EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE
HIGH COMMISSIONER’S PROGRAMME
STANDING COMMITTEE
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NGO Statement on UNHCR’s engagement with internally displaced persons

Dear Chairperson,

This statement is delivered on behalf of a wide range of NGOs.

On the twentieth anniversary of the IDP Guiding Principles, we are pleased that the Executive Committee is prioritising systemic and effective engagement with internally displaced persons. 30.6 million new internal displacements associated with conflict and disasters were recorded in 2017. By year end, 40 million people were estimated to be living in internal displacement as a result of conflict and violence. As the global numbers of IDPs continue to rise, and displacement becomes protracted, improving global and national responses is essential.

We welcome UNHCR’s commitment to improving its engagement in situations of internal displacement, as outlined in last September’s Final Report of the Operational Review. However, since the publication, it is not clear how much institutional progress has been made in implementing its recommendations. Strategic engagement by UNHCR on internal displacement must better reflect operational realities on the ground.

We understand UNHCR is drafting a new policy on IDPs and urge consultations with NGOs throughout the process to ensure policy is informed by diverse perspectives. UNHCR strategic partners can contribute based on their operational experience in internal displacement contexts, from preparedness to solutions. We also encourage meaningful participation of IDPs in this process. Any new policy should avoid introducing requirements or bureaucratic processes which would undermine rapid responses at the onset of a crisis. We strongly encourage including budget and human resource implications, including vis-à-vis refugee response, clear follow-up arrangements and a regular monitoring process in the policy framework.

As already indicated in the note “Refocusing on Internal Displacement” for the IASC Principals meeting, the new policy should also outline a clear direction for UNHCR’s role within the interagency system. We therefore encourage UNHCR to clarify its position in humanitarian coordination and operational response in mixed situations with refugees, returnees and IDPs.

The pursuit of more coherence, integration and linkages between UNHCR’s IDP and refugee responses in country is critical. This should include early warning monitoring mechanisms, flexible and multi-year funding arrangements, enhanced coordination and planning, and more efficient staff allocations. This is especially clear in situations where returning refugees are at risk of being internally displaced. The last years have seen worrying levels of refugee returns into situations characterised by high levels of insecurity. In many countries, including Afghanistan, Syria, DRC and Somalia, returning refugees have found themselves unable to settle back into their former homes and lives or integrate elsewhere in their country, leaving them internally displaced. There is a major gap, however, in systematic empirical data on the fate of many returning refugees and their progress towards achieving durable solutions.
More consistent approaches and more transparent mechanisms for assessing future displacement risk for returnees and measuring the success of returns must become an integral part of UNHCR’s strategic planning. Investing more in prevention planning is also important. This will require more active UNHCR engagement with governments, UN partners, NGOs and local actors. This will also mean engaging development actors at the onset of emergencies, including to identify future durable solutions in early stages of displacement. We would therefore be interested to learn how the new Division of Resilience and Solutions will work to integrate IDP concerns, and to bring their perspectives into long-term national development and peacebuilding processes? Is UNHCR planning to consult strategic partners in developing its guidance to facilitate integrated programming across population groups? When will the new Integrated Programme Service be operational?

Some governments continue to reject the notion that their countries are undergoing humanitarian and protection crises. Strong advocacy is vital in encouraging them to address humanitarian situations and allow access.

UNHCR’s co-chairing of the GP20 Plan of Action provides a useful mechanism by which NGOs and other actors can engage UNHCR on internal displacement. We should strive to ground the Plan in concrete actions and measurable outcomes, and expand engagement with affected States. Further, we encourage UNHCR to work to raise the GP20’s ambition and expand its scope beyond addressing existing displacement through assistance and protection, to promote system-wide action in reducing the risk of new displacement.

We also call on UNHCR to recognise more explicitly the role that climate change and the risk of extreme events play in driving displacement. UNHCR, in its role as member of the UN Climate Change Conventions’ Task Force on Displacement, should lead efforts on disaster risk reduction. It should do so especially in contexts where the impact of climate change and weather extremes interlink with resource scarcity and conflict, such as the Horn of Africa or the Lake Chad region, to prevent short-term internal displacement from becoming protracted.

We welcome UNHCR’s acknowledgment of the need for better data gathering and analysis, and particularly its collaboration with the World Bank to establish a joint Data Centre. This timely initiative recognises existing challenges and gaps in data and evidence that can be met to inform a more effective response on forced displacement. To complement existing efforts, avoid duplication, improve the interoperability of data and promote innovation, we encourage UNHCR to work closely with other relevant agencies and partners, such as OCHA’s humanitarian data centre, IOM, IDMC, JIPS, government bodies and local stakeholders. We particularly encourage investment by the Centre in its objective of monitoring the socio-economic impacts of forced displacement, to support policies and planning aimed at reducing displacement risk and protracted displacement. We would also welcome more details on the population data management package for internal displacement that UNHCR has been piloting with partners in the DRC. When will this be rolled out to other countries and what are the challenges and lessons UNHCR has encountered in developing and piloting the model?

Chairperson, we look forward to continued collaboration with UNHCR. It is only through genuine partnerships and efforts to bridge humanitarian and development gaps, that we can prevent protracted displacement and ensure no IDP is left behind.

A detailed version of this intervention is available on icvanetwork.org

Thank you.