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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 2022 to June 2023, 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)).



I. Introduction

1. A new evaluation policy was approved by UNHCR in October 2022. It builds on the previous policy of 2016 and aims to embed evaluation more firmly in the working practices of the organization, as a tool for decision-making, advocacy and strategic and programmatic choices. The policy sets out how and where evaluation can best be used; introduces norms for undertaking evaluations at the country level and establishing evaluation capacity at the regional level; and clarifies roles, responsibilities and accountabilities, including with respect to follow up on the implementation of recommendations. A strategy to support the launch of the new policy is being developed.

II. Evaluation coverage and quality and organizational investment in the function

2. The new evaluation policy for the period 2022 to 2027 requires that evaluations cover all major substantive policies as well as the outcome areas under the Strategic Directions 2022-2026. It also compels all country operations to undertake some form of evaluative activity at least once every five years. A mapping of both the substantive and geographic coverage of past evaluations was undertaken, which showed evidence of evaluative activity across all results areas. However, gaps in geographical coverage remain and will need be addressed in the 2024-2025 evaluation workplan (see annex II).

3. In early 2023, the Evaluation Office conducted a thorough review of its external quality assurance mechanism, which included an independent review of the 18 evaluation reports finalized in 2022 (12 centralized and 6 decentralized evaluations). The review found that, while the quality of UNHCR reports had improved, adjustments were necessary to strengthen the evaluative lens when assessing the inclusion of groups with different vulnerabilities and needs. As this was a repeated finding from the previous year's quality assessment, specific remedial measures were put in place to address it.

4. The budget for the Evaluation Office for both 2022 and 2023 was approximately \$6.5 million per year. This represents approximately 0.11 per cent of the organization's budget, and covers staffing and evaluations commissioned centrally, or 0.12 per cent with the inclusion of decentralized evaluations. The new evaluation policy commits UNHCR to providing an appropriate budget for evaluation that is commensurate with the organization's activities. Investments in staff capacity for monitoring and evaluation were observed in some countries, in part due to increasing demands by donors for project evaluations. In addition, Senior Regional Evaluation Officers embedded in five of the seven regional bureaux provided end-to-end support for decentralized evaluations commissioned by management.

III. Relevance and utilization

5. The Evaluation Office commissioned an independent one-year follow-up to the evaluation of the engagement of UNHCR in humanitarian-development cooperation, which was published in 2021, to track implementation of the management response.¹ It concluded that UNHCR had made good progress on implementing commitments set out in the management response and, more broadly, remained on track to enhance its engagement with development partners and to pursue development approaches. Specifically, the evaluation noted that planned and completed changes made to UNHCR financial and data systems would make it easier for the organization to manage and track financial contributions from development partners and provide the analytical basis for assisting these partners to plan and deliver projects in forced displacement contexts. It was observed that further clarity and guidance provided to country operations and further adjustments to the organization's

¹ Available at <https://www.unhcr.org/media/evaluation-unhcrs-engagement-humanitarian-development-cooperation-sep-2021>.

resource allocation framework were needed to enhance its ability to better plan for and manage earmarked development funding.

6. Progress towards implementing recommendations from the 2021 decentralized evaluation and audit on child protection programming was assessed in February 2023, a year after the completion of the two management responses. Both sets of recommendations were complementary, addressing issues of strategy, resources and planning, partnerships, case management, capacity and monitoring. Overall, progress was registered, including with respect to the drafting of a child protection policy and the inclusion of critical child protection issues in emergency guidance, risk registers and multi-year strategies in at least 53 operations. While benchmarks for resource allocation for child protection activities have not been established, guidance and costed plans are being developed, and mechanisms for oversight by the regional bureaux are being put in place. A number of initiatives to strengthen capacity and case management are underway, as is the finalization of a child protection monitoring tool. In summary, steps have been taken in all action areas responding to the recommendations, but more remains to be done to ensure progress in this critical area.

7. In 2023, UNHCR approved a new policy on emergency preparedness and response. The policy reflects a number of recurrent recommendations from evaluations of large-scale emergency responses, including the need to ensure stronger alignment with the policy on engagement in situations of internal displacement, provide additional guidance on the post-emergency phase and establish greater clarity on engagement in natural hazard-induced emergencies. The Evaluation Office is working closely with the Division of Emergency, Security and Supply to ensure that lessons and recommendations from evaluations fully inform updates to the Emergency Handbook, which will be key to the operationalization of the policy.

8. When the Sudan country strategy evaluation of 2021 was at the reporting stage, political developments in the country created implications for the strategic orientation of the organization's operation. Pivoting quickly, the evaluation team produced a number of strategic recommendations, taking into consideration potential socio-political developments and the mandate and work of UNHCR in the Sudan. With the strategic recommendations tied to established future scenarios, the evaluation informed the operation's thinking around programming and analysis and was critical to the planning of other emergency operations in other crisis situations.

9. UNHCR began developing a number of global focus area strategies to support the High Commissioner's Strategic Directions. The critical analysis generated by the evaluation of the organization's efforts towards the elimination of statelessness, the evaluation of the organization's engagement in humanitarian-development cooperation, the evidence synthesis of its performance in response to internal displacement and the organization's efforts to build greater accountability to affected people in its programming are supporting prioritization within these global strategies.

IV. Evaluation highlights

A. Global strategies and focus areas

10. The synthesis of the organization's approach to accountability to affected people involved the examination of 17 independent evaluations² from 2018 to 2022. The objective was to inform the organization's approaches to communicating with communities, ensuring that the views of the people we serve feed directly into our decision-making and advocacy. The synthesis showed the extensive use of a variety of methods and mechanisms by UNHCR operations to regularly consult and engage with displaced and stateless people. The organization's presence in crisis-affected locations and its operational need to engage with the displaced and stateless people were found to be enabling factors for the participatory

² The evaluations covered emergency responses, global strategies and policies, and regional as well as country operations.

activities. At the same time, the synthesis revealed that uneven levels of participatory practices persisted in different operations and highlighted that there was limited evidence that consultations resulted in actual changes in programmes, implementation and prioritization.

B. Emergency responses

11. In 2022, independent evaluations of the organization's responses to large-scale emergencies in Afghanistan and northern Ethiopia were carried out. Both evaluations assessed the operations during the crises, including their involvement in inter-agency coordination, preparedness activities, scale up processes and the development of comprehensive responses. The evaluations found that UNHCR succeeded in mobilizing effective large-scale responses to internal displacement including the delivery of critical protection services. The role of the regional bureaux in supporting preparedness was found to be an important determinant of the timeliness and effectiveness of the response, especially the agility with which UNHCR was able to deliver urgently needed cash assistance in the first months of the emergency in Afghanistan.

12. The evaluations identified the need to further strengthen efficiencies in operational business processes, particularly with regards to contracting implementing partners, procurement and the deployment of human resources. They also highlighted the specific challenges of working with de facto authorities in challenging humanitarian contexts.

C. Country strategies

13. The country strategy evaluation for Zimbabwe found that UNHCR, the Government of Zimbabwe and key partners were making progress towards transforming the Tongogara refugee camp, on the eastern border with Mozambique, into a regular settlement, in line with district development planning. Given resource limitations however, the evaluation suggested that UNHCR carefully assess its role and undertake a structural review to ensure it has the right staff with the right skills in the right locations, while leveraging the capacity of its operational partners. The evaluation also recommended that UNHCR continue its efforts aimed at addressing the risk of statelessness in Zimbabwe. Key steps, such as including stateless persons in the recently completed census and reactivating the high-level task force and coordination meetings led by key government ministries, were noted to be steps in the right direction.

14. The country strategy evaluation for Nepal found that UNHCR continued to play a critical role as an advocate for refugees. It was considered appropriate in the current context that UNHCR was phasing out direct assistance and focusing on advocacy. The evaluation concluded that UNHCR had developed a strong partnership with the Government and other key actors, including local partners, from whom it could mobilize support for refugees. The evaluation also confirmed that the UNHCR multi-year strategy 2023-2027 was well aligned with the national priorities and objectives of the Government. The evaluation concluded that livelihood programming for Bhutanese and other refugees under its mandate continues to be needed. At the same time, it concluded that the strategy should take into account the need for sustainability of the results.

15. The country strategy evaluation for Ecuador showed that UNHCR provided a comprehensive, effective and protection-sensitive response to the influx from Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of), despite the challenge of advocating international protection within a prevailing migration narrative and distinguishing its role within a joint response. While the working group for refugees and migrants, co-led by UNHCR, was effective in responding to urgent needs and advocating for resources, the evaluation recommended that the platform prioritize capacity-building for national institutions going forward. UNHCR strengthened collaboration with the private sector and local governments to enhance livelihoods, and the evaluation encouraged UNHCR to continue to work in this direction. Likewise, it noted that UNHCR had been effective at including new partner organizations under the localization pillar of its strategy and should strengthen such endeavours.

D. Joint and system-wide results

16. The Secretary-General's report of 2022 on the implementation of the quadrennial comprehensive policy review proposed the establishment of a system-wide evaluation office under the United Nations Sustainable Development Group, as part of the broader reform agenda. The purpose was to strengthen oversight, transparency and accountability, to incentivize joint work and collective learning on evaluation among the various United Nations entities, and to conduct and advance system-wide evaluative evidence towards the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

17. System-wide and joint evaluations, however, are not new, and UNHCR continued to play a key role in the management of inter-agency humanitarian evaluations. The system-wide humanitarian response in Yemen, provided some good practice examples of the efforts of UNHCR to design an appropriate response, undertaking large-scale needs assessments and adapting programming³ with feedback received from refugees. Most recently, the Afghanistan and Ethiopia Inter-Agency Standing Committee emergency responses, as well the implementation of the Global Humanitarian Response Plan to address the corona virus disease (COVID-19), were evaluated with UNHCR support. A complementary joint evaluation with members of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development-Development Assistance Committee specifically examined the protection of refugees during the pandemic.

18. A joint iterative evaluation was conducted in relation to the UNHCR-UNICEF Blueprint for Joint Action for Refugee Children, critically assessing implementation between 2020 and 2022 and emerging results to inform the ongoing roll-out and strategic decision-making. Lessons learned and good partnership practices informed a new strategic collaboration framework between the two organizations, which was launched in early 2023. The evaluation found that the Global Compact on Refugees ensured the strategic alignment of interests, and the strong support from leadership in both organizations created a robust foundation for collaboration.

19. Despite a shared strategic vision, both organizations encountered challenges in translating commitments into action, including a significant lack of additional funding. Strong operational leadership and consistent institutional prioritization were required to address these challenges. The evaluation also found positive examples of both organizations successfully leveraging their distinctive strengths, competencies, areas of expertise and relationships with government stakeholders to prompt sustainable change. At the same time, it was recognized that transformative measures to strengthen refugee inclusion required legal and policy changes driven by States themselves, softer approaches, such as increased communication, while reported as time-consuming, were found to be highly beneficial in building trust and understanding, reinforcing the overall effectiveness of these efforts.

20. An increase was noted in the number of joint evaluations commissioned at the country and regional levels that examined areas of common results. A recent summative evaluation commissioned by the World Food Programme and UNHCR in Lebanon, found that their joint multipurpose cash assistance programme remained relevant in addressing the needs of severely vulnerable Syrian refugees, despite the challenging context. The evaluation recommended that further efforts focus on more sustainable solutions to achieve self-reliance for refugees, while ensuring that the safety net component reaches the most vulnerable.

V. Building the organization's evaluation capacity

21. Besides strengthening staffing, a number of efforts were made to build evaluation knowledge and skills across the organization. An online peer exchange was organized in September 2022 for managers of decentralized evaluations aimed at familiarizing them with existing guidance and support services. Embedding Senior Regional Evaluation Officers in the regional bureaux has allowed for continuous coaching and mentoring of personnel who

³ UNHCR increased mobile interventions in remote areas and introduced rental subsidies to urban refugees at risk of eviction as a result of community feedback.

plan and manage decentralized evaluations. In response to a demand from the regional bureaux, several targeted presentations on the implementation of the 2018 age, gender and diversity policy evaluation and the synthesis on accountability to affected populations were provided. The presentations provided an opportunity for staff in the bureaux to discuss progress and challenges ahead with respect to these approaches and related core actions.

VI. Linkages between evaluation and results-based management, and the engagement of external partners

22. Over the last 12 months, the Evaluation Office worked closely with the Division of Strategic Planning and Results, contributing to the new results-based management policy and the UNHCR programme handbook which are currently being finalized. Specially, it incorporated key information and resources on evaluation planning, costing and management.

23. In terms of the engagement of external partners, the last year has seen an increased engagement of member States in evaluation, including their participation in discussions on specific evaluation findings and in evaluation reference groups. The Evaluation Office continues to play a leadership role in the work of the United Nations Evaluation Group. It also led a United Nations Evaluation Group/ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development-Development Assistance Committee peer review of the evaluation function of the United Nations Population Fund and presented a report to its Executive Board in July 2023.

VII. Innovation

24. In order to synthesize findings and more efficiently distil learning from a large number of independent evaluations, the Evaluation Office has been testing artificial intelligence tools. It is exploring the use of language learning models for synthesis work as well as for comparative and thematic analyses of existing evaluation reports.

25. Following the publication of the evaluation synthesis on accountability to affected people in 2022, the Evaluation Office worked on ways to apply the principles of accountability to affected people to its own evaluation practices. In the first half of 2023, evaluations in Mauritania and Nepal involved refugee representatives in country-level reference groups, with results discussed with representatives from the wider refugee communities.

VIII. Future outlook

26. While interest in evaluation continues to grow in the organization, timely completion of evaluations commissioned by management remains a challenge, and management responses to recommendations are frequently delayed. A new management response tracking and reporting system will be jointly designed by the Evaluation Office, and the Division of Strategic Planning and Results will address this, in part, by mainstreaming reporting on evaluation in regular reporting and within the results-based management system of the organization.

27. The Evaluation Office has gradually expanded the diversity of skills in its team, including in the areas of knowledge management, data and statistics, and communications, in response to new demands and opportunities. While the Senior Regional Evaluation Officers have demonstrated their value, there is almost no capacity for the professional management of evaluations at the country level. In order to achieve greater alignment between policy and resources, a review of the function is underway in 2023.

28. Looking ahead to 2024 and 2025, two new important topics for centralized thematic evaluations have been added to the global workplan: a formative evaluation of the organization's strategic framework for climate action, and a second on the organization's support for the inclusion of refugees in the urban labour market. Several humanitarian

evaluations will be carried out including of the situational response to the 2023 crisis in Sudan.

Annex I

Overview of completed evaluations July 2022-June 2023

<i>Evaluations</i>	<i>Countries concerned</i>
A) Centralized	
<i>Organizational policy, strategy, thematic</i>	
Humanitarian development cooperation – 1-year extension (2021-2022)	Global, Jordan, Kenya, Mauritania
Longitudinal evaluation of the implementation of the 2018 age, gender and diversity policy (year 2)	Chad, Greece, Kenya, Mexico, Thailand
<i>Country strategy</i>	
Northern Europe	Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Sweden
Nepal	
Zimbabwe	
Ecuador	
South Sudan	
<i>Emergency response</i>	
UNHCR response to the 2019-2020 internal displacement emergency in the Democratic Republic of the Congo	
UNHCR response to multiple emergencies in the central Sahel region: Burkina Faso, Niger (the), Mali	
UNHCR response to the emergency in northern Ethiopia	
UNHCR response to the emergency in Afghanistan	
<i>Inter-agency/joint</i>	
UNHCR/UNICEF fair deal blueprint for refugee children	Bangladesh, Cameroon, Ecuador, Ethiopia, Honduras, Indonesia, Iraq, Italy, Lebanon, Libya, Pakistan, Rwanda, Türkiye, Uganda
Inter-agency humanitarian evaluation of the Yemen crisis	Yemen
Inter-agency humanitarian evaluation on the COVID-19 response	Global
<i>Evaluative synthesis</i>	
UNHCR approach to accountability to affected people	Global

<i>Evaluations</i>	<i>Countries concerned</i>
B) Decentralized	
<i>Regional and multi-country level</i>	
West and Central Africa regional shelter and settlement evaluation	Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Mali, Niger (the), Sudan (the)
Tertiary education scholarship programme	Ecuador, Jordan, Rwanda, South Africa, Türkiye, Uganda
<i>Country level</i>	
Evaluation of the livelihoods and economic inclusion project in eastern Chad	
Misizi marshland agricultural project in Rwanda	
UNHCR-WFP joint action for multi-purpose cash assistance under the Directorate General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations in Lebanon (2019-2021)	
Costa Rica basic needs and livelihoods evaluation	

Annex II

Overview of ongoing and planned evaluations July 2023-June 2024

<i>Evaluations</i>	<i>Countries concerned</i>
A) Centralized	
<i>Organizational policy, strategy, thematic</i>	
Longitudinal evaluation of the implementation of the 2018 age, gender and diversity policy (final year)	Chad, Greece, Kenya, Mexico, Thailand
Approach to prevention, risk mitigation and response to gender-based violence (phase I, II)	To be confirmed
UNHCR's engagement in situations of internal displacement (2017-2022)	El Salvador, Iraq, Nigeria, Somalia
Evaluation of the regionalization and decentralization approach	To be confirmed
<i>Country strategy</i>	
Brazil	
Honduras	
Lebanon	
Mali	
Mauritania	
Mozambique	
Peru	
Tajikistan	
<i>Emergency response</i>	
UNHCR response to the regional refugee emergency to the crisis in Ukraine	Hungary, Poland, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Slovakia
UNHCR response to Ukraine level-3 emergency	Ukraine
<i>Inter-agency/joint</i>	
Inter-agency humanitarian evaluation of the response to the humanitarian crisis in northern Ethiopia	Ethiopia
Inter-agency humanitarian evaluation of the response to the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan	Afghanistan

<i>Evaluations</i>	<i>Countries concerned</i>
B) Decentralized	
<i>Regional and multi-country level</i>	
Joint UNICEF/UNHCR/KfW Development Bank evaluation of the Multi Country R-WASH Programme in the Horn of Africa	Ethiopia, Somalia, Sudan (the)
Djibouti Declaration on Refugee Education in IGAD Member States	Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan (the), Uganda
Joint UNHCR/World Diabetes Foundation Evaluation of the Multi-country Baseline Study of Non-Communicable Diseases	Burundi, Sudan (the), United Republic of Tanzania
Evaluation of the African Development Bank's project for G5 Sahel member countries to combat the COVID-19 disease pandemic	Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Niger (the)
Evaluation of UNHCR support to health, education and economic inclusion in West and Central Africa	Cameroon, Chad, Niger (the)
Joint ILO/EU/UNHCR/IOM/UNODC evaluation of the response to mixed movements in southern Africa	Costa Rica, Mexico, South Africa
Mid-term evaluation of the Green Financing Facility	Global
<i>Country level</i>	
Endline evaluation of the IKEA livelihoods and energy projects among Somali refugees and host communities in Ethiopia	
Baseline evaluation of climate-smart agriculture and market development for enhancing livelihoods of refugees and their host communities in Rwanda	
Endline evaluation of climate-smart agriculture and market development for enhancing livelihoods of refugees and their host communities in Rwanda	
Baseline evaluation on the emergency transit centres	Rwanda
Uganda livelihoods project	
Protection and solutions programme for internally displaced persons in Mindanao from 2010-2022	Philippines
Action Access, an alternatives to detention pilot (series 2)	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

<i>Evaluations</i>	<i>Countries concerned</i>
Migration policy	North Macedonia
Evaluation of livelihoods and economic inclusion using cash-based interventions in Burkina Faso	
