-627e84038f08e6ce3a77e8c7) but insisted there was "no threat to the adequacy of electricity in Finland". A Russian soldier has appeared in court accused of murdering an unarmed man on a bicycle, at the start of the first war crime trial in Ukraine since Vladimir Putin invaded the country. Vadim Shysimarin, a commander of the Kantemirovskaya tank division, is [*charged with the premeditated murder of a 62-year-old man.*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/may/13/first-russian-soldier-goes-on-trial-in-ukraine-for-war-crimes) The case is scheduled to resume on Wednesday.The UK has issued sanctions against a dozen members of Vladimir Putin's family and inner circle including his long-rumoured girlfriend. The Foreign Office argued that the Russian president officially owns only modest assets, and has [*sanctioned the people who help support his lavish lifestyle.*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/may/13/new-uk-russia-sanctions-target-putin-financial-network-ex-wife) Britain and Norway have signed a new joint declaration on enhancing cooperation between the two countries. [*Boris Johnson met his Norwegian counterpart, Jonas Gahr Støre, in London*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2022/may/13/russia-ukraine-war-latest-kyiv-to-hear-first-war-crimes-trial-putin-humiliating-himself-on-world-stage-truss-says-live?page=with:block-627e6e868f08493b6168c3f3#block-627e6e868f08493b6168c3f3) on Friday, where both leaders "underscored their full support for any sovereign choice made by Nordic partners to enhance their security", a Downing Street statement said. US president, Joe Biden, spoke with his Finnish counterpart, Sauli Niinistö, and Sweden's prime minister, Magdalena Andersson, in call today. Biden expressed his support [*for the right of both Nordic countries "to decide their own future,*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2022/may/13/russia-ukraine-war-latest-kyiv-to-hear-first-war-crimes-trial-putin-humiliating-himself-on-world-stage-truss-says-live?page=with:block-627e97888f08e6ce3a77e9b8#block-627e97888f08e6ce3a77e9b8) foreign policy, and security arrangements", the White House said. [*Niinistö said he discussed his country's "next steps*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2022/may/13/russia-ukraine-war-latest-kyiv-to-hear-first-war-crimes-trial-putin-humiliating-himself-on-world-stage-truss-says-live?page=with:block-627e8c778f083b856379a209#block-627e8c778f083b856379a209) towards Nato membership" in the call.Turkish president, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, remarked to journalists after leaving Friday prayers in Istanbul that Turkey would not welcome either Sweden or Finland joining the Nato. He said that Turkey was "currently following developments regarding Sweden and Finland, but we don't feel positively about this". The US defence secretary, Lloyd Austin, spoke to his Russian counterpart, Sergei Shoigu, for the first time since before Moscow's troops invaded Ukraine on 24 February, the Pentagon said. [*Austin "urged an immediate ceasefire in Ukraine*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2022/may/13/russia-ukraine-war-latest-kyiv-to-hear-first-war-crimes-trial-putin-humiliating-himself-on-world-stage-truss-says-live?page=with:block-627e7a058f08e6ce3a77e83f#block-627e7a058f08e6ce3a77e83f) and emphasised the importance of maintaining lines of communication", the Pentagon press secretary, John Kirby, said. The EU could agree on a phased embargo on Russian oil next week, despite concerns about supply in eastern Europe, according to diplomats and officials. A senior EU diplomat told Reuters [*an agreement could come as early as Monday*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2022/may/13/russia-ukraine-war-latest-kyiv-to-hear-first-war-crimes-trial-putin-humiliating-himself-on-world-stage-truss-says-live?page=with:block-627e81898f083b856379a158#block-627e81898f083b856379a158) when EU foreign ministers meet in Brussels. A third diplomat said there was a chance of an agreement later in the week.The lawyer for the US professional basketball player Brittney Griner said her pre-trial detention has been extended by one month. [*The two-time Olympic medallist was arrested in February at Moscow's airport,*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2022/may/13/russia-ukraine-war-latest-kyiv-to-hear-first-war-crimes-trial-putin-humiliating-himself-on-world-stage-truss-says-live?page=with:block-627e69a88f08e6ce3a77e737#block-627e69a88f08e6ce3a77e737) allegedly in possession of vape cartridges containing oil derived from cannabis. If found guilty, she could face a maximum penalty of 10 years in prison.

That's it from me, Léonie Chao-Fong, today as I hand the blog over to my US colleagues. I'll be back on Monday. Thank you for reading.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 8.04pm BST

block-time published-time 6.38pm BST

US president Joe Biden spoke with the leaders of Sweden and Finland today to show his support "for Nato's open door policy" and for the right of both Nordic countries "to decide their own future, foreign policy, and security arrangements", the White House said.

Biden spoke with his Finnish counterpart, Sauli Niinistö, and Sweden's prime minister, Magdalena Andersson, to discuss the "close defence and security cooperation" between the countries as well as their efforts "aimed at strengthening translatlantic security", the White House said in a statement.

The leaders also discussed the "close partnership" among the countries across a range of global issues, and "reiterated their shared commitment to continued coordination" to help Ukraine, it said.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 6.44pm BST

block-time published-time 6.17pm BST

Ukraine 'to arm a million people' in new phase of war

Ukraine's defence minister, Oleksii Reznikov, said Kyiv hopes to arm a million people as the country prepares for a "new, long phase of war".

In a Facebook post published earlier today, Reznikov said:

We are entering a new, long phase of the war. To win it, we must plan resources carefully, avoid mistakes and project our strength in such a way that the enemy ultimately breaks.

Reznikov thanked the British defence secretary, Ben Wallace, for his support to increase assistance for Kyiv, as well as American partners, including his US counterpart, Lloyd Austin.

Ukraine's goal is to "restore our sovereignty and territorial integrity within the internationally recognised borders", he said.

Reznikov added that he was "focusing on the need to provide for one million people who will be facing the enemy".

He warned that "extremely tough weeks are ahead" and that Ukraine needed "unity, cohesion, will and patience" during this extremely difficult period.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 6.38pm BST

block-time published-time 5.52pm BST

Finland's president, Sauli Niinistö, said he discussed his country's "next steps towards Nato membership" in a call with his US counterpart, Joe Biden, and Sweden's prime minister, Magdalena Andersson, today.

enltrA joint phone call with [*@POTUS*](https://twitter.com/POTUS?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) [*@JoeBiden*](https://twitter.com/JoeBiden?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) and [*@SwedishPM*](https://twitter.com/SwedishPM?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) Magdalena Andersson. We shared a deep concern over Russia's war on Ukraine. I went through Finland's next steps towards NATO membership. Finland deeply appreciates all the necessary support from the US.

- Sauli Niinistö (@niinisto) [*May 13, 2022*](https://twitter.com/niinisto/status/1525127298185404416?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

Andersson also tweeted about the call:

enltrImportant call with [*@POTUS*](https://twitter.com/POTUS?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) Biden and President [*@niinisto*](https://twitter.com/niinisto?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) on Russian aggression against Ukraine, and on ???? ???? security policy. Much appreciate ???? support for our security and respective security policy choices.

- SwedishPM (@SwedishPM) [*May 13, 2022*](https://twitter.com/SwedishPM/status/1525136551327432706?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

The call lasted about 40 minutes, the White House said.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 6.37pm BST

block-time published-time 5.42pm BST

The call came at about midday on Wednesday. There had been "chemical poisoning" after a blast and patients needed collecting, Emma Graham-Harrison and Kateryna Semchuk report.

Fears of a Russian chemical weapons attack have haunted Ukraine almost since the war began. And as the volunteer medics in Sloviansk pulled on the ageing gas masks and plastic overalls that were their only protection, they wondered if this was it.

They set off anyway, inured to personal risks after weeks of driving through shelling to patch up the men and women injured on one of the most intensely fought-over sections of the frontline.

A medic holds a gas mask she was given at a hospital in Sloviansk. Photograph: Ed Ram/The Guardian

"We got a call saying there was a yellow-brown cloud after the hit, and yellow-white flakes in the air like snow. The soldiers immediately started having breathing problems," said Vit, a paramedic who asked to go only by his nickname, which refers to his peacetime role as mayor of a small town. He was worried about being captured and tortured by Russian troops who were just a few miles away.

The ambulance team listened to the warning and then went to get the choking soldiers. Like the troops they support, they are supplementing limited, outdated equipment with courage and determination.

After dropping off their patient, who had gone into spasms in the ambulance, they were told the gas came not from chemical weapons but from a chemical plant that had been hit by Russian munitions.

But if the fear of one particular horror was put on hold for a moment, the other terrors of this war are drawing closer to this city in Donbas, less than 20 miles behind the frontline.

Read the full article: Trial by fire: volunteer medics brave Russian shells in Donbas

Related: [*In ageing gas masks, medics in Ukraine rush towards choking troops*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/may/13/gas-masks-medics-ukraine-choking-troops-sloviansk)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 6.36pm BST

block-time published-time 5.31pm BST

Italy would be "very happy" to support Nato membership for Finland and Sweden, the Italian foreign minister, Luigi Di Maio, said.

Speaking to reporters in Berlin, Di Maio said:

We as Italy will be very happy to welcome these two countries in this great alliance that defends its member countries and ... which has guaranteed peace for decades.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 5.35pm BST

block-time published-time 5.16pm BST

Russia to cut electricity supplies to Finland from Saturday

Russia will suspend electricity supplies to Finland from 1am on Saturday the supplier, RAO Nordic, said, amid rising tensions over H elsinki 's bid to join Nato.

RAO Nordic, a subsidiary of the Russian state energy holding Inter RAO, said in a statement that it was "forced to suspend the electricity import", starting from 14 May.

RAO Nordic "is not able to make payments for the imported electricity from Russia", the statement said.

It added:

This situation is ***exceptional*** and happened for the first time in over 20 years of our trading history.

The Finnish grid company, Fingrid, said trade in electricity imported from Russia would be suspended "for the time being" due to difficulties in receiving payments for electricity sold on the market.

Fingrid added:

There is no threat to the adequacy of electricity in Finland.

It said that power from Russia accounted for some 10% of Finland's total power consumption, adding:

Missing imports can be replaced in the electricity market by importing more electricity from Sweden and partly also by domestic production.

Finnish leaders yesterday declared the country must apply to join the Nato alliance "without delay". In response, the Kremlin said Russia would "definitely" see Finnish membership as a threat, and Russia's foreign ministry said Moscow would be "forced to take reciprocal steps, military-technical and other".

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 11.11pm BST

block-time published-time 5.04pm BST

The EU could agree on a phased embargo on Russian oil next week, despite concerns about supply in eastern Europe, according to diplomats and officials.

A senior EU diplomat told Reuters "there will be a deal", while a second senior diplomat said an agreement could come as early as Monday when EU foreign ministers meet in Brussels. A third diplomat said there was a chance of an agreement later in the week.

One diplomat said:

This is going to be decided at the highest political level, between Budapest and Brussels. I am optimistic.

The embargo deal was first proposed by the European Commission in early May but dependence on Russian oil in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia has posed the biggest obstacle.

Hungary has already obtained an exemption until the end of 2024, as has Slovakia, and the Czech Republic until mid-2024.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 5.26pm BST

block-time published-time 4.47pm BST

[*More*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2022/may/13/russia-ukraine-war-latest-kyiv-to-hear-first-war-crimes-trial-putin-humiliating-himself-on-world-stage-truss-says-live?page=with:block-627e7a058f08e6ce3a77e83f#block-627e7a058f08e6ce3a77e83f) on the US defence secretary, Lloyd Austin, who also spoke to his British counterpart, Ben Wallace, to discuss the next steps to help Ukraine, including military aid.

Wallace issued a statement after meeting Austin in talks held in the US:

We will continue to work with unity and resolve to provide Ukraine with what it needs to defend itself against Russia's unprovoked ***invasion***.

The pair discussed "the next steps to provide defensive support for Ukraine, as well as Aukus (a defence pact between Australia, the US and Britain), the future of Nato, and other aspects of our shared security", Wallace said.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.52pm BST

block-time published-time 4.32pm BST

The US defence secretary, Lloyd Austin, spoke to his Russian counterpart, Sergei Shoigu, for the first time since before Moscow's troops invaded Ukraine on 24 February, the Pentagon said.

The Pentagon press secretary, John Kirby, said in a statement:

On 13 May, secretary of defence Lloyd J. Austin III spoke with Russian minister of defence Sergey Shoygu for the first time since 18 February.

Austin "urged an immediate ceasefire in Ukraine and emphasised the importance of maintaining lines of communication", Kirby added.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.55pm BST

block-time published-time 4.22pm BST

The UK has issued sanctions against a dozen members of Vladimir Putin's family and inner circle, including his long-rumoured girlfriend, arguing that given the Russian president officially owns only modest assets, these are the people who help support his lavish lifestyle.

The Foreign Office announcement means asset freezes and travel bans will be imposed on, among others: Lyudmila Ocheretnaya, Putin's former wife; Alina Kabaeva, a media executive and the Russian president's presumed partner; and Anna Zatseplina, Kabaeva's grandmother.

The Foreign Office statement noted that Putin's official assets ran to little more than a small flat in St Petersburg and two Soviet-era cars, despite his very obvious enormous personal wealth, including a yacht and the vast [*Putin's Palace mansion*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jan/21/russian-activists-publish-leaked-photos-of-putin-linked-palace) on the Black Sea coast.

Alina Kabaeva, the Russian president's presumed partner, has been added to Britain's sanctions list. Photograph: Sasha Mordovets/Getty Images

The sanctions targeted what the statement called a "wallet" of relatives and associates. The statement said: "Putin relies on his network of family, childhood friends, and selected elite who have benefited from his rule and in turn support his lifestyle. Their reward is influence over the affairs of the Russian state that goes far beyond their formal positions."

Those named in the latest sanctions comprise seven family members and five people listed as financiers of Putin's lifestyle.

Kabaeva, a former Olympic rhythmic gymnast, holds several powerful positions and has long been rumoured to be Putin's girlfriend. She chairs the board of Russia's National Media Group, which controls several television stations. Zatseplina is associated with [*Gennady Timchenko, a billionaire with close links to Putin*](https://www.theguardian.com/news/2021/oct/03/pandora-papers-reveal-hidden-wealth-vladimir-putin-inner-circle).

Kabaeva, who is originally from Tashkent in Uzbekistan and won gold in the 2004 Athens Olympics, spent more than six years as an MP for Putin's United Russia party. In 2014, she stepped back from politics to [*begin her role*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/sep/16/putin-girlfriend-alina-kabayeva-media-group) with National Media Group, despite her apparent lack of relevant experience beyond hosting a TV chat show.

Ocheretnaya and Putin divorced in 2014, but she had since, the statement said, "benefited from preferential business relationships with state-owned entities and exhibited significant unexplained wealth".

The other family members issued with sanctions are Igor Putin, a businessman and cousin of the president; Mikhail Putin, another businessman believed to be related to the president; Roman Putin, who is Igor Putin's son and runs a consulting firm; and Mikhail Shelomov, a business owner and Putin's first cousin, once removed.

Related: [*UK sanctions target Putin's financial network including rumoured girlfriend*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/may/13/new-uk-russia-sanctions-target-putin-financial-network-ex-wife)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 5.01pm BST

block-time published-time 3.53pm BST

Kyiv will see a relaxing of curfew hours from Sunday onwards, the city's mayor, Vitali Klitschko, announced on Telegram.

From Sunday, the curfew will begin an hour later, from 11pm. It will continue to last until 5am.

Public transport will also run for longer hours from Monday, Klitschko said.

The mayor said:

Subway - from 6am to 10pm. Ground public transport - from 6am to 10.30pm. Observe the curfew rules.

And also - do not neglect air raid signals! Threat of missile attacks on Kyiv remains.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 5.10pm BST

block-time published-time 3.44pm BST

Britain and Norway have signed a new joint declaration on enhancing cooperation between the two countries, just days after the UK's prime minister, Boris Johnson, travelled to Sweden and Finland to pledge his support against potential Russian threats.

Johnson met his Norwegian counterpart, Jonas Gahr Støre, in London today, where both leaders "underscored their full support for any sovereign choice made by Nordic partners to enhance their security", a Downing Street statement said.

The statement continued:

The prime minister and Prime Minister Støre agreed that neither Nato nor the Nordic region posed a threat and that the longstanding policy of 'high north, low tension' had created decades of stability and prosperity for the area.

Støre told broadcasters that the pair discussed energy and climate policy, the need to provide support to Ukraine, as well as their cooperation on energy and carbon capture and storage.

He said it was a "historic" time for his region, with Finland potentially joining the Nato alliance.

enltrPM [*@jonasgahrstore*](https://twitter.com/jonasgahrstore?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) is in London today: meeting with PM [*@borisjohnson*](https://twitter.com/BorisJohnson?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) at No. 10, the two leaders signed a Joint Declaration on enhancing co-operation on areas from security & defence to climate change, environment & energy 'The UK is without question one of our closest allies' [*pic.twitter.com/5ExJnX6G4d*](https://t.co/5ExJnX6G4d)

- Norway in the UK (@NorwayinUK) [*May 13, 2022*](https://twitter.com/NorwayinUK/status/1525115718206988293?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 5.16pm BST

block-time published-time 3.25pm BST

The lawyer for the US professional basketball player Brittney Griner said her pre-trial detention has been extended by one month.

The two-time Olympic medallist was arrested in February at Moscow's airport, allegedly in possession of vape cartridges containing oil derived from cannabis. If found guilty, she could face a maximum penalty of 10 years in prison.

The Biden administration has said Griner, 31, has been wrongfully detained and has assigned diplomats to work on her release.

Griner appeared at the hearing in a court in Khimki just outside Moscow, handcuffed and wearing an orange hoodie with her face held low.

WNBA star and two-time Olympic gold medalist Brittney Griner leaves a courtroom after a hearing, in Khimki just outside Moscow, Russia. Photograph: Alexander Zemlianichenko/AP

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 3.37pm BST

block-time published-time 3.09pm BST

Ukrainian woman in her damaged house in Chernihiv oblast, Ukraine. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images The damaged house in Chernihiv oblast. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 3.38pm BST

block-time published-time 2.46pm BST

There has been a little bit of Finnish reaction to those comments by Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan. He said that Turkey was "currently following developments regarding Sweden and Finland, but we don't feel positively about this".

At the G7 foreign ministers' meeting in Germany, Reuters is quoting Finland's foreign minister Pekka Haavisto as saying that issues need to be taken step-by-step and that the ***process*** needs patience. He said that he would be meeting Turkey's foreign minister in Berlin tomorrow.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.56pm BST

block-time published-time 2.33pm BST

Kremlin press spokesperson Dmitry Peskov has given a read-out from Russia's security council meeting today, where he says Russian president Vladimir Putin discussed the situation in Ukraine and potential threats from the entry of Finland and Sweden into Nato, Russia's RIA news agency reports.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.56pm BST

block-time published-time 2.09pm BST

Erdogan says Turkey 'would not welcome' Finland or Sweden joining Nato

Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan remarked to journalists after leaving Friday prayers in Istanbul that Turkey would not welcome either Sweden or Finland joining the Nato.

"We are currently following developments regarding Sweden and Finland, but we don't feel positively about this," he said.

"We don't want to commit a mistake," he added. "Scandinavian countries are like guesthouses for terrorist organisations. To go even further, they have seats in their parliaments too."

Erdogan's comments were primarily directed at the militant group the Kurdistan Workers party (PKK), which Turkey regards as a terrorist organisation, although they appeared to encompass the communities of Kurdish origin in Scandinavia as a whole.

Accession to Nato requires consensus from all member countries.

Sweden has a large Kurdish diaspora, with the community considered to be one of the largest outside of the Middle East. Prominent Swedish citizens of Kurdish origin currently include six members of parliament. The Turkish authorities are yet to provide any evidence for their claims that the parliamentarians in question have links with the PKK or similar groups outside Sweden.

The Kurdish-speaking population of Finland was [*estimated*](https://www.populationu.com/finland-population) at just over 15,000 people as of 2020, less than 1% of the population.

Turkey has been a Nato member since 1952 and its membership remains a cornerstone of its foreign policy towards western countries. Despite this, Turkey [*recently decided to withdraw*](https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/diplomacy/turkey-snubs-military-exercise-in-athens-citing-greek-aggression) from a scheduled Nato military exercise in Athens in May due to disagreements with Greece.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 5.27pm BST

block-time published-time 1.56pm BST

Russia accused of forcibly deporting 210,000 children from Ukraine

Ukraine's human rights ombudsperson, Lyudmyla Denisova, said more than 210,000 children were among 1.2 million Ukrainians who Kyiv says have been deported against their will.

Speaking on national television, Denisova said:

When our children are taken out, they destroy the national identity, deprive our country of the future.

They teach our children there, in Russian, the history that (Russian president Vladimir) Putin has told everyone.

Denisova did not provide evidence to support these figures, and it has not been possible to independently verify them.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.58pm BST

block-time published-time 1.46pm BST

Ukraine has asked G7 countries to seize Russian assets and hand them to Kyiv to help rebuild the country, its foreign minister, Dmytro Kuleba, said.

Speaking to reporters as G7 foreign ministers met in northern Germany, Kuleba added that he hoped Hungary would agree with EU partners on an embargo on Russian oil.

Kuleba said:

Canada has already done this and I have a feeling that others will reach that point sooner rather than later. We are talking about hundreds of billions of dollars. Russia must pay.

enltrFollowing [*@ZelenskyyUa*](https://twitter.com/ZelenskyyUa?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) 's talks with G7 leaders, today I asked G7 to seize Russian sovereign assets and give them to Ukraine for rebuilding our country. Russia must pay. Politically, economically, and financially. I appreciate the positive reaction of G7 countries to our request. [*pic.twitter.com/DpUoanoEtW*](https://t.co/DpUoanoEtW)

- Dmytro Kuleba (@DmytroKuleba) [*May 13, 2022*](https://twitter.com/DmytroKuleba/status/1525089090777059331?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 1.35pm BST

Sweden has come closer to reversing its decades-long policy of military non-alignment, after a security policy review concluded that joining Nato would have a "deterrent effect" on the risk of conflict in northern Europe.

Swedish membership to Nato would "raise the threshold for military conflicts and thus have a deterrent effect in northern Europe", the report said. It stopped short of offering a concrete recommendation but noted that it was "not realistic to develop bilateral defence alliances outside existing European and Euro-Atlantic structures".

The report added:

Within the framework of current cooperation, there is no guarantee that Sweden would be helped if it were the target of a serious threat or attack.

The report paves the way for Sweden to announce a bid for Nato membership, and comes after Finnish leaders said they believed Finland should join Nato "without delay".

Sweden's defence minister Peter Hultqvist (left) and Foreign minister Ann Linde present a security policy analysis during a press conference in Stockholm, Sweden. Photograph: Henrik Montgomery/EPA

The Swedish foreign minister, Ann Linde, said Finland's position would affect Sweden and "needed to be considered". She also noted that both Finnish and Swedish Nato memberships would be considered "negative" by Russia.

Linde told reporters that Sweden did not anticipate a "conventional military attack" in reaction to a potential application, but acknowledged that the government has not ruled out "an armed assault against Sweden".

Russian retaliatory ***measures*** against Sweden "cannot be ruled out during a transition period", the report continued, citing "cyberattacks and other forms of hybrid attacks". Russia would be able to carry out "limited acts of violence" against Sweden, such as "sabotage by Russian special forces units or operations using long-range weapons".

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.42pm BST

block-time published-time 1.12pm BST

Russia is advising its citizens against travelling to the UK its foreign ministry said.

The ministry said:

Taking into account the extremely unfriendly course of the UK towards our country, in order to avoid financial losses and other possible problems, we recommend that Russian citizens refrain, if possible, from travelling to the UK and trying to obtain British visas.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.42pm BST

block-time published-time 1.04pm BST

Zelenskiy says he is 'ready to talk to Putin'

Volodymyr Zelenskiy has reiterated an offer to hold direct talks with his Russian counterpart, Vladimir Putin, in the Ukrainian president's fullest public comments on the prospect of peace talks in weeks.

Russia's withdrawal from Ukraine should be a starting point for any discussions between the two leaders, Zelenskiy told Italy's RAI 1 television, Reuters reports.

Zelenskiy said:

As president, I am ready to talk to Putin, but only to him. Without any of his intermediaries. And in the framework of dialogue, not ultimatums.

Ukraine and Russia have not held face-to-face talks since 29 March. Interfax news agency has quoted Moscow's chief negotiator, Vladimir Medinsky, as saying peace talks were being held remotely.

Zelenskiy also ruled out suggestions that Ukraine should make concessions for the sake of securing a peace agreement that would allow Putin to save face, adding that Ukraine would not compromise over its territorial integrity.

He said:

Get out of this territory that you have occupied since February 24. This is the first clear step to talking about anything.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.13pm BST

block-time published-time 12.45pm BST

Russia said it expelled 10 Romanian diplomats in response to similar expulsions by Bucharest, its foreign ministry said.

In a separate statement, the ministry said a member of the Bulgarian embassy was also being expelled.

block-time published-time 12.39pm BST

Germany says it has started training Ukrainian soldiers in the use of the Panzerhaubitze (PzH) 2000 artillery system this week.

The PzH 2000 howitzer is one of the most powerful artillery weapons in the Bundeswehr inventories and can hit targets at a distance of 40km (25 miles).

enltrGood morning! Training of Ukrainian soldiers in use of the PzH 2000 started in Germany this week. The delivery of 12 of these weapon systems is currently being coordinated and organised with the Netherlands. We are also reinforcing [*#NATO*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/NATO?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) 's eastern flank.?? [*https://t.co/XylsiFfy7S*](https://t.co/XylsiFfy7S) [*pic.twitter.com/G44q6rZPvm*](https://t.co/G44q6rZPvm)

- Germany at NATO (@GermanyNATO) [*May 13, 2022*](https://twitter.com/GermanyNATO/status/1525034964227657728?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 12.25pm BST

The Kremlin's spokesperson, Dmitry Peskov, has been speaking to reporters during his regular briefing. Referring to a report in a Finnish newspaper that Russia may cut gas supplies to Finland as soon as today, Peskov said it was "most likely" "another newspaper hoax".

Iltalehti reported yesterday that Finnish politicians had been warned that Russia could halt gas supplies to its neighbour on Friday. The newspaper cited unnamed sources and did not say where the warning came from.

Peskov said there were no plans to cut Finland off from gas supplies today, adding that Gazprom remained a reliable gas supplier, Reuters reports.

He also hit back at calls by Poland's prime minister, Mateusz Morawiecki, to "root out" Russia's "monstrous ideology".

In a column for Britain's Telegraph newspaper on Tuesday, Morawiecki said the Russian president, Vladimir Putin, was more dangerous than either Adolf Hitler or Josef Stalin because of the advanced weapons at his disposal.

Peskov told reporters:

This is the quintessence of that hatred towards Russians that has regrettably, like a metastasis, infected the entire Polish leadership and, in many ways, Polish society.

He said Morawiecki's "shocking" statement was "hysterical and unacceptable".

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.27pm BST

block-time published-time 12.11pm BST

Russian president Vladimir Putin held a phone call with German chancellor Olaf Scholz, in which Putin "outlined in detail the logic and main objectives of the special military operation", the Kremlin said on Friday.

According to the Kremlin's [*readout*](http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/68404) of the call, Putin also spoke about the "***measures*** being taken to ensure the safety of civilians" during what the Kremlin calls its "special military operation" in Ukraine.

The Kremlin further said that Putin drew attention to the "gross violations" committed by Ukrainian militants "professing the Nazi ideology". The Russian leader added that the current Russian-Ukrainian negotiations were "effectively blocked" by Kyiv.

During the conversation, the leaders agreed to hold further talks soon, the Kremlin said.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.27pm BST

block-time published-time 11.59am BST

A Russian soldier has appeared in the dock at the first war crime trial of Vladimir Putin's war in Ukraine.

The defendant, who arrived at Kyiv's small district court No 3 in a grey tracksuit and handcuffs, is Vadim Shysimarin, a 21-year-old commander of the Kantemirovskaya tank division, who is in Ukrainian custody charged with murdering a 62-year-old man.

It was a preliminary hearing and a first date for trial has been set for 18 May.

Shysimarin's lawyer said his client had confessed to the killing of the victim but that he had not yet discussed whether he would plead guilty.

Shysimarin spoke briefly to confirm his name and that he understood the charges against him.

Russian soldier Vadim Shysimarin, 21, suspected of violations of the laws and norms of war, sits inside a defendant's cage during a court hearing, in Kyiv, Ukraine. Photograph: Reuters

It is alleged that Shysimarin, a sergeant, had been fighting in the Sumy region in north-east Ukraine when he killed a civilian on 28 February in the village of Chupakhivka.

He is accused of shooting at a civilian car after his convoy of military vehicles had come under attack from Ukrainian forces. He then drove the car away with four other soldiers as he sought to flee Ukrainian fighters.

Shysimarin shot dead the unarmed man, who was on a bicycle and talking on his phone, after being ordered "to kill a civilian so he would not report them to Ukrainian defenders", according to prosecutors.

The crime is said to have happened "dozens of metres" from the victim's house and was committed using an AK-74 rifle.

The name of the 62-year-old victim was not made public.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.28pm BST

block-time published-time 11.51am BST

Germany's ***agriculture*** minister, Cem Özdemir, described grain theft by Russia in eastern Ukraine as "repugnant" as G7 countries met to discuss the impact of the war on the global food supply.

Özdemir was speaking to reporters at the start of a meeting in Stuttgart with colleagues from G7 countries, Ukraine, the EU, the OECD and the UN's food and ***agricultural*** agency, Reuters reports.

Özdemir said:

This is an especially repugnant form of war that Russia is leading.

Russia was "stealing, robbing, taking for itself grain from eastern Ukraine," Oezdemir said, describing it as an "economic war".

Ukraine's ***agriculture*** minister, Mykola Solsky, said his country was in a "very difficult situation" with regard to grain exports, adding:

We cannot get away from the fact that the harvest will be smaller than last year.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 11.59am BST

block-time published-time 11.32am BST

UK announces new sanctions targeting Putin's family and inner circle

Britain announced its latest round of sanctions targeting the Russian president's financial network, including his ex-wife, family and inner circle.

The sanctions are aimed at the "shady network propping up Putin's luxury lifestyle", British foreign secretary, Liz Truss, said in a statement.

The 12 new names added to the British sanctions list include the former first lady of the Russian Federation and ex-wife of Putin, Lyudmila Ocheretnaya.

Mikhail Shelomov, a Russian business owner and the leader's first cousin, once removed, has also been targeted.

Several other relatives of Putin holding executive positions at major Russian firms like Gazprom have also been sanctioned. They face asset freezes and travel bans.

Truss' statement read:

We are exposing and targeting the shady network propping up Putin's luxury lifestyle and tightening the vice on his inner circle.

We will keep going with sanctions on all those aiding and abetting Putin's aggression until Ukraine prevails.

Putins' official assets are modest, according to the UK Foreign Office, with his lifestyle "funded by a cabal of family, friends and elites".

Britain's sanctioned list now includes more than 1,000 individuals and 100 entities.

Hello, it's Léonie Chao-Fong with you again today.Feel free to get in touch [*on Twitter*](https://twitter.com/leonie_chaofong) or [*via email*](mailto:leonie.chao-fong@theguardian.com) if you have anything you'd like to flag.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.00pm BST

block-time published-time 11.24am BST

The anti-Kremlin band Pussy Riot perform during the opening concert of the group's Riot Days tour, at Funkhaus Berlin Nalepastrasse in Berlin, Germany. Photograph: Action Press/Rex/Shutterstock

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.01pm BST

block-time published-time 11.09am BST

Today so far ... The UK's Ministry of Defence has said the failed crossing of the Siverskyi Donets river by Russian forces in the Donbas showed the pressure Russian commanders were under.Ukrainian military forces released footage on Thursday that they say shows destroyed Russian military vehicles and a pontoon bridge in eastern Ukraine. According to the Ukrainian forces, the images were taken along the Siverskyi Donets River. The first war crime trial since Vladimir Putin ordered the ***invasion*** of Ukraine has opened in Kyiv in a watershed moment. Vadim Shysimarin, a 21-year-old Russian commander of the Kantemirovskaya tank division, allegedly killed a civilian on 28 February in the village of Chupakhivka while fighting in the Sumy region in north-east Ukraine.Russia's defence ministry has claimed its forces struck the Kremenchug oil refinery in central Ukraine, destroying its production capacity and fuel tanks.Ukraine says it has damaged a Russian navy logistics ship near Snake Island, a small but strategic outpost in the Black Sea.Kharkiv governor Oleh Synyehubov said "the night was relatively calm" in the region. However he added that in Dergachi "the Russians damaged the humanitarian headquarters, the registry office, part of the clinic, and the ambulance building", and that in Shebelinka "a Russian shell hit a hangar building. The roof of the hangar and 10 trucks were on fire. Unfortunately, three people died and five others were injured."The Ukrainian counteroffensive around the north-eastern city of Kharkiv is " starting to look very similar to the counteroffensive that ultimately drove Russian troops away from Kyiv and out of western Ukraine entirely", the Institute for the Study of War has said in its [*latest assessment*](https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-may-12) of the conflict.Swedish membership of Nato would have a stabilising effect and would benefit countries around the Baltic sea, Sweden's foreign minister Ann Linde said today, the day after neighbour Finland committed to applying to join the 30-nation alliance.The EU's top diplomat, Josep Borrell, has said that the European Union would provide another 500m (£425m) worth of military support to Ukraine, and that he was confident a deal could be reached in the coming days to agree an embargo on Russian oil.British foreign secretary Liz Truss said it was vital to keep up the pressure on Russia by supplying more weapons to Ukraine and imposing further sanctions. "It is very important at this time that we keep up the pressure on Vladimir Putin by supplying more weapons to Ukraine and by increasing the sanctions."

That is it from me, Martin Belam, for now. Léonie Chao-Fong will continue to bring you the latest developments.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 11.32am BST

block-time published-time 11.04am BST

The first war crime trial since Vladimir Putin ordered the ***invasion*** of [*Ukraine*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/ukraine) has opened in Kyiv in a watershed moment.

Vadim Shysimarin, a 21-year-old Russian commander of the Kantemirovskaya tank division, allegedly killed a civilian on 28 February in the village of Chupakhivka while fighting in the Sumy region in north-east Ukraine.

Shysimarin, who has been held in Ukrainian custody, is accused of shooting at a civilian car after his convoy of military vehicles came under attack from Ukrainian forces. He then drove the car away with four other soldiers as he sought to flee Ukrainian fighters.

Shysimarin shot dead a 62-year-old unarmed man who was on a bicycle and talking on his phone, after being ordered "to kill a civilian so he would not report them to Ukrainian defenders", according to prosecutors. The crime is said to have happened "dozens of metres" from the victim's house and was committed using an AK-74 rifle.

A spokesperson for the prosecutor's office said before the trial opened: "Prosecutors and investigators of the SBU [Ukrainian secret services] have collected enough evidence of his involvement in violation of the laws and customs of war combined with premeditated murder. For these actions, he faces 10 to 15 years in prison or life in prison."

Two other cases are likely to be heard in court within days including an in absentia trial of Mikhail Romanov, a Russian soldier accused of rape and murder. He is accused of breaking into a house in March in a village in the Brovarsky region near Kyiv, murdering a man and then repeatedly raping his wife while "threatening her and her underage child with violence and weapons".

You can read more of Daniel Boffey's report from Kyiv here: [*First Russian soldier goes on trial in Ukraine for war crimes*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/may/13/first-russian-soldier-goes-on-trial-in-ukraine-for-war-crimes)

block-time published-time 10.45am BST

Reuters is carrying another quote from Sweden about their moves to consider joining Nato. Defence minister Peter Hultqvist said: "If Sweden chooses to seek Nato membership, there is a risk of a reaction from Russia. Let me state that, in such a case, we are prepared to deal with any counter-response."

Yesterday, Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov said Russia would "definitely" consider it a threat if Sweden's neighbours Finland were to join Nato.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 11.32am BST

block-time published-time 10.25am BST

Swedish membership of Nato would have a stabilising effect and would benefit countries around the Baltic sea, Sweden's foreign minister Ann Linde said today, the day after neighbour Finland committed to applying to join the 30-nation alliance.

"Swedish Nato membership would raise the threshold for military conflicts and thus have a conflict-preventing effect in northern Europe," Linde told reporters when presenting a parliament report on security, Reuters reports.

Sweden is widely expected to follow Finland's lead and media reports have suggested Stockholm could apply for Nato membership as early as Monday.

Updated at 11.32am BST

10.23am BST

Ukrainian military forces released footage on Thursday that they say shows destroyed Russian military vehicles and a pontoon bridge in eastern Ukraine. According to the Ukrainian forces, the images were taken along the Siverskyi Donets River. The UK's Ministry of Defence said on Friday the failed crossing of the river by Russian forces showed the pressure Russian commanders were under. The ministry's intelligence update said the images suggested that Russia "lost armoured manoeuvre elements of at least one battalion tactical group" at the river, located west of Severodonetsk.

9.55am BST

While G7 foreign ministers have been meeting in Germany, Russia's foreign minister Sergei Lavrov has been meeting his counterpart from Belarus.

???????? In [*#Dushanbe*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/Dushanbe?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) , FM Sergey [*#Lavrov*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/Lavrov?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) held a meeting with Minister of Foreign Affairs of [*#Belarus*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/Belarus?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) Vladimir Makei. [*#RussiaBelarus*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/RussiaBelarus?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) [*pic.twitter.com/6ktTE7funu*](https://t.co/6ktTE7funu)

- MFA Russia ???? (@mfa\_russia) [*May 13, 2022*](https://twitter.com/mfa_russia/status/1525035922332520448?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

9.49am BST

Ukraine's president Volodymyr Zelenskiy has just posted a video clip of an interview conducted with Rai 1 in Italy. Overnight he posted to Telegram in English, saying:

Russia's strategic defeat is already obvious to everyone in the world and even to those who still continue to communicate with them. Russia simply lacks courage to admit it so far. They are cowards. And they are trying to hide the truth behind missile, air and artillery strikes. Therefore, our task is to fight until we achieve our goals in this war. Free our land, our people and reliably ensure our security.

Updated at 10.09am BST

9.23am BST

Russia's defence ministry has claimed its forces struck the Kremenchug oil refinery in central Ukraine, destroying its production capacity and fuel tanks.

Reuters reports the ministry also said its forces shot down a Ukrainian Su-27 aircraft in Kharkiv region. The reports have not been independently verified.

9.00am BST

Kharkiv governor Oleh Synyehubov has provided an update on the situation in his region on Telegram, saying "the night was relatively calm".

He said that a rocket had hit "the territory of Kharkiv airport", but that no one was injured. He listed a small number of injuries and fatalities in Saltivka, Dergachi, Zolochiv, Balaklia and Shebelinka.

He said that in Dergachi "the Russians damaged the humanitarian headquarters, the registry office, part of the clinic, and the ambulance building", and that in Shebelinka "a Russian shell hit a hangar building. The roof of the hangar and 10 trucks were on fire. Unfortunately, three people died and 5 others were injured."

He added:

In the Kharkiv direction, the occupiers did not attempt to attack. Fighting continues in the Izium region. Our armed forces hold positions and repel the enemy!

None of the claims have been independently verified.

Updated at 9.33am BST

8.37am BST

Borrell: EU will provide another 500m of military support to Ukraine

A quick snap from Reuters here that the EU's top diplomat, Josep Borrell, has said this morning that the European Union would provide another 500m (£425m) worth of military support to Ukraine, and that he was confident a deal could be reached in the coming days to agree an embargo on Russian oil.

Updated at 9.34am BST

8.28am BST

Here are some of the latest images we have been sent over the newswires showing the impact of the conflict in Ukraine and beyond.

Dmytro Kuleba (left), Ukraine foreign minister, meets Nico Popescu, foreign minister of Moldova, on 13 May in Weissenhaus, Germany.Photograph: Thomas Imo/Photothek/Getty ImagesA satellite image provided by Maxar Technologies shows the western end of Azovstal steel plant in Mariupol on Thursday 12 May.Photograph: APVolunteers organise donations at the logistics centre at the Art Palace in Lviv. It can provide aid packages for more than 500 Ukrainian displaced families every day.Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty ImagesRefugees say goodbye in Odesa before taking a bus on an evacuation trip to Italy organised by a Ukrainian volunteer initiative.Photograph: Vladimir Sindeyeve/NurPhoto/Rex/Shutterstock

Updated at 8.40am BST

7.53am BST

British foreign secretary Liz Truss said it was vital to keep up the pressure on Russia by supplying more weapons to Ukraine and imposing further sanctions.

"It is very important at this time that we keep up the pressure on Vladimir Putin by supplying more weapons to Ukraine and by increasing the sanctions," Reuters reports she told the media on arrival at a G7 foreign ministers meeting in northern Germany.

7.41am BST

Serhiy Haidai, the Ukrainian governor of Luhansk, has issued a short update on Telegram this morning. He said that the Russians had "made every effort to break through the defences in Luhansk region" and attempted to storm "Rubizhne, Zolote, Nizhne, suburbs of Severodonetsk".

He suggested that the Russians were making another attempt to cross the Siverskyi Donets, describing them as "racists" and "idiots". He then said:

[The Russians] do not manage to defeat the Ukrainians in battle, so the racists deliberately destroy the region, turning it into a desert. Most of our settlements are destroyed by 70%, those that are under occupation even more.

7.24am BST

The Russian embassy in Latvia has issued a strongly worded statement about the decision yesterday in Riga to suspend protections of Soviet monuments within its borders. The embassy says:

We are outraged by the decision of the Latvian Saeima to unilaterally suspend Article 13 of the Russian-Latvian Intergovernmental Agreement of 30 April, 1994, which prescribes the Latvian side to protect, maintain and take care of memorials.

This traitorous, unjustified step has neither moral nor legal grounds and constitutes a flagrant violation of the universally recognised principles and norms of international law, including the provisions of this very treaty.

This situation clearly demonstrates for the entire responsible international community the true face of the political elite of modern Latvia: cynicism, double standards, a complete rejection of civilised ways of settling interstate issues and brazen disregard for the fundamental principles of international law. In Latvia, the problem of settling the score with one's own historical past is looming large.

[*Yesterday Latvia's parliament voted*](https://eng.lsm.lv/article/politics/saeima/saeima-decides-to-legally-allow-soviet-monument-demolition.a456417/) that protection of Soviet monuments would be suspended until Russian forces left Ukraine. MP Krista Baumane said the monuments were symbols of Russian occupation and of Russian crimes in Ukraine.

A small number of lawmakers opposed the move, saying they were memorials for the victory over Nazism in the second world war, and nothing to do with the current conflict.

Updated at 7.41am BST

6.49am BST

Failed river crossing shows pressure Russian commanders are under, says UK MoD

The UK's ministry of defence has said the failed crossing of the Siverskyi Donets river by Russian forces in the Donbas showed the pressure Russian commanders were under:

Conducting river crossings in a contested environment is a highly risky manoeuvre and speaks to the pressure the Russian commanders are under to make progress in their operations in eastern Ukraine.

Russian forces have failed to make any significant advances despite concentrating forces in this area after withdrawing and redeploying units from the Kyiv and Chernihiv Oblasts.

On Wednesday, Ukrainian forces successfully prevented the crossing, and released images which the MoD said indicated that Russia "lost significant armoured manoeuvre elements of at least one Battalion Tactical Group".

The pictures showed what Ukraine claimed were destroyed Russian tanks and other armoury in the village of Bilohorivka, near the strategic Ukrainian-held city of Lysychansk.

Artillerymen of the 17th tank brigade of the [*#UAarmy*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/UAarmy?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) have opened the holiday season for ruscists. Some bathed in the Siverskyi Donets River, and some were burned by the May sun. [*pic.twitter.com/QsRsXmnJ65*](https://t.co/QsRsXmnJ65)

- Defence of Ukraine (@DefenceU) [*May 11, 2022*](https://twitter.com/DefenceU/status/1524438980191731717?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

The UK's ministry of defence also said Russia was "investing significant effort in the vicinity of Izium and Severodonetsk in an attempt to achieve a breakthrough towards Sloviansk and Kramatorsk."

The primary objective on this axis is to envelop Ukrainian forces in the Joint Forces Operation area, isolating them from support or reinforcement by units in the west of the country.

Latest Defence Intelligence update on the situation in Ukraine - 13 May 2022 Find out more about the UK government's response: [*https://t.co/7SVSQChAFe*](https://t.co/7SVSQChAFe) ???? [*#StandWithUkraine*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/StandwithUkraine?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) ???? [*pic.twitter.com/vqt5MS4LR5*](https://t.co/vqt5MS4LR5)

- Ministry of Defence ???? (@DefenceHQ) [*May 13, 2022*](https://twitter.com/DefenceHQ/status/1524979878654840833?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

Updated at 8.26am BST

6.30am BST

The Ukrainian counteroffensive around the north-eastern city of Kharkiv is " starting to look very similar to the counteroffensive that ultimately drove Russian troops away from Kyiv and out of western Ukraine entirely", the Institute for the Study of War has said in its [*latest assessment*](https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-may-12) of the conflict.

It was "forcing the Russian command to make hard choices", including by making Russian units focus their bombardments on attacking Ukrainian troops rather than the city, the US-based thinktank continued.

Meanwhile, Russian forces may be abandoning their efforts to encircle Ukrainian troops along the Izyum-Slovyansk-Debaltseve line in eastern Ukraine in favour of shallower encirclements of the cities of Severodonetsk and Lysychansk in Luhansk.

However, it was "unclear if Russian forces can encircle, let alone capture, Severodonetsk and Lysychansk even if they focus their efforts on that much-reduced objective", the institute said.

Russian offensives have bogged down every time they hit a built-up area throughout this war, and these areas are unlikely to be different.

Continued and expanding reports of demoralisation and refusals to fight among Russian units suggest that the effective combat power of Russian troops in the east continues to be low and may drop further.

If the Russians abandon efforts to advance from Izyum, moreover, Ukrainian forces would be able to concentrate their efforts on defending Severodonetsk-Lysychansk or, in the worst case, breaking a Russian encirclement before those settlements fall.

However, the thinktank also noted Russian forces probably control almost all of the city of Rubizhne as of 12 May and have most likely seized the town of Voevodivka, north of Severodonetsk.

They will likely launch a ground offensive on or around Severodonetsk in the coming days. The relative success of Russian operations in this area combined with their failure to advance from Izyum and the notable decline in the energy of that attempted advance suggest that they may be giving up on the Izyum axis.

The report also noted that Russian forces were strengthening their position on Snake Island, in the Black Sea, in a bid to block Ukrainian maritime communications near they key port city of Odesa.

[*#Russian*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/Russian?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) forces may be abandoning efforts at a wide encirclement of [*#Ukrainian*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/Ukrainian?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) troops along the Izyum-Slovyansk-Debaltseve line in favor of shallower encirclements of Severodonetsk and Lysychansk. Read the latest from [*@TheStudyofWar*](https://twitter.com/TheStudyofWar?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) and [*@criticalthreats*](https://twitter.com/criticalthreats?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) : [*https://t.co/VxNkHsOInx*](https://t.co/VxNkHsOInx) [*pic.twitter.com/UcfBQlkQwt*](https://t.co/UcfBQlkQwt)

- ISW (@TheStudyofWar) [*May 13, 2022*](https://twitter.com/TheStudyofWar/status/1524933375772852229?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

Updated at 7.08am BST

6.15am BST

Ukraine says it has damaged a Russian navy logistics ship near Snake Island, a small but strategic outpost in the Black Sea, Reuters reports.

"Thanks to the actions of our naval seamen, the support vessel Vsevolod Bobrov caught fire - it is one of the newest in the Russian fleet," said Serhiy Bratchuk, a spokesman for the Odesa regional military administration.

Reuters could not independently verify the details. Russia's defence ministry did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

A satellite image shows a Russian Serna-class landing craft and possible missile contrail near Snake Island, Ukraine.Photograph: Maxar Technologies/Reuters

Satellite imagery provided by Maxar, a private US-based company, showed the aftermath of what it said were probable missile attacks on a Russian Serna-class landing craft near the island, close to Ukraine's sea border with Romania.

Images also showed recent damage to buildings on the island, which became famous for the [*foul-mouthed defiance of its Ukrainian defenders*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/25/ukraine-soldiers-told-russians-to-go-fuck-yourself-before-black-sea-island-death) early in the ***invasion***.

Renewed fighting around Snake Island in recent days may become a battle for control of the western Black Sea coast, according to some defence officials, as Russian forces struggle to make headway in Ukraine's north and east.

Updated at 7.06am BST

5.56am BST

Russian commander set to go on trial for war crimes in Kyiv

A court in Kyiv will hear the first war crime trial since the ***invasion*** began when a Russian soldier accused of murdering a 62-year-old civilian appears in the dock on Friday, the Guardian's Daniel Boffey reports.

The defendant who will appear at Kyiv's district court is Vadim Shysimarin, a 21-year-old commander of the Kantemirovskaya tank division, who is currently in Ukrainian custody.

It is alleged Shysimarin, a sergeant, had been fighting in the Sumy region in north-east Ukraine when he killed a civilian on 28 February in the village of Chupakhivka.

He is accused of shooting at a civilian car after his convoy of military vehicles had come under attack from Ukrainian forces. He then drove the car away with four other soldiers as he sought to flee Ukrainian fighters.

Shysimarin shot dead the unarmed man, who was on a bicycle and talking on his phone, after being ordered "to kill a civilian so he would not report them to Ukrainian defenders", according to prosecutors.

Read on here:

Related: [*First Russian soldier to go on trial in Ukraine for war crimes*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/may/12/first-russian-soldier-to-go-on-trial-in-ukraine-for-war-crimes)

5.53am BST

Don't lift sanctions on Russia till all troops have left Ukraine, Truss says

International sanctions on Russia should remain in place until all its troops have left Ukraine, UK foreign secretary Liz Truss has told a meeting of her G7 counterparts in Germany [*according to the BBC*](https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-61432502).

"Putin is humiliating himself on the world stage. We must ensure he faces a defeat in Ukraine that denies him any benefit and ultimately constrains further aggression," she said.

UK foreign secretary Liz Truss.Photograph: Tayfun Salci/ZUMA Press Wire/REX/Shutterstock

She also said that Ukraine's allies should commit to more sanctions against Russia and that they should go "further and faster" to support it in its war.

"The best long-term security for Ukraine will come from it being able to defend itself. That means providing Ukraine with a clear pathway to Nato-standard equipment," she said.

Truss [*has been accused of taking a risky approach to the war*](https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/apr/28/liz-truss-ukraine-war-russia-conservative-power) , one that could risk inflaming the situation further and endangering any peace talks or chances of de-escalation.

5.48am BST

Welcome summary

Hello, this is Helen Livingstone bringing you the latest developments on Russia's ***invasion*** of Ukraine.

Here's a roundup of the latest:

A court in Kyiv [*will hear the first war crime trial*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/may/12/first-russian-soldier-to-go-on-trial-in-ukraine-for-war-crimes) of the ***invasion***. Vadim Shysimarin, 21, a commander in Russia's Kantemirovskaya tank division, is accused of shooting dead an unarmed man, 62, who was on a bicycle and talking on his phone in the village of Chupakhivka, Sumy. Shysimarin was ordered "to kill a civilian so he would not report them to Ukrainian defenders", according to prosecutors.International sanctions on Russia should only be lifted when all its troops have left Ukraine, UK foreign secretary Liz Truss has told a meeting of her G7 counterparts according to the BBC. "We must ensure he [Putin] faces a defeat in Ukraine that denies him any benefit," she said. The Russian foreign ministry in Moscow said it would have to take "military-technical" steps if Helsinki applied for Nato accession, after Finland's president, Sauli Niinistö, and prime minister, Sanna Marin, said it must apply to join the military alliance "without delay". Sweden is expected to follow within days.Russia could cut its gas supplies to Finland on Friday, a day after Finnish leaders said they would apply to join Nato, according to reports.The Republican senator Rand Paul has blocked the passage of a $40bn aid bill for Ukraine in the US Senate. Paul demanded changes including an inspector general to oversee how it is spent.Michael Carpenter, the US ambassador to the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), said that "at least several thousand Ukrainians" have been sent to so-called "filtration centres" in Russia where they are subject to "brutal interrogations". Tens of thousands more had been evacuated to Russia or Russia-controlled territory. Carpenter said that one survivor said "everyone was afraid to be taken to Donetsk", where they could be the victim of "further investigation or murder".Urgent ***measures*** to break the Russian blockade of grain exports from Ukraine's ports, including by trying to open routes through Romania and the Baltic, are being discussed at a three-day meeting of G7 foreign and ***agriculture*** ministers in Germany. Before the war, most of the food produced by Ukraine - enough to feed 400 million people - was exported through its seven Black Sea ports.Ukraine claimed it had damaged and set on fire a Russian navy logistics ship in the Black Sea. The Vsevolod Bobrov was near Snake Island, said Serhiy Bratchuk, a spokesman for the Odesa regional military administration in southern Ukraine. The Guardian could not independently verify the details and Russia's defence ministry did not immediately respond to a request for comment.Ukraine's deputy prime minister, Iryna Vereshchuk, said "very difficult negotiations" were ongoing to evacuate 38 seriously wounded fighters from the besieged Azovstal steel plant in the Ukrainian port city of Mariupol, in exchange for Russian prisoners of war. "We work step by step,'" he said. "We will exchange 38, then we will move on."The number of people who have fled Ukraine to escape Russia's ***invasion*** has exceeded six million, the UN's refugee agency has said. A further eight million people have been displaced inside Ukraine.The UN's human rights council has passed a resolution to investigate alleged abuses by Russian troops in parts of Ukraine formerly under their control, with a view to holding those responsible to account. The resolution passed by a strong majority, with 33 members voting in favour and two - China and Eritrea - against. There were 12 abstentions.113122022-05-13T04:48:43Zfalsefalse2022-05-14T02:13:17ZtrueAUStheguardian.com[*https://www.theguardian.com/p/ye4bxtruetruehttps://media.guim.co.uk/1be8fc155cfa180d0037406472a7004ae3eaea92/0\_216\_1600\_959/500.jpgfalseentrueWashington*](https://www.theguardian.com/p/ye4bxtruetruehttps://media.guim.co.uk/1be8fc155cfa180d0037406472a7004ae3eaea92/0_216_1600_959/500.jpgfalseentrueWashington) is "working to clarify Turkey's position" after president Recep Tayyip Erdogan expressed opposition to Finland and Sweden joining Nato, White House spokeswoman Jen Psaki has said according to Reuters. The idea of the two nations becoming members of the transatlantic alliance had received "broad support from NATO member countries," Psaki said. Pentagon spokesman John Kirby likewise said the United States is working to "better understand" Ankara's stance. Turkey is a valued NATO ally; that has not changed. They have been involved and helpful in trying to get dialogue going between Russia and Ukraine ,and they have provided assistance to Ukraine. So nothing changes about their standing in the NATO alliance. Erdogan told journalists on Friday that "we do not have a positive opinion" about the two countries joining the alliance, and said they shelter "terrorist organizations." Turkey has long accused Nordic countries, in particular Sweden, which has a strong Turkish immigrant community, of harbouring extremist Kurdish groups as well as supporters of Fethullah Gulen, the US-based preacher wanted over the failed 2016 coup. The leaders of the US and the 10-country Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) have called for an "immediate cessation of hostilities" in Ukraine and the creation of "an enabling environment for peaceful resolution", following a summit in Washington. "We continue to reaffirm our respect for sovereignty, political independence, and territorial integrity. We reiterate our call for compliance with the UN Charter and international law," the group said in a statement. We support the efforts of the UN Secretary-General in the search for a peaceful solution. We also call for the facilitation of rapid, safe and unhindered access to humanitarian assistance for those in need in Ukraine, and for the protection of civilians, humanitarian personnel, and persons in vulnerable situations. Russian president Vladimir Putin is likely to annex the occupied parts of southern and eastern Ukraine into Russia "in the coming months", according to Katherine Lawlor and Mason Clark, analysts at the Institute for the Study of War, warning that the move could then be used to threaten Ukraine and its allies with nuclear attack. After annexation, He [Putin] will likely then state, directly or obliquely, that Russian doctrine permitting the use of nuclear weapons to defend Russian territory applies to those newly annexed territories. Such actions would threaten Ukraine and its partners with nuclear attack if Ukrainian counteroffensives to liberate Russian-occupied territory continue. Putin may believe that the threat or use of nuclear weapons would restore Russian deterrence after his disastrous ***invasion*** shattered Russia's conventional deterrent capabilities. Putin's timeline for annexation is likely contingent on the extent to which he understands the degraded state of the Russian military in Ukraine. The Russian military has not yet achieved Putin's stated territorial objectives of securing all of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts and is unlikely to do so. If Putin understands his military weakness, he will likely rush annexation and introduce the nuclear deterrent quickly in an attempt to retain control of the Ukrainian territory that Russia currently occupies. If Putin believes that Russian forces are capable of additional advances, he will likely delay the annexation in hopes of covering more territory with it. In that case, his poor leadership and Ukrainian counteroffensives could drive the Russian military toward a state of collapse. Putin could also attempt to maintain Russian attacks while mobilizing additional forces. He might delay announcing annexation for far longer in this case, waiting until reinforcements could arrive to gain more territory to annex. Ukraine and its allies therefore "likely have a narrow window of opportunity to support a Ukrainian counteroffensive into occupied Ukrainian territory before the Kremlin annexes that territory,"Lawlor and Clark write. As reports suggest that Ukrainian forces have successfully pushed back Russian forces from around the country's second largest city, Kharkiv, near the country's north-eastern border with Russia, here are some images showing the destruction left behind: An interesting thread here on Russia's failed Donbas river crossing from retired Australian major general Mick Ryan. In it, he notes that: This Russian river crossing has gained attention because it resulted in the loss of (probably) a battalion tactical group and some critical engineer equipment. The reality is, it is worse than that. He also says: An important aspect of assault river crossings is that they are only undertaken if absolutely necessary. The resources needed - engineers, bridges, artillery - are closely husbanded by commanders. As I already mentioned, they are really hard, especially when being shot at. Therefore, such operations normally only occur on an axis of advance that is a main effort (or about to become the main effort). This has been missed by many commentators - the Russians clearly intended to invest in this axis and throw a lot of combat power down it. Ukraine has "likely won the battle of Kharkiv", the country's second largest city, the Institute for the Study of War has said in its latest assessment of the conflict. Ukrainian forces prevented Russian troops from encircling, let alone seizing Kharkiv, and then expelled them from around the city, as they did to Russian forces attempting to seize Kyiv. Russian units had "generally not attempted to hold ground against counterattacking Ukrainian forces over the past several days, with a few exceptions." Reports from Western officials and a video from an officer of the Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) indicate that Moscow is focused on conducting an orderly withdrawal and prioritizing getting Russians back home before allowing proxy forces to enter Russia rather than trying to hold its positions near the city. The US-based think tank said Ukraine would now likely "attempt to disrupt ground lines of communication (GLOCs) between Belgorod [in Russia] and Russian forces concentrated around [the Russian-occupied city of] Izyum, although Russia is using several GLOCs, including some further away from current Ukrainian positions than any Ukrainian counteroffensive is likely to reach soon." Russian troops had "made no progress" with an attempted ground offensive from Izyum, it continued, adding: "We had previously hypothesized that Russia might give up on attempts to advance from Izyum, but the Russians have either not made such a decision or have not fully committed to it yet." Meanwhile, it said, the main Russian effort was aimed at encircling the cities of Severodonetsk and Lysychansk in Luhansk. Russian troops attacking from Popasna to the north made no significant progress in the last 24 hours. Russian forces coming north-to-south have failed to cross the Siverskyi Donets River and taken devastating losses in their attempts. The Russians may not have enough additional fresh combat power to offset those losses and continue the offensive on a large enough scale to complete the encirclement, although they will likely continue to try to do so. Other key takeaways included: Russian forces have likely secured the highway near the western entrance to the Azovstal Steel Plant but fighting for the facility continues. Russian forces in Zaporizhia Oblast are likely attempting to reach artillery range outside Zaporizhia City. Ukrainian forces are reportedly attempting to regain control of Snake Island off the Romanian coast or at least disrupt Russia's ability to use it. Hello, this is Helen Livingstone taking over from my colleague Sam Levin. First, a bit more from Zelenskiy's latest nightly address, in which he warned that the war and Russia's blockade of Ukraine's ports were "provoking a large-scale food crisis". Russian officials are also openly threatening the world that there will be famine in dozens of countries. And what could be the consequences of such a famine? What political instability and migration flows will this lead to? How much will you have to spend then to overcome the consequences? These are the questions that need to be answered by those who are delaying sanctions on Russia or trying to postpone aid to Ukraine. His warning came as G7 foreign and ***agriculture*** ministers were meeting in Germany to discuss ways of breaking the Russian blockade of grain exports. Zelenskiy also claimed that Russia had lost almost 27,000 soldiers, "many of them young conscripts", and that Ukraine had downed a 200th Russian military aircraft. Russia had also "lost more than three thousand tanks, armored combat vehicles, a large number of conventional military vehicles, helicopters, drones and all its prospects as a state." And why all this? For a monument to Lenin to stand in the temporarily occupied Henichesk for a little longer? There is no other result for Russia and there will not be any. The Guardian is not able to verify Ukraine's claims regarding Russian losses and Moscow has provided very little detail. Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan said on Friday that Turkey would not welcome either Sweden or Finland joining the Nato. Ukraine's defence minister, Oleksii Reznikov, said Kyiv hopes to arm a million people as the country prepares for a "new, long phase of war". Russia will suspend electricity supplies to Finland from 1am on Saturday the supplier, RAO Nordic, said, amid rising tensions over Helsinki's bid to join Nato. The US is sending 10,500 new troops to Europe to replace soldiers who were earlier deployed, the Pentagon said on Friday. Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelenskiy said talks with Russia on getting wounded defenders out of the Azovstal plant in Mariupol were very complex and that negotiations were underway. Ukrainians have repelled multiple attempts by the Russians to cross a strategically significant river in the Donbas, inflicting heavy losses in the ***process***, according to local officials and British intelligence. Georgia's breakaway region of South Ossetia will hold a referendum on joining Russia on 17 July, the region's leader announced on Friday. Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelenskiy said talks with Russia on getting wounded defenders out of the Azovstal plant in Mariupol were very complex, adding Kyiv was using influential intermediaries, Reuters reported, citing his late night address: Russian forces have been constantly bombarding the steelworks in the southern port of Mariupol, the last bastion of hundreds of Ukrainian defenders in a city almost completely controlled by Russia after more than two months of a siege. Ukraine, saying there is no military solution to the standoff, has proposed evacuating 38 of the most severely wounded defenders. If Moscow allows them out, Kyiv says it will release a number of Russian prisoners of war. "At the moment very complex negotiations are under way on the next phase of the evacuation mission - the removal of the badly wounded, medics. We are talking about a large number of people," Zelenskiy said in his address. "Of course, we are doing everything to evacuate all the others, every one of our defenders. We've already involved everyone around the world who could be the most influential intermediaries," he added, without giving details. Oleksandra Ustinova, a member of the Ukrainian parliament, spoke to reporters in Washington DC today and said the crisis on the battlefield was now "far worse" than it was at the start of the war, CNN reports. Ustinova said "it is hell" on the frontlines, the news network reported: "We keep losing many more men now than it was at the beginning of the war." She was speaking at a German Marshall Fund roundtable. She also called on the US to supply fighter jets and air defense systems, saying, according to CNN: If we had howitzers two months ago, Mariupol would not happen because they wouldn't be able to surround like they did, to surround the city and literally destroy it... For us, time means lives, thousands of lives. We've been hearing that it has been ***unprecedented*** how fast everything is moving and how fast the decisions are taking. But there has never been a war since World War Two like that. And unfortunately, we keep asking here to take the decisions faster." Reuters has a dispatch from Dergachi, on the outskirts of Kharkiv, where firefighters were dousing smoldering wreckage after, according to local officials, a Russian missile attack hit the House of Culture, which was used to distribute aid supplies. Volunteers inside were attempting to salvage packages of baby diapers and formula, the news agency reported on Friday. The mayor, Vyacheslav Zadorenko, told Reuters: I can't call it anything but a terrorist act. They wanted to hit the base where we store provisions and create a humanitarian catastrophe." The mayor also said that another missile had slammed into the building on Thursday and wounded a clinic staff member and killed a young couple in their home. Some more on the latest developments: The US is sending 10,500 new troops to Europe to replace soldiers who were earlier deployed, the Pentagon's spokesperson John Kirby also announced in his briefing today. He said the deployments were "one for one unit replacements" and that the turnovers would happen in the coming weeks and into the summer: "It will be a rotation over time." Kirby explained: These are not permanent moves. These moves are designed to respond to the current security environment. Moreover these forces are not going to fight in Ukraine. They are going to support the robust defense of Nato allies. Still, as the New York Times noted, the move suggests that the temporary expansion of troops is likely becoming more permanent. Ukrainian military authorities loaded the bodies of Russian soldiers onto refrigerated rail cars on Friday, saying they were prepared to return the bodies to Russia in accordance with international law, Reuters reports. The authorities loaded the bodies after fighting in the Kyiv and Chernihiv regions. From the news agency: Volodymr Lyamzin, the head of Ukraine's civil-military cooperation, said his country was acting in accordance with international law and was ready to return the bodies to Russia. "According to the norms of international humanitarian law, and Ukraine is strictly following them, after the active phase of the conflict is over, sides have to return the bodies of the military of another country, "Ukraine is ready to return the bodies to the aggressor", he said. Lyamzin said there were several refrigerator trains stationed in different regions across Ukraine where the bodies of Russian soldiers were being kept. Several hundred bodies were being stored at a facility on the outskirts of Kyiv filmed by Reuters. The Russian army has continued its strategic offensive in the country's east, attacking new villages and towns, the Ukrainian army said in its daily operational statement today, the Associated Press reports: Russian troops were engaging their Ukrainian opponents with live fire near the Rubezhnoye settlement, near the strategic city of Severodonetsk in Ukraine's Donbas, the Ukrainian military's general staff said in a Facebook post. Analysts say that fighting in the Sevedononetsk area is critical to securing control over the Donbas, Ukraine's eastern industrial heartland, which is made up of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions. On Friday, Russian troops unsuccessfully stormed the towns of Zolote and Kamyshevakha, the Ukrainian military said. It added that Moscow's forces were firing artillery at the strategically important settlements of Kamenka and Novoselivka. The military also said that Russia continued shelling Ukrainian positions in Mariupol, near the Azovstal steel plant where Kyiv's troops continue to hold out. The accuracy of the claims could not be immediately verified, the AP noted. The Pentagon spokesperson, John Kirby, urged Congress to pass the $40bn supplemental aid package for Ukraine during a briefing on Friday. He said 19 May was a critical deadline, CNN reported: 19 May is the day we really, without additional authorities, we begin to not have the ability to send new stuff in. By the 19th of May, it'll start impacting our ability to provide aid uninterrupted." Kirby said: "We continue to urge the Senate to act as quickly as possible so that we don't get to the end of May and not have any additional authorities to draw upon... We've been moving at a fairly fast clip here both in terms of the individual packages that have been approved and how fast that stuff is getting into Ukrainian hands... We'd like to be able to continue that pace for as long as we can." Democrats and Republicans had both supported the aid package this week, but Rand Paul, the GOP senator and libertarian from Kentucky, single-handedly blocked its approval: The United States accused Russia of using the UN Security Council to spout disinformation and conspiracy theories about biological weapons in Ukraine, to distract from its ***invasion*** of the country, the Associated Press reported. US deputy ambassador Richard Mills called the Russian claims of alleged US involvement in a biological weapons program "categorically false and ludicrous". He warned the council Friday that Moscow's actions follow a pattern of accusing others of violations it has perpetrated or intends to perpetrate, adding that they need to be watched closely "for the possibility of a false flag chemical or biological attack by Russia's forces". UN deputy disarmament chief Thomas Markram reiterated to the council what his boss said at council meetings on 11 March and 18 March on similar Russian allegations: the United Nations is not aware of any biological weapons program in Ukraine. Russia's UN Ambassador Vassily Nebenzia had earlier said in the meeting that he had called for a third council meeting because his government continues to receive "very worrying documentary evidence" that the US defense department is directly involved in carrying out "dangerous biological projects that look like a secret biological military program" in Ukraine. Lloyd Austin, the US defense secretary, held a call with Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu on Friday in which he called for an immediate ceasefire in Ukraine, the Pentagon said. During the call Austin also "emphasized the importance of maintaining lines of communication", the Pentagon said. It was the first time Austin had spoken with Shoigu since 18 February, six days before Russia invaded Ukraine. The New York Times reported that the call came "at the initiative of the American side". "What motivated them to change their mind and be open to it, I don't think we know for sure," a senior Pentagon official told the Times. The hourlong conversation was "professional", the Times reported, but broke no new ground. "The call itself didn't specifically solve any acute issues or lead to a direct change in what the Russians are doing or saying," the official told the Times. He said Austin hoped the call would "serve as a springboard for future conversations". The call came after Republican US senator Rand Paul blocked the passage of a $40bn aid bill for Ukraine on Thursday. The bill will be taken up again next week. "Difficult negotiations" are taking place to remove Ukrainian defenders holed up under the Azovstal steelworks in besieged Mariupol, CNN reported. Pavlo Kyrylenko, head of Donetsk region military administration, told CNN that attempts to save the fighters were ongoing. "Difficult negotiations are underway, and they are still going on at this time, in order to save the defenders - gradually - because the Russian Federation is trying to dictate its conditions and requirements as much as possible. Therefore, in the first place, it will be seriously wounded fighters," he said. Kyrylenko said that Russians continue to bombard Avozstal. "These are heavy, vacuum, high-explosive bombs," he said. "We have to talk about it only when people will be safe. Only then we shall give any comments. Negotiations are ongoing and they are really very difficult. Because, first, the Russian Federation always changes them [the conditions]. And even those agreements that are reached are not a 100% agreement with Russia," Kyrylenko said. Consumer inflation in Russia accelerated in April to 17.83% in year-on-year terms, its highest level since January 2002, Reuters reported. Data released showed inflation was boosted by the volatile rouble and ***unprecedented*** western sanctions, which have disrupted logistics chains. But monthly inflation slowed to 1.56% in April from 7.61% in March, when it staged the biggest month-on-month increase since January 1999, data from the federal statistics service Rosstat showed. Inflation in Russia has accelerated sharply after Russia invaded Ukraine on 24 February. High inflation has been the key concern among households for years as it dents living standards, a fall which this year will be aggravated by a steep economic contraction. It is 9pm in Kyiv. Here's where we stand: Ukrainians have repelled multiple attempts by the Russians to cross a strategically significant river in the Donbas, inflicting heavy losses in the ***process***, according to local officials and British intelligence. Serhiy Haidai, the governor of the Luhansk region, said Russian forces had been repulsed three times as they tried to cross the Siversky Donets River, 12 miles (20km) west of Severodonetsk, losing armour and bridging equipment. Ukraine's defence minister, Oleksii Reznikov, said Kyiv hopes to arm a million people as the country prepares for a "new, long phase of war". He warned that "extremely tough weeks are ahead" and that Ukraine needed "unity, cohesion, will and patience" during this difficult period. Russia will suspend electricity supplies to Finland from 1am on Saturday the supplier, RAO Nordic, said, amid rising tensions over Helsinki's bid to join Nato. The Finnish grid company, Fingrid, said trade in electricity imported from Russia would be suspended "for the time being" due to difficulties in receiving payments for electricity sold on the market, but insisted there was "no threat to the adequacy of electricity in Finland". A Russian soldier has appeared in court accused of murdering an unarmed man on a bicycle, at the start of the first war crime trial in Ukraine since Vladimir Putin invaded the country. Vadim Shysimarin, a commander of the Kantemirovskaya tank division, is charged with the premeditated murder of a 62-year-old man. The case is scheduled to resume on Wednesday. The UK has issued sanctions against a dozen members of Vladimir Putin's family and inner circle including his long-rumoured girlfriend. The Foreign Office argued that the Russian president officially owns only modest assets, and has sanctioned the people who help support his lavish lifestyle. Britain and Norway have signed a new joint declaration on enhancing cooperation between the two countries. Boris Johnson met his Norwegian counterpart, Jonas Gahr Støre, in London on Friday, where both leaders "underscored their full support for any sovereign choice made by Nordic partners to enhance their security", a Downing Street statement said. US president, Joe Biden, spoke with his Finnish counterpart, Sauli Niinistö, and Sweden's prime minister, Magdalena Andersson, in call today. Biden expressed his support for the right of both Nordic countries "to decide their own future, foreign policy, and security arrangements", the White House said. Niinistö said he discussed his country's "next steps towards Nato membership" in the call. Turkish president, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, remarked to journalists after leaving Friday prayers in Istanbul that Turkey would not welcome either Sweden or Finland joining the Nato. He said that Turkey was "currently following developments regarding Sweden and Finland, but we don't feel positively about this". The US defence secretary, Lloyd Austin, spoke to his Russian counterpart, Sergei Shoigu, for the first time since before Moscow's troops invaded Ukraine on 24 February, the Pentagon said. Austin "urged an immediate ceasefire in Ukraine and emphasised the importance of maintaining lines of communication", the Pentagon press secretary, John Kirby, said. The EU could agree on a phased embargo on Russian oil next week, despite concerns about supply in eastern Europe, according to diplomats and officials. A senior EU diplomat told Reuters an agreement could come as early as Monday when EU foreign ministers meet in Brussels. A third diplomat said there was a chance of an agreement later in the week. The lawyer for the US professional basketball player Brittney Griner said her pre-trial detention has been extended by one month. The two-time Olympic medallist was arrested in February at Moscow's airport, allegedly in possession of vape cartridges containing oil derived from cannabis. If found guilty, she could face a maximum penalty of 10 years in prison. That's it from me, Léonie Chao-Fong, today as I hand the blog over to my US colleagues. I'll be back on Monday. Thank you for reading. US president Joe Biden spoke with the leaders of Sweden and Finland today to show his support "for Nato's open door policy" and for the right of both Nordic countries "to decide their own future, foreign policy, and security arrangements", the White House said. Biden spoke with his Finnish counterpart, Sauli Niinistö, and Sweden's prime minister, Magdalena Andersson, to discuss the "close defence and security cooperation" between the countries as well as their efforts "aimed at strengthening translatlantic security", the White House said in a statement. The leaders also discussed the "close partnership" among the countries across a range of global issues, and "reiterated their shared commitment to continued coordination" to help Ukraine, it said. Ukraine's defence minister, Oleksii Reznikov, said Kyiv hopes to arm a million people as the country prepares for a "new, long phase of war". In a Facebook post published earlier today, Reznikov said: We are entering a new, long phase of the war. To win it, we must plan resources carefully, avoid mistakes and project our strength in such a way that the enemy ultimately breaks. Reznikov thanked the British defence secretary, Ben Wallace, for his support to increase assistance for Kyiv, as well as American partners, including his US counterpart, Lloyd Austin. Ukraine's goal is to "restore our sovereignty and territorial integrity within the internationally recognised borders", he said. Reznikov added that he was "focusing on the need to provide for one million people who will be facing the enemy". He warned that "extremely tough weeks are ahead" and that Ukraine needed "unity, cohesion, will and patience" during this extremely difficult period. Finland's president, Sauli Niinistö, said he discussed his country's "next steps towards Nato membership" in a call with his US counterpart, Joe Biden, and Sweden's prime minister, Magdalena Andersson, today. Andersson also tweeted about the call: The call lasted about 40 minutes, the White House said. The call came at about midday on Wednesday. There had been "chemical poisoning" after a blast and patients needed collecting, Emma Graham-Harrison and Kateryna Semchuk report. Fears of a Russian chemical weapons attack have haunted Ukraine almost since the war began. And as the volunteer medics in Sloviansk pulled on the ageing gas masks and plastic overalls that were their only protection, they wondered if this was it. They set off anyway, inured to personal risks after weeks of driving through shelling to patch up the men and women injured on one of the most intensely fought-over sections of the frontline. "We got a call saying there was a yellow-brown cloud after the hit, and yellow-white flakes in the air like snow. The soldiers immediately started having breathing problems," said Vit, a paramedic who asked to go only by his nickname, which refers to his peacetime role as mayor of a small town. He was worried about being captured and tortured by Russian troops who were just a few miles away. The ambulance team listened to the warning and then went to get the choking soldiers. Like the troops they support, they are supplementing limited, outdated equipment with courage and determination. After dropping off their patient, who had gone into spasms in the ambulance, they were told the gas came not from chemical weapons but from a chemical plant that had been hit by Russian munitions. But if the fear of one particular horror was put on hold for a moment, the other terrors of this war are drawing closer to this city in Donbas, less than 20 miles behind the frontline. Read the full article: Trial by fire: volunteer medics brave Russian shells in Donbas Italy would be "very happy" to support Nato membership for Finland and Sweden, the Italian foreign minister, Luigi Di Maio, said. Speaking to reporters in Berlin, Di Maio said: We as Italy will be very happy to welcome these two countries in this great alliance that defends its member countries and ... which has guaranteed peace for decades. Russia will suspend electricity supplies to Finland from 1am on Saturday the supplier, RAO Nordic, said, amid rising tensions over Helsinki's bid to join Nato. RAO Nordic, a subsidiary of the Russian state energy holding Inter RAO, said in a statement that it was "forced to suspend the electricity import", starting from 14 May. RAO Nordic "is not able to make payments for the imported electricity from Russia", the statement said. It added: This situation is ***exceptional*** and happened for the first time in over 20 years of our trading history. The Finnish grid company, Fingrid, said trade in electricity imported from Russia would be suspended "for the time being" due to difficulties in receiving payments for electricity sold on the market. Fingrid added: There is no threat to the adequacy of electricity in Finland. It said that power from Russia accounted for some 10% of Finland's total power consumption, adding: Missing imports can be replaced in the electricity market by importing more electricity from Sweden and partly also by domestic production. Finnish leaders yesterday declared the country must apply to join the Nato alliance "without delay". In response, the Kremlin said Russia would "definitely" see Finnish membership as a threat, and Russia's foreign ministry said Moscow would be "forced to take reciprocal steps, military-technical and other". The EU could agree on a phased embargo on Russian oil next week, despite concerns about supply in eastern Europe, according to diplomats and officials. A senior EU diplomat told Reuters "there will be a deal", while a second senior diplomat said an agreement could come as early as Monday when EU foreign ministers meet in Brussels. A third diplomat said there was a chance of an agreement later in the week. One diplomat said: This is going to be decided at the highest political level, between Budapest and Brussels. I am optimistic. The embargo deal was first proposed by the European Commission in early May but dependence on Russian oil in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia has posed the biggest obstacle. Hungary has already obtained an exemption until the end of 2024, as has Slovakia, and the Czech Republic until mid-2024. More on the US defence secretary, Lloyd Austin, who also spoke to his British counterpart, Ben Wallace, to discuss the next steps to help Ukraine, including military aid. Wallace issued a statement after meeting Austin in talks held in the US: We will continue to work with unity and resolve to provide Ukraine with what it needs to defend itself against Russia's unprovoked ***invasion***. The pair discussed "the next steps to provide defensive support for Ukraine, as well as Aukus (a defence pact between Australia, the US and Britain), the future of Nato, and other aspects of our shared security", Wallace said. The US defence secretary, Lloyd Austin, spoke to his Russian counterpart, Sergei Shoigu, for the first time since before Moscow's troops invaded Ukraine on 24 February, the Pentagon said. The Pentagon press secretary, John Kirby, said in a statement: On 13 May, secretary of defence Lloyd J. Austin III spoke with Russian minister of defence Sergey Shoygu for the first time since 18 February. Austin "urged an immediate ceasefire in Ukraine and emphasised the importance of maintaining lines of communication", Kirby added. The UK has issued sanctions against a dozen members of Vladimir Putin's family and inner circle, including his long-rumoured girlfriend, arguing that given the Russian president officially owns only modest assets, these are the people who help support his lavish lifestyle. The Foreign Office announcement means asset freezes and travel bans will be imposed on, among others: Lyudmila Ocheretnaya, Putin's former wife; Alina Kabaeva, a media executive and the Russian president's presumed partner; and Anna Zatseplina, Kabaeva's grandmother. The Foreign Office statement noted that Putin's official assets ran to little more than a small flat in St Petersburg and two Soviet-era cars, despite his very obvious enormous personal wealth, including a yacht and the vast Putin's Palace mansion on the Black Sea coast. The sanctions targeted what the statement called a "wallet" of relatives and associates. The statement said: "Putin relies on his network of family, childhood friends, and selected elite who have benefited from his rule and in turn support his lifestyle. Their reward is influence over the affairs of the Russian state that goes far beyond their formal positions." Those named in the latest sanctions comprise seven family members and five people listed as financiers of Putin's lifestyle. Kabaeva, a former Olympic rhythmic gymnast, holds several powerful positions and has long been rumoured to be Putin's girlfriend. She chairs the board of Russia's National Media Group, which controls several television stations. Zatseplina is associated with Gennady Timchenko, a billionaire with close links to Putin. Kabaeva, who is originally from Tashkent in Uzbekistan and won gold in the 2004 Athens Olympics, spent more than six years as an MP for Putin's United Russia party. In 2014, she stepped back from politics to begin her role with National Media Group, despite her apparent lack of relevant experience beyond hosting a TV chat show. Ocheretnaya and Putin divorced in 2014, but she had since, the statement said, "benefited from preferential business relationships with state-owned entities and exhibited significant unexplained wealth". The other family members issued with sanctions are Igor Putin, a businessman and cousin of the president; Mikhail Putin, another businessman believed to be related to the president; Roman Putin, who is Igor Putin's son and runs a consulting firm; and Mikhail Shelomov, a business owner and Putin's first cousin, once removed. Kyiv will see a relaxing of curfew hours from Sunday onwards, the city's mayor, Vitali Klitschko, announced on Telegram. From Sunday, the curfew will begin an hour later, from 11pm. It will continue to last until 5am. Public transport will also run for longer hours from Monday, Klitschko said. The mayor said: Subway - from 6am to 10pm. Ground public transport - from 6am to 10.30pm. Observe the curfew rules. And also - do not neglect air raid signals! Threat of missile attacks on Kyiv remains. Britain and Norway have signed a new joint declaration on enhancing cooperation between the two countries, just days after the UK's prime minister, Boris Johnson, travelled to Sweden and Finland to pledge his support against potential Russian threats. Johnson met his Norwegian counterpart, Jonas Gahr Støre, in London today, where both leaders "underscored their full support for any sovereign choice made by Nordic partners to enhance their security", a Downing Street statement said. The statement continued: The prime minister and Prime Minister Støre agreed that neither Nato nor the Nordic region posed a threat and that the longstanding policy of 'high north, low tension' had created decades of stability and prosperity for the area. Støre told broadcasters that the pair discussed energy and climate policy, the need to provide support to Ukraine, as well as their cooperation on energy and carbon capture and storage. He said it was a "historic" time for his region, with Finland potentially joining the Nato alliance. The lawyer for the US professional basketball player Brittney Griner said her pre-trial detention has been extended by one month. The two-time Olympic medallist was arrested in February at Moscow's airport, allegedly in possession of vape cartridges containing oil derived from cannabis. If found guilty, she could face a maximum penalty of 10 years in prison. The Biden administration has said Griner, 31, has been wrongfully detained and has assigned diplomats to work on her release. Griner appeared at the hearing in a court in Khimki just outside Moscow, handcuffed and wearing an orange hoodie with her face held low. There has been a little bit of Finnish reaction to those comments by Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan. He said that Turkey was "currently following developments regarding Sweden and Finland, but we don't feel positively about this". At the G7 foreign ministers' meeting in Germany, Reuters is quoting Finland's foreign minister Pekka Haavisto as saying that issues need to be taken step-by-step and that the ***process*** needs patience. He said that he would be meeting Turkey's foreign minister in Berlin tomorrow. Kremlin press spokesperson Dmitry Peskov has given a read-out from Russia's security council meeting today, where he says Russian president Vladimir Putin discussed the situation in Ukraine and potential threats from the entry of Finland and Sweden into Nato, Russia's RIA news agency reports. Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan remarked to journalists after leaving Friday prayers in Istanbul that Turkey would not welcome either Sweden or Finland joining the Nato. "We are currently following developments regarding Sweden and Finland, but we don't feel positively about this," he said. "We don't want to commit a mistake," he added. "Scandinavian countries are like guesthouses for terrorist organisations. To go even further, they have seats in their parliaments too." Erdogan's comments were primarily directed at the militant group the Kurdistan Workers party (PKK), which Turkey regards as a terrorist organisation, although they appeared to encompass the communities of Kurdish origin in Scandinavia as a whole. Accession to Nato requires consensus from all member countries. Sweden has a large Kurdish diaspora, with the community considered to be one of the largest outside of the Middle East. Prominent Swedish citizens of Kurdish origin currently include six members of parliament. The Turkish authorities are yet to provide any evidence for their claims that the parliamentarians in question have links with the PKK or similar groups outside Sweden. The Kurdish-speaking population of Finland was estimated at just over 15,000 people as of 2020, less than 1% of the population. Turkey has been a Nato member since 1952 and its membership remains a cornerstone of its foreign policy towards western countries. Despite this, Turkey recently decided to withdraw from a scheduled Nato military exercise in Athens in May due to disagreements with Greece. Ukraine's human rights ombudsperson, Lyudmyla Denisova, said more than 210,000 children were among 1.2 million Ukrainians who Kyiv says have been deported against their will. Speaking on national television, Denisova said: When our children are taken out, they destroy the national identity, deprive our country of the future. They teach our children there, in Russian, the history that (Russian president Vladimir) Putin has told everyone. Denisova did not provide evidence to support these figures, and it has not been possible to independently verify them. Ukraine has asked G7 countries to seize Russian assets and hand them to Kyiv to help rebuild the country, its foreign minister, Dmytro Kuleba, said. Speaking to reporters as G7 foreign ministers met in northern Germany, Kuleba added that he hoped Hungary would agree with EU partners on an embargo on Russian oil. Kuleba said: Canada has already done this and I have a feeling that others will reach that point sooner rather than later. We are talking about hundreds of billions of dollars. Russia must pay. Sweden has come closer to reversing its decades-long policy of military non-alignment, after a security policy review concluded that joining Nato would have a "deterrent effect" on the risk of conflict in northern Europe. Swedish membership to Nato would "raise the threshold for military conflicts and thus have a deterrent effect in northern Europe", the report said. It stopped short of offering a concrete recommendation but noted that it was "not realistic to develop bilateral defence alliances outside existing European and Euro-Atlantic structures". The report added: Within the framework of current cooperation, there is no guarantee that Sweden would be helped if it were the target of a serious threat or attack. The report paves the way for Sweden to announce a bid for Nato membership, and comes after Finnish leaders said they believed Finland should join Nato "without delay". The Swedish foreign minister, Ann Linde, said Finland's position would affect Sweden and "needed to be considered". She also noted that both Finnish and Swedish Nato memberships would be considered "negative" by Russia. Linde told reporters that Sweden did not anticipate a "conventional military attack" in reaction to a potential application, but acknowledged that the government has not ruled out "an armed assault against Sweden". Russian retaliatory ***measures*** against Sweden "cannot be ruled out during a transition period", the report continued, citing "cyberattacks and other forms of hybrid attacks". Russia would be able to carry out "limited acts of violence" against Sweden, such as "sabotage by Russian special forces units or operations using long-range weapons". Russia is advising its citizens against travelling to the UK its foreign ministry said. The ministry said: Taking into account the extremely unfriendly course of the UK towards our country, in order to avoid financial losses and other possible problems, we recommend that Russian citizens refrain, if possible, from travelling to the UK and trying to obtain British visas. Volodymyr Zelenskiy has reiterated an offer to hold direct talks with his Russian counterpart, Vladimir Putin, in the Ukrainian president's fullest public comments on the prospect of peace talks in weeks. Russia's withdrawal from Ukraine should be a starting point for any discussions between the two leaders, Zelenskiy told Italy's RAI 1 television, Reuters reports. Zelenskiy said: As president, I am ready to talk to Putin, but only to him. Without any of his intermediaries. And in the framework of dialogue, not ultimatums. Ukraine and Russia have not held face-to-face talks since 29 March. Interfax news agency has quoted Moscow's chief negotiator, Vladimir Medinsky, as saying peace talks were being held remotely. Zelenskiy also ruled out suggestions that Ukraine should make concessions for the sake of securing a peace agreement that would allow Putin to save face, adding that Ukraine would not compromise over its territorial integrity. He said: Get out of this territory that you have occupied since February 24. This is the first clear step to talking about anything. Russia said it expelled 10 Romanian diplomats in response to similar expulsions by Bucharest, its foreign ministry said. In a separate statement, the ministry said a member of the Bulgarian embassy was also being expelled. Germany says it has started training Ukrainian soldiers in the use of the Panzerhaubitze (PzH) 2000 artillery system this week. The PzH 2000 howitzer is one of the most powerful artillery weapons in the Bundeswehr inventories and can hit targets at a distance of 40km (25 miles). The Kremlin's spokesperson, Dmitry Peskov, has been speaking to reporters during his regular briefing. Referring to a report in a Finnish newspaper that Russia may cut gas supplies to Finland as soon as today, Peskov said it was "most likely" "another newspaper hoax". Iltalehti reported yesterday that Finnish politicians had been warned that Russia could halt gas supplies to its neighbour on Friday. The newspaper cited unnamed sources and did not say where the warning came from. Peskov said there were no plans to cut Finland off from gas supplies today, adding that Gazprom remained a reliable gas supplier, Reuters reports. He also hit back at calls by Poland's prime minister, Mateusz Morawiecki, to "root out" Russia's "monstrous ideology". In a column for Britain's Telegraph newspaper on Tuesday, Morawiecki said the Russian president, Vladimir Putin, was more dangerous than either Adolf Hitler or Josef Stalin because of the advanced weapons at his disposal. Peskov told reporters: This is the quintessence of that hatred towards Russians that has regrettably, like a metastasis, infected the entire Polish leadership and, in many ways, Polish society. He said Morawiecki's "shocking" statement was "hysterical and unacceptable". Russian president Vladimir Putin held a phone call with German chancellor Olaf Scholz, in which Putin "outlined in detail the logic and main objectives of the special military operation", the Kremlin said on Friday. According to the Kremlin's readout of the call, Putin also spoke about the "***measures*** being taken to ensure the safety of civilians" during what the Kremlin calls its "special military operation" in Ukraine. The Kremlin further said that Putin drew attention to the "gross violations" committed by Ukrainian militants "professing the Nazi ideology". The Russian leader added that the current Russian-Ukrainian negotiations were "effectively blocked" by Kyiv. During the conversation, the leaders agreed to hold further talks soon, the Kremlin said. A Russian soldier has appeared in the dock at the first war crime trial of Vladimir Putin's war in Ukraine. The defendant, who arrived at Kyiv's small district court No 3 in a grey tracksuit and handcuffs, is Vadim Shysimarin, a 21-year-old commander of the Kantemirovskaya tank division, who is in Ukrainian custody charged with murdering a 62-year-old man. It was a preliminary hearing and a first date for trial has been set for 18 May. Shysimarin's lawyer said his client had confessed to the killing of the victim but that he had not yet discussed whether he would plead guilty. Shysimarin spoke briefly to confirm his name and that he understood the charges against him. It is alleged that Shysimarin, a sergeant, had been fighting in the Sumy region in north-east Ukraine when he killed a civilian on 28 February in the village of Chupakhivka. He is accused of shooting at a civilian car after his convoy of military vehicles had come under attack from Ukrainian forces. He then drove the car away with four other soldiers as he sought to flee Ukrainian fighters. Shysimarin shot dead the unarmed man, who was on a bicycle and talking on his phone, after being ordered "to kill a civilian so he would not report them to Ukrainian defenders", according to prosecutors. The crime is said to have happened "dozens of metres" from the victim's house and was committed using an AK-74 rifle. The name of the 62-year-old victim was not made public. Germany's ***agriculture*** minister, Cem Özdemir, described grain theft by Russia in eastern Ukraine as "repugnant" as G7 countries met to discuss the impact of the war on the global food supply. Özdemir was speaking to reporters at the start of a meeting in Stuttgart with colleagues from G7 countries, Ukraine, the EU, the OECD and the UN's food and ***agricultural*** agency, Reuters reports. Özdemir said: This is an especially repugnant form of war that Russia is leading. Russia was "stealing, robbing, taking for itself grain from eastern Ukraine," Oezdemir said, describing it as an "economic war". Ukraine's ***agriculture*** minister, Mykola Solsky, said his country was in a "very difficult situation" with regard to grain exports, adding: We cannot get away from the fact that the harvest will be smaller than last year. Britain announced its latest round of sanctions targeting the Russian president's financial network, including his ex-wife, family and inner circle. The sanctions are aimed at the "shady network propping up Putin's luxury lifestyle", British foreign secretary, Liz Truss, said in a statement. The 12 new names added to the British sanctions list include the former first lady of the Russian Federation and ex-wife of Putin, Lyudmila Ocheretnaya. Mikhail Shelomov, a Russian business owner and the leader's first cousin, once removed, has also been targeted. Several other relatives of Putin holding executive positions at major Russian firms like Gazprom have also been sanctioned. They face asset freezes and travel bans. Truss' statement read: We are exposing and targeting the shady network propping up Putin's luxury lifestyle and tightening the vice on his inner circle. We will keep going with sanctions on all those aiding and abetting Putin's aggression until Ukraine prevails. Putins' official assets are modest, according to the UK Foreign Office, with his lifestyle "funded by a cabal of family, friends and elites". Britain's sanctioned list now includes more than 1,000 individuals and 100 entities. Hello, it's Léonie Chao-Fong with you again today. Feel free to get in touch on Twitter or via email if you have anything you'd like to flag. The UK's Ministry of Defence has said the failed crossing of the Siverskyi Donets river by Russian forces in the Donbas showed the pressure Russian commanders were under. Ukrainian military forces released footage on Thursday that they say shows destroyed Russian military vehicles and a pontoon bridge in eastern Ukraine. According to the Ukrainian forces, the images were taken along the Siverskyi Donets River. The first war crime trial since Vladimir Putin ordered the ***invasion*** of Ukraine has opened in Kyiv in a watershed moment. Vadim Shysimarin, a 21-year-old Russian commander of the Kantemirovskaya tank division, allegedly killed a civilian on 28 February in the village of Chupakhivka while fighting in the Sumy region in north-east Ukraine. Russia's defence ministry has claimed its forces struck the Kremenchug oil refinery in central Ukraine, destroying its production capacity and fuel tanks. Ukraine says it has damaged a Russian navy logistics ship near Snake Island, a small but strategic outpost in the Black Sea. Kharkiv governor Oleh Synyehubov said "the night was relatively calm" in the region. However he added that in Dergachi "the Russians damaged the humanitarian headquarters, the registry office, part of the clinic, and the ambulance building", and that in Shebelinka "a Russian shell hit a hangar building. The roof of the hangar and 10 trucks were on fire. Unfortunately, three people died and five others were injured." The Ukrainian counteroffensive around the north-eastern city of Kharkiv is "starting to look very similar to the counteroffensive that ultimately drove Russian troops away from Kyiv and out of western Ukraine entirely", the Institute for the Study of War has said in its latest assessment of the conflict. Swedish membership of Nato would have a stabilising effect and would benefit countries around the Baltic sea, Sweden's foreign minister Ann Linde said today, the day after neighbour Finland committed to applying to join the 30-nation alliance. The EU's top diplomat, Josep Borrell, has said that the European Union would provide another 500m (£425m) worth of military support to Ukraine, and that he was confident a deal could be reached in the coming days to agree an embargo on Russian oil. British foreign secretary Liz Truss said it was vital to keep up the pressure on Russia by supplying more weapons to Ukraine and imposing further sanctions. "It is very important at this time that we keep up the pressure on Vladimir Putin by supplying more weapons to Ukraine and by increasing the sanctions." That is it from me, Martin Belam, for now. Léonie Chao-Fong will continue to bring you the latest developments. The first war crime trial since Vladimir Putin ordered the ***invasion*** of Ukraine has opened in Kyiv in a watershed moment. Vadim Shysimarin, a 21-year-old Russian commander of the Kantemirovskaya tank division, allegedly killed a civilian on 28 February in the village of Chupakhivka while fighting in the Sumy region in north-east Ukraine. Shysimarin, who has been held in Ukrainian custody, is accused of shooting at a civilian car after his convoy of military vehicles came under attack from Ukrainian forces. He then drove the car away with four other soldiers as he sought to flee Ukrainian fighters. Shysimarin shot dead a 62-year-old unarmed man who was on a bicycle and talking on his phone, after being ordered "to kill a civilian so he would not report them to Ukrainian defenders", according to prosecutors. The crime is said to have happened "dozens of metres" from the victim's house and was committed using an AK-74 rifle. A spokesperson for the prosecutor's office said before the trial opened: "Prosecutors and investigators of the SBU [Ukrainian secret services] have collected enough evidence of his involvement in violation of the laws and customs of war combined with premeditated murder. For these actions, he faces 10 to 15 years in prison or life in prison." Two other cases are likely to be heard in court within days including an in absentia trial of Mikhail Romanov, a Russian soldier accused of rape and murder. He is accused of breaking into a house in March in a village in the Brovarsky region near Kyiv, murdering a man and then repeatedly raping his wife while "threatening her and her underage child with violence and weapons". You can read more of Daniel Boffey's report from Kyiv here: First Russian soldier goes on trial in Ukraine for war crimes Reuters is carrying another quote from Sweden about their moves to consider joining Nato. Defence minister Peter Hultqvist said: "If Sweden chooses to seek Nato membership, there is a risk of a reaction from Russia. Let me state that, in such a case, we are prepared to deal with any counter-response." Yesterday, Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov said Russia would "definitely" consider it a threat if Sweden's neighbours Finland were to join Nato. Swedish membership of Nato would have a stabilising effect and would benefit countries around the Baltic sea, Sweden's foreign minister Ann Linde said today, the day after neighbour Finland committed to applying to join the 30-nation alliance. "Swedish Nato membership would raise the threshold for military conflicts and thus have a conflict-preventing effect in northern Europe," Linde told reporters when presenting a parliament report on security, Reuters reports. Sweden is widely expected to follow Finland's lead and media reports have suggested Stockholm could apply for Nato membership as early as Monday. Ukrainian military forces released footage on Thursday that they say shows destroyed Russian military vehicles and a pontoon bridge in eastern Ukraine. According to the Ukrainian forces, the images were taken along the Siverskyi Donets River. The UK's Ministry of Defence said on Friday the failed crossing of the river by Russian forces showed the pressure Russian commanders were under. The ministry's intelligence update said the images suggested that Russia "lost armoured manoeuvre elements of at least one battalion tactical group" at the river, located west of Severodonetsk. While G7 foreign ministers have been meeting in Germany, Russia's foreign minister Sergei Lavrov has been meeting his counterpart from Belarus. Ukraine's president Volodymyr Zelenskiy has just posted a video clip of an interview conducted with Rai 1 in Italy. Overnight he posted to Telegram in English, saying: Russia's strategic defeat is already obvious to everyone in the world and even to those who still continue to communicate with them. Russia simply lacks courage to admit it so far. They are cowards. And they are trying to hide the truth behind missile, air and artillery strikes. Therefore, our task is to fight until we achieve our goals in this war. Free our land, our people and reliably ensure our security. Russia's defence ministry has claimed its forces struck the Kremenchug oil refinery in central Ukraine, destroying its production capacity and fuel tanks. Reuters reports the ministry also said its forces shot down a Ukrainian Su-27 aircraft in Kharkiv region. The reports have not been independently verified. Kharkiv governor Oleh Synyehubov has provided an update on the situation in his region on Telegram, saying "the night was relatively calm". He said that a rocket had hit "the territory of Kharkiv airport", but that no one was injured. He listed a small number of injuries and fatalities in Saltivka, Dergachi, Zolochiv, Balaklia and Shebelinka. He said that in Dergachi "the Russians damaged the humanitarian headquarters, the registry office, part of the clinic, and the ambulance building", and that in Shebelinka "a Russian shell hit a hangar building. The roof of the hangar and 10 trucks were on fire. Unfortunately, three people died and 5 others were injured." He added: In the Kharkiv direction, the occupiers did not attempt to attack. Fighting continues in the Izium region. Our armed forces hold positions and repel the enemy! None of the claims have been independently verified. A quick snap from Reuters here that the EU's top diplomat, Josep Borrell, has said this morning that the European Union would provide another 500m (£425m) worth of military support to Ukraine, and that he was confident a deal could be reached in the coming days to agree an embargo on Russian oil. Here are some of the latest images we have been sent over the newswires showing the impact of the conflict in Ukraine and beyond. British foreign secretary Liz Truss said it was vital to keep up the pressure on Russia by supplying more weapons to Ukraine and imposing further sanctions. "It is very important at this time that we keep up the pressure on Vladimir Putin by supplying more weapons to Ukraine and by increasing the sanctions," Reuters reports she told the media on arrival at a G7 foreign ministers meeting in northern Germany. Serhiy Haidai, the Ukrainian governor of Luhansk, has issued a short update on Telegram this morning. He said that the Russians had "made every effort to break through the defences in Luhansk region" and attempted to storm "Rubizhne, Zolote, Nizhne, suburbs of Severodonetsk". He suggested that the Russians were making another attempt to cross the Siverskyi Donets, describing them as "racists" and "idiots". He then said: [The Russians] do not manage to defeat the Ukrainians in battle, so the racists deliberately destroy the region, turning it into a desert. Most of our settlements are destroyed by 70%, those that are under occupation even more. The Russian embassy in Latvia has issued a strongly worded statement about the decision yesterday in Riga to suspend protections of Soviet monuments within its borders. The embassy says: We are outraged by the decision of the Latvian Saeima to unilaterally suspend Article 13 of the Russian-Latvian Intergovernmental Agreement of 30 April, 1994, which prescribes the Latvian side to protect, maintain and take care of memorials. This traitorous, unjustified step has neither moral nor legal grounds and constitutes a flagrant violation of the universally recognised principles and norms of international law, including the provisions of this very treaty. This situation clearly demonstrates for the entire responsible international community the true face of the political elite of modern Latvia: cynicism, double standards, a complete rejection of civilised ways of settling interstate issues and brazen disregard for the fundamental principles of international law. In Latvia, the problem of settling the score with one's own historical past is looming large. Yesterday Latvia's parliament voted that protection of Soviet monuments would be suspended until Russian forces left Ukraine. MP Krista Baumane said the monuments were symbols of Russian occupation and of Russian crimes in Ukraine. A small number of lawmakers opposed the move, saying they were memorials for the victory over Nazism in the second world war, and nothing to do with the current conflict. The UK's ministry of defence has said the failed crossing of the Siverskyi Donets river by Russian forces in the Donbas showed the pressure Russian commanders were under: Conducting river crossings in a contested environment is a highly risky manoeuvre and speaks to the pressure the Russian commanders are under to make progress in their operations in eastern Ukraine. Russian forces have failed to make any significant advances despite concentrating forces in this area after withdrawing and redeploying units from the Kyiv and Chernihiv Oblasts. On Wednesday, Ukrainian forces successfully prevented the crossing, and released images which the MoD said indicated that Russia "lost significant armoured manoeuvre elements of at least one Battalion Tactical Group". The pictures showed what Ukraine claimed were destroyed Russian tanks and other armoury in the village of Bilohorivka, near the strategic Ukrainian-held city of Lysychansk. The UK's ministry of defence also said Russia was "investing significant effort in the vicinity of Izium and Severodonetsk in an attempt to achieve a breakthrough towards Sloviansk and Kramatorsk." The primary objective on this axis is to envelop Ukrainian forces in the Joint Forces Operation area, isolating them from support or reinforcement by units in the west of the country. The Ukrainian counteroffensive around the north-eastern city of Kharkiv is "starting to look very similar to the counteroffensive that ultimately drove Russian troops away from Kyiv and out of western Ukraine entirely", the Institute for the Study of War has said in its latest assessment of the conflict. It was "forcing the Russian command to make hard choices", including by making Russian units focus their bombardments on attacking Ukrainian troops rather than the city, the US-based thinktank continued. Meanwhile, Russian forces may be abandoning their efforts to encircle Ukrainian troops along the Izyum-Slovyansk-Debaltseve line in eastern Ukraine in favour of shallower encirclements of the cities of Severodonetsk and Lysychansk in Luhansk. However, it was "unclear if Russian forces can encircle, let alone capture, Severodonetsk and Lysychansk even if they focus their efforts on that much-reduced objective", the institute said. Russian offensives have bogged down every time they hit a built-up area throughout this war, and these areas are unlikely to be different. Continued and expanding reports of demoralisation and refusals to fight among Russian units suggest that the effective combat power of Russian troops in the east continues to be low and may drop further. If the Russians abandon efforts to advance from Izyum, moreover, Ukrainian forces would be able to concentrate their efforts on defending Severodonetsk-Lysychansk or, in the worst case, breaking a Russian encirclement before those settlements fall. However, the thinktank also noted Russian forces probably control almost all of the city of Rubizhne as of 12 May and have most likely seized the town of Voevodivka, north of Severodonetsk. They will likely launch a ground offensive on or around Severodonetsk in the coming days. The relative success of Russian operations in this area combined with their failure to advance from Izyum and the notable decline in the energy of that attempted advance suggest that they may be giving up on the Izyum axis. The report also noted that Russian forces were strengthening their position on Snake Island, in the Black Sea, in a bid to block Ukrainian maritime communications near they key port city of Odesa. Ukraine says it has damaged a Russian navy logistics ship near Snake Island, a small but strategic outpost in the Black Sea, Reuters reports. "Thanks to the actions of our naval seamen, the support vessel Vsevolod Bobrov caught fire - it is one of the newest in the Russian fleet," said Serhiy Bratchuk, a spokesman for the Odesa regional military administration. Reuters could not independently verify the details. Russia's defence ministry did not immediately respond to a request for comment. Satellite imagery provided by Maxar, a private US-based company, showed the aftermath of what it said were probable missile attacks on a Russian Serna-class landing craft near the island, close to Ukraine's sea border with Romania. Images also showed recent damage to buildings on the island, which became famous for the foul-mouthed defiance of its Ukrainian defenders early in the ***invasion***. Renewed fighting around Snake Island in recent days may become a battle for control of the western Black Sea coast, according to some defence officials, as Russian forces struggle to make headway in Ukraine's north and east. A court in Kyiv will hear the first war crime trial since the ***invasion*** began when a Russian soldier accused of murdering a 62-year-old civilian appears in the dock on Friday, the Guardian's Daniel Boffey reports. The defendant who will appear at Kyiv's district court is Vadim Shysimarin, a 21-year-old commander of the Kantemirovskaya tank division, who is currently in Ukrainian custody. It is alleged Shysimarin, a sergeant, had been fighting in the Sumy region in north-east Ukraine when he killed a civilian on 28 February in the village of Chupakhivka. He is accused of shooting at a civilian car after his convoy of military vehicles had come under attack from Ukrainian forces. He then drove the car away with four other soldiers as he sought to flee Ukrainian fighters. Shysimarin shot dead the unarmed man, who was on a bicycle and talking on his phone, after being ordered "to kill a civilian so he would not report them to Ukrainian defenders", according to prosecutors. Read on here: International sanctions on Russia should remain in place until all its troops have left Ukraine, UK foreign secretary Liz Truss has told a meeting of her G7 counterparts in Germany according to the BBC. "Putin is humiliating himself on the world stage. We must ensure he faces a defeat in Ukraine that denies him any benefit and ultimately constrains further aggression," she said. She also said that Ukraine's allies should commit to more sanctions against Russia and that they should go "further and faster" to support it in its war. "The best long-term security for Ukraine will come from it being able to defend itself. That means providing Ukraine with a clear pathway to Nato-standard equipment," she said. Truss has been accused of taking a risky approach to the war, one that could risk inflaming the situation further and endangering any peace talks or chances of de-escalation. Hello, this is Helen Livingstone bringing you the latest developments on Russia's ***invasion*** of Ukraine. Here's a roundup of the latest: A court in Kyiv will hear the first war crime trial of the ***invasion***. Vadim Shysimarin, 21, a commander in Russia's Kantemirovskaya tank division, is accused of shooting dead an unarmed man, 62, who was on a bicycle and talking on his phone in the village of Chupakhivka, Sumy. Shysimarin was ordered "to kill a civilian so he would not report them to Ukrainian defenders", according to prosecutors. International sanctions on Russia should only be lifted when all its troops have left Ukraine, UK foreign secretary Liz Truss has told a meeting of her G7 counterparts according to the BBC. "We must ensure he [Putin] faces a defeat in Ukraine that denies him any benefit," she said. The Russian foreign ministry in Moscow said it would have to take "military-technical" steps if Helsinki applied for Nato accession, after Finland's president, Sauli Niinistö, and prime minister, Sanna Marin, said it must apply to join the military alliance "without delay". Sweden is expected to follow within days. Russia could cut its gas supplies to Finland on Friday, a day after Finnish leaders said they would apply to join Nato, according to reports. The Republican senator Rand Paul has blocked the passage of a $40bn aid bill for Ukraine in the US Senate. Paul demanded changes including an inspector general to oversee how it is spent. Michael Carpenter, the US ambassador to the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), said that "at least several thousand Ukrainians" have been sent to so-called "filtration centres" in Russia where they are subject to "brutal interrogations". Tens of thousands more had been evacuated to Russia or Russia-controlled territory. Carpenter said that one survivor said "everyone was afraid to be taken to Donetsk", where they could be the victim of "further investigation or murder". Urgent ***measures*** to break the Russian blockade of grain exports from Ukraine's ports, including by trying to open routes through Romania and the Baltic, are being discussed at a three-day meeting of G7 foreign and ***agriculture*** ministers in Germany. Before the war, most of the food produced by Ukraine - enough to feed 400 million people - was exported through its seven Black Sea ports. Ukraine claimed it had damaged and set on fire a Russian navy logistics ship in the Black Sea. The Vsevolod Bobrov was near Snake Island, said Serhiy Bratchuk, a spokesman for the Odesa regional military administration in southern Ukraine. The Guardian could not independently verify the details and Russia's defence ministry did not immediately respond to a request for comment. Ukraine's deputy prime minister, Iryna Vereshchuk, said "very difficult negotiations" were ongoing to evacuate 38 seriously wounded fighters from the besieged Azovstal steel plant in the Ukrainian port city of Mariupol, in exchange for Russian prisoners of war. "We work step by step,'" he said. "We will exchange 38, then we will move on." The number of people who have fled Ukraine to escape Russia's ***invasion*** has exceeded six million, the UN's refugee agency has said. A further eight million people have been displaced inside Ukraine. The UN's human rights council has passed a resolution to investigate alleged abuses by Russian troops in parts of Ukraine formerly under their control, with a view to holding those responsible to account. The resolution passed by a strong majority, with 33 members voting in favour and two - China and Eritrea - against. There were 12 abstentions.71133falsefalseHelen Livingstone (now); Sam Levin, Adam Gabbatt, Léonie Chao-Fong, and Martin Belam (earlier)US officials including US vice president Kamala Harris at a working lunch with the leaders of ASEAN countries in Washington.A local man with his destroyed tractor on a farm in the village of Mala Rohan, near Kharkiv.A Ukrainian soldier walks past a burning natural gas terminal on the northern outskirts of Kharkiv.A destroyed vehicle lies in the middle of a road in north Kharkiv.Goats cross a street between burned vehicles in the village of Vilkhivka near Kharkiv.A Ukrainian policeman stands inside a school sport hall in the village of Vilkhivka, where, according to residents, Russian soldiers were based, after it was retaken by Ukrainian army.A man tries to collect usable wares from his house which was destroyed by Russian attacks on Kharkiv.A destroyed Russian helicopter near the village of Mala Rohan, near Kharkiv, Ukraine.A medic holds a gas mask she was given at a hospital in Sloviansk.Alina Kabaeva, the Russian president's presumed partner, has been added to Britain's sanctions list.WNBA star and two-time Olympic gold medalist Brittney Griner leaves a courtroom after a hearing, in Khimki just outside Moscow, Russia.Ukrainian woman in her damaged house in Chernihiv oblast, Ukraine.The damaged house in Chernihiv oblast.Sweden's defence minister Peter Hultqvist (left) and Foreign minister Ann Linde present a security policy analysis during a press conference in Stockholm, Sweden.Russian soldier Vadim Shysimarin, 21, suspected of violations of the laws and norms of war, sits inside a defendant's cage during a court hearing, in Kyiv, Ukraine.The anti-Kremlin band Pussy Riot perform during the opening concert of the group's Riot Days tour, at Funkhaus Berlin Nalepastrasse in Berlin, Germany.Dmytro Kuleba (left), Ukraine foreign minister, meets Nico Popescu, foreign minister of Moldova, on 13 May in Weissenhaus, Germany.A satellite image provided by Maxar Technologies shows the western end of Azovstal steel plant in Mariupol on Thursday 12 May.Volunteers organise donations at the logistics centre at the Art Palace in Lviv. It can provide aid packages for more than 500 Ukrainian displaced families every day.Refugees say goodbye in Odesa before taking a bus on an evacuation trip to Italy organised by a Ukrainian volunteer initiative.A satellite image shows a Russian Serna-class landing craft and possible missile contrail near Snake Island, Ukraine.UK foreign secretary Liz Truss.

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[***Lauding Pandemic Response, Sixth Committee Speakers Urge Programme of Assistance to Have More Diverse Educational Materials, Resume In-Person Courses***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:63X7-K171-F0YC-N04C-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

New York: The United Nation has issued the following press release:

Delegates Conclude Debate on Protecting Persons in Event of Disasters, Take Up Universal Jurisdiction Scope, Application

While commending the flexibility with which the Programme of Assistance in the Teaching, Study, Dissemination and Wider Appreciation of International Law responded to the COVID‑19 pandemic, speakers in the Sixth Committee (Legal) urged the Programme to incorporate more diversity — including different regions and legal systems — into its educational offerings, and called for the return of the in‑person trainings that foster deep bonds among the international legal community.

Jessica M. Elbaz, Secretary of the Advisory Committee for the Programme of Assistance, introducing the Secretary‑General ’ s related report (document A/76/404), highlighted both the impact of the pandemic on the Programme ’ s activities and the high demand for them. Despite the pandemic, hundreds of applications were received for the Programme ’ s Regional Courses for professionals from developing countries, she noted.

The Codification Division, in response, conducted online workshops that catered to these circumstances, she said, but added that these courses are traditionally provided in person to allow for in‑depth discussions and the establishment of lasting links between participants. She also spotlighted the online offerings of the Audiovisual Library, which nearly two and a half million users around the world have used so far, and drew attention to the Programme ’ s continued investment in its students with the creation of an alumni network.

Harold Adlai Agyeman of Ghana, Chair of the Advisory Committee on the Programme of Assistance, underlined the importance of strengthening international legal education for the functioning of an interdependent world that must address a myriad of global issues, including climate change, terrorism, the law of the sea and artificial intelligence.

The Programme, he pointed out, provides not only academic opportunities, but also helps build lasting ties for multilateral cooperation, which benefits the Sixth Committee ’ s work. While the online content can serve as an interim capacity‑building ***measure*** in lieu of cancelled training courses, he voiced concern about the lack of reliable internet connectivity, which poses a challenge for students from developing countries, and stressed the value of the traditional, in‑person format.

The value of in‑person engagement was also highlighted by Alice Hicuburundi, Senior Legal Officer of the Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea, who provided an update on the Hamilton Shirley Amerasinghe Memorial Fellowship on the Law of the Sea. She noted that the 2020 Fellow opted to defer her Fellowship until 2022, in the hopes that it can be undertaken in person.

Noting that 33 Fellows from 30 developing countries have completed their Fellowships since its establishment in 1981 and are now making important contributions in their respective countries and regions, she encouraged voluntary contributions to the Fellowship to ensure that developing countries build the capacity to participate in ocean‑related ***processes***.

In the ensuing debate, many delegates echoed the importance of international legal education and encouraged the Programme to return to in‑person courses when it was able to do so.

The representative of the Republic of Moldova called for a more uniform practice that excludes remote self‑paced learning curricula, as she observed that “a wide range of ununiform solutions were implemented to various regional groups. ” She also encouraged the Codification Division to explore organizing virtual classrooms for participants from all regional groups.

Lebanon ’ s delegate welcomed the personalized, remote training programs that offered a remedy when the pandemic prevented in‑person training courses, which are the Programme ’ s flagship activity. However, these virtual programs must be considered temporary, he insisted, also suggesting that the Programme should choose more teachers from developing countries and aim for greater linguistic diversity in order to promote a balance between different legal cultures and systems.

Portugal ’ s representative, along with several other delegates, took up the call for diversity, noting that the Library must include contents in languages that have demographic and cross‑regional significance. Portuguese is the single most widely spoken language in the Southern Hemisphere, he noted, also calling for more promotion of the Programme ’ s activities. “The general public does not seem to be sufficiently aware of it,” he observed.

Sierra Leone ’ s delegate commended how the Programme pivoted to innovative online formats in response to the pandemic. She also drew attention to the variety of topics in the online workshops, but voiced concern about decreasing female participation and called for gender parity.

The representative of Thailand also touted the Programme ’ s use of as many modes of communication as possible, including podcasts, online courses and off‑site recording sessions. Still, she urged that updates to the Audiovisual Library ’ s website be made — especially its user‑interface design — to make it more user‑friendly and appealing to the younger generation of international law enthusiasts.

The Sixth Committee also concluded its debate on protection of persons in the event of disasters today, with many delegates stressing the importance of international cooperation in preventing, preparing for and tackling disasters. Indonesia ’ s delegate welcomed the reference in draft article 6 to those who are “particularly vulnerable”, while the representative of Tonga reminded delegates that for a small country, “any natural disaster is a national disaster. ” (For background, see Press Release GA/L/3640.)

The Committee also began its consideration of the Secretary‑General ’ s report on the scope and application of the principle of universal jurisdiction (document A/76/203).

Morocco ’ s delegate, speaking for the African Group, which had requested the Committee in 2009 to consider the principle ’ s uncertain scope and application, noted that Non‑African States are inclined to apply universal jurisdiction on African officials, without their consent or cooperation, outside of multilateral ***processes***. Highlighting the African Union ’ s model law on the principle as a template for developing legislation that limits its misuse, she said that, though the Committee has spent 10 years intensely debating and taking small steps, the scope of universal jurisdiction remains uncertain.

However, Liechtenstein ’ s delegate said that the scope of universal jurisdiction is sufficiently clear from existing treaty law and customary international law. The current political dynamic in the Security Council prevents it from providing the International Criminal Court with jurisdiction for serious crimes. That makes the application of universal jurisdiction all the more important, he pointed out, also welcoming the recent Koblenz trials in Germany — which led to a judgment against a Syrian national involved in crimes against humanity .

Countering that, the representative of Syria voiced concern about the politicization of the principle, stressing that there is no common understanding of its scope and application. Calling for absolute respect for the immunity of State representatives and the sovereign equality between States, he denounced the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to facilitate investigations into the most serious violations of international law committed in Syria.

Also speaking today in the debate on the protection of persons in the event of disasters were the representatives of Morocco (for the African Group), Solomon Islands, Cambodia, Jordan, Cameroon and Haiti.

Speaking during the debate on the Programme of Assistance were the representatives of Morocco (for the African Group), Cambodia (for the Association of Southeast Asian Nations), Finland (also speaking for Denmark, Iceland, Norway and Sweden), Singapore, South Africa, Iran, Cuba, Philippines, Egypt, Colombia, Qatar, China, United States, El Salvador, Mexico, Chile, Ethiopia, Cameroon, United Kingdom, Ireland, Sudan, Malaysia, Morocco, Republic of Korea, Algeria, Jamaica and the Russian Federation. A representative of the European Union, in its capacity as observer, also spoke during that debate.

Also speaking during the debate on universal jurisdiction were the representatives of Iran (for the Non‑Aligned Movement), Sweden (also speaking for Denmark, Iceland and Norway), New Zealand (also speaking for Canada and Australia), Singapore, Sierra Leone, Iran (in national capacity), Cuba, Philippines, Venezuela, South Africa, Qatar, China, Pakistan, United States, Israel, Brazil, El Salvador, Oman, Slovakia, Mexico, Burkina Faso, Switzerland, Czech Republic, India, Slovenia, Egypt and Ethiopia, as well as a representative of the European Union, in its capacity as observer.

The Sixth Committee will meet at 10 a.m on Friday, 22 October, to continue its consideration of the principle of universal jurisdiction.

Protection of Persons in the Event of Disasters

AAHDE LAHMIRI (Morocco), speaking for the African Group, expressed concern over the frequency and severity of natural disasters — exacerbated by climate change — and their impact on societies and the Sustainable Development Goals. Increasing in number and scale, these phenomena cause massive loss of life, food insecurity, water shortages, displacement and long-term negative socioenvironmental consequences all over the world, particularly in Africa.

She went on to emphasize the importance of international cooperation when responding to such events. Towards this end, she welcomed further discussion on this topic, including on the elaboration of a convention based on the draft articles of the International Law Commission on the protection of persons in the event of disasters.

MOHAMED FAIZ BOUCHEDOUB (Algeria), aligning himself with the African Group, said that producing a legal framework for the protection of persons in the event of disasters would fill a gap in the current legal regime. The majority of relevant legal instruments in existence are non-binding and there is little legal harmony between them, particularly when it comes to the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction. The draft articles contribute to promoting the rule of law by balancing the rights of people affected by disasters on the one hand, and the principle of State sovereignty on the other. However, the draft articles interpret disasters in a broad, vague way, which could give rise to ambiguities. On this, he emphasized the need to clearly distinguish between the legal regime that governs natural disasters and that which pertains to man-made disasters.

MUHAMMAD TAUFAN (Indonesia), noting that his country sits atop three tectonic plates which form a volatile seismic strip called the “Ring of Fire,” said Indonesia constantly faces risks from seismic activity. The Committee ’ s deliberations on the legal framework for protection of persons in the event of disaster is of paramount importance to deepen comprehension, promote international cooperation and share best practices. Welcoming the reference in draft article 6 to those who are “particularly vulnerable”, he also cited references to the duty to cooperate, stressing that the exercise of such duty should only be taken in light of the principle of sovereignty upon which the draft articles rest. Indonesia is at the forefront of disaster-prone countries that have developed, and are continuing to develop, comprehensive legal regimes in support of the entire disaster management spectrum, he said, recalling that such a system was not in place in Indonesia in 2004 when a tsunami struck the Aceh province.

JEANETT VEA (Tonga), noting that the World Risk Report ranked Tonga the third most-at-risk country to disaster in 2020, said such crises take both an economic and human toll, as cyclones, coastal erosion, flash flooding, earthquakes and tsunamis can wipe out infrastructure, homes, businesses and ***agriculture*** overnight. The Government ’ s 2017 resettlement policy aims to bring vulnerable housing to a cyclone-resistant standard. She welcomed the International Law Commission ’ s draft articles, stressing that for a small country, “any natural disaster is a national disaster”; any such legal development must be accompanied by comprehensive international assistance to the small island developing States. Urging developed countries to honour their climate and resilience financing commitments, she said that the international community must assist vulnerable States before and after disaster strikes, with ***measures*** to relieve affected persons. “We anticipate a constructive dialogue to determine the appropriate way forward,” she added, welcoming the sharing of best practices.

NOEL MARTIN MATEA (Solomon Islands), associating himself with the Association of Small Island States, said that sea-level rise and climate-change-induced natural disasters are an existential threat to countries such as his. The economic cost of such events is beyond the capacity of individual countries, he stressed, noting that the impact of climate change in his State is three times the global average. Internal displacement has become a new normal for his people, he said, adding that the draft articles represent an important starting point for a thorough agreement. Stressing the obligation to cooperate in preventing, preparing for and tackling disasters, he highlighted the importance of draft article 9 and its focus on disaster risk reduction. Human-made disasters should be included in the scope of the draft articles, he said.

SOMALY CHEA (Cambodia) said that her country has been working to prevent, reduce and respond to the risk of disasters, giving great attention to the protection of people during and post-disaster period. Her Government established the National Committee for Disaster Management in 1995 to lead the country ’ s capacity-building for prevention, preparedness and response; passed the Law on Disaster Management in 2015; and has in place the Strategic National Action Plan on Disaster Risk Reduction which has been updated. As a party to the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response, Cambodia is also fully committed to regional and international cooperation in disaster response, she said, adding that the draft articles would contribute to progressive development of international law governing disaster response.

ALAA NAYEF ZAID AL-EDWAN (Jordan) said that while the draft articles mention the principle of solidarity in its preamble, it does not reflect that principle in the form of specific obligations on States that can provide relief assistance. The duty of cooperation under draft article 7 should be read in an expansive manner to develop an obligation on such States. The draft articles are lex generalis that applies to the extent that international humanitarian law does not in a disaster situation. They fill a gap and do not prejudice any wider protection under the relevant rules of international humanitarian law, including the rights of relief and towards humanitarian organizations during armed conflict. He added that he supported elaboration of a convention based on the draft articles and called for the establishment of an ad hoc committee or working group to discuss the text and Member States ’ observations, potentially culminating in the adoption of a convention, he said.

ZACHARIE SERGE RAOUL NYANID (Cameroon), noting the imperative importance of protecting persons in disaster, said that the safety of individuals is a key concern of modern societies. International human rights laws affirm that everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person, he pointed out, recalling the Lake Nyos disaster in his country. Expressing reservations about the draft articles under consideration, he said that they conflate natural and manmade disasters, which are very different situations. Calling for a clear distinction between the two, he pointed to draft article 3 which causes uncertainty as to whether an epidemic or a pandemic can also be considered a disaster.

WISNIQUE PANIER (Haiti) welcomed the draft articles of the International Law Commission, stressing that those texts aim to reduce risks and facilitate an adequate and effective response to disasters that meets the needs of those affected. The entire history of Haiti is marked by disasters, which has hindered its development, he pointed out. His Government adopted legislative and regulatory provisions, especially following the earthquake of 2010. Among other initiatives, he highlighted the adoption of a national plan spanning from 2019 to 2030. He also encouraged the establishment of a mechanism to ensure transparency of post-disaster spending. Haiti has received several billions of dollars in aid over the past 10 years, but these billions spent have not taken into account the needs and strategies of the country, he stated, adding that “the international community must ensure that the victims are the real beneficiaries”.

Programme of Assistance

HAROLD ADLAI AGYEMAN (Ghana), Chair of the Advisory Committee on the Programme of Assistance in the Teaching, Study, Dissemination and Wider Appreciation of International Law, provided an overview of the Advisory Committee ’ s work during its fifty-sixth session. He stressed that the Programme not only provides academic opportunities, but also helps build lasting ties for multilateral cooperation, which benefits the Sixth Committee ’ s work. Noting that the United Nations International Law Fellowship Programme and the United Nations Regional Courses in International Law could not be held due to the COVID-19 pandemic and related restrictions, he spotlighted the provision of interactive online workshops on a wide range of topics in international law by the Codification Division of the United Nations Office of Legal Affairs.

Although this online content can serve as an interim capacity-building ***measure*** for cancelled training courses, he pointed out that a lack of reliable internet connectivity inhibited participation by some developing countries. Accordingly, he stressed the need to resume traditional, in-person format for the Fellowship Programme and Regional Courses as soon as possible. Turning to the United Nations Audiovisual Library of International Law, he emphasized the need for greater linguistic diversity in its content, but also stressed that resources must be first directed to the six official languages. It is imperative to strengthen the teaching and learning of international law today, he added, as its rules and principles remain essential for the functioning of an interdependent world and for addressing issues such as climate change, terrorism, the law of the sea and artificial intelligence.

JESSICA M. ELBAZ, Secretary of the Advisory Committee for the Programme of Assistance, highlighted the impact of the pandemic on its activities. The Fellowship Programme and the three Regional Courses, courses for professionals from developing countries in international law by specialists from diverse regions and legal systems, are traditionally provided in person. This allows for in-depth discussions and the establishment of lasting links between participants. Yet, despite the pandemic, hundreds of applications were received. Thus, the Codification Division conducted online workshops, including a regional workshop for Africa on international human rights law and one for Latin America and the Caribbean, which focused on the law of State responsibility. Noting that the regional workshop for Asia and the Pacific is planned for the middle of November, she highlighted the challenge posed by lack of access to a reliable Internet connection. Several participants were not able to participate at all, while others were disconnected during the sessions. More so, she pointed out that even though the sessions were interactive, they cannot in any way replace the in-depth discussions and connections that occur during in-person activities.

Turning to the Audiovisual Library, she said it has been consulted by nearly two and a half million users around the world since its inception. The circumstances of the pandemic demonstrate the importance of a virtual training and research centre, and the need to continue to maintain and enrich it, she said. Drawing attention to the creation of a network for the alumni of the training programmes, she said the Codification Division conducted six virtual sessions, allowing the alumni to have exchanges with speakers from the Audiovisual Library on the subject of their lectures. Noting lively discussions of various different subjects such as peace and security, the elimination of discrimination against women and international environmental law, she expressed gratitude to the General Assembly for having placed the Programme under the regular budget. However, voluntary contributions remain essential for the Programme to reach its full potential, she said, thanking those countries that had made such contributions.

ALICE HICUBURUNDI, Senior Legal Officer of the Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea, gave an overview of the current implementation of the Hamilton Shirley Amerasinghe Memorial Fellowship on the Law of the Sea, recalling that the Fellowship was established in 1981 to help Government officials and other professionals from developing States gain additional knowledge about the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. As of October, 33 Fellows from 30 developing countries have completed their Fellowships, she noted, describing them as “professionals who are now making important contributions in their respective countries and regions”. However, because of international travel restrictions due to the pandemic and related situation in New York, the 2020 Fellowship was tentatively postponed to 2021.

Given the continued travel restrictions during the fall of this year, the 2020 Fellow was given the choice to undertake a virtual Fellowship in 2021 or defer the Fellowship until 2022, in the hopes that it can be undertaken in‑person, she pointed out. In addition, developing countries must build and maintain the capacity to actively participate in ocean-related ***processes***. Therefore, it is essential that the Fellowships granted under this programme be implemented in a continuous and consistent manner. Necessary funds must be made available. She also recalled that no scholarships were allocated from 2007 to 2009, and in 2014, due to lack of funds. “We strongly encourage voluntary contributions for future Fellows,” she said.

AAHDE LAHMIRI (Morocco), speaking for the African Group, said that the Programme of Assistance is a key tool for enhancing all Member States ’ capacity to participate in the international order on an equal basis. The General Assembly has recognized that improved, universal knowledge of international law plays an inherent role in maintaining international peace and security, and facilitating friendly relations among States. Therefore, the Programme directly serves the principles of the United Nations and the foundation of the global order; it constitutes an important assistive tool for the implementation of United Nations programs and activities worldwide.

She also emphasized the importance of disseminating knowledge and building capacity for legal professionals worldwide, especially in Africa. The Regional Course in International Law for Africa saw the highest number of applications. The interest of African lawyers, Government officials and experts in the Programme — along with increased use of the Audiovisual Library — underscores the need for developing international-law capacity. While welcoming the Codification Division ’ s use of innovative ***measures*** to ensure continuity of its work, she stressed the importance of providing in-person programmes. She also called on Member States to support the Programme ’ s financing through the regular budget.

SIMONA POPAN, representative of the European Union, in its capacity as observer, said that respect for the principles of international law is enshrined in the founding treaty of the bloc. Reaffirming commitment to the Programme as an important tool for legal education at the national and international levels, she said that it has trained brilliant legal minds and demonstrated its value. The Fellowship Programme and the Regional Courses have greatly contributed to the formation of generations of specialists and the Audiovisual Library benefits students throughout the world. However, during the ***unprecedented*** times caused by the pandemic, the Library has particular relevance, she pointed out, adding that the lecture series covers a variety of relevant topics.

She highlighted the need for lingual inclusivity, adding that the lecture series and other study materials would benefit a wider group of enthusiastic legal scholars and students if they were offered in more languages than the six official languages. Emphasizing the importance of multilingualism in enhancing access, she said that the Programme must aim to teach disadvantaged students wherever they are. As well, the Programme should consider offline study materials that can be accessed with basic mobile technologies. That could narrow the gap between those who have access to e-learning and those who do not, she said.

SOVANN KE (Cambodia), speaking for the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), noted that the implementation of the Programme of Assistance was greatly impacted by the COVID-19 outbreak. The traditional in-person training programs, namely, the three United Nations Regional Courses in International Law for Africa, Asia-Pacific and Latin America, and the Caribbean, as well as the International Law Fellowship Programme, had to be cancelled due to the global spread of the virus. He commended the Codification Division for effectively addressing the unforeseen circumstances by providing remote self-paced learning curriculum to those participants whose training programs were cancelled. However, he stressed that remote self-paced learning curriculum should not become a de-facto substitute for live in-person trainings under the Programme of Assistance, nor should it be used as justification to reduce or cut the regular budget funds.

Expressing support for the financing of the Programme through the regular United Nations budget, he encouraged voluntary contributions. The use of information and communications technologies, including the United Nations Audiovisual Library, should be explored as a way to add value to live in-person trainings and not to serve as a substitute for them, he stressed. The Programme ’ s in-person trainings provides an invaluable experience to the participants, who learn from one another through engaging discussion and sharing of worldviews on legal culture and traditions. In this way, the Programme helps build close-knit bonds between the participants and promotes cooperation among future colleagues. The Codification Division has compiled information and launched a platform for the alumni of the training programs, organized under the Programme of Assistance, to exchange information and disseminate training materials.

VIRPI LAUKANNEN (Finland), also speaking for Denmark, Iceland, Norway and Sweden, said the world ’ s critical rules‑based order depends largely on the professionalism and commitment of people acting on behalf of the States. Through the Programme of Assistance, generations of Government lawyers, judges and diplomats from around the globe have been able to gain a deeper understanding of the body of law that governs today ’ s interconnected world. This benefits the international community as a whole. Noting the Programme ’ s significant contributions, she commended the active and continued engagement of the Codification Division in pursuing its mandate regarding the Programme. The International Law Fellowship Programme, as well as the Regional Courses, have been instrumental in providing international law training for young lawyers.

Noting that the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has hindered the organization of the Programme ’ s courses to their full extent, she commended the Codification Division for exploring innovative ways to pursue the Programme ’ s objectives despite the challenges posed by the pandemic. She also praised the continuous development of the Audiovisual Library, citing additional ***measures*** undertaken to bolster it in response to COVID-19. “The Library ’ s resources have been of particular relevance during [the pandemic], which necessitated a quick transformation of the traditional methods of learning into online education,” she observed.

KENNETH WONG (Singapore) said the Programme of Assistance is contributing to a greater adherence to international law. He commended the Codification Division of the Office of Legal Affairs for its efforts in implementing the Programme during the pandemic. While he regretted that the Regional Courses could not proceed as planned, he said he was pleased that online training opportunities are continuing to be available until face-to-face activities can safely resume. The International Law Audiovisual Library is a particularly valuable resource, he noted, suggesting that lecturers be encouraged to provide presentation slides or other visual aids for uploading to the website to help users follow the courses and more easily remember their content.

THABO MICHAEL MOLEFE (South Africa), aligning himself with the African Group, called for broad support for the Programme of Assistance in the Teaching, Study, Dissemination and Wider Understanding of International Law. The Programme is a key tool for enhancing all Member States ’ capacity to participate in the international order on an equal basis. He also said that he considers the Audiovisual Library to be an essential tool, specifically spotlighting the Lecture Series podcasts. The Regional Courses in international law, particularly in Africa, are a great success, he stressed. He called on Member States to voluntarily contribute to the Program of Assistance.

MOHAMMAD GHORBANPOUR NAJAFABADI (Iran) observed that the Regional Courses and the Fellowship Programme provide a valuable venue for participants to exchange their views, share experiences and ideas, as well as improve intercultural understanding and dialogue. In that context, he suggested that geographical representation among the lecturers should also be considered. Further, the synergies between international law and international relations should be established as one of the permanent curricula of the seminars. Being that the United Nations is one of the main sources for the development, codification and dissemination of international law, the United Nations digital library and the Organization ’ s Yearbook are two of the most valuable repositories, containing a multitude of works collected and examined over the course of its history.

ARIANNA CARRAL CASTELO (Cuba) welcomed the Codification Division ’ s work in implementing the Programme and expressed hope that those events suspended due to the COVID-19 pandemic will soon resume. The Programme has become an effective tool, benefitting many jurists, academics and public officials in developing countries around the world. She pointed out, however, that some small developing countries cannot fully participate in the Programme, due to limited funding or a situation like Cuba ’ s, in which the United States has imposed an economic, commercial and financial blockade for over 60 years. The Programme ’ s activities, therefore, must be included in the United Nations regular budget in order to facilitate participation by all countries.

ELAINE DIANA LIM LORENZO (Philippines), associating herself with ASEAN, noted her appreciation for the online training programmes that were offered in lieu of the in-person trainings, as well as the online continuing education activities provided to the alumni of the training programmes. However, there is value in the traditional in-person training programs. Filipino nationals have benefitted from and participated in various activities of the Programme of Assistance, which has helped in strengthening their capacities in international law and in the establishment of vital networks of contacts in the field of international law. Noting the Philippines ’ commitment in its continued contributions to the Programme of Assistance, she encouraged all Member States with the means to do so to make voluntary contributions as well.

AHMED ABDELAZIZ AHMED ELGHARIB (Egypt), associating himself with the African Group, expressed appreciation for the Codification Division and the Advisory Committee, underscoring that the Programme plays an important role in building the capacity of developing countries in international law. This directly served the common aim of enhancing rule of law at the international level. He also praised the Codification Division for its innovative solutions in continuing the work of the Programme during the Covid-19 pandemic, including through the pilot remote workshops on international law topics. In this context, he noted that the work of the Programme of Assistance could benefit from a greater geographical representation of lecturers, especially from Africa and the Middle East, and North Africa region. He also encouraged the Programme to focus training activities on new and emerging issues of international law.

AUGUSTINA ȘIMAN (Republic of Moldova), associating herself with the European Union, expressed concern, in particular to the training programmes, saying, “We observe that a wide range of ununiform solutions were implemented to various regional groups. ” Noting the important purpose of the Programme of Assistance, she called for a more uniform practice that excludes remote self‑paced learning curricula. She also encouraged the Codification Division to explore organizing on-line courses or virtual classrooms for participants from all regional groups, thus enabling the professors and the participants to engage in active discussions. Without travel or accommodation costs involved, that format could be an opportunity for more professionals from developing countries to participate, contributing to the wider appreciation of international law. She affirmed that her delegation stands ready to engage in productive discussions to revise and better adapt the Programme of Assistance to the circumstances arising from the pandemic.

LUCIA TERESA SOLANO RAMIREZ (Colombia), noting the pandemic ’ s impact on the Programme activities, welcomed the Secretariat ’ s efforts to continue supporting States and their representatives through virtual learning and online interactive courses offered by the Codification Division. Colombia has benefitted considerably from Programme activities, particularly those that allow for continued education for alumni. She expressed hope, however, for a return to the traditional, in-person format for training as soon as possible. She also encouraged the Codification Division to promote diversity among participants and teaching staff. It is vital to allow new voices to access the realm of international law “to overcome stereotypes and better reflect the knowledge of a heterogenous core of legal professionals,” she pointed out. Further, better access to content in the six official languages will ensure participation for all stakeholders, she added.

ALI AHMAD M. A. ALMANSOURI (Qatar), stressing the important role of the Programme of Assistance in increasing understanding of international law, said that it has provided assistance to generations of legal practitioners and academics. Noting that the financial challenges faced by the Programme can undermine the continuity of the valuable work it does, he said that his Government ensures that many Qatari legal practitioners take advantage of the Programme. Ensuring reliable funding will continue to support the dissemination of international law, he said, adding that his country will continue to support the Programme financially.

SERGIO AMARAL ALVES DE CARVALHO (Portugal), associating himself with the European Union, said that despite the Programme ’ s many contributions, “the general public does not seem to be sufficiently aware of it”. He encouraged Member States to promote the Programme at home, across academic institutions, public administration and other organizations in order to make students, young scholars and young professionals aware of it. The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated that reliable distance learning and remote training tools, including the Audiovisual Library, can have a positive impact and bridge inequality gaps. The Office of Legal Affairs made the most of those tools during the pandemic. He reiterated Portugal ’ s calls for the Library to also expand its inclusivity by having contents in languages that, albeit not official languages of the United Nations, have demographic and cross-regional significance. In that regard, Portuguese is the one of the most-spoken languages in the world and the single most widely spoken language in the Southern Hemisphere.

ZHAO YANRUI (China), noting that the Programme of Assistance has provided important impetus to the study of international law, said it has promoted the capacity-building of many developing countries. Highlighting the fruitful work carried out by the Codification Division, she said that during the pandemic, it defied all odds to give students an opportunity to interact with legal scholars, in addition to offering various publications. Her Government has contributed financially to the Programme ’ s work in different areas, she said, adding that China also directly supports capacity-building in Asian and African countries in international law, as illustrated by the China-AALCO Exchange and Research Program on International Law.

ELIZABETH MARYANNE GROSSO (United States), noting her country ’ s participation in the Advisory Committee, said that the Programmme of Assistance merits the continuing, strong support of all Member States so that it can thrive for years to come. While it is disappointing that the Regional Courses and Fellowship events could not be held in-person this year, she commended the Programme of Action ’ s nimble adaptation to the working conditions of COVID-19. The Codification Division was able to share remote, self-paced versions of essential training, as well as pilot versions of real-time online workshops on important topics, including the peaceful settlement of disputes and the law of State responsibility. She also highlighted the Programme of Action ’ s progress in developing its alumni network and improving the accessibility and content of the Audiovisual Library of International Law. In that regard, she stressed that the Library is a more valuable resource than ever, as scholars around the world continue to rely on remote learning.

LIGIA LORENA FLORES SOTO (El Salvador) said that the value of the United Nations Audiovisual Library of International Law, together with the Fellowship Programme, has contributed to the training of officials from different legal systems and regions of the world. She added that she was particularly pleased with the increase in the number of subjects developed, such as international space law, international watercourse law and international regulation of biotechnology, among others. In line with her support for multilingualism, she considered that a publication in the six official languages of the United Nations would represent a relevant contribution and would ensure greater access to information in the different regions of the world.

NATALIA JIMÉNEZ ALEGRÍA (Mexico) said that, in a world of massive migration and a widening North-South divide, the promotion of international law is fundamental. The role of the Programme of Assistance is to bridge the gap between developed and developing countries, which the pandemic has aggravated, she said. Highlighting the new contents offered by the United Nations Audiovisual Library of International Law, she said she hoped for a better respect of multilingualism in these contents. Her country regularly organizes activities for the dissemination of international law, she noted.

Mr. HITTI (Lebanon) pointed out that the COVID-19 pandemic prevented the organization of in-person training courses — the flagship activity of the Programme of Assistance. He welcomed the Codification Division ’ s provision of personalized, remote training programs to remedy this absence. However, these virtual programs must be considered temporary ***measures***; in-person training programs must resume as soon as possible. He also called for broader geographic diversity among the lecturers and teachers for Programme activities, suggesting that more could come from developing countries in regions such as North Africa and the Middle East. Further, greater linguistic diversity would foster inclusion and promote a balance between different legal cultures and systems.

JOSE JUAN HERNANDEZ CHAVEZ (Chile), highlighting the Programme ’ s inclusion in the regular budget, emphasized the need for a solid assistance mechanism that is sustainably resourced. While expressing regret that the Regional Course in International Law for Latin America and the Caribbean was not held in person in 2020 and 2021, he welcomed the Codification Division ’ s provision of interactive online sessions this year. The international community must respond to current challenges with a forward-looking approach and the Programme encourages young jurists and diplomats towards this end. He also welcomed work on the Audiovisual Library, expressing hope that it will continue to provide content in all official United Nations languages and, specifically, make the International Law Handbook available in Spanish.

HAWANATU KEBE (Sierra Leone), commending the Codification Division and its committed staff for the effective implementation of the Programme of Assistance, noted that its activities, though not carried out as planned, pivoted to innovative online formats. Encouraging this efficient use of available resources, she said that the Regional Courses complement the Fellowship, together creating a valuable programme of legal education for students from developing countries. She also took note of the variety of topics in the online workshops and the continued utilization of the alumni network, but voiced concern about the decreasing female participation.

Ms. BETACHEW BIRHANU (Ethiopia) said that the Programme is a crucial component of multilateralism by enabling practitioners to stay up-to-date in international law. Her country has hosted the regional workshop for Africa for many years, she said, calling it a grand opportunity for students to attain training, while forming interpersonal links. Expressing support for enhancing the reach of the Programme, she thanked the States who made financial contributions. She highlighted the efforts made to continue the Programme during the pandemic, including through virtual learning opportunities. However, she also noted that the Secretary-General ’ s report accurately emphasizes the value of in-person training. In that regard, she said she looked forward to receiving the next cohort of students in Addis Ababa.

Mr. NYANID (Cameroon), expressing his support for the Fellowship Programme, said he hoped that the number of participants will be increased. As well, strengthening the Audiovisual Library will allow the Organization to offer online training at a lower cost, to an unlimited number of people and institutions around the world. The Programme must allow participants to confront certain aspects of globalized international law. It should introduce complex issues related to the emergence of new actors in international law, such as multinationals or transnational corporations. In addition, it should address the applicability of certain norms of international law in the grey areas of international law, and attempt to solve legal problems in new contexts, such as migrant workers ’ rights, freedom of expression and the information technology revolution.

JONATHAN SAMUEL HOLLIS (United Kingdom) said the Programme of Assistance plays an important role in the delivery of international law training and dissemination of legal knowledge around the world. It facilitates the effective participation of diverse countries in multilateral frameworks and fora. In so doing, the Programme makes an effective contribution to the rule of law, to the promotion of friendly relations, and to the strengthening of international peace and security. The United Kingdom, he said, continues to make voluntary contributions to the Programme and supports the International Law Seminar, the Audiovisual Library of International Law, and the Trust Fund for the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf.

SIOBHÁN MILEY (Ireland) noting that the pandemic presented ***unprecedented*** challenges, highlighted the online educational activities and online lectures organized by the Codification Division, the Regional Courses as well as the International Law Fellowship Programme — all of which are supported by Ireland through annual contributions. Commending the Codification Division for establishing the alumni network of training programmes ’ participants, organized under the Programme of Assistance, she also pointed to the success of the Audiovisual Library, which is also supported by Ireland. The recent efforts to facilitate access to the Library ’ s lectures through social media and the Library podcast are commendable, she said, encouraging further reflection on how to facilitate quicker and easier access to this important resource. The work of the Programme of Assistance is very important to broaden awareness and promote a greater understanding of international law. In this regard, she encouraged other States to consider supporting its worthy initiatives.

Mr. MOHAMMED (Sudan), aligning himself with the African Group, stressed the importance of the Programme of Assistance in the promotion of the rule of law and commended the work of the Codification Division. He also highlighted the contribution of the Audiovisual Library of International Law. He called for more resources for the Programme, particularly to ensure the holding of the Regional Courses. As well, he welcomed the support of some countries for the Programme and called on Member States to pay more attention to it.

THARARUT HANLUMYUANG (Thailand), aligning herself with ASEAN, emphasized that the dissemination of legal knowledge must be carried out in an inclusive manner, adding that she supported the use of as many modes of communication as possible, including podcasts, online courses and off‑site recording sessions. She also said that the Audiovisual Library ’ s website should be updated — especially its user‑interface design — to make it more user‑friendly and more appealing to the younger generation of international law enthusiasts. Further, she encouraged States to link their treaty databases with the website in order to achieve seamless connectivity between treaty databases worldwide. The provision of remote learning tools, she added, should not become a substitute for in‑person training. To that end, she said that Thailand looks forward to hosting the Regional Course in International Law for Asia‑Pacific in Bangkok as soon as conditions permit.

MOHD HAFIZ BIN OTHMAN (Malaysia) commended the efforts of the Codification Division in exploring innovative means to continue pursuing the objectives of the Programme, despite the challenges posed by the pandemic for the second year in a row. The remote self-paced learning curriculum drew on readily available resources such as the International Law Handbook and the Audiovisual Library. While these online ***measures*** could not replace the in-depth exchanges and long-lasting bonds created with in-person trainings, she said that the Programme must continue to use information and communications technologies to disseminate knowledge of international law to a broader audience.

AAHDE LAHMIRI (Morocco), associating herself with the African Group, said that the Programme of Assistance has helped generations of practitioners, jurists and judges improve their understanding of international law. The high number of applications for its Regional Courses demonstrates both the strength of the Programme and the need to bolster Member State capacity in international law. She expressed regret that the pandemic prevented the holding of the Regional Courses and, while welcoming the Codification Division ’ s virtual offerings, called for a return to in‑person classes as soon as possible. The pandemic also demonstrated the need for teaching and learning online. In this regard, she emphasized the importance of the Audiovisual Library as well as efforts to improve its accessibility.

MOON YOUNG KIM (Republic of Korea) urged Member States to make the Programme more widely known and available to their universities and academia, and include its materials in the training of civil servants and diplomats. At the national level, her Government holds an annual moot court competition and awards a best thesis on public international law topics. As well, in‑person lectures and trainings at the Seoul Academy of International Law and Yeosu Academy of the Law of the Sea will resume this year. She also encouraged ways to broaden the audience, adding that making lectures available as podcasts has been a good example. Shorter versions, like miniseries, have great potential to introduce the basics of international law and to make it more relevant to the public. Further, the diversity of legal traditions needs to be borne in mind when designing and planning trainings. Only then can those efforts enrich the current interactions of international law and help bridge geographical imbalances.

MOHAMED FAIZ BOUCHEDOUB (Algeria), stressing the importance of deepening knowledge of international law, said the Programme plays a crucial role in strengthening the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and bringing about peace and security. The increase in applications for the Regional Courses organized by the Codification Division is evidence of the vitality and success of the Programme as well as of the demand from States for capacity‑building in international law. The Codification Division has been dynamic and proactive in its approach to continuing its activities online, he said, noting that of the 53 African countries, 27 sent in applications for the regional workshops. Also voicing support for the establishment of the alumni network, he called for a wider linguistic variety of content in the Audiovisual Library.

KAVOY ANTHONY ASHLEY (Jamaica) emphasized that the Programme of Assistance meets a critical need for capacity‑building in international law and diplomacy, especially for developing States. He commended the United Nations Office of Legal Affairs and the Codification Division for their efforts in executing the Programme ’ s activities despite challenges posed by the pandemic. Regretting that the 2021 Regional Course in International Law for Latin America and the Caribbean could not take place in person, he nevertheless noted that his country could benefit from its amended online version. He also underscored that interpersonal engagements have an added benefit of strengthening relationships between States. In that regard, he welcomed plans for the resumption of the in‑person training programmes in 2022, adding his thanks to States for their contributions to ensure sustainability of the Programme.

ALEXANDER S. PROSKURYAKOV (Russian Federation), noting the pandemic ’ s effect on the implementation of the Programme of Assistance, praised its decisive and effective conduct during the current difficult circumstances. The replacement of the Regional Courses with remote learning should remain a temporary ***measure*** necessitated by the situation, he stressed, adding that remote courses cannot substitute for the unique experience of live professional communication with eminent experts and practitioners. Voicing the hope that the courses in the Programme ’ s framework will return to in-person mode, he also welcomed efforts to complement the Audiovisual Library.

Scope and Application of Universal Jurisdiction

Mr. NAJAFABADI (Iran), speaking for the Non‑Aligned Movement, said that national courts that invoke the principle of universal jurisdiction against senior officials enjoying immunity violate the sovereignty of States. He recalled the context that saw the inclusion of this item on the agenda. In February 2009, the African Group requested its inclusion to remedy the uncertain scope of the principle and its abuses; the Group was alarmed by the implications of this principle on the sovereignty of the States concerned and asked for clarification to avoid any misapplication of the principle.

He went on to warn against any unjustified extension of the offences subject to such a principle and called for the establishment of a mechanism to prevent any abuse in its application. Universal jurisdiction must not replace other jurisdictions, namely the jurisdiction of the State of territory and the State of nationality, he said. Adding that he considered it premature to ask the International Law Commission to conduct a study on all aspects of the principle, he called for judicious and responsible application of universal jurisdiction in accordance with international law.

Ms. LAHMIRI (Morocco), speaking for the African Group and associating herself with the Non‑Aligned Movement, underscored the importance of this topic for the Group ’ s 54 Member States. She recalled the history leading to its inclusion on the Sixth Committee ’ s agenda, namely that an abuse of the principle of universal jurisdiction — particularly in relation to African officials — led to a request in 2009 for the Committee to consider the principle ’ s uncertain scope and application. Noting that the Committee has spent a great deal of time intensely debating and taking small steps collectively on this subject, she said this undermines addressing the use and misuse of the universality principle, which should concern all Member States. The Committee has failed to address the real concerns that necessitated the addition of this topic to its agenda, and for more than 10 years, the scope of universal jurisdiction has remained uncertain.

Non‑African States, she pointed out, are inclined to apply the principle of universal jurisdiction on African officials, outside of multilateral ***processes*** and without the consent or cooperation of the African States concerned. This consent and cooperation — when regulated in the multilateral system — can limit the misuse and abuse of universal jurisdiction, which should be complementary to the national jurisdiction of the concerned country. Further, the principle cannot be applied in contravention of those of international law, including State sovereignty and diplomatic immunity. Stressing that agreed‑upon norms must be established regarding the scope and application of universal jurisdiction, she said that the African Union ’ s model law on the subject offers a template for developing universal jurisdiction legislation that suits domestic peculiarities and limits misuse of the principle.

Ms. POPAN, representative of the European Union in its capacity as observer, voiced strong support for the principle that the most serious crimes of concern to the international community as a whole must not go unpunished. The fight against impunity prevents future crimes, she said, noting that the views and practices of individual States concerning the principle ’ s scope and application vary widely. The primary responsibility for prosecuting the crime lies with the State that has the direct link to the crime committed, she stressed.

Underscoring the importance of the principle of aut dedere aut judicare, she added that mounting State practice underlies the significance of this principle. Highlighting the 2012 judgment of the International Court of Justice in the case of Belgium v. Senegal, she said that effective investigation at the national level depends on a high degree of close cooperation with national authorities. The Union has set up a European network to investigate and prosecute genocide and crimes against humanity, she said, voicing the bloc ’ s willingness to engage further in the discussion.

JULIA FIELDING (Sweden), also speaking for Denmark, Finland, Iceland and Norway, welcomed the fact that universal jurisdiction has gained solid ground in recent years as a fundamental principle of criminal law, both within national jurisdictions and at the international level. Agreeing that primary responsibility for investigating and prosecuting international crimes rests with the territorial State in which the criminal conduct is alleged to have occurred, as a general rule, or the State of nationality of the accused, she said the exercise of universal jurisdiction by other States can serve as an important tool when the former do not take action.

All five countries for which she speaks have incorporated the principle of universal jurisdiction into their respective domestic legislation, she said. Such legislation allows domestic prosecution of certain crimes that did not take place on their respective territories and where neither the victim nor the alleged perpetrator were nationals of their respective countries. Urging other States to do the same, she went on to note that some delegations have expressed concern about the potential abuse of the principle. While she emphasized caution against developing an exhaustive list of crimes for which universal jurisdiction would apply, any form of misuse of prosecutorial powers should be prevented from occurring. She also called on States to adopt national legislation based on the Rome Statute, thereby ensuring domestic prosecution of crimes under the jurisdiction of the Court and a more effective cooperation framework with international courts.

LUKE ROUGHTON (New Zealand), also speaking for Australia and Canada, said universal jurisdiction provides an important mechanism to ensure that perpetrators do not receive a safe haven anywhere. Primary responsibility for investigating and prosecuting serious international crimes rests with the territorial State in which the criminal conduct was alleged to have occurred, he said, adding that they are often in the best position to achieve justice. As well, universal jurisdiction must be exercised in good faith and in line with other principles and rules of international law, and must be applied in a manner consistent with the rule of law and the right to a fair trial.

Noting that Australia, New Zealand and Canada have legislation establishing jurisdiction regarding the most serious international crimes, he encouraged Member States to follow suit, in accordance with international law, and to work cooperatively to hold perpetrators to account. Recalling the ongoing prosecution of Syrian nationals in Germany for crimes against humanity, he said universal jurisdiction is particularly important in cases where the International Criminal Court does not have jurisdiction over the relevant crimes.

Mr. WONG (Singapore) stressed that universal jurisdiction should only be applied in respect of particularly grave crimes that affect the international community as a whole. Further, he said that universal jurisdiction is a principle of customary international law, which requires close analysis of State practice and opinio juris. It should be distinguished from the exercise of jurisdiction provided for in treaties or the exercise of jurisdiction by international tribunals, constituted under specific treaty regimes. Stressing that universal jurisdiction cannot be exercised in isolation from, or to the exclusion of, other applicable principles of international law, he specifically pointed to the immunity of State officials from foreign criminal jurisdiction, State sovereignty and territorial integrity. He further noted that the principle of universal jurisdiction is not and should not be the primary basis for the exercise of criminal jurisdiction by States and should only be invoked as a last resort.

MICHAEL IMRAN KANU (Sierra Leone), associating himself with the African Group, said that a Member State in the report is reported as “currently hearing a case on war crimes, aggravated crimes against humanity and murders committed outside” of its territory. The case concerns a Sierra Leone national undergoing trial for alleged crimes committed outside of Sierra Leone. Although Sierra Leone has cooperated with the court, he noted, his country only embraces a form of universal jurisdiction for grave breaches of the 1949 Geneva Conventions and their 1977 Additional Protocols through the Geneva Conventions Act. That covers not only offences committed by citizens of Sierra Leone or criminal conduct carried out on his country ’ s territory, but persons of “whatever nationality” committing those enumerated offences whether “within or outside [of] Sierra Leone”. The ***process*** of universal jurisdiction over the Sierra Leone national has been less than satisfactory, he noted, calling for the Sixth Committee and the International Law Commission to work together. As prospects for progress appear to get slimmer, there is a need to instill new life in the annual debate. The working group is open to all States, he said, reiterating that legal issues must be separated from policy issues in order to advance on the topic.

Mr. POURIMANI (Iran), associating himself with the Non‑Aligned Movement, stated that a common understanding on the conceptual and legal framework of universal jurisdiction and its scope of application has yet to be reached — in particular, the intersection between universal jurisdiction and the immunities of certain high‑ranking officials. He pointed to the non‑consensual expansion of crimes under universal jurisdiction and the selective as well as arbitrary application of the principle for the benefit of certain specific States. He viewed universal jurisdiction as a treaty‑based exception in exercising national criminal jurisdiction, he said, drawing attention to the principle of territorial jurisdiction as the key to sovereign equality of States. Universal jurisdiction is complementary to other jurisdictional bases and can be applied for the most serious crimes. However, expansion of the jurisdiction beyond the most heinous crimes could call its legitimacy into question. Moreover, universal jurisdiction cannot be exercised in isolation, he added, stressing that referring this matter to the International Court of Justice will not produce satisfactory results due to the existence divergence of views, incoherence and lack of unanimous State practice.

YURI ARIEL GALA LÓPEZ (Cuba), associating himself with the Non‑Aligned Movement, expressed concern over the unilateral, selective, and politically motivated exercise of the principle of universal jurisdiction by courts of developed countries against individuals from developing countries. The main objective of the General Assembly ’ s work should be to regulate or create international guidelines to prevent the misuse of the principle and to safeguard international peace and security. Stressing the importance of complying with the full respect for the principles of political independence and non‑interference in the internal affairs of States, he said that the application of universal jurisdiction should be limited by the absolute respect for the sovereignty and national jurisdiction of States and should only supplement national jurisdictions. In this context, he underscored that the absolute immunity of Heads of State, diplomatic staff and other high-ranking officials should not be subject to any questioning, while offenses that fall under the application of this principle should be restricted to crimes against humanity.

AZELA GUERRERO ARUMPAC-MARTE (Philippines), associating herself with the Non‑Aligned Movement, said universal jurisdiction is considered part of Philippine law, both through its Constitution and through the 2009 Act on Crimes against International Humanitarian Law, Genocide and Other Crimes against Humanity. Highlighting other features of national law, she said the revised penal code follows the general rule that jurisdiction is territorial. Therefore, universal jurisdiction is an exception, grounded in the need to preserve international order. Thus, its scope and application must be limited and clearly defined, as the unrestrained invocation and abuse of the exercise of universal jurisdiction only undermines the principle behind it. Further, these certain offences must be limited to jus cogens crimes that have been deemed so fundamental to the existence of a just international legal order that States cannot derogate from them, even by agreement. The continuing challenge is defining its scope and application, she said, adding that this ***process*** should be State‑led, with discussions remaining in the Sixth Committee, rather than being referred to the International Law Commission.

ELIE ALTARSHA (Syria) said that the principle of universal jurisdiction complements national jurisdiction and does not substitute it. He stated that there is no common understanding of the scope and application of the principle and noted the divergences between States. Deeply concerned by the politicization of this principle, he called for absolute respect for the fundamental principles of international law such as the immunity of State representatives or the sovereign equality between States. He denounced “these politicized mechanisms that point the finger at entire continents”, taking the example of the International Criminal Court. Criticizing the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to facilitate investigations into the most serious violations of international law committed in Syria, he urged that Member States separate the legal issues from the political ones.

JHON GUERRA SANSONETTI (Venezuela), associating himself with the Non‑Aligned Movement, said that the crimes that could fall under universal jurisdiction must be clearly defined, and it should only be exercised by the agreed—upon international courts. Moreover, he stressed, universal jurisdiction can only be applied when national courts are unable or unwilling to exercise jurisdiction. Universal jurisdiction must be invoked in strict compliance with the principles of sovereign equality, political independence and non‑interference in the internal affairs of States. He expressed concern about the growing trend towards the establishment of fact‑finding mechanisms that are intended to supplant the organs of the judicial systems of States. He also denounced “a strategy aimed at exploiting justice as a weapon of arbitrary aggression, causing suffering, chaos and destruction”. Reaffirming his country ’ s commitment to the fight against impunity, he stated that the scope and application of the principle of universal jurisdiction must continue to be examined.

THABO MICHAEL MOLEFE (South Africa), associating himself with the African Group and the Non‑Aligned Movement, supported the use of the principle of universal jurisdiction to combat impunity and achieve justice for the most serious crimes. However, he also noted the need to clearly define the concept in order to prevent its application in a selective, politically motivated manner. To this end, he welcomed the progress made in defining the scope of universal jurisdiction, the criteria for its application, procedural aspects, the role of national judiciaries and international cooperation and assistance. The primary responsibility to investigate and prosecute international crimes lies with the State in which the crime occurred or with the perpetrators ’ State of nationality, he emphasized. Only when such States are unable or unwilling to prosecute does the principle of universal jurisdiction apply.

ALI AHMAD M. A. ALMANSOURI (Qatar), noting that impunity is a common element in crimes witnessed today, said that there exists universal consensus on the need for international cooperation to end impunity and preserve the rights of victims. He stressed the importance of finding the right balance between fighting impunity on the one hand, and the need to exercise universal jurisdiction while adhering to the United Nations Charter and international law — and motivated by proper intentions — on the other. The principle of universal jurisdiction is one of the most important means of preventing violations of international humanitarian law and deterring criminal activity, he said. Those who violate the four Geneva Conventions must be prosecuted — no matter their nationality — in national or international courts. Noting terrorism ’ s risk to civilians, he added that the international community must focus on applying the principle of universal jurisdiction to address this threat.

SINA ALAVI (Liechtenstein) welcomed the recent Koblenz trials in Germany — which led to a judgment against a Syrian national involved in crimes against humanity — as a sign of progress. Nevertheless, significant impunity gaps remain. Noting that national judicial authorities undoubtedly shoulder the primary responsibility for prosecuting perpetrators of the most serious international crimes, primarily on the basis of territoriality, she said other widely accepted jurisdictional links include the nationality of the perpetrator and the nationality of the victims. The scope of universal jurisdiction is sufficiently clear from existing treaty law and customary international law. In cases of glaring impunity gaps, the Security Council should provide the International Criminal Court with jurisdiction by referring situations to it. Unfortunately, that often does not happen, due to political dynamics that are not expected to change in the near future. Alternatives, such as the application of universal jurisdiction in national proceedings, then become all the more important.

YANG LIU (China) noted that, although the Committee has engaged in open exchanges of views and extensive discussions on this topic, the rules of international law on the subject are far from established; States have huge divergences on the application of the principle. While some international treaties and State practices are invoked as the basis for universal jurisdiction, in fact they are mostly obligations of aut dedere aut judicare, or practices of extraterritorial jurisdiction of relevant States based on different links with the crime. Also noting that in recent years, some States have exercised extraterritorial jurisdiction in ways that are incompatible with international law, he said that politically motivated litigation and violations of immunity or foreign State officials are clear abuses of the principle.

QASIM AZIZ BUTT (Pakistan), stressing the importance of ensuring accountability, said that fundamental divergences on the nature, scope and application of universal jurisdiction have cast a shadow over the Committee ’ s efforts to arrive at a common understanding. The selective use of the principle has affected the credibility of international law. It is crucial to close the legal gaps. The scope and application of universal jurisdiction must be addressed objectively and cautiously, he stressed, adding that it should be exercised only in ***exceptional*** circumstances. Underscoring that domestic legal remedies must be prioritized, he said that the State in whose territory the crime was committed must have primary authority over the prosecution and investigation of such crimes.

JULIAN SIMCOCK (United States) noted that basic questions remain about how jurisdiction should be exercised in relation to universal crimes and what States ’ views and practices are in relation to the topic. For its part, his delegation engaged in discussions on several important topics concerning universal jurisdiction, including with respect to its definition, scope, and application. In that context, the submissions made by States, the effort of the Working Group in the Sixth Committee and the Secretary-General ’ s reports have been valuable in helping identify differences of opinion among States, as well as points of consensus on this issue. As such, he said that he remains interested in further exploring issues related to the practical application of universal jurisdiction.

SARAH GOLDIE WEISS (Israel) expressed concern that actors attempting to advance political agendas often file spurious complaints based on the principle, in jurisdictions that have no nexus to the alleged incident. To maintain the integrity of domestic judicial procedures, it is crucial to ensure that States enact legislative, regulatory and policy safeguards to prevent such abuse. In that context, it is premature for any decisions to be reached regarding core issues, including the elaboration of a list of crimes over which universal jurisdiction could be exercised, the legal status of the principle or the conditions for its application. One of the central challenges is the lack of publicly available data regarding State practice, which creates a misleading and inaccurate picture in this regard. In international law, there is no exception or limitation to immunity in criminal proceedings against State officials in foreign courts when such an official asserts immunity, she pointed out. Indeed, the decision regarding whether to institute a criminal investigation carries with it the risk of violating the foreign official ’ s immunity under customary international law.

MAITÊ DE SOUZA SCHMITZ (Brazil) said that, as a first step, the Sixth Committee should endeavour to find a consensual definition of the principle, as well as a shared understanding of its scope and application, to avoid selectivity. The exercise of jurisdiction, irrespective of the link between the crime and the prosecuting State, is an exception to the more consolidated principles of territoriality and nationality. Hence, universal jurisdiction should be subsidiary to that of States with primary jurisdiction and limited to specific crimes. There is also a need to further discuss which crimes would trigger the universality principle, the need for formal consent on the part of the State with primary jurisdiction and the need for the alleged criminal to be in the territory of the State wishing to exercise universal jurisdiction. One of the most contentious issues remains the application of universal jurisdiction while upholding the jurisdictional immunities of State officials. This is a serious issue and Member States should show flexibility to allow the Committee to move forward and agree on core elements in that respect.

LIGIA LORENA FLORES SOTO (El Salvador) said that it is imperative that victims of serious crimes have access to justice and full redress. Her country has a solid legal framework to put the principle of universal jurisdiction into practice, she said. The jurisprudence of the Constitutional Court of the Supreme Court of Justice of El Salvador has adopted the principle that certain crimes are so damaging that States are obliged to exercise judicial jurisdiction, regardless of where such a crime was committed. The application of this principle is undisputed for several international crimes such as genocide, war crimes or other transnational crimes, such as drug trafficking or terrorism financing. It is essential that the exercise of this jurisdiction follows criteria of complementarity or subsidiarity, she added.

HAZAA MOHAMMED SAIF AL REESI (Oman) reaffirmed the importance of the application of the principle of universal jurisdiction, given its relevance in the arrest and prosecution of accused persons. Such jurisdiction should be limited to the most serious crimes and only when the State where the crime was committed is unable or unwilling to exercise jurisdiction. It must not violate the principle of non‑interference in the internal affairs of a State, he added. He also noted that Oman has joined several United Nations conventions, including the Convention against Torture, and enacted a series of laws between 2015 and 2020, including on money laundering, terrorism financing and extradition.

MATÚŠ KOŠUTH (Slovakia) drew attention to the increasing acceptance of universal jurisdiction in national legal systems, as well as to the principle ’ s increasing relevance in State practice. He voiced his support for the application of universal jurisdiction over crimes of concern to the international community as a whole — namely, piracy, crimes against humanity, war crimes and violations of Geneva Conventions, genocide or torture. Universal jurisdiction complements well‑established territorial and personal jurisdictional bases, and thus closes the impunity gap. In the absence of the universal acceptance of the Rome Statute and of a truly universal framework for mutual legal assistance, universal jurisdiction remains the guarantee of accountability for perpetrators of crimes under general international law. However, a closer analysis of legal aspects of universal jurisdiction would contribute to the alleviation of its sensitivities, he said, advocating for the International Law Commission to include the topic on its short‑term programme of work.

NATALIA JIMÉNEZ ALEGRÍA (Mexico), emphasizing that combating impunity is a natural obligation incumbent on all States, encouraged the International Law Commission to include consideration of the principle of universal jurisdiction on its current agenda. Some issues require clarification, such as the application of the principle of universal jurisdiction in absentia. On this, she said that while universal jurisdiction derives from the prescriptive jurisdiction of States, the presence or absence of the perpetrator stems from States ’ enforcement jurisdiction. Turning to the crimes subject to the exercise of universal jurisdiction, she said that there are two possible tracks to take going forward: either these crimes are determined by a list, or on a case‑by‑case basis. There is also a need to define whether the long‑term objective in this area is the establishment of a binding instrument or only of guidelines, she added.

Mr. ZOUNGRANA (Burkina Faso), associating himself with the African Group and the Non‑Aligned Movement, said that the exercise of universal jurisdiction is often the last resort for the most vulnerable against the worst violations of their human rights. The principle establishes a moral duty for humankind to combat impunity and ensure justice for all, reflecting States ’ obligation to uphold the rights inherent to the international community. National courts in Burkina Faso have jurisdiction over genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity, regardless of where they are committed or the nationality of the perpetrator or victim. He also pointed out that effective application of the principle of universal jurisdiction requires the inadequacies of various national legislation to be remedied. To that end, he encouraged the United Nations to strengthen judicial cooperation and mutual assistance among States.

VINCENT OLIVIER RITTENER (Switzerland) expressed regret that the international community has, to date, been unable to reach consensus on the definition and scope of the application of universal jurisdiction. The principle should be examined by the International Law Commission; a comprehensive legal study analysing its practical application would provide States with a solid basis for future constructive discussions. To that end, he said his country is ready to cooperate with other delegations in exploring the possibility of including the Commission in the debate. Describing cooperation between States as essential to ensure the prosecution of the most serious international crimes, he noted his country ’ s commitment to facilitating mutual assistance in the prosecution of the most serious crimes. Pointing to the recent legal amendments introduced by his country in order to cooperate with international penal bodies, he called on other States to follow suit and fight impunity through universal jurisdiction.

MAREK ZUKAL (Czech Republic), associating himself with the European Union, stated that universal jurisdiction is an important tool for States to bring perpetrators of the most heinous crimes to justice. It also is a way to exercise national jurisdiction over a crime irrespective of the nationality of its perpetrator or of the place where the crime has been committed. Noting that his country has incorporated national jurisdiction in its national legislation, he stressed that defining the scope and concrete application of the principle of universal jurisdiction on the international level should not be burdened by political considerations. Against this backdrop, he proposed to refer the topic to the International Law Commission to prepare a study on this issue, emphasizing that legal certainty regarding the scope and application of universal jurisdiction among the international community is very desirable.

KAJAL BHAT (India), associating herself with the Non‑Aligned Movement, said that those who commit crimes should not remain immune because of procedural technicalities, including lack of jurisdiction. Outlining her country ’ s position on the matter, she stated that universal jurisdiction is applicable in a limited set of crimes, such as piracy on the high seas. A careful analysis of State practice and opinio juris is needed in order to identify the existence of a customary rule of universal jurisdiction over a particular crime. Stressing that treaty‑based jurisdiction is conceptually and legally distinct from universal jurisdiction, she highlighted the need to ensure that the principle of universal jurisdiction is not misused. She also noted that much‑needed conceptual and legal clarity on crimes falling under universal jurisdiction is yet to emerge.

PETRA LANGERHOLC (Slovenia), underlining the unique nature of the principle of universal jurisdiction, called on States to assist courts in prosecuting serious international crimes through cooperation. To ensure effective application, gaps in national laws should be filled by establishing multilateral mechanisms for judicial cooperation and mutual assistance in criminal matters. Given the continued divergence of views among States over the appropriate scope and application of universal jurisdiction and a lack of meaningful progress regarding the principle, a legal study by the International Law Commission leading to draft guidelines or draft conclusions would be of great use. Moreover, by clarifying fundamental concepts and elements of universal jurisdiction under international law, there is less risk that States would either infringe on the sovereignty of another State or decline to exercise their criminal jurisdiction due to misunderstanding of its application.

Mr. ELGHARIB (Egypt) said that the principle of universal jurisdiction should complement rather than replace the national jurisdiction of the States where the crime was committed. Stressing that this should be the exception rather than the rule, he added that the principle should be invoked in clear situations and if the State of the territory where the crime was committed is unable or unwilling to exercise its jurisdiction. He recalled that the application of the principle of universal jurisdiction must comply with the principles of general and customary international law, respect for the sovereignty of States and non‑interference in their internal affairs, and must also respect the immunity of officials and diplomatic immunities. Further, he expressed hope that the discussions would lead to a consensus, in particular on the notions of international cooperation and consent of States. He voiced his opposition regarding the suggestion to ask the International Law Commission to consider this issue, adding that it is more appropriate to move forward with discussions in the Sixth Committee.

HANNA BETACHEW BIRHANU (Ethiopia), associating herself with the African Group and the Non‑Aligned Movement, said that the advancement of modern technology and increased globalization have made transnational crimes more difficult to control. To address this, States must adapt their law‑enforcement efforts and capacities. For its part, Ethiopia has adopted the principle of universal jurisdiction for acts such as genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes and human trafficking. The principle, however, should be applied as a ***measure*** of last resort and in a manner that complements the efforts of national courts with direct connection to the event in question. She also said that the universality principle should not be synonymized with the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court or that of similar ad hoc mechanisms, whose jurisdiction derives from specific agreements between States. Noting the problematic use of the principle against African leaders, she stressed that appropriate rules must be established to monitor and control its application.

**Load-Date:** October 23, 2021

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[***As it happened: A Levels results day 2021 across Dorset and the New Forest***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:63BF-K641-JD39-X2PF-00000-00&context=1516831)

Bournemouth Echo

August 10, 2021 Tuesday

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**Length:** 6786 words

**Byline:** [*Sarah Cartlidge*](http://Sarah Cartlidge)

**Body**

5:39pm

That's all our online coverage of A Level results day. Thank you for following it.

We will be covering GCSE results day on Thursday.

5:27pm

Nicola Murray-Fagan, head of UK student recruitment and outreach at Bournemouth University, said: "It's been wonderful to welcome so many students to BU who have achieved some great results during a challenging year.

"We do still have some places available through clearing and our teams will be on the phones until 8pm tonight and throughout the week speaking to those who might not have received the grades they expected."

4:50pm

The Blandford School

Mrs Sally Wilson, headteacher said: "We are immensely proud of all the work and achievements of our year 13 students, especially after such a difficult and disrupted year.

"It was immensely pleasing to share their excitement today as they opened their results with us, and we were able to celebrate with them in person.  All staff in the school have worked tirelessly to ensure students are all able to progress onto further education and employment; we wish them all the best of luck with their new ventures."

Three students will be studying Medicine, two are completing a Midwifery degree and one a Nursing degree.

Two students will be studying Veterinary Science, another competitive field. One student will be studying History and Politics at Lucy Cavendish College, Cambridge University.

Students are also taking degrees in Illustration, Dance and Professional Acting. Some students are breaking into new degree areas such as Renewable Energy Engineering at Exeter University and Football Business and Marketing at UCFB, Wembley Campus. With others going on to study Economics; Law; Chemistry; Italian and Spanish, amongst others.

The school said, in addition to the 76% of students studying at university other students are going directly into employment such as at Damory Veterinary Clinic and three students are applying to join the Police.

4:14pm

Bournemouth & Poole College

Pass rate 100% across all the final subjects with 49% - A\*-B and 76% - A\*-C

Bournemouth & Poole College student Ellie Card achieved three A\* results in Business, Psychology & Criminology.

4:11pm

Canford School

"We are delighted that all seven pupils holding Oxbridge offers confirmed their places for courses in Engineering, History and French, Chemistry, English and Medicine, alongside a choral scholarship to Cambridge, with Canfordians also securing places at the highly competitive Medical Schools, and to top institutions across the UK.

"Chosen destinations include Durham, Bristol, Exeter, Edinburgh, Loughborough, Nottingham, Imperial College London, UCL and Cardiff. Internationally, Canfordians are holding offers to US universities in Rhode Island, Montana, New York, Pennsylvania, Boston and New Jersey and to Nagoya in Japan.

"Courses selected in traditional single academic subjects are complemented this year by a wide variety of more vocational courses at university including Mechanical Engineering, Law, Psychology, International Relations, Criminology, Marketing, ***Agriculture***, Neuroscience and Accounting.

"Drama, Art History and Music are all represented among creative arts university courses alongside Art and Design Foundations at destinations including Central St Martin's and the Arts University, Bournemouth."

Headmaster Ben Vessey said: "Pupils across the country have had a turbulent Sixth Form experience as a result of Covid-19, culminating in internal assessments replacing the examinations they expected to take when they began their A Level and Pre-U courses.

"It has been an extremely challenging time for both pupils and staff, and today we celebrate this year group and commend the efforts and approach of every single member of it.

"I am very proud of the way in which this cohort has faced the situation, demonstrating the courageous attitude, humble ambition, purposeful engagement and gracious leadership which are the core values and hallmarks of a Canfordian.

"I am also extremely grateful to all our teaching staff who have displayed the same values and worked so hard to support every pupil."

3:37pm

We've created a gallery of A Level pictures submitted by schools today which you can find here

St Peter's School students

3:16pm

United Sixth Form

Students at United Sixth Form (USF), part of Avonbourne Boys' and Girls' Academies, are celebrating today after securing places at their first-choice universities.

Those who are set to join Russell Group universities include:

Romena Sukyte who is taking up a place at University College London to study Biomedical Sciences;   Amelia Chodala who is taking up a place at the University of Bristol to study History;   Mya Sherrard who is taking up a place at the University of Bristol to study Sociology;  Tristan Donchev who is taking up a place at the University of Liverpool to study Criminology;  Isabelle Bancroft who is taking up a place at Cardiff University to study Criminology and Sociology;  Mina Hennessy who is taking up a place at the University of Southampton to study Psychology;  Muniskhon Usmonkhonova who is taking up a place at the University of Southampton to study Education and Psychology.

The Sixth Form has also seen a number of students recognised for their prowess in music and performing arts, including Katie Garnett-Brown who is taking up a place at Trinity Laban School of Dance to study Dance and Choreography and Chloe Slater who is joining the BIMM Institute to study Songwriting.

Stuart Ingram, Executive Principal at Avonbourne Girls' and Avonbourne Boys' Academies said: "In what has been an ***unprecedented*** past 18 months, I am delighted to see so many of our Sixth Formers achieving the qualifications they need to take up places at their first-choice universities.

"We are all incredibly proud of the determination and resilience they have shown to their studies in the face of ongoing obstacles. They are thoroughly deserving of their success.

"I also want to recognise the tireless efforts of the team at United Sixth Form, who have gone above and beyond to ensure all students have the support and guidance they need to reach their goals.

"I am very much looking forward to seeing our Sixth Formers take the next steps in their education and lead what I'm sure will be very bright futures."

2:43pm

Well done to our #SixthForm students who received record-breaking #Alevel results today, we are ***exceptionally*** proud of all our pupils! ‍ An amazing 95% of grades were A\*-C with just under 60% being A or A\*! #achievetheextraordinary @Bournemouthecho #alevelresults2021 pic.twitter.com/bkGtsw41RX

- BCS Senior (@BCS\_Senior) August 10, 2021

2:14pm

Corfe Hills School

Headteacher James Sankey said: "Our students have worked incredibly hard and we are delighted to be celebrating with them today as they receive their A level results.

"They have made the most of a very challenging year and thoroughly deserve their success. We wish them all the best in their future endeavours.

"We are incredibly proud of how they have responded to the many changes and uncertainties that they have faced this year.

"As we celebrate with our students, I also want to thank our dedicated staff team who have gone above and beyond to support our students over the past year."

1:21pm

Bournemouth & Poole College is holding a 'Come to College' event at both its North Road and Lansdowne sites to support students who are receiving their GCSE and A Level results in August.

The events will take place over two days on Thursday, August 12 at 10am-4pm and on Friday August 13 at 10am to 1pm at both sites.

12:59pm

Magna Academy Poole

Principal Ms Natasha Ullah said: "Every year we celebrate the academic success of our students, whatever that represents for each individual. This year we are delighted that our students' abilities and efforts have been recognised and reflected in their results once again.

"The skill and professionalism of our teaching staff combined with robust academy systems means that our students have been awarded fair and realistic grades based upon Teacher Assessed Grades (TAGS).

"Despite the challenges of the pandemic students, staff and families have worked hard together to produce superb outcomes. Our students will now progress onto a range of destinations including university and apprenticeships."

12:55pm

Poole High School

Sian Phillips, deputy headteacher, said: "Massive credit goes to our staff and students who have worked so hard. This year, for our sixth form students it must have felt as if they were asked to start the metaphoric triathlon and ended up having to complete an ultramarathon.

"Huge credit therefore goes to each of them and their families. The fact that more students have gone on to university once again with a further increase going to Russell Group universities is a credit to each and every one of you.

"Some of the most popular degree courses Poole High students have accessed include Psychology, Law, Architecture, Mathematics, Criminology, History, Mechanical Engineering.

"The resilience that has been shown by all students in the last two academic years should give you enormous confidence to embrace future challenges. May the pride of Poole High go with you!"

12:48pm

The Purbeck School

Students receiving at least one A\* or equivalent grade included, Lottie Wilde, Isobel Holmes, Sophie Campbell, Joe Mitchell, Evan Dando, Stacey Cole, Callum Way, George Tubbs, Sam Kaplan, Jude Moar, Ellie Stannard, Carly Burgess, Taylor Churchill, Lucy Ingram, Josh Stukes, Isabella Vallier, Kenndy Yates, Lauren Hales, Gabriel Collington-Mears, Katie Fearless, Lauren Hales, Yasmin Jones, Tom Navin, Jasmine Robertson, Tom Navin, and Lauren Winter.

Headteacher Adam Darley said:"We are so proud of the students. This group of young people have had their sixth form education severely disrupted over the past two academic years.

"We are so pleased that their resilience, character, determination and hard work has been recognised by this fantastic set of results. We wish them all the very best for the future."

Assistant Head and Head of Sixth Form, Debs Rayner, said: "Well done to everyone involved, including the teaching and support staff who have worked tirelessly to support the students.

"It has been a tough 2 years, but throughout, students and staff have remained positive and focussed, it has been a real team effort, and they have been rewarded with these excellent results."

12:43pm

Bournemouth Collegiate School

Bournemouth Collegiate School said students had surpassed all expectations and smashed the previous school record for A level results.

Just under 60% of grades awarded were either an A\* or A grade, with 95% of grades A\*-C.

The two top performers were also the two Heads of School; Molly gaining straight A\*s in Physics, Chemistry and Biology, and Brendan, A\* in Geography and a double-starred distinction in BTEC Sport.

Headmaster, Russell Slatford, said: "We all know first-hand how difficult a time students across the country have had over the last two years, and we should celebrate the successes and achievements of all young people who have received their results today.

"The students at Bournemouth Collegiate School have shown commitment and resilience like no other, and these outstanding results are a true reflection of their extraordinary dedication and admirable abilities.

"The BCS community is immensely proud of them all; our students have shown ***exceptional*** leadership and have undoubtedly made the School a better place. We will miss them, and wish them the very best for the future."

12:27pm

Parkstone Grammar

Headteacher David Hallsworth said: "Huge congratulations must go to all students for their hard work and determination over the last two years.

"We believe in their incredible ability and know that they will go on to achieve many great things as they leave Parkstone and go on to their next opportunities.

"Their outstanding level of achievement has not been possible without the support of the excellent staff team who have worked tirelessly to ensure that unique arrangements for this year's examination year groups were fair and balanced; and compiled with great integrity.

"It would also not have been possible without the continued support of our parents and carers who have understood the immense pressures upon schools and have supported their school community throughout."

12:15pm

Twynham School

Executive Headteacher of Twynham School and The Grange School, Jy Taylor, said: "We are so proud of these young people. We will not be reporting headline figures as this will only feed the media reports of 'grade inflation' and will detract from the true successes of young people, not just at Twynham School, but around the country.

"Our students have worked incredibly hard over the past two years and we are delighted that the vast majority of them have secured results allowing them to progress onto their chosen next steps. If anything, these young people are better prepared than in any other year to make their way in a world full of challenges and hurdles.

"Whilst the national press seems to be focused on comparing results from previous years, what is missed is the positive impact the pandemic has had on these young people. They have studied their courses in a time of incredible adversity; requiring resilience and adaptability to cope with the two national lockdowns as well as a learning experience marked by isolations, social distancing and one-way systems."

Emma Pretty (Fitzwilliam College - Psychology and Behavioural Sciences) and Katy Jewell (Homerton College - Education) have both been accepted into Cambridge and Marty Hardy (Christ Church College - Psychology) has secured a place at Oxford.

Mr Taylor said: "Yet again our students have secured places at some of the most prestigious universities nationally and I am delighted that their efforts have been rewarded.

"It remains the case that degree-level education opens up opportunities that are simply not available to those who do not progress on to higher education and I am delighted that so many of our students have been accepted onto their preferred course. We wish them every success and are proud that they now become Twynham Sixth Form alumni".

11:59am

The Bourne Academy

The Bourne Academy said 36% of students going to University have gained a place at a Russell Group Institution.

Particular mention should go to:

Hayley Mann who achieved 3 A\*'s and an A in her EPQ.  She has secured a place at the University of Southampton to study Philosophy and Politics Haydn Meaden who achieved 3 A\*'s.  He has secured a place at the University of Southampton to study Law Melanie Casagrande Rodrigues Jorge who achieved 3 A\*'s.  She has secured a place at the University of Plymouth to study Biomedical Science Finn Bolton who was successful in gaining the highly sought after Cobham Higher Apprenticeship

Mark Avoth, Principal, said: "This has been an unbelievably tough year for our Year 13's - they have had so much to endure during the pandemic and we just want to say how extremely proud we are of them.

"They have proved themselves to be mature, self-motivated individuals who have worked tirelessly to ensure the best possible future outcomes for themselves.

"Our teachers also deserve huge credit for the enormous amount of work they have put into implementing another new system. My thanks to them for ensuring that our students have the best and fairest outcomes this year."

Mr Dean Taafe, Head of Sixth Form, said: 'I don't think anyone could argue that the experience of the 2021 cohort has been very different from many that have gone before.

"The pandemic has provided a unique set of educational challenges that I wholeheartedly believe our students have risen to, showing a level of maturity, independence and reliance that will stand them in good stead for the future.

They have developed new skills enabling them to adapt to a constantly evolving challenge and I am extremely proud of them all.'

11:51am

Shaftesbury School

The school said that 31% of A levels results were A\* and A grades while 70% of the BTEC grades were Distinction\* and Distinction.

Headteacher, Donna London-Hill said: "We are immensely proud of all the work and achievements of our students, especially after such a difficult and disrupted year.

"Every grade gained today is a result of the hard work of these remarkable young people and the support they have been given by our ***exceptionally*** dedicated team.

"Our teachers and support staff have worked tirelessly to ensure students are all able to progress onto their chosen universities, apprenticeships, employment or for some their gap year and we look forward to seeing what they will achieve in the future."

11:43am

Queen Elizabeth's School

Headteacher, Katie Boyes, said: "We are delighted with every student's achievement.

"The following are just some examples of the fantastic achievements of our students: Adele Morgan Delarboulas achieved 4 A\*'s, Joseph Parnum achieved 3 A\*'s and 1 A.

"Ruth Boyle, Megan Haynes, Victoria King, Matthew Parslow, Flora Snook, Martha Tribe and Annabel Wilcox all achieved 3 A\*'s in their A level courses from the full range of subjects across the school. Jake Draper achieved A\*, A\*, Distinction\* and Chelsea Tucker achieved A\*, A, Distinction\* in their A level and BTEC subjects."

Joe Parnum achieved 3 A\* grades and is going to Sheffield University to study Engineering. He said: "I had hoped for this but wasn't sure I had done so well in Spanish as it's a very difficult subject to practice during lockdown when you are away from school. It's a relief and I'm really looking forward to going to Uni."

Matthew Parslow scored three A\* grades and will be studying English with creative writing at Warwick University. He joked: "It's been a weird couple of years - unusual! But the school has dealt with all the challenges really well, adapting really quickly to home learning and I think it could have all been a lot harder without this."

Jake Draper also achieved a host of stars across his A Levels and plans to study Actuarial Science at Norwich University. He said: "I tried not to worry about my results too much as there was so much change and uncertainly and I felt I'd done ok. It's good to finally get the results though and look forward to Uni."

Dancer Martha Tribe's 3A\* grades are taking her to the prestigious Rambert School of Ballet and Contemporary Dance in London. She said: "I feel a bit overwhelmed to finally know I've done well, but also quite emotional to see all my teachers. I've been at QE since Year 9 and it's been amazing, so I will be very sad to leave."

Chelsea Tucker and Victoria King were celebrating after learning they had secured the grades they need to study Psychology at Bournemouth University.

Chelsea said: "I've done even better than I had hoped and I'm really pleased. I'm going to celebrate with a special lunch with my family."

Victoria added: "I'm thankful to the school for being so supportive. Our teachers were always in touch checking we were ok and thanks to them I don't think we missed out on anything."

Headteacher Katie Boyes continued: "We are immensely proud of all the hard work of our students, especially after such a difficult and disrupted 18 months. Despite this our students have achieved so much.

"Our teachers have worked tirelessly to ensure students are all able to progress onto further education and study, and we look forward to seeing what they will achieve in the future.

"We are thrilled that record numbers of our students have secured places on University courses, higher level apprenticeships and employment."

11:30am

The Burgate School

The Burgate School said its sixth form received results broadly in line with our above national average performance of previous years.

Students are leaving to embark on a wide variety of university courses ranging from Chemistry to Law, Psychology to Sports and Midwifery to Mechanical Engineering. Other students have chosen to enter apprenticeships, join the uniformed services or to take a gap year.

Jed Hayward who received four A\* grades said: "These results make the last seven years of hard work worth it. It's still sinking in! I'm off to Bristol to study Chemistry and can't wait!"

Helen Day who his heading to Exeter University to study Psychology achieved three A\* grades and told us: "I genuinely can't put into words how I feel. I'm completely shocked but ecstatic!"

Rob Pennington who received one A\* and two A grades is joining the Police Force and explained, " I am very happy with my results."

Tilda Kay who achieved an A\* and two A grades is going to Birmingham City University to study Midwifery and told us: "I'm shocked but so happy - I didn't think I would get these grades but am so happy because I worked really hard."

Twin sisters Eloise and Verona McDonald both achieved incredible results with Eloise receiving two A\* grades, one A grade and an A\* in her EPQ and Verona receiving one A\*, two A grades and an A\* in her EPQ also.

Eloise said: " I feel relieved that I got the grades I wanted to be able to study Biochemistry at Lancaster University."

Sister Verona said: "I am thrilled to get into the university of my dreams!"

David Pover, Headteacher said: "These results reflect the hard work, perseverance and, above all, the determination of Burgate students to do their very best.

"I should like to thank all of the staff for the unstinting support and guidance they have given to our students through these trying times."

11:27am

A few pictures from Ringwood School

11:25am

Ringwood School

Ringwood School said more students had applied for university than ever before.

STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) courses continue to be extremely popular. For example, we have students going on to read Medicine at Southampton and Exeter; Mechanical Engineering at Nottingham and Neuroscience at Cardiff.

All students holding Oxbridge offers (also more than ever before) have the required grades to take up these prestigious places next month.

Leanne Symonds, the School's headteacher said: "We are immensely proud of all the work and achievements of our students, especially after such a difficult and disrupted year.

"We credit their resilience in these difficult times and we thank our teachers who have worked tirelessly to ensure students are all able to progress onto higher education and study.

"We look forward to seeing what the Class of 2021 will achieve in the future."

11:20am

Pictures from Sturminster Newton High School

11:17am

Sturminster Newton High School

From all these great achievements particularly notable are Noa Alony Gilboa (A\*,A\*, A\*, a\*), Lawrence Hayward ((A\*,A\*,A\*, a\*), Jamie Glue (A\*,A\*,A, a\*) Beatrice Rocheleau (A\*,A\*,A, a\*) Fred Franklin (A\*, A,A, a\*) Jack Tibbles (A\*,A,B) and Ben Willets (A\*A,B).

SNHS Headteacher Jason Davis said: "We are all immensely proud of our students' achievements this year, following two years of difficulty and disruption to their studies.

"Our students have risen magnificently to the challenge and showed their determination, resilience and sheer bloody minded grit and work ethic in these results.

"Teachers have worked incredibly hard to ensure students achieve their best and progress onto further education, study and careers and I know parents have been working tirelessly to support students through this period.

"Congratulations to everyone for their magnificent achievements and we wish them all the best for the future and greatly look forward to hearing about the marks they will make on the world."

11:15am

St Peter's Catholic School

The school has reported the following achievements by students in their A levels and vocational qualifications:

Mariko Cook, Amelie Grailhe, Sophie Hall, Isabel Khoo, Oliver Lindsey Clark, Robert Maidment, Serena Parker, Lucy Whiting, Sophie Hodgson and Abby Uffindell all achieved A\* or equivalent in all of their subjects. One in four students achieved an average grade of at least an A across all of their subjects. A record number of students from St Peter's have secured places at Russell Group Universities

This year, following the cancellation of exams, grades were awarded through a ***process*** of teacher assessed grades, against a national standard and approved and awarded by the exam boards. The government is not publishing performance data for any schools or colleges this year due to the varying impact of the pandemic.

The school's headteacher, Ben Doyle, said: "We are immensely proud of all the work and achievements of our students, especially considering the disruption they have faced since March 2020.

"It is also important to recognise the diligence and dedication of our teachers and other staff members, they have worked tirelessly to ensure our students have had every opportunity to progress onto their chosen pathways."

11:13am

LeAF Studio

"Many of our students completed formal vocational exams in the January 2021 series, but with the cancellation of summer exams some grades were awarded through a ***process*** of teacher assessed grades, ***measured*** against a national standard and approved and awarded by the exam boards.

"We are delighted that these external quality assurance checks supported all of our teacher assessed grades without any changes being needed. The government is not publishing performance data for any schools or colleges this year due to the varying impact of the pandemic."

Special mention goes to head girl Beth Primmer who achieved a C in A Level Biology and B at A Level Business alongside D\*DD in BTEC Performing Arts Extended Diploma, giving her the equivalent of 5 A Level passes; all of this achieved alongside her training and specialism commitments.

Nadine Lapskas, LeAF Studio Principal, said: "We are immensely proud of all the work and achievements of our students, including those at our partner centres, especially after such a difficult and disrupted two years.

"Our teachers and coaches have worked tirelessly and with incredible dedication to ensure students are all able to progress onto further education and study, and we look forward to seeing what they will achieve in the future both in their specialisms and beyond."

10:58am

Prime Minister Boris Johnson congratulated students receiving their A-level results after what he called an "extremely challenging" year.

Congratulations to everyone receiving their A-level results today.

It's been an extremely challenging year and you should all be very proud of what you've achieved.

And as you move to this exciting next stage, make sure you remember to get your jab. pic.twitter.com/ZwVsj4qJbr

- Boris Johnson (@BorisJohnson) August 10, 2021

In a video on Twitter, he added: "Congratulations to everybody getting their A-level results today.

"I know it's been a particularly difficult year for everybody doing A-levels because of the pandemic and the conditions in which you've been working, but thank you for persevering, thank you for getting on with, obviously thank you also to your amazing teachers.

"I hope you've done well. If you haven't got exactly the results that you were wanting, never mind, it happens to the best of us and there are plenty of options available through Ucas.

"If you have done well, which I'm sure you have, then well done and good luck with your next big moves.

"Can I suggest that one of them should be straight away, if you hadn't yet done it, to get a vaccination, get a jab."

10:52am

Most schools in the BCP Council area have offered opportunities for students to collect results in person or to have a 1:1 support meeting to discuss future options.

There are also organisations including National Careers Service  who offer support online and by telephone: 0800 100 900. In our region, Flying Start Dorset  provide guidance and support. Post 16 Guidance for students is here

10:49am

Whatever your results, if you want to find out more and get help to explore your choices visit: [*https://nationalcareers.service.gov.uk/exam-results*](https://nationalcareers.service.gov.uk/exam-results)

You can also speak to a professional careers adviser for free and impartial information and advice via the webchat, or by calling the National Careers Service exam results helpline on 0800 100 900, open weekdays 8am-8pm Sat 10am-5pm.

10:46am

Bournemouth School

Overall, 52% of the grades awarded were A\* or A, with 93% A\*-C. The average points score per entry was 44.2 (compared to 42.4, 40.4 and 36.6 in 2019, 2018 and 2017, respectively).

Two students, James Carter and Robbie Pritchard, attained 4A\* grades, with a fifth of the cohort attaining the equivalent, in terms of A level points, of 3A\*s.

Shay Dhrona, Joseph Jackson and Conrad Yeung also achieved a "clean sweep" of A\* grades in all of the subjects that they were studying.

Thomas Ansell (A\*A\*A) and Maximilian Miramon (A\*A\*A\*A) leave the school to read law at Oxford and Cambridge respectively.

Ten students have secured places to study medicine or dentistry.

This year, following the cancellation of exams, grades were awarded through a ***process*** of teacher-assessed grades, against a national standard and approved and awarded by the examination boards.

Students sat formal examinations towards the end of Year 13, which were marked and moderated by teachers to form the mainstay of the evidence upon which the grades awarded were based.

Dr Dorian Lewis, the school's headteacher said: "We are immensely proud of all the work and achievements of our students, especially after such a difficult and disrupted year.

"Our teachers have worked tirelessly to ensure students that the teacher assessed grades were determined in a fair and objective manner, using all of the evidence at our disposal.

"These outstanding results will enable the majority of our students to progress to further education and study; we look forward to seeing what they will achieve in the future."

10:24am

Michael Antram, headteacher of St Edwards School, said: "I'm sure that all Headteachers will want to pay tribute to the teachers and subject leaders who have worked tirelessly to ensure that unique arrangements for this year's examination year groups were fair and balanced and compiled with great integrity.

"Also, the students of Year 13 who having had a significantly disrupted Key Stage 5, have worked hard to provide their teachers with assessment pieces that enable teachers to form a view about their progress in learning, and likely achievement. We also want to thank parents and carers, who have understood the immense pressures upon schools, and have supported their school community throughout."

10:19am

Sarah Rempel, director of education at BCP Council said: "I would like to reassure all students receiving their results today that council teams, schools and the College have support teams ready to help you make your next choices. We wish you the very best of luck.

"I would also like to thank my colleagues in secondary schools, colleges and providers who have worked hard to accurately assess the achievement of our students."

10:18am

Councillor Nicola Greene, portfolio holder for education at BCP Council, said:  "I would like to congratulate all pupils in the BCP Council area on their A Level, BTEC & Level 3 Apprenticeships this year.

"We are aware of how hard Year 13 have worked in challenging circumstances for them and their school or college.

"We are very proud of you and what you have achieved.

"We would like to thank teachers and school and college leaders, who worked very hard to assess your work fairly in all subjects, whilst looking after many vulnerable young people on site and at home".

10:17am

Some pictures from Ferndown School

Stasia Smith, Emma Tompkins and Mackenzie Foose

Ethan Grifin

Jenna Seton

10:13am

Ferndown School

"After receiving the highest Sixth Form results in Dorset for the last couple of years of official exams, we were delighted to see that this standard has been maintained and our students have achieved another excellent set of results in our own internal examinations."

The school is very pleased with the results for its STEM subjects, particularly Further Mathematics where 100% of students achieved the highest grades of A\* and A, and in Maths where 50% of the students achieved the highest of grades. The other STEM subjects of Physics, Biology and Chemistry also had over 50% of their students achieving A\* or A grades. The Creative Arts results were again superb, with the highlight being 2/3's of the Fine Art students receiving an A\* or A. Other standout subjects were Spanish, English Literature, Childcare, Geography, Photography, Ethics and History where 2/3's of the students received grades A\* to B. Our vocational subjects of Media, IT and Sport also performed extremely highly.

Headteacher Philip Jones said: "I would like to take this opportunity to thank both the students and their teachers for all of their hard work and dedication. This has been a very challenging year for the students and they have responded brilliantly".

Top Achievers included:

Edward May: 3 A\*s

Jonathan Moore: A\* and 2 A's

Ellis Elrick: A\*, A and a Distinction \*

Harry Howard: A\*, Distinction \* and a Distinction

Jamie Lee Scotton: D\*, A\*, A

Jenna Seaton, Honey Andrews and Stephen Booth: 2 A's and a Distinction \*

Jack Sandison and Emma Thompkins: 3 A's

Grace Barnett, Ethan Griffin, Matilda Lawton and Alina Keyms-Burgess: A\*, A & B

10:11am

Some pictures from The Arnewood School

(l-r) Sarah Dew (A\*A\*A), Amiee Waters (AAA) and Ruby Watts (A\*A\*A\*) who are all going to university to study law

Maths students (l-r) Maddie Gwilliam, Sam Fulton, Ben Pang, Kit Narito and Matilda Gleave

Politics students (l-r) Matilda Gleave, Sam Fulton, Justin Benoit-Means and Ruby Watts

10:08am

Arnewood School

There were some stand-out performers including Kit Narito who received three A\* grades and is to study Chemical Engineering at the University of Southampton.

Maddie Gwilliam (A\*AA) is off to Newcastle to read Maths and Finance and Matilda Gleave (A\*A\*A\*) will read Modern Languages at Warwick University.

Other students will go onto study law, politics, history and chemistry at universities around the country.

Nigel Pressnell, headteacher, said: "Despite all the difficulties of the past 17 months students have thrown themselves into their A Level studies and reaped the reward of their hard work.

"Centre-based assessment has given students an opportunity to demonstrate their best and many have flourished despite the multiple deadlines and the constant disruption of lockdowns.

"The ***process*** of awarding grades in schools is robust without disadvantaging students for what they could not learn whiles schools were closed.

"I am grateful to our teachers who took on the additional workload and responsibly of assessment to create a fairer and more reliable system than the flawed algorithm applied before last minute changes last year.

"Our results continue to match the high standards of previous years, and I congratulate all of the students in our outstanding sixth form for continuing  the high standard of academic excellence."

9:55am

A few A Level related stories courtesy of our colleagues at UK Today

The top 20 university degrees most likely to get you a job revealed by experts 'I wasn't disappointed' - reaction to Jeremy Clarkson's annual A-Level results tweet Universities not offering face-to-face teaching should scrap full fees, says Gavin Williamson A-Level results day: 5 options to consider if your grades aren't what you wanted

9:20am

Highcliffe School

Headteacher Patrick Earnshaw said: "Highcliffe Sixth Form students today received the best A Level and BTEC results so far achieved at our school; the result of hard work and talent.

"Congratulations to our Year 13 students on your excellent results, earned by your hard work and determination to succeed during a prolonged and ***unprecedented*** period of intense disruption to your education.

"Thank you to our teachers and support staff for your dedication and diligence maintaining the high quality education which Highcliffe Sixth students benefit from and thank you to our parents for your unwavering support and encouragement, throughout the same period.

"I am confident our Year 13 students will now go on to use their education to improve their own lives and the lives of those around them."

9:11am

Lots of happy faces here at BSG! @Bournemouthecho @0to19BCPSchools pic.twitter.com/tdxlZkmYdi

- BSG (@BSGupdate) August 10, 2021

8:47am

Brockenhurst College principal Polly Perkins CBE said: "It has been another tough year for students, who have done their level best to develop the knowledge and skills they need for the future in extremely testing circumstances.

"Today I am confident each Brockenhurst College student has received the grades they deserved and has used the adverse circumstances as an opportunity to build the digital skills and resilience necessary to continue achieving in this rapidly changing world.

"I wish them all well as they leave us to accept new opportunities and ultimately achieve their goals."

8:46am

Brockenhurst College

More than 500 A Level students at Brockenhurst College received their results today with the overall pass rate at 99 per cent.

The percentage of students achieving A\*-B grades was 56 per cent, with over 78 per cent achieving A\*-C grades across all their subjects.

More than two thirds of students in 13 A Level subjects achieved A\*-B grades.

Students who joined Brock with an average of grade 6 or above at GCSE achieved a 99.8 per cent overall pass rate, with 74.5 per cent achieving A\*-B grades and 90.5 per cent A\*-C grades.

One hundred per cent pass rates were achieved in 25 A Level subjects.

The College was also celebrating the success of Vocational course students who collectively achieved an incredible 99.8 per cent pass rate across a cohort of nearly 450 learners.

On Vocational Level 3 courses 63 per cent of students achieved a triple Distinction or above, the equivalent of achieving three A/A\* grades at A Level.

In Level 3 Sport and Exercise Science, 92 per cent of students achieved a triple Distinction or above, with 64 per cent achieving D\*D\*D\*, the highest possible grade.

Twenty students (65 per cent) studying Level 3 Health and Social care achieved D\*D\*D\*.

Meanwhile 88 per cent of Level 3 Media students achieved triple Distinction or above.

8:41am

After the most challenging years in educational history, our resilient, determined pupils have achieved an incredible set of results and we could not be prouder. Congratulations to you all. #Alevels2021 #Alevels #talbotheathschool @Bournemouthecho pic.twitter.com/UlYXZDcKLs

- Talbot Heath School (@TalbotHeathSch) August 10, 2021

8:20am

Good luck if you're one of the over 540,000 people collecting your results today!

We've answered some of the most frequently asked questions about results day:[*https://t.co/JQWRUT7L04#Alevels2021*](https://t.co/JQWRUT7L04#Alevels2021) #ResultsDay2021 pic.twitter.com/qsqWHUhNEl

- Department for Education (@educationgovuk) August 10, 2021

8:17am

Good luck to everyone receiving examination results today. It has been a very tough 18 months and you all have so much to be proud of. @Bournemouthecho

- Russell Slatford (@SlatfordRussell) August 10, 2021

8:07am

In England, ministers hope that exams will go ahead in summer 2022 after two years of cancelled exams.

But pupils taking GCSE and A-level exams next year could be given advance notice on the focus of exam papers to ensure they are not disadvantaged as a result of lost learning during the pandemic.

The proposals include giving schools and colleges some choice over the topics that students are assessed on, as well as providing exam aids, but final details will not be confirmed until the autumn term.

7:53am

Last summer, the fiasco around grading led to thousands of A-level students having their results downgraded from school estimates by a controversial algorithm, before Ofqual announced a U-turn.

But this year, no algorithm will be used to moderate teachers' grades.

7:50am

Teachers in England have been required to consider a range of evidence, including mock exams, coursework, and in-class assessments using questions by exam boards, to make decisions on pupils' grades.

Headteachers had to submit a personal declaration that they believed grades to be accurate.

Schools and colleges were asked to provide samples of student work to exam boards, as well as evidence used to determine the grades for the students selected, as part of quality assurance (QA) checks.

Random and targeted sample checks of evidence were also carried out after grades were submitted.

7:50am

Students will be given grades determined by teachers, rather than exams, with pupils only assessed on what they have been taught during the pandemic.

7:49am

Good morning everyone! We hope you are well.

Hundreds of students will be collecting their A Level results across Dorset and the New Forest today.

We wish them lots of luck.

We'll be bringing you results from schools and pictures throughout the day.

**Load-Date:** August 10, 2021

**End of Document**



[***Nigeria Monthly Briefing March 2022***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:656H-D5G1-DYRW-V4K4-00000-00&context=1516831)

ARC Briefing Nigeria

March 2022

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**Length:** 5459 words

**Body**

**ABSTRACT**

***Nigeria struggles to take advantage of soaring oil prices following Russia's invasion of Ukraine and faces growing food insecurity. President Muhammadu Buhari (2015-present) signs into law the Electoral Reform Act. Nigeria's major opposition party, the People's Democratic Party (PDP), announces party primaries will be held in May to elect state, national and governorship candidates. Senate approves the Money Laundering Prevention and Prohibition Act 2022. United Kingdom (UK)-based news agency Bloomberg reports that presidential candidate Bola Tinubu is seeking to settle a dispute out of court. The Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) Monetary Policy Committee retains the monetary policy rate at 11.5% and reports a rise in inflation driven by higher energy and fuel costs. Nigeria experiences two nationwide grid collapses. Nigeria National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) managing director Mele Kyari grants fuel import licences to aviation firms in a bid to ease the fuel shortages. Nigeria secures a $1.25 billion debt, to be repaid over a seven-year period at a yield of 8.375% in a dollar bond issue. International oil majors Shell Plc and Eni SpA declare force majeure on pipelines and production in Bayelsa State. The National Oil Spills Detection and Response Agency (NOSDRA) determines that two pipeline explosions were likely acts of vandalism and theft. Petroleum minister Timipre Sylva confirms that Nigeria is incapable of meeting its Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) quotas, due to a lack of investment in the oil and gas sector. UK-based medical journal The Lancet's Nigeria commission publishes a report calling for the removal of fuel subsidies and extension of healthcare insurance to Nigeria's poorest 83 million. New case numbers of Covid-19 remain low following Nigeria's fourth wave driven by the Omicron variant***.

**FULL TEXT**

**Ukraine conflict threatens food security**

**Nigeria**, along with 140 other **United Nations** member states, voted on 2 March in favour of the **UN General Assembly (UNGA)** resolution to condemn **Russia'**s ***invasion*** of **Ukraine** on 24 February.[[131]](#footnote-132)1 While Nigeria's condemnation of Russia's actions are unlikely to sour its intermittent diplomatic relations with Russia, the conflict and global economic fallout resulting from sanctions levied against Russia may create food security challenges and slow Nigeria's economic recovery from the **Covid-19** pandemic. The last known engagement between President **Muhammadu Buhari** (2015-present) and Russia's President **Vladimir Putin** (2000-2008; 2012-present) was at the **Russia-Africa** summit in **Sochi** (Russia) in October 2019.2 The **United Kingdom (UK)**-based **Carnegie Endowment for International Peace** referenced Nigeria's history of non-alignment in a recent paper explaining Nigeria's ambivalence, and resistance, to Russia's vaccine diplomacy efforts in 2020-2021.3

**Dangote Group** chairman and founder **Aliko Dangote** has cautioned that the Russia-Ukraine conflict is likely to result in a food crisis within the next three months.4 While addressing the congregation of the **Annual Nigerian Food Processors and Nutrition Leadership Forum** on 11 March, Dangote advised the government to immediately halt maize exports from Nigeria.5 Dangote noted that the price of fertiliser, wheat, maize and other products had already begun to climb.6 Nigeria imports a greater value of goods and services than it exports to Russia (see table below) and total exports to Russia accounted for only 0.068% of Nigeria's annual exports in 2019.7

| **Nigeria's Russian import/exports 2017-20208** | | |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Year** | **Value of Imports** | **Value of Exports** |
| 2017 | $683.5m | $15.8m |
| 2018 | $1.01 billion | $5.8 billion |
| 2019 | $740m | $4.05m |
| 2020 | $1.24 billion | $2.36m |

The Nigerian government has undertaken several economic programmes to support ***agricultural*** exports and boost foreign exchange earnings during a sustained period of low-oil price. However, Dangote claims this practice risks the country's food security:

"*Right now, you start seeing people exporting maize to earn foreign exchange, which I think we need to stop, so that we don't create shortage; and we need to make sure we grow more so we don't have a shortage."*9

The UN **World Food Programme (WFP)** reports that 8.7 million Nigerians are classed as 'food insecure' following sustained insurgencies and insecurity in **Northeast Nigeria**.10 In **Borno, Yobe** and **Adamawa States**, 4.4 million Nigerians are reliant upon food assistance and 320,000 children suffer from acute malnutrition in the region.11

Although the Russia-Ukraine conflict has driven international fuel prices higher, Nigeria as a petroleum exporting country has struggled to take advantage of this (see below).

**President Buhari signs electoral reform law ...**

President Buhari has signed into law the long-debated **Electoral Amendment Act 2021**.12 The legislation aims to enable Nigeria's political parties to police their candidates, limiting floor crossing and 'free movement' between parties. State governors are notorious for defecting or switching allegiance in the weeks leading up to gubernatorial elections. The bill was drafted in 2010 and was almost completed in time for Buhari's second presidential election in 2019 but ultimately declared too late to implement ahead of the elections viewed to be marred by voter intimidation.13

Buhari demonstrated historic reluctance to sign the law. The **National Assembly** passed the bill on 9 November and the **Senate** gave its assent on 10 November, presenting Buhari with a deadline of 19 December to sign the bill into law (see *ARC Briefing Nigeria Dec 2021*).14 Buhari failed to review and sign the bill within the legally mandated 30-day period in December but said he would assent to the bill if lawmakers provided options for the conduct of party primaries, a key sticking point.15 ,16 The Senate passed a version of the bill on 19 January that amended clause 84 and removed the requirement for each party to host primary elections (see *ARC Briefing Nigeria Jan 2022*). A harmonised version of the bill was passed by both the Senate and **House of Representatives** on 25 January.17 Buhari signed the electoral law on 25 February, describing its contents as:

"*salient and praiseworthy provisions that could positively revolutionise elections in Nigeria through the introduction of new technological innovations"*.18

Civil society organisations (CSOs) have broadly praised the new electoral law, which enacts safeguards for transparent voting using electronic voting and transmission of results.19 However, lawmakers strongly debated the use of electronic voting methods, arguing that poor telecommunications infrastructure in parts of Nigeria, including states where media blackouts have been leveraged as a tool to control criminality and security threats, may hinder voter participation.20

Enactment of the law has cleared the way for Nigeria's political parties to begin planning their national conventions and party primaries. The new electoral rules take immediate effect and will be tested during the governor elections in **Osun State** and **Ekiti State** in July.21 With less than 12 months before the presidential election, prospective candidates must now win party support to secure a ticket in the race.

Nigeria's largest opposition party, the **People's Democratic Party (PDP)**, launched its primaries on 17 March with the sale of nomination forms.22 The party will elect its candidates for state and national assemblies on 7 May and 12 May and candidates for governor positions will be nominated on 21 May ahead of the party's national convention 28-29 May.23

**United Kingdom (UK)**-based news agency **Reuters** reported on 23 February that Nigerian lawmakers were drafting plans to amend the constitution to compel new presidents to name a cabinet within a month of securing office. Calls for constitutional adjustments are allegedly motivated by Buhari's poor track record in appointing a cabinet. Buhari took six months to select his first cabinet in 201524 and five months to appoint a cabinet at the beginning of his second term in office in 2019, creating policy deadlock in both cases. However, any proposals to amend Nigeria's constitution are likely to draw strong criticism as Buhari approaches the end of his constitutionally limited presidential term.

**... as Senate approves bill amending money laundering rules**

Nigeria's Senate approved a bill amending money laundering regulations on 16 March.25 The **Money Laundering Prevention and Prohibition Act 2022** will now be put to the lower house of representatives for approval. If the lower house approves the bill, President Buhari will sign it into law.26

The new act requires banks and other financial institutions to report single transactions exceeding $12,035 made by individuals and $24,070 made by corporations. Transactions will be subject to review by a panel of the **Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC)**.27**Kaduna North** senator and chairman of the committee on anti-corruption and financial crimes **Suleiman Abdu Kwari** confirmed that the bill would resolve institutional issues preventing the establishment of the **Special Control Unit against Money Laundering** under the ministry of trade and investment, an EFCC initiative.28

Money laundering offences will be punishable by jail terms of two to five years and fines of up to N'50m ($121,654) for non-compliant corporations.29 The new act emphasises the role of banks and financial institutions in identifying and assessing potential money laundering practices and terrorism financing.30

**Bola Tinubu seeks to settle out of court...**

Presidential candidate and former **Lagos State** governor **Bola Tinubu** is reportedly seeking to settle out of court a dispute in which he is accused of secretly controlling a private company to collect taxes in Lagos State.31**Alpha Beta Consulting LLP (ABC LLP)** founder and accountant **Oladapo Apara** accused the former governor of concealing control of the limited liability partnership in a lawsuit filed in June 2021.32 ABC LLP was awarded a contract to collect taxes in the city of **Lagos** in the early 2000s when Tinubu was governor.33 Apara alleges that Tinubu instructed him to transfer 70% of ABC LLP's shares to two individuals of Tinubu's choosing, as a pre-condition to granting the project.34

ABC continues to hold a contract with Lagos State and acts as the state's tax collector.35 During ABC's tenure, state revenue has climbed from N'10 billion ($24.01 m) in 2002 to N'300 billion ($720.59 m) in 2019.36 ABC LLP is entitled to a 10% commission on the sum it collects on behalf of the state.37

A hearing is scheduled to be held on 24 March. UK-based news agency **Bloomberg** reports that both ABC LLP and Tinubu are currently pursuing an out-of-court resolution and settlement.

**Monetary Policy Committee maintains rate as inflation rises...**

The **Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) Monetary Policy Committee (MPC)** voted on 21 March to retain the monetary policy rate (MPR) at 11.5%, marking the ninth consecutive hold of the MPR.38 CBN governor **Godwin Emefiele** justified the decision to maintain the benchmark rate, citing the need to boost growth and tackle gasoline shortages and power failures (see below) in combination with rising inflation:

"*Tightening [the rate] could adversely impact the fragile recovery of output growth and may stiffen the expected investment expansion."*39

The vote, held at the 141st MPC meeting, was not unanimous, with three members voting to raise the MPR by 0.25% and one member in favour of a 0.5% rise.40 The press communique released after the meeting acknowledged

"*environments of heightened geopolitical tensions and persisting macroeconomic uncertainties associated with the Russia-Ukraine crisis and lingering Covid-19 pandemic"*.41

The **National Bureau of Statistics (NBS)** reported year-on-year inflation in February to be 15.70%, in its **Consumer Price Index (CPI)** published on 14 March, a slowdown from 17.33% in February 2021.42 Despite a year-on-year decline, inflation rose by 0.16% from January 2022.43 The rate of inflation in Nigeria has now exceeded the CBN's target band of 9% for six years.44

Nigeria's rising inflation rate is attributed to an increase in the price of goods and services, linked to fuel scarcity that began in February (see *ARC Briefing Nigeria Feb 2022*).45 Core inflation reached its highest in four years at 14.01%.46 The highest increases were found in gas, liquid and solid fuels, alcohol products and clothing services.47

***1 - Extract NBS CPI report February 2022***

In a positive development, food price inflation declined for the first time since September 2020, from 17.13% in January to 17.11% in February.48 Year-on-year food inflation was highest in **Kogi State** (21.04%), **Enugu State** (20.31%) and **Kwara State** (20.03%) and lowest in **Sokoto State** (13.89%), **Anambra State** (14.18%) and **Bauchi State** (14.43%).49

In the MPC report, Emefiele acknowledged a decrease in economic growth linked to rising energy prices in the domestic economy and the persistence of legacy security and infrastructural problems.50 Nigerians' purchasing power has been steadily eroded by an increase in the price of goods and services.51 Without adequate intervention by Nigeria's energy suppliers, the cost of living is likely to continue to rise, pinching households, which have not experienced growth in GDP per capita since 2014.52

**... and fuel scarcity and blackouts hit households and manufacturers**

Nigeria experienced its second nationwide grid collapse of 2022 on 14 March after 11 distribution companies (DisCos) were cut off from the national transmission network.53 Power was restored later the same day54 but **Ibadan Electric Distribution Company (IBEDC)** announced on social media platform **Twitter** a third outage on 15 March.55 The national grid has collapsed three times in the first three months of 2022, rivalling the four national blackouts in all of 2021.56 In February 2021, the World Bank estimated that Nigeria's poor power network resulted in economic losses of $26.2 billion (2% of GDP) each year.57

Bloomberg reports that many of Nigeria's power generation companies currently struggle to distribute energy through the country's poor transmission infrastructure. Indeed, 85 million members of Nigeria's population of 200 million do not have reliable access to electricity from the national grid.58

In response to the national outage, energy minister **Abubakar Aliyu** called a stakeholder meeting on 14 March, attended by members of the **Nigeria Electricity Supply Industry (NESI)**, including power generation companies, the **Transmission Company of Nigeria (TCN)**, **Nigerian Bulk Electricity Trading (NBET)**, **Niger Delta Power Holding Company (NDPHC)**, **Nigeria National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC)** and **Shell** to brainstorm solutions to Nigeria's "*perennial power crisis."*59

In February 2021, the World Bank approved a $500m loan to support the development of a metering programme designed to improve the performance of DisCos; however, the national transmission network has failed to keep up with privately-owned power generators.60**Association of Power Generation Companies (APGC)** executive secretary **Joy Ogaji** reported on 13 March that power generators have lost $4.1 billion since 2015, unable to distribute their "*stranded capacity"*.

While the federal government privatised energy generation and distribution in 2013, Nigeria's transmission network and NBET remain under state ownership. In March 2021, Nigeria's privatisation agency, the **National Council on Privatisation**, announced plans to unbundle and sell parts of the TCN network.61 However, until these plans progress, Nigerian power producers remain tied to a sub-standard transmission network. Equally, Nigeria's current fuel shortages, which began in February (see *ARC Briefing Nigeria Feb 2022*), are compounded as Nigerian energy consumers remain reliant on diesel and gasoline run generators as an alternative to the national grid. The price of gasoline has doubled in March, rising to $1.92 per litre.62

Although Nigeria has one of the lowest diesel prices in Africa, the **Manufacturers Association of Nigeria (MAN)** reports that power consumption accounts for up to 40% of manufacturers costs. MAN director-general **Segun Ajayi-Kadir**, speaking to Lagos-based **TVC News** on 15 March, noted that a 100% rise in fuel costs would translate to job losses, reduction of producing hours and higher consumer prices.63

NNPC managing director **Mele Kyari** announced on 15 March that aviation companies would be granted import licences to secure aviation fuel in a bid to ease the fuel shortages. Domestic airlines cautioned on 9 March that flights may be disrupted due to a scarcity of aviation fuel, with **Air Peace, Dana Air** and **Ibom Air** issuing notices on their websites and social media.64

**Nigeria manages another dollar bond sale**

Nigeria surprised emerging market economists, tapping into $1.25 billion on the Eurobond market on 16 March. Both Nigeria and **Turkey** issued dollar bonds, despite 'junk ratings' of B+ and B- assigned by **United States (US)**-based sovereign ratings agency **S&P Global**. Nigeria's $1.25 billion debt is to be repaid over a seven-year period at a yield of 8.375%.65 Initial guidance for Nigeria's bonds was 37.5 basis points higher than the settling price and had a premium 55 basis points higher than the dollar bond issued by Nigeria in 2021, which currently trades at a 7.8% yield.

The timing of Nigeria's bond issue has puzzled analysts, including **Bank of America** sub-**Saharan** economist **Tatonga Rusike**, who anticipated that Nigeria would issue in the second half of 2022, to take advantage of the windfall of higher oil prices. Rusike noted that despite high oil prices, the Nigerian government continues to operate in significant budget deficit, due in part to the rising cost of fuel subsidies, which were extended by 18 months in January (see *ARC Briefing Nigeria Jan 2022*).66**Debt Management Office (DMO)** director-general **Patience Ohiha** confirmed that the issuance was part of the federal government's plan to borrow $6.1 billion to plug the budget deficit.67 The **International Monetary Fund (IMF)** predicted in an Article IV consultation delivered on 7 February that the general government deficit would expand to 5.9% of GDP due to the continuation of fuel subsidies and high security costs.68 The IMF also forecast that the overall balance of consolidated government operations could reach -6.4% of GDP in 2022.69 A budget deficit of 6.4% of GDP is significantly higher than Nigeria's pre-pandemic average of 4.3%.

**Shell and ENI declare force majeure on Nigerian oil flows**

A declaration of force majeure by international oil majors UK-headquartered **Shell Plc** and **Italyh**-eadquartered **ENI SpA** has temporarily caused a sharp decline in Nigeria's oil export opportunities. The two oil majors declared *force majeure* on operations in Nigeria following an explosion on 28 February which disrupted the **Ogoda/Brass 24** pipeline in **Bayelsa State**, temporarily halting exports of key oil flows planned at a rate of 170,000 barrels per day (bpd) in March.70 The **National Oil Spills Detection and Response Agency (NOSDRA)** later confirmed that the incident was an act of vandalism and resembled an explosion on the same pipeline in November 2020. In November 2021, Bayelsa residents struggled with a pipeline leak that lasted 32 days at **Oil Mining Lease (OML) 29** in **Nembe** (see *ARC Briefing Nigeria Nov 2021*).71

Eni subsidiary **Nigerian Agip Oil Company (NAOC)** reported several explosions, the first of which occurred on 28 February at the **Obama** flow station, causing an oil leak and 5,000 bpd drop in production.72 NAOC confirmed that it had shut down wells connected to the leak and deployed containment barges and booms to limit the environmental impact of the leak.73 Nigerian media agencies reported that a further explosion occurred at NAOC's **Nembe** facility on the weekend of 12-13 March, leading to a larger spill and cutting oil exports from the Brass Export terminal by 25,000 bpd.74

NOSDRA deployed investigators to the two incidents.75 NOSDRA director **Idris Musa** confirmed that the two incidents were caused by vandalism.76 Musa also confirmed that 20 barrels of oil were spilled in the incident on 28 February, and 1,250 in the second explosion.77

Shell declared force majeure on the **Bonny Light Oil Export Program** on 3 March; two days later, Eni announced ***measures*** on the **Brass River Crude Oil Export Program**.78 Force majeure refers to a clause which, when triggered, removes the liability of the participants who in the event of natural or unavoidable catastrophes are unable to fulfil their contractual obligations.79 The declaration made by Shell and Eni brought to a halt the export of 170,000 bpd; however, stored cargoes continued to be shipped. Nigeria's total exports per day were targeted at 1.5 million bpd in March, according to loading plans seen by Bloomberg.80

Eni conducted repairs and lifted force majeure ***measures*** on 19 March, more than two weeks after the first explosion disrupted the flow of oil. As of 22 March, Shell has yet to confirm the progress of repairs and whether it will lift restrictions on the pipeline.

The incident highlights two problems facing the Nigerian state. Firstly, a rise in oil theft, vandalism and crime in the **Niger Delta**, reported by **Nigerian Upstream Petroleum Regulatory Commission (NUPRC)** chief executive **Gbenga Komolafe** to cause $4 billion in losses (150,000 bpd).81 Bayelsa state governor **Nyesom Wike** has declared war on oil theft and lost government revenue, noting that the rising oil price was mirrored by a rise in theft. Wike accused President Buhari's government of complicity and failure to prevent oil theft.82 Wike's speech highlighted the role of joblessness and the Buhari administration's decision to remove demilitarisation stipends previously received by Niger Delta militants:

"*Even if there's a lack of jobs because of the economic policies of the ruling party, should I allow crime to take place? No, certainly not."*83

Low or disrupted oil exports pose an existential threat to the federal government, which remains reliant on oil exports for Nigeria's foreign exchange earnings and revenue. Nigeria's oil production fell to 1.5 million barrels in December, a decline in production from 1.7 million barrels earlier in the year.84 Petroleum minister **Timipre Sylva** confirmed on 10 March at a ministerial plenary hosted in **Houston, Texas** (US) that Nigeria is currently incapable of meeting its **Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC)** quotas due to a lack of investment in the oil and gas sector.85 Nigeria's OPEC quota is 1.8 million bpd and its capacity is widely reported to be 2.5 million bpd.86 However, national production has struggled to exceed 1.7 million bpd since 2021.

Currently, the federal government controls most of the revenue generated through tax; however, several states launched a legal challenge against the federal government in late 2021, arguing that state governments should have powers to collect VAT (see *ARC Briefing Nigeria Oct 2021*). If the federal government wishes to maintain control of its purse strings, it must make a concerted effort to take advantage of the high oil price and use its earnings to address social inequality and unemployment driving oil theft.

**Lancet commission calls for healthcare reform**

UK-based medical journal **The Lancet'**s Nigeria commission published a report on 16 March calling for greater investment in healthcare to "*redefine the relationship between citizen and state"*.87 The report, titled *"Investing in Health and the Future of the Nation"*, advocates for the removal of costly fuel subsidies and redeployment of an estimated $3.6 billion currently funding subsidies to provide Nigeria's poorest 83 million with healthcare insurance.88

UK-based newspaper **The Financial Times**, commenting on the Lancet report, suggests that Nigeria's "*high burden of disease"* hampers its economic and social development.89 According to **University College of London (UCL)** dean and chair of the Lancet commission, **Ibrahim Abubakar**,

"*There's no shortage of areas where Nigeria is [medically] the worst in the world."*90

One of the major barriers to healthcare development in Nigeria is identified by the report as the absence of nationally or federally managed healthcare records system, making it "*impossible to take rational decisions about healthcare priorities"*.91 The Lancet report advocates that Nigeria adopt a digitalised system for medical records.92 Whilst Nigeria has digitised national corporate records,93 most of Nigeria's 36 states, operate a paper-based system for medical records.94

The report also calls for the Nigerian government to refocus its efforts from primary 'curative care' to preventative care, including improvements to sanitation, clean water and air pollution. Deputypresident **Yemi Osinbajo**, chair of the committee of health reforms, acknowledged the report and committed to considering the report recommendations.95

**Covid-19 cases stay low**

New cases of Covid-19 remain low in Nigeria, following a fourth wave of Covid-19 infections that peaked after the festive Christmas and New Year celebrations in December. The **Omicron** variant of Covid-19 first detected in Nigeria on 1 December was widely blamed for the sudden rise in infections.96 The fourth wave of infections has, thus far, seen a much lower death toll (see below).

**2 - *World Health Organisation data, 22 Mar 2022***

On 21 March, the **Nigeria National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC)** reported 87 new cases of Covid-19, 34 of which were recorded in Lagos State followed by 23 in **Rivers State**, four in **Osun State**, three in **Kano State** and two in **Kaduna State**.97 Since the **World Health Organisation (WHO)** declared the pandemic on 11 March 2020, Nigeria has recorded 255,190 cases in its population of 211.4 million, with 3,142 deaths attributed to Covid-19.98

To date, Nigerian health authorities have administered 29.6 million doses of Covid-19 vaccine, with 9 million (4.37%) fully vaccinated and 19.8 million individuals (9.65% of the population) having received only a first dose of the vaccine.99

As of 22 March, requirements for fully vaccinated international travellers arriving in Nigeria remain in place, including:100

\* Presentation of a negative polymerase chain reaction (PCR) test prior to departure from their country of origin, and;

\* Submission to a day-2 test following arrival in Nigeria.101

Partially vaccinated passengers are required to self-isolate for seven days and 'test to release' using a day-7 post-arrival PCR test.102

Phase four regulations easing lockdown have been in place since 11 May 2021 and include:

\* Nationwide curfew from 12am to 4am;

\* Restrictions on mass gatherings outside the workplace to no more than 50 persons;

\* Mandatory use of non-medical facemasks in public spaces.

**Planner**

2023 **(Nigeria)** Presidential elections;

**Chronology**

20 Mar 2022 **Abuja (Nigeria)***Reuters*. **Italy**-based energy group **Eni** says it has lifted a force majeure on exports of **Nigerian Brass River** crude oil after it finished repairing a pipeline that had been damaged by a blast;

17 Mar 2022 **Abuja (Nigeria)***Bloomberg*. A person with knowledge of the matter says **Nigeria** plans to raise as much as $1.5 billion in overseas debt, becoming one of the first sovereigns to return to the **Eurobond** market since the start of **Russia'**s ***invasion*** of **Ukraine;**

17 Mar 2022 **Abuja (Nigeria)***Bloomberg*. **Manufacturers Association of Nigeria** directorgeneral **Segun Ajayi-Kadir** says surging diesel prices will force Nigerian manufacturers to cut jobs, curb operations and raise prices;

17 Mar 2022 **Abuja (Nigeria)***Premium Times*. **Senate** passes bill that would empower the **Real Estate Development Association of Nigeria** to not only regulate its members but also regulate its competitors and others in the industry, generating significant controversy, with one lawmaker describing it as the most 'selfish' bill she has seen passed by any of Nigeria's houses of parliament;

17 Mar 2022 **Abuja (Nigeria)***Energy Capital & Power*. **Nigerian Nuclear Regulatory Agency** opens bidding for the construction of a 4GW nuclear plant, which will provide close to one third of Nigeria's installed generating capacity;

16 Mar 2022 **Abuja (Nigeria)***Financial Times*. Report by a group of global health experts says **Nigeria** urgently needs to overhaul its health system if it is to reduce an ***exceptionally*** high burden of disease that is hampering the country's development;

9 Mar 2022 **Abuja (Nigeria)***Daily Maverick*. **Nigerian Federal Inland Revenue Service** agrees an out-of-court settlement with **South Africa**-based **MultiChoice Group, Africa**'s largest pay-TV provider, over a $4.4 billion tax dispute;

9 Mar 2022 **Abuja (Nigeria)***MoneyWeb*. **Rivers State** governor **Nyesom Wike** declares "total war" against rampant oil theft and illegal refining that he claims is costing the country billions in lost revenues and contributing to environmental pollution;

3 Mar 2022 **Abuja (Nigeria)***Global Construction Review*. Government launches tender for **Nigeria'**s first nuclear power station, a four-reactor plant with a total output of 4GW, about a third of the country's present installed generating capacity;

2 Mar 2022 **Abuja (Nigeria)***Upstream*. **Nigerian** and **Equatorial Guinea** governments have signed an MoU that could see gas from Nigeria fed to a ***processing*** complex on **Bioko Island**, but reported plan by **United States**-based oil and gas major **Chevron** to exit Equatorial Guinea may complicate deal;

26 Feb 2022 **Bamako (Mali)***RFI*. An **Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)** mission led by former **Nigerian** president **Goodluck Jonathan** has failed to reach an agreement with the Malian military junta to set a timeline for the political transition;

23 Feb 2022 **Abuja (Nigeria)***Financial Times*. **High Court** in **London** hears allegations that **United States**-based investment bank **JPMorgan Chase** was "grossly negligent" paying almost $900m in 2011 to a company controlled by former **Nigerian** minister **Dan Etete** with a moneylaundering conviction despite numerous "red flags" about the transactions;

22 Feb 2022 **Nairobi (Kenya)***Business Day*. **Kenyan** technology company **MarketForce** raises $40m in a funding round led by **Nigeria**-based **V8 Capital Partners** to expand its digital retail distribution business;

**FOOTNOTES**

**Load-Date:** April 11, 2022

**End of Document**



[***Conflicts of sovereignty over EU trade policy: a new constitutional settlement?***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:671W-P2N1-F0C0-31HD-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

Introduction

European trade was never uncontentious, and there were always dissenting voices (della Porta ). To a large extent, EU trade policy is known as an area of intense lobbying as decision makers seek to satisfy demands stemming from key actors of global value chains (Young ). Over the past decade, though, the expression of diverging national and sectoral interests (Meunier ; De Bièvre and Dür ) has been supplanted by the expression of public dissent about the nature, purpose and objectives of trade. In other words, European trade policy has entered an era of ***unprecedented*** politicization (De Bièvre et al. ). Even the very rationale behind free trade—namely that far-reaching liberalization should be pursued because it generates growth and thus increases welfare—is now questioned by a number of political parties and citizens, thus upsetting a consensus which had stood for decades The contestation of the Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement (ACTA) in 2012, and the campaigns against the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) and the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) between the EU and Canada in 2015–2016 represent a climax in the contentiousness of trade policy (Rone ; Gheyle ; Oleart ). The increasing role of organized civil society mobilization, on the one hand, and contention surrounding the respective roles of the European, national (and regional) parliaments’, on the other, have been two important developments in this regard.

Part of the explanation lies with the rise of the “politics of deep integration” (Maggi and Ossa ; Leblond and Viju-Miljusevic ), which involves governments “agreeing to international rules governing domestic policies to mitigate their adverse trade effects” (Young , 453). From the late 1990s onwards, the rise of “deep trade” issues—ranging from intellectual property to health, environmental and labour standards, competition, regulatory cooperation or investment matters — has affected small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), consumers and a wide range of societal preferences to a larger extent than ever before (Leblond and Viju-Miljusevic ). The scholarly literature has looked at the politicization of trade agreements from several normative and theoretical angles. Scholars have first analysed whether politicization represents an impediment to the exclusive competence of the EU (Hübner et al. ; De Ville and Siles-Brügge ; Young , ; De Bièvre ; De Ville and Gheyle ). While the Treaty of Rome established the common commercial policy as an exclusive competence already in 1957, nearly all 40 trade agreements signed since 1972 included political and policy components (e.g. being association agreements), which led to qualify them as “mixed” (national/EU) thus implying ratification by national parliaments (De Bièvre and Gstöhl : chap. 2). It was the politicization of (deep) trade issues as seen in debates around TTIP and CETA, however, that drew ***unprecedented*** public attention to national parliaments’ role as potential veto players at the ratification stage (Roederer-Rynning and Kalestrup ; Roederer-Rynning ; Jančić , 2019; Pinz ). Some therefore pointed to “challenging” and “interesting” times for the EU (D’Erman ; Young ), seeing politicization as a potentially important threat to the EU’s capacity to assert itself as a unitary actor on the global stage. Others, in contrast, have argued that EU trade policy is undergoing substantive (and welcome) democratisation by combining higher visibility and stronger parliamentarism (Jančić ; Meissner and Schoeller ; Meissner ). This is especially the case because parliamentary activism has been backed by transnational mobilisation of citizens’ groups (Oleart ; Caiani and Graziano ; Conrad and Oleart ; Gheyle and De Ville ; Rone ), even tapping into party competition in certain national arenas (Rone ; Bollen et al. ). In this perspective, contestation over trade amounts to “empowering dissensus” – that is, a much-needed legitimization of the EU through agonistic politicization (Oleart ).

While the existing literature has come a long way explaining the forms, ***process***, causes and consequences of trade politicization (De Bièvre et al. ), this paper aims at shedding some new light on the contestation of EU trade policy through a “conflicts of sovereignty” approach. In this perspective (Brack et al. 2019; Bickerton et al. in this issue), more specifically, we detect a deeper disagreement about whether and how the popular and representative foundation of sovereignty should be strengthened, particularly as state executives have long enjoyed the monopoly of embodying — and sharing — sovereignty in EU policy making.

Empirically, we investigate to what extent popular mobilization and parliaments (at the national, supranational and regional level) have been successful in asserting themselves vis-à-vis the executives, namely national governments and the European Commission. We look not only at CETA (which has been most widely researched so far together with TTIP) but also at subsequent trade agreements, such as the often overlooked EU-Japan Economic Partnership Agreement (JEFTA), EU-Vietnam Trade Agreement (EVFTA), and EU-Singapore free trade agreement (EUSFTA). We focus on the European Parliament as well as the federal and regional parliaments in Germany and Belgium—two EU countries where TTIP and CETA were highly politicized (Gheyle ). If conflicts over CETA were to have an effect over parliamentary and popular engagement with trade policy and the distribution of political competencies, Belgium and Germany as federal states with high levels of politicization of trade across all levels of governance are the two EU countries where one might expect the effect to be the strongest.

Following previous research on parliamentary activity in the field of trade (Bollen ; Dahl Martinsen ; Pinz ), we took as ***measures*** of parliamentary assertion the number of questions asked on each agreement as well as amendments or requests, resolutions and plenary debates. Furthermore, we explored the nexus between parliamentary assertion and broader popular mobilization by studying both primary and secondary sources on the anti-CETA civil society campaign in Belgium and Germany, two federal states of contrasting size with multiple potential veto points where contention over CETA was intense. We triangulated these different types of data to get a more comprehensive picture of the multiple dimensions and levels of sovereignty conflicts around trade in the EU. Crucially, we explored whether parliament and civil society involvement were equally high with respect to subsequent agreements such as JEFTA, EVFTA and EUSFTA.

Our analysis unfolds in three steps. In section one, we seek to explain how mobilisation over trade agreements epitomizes conflicts of sovereignty stemming from broad structural transformations in EU politics. In section two, we show how these conflicts have manifested themselves in the contentious episode over CETA. In particular, we demonstrate that citizens’ movements and parliaments tried to reclaim for themselves sovereignty to decide over trade both at the EU and at the national level. In section three, we look first at the limited political and institutional outcomes of CETA, namely the resilience of the EU exclusive competence and waning politicization. We then explore whether subsequent trade agreements with Japan, Singapore, and Vietnam have triggered similar contention and why (not).

Beyond politicization: institutional and foundational sovereignty conflicts over trade

In line with the propositions put forward in the introduction to this special issue, we see the rise of political contention over trade as a reflection of mainly two intertwined broad transformations: EU integration and the crisis of representation. By centralizing a number of competencies at EU level, EU integration has de facto altered the political order within national states mainly by empowering executives. In their endeavours to manage functional interdependence and/or to project collective power onto the global arena, national governments have engaged in a reconfiguration of their “sovereignty practices” which they have legitimized through the idea (and discourse) of shared or pooled sovereignty (Jabko ). This has often implied the delegation of authority and competence to supranational bodies in the name of effectiveness. Trade policy offers a good illustration of this. The European Commission, a non-majoritarian institution little accountable to electoral politics, has long enjoyed the exclusive competence to negotiate free trade agreements in the name of all EU member states. As national governments in the Council define the Commission’s negotiation mandate, the politics of trade have been relocated into the remote and opaque arena made up of committees and working groups populated by EU and national technocrats.

This has tapped into the second broader transformation of European politics, namely the broader crisis of representation (and of representation through political parties, in particular). As national governments have come to enjoy greater autonomy and remoteness from the domestic arena, parliaments and parties have been left behind (albeit to various extents in different member states). The decade after the 2008 economic crisis saw a wave of contention across numerous counties with social movements demanding “real democracy now” and more meaningful popular participation in politics (Rone ). Long-term criticisms of democratic deficits at the EU, on the other hand, led to an attempt to mitigate them through formal empowerment of the EP with the Lisbon Treaty. To be sure, some scholars have emphasized that the EP in particular had not been a “weak parliament” before that either, because of its important role as a conditional agenda setter (Tsebelis ) and its strategic efforts to increase both its formal and informal powers (Héritier et al. ). Still, the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty changed the game by codifying the involvement of the EP (de Putte et al. ), giving it the right to veto and making already existing parliamentary control legally effective. Ultimately, the empowerment of the EP, rather than appeasing, fuelled even further demands for democratization of EU policy making both at the national and the transnational level.

Against this background, the conflicts over trade policy illustrate how diverging conceptions of sovereignty within as well as across domestic polities come to fill in the political vacuum created by “shared sovereignty” (on the problem with “shared sovereignty”, see Bickerton et al., this issue). Importantly, we detect two intertwined types of sovereignty conflicts. At first sight, the contestation of CETA is essentially a story of an unstable and contested institutional arrangements over trade policy along the vertical axis. As the more recent agreements touch upon their own prerogatives in areas such as sensitive regulatory issues, investment or state-investors relations, national (and possibly regional) parliaments seek to normally exert control over mixed agreements. In that perspective, the decision of the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) on the EU-Singapore agreement from 2017 was a ruling about a vertical, institutional conflict of competence between the EU and member states. A deeper understanding of the conflicts under examination, though, unveils tensions over the foundational principle underpinning sovereignty in Europe, namely the norm of popular self-rule. As argued in this issue, the weakening of popular sovereignty resulting from the practice of “shared sovereignty” in the EU has led to mobilization to reclaim a say from both civil society and parliaments at the regional and national level.

Conflicts over trade should therefore not be conceived in terms of a vertical zero-sum game between national sovereignty and EU competence with veto players coming along the way. The established literature has often regarded EU trade policy as a domain driven by a principal-agent dynamic. This has meant that the member states have continuously used increasingly both delegation to the Commission (their agent)—by consenting to enlarge the domain of EU exclusive competence—and control over the agent—through the negotiation mandate (De Bièvre and Dür. ). While national constitutions rule how national parliaments should exert control over the government in the realm of trade, the main locus of power in policy making has clearly lied in the bilateral principal-agent tie, i.e. the national and the EU executives. The recent politicization of trade, therefore, constitutes a backlash against established practices of shared sovereignty which have not featured a key role for citizens and their representatives. Issues surrounding market regulation by the state, transparency, and participation in decision making are raised by populist movements claiming that “people should have a say”.

In what follows, we examine the conflict over CETA and its implications for a new constitutional settlement for EU trade policy. A major difficulty lies in the fact that the empirical manifestations of popular sovereignty remain elusive and that its institutionalization is contested. Popular sovereignty is at the same incarnated by elected representatives performing representation in parliaments, whilst also claimed by mobilised activists whose active participation has been depicted as a European “democracy of stakeholders” (Aldrin and Hubbé 2016). Our analysis focuses ultimately on two empirical components of the sovereignty conflicts. The first component is the sovereignty claims themselves. By this, we mean the discursive constructions present in public debate that make claims about where final authority should lie in a political system. Sovereignty claims are often performative in nature: they seek to delegitimize certain actors or policies whilst relegitimizing others. The second component of sovereignty conflicts is the institutional struggles and reforms which they generate. These struggles are over the distribution of competencies and the relative autonomy of institutions in the exercise of these competencies. Conflicts of sovereignty arise when an important number of actors reclaim sovereignty by contesting the existing constitutional settlement, putting forward alternative ideas about where the ultimate authority lies in the polity.

Conflicts of sovereignty in the contestation over the CETA

Claims to transnational parliamentary and popular sovereignty

In 2016, the Belgian region of Wallonia refused to ratify CETA. This brought the long ***process*** of negotiation and ratification to a sudden halt, causing panic in Brussels. The visibility of the Walloon rebellion contributed to emphasizing a vertical reading of the conflict over CETA, featuring national (or regional) parliaments in a battle against the EU’s exclusive competence embodied by the European Commission.

Yet, an important act of the CETA controversy was played also at the EP, which made use of its newly acquired powers in trade. Under the terms of the Lisbon treaty, the EP can consent to or reject trade agreements. While ACTA had already been a first episode confirming that the EP would make an active use of its powers, the CETA confirmed this trend. From 2014 to 2048, the EP used a diverse repertoire of actions relying on procedural, cognitive and normative tools to assert its role in the conflict (Roederer-Rynning ). Our enquiry of EP activity over the CETA shows that 163 questions on CETA were raised from 2009 to 2020 (a particularly high number compared to only 2 questions on the South Korea trade agreement, and 11 questions on the Columbia, Ecuador and Peru Trade agreement for the same period), 7 resolutions were adopted in the same period and 8 plenary debates were held (see Table ). Most interestingly, a close examination shows that 44 out of the 163 questions on CETA (a bit more than one fourth) were on procedural issues. These included questions about the allocation of competencies and citizen participation in decision-making. We observed that the CETA did not raise serious concerns in the EP until after the end of negotiations in 2014—only 33 questions were asked on the agreement thought the whole period and 3 plenary debates were held. It was only when the major citizen-led campaigns against both TTIP and CETA gained traction that MEPs became active on the topic with 117 questions between 2014 and 2019 only, together with 5 debates (Table ).

Parliamentary scrutiny of the comprehensive economic and trade partnership agreement between the European Union and Canada

| **Parliament** | **Questions(oral and written)** | **Amendment or request** | **Resolution/motion adopted** | **Plenary debates** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| *European parliament* |  |  |  |  |
| 2009?2014 | 33 | 0\* | 5 | 3 |
| 2014?2019 | 117 | 12 | 2 | 5 |
| 2019?2020 | 13 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| BELGIUM |  |  |  |  |
| *Chamber of representatives* |  |  |  |  |
| 2010?2014 | 1 | Not available | 0 | 0 |
| 2014?2019 | 100 | Not available | 1 | 2 |
| 2019?2020 | 0 | Not available | 0 | 0 |
| *Senate* |  |  |  |  |
| 2010?2014 | 1 | Not available | 0 | 0 |
| 2014?2019 | 3 | Not available | 0 | 0 |
| 2019?2020 | 1 | Not available | 0 | 0 |
| *Walloon parliament* |  |  |  |  |
| 2009?2014 | 0 | Not available | 0 |  |
| 2014?2019 | 54 | Not available | 2 | 5 |
| 2019?2020 | 3 | Not available | 0 | 0 |
| *Flemish Parliament* |  |  |  |  |
| 2009?2014 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| 2014?2019 | 84 | 121 | 2 | 5 |
| 2019?2020 | 21 | 17 | 1 | 2 |
| *Brussels region parliament* |  |  |  |  |
| 2009?2014 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 2014?2019 | 139 | 42 | 0 | 1 |
| 2019?2020 | 44 | 14 | 0 | 1 |
| GERMANY |  |  |  |  |
| *Bundestag* |  |  |  |  |
| 2009?2013 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 2013?2017 | 139 | 42 | 0 | 1 |
| 2017?2020 | 44 | 14 | 0 | 1 |
| *Bundesrat* (since 2016) | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |

In line with our argument about executive dominance in practices surrounding shared sovereignty, negotiation mandate conferred to the Commission by national governments has been mainly surrounded by secrecy. There have been good arguments for this: the EU Factsheet on transparency in Trade Negotiations argued, for example, that a certain level of confidentiality is necessary to protect EU interests since revealing one’s strategy from the very beginning risks harming the outcome. Furthermore, a climate of confidence, in which provisional concessions are made that might not remain in the final deal, is crucial (EC Factsheet ). Civil society and the European Parliament, however, were not convinced of the benefits of secrecy and low saliency. Numerous MEPs expressed concerns with regard to transparency giving voice to a key concern expressed by NGOs mobilizing against CETA.

The European Parliament’s Committee on International Trade (INTA) received the basic text of CETA only a few weeks before the conclusion of the agreement in September 2014 in Ottawa. The 2009 negotiating directives, amended in 2011 to allow talks on ISDS, were made publicly available more than a year after the draft agreement between the two parties was agreed upon (Delimatsis 2016, 12). The main way MEPs got acquainted with the agreement before the end of negotiations in fact was through a leak by the German broadcaster ARD (ibid, 14). By fighting for their right to know more about the negotiation texts of CETA, elected representatives tried to assert themselves as agents who do far more than just rubberstamp agreements negotiated by others. In a question from August 2014, S&D MEP Marc Tarabella complained that CETA negotiations “took place behind closed doors, in keeping with established Commission practice, one which has long been criticised by ordinary members of the public and representatives of civil society”.

While the EP was institutionally empowered by the Lisbon Treaty, there are grounds to suggest that its exercise of these powers was driven by pressure from civil society. In EP questions, references to popular mobilisation and participation are numerous. For example, Europe of Nations and Freedoms MEP Dominique Martin claimed that:

EU institutions flouted the democratic ***process*** at several levels, both national and European. Civil society has legitimate concerns not only about the damage this type of free-trade agreement can do to jobs and to provisions for protecting workers, but also about the establishment of arbitration courts […] In order to speed up the adoption of the draft agreement and favour the interests of large groups, it was simply not tabled for debate in a number of national parliaments, and certain relevant EP committees were not even consulted. This failure to consult a large number of democratically-elected MPs is a serious attack on democracy. How does the Commission intend to explain to Europe’s citizens its evident desire to short-circuit debate about the agreement?

Remarkably, this question by an MEP from the ENF group does not oppose national and supranational European sovereignty at all, contrary to what one would expect from a far-right politician. Instead, the question problematizes the way democratic ***process*** was flouted at both the national and European level, framing democracy as a primary concern and talking explicitly about European citizens. The question is similar to the one posed in October 2014 by GUE/NGL MEP Jean-Luc Mélenchon. Referring to the public consultations on ISDS, Mélenchon claimed that “the Commission ultimately disregarded the views expressed by EU citizens on this issue, despite having consulted them in the first place”.

The reference to “European citizens” and European democratic participation was put forward powerfully by the Green and left-wing civil society organizations that registered a European Citizen Initiative against TTIP in July 2014. Unlike previous mobilizations against trade agreements that were global in nature, this time civil society mobilizations opted for a European Citizen Initiative—a new European Union mechanism introduced by the Lisbon Treaty, which aimed to connect direct democracy with EU-level legislative output (Siles-Brugge and Strange ; Weisskircher ). The “Stop TTIP” initiative, an ultimate expression of a claim for popular sovereignty at the European level, was rejected by the Commission on legal grounds. The Commission argued that the negotiation mandate for TTIP and CETA was not a legal act but merely a preparatory act on behalf of the EU institutions. Therefore, the citizens’ initiative fell outside the framework of the Commission’s powers to submit proposals for legal acts of the Union (Democracy International ). In 2017, the CJEU decided that the Commission should not have refused to register the ECI, since the principle of democracy, which is “one of the fundamental values of the EU” and the objective behind the European citizens’ initiatives, required a broader interpretation (Longo , 195). Once rejected, activists repurposed the initiative as a “self-organized” ECI including also concerns about CETA. Throughout the whole period of mobilization, activists consistently focussed on the transnational aspect of opposition to first TTIP and then CETA, emphasizing their desire to protect European regulatory standards as much as nation states’ regulatory capacities (Siles-Brugge and Strange ).

These developments have led authors such as Marc Pollack to talk about the rise of “new new sovereigntism”:

[A] European variant of the American new sovereigntism, in which a growing number of critics — concentrated primarily, though not only, among the pro-European left and centre-left — has raised fundamental procedural and substantive objections to international rules and norms, which they depict as hostile to European laws and values, and against which they champion a defiant resistance (Pollack ).

Unlike mobilizations against austerity, that remained very much enclosed within the national level, the transnational nature of the movement against TITP and CETA has been tangible (Caiani and Grazziano ; Rone ; Silles-Brugge and Strange ). As with the Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement (ACTA) rejected by the EP in 2012 or the contentious 2006 EU Services directive, it was the combination of national campaigns and transnational coordination and lobbying which made the movement against CETA particularly robust (Crespy and Parks ).

In sum, three mechanisms are at stake in the way in which popular and parliamentary sovereignty have asserted themselves at the European level against a notion of state sovereignty relying on the domination of the executives (the Council coordinating through the European Commission) over trade policy. First, the new competence to grant consent makes the EP matter—while it already had informal powers before the Lisbon Treaty (Tsebelis ), its new formal powers made it an obvious target of mobilization insofar as it offers a new potential veto point in the decision-making ***process***. Second, the intense mobilization of civil society incited the EP to make use of the new institutional opportunities to assert its new competence. Third, political groups sympathetic to the grievances of NGOs were pro-active from within the EP to build critical majority capable of challenging the decisions of the Commission and member states. Whilst the EP’s control powers over trade had been enhanced since 2009, the questions from MEPs on competence distribution and democratic control were concerned about the inclusion of multiple actors and interests, not just the EP. With the impetus given by the Walloon rebellion, Green, far-left, far-right, and increasingly also social-democratic MEPs endorsed the involvement of regional and national parliaments in making trade policy. Rather than an opposition between national sovereignty and EU exclusive competence, some MEPs were principally concerned with securing inclusive forms of democratic representation. Moreover, they reclaimed for themselves a role as representatives of the mobilized civil society, groups which they saw as a manifestation of “the people”.

Popular and parliamentary activism to reassert sovereignty at the national level

Politicization of CETA in Belgium

Against the background of the dispersal of parliamentary sovereignty vertically and horizontally (Crum and Fossum ), national parliaments have attempted to reassert themselves. This trend is especially evident in free trade agreements. After discussing transnational mobilization in the previous section, we now turn to the mobilization from citizens and parliaments in two federal countries, namely Belgium and Germany. As Table below shows, in those countries, the activity surrounding CETA has been ***exceptionally*** high. Data on activity over trade in the Belgian federal parliament confirm that while trade was a very low-salience issue for a long time, its salience in parliamentary questions increased dramatically when it comes to both TTIP and CETA (Bollen, , 332). Between 2014 and 2019, 100 questions were asked on CETA in the Belgian federal parliament compared to only 1 between 2010 and 2014 (see Table ). Similarly, high activity could be seen in the Walloon, Flemish and Brussels Region Parliaments for 2014–2019 period (ibid). Parliamentary reassertion has proven effective in unpacking deals made in Brussels and constraining representatives of the national executive to justify their choices in the public sphere.

As with the EP, popular mobilization prompted parliamentary activism at the national level. In Belgium, the 4th of May Coalition was instrumental for mobilizing against TTIP then CETA. The coalition comprised “all trade unions, all national health insurance funds, 11.11.11-CNCD, the consumers (Test-Aankoop/Test-Achat), environmental organizations (Greenpeace, Bond Beter Leefmilieu and Inter-Environnement Wallonie) and the Liga voor Mensenrechten (human rights organization)” (Gheyle : 317). These highly diverse groups published a common paper that demanded a new negotiation mandate for transatlantic trade deals. This mandate should exclude inter alia ISDS, regulatory harmonization and financial deregulation. These groups made a plea for more transparency and a sustained dialogue with parliaments and civil society (ibid). In 2015, organizations that had been active in the European “Stop TTIP” initiative established a demonstration coalition called “Stop TTIP-CETA". This was responsible for a number of highly attended protests as well as the “TTIP free zones” initiative as part of which many cities and regions declared themselves TTIP and CETA free (ibid, 323).

Certain political parties actively supported the efforts of civil society groups. In Belgium, contention over CETA was led by the francophone Socialist Party (PS), prompted by the campaign from organized civil society (including trade unions). While being in opposition at the federal level, the PS dominated in Wallonia as well as in the Brussels region (Bollen et al. ). Paul Magnette, Wallonia’s Minister President, and an academic specialised in European Studies, and André Antoine, a lawyer and President of the regional parliament, were the key figures in Wallonia’s political rebellion. From the outset, Walloon political leaders conceived their role in terms of voicing and channelling the grievances expressed by civil society in the streets into the Belgian and the European political system (Magnette, : 35–36). In November 2014, Wallonia’s parliament organized a public hearing about CETA and in September 2015. Paul Magnette invited representatives of citizens’ groups opposing CETA to the Elysette, the headquarters of the Walloon government. On 27 April 2016, Wallonia’s regional parliament adopted the following resolutions:

(a)urge the federal government to ask the Court of Justice of the European Union to check the compatibility between the CETA and EU Treaties, (b) urge the federal government to call in the Council for the qualification of CETA as a mixed agreement, (c) urge the federal government to refuse the provisional implementation of CETA, d) not give the federal government full powers to adopt CETA, (d) asking the federal government to advocate a conflict resolution mechanism based on public jurisdictions and (e) call the federal government to commit within the EU institutions to the enshrining of a number of principles in all future free trade agreements (Parlement Wallon ).

The regional parliament threatened it would block CETA ratification unless these conditions were met. In October 2016, Wallonia vetoed CETA.

This veto caused a major international diplomatic incident. The government of Wallonia came under intense pressure from both the Belgian (especially Flemish (Bollen )) and international media. It was widely reported that the small region of Wallonia was holding the rest of the EU hostage. Accused of cutting itself off from the rest of the EU, the Walloon leader Paul Magnette gave a famous response. In his words,: “[t]o be isolated from our own population, to be isolated from our own citizens, in an era, in the beginning of the twenty-first century, when democracy is so profoundly in crisis, this would be at least as grave as being diplomatically isolated” (Bollen : 335).

Nevertheless, the pressure on Wallonia proved too great. After difficult negotiations, the Council adopted a decision to sign CETA on October 28. The agreement reached required the EU and Canada issue a joint interpretative instrument with a binding status that clarified many of the problematic aspects of CETA, such as the parties’ ability to regulate economic activities in the public interest. Furthermore, Belgium asked the CJEU whether the controversial investor court system was compatible with European law. Ultimately, despite its rebellion, Wallonia gave a green light to CETA. Many observers felt that the improvements that had been secured, especially with regard to regulatory issues, were no more than a symbolic victory for the Walloon parliament. Still, at least with regard to ISDS, the outcome of the CJEU court case was important since it forced the Commission to transform private investment arbitration procedures into a public court system, while at the same time making it clear that this would be part and parcel of mixed competencies. We discuss the consequences of this decision on the negotiation and conclusion of trade agreements in the last section of the paper, highlighting how mixed competencies over investment were achieved at the price of national parliaments losing power over trade agreements.

Politicization of CETA in Germany

Popular mobilization was even stronger in Germany, where a variety of different actors contributed to the politicization of first TTIP and then CETA. Beyond those actors and groups well known from the “alter-globalization” organizations such as ATTAC or CAMPACT, there were many environmental organizations and food and consumer organizations such as Foodwatch. Small- and medium-sized businesses, religious organizations and trade unions joined the resistance to TTIP and CETA (Gheyle and Rone ). German organizations that had been crucial for the ‘Stop TTIP’ European Citizens Initiative were also very active domestically. This led to a dramatic rise of public opposition to TTIP and CETA—a situation especially paradoxical since Germany was the main country pushing for agreements such as TTIP and CETA and was the one to gain the most from them as EU’s top exporter (ibid).

Unlike what we saw in Belgium, there was no parliamentary rebellion associated with popular mobilization in Germany, not at the federal nor at the regional level. Instead, a constitutional struggle broke out. The Bundestag proved very cautious in waiting for the definitive decision of the Constitutional Court. In October 2016, complaints were filed which attempted to stop the agreement altogether. What was stake was the Bundestag's decision to empower the Federal government to approve (or reject) the agreement—and the provisional application of the provisions falling under the EU exclusive competence—in the Council. Two groups of citizens, of 125,000 and 68,000, respectively, filed the complaints. The former was made up of the consumer’s organization Foodwatch and the rights associations Campact and Mehr Demokratie, the latter was headed by the parliamentary group of Die Linke. From a legal point of view, they rooted their arguments on the articles of the German Constitution (Grundgesetz) referring to the democratic nature of the German state where “state authority is derived from the people” (Article 20.2) and to the role of the Bundestag in representing the sovereign people. At that time, both the Court and the Economics Minister Sigmar Gabriel who was heard by the Court argued, in contrast to the plaintiffs, from a more functional point of view. “A preliminary injunction preventing the Federal Government’s approval of the provisional application of CETA would”, they argued, “significantly interfere with the—generally broad—legislative discretion of the Federal Government in the fields of European, foreign and foreign economic policy”. In a similar manner, they continued, “this would also be true with regard to the European Union [… and] would have a negative effect on European external trade policy and the international status of the European Union in general” (BVerfG 2016). Shortly afterwards, a mere “position taking” put forward by the coalition parties (CDU/CSU and SPD) was adopted in the Bundestag. It recommended to follow the Court and to allow the Federal government to approve the provisional application of those parts of the CETA falling under EU competence.

This was not, however, the end of the story. Die Linke started a procedure over “disputes between supreme federal bodies” (Organstreitverfahren) arguing that by only adopting a “position” rather than a formal decision (resolution), the Bundestag had not fulfilled its constitutional obligation of participating in decisions over EU integration. Five years later, in 2021, the judges from Karlsruhe ruled that the Bundestag’s position was rooted in substantial deliberations. It had therefore fulfilled its constitutional and democratic duty to guide the action of the federal government in the EU Council. The Bundestag was awaiting the Court's decision to move towards ratification, and this is expected to happen under the new legislature following the 2021 federal election in September.

From the outset, a majority of the Bundestag has declared it would wait for the German Constitutional Court to rule before making its final decision over the ratification of CETA. While CETA was not very salient in the deliberations of the Bundesrat (the upper German chamber made up of representatives from the regional parliaments), the Bundesrat saw its right as that of joint ratification of CETA along with the Bundestag. As the Greens and die Linke, who supported the CETA campaign, hold seats in a majority of regional parliaments, the possibility is open for a disagreement between both chambers of the German parliament.

Overlapping the government-opposition dynamics, the German case more deeply reflects the clash between two conceptions of sovereignty. One conception, claimed by CETA’s opponents, is to extend the effective scrutiny powers of the Bundestag in the name of the people. The other, so far represented by the German Constitutional Court and the two coalition parties CDU/CSU and SPD, favours “shared sovereignty” at the EU level, with executives (the Federal government as well as the Commission) enjoying full discretion to decide over trade policies.

‘The empire strikes back’: resilience and the settling of sovereignty conflicts

The institutional outcomes of contesting CETA: symbolic victories and trade policy fragmentation

As discussed above, one of the conditions for securing the Walloon approval of CETA was for Belgium to ask the CJEU whether the investor-court system was compatible with EU law. In April 2019, the CJEU stated that the investment provisions on CETA were indeed compatible with EU law. In February 2017, the EP voted on CETA and confirmed it by 408 votes to 254, with 33 abstentions (Legislative Train Schedule). Signatories have applied the agreement but in an uneven fashion. Since it is a mixed agreement, it requires ratification by the national parliaments in all EU member states. As of July 2021, 12 EU Member States have still not ratified CETA. Since the CETA confrontation, the Belgian Socialists have been struggling to secure political commitments on trade at Belgian level. On 11 June 2020, Socialist MPs put forward in the Belgian federal parliament a “resolution over European free trade agreements with the aim of including constraining criteria with regard to human rights, social and environmental norms” (Chambre 2019). The parties forming the majority in the chamber rejected the proposition.

The reality of trade policy remains at odds with the vision of a new trade policy, as laid down in the Namur declaration: the manifesto signed by Paul Magnette and many other distinguished scholars including Thomas Piketty, Dani Rodrik, Marise Cremona, Paul Craig, and numerous other experts (EJIL, 2016). The manifesto and the “CETA drama” made many analysts hopeful that EU trade policy would become more democratic (Kleimann and Kubek ). On the other hand, The Trading Together Declaration () argued that developments such as the Wallonian veto are unwelcome and weaken the EU’s trading position, while ignoring that national parliaments already have mechanisms of controlling what national governments do in the Council of Ministers and that the EP exercises “direct control over the Council” (ibid). Regardless of the interpretation, for many, the Walloon veto spelled “the beginning of the end of EU trade policy (der Loo and Pelkmans ) and meant that “the EU threw away its trade powers” (Oliver et al. ). Ultimately, while CETA did prove to be a “game changer” for European trade politics (Banks ), this did not happen in the democracy-enhancing way civil society and parliaments would have wished.

Wary of repeating the dramatic last-minute negotiations and similar public contestation, the European Commission asked the CJEU to clarify whether it alone could conclude the free trade and investment agreement with Singapore which it had been negotiating in parallel with CETA. The decision of the European Commission to make CETA a mixed agreement was a political move taken under the pressure of public contestation. Now, the Commission wanted a legally authoritative and binding answer how to treat future trade agreements. The Luxembourg court ruled in May 2017 that while large part of the agreement fell under exclusive EU competence, portfolio investment and dispute settlement between investors and states required member state consent (Morgan ).

In theory, the CJEU’s Singapore decision could have led to a situation in which member states would ratify all major trade agreements. In practice, the European Commission started splitting major bilateral agreements into trade agreements under its exclusive competence and investment agreements requiring national parliamentary ratification. This solution speeded up the negotiation and ratification of trade agreements. All three agreements that have been signed and applied after the provisional ratification of CETA — the trade agreements with Japan, Singapore, and Vietnam — have not included the controversial plans for investor-state dispute settlement mechanisms or their later incarnation as Investor Court Systems (Conconi et al. 2020: 22). These agreements were also much less debated and contested than CETA. Their negotiation and signature passing almost unnoticed, as if the good old status quo around trade as a “quiet politics” issue (Culpepper ) had been restored. Unlike major EU trade agreements in the past, these new trade agreements did not need national ratification (De Bièvre and Gstöhl : chap. 2), pointing to a true “revolution” in trade policy, with national parliaments no longer needing to ratify trade agreements apart from in narrowly specified cases. One might argue that it was precisely the clever decision of the European Commission to defend legally the exclusive competence of the EU in the negotiation of trade agreements that explains the dramatic decrease in politicization of subsequent agreements. Yet, the legal and institutional explanation alone does not suffice. It is true that ISDS had been a key point of contestation in the popular and parliamentary mobilization against both TTIP and CETA. Still, it was not the only reason why these agreements were challenged. Concerns about regulatory cooperation as well as trade-related concerns such as threats to labour, environmental and food standards had been also a key point of contestation in previous mobilizations. Civil society organizations such as Attac Germany considered the agreement with Japan, for example, equally problematic in these trade (and not only investment-related) respects (JEFTA Stoppen ). Yet, JEFTA, as well as the agreements with Singapore and Vietnam, caused much less contestation than the agreement with Canada. In the next section, we argue that this is due not only to the timely and efficient legal offensive mounted by the Commission but also to the lack of popular mobilization on the issue, which had been a key factor in parliamentary involvement.

After CETA: a return to the low politicization of trade and executive domination

In this final section, we investigate the debates over the EU-Japan Economic Partnership Agreement, the EU-Vietnam Trade Agreement, and the EU-Singapore free trade agreement to assess whether the CETA controversy has had enduring effects. As far as civil society is concerned, it appears that following mobilization against TTIP and CETA, the key NGOs which had orchestrated mass street protests moved on to other issues (Rone ). While the organizations involved had built considerable networks across Europe and expertise in trade, their funding is more often than not project-based. This has meant that they can rarely afford to maintain an extended staff working on the same topic for long periods of time (Dür and Bièvre ; Drieghe et al. ). Furthermore, trade unions that had opposed TTIP and CETA mainly because of ISDS kept a low profile. The far-right had joined opposition to TTIP and CETA late, under the pressure from its voting base (Rone ). It disengaged from further critique of trade agreements, with the exception of the odd protectionist arguments about threats to ***agriculture*** or national automotive industries. Only the Greens and far-left parties belonging to the GUE/NGL group in the EP continued engaging critically with the issue of free trade. This was not sufficient to sustain a high level of politicization. In turn, the lack of civil society mobilization over subsequent agreements such as JEFTA, EVTA and EUSFTA made parliamentarians less interested in pursuing the topic (Pinz ).

When it comes to parliamentary questions, the decrease in interest is clear. While 163 questions were raised on CETA in the EP during the negotiations and ratification ***process*** (2009–2020), only 62 questions were raised on JEFTA (Table ), 32 questions on EVTA (Table ) and only 13 questions on EUSFTA (Table ) for the same period. Furthermore, a closer look at the motions on JEFTA, for example, reveals that the content of these motions has been very different. Most motions on CETA, especially in the period 2014–2019, were highly critical of the agreement. Most motions on JEFTA were mainly about details of the agreement rather than criticizing the agreement per se. Similarly, while a fourth of questions on CETA were dominated by concerns about the distribution of competencies in relation to the agreement and the lack of transparency and democratic participation, most questions on JEFTA focussed on ***agricultural*** concerns as well as the controversial Japanese practice of whaling.

Parliamentary scrutiny of the Japan-EU Free Trade Agreement

| **Parliament** | **Questions (oral and written)** | **Amendment or request** | **Resolution/motion adopted** | **Plenary debates** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| European parliament |  |  |  |  |
| 2009?2014 | 24 | 0 | 5 | 3 |
| 2014?2019 | 38 | 5 | 6 | 3 |
| 2019?2020 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| BELGIUM |  |  |  |  |
| *Chamber of representatives* |  |  |  |  |
| 2010?2014 | 0 | Not available | 0 | 0 |
| 2014?2019 | 0 | Not available | 1 | 0 |
| 2019?2020 | 0 | Not available | 0 | 0 |
| *Senate* |  |  |  |  |
| 2010?2014 | 0 | Not available | 0 | 0 |
| 2014?2019 | 0 | Not available | 0 | 0 |
| 2019?2020 | 0 | Not available | 0 | 0 |
| *Walloon parliament* |  |  |  |  |
| 2009?2014 | 0 | Not available | 0 | 0 |
| 2014?2019 | 11 | Not available | 2 | 5 |
| 2019?2020 | 1 | Not available | 0 | 0 |
| *Flemish parliament* |  |  |  |  |
| 2009?2014 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 2014?2019 | 4 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| 2019?2020 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| *Brussels region parliament* |  |  |  |  |
| 2009?2014 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 2014?2019 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 2019?2020 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| GERMANY |  |  |  |  |
| *Bundestag* |  |  |  |  |
| 2009?2013 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 2013?2017 | 10 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| 2017?2020 | 1 | 5 | 0 | 1 |
| *Bundesrat* (since 2016) | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

Parliamentary scrutiny of EU-Vietnam Trade and Investment Agreements

| **Parliament** | **Questions(oral and written)** | **Amendment or request** | **Resolution/motion adopted** | **Plenary debates** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| *European parliament* |  |  |  |  |
| 2009?2014 | 6 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| 2014?2019 | 21 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| 2019?2020 | 5 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| BELGIUM |  |  |  |  |
| *Chamber of representatives* |  |  |  |  |
| 2010?2014 | 0 | Not available | 0 | 0 |
| 2014?2019 | 2 | Not available | 0 | 0 |
| 2019?2020 | 0 | Not available | 0 | 0 |
| *Senate* |  |  |  |  |
| 2010?2014 | 0 | Not available | 0 | 0 |
| 2014?2019 | 0 | Not available | 0 | 0 |
| 2019?2020 | 0 | Not available | 0 | 0 |
| *Walloon parliament* |  |  |  |  |
| 2009?2014 | 0 | Not available | 0 | 0 |
| 2014?2019 | 4 | Not available | 0 | 0 |
| 2019?2020 | 2 | Not available | 0 | 0 |
| *Flemish Parliament* |  |  |  |  |
| 2009?2014 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 2014?2019 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| 2019?2020 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| *Brussels region parliament* |  |  |  |  |
| 2009?2014 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 2014?2019 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 2019?2020 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| GERMANY |  |  |  |  |
| *Bundestag* |  |  |  |  |
| 2009?2013 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 2013?2017 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 2017?2020 | 3 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| *Bundesrat* (since 2016) | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

Parliamentary scrutiny of EU-Singapore Free Trade and Agreement

| **Parliament** | **Questions(oral and written)** | **Amendment or request** | **Resolution/motion adopted** | **Plenary debates** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| European parliament |  |  |  |  |
| 2009?2014 | 5 | 0 | 2 | 0 |
| 2014?2019 | 7 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| 2019?2020 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| BELGIUM |  |  |  |  |
| *Chamber of representatives* |  |  |  |  |
| 2010?2014 | 0 | Not available | 0 | 0 |
| 2014?2019 | 3 | Not available | 0 | 0 |
| 2019?2020 | 1 | Not available | 0 | 0 |
| *Senate* |  |  |  |  |
| 2010?2014 | 0 | Not available | 0 | 0 |
| 2014?2019 | 0 | Not available | 0 | 0 |
| 2019?2020 | 0 | Not available | 0 | 0 |
| *Walloon parliament* |  |  |  |  |
| 2009?2014 | 0 | Not available | 0 | 0 |
| 2014?2019 | 6 | Not available | 0 | 0 |
| 2019?2020 | 0 | Not available | 0 | 0 |
| *Flemish parliament* |  |  |  |  |
| 2009?2014 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 2014?2019 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 2019?2020 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| *Brussels region parliament* |  |  |  |  |
| 2009?2014 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 2014?2019 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 2019?2020 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| GERMANY |  |  |  |  |
| *Bundestag* |  |  |  |  |
| 2009?2013 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 2013?2017 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 2017?2020 | 3 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| *Bundesrat* (since 2016) | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

The difference in engagement at the national level was even more striking. From 2010 to 2020, there had been 100 questions on CETA in the Belgian Federal Parliament and 185 questions in the Bundestag (Table ). This is a strikingly high number compared to no questions on JEFTA in the Belgian Federal Parliament and only eleven questions in the Bundestag for the same period (Table ). The majority of questions on JEFTA (ten out of eleven) in the Bundestag came exclusively by Green and Die Linke MPs in the 2013–2017 legislature. Many of these questions were about transparency and the involvement of national parliaments in the adoption of the Treaty as well as of the EP. On 14 June 2018, the pending ratification of CETA and the green light for the federal government to agree to JEFTA at EU level were both discussed at a plenary session of the Bundestag.

Attention to EUVTA has been even lower than attention to JEFTA, with only two questions posed in the Belgian Federal Parliament and three questions in the Bundestag between 2009 and 2020 (Table ). There had been also one motion and one plenary debate in the Flemish regional parliament in the period 2014–2020. This was an exception since both the German Bundestag and Bundesrat, as well as the Belgian Federal Parliament and other Belgian regional parliaments, completely ignored the agreement with Vietnam. Finally, the EUSFTA provoked four questions in the Belgian Federal Parliament and six in the Bundestag (Table ). There were no motions, resolutions or debates in the Belgian federal and regional parliaments, nor in the German Bundestag and Bundesrat, with the exception of a single motion by the Flemish Parliament in the 2019–2020 period (Tables , , ).

Parliamentary activism and extensive discussions about competence had been features of the politicization of CETA. They did not continue with regard to subsequent agreements. While many observers hailed CETA as a game changer and the conflicts it generated as the beginning of a new era of democratization of trade policy, this politicization was short-lived. The splitting strategy of the Commission proved successful. Since subsequent trade deals have fallen exclusively within the competence of the EU, they have been monitored by the EP, a move which has crowded out the debates in national parliaments. What is more, the limited politicization of subsequent trade agreements by civil society organizations also meant less pressure from the public, thus further dis-incentivizing parliaments to mobilize on the issue.

Conclusions

This paper has sought to demonstrate that recent mobilizations surrounding EU trade policy go beyond institutional conflicts about the scope of EU supranational competencies. Instead, they are the manifestation of deeper conflicts about the foundation of sovereignty in the EU political order. On the one hand, there has been a vision of sovereignty in the EU that relies on executive dominance in the sense that national governments (a) claim to embody sovereignty, (b) share it among themselves at EU level and (c) delegate their authority to the EU Commission. On the other hand, there has been a vision promoted by citizen groups and parliaments discontent with procedures consisting in little more than rubber-stamping what has been agreed by the Council and the Commission. Thus, civil society and members of both national parliaments and the EP have sought to assert themselves as the ultimate holders of sovereignty in a multilevel democratic order. For that purpose, they have sought to play an effective role as scrutinizers—and possibly veto players. Rather than opposing national parliaments to the EP, actors promoting this vision tend to conceive of it in a multilevel fashion and have been active in exploiting possibilities of networking across territorial levels of governance. The CJEU intervened in a crucial way in this conflict between two visions of sovereignty: to both prevent and circumvent politicization and parliamentary veto points, the CJEU decision on EU’s free trade agreement with Singapore allowed the Commission to separate trade and investment agreements. Doing so allows to narrow down the latter category of agreements qualifying as mixed and therefore to curtail the further involvement of regional and national parliaments in EU trade policy.

If the politicization of trade reflected a mere vertical institutional struggle between national and supranational sovereignty, then after the Commission started splitting trade from investment, the EP should have continued engaging with subsequent trade agreements as much as it did with CETA in an attempt to provide full parliamentary control at the supranational level. Yet, this was not the case. Not only did national parliaments lose interest but so did, albeit to a smaller extent, the EP. The free trade agreements with Japan, Singapore, and Vietnam were swiftly negotiated and passed almost unnoticed. Facing a new institutional set-up and an absence of popular mobilization from below, both the EP and national parliaments lost an incentive to question “who rules?” over trade and challenge the practice of executive autonomy in that area.

CETA therefore failed to bring about a new constitutional settlement over trade, whereby peoples and their representatives would have a greater say. Furthermore, large corporations and diverse sectoral interests are keeping on weighing for a further intensification of global trade, a goal that is pursued in spite of uneven social development levels and a deteriorating climate. The cornerstone of EU trade policy is thus bound to remain contentious—perhaps increasingly so—in the years to come.

**Notes**

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[***Putin's Munich speech should have been heeded by the West [Video]***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:65FR-V5J1-JCMN-Y36R-00000-00&context=1516831)

Newstex Blogs

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**Body**

May 15, 2022( The Duran: [*http://theduran.com*](http://theduran.com) Delivered by Newstex) ;

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Today's 'new' news in Russia is the commentary about how the West did not heed President Vladimir Putin's speech in 2007 in Munich. Izvestia reported today, May 14th, thatThe Hillan American political news website, notes very specifically that the West appears not to have heeded President Vladimir Putin's speech in 2007, and instead, ignored his comments in pursuit of a 'unipolar world' headed by the United States. The article goes on to say that this deliberate calculation is largely responsible for the existence of the present war in Ukraine.

To be precise, the Izvestia article starts in this way (translated, with any errors my own):

The West made the mistake of ignoring the main message of Russian President Vladimir Putin's Munich speech in 2007. On May 11, a columnist for The Hill writes about this.

The publication recalled that 15 years ago, the Russian leader insisted on commitment to the idea of ​​a multipolar world. At the Munich Security Conference, he launched an angry tirade against the US as 'the only pole of power' and against NATO expansion.

'Participants in the meeting were shocked by the vigor of Putin's attacks, but on the whole they brushed them aside. It was a mistake,' the journalist said.

The author of the article also expressed the opinion that the President of Russia considered the reaction of Western leaders to his theses disrespectful.

Earlier, on February 13, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said that the problems identified by Russian President Vladimir Putin in the Munich speech in 2007 had increased, although Moscow wanted them to decrease.

The day before, Peskov noted that Putin's Munich speech in 2007 was revolutionary in terms of direct presentation of pressing problems, with a vision of the future. He stressed that all the aspects touched upon by the president are now. A spokesman for the Russian leader pointed out that these problems need to be addressed.

Prior to that, on February 10, Horst Teltschik, a former adviser and ally of German Chancellor Helmut Kohl, revealed the details of Putin's speech at the Munich Conference in 2007.

He pointed out that during his speech at the conference, Putin raised a number of important issues - in particular, it was about the danger of deploying American missile defense systems in Romania and Bulgaria.

At the same time, Telchik pointed out that the opportunity for a new Russia-NATO dialogue after Putin's speech was missed.

Now, let's do two things: First, let's look at the actual Hill piece to see if this lines up with what the actual piece says, and then let's look at President Putin's Munich speech itself. The text of The Hill piece[1], written by Harlan Ullman, is reproduced in its entirety, but with my added emphases:

In an interview last week with theItalian newspaper Corriere Della Sera,[2]Pope Francis said that 'NATO barking at Russia'[3]caused the Kremlin 'to react badly and unleash the conflict.'Yet, entirely dismissing the pope's stunning remark might be short-sighted because, certainly, some U.S. and NATO actions did indeed cause the Kremlin to 'react badly.'

Over the past 22 years in particular, several of America's policies, miscues and miscalculations towardsRussia have backfired[4]. None can be used as an excuse for Russian President Vladimir Putin's illegal and horrific war in Ukraine.But a brief review of U.S.-Russian relations underscores the power of unintended consequences.

Putin becameacting Russian president[5]on New Year's Day 2000, the same year George W. Bush would be elected America's 43rd president. The Boris Yeltsin presidency left Russia in dire straits, psychologically damaged by the demise of its once superpower status. In his Millennium Address that day, Putin provided the outlines of how he would restore Russian greatness.

Initially, Bush and Putin got along.But the new administration's obsession with Iran as the enemy led Bush to focus the Pentagon on missile defense and space.One consequence was that Bush announced America's intentto withdraw[6]from the 1974 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty that had been central to the U.S.-USSR strategic relationship.Abrogating the treaty did not go down well in Moscow, especially given the the huge military technological lead the Kremlin believed Washington had after the 1991 Gulf War.That was before 9-11.

When America intervened in Afghanistan in late 2001, Putin was irritated because the Bush team rejected Russian advice based on its decade-long failure in that country.In 2003, Putin strongly counseled Bush against invading Iraq, as the Russian leader feared the region would be thrown into turmoil. And thecontinuing expansion[7]of NATO was neuralgic for Russia.A series of U.S. administrations downplayed or ignored how seriousthis issue was for Russia.

At theMunich Security Conference[8], Putin unleashed an angry broadside against the U.S. as a 'uni-power' and against NATO expansion.Participants were shocked by the intensity of Putin's attacks but otherwise largely dismissed them.That was a mistake.It was clear that Putin believed he was being disrespected and marginalized by the U.S. and NATO, adding to his growing resentment about the patronizing treatment he believed Russia was receiving.

The2008 NATO Summit[9]at Bucharest was perhaps the turning point.Georgia and Ukraine had applied for NATO MAP — Membership Action Plan, the roadmap to full membership.Blocked by France and Germany, MAP was denied.But in a throwaway line[10], President Bush stated that Georgia and Ukraine could at some date join.That 'promise' was included in the final summit report so as not to offend the American president.

Putin was outraged andtold Bush[11]'this will not stand,' echoing George H. W. Bush's response to Saddam Hussein's ***invasion*** of Kuwait in 1990.Bush dismissed the warning.

In 2008[12], Putin provoked Georgia to respond to a Russian 'false flag' operation and subsequently occupied South Ossetia and Abkhazia.With contested borders, Georgia was technically ineligible for NATO membership.Six years later,[13]Russia annexed Crimea from Ukraine following the Maidan Square protests and the unseating of pro-Russia President Viktor Yanukovych, accusing Washington of abetting regime change.

In 2016[14], Russia was charged with interfering in U.S. presidential elections andwidespread hacking operations[15].Despite President Trump'sattempt to improve relations with Putin, at best they remained frozen. Some Democrats accused Trump of being Putin's 'useful idiot.' And relations were made more toxic by a series of U.S. defense strategies, beginning with the Obama administration targeting Russia as one of five potential adversaries to be 'deterred and, if war came, defeated.'

Perhaps the incompetentU.S. withdrawal[16]from Afghanistan in August 2021 convinced Putin he could take bold action in Ukraine without much risk.After massing troops on Ukraine's borders, Russia subsequently sentdemands[17]to the U.S., NATO and EU calling for a new European security framework; NATO retraction to the West; and denying Ukraine NATO membership. Each was rejected.

Instead, theU.S. proposed talks[18]on strategic stability and arms control, ignoring Putin's key demands. When Putin decided to invade Ukraine is unclear.But from his perspective, he was left with no choice. Ukraine was a vital Russian interest to be resolved by war if necessary. The West failed to comprehend that.

Could any U.S. actions haveprevented war?Probably not.But failure to consider unintended consequences is a lesson that should not be forgotten. Perhaps that is what the pope meant.

In my own opinion, the last paragraph of Harlan's piece is an example of trying to appease the elites who want this war in the United States, and who even have nuclear ideations about it, based on the kind of rhetoric we get. Sure, Russian authorities have also been dropping the rhetoric of nuclear war in the period of this conflict, but it was Great Britains Liz Truss that began this round, not Vladimir Putin. Again, seen from the Russian perspective,this war is an attempt to STOP the NATO expansion and proxy war that was already in action since 2014.

Naturally, the Western Europeans and the United States ignore the truth of their own people involved in a slow, but brutal, war of attrition in the Donbass following the declarations of independence from Ukraine by the two republics there, Donetsk and Lugansk.

Harlan's analysis is very sound, and part of what is interesting here is that this article made it to the light of day in a significant (and often perceived left-leaning) political publication. As our own Editor in Chief, Alexander Mercouris repeatedly has pointed out in other examples[19], it appears that cracks are developing in the absurd narrative about this war that was spun by Americans who appear to have smoked far, far too much cannabis to create really good propaganda. However, they still scored a major success in swaying the American population because a great many of the people of our nation are on too many psychotropic meds,plus cannabis, so they are also unable to think straight.

Even with all this in the West's favor, the truth of this situation appears to be getting revealed, as truth always does. Whether or not the full picture is shown to enough people in the United States to mobilize them to stop their government's behavior remains to be seen. But, we are trying to help that happen.

Finally, reprinted below is the full text of the translation from the Kremlin's own website, of the speech that President Putin gave in 2007 in Munich. The accompanying video shows it. Read it for yourself, and consider it. If the reader is too prejudiced against Vladimir Putin to accept any words coming from his mouth, consider that President Trump has said much the same thing, as has Senator Rand Paul, Representative Tulsi Gabbard, and others. For your consideration:

[embedded content]

Speech andtheFollowing Discussion attheMunich Conference onSecurity Policy

February 10, 2007

Vladimir Putin: Thank you very much dear Madam Federal Chancellor, Mr Teltschik, ladies andgentlemen!

Iam truly grateful tobe invited tosuch arepresentative conference that has assembled politicians, military officials, entrepreneurs andexperts from more than 40 nations.

This conference's structure allows me toavoid excessive politeness andtheneed tospeak inroundabout, pleasant but empty diplomatic terms. This conference's format will allow me tosay what Ireally think about international security problems. Andif mycomments seem unduly polemical, pointed orinexact toour colleagues, then Iwould ask you not toget angry with me. After all, this is only aconference. AndIhope that after thefirst two orthree minutes ofmyspeech Mr Teltschik will not turn onthered light over there.

Therefore. It is well known that international security comprises much more than issues relating tomilitary andpolitical stability. It involves thestability oftheglobal economy, overcoming poverty, economic security anddeveloping adialogue between civilisations.

This universal, indivisible character ofsecurity is expressed asthebasic principle that 'security forone is security forall'. AsFranklin D. Roosevelt said during thefirst few days that theSecond World War was breaking out: 'When peace has been broken anywhere, thepeace ofall countries everywhere is indanger.'

These words remain topical today. Incidentally, thetheme ofour conference- global crises, global responsibility- exemplifies this.

Only two decades ago theworld was ideologically andeconomically divided andit was thehuge strategic potential oftwo superpowers that ensured global security.

This global stand-off pushed thesharpest economic andsocial problems tothemargins oftheinternational community's andtheworld's agenda. And, just like any war, theCold War left us with live ammunition, figuratively speaking. Iam referring toideological stereotypes, double standards andother typical aspects ofCold War bloc thinking.

Theunipolar world that had been proposed after theCold War did not take place either.

Thehistory ofhumanity certainly has gone through unipolar periods andseen aspirations toworld supremacy. Andwhat hasn't happened inworld history?

However, what is aunipolar world? However one might embellish this term, attheend oftheday it refers toone type ofsituation, namely one centre ofauthority, one centre offorce, one centre ofdecision-making.

It is world inwhich there is one master, one sovereign. Andattheend oftheday this is pernicious not only forall those within this system, but also forthesovereign itself because it destroys itself from within.

Andthis certainly has nothing incommon with democracy. Because, asyou know, democracy is thepower ofthemajority inlight oftheinterests andopinions oftheminority.

Incidentally, Russia- we- are constantly being taught about democracy. But forsome reason those who teach us do not want tolearn themselves.

Iconsider that theunipolar model is not only unacceptable but also impossible intoday's world. Andthis is not only because if there was individual leadership intoday's- andprecisely intoday's- world, then themilitary, political andeconomic resources would not suffice. What is even more important is that themodel itself is flawed because atits basis there is andcan be no moral foundations formodern civilisation.

Along with this, what is happening intoday's world- andwe just started todiscuss this- is atentative tointroduce precisely this concept into international affairs, theconcept ofaunipolar world.

Andwith which results?

Unilateral andfrequently illegitimate actions have not resolved any problems. Moreover, they have caused new human tragedies andcreated new centres oftension. Judge foryourselves: wars aswell aslocal andregional conflicts have not diminished. Mr Teltschik mentioned this very gently. Andno less people perish inthese conflicts- even more are dying than before. Significantly more, significantly more!

Today we are witnessing analmost uncontained hyper use offorce- military force- ininternational relations, force that is plunging theworld into anabyss ofpermanent conflicts. Asaresult we do not have sufficient strength tofind acomprehensive solution toany one ofthese conflicts. Finding apolitical settlement also becomes impossible.

We are seeing agreater andgreater disdain forthebasic principles ofinternational law. Andindependent legal norms are, asamatter offact, coming increasingly closer toone state's legal system. One state and, ofcourse, first andforemost theUnited States, has overstepped its national borders inevery way. This is visible intheeconomic, political, cultural andeducational policies it imposes onother nations. Well, who likes this? Who is happy about this?

Ininternational relations we increasingly see thedesire toresolve agiven question according toso-called issues ofpolitical expediency, based onthecurrent political climate.

Andofcourse this is extremely dangerous. It results inthefact that no one feels safe. Iwant toemphasise this- no one feels safe! Because no one can feel that international law is like astone wall that will protect them. Ofcourse such apolicy stimulates anarms race.

Theforce's dominance inevitably encourages anumber ofcountries toacquire weapons ofmass destruction. Moreover, significantly new threats- though they were also well-known before- have appeared, andtoday threats such asterrorism have taken onaglobal character.

Iam convinced that we have reached that decisive moment when we must seriously think about thearchitecture ofglobal security.

Andwe must proceed bysearching forareasonable balance between theinterests ofall participants intheinternational dialogue. Especially since theinternational landscape is so varied andchanges so quickly- changes inlight ofthedynamic development inawhole number ofcountries andregions.

Madam Federal Chancellor already mentioned this. Thecombined GDP ***measured*** inpurchasing power parity ofcountries such asIndia andChina is already greater than that oftheUnited States. Andasimilar calculation with theGDP oftheBRIC countries- Brazil, Russia, India andChina- surpasses thecumulative GDP oftheEU. Andaccording toexperts this gap will only increase inthefuture.

There is no reason todoubt that theeconomic potential ofthenew centres ofglobal economic growth will inevitably be converted into political influence andwill strengthen multipolarity.

Inconnection with this therole ofmultilateral diplomacy is significantly increasing. Theneed forprinciples such asopenness, transparency andpredictability inpolitics is uncontested andtheuse offorce should be areally ***exceptional*** ***measure***, comparable tousing thedeath penalty inthejudicial systems ofcertain states.

However, today we are witnessing theopposite tendency, namely asituation inwhich countries that forbid thedeath penalty even formurderers andother, dangerous criminals are airily participating inmilitary operations that are difficult toconsider legitimate. Andasamatter offact, these conflicts are killing people- hundreds andthousands ofcivilians!

But atthesame time thequestion arises ofwhether we should be indifferent andaloof tovarious internal conflicts inside countries, toauthoritarian regimes, totyrants, andtotheproliferation ofweapons ofmass destruction? Asamatter offact, this was also atthecentre ofthequestion that our dear colleague Mr Lieberman asked theFederal Chancellor. If Icorrectly understood your question (addressing Mr Lieberman), then ofcourse it is aserious one! Can we be indifferent observers inview ofwhat is happening? Iwill try toanswer your question aswell: ofcourse not.

But do we have themeans tocounter these threats? Certainly we do. It is sufficient tolook atrecent history. Did not our country have apeaceful transition todemocracy? Indeed, we witnessed apeaceful transformation oftheSoviet regime- apeaceful transformation! Andwhat aregime! With what anumber ofweapons, including nuclear weapons! Why should we start bombing andshooting now atevery available opportunity? Is it thecase when without thethreat ofmutual destruction we do not have enough political culture, respect fordemocratic values andforthelaw?

Iam convinced that theonly mechanism that can make decisions about using military force asalast resort is theCharter oftheUnited Nations. Andinconnection with this, either Idid not understand what our colleague, theItalian Defence Minister, just said orwhat he said was inexact. Inany case, Iunderstood that theuse offorce can only be legitimate when thedecision is taken byNATO, theEU, ortheUN. If he really does think so, then we have different points ofview. OrIdidn't hear correctly. Theuse offorce can only be considered legitimate if thedecision is sanctioned bytheUN. Andwe do not need tosubstitute NATO ortheEU fortheUN. When theUN will truly unite theforces oftheinternational community andcan really react toevents invarious countries, when we will leave behind this disdain forinternational law, then thesituation will be able tochange. Otherwise thesituation will simply result inadead end, andthenumber ofserious mistakes will be multiplied. Along with this, it is necessary tomake sure that international law have auniversal character both intheconception andapplication ofits norms.

Andone must not forget that democratic political actions necessarily go along with discussion andalaborious decision-making ***process***.

Dear ladies andgentlemen!

Thepotential danger ofthedestabilisation ofinternational relations is connected with obvious stagnation inthedisarmament issue.

Russia supports therenewal ofdialogue onthis important question.

It is important toconserve theinternational legal framework relating toweapons destruction andtherefore ensure continuity intheprocess ofreducing nuclear weapons.

Together with theUnited States ofAmerica we agreed toreduce our nuclear strategic missile capabilities toup to1700-2000 nuclear warheads by31 December 2012. Russia intends tostrictly fulfil theobligations it has taken on. We hope that our partners will also act inatransparent way andwill refrain from laying aside acouple ofhundred superfluous nuclear warheads forarainy day. Andif today thenew American Defence Minister declares that theUnited States will not hide these superfluous weapons inwarehouse or, asone might say, under apillow orunder theblanket, then Isuggest that we all rise andgreet this declaration standing. It would be avery important declaration.

Russia strictly adheres toandintends tofurther adhere totheTreaty ontheNon-Proliferation ofNuclear Weapons aswell asthemultilateral supervision regime formissile technologies. Theprinciples incorporated inthese documents are universal ones.

Inconnection with this Iwould like torecall that inthe1980s theUSSR andtheUnited States signed anagreement ondestroying awhole range ofsmall- andmedium-range missiles but these documents do not have auniversal character.

Today many other countries have these missiles, including theDemocratic People's Republic ofKorea, theRepublic ofKorea, India, Iran, Pakistan andIsrael. Many countries are working onthese systems andplan toincorporate them aspart oftheir weapons arsenals. Andonly theUnited States andRussia bear theresponsibility tonot create such weapons systems.

It is obvious that inthese conditions we must think about ensuring our own security.

Atthesame time, it is impossible tosanction theappearance ofnew, destabilising high-tech weapons. Needless tosay it refers tomeasures toprevent anew area ofconfrontation, especially inouter space. Star wars is no longer afantasy- it is areality. Inthemiddle ofthe1980s our American partners were already able tointercept their own satellite.

InRussia's opinion, themilitarisation ofouter space could have unpredictable consequences fortheinternational community, andprovoke nothing less than thebeginning ofanuclear era. Andwe have come forward more than once with initiatives designed toprevent theuse ofweapons inouter space.

Today Iwould like totell you that we have prepared aproject foranagreement ontheprevention ofdeploying weapons inouter space. Andinthenear future it will be sent toour partners asanofficial proposal. Let's work onthis together.

Plans toexpand certain elements oftheanti-missile defence system toEurope cannot help but disturb us. Who needs thenext step ofwhat would be, inthis case, aninevitable arms race? Ideeply doubt that Europeans themselves do.

Missile weapons with arange ofabout five toeight thousand kilometres that really pose athreat toEurope do not exist inany oftheso-called problem countries. Andinthenear future andprospects, this will not happen andis not even foreseeable. Andany hypothetical launch of, forexample, aNorth Korean rocket toAmerican territory through western Europe obviously contradicts thelaws ofballistics. Aswe say inRussia, it would be like using theright hand toreach theleft ear.

Andhere inGermany Icannot help but mention thepitiable condition oftheTreaty onConventional Armed Forces inEurope.

TheAdapted Treaty onConventional Armed Forces inEurope was signed in1999. It took into account anew geopolitical reality, namely theelimination oftheWarsaw bloc. Seven years have passed andonly four states have ratified this document, including theRussian Federation.

NATO countries openly declared that they will not ratify this treaty, including theprovisions onflank restrictions (ondeploying acertain number ofarmed forces intheflank zones), until Russia removed its military bases from Georgia andMoldova. Our army is leaving Georgia, even according toanaccelerated schedule. We resolved theproblems we had with our Georgian colleagues, aseverybody knows. There are still 1,500 servicemen inMoldova that are carrying out peacekeeping operations andprotecting warehouses with ammunition left over from Soviet times. We constantly discuss this issue with Mr Solana andhe knows our position. We are ready tofurther work inthis direction.

But what is happening atthesame time? Simultaneously theso-called flexible frontline American bases with up tofive thousand men ineach. It turns out that NATO has put its frontline forces onour borders, andwe continue tostrictly fulfil thetreaty obligations anddo not react tothese actions atall.

Ithink it is obvious that NATO expansion does not have any relation with themodernisation oftheAlliance itself orwith ensuring security inEurope. Onthecontrary, it represents aserious provocation that reduces thelevel ofmutual trust. Andwe have theright toask: against whom is this expansion intended? Andwhat happened totheassurances our western partners made after thedissolution oftheWarsaw Pact? Where are those declarations today? No one even remembers them. But Iwill allow myself toremind this audience what was said. Iwould like toquote thespeech ofNATO General Secretary Mr Woerner inBrussels on17 May 1990. He said atthetime that: 'thefact that we are ready not toplace aNATO army outside ofGerman territory gives theSoviet Union afirm security guarantee'. Where are these guarantees?

Thestones andconcrete blocks oftheBerlin Wall have long been distributed assouvenirs. But we should not forget that thefall oftheBerlin Wall was possible thanks toahistoric choice- one that was also made byour people, thepeople ofRussia- achoice infavour ofdemocracy, freedom, openness andasincere partnership with all themembers ofthebig European family.

Andnow they are trying toimpose new dividing lines andwalls onus- these walls may be virtual but they are nevertheless dividing, ones that cut through our continent. Andis it possible that we will once again require many years anddecades, aswell asseveral generations ofpoliticians, todissemble anddismantle these new walls?

Dear ladies andgentlemen!

We are unequivocally infavour ofstrengthening theregime ofnon-proliferation. Thepresent international legal principles allow us todevelop technologies tomanufacture nuclear fuel forpeaceful purposes. Andmany countries with all good reasons want tocreate their own nuclear energy asabasis fortheir energy independence. But we also understand that these technologies can be quickly transformed into nuclear weapons.

This creates serious international tensions. Thesituation surrounding theIranian nuclear programme acts asaclear example. Andif theinternational community does not find areasonable solution forresolving this conflict ofinterests, theworld will continue tosuffer similar, destabilising crises because there are more threshold countries than simply Iran. We both know this. We are going toconstantly fight against thethreat oftheproliferation ofweapons ofmass destruction.

Last year Russia put forward theinitiative toestablish international centres fortheenrichment ofuranium. We are open tothepossibility that such centres not only be created inRussia, but also inother countries where there is alegitimate basis forusing civil nuclear energy. Countries that want todevelop their nuclear energy could guarantee that they will receive fuel through direct participation inthese centres. Andthecentres would, ofcourse, operate under strict IAEA supervision.

Thelatest initiatives put forward byAmerican President George W. Bush are inconformity with theRussian proposals. Iconsider that Russia andtheUSA are objectively andequally interested instrengthening theregime ofthenon-proliferation ofweapons ofmass destruction andtheir deployment. It is precisely our countries, with leading nuclear andmissile capabilities, that must act asleaders indeveloping new, stricter non-proliferation ***measures***. Russia is ready forsuch work. We are engaged inconsultations with our American friends.

Ingeneral, we should talk about establishing awhole system ofpolitical incentives andeconomic stimuli whereby it would not be instates' interests toestablish their own capabilities inthenuclear fuel cycle but they would still have theopportunity todevelop nuclear energy andstrengthen their energy capabilities.

Inconnection with this Ishall talk about international energy cooperation inmore detail. Madam Federal Chancellor also spoke about this briefly- she mentioned, touched onthis theme. Intheenergy sector Russia intends tocreate uniform market principles andtransparent conditions forall. It is obvious that energy prices must be determined bythemarket instead ofbeing thesubject ofpolitical speculation, economic pressure orblackmail.

We are open tocooperation. Foreign companies participate inall our major energy projects. According todifferent estimates, up to26 percent oftheoil extraction inRussia- andplease think about this figure- up to26 percent oftheoil extraction inRussia is done byforeign capital. Try, try tofind me asimilar example where Russian business participates extensively inkey economic sectors inwestern countries. Such examples do not exist! There are no such examples.

Iwould also recall theparity offoreign investments inRussia andthose Russia makes abroad. Theparity is about fifteen toone. Andhere you have anobvious example oftheopenness andstability oftheRussian economy.

Economic security is thesector inwhich all must adhere touniform principles. We are ready tocompete fairly.

Forthat reason more andmore opportunities are appearing intheRussian economy. Experts andour western partners are objectively evaluating these changes. Assuch, Russia's OECD sovereign credit rating improved andRussia passed from thefourth tothethird group. Andtoday inMunich Iwould like touse this occasion tothank our German colleagues fortheir help intheabove decision.

Furthermore. Asyou know, theprocess ofRussia joining theWTO has reached its final stages. Iwould point out that during long, difficult talks we heard words about freedom ofspeech, free trade, andequal possibilities more than once but, forsome reason, exclusively inreference totheRussian market.

Andthere is still one more important theme that directly affects global security. Today many talk about thestruggle against poverty. What is actually happening inthis sphere? Ontheone hand, financial resources are allocated forprogrammes tohelp theworld's poorest countries- andattimes substantial financial resources. But tobe honest— andmany here also know this- linked with thedevelopment ofthat same donor country's companies. Andontheother hand, developed countries simultaneously keep their ***agricultural*** subsidies andlimit some countries' access tohigh-tech products.

Andlet's say things asthey are- one hand distributes charitable help andtheother hand not only preserves economic backwardness but also reaps theprofits thereof. Theincreasing social tension indepressed regions inevitably results inthegrowth ofradicalism, extremism, feeds terrorism andlocal conflicts. Andif all this happens in, shall we say, aregion such astheMiddle East where there is increasingly thesense that theworld atlarge is unfair, then there is therisk ofglobal destabilisation.

It is obvious that theworld's leading countries should see this threat. Andthat they should therefore build amore democratic, fairer system ofglobal economic relations, asystem that would give everyone thechance andthepossibility todevelop.

Dear ladies andgentlemen, speaking attheConference onSecurity Policy, it is impossible not tomention theactivities oftheOrganisation forSecurity andCooperation inEurope (OSCE). Asis well-known, this organisation was created toexamine all- Ishall emphasise this- all aspects ofsecurity: military, political, economic, humanitarian and, especially, therelations between these spheres.

What do we see happening today? We see that this balance is clearly destroyed. People are trying totransform theOSCE into avulgar instrument designed topromote theforeign policy interests ofone oragroup ofcountries. Andthis task is also being accomplished bytheOSCE's bureaucratic apparatus which is absolutely not connected with thestate founders inany way. Decision-making procedures andtheinvolvement ofso-called non-governmental organisations are tailored forthis task. These organisations are formally independent but they are purposefully financed andtherefore under control.

According tothefounding documents, inthehumanitarian sphere theOSCE is designed toassist country members inobserving international human rights norms attheir request. This is animportant task. We support this. But this does not mean interfering intheinternal affairs ofother countries, andespecially not imposing aregime that determines how these states should live anddevelop.

It is obvious that such interference does not promote thedevelopment ofdemocratic states atall. Onthecontrary, it makes them dependent and, asaconsequence, politically andeconomically unstable.

We expect that theOSCE be guided byits primary tasks andbuild relations with sovereign states based onrespect, trust andtransparency.

Dear ladies andgentlemen!

Inconclusion Iwould like tonote thefollowing. We very often- andpersonally, Ivery often- hear appeals byour partners, including our European partners, totheeffect that Russia should play anincreasingly active role inworld affairs.

Inconnection with this Iwould allow myself tomake one small remark. It is hardly necessary toincite us todo so. Russia is acountry with ahistory that spans more than athousand years andhas practically always used theprivilege tocarry out anindependent foreign policy.

We are not going tochange this tradition today. Atthesame time, we are well aware ofhow theworld has changed andwe have arealistic sense ofour own opportunities andpotential. Andofcourse we would like tointeract with responsible andindependent partners with whom we could work together inconstructing afair anddemocratic world order that would ensure security andprosperity not only foraselect few, but forall.

Thank you foryour attention.

Horst Teltschik: Thank you very much foryour important speech. We heard new themes, including theissue ofglobal security architecture- one was not intheforeground over thelast few years- disarmament, arms control, theissue oftheNATO-Russian relations, andcooperation inthefield oftechnology.

There are still awhole number ofquestions andMr President is ready toanswer.

Question: Dear Mr President, thank you foryour speech. Iwould like toemphasise that theGerman Bundestag is convinced ofRussia's importance asEurope's partner andoftheimportance oftherole you play. TheFederal Chancellor said this inher speech.

Proceeding from experience, Iwould like tomention two issues inyour speech. First ofall, onyour opinion ofNATO andNATO expansion, aphenomenon that you consider dangerous forRussia. Would you acknowledge that this phenomenon is, inpractice, not expansion but rather theself-determination ofdemocratic states who want this? Andthat NATO finds it difficult toaccept states that do not declare this readiness? You could admit that thanks toNATO expansion eastern borders have become more reliable, more secure. Why are you afraid ofdemocracy? Iam convinced that only democratic states can become members ofNATO. This stabilises neighbours.

About what is happening inside your country. Themurder ofAnna Politkovskaya was asymbol. One can say that this affects many journalists, makes everybody afraid, andthelaw onnon-governmental organisations also causes alarm.

Question: Iwell understand your comments about non-proliferation. Especially attheend oftheCold War we saw areduction ofthedeployment ofnuclear weapons, but we also saw increased terrorism. Nuclear materials must be kept away from terrorists.

Question: Coming back tothequestion that was also asked totheFederal Chancellor. What does thefuture hold forKosovo andSerbia? What is your opinion ofMr Ahtisaari? How will Russia influence resolving this problem?

Question: Can you comment ontheexperiences ofRussian servicemen inChechnya? Andabout your comments onenergy: you briefly mentioned themarket role energy plays inpolitics. TheEU is interested inreaching apartnership agreement that contains fixed policy principles. Are you ready toguarantee reliable energy deliveries, including intheagreement?

Question: Mr President, your speech was both sincere andfrank. Ihope that you understand myfrank anddirect question. Inthe1990s Russian experts actively helped Iran develop missile technologies. Iran now has advanced medium- andlong-range missiles that would enable it tostrike Russia andpart ofEurope. They are also working towards placing nuclear warheads onthese missiles. Your country has made efforts tonegotiate with Iran onthis issue andsupported theUN Security Council resolution toprevent Iran from carrying out such apolicy.

Myquestion is asfollows: what efforts will Russia make- through theUN orotherwise- tostop these very serious events inIran?

Question: Iam confident that thehistorians ofthefuture will not describe our conference asone inwhich theSecond Cold War was declared. But they could. You said that it is necessary toput pressure onIran andtoprovide positive incentives. But is it not true that Russia is interfering with theprocess ofapplying strong pressure through sanctions? Secondly, with regards todeliveries ofweapons, Russia is encouraging Iran, especially since these weapons appeared inLebanon andinGaza. What are your comments onthis?

Question: Iunderstand your sincerity andIhope that you will accept our sincerity. First ofall, about arms control. Who needs anew arms race? Iwant topoint out that theUSA has not developed anew strategic weapon inmore than two decades andthat you recently tested theTopol-M missile, andthat it is already deployed insilos andonmobile installations. You criticised theUSA forunilateral actions andsaid twice that military actions can only be legitimate if they receive UN approval. TheUSA is carrying out military actions inIraq andinAfghanistan according toUN decisions andtoday inKosovo themajority oftroops are supporting peace-making operations inthis country.

Myquestion is thefollowing: are you saying that independently ofhow Russia perceives athreat toits international interests, it will not undertake military operations without UN approval?

Question: You talked about thedanger ofaunipolar world inwhich one sovereign makes adecision without consulting anyone else. Inmany people's opinion, inRussia we are seeing anincreasingly unipolar government where competing centres ofinfluence are forced totow theparty line, whether it be intheState Duma, theregional leadership, themedia, business communities ornon-governmental organisations. Would aunipolar government be such areliable partner when theissue ofenergy security is atstake?

President Vladimir Putin: First ofall Iwould like tothank you foryour questions. Very interesting. It is ashame that we have little time left because Iwould be pleased tohave aseparate discussion with all ofyou. Ivery much enjoy this, Ilike it.

Iwill begin with thelast question about theunipolar nature oftheRussian government. Today theCommunist Party oftheRussian Federation, theUnited Russia Party, theLiberal Democratic Party andother political forces aswell sit intheRussian parliament. Andtheir basic positions differ significantly. If you aren't aware ofthis then just have atalk with theleadership oftheCommunist Party oftheRussian Federation andthen with theleader ofour liberal democrats, Mr Zhirinovsky. You will see thedifference atonce. If you cannot see it now, then have atalk with them. There is no problem here, simply go toMoscow andtalk tothem.

About our future plans. We would like tohave amature political system, amulti-party system with responsible politicians who can anticipate thecountry's development andnot only work responsibly before elections andimmediately after, but inalong-term future aswell. That is what we aspire to. Andthis system will certainly be amulti-party one. All our actions within Russia, including changing theState Duma election regime, theelection regime intheRussian parliament, are designed tostrengthen amulti-party system inRussia.

Andnow about whether our government cabinet is able tooperate responsibly inresolving issues linked toenergy deliveries andensuring energy security. Ofcourse it can! Moreover, all that we have done andare doing is designed toachieve only one goal, namely totransfer our relations with consumers andcountries that transport our energy tomarket-based, transparent principles andlong-term contracts.

Iwill remind you andmycolleague, thePresident ofUkraine, who is sitting opposite from me, also knows this. Forfifteen years prior to2006, aslong aswe did not make thecorresponding decisions during our difficult talks, deliveries ofRussian energy and, first andforemost, ofgas toEurope depended ontheconditions andprices forthedeliveries ofRussian gas toUkraine itself. Andthis was something that Ukraine andRussia agreed among themselves. Andif we reached no agreement, then all European consumers would sit there with no gas. Would you like tosee this happen? Idon't think so. Anddespite all thescandals, theprotection ofinterests, anddifferences ofopinion we were able toagree with President Yushchenko. Iconsider that he made aresponsible, absolutely correct andmarket-oriented decision. We signed separate contracts forthedelivery ofour gas toUkraine andfordelivering Russian gas toEurope forthenext five years. You should thank us, both Russia andUkraine, forthis decision. Andthank you also foryour question.

It would have been better if Ianswered your questions atonce.

Regarding our perception ofNATO's eastern expansion, Ialready mentioned theguarantees that were made andthat are not being observed today. Do you happen tothink that this is normal practice ininternational affairs? But all right, forget it. Forget these guarantees. With respect todemocracy andNATO expansion. NATO is not auniversal organisation, asopposed totheUN. It is first andforemost amilitary andpolitical alliance, military andpolitical! Well, ensuring one's own security is theright ofany sovereign state. We are not arguing against this. Ofcourse we are not objecting tothis. But why is it necessary toput military infrastructure onour borders during this expansion? Can someone answer this question? Unless theexpansion ofmilitary infrastructure is connected with fighting against today's global threats? Let's put it this way, what is themost important ofthese threats forus today- themost important forRussia, fortheUSA andforEurope- it is terrorism andthefight against it.

Does one need Russia tofight against terrorism? Ofcourse! Does one need India tofight against terrorism! Ofcourse! But we are not members ofNATO andother countries aren't either. But we can only work onthis issue effectively byjoining our forces. Assuch, expanding infrastructure, especially military infrastructure, toour borders is not connected inany way with thedemocratic choices ofindividual states. AndIwould ask that we not mix these two concepts.

You know, Iwrote so illegibly here that even Icannot read myown writing. Iwill therefore answer what Ican read andif Ido not answer something, please remind me ofthequestion.

What will happen with Kosovo andwith Serbia? Only Kosovars andSerbs can know. Andlet's not tell them how they should live their lives. There is no need toplay God andresolve all ofthese peoples' problems. Together we can only create certain necessary conditions andhelp people resolve their own problems. Create thenecessary conditions andact astheguarantors ofcertain agreements. But we should not impose these agreements. Otherwise, we shall simply put thesituation into adead end. Andif one oftheparticipants inthis difficult ***process*** feels offended orhumiliated, then theproblem will last forcenturies. We will only create adead end.

What does our position consist in? Our position consists inadhering precisely tothis principle. Andif we see that one party is clearly dissatisfied with theproposals toresolve thesituation then we are not going tosupport this option.

Idid not exactly understand what you meant when you asked about our servicemen's experience inChechnya. Their experience is not pleasant, but it is extensive. Andif you are interested inthegeneral situation inChechnya, then Ican tell you that aparliament andapresident have been elected, andthat thegovernment is functioning. All thebodies ofauthority andadministration have been formed. Practically all thepolitical forces inChechnya have been involved inwork intheRepublic. Asanexample, theformer Defence Minister ofAslan Maskhadov's government is now amember ofparliament inChechnya. Andwe made awhole series ofdecisions that would allow former insurgents toreturn not only tonormal life, but also totheRepublic's political activities. Assuch, today we prefer toact byusing economic andpolitical means and, inpractice, we have transferred theresponsibility forensuring security almost 100 percent totheChechen people. Because theagencies oflaw andorder that were formed inChechnya are almost 100 percent composed oflocal citizens, from those living inChechnya onapermanent basis- from Chechens.

AstoLebanon, Ialso did not quite understand what you meant. But, yes, thefact that we sent military construction workers toLebanon torestore bridges andinfrastructure that was destroyed intheconflict with Israel is aconfirmation ofawell-known situation, theone Idescribed just now. Andmilitary units protecting these builders were made up ofservicemen from Chechnya andwith Chechen origins. We recognised that if our servicemen must operate inregions inhabited byMuslims, sending acontingent ofMuslim servicemen would be no bad thing. Andwe were not mistaken. Thelocal population really gave awarm welcome toour military builders.

Now about theenergy agreement with theEuropean Union, since this is how Iunderstood thequestion. We have said many times that we are not against agreeing ontheprinciples underlying our energy relations with theEU. Moreover, theprinciples contained intheCharter are generally comprehensible. But theCharter itself is not so acceptable tous. Because not only Russia but also our European partners do not adhere toits principles. It is enough toremember that themarket fornuclear materials remains closed forus. Nobody has opened this market tous.

There are also other moments which Isimply do not want todraw attention tonow. But astotheprinciples themselves, we are already using these principles inour work with German companies. Ishall remind you ofthetransaction that took place between Gazprom andBASF. Asamatter offact, this was anasset swap. We are ready tocontinue towork this way. We are ready. But ineach concrete instance we must understand what we give, what our partners give, calculate, have anindependent international expert evaluation, andthen make adecision. We are ready toengage inthis work. We have actually just recently done something similar with our Italian partners, with thecompany ENI. Andwe did more than simply sign anagreement about deliveries until 2035- Ithink- we also talked about swapping assets. Andwe are studying this same type ofcooperation with our Ukrainian friends. This is going ahead.

Andis it necessary tofix these principles inapossible future fundamental text between Russia andtheEU? It is possible tohave different opinions onthis issue. Iconsider that it is not necessary because, inaddition toenergy, we have other spheres inwhich we cooperate with theEU, including ***agriculture***, high-tech andtransportation. Andall ofthis is very important andvery interesting. Andwe cannot put all ofthis inone fundamental act that should act asaframework document. Orwould you want us toput only what you need inthedocument andleave what we need outside oftheframework? Let's discuss things honestly with one another andtake mutually acceptable decisions.

'Inthe1990s Russia helped Iran develop missile technologies'. Ithink that you asked me this question. 'Today Iran wants toput nuclear warheads onthese missiles that could reach Europe. What is Russia going todo about theIranian nuclear programme?' Is that so?

Well first ofall, Ido not have data that inthe1990s Russia helped Iran create its own missile technologies. It was other countries that worked very actively towards this. Andtechnology was transferred through different channels. Andwe have proof ofthis. Atthetime Igave these proofs directly tothePresident oftheUnited States. Andtechnology also came from Europe andfrom Asian countries.

So Russia is hardly atfault here. Iassure you. Russia is thecountry least involved here. Least ofall. If it is involved atall. Atthetime Iwas still working inSt Petersburg, but we were not involved with this. Ican assure you ofthis. But you know that atthebusiness level something could have happened. We trained experts ininstitutes andso on. Andattherequest andaccording totheinformation ofour American partners we reacted harshly tothis. Immediately andharshly. We did not observe such areaction from our other partners, including European partners. Moreover, Ido not know whether you are aware ofthis ornot but you should know that military technology andspecial equipment is still coming from theUnited States. Until now. Until now spare parts forF-14 planes come from thearmed forces andthePentagon. Asfar asIknow, there is even aninvestigation taking place intheUnited States onthis account. Anddespite thefact that this investigation is proceeding andthat these spare parts were seized attheborder andthen sent back, after acertain amount oftime, according tothedata Ihave- andif they are not correct then check them- those same cargos were again seized attheborder. Even bearing atag 'material evidence'.

You know, this stream is really hard tostop. We need towork together todo so.

About whether ornot Iran has missiles that threaten Europe. You are mistaken. Today Iran has- Mr Gates is here today andcertainly knows this data better than Ido, andtheRussian Defence Minister is also here- missiles with arange of2000 kilometres.

Russian Defence Minister Sergei Ivanov: 1600-1700 kilometres.

Vladimir Putin: 1600-1700 kilometres. Only. Well, count how many kilometres there are between Munich andtheIranian border. Iran has no such missiles. They plan todevelop some with arange of2400 kilometres. It is not known whether they have thetechnology todo so. Andwith respect to4000, 5000 or6000 kilometres, then Ithink that this would simply require adifferent economy. So, it is improbable ingeneral. AndIran is not threatening Europe. With regard totheidea that they are preparing touse nuclear warheads then we do not have such data. We do not have this data about nuclear warheads.

North Korea has tested anuclear device. Iranians are constantly saying that their nuclear programme has apeaceful character. But Iagree with you that theinternational community has concerns about thecharacter andquality ofIran's nuclear programmes. AndMr ElBaradai recently stated these concerns inwhat Ithink were six orseven points. Iagree with you about this. AndIdo not understand why theIranian party has still not reacted inapositive andconstructive way totheconcerns that Mr ElBaradai stated andtherefore assuaged these concerns. Ido not understand this just asyou do not understand it.

What are we going todo? Ithink that together we need towork patiently andcarefully. And, that's right, tocreate incentives andshow theIranian leadership that cooperation with theinternational community is much better than confrontation.

Yes, andagain about thedeliveries ofweapons toIran. You know that there has been more talk than deliveries. Our military andtechnical cooperation with Iran is minimal. Simply minimal. Iam not sure what minimal figures it is estimated at. Ingeneral we deliver much less arms totheMiddle East than other countries, including theUnited States. No comparison is possible there. We recently delivered ananti-aircraft weapon system toIran- that is true- with amedium range, approximately 30 to50 kilometres. That is true. Why did we do this? Ican explain why. We did this so that Iran did not feel it had been driven into acorner. So that it didn't feel that it was insome kind ofhostile environment. Rather that Iran could understand that it had channels ofcommunication andfriends that it could trust. We very much expect that theIranian party will understand andhear our signals.

Astoour weapons inLebanon andintheGaza strip. Iam not aware ofour weapons intheGaza strip. Ihave not heard ofsuch examples. Well, Kalashnikovs are ingeneral themost widely used small arms intheworld. They are probably everywhere. Andprobably there are still automatic Kalashnikovs inGermany or, inany case, some that have still not been destroyed. That is one hundred percent certain.

InLebanon it is true. Elements ofour anti-tank systems really have been seen there. That is true. Our Israeli partners told me about this atonce. We carried out athorough investigation into what happened. Andwe determined that these systems had remained inLebanese territory after theSyrian army left. We carried out thecorresponding work with our Syrian partners. We determined that our future military andtechnical cooperation with Syria would exclude thepossibility that weapons could fall into any hands other than theones they were destined for. We developed such asystem. Among other things, we agreed onasystem ofpossible warehouse inspections, atany time that is convenient forRussian experts. Inspections inwarehouses after deliveries ofRussian weapons systems toSyria.

'TheUSA are not developing strategic weapons but Russia is. Will Russia use force inthefuture if it is not sanctioned bytheUN? Russia is developing asystem ofstrategic weapons'.

Fine question, excellent! Iam very grateful toyou forthis question. It will give me theopportunity totalk about theessence ofwhat is happening. What are we indebted tointhepast decades if there was astand-off between two superpowers andtwo systems but nevertheless abig war did not take place? We are indebted tothebalance ofpowers between these two superpowers. There was anequilibrium andafear ofmutual destruction. Andinthose days one party was afraid tomake anextra step without consulting theother. Andthis was certainly afragile peace andafrightening one. But aswe see today, it was reliable enough. Today, it seems that thepeace is not so reliable.

Yes, theUnited States is ostensibly not developing anoffensive weapon. Inany case, thepublic does not know about this. Even though they are certainly developing them. But we aren't even going toask about this now. We know that these developments are proceeding. But we pretend that we don't know, so we say that they aren't developing new weapons. But what do we know? That theUnited States is actively developing andalready strengthening ananti-missile defence system. Today this system is ineffective but we do not know exactly whether it will one day be effective. But intheory it is being created forthat purpose. So hypothetically we recognise that when this moment arrives, thepossible threat from our nuclear forces will be completely neutralised. Russia's present nuclear capabilities, that is. Thebalance ofpowers will be absolutely destroyed andone oftheparties will benefit from thefeeling ofcomplete security. This means that its hands will be free not only inlocal but eventually also inglobal conflicts.

We are discussing this with you now. Iwould not want anyone tosuspect any aggressive intentions onour part. But thesystem ofinternational relations is just like mathematics. There are no personal dimensions. Andofcourse we should react tothis. How? Either thesame asyou andtherefore bybuilding amulti-billion dollar anti-missile system or, inview ofour present economic andfinancial possibilities, bydeveloping anasymmetrical answer. So that everybody can understand that theanti-missile defence system is useless against Russia because we have certain weapons that easily overcome it. Andwe are proceeding inthis direction. It is cheaper forus. Andthis is inno way directed against theUnited States themselves.

Icompletely agree if you say that theStrategic Defense Initiative (SDI) is not directed against us, just asour new weapons are not directed against you. AndIfully agree with mycolleague andmyfriend about another thing. Do you know- andIwill not be afraid oftheword- that inspite ofall our disagreements Iconsider thePresident oftheUnited States myfriend. He is adecent person andIknow that today thewolves can blame theUnited States foreverything that is being done ontheinternational arena andinternally. But Iknow that he is adecent person andit is possible totalk andreach agreements with him. Andwhen Italked tohim he said: 'Iproceed from thefact that Russia andtheUSA will never be opponents andenemies again'. Iagree with him. But Irepeat once again that there are symmetries andasymmetries here, there is nothing personal. It is simply acalculation.

Andnow about whether Russia will use military force without thesanction oftheUN. We will always operate strictly within theinternational legal framework. Mybasic education is inlaw andIwill allow myself toremind both myself andmycolleagues that according totheUN Charter peace-keeping operations require thesanction ofboth theUN andtheUN Security Council. This is inthecase ofpeace-keeping operations. But intheUN Charter there is also anarticle about self-defence. Andno sanctions are required inthis case.

So, what have Iforgotten?

Question: Myquestion was about multipolarity inRussia itself andabout theattitude oftheinternational community towards Russia if Russia does not observe these principles, inreference tothemurder ofjournalists, fears, anxieties, theabsence offreedom andnon-governmental organisations.

Vladimir Putin: Iwill say acouple ofwords. Ialready answered part ofthequestion when Italked about thestructure oftheRussian parliament. Look atwho is represented there, thepolitical views ofthepeople who have leadership positions inparliament, thelegitimate parties. Now, astonon-governmental organisations, they are working actively inRussia. Yes, we introduced anew system forregistering these organisations. But it is not that different from registration systems inother countries. Andwe have not yet seen any complaints from non-governmental organisations themselves. We have not refused registration toalmost any organisations. There were two orthree cases that were refused onsimply formal grounds andthese organisations are working oncorrecting certain provisions intheir charters andso on. Nobody has been refused registration based onsubstantial, fundamental issues. All are continuing towork inthemost active possible way andwill continue todo so inthefuture.

What bothers us? Ican say andIthink that it is clear forall, that when these non-governmental organisations are financed byforeign governments, we see them asaninstrument that foreign states use tocarry out their Russian policies. That is thefirst thing. Thesecond. Inevery country there are certain rules forfinancing, shall we say, election campaigns. Financing from foreign governments, including within governmental campaigns, proceeds through non-governmental organisations. Andwho is happy about this? Is this normal democracy? It is secret financing. Hidden from society. Where is thedemocracy here? Can you tell me? No! You can't tell me andyou never will be able to. Because there is no democracy here, there is simply one state exerting influence onanother.

But we are interested indeveloping civil society inRussia, so that it scolds andcriticises theauthorities, helps them determine their own mistakes, andcorrect their policies inRussian citizens' interests. We are certainly interested inthis andwe will support civil society andnon-governmental organisations.

Astofears andso on, are you aware that today Russians have fewer fears than citizens inmany other countries? Because inthelast few years we made cardinal changes toimprove theeconomic well-being ofour citizens. We still have agreat many problems. Andwe still have agreat many unresolved problems. Including problems linked with poverty. AndIcan tell you that fears basically come from this source.

Astojournalists then yes, this represents animportant anddifficult problem. And, incidentally, journalists are not only killed inRussia, but inother countries aswell. Where are most journalists killed? You are anexpert andprobably know inwhich country themost journalists died in, say, thelast year andahalf? Thelargest number ofjournalists were killed inIraq.

Astotragedies within Russia, we will certainly struggle with these phenomena inthemost thorough way possible andsternly punish all criminals who try toundermine trust inRussia anddamage our political system.

Thank you foryour attention.

Report[20]

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[ 1]: [*https://thehill.com/opinion/national-security/3484182-did-nato-cause-the-war-in-ukraine/*](https://thehill.com/opinion/national-security/3484182-did-nato-cause-the-war-in-ukraine/) [ 2]: [*https://www.wsj.com/livecoverage/russia-ukraine-latest-news-2022-05-03/card/pope-says-nato-may-have-provoked-russian-****invasion****-of-ukraine-E7VAcqXGK8xNoHxJPQFs*](https://www.wsj.com/livecoverage/russia-ukraine-latest-news-2022-05-03/card/pope-says-nato-may-have-provoked-russian-invasion-of-ukraine-E7VAcqXGK8xNoHxJPQFs) [ 3]: [*https://www.wsj.com/livecoverage/russia-ukraine-latest-news-2022-05-03/card/pope-says-nato-may-have-provoked-russian-****invasion****-of-ukraine-E7VAcqXGK8xNoHxJPQFs*](https://www.wsj.com/livecoverage/russia-ukraine-latest-news-2022-05-03/card/pope-says-nato-may-have-provoked-russian-invasion-of-ukraine-E7VAcqXGK8xNoHxJPQFs) [ 4]: [*https://www.google.com/search?q=the+fifth+horseman+and+the+new+mad&sxsrf=ALiCzsZWk4ml7APCth0bw196h1CgP2RguQ:1651776803087&source=hp&ei=Ix10YsWnAp3LytMPgZ25wAs&iflsig=AJiK0e8AAAAAYnQrMz-J\_8JGzdpDhYh\_4ZYMt-vj3ESj&oq=The+&gs\_lcp=Cgdnd3Mtd2l6EAEYADIECCMQJzIECCMQJzIECCMQJzIECAAQQzIECAAQQzIECAAQQzIECAAQQzIECAAQQzIECAAQQzIECAAQQzoHCCMQ6gIQJzoNCC4QxwEQrwEQ6gIQJzoHCC4Q6gIQJzoECC4QQzoLCAAQgAQQsQMQgwE6DgguEIAEELEDEMcBEKMCOgUIABCABDoRCC4QgAQQsQMQgwEQxwEQowJQtAZYkgxg-R1oAXAAeACAAZUBiAHFA5IBAzIuMpgBAKABAbABCg&sclient=gws-wiz*](https://www.google.com/search?q=the+fifth+horseman+and+the+new+mad&sxsrf=ALiCzsZWk4ml7APCth0bw196h1CgP2RguQ:1651776803087&source=hp&ei=Ix10YsWnAp3LytMPgZ25wAs&iflsig=AJiK0e8AAAAAYnQrMz-J_8JGzdpDhYh_4ZYMt-vj3ESj&oq=The+&gs_lcp=Cgdnd3Mtd2l6EAEYADIECCMQJzIECCMQJzIECCMQJzIECAAQQzIECAAQQzIECAAQQzIECAAQQzIECAAQQzIECAAQQzIECAAQQzoHCCMQ6gIQJzoNCC4QxwEQrwEQ6gIQJzoHCC4Q6gIQJzoECC4QQzoLCAAQgAQQsQMQgwE6DgguEIAEELEDEMcBEKMCOgUIABCABDoRCC4QgAQQsQMQgwEQxwEQowJQtAZYkgxg-R1oAXAAeACAAZUBiAHFA5IBAzIuMpgBAKABAbABCg&sclient=gws-wiz) 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[*https://www.google.com/search?q=the+fifth+horseman+and+the+new+mad&sxsrf=ALiCzsZWk4ml7APCth0bw196h1CgP2RguQ:1651776803087&source=hp&ei=Ix10YsWnAp3LytMPgZ25wAs&iflsig=AJiK0e8AAAAAYnQrMz-J\_8JGzdpDhYh\_4ZYMt-vj3ESj&oq=The+&gs\_lcp=Cgdnd3Mtd2l6EAEYADIECCMQJzIECCMQJzIECCMQJzIECAAQQzIECAAQQzIECAAQQzIECAAQQzIECAAQQzIECAAQQzIECAAQQzoHCCMQ6gIQJzoNCC4QxwEQrwEQ6gIQJzoHCC4Q6gIQJzoECC4QQzoLCAAQgAQQsQMQgwE6DgguEIAEELEDEMcBEKMCOgUIABCABDoRCC4QgAQQsQMQgwEQxwEQowJQtAZYkgxg-R1oAXAAeACAAZUBiAHFA5IBAzIuMpgBAKABAbABCg&sclient=gws-wiz*](https://www.google.com/search?q=the+fifth+horseman+and+the+new+mad&sxsrf=ALiCzsZWk4ml7APCth0bw196h1CgP2RguQ:1651776803087&source=hp&ei=Ix10YsWnAp3LytMPgZ25wAs&iflsig=AJiK0e8AAAAAYnQrMz-J_8JGzdpDhYh_4ZYMt-vj3ESj&oq=The+&gs_lcp=Cgdnd3Mtd2l6EAEYADIECCMQJzIECCMQJzIECCMQJzIECAAQQzIECAAQQzIECAAQQzIECAAQQzIECAAQQzIECAAQQzIECAAQQzoHCCMQ6gIQJzoNCC4QxwEQrwEQ6gIQJzoHCC4Q6gIQJzoECC4QQzoLCAAQgAQQsQMQgwE6DgguEIAEELEDEMcBEKMCOgUIABCABDoRCC4QgAQQsQMQgwEQxwEQowJQtAZYkgxg-R1oAXAAeACAAZUBiAHFA5IBAzIuMpgBAKABAbABCg&sclient=gws-wiz) 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?subject=Hey,%20I%20would%20like%20to%20report%20an%20abuse&body=Reported%20link:%20[*https://theduran.com/putins-munich-speech-should-have-been-heeded-by-the-west-video*](https://theduran.com/putins-munich-speech-should-have-been-heeded-by-the-west-video)/

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[***Alberta Labour Relations Board decision: United Food And Commercial Workers Union, Local No. 401 v Cargill Ltd., 2022***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:65DX-7D01-F0YC-N02R-00000-00&context=1516831)

Baltic Legal Updates

May 11, 2022 Wednesday

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**Length:** 28661 words

**Body**

Edmonton: Alberta Labour Relations Board has issued the following decision on (2022-04-29):

IN THE MATTER OF THE LABOUR RELATIONS CODE

UNITED FOOD AND COMMERCIAL WORKERS UNION,

LOCAL NO. 401

Applicant

- and -

CARGILL LTD.

Respondent

Date of Decision:April 29, 2022FILE:GE-08267

BOARD MEMBERS

J. Leslie Wallace – Vice-Chair

Carol Graham – Member

Peter Marsden – Member

APPEARANCES

For the Applicant:Kara O ’ Halloran (Counsel), Kristan McLeod (Counsel), Devin Yeager, Joe Attwood, Miriam Tukku, Jamie Walsh-Rollo

For the Respondent:Damon Bailey, Q.C (Counsel), Alison Adam (Counsel), Rebecca Silverberg (Counsel), Tanya Teeter

REASONS FOR DECISION

I.Introduction

[1]These are reasons given in an application to summarily dismiss an unfair labour practice complaint at the close of the Union ’ s case.They explain and amplify the “bottom line” decision given in this matter on May 20, 2021, which allowed the application and dismissed the complaint.

[2]Cargill Ltd. (“Cargill” or the “Employer”) operates the largest meat packing plant in Canada just outside High River, near Calgary, Alberta.In March and April, 2020, it was the location of what was, for the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, the largest outbreak of the COVID-19 virus in Canada ***measured*** by direct and linked cases.Over 1000 cases linked to the plant occurred.Two employees died of the virus during that time.

[3]The outbreak placed immense strains on the workplace and on the bargaining relationship between the Employer and its employees ’ bargaining agent, United Food and Commercial Workers Union, Local No. 401 (“UFCW”, “Local 401”, or the “Union”).It posed a very serious threat to employee health and safety, to ongoing production at the plant, and more generally to public health in the Calgary region.It became a major issue for government agencies, notably Alberta Health Services (“AHS”) and Occupational Health and Safety (“OHS”), which both became involved in the Employer ’ s response to the outbreak.

[4]Part of the Employer ’ s response was an approximately two-week shutdown of the plant in late April 2020.The Union had already publicly called for a shutdown before this.It viewed Cargill ’ s health and safety ***measures*** as inadequate, and opposed the reopening of the plant from this shutdown on May 4, 2020.On May 1, 2020, it filed a complaint to this Board that the Employer had interfered with the Union ’ s representation of employees and discriminated against, restrained or intimidated employees for union membership or activity, contrary to sections 148(1)(a)(ii) and 149(1)(a)(i), (ii) and (viii), 149(1)(b) and (c) of the Labour Relations Code (the “Code”).It sought, among other relief, an interim order that the plant remain closed.

[5]The Board denied an urgent hearing, scheduled the matter to hearing before this panel in the normal course, and appointed its Vice-Chair Lyle Kanee, Q.C , to assist the parties to resolve some or all their issues.Their meetings with Vice-Chair Kanee resulted in an interim agreement that operated for some or all the time occupied in bringing the complaint to the stage of hearing that it reached.

[6]Though we will canvass all aspects of the Union ’ s complaint presently, for now it is enough to say that the crux of the Complaint is that the Employer failed to accord the Union its proper representational role in evaluating and responding to the outbreak.It says this failure manifested itself in multiple ways, including undermining or failing to recognize the roles both of full-time Union representatives, and Union appointees to the Employer ’ s Joint Workplace Health and Safety Committee (“JWHSC”). A secondary aspect of the Complaint alleged that Cargill suspended its second shift starting April 13, 2020 in retaliation for the Union ’ s public advocacy.

[7]The Union presented evidence over six days in separate groups of hearing days in June 2020 and January 2021.At the close of the Union ’ s case, the Employer applied for the Board to dismiss the Complaint on the basis that the evidence did not disclose a substantive case that either section 148 or section 149 of the Code had been violated.

II.Facts

A.Overview

[8]The Cargill plant at High River supplies approximately 30% of Canada ’ s beef.It employs some 2000 unionized employees, along with out of scope salaried employees and managers, in two principal production areas:harvest, colloquially the “kill floor”, where animals are slaughtered; and fabrication, where the carcasses are broken down and cut into wholesale cuts, and packaged for shipping.The Union ’ s predecessor Local 1118 was the certified bargaining agent for the production employees of Cargill from 1991.In 2016, Local 1118 merged with Local 401, the present bargaining agent.

[9]The Cargill workforce is ***exceptionally*** diverse.A great many of the production workforce are recent immigrants to Canada.Many national communities are represented.Turnover is high.Many employees have a first language other than English and imperfect command of the English language, along with the unfamiliarity with labour relations that exists in many industrial workforces.The production ***process*** is highly integrated.It depends upon continuous, high-speed operation of the production line, and minimizing down time.Food safety and occupational health and safety are imperatives.All of this makes union representation of the workforce much more challenging than in most other workplaces.

[10]The Union relies heavily on face-to-face communication with its members in the Cargill unit.This is so in part because the ***exceptional*** diversity of the workforce tends to fragment social media communities by ethnicity and culture and so makes electronic communication more difficult.Although the Union assigns two full-time representatives to the plant, there are other key elements to its representational work.Important to this case are the employee representatives to the JWHSC and the “walking stewards”, production workers who by the collective agreement are entitled to be released from their production role to “roam” the floor, monitor workplace conditions and represent union members in the immediate vicinity of their work stations.

[11]It is convenient at this point to list the principal actors on behalf of both parties in these events:

Local 401

Thomas Hesse: President of the Union.Mr. Hesse was a long-time organizer and official for the Union until 2019, when he succeeded to the presidency after the death of President Douglas O ’ Halloran.

Devin Yeager: Labour Relations Officer for the Union, formerly Executive Director of Local 1118, now with responsibility for members at the smaller Cargill Case-Ready plant in Calgary, and as a representative at Cargill High River.

Joe Attwood:Labour Relations Officer for the Union, with secondary responsibility for Cargill, and temporary representative on the JWHSC in the fall of 2019.

Jamie Walsh-Rollo:Cargill employee, at the time of the hearing a “Cryovac [sealing machine] operator”, shop steward, and employee representative on the JWHSC.

Miriam Tukku:Cargill employee and shop steward, at the time of the hearing working in the “back packoff” area, and the other employee representative and co-chair on the JWHSC.

Cargill

Tanya Teeter:Vice-President of Human Resources, working out of Cargill offices in the United States.She is the principal Employer contact to Mr. Hesse.

Dale LaGrange:General Manager of the High River Plant.

Devin Tretiak:Senior Employee Relations representative at the High River Plant.He is the most senior Employer labour relations representative on site and the principal point of contact with Messrs. Yeager and Attwood.

Rob Hale:Senior Human Resources representative at the High River Plant, most often in contact with Mr. Yeager.

Renee Siki:Safety Manager, High River Plant.She was member of, and the principal Employer point of contact with, the JWHSC, and therefore with Ms. Walsh-Rollo and Ms. Tukku.

[12]The COVID-19 respiratory virus surfaced in Canada at some time in February 2020.It proved to be highly contagious, spreading by various means – respiratory droplets, aerosolized particles, and fomite (inanimate surface-to-host) transmission, the relative ease of each being still under study and debate over two years later.It presents in a baffling range of virulence, affecting some hosts so little as to be essentially asymptomatic (and undetected), while hospitalizing and killing others, most notably older persons and those with underlying health conditions and the immunocompromised, and all points in between.At the time of writing, several mutant variants, with differing characteristics, have fed new waves of the pandemic.Although the medical world still struggles to achieve a full understanding of the epidemiology of COVID-19, early in the pandemic, and still, there was little doubt that the dominant transmitter of the disease is close indoor contact with infected hosts.The risk increases greatly with the number of contacts and exposure time.The environment of a meat packing plant, featuring large numbers of employees working close together on an open production line and performing physically demanding work, congregating in lunchrooms, hallways and other common areas, and often travelling to and from work by shared transportation, is an example of an extremely high-risk transmission environment.

B.A Timeline

[13]We have elected to set out the Union ’ s evidence of the main events of the first COVID-19 wave at the Cargill plant in a timeline drawn from the documentary and testimonial evidence.Although the Employer has not yet led evidence, most of these bare events are documented and allow for little doubt.More at issue are the meanings of and motivations behind what happened, and we address those issues later by canvassing the evidence more fully and as necessary, witness by witness.For brevity, and with no disrespect, we will often refer to the principal actors by their surnames.

[14]Here is how the first wave of COVID-19 and the response to it unfolded at Cargill:

1.Early March 2020:Cargill High River plant management and staff are on heightened alert for first signs of the COVID-19 virus in the plant.

2.March 10, 2020:The World Health Organization (WHO) declares COVID-19 a global pandemic.

3.March 10, 2020:The first indication appears in the documentary record of Cargill ’ s COVID-19 response.Minutes of the Health and Safety Committee meeting make brief mention of the need to observe hand washing protocols.

4.March 17, 2020:Cargill is monitoring the number of employees under quarantine.In response to an enquiry from Union plant representative Devin Yeager, Cargill Senior Employee Relations Specialist Devin Tretiak reports 7 employees quarantined, and no confirmed cases yet.

5.March 17, 2020:The Government of Alberta declares COVID-19 a public health emergency.

6.March 20, 2020:Local 401 President Tom Hesse and Secretary-Treasurer Richelle Stewart issue an eight-page letter to Local 401 ’ s major employers, including Cargill.It advocates a culture of workplace respect in response to the pandemic; heightened tolerance of workplace absences; waiver of sick note requirements; increased sanitizing of surfaces; frequent health and safety meetings; social distancing marked by reduced line speeds, increased space between workstations, reconfiguring of work schedules to reduce the number of workers in close proximity, and staggered breaks and lunch periods; paid isolation, personal and family illness absences; waiver of waiting and eligibility periods for access to benefits; suspension of grievance time limits; and an expedited dispute resolution ***process***.It asks for detailed responses, including employers ’ action plans in the event COVID-19 appears in the workplace.

7.March 23, 2020:Cargill Vice-President Tanya Teeter responds to the Hesse/Stewart letter with a two-page reply stating the safety ***measures*** being implemented at High River.Among these ***measures*** are staggered break times; changed table configurations in lunchrooms; heated outdoor break space; small-group training; increased sanitation procedures in the common areas; restriction of visitors; premium pay of $2.00 per hour for a six-week period; a $500 bonus for completion of 8 weeks of scheduled shifts; and 14 days of paid time off for COVID-19 related absence, including unavoidable childcare absences.Mr. Hesse is disappointed with the overall response, though he considered the monetary changes to be “positive steps”.He leaves it to Union plant representatives to monitor the situation.

8.March 24, 2020:The staggering of break times, without reducing chain speed on the fabrication floor, and the high number of absentees, cause a spillover controversy about the Union ’ s walking stewards.They are now sometimes not released by their supervisors as being unable to be absent from their work station at the usual times. Union walking steward and JWHSC member Jamie Walsh-Rollo is unable to “walk” from March 17, 2020 onwards. Devin Tretiak informs Union plant representatives Joe Attwood and Devin Yeager that where walking stewards cannot be released, walking stewards from the kill floor will be made available.On March 25, 2020, an alleged incident of a Cargill supervisor refusing to release a walking steward and purporting to designate a replacement causes Yeager to protest to Tretiak and insist that the Company not try to designate the Union ’ s stewards.

9.March 25, 2020:Mr. Yeager corresponds with Cargill to propose the general waiver of grievance time limits Mr. Hesse ’ s letter spoke of.Senior Human Resources Specialist Rob Hale replies with agreement, excepting grievances with accumulating liability.Yeager misunderstands Hale to mean any grievance with any degree of monetary liability, and seeks clarification.The issue appears not to have been spoken of again in the documentation.

10.March 25, 2020:Safety Manager Renee Siki asks Myriam Tukku and Jamie Walsh-Rollo of the JWHSC for assistance locating translators among the bargaining unit to assist in preparing documentation for the new COVID-19 active screening ***process*** to be implemented at the entrance to the plant.No response is provided.

11.March 26, 2020:The regular JWHSC meeting occurs.Walsh-Rollo and Tukku attend.COVID-19 issues dominate the meeting.

12.March 27, 2020:Alberta ’ s Chief Medical Officer of Health (“CMO”) orders closure of non-essential businesses in Alberta.The CMO order exempts essential businesses.Cargill is considered an essential service for purposes of public health restrictions.

13.March 30, 2020:Union representatives start advocating for more robust health and safety responses from Cargill, based on their understanding of practices at Olymel, a pork producer in Red Deer that is also a Local 401 employer.Yeager proposes to Hale a meeting at the plant to discuss the issues.Hale replies on April 2 with a qualified “yes”, but one qualification is to exclude Yeager because, as a Union representative with more than one assigned workplace (he is the principal Union representative at Cargill ’ s smaller Case-Ready plant in Calgary), he fell afoul of Cargill ’ s new rules against employees and visitors moving from plant to plant.Hale also notes that managers are extremely busy with COVID-19 issues and high absenteeism, and suggests meetings once every two weeks.The discussion of this point breaks off for about a week.

14.March 31, 2020:Walsh-Rollo is absent from the workplace until April 13 on close contact quarantine.

15.March 31, 2020:Mr. Hesse corresponds with Plant Manager Dale LaGrange about the temperature screening program.He expresses concerns about employee privacy and the efficacy of temperature screening as a safety ***measure***; asks for details of administration of the checks and use of the resulting information; and asks for assurances that employees sent home will be compensated.

16.April 3, 2020:Ms. Teeter responds to the March 31 letter to Mr. LaGrange.She outlines the screening ***process***, confirms the application of the 14-day paid time off provision, and confirms no deductions from pay for late starts due to the testing.

17.April 4, 2020:The first positive COVID-19 case at the plant is confirmed.Yeager telephones Teeter to ask her to inform the Union early of positive cases because of the climate of fear and the prevalent “rumour mill” around COVID-19 at the plant.

18.First week of April, 2020:Union officials receive accumulating news of confirmed COVID-19 diagnoses at other meat plants, principally in the United States.They hear that one eastern U.S plant is closed in the face of over 100 diagnoses.The volume of calls from members to Local 401 officials and representatives steeply increases as “panic sets in”.The Union receives at least one report of a sick employee being scheduled to work that it takes up with Cargill.The concern turns out to be unfounded.

19.April 7, 2020:Alberta Health Services performs a site visit and tour of the plant.Union representatives are neither invited nor involved.During the visit, AHS discloses a second confirmed case among plant employees.AHS does not issue a report of the results of this visit.

20.April 8, 2020:Amid building anxiety about the upcoming Easter weekend, LaGrange writes a letter to employees that is posted in the plant.It is sent to Yeager in advance and copied to the Union after posting.It advises employees of the second confirmed COVID-19 case at the plant.He attempts to reassure them about plant safety, while exhorting them to practice good sanitation habits and to mitigate or cancel outside social gatherings.

21.April 9, 2020:The Union is aware of approximately five confirmed cases.Yeager renews his March 30 request to Hale for an immediate meeting over health and safety issues.No immediate response is provided.

22.Easter Weekend (April 11-13, 2020):Going into the weekend holiday closure, stewards make anecdotal reports to Yeager and other Union representatives of more COVID-19 cases in the plant.Yeager texts Teeter asking for the latest numbers.She reports 38 cases – 29 bargaining unit members, 5 salaried employees, and 4 contractor employees.This confirms some of the anecdotal evidence.Yeager reports the developing situation to Hesse.This is the last formal notification from the Employer to the Union of case numbers at the plant.

23.April 11, 2020:Safety Manager Renee Siki advises shop stewards and JWHSC members Tukku and Welsh-Rollo that the April JWHSC meeting is cancelled.Tukku protests that it should continue, but the message does not list Siki as a recipient, and so does not get to Siki until too late.Siki later emails Tukku and Walsh-Rollo saying, “ we need to talk about this ”, but Walsh-Rollo, on the verge of an illness, does not follow up.Nor does Tukku.On April 14, Siki emails Yeager and Attwood to offer to reschedule the meeting the following week if enough members are available.The plant shutdown intervenes and the meeting is never held.

24.April 12, 2020 (AM, Easter Sunday):Mr. Hesse writes and sends a two-page letter (the “Easter Sunday Letter”).It is addressed to LaGrange and copied to the Premier of Alberta, the Minister of Labour and Immigration, Teeter, Tretiak and Hale, and published that day to members through the Union ’ s e-mail system.The letter expresses fear that hundreds of employees in the plant may soon be carrying the virus.It says that as many as 30 UFCW members across North America have died of COVID-19 at that point.It expresses the view that the Employer is not doing enough for employee health and safety and says, “It is time to act”.It calls for an immediate two-week plant closure, a comprehensive safety assessment, continued pay for employees, and an immediate meeting with Union officials, experts and government officials to design enforceable health and safety rules for the workplace.

25.April 12, 2020, evening:A brief phone conversation between Teeter and Yeager, in reaction to the Hesse letter.Teeter asks if the Union is trying to instigate a work stoppage.Yeager says no.Teeter enquires about distribution of the letter to members; Yeager confirms it has been distributed to the membership.He assures her Union staff were under direction to answer members ’ questions by saying the plant is not closed and wait to hear from your employer.

26.April 13, 2020:Another phone call from Teeter to Yeager.She advises that attendance at the plant is down, the line speed has been reduced and the second shift would be cancelled.She suggests that the Union had been “irresponsible”.Layoff is mentioned.Teeter suggests that the Union ’ s letter put the staffing issue outside the Employer ’ s control, thus justifying layoff, but Teeter declines an invitation to set out the Employer ’ s position in writing.Ultimately the Union files a grievance over the shift suspension.

27.April 13, 2020:Teeter sends a letter to Hesse announcing immediate suspension of the second shift.It expresses “deep concern” with the Union ’ s “inflammatory” letter of April 12, rejects the argument that Cargill ’ s health and safety ***measures*** were insufficient, restates the ***measures*** taken, and expresses Cargill ’ s view to be that closure is not warranted.It advises that 45% of day shift employees failed to attend work that day and says the Union ’ s letter “likely contributed” to that.It advises that willing second shift employees would have opportunity to work on the day shift, according to needs, skills and seniority.At the plant level, Tukku has a brief exchange with Tretiak in the cafeteria area in which he blames the Union for the loss of the second shift.

28.April 13, 2020:Union representative Joe Attwood e-mails Hale to request full updated information on confirmed positive cases in the plant.

29.April 13, 2020:Cargill posts notice in the plant of the immediate shutdown of the second shift.It also distributes a letter to second shift employees over LaGrange ’ s signature confirming suspension of the shift and opportunities for second shift workers to temporarily move to day shift.It advises that employees unable or unwilling to move will be laid off without pay.The shutdown of the second shift in fabrication requires the kill floor to be shut down to avoid overflowing the coolers.After this, the kill floor remains shut down day-to-day depending on the state of cooler space.

30.April 14, 2020 (AM):A virtual meeting is held between Alberta Occupational Health and Safety officials and Cargill.Tukku and Walsh-Rollo are in attendance as members of the JWHSC.Tukku asks to have Yeager patched in by phone from outside, but this is not done.Yeager sends an email that afternoon, after the meeting is over, asking for a call in number.He learns that the meeting was already held.The meeting canvasses health and safety ***measures*** in place at the plant and promises an OHS virtual site inspection at a date to be determined (in fact, it takes place the next day).The OHS report of the meeting mentions the Union ’ s expressed concerns, but does not indicate whether the meeting was intended as a response to those. Tukku and Walsh-Rollo are not satisfied with the report, but do not express these concerns to other Union representatives.

31.April 14, 2020:Hale sends a letter to Yeager advising that Cargill had sufficient day shift work for all willing fabrication employees to work; and so no employees would be laid off at that time.It also advises that kill floor employees with fabrication experience were invited to report to the fabrication day shift.Now and following, Yeager expresses concern about the consistency and completeness of Cargill communications of these work opportunities to the bargaining unit, because bonuses and other compensation items may depend on employees ’ knowledge that work is available.

32.April 15, 2020, PM:OHS conducts its promised virtual inspection of the fabrication facilities and common areas (the kill floor being inactive).Tukku attends for the Union. The OHS report issued the next day notes the health and safety ***measures*** in place.It concludes:

It is the opinion of the officer, that the employer, as far as it is reasonably practicable for the employer to do so, ensure [sic:ensured?] the health and safety and welfare of workers engaged in the work of that employer (…)

33.April 15, 2020:Another friction point appears between Union and Employer.The Union had scheduled a virtual “town hall” meeting with members in its industrial units, including Cargill, for Sunday, April 19, 2020.To publicize the meeting, and without prior notice to Cargill, it engages a contractor to erect a mobile sign outside the plant.Similar signs go up in front of other major UFCW industrial employers.The sign mentions COVID-19.Hale calls Yeager.He is upset.Several emails follow between them, and the exchange becomes acrimonious.He tells Yeager the sign is on company property.Yeager denies any intent to use company property and requests property information to support moving the sign.Verbal information only is provided.After a delay, the sign is moved, but Yeager chides Hale for being so concerned about the Union ’ s communication to its members.

34.April 16, 2020:AHS convenes a virtual meeting on the state of COVID-19 at the plant.Hesse, Yeager and Teeter attend. AHS participants leave the impression upon the Union that they are attempting to broker better communication between Employer and Union.The Union expresses the need for more factual information on the current state of the workforce and the case numbers that AHS is recording.The meeting ends when AHS indicates its allotted time is up.Two days later (April 18), Teeter forwards Yeager the April 15 OHS inspection report, and a full list of employees who are under quarantine for either a positive test, a close contact, or screened out by active screening.In this e-mail, Teeter confirms to Yeager that management is willing to have him and Hesse tour the plant.The invitation is not accepted, and no tour takes place.

35.April 17, 2020:In the course of an email enclosing notes of the April 14 OHS meeting, Siki asks Tukku and Welsh-Rollo for the names of possible “ rovers ” (i.e , walking stewards) for the reduced shift currently operating.Yeager emails Hale and Tretiak to protest Siki ’ s involvement in assignment of walking stewards and directs that such matters go through himself or Attwood.

36.April 17, 2020:The Union concludes from AHS sources that there may be over 300 cases of COVID-19 at the plant.

37.April 17, 2020:Teeter informs Yeager that Alberta government officials and Cargill will be conducting a virtual “town hall” meeting of their own on Saturday, April 18, 2020, the day before the Union ’ s meeting.Yeager reports this to Hesse.The Union is unhappy with the news, considers that it is likely to undermine the Union ’ s own meeting the next day, and is concerned at the possibility it was purposively scheduled to do so and may have been a response to the sign controversy.To Yeager, Teeter offers to try to get the meeting moved, but it is not.

38.April 18, 2020 (AM):The Union sends a letter by email to members.It disparages Cargill ’ s and the government ’ s motives in scheduling that afternoon ’ s meeting as late and inauthentic.It reminds members to join the “ real authentic ” town hall meeting, the Union ’ s, the next day to get the “real facts” and “real truth”. It tells members the Union is aware of 358 confirmed cases from the plant, with one member in intensive care.

39.April 18, 2020 (afternoon):The government/Cargill town hall takes place.Union officials are not invited to participate, but Walsh-Rollo and Yeager attend virtually.The presenting panel includes only one production employee.Yeager ’ s opinion is that the call was aimed at conveying the messages that the plant was safe and it was imperative the plant stay open.

40.April 19, 2020:The Union town hall is held.“A few thousand” members participate, the largest number from Cargill.Hesse speaks to general issues.Yeager speaks to Cargill-specific issues, including reinforcing Teeter ’ s information about availability of work.

41.April 19, 2020:The first employee fatality from COVID-19 at Cargill.A female worker in fabrication dies of the virus.The Union learns of it the next day.

42.April 20, 2020:Cargill management decides to temporarily idle the entire plant.Teeter discloses this to Yeager by phone and indicates a planned closure date of Wednesday, April 22, after the coolers were emptied.Yeager follows up with questions on the operational details of the shutdown.

43.April 21, 2020:Yeager corresponds with Hale for details of how the idling period will roll out, whether maintenance or other non-production employees will report to work, and what level of income maintenance will operate.Teeter responds to Yeager ’ s email of the previous day with some details.She indicates the Employer will not be implementing a layoff, but paying guaranteed weekly hours instead.Hale responds the next day, April 22, to the same effect, adding that Maintenance, Waste Water and Warehouse personnel will continue to work.

44.April 22, 2020:The plant closes to slaughter and fabrication employees.

45.April 22, 2020:Union counsel Mark Wells, at Hesse ’ s instruction, writes and sends a letter to Teeter, OHS Investigations Unit Director Marc Smith, and Labour and Immigration Deputy Minister Shawn McLeod.It formally reports the death of the Cargill employee and states that another Union member is hospitalized and in medical distress.It calls for an investigation.It demands Union participation in that and any further investigation.It expresses frustration with the level of information provided by Cargill to the Union, and skepticism at the accuracy of the information provided so far.Deputy Minister McLeod replies on April 26, 2020, advising that OHS has issued a demand to the Employer to carry out an investigation, and prepare a report with participation of the JWHSC, as required by the Occupational Health and Safety Act.

46.April 23, 2020:Hesse writes a letter to the Premier.It calls for a new regulatory regime for food industry employers during the COVID-19 pandemic.It outlines what the Union sees as necessary features of that regime, both generally in the food industry and specific to grocery stores.The letter is a call for government action and is not sent to Cargill.It is copied to many political and trade union officials.

47.April 23, 2020:OHS schedules an inspection of the plant for the afternoon of Monday, April 26.Cargill advises the Union and invites a Union representative.

48.April 24, 2020:The Union files a group/policy grievance alleging breaches of the collective agreement, occupational health and safety legislation, and public health orders.It canvasses the course of the pandemic at the plant to date and the Employer ’ s response.It cites the death of one member and the hospitalization in ICU of another.Prominent in the particulars are allegations that the April 15, 2020 OHS virtual inspection was inadequate; and that Tukku and one other member had been called back to work from COVID-19 isolation in breach of the quarantine period.It alleges failure to adequately involve the Union in the COVID-19 response and “reckless and negligent” actions in respect of safety.

49.April 24, 2020 (PM):Teeter sends an invitation to the Union to participate in a tour of the plant along with OHS officials on April 27, 2020.Mr. Wells at Hesse ’ s instruction responds two days later, on Sunday, April 26.The letter takes issue with the conduct of a tour of the idled plant without progress on the Union ’ s grievance, its April 22, 2020 call to OHS for an investigation into the employee death, and Hesse ’ s letter to the Premier.It calls for a “worker-based methodology” to identifying COVID-19 hazards at the workplace.The letter nevertheless engages cautiously on the subject of a tour and requests information on its origin, the participants and the scope of the inspection, among other things.

50.April 27, 2020:Cargill outside counsel Alison Adam responds to Wells.She rejects criticism contained in his letter and restates Cargill ’ s intent to have a Union representative at that afternoon ’ s inspection.The in-person inspection occurs as scheduled.Yeager attends it.During the inspection, Yeager takes some photos on his phone.This generates a side controversy that the photos may disclose Cargill proprietary business information in connection with the plant layout.Adam emails Wells that afternoon to protest and seek for the photos be deleted.Yeager refuses to delete photos identified as problematic by Cargill.There is no indication in the record that Cargill pursued it further.

51.April 28, 2020:OHS releases its report of the previous day ’ s inspection.The report details the health and safety ***measures*** in place, insofar as those are apparent in the idled plant.

52.April 29, 2020:There is apparently another inspection of the plant by AHS, OHS, and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency.The Union is not advised or invited.We say “apparently”, because there was no evidence about it except for a mention in Exhibit #A-49, the Employer ’ s document entitled “Safety ***Measures*** Taken by Cargill in Response to COVID-19”.

53.April 29, 2020 (morning):Yeager e-mails Teeter to say employees are receiving calls from supervisors that the plant will soon reopen.Teeter phones Yeager to advise that the plant is to reopen on May 4, 2020.

54.April 29, 2020 (PM):That afternoon a press release issued by a Calgary media consultant confirms the reopening.It contains a quote attributed to Cargill ’ s President containing the assertion: “We ’ ve been in regular communication with the union, AHS and OHS and have welcomed them for site visits which served to validate the enhanced safety ***measures*** in our facility”.

55.April 29, 2020 (PM):A letter from LaGrange goes to employees stating a return to work for May 4 and May 6, 2020, for slaughter and fabrication employees respectively.It states the health and safety ***measures*** adopted both before and during the shutdown.It also takes issue with four items of “misinformation…circulating in the community” and attempts to refute them.

56.April 29, 2020 (PM):Teeter emails Hesse.She attaches the LaGrange letter to employees and states that Cargill is meeting the “ majority ” of items specific to food manufacturing contained in Hesse ’ s April 23 letter to the Premier.

57.April 29, 2020 (PM):Shortly before this, Hesse emails Teeter to say that Cargill should not reopen the plant.He speaks of the lack of any “ reliable ***process*** ” to conclude the plant is safe.The message closes by saying “Our concerns are grave.We will be taking steps to prevent reopening. (…)”.

58.April 30, 2020:At Hesse ’ s instruction, Wells sends a letter to Deputy Minister McLeod, OHS Director Smith, and Teeter, requesting that OHS and Alberta Labour issue a “stop work” order for the High River plant under the Occupational Health and Safety Act.Alternatively it requests active OHS monitoring of the reopening of both parts of the facility.It alleges that Cargill had not yet investigated or reported on the fatality and serious illness complained of by the Union in its April 22 letter.It indicates that AHS sources had confirmed as of April 28 seven Cargill employees hospitalized, of which five were in intensive care.The letter then listed the Union ’ s outstanding concerns with OHS ’ s ***processes***, including:failure to speak with employees in the investigation; failure to share hazard assessments, COVID-specific safety policies, or other safety documents, with the Union; and failure of the investigation to address a number of issues like crowding, enforcement of safety policies, staff shortages, and adequacy of personal protective equipment.It complains of the Union ’ s exclusion from inspections by OHS, AHS, or the Ministry of Labour and Immigration leading to the determination the plant could be reopened.Cargill by counsel responds the same day, rejecting allegations it has not complied with its OH&S obligations, but agreeing to UFCW ’ s suggestion that an OHS officer be assigned to monitor the resumption of operations.

59.May 1, 2020:This Complaint is filed with the Labour Relations Board, leading to the appointment of Vice-Chair Kanee under section 11 of the Code, and the interim agreement in effect pending this litigation.The Union also files a group/policy grievance about the cancellation of the second shift on April 13, 2020, and two grievances about weekly pay guarantees for that and the following week.

60.May 3, 2020:Hesse emails Teeter during the course of the LRB mediation.Although he speaks of being encouraged by some of the dialogue, he also reports that a poll of Union members recorded 85% were afraid to return to work and 80% believed the plant should not reopen.He requests that Cargill voluntarily continue to idle the plant pending results of the Board ’ s ***process***.

61.May 4, 2020:Slaughter operations reopen as scheduled.

62.May 6, 2020:Fabrication operations reopen as scheduled.

63.May 7, 2020:The second death occurs in the bargaining unit.A senior employee and shop steward dies after a lengthy time in intensive care.

[15]With this timeline in mind, we briefly state the Union ’ s Complaint.We then canvass the evidence of each witness insofar as it bears on the case.We have not attempted to exhaustively reproduce witnesses ’ testimony, but have selected the aspects of the evidence that we considered important to the issues.

C.The Complaint

[16]The thrust of the Complaint was stated by the Union as follows, after extensive particularization of the facts:

71.The Employer suspended the 2nd shift operations, resulting in lost shifts, confusion, fear, and uncertainty to employees in retaliation for the Union representing their members and advocating on their members ’ behalf on issues of health and safety.By taking this retaliatory action the Employer is trying to ensure workers fear for their employment, attend work and not exercise their right to a safe and healthy workplace.

72.Further, the Employer has refused to substantively deal with the Union with respect to the COVID-19 outbreak at the workplace, creating mass confusion, and interfering with the Union ’ s ability to represent its members in a most critical time.There is an ongoing failure on the part of the Employer to consult with and include the Union in discussions and decisions related to COVID-19, while at the same time the Employer is taking its message directly to employees and/or allowing the government to do it for them.The Employer ’ s decision to reopen the facility again created fear, confusion and uncertainty.The Employer failed to consult with the Union on this decision or give them appropriate Notice.The employer ’ s communication to employees in respect to the reopening was inaccurate and misleading and/or designed to create employee distrust in the Union.The Employer ’ s conduct has served to interfere with the representation of employees by the Union and the employees ’ rights to representation in violation of s. 148(1)(a)(ii) and 149(1)(b) of the Code.Employees are particularly vulnerable during this time of pandemic and in light of the rapid increase of COVID-19 cases at their workplace; ignoring their Union and retaliating against employees for their Union advocating for employees ’ health and safety is particularly egregious interference with representational rights.

73.The Employer ’ s conduct has also discriminated against the affected employees in regard to their employment and/or any term or condition of their employment in violation of ss. 149(1)(a)(i), (ii), (viii) of the Code.By taking this action the Employer also sought to compel employees to cease to be a member of a trade union in violation of s. 149(1)(c) of the Code.

D.Evidence of Thomas Hesse

[17]Mr. Hesse testified about these events from his position of executive responsibility, i.e , about the Union ’ s strategic response to COVID-19 among all its members ’ employers, and not necessarily with knowledge of every Union-employer communication pertaining to Cargill.That said, he was heavily involved in these events.He started his testimony with comments about the unique challenges to representing employees in meat ***processing*** plants generally, and specifically at Cargill.He characterized the work as hard and dangerous, requiring employees to work quickly at minute tasks.The mechanized line running at a set speed makes it impossible to perform representational tasks except at breaks and away from the line.The workforce is fragmented by their many different languages and cultures and often-imperfect command of English.Representation is made more than ordinarily difficult by the large number of commuting employees and the sheer physical exhaustion employees feel at the end of a shift.To an unusual degree, the Union depends upon face-to-face contact with its members:“It ’ s like social work”, he said, “Nothing else is as effective. ”

[18]Mr. Hesse said of the pandemic, “it turned us upside-down”.The Union had to rely much more on telephone contact with members and much more upon the in-plant presence of its shop stewards, as the full-time representatives found their mobility and frequency of workplace visitations reduced.He noted that this plant did not have a large supply of experienced, sophisticated shop stewards.To this was added the pressure of having to learn quickly about the disease and its workplace implications and then engage with all employers in a “complete reassessment” of the normal employer-employee relationship.

[19]The March 20, 2020 circular to major UFCW employers (Ex. #A-3) was an effort to engage in this reassessment.Mr. Hesse characterized the Cargill response as cursory for a plant of its size and pointed to its brief discussion of sanitation ***measures*** and failure to mention the role of workplace health and safety committees.He contrasted it unfavourably to the Union ’ s experience at the Olymel plant in Red Deer, which he visited, and Olymel ’ s closure of its Quebec plant based on a small number of positive cases.He came away with the impression that that employer had “real, substantive engagement” with the Union and its employees and a level of cooperation and transparency not seen with Cargill.In cross-examination, Mr. Hesse agreed that he did not follow up with Ms. Teeter about this dissatisfaction with her response, and offered the explanation that he was trying to be circumspect and not make a bad situation worse so early in the dialogue.

[20]Mr. Hesse testified to the origins of his Easter Sunday (April 12) letter to major food ***processing*** employers, including Cargill, and copied to government officials (Ex. #A-10).By then he had reports of Cargill ’ s first positive case and tentative information of an increase to over 30 cases; news of plant outbreaks in the U.S ; and first cases at the JBS plant in Brooks.He was greatly concerned at the trajectory of case numbers.He considered it a matter of conscience to do something and wrote and sent the letter calling for a two-week closure, a comprehensive safety assessment, enhanced compensation and high-level tripartite meetings of employer, union and government to formulate new health and safety rules.He denied any intent to incite Cargill workers to stay home, and said, although there was “plenty of enthusiasm” for a wildcat strike, “I wouldn ’ t have it”.Mr. Hesse testified that he was disheartened by Ms. Teeter ’ s response, especially that (in his view) the employer had rushed to blame the Union for absenteeism.

[21]Later that week, Mr. Hesse was invited by AHS to the April 16 conference call concerning safety at the plant.He attended, but was not reassured by what he viewed as AHS participants ’ qualified answers to the question of plant safety and failure to say whether the plant should close or not.His own view was to wonder, if the plant was safe, why were so many employees not coming to work?

[22]The next major event for Mr. Hesse was the controversy over the back-to-back town hall meetings on April 18 and 19, 2020.He learned about the meeting of the 18th scheduled by the government only a day earlier, in a phone call with the Minister of Labour and Immigration.This generated an email exchange between Hesse and Teeter in which he expressed the view that the event occurring the day before the Union ’ s event would be confusing to employees and would undermine the Union.He testified, as our notes record it, that “ There ’ s a global pandemic, the plant has slowed significantly, there is mass confusion, the message should be to employees that they should talk to their union.To the extent they ’ re saying, ‘don ’ t talk to the union, talk to us ’ , they were at least turning a blind eye to the obvious conduit through which information should flow ”.Mr. Hesse protested to the Minister of Labour and Immigration the next morning (Ex. #A-27), urging him to cancel the government town hall, and saying “[It] feels like a dirty trick. ”

[23]The government town hall meeting went ahead, and late on the morning of April 18 the Union sent out an email circular to members (Ex. #A-28).It was critical of the government town hall, suggested that it was only being done as a result of the Union ’ s pressure, and urged members to ask questions if they attended it.It spoke of 358 cases of COVID connected to the plant, and revealed that one employee was in a coma on a ventilator fighting for life.And it reminded them that “ the REAL AUTHENTIC absolutely necessary Town Hall is tomorrow (Sunday) at 2 PM. ”

[24]The Union town hall went ahead the next day.Mr. Hesse testified that his main impression of the meeting was “a lot of fear”, that employees were not reassured by what the Employer and government were saying.

[25]By then, Ms. Teeter had extended an offer to Mr. Yeager for he and Mr. Hesse to tour the plant to see the safety protocols in place (Ex. #A-29).It is not clear exactly when Mr. Hesse became aware of the invitation; but he testified that when he did get it, he was skeptical.He was wary of going into a plant that most of his members said was unsafe, and thereby sending “contradictory messages”.And anyway, by then the plant had been idled (suggesting he learned of the offer only on the 20th); he did not believe it would give the same picture as the plant in full operation.

[26]Mr. Hesse spoke of the letter of April 22 from Mark Wells to Shawn McLeod, Deputy Minister of Labour and Immigration, and others (Ex. #A-33) as his acting on the belief that the Employer was ignoring the Union and failing to give it reliable, or any, information.It raised the specific issue that Cargill ’ s spreadsheet of employee availability (Ex. #A-29) showed both the deceased Union member and the member in intensive care to be available to work.It speculated that AHS and OHS may have relied upon unreliable information about safety issues at Cargill, and demanded that the Union be involved in future evaluations of Cargill ’ s worksite.

[27]Discussion continued about a Union viewing of the plant during the idled period.On April 23, OHS scheduled an inspection of the plant for the following Monday, April 27.Ms. Teeter the next day invited the Union to participate in this inspection.Mr. Wells, again at Mr. Hesse ’ s instruction, replied on Sunday, April 26 (Ex. #A-38), expressing skepticism about the inspection ’ s motivation, advocating a more “worker-centred” approach to safety evaluation, and asking a series of questions about the inspection.It closed by saying:

To be clear, Union officials are very interested in observing and understanding working conditions at Cargill ’ s High River operations, but it strikes the Union that if the goal of a “tour” is to establish whether the facility is safe for workers, workers ’ perspectives should first be obtained.The unfolding tragedy in High River appears to be a product of a top-down approach to worksite safety dictated by Cargill, Alberta Health Services and Alberta Occupational Health and Safety.The Union ’ s position is that it would be unwise to repeat that approach and expect a better result.

[28]The inspection went ahead with Mr. Yeager in attendance, leading to the side issue of the photographs he took in the plant.Two days later, April 29, Cargill announced its reopening with one shift on May 4, 2020.Mr. Hesse was put in contact with the communications consultant handling the press release and received Cargill ’ s statement (Ex. #A-43).He testified that he was not satisfied with the announcement because it did not contain any representation from Cargill that the plant was safe.Further, he did not like the reference in a statement in the press release attributed to Cargill North American Leader Jon Nash saying [emphasis added], “We ’ ve been in regular communication with the union, AHS and OHS and have welcomed them for site visits which served to validate the enhanced safety ***measures*** in our facility”.In his view, this was “pure spin, not authentic”.He considered that it was both untrue and an attempt to co-opt the Union to look like it was approving the message.

[29]Mr. Hesse immediately emailed Ms. Teeter to express his view that the plant should not reopen, to complain about the lack of any report on plant safety coming out of the OHS inspection (or otherwise), and advising the Union would take steps to prevent the reopening.There followed three days later the Union ’ s request to OHS for a “ stop work ” order (Ex. #A-46), and another day later this Complaint to this Board.No stop work order was issued, this Complaint was mediated to produce an interim protocol, the plant reopened as scheduled, and the second member of the bargaining unit died.Through it all, Mr. Hesse testified that he was concerned that the plant was reopening in the face of the widespread fear among his members and the still-increasing trajectory of COVID-19 cases in Alberta.In his testimony in chief, he closed by saying, “Institutionally, the Union struggled with this.But more importantly, our members are in an ***unprecedented*** head space.The world turned a blind eye to the vulnerability of these workers, or that they had a union.Someone needs to say something about that, and that ’ s why we ’ re here. ”

[30]In cross-examination, Mr. Hesse admitted that his early communications with Ms. Teeter did not express any building reservations he may have been feeling about Cargill ’ s response to COVID-19.He was reluctant to “beat up” on company officials at a difficult time, and instead thought it best to “shift focus to the plant level”.The atmosphere of the relationship changed, however, with Hesse ’ s Easter Sunday letter and Teeter ’ s response to it.Mr. Hesse acknowledged not thinking about giving Cargill advance warning of his letter.And while he admitted that Teeter ’ s response did engage to some extent on issues of plant safety, he felt the “three big asks” – a closure, comprehensive safety assessment, and high-level meetings on safety ***measures*** – were not addressed.He said that from the letter and Mr. Yeager ’ s reports from the plant, production rather than safety was Cargill ’ s first concern.

[31]Mr. Hesse was pressed on the seeming disconnect between the Complaint which alleges failure to communicate about safety issues, and two invitations to personally view the plant that he did not accept.He agreed that the first invitation did not cause him to think differently.In an evocative turn of phrase, he said, “It was way too little, way too late… I ’ m not going to tour Hiroshima after the bomb”.Of the second invitation, around April 24, he insisted that it would be pointless because it was a “walk-through” of an idled plant, not a real investigation or the worker-centred enquiry it insisted upon; and by then, the Union was wary about being drafted into events that might look like an endorsement of the plant.Whatever value the second tour might have, he said, it could not be the basis of a decision to reopen.

[32]Of the two “Town Hall” meetings scheduled on consecutive days, Mr. Hesse acknowledged that he did not know whether Cargill or the Government of Alberta organized it, but he maintained that they acted together, and by timing and design it was bound to confuse workers and undermine the Union ’ s position in the workplace when the “obvious legal advocate” did not have a central role in the meeting.He agreed that legally the Employer did not need pre-approval to speak to its employees about COVID-19 issues, but maintained that it was in ethical terms a “dirty trick”, because “in context, it had to look like it was undermining us”.

[33]Of Cargill ’ s decision to reopen and the Union ’ s reaction, Mr. Hesse acknowledged that Ms. Teeter attempted to inform him that day (April 29), and later sent an email to him (Ex. #A-44) enclosing Cargill ’ s letter to employees and inviting further discussion.He acknowledged that he did not follow up on that invitation, and said that the Union was considering its litigation options, so he was not going to engage the Employer under those circumstances.

[34]Mr. Hesse ’ s cross-examination ended with a discussion of the cancellation of the second shift on April 13th, the day after the Union ’ s Easter Sunday letter.Mr. Hesse agreed that he was made aware of attendance being significantly down that day, but said that he considered Ms. Teeter ’ s response and reports from Mr. Yeager to indicate that the Employer was “in no small ***measure***” punishing both the Union and employees; though he agreed it would not be punishment of employees for exercising a right under the Code.

E.Evidence of Devin Yeager

[35]Mr. Yeager was in many ways the principal witness for the Union.As both a salaried Union representative reporting directly to Mr. Hesse, and the representative serving as the principal Union contact to both plant management and union stewards (in the frequent absences of Joe Attwood in collective bargaining), he had the broadest combined knowledge of executive-level and shop floor-level events among the Union ’ s witnesses.Mr. Yeager started his testimony with discussion of the Union ’ s presence at the Cargill plant.It comprised a small Union office; himself and Mr. Attwood as full-time salaried Union employees with shared responsibility for this and at least one other employer (Mr. Yeager ’ s other charge was the Cargill Case-Ready plant in Calgary); part-time or relief representatives Joseph Kob and Ben Salonius; several volunteer job stewards; and walking stewards, who are more highly trained than regular stewards.He explained that under the collective agreement, walking stewards are entitled to scheduled absences from their production jobs to perform representation on the floor and deal directly with supervisors and company human resources officers.Walking stewards serve on six-week rotations, increased from two weeks at the time of these events.

[36]Asked about the quality of the overall labour relations relationship at Cargill, Mr. Yeager said it was mixed, “we had some good times and not-so-good times”.Though he would not call it one of the Union ’ s “better” units, the Union had a fair working relationship with some of the human resources officers, and he had worked successfully with Ms. Teeter as lead negotiators for the most recent Cargill Case-Ready agreement.

[37]Mr. Yeager ’ s testimony about the events in question started with the issue of walking stewards not being released at scheduled times.He noted that restricting the mobility of the walking stewards and replacing them with other representatives put the Union and employees at a disadvantage, both from the loss of the walking stewards ’ greater knowledge and experience, and the loss of continuity when issues are dispersed among several stewards.He said that he advised Devin Tretiak that the Union was willing to work with the Employer to overcome problems, but that it could not let the Employer nominate its stewards.

[38]The walking stewards issue came up again in mid-April, when Yeager received Renee Siki ’ s email transmitting the OHS Report of its April 14, 2020 virtual meeting and the accompanying mention of the “ rovers ” (walking stewards) issue.Mr. Yeager said that he “keyed” on the mention of the rovers, and was concerned that the health and safety department was now attempting to get involved in the assignment of walking stewards.Historically this had been a matter for discussion between senior HR personnel and the full-time union representatives.Yeager sent Tretiak and Hale an email protesting Siki ’ s involvement and saying, “ We believe that Renee [Siki] has shown a pattern in the last week of attempting to exclude the Union Labour Relations Officers [i.e , he and Attwood] from discussions or meetings and as such, we request that she should direct all labour relations matters to either yourselves to address to us, or to us directly ”.

[39]The next significant issue in time was the Union ’ s early request for more frequent health and safety meetings, tracking the experience at the Olymel plant.He was disappointed in the Employer ’ s failure to adopt that idea, and further at the news that he would be restricted from attending at the plant because of the new Cargill rule against employees moving between locations.At the time, Joe Attwood was heavily involved in collective bargaining for the Union ’ s very large Safeway bargaining unit.Yeager ’ s exclusion thus put the Union in a difficult position at Cargill:He said, “we just don ’ t have enough people trained up to do [the job]”.It moved one experienced walking steward to help with phone enquiries, and relied as far as possible on phone and video contact, but, in his words, “it was a busy, trying time”.

[40]Mr. Yeager testified at length about the consequences of the first confirmed case at Cargill on approximately April 4.He said that without accurate information directly from the Employer, the Union was left to contend with the “rumour mill”.Supervisors sometimes announced news of a positive case, sometimes it was simply employees chasing information about an absence, but “the anxiety level spiked, exponentially”; and it manifested itself in Union voicemail systems being inundated with calls and demands for information from “ freaked out ” employees.There was confusion between public gathering limits instituted by Alberta Health and workplace restrictions, many employees asking why Cargill continued to operate with so many employees close together.Rumours developed about absent employees coming back to work inside the isolation period.And some employees reacted badly to Dale LaGrange ’ s April 8th notice urging compliance with public health directives over the upcoming Easter weekend, asking (in Mr. Yeager ’ s words), “why the concern about 15 people and not the 500 people on the production floor?”

[41]Mr. Yeager confirmed that he was not made aware of the first AHS site visit to Cargill on the afternoon of April 7 until after it occurred.

[42]There was still no progress on increasing the number of health and safety meetings going into the Easter 2020 weekend.Yeager started getting reports from his stewards that there were many more positive cases than the five the Union knew about.Even though Cargill shut down production for the Saturday and Sunday, Union phone and email systems were jammed with enquiries.Yeager had started building a list of reported COVID-19 related absences among the membership, and he reported his concerns to Mr. Hesse leading up to Easter Sunday.He was involved in the review, but not the writing, of Mr. Hesse ’ s Easter Sunday letter and oversaw its communication to members through the Union ’ s email system.And he spoke with Ms. Teeter that day and the next, first clarifying that the Union was not inciting a stoppage and would be telling enquiring employees that the plant was not closed and they should “ wait to hear from your employer ”; and the next day, repeating that the Union was not inciting employees not to come in to work, then discussing whether the Employer would treat a suspension of the second shift as a layoff.He said that he fielded many employee calls that day, mostly asking why the plant was not closing down, and after the shift suspension announcement, whether they were laid off and what should they do now?

[43]Cargill soon backed away from the thought of laying employees off and instead resolved to merge willing workers into the remaining shift, as it explained to the Union (Ex. #A-17) and started trying to communicate to its workforce.But that, Mr. Yeager explained, made the Union ’ s communication difficulties with the Employer and with its members more acute.The Union had no answers for how and when enquiring members would be contacted about the availability of work.It faced confusion among members whether they were laid off or not, and it was unhappy that management efforts to contact employees about the availability of work (when attendance bonuses might depend upon it) seemed to it to be haphazard.Further, the Union had not yet received the positive case numbers from the Employer it had requested and took to prodding management about it (Ex. #U-19).The situation was made more chaotic by a temporary shutdown of the kill floor when the loss of the second fabrication shift created a bottleneck in the coolers.Mr. Yeager spoke of the Union having to assign up to six people to triaging phone enquiries from members.

[44]The Union remained confused and unsatisfied with the Employer ’ s direction on health and safety issues.Yeager testified that he and his colleagues did not see how merging two shifts into one, at an unreduced chain speed, helped to achieve social distancing.And they were concerned that they were learning about some safety ***measures***, like the installation of Plexiglas shielding between stations, only from Ms. Teeter ’ s communications to Mr. Hesse.

[45]Mr. Yeager ’ s testimony then turned to the three main events of that week (April 13-19):the OHS conference call of Tuesday, April 14 that he attempted to join but did not; the April 16 conference call with AHS officials that he and Mr. Hesse attended; and the controversy over the upcoming Town Hall meetings, including the conflict over the Union ’ s sign advertising its meeting.Of the OHS call, he confirmed that he was waiting to be patched into the call, but never was.He learned that Miriam Tukku had asked for him to be on the call, but received no answer.When he received a copy of the OHS report of its virtual inspection the next day, he was struck by a reference to “rovers”, the walking stewards, and became concerned that Cargill health and safety officials, principally Renee Siki, had started to become involved in the assignment of walking stewards.The result was an email from Yeager to Rob Hale and Devin Tretiak (Ex. #A-25) expressing concern at this, reiterating that this was an issue to be directed to himself and Attwood, and asking how the Employer was meeting its obligations to release walking stewards with the kill floor suspended.

[46]Of the April 16, 2020 virtual meeting with AHS officials, Mr. Yeager, like Mr. Hesse, thought that AHS was making an effort to facilitate dialogue between the parties.He said the tone was one of, “how do we move forward?”, but much of the time was occupied by he and Mr. Hesse getting basic information from AHS:case numbers, contact tracing procedures, and inspection procedures, for example.Yeager said that Union participants were surprised when AHS ended the call, and said that had they known there was limited time, they might have allocated their own time differently.

[47]Mr. Yeager related his dispute with Rob Hale over the placement of the Union sign advertising the Union town hall meeting of April 19, 2020.It spanned several phone calls and e-mails in which Hale was insistent that the sign had been erected on Cargill property and demanding removal, while Yeager disavowed any intent to trespass, asked for the real property report to show the property line, and informed Hale that he was doing what he could to get the sign moved.The sign was eventually moved after the discussion had descended to mutual threats of removal and legal action.Mr. Yeager testified that the main thing he took away from the exchange was that the Employer was focused on something trivial like the sign, where it should have been more concerned with getting health and safety information to the Union.

[48]At the time of this exchange, the Union was not yet aware of the government/Cargill telephone town hall meeting scheduled for April 18 (we will call it the “Government” meeting, while acknowledging the initial ambiguity about who sponsored it; the best indication in evidence is the e-mail from Ms. Teeter to Mr. Hesse on the evening of Friday, April 18, Ex. #A-26, in which she attributes the meeting to Alberta ’ s Minister of ***Agriculture***).Mr. Yeager said that he did not believe that it had yet been set up, and he believed “they” – in context, probably Cargill, though he did not specify – got the idea after learning about the Union ’ s meeting.When he did learn about the Government town hall, on Friday, April 18, he too was concerned about the prospect of confusion among employees.He attended the Government town hall meeting, and testified that to him, the call was a joint effort between Cargill and the Alberta government.It was a moderated call; the Minister of Labour and Immigration, Minister of ***Agriculture***, Chief Medical Officer of Health, and Cargill senior executive Jon Nash were all present.In Yeager ’ s view, the dominant message was that the plant was safe and it was imperative that it stay open.He contrasted it with the mood of the Union ’ s town hall the next night, where he agreed with Mr. Hesse ’ s testimony that there was a great deal of fear expressed about the safety of the plant.

[49]Mr. Yeager ’ s testimony then turned to the events of the first “shutdown week”, April 20 to 26, 2020.On the evening of Saturday the 18th, he had received Ms. Teeter ’ s email attaching the report of the OHS inspection on the 15th and a full list of Cargill employees with quarantined employees highlighted, along with the invitation for he and Mr. Hesse to tour the plant. Like Mr. Hesse, Mr. Yeager indicated that they did not follow up the invitation, for fear that the Employer was trying to enlist the Union into validating its safety claims.However, on Monday the 20th, he then learned from Ms. Teeter that the plant would be idled on the following Wednesday.The next day, he sent emails to Mr. Hale and Ms. Teeter asking for some details of who, if anyone, remained working, their hours, employer contact information during the shutdown, the anticipated length of the shutdown, and employee pay while idled.Late that day, Ms. Teeter responded with answers to most of these questions (Ex. #A-31).She indicated that maintenance and other ancillary employees would tentatively work through, some shift schedules might change for them, the shutdown would last that week and the next, and the Employer would pay employees ’ weekly guaranteed wages rather than lay them off.

[50]Asked what his view of the shutdown was, Mr. Yeager responded that it was the right thing to do, but it had been too late and the Union remained concerned that some employees were still working.He also said, “we were questioning whether it was sincere or just motivated by the first fatality”.

[51]The second week of shutdown, April 27 to May 3, 2020, was dominated by the OHS inspection of the idled plant on Monday, April 27.Mr. Yeager testified that he received notice of it and an invitation to participate from Ms. Teeter on April 24, but collectively he and his UFCW colleagues were unsure of the intent, i.e , was it in preparation for a relaunch, and were again suspicious that it was an attempt to co-opt the Union into the message that the plant was safe.He attended the OHS inspection on April 27.He said that he was generally happy with the OHS Officer ’ s conduct of the tour, and wanted to document with his phone camera the items that the OHS Officer was looking at.This is what led to the dispute over his photos of the plant floor.Mr. Yeager said that he also asked Renee Siki about rumours of the plant reopening on May 4, a week away, but both she and Plant Manager Dale LaGrange deflected the question.He noted, however, that upon returning to his office he was already in receipt of a letter from Cargill counsel objecting to the picture-taking.He said that this was “part of the pattern of focusing on small things rather than the things of real importance”.

[52]Mr. Yeager testified that on the Monday and Tuesday (April 27-28), he received increasing reports from members that Cargill supervisors were talking about reopening the plant on May 4, 2020.So, on Wednesday, April 29 he emailed Ms. Teeter to ask her directly. She responded that it was true, the decision had just been made.That afternoon, Cargill ’ s announcement to that effect was released (Ex. #A-43); Ms. Teeter confirmed the news to Mr. Hesse, forwarded to Mr. Yeager; and a letter over Mr. LaGrange ’ s signature went to Cargill employees (Ex. #A-44).

[53]Of Cargill ’ s public announcement of the reopening, Mr. Yeager testified that the Union was concerned about some of the content of the quotation attributed to senior executive Jon Nash.(Ex. #A-43) The quotation said, in part:

In partnership with health, regulatory officials and after taking actions suggested by the local union, we have made the decision to reopen our facility (…).

(…)

We ’ ve been in regular communication with the union, AHS and OHS and have welcomed them for site visits which served to validate the enhanced safety ***measures*** in our facility. (…)

[54]Mr. Yeager said that these comments made it seem to employees as if the Union had been involved with the reopening more than it was, while in fact it had not been given the information needed to approve what the Employer had done.He said, “I was allowed into the plant for the first time two days prior, and to say that we ’ re working with them is inaccurate”.

[55]The LaGrange letter to employees of that day set resumption dates of May 4 and May 6 for the kill floor and fabrication employees respectively, outlined safety ***measures*** in place, and sought to correct several points of what Cargill referred to as “misinformation” about the COVID-19 response at Cargill.It also made references to the Union:

• “Cargill will begin reopening the High River facility on May 4.This decision comes after significant deliberation among the Cargill leadership, as well as discussions with your Union and support from health authorities and other regulators. (…)

• “We have also been in communication with the local UFCW, inviting them to be part of an April 16 discussion with AHS and subsequent meetings.While our views and approach differ, we believe that we share the same goal:to ensure your safety and wellbeing. (…)

[56]Mr. Yeager said that he and his colleagues did have some concern about the content of the LaGrange letter, mostly that the reference to “misinformation”, Cargill ’ s pledge of “honesty” and the listing of the points it responded to, gave an impression of disparaging the Union ’ s message and work.

[57]When questioned about the Union ’ s April 30, 2020 letter to Alberta Labour and Immigration Deputy Minister McLeod and others, Mr. Yeager indicated he contributed background information for its drafting.

[58]Mr. Yeager concluded his direct examination by speaking of his involvement in the reopening.He said that he attended two Zoom calls with AHS and employees at the plant, and participated despite not being initially invited, and being “heavily vetted” by the AHS participants at the outset.He also followed the AHS and OHS tours of the facility on May 3, 2020, and joined the debriefing afterwards.Mr. Yeager also identified the Union ’ s letter of May 4, 2020 to the OHS Officer responsible for the inspection, constituting a final effort to have the reopening stopped.He explained that he and his colleagues were not satisfied the plant was safe because, as he put it, “the basic tenor of a lot of the inspection on May 3 was, “we ’ ll figure it out as we go”.And he spoke of Cargill ’ s list entitled “Safety ***Measures*** taken by Cargill in Response to COVID-19” (Ex. #A-49) to indicate that that document had not been shared with the Union before and “none of this was known to us” around the dates stated for their implementation.He expressed the criticism that the safety reviews had not sufficiently involved the workers themselves, had not shared hazard assessment and other safety documents, had not involved the JWHSC, and failed to address several topics.

[59]Overall, Mr. Yeager offered the view that the central aspect of the Union ’ s dissatisfaction with Cargill ’ s actions during these events was what he called the Union ’ s “exclusion” from health and safety discussions and the responses Cargill adopted.He said, “I jokingly refer to [the health and safety issues] as a ‘national secret ’ .I think this has caused the issue we ’ re here about”.

[60]Mr. Yeager was cross-examined first about the early issues that developed between the parties about walking stewards, and relaxation of grievance time limits.Of the walking stewards, he acknowledged that the issue was not the Employer ’ s refusal to give walking stewards release from their duties on the line, but purporting to designate their replacements.He agreed that this issue died down between himself and Devin Tretiak by the end of March, only to be revived when the amalgamation of two shifts into one after April 13, 2021 occurred.He said of this, “I think Devin [Tretiak] was honest, he was trying, but I think that he was not always being told of the situations developing out on the floor”.

[61]Of his conversations with Rob Hale on suspension of grievance time limits, he agreed that he interpreted Hale ’ s refusal to suspend limits to be related to any grievance with a monetary value, not just ones where liability builds over time.

[62]The next topic in cross-examination was the abortive attempt to schedule a meeting Yeager made to Hale on March 30, 2020.Mr. Yeager acknowledged that his initial proposal was for a meeting on short notice of only a few hours and required “rounding up” participants from other areas, though he noted that the short notice was not ***unprecedented*** between them.He confirmed that Hale did not refuse a meeting outright, but wanted them less often and wanted someone other than Yeager to participate because Yeager was exposed to another workplace.He agreed that he did not respond to this by email, but only sent a letter saying he would speak to legal counsel.The request for a meeting was not renewed until April 9, a week after Hale ’ s response.Mr. Yeager agreed that this was not a type of meeting contemplated by the parties ’ collective agreement, though it was “ not unusual ” for them, and that he did not assert any provision of the agreement (notably Article 15.5) to any of Hale, Tretiak, or Tanya Teeter in support of the demand for a meeting.

[63]Mr. Yeager was asked about the follow-up to Mr. Hesse ’ s letter of March 20, 2020 advocating pandemic response ***measures*** to Cargill and other food industry employers, and Ms. Teeter ’ s “disappointing” response of March 23.He agreed that he had been left as the person responsible for follow-up, and did not specifically raise the letter with Mr. Tretiak in their meeting the next day.He said that they talked about some topics around COVID-19, like traffic flow, social distancing in congested areas, and the special problem of the cafeteria.He said that it was a “good conversation”, and he did not fault Tretiak if he did not yet have answers.

[64]The lack of information coming from the Employer to the Union about positive cases was a theme in Mr. Yeager ’ s direct examination.In cross-examination, he was asked about the news of the first confirmed COVID-19 diagnosis among plant employees, and how it was disseminated.He testified that Hale had told Joe Attwood that supervisors were the source of the information, and the Employer had directed them to tell employees in small groups.Asked, “what was your problem with that?”, Mr. Yeager responded, “it makes us look useless if we don ’ t get that information beforehand”.Mr. Yeager took the question up with Ms. Teeter, who said she was willing to share that information, but only on the strength of confirmed case information, not rumours.Unfortunately, rumours were rife, there would be delays before Cargill got the information, and then it might be conveyed to any of several people in the Union ’ s and Employer ’ s organizations.

[65]On that same theme, Mr. Yeager had expressed unhappiness about not getting advance notice of Mr. LaGrange ’ s April 8 letter to employees about the second positive test at the plant (Ex. #A-9).He agreed, however, that he was not entirely sure about that, and that an email in Exhibit #E-43 shows that the Union was indeed given advance notice of the letter that morning.He also agreed that in another incident around that time, a report received by the Union about a sick employee returning to work, the Employer responded quickly and the matter was resolved.

[66]Cross-examination then moved to the April 7, 2020 site visit by AHS personnel that the Union was not invited to.Mr. Yeager could not recall whether he expressed displeasure to Ms. Teeter when they next spoke.He confirmed that Teeter agreed to share information about the report verbally, without committing to sharing the report itself without having seen it; and he acknowledged that AHS in fact did not send out any report.

[67]Turning to Mr. Hesse ’ s Easter Sunday letter and its aftermath, Mr. Yeager confirmed that there had been no attempt by the Union to deal with the confusion among employees by sending a mass email to members calling on them to report to work.Instead, he and his colleagues were completely occupied with responding to employees individually.He acknowledged that attendance the next morning, April 13, was reduced, though he did not have numbers.He agreed that Ms. Teeter did not tell him that the shift suspension was an attempt to punish employees for the Union ’ s Easter Sunday letter, but says that he considered that to be the effect.And he confirmed that the Union filed a grievance over the shift suspension, one of the issues being whether the Union ’ s letter made the situation one “ outside the company ’ s control ” that obviated the requirement of two days ’ notice of layoff.

[68]There was significant cross-examination about the missed meeting with representatives of OHS on the morning of April 14, 2020.Counsel reviewed two related lines of communication:a text string between Myriam Tukku and Renee Siki from the previous day (Ex. #A-15); and an email string from that day between Siki and Joe Attwood, copied to Mr. Yeager (Ex. #E-46).Reading them together, Mr. Yeager confirmed that, in fact, three meetings were originally scheduled for April 14:the virtual meeting with OHS in the morning, and the joint ergonomics committee (“ JET ”) and JWHSC meetings that normally proceeded in the afternoon.On April 11, Ms. Siki proposed cancelling both the JET and JWHSC meetings.The next day, Ms. Tukku asked that the JWHSC meeting go ahead.

[69]The text string between Tukku and Siki occurred the evening of the next day, Monday, April 13.Tukku asked, “what about including Jamie [Walsh-Rollo] and Joe Attwood in tomorrow ’ s safety meeting?”.Siki responded, “Sure they could join the call if they are in the plant?”.Tukku replied, “Are you able to get Jamie off the FAB floor and Joe will be there tomorrow. ”Siki agreed, “Okay, will need to schedule a larger room for everyone to fit.(…)”.And the next morning, Siki confirmed to Tukku that the front board room was reserved for 9:30 am and she and Walsh-Rollo would be let off the floor at 9:15 am.

[70]Returning to the email string, as of the morning of April 14, the OHS call was going ahead at 9:30 am and no steps had been taken to have the afternoon joint committee meetings go ahead.Forty minutes before the start time of the OHS meeting, Joe Attwood advised Siki, copied to Yeager, that “ someone from my office would attend ” on “this [unspecified] call”.Ten minutes later, Siki advised Attwood, copied to Yeager, that she had arranged the larger front boardroom for in-person attendees to meet social distancing requirements.The OHS virtual meeting went ahead at 9:30 am.Mr. Attwood was not there.Ms. Tukku asked for Yeager to be patched into the call.This did not happen.At 2:41 p.m that day, Mr. Yeager emailed Ms. Siki asking for a call in number for the meeting.She advised that the call with OHS had already taken place, OHS would provide a report of the call, the JWHSC meeting was cancelled, but she was open to rescheduling it for the next week.

[71]In cross-examination, Mr. Yeager confirmed what was plain from the overlapping text and email strings:that Siki had voiced no objection to Joe Attwood attending the OHS safety meeting, and it was anticipated that it would be Attwood attending for the Union along with Tukku and Walsh-Rollo.He confirmed that he had not been happy that he and Attwood had not been included in the original emails about the cancellation of the JET and JWHSC meetings, but acknowledged that he had not attended any of these meetings before.To counsel ’ s question whether Attwood had attended at any time since relinquishing his co-chair responsibilities in the fall of 2019, he could not say.

[72]Of his 2:41 p.m email on April 14, after the OHS meeting had concluded, Mr. Yeager acknowledged that he had believed the meeting in question was the regular JWHSC meeting that afternoon, but noted that there had been no employer response to Tukku ’ s request he be patched into the morning OHS call.He stated that he believed he had been intentionally excluded.To counsel ’ s question of how this squared with Siki ’ s text expressing willingness to have Attwood there, Mr. Yeager could not offer a response.He also agreed that he did not know whether Ms. Siki had been present in person for the morning OHS meeting, or had attended virtually.

[73]Finally on this point, Mr. Yeager was asked why he did not respond positively to Ms. Siki ’ s offer to reschedule the cancelled JHSC meeting.He responded that he did not read Siki ’ s email as a request for his dates, that he gave no specific instructions to reschedule the meeting, and, “ it was chaotic ” at the time.Nor did the Union express interest in a new date for the JHSC meeting in an exchange with Ms. Siki on April 17, when she raised the topic.Mr. Yeager said he strongly denied the suggestion that the Union was not interested in another meeting, but acknowledged there was no evidence of that interest in this email.

[74]Cross-examination then turned to the April 16, 2021 call with AHS that Messrs. Yeager and Hesse attended.Mr. Yeager reiterated that the Union had been cut off before they had finished their questions, but could not speak to the proposition that AHS had scheduled the appointment and limited it to one hour, nor that AHS had been the party to conclude the call.Mr. Yeager was pressed, however, on the matter of the follow-up to this meeting.He acknowledged that Mr. Hesse in the conference call had mentioned that the Union had not been afforded an opportunity to tour the plant, and that Ms. Teeter in her follow-up email two days later (Ex. #A-29) did offer a tour to either or both of Yeager and Hesse.Questioned why neither accepted the offer, he repeated Mr. Hesse ’ s testimony to the effect that, as he put it, “ it would be hypocritical to say the plant was unsafe, and then be paraded around to make it look like an endorsement ”.

[75]Cross-examining counsel then asked a pointed question, which our notes record as:“How can you reconcile saying, we aren ’ t being told what the company is doing, then when invited to see, we won ’ t go, and we ’ ll later say in a complaint that they aren ’ t telling us what they ’ re doing?”Mr. Yeager did not make a substantive reply.To counsel ’ s follow-up, “It ’ s the optics, isn ’ t it?”, he denied it, without elaboration.

[76]Of the town hall meetings of April 18 and 19, 2020, Mr. Yeager was asked whether he had been worried about the government “getting the first word in” and contradicting the Union ’ s message.He responded that he and his colleagues had inferred that the government had learned about the Union ’ s town hall and then, “only days later, they had one scheduled for the day before”.He did not answer the question whether it would have been any different had the government town hall been scheduled the day after the Union ’ s, except to say, “it may have been, I don ’ t know, it ’ s hypothetical”.

[77]Mr. Yeager was cross-examined on an important theme in his testimony, that the Union did not get satisfactory information from the Employer on the case counts in the plant at any time after the report of 38 cases on April 11, the start of the Easter weekend.Challenged as to whether he disbelieved Teeter ’ s and Hale ’ s responses that the Employer did not have a number to give them, he said, “It was odd to me that they went silent after it went public that there were 38 cases, it all ceased after April 12. (…)It seemed odd that they were so focused on tracking and tracing, yet couldn ’ t tell us what the numbers were. ”In re-examination by Union counsel, Mr. Yeager noted that he had not considered the last confirmed case count of 38 to be “small”; it was higher than expected, and by far the largest outbreak in the Local.Even the numbers publicly released by AHS were not entirely satisfactory, he also said, because they never broke the case counts down between salaried employees, contractors, and bargaining unit members.

[78]Eventually, as the outbreak exploded, AHS began providing the Cargill case numbers publicly, but the Union continued to be dissatisfied with its access to the numbers.To counsel ’ s question why it continued to be so concerned, Mr. Yeager responded that he and his colleagues were highly concerned that the Union had to rely on the news to learn about its sick members; he called it “highly troubling” that this was the case.He admitted that he did not renew his original requests for positive test numbers after getting the quarantine list, but said “I didn ’ t feel I needed to repeat [the request] every day”.He also confirmed that he did not approach Ms. Teeter about the Union ’ s concerns about the accuracy of the quarantine list after learning that it showed its critically-ill steward as “available for work”.To the question, “why did you file a complaint with OHS instead, was it just a desire to be adversarial and give no opportunity to explain?”, he responded simply, “we chose to file a complaint, to go another way”.

[79]The last topic in Mr. Yeager ’ s cross-examination was the lead-up to the plant reopening on May 4.He could not say whether the April 27 inspection was done at the instance of OHS

rather than Cargill, only that Cargill told the Union it was an OHS request.He confirmed that Cargill representatives were upset about his taking photos, but ultimately did not pursue that issue any further.

F.Evidence of Joe Attwood

[80]Joe Attwood, the second full-time Union representative with responsibilities for employees at the Cargill plant, gave limited evidence.He was not physically present at the plant between March 4 and May 21, 2020.For much of that time he was heavily engaged in bargaining two other collective agreements, with Canada Safeway and Mountain Creek Farms, then was away for three weeks of scheduled vacation starting approximately April 15, 2020.His testimony was mainly directed at discrete topics:the operation of the JWHSC at Cargill, the walking stewards controversy, the early friction between Union and Employer over COVID-19 case numbers, the missed OHS virtual meeting of April 14, 2020, and in cross-examination, the state of Union-Employer communications in respect of several items early in the period under review.

[81]Mr. Attwood testified about his efforts to transform the JWHSC into a more effective committee when he was first assigned to the Cargill plant in May 2019.He found that the committee lacked structure and attendance was lax.He named himself Union co-chair of the committee and started a ***process*** of recruiting and appointing Union representatives to the committee.This ended in July 2019 with appointment of Ms. Tukku and Ms. Walsh-Rollo along

with six other members and seven alternates.There remained occasional problems with supervisors releasing committee members on time for meetings, but the structure was robust enough that Attwood terminated his co-chair assignment in favour of Tukku and Walsh-Rollo in September 2019.He did not attend JWHSC meetings after that.

[82]Mr. Attwood took the panel through several emails with Devin Tretiak and Rob Hale early in the COVID-19 pandemic, in which he stated the Union ’ s position that it should receive full information about positive results.Both sides, Union and Employer, were cautious about their information, trying to observe a ***measure*** of employee privacy while guarding against rumour and gossip. Attwood became more insistent around April 11, 2020, asking Hale for accurate information.Hale responded that he would supply an update and was seeking the information himself. On April 13, Easter Monday, Attwood sent a more pressing email to Hale complaining of the lack of information.In cross-examination, however, Mr. Attwood acknowledged that Ms. Teeter had sent the complete list of quarantined employees to Mr. Yeager the day before, and he (Attwood) had been unaware of that at the time.

[83]Mr. Attwood was peripherally involved in the walking steward controversy, in that Jamie Walsh-Rollo complained to him and Devin Yeager that she had been denied opportunity to “walk” three days in a week.He confirmed that Mr. Yeager was the representative most involved, and that he shared Yeager ’ s view that the Union had the “definitive” right to designate the walking stewards.He expressed that he was surprised when Renee Siki appeared to become involved in the issue of the walking stewards in her enquiry to Tukku and Walsh-Rollo about other possible “rovers”.He acknowledged in cross-examination, however, that he was unaware of any communication to Siki that issues around the walking stewards would be confined to people other than her – himself, Yeager, Tretiak and Hale.He said that “maybe” Siki had unknowingly become involved an issue she was not expected to be part of.

[84]Of the April 14 OHS meeting, Mr. Attwood added only that he thought he had told Mr. Yeager that the OHS meeting was at 9:30 am that day.Cross-examining counsel put it to him that Siki thought he, Attwood, would be attending; Attwood did not say specifically Yeager is attending; but Yeager believed the meeting is at 3:30 pm; so was it not just a colossal misunderstanding rather than an attempt to exclude the Union?Mr. Attwood said, “it ended up that way”, i.e a “colossal misunderstanding”.To further questioning about the Union ’ s failure to respond to Siki ’ s offer to reschedule the JWHSC meeting also scheduled for that day, and what that said about the Union ’ s degree of concern, Mr. Attwood acknowledged, “this may be an example of a communication that was missed”.

[85]Employer counsel took Mr. Attwood through several email chains in late March 2020 that Attwood participated in:one about a sign that went up in the workplace about revised break times; one about the Union assisting the Employer to locate translators; and another one about an employee rumoured to have returnedto work after going home with symptoms.In each case, Mr. Attwood acknowledged that the Employer and Union had timely discussions about them, and any missed communications were inadvertent.

G.Evidence of Jamie Walsh-Rollo

[86]Jamie Walsh-Rollo – cryovac operator in Fabrication, walking steward and Union co-chair of the JWHSC – testified mostly with respect to JWHSC operations, her activities and role as a walking steward, and the early events of Cargill ’ s COVID-19 response in March 2020.She had little to say about events in April 2020 because she worked only four days that month:she was absent from March 31 to April 12 inclusive on COVID-19 quarantine; at work April 13 to 15; absent April 16 to 20 with an unrelated illness; at work April 21; and then absent from the plant-wide idling for the rest of the month.

[87]After describing her work as a walking steward, Ms. Walsh-Rollo spoke of the start of problems doing that work in mid-March of 2020.Her walking steward assignment commenced on March 16, but for that day and the remainder of that week her supervisor declined to release her at the usual time due to, he said, too many absentees in her area.She spoke to Attwood or Yeager about this, probably on March 17, and was eventually released to walk that day, but the problem recurred after that. On March 20, she advised Renee Siki of her inability to “walk”, without response.In the end, combined with her absences, she did not resume walking steward duties until after the reopening in May.

[88]Ms. Walsh-Rollo described the routine of preparing and then following up a JWHSC meeting.Union members are canvassed for agenda items.These and management items are incorporated into a Power Point presentation.Minutes are kept by a management member and distributed on request, and in any event at the next monthly meeting.Since the reopening, follow-up is now done through an “action register” recording tasks and the action taken.Ms. Walsh-Rollo said, however, that previously she had to check to ensure JWHSC tasks had been carried out.She related what she considered to be an ongoing problem leading up to the pandemic of management representatives “swamping” the small numbers of union members who were interested enough to attend the JWHSC meetings.She also noted that each department normally held its own health and safety meetings as well, but these stopped around the time of the pandemic because, she said, management considered that there was “too much going on”.

[89]Ms. Walsh-Rollo testified that COVID-19 ***measures*** first came up in JWHSC meetings only in mid-March 2020, and then only briefly, but that by March 26, it was the dominant topic of that day ’ s JWHSC meeting.There was already controversy on the floor about supervisors wearing masks while bargaining unit members had none.She (Walsh-Rollo) raised issues about crowding of locker rooms, lunchroom tables and microwave areas, and the lack of hand sanitizer.

[90]As earlier noted, Ms. Walsh-Rollo was absent from March 31 to April 12, during which time the Union ’ s Easter Sunday letter was written and sent.She returned on April 13 and was quickly asked by one of the supervisors whether “you (the Union) are telling people not to come in?”, adding “now they (management) are looking at layoffs”.She heard nothing more, but experienced three long days in which uncut meat piled up and the line had to be stopped.

[91]Ms. Walsh-Rollo was in attendance at the April 14 OHS meeting, and confirmed that on Mr. Yeager ’ s instructions she asked if he could be put into the call.No answer was given and, as we know, neither Yeager nor Attwood attended.She spoke of some of the topics covered in the OHS meeting – – poor social distancing between operators and stagers (helpers), noise levels inhibiting communication from a safe distance, difficulties with mask use, problems sourcing face shields, and the state of communications between management and union.Asked to comment on the OHS Report on this meeting (Ex. #A-20), she noted the absence of any mention of masking problems and microwave cleaning.

[92]Ms. Walsh-Rollo then was absent again until the reopening.She did, however, attend both virtual town hall meetings.She expressed her own confusion about the sudden meeting called by the government, and concern that the presenters in that meeting included only one plant worker.In her view, the Sunday meeting the Union hosted was the better one, with many more questions asked and answered.

[93]In cross-examination, Ms. Walsh-Rollo was asked about the controversy over walking stewards, starting with her not being allowed to “walk” as normal in late March.She said that initially she did not believe the statement of her supervisor that there were too many absences to release her because her own immediate area was not obviously shorthanded; but she accepted that assessment upon returning to work from her quarantine absence on April 13.Nevertheless, she raised the issue of walking stewards at the April 14 OHS meeting because the kill floor was idled at that time, making substitute walking stewards from the kill floor unavailable.Renee Siki asked her and Myriam Tukku for names of substitutes, leading to Devin Yeager ’ s complaint to Cargill management about Siki becoming involved in an issue reserved to the full-time UFCW representatives and their management counterparts (Tretiak and Hale).Ms. Walsh-Rollo said she had been unaware of the Yeager complaint, and did not speak to Yeager about her role in getting Siki involved in the issue.

[94]Asked about her concerns of management attendees “swamping” the few Union members attending JWHSC meetings, Ms. Walsh-Rollo agreed that member interest was low leading into the COVID-19 period (only three or four of fifteen authorized representatives typically attended), but in response to her concern, Joe Attwood elected not to ask management to reduce its attendance, but told her he would try to get more Union attendees to come.Nonetheless, she agreed that Union member concerns were addressed early in each meeting, were never removed from the agenda, and were generally followed up.The problem with follow-up, in her view, was simply that the actions taken were not sufficiently communicated to her; she never had occasion to complain to management that Union safety concerns from the JWHSC meetings were being ignored.

[95]Ms. Walsh-Rollo agreed with the proposition that she was absent from the plant for a significant time in April 2020, during which there were changes made to safety ***measures*** in the workplace, including installation of barriers, adjustment of break times, and changes to the lunchroom configuration.Face shields were slow to be distributed; she acknowledged, however, that management informed her they were not available in sufficient numbers and she did not doubt that to be the case.Also slow to happen was rearrangement of the lunchroom tables, which took at least three weeks.She noted that she was frustrated by this delay because it posed a serious potential for transmission.

H.Evidence of Myriam Tukku

[96]Myriam Tukku, shop steward and Union Co-Chair of the JWHSC, works in the Back Packoff area, the last group of stations in the fabrication area before shipping.She was a major witness for the Union, in that she was the only witness who was present on the plant floor for the entire time under review that the plant operated.

[97]Ms. Tukku spoke of some of the same issues from early in the period under review as did Jamie Walsh-Rollo:the role of the walking steward, walking stewards not being released from the line, efforts to make the JWHSC more effective and the perceived imbalance on the JWHSC.She noted some of the early problems with COVID-19 response in the workplace that concerned her:poor support for social distancing, lack of hand sanitizer and substitution of bleach solution for bargaining unit employees, and a lack of masks until sometime around the Easter weekend.She expressed support for the Union ’ s early efforts to advocate for better COVID-19 response, and particularly for Mr. Hesse ’ s Easter Sunday letter.She also criticized Mr. LaGrange ’ s April 8 letter to employees cautioning against normal social interactions over the Easter weekend, saying that she felt the company was placing safety responsibilities on the employees, and potential blame, while safety ***measures*** in the plant fell short.

[98]Of the aftermath of the Easter Sunday letter, Ms. Tukku testified that on April 13, 2020, she had an encounter with Devin Tretiak, who was moving tables in the lunchroom and told her that the night shift was cancelled, that “that is what your union wants”, and that “people were going to be let go”.

[99]Ms. Tukku then spoke of the OHS conference call on April 14 and the virtual tour it conducted the next day.It will be recalled that she and Jamie Walsh-Rollo were the only Union representatives physically present for the April 14 call, that Renee Siki had been told Joe Attwood would be present, but Attwood was away in collective bargaining.She said that she learned late that Mr. Attwood could not attend, after she had cleared it with Renee Siki for him to be patched into the call; and the morning of the meeting, when Siki ’ s assistant was setting up the call (Ms. Siki was attending virtually), she declined to try to add Yeager because she only had instructions to expect Walsh-Rollo and Tukku.

[100]Of the OHS virtual tour on April 15, Ms. Tukku took the panel through an email chain in which Ms. Siki asked her to participate in the virtual tour and arranged for her to be released to do that.She testified that after this exchange, she and Siki talked, and the discussion centred on the walking stewards problem.Siki indicated that she was unaware of the problem before then and would look into it, but expressed that some kind of steward coverage would be available.

[101]Ms. Tukku spoke of the virtual tour, the course that it took through the plant, and her criticisms of it.She noted that the cafeterias were closed, hallways were empty, the line was “really slow”, harvest and night shift had both been cancelled, and day shift had been reduced from about 500 to 200 employees.Overall, she felt it had not been conducted at a normal time and was not a fair depiction of the plant.

[102]Later that day, April 15, Renee Siki emailed Tukku and Walsh-Rollo to send them the Contact Report prepared after the April 14 conference call (Ex. #A-25).In the course of that email, Siki asked for suggestions for substitute walking stewards, and for their views of a rescheduled smaller JWHSC meeting to replace the cancelled one.Siki repeated the request in another email two days later.Ms. Tukku did not respond to either request.She explained this by noting Ms. Siki had been upset that Jamie Walsh-Rollo had raised topics in an earlier OHS meeting that had not been raised with her (Siki) beforehand.Ms. Tukku said she did not want to similarly get in Siki ’ s “ bad books ” over the fact Devin Yeager had rebuked management for Siki becoming involved in the walking stewards issue; she said it would be known she was Yeager ’ s source for that information, and so just didn ’ t respond.

[103]The last part of Ms. Tukku ’ s examination-in-chief addressed the plant ’ s reopening on May 4 and the OHS inspection prior to opening shift that morning.Counsel took her through the OHS Notice to Produce given to Cargill beforehand, requiring several documents:the most recent COVID-19 hazard assessment, various worker training procedures and policies, a rapid response plan for workers becoming symptomatic on site, and meeting minutes of recent JWHSC meetings.She testified that she had never been given copies of those documents by management.That morning, she delivered to the OHS Officer a copy of the Union ’ s demand to close the plant, with which she agreed.

[104]In cross-examination, Ms. Tukku was questioned about some of the concerns she expressed in her evidence and the degree of communication about them that existed between herself and either management, or other Union representatives.Of the JWHSC meetings, she acknowledged that she did not pursue with Joe Attwood the problem of inadequate Union attendance that developed after he stepped down as Union co-chair.She indicated that she was focused on her own participation, and did not report the ongoing difficulties getting a quorum of Union participants.Of her dissatisfaction with the degree of follow-up her issues in the JWHSC received, she spoke of specific issues that were not addressed quickly or at all, but acknowledged that for a couple of issues – a problem with box stand design and placement, and COVID-19 preparedness at the March 10, 2020 meeting – she also missed opportunities to follow them up.Of Renee Siki ’ s March 25, 2020 request for assistance in locating translation resources to implement the new active screening ***process***, she agreed that she did not attempt to tell Siki that she, Tukku, could not find translators for that task.And to Ms. Tukku ’ s criticism that hand sanitizer was not available to bargaining unit members while administrative staff were observed using it, she allowed that perhaps there was a general shortage as Ms. Siki had claimed, and that she did not pursue with Siki her concern of differential treatment among parts of the workforce.Finally, Ms. Tukku acknowledged some productive exchanges on safety topics with Renee Siki in an impromptu meeting they had on April 2, 2020, and that she did not at that time raise with Siki some of the criticisms she voiced in her testimony.

[105]Ms. Tukku was cross-examined in some detail about the April 14, 2020 meeting with OHS officers that neither Attwood nor Yeager attended.She testified that Attwood was added to the call list at her suggestion in a phone conversation with Siki the evening before.She had, she said, spoken with Attwood that evening and agreed that “the Union” (meaning, presumably, a full-time representative) should be included; but Attwood had not committed to coming at that point (doubtless because he had Safeway bargaining the next day).Yet she advised Siki he would be attending, to which Siki agreed, on the understanding Attwood would be in the plant.She, Tukku, learned late that evening that Attwood would not be there and Yeager would phone in instead.The next morning, she was busy with her work until being released from her station, and so did not tell anyone from management that Yeager would be on the call until the meeting was assembling.She told Ms. Siki ’ s assistant, she said, that Yeager would be calling in, but the assistant had no instructions to that effect.Yeager was not added (and indeed, we know from other evidence that he was unaware that the call was in the morning rather than the afternoon).Asked why she did not protest that Yeager should be on the call, she answered, “I just felt defeated, they outnumbered us”.

[106]Counsel reviewed with Ms. Tukku the notes of the meeting kept by Jamie Walsh-Rollo to challenge the assertion that the Union members of the Committee felt intimidated.He noted that the notes showed she and Ms. Walsh-Rollo raising several topics.Ms. Tukku said she was comfortable raising “some, not all” of her concerns during the meeting; but of the example she gave, the lack of hand sanitizer for bargaining unit employees, she acknowledged that she had simply forgot to raise that issue.Of the issues she did raise, she testified that the management representatives there were quick to “jump in with an answer”, making things uncomfortable for her.

[107]Ms. Tukku ’ s cross-examination then moved to address the next day, April 15, 2020, and the email from Renee Siki attaching the OHS Contact Report from the previous day ’ s meeting. She acknowledged that she did not respond to Siki ’ s suggestion of a rescheduled, smaller, JWHSC meeting the next week.Asked why that was so, she was not able to answer other than to speculate that she may not have carefully read the entire email.

[108]Ms. Tukku was asked about Siki ’ s follow-up email of April 17 on that topic, which also prodded Ms. Tukku for the names of possible “ rovers ”, i.e , walking stewards.She acknowledged that this was Siki ’ s attempt to help after hearing the complaints of Tukku and Walsh-Rollo that they were not being released from the line to perform those duties.The email chain shows, and Ms. Tukku acknowledged, that she forwarded the email to Yeager and relief Union representative Ben Salonius in order to enlist their help in finding substitute walking stewards.This, of course, led Yeager to believe that Siki was inappropriately intervening to deal directly with stewards on a matter that was properly dealt with by the full-time Union representatives and their Human Resources counterparts; the result was Yeager ’ s email late that afternoon to Tretiak and Hale objecting to Siki ’ s involvement.

[109]Asked why she did not speak to either Yeager or Siki to clear up the confusion and identify herself as the (innocent) instigator of the controversy, rather than “let the Union rip into Renee (Siki)”, Ms. Tukku did not offer an explanation, other than she was worried about herself, she assumed that Siki would understand what had happened, and she felt the need to support her Union.

[110]The last topic in cross-examination was the OHS virtual tour of April 15, 2020, i.e , the day after the missed conference call with OHS officers noted above.Ms. Tukku acknowledged that she did not ask for a full-time Union representative to be on the tour, because “it was just [Siki ’ s subordinate] Rob Petersen leading it” and she had been hurriedly released from the production floor to attend it.She was not able to offer an answer why she did not inform the Union of the tour when, in hindsight, it was now apparent that the Union was annoyed it had not been invited.

[111]This closes our review of the Union ’ s evidence.We proceed to our analysis of the case presented thus far.

III.Decision

[112]In the Board ’ s jurisprudence, an application to summarily dismiss a complaint may be made at any time, and without putting the moving party to its election whether to call its own evidence.The standard such an application must meet is sometimes expressed as, whether the proceedings to that point raise an arguable case.Sometimes the test is put as, whether the applicant has established a case with a “reasonable prospect of success”:see, e.g , UNA, Loc. 311 v. Good Samaritan Society, [2009] Alta. L.R.B.R 1; UNA v. Capital Care Group Inc. et al., [2016] Alta. L.R.B.R LD-059.Practically, the analysis to some extent depends upon the stage of the proceedings when the application is made.If made at the close of the “pleadings” – application, response, and any particulars – the Board has little ability to make any nuanced evaluation of the facts; it must proceed on the assumption that the facts pled in support of the application will be established by evidence, unless the facts pled lack even an “air of reality”:

Complainant v. AUPE, [2021] Alta. LR.B.R 1.This tends to focus the enquiry in such cases upon whether the materials raise an arguable case according to law.The case generally proceeds if the pled and assumed facts arguably entitle the applicant to relief within the Board ’ s existing jurisprudence.If, like in this case, the application is made at the close of the complaining party ’ s evidence, where usually the vast majority of the documentary evidence has been admitted and one side ’ s witnesses have been subject to both direct and cross-examination, the actual facts of the case should be much more readily apparent.The focus in such cases is whether the complaining party has indeed established facts that give it a reasonable prospect of success unless the other party leads its evidence.The Board is able, and entitled, to make a more searching analysis of the facts than in a pre-hearing application for summary dismissal.

[113]Some preliminary general comments are warranted about the facts of this case.At the outset of our analysis, we consider it necessary to remind ourselves and readers of something that is fundamental to our decision:the questions before the Board are narrow ones.Has the Employer interfered with the Union ’ s statutory right to represent its employees?Has it discriminated against, intimidated or restrained employees in the exercise of their rights to belong to and participate in the Union?That is what this case is about.It is not about many other things that came up in the course of the evidence.It is not about whether the response to the COVID-19 pandemic as it played out at the Cargill plant, whether by the Employer, Alberta Health Services, or the Alberta government writ large, was optimal, or even adequate.It is not about whether Alberta ’ s occupational health and safety regime properly protects worker safety in a crisis like this pandemic.It is not about whether sickness and deaths could have been avoided had things been done differently, except as the “doing things differently” involves not violating rights under the Code.

[114]The case is not about philosophical issues around the relative roles of management and organized labour in a workplace such as this.There can be profound but genuine differences of opinion about whether “co-management” of enterprise, and of what degree, is better public policy than a regime of robust management rights.For our purposes, we accept that the policy response in Alberta, as in North America generally, has been that management retains all rights to reasonably direct the enterprise that are not expressly constrained by a collective agreement or statute.

[115]These are issues for academics and policy-makers.Our task is to evaluate the evidence and determine whether by the facts presented so far, and our understanding of the established law, there is a case that has a reasonable prospect of success.We should take note of, and respect, the high stakes and heightened emotion that forms the background to the case:of the sickness and death the pandemic visited upon vulnerable employees, and the fearsome stress that it placed upon employees, Union personnel, and management alike.But we must not allow that to drive us to conclusions that are not supported by either the evidence in front of us, or the established law.

[116]Overall, in our view, the evidence of the Union fails to show a case with a reasonable prospect of success, either of a substantial failure of the Employer to communicate with and engage the Union on the workplace issues it was raising, or of any positive action by the Employer to inhibit or undermine the Union ’ s basic statutory role as employee bargaining agent, or of retaliation against employees for their and their union ’ s actions. What it shows instead is that there was sustained communication between Union and Employer on multiple levels:Between Teeter, Hesse, and Yeager; Tretiak, Hale, Yeager and to a lesser extent, Attwood; and between Siki and Tukku and Walsh-Rollo.The problem was much less a failure to communicate than merely a failure to agree on some basic issues – whether a shutdown, or a continuance of the shutdown, was necessary to ensure employee safety; whether the Union ’ s model of a “worker-centred” safety assessment was necessary; and perhaps, whose ­ – the Union ’ s or the Employer ’ s – should be the loudest voice that employees hear on issues of plant safety.There is perhaps also a more profound disagreement over what “safe” means in the context they were presented with.But our view of the evidence is that it does not support the Union ’ s basic complaint that it was not being listened to and its rightful role as bargaining agent was suppressed.Instead, it shows only that it was heard but the Employer did not necessarily agree.These disagreements may lend themselves to legitimate debate and sometimes proceedings in other forums like grievance arbitration and occupational health and safety proceedings.What we think untenable, however, is that the Employer ’ s declining to accept the Union ’ s positions amounted to more than mere disagreement, and was in fact an attempt to deny and hobble the Union in its representative role.

[117]What the evidence also shows is the extent to which the pandemic, infiltrating a high-risk working environment staffed by vulnerable employees, with many vectors inside and outside the plant by which the virus could spread, and no vaccine or other medical means available to combat it, created a level of human resources mayhem that Union and Employer alike were simply, and understandably, ill-equipped to deal with.

[118]The evidence certainly shows that of the Union.It was left trying to perform its representational role for a bargaining unit of 2000 employees through only two permanent representatives, both of whom also carried other responsibilities.One of them (Attwood) was absent for most of the time under review in collective bargaining or on vacation, and the other (Yeager) operated at the distinct disadvantage of having his access to the plant limited by Cargill ’ s COVID-19 rules.The small number of relief representatives and stewards available did not redress the shortage.Mr. Yeager, in particular, spoke eloquently of his and his colleagues ’ experience of trying to cope with the flood of issues, enquiries and communications that the pandemic generated.This is not to criticize the Union in any way for the lack of available resources during this time; we would fully expect to hear much the same story from the Employer witnesses were they to testify.We only note it to say that nothing about the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic at Cargill could be considered “normal” labour relations.While the obligations and strictures of the Code nevertheless continue to apply, this Board must examine the evidence sensitively and be careful assigning blame in a situation where it was nearly impossible for the parties to conduct themselves with anything close to labour relations perfection.

[119]The evidence predictably showed many examples of stress, miscommunication and failures to choose what, in hindsight, might have been the best course.One of the clearest impressions the evidence conveyed was that all involved in the situation were groping toward the best responses, with insufficient or imperfect information.There were occasional flashes of anger in the bargaining relationship.But all these things should not distract from the essential issues before us:was the Union ’ s statutory representative role undermined, and were employees penalized for the activities of their union or for themselves exercising statutory rights?

[120]We may deal briefly with the Union ’ s allegation that the Employer violated the various subsections of Section 149 of the Code.This allegation centres on the suspension of the second shift on April 13, 2020.It asserts that the suspension of the second shift, and the resulting loss of work to employees, was punishment for the Union ’ s Easter Sunday letter calling for a shutdown of the plant.

[121]Unlike the prohibition against interference with union representation of employees set out in Section 148, the prohibitions in Section 149 require some form of intention:that employees were dismissed, disciplined or discriminated against “because” of union membership, activity or exercising a right under the Code; or that the Employer did “seek” to intimidate, penalize or discriminate against an employee for a protected reason or activity.Adams in Canadian Labour Law (2017:Looseleaf:Canada Law Book) states the requirement this way (at §10.130):

Canadian statutory provisions, barring discharge or other discriminatory treatment “because” or “for the reason that” employees are engaged in legitimate union activities, have been interpreted by courts as requiring scrutiny to see if “membership in a trade union was present to the mind of the employer in his decision to dismiss, either as a main reason or one incidental to it, or as one of many reasons regardless of priority” for the dismissal.Improper motive does not have to be the dominant motive.Since employers are not likely to confess to an anti-union animus, tribunals have to rely on circumstantial evidence to draw inferences about employer motivation. (…)

[122]Our analysis on this point must contend with the fact that this aspect of the Union ’ s complaint – – and unlike the principal allegations of interference in union representation of employees – – involved a “reverse onus” provision of the Code. (This Complaint was filed before the reverse onus provision was amended by the Restoring Balance in Alberta ’ s Workplaces Act, 2020. Pursuant to the transitional provision contained in section 209(2)(i) of the Code, the previous section applies.) Section 149(2) says that the burden of proof in respect of allegations under section 149(1)(a) and (c), among other subsections, is on the employer to show that it did not act in contravention of these provisions.The Union argues that an application to summarily dismiss these aspects of the Complaint is not appropriate in the circumstances, as the Union has put sufficient evidence of the section 149(a) and (c) breaches before the Board to require a response from Cargill.

[123]In our opinion, the fact that an aspect of a complaint carries a reverse onus upon the employer does not disable that employer from seeking a summary dismissal of those allegations, or of the entire complaint, at the close of the Union ’ s case.The predominant rationale for a reverse onus in parts of section 149 of the Code is that, as we have noted, these provisions prohibit intentional conduct.Intent is often uniquely within the knowledge of the employer.While labour boards have long been willing to draw inferences about intent from suspicious circumstances and the overall factual context, a reverse onus effectively forces the employer to contribute to the Board ’ s task of discerning the intention behind the acts complained of, at the risk of otherwise losing its case.

[124]This purpose of the reverse onus, however, is not necessarily engaged at the stage of a summary dismissal at the end of the Union ’ s case.As we have noted, there can be a great deal of testimonial and documentary evidence before the Board at that point.(That is certainly true of this case, where the principal allegations involved interference with the Union ’ s representation of employees: the Union accordingly proceeded first without objection, unlike a case where the principal or only allegation is one upon which the employer bears the burden of proof:See, e.g , Widewaters Calgary Hotel Management Co., ULC [2018] Alta. L.R.B.R 20 (at para. 64)).Where the totality of that evidence – – which can include many Employer documents admitted by agreement or through the Union ’ s witnesses, and many Employer communications to which the Union was a party – – not only does not raise a case requiring a response from the Employer, but instead defeats the Union ’ s case, we see no policy rationale for denying summary dismissal of the section 149 allegations.While the reverse onus places the substantive burden of proof upon the employer, it does not necessarily compel it to lead evidence.If summary dismissal were denied, the Employer could simply decline to lead any evidence of its own, and it would be entitled to a dismissal on the basis that the Union ’ s evidence discharged the Employer ’ s reverse onus.As long as the Board keeps in mind that, for the section 149 allegations, evenly balanced probabilities entitle the Union rather than the Employer to succeed, we see no reason why an application for summary dismissal should not be available to terminate proceedings that have shown no realistic prospect of success.Practically, summary dismissal applications in mixed-onus cases like this one are unlikely to succeed until the union ’ s evidence is complete and a robust evidentiary record is before the Board.Only at that point will a hearing panel likely conclude that the union ’ s section 149 case has already been defeated.But to exclude the use of a summary dismissal application entirely would unnecessarily deprive the Board of an important tool to promote the efficiency of its proceedings.

[125]The Union ’ s evidence here fails to raise an arguable case that the suspension of the second shift commencing April 13, 2020 was motivated even in part by the Union ’ s advocacy in its Easter Sunday letter, or a desire to retaliate against employees for failing to attend work.Rather, it establishes the contrary.We must observe that it is itself a dubious proposition that the Employer would suspend half of its principal revenue-producing activity, with all the organizational and logistical difficulties this would pose, out of a desire to muzzle the Union or punish a workforce that was already very nervous about going to work.But it becomes an untenable proposition when the evidence shows that the plant in fact experienced a wave of absenteeism starting that day.Ms. Teeter for Cargill management immediately asserted to Mr. Yeager that attendance was down and that a layoff might be necessary (though ultimately the layoff did not happen).In the later email announcing suspension of the second shift, she claimed absenteeism of 45% on the day shift that day.No witness for the Union contested that assertion in the document.Ms. Tukku acknowledged that during the period immediately after the Easter Sunday letter, “ it looked like no one was there ”.

[126]Unquestionably, the evidence shows that Cargill management was angry at the Union for its suggestion that safety ***measures*** were inadequate and the plant should shut down.It reacted initially with suspicion and some barely-concealed hostility that at worst the Union might have fomented a strike, and at best it had been “irresponsible” in its messaging.This suspicion and hostility showed up not just in Ms. Teeter ’ s initial response, but at other levels of management, like Devin Tretiak ’ s comments to Myriam Tukku while rearranging the cafeteria tables, and comments attributed to unnamed supervisors.But these comments do nothing to advance the case that the Employer suspended the second shift to punish the Union and employees in the bargaining unit.Respecting the Union ’ s right to represent employees does not oblige the Employer to like the Union ’ s message.It does not have to stay silent in the face of a message it considers provocative, though it may be counsel of caution to ***measure*** its words.This was one of the “flashes of anger”, under conditions of extreme stress, that we noted earlier in this bargaining relationship.It should not be surprising that something like these comments occurred, and it would be highly unrealistic to jump to even a provisional conclusion that they reflected an intention to punish employees and the Union.The evidence, to us, shows that the comments were only what they appeared to be:a surge of frustration at the chaotic aftermath of the Easter weekend.

[127]In the end, the Employer backed away from assertions that the Union intentionally or irresponsibly brought about the wave of absenteeism.We are left with evidence of a claimed – and uncontested – absence rate of 45% from the day shift on April 13, at a time when COVID-19 case numbers were accelerating and, by all indications, anxiety among employees was justifiably high.There was every indication that this would not be a problem confined to the single date of April 13, as indeed it was not.We do not need direct evidence to conclude that this level of absenteeism, or anything close to it, presented management with an overwhelming practical problem of how to keep the line running normally for both shifts. Whether that was a reasonable management decision, or one in accordance with the Collective Agreement, is a grievable issue, and one on which the Union in fact filed a grievance.But in the face of the evidence of this overwhelming practical problem, much more would be required for this panel to see a triable issue in the assertion that it was really, or even partially, a way to punish employees and their Union for questioning the safety of the plant and then failing to attend work in large numbers.The evidence simply does not support that part of the Union ’ s case with any real force, and instead shows that the Employer was motivated to cancel the second shift by permissible operational considerations.

[128]The principal thrust of the Union ’ s Complaint is that the Employer interfered with its representational activities, by undermining or otherwise failing to recognize its representational role in the early period of response to the COVID-19 pandemic under review, and particularly in regard to the Union ’ s role in ensuring the workplace health and safety of its members.Intention is not a necessary element of a claimed violation of section 148(1)(a)(ii):“No employer … shall … interfere with (…) the representation of employees by a trade union”.Instead, this and other Canadian labour boards have employed a balancing approach, by which the prohibition is ***measured*** against the legitimate employer interests that may impact upon the union ’ s representative activities.Again, Adams in Canadian Labour Law, supra, sums up the governing approach this way (using the specific example of Ontario ’ s then-section 70, Labour Relations Act, and “no solicitation” rules in the workplace), at §10.3:

What is apparent in comparing s. 70 with s. 72 … of the Ontario Act is the presence of the words “because” and “seeks” in s. 72 and the sole reference to “interference” in s. 70.Section 70 is cast in very general terms and deals with interference with the formation, selection or administration of a trade union. (…)The Ontario Board has responded (…) by holding that it will confine itself to a very limited balancing of interests under s. 70 and to employer conduct that more than incidentally affects a trade union (…).

Indeed, all labour boards have refused to hold that any interference whatsoever with the formation or administration of a union is improper and, instead, have confined their examination to the bona fides or legitimacy of the management action complained about.The “no solicitation” cases are representative of this approach.While the cases have downplayed or ignored motive, they have not involved a delicate weighing of the legitimate but conflicting interests of labour and management.Only a very limited balancing of interests has gone on. (…)They [labour boards] will only intervene where there is little or no business justification for the imposition of the no-solicitation rule.

[129]Another attribute of the prohibition against interference in union representation of employees typified by section 148(1)(a)(ii) is that it might be described as broad, but not deep.What this means is that it protects a wide range of union activities, from the initial acquisition of bargaining rights, to the right to bargain collectively, and to the everyday representational work involved in administering and enforcing the collective agreement; but it protects them only at what is described as the “foundational” level.It leaves a wide field for collective bargaining to add to the representational rights the bargaining agent enjoys in the workplace, like the right to a union office on employer property, other rights of access in the workplace, the right to file grievances and advance them through a customized grievance procedure, most joint committee structures, and rights to certain information about employees.These additional rights are considered enforceable by grievance arbitration, not through unfair labour practice proceedings.The dividing line between these types of representational rights is, essentially, whether the right asserted is one of statutory proportions:does the denial of the right significantly threaten the union ’ s basic status as the exclusive bargaining agent, or its fundamental efficacy as the representative of employees?Examples of such a foundational right are the right of the union to basic contact information for employees in the bargaining unit:Central Web Offset Ltd., [2011] Alta. L.R.B.R 308; and the right of an employee to require, and the union to provide, union assistance at an interview where there is a significant prospect that discipline will be imposed:CALCO Club [1992] Alta. L.R.B.R 77; and UNA, Loc. 37 v. Mistahia Health Region [1997] Alta. L.R.B.R 635.

[130]The Board has explained this distinction between statutory and contractual representation rights as follows in this extended passage from CJA, Loc. 2103 v. Calgary Exhibition and Stampede Ltd., [2015] Alta. L.R.B.R 1:

[19] In cases that have found a breach of section 148(1)(a)(ii), a common thread is employer actions that impede, subvert or deny the exercise of the union's legitimate role in the workplace, whether that be as party to a collective agreement, as employees' agent of mutual support and assistance, or as employees' exclusive bargaining agent further to section 38(1) of the Code.

[20] A smaller subset of these cases is those which would impose positive obligations on an employer to facilitate the Union ’ s representation. Without expressly articulating it, labour boards appear to have found such obligations in cases where, without the employer ’ s positive action, the existence, efficacy or perceived legitimacy of the Union would be significantly threatened. The disclosure of employee contact information, referred to above at paragraph 18, is one example. There must be clear parameters upon the positive obligations placed on the employer in facilitating representation. Otherwise, the statutory obligation of section 148(1)(a)(ii) subsumes many topics which ought to be legitimately the subject of bargaining between the parties.

(…)

[23] The Board ’ s approach to positive obligations of information disclosure under section 148(1)(a)(ii), outside of the bargaining context, must strike a balance which protects the core of a union ’ s representation without imposing obligations beyond that core. In our view, the only information subject to such a statutory obligation is that without which the viability of the union ’ s representation would be significantly undermined or significantly threatened. Other information which simply aids the union ’ s administration of the collective agreement on behalf of the employees is appropriately the subject of negotiation and potential inclusion in the collective agreement. We see such terms – for instance, requirements of employers to provide an up-to-date seniority list – in many collective agreements. The Ontario Labour Relations Board recognized this distinction of acquiring rights both through statute and collective bargaining in Millcroft Inn Ltd., [2000] O.L.R.D No. 2581, 63 C.L.R.B.R (2d) 181, another decision in a long line of cases involving the withholding of names, address, and telephone numbers of employees. At paragraph 19 the Board states:

Rights in labour relations are acquired in two primary ways: under the Act and by agreement in collective bargaining. The rights acquired under each regime are different in quality. The rights under the Act are enabling in character. They provide the basis upon which a collective bargaining relationship can be established and maintained. They create the foundation upon which the edifice of the relationship is built. The substantive rights which a union secures for itself and the employees in a collective agreement are of a different sort. They are substantive entitlements which advance the interests of employees. They are the outcome of the exercise of the enabling rights protected under the Act. Thus, for example, union rights to sit on joint employer-employee committees, to be consulted in planning decisions, to raise grievances, to be present before, at or after disciplinary inquiries, these are the kinds of rights which a union can negotiate through the employer ’ s agreement. In contrast, the basic rights, those protected by the Act, are not dependent upon the employer ’ s consent. They exist independently. Their purpose is to ensure that a union is able to meet its statutory obligations, particularly its duty to represent employees in a fair and effective manner.

[131]The Union ’ s submissions attempt to characterize the matters upon which it alleges the Employer ’ s conduct was deficient or improper as being of the “statutory” or “foundational” kind of representational issue.It relies in particular upon two things:first, that many of the matters arose out of the Union ’ s attempts to protect and advance employees ’ interests in workplace health and safety, which it characterizes as “legitimate and core union activities”; and second, that the circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic required a “heightened sensitivity” to the Union ’ s representational rights, such that the Board should protect those representational rights as assiduously as it does during other critical periods like the initial organization of a union at the worksite, or first collective agreement bargaining, when employee support is typically unstable and subject to improper influence.

[132]We are unable to agree with these propositions.Of the first, we agree that worker health and safety is a highly important workplace interest for employees and their bargaining agents.It has been a catalyst for union organizing and collective bargaining since the grim days of Upton Sinclair ’ s novel The Jungle, and earlier.But it does not follow that it is a “foundational” representational interest in the sense the jurisprudence conveys.The idea of a “foundational” representational interest is that of an interest that is so fundamental to the concept of the exclusive bargaining agent that it must be inferred even where the statute is silent.Health and safety interests do not fall into this category.That is not to say that these protections are not of the utmost importance.Indeed, so important is the subject of worker health and safety that it is addressed by a separate statutory regime, the modern occupational health and safety code, that grants rights in respect of health and safety directly to employees, independent of their union ’ s exclusive bargaining agency.Alberta ’ s version, the Occupational Health and Safety Act, S.A 2020, c. O-2.2[1] (the “OHS Act”) enforces worker participation in health and safety matters even in the absence of a bargaining agent.Where there is a bargaining agent, the OHS Act mandates joint health and safety committees with a minimum parity of employee to management participants on them, and a statutory mandate for the joint health and safety committee:OHS Act, ss. 13-16.Unions can and often do negotiate specific health and safety provisions in their collective agreements, but these generally either formalize the mechanisms of the joint health and safety committees within the context of that bargaining relationship, or grant union and employee rights above and beyond the statutory occupational health and safety regime. These are bargainable matters, and they are grievable matters where collective agreement language exists (or even where it does not, on the basis that the OHS Act is an “employment-related statute” the provisions of which are implied by law into every collective agreement:Parry Sound (District) Social Services Administration Board v. OPSEU, Loc. 324, 2003 SCC 42, [2003] 2 S.C.R 157). We are unable to see in this structure any real parallel to the foundational representational interests that labour boards view as necessary to protect, even in the absence of collective agreement language, through section 148(1)(a)(ii) of the Code and its counterpart provisions elsewhere.

[133]We are also unable to agree with the second proposition, that the COVID-19 pandemic demanded heightened sensitivity to Union representational interests. On the surface, this assertion may seem attractive.Closer scrutiny, however, leads us to consider that the appropriate degree of involvement of the union in pandemic response and management (beyond what the collective agreement entitles it to) should be viewed as an operational issue, arguably a moral one, but not a legal one.True foundational representational interests that should be protected by unfair labour practice prohibitions are relatively easy to discern.Their limits, whether described by time or by type of interference, are relatively certain.Terminating a union organizer during a certification drive or during bargaining of a first collective agreement; bargaining directly with employees, to the exclusion of the union; holding a closed-door disciplinary interview with a vulnerable employee without a union representative present; withholding employee contact information that the union needs before it can even know who it represents:these are not difficult situations to recognize and delimit.

[134]If we accept the Union ’ s proposition, though, questions arise.What constitutes an emergency that triggers a regime of enhanced representational rights:a declared pandemic?An undeclared but appreciable public health crisis?A workplace fatality?Non-health emergencies, like, arguably, looming business failure?When does the period of heightened sensitivity begin?With the provincial declaration of a public health emergency, perhaps, though there might be other possible starting points.More awkward, perhaps, is the question of when does the period of heightened sensitivity end?As the course of the COVID-19 pandemic has shown, it may be extremely difficult to state with certainty when the special circumstances justifying enhanced union representational rights during a public health crisis no longer exist.And, during a period of heightened sensitivity, on what range of matters should the union get an increased role:just narrow questions relating to pandemic preparedness or response?Or other issues, too?And if the latter, how are the parties to know the dividing line between issues requiring union involvement and those management may safely leave to the exercise of the broad management rights it has (usually) specifically reserved in its collective agreement?There seems a serious risk of multiplying unfair labour practice proceedings and collateral questions within them if the Board were to expand the scope of section 148(1)(a)(ii) beyond the protection of foundational representational rights as its jurisprudence has recognized them.

[135]For these reasons, we consider it appropriate to evaluate the Union ’ s case according to the established criteria of a foundational representative interest articulated in Calgary Exhibition and Stampede:do the Employer ’ s actions “impede, subvert or deny” the Union ’ s legitimate role in the workplace?And if the Union asserts a positive obligation upon the Employer to do or permit something that enhances the Union ’ s representation, would the “existence, efficacy or perceived legitimacy of the Union … be significantly undermined or significantly threatened” otherwise?With these observations, we assess the individual actions and incidents related by the evidence and relied upon by the Union as follows.

[136]Unilateral introduction of enhanced employment terms.The Union in argument says that the Employer ’ s changes to employee terms and conditions of employment in the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic (on or about March 23, 2020) interfered with the Union ’ s representation of employees.It will be recalled that these adjustments were a $2.00 per hour wage premium, a $500.00 attendance bonus for eight weeks without missed shifts, and 14 days of paid leave for COVID-19 illness and childcare absences.While the Union ’ s evidence raises a prima facie case that these were unilateral changes that ignored the Union ’ s exclusive bargaining agency, the evidence was that these were all enhancements to current terms; and that the Union, speaking through Mr. Hesse, did not object to the substance of these changes.There was no evidence that anyone from the Union voiced objection to the unilateral nature of the changes.It was a grievable matter, being a potential breach of the Union recognition clause, Article 1.3 of the Collective Agreement; yet no grievance was filed.The unilateral changes occurred in the context of a mature bargaining relationship of over 30 years duration.In these circumstances, the evidence does not raise an arguable case that the Employer ’ s unilateral changes were of statutory proportions or threatened a foundational representational interest of the Union.While an objection or even a grievance might have been justified, the fact that the Union itself did not take any steps to challenge these ***measures*** deprives the argument of a breach of Section 148(1)(a)(ii) of any force.

[137]The walking stewards issue. The Union points to the Employer ’ s refusal to release Jamie Walsh-Rollo and other walking stewards to perform their duties, and Employer ’ s attempts to procure substitute walking stewards not designated by the Union, as another change to existing terms and conditions of employment that interfered in its representational rights.The Union ’ s rights in respect of walking stewards are set out in Article 21.21 of the Collective Agreement:

21.21 Walking Stewards

The Union will designate representatives from day shift and afternoon shift who will be excused from work and paid for all hours starting after first break to attend to Union business. The Union shall keep the Company apprised of whom the representatives being utilized are.

[138]The evidence led does not show any hint that the Employer ’ s refusal to let walking stewards “walk” at times was a purposeful attempt to subvert the Union ’ s representation.To be sure, and as earlier noted, intent is not a necessary element of a breach of section 148(1)(a)(ii) of the Code.But insofar as that leads to an approach that balances Union representational rights against legitimate Employer interests, it is relevant that the rationale advanced to the Union by Employer representatives was that the line was too understaffed to permit release as normal.No Union witness seriously challenged that assertion.Indeed, Devin Yeager testified that he was prepared to work with the Employer to resolve that issue, and let that be known to Employer representatives.He also testified in cross-examination that the Union ’ s issue was not the refusal to release walking stewards, but management purporting to designate their replacements.That evidence is inconsistent with an assertion that the Employer ’ s action so threatened the Union ’ s ability to represent its members that it can be described as interference with the Union ’ s foundational representational interests.

[139]No doubt, the Employer ’ s actual or proposed handling of the walking stewards problem might have lent itself to a grievance.That grievance could have explored the relationship between Article 21.21 and management rights to ensure continuation of production in the specific circumstances of the refusals.It could have examined the Union ’ s seemingly strong prima facie case that the Employer had no role in designating who could perform walking steward duties.But in this mature bargaining relationship, the dispute is not one of statutory proportions.A grievance was the available and proper channel to raise the dispute, and it is telling that the Board did not hear evidence of a grievance being filed on this issue.

[140]We also wish to make particular reference to the later resurrection of the walking stewards issue when Safety Manager Renee Siki queried Myriam Tukku about possible “rovers” to perform in relief in that role, and was then criticized by Devin Yeager for becoming involved, when Siki ’ s email was forwarded to him.The evidence is quite clear that Siki bore no blame for this incident.She was responding to concerns raised by Tukku and Walsh-Rollo, neither of whom rose to her defence when Yeager became irritated at her involvement. It was a perhaps unguarded attempt to help, not an improper attempt to insert herself into a labour relations matter properly reserved to Messrs. Yeager, Attwood, Tretiak and Hale.

[141]Unilateral suspension of the second shift.The Union argues that the Employer improperly and unilaterally altered terms and conditions of employment when it suspended the second shift in response to the absenteeism that occurred starting April 13, 2020, just after the Easter weekend.It says that the Employer was instead obliged to meet with the Union in response to Mr. Hesse ’ s Easter Sunday letter calling for a meeting and an immediate plant closure.We are similarly unable to see that this action threatened a foundational representational interest of the Union.Prima facie, a decision to suspend a shift and, as it later transpired, staff the remaining shift with willing workers from among the entire workforce, is an exercise of core management rights to organize production and direct the workforce.It is not a decision that typically requires management to give advance notice to, or negotiate with, the Union.It is instead a grievable issue to the extent that the Collective Agreement furnishes a basis to grieve.We note that this Agreement contains many and detailed restrictions upon managerial powers, and in Article 3.1, the management rights clause, a general agreement to act reasonably in application of the collective agreement.This was again the available and proper means of challenge to the shift suspension.The Union in fact filed a grievance about it.In our view, whether the Employer should speak to or negotiate with the Union in advance about a suspension of the shift, or on the topics raised by Mr. Hesse ’ s Easter Sunday letter, was a choice about the best labour relations response, and not a matter of statutory compulsion enforceable by section 148(1)(a)(ii) of the Code.The Employer ’ s conduct on this point does not support a case of interference in Union representation of employees.

[142]Failure to share COVID-19 information with the Union.The Union complains that Cargill shared information with the Union about COVID-19 cases in the workplace and its ***measures*** in response belatedly or not at all, and in so doing interfered with its representation of its members.It notes that the Union generally learned of positive cases and close contacts through the workplace rumour mill; that the Employer was unwilling to entertain Union enquiries based on “gossip”; and that the Employer did not share any information about positive cases after April 12, 2020.It says that specific and repeated requests for timely information about infections in the workplace were not acted upon, even though information was shared with supervisors.It further argues that Cargill failed to provide timely information to the Union about a number of operational issues, like hazard assessments; that it failed to engage the Union about the decision to shut the plant down in the third week of April or to reopen it on May 4, 2020 and failed to inform the Union about the reopening for two days after it started contacting employees about it.Last in this group of arguments, it says that Cargill ’ s failure to engage with the Union on COVID-19 topics impeded the Union ’ s efforts to represent employees regarding a number of workplace issues like eligibility for pay and bonuses, disability benefits, risk of discipline and scheduling concerns.

[143]The first difficulty with this line of argument is that it ignores or minimizes certain aspects of the evidence.Cargill officials did not provide information on positive cases as quickly, completely or accurately as the Union wanted.But there is no evidence of a direct refusal to provide such information.Rob Hale, after modest delay, responded to Devin Yeager ’ s early enquiries.Tanya Teeter later told Yeager that she was prepared to share information, but only on the basis of confirmed cases, not rumour – a reasonable proviso.She alerted him to Cargill ’ s own difficulties interpreting the information.On April 18, 2020, Cargill provided a complete spreadsheet of employees absent from work on quarantine.It seems to have been inaccurate, at least insofar as it listed two desperately ill employees as available to work.But that speaks only of the inaccuracy of the list.It does not speak to any unwillingness to share information with the Union; rather, it is evidence to the contrary.There was evidence that eventually – the date is not clearly stated in the evidence – Alberta Health Services started providing the case counts at the plant that the Union desired.At that point, further case information coming directly from the Employer would have been at best unnecessary and at worst, confusing.

[144]To the Union ’ s criticism that it learned of the reopening two days late, that is not consistent with Ms. Teeter ’ s response to Mr. Hesse ’ s direct enquiry of April 29, 2020 confirming the May 4 reopening date and saying that the decision had “just been made”.That Union witnesses reported hearing employees report their earlier hearing from supervisors that the plant would reopen May 4 is third-hand hearsay evidence that does little to establish that the definite decision to reopen was made long before it was communicated to the Union.It could at least as easily have been an option the Employer was exploring, that was misinterpreted by supervisors and employees alike as a decision.

[145]And last, the Union ’ s general assertion that Cargill ’ s uncommunicativeness interfered with its ability to administer aspects of the collective agreement and amended terms like attendance bonuses, is weakened by the fact that there was no evidence of any particular grievance or potential grievance that was actually impeded by a lack of such information.Union witnesses instead expressed their difficulties in prospective or extremely generalized terms, i.e , that the lack of information could make it difficult to advise employees or know when a grievance should be filed.

[146]The larger problem with the Union ’ s case on this point, however, is that it presupposes a right to the desired information that is unsupported by law or anything in the collective agreement. As the Employer argues, nothing in either the general law or the law particular to labour relations creates a right in the Union to be given information like absentee numbers, illness case counts, or a decision to shut the plant or to reopen it, in advance of employees or the general public.It might have been good, co-operative labour relations to do so, and maybe some opportunities to practice this were missed.It might have assisted the Union to be, and to appear, more in control of the pandemic situation at Cargill than it was.But advance notice of such things is not a matter of right for a trade union unless it either arises from other legislation, such as occupational health and safety laws, or is bargained into the collective agreement. Those do not exist in this case, and so the Union ’ s case on these points also fails to raise a triable allegation of interference in its representation of employees at the “foundational” level.

[147]Exclusion of the Union from COVID-19 related meetings and tours.The Union complains that it was generally denied a role in Cargill ’ s crafting of its pandemic response and Cargill ’ s interactions with government agencies throughout.Specifically, it points to its repeated unsuccessful requests for meetings with Cargill management; its exclusion from an AHS and Canadian Food Inspection Agency (“CFIA”) tour of the plant on April 7, 2020; the absence of any full-time union representative from the April 14, 2020 OHS conference call and the April 15, 2020 virtual tour that resulted; an AHS site visit on April 17, 2020; and the April 29, 2020 pre-reopening tour by AHS, OHS and CFIA.

[148]One aspect of this allegation is simply not supported by the evidence.Insofar as the complaint is that “the Union” was not present on the April 14, 2020 conference call and the April 15, 2020 virtual tour, the evidence was that one or both of Myriam Tukku and Jamie Walsh-Rollo attended them.Both held union positions as walking stewards and union co-chairs of the JWHSC.As such, they were representatives of the Union with statutory rights and responsibilities under the OHS Act.What the evidence did show was that neither Devin Yeager nor Joe Attwood, the full-time Union representatives for Cargill, attended.In the case of the April 14 conference call, it is absolutely plain that Yeager ’ s non-attendance was nothing more than a mistake, or a series of mistakes:Attwood gave Myriam Tukku the impression he would be attending the meeting when he meant someone senior in the Union would be on the call, presumably Yeager; that impression was conveyed to the Employer; Tukku did not correct the contact information late the night before when Attwood ’ s absence became known; the Employer ’ s administrative representative did not have instructions to patch Yeager in and declined to do it on her own; Tukku and Walsh-Rollo did not insist on having Yeager contacted when that occurred; and Yeager was confused about the time of the meeting, so did not try to call in himself.Nothing about this chain of events supports a finding that Yeager was purposely, or even negligently, excluded from the meeting.

[149]Of the April 15 virtual tour, the evidence was that Ms. Tukku knew of it in advance and could have informed Mr. Yeager of it if his attendance was deemed necessary, but did not.Again, while it might have been good labour relations practice to have included the Union ’ s full-time representative in the discussion, even by something as simple as copying him with emails, it was not a necessity for the Employer to guess which representative of the Union would be attending and so needed to know.Ms. Siki was used to dealing with the Union co-chairs of the JSHSC, and it was not a purposeful undermining of the Union to have informed them and placed upon them any initiative to have another Union representative present.

[150]The other aspects of the Union ’ s allegation assert entitlements to meet with the Employer, or to be present at meetings with government officials, that exist neither by the law nor by the collective agreement.The Union made several requests early in the pandemic period to meet with the Employer and was disappointed that it did not get a meeting.Whether such meetings would have been an exercise in good, productive labour relations, the Union possessed no positive right in the collective agreement to require them, and we are unable to say that the meetings sought, at the time they were sought, were so fundamental to the Union ’ s statutory role as exclusive bargaining agent that a positive right to them should be recognized through section 148(1)(a)(ii) of the Code.Though the Union was not informed of meetings and site tours with AHS on April 7 and April 17, 2020, whether it should be present and the scope of its involvement was something for AHS and the Employer to decide.The joint OHS-AHS-CFIA re-opening tour of April 29, 2020 was also not a meeting that the Union possessed a positive right to attend.Section 15 of the current Occupational Health and Safety Act places the Union ’ s attendance in the hands of the OHS officer conducting a site inspection; it is entitled to be in attendance if the officer requests.This is not in any way to say that it would not have been a good idea to have either or both of a full-time Union representative or a member of the JWHSC present at any or all of these events.As earlier noted, that is a question not before this Board.It is a question of effective administration of the OHS Act and public health statutes, not one of core representational rights under the Code.To the extent that these other statutes give employees or their bargaining agent a role in the proceeding, any remedy lies under those statutes.

[151]We also feel obliged to say that the Union ’ s case, to the extent it asserts an entitlement to participate in inspections and tours of the plant as being a foundational right of representation, is damaged by the evidence that several offers for the Union to be involved in other health and safety meetings or tours of the plant were rejected or ignored.It did not respond to the Employer ’ s suggestion to reschedule the missed JWHSC meeting of April 14, 2020.It declined to follow up Ms. Teeter ’ s offer of April 18, 2020 for Messrs. Hesse and Yeager to tour the plant. It was reluctant to participate in the April 27, 2020 OHS inspection tour, though it eventually did.

[152]The evidence before us indicates strongly that as time went on, the Union position hardened and it became greatly concerned that its participation in Employer initiatives to assess the health and safety status of the plant would undermine its message that the plant was unsafe, and perhaps “co-opt” the Union into the Employer ’ s position. That is a strategic judgment that the Union may be entitled to make, but by adopting such a position the Union cannot avoid the logical consequence:if participating in such meetings and inspections is truly a “foundational” aspect of representation, i.e , it is essential to exercise of the Union ’ s exclusive bargaining agency, can its refusal or reluctance to accept what appear to be bona fide offers to participate be ignored?We find ourselves unable to ignore them.They illustrate that where it conflicted with important strategic considerations, the Union treated participation in such meetings as discretionary rather than a matter of necessity.

[153]Direct communication with employees.The Union argues that there were several incidents of the Employer directly communicating to employees either in advance of, or to the exclusion of, the Union and that this undermined the Union ’ s representation of its members.It points specifically to:the communication of its decision to suspend the second shift on April 13, 2020; comments by an unnamed supervisor to Jamie Walsh-Rollo and Devin Tetiak to Myriam Tukku, both suggesting that the Union ’ s Easter Sunday letter was to blame for the shift suspension; the Employer ’ s participation in the Government Town Hall meeting of April 18, 2020; communication of the decision to idle the plant on April 21, 2020; and both the timing and the substance of its communication of the decision to reopen the plant leading up to the May 4, 2020 reopening.The Union says that certain passages in the letter to employees announcing the reopening painted a false picture to employees that the Union participated in and approved of the opening and thereby misled employees, sowed confusion in the workplace, and undermined the Union ’ s representation.

[154]In our view, the evidence of these events neither individually nor collectively establishes a case of interference with union representation that has a reasonable prospect of success. Two general points should be made at the outset of this part of our remarks.First, employers are not under a form of “gag order” in their communications to either the Union or their employees.Section 148(2)(c) of the Code, sometimes referred to as the “employer free speech” provision, says:

148(2)An employer does not contravene subsection (1) [which includes the prohibition against interference in union representation] by reason only that the employer

(…)

(c)expresses the employer ’ s views so long as the employer does not use coercion, intimidation, threats, promises or undue influence.

[155]The legislative intent evident in this provision is plainly to establish a relatively high threshold before mere employer speech will be taken to be, among other things, interference with union representation prohibited by the Code.The speech will be permissible so long as it is not coercive or intimidating in nature, and does not convey threats or promises or exercise an undue influence. Further, whether employer speech is coercive or threatening or otherwise falls outside the scope of protected speech under section 148(2)(c) is assessed on an objective standard:Teamsters, Loc. 362 v. Rolling Mix Concrete LP, [2016] Alta. L.R.B.R LD-049.While this Board is aware of academic opinion that holds that much employer speech is inherently of one or more of these characters, the statutory direction contained in Section 148(2)(c), as interpreted in this Board ’ s jurisprudence, is that unions and their members are to be credited with some resilience and ability to assess their employer ’ s words without the intervention of the Code.

[156]The second, related, point is that the Board should assess the strength of an allegation of interference with Union representation with some degree of reference to the nature of the parties in the case and their relationship.This Union is not a small, weak or inexperienced bargaining agent.It is one of the largest locals of the largest private-sector union in Canada, with long and successful experience in representing employees, often in sectors of the economy where union representation of employees is a daunting task. It has a relationship of many years with Cargill. It has access to the resources that a large local of a large national union can command.It is managed and represented by capable, experienced people.It has professional communications and information technology personnel and the means to communicate effectively with its members, some of which we heard about.We do not reject Mr. Hesse ’ s evidence of the difficulties inherent in representing workforces like the one at Cargill, which is plainly true.However, it remains the case that, in our view, this is a bargaining relationship in a stage of its history where the relationship rarely experiences an existential threat.Nor, in our experience, is this a Union that intimidates easily or tolerates circumstances where it views its members as being intimidated, coerced or improperly influenced.

[157]What this surrounding context means to us, is that this Board should take a view of the evidence that uses a healthy dose of realism.Especially considering the legislative attitude to employer speech in Alberta, and the realities of this union and this bargaining relationship, are the facts and evidence relied upon capable of establishing that the Employer has in a real, substantive way interfered with the Union ’ s ability to represent these employees?

[158]The answer must be “no”.One element that comes out clearly in the evidence is the sparseness of the allegedly problematic Employer communications in relation to the volume of communications with Union and employees that happened during this time. Considering the number of contentious topics that arose between Cargill and the Union during this time – like the walking stewards controversy, the meetings with government officials, the dispute over the Union ’ s signage, the Easter Sunday letter, and the cancellation of the second shift – it is notable that Employer speech overtly critical of the Union was minimal.Where it arguably occurred, it was directed privately to Union officials.Even the comments suggesting the Union ’ s responsibility for the absenteeism that resulted in suspension of the second shift were directed at employees who happened to be Union stewards or full-time representatives.

[159]Nor is there anything of substance in the evidence that suggests the Employer was endeavouring to bypass the Union to get its message directly to employees. Nothing in the Code requires the Employer to communicate with the Union before, or to the exclusion of, its employees in these circumstances.In this case, communications to employees were sometimes preceded by “heads up” notifications to the Union, sometimes the Union was informed at the same time, and on a few occasions the Union was notified shortly afterwards.Where the latter happened, nothing suggests to us that it was anything more than the normal vagaries of communication among busy people, in this case operating in “crisis mode”.

[160]Particular mention should be made of the Employer ’ s involvement in the April 18, 2020 virtual town hall meeting held by the Alberta government.The Union viewed the timing of this event with suspicion, and it was clearly frustrated at the inevitable employee confusion and the threat of its own town hall being to some extent “hijacked”.But nothing in the evidence pointed to Cargill as the instigator of the April 18 meeting or to any nefarious purpose behind it of interfering in the Union ’ s representative activities.

[161]What is ultimately fatal to this part of the Union ’ s case, however, is that nothing in the Employer communications relied upon can in our opinion be reasonably viewed as coercive, intimidating, an undue influence, or promissory or threatening in nature.The most serious charge of this type is that the Employer gave employees a false impression that their Union had been thoroughly involved in the assessment of plant safety and therefore approved of the plan to reopen the plant on May 4.While aspects of, especially, the April 29 letter to employees perhaps lend themselves to that criticism, any failings of truth or accuracy in the Employer ’ s statements fall short of coercion, intimidation, threats or undue influence.They are statements that by legislative intention are left to the Union to correct through its own freedom of speech and for employees to assess for themselves.

IV.Conclusion

[162]This closes our review of the arguments in this summary dismissal application.Overall, we take the view that the evidence of the Union does not disclose a substantial case, i.e , one with a realistic prospect of success, either that the Employer retaliated against employees for the Union ’ s representational activities (s. 149), or that the Employer interfered with Union representational rights that are properly seen as “foundational” (s. 148).The Union may not like that the Employer gave it a much lesser role in the overall pandemic response in the workplace than it wished or than it believes was necessary to cope with the crisis.In our view, however, the Code does not elevate such desires and honest beliefs into rights through an unduly expansive approach to what constitutes union “representation”.To the extent that the Union has enforceable rights in respect of the Employer ’ s handling of the early phases of the COVID-19 pandemic, they exist under other statutes or as grievances under the Collective Agreement.

[163]In a hearing comprising six days of testimony and over one hundred documents, it is inevitable that this panel will not have specifically commented on every aspect of the evidence or the parties ’ submissions.We have endeavoured to record our views of the most important issues, but the parties can be assured that the entirety of the case has been considered.Nothing upon which we have remained silent alters the result.

[164]We repeat our comment made at the outset of these reasons:this is not an inquiry into the pandemic response at the Cargill plant, nor is it an audit of the parties ’ labour relations and how they might have been improved.It is an unfair labour practice complaint alleging specific breaches of the Code.In its entirety, and for the reasons articulated, we judge that the evidence does not establish a case with a reasonable prospect of success.It is in our view appropriate to grant the Employer ’ s summary dismissal application and terminate the proceedings at this point.

[165]The Complaint is dismissed.The Board thanks the parties for their patience and for their co-operative, professional and thorough presentation of the case.

ISSUED and DATED at the City of Edmonton in the province of Alberta this 29th day of April 2022 by the Labour Relations Board and signed by its Vice-Chair.

J. Leslie Wallace, Vice-Chair

**Load-Date:** May 11, 2022

**End of Document**



[***CARBIS BAY G7 SUMMIT COMMUNIQUÉ***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:62XR-M051-F0YC-N09X-00000-00&context=1516831)

Impact News Service

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**Body**

Washington: White House Administration has issued the following news release:

We, the leaders of the Group of Seven, met in Cornwall on 11-13 June 2021 determined to beat COVID-19 and build back better. We remembered everyone who has been lost to the pandemic and paid tribute to those still striving to overcome it. Inspired by their example of collaboration and determination, we gathered united by the principle that brought us together originally, that shared beliefs and shared responsibilities are the bedrock of leadership and prosperity. Guided by this, our enduring ideals as free open societies and democracies, and by our commitment to multilateralism, we have agreed a shared G7 agenda for global action to:

End the pandemic and prepare for the future by driving an intensified international effort, starting immediately, to vaccinate the world by getting as many safe vaccines to as many people as possible as fast as possible. Total G7 commitments since the start of the pandemic provide for a total of over two billion vaccine doses, with the commitments since we last met in February 2021, including here in Carbis Bay, providing for one billion doses over the next year. At the same time we will create the appropriate frameworks to strengthen our collective defences against threats to global health by: increasing and coordinating on global manufacturing capacity on all continents; improving early warning systems; and support science in a mission to shorten the cycle for the development of safe and effective vaccines, treatments and tests from 300 to 100 days. Reinvigorate our economies by advancing recovery plans that build on the $12 trillion of support we have put in place during the pandemic. We will continue to support our economies for as long as is necessary, shifting the focus of our support from crisis response to promoting growth into the future, with plans that create jobs, invest in infrastructure, drive innovation, support people, and level up so that no place or person, irrespective of age, ethnicity or gender is left behind. This has not been the case with past global crises, and we are determined that this time it will be different. Secure our future prosperity by championing freer, fairer trade within a reformed trading system, a more resilient global economy, and a fairer global tax system that reverses the race to the bottom. We will collaborate to ensure future frontiers of the global economy and society, from cyber space to outer space, increase the prosperity and wellbeing of all people while upholding our values as open societies. We are convinced of the potential of technological transformation for the common good in accordance with our shared values. Protect our planet by supporting a green revolution that creates jobs, cuts emissions and seeks to limit the rise in global temperatures to 1.5 degrees. We commit to net zero no later than 2050, halving our collective emissions over the two decades to 2030, increasing and improving climate finance to 2025; and to conserve or protect at least 30 percent of our land and oceans by 2030. We acknowledge our duty to safeguard the planet for future generations. Strengthen our partnerships with others around the world. We will develop a new partnership to build back better for the world, through a step change in our approach to investment for infrastructure, including through an initiative for clean and green growth. We are resolved to deepen our current partnership to a new deal with Africa, including by magnifying support from the International Monetary Fund for countries most in need to support our aim to reach a total global ambition of $100 billion. Embrace our values as an enduring foundation for success in an ever changing world. We will harness the power of democracy, freedom, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights to answer the biggest questions and overcome the greatest challenges. We will do this in a way that values the individual and promotes equality, especially gender equality, including by supporting a target to get 40 million more girls into education and with at least $2¾ billion for the Global Partnership for Education.

We shall seek to advance this open agenda in collaboration with other countries and within the multilateral rules-based system. In particular, we look forward to working alongside our G20 partners and with all relevant International Organisations to secure a cleaner, greener, freer, fairer and safer future for our people and planet.

INTRODUCTION

1. We, the Leaders of the Group of Seven, met together in Cornwall, United Kingdom on 11-13 June 2021 at a critical juncture for our people and planet.

2. We acknowledge the ongoing impacts of COVID-19 in our own societies and around the world, and that those impacts have not been felt evenly. We remember all those who have died as a result of the pandemic and pay tribute to all those continuing to work to overcome the virus.

3. United as open societies and economies and guided by our shared values of democracy, freedom, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, we commit to beating COVID-19 everywhere and building back better for all. We are firmly convinced that these values remain the best foundation for the social and economic advancement of all humanity. We affirm that by investing in our people, tackling inequalities, including gender inequality, promoting dignity and championing freedoms, we will release innovation capable of tackling the great challenges of our time.

4. Our agenda for global action is built on our commitment to international cooperation, multilateralism and an open, resilient, rules-based world order. As democratic societies we support global institutions in their efforts to protect human rights, respect the rule of law, advance gender equality, manage tensions between states, address conflict, instability and climate change, and share prosperity through trade and investment. That open and resilient international order is in turn the best guarantor of security and prosperity for our own citizens.

5. We were joined in Cornwall by the Leaders of Australia, India, the Republic of Korea and South Africa, with whom we have agreed a shared statement on the value and role of open societies. We will continue to work together with these and all our partners in tackling global challenges. We reaffirm our commitment to multilateralism and to working with the G20, UN and wider multilateral system to deliver a strong, sustainable, resilient and inclusive recovery.

HEALTH

6. Our immediate focus is beating COVID-19 and we set a collective goal of ending the pandemic in 2022. The COVID-19 pandemic is not under control anywhere until it is under control everywhere. In an interconnected world global health and health security threats respect no borders. We therefore commit both to strengthen global action now to fight COVID-19, and to take further tangible steps to improve our collective defences against future threats and to bolster global health and health security. This includes strengthening the World Health Organization (WHO) and supporting it in its leading and coordinating role in the global health system.

7. We recognise that the pandemic has left no one untouched, impacting not only physical health but also mental health and social wellbeing. We pay tribute to the extraordinary efforts of first responders, health workers, paid and unpaid care workers, scientists, and manufacturers who have developed and deployed COVID-19 medical tools at a pace few thought possible, opening up a path out of the pandemic. At the same time, we recognise that we have a long way to go to achieve global equitable access to these medical tools, and to manage the risks from new COVID-19 variants which have the potential to reverse our progress.

8. Recognising that ending the pandemic in 2022 will require vaccinating at least 60 per cent of the global population, we will intensify our action to save lives. Our international priority is to accelerate the rollout of safe and effective, accessible and affordable vaccines for the poorest countries, noting the role of extensive immunisation as a global public good. We reiterate our endorsement of the G20 Rome Declaration and the statement agreed by our Foreign and Development Ministers on equitable access. We will work together and with others, leveraging the full spectrum of the capability and capacity we can each deploy to support the global vaccination effort, through finance for and sharing of doses, science, ensuring accessibility through voluntary licensing, manufacturing and ensuring availability through exports, opening supply chains, and supporting final mile delivery.

9. We reaffirm our support for the ACT-A and its COVAX Facility as the primary route for providing vaccines to the poorest countries. Since the start of the pandemic, we have committed $8.6 billion to the vaccines pillar of ACT-A to finance the procurement of vaccines, including $1.9 billion since we last met in February. This provides for the equivalent of over one billion doses. We welcome the recent successful COVAX Summit co-hosted by Japan and Gavi which mobilised financing pledges exceeding the COVAX AMC target. Recognising the urgent need to speed up delivery of doses, we are committing to share at least 870 million doses directly over the next year. We will make these doses available as soon as possible and aim to deliver at least half by the end of 2021 primarily channelled through COVAX towards those in greatest need. Taken together, the dose equivalent of our financial contributions and our direct dose sharing mean that the G7’s commitments since the start of the pandemic provide for a total of over two billion vaccine doses. The commitments since we last met in February 2021 including here in Carbis Bay provide for one billion doses over the next year. We will work together with the private sector, the G20 and other countries to increase this contribution over the months to come.

10. These commitments build on our wider contributions to the global vaccination effort. These include exports from domestic production, with at least 700 million doses exported or to be exported this year, of which almost half have gone or will go to non-G7 countries, with a commitment to continue exporting in significant proportions; and the promotion of voluntary licensing and not-for-profit global production, which has so far accounted for over 95 per cent of the COVAX supply.

11. We reaffirm our support for all pillars of the ACT-A across, treatments, tests and strengthening public health systems as well as vaccines. As the G7, since our meeting in February, we have committed over $2 billion in total to the ACT-Accelerator (including vaccines), taking our collective commitment since the start of the pandemic to over $10 billion. We support discussions regarding the extension of the ACT-A mandate into 2022, noting the planned comprehensive review to optimise its effectiveness and accountability. Efforts on this scale require close monitoring of progress made by ACT-A with reliable, transparent, up-to-date and clear information on procurement and delivery to both donor and recipient countries in close partnership with regional organisations. Progress should be reported to the G20 in Rome.

12. In support of achieving our goal, we commit to an end-to-end approach to boost supply of COVID-19 tools, including vaccines, raw materials, tests, therapeutics, and personal protective equipment (PPE), through more production in more places to sustain a global supply network for this pandemic and the next. This will be based on the principles of open trade and transparency, including through terminating unnecessary trade restrictive ***measures*** and supporting open, diversified, secure and resilient supply chains. It will be backed up by a practical and pragmatic approach to breaking down bottlenecks that are holding back the efficient use of current production capacity, as well as promoting partnerships to increase capacity further. To this end, we will support the ACT-A Facilitation Council Working Group together with the World Health Organisation (WHO), the World Trade Organisation (WTO), Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI), Gavi, UNICEF and other partners such as the Medicines Patent Pool and the private sector, to coordinate a global vaccine supply network to optimise manufacturing capacities for safe and effective vaccines and other pandemic tools, and to share information about supply chains. Emphasising the need for equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines, we will support manufacturing in low income countries and, noting the importance of intellectual property in this regard, we will engage constructively with discussions at the WTO on the role of intellectual property, including by working consistently within the TRIPS agreement and the 2001 Doha Declaration on the TRIPS agreement and Public Health. We note the positive impact that voluntary licensing and technology transfer on mutually agreed terms have already made to increasing global supply. We note the positive impact that voluntary licensing and technology transfer on mutually agreed terms have already made to increasing global supply. We will explore all options to ensure affordable and accessible COVID-19 tools for the poorest countries, including non-profit production, tiered and transparent pricing, and sharing by manufacturers of a proportion of production with COVAX, noting the previous precedent of the 10 per cent target in relation to influenza. We support efforts to accelerate manufacturing capacities of COVID-19 tools on all continents, encouraging new partnerships based on voluntary licensing and technology transfer on mutually agreed terms and in particular will strive to support African efforts to establish regional manufacturing hubs. We will continue to work with partners, regional organisations and recipient countries, including through COVAX, to boost country-readiness, and will maintain our efforts to support vaccine confidence.

13. To get and stay ahead of the virus, we commit to continue our investment in cutting edge research and innovation, seeking to ensure that global vaccines remain effective against variants of concern, and that effective tests and treatments are available. To this end, we will boost global surveillance and genomic sequencing and swift information sharing needed to enable the rapid detection to combat the virus and its emerging variants. G7 countries should extend every effort to achieve, wherever possible, a level of genomic sequencing of at least 10 per cent of all new positive COVID-19 samples during the pandemic phase and share genomic sequencing information with existing global databases.

14. Alongside the above, we will continue and enhance our commitments to support fragile countries in dealing with the pandemic and other health challenges. This includes supporting ACT-A partners such as The Global Fund and Unitaid which have played a crucial role in delivering lifesaving medical and other supplies, including oxygen, tests, therapeutics and PPE, and assisting countries together with WHO to strengthen their health systems, build capacity, manage outbreaks and prevent disease spread. We call on the World Bank Group and the other Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs) to increase the speed of their financial support, and will continue to support ACT-A in this regard.

15. Alongside responding to the current pandemic, we must act now to strengthen the global health and health security system to be better prepared for future pandemics and to tackle long standing global health threats, including Antimicrobial Resistance. We welcome the Rome Declaration, the ***measures*** set out within the ‘Strengthening WHO preparedness for and response to health emergencies’ Resolution as adopted at the 74th World Health Assembly, acknowledge the bold recommendations of the Independent Panel for Pandemic Preparedness and Response (IPPPR), and the work of the International Health Regulations Review Committee (IHR Review Committee) and Independent Oversight and Advisory Committee (IOAC). We look forward to continuing to work with the G20, UN, WHO, WTO and other relevant international organisations, in accordance with their mandates and rules for decision making, to make progress in the swift implementation of recommendations, and to seek the necessary multilateral action, including exploring the potential value of a treaty. We look forward to the special session on pandemic preparedness in the Autumn, as agreed at the World Health Assembly.

16. As G7 countries, we acknowledge our particular role and responsibilities in international efforts to strengthen the global health system, and commit to harnessing our unique strengths to support this. We endorse the G7 Carbis Bay Health Declaration and the G7 Health Ministers’ Communique, and the concrete actions outlined to ensure all countries are better equipped to prevent, detect, respond to and recover from health crises including in alignment with the International Health Regulations (IHR). We place particular emphasis on:

Improving integration, by strengthening a “One Health” approach across all aspects of pandemic prevention and preparedness, recognising the critical links between human and animal health and the environment. Strengthening transparency and accountability, including reiterating our commitment to the full implementation of, and improved compliance with, the International Health Regulations 2005. This includes investigating, reporting and responding to outbreaks of unknown origin. We also call for a timely, transparent, expert-led, and science-based WHO-convened Phase 2 COVID-19 Origins study including, as recommended by the experts’ report, in China. Improving the speed of response by developing global protocols which trigger collective action in the event of a future pandemic. Ensuring fairness, inclusion and equity, including the empowerment and leadership of women and minorities in the health and care sectors, and addressing the links between health crises and wider social determinants of health such as poverty and structural inequalities, and leaving no one behind by advancing the achievement of Universal Health Coverage. Increasing the resilience of global health systems to deal with outbreaks of emerging and enduring pathogens, including by investing in the health and care workforce worldwide to build capacity and keep health care workers safe. Strengthening financing models to support longer-term preparedness, sustainable global health and health security, in particular but not limited to the WHO. We will explore options for building consensus this year, around sustainable global health and health security financing, supported by robust financial reporting, increased and defined accountability, and oversight. We ask our Finance Ministers to work with others, the G20 and its High Level Independent Panel (HLIP) to make progress in this regard. We will explore options to strengthen global accountability, tracking and allocation of global health security financing, including the IPPPR recommendation toward a Global Health Threats Council.

17. The G7 has a leading role to play in deploying our collective scientific capabilities as part of an enhanced global health response. Data can play a transformative role in supporting effective early warning and rapid response to health crises. We therefore need to improve the quality and coverage of international, regional and national pathogen surveillance to enable us to gather, share and analyse data to identify new variants in our fight against the current pandemic, and to detect and monitor future pathogens with pandemic potential. We support the establishment of the international pathogen surveillance network – a global pandemic radar – and welcome the WHO’s commitment to work with experts and countries to help achieve this, based on a common framework, including standards and rules for sharing data, that builds on existing detection systems such as the influenza and polio programmes but with greater capacity for genomic sequencing and broader in coverage. We note the report to the Presidency on pathogen surveillance by Sir Jeremy Farrar. To this end we welcome the WHO’s Global Hub for Pandemic and Epidemic Intelligence, as well as additional centres as part of this network. This will also need to be supported by capability building at the regional level, thereby increasing global sequencing and pathogen surveillance capacities across the world. We ask that the WHO reports back to Leaders on the progress of the network by the end of this year as part of the G20 ***process***.

18. It is essential that we maintain and build upon the extraordinary innovation, scientific power, and collaboration that we have seen in the response to this pandemic, including the development of COVID-19 vaccines in just over 300 days. As G7 members we have a particular role to play in seeking to make safe and effective diagnostics, therapeutics and vaccines even more quickly available in the future. Recognising the unpredictable nature of future health emergencies, in the event of a future pandemic we will seek to create an adequate framework to have safe and effective vaccines, therapeutics and diagnostics available within 100 days, consistent with our core principles around trade and transparency of equitable access, and high regulatory standards. We thank the UK’s Chief Scientific Adviser and his G7 counterparts, the international organisations, industry representatives and expert advisers involved in the partnership on pandemic preparedness convened by the UK Presidency and note their practical proposals. We welcome the 100 Days Mission, and recognise that this will require continued, concerted collaboration between the public and private sectors, and the leadership of international health organisations, to make what has been ***exceptional*** during this crisis become routine in the future. We invite G7 Chief Scientific Advisers or equivalents to review progress and report to Leaders before the end of the year.

ECONOMIC RECOVERY AND JOBS

19. Our plans for the recovery from COVID-19 need to put us on a path to strong, sustainable, balanced, inclusive and resilient growth by not only addressing the immediate challenges arising from the pandemic, but also the long-term shifts in the global economy and society, including demographic, technological, and environmental trends, and inequalities between and within countries, many of which have been magnified by the COVID-19 pandemic. Recognising the interconnected nature of these global challenges, we are taking an integrated approach to our shared commitments.

20. To mitigate the impact of the pandemic, we have provided ***unprecedented*** support to citizens and businesses, including to retain jobs and support incomes and keep businesses afloat, totalling over $12 trillion including fiscal support and liquidity ***measures***. We will continue to support our economies for as long as is necessary, shifting the focus of our support from crisis response to promoting strong, resilient, sustainable, balanced and inclusive growth into the future. Once the recovery is firmly established, we need to ensure the long-term sustainability of public finances to enable us to respond to future crises and address longer-term structural challenges, including for the benefit of future generations.

21. We share key priorities including protecting, supporting and creating decent jobs, and investing in quality infrastructure, innovation, training and skills and addressing inequalities. We will continue to exchange ideas and share best practices to ensure we learn from each other and update our approaches through different phases of the recovery. We thank Lord Nick Stern for his paper on “G7 leadership for sustainable, resilient and inclusive economic recovery and growth” as commissioned by the UK G7 Presidency. At the heart of our agenda for economic growth and recovery is a green and digital transformation that will increase productivity, create new decent and quality jobs, cut greenhouse gas emissions, improve our resilience, and protect people and the planet as we aim for net zero by 2050.

22. We need a tax system that is fair across the world. We endorse the historic commitment made by the G7 on 5 June. We will now continue the discussion to reach consensus on a global agreement on an equitable solution on the allocation of taxing rights and an ambitious global minimum tax of at least 15 per cent on a country-by-country basis, through the G20/OECD inclusive framework and look forward to reaching an agreement at the July meeting of G20 Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors. With this, we have taken a significant step towards creating a fairer tax system fit for the 21st century, and reversing a 40-year race to the bottom. Our collaboration will create a stronger level playing field, and it will help raise more tax revenue to support investment and it will crack down on tax avoidance.

23. We recognise the importance to the global economy of safely restarting international travel, by land, air and sea, and multilateral efforts to achieve this, including new public health guidance on international travel by the WHO, International Civil Aviation Organisation and International Maritime Organisation. We recognise that this will need a set of common standards for travel including interoperability and mutual recognition of digital applications, testing requirements, recognition of vaccination status including exemptions and comparable criteria for when responsive ***measures*** may be required. We welcome G7 Transport and Health Ministers’ ongoing discussions and ask them to deepen cooperation to support a safe reopening.

24. As leaders accountable to all our citizens, we are determined to ensure our plans for recovery build back better for all including by strengthening education and upskilling, and facilitating labour market participation and transitions to ‘level up’ our economies so that no geographic region or person, irrespective of their gender, age, disability, ethnicity, sexual orientation or economic status, is left behind. We recognise this has not always been the case with recoveries from previous global crises, and are together united in our resolve that this time our response should continue to be different.

25. While our support during the pandemic has helped to keep millions of people in employment, the crisis has meant that many have still lost their jobs, and the impact has not been felt equally, including with respect to young people, women and disadvantaged groups, as well as atypical and low-skilled workers. The crisis has also shown the importance of social protection systems and the critical role and incredible contribution of caregivers in our societies, often unpaid and often disproportionately women, and the importance of improving decent working conditions for these caregivers as part of our recovery plans. At the same time, technological change is profoundly changing our labour markets. We welcome the contributions of the G7 Employment Taskforce on building back better, greener and more inclusively, including their discussions with social partners and G7 Engagement Groups, including Labour 7, Youth 7, Women 7 and Business 7 covering how we can prepare our labour markets for the future. One of the highest priorities for our ongoing cooperation will be ensuring our labour markets continue to evolve to respond to these changes and deliver decent jobs and equal opportunities for everyone, while fully respecting the ILO Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, and taking into account relevant international labour standards.

26. The COVID-19 pandemic has illustrated the risk to economic resilience posed by global crises and shocks. These can manifest from acute shocks, for example as a result of pandemics, and chronically, from challenges such as market imbalances and distortions. Our recoveries must ensure we build back more resilient. As we recover, these risks need addressing in a more coordinated way. We will collaborate more strongly between us and with allies on a new approach to economic resilience. We recognise climate change and growing inequalities as key risks for the global economy. We will consider mechanisms and share best practices to address risks to the resilience of the critical global supply chains, in areas such as critical minerals and semiconductors, reflecting on models used elsewhere such as stress-testing. We will also enhance our cooperation on investment security within our G7 Investment Screening Expert Group, to ensure we are resilient in our openness to all, able to tackle risks in keeping with our shared principles of open markets, transparency and competition. Our solutions will be built on our shared principles of openness, sustainability, inclusion, innovation and competition will help retain and reinforce the benefits of open markets; without them, we risk a future of normalised volatility and fragmentation in the global economy. To this end we appreciate the work by the G7 Panel on Economic Resilience, and thank the OECD for its work in support, and we will continue to work on the issues highlighted by the Panel.

FREE AND FAIR TRADE

27. We stand united in our commitment to free and fair trade as foundational principles and objectives of the rules-based multilateral system. We agree on the need for the world’s leading democratic nations to unite behind a shared vision to ensure the multilateral trading system is reformed, with a modernised rulebook and a reformed World Trade Organization (WTO) at its centre, to be free and fair for all, more sustainable, resilient and responsive to the needs of global citizens. We will maintain a particular focus on ensuring that the prosperity trade can bring is felt in all parts of our countries and by all peoples across the globe, especially the poor.

28. We support multilateral and plurilateral agendas to address issues in the global trading system itself and shared global challenges. We support G7 Trade Ministers’ efforts in this regard, and look forward to further work in the G20. Looking ahead to the 12th WTO Ministerial Conference (MC12) in November, we will work with other WTO members to make progress on immediate issues, including reaching a meaningful conclusion to the multilateral negotiation on fisheries subsidies and advancing negotiations on e-commerce. We also welcome the work undertaken towards the conclusion of the negotiations under the Joint Statement Initiative on Services Domestic Regulation by its participants. We support G7 Trade Ministers’ commitments to review our trade policy to ensure it supports women’s economic empowerment, and recognise the importance of developing a strong evidence base of gender-disaggregated data and analysis. We invite Trade Ministers to support the wider WTO membership to deliver an ambitious outcome at MC12 to bolster women’s participation in trade and economic empowerment. We endorse the conclusions of G7 Trade Ministers on promoting the transition to sustainable supply chains, and acknowledge the risk of carbon leakage, and will work collaboratively to address this risk and to align our trading practices with our commitments under the Paris agreement. We also welcome G7 Trade Ministers’ call to work in the WTO to formulate pragmatic, effective and holistic solutions to support trade in health, as well as their support for open, diversified, secure, and resilient supply chains in the manufacture of COVID-19 critical goods and vaccines and their components.

29. We are concerned by the use of all forms of forced labour in global supply chains, including state-sponsored forced labour of vulnerable groups and minorities, including in the ***agricultural***, solar, and garment sectors. We agree on the importance of upholding human rights and of international labour standards, including those deriving from International Labour Organisation membership, throughout global supply chains and tackling instances of forced labour. We commit to continue to work together including through our own available domestic means and multilateral institutions to protect individuals from forced labour and to ensure that global supply chains are free from the use of forced labour. We therefore task G7 Trade Ministers to identify areas for strengthened cooperation and collective efforts towards eradicating the use of all forms of forced labour in global supply chains, ahead of the G7 Trade Ministers’ meeting in October 2021.

30. We will provide the sustained effort and momentum necessary to ensure progress is made in the modernisation of the WTO to promote fair competition and help secure shared prosperity for all. We will work together at the WTO and with the wider WTO membership ahead of MC12 to advance the following points:

modernisation of the global trade rulebook so that it both better reflects, with new rules, the transformations underway in the global economy, such as digitalisation and the green transition; and strengthens rules to protect against unfair practices, such as forced technology transfer, intellectual property theft, lowering of labour and environmental standards to gain competitive advantage, market-distorting actions of state owned enterprises, and harmful industrial subsidies, including those that lead to excess capacity; stronger adherence to the existing and modernised rulebook, including through greater respect for and compliance with transparency obligations, and a strengthened WTO monitoring and deliberating function; a fairer approach to countries’ different responsibilities under the rulebook, including through addressing the arrangements for special and differential treatment so they reflect developments in the global economy but continue to account for the special needs of the least developed and low-income developing countries; proper functioning of the WTO’s negotiating function and dispute settlement system, requiring addressing long-standing issues; and, support for the interests of the least developed and low-income developing countries, including in the full implementation of WTO rules to integrate into the world trading system, so that any modernisation of the global trading system supports the social and economic growth and development of these countries.

FUTURE FRONTIERS

31. Future frontiers of the global economy and society – from cyber space to outer space – will determine the future prosperity and wellbeing of people all over the world in the decades ahead. As we are witnessing an increasing divergence of models, this transformation raises important questions about the interaction between economic opportunity, security, ethics, and human rights, and the balance between the role of the state, businesses and individuals.

32. We will work together as part of an ongoing agenda towards a trusted, values-driven digital ecosystem for the common good that enhances prosperity in a way that is sustainable, inclusive, transparent and human-centric. In doing so we will make it a sustained strategic priority to update our regulatory frameworks and work together with other relevant stakeholders, including young people, to ensure digital ecosystems evolve in a way that reflects our shared values. We commit to preserve an open, interoperable, reliable and secure internet, one that is unfragmented, supports freedom, innovation and trust which empowers people. If used properly, technologies can help us strengthen health capacities, tackle environmental threats, widen access to education and open new economic opportunities. We will leverage these technologies to advance tech for the common good and promote digital literacy worldwide. We will strengthen coordination on and support for the implementation and development of global norms and standards to ensure that the use and evolution of new technologies reflects our shared democratic values and commitment to open and competitive markets, strong safeguards including for human rights and fundamental freedoms. We also affirm our opposition to ***measures*** which may undermine these democratic values, such as government-imposed internet shutdowns and network restrictions. We support the development of harmonised principles of data collection which encourage public and private organisations to act to address bias in their own systems, noting new forms of decision-making have surfaced examples where algorithms have entrenched or amplified historic biases, or even created new forms of bias or unfairness.

33. We call on the private sector to join us in our efforts and reaffirm our support for industry-led inclusive multi-stakeholder approaches to standard setting, in line with our values and principles which underpin these standards. As such, we welcome the Presidency’s initiative of a ‘Future Tech Forum’ in September 2021 with the support of the OECD. The Forum will convene like-minded democratic partners to discuss the role of technology in supporting open societies and tackling global challenges. The Forum will support efforts to mitigate the risk of regulatory fragmentation and to facilitate coherency of our emerging technology ecosystems, and it will invite proposals for Leaders to consider in appropriate global fora. We support the aim to facilitate dialogue between governments, industry, academia, civil society and other key stakeholders. As such we will continue to take bold action to build more transparency in our technologies, building on the Open Government Partnership. Building on the work of the Global Partnership for Artificial Intelligence (GPAI) advanced by the Canadian and French G7 Presidencies in 2018 and 2019, we will aim to rally all partners around our open and human centric approach to artificial intelligence looking forward to the GPAI Summit in Paris in November 2021. To support effective standard-setting that reflects our core values and principles, we will strengthen our coordination, including by consulting with industry, with regards to engagement with and appointments to Standard Developing Organisations, where appropriate. We commit to better sharing of information and best practice, including between our national standards bodies, enhanced capacity building and support for multi-stakeholder participation in standard-setting. To this end, we endorse the Framework for G7 Collaboration on Digital Technical Standards.

34. We will support cooperation on specific areas in relation to the evolution of future frontiers. Based on the work of our Digital and Technology Ministers, we agree the focus of our cooperation for this year will be a structured dialogue around specific areas:

Championing data free flow with trust, to better leverage the potential of valuable data-driven technologies while continuing to address challenges related to data protection. To that end we endorse our Digital Ministers’ Roadmap for Cooperation on Data Free Flow with Trust. Enabling businesses to use electronic transferable records in order to generate efficiencies and economic savings to support the global economic recovery. In support of this aim we endorse the Framework for G7 Collaboration on Electronic Transferable Records. Taking further steps to improve internet safety and counter hate speech, while protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms, including free expression. We will protect our citizens online and offline, including children and vulnerable at-risk groups, and especially women and girls. We therefore endorse our Digital Ministers’ Internet Safety Principles which aim to set out common approaches to improving online safety. We invite Interior Ministers to work on a G7 agreement on sharing of information and best practice on tackling existing and emerging online forms of gender-based violence, including forms of online abuse. We affirm our support of the Christchurch Call, emphasising the need for respecting freedoms of speech and peoples’ reasonable expectation of privacy and further invite G7 Interior Ministers to continue work on preventing and countering Violent Extremist and Terrorist Use of the Internet begun in Ischia in 2017 and continued in Toronto in 2018 and Paris in 2019. We commit to work together to further a common understanding of how existing international law applies to cyberspace and welcome the work of our Foreign Ministers to promote this approach at the UN and other international fora. We also commit to work together to urgently address the escalating shared threat from criminal ransomware networks. We call on all states to urgently identify and disrupt ransomware criminal networks operating from within their borders, and hold those networks accountable for their actions. Securing supply chains. Recognising the foundational role that telecommunications infrastructure, including 5G and future communication technologies, plays and will play in underpinning our wider digital and ICT infrastructure we will promote secure, resilient, competitive, transparent and sustainable and diverse digital, telecoms, and ICT infrastructure supply chains. Deepening cooperation on Digital Competition in order to drive innovation across the global economy, enhancing consumer choice. We recognise that there is increasing international consensus that participants with significant market power can exploit their power to hold back digital markets and the wider economy. Therefore, building on the 2019 French G7 Presidency’s common understanding on ‘Competition and the Digital Economy’, we will work together through existing international and multilateral fora to find a coherent way to encourage competition and support innovation in digital markets.

35. Beyond these priorities, we will review whether other areas of collaboration with respect to future frontiers are appropriate. We are committed to the safe and sustainable use of space to support humanity’s ambition now and in the future. We recognise the importance of developing common standards, best practices and guidelines related to sustainable space operations alongside the need for a collaborative approach for space traffic management and coordination. We call on all nations to work together, through groups like the United Nations Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space, the International Organization for Standardization and the Inter-Agency Space Debris Coordination Committee, to preserve the space environment for future generations.

36. Underpinning all of these future frontiers, and wider challenges of the coming century, is the importance of scientific discovery and its deployment. We will therefore work together to promote stronger collaboration on research and development, and promote principles of research security and integrity and open science building off the historical levels of collaboration seen in the past year to internationally beneficial results. Central to this should be building a diverse and resilient science and research community, inclusive for all groups including women. Domestically we will seek to redress the imbalance in women’s and girls’ under-representation in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) which acts as a barrier to access to these growing industries. We will explore how existing and potential new mechanisms and initiatives can support risk reduction, prevention and response to future systemic crises, natural disasters and pace of technological change. As such we endorse the G7 Compact on Research Collaboration and its commitment to: support policies, legal frameworks and programmes to promote research collaboration; promote sharing of research data; explore enhancements to research assessment and rewards for collaboration and knowledge sharing; and develop a common set of principles which will help protect research and innovation ecosystem across the G7 to open and reciprocal research collaboration.

CLIMATE AND ENVIRONMENT

37. The ***unprecedented*** and interdependent crises of climate change and biodiversity loss pose an existential threat to people, prosperity, security, and nature. Through global action and concerted leadership, 2021 should be a turning point for our planet as we commit to a green transition that cuts emissions, increases adaptation action worldwide, halts and reverses biodiversity loss, and, through policy and technological transformation, creates new high quality jobs and increases prosperity and wellbeing. Ahead of the 15th Conference of the Parties of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD COP15), the 26th UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties (UNFCCC COP26) and the fifteenth session of the Conference of the Parties to the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (CCD COP15), we commit to accelerating efforts to cut greenhouse gas emissions and keep the 1.5°C global warming threshold within reach, strengthening adaptation and resilience to protect people from the impacts of climate change, halting and reversing biodiversity loss, mobilising finance and leveraging innovation to reach these goals. We welcome and encourage business, civil society and regional commitments to global climate and biodiversity ambition through science based targets, including the Race to Resilience and Race to Zero campaigns. Together we welcome the active role and participation of vulnerable communities, underrepresented groups and will work towards achieving equality, including gender equality, in the climate and environment sector. We will continue our efforts to progress the Equal by 30 Campaign for gender equality in the energy sector.

38. As G7 members, we all reaffirm our commitment to the Paris Agreement and to strengthening and accelerating its implementation through robust national policies and ***measures*** and scaled up international cooperation. To this end we collectively commit to ambitious and accelerated efforts to achieve net zero greenhouse gas emissions as soon as possible and by 2050 at the latest, recognising the importance of significant action this decade. In line with this goal, we have each committed to increased 2030 targets and, where not done already, commit to submit aligned Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) as soon as possible ahead of COP26, which will cut our collective emissions by around half compared to 2010 or over half compared to 2005. We also commit to submit 2050 Long Term Strategies (LTSs) by COP26 and to regularly update these as needed in line with the Paris agreement to reflect the latest science, technological advances and market developments. Recognising the importance of adaptation in our own national planning, we also commit to submitting adaptation communications as soon as possible, and if feasible by COP26. In fulfilling these commitments we will continue to increase our efforts to keep a limit of 1.5°C temperature rise within reach and chart a G7 pathway towards Net Zero economies. We call on all countries, in particular major emitting economies, to join us in these goals as part of a global effort, stepping up their commitments to reflect the highest possible ambition and transparency on implementation under the Paris Agreement. We also note the value of supporting international initiatives such as the OECD’s International Programme for Action on Climate Mechanism (IPAC).

39. To be credible, ambitions need to be supported by tangible actions in all sectors of our economies and societies. We will lead a technology-driven transition to Net Zero, supported by relevant policies, noting the clear roadmap provided by the International Energy Agency and prioritising the most urgent and polluting sectors and activities:

In our energy sectors, we will increase energy efficiency, accelerate renewable and other zero emissions energy deployment, reduce wasteful consumption, leverage innovation all whilst maintaining energy security. Domestically, we commit to achieve an overwhelmingly decarbonised power system in the 2030s and to actions to accelerate this. Internationally, we commit to aligning official international financing with the global achievement of net zero GHG emissions no later than 2050 and for deep emissions reductions in the 2020s. We will phase out new direct government support for international carbon-intensive fossil fuel energy as soon as possible, with limited exceptions consistent with an ambitious climate neutrality pathway, the Paris Agreement, 1.5°C goal and best available science. To be credible, ambitions need to be supported by tangible actions in all sectors of our economies and societies. We will lead a technology-driven transition to Net Zero, noting the clear roadmap provided by the International Energy Agency and prioritising the most urgent and polluting sectors and activities. Recognising that coal power generation is the single biggest cause of greenhouse gas emissions, and consistent with this overall approach and our strengthened NDCs, domestically we have committed to rapidly scale-up technologies and policies that further accelerate the transition away from unabated coal capacity, consistent with our 2030 NDCs and net zero commitments. This transition must go hand in hand with policies and support for a just transition for affected workers, and sectors so that no person, group or geographic region is left behind. To accelerate the international transition away from coal, recognising that continued global investment in unabated coal power generation is incompatible with keeping 1.5°C within reach we stress that international investments in unabated coal must stop now and we commit now to an end to new direct government support for unabated international thermal coal power generation by the end of 2021, including through Official Development Assistance, export finance, investment, and financial and trade promotion support. This transition must also be complemented by support to deliver this, including coordinating through the Energy Transition Council. We welcome the work by the Climate Investment Funds (CIFs) and donors plan to commit up to $2 billion in the coming year to its Accelerating the Coal Transition and Integrating Renewable Energy programs. These concessional resources are expected to mobilize up to $10 billion in co-financing, including from the private sector, to support renewable energy deployment in developing and emerging economies. We call on other major economies to adopt such commitments and join us in phasing out the most polluting energy sources, and scaling up investment in the technology and infrastructure to facilitate the clean, green transition. More broadly, we reaffirm our existing commitment to eliminating inefficient fossil fuel subsidies by 2025, and call on all countries to join us, recognising the substantial financial resource this could unlock globally to support the transition and the need to commit to a clear timeline. In our transport sectors, we commit to sustainable, decarbonised mobility and to scaling up zero emission vehicle technologies, including buses, trains, shipping and aviation. We recognise that this will require dramatically increasing the pace of the global decarbonisation of the road transport sector throughout the 2020s, and beyond. This includes support for accelerating the roll out of necessary infrastructure, such as charging and fueling infrastructure and enhancing the offer of more sustainable transport modes, including public transport, shared mobility, cycling and walking. We commit to accelerate the transition away from new sales of diesel and petrol cars to promote the uptake of zero emission vehicles. In our industrial and innovation sectors we will take action to decarbonise areas such as iron and steel, cement, chemicals, and petrochemicals, in order to reach net zero emissions across the whole economy. To this end, we will harness our collective strengths in science, technological innovation, policy design, financing, and regulation including through our launch of the G7 Industrial Decarbonisation Agenda to complement, support and amplify ambition of existing initiatives. This includes further action on public procurement, standards and industrial efforts to define and stimulate demand for green products and enhance energy and resource efficiency in industry. We will focus on accelerating progress on electrification and batteries, hydrogen, carbon capture, usage and storage, zero emission aviation and shipping, and for those countries that opt to use it, nuclear power. We therefore fully support launching Mission Innovation phase two and the Clean Energy Ministerial third phase. In our homes and buildings, and also industry, we recognise the need for an urgent step change in the deployment of renewable heating and cooling and reduction in energy demand. This complements required shifts in building design, sustainable materials and retrofits. We therefore welcome the Super-Efficient Equipment and Appliance Deployment (SEAD) initiative’s goal of doubling the efficiency of lighting, cooling, refrigeration and motor systems sold globally by 2030. In our ***agricultural***, forestry and other land use sectors, we commit to ensuring our policies encourage sustainable production, the protection, conservation, and regeneration of ecosystems, and the sequestration of carbon. We welcome the opportunity to discuss these issues at the COP26 Transition to Sustainable ***Agriculture*** Policy Dialogue and UN Food Systems Summit in September.

40. Achieving our collective ambitions of a global green and resilient recovery offers the greatest economic opportunity of our time to boost income, innovation, jobs, productivity and growth while also accelerating action to tackle the existential threat of climate change and environmental degradation. To close the gap between the funds needed and actual finance flows requires mobilising and aligning finance and investment at scale towards the technologies, infrastructure, ecosystems, businesses, jobs and economies that will underpin a net-zero emissions resilient future that leaves no one behind. This includes the deployment and alignment of all sources of finance: public and private, national and multilateral. We recognise the particular challenges of financing the transition to net zero economies poses for developing countries and stand by our bilateral and multilateral commitments to support these partners, in the context of meaningful and transparent decarbonisation efforts. We reaffirm the collective developed country goal to jointly mobilise $100 billion per year from public and private sources, through to 2025 in the context of meaningful mitigation actions and transparency on implementation. Towards this end, we commit to each increase and improve our overall international public climate finance contributions for this period and call on other developed countries to join and enhance their contributions to this effort. We welcome the commitments already made by some of the G7 to increase climate finance and look forward to new commitments from others well ahead of COP26 in Glasgow. This increase in quantity and predictability is complemented by improved effectiveness and accessibility, and includes more finance contributing to adaptation and resilience, disaster risk and insurance, as well as support for nature and nature-based solutions. We are committed to further enhance synergies between finance for climate and biodiversity and to promote funding that has co-benefits for climate and nature and are working intensively towards increasing the quantity of finance to nature and nature-based solutions. We welcome efforts of the MDBs to scale up their climate and nature finance, urge them to mobilise increased finance including from the private sector, and call on them, Development Finance Institutions (DFIs), multilateral funds, public banks and relevant agencies to publish before COP26 a high-level plan and date by which all their operations will be fully aligned with and support the objectives of the Paris Agreement and the multilateral environmental agreements we support.

41. We also support the transformation underway to mobilise further private capital towards these objectives in particular to support developing countries and emerging markets in making the most of the opportunities in the transition; whilst mitigating and adapting to climate change. We call upon the MDBs and our DFIs to prioritise capital mobilization strategies, initiatives and incentives within their operations. The G7 commits to leverage different types of blended finance vehicles including through our greater strategic approach to development finance, greater collaboration between our DFIs and billions worth of planned commitments towards CIF and Green Climate Fund, all of which will mobilise billions more in private finance. We also encourage further development of disaster risk finance markets. Towards this, G7 members have committed hundreds of millions worth of new financing for early action, disaster risk and insurance in line with the InsuResilience Global Partnership and Risk-Informed Early Action Partnership (REAP). We commit to establishing the necessary market infrastructure for private finance to support and incentivise the net zero transition. Developing the global green finance market will help mobilise private sector finance, and reinforce government policy to meet our net zero commitments. We support the recently launched Glasgow Finance Alliance for Net Zero, and call on swift, robust delivery of their commitments to reduce real economy emissions. We emphasise the need to green the global financial system so that financial decisions take climate considerations into account. We support moving towards mandatory climate-related financial disclosures that provide consistent and decision-useful information for market participants and that are based on the Task Force on Climate-related Financial Disclosures (TCFD) framework, in line with domestic regulatory frameworks. We also look forward to the establishment of the Taskforce on Nature-related Financial Disclosures and its recommendations. These initiatives will help mobilise the trillions of dollars of private sector finance needed, and reinforce government policy to meet our net zero commitments. We recognise the potential of high integrity carbon markets and carbon pricing to foster cost-efficient reductions in emission levels, drive innovation and enable a transformation to net zero, through the optimal use of a range of policy levers to price carbon. We underline their importance towards the establishment of a fair and efficient carbon pricing trajectory to accelerate the decarbonisation of our economies, to achieve a net zero global emissions pathway. In all this, we will develop gender-responsive approaches to climate and nature financing, investment and policies, so that women and girls can participate fully in the future green economy.

42. Biodiversity loss is an intrinsically linked, mutually reinforcing, and equally important existential threat to our planet and our people alongside climate change. In this context, we acknowledge as the G7 our contribution to the decline of biodiversity and pledge to play our part in its restoration and conservation. We support an ambitious post-2020 global biodiversity framework to be adopted by parties at CBD COP15 which sets ambitious goals, strengthens implementation, and enhances regular reporting and review. We acknowledge our responsibility to support the world in reversing the trajectory of the loss of biodiversity and the natural environments that support it, alongside ensuring that the impact on nature is fully taken into account in our policy decision making.

43. In support of strong outcomes for nature at the Convention on Biological Diversity COP-15 in Kunming and COP26 this year, and noting the Leaders’ Pledge for Nature launched at the 75th session of the UN General Assembly 2020, we adopt the G7 2030 Nature Compact in support of the global mission to halt and reverse biodiversity loss by 2030. The Nature Compact commits us to take action across four key pillars:

First, we commit to champion ambitious and effective global biodiversity targets, including conserving or protecting at least 30 per cent of global land and at least 30 per cent of the global ocean by 2030. We will contribute by conserving or protecting at least 30 per cent of our own land, including terrestrial and inland waters, and coastal and marine areas by 2030 according to national circumstances and approaches. These actions will help stem the extinction crisis, safeguard water and food supplies, absorb carbon pollution, and reduce the risks of future pandemics. We also fully support the commitment of the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR) to develop a representative system of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) in the Convention area in the Southern Ocean based on the best available scientific evidence. Second, we will support the transition to sustainable management and use of natural resources, and use appropriate levers to address unsustainable and illegal activities negatively impacting nature, and therefore livelihoods. This includes stepping up action to tackle increasing levels of plastic pollution in the ocean, including working through the UN Environment Assembly (UNEA) on options including strengthening existing instruments and a potential new agreement or other instrument to address marine plastic litter, including at UNEA-5.2 Third, we will work intensively towards increasing investment in the protection, conservation and restoration of nature, including committing to increase finance for nature based solutions through to 2025, maximising synergies of climate and biodiversity finance, and ensuring prominence of nature in both policy and economic decision-making. Finally, we will prioritise strengthened accountability and implementation mechanisms of Multilateral Environmental Agreements to which we are parties. We will implement the Compact and review our progress against it regularly through existing G7 mechanisms, including at the G7 Leaders’ Summit in five years when we will review options to ratchet up our action and ambition, as needed, to ensure delivery of our 2030 vision. Those G7 members party to the CBD will also champion successful implementation of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework to be agreed at COP15.

GENDER EQUALITY

44. Gender equality is at the heart of an open, inclusive, and just society. Persistent gaps in gender equality affect access to basic services as well as decent work, equal pay, social protection, education, technology and many other areas. Unequal division of unpaid care responsibilities in the home and low pay for paid care work also limits women’s empowerment, social and economic participation and leadership. Gender equality intersects with other characteristics and our actions need to take account of these intersections in a meaningful way, including tackling racism in all forms and violence and discrimination against LGBQTI+ populations. We recognise the devastating and disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on women and girls, which risks reversing hard-won gains especially with regards to gender-based violence, sexual and reproductive health and rights, education and jobs.

45. The advancement of gender equity and equality are a central pillar of our plans and policies to build back better, informed by three key priorities: educating girls, empowering women and ending violence against women and girls. Achieving gender equality needs to be underpinned by the full, equal and meaningful participation of women in all aspects of decision-making. We are committed to close alignment with the Generation Equality Forum (GEF) and commend the organisation of the first G20 Ministerial Conference on women’s empowerment. We thank the Gender Equality Advisory Council (GEAC) for its work and recommendations, and look forward to receiving the GEAC’s full report in the Autumn. We agree to a consistent and sustained focus on gender equality to project our global leadership on this issue, and intend to convene the GEAC as a standing feature of all G7 Presidencies. We know that we cannot make true progress towards gender equality without robust data and a way to track it over time. We invite the GEAC to work with existing accountability mechanisms such as the Accountability Working Group and the Taormina Roadmap to monitor G7 commitments to achieve gender equality on an annual basis.

46. We reaffirm our full commitment to promote and protect the sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) of all individuals, and recognise the essential and transformative role they play in gender equality and women’s and girls’ empowerment, and in supporting diversity, including of sexual orientations and gender identities. We commit to working together to prevent and address the negative impacts on access to SRHR from the COVID-19 pandemic, with specific attention to the most at risk, marginalised and inadequately served groups. In recognition of increased violence against women and girls during the COVID-19 crisis, we commit to preventing, responding to and eliminating all forms of sexual and gender-based violence (GBV). We will achieve this through women’s empowerment and by scaling-up implementation of evidence-based, accessible survivor and victim-centred policies, prevention and support programmes, including through our pandemic response and recovery at home, in partner countries and in conflict zones. We acknowledge our collective responsibility to beneficiaries and partners, their communities, and survivors to do more to address sexual exploitation and abuse in international aid. We condemn GBV against women and girls and denounce the use of sexual violence in conflict situations and underscore that such acts may constitute crimes against humanity or war crimes. We note the varied legal and institutional frameworks which currently address conflict and invite Foreign and Development Ministers to consider how best to strengthen international architecture around conflict-related sexual violence.

47. COVID-19 has exacerbated underlying inequalities, leading to one of the worst education crises in history for children around the world, but especially for the most marginalised and at risk girls. Around 11 million girls from pre-primary to secondary school are at risk of not returning to school. We commit to two new global SDG4 milestone girls’ education targets: 40 million more girls in education by 2026 in low and lower-middle income countries; and 20 million more girls reading by age 10 or the end of primary school by 2026, in low and lower-middle income countries. We endorse the G7 Foreign and Development Ministers’ Girls Education Declaration. These targets should be underpinned by sustainable financing and so today G7 members commit to a combined total pledge of at least $2¾ billion funding over the next 5 years for the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) ahead of its replenishment in July. We call on others to join with the G7 and make ambitious pledges to a fully funded GPE.

GLOBAL RESPONSIBILITY AND INTERNATIONAL ACTION

48. We will work together to promote our shared values as open societies in the international system, as reflected in the Statement on Open Societies signed with the Leaders of countries from the Indo-Pacific region and Africa, who have joined us at Carbis Bay, namely, Australia, India, South Africa and the Republic of Korea. Further to this, we commit to: increase cooperation on supporting democracy, including through strengthening the G7 Rapid Response Mechanism to counter foreign threats to democracy including disinformation; strengthen media freedom and ensure the protection of journalists; support freedom of religion or belief; condemn racism in all its forms; address human rights abuses, including the failure to protect civilians in conflict; oppose the practice of arbitrary detention, including by amplifying the Declaration Against Arbitrary Detention in State-to-State Relations and welcoming its Partnership Action Plan; and recognise the need for action on corruption, including by sharing information on illicit financial activities, tackling the misuse of shell companies, and curtailing the ability of illicit actors to hide wealth, including in real estate. We support the growth of peaceful, just and inclusive societies by ensuring safe and vibrant civic spaces. For our own part, our discussions have benefited from input from the perspectives and expertise of external engagement groups representing all sectors of society, including the Business 7, Civil Society 7, Labour 7, Science 7, Women 7 and Youth 7. We thank them for their consideration and recommendations across the breadth of our policy priorities.

49. We recognise the particular responsibility of the largest countries and economies in upholding the rules-based international system and international law. We commit to play our role in this, working with all partners and as members of the G20, UN and wider international community, and encourage others to do the same. We will do this based on our shared agenda and democratic values. With regard to China, and competition in the global economy, we will continue to consult on collective approaches to challenging non-market policies and practices which undermine the fair and transparent operation of the global economy. In the context of our respective responsibilities in the multilateral system, we will cooperate where it is in our mutual interest on shared global challenges, in particular addressing climate change and biodiversity loss in the context of COP26 and other multilateral discussions. At the same time and in so doing, we will promote our values, including by calling on China to respect human rights and fundamental freedoms, especially in relation to Xinjiang and those rights, freedoms and high degree of autonomy for Hong Kong enshrined in the Sino-British Joint Declaration and the Basic Law.

50. We endorse the statement made by our Foreign and Development Ministers in May. Building on this, in particular to reflect recent developments, we have reviewed the following live issues.

51. We reiterate our interest in stable and predictable relations with Russia, and will continue to engage where there are areas of mutual interest. We reaffirm our call on Russia to stop its destabilising behaviour and malign activities, including its interference in other countries’ democratic systems, and to fulfil its international human rights obligations and commitments. In particular, we call on Russia to urgently investigate and credibly explain the use of a chemical weapon on its soil, to end its systematic crackdown on independent civil society and media, and to identify, disrupt, and hold to account those within its borders who conduct ransomware attacks, abuse virtual currency to launder ransoms, and other cybercrimes.

52. We reiterate our support for the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine within its internationally recognised borders. We call on Russia to alleviate tensions and act in accordance with its international obligations, and to withdraw the Russian military troops and materiel at the eastern border of Ukraine and on the Crimean peninsula. We remain firmly of the view that Russia is a party to the conflict in Eastern Ukraine, not a mediator. We affirm our support for the Normandy ***Process*** to secure the implementation of the Minsk agreements, and call on Russia and the armed formations it backs to engage constructively and recommit to the ceasefire. We reaffirm our efforts to strengthen Ukraine’s democracy and institutions, encouraging further progress on reform.

53. We are deeply concerned by the Belarusian authorities’ continuing attacks on human rights, fundamental freedoms and international law, as exemplified by the forced landing of flight FR4978 and the arrest of an independent journalist and his partner. We will work together to hold those responsible to account, including through imposing sanctions, and to continue to support civil society, independent media and human rights in Belarus. We call on the regime to: change course and implement all the recommendations of the independent expert mission under the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe’s (OSCE) Moscow Mechanism; enter into meaningful dialogue with all sectors of society; and hold new free and fair elections.

54. We are deeply concerned by the ongoing conflict in Ethiopia’s Tigray region and reports of an unfolding major humanitarian tragedy, including potentially hundreds of thousands in famine conditions. We condemn ongoing atrocities, including widespread sexual violence, and we welcome the ongoing Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) investigations and call for full accountability for reported human rights violations in Tigray and for the perpetrators to be brought to justice. We call for an immediate cessation of hostilities, unimpeded humanitarian access to all areas and the immediate withdrawal of Eritrean forces. We urge all parties to pursue a credible political ***process***, which is the only solution to the crisis. We further call upon Ethiopia’s leaders to advance a broader inclusive political ***process*** to foster national reconciliation and consensus toward a future based on respect for the human and political rights of all Ethiopians.

55. While acknowledging the increased international mobilisation and the progress in the fight against terrorism in the Sahel, we express our concern about the continuing attacks targeting civilian populations, and the deepening humanitarian crisis. We urge all actors to respect human rights and international humanitarian law. We will deliver on our commitments to renew efforts to address drivers of instability, with a focus on political and civilian dimensions of the “civil surge” agreed upon by the governments of the G5 Sahel and their partners, gathered in the Sahel coalition, at the N’Djamena summit in February 2021. We support the efforts of the African Union and Economic Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in response to recent events in Chad and Mali. We reiterate the necessity to create the conditions for timely civilian-led transitions to democratic, constitutional rule in both countries.

56. We confirm our full support for the interim executive authority as it pursues Libyan-led and Libyan-owned stabilisation, facilitated by the UN in the framework of the Berlin ***Process***. We reaffirm the importance of free, fair and inclusive elections to be held on 24 December. We reiterate the urgent need to implement in full the 23 October ceasefire agreement, including through the withdrawal of all foreign fighters and mercenaries from Libya. All states must comply with UN Security Council Resolutions 2570 and 2571.

57. We call on all Afghan parties to reduce violence and agree on steps that enable the successful implementation of a permanent and comprehensive ceasefire and to engage fully with the peace ***process***. In Afghanistan, a sustainable, inclusive political settlement is the only way to achieve a just and durable peace that benefits all Afghans. We are determined to maintain our support for the Afghan government to address the country’s urgent security and humanitarian needs, and to help the people of Afghanistan, including women, young people and minority groups, as they seek to preserve hard-won rights and freedoms.

58. We call for the complete denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula and the verifiable and irreversible abandonment of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea’s (DPRK) unlawful weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missile programmes in accordance with all relevant UN Security Council resolutions. We call on all states to fully implement these resolutions and their associated sanctions. We welcome the readiness of the United States to continue its diplomatic efforts in coordination with all relevant partners and call on the DPRK to engage and resume dialogue. We once again call on DPRK to respect human rights for all and to resolve the issue of abductions immediately.

59. We condemn in the strongest terms the military coup in Myanmar, and the violence committed by Myanmar’s security forces, and we call for the immediate release of those detained arbitrarily. We pledge our support to those advocating peacefully for a stable and inclusive democracy. Recalling ASEAN’s central role, we welcome its Five Point Consensus and urge swift implementation. We reiterate our commitment to ensuring that neither development assistance nor the sale of arms will benefit the military, and urge businesses to exercise due diligence in their trade and investment in the same vein. We reaffirm G7 unity on pursuing additional ***measures*** should they prove necessary. We are also deeply concerned by the humanitarian situation, call for unfettered humanitarian access to vulnerable and displaced populations, support the Humanitarian Response Plan, and encourage others to contribute.

60. We reiterate the importance of maintaining a free and open Indo Pacific, which is inclusive and based on the rule of law. We underscore the importance of peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait, and encourage the peaceful resolution of cross-Strait issues. We remain seriously concerned about the situation in the East and South China Seas and strongly oppose any unilateral attempts to change the status quo and increase tensions.

61. We are committed to ensuring that Iran will never develop a nuclear weapon. We welcome the substantive discussions between Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPoA) participants, and separately with the United States, to accomplish a return of the United States and Iran to their JCPoA commitments. We support the goal of restoring the nonproliferation benefits of the JCPoA and of ensuring the exclusively peaceful nature of Iran’s nuclear programme. We urge Iran to stop and reverse all ***measures*** that reduce transparency and to ensure full and timely cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency. A restored and fully-implemented JCPoA could also pave the way to further address regional and security concerns. We condemn Iran’s support to proxy forces and non-state armed actors, including through financing, training and the proliferation of missile technology and weapons. We call on Iran to stop all ballistic missile activities and proliferation inconsistent with UNSCR 2231 and other relevant resolutions, refrain from destabilising actions and play a constructive role in fostering regional stability and peace. We support efforts to pursue transparency, accountability and justice for the victims of Ukraine International Airlines Flight 752, shot down by Iran in January 2020. We reiterate our deep concern over the continued human rights violations and abuses in Iran.

62. We commend the Iraqi Security Forces, including the Kurdish Peshmerga, and Government of Iraq in their success against ISIS and affirm continuing support for those efforts, including stabilisation in liberated areas. We also affirm our support for Iraq’s sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity. We fully endorse UNSCR 2576 and its call for election monitors to help ensure free and fair elections in October, and encourage all Iraqis to participate in those elections. Finally, we welcome the efforts of the Government of Iraq to hold illegal armed groups accountable for attacks against Iraqi citizens and Coalition personnel who are in Iraq at its invitation solely to train and advise Iraqi forces in their fight against ISIS.

63. We acknowledge the far-reaching impacts of COVID-19 on the poorest countries who already were grappling with the effects of conflict, climate change, socio-economic shocks and a chronic lack of resources and infrastructure. As we advance recovery plans to support our economies and build back better, in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including through innovative ***measures*** and massive budgetary support, developing partner countries, especially in Africa, cannot be left behind. We are deeply concerned that the pandemic has set back progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals and continues to exacerbate global inequalities, and therefore recommit to enhance our efforts to achieve the SDGs by 2030, including by supporting the Addis Ababa Action Agenda (AAAA) and aligning financial flows with the SDGs. We take note of the policy options developed through the Financing for Development in the Era of COVID-19 and Beyond Initiative.

64. The IMF estimates that, between now and 2025, low income countries will need around $200 billion to respond to the pandemic and $250 billion in investment spending for convergence with advanced economies. We reiterate our commitment to implement the G20 and Paris Club Common Framework for Debt Treatments beyond the Debt Service Suspension Initiative. We support fair and open lending practices, and call on all creditors to adhere to these. We underline the importance of information sharing, and reiterate the need for comparability of treatment for private and other official bilateral creditors in debt treatments. We urge the MDBs to explore all options to unlock additional financing for developing countries, including more efficient and effective use of their resources, further work on balance sheet optimisation and further analysis of their capital adequacy frameworks.

65. We welcome the agreement by G7 Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors to support a new $650 billion allocation of IMF Special Drawing Rights, urging implementation by the end of August 2021 accompanied by transparency and accountability ***measures***. We encourage the IMF to work quickly with all relevant stakeholders to explore a menu of options for channelling SDRs to further support health needs, including vaccinations, and to help enable greener, more robust recoveries in the most affected countries, supporting the poorest and most vulnerable countries in tackling these urgent challenges. G7 countries are actively considering options that we can take as part of a global effort to magnify the impact of this general allocation for countries most in need, especially in Africa, including through voluntarily channelling SDRs and/or budget loans, in line with national circumstances and legal requirements. This includes scaling up financing to the IMF’s Poverty Reduction and Growth Trust and the IMF’s review of concessional financing and policies to strengthen its capacity to support low income countries. To support our aim to reach a total global ambition of $100 billion, we call for contributions from other countries able to do so, alongside the G7. We task G7 Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors to urgently consider the detail of this, including by working with the G20 and other stakeholders.

66. We note with grave concern that the world faces an ***unprecedented*** humanitarian crisis as the UN reports that over 34 million people are already facing emergency levels of food insecurity and are one step from catastrophe or famine. In this light, we endorse the G7 Famine Prevention and Humanitarian Crises Compact committed to by G7 Foreign and Development Ministers. We reaffirm our commitment to provide $7 billion in humanitarian assistance, take diplomatic action to promote humanitarian access and the protection of civilians, including women and girls, and strengthen anticipatory and early action in partnership with the UN and World Bank Group. We call attention to the rise in poverty, hunger and malnutrition globally, noting the exacerbating role of the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change, economic shocks, biodiversity loss and increased conflict, and agree further action is needed to reverse these trends and strengthen global food systems. We reaffirm our commitment to the Broad Food Security and Nutrition Development Approach made at Elmau in 2015, and note that responsible investments in food security, food systems, and nutrition are essential to support SDG2 and World Health Assembly nutrition targets. We further encourage strong commitments in these areas to be announced at the G20, the UN Food Systems Summit, COP26 and the Tokyo Nutrition for Growth Summit later this year.

67. We recognise the significant infrastructure needs across low and middle income countries, which have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Reflecting our shared values and shared vision, we will aim for a step change in our approach to infrastructure financing, notably on quality infrastructure and investment, to strengthen partnerships with developing countries and help meet their infrastructure needs. Working together and with others, and by building on and going beyond our existing action, we will develop a partnership to build back better for the world with the aim of maximising impact on the ground to meet the needs of our partners, and to ensure our collective effort is greater than the sum of its parts. This partnership will orient development finance tools toward the range of challenges faced by developing countries, including in resilient infrastructure and technologies to address the impacts of climate change; health systems and security; developing digital solutions; and advancing gender equality and education. A particular priority will be an initiative for clean and green growth to drive a sustainable and green transition in line with the Paris Agreement and Agenda 2030. Underpinning our approach will be the following key principles:

values-driven vision: we believe that infrastructure development, implementation and maintenance – carried out in a transparent and financially, environmentally, and socially sustainable manner – will lead to beneficial outcomes for recipient countries and communities. intensive collaboration: we will each pursue the necessary actions through our own DFIs, and other relevant bodies, while strengthening collaboration to determine how we can increase the scale and scope of our collective offer to developing partner countries. market-led: we believe current funding and financing approaches are not adequate to address the infrastructure financing gap and are committed to enhancing the development finance tools at our disposal, including by mobilising private sector capital and expertise, through a strengthened and more integrated approach across the public and private sector, to reduce risk, strengthen local capacities, and support and catalyse a significant increase in responsible and market-based private capital in sectors with anticipated returns, and to strengthen local capacities, in a sustainable manner, in line with the Addis Ababa Action Agenda on Financing for Development. strong standards: to ensure our approach and values are upheld, and to drive a race to the top, we will make high standards – across environmental, social, financial, labour, governance and transparency – a central plank of our approach, including by building on multilateral agreed standards on quality infrastructure such as the G20 Principles for Quality Infrastructure Investment. This will help to provide citizens of recipient communities with the long-run benefits they expect and deserve. We emphasise the importance of transparent, open, economically efficient, fair and competitive standards for lending and procurement, also in line with debt sustainability, and the adherence of international rules and standards for major creditor countries. enhanced multilateral finance: we recognise that many MDBs and other International Financial Institutions (IFIs) have evolved to embody the highest standards for project planning, implementation, social and environmental safeguards, and analytical capability. We will work with the IFIs to enhance their catalytic impact and increase the mobilisation of capital needed for impactful and sustainable infrastructure investment, and ensure that the pace of project development and disbursement meets the needs of partner countries. strategic partnerships: we will ground this initiative in strategic and substantial partnerships between countries, to support innovation and technological development, focused on the most pressing needs.

We will work together to take forward an agenda based on these principles and work closely with others, including developing country partners, to ensure that it is developed in an open and collaborative way. We will establish a taskforce to develop practical proposals and report back to us in the Autumn.

68. A central focus of our new strategic approach will be supporting sustainable growth in Africa. Building on the conclusions of the Summit on Financing African Economies that was held in Paris on 18 May 2021 and on the needs expressed by our African partners, we are resolved to deepen our current partnership to a new deal with the African continent, with African states, institutions and expertise at its core. In line with these ambitions, our DFIs and multilateral partners intend to invest at least $80 billion into the private sector in Africa over the next five years to support sustainable economic recovery and growth in line with the AAAA. This builds on the 2X Challenge partnership between G7 DFIs launched in 2018 and the target of an additional $15 billion of new funding for this as announced by G7 Foreign and Development Ministers in May 2021 to help address the disproportionate barriers that women face to access capital, leadership roles, quality employment and affordable care. We welcome the Alliance for entrepreneurship in Africa that was launched on May 18 and look forward to its first meeting by the end of the year, under the auspices of the International Financing Corporation and in full partnership with all public and private partners willing to invest more in Africa’s future and to leverage its growth opportunities. We ask the MDBs and especially the World Bank to mobilise more private financing into Africa by developing and reinforcing the relevant risk sharing instruments for the benefit of African small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). We reiterate our support to the G20 Compact with Africa as a key framework to enhance the business environment in Africa and call on reform orientated partners to join and strengthen this initiative. We invite G7 Foreign and Development ministers to continue to work with developing country partners and DFIs at the second Foreign and Development Ministers meeting.

69. As open societies we are committed to accountability and transparency, and to upholding the promises we have made. In this spirit, we endorse the 2021 Carbis Bay Progress Report from the G7 Accountability Working Group, reporting on G7 commitments to strengthen health systems to advance universal health coverage and global health. We look forward to the next Comprehensive Progress Report from the G7 Accountability working group in 2022.

CONCLUSION

70. In Cornwall we have revitalised our G7 partnership. Our Shared Agenda for Global Action is a statement of our shared vision and ambition as we continue to collaborate this year and under future Presidencies. As we do so we look forward to joining with others to ensure we build back better, in particular at the G20 Summit, COP26, and CBD15 and the UN General Assembly, and reiterate our support for the holding of the Olympic and Paralympic Games Tokyo 2020 in a safe and secure manner as a symbol of global unity in overcoming COVID-19.

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**Highlight:** Rolling coverage of the latest economic and financial news, including growth figures from across the eurozoneStagflation worries in the eurozonePound's on track for worst month against dollar since 2016Prosecutors search Deutsche Bank HQ in money laundering investigationRussia cuts borrowing costs to 14%, sees deep recessionEurozone inflation hits record high of 7.5%Eurozone growth slowed to 0.2%

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Related: [*Deutsche Bank HQ in Frankfurt raided over suspected money laundering*](https://www.theguardian.com/business/2022/apr/29/deutsche-bank-hq-frankfurt-raided-suspected-money-laundering)

Related: [*UK house price growth slows as cost of living crisis starts to hit market*](https://www.theguardian.com/business/2022/apr/29/uk-house-price-growth-slows-cost-of-living-crisis-starts-to-hit-market)

Related: [*AstraZeneca boss calls for UK to provide new Covid-19 medicine to the vulnerable*](https://www.theguardian.com/business/2022/apr/29/evusheld-covid-19-medicine-astrazeneca-immunosuppressed-vulnerable-uk)

Related: [*Johnson Matthey shares soar after US conglomerate buys stake*](https://www.theguardian.com/business/2022/apr/29/johnson-matthey-shares-soar-after-us-conglomerate-buys-stake)

Related: [*Appliance seller AO forecasts profits to dive as consumers cut spending*](https://www.theguardian.com/business/2022/apr/29/appliance-seller-ao-forecasts-profits-to-dive-as-consumers-cut-spending)

Related: [*Oil and gas industry defends North Sea spending levels as Kwarteng urges more*](https://www.theguardian.com/business/2022/apr/29/oil-gas-firms-north-sea-investment-kwasi-kwarteng-windfall-tax)

Goodnight, and best wishes for the bank holiday weekend if you're in the UK (and not working...). GW

block-time published-time 6.21pm BST

In the push to cut carbon emissions, lorry vehicle makers are experimenting with a range of greener technologies to replace diesel engines.

Both gas-powered, and battery electric, lorries are being develoepd. And my colleague Jasper Jolly has a couple for a spin to see how manufacturers are making progress:

Here's how it went....

"Just be careful where your back end is going," says the instructor as this reporter nervously steers a 44-tonne articulated Volvo lorry on a roundabout. It is good advice at roundabouts, as in life. The trailer rolls past the safety barrier with a barely visible gap, to the relief of everyone involved.

It is a manoeuvre played out across the world countless times each day as lorries lug the goods required for modern life from factory to consumer. However, this truck is slightly different: instead of a diesel engine, it is running on natural gas.

It is one of the products of a series of bets by lorry manufacturers on how to reduce the carbon footprint of road transport, a [*key contributor to global carbon emissions*](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2019/sep/16/uk-road-transport-emissions-up-since-1990-despite-efficiency-drive). About 16% of the UK's carbon emissions in 2019 were from heavy goods vehicles, which carried 1.4bn tonnes across 17.8bn km in the year to June 2021, according to the Department for Transport.

[*Electric road system proposal would cover two-thirds of the UK's freight miles*](https://interactive.guim.co.uk/uploader/embed/2022/04/electric-motorwaysmapupdate/giv-6562QRL5rKuoUisc/) Electric road system proposal would cover two-thirds of the UK's freight miles

Manufacturers are backing a range of technologies from gas, to battery electric and various types of hydrogento try to decarbonise those journeys - but none has yet succeeded at scale.

Everyone who drives an electric car for the first time after a lifetime of petrol or diesel [*has had the moment of realisation*](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/may/29/its-like-a-rocket-ship-videos-show-petrolheads-behind-the-wheel-of-an-electric-car) : this really is the future. A similar dynamic is happening now with lorries. At the same test drive event, held this week at the Millbrook Proving Ground by the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders, there was also the chance to try out the LF Electric, assembled by Dutch lorrymaker DAF Trucks at its Leyland subsidiary in Lancashire.

Compared to the noise and judder of a diesel engine it is a serene experience on a sunny spring day in the rolling Bedfordshire hills. So serene, in fact, that another good-natured instructor has to intervene to prevent another roundabout mishap....

Do check out the full piece:

Related: [*'This really is the future': HGV manufacturers race to decarbonise trucks*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/29/hgv-manufacturers-race-to-decarbonise-trucks-lorries-carbon-footprint-uk)

block-time published-time 5.55pm BST

European markets close

European stock markets have ended the week higher, even as shares slide on Wall Street.

In London, the FTSE 100 gained 35 points, or 0.5%, to 7544, as stocks continued to recover from their plunge on Monday.

Germany's DAX gained 0.85%, while France's CAC rose 0.4%.

Quite a contrast with New York, where the Dow Jones is now down 1.7% or 575 points at 33,340.

David Madden, market analyst a t Equiti Capital, says European shares pushed higher despite tensions around Russia have ticked up.

President Putin has threatened to hit back at countries that are assisting Ukraine. Gas supplies into the EU are being monitored as there are some worries the energy market could become weaponised.

Yesterday, Germany dropped its objection to an EU wide embargo on Russian oil. That has led to speculation about a potential ban on oil from Russia.

Even though those fears are in circulation, eurozone equities rose on the day, Germany's DAX hit a one-week, Italian stocks are posting strong gains too. In the US, the bulls are in retreat as stocks have handed back some of the stellar gains that were recorded last night. US tech stocks have experienced a spike in volatility lately ahead of next week's important Federal Reserve meeting, where it is widely believed that interest rates will be hiked by 0.5%.

block-time published-time 5.23pm BST

Pound on track for worst month against resurgent dollar since 2016

The pound is on track for its worst month against the US dollar in six years, amid worries that a recession could be looming.

With only a few hours trading to go, sterling has lost 5.7 cents against the US dollar since the start of April to around $1.256, the biggest monthly drop since October 2016.

The euro has had an equally grim month, down five cents to around $1.05, its biggest fall since 2015.

The dollar has benefitted from expectations of sharp rises in US interest rates this year, as the Federal Reserve tries to rein in inflation, and hit a 20-year high agains a basket of currencies this week.

As Kit Juckes of Société Générale explains:

The war in Ukraine, Chinese efforts to offset the economic impact of the 'Zero Covid' policy and Japan's attempts at defeating deflation are all helping the dollar, while the Fed's attempt to catch up with the post-pandemic inflation spike continues.

The possibility of an end to Russian energy exports to Europe is also hitting confidence, he adds:

Meanwhile, the war created massive downside tail risk for the euro. This is obviously vastly less important than the human tragedy unfolding in Ukraine, but what happens if energy supplies cease? And with that recession risk present, who cares how hawkish the ECB is or what is priced into the rates curve?

So down went the euro and everything associated with it, including sterling, as deep cracks that were already present in the economic outlook started to become glaringly obvious.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 5.27pm BST

block-time published-time 4.53pm BST

The eurozone is heading towards a contraction as the cost of living squeeze and the Ukraine war hit the economy, warns BNP Paribas's Markets 360 team.

They say that this morning's slightly weaker than expected Q1 GDP figures showed some early signs that household consumption was already losing steam at the start of the year.

This foreshadows a more significant slowdown further ahead in our view as the squeeze on real incomes intensifies and sentiment is hit from the war.

We think a contraction in the coming quarters is increasingly likely. Alongside today's inflation figures, today's data highlight the growth-inflation trade-off that the ECB faces - we think inflation concerns will keep the Governing Council on a normalisation path, but see lift-off happening in September rather than July.

block-time published-time 4.38pm BST

Russia's central bank chief has said the danger of an inflationary spiral have decreased, as she explained [*today's rate cut.*](https://www.theguardian.com/business/live/2022/apr/29/eurozone-gdp-growth-france-germany-inflation-russia-ukraine-energy-crisis-business-live?filterKeyEvents=false&page=with:block-626bbefe8f089c79bcffa2b0#block-626bbefe8f089c79bcffa2b0)

Central Bank Governor Elvira Nabiullina said inflationary pressure stabilised in the second half of March, and pointed to stabilizing inflation expectations and improving savings sentiment among households.

Nabiullina said (via Interfax):

"In April, households' inflation expectations have returned to the levels of mid-2021. According to the surveys of households, expected inflation is below the observed price growth, meaning that people believe that prices will no longer rise as quickly.

Companies' short-term price expectations have edged down as well, though they remain higher than last year.

block-time published-time 4.00pm BST

US consumer sentiment picked up in April.

As anxiety over the economic outlook eased -- even as the economy went into reverse -- according to the University of Michigan's consumer sentiment index. It rose to 65.2 for April, up from 59.4 in March. but still below 88.3 in April 2021.

Most of the surge was concentrated in expectations, with gains of 21.6% in the year-ahead outlook for the economy and an 18.3% jump in personal financial expectations.

enltrThe University of Michigan consumer sentiment index is at 65.2 in the final reading for April, a small downward revision from the preliminary report of 65.7. It is up from the final 59.4 in March. [*pic.twitter.com/01bUpdj1u5*](https://t.co/01bUpdj1u5)

- Econoday, Inc. (@Econoday) [*April 29, 2022*](https://twitter.com/Econoday/status/1520044344090136576?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

Richard Curtin, surveys of consumers chief economist, says confidence is still weak, though:

The global economy has added even more uncertainties about prospects for the U.S. economy, including the growing involvement in the military support for Ukraine, and renewed supply line disruptions from the covid crisis in China. Who would not be apprehensive about future conditions, even if on balance they anticipated a continued expansion?

Moreover, consumers have lost confidence in economic policies, with fiscal actions increasingly hampered by partisanship in the runup to the Congressional elections

block-time published-time 3.28pm BST

The New York Stock Exchange Photograph: John Minchillo/AP

Wall Street has dipped in early trading, as Amazon's shares slide after it reported its first loss since 2015.

Amazon have fallen almost 12% to $2,547, their lowest since June 2020, after it reported a net loss of $3.8bn in the quarter.

It was dragged into the red by a fall in the value of its stake in electric vehicle maker Rivian. But revenue growth slowed to just 7%, Amazon's slowest growth rate in nearly two decades.

Related: [*Amazon sees first loss since 2015 as shares tumble 10%*](https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2022/apr/28/amazon-revenue-loss-shares-drop)

Craig Erlam of OANDA says Amazon was the latest to catch Wall Street off guard, as it faced a multitude of challenges -- including the Ukraine war, the cost of living squeeze, and the end of lockdown restrictions.

There were the usual strong points to the report, like the cloud and advertising businesses - although the latter did fall a little short of expectations - but like many others, the company is struggling to adjust to post-pandemic life having scaled up massively over the last couple of years.

The tech-focused Nasdaq index is down 1.3%, as is the broader S&P 500, with Amazon leading the fallers.

block-time published-time 2.56pm BST

Russia default fears ease as dollar payments made

The risk of Russia defaulting on its sovereign debt may be easing today, after Moscow made a number of already-overdue international debt payments in dollars.

Moscow has said that dollar payments on two foreign bonds are progressing after sanctions held them up for weeks.

It has previously used roubles to cover the payments after US restrictions prevented them being made in dollars. [*Missing the dollar payments breached the terms on the debt*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/15/russia-near-to-defaulting-on-overseas-debts-says-ratings-agency) , starting a 30-day grace period that ends next week.

Russia's finance ministry said it had managed to pay $564.8m on a 2022 Eurobond and $84.4m on a 2042 bond in dollars - the currency specified on the bonds.

enltrRUSSIA'S FINANCE MINISTRY SAYS IT PAYS MATURITY AND COUPON OF $564.8 MLN ON 2022 EUROBOND AND COUPON PAYMENT OF $84.4 MLN ON 2042 EUROBOND IN U.S. DOLLARS RUSSIAN FINANCE MINISTRY SAYS IT HAS CHANNELED THE REQUIRED FUNDS TO CITIBANK, N.A., LONDON BRANCH via [*@Reuters*](https://twitter.com/Reuters?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) [*https://t.co/g9UxkhUIr0*](https://t.co/g9UxkhUIr0)

- Jorgelina do Rosario (@jdorosario) [*April 29, 2022*](https://twitter.com/jdorosario/status/1520032554031751168?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

The ministry said it had channeled the required funds to the London branch of Citibank, one of the so-called paying agents of the bonds whose job is to disburse them to the investors that originally lent the money to Moscow.

We now wait to see if the money reaches the bond holders before the 30-day grace period expires on 4th May.....

enltrRussian default risk eases. Concern Russia may default on USD denominated bonds eased after Russia's Finance Ministry confirms payments made today in US dollars on two seperate bonds. Russia Says It Made Sovereign Bond Payments in U.S. Dollars [*https://t.co/wZxku7MSP2*](https://t.co/wZxku7MSP2)

- James Wallace (@JamesWallace78) [*April 29, 2022*](https://twitter.com/JamesWallace78/status/1520030189576617984?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 2.29pm BST

Britain's cost of living crisis, and the ongoing problems in the global supply chain, continue to hammer AO World, the online electricals retailer.

AO, which sells kitchen appliances, computers, TVs and gaming consoles over the web, warned that its profits will dive this year as it faces falling sales.

AO had previously been hit by global supply chain issues and a shortage of drivers. Now, customers are cancelling warranties on its products to save money amid the cost of living crisis, as my colleague Sarah Butler explains:

It said underlying profits would be only £8m for the year to 31 March 2022, down from £64m last year, reflecting higher costs from driver shortages, extra marketing spending in Germany as well as lower sales and warranty cancellations. Sales fell 6% to £1.6bn in the year but remain 52% ahead of pre-Covid levels.

The company said it had noticed "higher warranty cancellations than average historical trends" in March as customers "responded to the escalating cost of living".

It said the latest trading figures indicated the trend was continuing, potentially forcing a writedown of the value of its insurance contract leading to a "material impact on full-year profits".

Related: [*Appliance seller AO forecasts profits to dive as consumers cut spending*](https://www.theguardian.com/business/2022/apr/29/appliance-seller-ao-forecasts-profits-to-dive-as-consumers-cut-spending)

Shares in AO have slumped 20% to 70p, a two-year low, having soared over $4 in January 2021 as the pandemic drove a boom in web shopping.

Ao World's share price Photograph: Refinitiv

block-time published-time 2.01pm BST

Eurozone facing stagflation as growth slows and prices soar

The eurozone faces stagflation after [*growth slowed to 0.2%*](https://www.theguardian.com/business/live/2022/apr/29/eurozone-gdp-growth-france-germany-inflation-russia-ukraine-energy-crisis-business-live?filterKeyEvents=false&page=with:block-626ba9528f08581273d1bde0#block-626ba9528f08581273d1bde0) in the last quarter and inflation hit [*a record level of 7.5%*](https://www.theguardian.com/business/live/2022/apr/29/eurozone-gdp-growth-france-germany-inflation-russia-ukraine-energy-crisis-business-live?filterKeyEvents=false&page=with:block-626ba95a8f08fff86b7388ff#block-626ba95a8f08fff86b7388ff).

Russia's war in [*Ukraine*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/ukraine) is driving up energy costs across the continent, just as economies emerged from Omicron disruption, while China's Covid-19 outbreaks threaten more disruption oo.

Berenberg Bank explains:

Putin's war means Eurozone stagflation: Russia's brutal war against Ukraine has driven up prices for energy and foodstuffs, disrupted supply chains and dealt a serious blow to consumer confidence. As the most exposed major region globally, the Eurozone has fallen into stagflation as a result.

Tough luck: A series of unusual shocks is battering the Eurozone. In late 2021 and the beginning of 2022, the Delta and Omicron waves of the COVID-19 pandemic weighed on economic activity in the Eurozone much more than in the US and the UK. Moreover, just as the region was gearing up for a major rebound - as indicated by a February bounce in economic sentiment - Putin's war derailed the nascent upturn. Due to its strong reliance on global trade, the Eurozone is now more at risk from Chinese lockdowns than the US.

My colleague Richard Partington says w arning lights are flashing in the eurozone economy today, after France stalled and Italy shrunk in the last quarter.

Raising the spectre of stagflation as living costs soar while growth in GDP falters, France's economy unexpectedly ground to a halt in the first three months of the year, recording zero growth as supply chain disruption and higher energy costs held back activity.

Italy's economy shrank, Spain lost momentum, while [*Germany*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/germany) rebounded from a contraction in the fourth quarter when Omicron and supply chain problems had weighed heavily on the euro area's largest economy.

Suggesting a weaker period ahead as the conflict continues to push up the price of energy, hitting net importers of gas across the continent, separate figures for April showed eurozone inflation hit a record high of 7.5%.

Here's the full story:

Related: [*Eurozone growth slips as Russia-Ukraine war pushes up energy costs*](https://www.theguardian.com/business/2022/apr/29/eurozone-growth-slips-as-russia-ukraine-war-pushes-up-energy-costs)

block-time published-time 1.52pm BST

Over in the US, the Federal Reserve's preferred ***measure*** of consumer inflation has just hit a 40-year high.

The PCE prices index rose by 6.6% in the year to March, the highest reading since 1982, with energy prices up 33.9% and food up 9.2%

In March alone, the PCE rose by 0.9% in March, up from 0.5% in February.

frltrPCE m/m 0.9% (est 0.9%, last 0.5%) PCE y/y 6.6% (est 6.7%, last 6.3%) PCE core m/m 0.3% (est 0.3%, last 0.3%) PCE core y/y 5.2% (est 5.3%, last 5.3%)

- Mario Cavaggioni (@CavaggioniMario) [*April 29, 2022*](https://twitter.com/CavaggioniMario/status/1520019421326196736?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

enltrPCE Price Index YoY%: {ECAN} [*pic.twitter.com/iphBNpqjrh*](https://t.co/iphBNpqjrh)

- Michael McDonough (@M\_McDonough) [*April 29, 2022*](https://twitter.com/M_McDonough/status/1520019836616724484?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

Despite rising prices, Americans kept spending last month. Consumer spending grew 1.1%, faster than expected, meaning real spending was up 0.1% after inflation

Personal income rose 0.5% in March, as wages increased (but still lagged inflation), while the savings rate dipped to 6.2% from 6.8%.

enltrConfirmation that savings boom is over: personal savings rate fell to 6.2% in March, lowest since 2013 [*pic.twitter.com/RQKMdzkBjq*](https://t.co/RQKMdzkBjq)

- Liz Ann Sonders (@LizAnnSonders) [*April 29, 2022*](https://twitter.com/LizAnnSonders/status/1520021943621140483?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

enltrUS March Personal income climbs 0.5%, spending increases 1.1%, while real spending rises 0.2%. Core PCE Y/Y increases at a moderate 0.2% & is 5.25 Y/Y. M/M PCE up 0.9%. Q1'22 Employment Cost Index comes in hot at 1.4%. This underscores the urgency at the Fed to act decisively.

- Joseph Brusuelas (@joebrusuelas) [*April 29, 2022*](https://twitter.com/joebrusuelas/status/1520018449942163457?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 1.22pm BST

Deutsche Bank has been under pressure from authorities in recent years to improve its areas such as money-laundering controls, ahead of [*today's searches*](https://www.theguardian.com/business/live/2022/apr/29/eurozone-gdp-growth-france-germany-inflation-russia-ukraine-energy-crisis-business-live?page=with:block-626bc6838f089c79bcffa32c#block-626bc6838f089c79bcffa32c).

Back in 2018, Germany's financial watchdog, Bafin, ordered [*Deutsche*](https://www.theguardian.com/business/deutschebank) to do more to prevent money-laundering and "terrorist financing," and appointed KPMG as an independent auditor to assess progress.

Three years later, [*Bafin ordered Deutsche to bring in tighter controls,*](https://www.reuters.com/article/us-deutsche-bank-bafin-idUSKBN2ChlCW) and expanded KPMG's mandate.

In 2020, Frankfurt Prosecutor's Office fined Deutsche Bank 13.5m for being slow to report suspected money laundering in more than 600 cases related to its work with Danske Bank, but [*dropped a money-laundering probe against Deutsche Bank managers*](https://www.reuters.com/article/deutsche-bank-moneylaundering-idCNL8N2hlEZ).

enltrOh my god Deutsche Bank is being raided again - by three separate parties no less: police, prosecutors and regulators... [*@OlafStorbeck*](https://twitter.com/OlafStorbeck?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) [*https://t.co/1VfPXvgl2M*](https://t.co/1VfPXvgl2M) [*pic.twitter.com/vwWuSqLxaF*](https://t.co/vwWuSqLxaF)

- Stephen Morris (@sjhmorris) [*April 29, 2022*](https://twitter.com/sjhmorris/status/1519993775204052992?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

Seperately, in Janary 2021, [*Deutsche agreed to pay US authorities around $130m*](https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/deutsche-bank-agrees-pay-over-130-million-resolve-foreign-corrupt-practices-act-and-fraud) and entered into a deferred prosecution agreement to resolve allegations that it breached bribery and fraud laws.

Last month, Deutsche admitted it had breached this DPA by failing to flag a whistleblower complaint over its environment, social and governance work - meaning the DoJ has extended its monitorship.

Today's may add to a list of legal and regulatory issues looming over Deutsche Bank's CEO Christian Sewing, [*says Bloomberg*](https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-04-29/deutsche-bank-searched-in-potential-money-laundering-case) :

Recent challenges include an internal probe into staff's widespread use of private communication channels, a lawsuit alleging mis-selling of foreign-exchange derivatives, and criticism from U.S. and German regulators of the bank's deficient controls.

block-time published-time 12.09pm BST

German authorities search Deutsche Bank over potential money laundering

Prosecutors, federal police and other officials are conducting a search at Deutsche Bank in Frankfurt, the city's prosecutors have said.

Germany's largest lender said the search involved suspicious transactions it had itself reported in relation to money laundering, and that it was cooperating fully.

[*Reuters has the details*](https://www.reuters.com/business/deutsche-bank-offices-searched-by-authorities-frankfurt-prosecutors-2022-04-29/) :

Prosecutors said they had a search warrant but declined to elaborate. They said representatives of financial regulator BaFin were also taking part.

BaFin and federal police declined to comment.

Deutsche Bank, under CEO Christian Sewing, has been trying to repair its reputation after a series of embarrassing and costly regulatory failings.

This week, the bank posted a better-than-expected 17% rise in first-quarter profit as investment banking revenue climbed, but it warned that the Russia-Ukraine conflict could hurt annual earnings.

A Reuters witness said that there was no sign of authorities outside the bank's headquarters.

Deutsche Bank's shares are down around 2%.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.19pm BST

block-time published-time 12.04pm BST

Russia's economy could shrink 10% this year - central bank

Russia's economy is expected to contract by between 8% and 10% this year, the Bank of Russia warns.

The decrease will be mainly driven by "supply-side factors", it says -- namely the sanction imposed on Russia since the war began.

That would be the worst drop since Russia's economy shrank for several years in the early 1990s, exceeding the [*7.8% decline after the 2008 financial crisis*](https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.KD.ZG?locations=RU).

Related: [*Russia heading for worst recession since end of cold war, says UK*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/08/russia-heading-for-worst-recession-since-end-of-cold-war-says-uk)

[*Anouncing today's rate cut*](https://www.theguardian.com/business/live/2022/apr/29/eurozone-gdp-growth-france-germany-inflation-russia-ukraine-energy-crisis-business-live?filterKeyEvents=false&page=with:block-626bbefe8f089c79bcffa2b0#block-626bbefe8f089c79bcffa2b0) , the Bank says the economy has already begun to decline

Based on Bank of Russia estimates, economic activity began to decline in March 2022.

High-frequency indicators point to a contraction in consumer and business activity. After a temporary surge, consumer demand is decreasing in real terms, accompanied by a rise in households' propensity to save. The decline in imports due to the introduction of external trade and financial restrictions is outstripping the decline in exports.

Despite the gradual change in the country and commodity structure of exports and imports as new suppliers and sales markets emerge, businesses are experiencing considerable difficulties in production and logistics.

It predicts that the Russian economy will begin growing gradually in 2023, amid a structural transformation:

In 2023 Q4, output will be up by 4.0-5.5% on the same period in 2022.

However, the overall GDP change in 2023 will be within the range of (-3.0)-0.0% due to the base effect of 2022 Q1. In 2024, GDP will increase by 2.5-3.5%.

enltr [*@bank\_of\_russia*](https://twitter.com/bank_of_russia?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) cuts key rate to 14% from 15%, sees 2022 GDP contracting 8%-10%. Inflation running 17.6% in April, yet sees more rate cuts ahead. Initial rate rise wasn't about cooling demand to forestall inflation, but to keep money in the country. Key headline: 1/2

- Michael McKee (@mckonomy) [*April 29, 2022*](https://twitter.com/mckonomy/status/1519992065182031872?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

enltr\*BANK OF RUSSIA SEES 2022 CURRENT ACCOUNT SURP. $145B; SAW $133B European energy payments fill the hole from frozen forex reserves, keep Russia afloat 2/2

- Michael McKee (@mckonomy) [*April 29, 2022*](https://twitter.com/mckonomy/status/1519992066243284994?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 11.55am BST

Russia's central bank says that inflation in Russia could be as high as 23% this year, a sign of the economic damage caused by sanctions imposed since the Ukraine war:

[*Announcing today's interest rate cut*](https://www.theguardian.com/business/live/2022/apr/29/eurozone-gdp-growth-france-germany-inflation-russia-ukraine-energy-crisis-business-live?filterKeyEvents=false&page=with:block-626bbefe8f089c79bcffa2b0#block-626bbefe8f089c79bcffa2b0) , it says:

As of 22 April, annual inflation was 17.6% (vs 16.7% in March).

In the baseline scenario, the Bank of Russia expects annual inflation to continue to increase in the coming months, due to the base effect, to total 18.0-23.0% in 2022.

Inflation is then seen at 5.0-7.0% in 2023, before returning to the Bank of Russia's 4% target in 2024.

block-time published-time 11.50am BST

Russia cuts interest rates to 14%

Russia's central bank has lowered interest rates to 14%, a bigger cut than expected.

At its regular meeting, the Bank of Russia lowered its key rate by 300 basis points to 14% from 17%.

Economists had expected a smaller cut to 15%, but this still leaves borrowing costs much higher than before the Ukraine war.

Announcing the move, the Bank of Russia says that inflationary pressures have eased after the rouble recovered from its plunge when the Ukraine ***invasion*** began in February:

The external environment for the Russian economy remains challenging and significantly constrains economic activity. With price and financial stability risks no longer on the rise, conditions have allowed for the key rate reduction.

Recent weekly data indicate a slowdown in current price growth rates on the back of a strengthening of the ruble and a cooling of consumer activity. Further inflation movements will be shaped by such impactful factors as the efficiency of import substitution ***processes*** and the scale and speed at which imports of finished goods, raw materials and components will be recovering.

The Bank of Russia's monetary policy will take into the account the need for a structural transformation of the economy and will ensure a return of inflation to target in 2024.

In February, [*Russia's central bank more than doubled interest rates from 9.5% to 20%*](https://www.theguardian.com/business/2022/feb/28/russia-central-bank-rates-rouble-sanctions-economy-ukraine) shortly after the war began, in an attempt to support the sliding rouble.

Russia's currency has since recovered to levels before the ***invasion***, at around 70 to the US dollar, having hit a record high of 135 to the rouble in March.

block-time published-time 11.47am BST

In the City, shares in UK specialist chemicals group Johnson Matthey are up 18% after the investment arm of New York-based industrial firm Standard Industries took a 5.23% stake

Matthey's stock jumped as much as 30% on the FTSE 250 index of mid-size firms, and are trading at their highest since November.

That was the month when the company announced it was pulling out of the fast-growing market for electric vehicle batteries, sending shares sliding and leading to Johnson Matthey exiting the FTSE 100 index.

enltrJohnson Matthey shares have jumped nearly 30% this morning. Standard Latitude Master Fund has taken a 5.2% stake in the company

- Dan Coatsworth (@Dan\_Coatsworth) [*April 29, 2022*](https://twitter.com/Dan_Coatsworth/status/1519968519756070914?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

Reuters says:

A London trader, on condition of anonymity, said the stake deal could be a prelude to "some kind of move", referring to possible transactions.

Related: [*Blow to UK battery industry hopes as Johnson Matthey halts research*](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/nov/11/blow-to-uk-battery-industry-hopes-as-johnson-matthey-halts-research)

block-time published-time 11.00am BST

ING: A turbulent quarter, and more high inflation to come

The eurozone slowed rapidly due to a "hodgepodge of reasons", from Omicron to the Ukraine war, says ING senior economist Bert Colijn.

Zooming out, we see a eurozone economy undergoing a turbulent quarter though managing to eke out a small positive growth number, with the Omicron impact milder than expected and the war in Ukraine having an increasing impact from early March onwards.

Supply chain problems flared up again in March, causing production shutdowns across the eurozone, which has added to the slowing growth figure in 1Q.

Colijn also fears that [*core inflation across the eurozone*](https://www.theguardian.com/business/live/2022/apr/29/eurozone-gdp-growth-france-germany-inflation-russia-ukraine-energy-crisis-business-live?page=with:block-626bacf88f08fff86b738920#block-626bacf88f08fff86b738920) could continue to climb this year, hurting households.

The spike in fuel, electricity and gas prices from early March at the start of the war in Ukraine was followed by cautious retreats and governments reducing taxes on energy. This has resulted in a slight moderation of energy inflation, but concerns remain for the months ahead. The recent jump in market gas prices on the back of Russia cutting off Poland and Bulgaria from gas supply illustrates that it is very possible energy prices spike once again as the war continues.

The impact on core inflation remains key and poses a concern for the ECB. Second-round effects and supply chain problems add to faster price increases in goods and services as well, which has caused core prices to jump from 2.9% in March to 3.5% in April.

enltrEurozone core inflation jumps to 3.5% in April. Second round effects of high energy prices are coming in faster than expected. Key figure for the ECB out of all data just released. [*pic.twitter.com/JCRqKoyPWT*](https://t.co/JCRqKoyPWT)

- Bert Colijn (@BertColijn) [*April 29, 2022*](https://twitter.com/BertColijn/status/1519965920948588544?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

With supply chain problems set to last longer and become more severe again due to Chinese lockdowns and the war, expect core inflation to trend higher for most of 2022 at least. This broadening of high inflation is a key concern for the ECB and adds to pressure to act quickly, despite the fact that this inflation continues to be rooted in supply-side issues beyond the control of the central bank.

[*More here*](https://t.co/BElA1NXePH) :

enltrSome more thoughts on today's GDP and inflation data for the Eurozone: [*https://t.co/BElA1NXePH*](https://t.co/BElA1NXePH)

- Bert Colijn (@BertColijn) [*April 29, 2022*](https://twitter.com/BertColijn/status/1519974748612337664?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 11.02am BST

block-time published-time 10.59am BST

Austria's economy bucked the trend, with strong growth in January-March as it emerged from Covid-19 lockdowns.

Austrian GDP expanded by 2.5% in Q1, after a 1.5% contraction in Q4.

Austria lifted [*its "lockdown of the unvaccinated" in January*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jan/31/austria-lifts-lockdown-of-unvaccinated-as-europe-opens-up-covid) , and relaxed [*restrictions*](https://www.thelocal.at/20220129/austria-to-relax-covid-rules-for-shopping-restaurants/) on shops and hospitality venues in February, after imposing curbs to combat the omicron variant last winter.

enltrThe Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in Austria expanded 2.50 percent in the first quarter of 2022 over the previous quarter. [*https://t.co/pAKTuooPJW*](https://t.co/pAKTuooPJW) [*pic.twitter.com/xauLPnRWhZ*](https://t.co/xauLPnRWhZ)

- Trading Economics (@tEconomics) [*April 29, 2022*](https://twitter.com/tEconomics/status/1519934642736054272?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 10.47am BST

enltrHeadline Inflation stood at record high 7.5% in April. It's about peaking. However, core inflation increased further to 3.5%. It will be a hard task for ECB to get headline back to 2%. [*pic.twitter.com/Buhu1TSpRQ*](https://t.co/Buhu1TSpRQ)

- Helge J. Pedersen (@helgejpedersen) [*April 29, 2022*](https://twitter.com/helgejpedersen/status/1519975595270152195?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 10.23am BST

Core inflation across the eurozone, which strips out energy, food, alcohol & tobacco, jumped to a record 3.5%.

That shows that inflationary pressures are broadening.

Here's some snap reaction to [*the rise in the cost of living:*](https://www.theguardian.com/business/live/2022/apr/29/eurozone-gdp-growth-france-germany-inflation-russia-ukraine-energy-crisis-business-live?filterKeyEvents=false&page=with:block-626ba95a8f08fff86b7388ff#block-626ba95a8f08fff86b7388ff)

enltr?? Core Eurozone CPI posts record high at 3.5%. Europe now showing the type of inflation breadth seen in the US. 2nd round effects of energy shock clear. If the ECB wants to get to 0% quick... why wait until July to hike. Growing risks they throw in the towel & hike in June [*$EUR*](https://twitter.com/search?q=%24EUR&src=ctag&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) [*pic.twitter.com/OFvvm0Epqw*](https://t.co/OFvvm0Epqw)

- Viraj Patel (@VPatelFX) [*April 29, 2022*](https://twitter.com/VPatelFX/status/1519966040754692097?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

enltr???? Euro area core inflation rises to 3.5% in April. ?? [*https://t.co/pZLNeKAPl5*](https://t.co/pZLNeKAPl5)

- Frederik Ducrozet (@fwred) [*April 29, 2022*](https://twitter.com/fwred/status/1519965313865031680?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

enltrEven excluding energy, inflation components in Eurozone running hot... That is a real problem for [*#ECB*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/ECB?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) and surely for households if wages growth remains subdued. I do expect hl will see a tangible slowdown in economy... [*https://t.co/w4pUXaEhNP*](https://t.co/w4pUXaEhNP)

- Mario Cavaggioni (@CavaggioniMario) [*April 29, 2022*](https://twitter.com/CavaggioniMario/status/1519967704194691075?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

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Euro zone inflation hits fresh record high in April

Inflation across the eurozone has hit a record high, as Europe's cost of living crisis intensifies.

Eurozone inflation rose to 7.5% in April, statistics office Eurostat estimates, up from March's 7.4% (which was itself a record). Prices jumped by 0.6% in April alone.

Energy was the biggest single factor driving annual inflation up, with prices jumping 38% year-on-year, down from March's 44.4%.

But while energy costs dipped during April, other price pressures intensified.

Food, alcohol & tobacco annual inflation increased to 6.4% from 5.0% in March, while industrial goods prices rose 3.8% from 3.4%, and services inflation accelerated to 3.3%, from 2.7% in March.

enltrEuro area [*#inflation*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/inflation?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) up to 7.5% in April 2022: energy +38.0%, food +6.4%, other goods +3.8%, services +3.3% - flash estimate [*https://t.co/w6PvwGYiUH*](https://t.co/w6PvwGYiUH) [*pic.twitter.com/AmCTAcMPCX*](https://t.co/AmCTAcMPCX)

- EU\_Eurostat (@EU\_Eurostat) [*April 29, 2022*](https://twitter.com/EU_Eurostat/status/1519964715916554240?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

This puts more pressure on the European Central Bank to raise interest rates from current record lows this summer, to bring inflation down towards its 2% target.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 10.22am BST

block-time published-time 10.08am BST

Eurozone growth slows to 0.2%

Just in: Growth across the eurozone slowed to a near crawl last month, as soaring energy prices and supply chain disruption intensified by the Ukraine war hit the economy.

Eurozone GDP increased by 0.2% in January-March, down from 0.3% growth in October-December.

[*France's stalling economy*](https://www.theguardian.com/business/live/2022/apr/29/eurozone-gdp-growth-france-germany-inflation-russia-ukraine-energy-crisis-business-live?filterKeyEvents=false&page=with:block-626b76a48f08fff86b738762#block-626b76a48f08fff86b738762) , and the 0.2% [*contraction*](https://www.theguardian.com/business/live/2022/apr/29/eurozone-gdp-growth-france-germany-inflation-russia-ukraine-energy-crisis-business-live?filterKeyEvents=false&page=with:block-626ba2188f089c79bcffa149#block-626ba2188f089c79bcffa149) in Italy, took the shine of Germany's [*return to growth*](https://www.theguardian.com/business/live/2022/apr/29/eurozone-gdp-growth-france-germany-inflation-russia-ukraine-energy-crisis-business-live?filterKeyEvents=false&page=with:block-626b9db18f08fff86b738879#block-626b9db18f08fff86b738879).

Growth across the wider EU slowed too, to +0.4% from +0.5%

enltrEuro area [*#GDP*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/GDP?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) +0.2% in Q1 2022, +5.0% compared with Q1 2021: preliminary flash estimate from [*#Eurostat*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/Eurostat?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) [*https://t.co/VXXF5PD6m8*](https://t.co/VXXF5PD6m8) [*pic.twitter.com/VXHLnUMFjl*](https://t.co/VXHLnUMFjl)

- EU\_Eurostat (@EU\_Eurostat) [*April 29, 2022*](https://twitter.com/EU_Eurostat/status/1519964716298346496?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 10.09am BST

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Related: [*UK house price growth slows as cost of living crisis starts to hit market*](https://www.theguardian.com/business/2022/apr/29/uk-house-price-growth-slows-cost-of-living-crisis-starts-to-hit-market)

block-time published-time 9.51am BST

[*Despite returning to growth in Q1*](https://www.theguardian.com/business/live/2022/apr/29/eurozone-gdp-growth-france-germany-inflation-russia-ukraine-energy-crisis-business-live?filterKeyEvents=false&page=with:block-626b9db18f08fff86b738879#block-626b9db18f08fff86b738879) , Germany's economy will be weak this quarter, predicts Oliver Rakau, chief German economist at Oxford Economics :

Here's his take on this morning's GDP report:

enltrGerman GDP grew a moderate 0.2% q/q in Q1. As usual [*@destatis*](https://twitter.com/destatis?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) doesn't release a breakdown with the 1st estimate, but it did mention higher investment, while net trade was a drag. Unseasonably warm Jan/Feb likely propped up Q1 construction investment, but reversal in Q2 likely 1/5 [*pic.twitter.com/mysrEIR2Rg*](https://t.co/mysrEIR2Rg)

- Oliver Rakau (@OliverRakau) [*April 29, 2022*](https://twitter.com/OliverRakau/status/1519960588536975362?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

enltrIndustrial turnover data also points to a strong rise in equipment investment in Q1. 2/5 [*pic.twitter.com/iLVmHX9J1V*](https://t.co/iLVmHX9J1V)

- Oliver Rakau (@OliverRakau) [*April 29, 2022*](https://twitter.com/OliverRakau/status/1519960593230450688?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

enltrDestatis did not mention consumption, which usually suggests it roughly stagnated. That would be consistent with mobility data. The reported drag from net trade is IMO inconsistent with Jan/Feb data, so points to very bad March (obv. quite possible). 3/5 [*pic.twitter.com/U1peURlqWt*](https://t.co/U1peURlqWt)

- Oliver Rakau (@OliverRakau) [*April 29, 2022*](https://twitter.com/OliverRakau/status/1519960598213242882?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

enltrWhat does it mean for Q2? Mobility data points to a sharp rise in consumer services spending, but consumer confidence suggests the opposite, which I think implies a drag from goods spending primarily. IP is likely to contract and investment will see payback for strong Q1. 4/5

- Oliver Rakau (@OliverRakau) [*April 29, 2022*](https://twitter.com/OliverRakau/status/1519960600574631938?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

enltrSo while Q1 was better than I had expected, I think this only shifts the expected weakness into Q2 despite the momentum from reopening and resilient labour market. 5/5 [*https://t.co/mu8ecCpAqs*](https://t.co/mu8ecCpAqs)

- Oliver Rakau (@OliverRakau) [*April 29, 2022*](https://twitter.com/OliverRakau/status/1519960602533322758?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

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Italy at risk of recesion as economy shrank 0.2% in Q1

Italy's economy, though, is on the brink of recession.

Italian GDP shrank by 0.2% in the first quarter of 2022, the first contraction since the end of 2020.

It's a sign that pandemic disruption, high commodity prices and the Ukraine war could have hit activity, [*as we saw with France this morning*](https://www.theguardian.com/business/live/2022/apr/29/eurozone-gdp-growth-france-germany-inflation-russia-ukraine-energy-crisis-business-live?filterKeyEvents=false&page=with:block-626b76a48f08fff86b738762#block-626b76a48f08fff86b738762).

Statistics body ISTAT reports that the Italian economy was 5.8% larger than a year ago, following the recovery during 2021, adding:

The quarter on quarter change is the result of an increase of value added in ***agriculture***, forestry and fishing, a decrease in that of services and a stationarity in industry. From the demand side, there is a positive contribution by the domestic component (gross of change in inventories) and a negative one by the net export component.

enltrThe Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in Italy contracted 0.20 percent in the first quarter of 2022 over the previous quarter. [*https://t.co/4KYXd8Q0GK*](https://t.co/4KYXd8Q0GK) [*pic.twitter.com/3XSVhlVADl*](https://t.co/3XSVhlVADl)

- Trading Economics (@tEconomics) [*April 29, 2022*](https://twitter.com/tEconomics/status/1519949739860676608?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

enltr [*#Italy*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/Italy?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) - GDP declines by 0.2% q/q in Q1 - flash estimate GDP growth eases to 5.8% y/y from 6.2% y/y in Q4 2021 [*https://t.co/8qMedAe7HM*](https://t.co/8qMedAe7HM) [*#EmergingMarkets*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/EmergingMarkets?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) [*pic.twitter.com/f6ucgBQkiI*](https://t.co/f6ucgBQkiI)

- EmergingMarketWatch (@EmergingMWatch) [*April 29, 2022*](https://twitter.com/EmergingMWatch/status/1519957170950914050?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 9.28am BST

Growth in Spain was weaker than expected in the last quarter.

Spanish GDP increased by 0.3% in January-March, below the 0.5% expected, and a sharp slowdown on the 2.2% growth in the last quarter of 2021.

Reuters has more details:

Spiralling inflation, exacerbated by the Ukraine crisis and a Spanish truck drivers' strike in March, dragged down household spending by 3.7% over the quarter, the National Statistics Institute data showed.

On an annual basis output expanded by 6.4%, roughly inline with a Reuters poll for 6.5% growth as the economy rebounded from the first quarter of 2021 when Spain was buffeted by a huge snowstorm that cut transport lines with the capital.

block-time published-time 9.22am BST

Germany avoids recession with 0.2% growth

Germany has returned to growth, as Europe's largest economy avoided being dragged into recession by the Ukraine war.

German GDP increased by 0.2% in the January-March quarter, lifted by an increase in investment, although net trade has a negative impact.

That follows a 0.3% contraction in the last quarter of 2021, when restrictions to combat the Omicron variant and supply chain problems hit its economy. It means Germany has avoided two quarters of falling growth in a row.

enltrThe Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in Germany expanded 0.20 percent in the first quarter of 2022 over the previous quarter. [*https://t.co/KzieO2dmwM*](https://t.co/KzieO2dmwM) [*pic.twitter.com/fei6iRksRF*](https://t.co/fei6iRksRF)

- Trading Economics (@tEconomics) [*April 29, 2022*](https://twitter.com/tEconomics/status/1519949749104828416?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

The Federal Statistics Office warns, though, that the Ukraine conflict has been hurting Germany's economy over the last two months.

Economic performance increased slightly in the first quarter of 2022, following the recovery of the German economy last summer and the decline at the end of 2021.

This was mainly due to higher capital formation, whereas the balance of exports and imports had a downward effect on economic growth.

The economic consequences of the war in Ukraine have had a growing impact on the short-term economic development since late February.

German economists and [*government ministers*](https://www.reuters.com/business/germany-would-go-into-recession-with-russian-energy-embargo-minister-2022-04-27/) have warned that a ban on [*Russian gas imports*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/04/pressure-mounts-germany-embargo-russian-energy-imports) could plunge Germany into a recession this year, amid pressure to cut funds to Russia.

Related: [*Ban on Russian gas would plunge Germany into recession, warns Bundesbank*](https://www.theguardian.com/business/2022/apr/22/russian-gas-ban-germany-recession-bundesbank)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 9.25am BST

block-time published-time 9.04am BST

UK house price growth slows

UK house price growth has slowed from its highest level in 17 years.

The average house price rose by 12.1% in the year to April, building society Nationwide reports. That's down from [*14.3% in March, which was the highest since late 2004*](https://www.theguardian.com/business/2022/mar/31/uk-house-prices-grow-at-fastest-rate-for-17-years).

Prices rose by 0.3% during April, down from 1.1% in March, lifting prices on Nationwide's index to a new record of £267,620.

Robert Gardner, Nationwide's Chief Economist, predicted the slowdown will continue, as pressure mounts on household budgets and interest rates continue to rise.

We continue to expect the housing market to slow in the quarters ahead.

The squeeze in household incomes is set to intensify with inflation expected to rise further, perhaps reaching double digits in the quarters ahead if global energy prices remain high.

Moreover, assuming that labour market conditions remain strong, the Bank of England is likely to raise interest rates further, which will also exert a drag on the market if this feeds through to mortgage rates."

enltr?? Bit of a slowdown in Nationwide's house price index this morning (relatively speaking). April prices up 12.1% on the year vs 14.3% in March, which was the biggest rise since 2004. Nationwide sees further slowdown due to squeeze on real incomes, stretched affordability etc. [*pic.twitter.com/I6gjQpe3DZ*](https://t.co/I6gjQpe3DZ)

- David Milliken (@david\_milliken) [*April 29, 2022*](https://twitter.com/david_milliken/status/1519928285496549376?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 9.09am BST

block-time published-time 8.58am BST

NatWest has reported a 40% jump in first quarter profits but warned of the UK's "uncertain" economy amid the cost of living crisis, saying it had already referred more than 2,000 customers to debt experts at Citizens Advice.

The banking group - formerly known as Royal Bank of Scotland - beat expectations after reporting a jump in pre-tax profits to £1.2bn compared with £885m a year earlier. That was compared to analyst forecasts of a 15% drop in profits to £755m.

Its strong first quarter results - the first reported since the [*UK government stake in the group fell below 50%*](https://www.theguardian.com/business/2022/mar/28/natwest-buys-back-shares-uk-government-rbs) last month - was supported by mortgage borrowing, higher interest rates and a rebound in consumer spending as Covid restrictions were eased.

NatWest's chief executive, Alison Rose, warned that "The world has changed considerably during the last three months," noting the impact the Russian ***invasion*** of Ukraine was having on the UK economy.

Rose said:

We are also very aware of the challenges and concerns the cost-of-living crisis is causing for many of our customers up and down the country. [*NatWest Group*](https://www.theguardian.com/business/natwest-group) is focused on providing practical help and support for the people, families and businesses we serve".

NatWest said it had identified vulnerable customers and had referred 2,100 people to Citizens Advice in the last year. [*Here's the full story:*](https://www.theguardian.com/business/2022/apr/29/natwest-reports-40-profit-jump-as-bank-refers-customers-to-debt-experts)

Related: [*NatWest reports 40% profit jump as bank refers customers to debt experts*](https://www.theguardian.com/business/2022/apr/29/natwest-reports-40-profit-jump-as-bank-refers-customers-to-debt-experts)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 8.58am BST

block-time published-time 8.54am BST

UK facing 'wave of insolvencies', with more firms in critical financial distress

Britain's economy faces a "wave of insolvencies" after the number of UK companies at risk of collapsing jumped by nearly a fifth this year.

Insolvency firm Begbies Traynor reports that the number of firms in 'critical financial distress' jumped by almost a fifth in the first quarter of this year, year-on-year.

There were 1,891 firms facing a county court judgement of at least £5,000, or a winding up petition, in the quarter, led by a 51% jump in the construction sector and a 42% rise among bars and restaurants, it says.

Overall County Court Judgements - a warning sign of future insolvencies - jumped 157% to 22,552 in the quarter compared with a year ago; with March seening the highest number in a single month for five years.

Begbies Traynor fears a wave of business failures is approaching, as Covid support is cut off, inflation climbs, and firms face supply chain problems and a post-Brexit hangover.

Begbies Traynor partner Julie Palmer told the Today Programme that courts are now ***processing*** claims from creditors who couldn't take action earlier in the pandemic.

We think they'll be accelerated by the fact that in a day's time, the landlords are able to start petitioning, to take legal action against companies.

We think the landlords are a very impatient lobby that will swell those figures.

Anecdotally, there is about a year's backlog of creditors looking to take action, Palmer says:

As the backlog clears, we think the figures will really begin to swell.

Palmer says the government needs a two-pronged approach. Firms who need more support could be given leniency in repaying pandemic funding. But there are also 'zombie companies' who need to be allowed to fail, she adds.

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French inflation surges to highest in decades

In another blow, French inflation has just hit its highest level in decades.

Consumer prices accelerated by 4.8% per year in April, INSEE estimates, the highest level since 1985.

The surge was driven by a 26.6% increase in energy prices ( [*despite Emmanuel Macron's government capping energy bill increases*](https://metro.co.uk/2022/02/07/why-are-energy-bills-so-much-cheaper-in-france-16059524/) ), while food prices jumped 3.8% including a 6.6% rise in fresh food

There was also a pick-up in prices for services (2.9%) and manufactured goods (+2.7%).

enltr???? French services inflation rose to a 20-year high of 2.9% in April. [*pic.twitter.com/nFrzJgaYnL*](https://t.co/nFrzJgaYnL)

- Frederik Ducrozet (@fwred) [*April 29, 2022*](https://twitter.com/fwred/status/1519933812716806144?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

On an EU-harmomised basis, French inflation hit a record high of 5.4%, up from 5.1% in March - further away from the ECB's 2% target.

frltr [*#France*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/France?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) : Les chiffres publiés aujourd'hui par l'INSEE sur notre économie sont catastrophiques : [*#PIB*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/PIB?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) : - 0,05 % et - 0,4 % hors stocks [*#Inflation*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/inflation?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) : + 4,8 %, un sommet depuis novembre 1985 Prix à la production sur un an: + 24,4 % un nouveau pic historique Attachez vos ceintures ! [*pic.twitter.com/pMYGLJIjfZ*](https://t.co/pMYGLJIjfZ)

- Marc Touati (@MarcTouati) [*April 29, 2022*](https://twitter.com/MarcTouati/status/1519939341103120390?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

enltrThe Eurozone economy at a glance: 1) France surprised negatively with a 0% GDP in Q1 2) Inflation came in stronger than expected in April at 5.4% YoY The ECB is like a bull which goes nuts when it sees red. Red is number 2. The growth slowdown will be wrongly downplayed.

- Alf (@MacroAlf) [*April 29, 2022*](https://twitter.com/MacroAlf/status/1519932459919495168?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 9.21am BST

block-time published-time 8.10am BST

ING: France faces more stagnation.

France's unexpected slowdown in the first three months of the year does not bode well for the future, warns Charlotte de Montpellier of ING.

De Montpellie predicts that French economic gowth will remain weak, amid weak household demand, pressures on businesses, and disruption from China's Covid-19 lockdowns.

For the coming quarters, the growth outlook is not very bright. The sharp rise in inflation, which is now spreading more and more widely throughout the economy, is weighing on household incomes.

This is compounded by household pessimism, illustrated by the sharp fall in consumer confidence in March and the fact that it did not recover in April. These two elements are likely to further dampen household demand. This drop in household demand will also start to be felt by companies, which will be less able to pass on the cost increases they are facing in their selling prices. There is therefore a risk of a deterioration in business confidence, which until now had held up rather well despite the shock of the war. In addition, the situation in China should weigh on production lines, complicating the supply of inputs and disrupting production in the coming months, but also on French exports.

French economic growth is therefore likely to remain weak. Although none of these factors is sufficient to tip the French economy completely into recession, the combination of all of them at the same time drastically increases the risk of one or two quarters of negative growth for the rest of the year.

enltrThe French GDP figures are even worse than they appear. Without the positive contribution of inventories, the economy would shrink sharply as domestic demand falls [*https://t.co/6zYRoZA410*](https://t.co/6zYRoZA410)

- Charlotte de Montpellier (@CdeMontpellier) [*April 29, 2022*](https://twitter.com/CdeMontpellier/status/1519930394832949249?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 7.57am BST

Germany's import price inflation has accelerated sharply in March to its highest level since the oil crisis of 1974, highlighting that inflationary pressures are intense.

The cost of inported goods surged by a jaw-dropping 31.2% in March, compared with a year ago, and by 5.7% in March alone.

The surge in costs shows the impact of the war in Ukraine, says statistics body Destatis.

Energy import prices soared 160.5% per year, with gas prices quadrupling (+304.3%) and crude oil up 81.3%.

The index of export prices was 15.9%, showing that firms have lifted their own prices in response.

enltrOOPS! [*#Inflation*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/inflation?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) pressure intensifies in [*#Germany*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/Germany?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw). Import Price jumps to 31.2% in March, highest since Sep1974 during the first [*#oil*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/Oil?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) crisis. The current data are beginning to reflect the impact of the war in [*#Ukraine*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/Ukraine?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw). [*pic.twitter.com/Y8DXGbGOfZ*](https://t.co/Y8DXGbGOfZ)

- Holger Zschaepitz (@Schuldensuehner) [*April 29, 2022*](https://twitter.com/Schuldensuehner/status/1519921189027782656?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 8.16am BST

block-time published-time 7.46am BST

enltrFrench Q1 GDP misses forecasts. Flat vs +0.3% consensus vs +0.7% prior. Slowdown driven by drop in household expenditure.

- Daniel Lacalle (@dlacalle\_IA) [*April 29, 2022*](https://twitter.com/dlacalle_IA/status/1519927357439631360?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time published-time 7.42am BST

[*France's statistics body INSEE says*](https://www.theguardian.com/business/live/2022/apr/29/eurozone-gdp-growth-france-germany-inflation-russia-ukraine-energy-crisis-business-live?filterKeyEvents=false&page=with:block-626b76a48f08fff86b738762#block-626b76a48f08fff86b738762) that weak domestic demand hit the economy, while trade and inventory changes had a positive impact to GDP.

GDP stagnated in Q1 2022 (0.0% quarter on quarter after +0.8%) in connection with the weakness of the domestic demand: Households' consumption expenditure sharply decreased (-1.3% after +0,6%) while gross fixed capital formation (GFCF) slightly decelerated (+0.2% after +0.3%). Finally, internal demand excluding inventory changes contributed to -0.6 points to GDP growth, after +0.5 points in the previous quarter.

Foreign trade, although slowing down, continued to progress. The increase was more marked on the export side (+1.5% after +3.5%) than on the import side (+1.1% after +3.2%). Thereby, the contribution of foreign trade to GDP growth was slightly positive this quarter: +0.1 points after +0.0 in the previous quarter.

At last, the contribution of inventory changes to GDP growth was positive again this quarter (+0.4 points after +0.3 points in Q4 2021).

enltr???? GDP stagnated in Q1 2022 (0.0% q-o-q after +0.8%) due to a sharp decline in consumer spending and slower investment. Contributions to GDP growth: Domestic demand ex inventory changes: -0.5 Foreign trade: +0.1 Inventory changes: +0.4 [*https://t.co/udvZwxgz9u*](https://t.co/udvZwxgz9u) [*pic.twitter.com/fIBGOOcTob*](https://t.co/fIBGOOcTob)

- Nadia Gharbi (@nghrbi) [*April 29, 2022*](https://twitter.com/nghrbi/status/1519921074770780161?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 8.00am BST

block-time published-time 7.41am BST

French slowdown fuels stagflation fears

[*France's sharp slowdown*](https://www.theguardian.com/business/live/2022/apr/29/eurozone-gdp-growth-france-germany-inflation-russia-ukraine-energy-crisis-business-live?filterKeyEvents=false&page=with:block-626b76a48f08fff86b738762#block-626b76a48f08fff86b738762) raises the spectre of stagflation in the eurozone, [*warns the FT*](https://www.ft.com/content/dca04a3c-0e6b-425a-9cd5-6d83985230e0) :

The main drag on French growth was a fall in household spending, indicating that higher food and energy prices and the fallout from the Ukraine war are taking their toll on retail spending and consumer confidence.

[*Bloomberg says*](https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-04-29/france-unexpectedly-stagnates-as-war-takes-toll-gdp-update?sref=ZVajCYcV) France unexpectedly stagnated as the Ukraine war took its toll:

France's economy unexpectedly stagnated at the start of the year, sounding an early warning of the damage to Europe from soaring energy costs and worsening supply snarls following Russia's ***invasion*** of Ukraine.

Europe's near-term outlook is ***exceptionally*** uncertain. Another round of sanctions -- including a possible ban on Russian oil imports -- risks hammering industry, while record inflation and plummeting confidence are jeopardizing consumer demand.

enltr???? [*#France*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/France?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) Unexpectedly Stagnates as War Takes Toll: GDP Update - Bloomberg \*Link: [*https://t.co/y6ytBUXLB5*](https://t.co/y6ytBUXLB5) [*pic.twitter.com/NGc7tryXky*](https://t.co/NGc7tryXky)

- Christophe Barraud???? (@C\_Barraud) [*April 29, 2022*](https://twitter.com/C_Barraud/status/1519916536525467652?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 7.46am BST

block-time published-time 7.41am BST

Introduction: French economy grinds to a halt in Q1

Good morning, and welcome to our rolling coverage of business, the world economy and the financial markets.

France's economy has unexpectedly ground to a halt as the energy crisis, inflation and supply chain problems exacerbated by the Ukraine war hit growth.

French GDP was unchanged in the first quarter of this year, weaker than the 0.3% growth expected by economists, official data released this morning shows.

enltr [*#France*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/France?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) 's economy did not grow in Q1. [*#GDP*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/GDP?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) growth = ZERO. [*pic.twitter.com/JNQE0vVbsk*](https://t.co/JNQE0vVbsk)

- jeroen blokland (@jsblokland) [*April 29, 2022*](https://twitter.com/jsblokland/status/1519918681517666305?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

After growing 0.8% in October-December, France's growth fizzled out in January-March, statistics body INSEE reports.

It's a sign of the economic damage being caused by soaring energy and commodity prices, and supply chain disruption from the Ukraine war.

Household spending contracted by 1.3%, a signal that the surge in inflation is hitting domestic budgets and confidence, despite [*France's 25bn package of support for energy bills.*](https://www.theguardian.com/business/2022/jan/14/france-edf-cap-household-energy-bills)

enltr\*FRENCH ECONOMY STAGNATED IN FIRST QUARTER; EST. 0.3% GROWTH \*FRANCE GDP GREW 5.3% IN 1Q Y/Y; EST. +5.5%

- Nour Eldeen Al-Hammoury (@NourHammoury) [*April 29, 2022*](https://twitter.com/NourHammoury/status/1519917349771649024?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

We find out at 10am how the wider eurozone fared in the first quarter, with growth figures from Germany, Spain and Italy all expected this morning too.

enltrBelgian and French GDP came in below Consensus, markedly so in the case of France as consumption contracted. Up next, Spain in an hour and a bit. [*pic.twitter.com/3Z5mOzIZcV*](https://t.co/3Z5mOzIZcV)

- Oliver Rakau (@OliverRakau) [*April 29, 2022*](https://twitter.com/OliverRakau/status/1519916553201979392?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

France's slowdown will increase concerns over the health of the world economy.

Yesterday we learned [*America's economy shrank unexpectedly*](https://www.theguardian.com/business/2022/apr/28/us-economy-saw-unexpectedly-severe-drop-first-quarter) in the first quarter of the year, contracting by -0.4% in the first quarter, or -1.4% on an annualized basis.

That was the US's weakest quarter since the early days of the pandemic, as the widening US trade deficit pulled down GDP.

Supply chain problems, and ongoing pandemic disruption, is continuing to hit the companies. [*Last night, Apple warned*](https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2022/apr/28/apple-reports-positive-results-shortages-economic-fallout) that chip shortages and factory shutdowns in China could cost it up to $8bn of revenue this quarter.

enltr???? [*#France*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/France?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw) Unexpectedly Stagnates as War Takes Toll: GDP Update - Bloomberg \*Link: [*https://t.co/y6ytBUXLB5*](https://t.co/y6ytBUXLB5) [*pic.twitter.com/NGc7tryXky*](https://t.co/NGc7tryXky)

- Christophe Barraud???? (@C\_Barraud) [*April 29, 2022*](https://twitter.com/C_Barraud/status/1519916536525467652?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

It's another sign that the world economy is slowing. [*America's economy shrank unexpectedly*](https://www.theguardian.com/business/2022/apr/28/us-economy-saw-unexpectedly-severe-drop-first-quarter) in the first quarter of the year, contracting by -0.4% in the first quarter, or -1.4% on an annualized basis.

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We get the full eurozone growth report at 10am, along with new inflation figures.

Elsewhere, Russia's central bank may cut interest rates today, possibly from 17% to 15%, as it continues to wind back February's emergency doubling of borrowing costs [*(to 20%*](https://www.cnbc.com/2022/02/28/russia-central-bank-hikes-interest-rates-to-20percent-from-9point5percent-to-bolster-ruble.html) ) to prop up the rouble after the Ukraine ***invasion***.

The agenda 10am BST: Eurozone growth report for Q1 202210am BST: Eurozone inflation report for April11.30am BST: Bank of Russia sets interest rates1pm BST: Bank of Russia press conference1.30pm BST: US Personal Consumption Expenditures ***measure*** of inflation

**Load-Date:** April 29, 2022

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[***Morocco Monthly Briefing September 2021***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:63TW-WRG1-JC8V-42HD-00000-00&context=1516831)

ARC Briefing Morocco

September 2021

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**Length:** 5423 words

**Body**

**ABSTRACT**

***King Mohammed VI (1999-present) instructs Rassemblement National des Indépendants (RNI) secretary-general Aziz Akhannouch to form a new government after the RNI wins a majority of seats in the House of Representatives in general elections on 8 September. Algeria announces its unilateral decision to sever all diplomatic ties with Morocco, accusing Rabat of committing "hostile acts" and colluding with "terrorist groups" to undermine its interests. The Bank Al-Maghrib (BAM) (central bank) receives an additional allocation of reserves of over $ 1.2 billion in Special Drawing Rights (SDR) from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which it can access to continue financing Morocco's economic rebound from Covid-19 and to support other economic initiatives. Amid reports of a surge in critical Covid-19 infections among children, the education and health ministries announce the extension of the country's vaccination campaign to 12- to 17-year-olds***.

**FULL TEXT**

**Aziz Akhannouch is Morocco's new prime minister...**

**Morocco**'s general elections on 8 September delivered a stunning upset to the political status quo. The **Parti de la Justice et du Développement** (**PJD**), in power since 2010, secured only 13 of the 395 seats in parliament, while the **Rassemblement National des Indépendants** (**RNI**) won 102 seats.[[132]](#footnote-133)1 King **Mohammed VI** (1999-present) instructed RNI secretary-general **Aziz Akhannouch** on 10 September to form a new government in accordance with constitutional provisions.[[133]](#footnote-134)2 Akhannouch formally became Morocco's new prime minister on 11 September. RNI member and former sports minister **Rachid Talbi Alami** said on 12 September that the party would launch consultations for the formation of a new government starting 13 September. The consultations are expected to include all parties that obtained seats in parliament for the formation of a coalition government.[[134]](#footnote-135)3

Akhannouch replaces **Saad Eddine El-Othmani**, who led the ruling coalition for four years as head of the PJD, which won 125 seats in the 2016 general election.[[135]](#footnote-136)5 Local analysts claim the PJD failed to deliver on its 2016 electoral promises, which included lifting more citizens out of poverty amid a widening gap between Morocco's rich and poor, and improving health care and education.[[136]](#footnote-137)6 The PJD also suffered a surprising electoral loss in the professional chambers elections held on 6 August (see *ARC Briefing Morocco August 2021*).

| **Morocco legislative election results**[[137]](#footnote-138)4 | | |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **2021** | **2016** |
| **Rassemblement National des Indépendants (RNI)** | 102 | 37 |
| **Parti Authenticité et Modernité (PAM)** | 87 | 102 |
| **Istiqlal Party** | 81 | 46 |
| **Union Socialiste des Forces Populaires (USFP)** | 35 | 20 |
| **Mouvement Populaire** | 29 | 27 |
| **Parti du Progr's et du Socialisme (PPS)** | 21 | 12 |
| **Union Constitutionelle** | 18 | 19 |
| **Parti de la Justice et du Développement (PJD)** | 13 | 125 |

Akhannouch, a wealthy businessman and son of petroleum mogul **Ahmed Akhannouch**, is the founder of leading Moroccan fuel distributor **Afriquia** petroleum company. He is believed to have close ties to the palace and has been part of all coalition governments for the past 23 years, except during a brief period between 2012 and 2013. Akhannouch was CEO of the **Akwa Group** business conglomerate, which is focused on the lucrative oil and gas industry. **United States (US)**-based financial publication **Forbes** has ranked Akhannouch as the 12th richest person in **Africa**, worth $ 2 billion.[[138]](#footnote-139)7 Akhannouch was also president of the **Souss-Massa-Draa** regional council and served on the board of a think-tank with the late King **Hassan II** (1961-1999) until 1999.[[139]](#footnote-140)8

Reaction to the PJD's electoral loss and Akhannouch's appointment as prime minister has been mixed, ranging from relief and cautious optimism to apprehension about the direction in which Akhannouch and the RNI will take the country.[[140]](#footnote-141)9 However, despite the change of government, policy shifts are unlikely since King Mohammed still makes major decisions in Morocco and has the right to exercise his veto on government appointments.[[141]](#footnote-142)10 Akhannouch said the RNI will consult other parties in agreement with King Mohammed to *"implement his majesty's vision"* and form a *"coherent and homogeneous majority that will be tasked to carry out convergent programmes"*.[[142]](#footnote-143)11 Akhannouch has also pledged to push for social and economic reform in Morocco. However, a local source expressed widespread sceptism:

*"Morocco has a chance to start anew with a new government. Let's just wish for the best, and at the same time be well-prepared for the worst! Governments in this country have made promises before and disappointed."*[[143]](#footnote-144)12

**Algeria cuts diplomatic relations with Morocco**

**Algeria**'s unilateral move to cut ties with Morocco has raised concerns within the international community, with many countries and diplomats calling on both countries to de-escalate tensions and maintain regional dialogue and stability. Algeria announced on 24 August its decision to sever all diplomatic ties with Morocco, accusing **Rabat** of committing *"hostile acts"* and colluding with *"terrorist groups"* to undermine Algerian interests.[[144]](#footnote-145)13 Morocco responded to Algeria's decision on 25 August, stating that it regretted its neighbour's *"unilateral and unjustified"* decision and *"categorically rejects the false, rather absurd, justifications on which it was based"*.[[145]](#footnote-146)14 Morocco emphasised its commitment to regional stability and said it would remain a good friend and neighbour to all Algerian people despite the diplomatic rift.

Tension between the two countries dates back to 1976, after **Algiers** started supporting the separatist **Polisario Front**, an armed group demanding independence for the **Western Sahara**.[[146]](#footnote-147)15 Moroccan forces and the Polisario Front have been fighting for decades over the vast disputed territory, bordering Morocco, **Mauritania** and Algeria, which was previously under **Spanish** control.[[147]](#footnote-148)16 Recent tensions stem from the recognition on 10 December by the administration of former US president **Donald Trump** (2017-2021) of Moroccan sovereignty over the Western Sahara, when the US became the first country to recognise Morocco's claim and reaffirmed its proposal to grant limited autonomy to **Sahrawis** under Moroccan control.[[148]](#footnote-149)17

International stakeholders are concerned that increased tensions will exacerbate instability in a region that is also diplomatically unstable. The diplomatic impasse may also impact the future of the **Maghreb-Europe** gas pipeline.[[149]](#footnote-150)18 The 1,400-km pipeline is a system of high-pressure gas pipelines carrying natural gas from the wells in **Hassi R'Mel** (Algeria) to **Spain** and **Portugal** via an underwater section in the **Strait of Gibraltar**.[[150]](#footnote-151)19 The pipeline contract expires in October, but Morocco has said it is in favour of maintaining the pipeline.[[151]](#footnote-152)20 Spain's foreign affairs minister, **Jose Manuel Albares**, said on 30 August that he had held talks with Moroccan and Algerian officials regarding the future of the pipeline but a final decision has yet to be made.[[152]](#footnote-153)21

*Source: Europe Maghreb Pipeline Ltd*

The **United Nations (UN)** on 26 August joined calls for an end to the Moroccan-Algerian diplomatic crisis while **African Union (AU) Commission** chair **Moussa Faki Mahamat** expressed *"deep regret"* over the breakdown of diplomatic relations between the neighbouring countries[[153]](#footnote-154)22 and the **European Union (EU)** offered to mediate the dispute between Morocco and Algeria.[[154]](#footnote-155)23 On 27 August, **Qatar** and **Oman** joined other **Gulf State** governments, the **United Arab Emirates, Bahrain** and **Saudi Arabia**, in calling for the restoration of diplomatic ties between Morocco and Algeria. On 5 September, the **Arab League** also recommended its help to restore relations between the two countries.

However, Algeria's foreign minister, **Ramtane Lamamra**, said on the sidelines of the Arab foreign ministers' meeting on 10 September that the decision to sever relations with Morocco is a *"sovereign, final, and irreversible"* act.[[155]](#footnote-156)24 Lamamra said Algiers is not responsible for cutting ties, accusing Morocco of being first in escalating tensions.[[156]](#footnote-157)25 Lamamra accused Morocco of having a hand in the wildfires that broke out in Algeria's **Kabylia** region in August (see *ARC Briefing Algeria August 2021*)[[157]](#footnote-158)26 and said Algeria would not yield to any mediation initiatives to review its diplomatic stance because it has suffered *"political and moral damage"* at the hands of the Kingdom.[[158]](#footnote-159)27 Lamamra said any initiative would ignore Morocco's responsibility in the chronic deterioration of bilateral relations.[[159]](#footnote-160)28

**IMF windfall boosts foreign currency reserves**

Morocco's central bank, **Bank Al-Maghrib (BAM)**, received an additional allocation of reserves of over $ 1.2 billion in **Special Drawing Rights (SDR)** from the **International Monetary Fund (IMF)** on 23 August.[[160]](#footnote-161)29 The BAM can access the financial windfall to continue financing Morocco's economic rebound from **Covid-19** and to support other economic initiatives.[[161]](#footnote-162)30 The SDRs are an international reserve asset created by the IMF in 1969 to supplement official reserves of member states and are used during times of global financial crisis.[[162]](#footnote-163)31 The IMF injected a total of $ 650 billion in SDR reserve assets onto the balance sheets of the world's central banks in August.[[163]](#footnote-164)32 This is only the fifth time the IMF has allocated SDRs since it was created in 1969.[[164]](#footnote-165)33 IMF chief **Kristalina Georgieva** on 2 September described the allocation as *"a shot in the arm for the global economy at a time of* ***unprecedented*** *crisis"*.[[165]](#footnote-166)34

The financial injection is a welcome boost for Morocco, particularly following BAM reports earlier in the year that Moroccans were draining financial institutions of cash as a result of the pandemic. The increased demand for cash led to an increase in currency circulation in Morocco to MAD 319 billion ($ 35 billion).[[166]](#footnote-167)35 However, due to the sudden surge in cash circulation, domestic financial institutions were at risk of a shortage in institutional funds to ensure their continued operations. The BAM reported that with the latest financial boost from the IMF, Morocco's **Avoirs officiels de réserve** (**AOR**) (official reserve assets) jumped by nearly 3.9% in comparison to the previous week.[[167]](#footnote-168)36 As a result, reserve levels in Morocco have returned to their highest level since late January. At the last quarterly meeting of BAM's board in June, central bank governor **Abdellatif Jouahri** said the SDR funds would allow the bank to strengthen its reserves, arbitrate them against currencies, or use them to finance its expenses.[[168]](#footnote-169)37

**Morocco targets 12- to 17-year-olds in vaccination campaign**

The ministries of education and health announced on 28 August the extension of Morocco's Covid-19 vaccination campaign to include students aged 12-17 amid reports of a surge in critical Covid-19 infections among children.[[169]](#footnote-170)38 The now former ministers of national education minister and health, **Saaid Amzazi** and **Khalid Ait Taleb** respectively, chaired the official launch of the vaccination campaign, which has about 420 vaccination centres nationwide to inoculate 12-17-year-olds.[[170]](#footnote-171)39 The education ministry also decided on 6 September to postpone the start of the academic year to 1 October in order to achieve herd immunity against the virus among educators.[[171]](#footnote-172)40 Initially, the ministry had announced that the school year would start on 10 September.

According to the health ministry's update on 14 September, it has fully vaccinated 16,875,343 of its 36.4 million citizens against Covid-19 since beginning its vaccination campaign at the end of January.[[172]](#footnote-173)41 At least 20,362,745 people have received a first dose. The kingdom aims to vaccinate at least 80% of its population, meaning it will have to inoculate as many as 33 million people to achieve herd immunity against Covid-19.[[173]](#footnote-174)42 A **World Health Organization (WHO)** study on 2 September placed Morocco among a small group of **African** countries that have reached global vaccine targets set earlier this year.[[174]](#footnote-175)43

Despite its successful Covid-19 response, Morocco continues to record thousands of new cases daily.[[175]](#footnote-176)44 The health ministry announced that Morocco had recorded 2,642 new cases throughout the country on 15 September and a further 2,432 cases on 16 September.[[176]](#footnote-177)45 The seven-day average as of 16 September is 2,359 daily cases.[[177]](#footnote-178)46 As of 16 September, Morocco had recorded a total of 913,423 cases, with 872,976 recoveries and 13,775 Covid-19-related deaths.[[178]](#footnote-179)47

Health officials have stressed the need for citizens to continue following precautionary ***measures*** as set by the health ministry.[[179]](#footnote-180)48 The government has extended its health state of emergency through 31 October.[[180]](#footnote-181)49 Curfew is in effect from 9pm to 5am, while travel to and from **Casablanca, Agadir** and **Marrakesh** is banned, and only those with valid vaccination passports, a permit, and in need of urgent medical attention are allowed to travel to the three cities.[[181]](#footnote-182)50 Restaurants, cafes and stores are allowed to operate until 9pm daily. Businesses and services such as hotels, restaurants and intercity transport can operate, subject to certain capacity limitations.[[182]](#footnote-183)51 Domestic flights and public transport, including bus and rail service, are in operation but private and public gatherings are banned.

For Covid-19 tracking and monitoring purposes, government has classified areas in the country as either "Zone-1" or "Zone-2" regions based on their local levels of Covid-19 activity. Restrictions in Zone-1 areas have been eased due to lower disease activity and residents can leave their homes without special permits; however, they must carry national identity cards at all times.[[183]](#footnote-184)52 Establishments in Zone-1, such as restaurants, beaches, hotels, cafes and all businesses, can only operate at 50% capacity and must adhere to social distancing guidelines. In Zone-2 areas, government has eased only some restrictions and residents may not travel outside their municipalities of residence without special permits.

For entry to Morocco, government classifies countries into "List A" and "List B". List A includes countries with positive indicators regarding their control of the Covid-19 epidemiological situation. Travellers from such countries, whether Moroccan or foreigners living there, can enter Morocco subject to providing a vaccination certificate or a negative polymerase chain reaction (PCR) test taken 72 hours before departure.[[184]](#footnote-185)53 List B includes countries experiencing a spread of variants or lacking precise Covid-19 case statistics. Travellers from these countries must obtain ***exceptional*** authorisation prior to travel, present a negative PCR test result taken less than 48 hours prior to arrival, and undergo mandatory quarantine on arrival. Unvaccinated or partially vaccinated individuals traveling from List B countries are required to undergo a mandatory 10-day quarantine period at a government-designated facility at their own expense. Travelers from List B countries presenting a certificate of full vaccination against Covid-19 are exempt from quarantine requirements. In the most recent update to Morocco's travel restrictions published on 24 August, the foreign ministry announced that Moroccan residents will be able to self-isolate for five days at home upon arriving from a List B country.[[185]](#footnote-186)54 The foreign affairs ministry updates the countries on List A and List B regularly and at least twice a month.

**Planner**

Oct 2021 **(Morocco)** Scheduled joint Morocco-**United Kingdom** military exercise

Oct 2021 **(Morocco)** Scheduled release of Moroccan-led **United Nations (UN)** fact-finding mission to **Libya** report on the Libyan crisis;

Oct 2021 **(Morocco)** Expiry of **Maghreb-Europe** gas pipeline contract;

Dec 2021 **(Morocco)** Scheduled start date for **Sothema** laboratory to begin manufacturing the **Sinopharm** Covid-19 vaccines;

2021 **(Morocco)** Scheduled construction of five new dams;

2021 **Oued Zem (Morocco)** Scheduled opening of automotive testing centre;

Q4 2021 **Marrakech (Morocco)** 24th **General Assembly of the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO)**

2022 **Marrakech (Morocco) International Monetary Fund** and **World Bank** annual meetings to take place in Morocco;

**Chronology**

16 Sep 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***Morocco World News*. The **National Airports Office** announces that 16 Moroccan airports have received "*Airport Health Accreditation*" from the **International Council of Airports** (**ACI**);

15 Sep 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***Morocco World News*. Newly appointed prime minister **Aziz Akhannouch** reports progress in consultations to form a new government coalition and says details of the new government coalition will be available next week;

15 Sep 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***Ministère de la santé*. As 15 September, over one million students aged 12 to 17 have received their first dose of a **Covid-19** vaccine across Morocco;

13 Sep 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***The Arab Weekly*. Foreign minister **Nasser Bourita** receives **United Nations (UN)** special envoy to **Libya, Jan Kubis**, for his first official visit to Morocco;

13 Sep 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***Morocco World News*. New prime minister **Aziz Akhannouch** announces launching an *"immediate* ***process****"* of withdrawing from all management within his family's business;

12 Sep 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***Morocco World News*. General election victors **Rassemblement National des Indépendants** (**RNI**) are expected to launch consultations for formation of a new government, starting 13 September;

12 Sep 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***Morocco Latest News*. The **National Transportation and Rights of Drivers Observatory** announces that two Moroccan international transportation drivers were killed in a shooting in **Mali** on 11 September;

11 Sep 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***DW*. King **Mohammed VI** designates **Rassemblement National des Indépendants** (**RNI**) secretary-general **Aziz Akhannouch** as prime minister-elect following the RNI's victory in the legislative results and asks him to form Morocco's new government;

11 Sep 2021 **(New York)***United States*. **United Nations (UN)** secretary-general **Antonio Guterres** warns that the **Taliban**'s takeover in **Kabul** could create a rise in extremism in **Morocco**'s diplomatic backyard;

10 Sep 2021 **Algiers (Algeria)***Echorouk Online*. **Algeria**'s foreign affairs minister, **Ramtane Lamamra**, says his country's decision to cut relations with **Morocco** is a *"sovereign, final, and irreversible decision"*;

10 Sep 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***Aljazeera*. King **Mohammed VI** receives **Rassemblement National des Indépendants** (**RNI**) secretary-general **Aziz Akhannouch** at the royal palace in **Fez**, asking him to form a government;

10 Sep 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***Morocco World News*. The **Arab League** expresses satisfaction with Morocco's successful polls, saying they took place in accordance with the legal framework of the electoral ***process*** and international standards;

10 Sep 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***Sahara News. The***Rassemblement National des Indépendants** (**RNI**) attains 102 seats in the House of Representatives against 97 in the initial results;

9 Sep 2021 **Swords (Ireland)***Ryanair*. Low-cost **Ireland**-headquartered carrier **Ryanair** announces the launch of three new air routes linking **Morocco** and **Spain**;

9 Sep 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***Map News*. The **Parti de la Justice et du Développement** (**PJD**) general secretariat announces a collective resignation at its press conference following a catastrophic loss in the legislative elections;

9 Sep 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***Morocco World News*. **Saham Group**'s **Majorel** to be listed on the **Amsterdam** stock exchange, and will become the second Moroccan operator to be listed on an international stock exchange, after **Maroc Telecom**;

9 Sep 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***Ministère de l'Intérieur*. Interior ministry announces that based on 96% of the ballots counted, the results of the 2021 Moroccan legislative elections appear to be a victory for the **Rassemblement National des Indépendants** (**RNI**) with 97 seats, followed by long-term opposition member the **Parti Authenticité et Modernité** (**PAM**) with 82 seats, while **Parti de la Justice et du Développement** (**PJD**) ends its decade-long rule winning just 12 seats in the 2021 legislative elections;

8 Sep 2021 **Sale (Morocco)***Morocco World News*. The **United States (US)** donates a 30-bed mobile isolation unit worth $ 1.5m to Morocco to boost its efforts to combat the **Covid-19** crisis;

8 Sep 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***Ministère de l'Intérieur*. Interior ministry reports 50.18% participation in national vote upon ballots closure at 7 p.m.;

8 Sep 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***Ministère de la santé*. Health ministry reports Morocco's fully vaccinated population has reached 16,102,416;

8 Sep 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***Morocco World News*. Moroccan scientific committee recommends administration of a third booster shot of **Covid-19** vaccines to high-risk populations and health frontliners;

8 Sep 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***Aljazeera*. Voting for the legislative, municipal, and regional elections open at 8 a.m. today across Morocco;

8 Sep 2021 **Dakhla (Morocco)***Morocco World News*. **British** tech entrepreneur **Richard Branson** announces plans to invest in **Dakhla**'s tourism industry;

8 Sep 2021 **Manhattan (United States)***Map News*. **United States** (**US**) financial magazine **Global Finance** has ranked **Bank Al-Maghrib** (central bank) governor **Abdellatif Jouahri** among the top 10 central bank governors worldwide;

7 Sep 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***Diplomatie*. **Burundi**'s foreign minister, **Benjamin Ndagimana**, holds an historic meeting with foreign minister **Nasser Bourita** in **Rabat**, days before he is set to take control of the Burundian consulate in **Laayoune**;

7 Sep 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***Ministère de l'Education Nationale*. The education ministry announces it will work on rescheduling this school year's holidays and exams and extension of studies until July 2022;

7 Sep 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***Ministère de la santé*. Health ministry reports 19,339,035 people have received their first doses of a **Covid-19** vaccine in Morocco as of 6 September;

6 Sep 2021 **Madrid (Spain)***Morocco World News*. **Spanish** news agency **EFE** expresses concern regarding the fate of the **Maghreb-Europe** gas pipeline following severing of diplomatic ties between **Algeria** and **Morocco**;

6 Sep 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***Ministère de l'Education Nationale*. Education ministry postpones start of academic year to 1 October citing the need to achieve herd immunity against coronavirus among educators as it seeks to ensure vaccination of children aged 12-17;

6 Sep 2021 **Casablanca (Morocco)***Attijari Global Research*. **Attijari Global Research (AGR)** forecasts that **Bank Al-Maghrib** (central bank) will keep its rate steady at 1.5% in second half of 2021;

5 Sep 2021 **Cairo (Egypt)***Morocco World News*. **Arab League** recommends its help to restore relations between **Morocco** and **Algeria**;

5 Sep 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***Remonews*. Government confirms mandatory **Covid** vaccination pass in public spaces;

5 Sep 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***Morocco World News*. **Bank Al-Maghrib** (central bank) currency reserves skyrocket after months of steady decline after receiving a $ 1.2 billion financial boost from **the International Monetary Fund (IMF)**;

3 Sep 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***Africa Data Centres*. Morocco will host a new development plan, the **Hyperscale Data Center in Pan-African Initiative**, to expand data storage in **Africa** as part of ten interconnected centres across the continent;

3 Sep 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***Morocco World News*. **Scientific and Technical Committee of Vaccinations** member **Said Afif** says Morocco's **Sothema** laboratory will start manufacturing **China**-made **Sinopharm** Covid-19 vaccines in December and is expected to produce five million doses monthly;

3 Sep 2021 **Dongguan (China)***Morocco World News*. **China**-headquartered phone manufacturer **Oppo** is reportedly planning an expansion of its global rapid phone repair service in several countries including **Morocco**;

2 Sep 2021 **Geneva (Switzerland)***World Health Organization*. **World Health Organization (WHO)** study places Morocco among a small group of **African** countries that have reached global **Covid-19** vaccine targets set earlier this year;

2 Sep 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***Newsbeezer*. Morocco signs a new amendment agreement with **Netherlands**-based automotive manufacturing company **Stellantis**, seeking to strengthen cooperation and commitment both parties share to develop the automotive industry;

2 Sep 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***Morocco World News*. Foreign minister **Nasser Bourita** reiterates Morocco's determination to continue supporting factions in **Libya** find a mutually acceptable and lasting solution to end their conflict;

2 Sep 2021 **Algiers (Algeria)***Middle East Monitor*. Algeria's communication minister, **Ammar Belhimer**, states that all components of **Algeria**'s government oppose the **Moroccan-Israeli** alliance;

2 Sep 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***Conseil national des droits de l'Homme*. Moroccan **Conseil national des droits de l'Homme (CNDH)** announces that 19 international organisations and bodies have received permission to participate as observers in the general elections scheduled for 8 September;

2 Sep 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***Morocco World News*. Morocco receives a batch of the **AstraZeneca** Covid-19 vaccine as part of the **COVAX** programme;

1 Sep 2021 **Casablanca (Morocco)***Hexcel Corporation*. **United States (US)** industrial materials manufacturing company, **Hexcel Corporation**, says it will expand its presence in Morocco with an expansion of its **Casablanca** factory;

1 Sep 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***The OCP Group*. State-owned phosphate and fertiliser group the **OCP Group** reports turnover of nearly MAD 32.48 billion ($ 3.6 billion) in the first half of 2021, compared to MAD 27.4 billion ($ 3.05 billion) a year earlier, attirbuting improved performance to a higher sales price compared with Q2 2020;

31 Aug 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***Oil Review Middle East*. **United Kingdom**-based Moroccofocused oil and natural gas exploration company **Sound Energy** announces acquisition of **Schlumberger Silk Route Services Limited (SSRS)**;

31 Aug 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***Ministère de la santé*. National education minister **Saaid Amzazi** and health minister **Khalid Ait Taleb** launch Morocco's vaccine campaign for students aged 12-17 launches, with about 420 vaccination centres across the country;

31 Aug 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***Ministère de la santé*. Health ministry announces new campaign to ensure reliability of **Covid-19** tests, saying it has sanctioned laboratories that do not meet standards;

30 Aug 2021 **Sword (Ireland)***Ryanair*. Low-cost **Ireland**-headquartered airline **Ryanair** announces launch of new flight linking **Agadir** (**Morocco**) and **Bologna** (**Italy**);

30 Aug 2021 **Brasilia (Brazil)***ABNA News*. **Brazil** reiterates its willingness to accelerate negotiations of free trade agreement between **Morocco** and the **Bienvenidos al Mercado Común del Sur (MERCOSUR)**;

30 Aug 2021 **Madrid (Spain)***Tellereport*. **Spain**'s foreign affairs minister, **Jose Manuel Albares**, says he held talks with **Moroccan** and **Algerian** officials regarding the future of the **Europe-Maghreb** gas pipeline;

30 Aug 2021 **London (United Kingdom)***Morocco World News*. **United Kingdom** (**UK**) **Office for National Statistics** shares an undivided map of **Morocco** on its websites, the second time in a week that UK agencies have done so after **BBC News** shared an undivided map of Morocco on its platforms;

29 Aug 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***Morocco World News*. Morocco's permanent ambassador to the **United Nations (UN**), **Omar Hilale**, responds to **Algeria**'s allegations about the **Western Sahara** by pointing out the country's role in exacerbating tensions in the region and highlighting human rights violations perpetrated by Algeria in the **Tindouf** camps;

29 Aug 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***Morocco World News*. Prime minister **Saad Eddine El Othmani** urges parents to vaccinate their children amid reports of a surge in critical **Covid-19** infections among children;

28 Aug 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***Ministère de la santé*. Education and health ministries announce extension of **Covid-19** vaccination campaign to include students aged 12-17;

28 Aug 2021 **Tripoli (Libya)***Morocco World News*. Moroccan-led **United Nations (UN)** factfinding mission to **Libya** announces upcoming report on the crisis and will present its findings in October;

27 Aug 2021 **New York (United States)***United Nations Press Release*. **United Nations (UN)** secretary-general **Antonio Guterres** appoints **Russia**'s **Alexander Ivanko** as **Western Sahara** special representative;

27 Aug 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***Morocco World News*. **Qatar** and **Oman** join other **Gulf** state governments in calling for the restoration of diplomatic ties between Morocco and **Algeria**, following the lead of the **United Arab Emirates, Bahrain** and **Saudi Arabia**;

27 Aug 2021 **Algiers (Algeria)***Morocco World News*. **Algeria** has hinted at terminating the gas pipeline bypassing Morocco to **Spain**; the pipeline contract expires in October but Morocco has said it is in favour of maintaining the **Maghreb-Europe** gas pipeline;

26 Aug 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***AFP News*. Morocco has reportedly decided to close its embassy in **Algiers** and repatriate its diplomats;

26 Aug 2021 **Brussels (Brussels)***Morocco World News*. The **European Union (EU)** offers to mediate the dispute between **Morocco** and **Algeria**;

26 Aug 2021 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)***APA News*. **African Union (AU)** Commission chair **Moussa Faki Mahamat** expresses his deep regret over the breakdown of diplomatic relations between **Algeria** and **Morocco**;

26 Aug 2021 **Abu Dhabi (United Arab Emirates)***Morocco World News*. A **Moroccan** delegation on a working trip to **Abu Dhabi** signs the **Arab Space Cooperation Group**'s basic charter;

26 Aug 2021 **Brasilia (Brazil)***Maroc*. **Brazil** has granted official recognition to **Morocco**'s **Foodex** to certify Moroccan ***agricultural*** exports to Brazil;

26 Aug 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***Morocco World News*. More than 4,500 observers have received approval from the **Special Commission for the Accreditation of Election Observers** to participate in the upcoming elections scheduled for 8 September;

26 Aug 2021 **New York (United States)***Morocco World News*. **United Nations (UN)** has joined in calling for an end to the **Moroccan-Algerian** diplomatic crisis.

25 Aug 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***Morocco World News*. Morocco digitises its civil status system as part of a larger civil status reform;

25 Aug 2021 **Algiers (Algeria)***New.in-24*. Morocco's ambassador in **Algiers, Mohamed Ait Ouali**, has refused a meeting with Algeria's foreign minister, **Ramtane Lamamra**, following the announcement that **Algeria** will cut ties with **Rabat**;

25 Aug 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***Morocco World News*. The economic and financial forecasting department predicts the local economy will grow by 5.8% in 2021 as the government accelerates the national recovery plan;

25 Aug 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***Diplomatie*. Foreign minister **Nasser Bourita** receives the vice president of the **Libyan** Presidency Council, **Abdullah Al-lafi** in **Rabat**;

25 Aug 2021 **Casablanca (Morocco)***Franchising.com*. The world's largest ice cream company, **Baskin Robbins**, opens its first Moroccan franchise in **Casablanca**;

25 Aug 2021 **Rabat (Morocco)***Morocco World News*. Government passes a law allowing for foreign doctors to practise in Morocco, aiming to simplify administrative and legal procedures regulating foreigners' right to practise medicine in Morocco;

24 Aug 2021 **Algiers (Algeria)***Aljazeera*. **Algeria**'s government severs diplomatic ties with **Morocco**;

24 Aug 2021 **Sale (Morocco)***Morocco World News*. Morocco's second *"smart vaccination"* centre opens its doors in **Sale**;

20 Aug 2021 **Geneva (Switzerland)***Expatica*. Switzerland's **Federal Court** endorses the state secretariat for the migration designation of **Sahrawi** refugees as *"without nationality"*;

**FOOTNOTES**

**Load-Date:** October 12, 2021

**End of Document**



[***Greater Female Participation, Gender-Responsive Approaches Key for Tackling Climate Change, Natural Disasters, Speakers Stress as Women’s Commission Opens Session***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:650Y-KBJ1-JDG9-Y21D-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

New York: The United Nation has issued the following press release:

Responses to climate change, natural disasters and environmental degradations require active participation of women, who are the most affected by the impacts of those global challenges, speakers told the opening day of the Commission on the Status of Women ’ s annual session today, stressing the need to break away from male-oriented solutions.

“We are still living with the results of millennia of patriarchy that excludes women and prevents their voices from being heard,” said United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres, stressing that everyone — including men and boys — should be working for women ’ s rights and gender equality.

Women occupy just one third of decision-making positions under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, Kyoto Protocol and Paris Agreement on climate change, and only 15 per cent of environment ministers are women, he pointed out. Around the world, just one third of 192 national energy frameworks include gender considerations, and gender is rarely considered in climate financing.

The sixty-sixth session of the Commission, taking place from 14 to 25 March, brought together representatives of Member States, United Nations entities and non-governmental organizations from all regions of the world. The priority theme is: “Achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls in the context of climate change, environmental and disaster risk reduction policies and programmes”.

Commission Chair Mathu Joyini (South Africa) said that it could not be timelier to discuss gender inequality as the world faces the greatest sustainable development challenges, including climate change and environmental and disaster risks. These challenges disproportionately affect women and girls in rural and indigenous communities and in conflict settings. However, women are also agents of change in addressing them.

Inger Andersen, Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), said that, although women are stewards of the planet, feminist leadership on peace or climate action remains in the minority. There must be women leaders because “male-dominated teams will come up with male-dominated solutions”, she said, and “we ’ ve had enough of male-dominated solutions”. It is therefore critical to put women at the heart of environmental decision-making. Ensuring a just transition to a green, sustainable future requires gender‑responsive approaches to reorienting finance flows and economic models and investing in resilience and capacity-building.

Sima Bahous, Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), said that Member States have already made many important commitments to gender equality through multilateral environmental agreements, such as the Rio conventions and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction. Now is the time to implement what has already been agreed and create gender action plans where there are gaps. By investing in women ’ s resilience, “we are building the defences of the future, as well as the assets of today”, she said. “Women are the solution multipliers,” she continued, calling upon all to re-commit to the full and meaningful inclusion of the world ’ s women and girls in climate solutions, as leaders, partners, innovators, implementers and co-creators.

Gladys Acosta Vargas (Peru), Chair of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, said that the Committee is alarmed by the increasing attacks, threats, harassment and killings faced by indigenous women human rights defenders advancing their environmental, land and territorial rights, and those advocating against the implementation of development projects without the free, prior and informed consent of the indigenous peoples concerned. The Committee is currently drafting a general recommendation calling on States to ensure the safety and support the work of these women engaged in advocacy for environmental protection and climate justice.

Also addressing the Commission was Joaniita Babirye, co-founder of Girls for Climate Action and a youth leader with Feminist Action for Climate Justice, who reported that, within the past five years, ecosystems have encroached on her hometown of Jinja, Uganda. Whenever it rains, houses flood, people lose their crops and communities get exposed to water-borne diseases. “Families — now climate refugees — have been forced to move to camps sites for shelter, and where possible, a fresh start to life,” she said. Climate change, left unattended to, will tear communities apart, and as the crisis intensifies, humanity will be fighting over the few available resources, she warned.

Following the opening segment, the Commission began its general discussion. Lesotho ’ s representative, speaking for the Group of African States, said that, while Africa is not responsible for the factors causing climate change, it is the most vulnerable to climate change given its low capacity to adapt. Women in rural areas, as their financial resources dwindle, are forced to flee their homes, settling in camps and urban dwellings. In those circumstances, women can end up supporting themselves and their families through child marriage and prostitution, and also be subjected to trafficking, violence and exploitation. Therefore, the gender gap must be closed in access to education, information and skills to support women ’ s and girls ’ resilience.

Sudan ’ s Minister for Social Development, speaking for the Group of Arab States, stressed that it was essential to involve women in climate action through establishing national and regional bodies to implement international normative frameworks and conventions. The Group ’ s priority focuses on economic empowerment of women through regional cooperation led by the League of Arab States, in the areas of the green and blue economies.

In the afternoon, the Commission held two ministerial round-table discussions — one on the theme “Climate change, environmental and disaster risk reduction policies, and programmes: advancing gender equality through holistic and integrated actions from global to local”, and the other on the theme “Women ’ s voice and agency: good practices towards achieving women ’ s full, equal and meaningful participation and decision-making in the context of climate change, environmental and disaster risk reduction policies and programmes”.

At the meeting ’ s outset, the Commission adopted an annotated provisional agenda for its sixty-sixth session (document E/CN.6/2022/1) and an addendum (document E/CN.6/2022/1/Add.1) containing its organization of work.

The Commission elected, by acclamation, Antje Leendertse (Germany) and Māris Burbergs (Latvia) as Vice-Chairs of the Commission for its sixty-sixth and sixty‑seventh sessions, and Song Hye Ryoung (Republic of Korea), as Vice-Chair for its sixty-sixth session. Pilar Eugenio (Argentina) was designated as Rapporteur.

The Commission appointed Morocco and Iraq to serve on the Working Group on Communications on the Status of Women for the sixty-sixth session, as well as Turkey for the sixty-sixth and sixty-seventh sessions.

The other speakers in the opening segment were Collen Vixen Kelapile (Botswana), President of the Economic and Social Council; Abdulla Shahid (Maldives), President of the General Assembly; Reem Alsalem, Special Rapporteur on violence against women; and Maria Belen Paez, co-founder of the Asociación Terra Mater and global advocate and activist for human rights and the rights of nature dedicated to the conservation of the Amazon.

Also delivering statements in the general discussion were the representatives of France (on behalf of the European Union), Belgium (on behalf of the LGBTI Core Group), Belarus (on behalf of Group of Friends of the Family), Cambodia (on behalf of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations), Angola (on behalf of the Community of Portuguese-Speaking Countries), Turkey (for Mexico, Indonesia, Republic of Korea and Australia) and Botswana (on behalf of the Group of Landlocked Developing Countries).

The Commission on the Status of Women will reconvene at 10 .m on Tuesday, 15 March, to continue its work.

Opening Remarks

MATHU JOYINI (South Africa), Chair of the Commission on the Status of Women, said that the current session will be held mostly in person, with some virtual meetings. She had hoped for a return to the normal modality, but the COVID-19 pandemic has continued to cause restrictions. Nonetheless, the hybrid format will allow a maximum number of participants. This year ’ s Commission will tackle the theme, “gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls in the context of climate change, environmental and disaster risk reduction policies and programmes. ” It will also review progress on agreed conclusions of the sixty‑first session regarding women ’ s economic empowerment in the changing world of work. In addition, the Commission will consider emerging issues, including recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and sustainable future.

It could not be timelier to discuss gender inequality as the world faces the greatest sustainable development challenges, including climate change and environmental and disaster risks, she said. These challenges disproportionately affect women and girls in rural and indigenous communities and in conflict settings. However, women are also agents of change in addressing these challenges. This year ’ s session can be used to advance women ’ s empowerment. Stressing the importance of making all policies gender-responsive, she said South Africa had done so, recognizing the special role played by women. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action commits States to ensuring that women can fully exercise their human rights. Their rights, including reproductive rights, must not be limited by conditions created by disasters and environmental challenges, she said, stressing that COVID-19 has obstructed, or in some cases reversed, progress on gender equality. This year ’ s Commission should advance a global normative framework on gender equality, key for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Gender equality can be made a reality by harnessing partnerships among all stakeholders, she said.

ANTÓNIO GUTERRES, Secretary-General of the United Nations, said that this year ’ s Commission confronts the ***unprecedented*** emergencies of the climate crisis, pollution, desertification and biodiversity loss, coupled with the COVID-19 pandemic, and the impact of new and ongoing conflicts. Everywhere, women and girls face the greatest threats and the deepest harm and they are taking action to confront the climate and environmental crises, yet they continue to be largely excluded from the rooms where decisions are taken. Women and girls living in small island nations, least developed countries and places affected by conflict are impacted most of all. Women suffer most when local natural resources including food and water come under threat and have fewer ways to adapt.

Women occupy just one third of decision-making positions under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, Kyoto Protocol and Paris Agreement on climate change, and only 15 per cent of environment ministers are women, he pointed out. Around the world, only one third of 192 national energy frameworks include gender considerations, and gender is rarely considered in climate financing. “We are still living with the results of millennia of patriarchy that excludes women and prevents their voices from being heard,” he said, stressing that everyone — including men and boys — should be working for women ’ s rights and gender equality. He said that his first-ever report on the links between the climate emergency and gender equality outlines concrete steps to put women and girls at the centre of climate and environmental policy.

Noting the negative impacts on women of the pandemic, he said gender equality and women ’ s rights must be at the heart of a renewed social contract that is fit for today ’ s societies and economies. At the global level, he said his report Our Common Agenda proposes a re-balancing of power and resources through a New Global Deal, with gender equality a pre-requisite. The report proposes a New Agenda for Peace with the goal of reducing all forms of violence — including gender-based violence — and putting women and girls at the heart of security policy. “The climate and environmental crises, coupled with the ongoing economic and social fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic, are the defining issues of our time,” he said, stressing that collective response will chart the course for decades to come. To forge the sustainable future, women and girls must be front and centre, leading the way.

COLLEN VIXEN KELAPILE (Botswana), President of the Economic and Social Council, said the Commission ’ s work is central for Council as it guides a pandemic recovery that is centred on people and gender-sensitive. The Commission ’ s priority theme this year, “Achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls in the context of climate change, environmental and disaster risk reduction policies and programmes”, is closely aligned with the Council ’ s own priorities to address the triple planetary crisis: climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution. These escalating challenges, which affect women and girls much more severely and disproportionately, must be addressed urgently. Gender must be mainstreamed into all plans, policies and programmes. Gender-responsive approaches are urgently required to address the climate crisis, biodiversity loss, environmental degradation and disaster risk reduction.

“The work of [the Commission on the Status of Women] is important now, more than ever before, given all the challenges that women and girls are facing,” he said. “We must, therefore, ensure that this Commission functions in an efficient, effective, transparent and inclusive manner. ” The Commission should leverage the expert analysis to produce evidence-based and action-oriented assessments, and develop sound policy recommendations that use integrated approaches to advance the 2030 Agenda and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. As the Commission ’ s parent body, the Council remains committed to support its work and looks forward to benefiting from its expert analysis and recommendations for making tangible progress towards achieving gender equality and empowerment of women, everywhere. “The people we serve — particularly women and girls — will be counting on the outcomes of this Session to help them navigate these challenges,” he said.

ABDULLA SHAHID (Maldives), President of the General Assembly, noted that no country has fully achieved equality and empowerment for women and girls since the Commission laid out its guiding principles in 1947. Women have the knowledge and understanding of what is needed to adapt to changing environmental conditions and develop practical solutions, yet they are still a largely untapped resource. Restricted land rights, lack of access to financial resources, training and technology, and limited access to political decision-making spheres often prevent them from playing a full role in tackling climate change and other environmental challenges. It was essential that women ’ s right to participate at all levels of decision-making be guaranteed in climate change policies and programmes. Although climate change mitigation and adaptation programmes may provide new employment and livelihood opportunities, failure to address the structural barriers women face to access their rights will increase gender-based inequalities and intersecting forms of discrimination, he stressed.

While women have entered the labour market in large numbers in recent years, he continued, gender-based discrimination and segregation in the labour market, as well as weak regulations, confine women to jobs that are low paid and of poor quality in terms of working conditions and access to social protection. Women ’ s exploitation in the labour market is further compounded by their disproportional share of unpaid care responsibilities. “The result is that women ’ s unpaid household and care work subsidizes the economy for free. Recognition is growing worldwide that our economic system needs profound reforms,” he said, adding that “we need to ensure that human rights form the ethical framework for macroeconomic policies and review their impact on women. ” He urged the international community to commit to challenge discriminatory social norms and gender stereotyping that underpin inequality in women ’ s work. As women gain more representation within decision-making bodies, Member States need to commit to develop gender action plans that combine climate action with efforts to improve gender equality, he said.

INGER ANDERSEN, Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), said that the triple planetary crisis — climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution — is only making an already unequal world more unequal and more divided. She noted 70 per cent of women live in poverty, with extreme weather events reducing ***agricultural*** productivity, and some countries experiencing a 300 per cent increase in domestic violence and sexual and gender‑based violence following tropical cyclones and typhoons. Violence against women environmental defenders is likewise on the rise. “As we chip away at the natural world, daily tasks like securing water, food and fuel take longer,” she said. Women are at a higher risk from indoor air pollution, toxic chemicals in the workplace and poor sanitation. In response, she called for “change in our own organizations,” noting UNEP ’ s new medium-term strategy from 2022 to 2025 prioritizing gender equality and women ’ s empowerment, aligned with the Secretary‑General ’ s Our Common Agenda articulating the transformational shifts that will facilitate women ’ s economic inclusion, investment in the care economy, and green jobs.

“We all know women are stewards of our planet — but whether it is on peace or on climate change, feminist leadership remains in a minority,” she stated. Data from the International Union for Conservation of Nature shows that, in 2020, women held 15 per cent of top jobs as ministers of environmental sectors. There must be women leaders because “male-dominated teams will come up with male‑dominated solutions”, she said, and “we ’ ve had enough of male-dominated solutions”. In reinvigorating environmental multilateralism, putting women at the heart of environmental decision-making is critical. Ensuring a just transition to a green, sustainable future requires gender-responsive approaches to reorienting finance flows and economic models, and investing in resilience and capacity‑building. She cited the fifth United Nations Environment Assembly in Nairobi, where countries delivered on a landmark resolution to kick-start negotiations on a global agreement to end plastic pollution. “This historic resolution can have a historic impact on women, who are at the very heart of transforming the plastics value chain, and indeed our move to a circular economy,” she stated.

MARIA BELEN PAEZ, co-founder of the Asociación Terra Mater and global advocate and activist for human rights and the rights of nature dedicated to the conservation of the Amazon, said the role of women in the context of climate change is becoming increasingly visible and exposed, especially in rural and forested areas, such as the Amazon, pacific coast and Andes regions. Women are primarily in charge of planting seeds, caring for farms and market gardens, and protecting and preparing the home for children, adolescents and elderly adults. Yet, existing policies of mitigation at the national and subnational levels are not sufficient to safeguard or activate the participation of women when it comes to their human rights, territorial rights and their rights to nature.

“Women are absolutely linked to their natural environment,” she emphasized, including from the sacred and holistic perspectives. However, organizational and institutional leadership is conducted by males, which foregrounds other ambitions, goals and aspirations affecting smaller activities in rural areas. Women have opted to organize themselves in communities to speak with one voice on an altering environment, including women in the Amazon rejecting the expansion of industrial borders there. She further cited the role of midwives in strengthening maternal‑infant health, including using traditional knowledge and generating greater female participation at multiple levels. While women have always been vulnerable, they have also been resilient, she noted, adding that climate change provides opportunities for women to show greater leadership when it comes to caring for the planet.

JOANIITA BABIRYE, co-founder of Girls for Climate Action and a youth leader with Feminist Action for Climate Justice, reported that, within the past five years, ecosystems have encroached on her hometown of Jinja, Uganda. Whenever it rains, houses flood, people lose their crops and communities get exposed to water‑borne diseases. This plight is not limited to the eastern part of Uganda. The western district of Kasese is also experiencing such encroachment, where the now regular flooding leaves many residents ’ homes flooded, animals killed and crops destroyed. “Families — now climate refugees — have been forced to move to camps sites for shelter, and where possible, a fresh start to life,” she said. Nonetheless, within the camps, there is a presence of school dropouts, teenage pregnancies and gender-based violence, along with a prevalence of HIV, joblessness and absolute poverty, among others.

She went on to note that the climate crisis disproportionately affects marginalized and indigenous communities that highly depend on the environment for their day-to-day livelihood. Climate change, left unattended to, will tear communities apart and, as the crisis intensifies, humanity will be fighting over the few available resources. Noting that adolescent girls are a key population disproportionately impacted by climate issues, she stressed that their leadership must be placed at the forefront these efforts. She also called for collective commitments to keep investing in the solutions initiated by young women and girls, including innovations that increase the resilience of communities to climate change impacts.

SIMA BAHOUS, Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), said all crises and conflicts exact their highest price on women and girls, pointing to the impact in Myanmar, Afghanistan, the Sahel, Haiti, Syria, Somalia, Yemen and Ethiopia. The horrifying war in Ukraine has joined that list. The Secretary‑General has been clear: the ***invasion*** and war in Ukraine must end, and peace must prevail. “We see with every passing day the damage done to the lives, hopes and futures of Ukrainian women and girls,” she said. The COVID-19 pandemic laid bare the existing inequalities. It brought progress on women´s empowerment to a screeching halt. As with all crises, climate change exacts its highest price on women and girls. Member States have already made many important commitments to gender equality through multilateral environmental agreements such as the Rio conventions and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction. Now is the time to implement what has already been agreed and create gender action plans where there are gaps.

Stressing the importance of leveraging women ’ s skills in managing the conservation and sustainable use of natural resources, she called for greater investment in women ’ s resilience. By doing so, “we are building the defences of the future, as well as the assets of today”, she said. For instance, decentralized sustainable energy solutions must be expanded and gender-responsive fisheries in the blue economy must be supported. Currently, less than 17 per cent of the water sector workforce is made up of women. There is potential for an estimated 24 million new jobs in green sectors. It is critical that women are given the training and support to access these jobs, she said, urging the Commission, tasked also with reviewing progress in women ’ s economic empowerment, to do its part.

The three interlocking and unresolved aspects that are critical to address the nexus between climate change and gender equality — crises, the economy, including care, and violence against women and girls — underpin the structural barriers that block progress for sustainable development, she said. Climate financing is especially needed to support women ’ s organizations, enterprises and cooperatives. Women and girls must be placed at the centre of climate and environmental policy. “Women are the solution multipliers,” she said, calling upon all to re-commit to the full and meaningful inclusion of the world ’ s women and girls in climate solutions, as leaders, partners, innovators, implementers and co-creators.

GLADYS ACOSTA VARGAS (Peru), Chair of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, expressing deep concern about the grave humanitarian situation in faced by the affected civilian populations, including large numbers of refugee women and children who are compelled to leave behind their loved ones and their homes, called for an end to the hostilities in Ukraine and urged the conflict parties to intensify efforts to seek a peaceful settlement and ensure the equal participation of women in peace ***processes***, in line with Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security and the Committee ’ s general recommendation no. 30 (2013) on women in conflict prevention, conflict and post-conflict situations. Noting this year marks the fortieth anniversary of the Committee, she said one of its main achievements over the past 40 years has been to ensure that the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women covers all forms of discrimination against women.

The Committee is alarmed by the increasing attacks, threats, harassment and killings faced by indigenous women human rights defenders advancing their environmental, land and territorial rights, and those advocating against the implementation of development projects without the free, prior and informed consent of the indigenous peoples concerned. In that regard, the Committee is currently drafting a general recommendation calling on States to ensure the safety and support the work of these women engaged in advocacy for environmental protection and climate justice. Noting that the pandemic had shifted the world ’ s attention away from conflict-related gender-based violence, she said that, in November 2021, in a joint statement on “Prevention, protection and assistance for children born of conflict-related rape and their mothers”, the Women ’ s Rights Committee and the Committee on the Rights of the Child expressed concern about the grave consequences of sexual violence in conflict. The joint statement informed the analysis and recommendations of the Secretary-General ’ s related report, also refers to the frameworks of cooperation signed between the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on sexual violence in conflict and both Committees.

In addition, the Women ’ s Rights Committee issued a joint statement with the Children ’ s Rights Committee Convention in August 2021 urging the Taliban to uphold the rights of women and girls in Afghanistan, decided to request an ***exceptional*** report on their situation, and joined two recent joint media statements of human rights mechanisms calling for an end to the military attack against Ukraine and urgent protection of women ’ s rights, she said. Throughout the pandemic, the Committee continued to carry out its mandated activities under the Convention and the Optional Protocol, yet resources afforded by Member States have not kept pace with its increased workload, particularly under the individual communications and inquiry procedures. She remained hopeful that the outcome of the 2020 Treaty Body Review ***process*** will address these resource issues.

REEM ALSALEM, Special Rapporteur on violence against women, called for a closer engagement and working relationship between the Commission on the Status of Women, the treaty bodies and the Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council. Noting that she was a firm believer in collaborative work, she spotlighted her coordinating efforts with the Committee of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women on specific country situations, such as Afghanistan. In addition, her first report to the Human Rights Council would focus on the important issue of violence against indigenous women and girls, to capitalize on the Committee ’ s objective to put out a set of recommendations on the rights of indigenous women and girls. “Gender-based violence permeates the experience of most women everywhere,” she said, describing it as one of the most extreme manifestations of discrimination that stand in the way of promoting gender equality and women ’ s empowerment.

Underlining the need for a fuller exploration and tackling of the relationship between the major challenges at present, such as climate change, environmental degradation and violence against women, she commended the assessment of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, which captured and reflected such interlinkages, recognizing that many groups of women are amongst the most vulnerable to climate change. However, pointing to a serious lack of data in these reports, she reported that she will be dedicating her first report to the General Assembly in September on the relationship between climate change and environmental degradation and gender-based violence. She also called upon States to reaffirm the existing legal normative framework on gender equality and non‑discrimination, particularly the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, which continues to be the most widely ratified and fundamental human rights treaty that addresses the rights of women and the responsibilities of States towards ensuring them, including their right to be free from violence.

General Discussion

The Commission on the Status of Women then held a discussion on the theme “Achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls in the context of climate change, environmental and disaster risk reduction policies and programmes”.

NKOPANE RASEENG MONYANE (Lesotho), speaking on behalf of the Group of African States, noted climate change and environmental degradation disproportionately affect the world ’ s poor, the majority of whom are women. While greater inclusion of women at the highest levels of decision-making is necessary, it is not sufficient. Women must be able to lead at national and local levels, with their initiatives, indigenous knowledge and perspectives informing and influencing solutions to climate change. While Africa is not responsible for the pollution and the factors causing climate change, it is the most vulnerable to climate change given its low capacity to adapt and respond economically, politically and geographically. Reaffirming the African leadership ’ s commitment to the outcome of the 2012 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development in Brazil, he stressed the importance of strengthening the continent ’ s resilience by building capacities for anticipating and responding to disasters and reducing the impact on people living in vulnerable situations — especially women — through implementing the African Solidarity Initiative. He appealed to partners to fulfil their financial climate commitments and official development assistance (ODA) which are essential for Africa ’ s adaptations and mitigation plans and to also reduce their greenhouse‑gas emissions.

While ***agriculture*** continues to provide most employment opportunities for women and girls in Africa, the impacts of climate change on women are further exacerbated in settings that are affected by violent conflict, sanctions, political instability and economic strife. Women in these settings cannot compete equally with women from other regions; they are excluded from political and economic power, and have limited access to finance and other resources, increasing resources to address their vulnerability to the impacts of global warming. As their financial resources dwindle, women in rural areas are forced to flee their homes, settling in camps and urban dwellings. In those circumstances, women can end up supporting themselves and their families through child marriage and prostitution, and also be subjected to trafficking, violence and exploitation. He called for equal access for all girls and women to secondary and tertiary education in science, technology, engineering and mathematics; quality jobs in the sustainable economy, and in climate, environment and disaster risk areas. The gender gap must also be closed in access to education, information and skills to support women ’ s and girls ’ resilience.

ELISABETH MORENO, Minister in Charge of Equality between Women and Men, Diversity and Equal Opportunities of France, speaking on behalf of the European Union, expressed solidarity with Ukraine, including the women and girls who are often the first victims of conflict. Expressing concern over Russian attacks on civilians and infrastructure including hospitals and schools, she noted that, in just 19 days, over 2.5 million people — mostly women and children — have fled Ukraine. Advancing gender equality and environmental goals are mutually reinforcing initiatives, she said, citing Europe ’ s transition to a neutral economy and the European Green Deal. The bloc remains committed to respecting international frameworks on the Sustainable Development Goals, climate change and disaster risk reduction. She called for close alignment on all relevant multilateral commitments, and for decisive and ambitions action. As women in poverty, indigenous women, refugees and those with disabilities are disproportionately affected by climate change, it is crucial to address root causes from a gender dimension and extend ***measures*** to include mental and maternal health.

The European Union remains committed to implementing the Beijing Platform for Action, as well as initiatives addressing sexual and reproductive health, as all people should be able to take decisions freely without restrictions or violence. She called for universal access to information and high-level education, including comprehensive sexual education and health‑care services. Citing the European Directive for Gender Equality on company boards, she noted ministers had reached an agreement on the issue today. In addition, the European Year of Youth recognizes the role of young people in climate action and justice. Noting the European Union plays a key role in peacebuilding and is also fighting gender stereotypes, she called for increased participation of women with degrees in science, technology, engineering and mathematics, and expanding women ’ s access to decent employment and entrepreneurship in the green, blue and circular economies. Quoting French philosopher Simone de Beauvoir, she stressed that the rights of women and girls must be defended every day.

SARAH SCHLITZ, State Secretary for Gender and Equal Opportunity of Belgium, speaking on behalf of the LGBTI Core Group, said this year's theme can highlight the importance of including LGBTI [lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex] persons in this discussion. Doing so would ensure that no one is left behind and that no one is discriminated against because of their sexual orientation, gender identity and expression and sex characteristics. LGBTI persons also experience gender-based violence and discrimination, so their rights, strengths and interests must be taken into account. It is crucial to address the critical links between gender equality, human rights, climate change and environmental issues and the impacts on LGBTI persons, including on their mental health. LGBTI persons face disproportionate risks to violence and discrimination after a disaster, as well as the ongoing impacts of climate change. Factors that exclude LGBTI persons from accessing basic services, such as quality health care and safe water and sanitation, are exacerbated during emergency responses and recovery efforts.

She went on to express concern about the increase in threats and violence against LGBTI human rights defenders, including those working on environmental issues. Women and girls, in all their diversity, must have full, equal, effective and meaningful participation and leadership opportunities at all levels of climate change, environmental and disaster risk reduction governance. The Secretary‑General's report is timely as it highlights that persons with diverse sexual orientation, gender identity and expression and sex characteristics are at increased risk of gender-based violence and discrimination when attempting to secure assistance after disasters. Their needs are often neglected in disaster risk reduction policies and practices, she said, echoing the Secretary‑General ’ s view that an effective framework for monitoring and reporting for gender-responsive climate change policies and programs and disaster risk reduction is important.

VALENTIN RYBAKOV (Belarus), speaking on behalf of the Group of Friends of the Family, said that, since its foundation in 2015, the Group has championed the primary and fundamental role of family as an agent of sustainable and economic development and has always stressed the importance of family-oriented national policies, strategies and programmes to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. The family is the basic unit and the starting point to resolve a set of global problems from poverty reduction to climate change. In this regard, it is imperative to understand interrelation and interdependence between climate change and family integrity. The consequences of the dramatic climate changes affect everyone, every family and community in all countries across the globe and can significantly undermine family stability. Climate change and environmental challenges and disasters often result in loss of homes and livelihoods, destruction and damage to schools and health‑care facilities and the displacement of people, their families and communities.

“Family is the first and most important source of our habits,” he said. Family members instil in their children respect and caring attitude towards the nature and form their responsible environmental behaviour from an early age. Children are “permanent observers” of adult ’ s choices, actions and deeds. Parents share responsibility for the formation of child ’ s personality, laying a foundation for his or her moral behaviour, norms and lifestyle choices. Recognizing the primary role of the family in cultivating ecological culture and responsibility and the important role of women in this interconnected and interdependent relationship between climate change and family stability, he said women ’ s great contribution to the welfare of the family and to the development of society, as provided for by the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, is essential among other factors for the provision of education on climate, resilience building, preservation and conservation of the environment.

AHMED ADAM BAKHEET, Minister of Social Development of Sudan, speaking on behalf of the Group of Arab States, noted that national resources have been threatened by climate change, leading to the ecological system deterioration, food insecurity and lack of access to clean water. Climate change causes expanded gender disparity, negatively affecting women. The ongoing conflicts also produce an increased number of internally displaced persons, who are already affected by climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic. He called for an end to Israel ’ s occupation of Palestinian land and for the equal rights of Palestinian people. In addition, he stressed that it was essential to involve women in climate action through establishing national and regional bodies to implement international normative frameworks and conventions.

The Group ’ s priority focuses on economic empowerment of women through regional cooperation led by the League of Arab States, in the areas of the green and blue economies, he continued. It was important to allow women to own land through national legislation, and to provide social security for women and girls. It was also imperative to ensure their access to drinking water and food. Based on Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), Arab countries are building capacity of women in peace and security. It was also critical to collect gender disaggregated data, he said, stressing the need to ensure the participation of women in preparing and implementing policies related to climate change and disaster risk reduction.

SOVANN KE (Cambodia), speaking on behalf of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), noted that achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls has always been at the centre of ASEAN ’ s collective efforts. He highlighted the disproportionate impacts of COVID-19 on women, who form 70 per cent of front-line responders, bear the burden of unpaid domestic and care work, and are subject to increased domestic violence and loss of employment and income. To address that, the ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework seeks to mainstream gender equality throughout the recovery scheme and actions of the Association. Also stressing women ’ s roles as drivers of the recovery ***process***, he called on States to strengthen women ’ s empowerment, particularly in the economic sphere such as through digital and financial inclusion.

Recognizing the disproportionate impacts of natural disaster and climate change on women, he noted that women can fulfil key roles in building and sustaining resilience. Women are not merely victims who are affected by such crisis, but also are active agents for transformative change. The ASEAN Gender Mainstreaming Strategic Framework 2021 – 2025, among other efforts, establishes concrete steps to ensure that gender equality and inclusion are fully integrated in initiatives, including those on climate change and disaster risk reduction. The region is one of the most vulnerable to climate change and is prone to disasters, he pointed out. ASEAN is determined to integrate gender perspectives into policies and plans on climate change, environmental and disaster risk reduction, and to work closely with the international community and other stakeholders to put women and girls are at the heart of its collective responses.

FAUSTINA ALVES DE SOUSA, Minister for Social Action for the Family and the Promotion of Women of Angola, speaking on behalf of the Community of Portuguese‑Speaking Countries, noted that language unites more than 260 million people on four different continents. She reiterated a call for the full implementation of the Women ’ s Rights Convention, Beijing Platform for Action, International Conference on Population and Development and all other international commitments that aim for de facto equality between women and men, as well as the mainstreaming of gender equality in all international agendas. In particular, the Beijing Platform for Action has allowed for adoption of a vast set of recommendations aimed at removing obstacles to active participation of women in all spheres and at all levels of public and private life, so as to ensure their empowerment.

It is also necessary for all actors to make concerted efforts to ensure that climate change and disaster risk reduction ***measures*** take gender issues into account, she said. Women undoubtedly possess invaluable knowledge and skills, and are effective agents of change in climate change mitigation and adaptation as well as disaster risk reduction and resilience-building. She called for a holistic and gender-sensitive approach to sustainable development, climate change and the environment, as natural disasters do not affect people equally. Inequalities in exposure and sensitivity to risk, as well as in access to resources, capacities and opportunities systematically disadvantage certain groups of people, in particular women, making them more vulnerable. She deplored the conflict situation that still exists in some Member States, noting the urgent need to implement Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security. Citing the memorandum of understanding between the Community and UN-Women she expressed support for joint efforts to overcome common barriers that hinder the development of women and girls, including female genital mutilation, child marriage and human trafficking.

DERYA YANIK, Minister of Family and Social Services of Turkey, also speaking on behalf of Mexico, Indonesia, Republic of Korea and Australia, said that achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls is central to this collective ethos and is a core priority for the group. She reaffirmed the powerful role that women play in food security and the management and conservation of natural resources, including soil and water. It is vital that climate and disaster risk reduction action and strategy be gender-responsive and inclusive, including women and girls in policy planning, development, implementation and monitoring. She also voiced her strong support for the full, equal and meaningful participation of all women in decision-making, leadership and representation at all levels in climate efforts and environmental and disaster risk reduction policies.

She called on all Member States to strongly support efforts to prevent, punish and eliminate gender-based violence. In addition, disaggregated data literacy and gender analysis should be strengthened, including data on unpaid care and domestic work, sexual and reproductive health, gender-based violence and harmful practices, and access to and management of resources, migration and displacement. She also expressed the group ’ s support for efforts to expand high‑quality, timely and reliable data disaggregated, including by income, gender, age, race, ethnicity, migratory status, disability, geographic location and other characteristics, relevant in national contexts. This would help expand understanding of the impacts of climate change and disasters and help drive gender-responsive policy responses. “We still have a long way until the full realization of our shared vision set out in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, including ‘women and environment ’ as one of the critical areas of concern,” she said.

ANNA MARIA MOKGETHI, Minister for Nationality, Immigration and Gender Affairs of Botswana, speaking for the Group of Landlocked Developing Countries, stressed that the impacts of climate change aggravate women and girls ’ vulnerabilities, especially those highly dependent on the ***agricultural*** sector for employment, food security and livelihoods. She also pointed to land degradation which affects an estimated 3.2 billion people worldwide, particularly women in rural communities and smallholder farmers. The COVID-19-related disruptions of food and nutrition systems and increasing food prices worsened the gender food security gap at the global level, as well. Despite the central role women played in the response to COVID-19, they are underrepresented in leadership and decision‑making ***processes*** in the health‑care sector itself, she added. Highlighting the issue of unemployment among women during the pandemic, she noted that, in landlocked developing countries, from 2000 to 2019, the proportion of employed population below the international poverty line of $1.90 per day has continuously been higher for women, as compared to men.

Despite the structural inequalities, women and girls remain effective actors and agents of change in their communities and countries, she continued. Highlighting progress in women rights, she noted that the proportion of women in national in landlocked developing countries parliaments increased steadily from 7.8 per cent in 2000 to 27.6 per cent in 2021, higher than the world ’ s average in 2021. As of 1 January 2021, 11 landlocked developing countries had women in the highest positions of State, either as Heads of State or Government and as Speakers of Parliament. Putting forward key imperative steps, she stressed the need to strengthen climate change resilience and adaptive capacities of smallholder farmers and mobilize adequate financial resources to significantly increase investment in gender-responsive climate change and disaster risk reduction. She also called for targeted support for women to return to economic activity, and efforts to ensure equal pay between men and women and support and services to prevent and respond to violence against women and girls.

Ministerial Round Table I

In the afternoon, the Commission held a ministerial round‑table discussion on the theme “Climate change, environmental and disaster risk reduction policies, and programmes: advancing gender equality through holistic and integrated actions from global to local”.

Ministers and senior officials of Member States exchanged views on steps taken by Governments to advance coordinated and integrated gender perspectives into climate change, environmental and disaster risk reduction policies and programmes. They also discussed ways to encourage Governments to increase the availability and accessibility of high-quality financing for gender-responsive policies and programmes in these fields. They considered what ***measures*** can be taken by Governments to increase the collection, analysis, dissemination and use of gender statistics and sex-disaggregated data on the risks and impact in relation to climate change, the environment and disasters.

MAITE NKOANA-MASHABANE, Minister for Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities of South Africa, who chaired the round table, said integrating gender perspectives into climate change, environmental and disaster risk reduction policies and programmes at all levels is critical for the achievement of gender equality and sustainable development. This requires an all-of-government approach. More efforts are needed to create national frameworks for the holistic, coordinated and synergistic gender-responsive implementation of such policies and programmes and their financing at the global, national and local levels. Filling data gaps on the gender-environment nexus, including on climate change and disaster risk reduction, is a key step in informing policies and programmes to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. South Africa has taken stock of progress in implementing its commitments made under the Beijing Declaration and the Paris Agreement, she said, citing her country ’ s gender‑responsive policy actions, laws it has introduced and international conventions it has ratified. South Africa ’ s national development plans recognize the importance of gender equality.

ENSIEH KHAZALI, Vice‑President for Women and Family Affairs of Iran, said that a contract was signed between the Vice-Presidency and the Department of Environment to empower women and increase their contribution to environmental protection. The Department employs 1,171 women, who account for 40 per cent of the deputy positions, while 25 per cent of the macro‑management posts in environmental affairs are occupied by women. Women have overseen the Department for four terms so far. In addition, hundreds of women chief executives serve in knowledge-based companies working in the field of environment, biotechnology and energy. A woman also serves as the Secretary of the National Working Group on the Adaptation to Water Shortage.

Mr. YANIK, Minister for Family and Social Service of Turkey, said cooperatives contribute to the fight against climate change by increasing women ’ s access to resources and economic opportunities. About 6,000 women and 3,000 men will benefit from the Ministry of Family and Social Services ’ cooperative project, which aims to develop their capacity and ensure sustainability. To determine the priorities for increasing the resilience of farmers and producers to changing climatic conditions, the Evaluation of ***Agricultural*** Producers ’ Resilience to Climate Change programme will be expanded to all regions. With the “Zero Waste” project, citizens ’ awareness of environmental protection and recycling has increased significantly, with women playing a vital role in the project ’ s success. Turkey has committed to achieving net-zero emissions by 2053 and is determined to assume a leading and effective role in resolving climate challenges by placing the Green Development Initiative at the centre of all its efforts.

MAYA MORSY, Minister of Women and President of the National Council for Women of Egypt, said that, despite its limited contribution to climate change her country is among the nations most affected by it. The “Women 2030” national strategy clearly defines women ’ s role in addressing environmental challenges. Her Government also has a national strategy for climate change adaptation. Egypt ’ s Cabinet includes a woman Minister for Environment, and a woman Minister for Planning and Economic Development. A National Council for Climate Change has been established, led by the Prime Minister. There are seven actionable areas, among them the strengthening of women ’ s meaningful participation in environmental governance and leveraging opportunities for women within the just transition to the green and blue economies. Stressing the need for all stakeholders to work together to accelerate progress on women ’ s empowerment within the climate change agenda, she invited all to attend the twenty-seventh session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP27) to be held in Sharm El-Sheikh, Egypt.

MARIE THÉRÈSE ABENA ONDOA, Minister for Women Empowerment and the Family of Cameroon, said her country is facing an abnormal recurrence of extreme climatic conditions such as strong winds, high temperatures and heavy rainfall that endanger human communities, ecosystems and the services they provide. Climate change reinforces the differences and inequalities between men and women in terms of their vulnerability and their capacity to react to the consequences of its effects. In Cameroon, women make up a large percentage of poor communities that depend on local natural resources for their livelihoods, particularly in rural areas where they bear the burden of family responsibilities, such as water supply and collection of traditional fuel for cooking and heating, but also food security. Her country has ratified all international treaties relating to climate change. The main issues that need to be tackled to ensure the strengthening of mitigation and adaptation efforts which properly integrate gender stem from these treaties and are incorporated into various national programmes.

DEAN JONAS, Minister for Social Transformation, Human Resource Development and the Blue Economy of Antigua and Barbuda, a gendered lens must be used to assess all planned action in relation to the conceptualization, planning and implementation of climate change and disaster risk reduction programmes and policies. This will ensure that the frameworks used by climate and disaster management entities are comprehensively created and comprise specific and strategic plans that meet the unique needs of various groups such as women and girls, the elderly and persons living with disabilities. Furthermore, in the context of small island developing States, such as those in the Caribbean, the identification of sustainable financing mechanisms is critical. This will allow for more proactive relations to pre-emptively strengthen the resilience levels of vulnerable groups and lessen dependence on external support in the aftermath of events that are highly destructive and catastrophic economically and physically.

LENITA FREIDENVALL, Special Adviser for the Ministry of the Labour Market of Sweden, said her country strives to lead in implementation of the Paris Agreement on climate change, including the goal related to gender equality. Sweden adopted a Climate Policy Action Plan in 2019 which incorporates a gender perspective into all climate action. The Environment Protection Agency has been tasked with developing a strategy to mainstream gender in implementation of the Paris accord, directed towards the public and private sectors, academia and civil society. Sweden has a feminist Government. All ministers are responsible for integrating a gender perspective into their respective policy areas. A gender perspective is always relevant and present in policymaking, she said, both in supporting women and children fleeing the Russian Federation ’ s ***invasion*** of Ukraine and in tackling the climate crisis and its consequences.

In closing remarks, ACHIM STEINER, Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), said that the Commission drew strong linkages between gender, climate change, disasters and environmental changes. Speakers highlighted that woman are on the front lines of facing these impacts. The Commission heard references to vulnerability of women in rural areas. It also heard suggestions for designing gender-responsive responses to these global challenges. Many speakers referred to the need for financing that benefits women and stressed that data is a crucial foundation for planning and informing policies. The ministers also underscored the significant role played by laws and constitutions in gender equality and climate action, as well as the importance of women ’ s leadership and participation.

Also participating were ministers and other high-level representatives from Chile, Suriname, Italy, Uganda, United Arab Emirates, Dominican Republic, New Zealand, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Jordan, Luxembourg, Panama, Ireland, Nigeria, Qatar, Mozambique, Belgium and Pakistan.

Ministerial Round Table II

The Commission held a second round table on the theme “Women ’ s voice and agency: good practices towards achieving women ’ s full, equal and meaningful participation and decision-making in the context of climate change, environmental and disaster risk reduction policies and programmes”.

In his opening remarks, GATIS EGLITIS, Minister for Welfare of Latvia, who co-chaired the meeting, said women and girls are taking climate and environmental actions at all levels. They hold a deep knowledge of community needs and priorities and they are essential to combating climate change and environmental degradation, reducing disaster risk and building resilience at all levels. Yet, women ’ s participation and leadership fall short of gender parity and lack the critical mass necessary to influence decisions, policies and strategies. The civil society organizations of women, and especially young women, face multiple barriers to participation and leadership ranging from diminished funding to physical threats to their members. These gender gaps are very concerning as the equal participation and leadership of women make climate, environment and disaster risk governance more effective.

Speaking in his national capacity, Mr. Eglitis said Latvia has committed to reach climate neutrality at a national level by 2050. Changing gender stereotypes in education is the start to achieving women ’ s full and equal participation. Encouraging more students, especially young women and girls, to choose studies in the science, technology, education and mathematics fields is one of Latvia ’ s main goals in this area. The Government is working with the private sector to allow women to acquire information and communications technology skills and then enter the labour market. Latvia is also developing supportive family policies that balance work life. During the pandemic, women carried a disproportionately higher burden of the daily household chores and care for family members.

MARTHA LUCÍA RAMÍREZ, Vice-President of and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Colombia, said a gender approach is necessary for inclusive global economic growth and to curb climate change. The Government is taking concrete action to control climate change, which is disproportionally affecting women, whom are the caregivers of nature. The development of renewable energies is very important to control the changing climate. The Government is developing public policies to close the pay gap between men and women and ensure women receive the proper renumeration for their work. The management of climate change is an opportunity to move towards gender equality in the country. For example, rural women are gaining work by helping to plant trees.

COLLINS NZOVU, Minister for Green Economy and Environment of Zambia, said climate change has negatively impacted the livelihoods of rural women, who depend on the environment for their livelihoods. To help women and give them access to resources, the Government has put in place several interventions. For example, Vision 2030 provides an approach for development and management of resources that leaves no one behind. The country is working to strengthen its legislative framework to help rural women. Other policies aim to integrate gender equality into climate change programmes. Climate change action plans should consider gender and give women and men equal access to benefits.

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