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

**Standing Committee
Eighty-fourth meeting**

Emergency preparedness and response

Summary

This paper presents developments in the areas of emergency preparedness and response since the last update provided to the eighty-first meeting of the Standing Committee in July 2021 (EC/72/SC/CRP.13). Outlining the increasing number of emergencies across different regions in 2021 and the beginning of 2022, the paper highlights the emergency-related activities undertaken by UNHCR and its partners in a challenging context marked by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19), growing insecurity and the adverse effects of climate change.

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I. Introduction

1. Since 2020, COVID-19 has acted as a risk multiplier, exacerbating existing vulnerabilities in already fragile contexts. Humanitarian crises have become increasingly complex, with growing numbers of people on the move, access constraints and insecurity. The pandemic and the worsening effects of climate change have intensified these challenges and increased the need for emergency preparedness and associated resource requirements. The operational context remained challenging for the emergency response, including with respect to deployments and the global supply chain.

2. In 2021 and 2022, UNHCR contributed to the Inter-Agency Standing Committee system-wide scale-up activations for Afghanistan, Ethiopia and Ukraine. Partnerships, including with governments, local actors and persons of concern, remained crucial for UNHCR to "stay and deliver" and enhance life-saving protection and assistance. UNHCR remained committed to close coordination through active participation in inter-agency fora, including the Inter-Agency Standing Committee's Emergency Directors Group and the Early Warning, Early Action and Readiness Working Group.

3. UNHCR conducted its emergency preparedness and response activities in line with the humanitarian principles that underpin the organization's activities, such as the age, gender and diversity approach, and accountability to affected populations. As part of its commitment to localization, UNHCR strengthened partnerships with regional and local actors on emergency preparedness and response, including in the context of climate change. Consistent with the business transformation programme, UNHCR sought to further increase its supply chain efficiency through the streamlining of systems and process integration end-to-end.

II. Strengthening emergency preparedness and response capacity

A. Preparedness actions

4. In 2021, UNHCR further reviewed its global preparedness system to support overall readiness and increase emergency response capacity: the risk analysis was fully integrated into the enterprise risk management system, an emergency risk management tool was issued for the use of country operations, and contingency planning was incorporated in the results-based management system, COMPASS. Along with the revision of its policy on emergency preparedness and response, UNHCR streamlined and simplified its preparedness guidance.

5. UNHCR continued to undertake global monitoring of situations at high risk of an emergency and contributed to the monthly Inter-Agency Standing Committee early warning, early action and readiness process. Additionally, there was an increased focus on emergency risks caused by environmental hazards. In this regard, UNHCR participated in specialized fora, such as the meteorological subgroup of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee's Early Warning, Early Action and Readiness Working Group, and partnered with relevant actors, such as the World Meteorological Organization.

6. In 2021, 33 UNHCR offices identified a high risk of a new or escalated emergency which may affect their operation. The operations and regional bureaux were supported to undertake comprehensive risk analyses, develop planning scenarios, identify urgent preparedness gaps and undertake contingency planning. Despite the restrictions and challenges posed by COVID-19 measures, UNHCR continued leading inter-agency efforts to ensure preparedness for possible situations of cross-border forced displacement, with a focus on the situations that deteriorated in 2021 and the beginning of 2022: Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Central African Republic (the), Myanmar and Ukraine.

B. Capacity-building

7. Given the growing number of new emergencies, UNHCR scaled up its capacity to enhance the quality, effectiveness and impact of its emergency preparedness and response

actions. Owing to the pandemic, emergency training was conducted entirely online. More than 800 UNHCR and partner staff were trained during the reporting period, including some 360 people selected for the emergency deployment rosters, through eight virtual workshops on emergency management and three senior emergency learning programmes. In addition, several context-specific emergency trainings were delivered for country operations in the Americas, Europe and the southern Africa region. The UNHCR Regional Centre for Emergency Preparedness (eCentre) in Bangkok, Thailand successfully organized trainings for over 300 government and humanitarian personnel from 23 countries, mainly from the Asia and Pacific region. UNHCR also organized an emergency team leadership programme on behalf of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee for some 30 participants from different humanitarian organizations.

8.   In 2021, UNHCR began overhauling its Emergency Handbook. This digital reference and guidance tool for emergency situations receives an average of 25,000 visits per month. The revision will include improvements to reach and functionality.

III.   Delivery of emergency response

A.   Overview of emergencies and policy implementation

9.   In 2021, UNHCR issued 40 emergency declarations in 29 countries. As of 20 May 2022, UNHCR had declared new emergencies in a further 10 countries.

10.   The emergency declarations varied in complexity, scale and magnitude, with 60 per cent in 2021 for the preparedness and initial response phases. In other cases, as in Afghanistan, Ethiopia and Ukraine, the deterioration of a situation triggered an upgrade to a higher emergency level. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee humanitarian system-wide scale-up protocols were also activated for these three situations, and UNHCR aligned its internal declarations accordingly to ensure coherence with the inter-agency response.

11.   In addition to conflict-induced emergencies, UNHCR responded to natural hazard--induced emergencies. These included the responses in: Haiti, triggered by a 7.2 magnitude earthquake; the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda, after the eruption of the Nyiragongo volcano; and Mozambique, following Tropical Cyclone Gombe. UNHCR also provided life-saving protection and emergency assistance where climate change contributed to forced displacement. In Chad, UNHCR responded to an influx of refugees from Cameroon, where competition over natural resources exacerbated intercommunal violence.

12.   Throughout these emergencies, UNHCR prioritized activities aimed at preventing and responding to sexual exploitation and abuse, and ensured that mental health and psychosocial support was provided. Due consideration to the duty of care of UNHCR personnel was also central to the response.

13.   In 2021, UNHCR began revising its policy on emergency preparedness and response through an extensive internal consultation process. The revised policy will streamline processes and simplify operational procedures on partnerships, supply and access to human and financial resources during an emergency response. It will also emphasize the importance of coordination responsibilities and accountabilities, including more predictable and effective engagement in emergencies resulting from natural hazards and climate change.

B.   Emergency deployments and partnerships

14.   In 2021, quickly deteriorating security situations and frequently changing requirements for travel, as a consequence of COVID-19, continued to challenge the ability of UNHCR to deploy staff to new emergencies in a timely manner. Under the circumstances, some 50 deployments commenced through remote working arrangements until travel became possible. Emergency rosters were also renewed to strengthen deployment capacity, with consideration to gender and geographic diversity in the selection process. In 2021, despite

the challenges, UNHCR facilitated nearly 450 emergency deployments from the rosters, which represented more than a 40 per cent increase in deployments from the previous year.

15. In 2021, a full-time emergency surge team, comprised of seven staff members, spent nearly 800 days on emergency and functional support missions and led complex emergency responses. Between January and the end of May 2022, UNHCR mobilized more than 530 emergency missions and deployments, owing chiefly to the escalation of the situation in Ukraine and impact on the region.

16. UNHCR expanded its emergency standby partnerships to 20 organizations by signing new agreements with Ericsson Response and the German Center for International Peace Operations. The recorded value of the service donation from the emergency standby partners was higher than in previous years, amounting to $11.4 million. UNHCR also remained actively engaged in the inter-agency Standby Partnership Network, consisting of 15 United Nations organizations and 54 partners involved in emergency deployment.

17. UNHCR continued to closely coordinate its emergency responses at the global level through the Inter-Agency Standing Committee's Emergency Directors Group, as well as at the country and regional levels. UNHCR shared data and information through its operational data portal for refugee situations and made substantial contributions to information portals managed by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, such as the Humanitarian Data Exchange.

C. Supply management

18. Effective service delivery to emergencies was essential, as global transportation networks had not yet recovered from the disruptions created by COVID-19. In 2021, UNHCR's supply chain faced volatile air and sea freight markets, including container shortages, high cargo rates, longer transit times, and difficulties with customs clearance and manufacturing. Despite the circumstances, UNHCR continued to respond to new and ongoing emergencies throughout 2021, dispatching $47.6 million worth of emergency core relief items from its seven global emergency stockpiles. Given the increased number of emergencies, UNHCR augmented its global stockpile management capacity to be able to assist 1 million people.

19. The Ukraine crisis has further exacerbated the challenges of the freight and logistics market globally. Since the onset of the emergency, UNHCR has been working with global freight forwarders, suppliers, logistics companies, local authorities and partners to maximize transportation options. UNHCR has also widened its supplier base and established new humanitarian corridors for delivering relief items to Ukraine. As of 1 May 2022, the organization established 16 new warehouses in the region and organized 10 airlifts and multiple road shipments.

20. To optimize the use of resources, UNHCR prioritized the practice of secondary bidding for high-value orders and for the shipment of core relief items procured through global frame agreements. Secondary bidding is a solicitation exercise whereby suppliers holding already established frame agreements with set prices are invited to further bid their best and final offers for the required goods and services. This approach results in significantly lower prices, freeing up resources to serve more people in need. In 2021, secondary bidding lowered costs by an estimated $6.76 million.

21. UNHCR is committed to mitigating the impact of climate change and environmental degradation by minimizing the environmental footprint of its humanitarian assistance, in line with its operational strategy for climate resilience and environmental sustainability 2022--2025. To reduce greenhouse gas emissions, UNHCR identified the 10 highest emitting core relief items and prioritized their modification. The Office also outlined key actions that help reduce the environmental impact of the end-to-end supply chain, including with respect to the production modalities of core relief items and more efficient and leaner delivery mechanisms.

22. As part of the business transformation programme, UNHCR designed a product taxonomy of goods and services to optimize its procurement process. To maintain data

consistency without sacrificing agility, UNHCR plans to create a single global vendor administration unit. It will also provide access to the new enterprise resource planning system (Cloud ERP) to partners and logistics service providers that manage UNHCR warehouses in order to optimize the use of limited resources and ensure the timely recording of warehouse activities. Furthermore, significant progress has been made on the design of the shipment tracking tool. These efforts will be supported through a review of the service delivery model and supply policies, procedures and guidance, ensuring simplifications, informed decision-making and better, faster, more effective deliveries.

IV.   Risks and challenges

23.   The increasing number of emergencies is a growing trend, as demonstrated by the need for the Inter-Agency Standing Committee to issue three humanitarian system-wide scale-up activations in 18 months. The increase is expected to continue given the challenging global operational context, the lingering challenges caused by COVID-19, the global ripple effects of the Ukraine situation and the adverse effects of climate change, which act as a risk multiplier and exacerbate tensions and insecurity.

24.   In addition to causing forced displacement, the conflict in Ukraine poses a significant risk to global food security, markets and supply chains. Disruptions to the harvest and planting seasons, the threat of trade restrictions and the increased cost of fuel resulting from the conflict, are likely to inflate food prices around the world, with lower-income countries most affected. Higher food prices may trigger social unrest, political instability and increased protection risks.

25.   The disruption to global food systems caused by the conflict in Ukraine may also interact with climate-related challenges, such as flooding, droughts and desertification, with severe consequences. With these factors in mind, the number of persons of concern to UNHCR may increase, along with new or secondary displacements. The increased operational costs of responding to emergencies would present a further challenge for UNHCR in its commitment to deliver life-saving protection and assistance.

V.   Conclusion

26.   Considering the possible increase in the number of emergencies, strong preparedness, including risk analysis and contingency planning, is a priority. UNHCR remains committed to coordinating closely with partners on early awareness activities related to the global emergency risks and trends that are likely to cause forced displacement.

27.   The drivers and impacts of displacement are becoming increasingly intertwined and complex, especially in the context of climate change. UNHCR will seek to be a predictable and reliable actor in emergencies involving climate and natural hazard-induced forced displacement, in collaboration with national, local, and other humanitarian actors. Furthermore, UNHCR will promote the importance of environmental sustainability throughout its emergency response, including through the end-to-end supply chain.

28.   In order to optimize these opportunities and realize its priorities, UNHCR continues to count on the support of States, particularly the members of the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme.

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