UNHCR
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
Haut Commissariat des Nations Unies pour les réfugiés

Evaluation of UNHCR's implementation of three of its protection strategies: the Global Education Strategy, the Updated SGBV Strategy, and the Child Protection Framework

July 2017

Executive Summary

ES/2017/02

Oxford Policy Management

UNHCR Evaluation Service

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Acknowledgements

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Evaluation information at a glance	
Title of the evaluation:	Evaluation of UNHCR's implementation of three protection strategies: The Global Education Strategy, the Updated SGBV Strategy and the Child Protection Framework
Timeframe covered:	2012– mid-year 2016
Type of evaluation:	Global policy and strategy evaluation
Countries covered:	Global scope with evaluation missions in Bangladesh, Egypt, Islamic Republic of Iran, Mexico and Rwanda, and study of ten additional countries: Chad, India, Jordan, Kenya, Lebanon, Malaysia, Niger, Pakistan, Uganda, and Zambia.
Evaluation initiated by: Funded by:	UNHCR Division of International Protection UNHCR Evaluation Service
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Executive summary

Overview and approach

In 2011-12, UNHCR developed and issued three protection strategies: the Global Education Strategy, the Updated Strategy on Sexual Gender Based Violence (SGBV), and the Child Protection (CP) Framework. The three strategies define organizational objectives and were expected to provide strategic guidance for developing country-level strategies and to address protection challenges and interventions directly related to education, SGBV and CP.

The objectives of this evaluation were to:

- Gather evidence on whether and how the three strategies have been working together, addressing cross-cutting protection challenges that required joint approaches to maximise protection outcomes;
- Learn from different countries' experience in receiving and implementing the strategies;
- Learn about enabling and constraining factors to the realisation of the strategies;
- Document and assess the quality of design of the strategies and how they have been set-up, including the monitoring and reporting functions.

The three headline evaluation questions were:

A. **Quality**: Are the three Strategies relevant, coherent, informed by evidence, and adequately designed?
B. **Implementation**: To what extent have the Strategies been implemented?
C. **Contribution to results**: What were the results of the Strategies?

The evaluation selected fifteen countries of study. Five countries were visited: Bangladesh, Egypt, Iran, Mexico and Rwanda. The additional ten countries studied were: Chad, India, Jordan, Kenya, Lebanon, Malaysia, Niger, Pakistan, Uganda, and Zambia.

The evaluation team drew on the following sources of evidence:

- Sector expert reviews of the global strategies, undertaken by education, child protection and SGBV sector experts to assess the technical content of the global strategies;
- Document review of HQ-level documents, including a review of monitoring and reporting documents, meeting agendas, as well as interagency policies and frameworks;
- Document review of 15 country operations, centred on country-level strategies and drafts, and Country Operation Plans (COPs) for 2012 and 2016 (data at mid-year);
- Interviews with HQ staff, undertaken during two missions to Geneva and follow-up interviews;
- Interviews with staff from 15 Country Offices: conducted face-to-face in country in the five case-study countries visited, as well as remotely for the additional ten study countries;
- Interviews with government interlocutors, UNHCR partners and Persons of Concern (PoCs) in the five case-study countries visited (through key informant interviews, focus group discussions, household case studies, and Participatory Ethnographic Evaluation Research conducted with women in countries implementing the SGBV strategy).

Some limitations related to data collection and analysis included:

- Challenges in identifying interviewees best placed to provide insights on strategy roll-out and country-level adaptation, requiring additional efforts to ensure adequate coverage of the evaluation issues.
- Analysing CO-level data given the inconsistency of indicators reported on.

- Challenges in establishing the strategy as an influencing and contributory factor in specific operational decisions, as well as results at the PoC level.

- Constraints during country visits included: lack of access to refugees in camps; low representativeness of samples selected by some Country Offices and partners; and risk of bias given the presence of government officials or UNHCR staff during some interviews and focus group activities.

Findings and conclusions

The evaluation found that:

- The three strategies have been useful in that they have provided frameworks of guidance to country offices on how to approach three critical areas of protection policy. They have, to varying but significant degrees, been adapted and implemented in almost all the pilot countries whose experience has been reviewed as part of the Evaluation.

- The process of support to adaptation was appreciated by country offices. This has resulted in country-level strategies and the inclusion of some specific action areas in COPs.

- It is however difficult to identify results and changes that can be clearly attributed at the country level to the strategies. Changes identified in the protection provided to PoCs appeared principally to reflect national contextual factors rather than being clearly driven by the strategies.

- The strategies are not based on clearly articulated assumptions or theories of change and insufficient guidance has been provided about how to interpret and implement them in very different operational contexts.

- The frameworks of objectives set out in the strategies are of varying degrees of precision and measurability.

- UNHCR's corporate monitoring and reporting system, which provides a high level of discretion to country offices in the selection of indicators, makes it difficult to track performance in relation to the strategies over time or compare performance across countries.

- There was significant uncertainty and confusion regarding the role and purpose of the strategies among both HQ and Country Office staff. Further, there was lack of clarity about the precise status and purpose of the strategies and their relationship to other strategic guidance.

- UNHCR Country Offices may lack the skills and resources to fully adapt and implement the strategies.

- The COP process based around a single year budget with considerable uncertainty about, and fluctuations in, resource availability militates against coherent strategy planning and implementation.

- The strategies (and the supporting documentation and processes) may be seen as insufficiently prescriptive while also not providing sufficiently structured guidance on how to deal with the sorts of challenges that Country Offices in fact encounter.

Are the three strategies relevant, coherent, informed by evidence, and adequately designed?

The approaches set out in the strategies are well-aligned with relevant current international agendas, emphasise partnerships and the need for a multisectoral approach, and are coherent with international law on refugees and relevant international targets and conventions. They were considered by country offices to be relevant to national contexts and compatible with government approaches. The strategies do not however set out a clear pathway specifying how the suggested activities will contribute to the strategic objectives, or the key assumptions that underlie the envisaged causal links. The strategies also do not sufficiently acknowledge the different types of needs faced by persons of concern, and the implications of this for how strategies could be implemented. The strategies are coherent with each other despite their separate preparation processes and differences in terminology and structure. They do not systematically present evidence to make a case for how strategic objectives were developed, and why they are being proposed.

The Education Strategy sets out clear goals while those of the Child Protection Framework are more broadly formulated, and the SGBV Strategy does not propose clear or measurable objectives.

The goals, objectives and action areas of the three strategies are embedded in UNHCR's Results Framework only to a very limited extent. Guidance notes and tools provided limited guidance or support to country operations about how to generate data on indicators.

To what extent have the strategies been implemented?

The strategies were adapted to a significant extent in the 15 countries studied, particularly through the creation of standalone thematic strategies which adopted at least half of the strategy action areas and goals. This was done for twelve out of thirteen piloting countries for Education, ten out of twelve for SGBV and for all seven for Child Protection.

In relation to the inclusion of activities in COPs, the SGBV Strategy had the greatest influence, while being a SGBV Strategy pilot country increased the likelihood that Child Protection activities were incorporated in the COP. With regards to the Education Strategy, nearly all the countries that were implementing any education activities corresponding to strategy action areas were already including these in the COP in 2012. It is therefore difficult to ascertain the degree of influence of the Education Strategy on programming developed after its rollout.

Most of the five case study countries are implementing activities that cover all the action areas but are not reporting against most of these in their COPs. For child protection, reporting against indicators which include activities actually being implemented is uneven, while for SGBV the inputs monitored and reported in the COP most precisely cover the activities being implemented.

What were the results of the strategies?

UNHCR's monitoring and reporting system has significant limitations for assessing the results achieved either at system or PoC-level. This reflects the fact that reporting does not take place against a consistent set of indicators directly related to strategy objectives either across countries or over time.

The SGBV and child protection strategies do appear to have had some positive influence on country operations since various goals and actions areas had not previously been a clear focus of country operations activities. As most education activities and objectives were already included in various COPs at the time of the issuance of the Education Strategy, there is no conclusive evidence of the strategy

directly influencing country operations, improvements in capacity, internal coordination or monitoring. This may have to do with the fact that education systems relating to the action areas in the Global Education Strategy were already generally in place in pilot countries prior to the global strategy rollout.

There was limited evidence of the strategies contributing to improvements in the enabling environment. Generally, positive developments occurred only in countries which already had relatively favourable environments and where this occurred it did not appear that the strategies contributed significantly to change. While there was some evidence of strengthened partnership arrangements in the case study countries it was not possible to identify a way in which the strategies had contributed to this.

The comparison of the COPs for 2012 and 2016 for the five case study countries did not allow a conclusive assessment of progress because of a lack of consistency in the indicators reported. There was no clear evidence of improvements in performance against objectives for the countries for which data was available in relation to Global Education Strategy, and SGBV reporting was too incomplete to allow any conclusions to be drawn. It was clear from interviews and reviews of other information that major unresolved protection issues in the areas covered by the three strategies remained for PoCs in the five case study countries.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Ensure a clear purpose, target audience and consistent approach and terminology of protection strategies.

UNHCR should ensure that if thematic protection strategies are developed in the future, these protection strategies:

(a) include a clear statement on purpose;

(b) specify the target audience and how the protection strategy should be used;

(c) apply a coherent and consistent approach and terminology both within each strategy document and across different strategies; and

(d) are effectively led and consistently supported across UNHCR at all management levels.

Recommendation 2: Ensure measurability of thematic protection strategies.

To the extent that thematic protection strategies define global level objectives (or outcomes) in support of advancing global strategic directions, UNHCR should ensure that:

(a) the logic model or casual pathways and related assumptions showing how the types of action proposed are anticipated as contributing to achieving the objectives are made explicit;

(b) a set of core indicators to be used across all countries is defined and agreed *prior to* the issuance of the strategies;

(c) the necessary systems, approaches and capacities to measure progress are identified, taking into consideration differences in the operational contexts for Country Offices; and

(d) the set of core indicators should be prescriptive to allow for comparisons over time, as well as between countries where the same frameworks have been rolled out. COs should have discretion to add additional indicators.

Recommendation 3: Improve communication on protection strategies.

UNHCR should improve communication across the organisation about the purpose of protection strategies both as they are issued and during roll-out and adaptation.

Recommendation 4: Plan and provide appropriate guidance and support.

UNHCR should provide appropriate forms of support and guidance to assist Country Offices in strategic planning and prioritization, incorporating protection strategies into programmatic and strategic decision-making and implementation (roll-out and country-level adaptation), while ensuring an integrated approach across protection and with other protection units. The forms of support and guidance required should be responsive to expressed Country Office needs and preferences and are expected to include guidance on prioritization and on addressing interlinkages across strategies and functional areas.

Recommendation 5: Appropriate resourcing of strategy implementation.

UNHCR should review the staffing and other resource implications for country operations to be able to adapt and implement thematic protection strategies. This would include assessing when and how additional staff should be deployed/contracted.