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**Consideration of reports relating to programme
and administrative oversight and evaluation**

Report on evaluation

Report of the High Commissioner

Summary

This report, covering the period from July 2016 through June 2017, is provided pursuant to the decision of the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme to consider reports relating to programme and administrative oversight and evaluation during its annual plenary session (A/AC.96/1003, para 25.1.(f) (vi)).

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I. Introduction

1. In line with the organizational commitment to systematically evaluate and assess UNHCR's policies, programmes, projects, partnerships and processes for the dual purpose of accountability and learning, the High Commissioner issued a new "Policy on evaluation",¹ which entered into effect in October 2016. The Policy incorporates the key evaluation principles of independence, impartiality, credibility and utility, and reflects United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) "Norms and standards for evaluation",² as issued in June 2016. The Policy also introduces two levels of evaluations: i) centralized evaluations, commissioned and managed by the Evaluation Service, primarily focusing on policies, strategies, programmes and themes of corporate significance at the global, strategic and institutional levels, as well as on level-3 refugee emergency operations; and ii) decentralized evaluations, commissioned and managed by relevant UNHCR bureaux, divisions and country offices, focusing on activities, themes, operational areas, and programmes at the regional or country level. It requires quality assurance of all evaluation processes and products regardless of the level.

2. The new Policy further emphasizes the importance of having an evaluation function that is independent from management functions. In that connection, an important first step was taken to reconstitute the former Policy Development and Evaluation Service into a dedicated Evaluation Service. As required and as per good practice, the Head of the Evaluation Service reports directly to the High Commissioner.

3. Recognizing that the Policy will lead to some critical organizational shifts, several additional actions have been taken to strengthen UNHCR's evaluation function.

II. Evaluation policy and implementation

4. As mentioned above, the new Policy requires UNHCR to take concrete actions. A critical first step has been to define the skill set and profiles of the workforce within the newly configured Service in order to enable UNHCR to deliver on the responsibilities established by the Policy. The Policy stipulates that at least 50 per cent of the positions in the Evaluation Service should be filled by evaluation experts. In order to equip the organization with the required high-quality technical expertise, two external experts were identified and recruited in 2015-2016. Subsequently, the Head of the Evaluation Service was recruited externally following open competition and took up her position in June 2017.

5. In line with the shift to a dedicated, stand-alone Evaluation Service with no policy development responsibilities, three existing positions were reclassified in order to ensure a more robust evaluation function. Given that three staff in the Service have already been externally recruited, two of the three existing positions will be filled with UNHCR staff, while the third remaining position is reclassified as an expert position and will be open to both internal as well as external applicants. This will help achieve a balance between internal knowledge of operations and external expertise. The filling of these positions is currently under way, and staff are expected to take them up before the end of 2017.

6. Following the issuance of the Evaluation Policy, the Service developed evaluation quality assurance guidelines in November 2016. As the first comprehensive guidelines on the quality and integrity of the evaluation process and products, these represent a second critical step in supporting the implementation of the new Policy, and cover the various phases in an evaluation process, from initiating an evaluation to its finalization and management response, and for ensuring conformity with good practice. The guidelines

¹ Available from <http://www.unhcr.org/3d99a0f74>.

² See <http://www.unevaluation.org/document/detail/1914>.

have been applied to ongoing evaluations over the past year and have resulted in significant revisions during the inception phase of evaluations. They have also been shared with UNHCR-contracted evaluation companies and individual consultants, and serve as an important tool for regional bureaux, divisions and country offices considering the commissioning of decentralized evaluations. Besides contributing to overall quality, the guidelines shed further light on the requirements for evaluation, and how evaluations are different from monitoring and other forms of assessment. Moreover, when applying these guidelines, the Service has learned valuable lessons on how to craft clearer terms of reference, engage stakeholders from the beginning and throughout the evaluation process, and guide and manage external contractors. Lessons learned will be used during future evaluations and will likely inform a revision of the guidelines in the future.

7. A third important element of the new Policy is the mandatory requirement of a management response to all evaluations. By formally institutionalizing this element in the evaluation cycle, the Service ensures that evaluations become actionable and lead to programmatic changes and organizational learning. Prior to the issuance of the policy, management responses to evaluation findings and recommendations were sometimes developed and even followed up on, but these were undertaken in the absence of an institutional accountability mechanism and process. Since the issuance of the policy, management responses address recommendations in all evaluations, as and when they are finalized. Further, an update one year after implementation of the response is requested by the Service and made publicly available.

8. The fourth enabling initiative introduced by the Evaluation Service was a number of information and discussion sessions as well as individual meetings, which were organized for staff from regional bureaux and divisions, on the new Policy and its implications for the evaluation function across the organization. These discussions provided fresh insight into the challenges associated with implementation and uptake of the Policy, as well as into the ways to move the Service forward.

9. Overall, the first eight months of implementation of the Policy have provided some useful reflections. First, there is a strong level of interest in the organization in investing in evaluation for learning as well as accountability. By delivering high-quality evaluations that serve both purposes, this interest can be leveraged into even greater commitment. Second, to increase the active engagement of UNHCR staff in country operations and at Headquarters, the Service needs to generate deeper understanding of the value and utility of evaluation. For staff in the field in particular, this case is best made after they go through an evaluation of their programme. Third, while the Policy represents a significant and major shift for UNHCR in terms of evaluation, building capacity and strengthening the culture of evaluation cannot be achieved in the short term but requires a multi-year strategy. It is also vital that the organization recognize the importance of early investment in evaluation, even though the benefits may only be reaped in a few years' time. Finally, the Service acknowledges that quality evaluations are connected to overall programme design, programme monitoring, and other aspects of results-based management, policy development and implementation, as well as learning. As such, it believes that evaluation work can play an influential role in contributing to, and encouraging improvements in, data collection and analysis as key components of the evidence required to help improve operational outcomes.

10. The Service is currently developing a strategic multi-year workplan with the aim of building evaluation capabilities and connecting evaluations to ongoing change efforts on data, results-based management, global learning approaches and policy development. This workplan will be designed in consultation with key stakeholders, such as UNHCR staff and staff working in the evaluation services of United Nations sister agencies, and will include organizational priorities as well as provisions to address emerging issues relevant to field operations.

III. Evaluation activities

11. The Evaluation Service commissioned and managed a range of evaluations, reviews and other work related to evaluation and assessment from July 2016 through June 2017. In total, five centralized evaluations on subjects and geographical areas of strategic and corporate significance were commissioned by the Service.

12. At the request of the Division of International Protection, the Service commissioned the evaluation of UNHCR's global strategies on child protection, education and on the prevention of and response to sexual and gender-based violence, which have been rolled out in field operations for four years. An external independent evaluation was carried out and is now close to finalization after some delays. Among the lessons learned from this evaluation are the challenges associated with evaluating global strategies in the absence of systematic, measurable objectives and/or a theory of change. Further, the three strategies were each written for different purposes and with varying scope, making it difficult to analyse their application. The evaluation also confirmed the importance of consistent and continuing communication, support and guidance to field operations, as well as resources for implementation at country level.

13. In follow-up to the High Commissioner's 2013 Dialogue on Protection Challenges on internally displaced persons (IDPs), UNHCR commissioned an evaluation of UNHCR's role as protection cluster lead. This evaluation was relatively complex and entailed field missions to six countries where UNHCR leads the protection cluster or the protection working group. To ensure engagement of key stakeholders, a reference group, comprising UNHCR staff and partners, was actively involved in the evaluation process. The Service also reached out to the global protection cluster by organizing a workshop to discuss initial draft findings of the evaluation and by giving a briefing at its annual meeting. The final report and management response is expected to be released in the second half of 2017.

14. In relation to the global commitment on engagement with IDPs, as per UNHCR's "Strategic directions" (2017-2021), the Evaluation Service, in close collaboration with the Regional Bureau for Europe, commissioned an evaluation of UNHCR operations in Ukraine, where the Office declared, internally, a level-2 emergency in January 2015 and where it co-leads the protection and the shelter clusters. The evaluation is generating evidence of UNHCR's performance in the context of an inter-agency humanitarian response to large-scale internal displacement. While the Office has commissioned evaluations of level-3 refugee emergency response, it had not yet commissioned a specific evaluation of its engagement in IDP emergencies. This evaluation started in late 2016 and is expected to be finalized in the summer of 2017.

15. Fourth, the Service commissioned a review of UNHCR's involvement with host communities. The review aims to assess UNHCR's approach towards host communities in areas where there are large numbers of refugees, and examines the extent to which UNHCR's current policies, strategies and programmes are appropriate and applicable in these contexts. At the time of writing, the review is ongoing and will be finalized in the third quarter of 2017.

16. Lastly, the Service commissioned and finalized the evaluation of the United Kingdom's Quality Integration Project (UK QIP). The UK QIP's goal is to promote and develop a fairer and more efficient asylum system in the United Kingdom, with built-in quality assurance mechanisms. It is implemented by UNHCR in close coordination with the United Kingdom Home Office, which funds the project. The UK QIP serves as a model for initiating and implementing high-quality assurance programmes and will be disseminated in the United Kingdom and elsewhere in the coming months.

17. Building on the experience drawn from the evaluation of the three global protection strategies, the Evaluation Service is currently reviewing the feasibility of commissioning an evaluation of the "Policy on alternatives to camps". In conducting this feasibility

assessment, actionable recommendations to strengthen the strategy's theory of change and measurement framework will be developed, including with the view to increasing opportunities to invest in a full evaluation at a later stage.

18. The Evaluation Service has also provided guidance to field operations interested in commissioning decentralized evaluations. In this regard, input and advice have been provided for an evaluation of UNHCR's emergency response in White Nile State in Sudan and for an evaluation synthesis of existing studies related to UNHCR's cash-based interventions in Jordan. Both are expected to commence and be completed the coming six to eight months. Other possible topics for evaluations will be explored with regional bureaux and divisions.

IV. Research and publications

19. The Evaluation Service maintained its support of independent research through the "New issues in refugee research" series. Three papers were published on the promotion of self-reliance by connecting Malian refugee artisans to the Swiss market using public-private partnerships; migration-related regimes and their impact on refugee protection frameworks in Asia and the Pacific; and the right of refugees to freedom of movement in countries of asylum on the African continent.

V. External relations and inter-agency evaluations

20. The Evaluation Service has continued its participation in several inter-agency and external evaluation bodies. It is an active member of the Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation (IAHE) steering group, and participated in the UNEG evaluation practice exchange and annual general meeting held in May 2017. The Service is also the co-convenor, with the World Food Programme, of the UNEG humanitarian evaluation interest group. In addition, it serves as UNHCR's overall focal point for the Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action (ALNAP), participating in its annual meeting and liaising with the network on relevant issues.

21. The Evaluation Service coordinated the 2016-2017 programme evaluation of UNHCR's role in the registration of refugees, which was conducted by the Inspection and Evaluation Division of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS). In doing so, the Service acted as the focal point for all internal and external stakeholders and arrangements. This OIOS programme evaluation as well as a previous OIOS programme evaluation of UNHCR's engagement with refugees and IDPs in mixed movements were both formally presented by OIOS at the June 2017 session of the Committee for Programme and Coordination (CPC) in New York.

22. The Multilateral Organizational Performance Assessment Network (MOPAN) has launched the new 2017-2018 assessment cycle, and UNHCR will be assessed during this cycle. In this regard, the Evaluation Service is providing support and input as needed.
