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High Commissioner's Programme**

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**UNHCR engagement with internally displaced
persons**

Summary

This paper provides an update on the latest developments in the engagement of UNHCR with internally displaced persons, including advocacy, operational aspects, and coordination and leadership. It further highlights the progress UNHCR has made in relation to strategic partnerships and engagement with the Secretary-General's Action Agenda on Internal Displacement. It also reviews the efforts of UNHCR in advocating the centrality of protection and solutions in internal displacement situations.

I. Introduction

1. At the end of 2023, the scale of internal displacement reached a record high, with 63.3 million individuals being displaced within their own borders due to conflict and violence. A total of 13.7 million people were newly displaced during the year. The internally displaced continue to be the largest demographic group among persons of concern to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in the world.
2. UNHCR works in internal displacement situations in more than 30 countries, across all regions. In 2023, almost 5.1 million internally displaced persons were reported to have returned to their places of origin worldwide.

II. Advocating in situations of internal displacement

3. Every human being has the right to be protected against being arbitrarily displaced from their home or place of habitual residence, whether internally or across borders. This is established in the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement and is grounded in both international humanitarian and human rights law.
4. Most situations where UNHCR operates are located in active conflict areas, where recurrent violations of international humanitarian and human rights law, particularly against civilians, persist. In addition, food insecurity, drought and climate-related disasters are exacerbating the vulnerability of those forced to flee.
5. UNHCR advocates on behalf of the internally displaced and reinforces the primary responsibility of States to assist and protect them. Protection analysis is a key advocacy tool for UNHCR. During the course of 2023, protection analysis prepared by the UNHCR-led Global Protection Cluster was shared with affected States, United Nations Resident Coordinators and United Nations Country Teams, as well as with internally displaced persons, to ensure that protection is placed at the centre of the response.
6. UNHCR continued to support States to strengthen their legislation and policies for internally displaced persons in 2023. In this context, technical support missions were undertaken to Guatemala, Iraq and Mozambique. UNHCR also contributed to government-led reforms of legislative and policy frameworks in Burkina Faso, Colombia, Ethiopia, Mexico, Mozambique, Nigeria and Ukraine. Chad and Honduras adopted laws on protection and assistance for internally displaced persons, and UNHCR helped raise awareness about and provided support to implement these laws in both countries. Efforts were also made to promote the implementation of a law on the protection and assistance of internally displaced people adopted by the Niger in 2018.
7. UNHCR supported the work of the inter-agency Protection Expert Group on internal displacement, which assists governments and partners in addressing protection challenges through country visits, including to Ukraine in 2023. A cross-regional forum on implementing laws and policies on internal displacement was organized at the International Institute of Humanitarian Law in San Remo, Italy. An online event to commemorate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement was also organized.
8. UNHCR continued to strengthen national statistical systems. It did so by working closely with the Joint Internal Displacement Profiling Service, the Expert Group on Refugee, Internally Displaced Persons and Statelessness Statistics, and regional bodies such as the Economic Commission for Latin America and the African Union Institute for Statistics. Specialized training programmes were organized by the Joint Internal Displacement Profiling Service, and technical support missions were undertaken to countries such as Azerbaijan, Mexico and Somalia. UNHCR worked to strengthen collaboration with national statistical institutes, including Statistics Norway and Statistics Sweden, to facilitate the pursuit of durable solutions in situations of internal displacement.

III. Including solutions to internal displacement in early humanitarian responses

9. The UNHCR policy on emergency preparedness and response, published in 2023, anchors “durable solutions from the start” as a key principle. It encourages a shift towards embedding solutions into emergency preparedness and response activities from the onset of a crisis, including in situations of internal displacement.

10. For UNHCR, “durable solutions from the start” means investing in people and their own capabilities, including to mitigate the risk of dependence on assistance. In the Sudan and Ukraine, UNHCR promoted durable solutions from the outset of internal displacement by engaging with the authorities and communities to enable informed choices with respect to solutions. Solution-oriented programming was also advocated in cluster coordination and other relevant processes. As part of the emergency response in the Sudan, UNHCR made investments in local communities to help build their capacity to assist and protect others. For example, in the White Nile State, UNHCR supported a project on the economic empowerment of women and social cohesion with an organization led by internally displaced persons.

IV. Accompanying the transition from humanitarian response to development

11. UNHCR contributes to a multi-stakeholder, “whole-of-society” approach to internal displacement through a wide range of inclusive partnerships in support of governments, including with civil society organizations, the private sector and the forcibly displaced. The Office’s strategy on engaging with development actors, launched in 2023, aims to deepen the engagement with these actors to address displacement and plan for solutions.

12. The community-based and area-based approaches adopted by UNHCR have capitalized on strong relations with State authorities, host communities and partners in Afghanistan, Colombia and Ukraine. An innovative area-based pilot project in the Adamawa State of Nigeria, led by the Government, aims to help people integrate or reintegrate in their area of residence and to prevent further displacement by supporting permanent housing and strengthening access to land rights, economic opportunities and government services.

13. Efforts have been made to strengthen collaboration across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus. In Cameroon, South Sudan and the Sudan, UNHCR, together with United Nations partners, supported internally displaced persons and host communities with financing from the United Nations Secretary-General’s Peacebuilding Fund.

14. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) convened a policy roundtable on programming and implementation of the humanitarian-development-peace nexus in forced displacement contexts. This was organized in conjunction with the International Network on Conflict and Fragility, which is made up of members of the OECD Development Assistance Committee and key multilateral agencies. It also helped organize a policy dialogue on migration and development, which was co-hosted by Germany and UNHCR, during which the International Network on Conflict and Fragility’s common position on addressing forced displacement with a humanitarian-development-peace nexus approach was adopted. This aims to ensure that the engagement of policymakers and practitioners in forced displacement contexts goes beyond humanitarian assistance.

V. Strengthening partnerships

15. In 2023, the joint United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and UNHCR global collaboration framework for inclusion and solutions 2023-2025, which aims to strengthen cooperation between the two organizations, was launched. Both organizations also released a brief on good practices and opportunities relating to inclusion and solutions for internally displaced persons. New commitments towards joint country action plans were adopted in 10 country operations in Africa to advance inclusion and solutions for internally

displaced and stateless populations in countries such as Burkina Faso, the Central African Republic and the Sudan. Other examples of collaboration included a joint local integration project in Ukraine and a joint development strategy in Mozambique.

16. Cooperation with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) remained critical, including in internal displacement situations. The IOM and UNHCR framework of engagement, established in June 2022 and reconfirmed in May 2024, ensures greater complementarity. This includes efforts to streamline capacities and resources in the context of durable solutions for internally displaced persons and to address data gaps through enhanced collaboration.

17. UNHCR and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) continued to advance gender equality for women and girls, amplifying their global joint letter signed in 2020. In the Americas, a regional joint work plan 2023-2024 was developed to address the needs of refugee, internally displaced and stateless women and girls, including to mitigate protection risks, such as gender-based violence, and to promote their empowerment.

18. In 2023, the UNHCR-World Bank Joint Data Center enhanced the collection, analysis and sharing of socioeconomic data on forced displacement, in line with international standards. In the Central African Republic, internally displaced persons were included in the national survey of living conditions with the support of the Joint Data Center. The country's first poverty assessment, launched in November 2023, indicated that internally displaced persons in camps were worse off than the general population. It provided a roadmap to address poverty and internal displacement, and highlighted opportunities for humanitarian and development collaboration. Data collection efforts, with sensitivity to conflict and displacement and to vulnerable groups, can guide the design, implementation and monitoring of poverty reduction policies.

19. UNHCR strengthened its engagement with the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) and its processes related to internal displacement. It contributed to the IASC independent review of the humanitarian response to internal displacement and participates in the working group overseeing the ongoing management response. UNHCR also continued to carry out the recommendations contained in the independent review of the implementation of the IASC protection policy on internally displaced persons.

VI. Ensuring effective humanitarian coordination

20. The Global Protection Cluster on internal displacement, led by UNHCR, worked on strengthening the response to protection risks in the context of humanitarian crises, including in situations of armed conflict and disaster. In 2023, it provided support to country-level protection clusters which were activated in 31 crises situations. UNHCR led or co-led 29 of these 31 protection clusters, with a focus on shared protection analysis, joint protection advocacy and response to the most severe protection risks. In line with the recommendations contained in the independent review of the implementation of the IASC protection policy on internally displaced persons, the Global Protection Cluster focused on optimization and coherence within the cluster. Under the leadership of UNHCR, the Global Protection Cluster prepared a report on the centrality of protection in humanitarian action in 2022 in the context of crises where the humanitarian cluster system was activated.

21. The Global Shelter Cluster reached 20 million people in need through more than 1,100 partners globally. It supported clusters at the country level with effective coordination, information management and advocacy. Key priorities included the reduction of the environmental impact of humanitarian shelter responses and greater localization, advancing recovery and durable shelter solutions and advocating integrated approaches. To improve evidence-based decision-making in the context of shelter interventions, the Global Shelter Cluster launched a shelter severity classification system. UNHCR led 15 of the 31 country clusters.

22. The Camp Coordination and Camp Management cluster targeted 20 million individuals residing in internal displacement sites or various forms of informal collective

accommodation in 2023. In partnership with the Humanitarian Advisory Group, the cluster collaborated with over 160 national partners and facilitated multi-stakeholder consultations on localization. The cluster ensured that its community engagement forum fostered interactions with internally displaced communities to bolster their involvement. To this end, a new online platform for cluster members and other humanitarian actors was established. This platform allows practitioners to collaborate and exchange experiences as well as to share resources.

23. UNHCR and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations supported the development of a guidance note on advancing the humanitarian-development-peace nexus approach through IASC global clusters and the design of an accompanying checklist. This initiative aims to facilitate the design of responses that promote the coherence and complementarity of life-saving, development and peace interventions towards collective outcomes. UNHCR led or co-led 18 out of the 26 camp coordination and camp management clusters.

VII. Engaging with the Secretary-General's Action Agenda on Internal Displacement

24. UNHCR contributes to the implementation of the United Nations Secretary-General's Action Agenda on Internal Displacement, which sets out steps to better resolve, prevent and address internal displacement crises. Reaffirming its commitment, UNHCR published an institutional plan on solutions to internal displacement which outlines its operational strategy and concrete actions to prevent, respond and seek pathways to solutions on internal displacement. As detailed in the plan, guidance at the global and country levels in areas of law and policy, strategic partnerships, data and information management, advocacy and communications, operational engagement, and strategy-setting is being developed. UNHCR created a protection risk assessment tool for internally displaced persons to ensure that the required safeguards are in place to mitigate protection risks, while engaging in programming for solutions. The tool will be used by Resident Coordinators and United Nations Country Teams, and is presently being tested in Afghanistan, the Central African Republic, Chad and Mozambique, among other countries.

25. Within UNHCR, strategic oversight of commitments on operational and protection-related aspects of the organization's response to internal displacement falls under the purview of both the Assistant High Commissioner (Operations) and the Assistant High Commissioner (Protection). UNHCR assisted the office of the Special Adviser on Solutions to Internal Displacement through the secondment of three staff members in 2023 and through direct support and advice provided upon the request of the Special Adviser.

26. UNHCR, UNDP and IOM provided support to Resident Coordinators in the Central African Republic, Colombia, Ethiopia, Mozambique and Nigeria, co-leading durable solutions working groups and supporting the development of regional and State-level action plans. UNHCR worked closely with the United Nations Human Settlements Programme to develop a draft framework for solutions to urban displacement and guidelines to integrate displacement into national urban policy frameworks.

27. Drawing on its expertise, UNHCR is renewing its approach to intentions surveys for both refugees and internally displaced persons aimed at modernizing and standardizing them, in line with the criteria of the IASC Framework on Durable Solutions for Internally Displaced Persons and reflecting its age, gender and diversity policy. This initiative is firmly rooted in community participation and consultation to ensure constant dialogue with internally displaced persons, including in the search for solutions from the start.

28. The UNHCR Principal Adviser on Internal Displacement continued to promote, catalyse and coordinate more predictable engagement in situations of internal displacement. The Principal Adviser also engaged in advising the Resident Coordinator and United Nations Country Team in Yemen to advance the national solutions strategy and develop a solutions framework. A United Nations system-wide approach to internal displacement is currently under development, including with the support of the United Nations High-level Committee on Programmes.

VIII. Reporting

29. Concerted efforts have been made to highlight the organizational commitment of UNHCR to the implementation of the United Nations Secretary-General's Action Agenda on Internal Displacement. The High Commissioner underlined the organization's commitment towards solutions for internally displaced persons in his statements to the Third Committee of the General Assembly in October 2023 and to the UNHCR Executive Committee at its seventy-fourth session in October 2023.

30. An independent evaluation undertaken by UNHCR to assess its engagement in situations of internal displacement proposed recommendations to strengthen the strategic positioning of the organization, its leadership role and operational approach in internal displacement settings. The management response to the evaluation will be published in due course.

31. In an effort to operationalize the aspects of the High Commissioner's strategic directions 2022-2026 that relate to internal displacement, UNHCR has developed a five-year strategic plan for protection and solutions for internally displaced persons. The plan sets out predictable and prioritized actions to achieve measurable change in the lives of internally displaced persons. It outlines the Office's specific role and contribution to protection and solutions as well as the differentiated approaches that it plans to employ in diverse internal displacement contexts, in accordance with sustainable programming principles. The plan seeks to address the recommendations of the independent review of the humanitarian response to internal displacement and is aligned with its recommendations.

IX. Budget and expenditure

32. In 2023, a total needs-based budget of \$2,015.0 million for the engagement of UNHCR in situations of internal displacement was approved by the Executive Committee at its seventy-third session in October 2022. The final 2023 budget reached \$2,099.0 million, which represented a decrease of 6 per cent compared to the budget of \$2,300.0 million in 2022. The total expenditure in internal displacement situations reached \$1,018.0 million by the end of 2023.
