

EVALUATION AND POLICY ANALYSIS:
UNHCR'S PLAN AND ACTIVITIES

1. This paper on UNHCR's evaluation and policy analysis plan and activities is divided into three sections. The first describes the range of recent measures that have been taken to enhance the capacity, effectiveness and impact of UNHCR's evaluation function. The second section provides an account of the organization's efforts to consolidate and build upon those initiatives through the introduction of a formal evaluation policy statement. The final section identifies the principal evaluation projects that UNHCR has undertaken or initiated over the past year, as well as the steps being taken to employ the findings and recommendations of those evaluations for the purposes of policymaking, planning and programming.

I. RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN THE EVALUATION FUNCTION

2. Since the end of the 1990s, UNHCR has made a concerted effort to revitalize and reinforce its evaluation function, with the intention of enhancing its capacity for organizational learning and performance review, as well as its accountability to refugees and other key stakeholders. A wide range of measures have been taken in pursuit of these objectives, including (but not limited to) the following:

- (a) the establishment and progressive strengthening of the Evaluation and Policy Analysis Unit (EPAU), which reports directly to the Assistant High Commissioner for Refugees and which has overall responsibility for the management and development of the evaluation function in UNHCR;
- (b) the introduction of an evaluation mission statement, committing UNHCR to the highest possible degree of transparency and consultation in the conduct of its evaluation activities, including the placement of all evaluation findings and recommendations in the public domain;
- (c) the implementation of a plan of action for the development and devolution of the evaluation function, with the intention of providing UNHCR's functional units, regional bureaux and field offices with the tools and resources needed to play a more active role in the analysis and assessment of the organization's work;
- (d) the establishment of a flexible and rolling evaluation work programme, focusing on those policy issues, programmes, projects and practices which are of most direct concern to UNHCR's management and key stakeholders;
- (e) the establishment of Steering Committees, consisting of key stakeholders within and outside UNHCR, to guide and supervise the progress of each major evaluation project, and to ensure the effective utilization of evaluation findings and recommendations;
- (f) the extensive use of external evaluation consultants, and the selection of such consultants by means of open and competitive bidding procedures, so as to maximize the independence and quality of UNHCR's evaluation activities;
- (g) the introduction of lessons-learned exercises at the completion of major evaluation projects, undertaken with the purpose of reviewing and improving the evaluation procedures, methods and management controls employed by UNHCR.

- (h) the employment of innovative and interactive evaluation methods, including 'real-time' evaluations of UNHCR's emergency operations; 'beneficiary-based' evaluations of long-term programmes; facilitated self-evaluation workshops at field level; as well as joint and inter-agency evaluation projects, conducted in association with other humanitarian actors;
- (i) the active involvement of EPAU staff members in UNHCR's strategic planning, policymaking and partnership functions, enabling the organization to make more immediate and effective use of the findings and recommendations which emanate from evaluation projects; and,
- (j) the expansion of the evaluation function to include analytical and research-based activities which are intended to provide UNHCR and its partners with a better understanding of the political, institutional, operational and policy environments in which they are obliged to work.

II. UNHCR'S EVALUATION POLICY

3. In order to consolidate and build upon the developments described above, UNHCR will shortly introduce a formal evaluation policy statement. Based upon an independent review of EPAU's work, as well as a year-long process of internal discussion and stakeholder consultation, it is hoped that the policy statement will be issued by the time of the June 2002 meeting of the Standing Committee. As with all other documents prepared by EPAU, the policy statement will be available in hard copy to all interested parties and will be freely accessible on the Evaluation and Policy Analysis page of the UNHCR website, <www.unhcr.org>.

4. The forthcoming evaluation policy statement addresses four principal issues. First, it describes the *role of evaluation in UNHCR*, stressing the need for evaluation activities to be effectively coordinated with other components of the organization's performance review and learning frameworks. The policy statement identifies the primary purposes for which evaluation is used in UNHCR, and elaborates upon the key principles on which all of the organization's evaluation activities will be based: transparency, independence, consultation, relevance and integrity.

5. A second function of the evaluation policy statement is to specify *UNHCR's commitment to evaluation*, in terms of the level, types, resourcing and quality of evaluation activity undertaken by the organization. In brief, the policy envisages a phased expansion of the evaluation function, with specific obligations being placed upon EPAU, UNHCR's regional bureaux and its larger field offices.

6. Third, the evaluation policy statement provides a procedural and managerial framework for the *conduct of evaluation in UNHCR*. In this respect, the document addresses issues such as the content of the terms of reference to be established for each evaluation project; the composition and required competence of evaluation teams engaged by UNHCR; the nature of the competitive bidding procedures used to award evaluation contracts; the role of evaluation Steering Committees; as well as the consultative, quality control, management response and dissemination mechanisms that will be built into the design of all evaluation projects. This part of the policy statement also commits UNHCR to a 'utilization focused' approach to evaluation, whereby the intended use of findings and recommendations is taken into full account during the planning and design of each evaluation project.

7. A fourth and final purpose of the policy statement is to define the role, responsibilities and working methods of the Evaluation and Policy Analysis Unit. The document sets out the procedure to be used for the selection and approval of new evaluation projects. It also envisages the

establishment of a new Evaluation Advisory Group. Consisting of representatives from the Executive Committee, the UN system, the NGO and research communities, the Advisory Group will advise EPAU on the development and effective utilization of UNHCR's evaluation activities.

8. Finally, the document requests Executive Committee members and observers to coordinate their own evaluation activities with EPAU and encourages them to conduct those activities in accordance with the evaluation principles and standards set out in the UNHCR policy statement.

III. EVALUATION PROJECTS AND ACTIVITIES

9. During the period under review, UNHCR's evaluation function has focused on a number of global operational and policy issues which are of particular concern to the organization and its partners. The following paragraphs identify those issues and provide a brief description of the evaluation projects and activities that have been undertaken or initiated with respect to each of those themes. A more detailed evaluation work programme for the second half of 2002 will be made available to the Executive Committee members and posted on the Evaluation and Policy Analysis page of the UNHCR website.

Refugee Children

10. The impact of UNHCR's activities in meeting the *rights and protection needs of refugee children* has been the subject of a major independent evaluation over the past 18 months. Undertaken by an eight-person team of international experts, who visited nine different field operations, the report of this evaluation project was published in May 2002, prior to relevant discussions at the UN Special Session on Children in New York and the Global Consultations on International Protection in Geneva.

11. The Assistant High Commissioner for Refugees, in association with the Division of Operational Support (DOS), Department of International Protection (DIP) and the project's Steering Committee, will assume responsibility for drawing up a global plan of action, based on the evaluation's findings and recommendations. That plan of action will also be coordinated with UNHCR's current efforts to address and prevent the sexual exploitation of refugee girls, a problem which has recently come to the fore in the West Africa region.

12. With regard to the needs of younger refugees, the period under review also witnessed the publication of a book by EPAU and DOS, titled 'Learning for a Future: Refugee Education in Developing Countries'. Focusing on issues such as emergency education, peace education, the quality of refugee education and vocational training, the volume presents the findings and recommendations of an evaluation and research project sponsored by an Executive Committee member.

13. A principal finding of the independent evaluation on refugee children is UNHCR's limited capacity in the realm of *community services and social protection*. These issues will be addressed more systematically in a recently initiated global review of the organization's community services function. It is hoped that the initial findings of this review, which will be supported by more specific community services evaluation projects in India, Tanzania and Zambia, will be presented to the October 2002 meeting of the Executive Committee.

Durable solutions for refugees

14. In recent months, the High Commissioner has given renewed consideration to UNHCR's role in finding *durable solutions for refugees*, with a particular emphasis on the organization's efforts to *promote self-reliance* in areas of displacement. A number of recent, current and planned evaluation projects are contributing to this initiative. These include a global review of UNHCR's role in protracted refugee situations, which has been undertaken in close consultation with the Reintegration and Local Settlement Section and the Regional Bureau for Africa.

15. In addition, EPAU has completed an analysis of the potential for local integration as a solution to refugee problems, which has been used as the basis for a paper that will be discussed at the Global Consultations on International Protection; as well as lessons-learned reviews of UNHCR reintegration programmes in four African and Asian countries. Evaluations are also under consideration with respect to durable solutions programmes for refugees in Central Asia, and economic revitalization programmes in areas of displacement in the Caucasus.

Internally displaced populations

16. The international community's role in *meeting the needs of internally displaced populations* has been the subject of increased analysis and discussion in recent times. EPAU has sought to relate that debate to UNHCR's mandate and operational activities by undertaking evaluations of the organization's programmes in Angola (in association with DIP) and Sri Lanka (in association with the UK's Department for International Development). A review of the UNHCR programme in Colombia is also planned.

17. UNHCR's work with internally displaced populations will be the subject of a more detailed and global analysis in May 2002, when EPAU and DIP will jointly convene a two-day workshop titled 'Protection and solutions in situations of internal displacement: learning from UNHCR's operational experience'. Bringing together UNHCR staff from a dozen different operations around the world, and involving personnel from several other humanitarian agencies, the workshop will identify and share examples of good operational practice. It will also review the utility of UNHCR's operational guidelines for UNHCR's involvement with internally displaced persons, as well as the UN's Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement.

Emergency preparedness and response capacity

18. The issue of *UNHCR's emergency preparedness and response capacity* continues to be a major feature of the EPAU work programme. Soon after the events of 11 September 2001, UNHCR made a commitment to undertake a 'real-time' evaluation of its response to the crisis in Afghanistan and neighbouring countries.

19. This initiative has led to the preparation of three real-time evaluation bulletins, providing senior managers at Headquarters and the field with findings and recommendations that can be put to immediate operational use. Given the degree of interest in the 'real-time' evaluation concept amongst other humanitarian actors, EPAU has prepared a brief paper titled 'Real-time humanitarian evaluations: some frequently asked questions'.

20. As a result of findings presented in the real-time evaluation on Afghanistan, a more detailed and global review of UNHCR's emergency procurement, delivery and stockpiling arrangements has been launched. It is planned for completion in the second half of 2002.

Refugee women

21. An important focus of UNHCR's evaluation work programme has been and continues to be the *protection and welfare of refugee women*. In this context, EPAU has supported an assessment of UNHCR's work in this domain, sponsored by two Executive Committee members and undertaken by the Women's Commission on Refugee Women and Children. Publication of this assessment is expected by the time of the June 2002 meeting of the Standing Committee.

22. Other completed, current and forthcoming projects in this area include an independent evaluation of UNHCR's efforts to address the problem of sexual violence in Dadaab, Kenya; an independent evaluation of the Kosovo Women's Initiative; and a forthcoming workshop that will compare and assess the women's initiatives undertaken by UNHCR in Bosnia, Kosovo and Rwanda. EPAU is also assisting DOS to coordinate an inter-agency evaluation initiative that is designed to assess and improve the reproductive health services provided to refugees.

Other themes

23. In addition to the themes and projects identified above, EPAU continues to provide UNHCR with evaluation and analysis in a number of other areas. These include the implementation of the organization's policy on *refugees in urban areas*; the interface between *asylum and international migration*, including the issues of human smuggling, transit migration and the 'secondary movement' of refugees; the issue of *standards and quality in humanitarian assistance*; and finally, the problem of *security in refugee-populated areas*, especially those areas where bona fide refugees are mixed with armed elements.

IV. CONCLUSION

24. Looking to the future, EPAU will in the months to come focus special attention on the introduction of UNHCR's evaluation policy, including the development of those tools and training activities which are required for the policy to be effectively implemented. At the same time, the unit will develop a programme of work for the coming year that is linked to the strategic priorities of UNHCR and its partners. In this respect, UNHCR welcomes any suggestions from Executive Committee members concerning specific evaluation projects which the organization might initiate in the course of the next twelve months.