

**Executive Committee of the  
High Commissioner's Programme**

Distr. : Restricted  
12 February 2019  
English  
Original: English and French

**Standing Committee**  
74<sup>th</sup> meeting

---

**Emergency preparedness and response**

*Summary*

This paper outlines the progress and achievements made by UNHCR and its partners in supporting and delivering emergency assistance and protection in 2018. It presents updates on emergency preparedness, policy implementation and capacity development and briefly describes the challenging security environment in which UNHCR works. The paper concludes with an outline of priorities and opportunities moving forward.

## Contents

<i>Chapter</i>	<i>Paragraphs</i>	<i>Page</i>
I. Introduction .....	1-3	3
II. Strengthening emergency preparedness and response.....	4-7	3
III. Delivery of emergency responses.....	8-15	4
A. Standby capacity and emergency deployments.....	8-10	4
B. Capacity development.....	11-12	4
C. Policy implementation .....	13-15	5
IV. Opportunities and priorities.....	16-17-	5
V. Risks and challenges ... ..	18-19	6

## I. Introduction

1. In 2018, nearly 30 million refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) received protection and humanitarian assistance provided by UNHCR and partners. UNHCR responded to a total of 10 emergencies in 23 countries during the year, including the Nigeria and Venezuela situations, as well as the Rohingya refugee emergency in Bangladesh. The ongoing displacement resulting from the conflicts in the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen, both system-wide level-3 emergencies, continued to require significant resources. UNHCR mobilized humanitarian assistance, and the institutional support required to respond to these unfolding or escalating refugee and IDP emergencies.

2. Emergency preparedness and response is one of five organizational priorities contained in the High Commissioner's strategic directions for 2017-2021. The Global Compact on Refugees, which was affirmed by the United Nations General Assembly in December 2018, also emphasizes its importance and called for States and a wide range of relevant stakeholders to contribute resources and expertise to preparedness measures. UNHCR supports a more comprehensive and inclusive approach to emergency preparedness and response. It is reviewing and redesigning its emergency preparedness guidelines with a multi-stakeholder approach, and seeking initiatives to support the capacity of its partners, particularly local actors. This work is being co-led by the Division of Resilience and Solutions and the Division of Emergency, Security and Supply, in close collaboration with the operations, the regional bureaux and key partners.

3. Humanitarian personnel work in increasingly dangerous and complex operational environments. Many emergency situations were again in 2018 characterized by violence, civil unrest, criminality and disregard for civilian life, which in some cases led to the obstruction of protection and assistance. UNHCR works closely with the national and local authorities in the countries in which it operates to ensure the safety, security and well-being of affected populations, as well as UNHCR and partner staff.

## II. Strengthening emergency preparedness and response

4. As of 31 December 2018, 23 situations affecting 63 countries were assessed as at medium or high risk of being affected by a refugee emergency, using UNHCR's early warning, risk monitoring analysis and preparedness system (HALEP). As a result, some countries were placed on a "watch list" for priority attention and operations were provided with additional support to boost preparedness levels. In the same year, four countries were assessed as at reduced risk and removed from the "watch list".

5. UNHCR strengthened its Senior Emergency Roster in 2018 to boost its leadership and coordination capacities. As a result, the organization was able to respond rapidly and effectively to multiple and simultaneous requests for reinforcement, including from the operations in Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Iraq, Uganda and Venezuela (the Bolivarian Republic of).

6. Following an operational review of UNHCR's engagement in situations of internal displacement, in 2018, the Office took measures to strengthen its preparedness and response to IDP crises, including by reinforcing its Emergency Management Team with qualified and dedicated first responders.

7. UNHCR's efforts to strengthen emergency preparedness also included joint initiatives with standby partners. In 2018, the Norwegian Refugee Council and UNHCR co-chaired the annual consultations of emergency standby partners. The event sparked critical reflection on the performance, results and value of standby partnerships. Agreement was reached on a

number of top priorities, such as enhancing capacity development, duty of care, trends and impact analysis, reporting and monitoring.

### **III. Delivery of emergency responses**

#### **A. Standby capacity and emergency deployments**

8. In 2018, there were a total of 420 emergency deployments (consisting of over 51,500 mission days), which constituted 17 per cent more deployments and 62 per cent more mission days compared to 2017. Altogether, 48 refugee and IDP operations benefitted from emergency deployments in 2018. The majority of deployments were to respond to emergencies in Bangladesh, Brazil, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Nigeria, Peru and Uganda, in some cases involving both refugee and IDP situations. The successful rapid mobilization and timely deployment of emergency teams to these multiple and concurrent emergencies played a critical role in the quality and impact of responses. UNHCR Emergency Management Teams spent over 1,800 mission days on emergency deployment.

9. The year 2018 marked the twenty-seventh anniversary of UNHCR's emergency standby partnerships arrangement. These partnerships continue to provide valuable expert surge capacity to fill unmet critical needs in both refugee and IDP operations. In 2018, 10 standby partners deployed over 200 emergency specialists to operations worldwide. Technical, financial, material, logistical and engineering support was also provided. Standby partners made critical contributions to ensuring effective and timely responses to the large number of humanitarian emergencies faced in 2018.

10. A priority for UNHCR is to expand its emergency preparedness and response partnership network. This includes close engagement in State-led mechanisms, the value of which has been demonstrated in the context of the implementation of the comprehensive refugee response framework. This approach will help foster new and complementary strategic partnerships with a broad range of actors.

#### **B. Capacity development**

11. UNHCR facilitated training and developed operational guidance and tools to enhance the quality, effectiveness and impact of its emergency preparedness and response actions. In 2018 emergency trainings, such as the Workshop on Emergency management, the Senior Emergency Leadership Programme and Situational Emergency Trainings, were provided to more than 1,250 UNHCR, government and partner staff. To respond to the crises in Latin America and a growing demand for qualified emergency responders, UNHCR, acting on behalf of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), conducted an Emergency Team Leadership Training for Spanish-speaking senior humanitarian professionals from Latin America in Bogota, Colombia. Furthermore, the multi-lingual version of the Emergency Handbook (English, French, Spanish and Arabic) was launched in 2018 and continues to be regularly updated.

12. In 2018, Germany, Norway and Senegal provided training facilities and technical support to UNHCR's emergency training programmes. Japan contributed financially to the management and operations of UNHCR's Regional Centre for Emergency Preparedness in Bangkok (eCentre). This enabled the eCentre to successfully train over 500 government and humanitarian personnel with a geographic focus on the Asia and Pacific region.

## C. Policy implementation

13. In accordance with its new Policy on Emergency Preparedness and Response (2017), the Office declared eight level-2 emergencies in 2018, boosting support and resources in Chad, Nigeria and Uganda; the countries affected by mixed movements in the North of Central America and the Venezuela situation; and in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (in response to the worsening IDP situation in parts of the country). To ensure that limited emergency resources were redirected to where they were most urgently required, the Burundi, Iraq and South Sudan emergencies were deactivated<sup>1</sup> in the same year.

14. In 2018, the policy continued to be rolled out to the field. Initial reactions to the new policy were positive and encouraging. However, areas for future improvement have already been identified, including in relation to ensuring more predictability in IDP emergencies, enhancing data quality and evidence-based responses, and working more closely with host countries and State-led structures to foster inclusive and comprehensive responses (in line with the Global Compact on Refugees).

15. UNHCR continued to be actively engaged in the IASC Emergency Directors Group and other IASC bodies working on emergency preparedness. Areas of cooperation included early warning, risk monitoring and analysis of actual and potential emergency situations; the development of joint emergency responses; and measures to strengthen inter-agency coordination in emergencies. The Office also played a key role in developing the IASC “Humanitarian system-wide scale-up” protocols, which replace the 2012 IASC “humanitarian system-wide emergency activation (L3 response)” and which aim to strengthen the response to sudden-onset or significantly deteriorating humanitarian crises where the capacity to lead, coordinate and deliver assistance and protection does not match the scale, complexity and urgency of the situation.

## IV. Opportunities and priorities

16. In 2019, UNHCR’s overarching aim is to support operations to effectively prepare for and respond to potential, actual or escalating refugee and IDP emergencies. Its actions will be informed by various initiatives, including the GCR and the comprehensive responses envisaged therein, and the ongoing internal reform efforts and related regionalization and decentralization process. These initiatives will guide UNHCR’s interventions in emergency preparedness and response in the years to come.

17. With this in mind, the following priorities were identified to shape UNHCR’s efforts in 2019:

- (i) Enhance preparedness for refugee and IDP emergencies by: strengthening the effectiveness and timeliness of UNHCR’s early warning systems; bolstering risk monitoring and analysis; and actively engaging with the IASC Reference Group on Risk, Early Warning and Preparedness and the IASC Task Team on Preparedness and Resilience;
- (ii) Improve data quality and information management to measure baselines, progress and impact quantitatively, and to underpin advocacy to give prominence and visibility to the need for support for emergency operations;

---

<sup>1</sup> These deactivations did not necessarily mean that the crises had come to an end, nor that they had substantially abated, but rather that a benchmark requiring operational capacities had been achieved and that exceptional or extraordinary measures were no longer necessary.

- (iii) Ensure rapid and predictable responses to refugee and IDP emergencies by: deploying experienced support teams; delivering integrated and timely supplies and logistical support; developing emergency standby arrangements to enable effective responses; and supporting the enforcement of accountabilities, responsibilities, authorities and oversight at all levels of the organization;
- (iv) Align emergency preparedness and response, and security and supply structures and services with UNHCR's regionalization and decentralization process, including by supporting the devolved regional structures;
- (v) In line with the GCR, adopt a multi-stakeholder approach to emergency management, working closely with State-led structures and complementing the capacities and resources of other stakeholders, particularly at the local level;
- (vi) Invest in developing the capacity of frontline staff and partners, particularly national and local emergency preparedness and response actors, through training and enhanced guidelines on emergency preparedness and response for practitioners;
- (vii) Promote the increased use of innovative solutions, including cash-based initiatives and technology, to empower refugees and IDPs and accelerate transition away from emergencies to self-reliance, livelihoods and longer-term solutions.

## V. Risks and challenges

18. The most salient operational risks and challenges that may impede UNHCR from fully achieving the priorities outlined above are as follows:

- Limited humanitarian access to people in continued need of international protection and humanitarian assistance, often in remote and dangerous areas;
- Multiple emergencies taking place simultaneously requiring rapid, efficient and effective responses and capacity to sustain an effective response from UNHCR and its partners;
- Inadequate financial, material and human resources to support worsening crises and forgotten protracted situations which, if left to fester, could provoke future emergencies;
- Visa restrictions for humanitarian workers by some States.

19. In order to optimize the opportunities described above and achieve its priorities, UNHCR counts on the support of States, particularly the members of the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme.