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**Emergency preparedness and response**

Summary

This paper outlines the measures taken by UNHCR to strengthen its emergency preparedness and response, including restructuring of the emergency section, the issuance of new policy guidance and tools, and expansion of the Office's stand-by capacity. It discusses partnerships, citing collaboration with governments and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that provide stand-by capacity, and noting the importance of national NGOs in terms of access to populations and local knowledge. The paper also briefly touches upon UNHCR's commitment to strengthening inter-agency coordination in emergencies, including through the Transformative Agenda.

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## I. Introduction

1. Since the last report on UNHCR's emergency response capacity (see EC/62/SC/CRP.3)<sup>1</sup>, the Office has had to respond to a number of simultaneous, large-scale emergencies in complex operational contexts, where insecurity and a lack of infrastructure have often impeded access. UNHCR is leading the response to refugee emergencies resulting from the conflicts in Mali, Sudan and South Sudan, and the Syrian Arab Republic, while at the same time contributing to the inter-agency efforts to meet the needs of internally displaced persons and other affected populations.

2. This paper outlines the measures taken by UNHCR to strengthen its emergency response capacity and highlights the importance of partnerships in addressing the protection and assistance needs of refugees and other persons of concern in a timely and effective manner.

## II. Establishment of the Emergency Capacity Management Service

3. Within the Division of Emergency, Security and Supply (DESS), UNHCR's emergency section was upgraded in 2011 with the aim of enhancing the central management and coordination mechanism. The resulting Emergency Capacity Management Service (ECMS) has a new staffing structure, which assigns personnel to specific thematic areas while ensuring that they remain deployable to emergencies. Job descriptions were revised and newly appointed staff members were in place by January 2012.

4. A key element of this reconfiguration was the embedding of four technical positions<sup>2</sup>, critical to emergency preparedness and response, into the following entities: the Division of International Protection (DIP), the Division of Information Systems and Telecommunications (DIST), the Division of Programme Support and Management (DPSM) and the Global Learning Centre (GLC). Following an initial pilot phase involving DIST, a review demonstrated that a single management structure for information and communications technology support to emergencies was more efficient and would provide clear lines of responsibility and accountability. It was therefore decided to permanently transfer all ICT-related responsibilities from ECMS to DIST. The embedding of the other three functions will be further reviewed during the course of 2013.

## III. Strengthening emergency procedures, policies and tools

5. A review of UNHCR's emergency preparedness and response performance in recent years identified a number of gaps in its capacity, policies and tools. Further analysis resulted in the issuance of guidance notes aimed at improving UNHCR's ability to lead a timely and effective inter-agency response to refugee emergencies, in accordance with its mandated responsibilities, and to deliver on its cluster lead responsibilities in the context of other humanitarian crises. The guidance notes, which were issued in 2012, addressed the identified gaps and adapted UNHCR's emergency response mechanisms to meet new demands and expectations, especially in the inter-agency context. Based on feedback, the guidance notes will be revised and further refined, and additional guidance will be issued as other requirements are identified.

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<sup>1</sup> Available from <http://www.unhcr.org/4d665c6e9.html>.

<sup>2</sup> The four technical positions cover the following areas: (1) protection, (2) information technology, (3) emergency shelter, and (4) emergency management training. They remain structurally in the budget of ECMS during the pilot phase.

6. The UNHCR Handbook on Emergencies, which was first issued in 1982, has served as a useful reference tool for staff and partners in emergency operations. It is currently undergoing revision and is scheduled to be launched in the summer of 2013.

#### **IV. Emergency stand-by capacity**

7. Experience gained over the past two years in responding to simultaneous, large-scale emergencies has confirmed that the immediate availability of individuals with a wide range of professional skills and experience is an essential part of an efficient response. The Emergency Response Team (ERT) roster continues to supply UNHCR's main internal emergency stand-by capacity. Staff members on the roster have completed the Workshop on Emergency Management and/or the training on Information Management in Emergencies (which is organized by DPSM in cooperation with the Global Learning Centre).

8. In addition to the ERT, the substantive divisions within UNHCR play an important role in strengthening the network of technical experts, upon whom the Office is able to call for deployment to emergencies.

9. The Senior Corporate Emergency Roster (SCER), established in 2011, is composed of senior staff members, nominated by the regional bureaux and divisions, who are on standby for one year to provide leadership in emergencies. The first workshop to prepare roster members for possible deployment was held in March 2011. The SCER also enables UNHCR to deploy skilled senior managers for the system-wide response to level-3<sup>3</sup> emergencies.

10. With the support of the Global Learning Centre, various emergency-related staff development programmes have been implemented. Long-standing and well-regarded workshops, such as the Workshop on Emergency Management, in which partners are also invited to participate, are continuously reviewed to ensure that content reflects the latest developments, such as the Transformative Agenda adopted by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC). New workshops have also been created to strengthen stand-by capacity in specific technical areas or to target specific countries.

#### **V. Partnerships**

11. UNHCR has benefited for many years from emergency stand-by agreements with various governmental and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). These allow the Office to deploy staff from the rosters of stand-by partners to serve in emergency operations, making the agreements an important part of UNHCR's emergency response capacity. Regular contacts with these partners take place, and UNHCR participates in a United Nations coordination forum with stand-by partners.

12. To broaden its range of stand-by partners, the Office signed agreements with two new entities. In September 2012, an emergency stand-by agreement ("Emergency.lu" project) was reached with the Government of Luxembourg. This project is a public/private partnership between the Government and private companies that provides a multi-layered telecommunications platform for humanitarian aid responders, consisting of satellite infrastructure and capacity, communication and coordination services, satellite ground terminals for rapid and long-term deployment, and transportation of equipment to operational areas. The agreement also includes a focus on innovation and the transfer of knowledge. In October 2011, an emergency stand-by agreement was also signed with the

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<sup>3</sup> The designation of a level-3 emergency, in consultation with the IASC Principals, will be issued by the Emergency Relief Coordinator, on the basis of an analysis of five criteria: scale, complexity, urgency, capacity, and reputational risk. More information may be found in the Transformative Agenda Protocols, Humanitarian System-Wide Emergency Activation: definition and procedures, available from: <http://www.humanitarianinfo.org/iasc/pageloader.aspx?page=content-template-default&bd=87>.

Cascos Blancos (White Helmets) Commission of Argentina. UNHCR has already benefited from these new agreements through deployments and technical support.

13. The Office strengthened its collaboration with the International Humanitarian Partnership (IHP), an informal network of seven governmental organizations in Europe working in the field of emergency management. A Declaration of Intent was signed between these seven organizations and UNHCR in January 2013. This collaboration has helped provide staff and office accommodation in Dollo Ado, Ethiopia, in South Sudan and in the Za'atri camp in Jordan. IHP also supports the Workshop on Emergency Management by creating base camps used during field simulation exercises. Individual IHP members provide venues and accommodation for emergency training courses.

14. To ensure that all offices are fully informed about the available support of stand-by partners and the applicable procedures and policies, UNHCR's Stand-by Partner Guide has been updated.

15. Partners from national NGOs contribute significantly to emergency response, increasing access to populations. They have deep understanding of national and regional dynamics and established relationships with local communities. Recognizing the critical role played by national NGOs in responding to emergencies, UNHCR launched a pilot project, in partnership with the International Medical Corps (IMC), to strengthen the capacity of eleven national partners from three priority regions: Asia, East Africa and the Middle East. While UNHCR has undertaken, and will continue to pursue, other capacity development initiatives, this project is unique; it supports national NGOs in assuming greater responsibility in emergencies, in a predictable and reliable manner, including possibly beyond their country's borders. The project includes a focused training workshop and onsite coaching. Upon completion of this pilot phase in the second half of 2013, a lessons-learned workshop will be held to review the outcome, achievements and challenges.

16. Close cooperation and coordination with other UN agencies are essential for an effective emergency response. UNHCR continues to work closely with the World Food Programme (WFP) and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), and cooperation with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has been significantly strengthened (see *UNHCR Global Appeal 2013; Update*, pp. 58-63).<sup>4</sup> Inter-agency cooperation takes place both bilaterally and within the context of the IASC, including the emergency forum for directors and various working groups and sub-groups.

## VI. Transformative Agenda

17. UNHCR has been actively involved in shaping the IASC's Transformative Agenda and has pledged to ensure appropriate leadership capacity for the system-wide response to level-3 emergencies. It helped develop new guidance on the cluster approach to ensure more strategic activation, management and deactivation of the clusters. The Office participates in the common humanitarian programme cycle (HPC), including needs assessment and analysis, joint planning, and monitoring and evaluation, aimed at ensuring more systematic coordination at the country level. UNHCR is also a key partner in the development of the IASC's Inter-Agency Rapid Response Mechanism. Cluster management and coordination within UNHCR has been strengthened and adapted to meet expectations and commitments under the Transformative Agenda.

18. UNHCR launched important internal changes in parallel with the Transformative Agenda and has continued to strengthen, adapt and align its systems with those under development by the IASC. These changes are aimed at strengthening UNHCR's leadership and coordination of refugee operations, a role recognized and affirmed by the IASC during the development of the Transformative Agenda.

<sup>4</sup> Available from <http://www.unhcr.org/ga13/index.xml>.

## **VII. Conclusion**

19. Recent large-scale emergencies continue to highlight the importance of UNHCR's ability to respond, in a timely and effective manner, to the needs of refugees and other persons of concern. Significant progress has been made in strengthening internal mechanisms, procedures and tools, through an organization-wide approach involving the regional bureaux and other entities. This is not a one-time effort but an ongoing process; the capacity of UNHCR to respond to emergencies continues to be a priority and will be continuously reviewed and updated.

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