

# Consolidating a strengthened emergency response

One of the High Commissioner's principal commitments upon taking office in 2005 was to make UNHCR better equipped to respond to future emergencies. With this in mind and drawing upon lessons learned from the Kosovo and the Tsunami emergencies, the *2006 Plan of Action on Strengthening UNHCR's Emergency Response Capacity* was developed. The plan incorporates UNHCR's responsibilities deriving from the inter-agency humanitarian reform initiative, including its responsibilities with regard to internally displaced persons (IDPs). Overall, the Plan aims to establish and maintain a standing response capacity for refugee and conflict-generated IDP emergencies for up to 500,000 people by the end of 2007.

Successful emergency response requires operational engagement, readily available staff and resources, and effective coordination. Its success depends on how fast the right people and the necessary relief items can be mobilized, as well as on good management and administration capacity, and efficient emergency procedures. Crisis scanning, situation-specific awareness and contingency planning are key components of emergency preparedness, which need to be constantly updated. Preparedness and response activities need to address both refugee and IDP situations.

Through 2006 and 2007, UNHCR took numerous steps to strengthen its emergency preparedness capacity in terms of standby partnerships, staffing, training, stockpiling, operational support and emergency finance and implementation procedures. The Central Emergency Stockpile (CES) has been increased to target up to 500,000 beneficiaries (with the exception of lightweight tents), and the number of emergency staff on standby is now up to 300 people. New standby agreements have been signed with governmental and non-governmental partners to identify potential gaps. The third edition of the *Handbook for Emergencies* was launched in February 2007. New guidelines on standby partners are being drafted and will be ready by the end of the year.

Internal communications and linkages between the Emergency Support Service (ESS) and the Supply Management Service (SMS) have been strengthened through the integration of the latter into the Division of Operational Services. All standby deployments are now managed by the ESS, thereby benefiting from

streamlined procedures and economies of scale. A liaison position has been created to better link with the SMS in the Budapest Service Centre in 2008.

In 2007, UNHCR has deployed Emergency Response Teams (ERTs) to Somalia, Kenya, Iraq, Sri Lanka, the Syrian Arab Republic (Syria) and Jordan. Between January and September 2007, more than 110 staff, to 22 countries were deployed. The largest deployments were to respond to the crisis in Puntland (Somalia), the Somali influx and the floods in Dadaab (Kenya); the renewed internal displacement in Sri Lanka; and for the protection and registration needs of Iraqis in Jordan and Syria. ERT members were deployed for an average of 118 days, representing a total of 12,976 days.

In Somalia, lack of access to displaced persons has been a significant obstacle to assistance. National staff in Somalia have risked their lives to ensure that assistance reaches the most vulnerable. UNHCR was able to deploy teams to Galkayo and Baidoa in two periods of three months each. Yet, the security situation in and around Mogadishu has prevented the Office from monitoring the distribution of non-food items. Given the high levels of poverty and the absence of services, a community-based approach has been used to provide assistance to IDPs and their host communities, all of whom have been affected by the ongoing conflict.

During the latter months of 2006 and early 2007, refugee camps in Dadaab (Kenya) were hit by multiple emergencies, including a mass influx of 34,000 Somali refugees, severe flooding which re-displaced some 14,000 refugees, and outbreaks of polio and Rift Valley Fever. Throughout this period, UNHCR's presence in Dadaab was strengthened by an Emergency Response Team. The team provided operational support in receiving and assisting new arrivals; provided support for the post-emergency response by putting in place structures and advising on emergency response tools and procedures; and supported regular field activities in the refugee programme.

ESS also deployed a Senior Emergency Preparedness Response Officer (EPRO) to Baghdad to liaise between the Iraq office in Amman and the relevant actors in Baghdad. The first two-month mission was considered successful and a second mission is underway.

In order to bring UNHCR's standing response capacity up to the agreed 500,000 person level, the following will be required:

- **Staffing:** The number of standby staff has been increased to 300 by including former ERT members on a two-year roster for exceptional large-scale emergencies. In both 2008 and 2009, UNHCR will conduct four Workshops on Emergency Management (WEM). IDP-specific issues, including the humanitarian reform and the inter-agency cluster approach have been mainstreamed into the WEM. ESS will maintain an active ERT roster, consisting of 100 UNHCR staff and 30 staff from partners and other United Nations agencies. Combined with senior staff deployments from the Emergency Preparedness and Response Section, this constitutes the primary emergency response mechanism during the initial phase of new emergencies. In 2007, UNHCR conducted two courses for the new inter-agency Emergency Team Leadership Training Programme (ETLP), to strengthen the quality of leadership in humanitarian emergency operations, improve coordination among all actors, and develop best practices in emergency leadership and management. UNHCR will also organize two courses per year in 2008 and 2009. Furthermore, UNHCR will strengthen the capacity of internal technical experts; reinforce existing partnerships and seek new ones; and review internal posting systems to increase the efficiency of deployment of regular staff. A roster of experienced, skilled and available staff for the global IDP cluster is gradually being built.
- **eCentre:** Close collaboration between Headquarters and the eCentre in Japan will remain a core objective within the overall emergency training strategy in 2008. The eCentre is a training and capacity-building facility for Asia and was established by the Government of Japan and UNHCR. The main goal of the eCentre is to improve emergency preparedness and response, as well as the management of staff safety, by cooperating with and strengthening the operational capacity of relevant government departments, NGOs and United Nations agencies in Asia and the Pacific region. Activities will include training on participatory assessment and will pay special attention to encourage female participants and organizations carrying out activities focused on the special needs of women and children.
- **Non-food items and logistics:** UNHCR's Central Emergency Stockpiles in Copenhagen and Dubai are being increased to cover the basic emergency needs for key shelter and domestic items for 500,000 people. A considerable investment of some USD 3 million is still required to meet the target for all items. The new lightweight emergency tents are key items for which there are currently shortfalls. Sufficient operational

support items in the CES include light vehicles, generators and prefabricated warehouses.

To improve refugee security through camp lighting and in line with environmental considerations, UNHCR is in the process of including solar lamps in the central emergency stockpile. Improved management mechanisms will be in place for UNHCR stockpiles to ensure effective use and rapid deployments. In addition, the Office will seek external standby capacity and coordination for supplies and logistics, including regional and national capacity in standby agreements, NGO capacities, and agreements with various Governments' civil defence departments. During 2007, UNHCR has signed several standby agreements to enhance its emergency response capacity in protection and technical sectors. In 2008, UNHCR will review identified gaps and consider possible ways to complement existing standby agreements and partnerships.

- **Operational support:** The Office will improve office and staff accommodation to meet designated minimum standards; introduce readily available and pre-determined information technology and communications packages for immediate deployment with ERTs; and provide other support kits as needed. Field and personal emergency kits have been upgraded to include additional and higher-quality items. Items will be stored at the central emergency stocks in Dubai and Copenhagen, and in Geneva.
- **Management and emergency procedures:** UNHCR will reinforce emergency procedures and internal emergency management by consolidating all emergency operations and management procedures into a single document. Situational Emergency Training workshops are provided to UNHCR offices when required.
- **Early warning and preparedness:** ESS has been actively participating at the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) sub-working group on early warning and early action. UNHCR's own early warning system, "Action Alert", has provided information on the level of preparedness for potential crises, but has not been sufficient to trigger preparedness measures. In reaction to user feedback, UNHCR started a review of the system to include colour classification (red, orange, yellow and blue) aimed to activate a category-specific list of emergency activities and agreed to align its system with the IASC criteria when determining the level of alert (i.e. threat to life/livelihood; likely scale; imminence; likely population movements; regional implications; and level of preparedness). In order to involve senior management more systematically in early warning and preparedness, regular crisis scanning sessions will be held.



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Emergency relief items were airdropped to Dadaab, Kenya, when flooding cut access from the camps to the outside world.

ESS assists field offices to develop local capacity for situational preparedness, including contingency planning.

- **Financial and implementation procedures:** UNHCR will maintain a financial allocation in the Operational Reserve for emergency activities. Resource allocation procedures for emergencies have been revised and simplified in 2007. The new procedures bring authority over the use of approved resources closer to the point of delivery by empowering Representatives, Bureau Directors, and the Assistant High Commissioner (Operations) to reallocate approved financial and staffing resources in response to changing operational needs. They also improve operational flexibility by facilitating direct access to the Operational Reserve for emergency purposes and streamlining decision-making on the use of the “New or additional activities — mandate-related” Reserve. From 2008 onwards, USD 10 million will initially be made available for emergencies within the Operational Reserve.
- **Security of beneficiaries:** In humanitarian emergencies, the issue of refugee, IDP, returnee and local community security and physical protection can be one of the most demanding and critical

humanitarian protection interventions. UNHCR must always be ready to interact with those who have the responsibility and legal obligation to ensure the protection for civilians caught up in armed conflict. To this effect, UNHCR created posts for Refugee Security Liaison Officers for the operation in Chad where the need was found to be most critical. Efforts to strengthen national capacity to manage refugee and returnee-related security issues will include advocacy and activities in the areas of mine action, small arms and light weapons, disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, and interaction with national and international military forces. In 2008, UNHCR will further explore its strategic and operational cooperation with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) and pay particular attention to planning of and participation within UN integrated missions.

UNHCR’s strengthened emergency response capacity aims to ensure a predictable and professional emergency response to refugee and IDP situations. A strong focus on partnerships and inter-agency collaboration, as well as the establishment of sufficient capacity in the three UNHCR-led clusters, will contribute significantly to the Humanitarian Reform process.

## Workshop on Emergency Management (WEM) and Emergency Response Teams

UNHCR's emergency training and emergency roster continue to be the primary resources for internal emergency response capacity. Emergency Response Team (ERTeam) members have to hit the ground running, often in extremely stressful and chaotic situations. That is why, when they volunteer to be on standby for the ERTeam, even though they may be experienced staff, they still have to complete the Workshop on Emergency Management – ten days of intensive training in practical skills such as camp design and management, cluster lead and coordination, telecommunications, off-road driving and first aid. The training includes a wide range of security issues, including dealing with armed militia, and how to react if held at gunpoint, kidnapped or taken hostage.

The course, which takes around 40 participants from UNHCR and other organizations from across the

world, is held four times a year. Upon completion participants are physically and mentally prepared to face some of the toughest and most challenging situations in the world.

Over the past two years, ERTeams have been deployed in more than 20 situations, including South Sudan, Darfur, East and Southern Chad, Pakistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Timor-Leste, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and Iraq; and most recently, to help tens of thousands of newly displaced IDPs in Sri Lanka and thousands of displaced Somalis, both inside their country and across the border in Ethiopia and Kenya.

A new monthly fund-raising programme to support the Emergency Response Team, aimed at individual contributors, was launched at the end of 2006 by UNHCR's Goodwill Ambassador, Angelina Jolie. See [www.erteam.unhcr.org](http://www.erteam.unhcr.org).