

UNHCR'S ROLE IN SUPPORT OF AN ENHANCED HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE TO  
SITUATIONS OF INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT

POLICY FRAMEWORK AND IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

I. INTRODUCTION

1. Based upon its established competence and capacity, UNHCR aims to provide effective support to national and international responses to situations of forced displacement. Complementing its longstanding mandate to provide protection and solutions to refugees, the High Commissioner's Office is committed to become a predictable and reliable partner in efforts to address and resolve the plight of people who are displaced within their own country.

2. This document explains the global significance of internal displacement; identifies the capacities that UNHCR brings to such situations; presents the principles which form the basis of UNHCR's evolving role in IDP situations; and summarizes the implementation strategy that the Office has established in relation to this issue. The paper does not purport to offer a comprehensive account of UNHCR's engagement with the issue of IDPs, and has been complemented by an additional paper that focuses on the legal and protection dimensions of UNHCR's involvement in situations of internal displacement.

II. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT

3. Concern for the welfare of IDPs has grown steadily in recent years, a development that has been driven by a variety of related considerations.

4. The number of people who have been internally displaced as a result of armed conflict has increased substantially over the past decade, and now stands at approximately 25 million. In many situations, the internally displaced are confronted with serious and persistent threats to their well-being. A large proportion of the world's IDPs have been displaced for protracted periods of time and do not have an early prospect of finding a solution.

5. While their vulnerability to such threats is by no means unique, and while the dynamics and consequences of displacement vary considerably from one country to another, there is considerable evidence to suggest that IDPs experience specific forms of loss and require particular efforts to address and resolve their plight.

6. Responses to the challenge of internal displacement have generally been inadequate, depriving many IDPs, local communities and the countries concerned of the support they need. While awareness of the IDP problem has grown significantly in recent years, operational efforts to meet the needs of internally displaced populations have remained patchy and piecemeal.

### III. THE HUMANITARIAN REFORM PROCESS

7. In 2005, the United Nations initiated a programme of humanitarian reform, based on a recognition that responses to complex emergencies and disasters often failed to meet the needs of IDPs and other affected populations in a timely and consistent manner.

8. A number of measures have been introduced to address this situation, including the establishment of an agreed division of labour (known as the “Cluster Approach”) amongst the United Nations and other humanitarian agencies. Under the provisions of this arrangement, which has been endorsed by the Secretary-General, UNHCR has agreed to play a leading role in efforts to ensure the protection of conflict-related IDPs, the provision of emergency shelter to such populations, as well as the coordination and management of IDP camps. In addition, UNHCR actively participates in other clusters; shares a role with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and UNICEF in ensuring the protection of people displaced by natural disasters; and has been designated by UNAIDS as the lead agency for HIV and AIDS amongst displaced populations.

9. UNHCR is fully supportive of the humanitarian reform process, is firmly committed to the task of establishing an enhanced response to the needs of IDPs, and is determined to exercise the responsibilities which it has assumed in relation to such populations. The Office has a number of important assets at its disposal in meeting these commitments. These include the legitimacy and moral authority that derives from the status of the Office within the United Nations; the Executive Committee and General Assembly’s consistent support for UNHCR in providing protection and humanitarian assistance to internally displaced persons; the close working relationship that the Office has established with states, international, regional and non-governmental organizations in every part of the world; and, most significantly, the expertise, competence and capacity that UNHCR has developed in protecting and finding solutions for uprooted populations since its establishment more than 50 years ago.

10. In this context, UNHCR wishes to underline that its engagement in situations of internal displacement is by no means new. Indeed, UNHCR has provided services to IDPs throughout much of the world since the early 1970s, and is currently active in most of the countries where international support is provided to IDP populations.

11. The Office takes note of the Report of the High-level Panel on System-wide Coherence, which states that “UNHCR must reposition itself to provide protection and assistance to displaced people in need, regardless of whether they have crossed an international border.” UNHCR stands ready to engage in a discussion on this and other relevant recommendations of the report with the United Nations Secretary-General, member states and other partners.

#### IV. UNHCR'S IDP POLICY FRAMEWORK

12. To guide UNHCR's evolving role in relation to the issue of internal displacement, the Office has established a policy framework which consists of eight principles as outlined below. These principles will be systematically disseminated to all UNHCR personnel and partners, and will be scrupulously respected in all IDP activities and operations undertaken by the Office.

##### *1. Scope and nature of involvement*

13. UNHCR stands ready to contribute to the inter-agency response in situations of internal displacement in any conflict-affected country where the presence and programmes of the Office have the consent of the authorities, where the humanitarian activities of UNHCR and its partners are free from undue political or military interference, and where the security environment enables its personnel to function within acceptable levels of risk. The exact scope and nature of the organization's involvement in specific IDP situations will naturally be affected by the views of the concerned State, the role assumed by other humanitarian organizations and the availability of funding.

14. UNHCR considers that the Cluster Approach provides a valuable basis for the development of an enhanced inter-agency response in situations of internal displacement, while recognizing that this approach is still a "work in progress" that will need to be reviewed and revised in the light of experience. The Office supports the implementation of the Cluster Approach in all new emergencies, as well as its progressive extension to countries with Humanitarian Coordinators. UNHCR is also committed to continued collaboration with other agencies in longstanding situations of internal displacement where such Coordinators have not been designated.

15. In accordance with agreements made under the humanitarian reform process, UNHCR's primary objective in such situations will be to provide effective leadership in the areas of protection, emergency shelter, camp coordination and management. The Office will give particular attention to those IDP situations where such functions are in greatest need of reinforcement, and will also play an active role in other clusters.

16. UNHCR will not seek an extensive or prolonged operational involvement in situations where people have been displaced by natural disasters. However, the Office may, in consultation with affected states and partner organizations, lend immediate support to such populations when it is in a position to do so.

##### *2. IDPs and refugees*

17. UNHCR will ensure that its role in situations of internal displacement does not detract from its mandated activities in relation to refugees, and will seek to maximize the synergies and economies of scale that link the two functions.

18. UNHCR will uphold the internationally recognized right of people to seek and enjoy asylum in other states, and has established criteria to ensure that IDP activities undertaken by the Office do not undermine that right. UNHCR will fully respect those criteria and discourage others from acting in a manner that is detrimental to the principles and practice of refugee protection.

### *3. State responsibility*

19. It is a well-established principle in international law that states have primary responsibility for the rights and welfare of their citizens, including those who are internally displaced. UNHCR stands ready to work with States in fulfilling this responsibility.

20. The Office recognizes that UNHCR and other humanitarian actors can play only a limited role in addressing the issue of internal displacement. UNHCR consequently encourages states and relevant organs of the United Nations to prevent and resolve situations of internal displacement and to protecting the rights of IDPs.

### *4. Partnerships*

21. UNHCR's involvement in situations of internal displacement will entail the establishment of partnerships and working relationships with a range of national actors, including central government structures and local authorities, human rights institutions, parliamentarians, the judiciary, NGOs, religious bodies and other members of civil society, as well as displaced persons and communities themselves.

22. With respect to humanitarian agencies, UNHCR acknowledges that the challenges of internal displacement lie beyond the remit and capacity of any single organization, including its own. The Office considers that the needs of IDPs will be most effectively met by means of inter-agency and partnership approaches that support national efforts, which are responsive, flexible and adapted to realities on the ground. In accordance with the objectives of the humanitarian reform process, UNHCR also considers it essential to establish partnerships in a way that fills gaps, averts overlapping activities and makes efficient use of the resources available.

23. In its contribution to such approaches, UNHCR will continue to work closely with the Emergency Relief Coordinator, OCHA and other members of the IASC. As well as fulfilling the responsibilities that it has accepted under the Cluster Approach, the Office will cooperate with other actors in the task of assessing, adjusting and enhancing that approach.

24. In the context of its IDP programmes, UNHCR is committed to the development of strategic partnerships at the global and national levels, as well as in functional areas such as operations, advocacy, human and financial resource mobilization. In this respect, UNHCR will draw upon its longstanding relationship with the NGO community. The Office will ensure that such partnerships are based on the development of common visions, understandings and strategies, as well as joint policy analysis, planning and programming activities.

### *5. Protection and human rights*

25. UNHCR's efforts on behalf of the internally displaced are based on the principle that IDPs, like all other citizens, are entitled to protection under national law, international human rights and humanitarian law, at all stages of the displacement process. In accordance with this principle, the Office will cooperate with national and international actors that are engaged in the establishment of laws and mechanisms that safeguard the rights of IDPs and enable them to find lasting solutions to their plight.

26. Based upon this approach, all IDP activities and operations undertaken by the Office will incorporate the norms, standards and principles of international human rights and humanitarian law, as well as the United Nations *Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement*. UNHCR will also advocate on behalf of these norms, standards and principles, in close association with OHCHR, the Representative of the Secretary-General on the human rights of internally displaced persons and the International Committee of the Red Cross.

#### *6. Resolving situations of internal displacement*

27. UNHCR considers it imperative to avert the emergence of protracted IDP situations, especially those in which the internally displaced are deprived of their rights, basic needs and opportunities for self-reliance. UNHCR will consequently work closely with States, as well as other national and humanitarian actors, in promoting lasting solutions for IDPs, including voluntary return to their former place of residence, long-term or permanent settlement in areas to which they have been displaced, or voluntary relocation to another part of their own country.

28. Irrespective of the solution pursued, the Office considers it essential to ensure that IDPs are able to benefit from a process of legal, economic and social integration, thereby enabling the progressive and timely withdrawal of UNHCR's presence and programmes. UNHCR will establish appropriate benchmarks and "exit strategies" to facilitate this task.

#### *7. Age, gender and diversity mainstreaming*

29. UNHCR's role in the protection of IDPs will be based on the principle of age, gender and diversity mainstreaming. This principle recognizes that displaced populations consist of different social groups, including women, girls, men and boys, who have equal rights under international law, but who also have varying resources, abilities, aspirations, needs and vulnerabilities.

30. In view of the fact that displaced females generally have less power, a lower social status and fewer opportunities in life than displaced men and boys, and given that such inequalities are often exacerbated in the process of displacement, UNHCR will support and empower women and girls as a means of reinforcing their rights and welfare.

#### *8. Community-based approach*

31. UNHCR will adopt an inclusive and participatory approach to IDP protection and solutions, building upon the capacities of displaced communities and facilitating their involvement in decisions that affect their lives. The Office will give special attention to the protection of IDPs who are at risk of discrimination and marginalization.

32. UNHCR's activities will be primarily targeted at large and concentrated IDP populations, whether they are living with and amongst the resident population or are accommodated in camps and settlements. The Office may also provide support to local communities in areas of displacement. UNHCR is not, however, in a position to assume broader responsibility for the well-being of other and non-displaced citizens affected by conflict and crisis.

## V. IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

33. To ensure that the policy framework and rules of engagement presented above are effectively operationalized, UNHCR has formulated an implementation strategy on internal displacement, as outlined below. Details of the evolution and implementation of this strategy will be shared on a regular basis with Executive Committee members and other partners. All UNHCR Directors have been requested to take this strategy into account in the establishment of their respective work plans and to quantify the potential funding and staffing implications.

34. UNHCR's role in situations of internal displacement continues to be an important consideration in its ongoing Structural and Management Reform initiative, the objective of which is to optimize the effectiveness and responsiveness of the Office across the whole range of its activities. As it designs and implements necessary reforms to its processes, Headquarters and Field structures and workforce profile, the Office will ensure that these are responsive to the demands of its role in situations of internal displacement. UNHCR will also ensure that the way in which resources are mobilized, the budget is structured, staff are managed and partnerships are forged are consistent with the collaborative and country-based approach which characterizes the Cluster Approach.

### *1. Organizational capacity and structure*

35. A senior-level staff member will be appointed on a temporary basis to coordinate the full and timely implementation of the corporate strategy. Working in close consultation with the Assistant High Commissioner (Operations) and Assistant High Commissioner (Protection), as well as other staff members engaged in IDP issues, the Coordinator will also ensure that the implementation of the strategy is consistent with the policy framework set out in this document. Primary responsibility for IDP operations will remain with the Regional Bureaux, who will ensure that UNHCR's evolving role with IDPs is adapted to the specific circumstances of each country and region.

36. UNHCR's IDP Support Team (IST), which serves as a multifunctional and mid-level coordination mechanism, will continue to meet on a regular basis, chaired by the Coordinator and involving senior representatives from all parts of Headquarters. IST members will ensure that the entities they represent are provided with relevant information on developments relating to the corporate strategy, a task that will be facilitated by the establishment of an internal IDP website.

37. UNHCR will strengthen the capacity and technical competences of the three Global Clusters that it leads. Given UNHCR's primary interest in the protection of IDPs and the *droit de regard* that the Protection Cluster exercises in relation to the other clusters, the Office will prioritize the provision of senior and stable leadership to the Protection Cluster.

### *2. Internal communications and staff development*

38. The Office will initiate an extensive internal communications and staff development programme, so as to equip staff members with the knowledge, skills and attitudes that are required to support the corporate strategy. This programme will incorporate issues such as the

Cluster Approach, the Humanitarian Coordinator system, pooled funding arrangements, the role of the Representative of the Secretary-General on the human rights of internally displaced persons and the *Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement*.

39. UNHCR's efforts in this area will draw upon the experience of staff members who have previously been deployed in IDP situations, as well as those who are familiar with the tasks of partnership building and inter-agency coordination. Particular attention will be given to a review and revision of existing learning programmes, so as to equip the Office with the capacity and competencies required by the Cluster Approach.

40. Revised tools will be required to reflect the evolving nature of UNHCR's involvement with IDPs. Priority will be given to the preparation of concise and practical field-based tools to complement inter-agency guidance materials.

### *3 Human resources deployment*

41. UNHCR's human resources deployment strategy has four principal components.

- The Office will ensure an effective presence from the beginning of new IDP emergencies, deploying teams of suitably senior and experienced personnel.
- In IDP situations where the Cluster Approach is invoked, UNHCR will deploy an appropriate number of staff members with effective coordination and communication skills and who have specific competences in the three functional areas in which UNHCR has assumed cluster lead responsibilities.
- UNHCR will make strategic use of short-term staffing arrangements and surge capacities, ensuring that the cluster lead activities of the Office are not undermined by an over-reliance on such personnel, who are subject to regular turnover.
- The Office will strengthen its stand-by arrangements with partners, particularly in the technical sectors.

42. UNHCR will identify staff members with the skills and experience required to function effectively in IDP operations for inclusion in the organization's emergency roster. Those who are placed on the roster will be provided with specialized training in order to develop their leadership and coordination skills, as well as their understanding of UNHCR's policy framework and corporate strategy on IDPs.

### *4. Resource mobilization and management*

43. UNHCR will implement a resource mobilization strategy that takes advantage of the fundraising opportunities associated with the process of humanitarian reform, without detracting from its mandated responsibility to provide protection and solutions to refugees.

44. To meet these objectives, the Office, in consultation with the Executive Committee, plans to redesign its budget structure and to establish a Global IDP Programme that operates on the basis of project funding. The Global IDP Programme will be rooted in country-level needs

assessment, planning and result-based management systems. UNHCR's Regional Bureaux and Representatives will play an important role in this process, which will be undertaken in close coordination with other IASC members at the country and global levels.

45. Under the terms of the proposed arrangement, the Global IDP Programme would be approved at the annual meeting of the Executive Committee. Supplementary budgets would continue to be used for short periods of time in response to new IDP emergencies and unforeseen developments in existing situations. In addition to supporting fundraising efforts on behalf of IDPs and preserving the integrity of UNHCR's refugee programmes, this approach is also expected to facilitate the task of human resource management.

#### *5. Security in IDP-populated areas*

46. Situations of internal displacement are generally more dangerous than those involving refugees, as they are often located in areas of active conflict and are characterized by the presence of military forces, security personnel and militia groups. UNHCR's IDP protection activities will take full account of these circumstances and will be based on partnerships with national and international actors that are able to contribute to the security of internally displaced populations. Special efforts will be made to address the issue of sexual and gender-based violence.

47. UNHCR's response to the challenge of staff security in IDP-populated areas will be pursued in close association with the national and local authorities of the countries concerned. At the same time, the Office will review its own security arrangements in IDP operations, including the adaptation of the organization's existing guidelines on the presence of armed elements in refugee situations to the context of internal displacement.

48. The Office recognizes the important role played by other UN actors in relation to security, including the United Nations' Department of Safety and Security, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and Designated Officials. In partnership with these actors, UNHCR will strive to ensure that the security arrangements established by the United Nations ensure the safety of humanitarian personnel without presenting unnecessary obstacles to humanitarian action.

#### *6. Emergency preparedness and contingency planning*

49. The implementation strategy will pay close attention to the issue of emergency preparedness and contingency planning, because the effectiveness of the Cluster Approach will be most seriously tested in new and fast-moving IDP situations, and because UNHCR's role and

reputation in situations of internal displacement are dependent on the ability of the Office to respond to sudden crises. UNHCR's efforts in this area will adopt the inter-agency mode of consultation required by the Cluster Approach and the process of humanitarian reform.

#### *7. Results-based management*

50. The Office will continue to contribute to inter-agency efforts to establish a set of performance and impact indicators that will be used as a basis for the formulation of an enhanced response to the provision of protection, assistance and solutions to IDPs.

51. To assist in the process of planning and prioritizing its own IDP activities and operations, UNHCR will continue with the development of results-based management software, which will enable the Office to better assess the impact and shortcomings of its leadership role and programmatic interventions at the country, regional and global levels.

#### *8. Monitoring, assessment and evaluation*

52. Despite the additional attention that has recently been given to the issue of internal displacement, relatively little is known about the impact of the humanitarian reform process on the circumstances of IDPs. UNHCR will address this situation by ensuring the establishment of effective monitoring mechanisms.

53. In keeping with the High-level Panel's recommendation that the international response to humanitarian emergencies should be subject to "transparent, periodic and independent assessment", UNHCR, in cooperation with states and partner organizations, will assess its IDP operations and ensure that such reviews are utilized for the purposes of policymaking, planning and programming. The Office will also play a full part in inter-agency evaluation initiatives related to IDP issues and operations.