

# Independent Evaluation of UNHCR's Decentralization and Regionalization (D&R) Reform

## Background of the Evaluation

From January to August 2024, an independent evaluation assessed UNHCR's Decentralization and Regionalization (D&R) reform (2019-2023), focusing on its design, implementation and outcomes across the organization. Our analysis centered on four key areas: Strategy; **People, Organization and Governance**; Processes and Technology—essential components of an effective organizational model, ultimately leading to actionable insights for enhancing the D&R framework. Within each key area, several facets of the reform were assessed based on the initiatives implemented.

How has the D&R reform reshaped organizational structure, staffing, roles, and culture to enable decentralized operation across the organization?



## People, Organization & Governance

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### ORGANIZATIONAL ARCHITECTURE

- D&R allowed useful flexibility in regional structures. However, this has led to the lack of uniformity across different regions and difficulty in collaboration across Regional Bureaux
- The appropriateness of the location and number of Regional Bureaux is still subject to debate
- At National and sub-national levels, D&R structures were adapted to existing organizational architectures. While this responded to country needs, challenges were identified in organizational coherence, delegation of authority, and matrix Country Office structures

### FUNCTIONS AND STAFFING

- The proportion of (Multi-)Country Offices' workforce has slightly increased, in line with D&R goals, however, this cannot be exclusively attributed to D&R. Increases in needs and budgets are likely to have contributed to the growth. A meaningful reduction in the HQ workforce intended to offset the growth of Country Offices and Regional Bureaux did not take place
- A lack of defined workforce strategy and skills mapping hinders clear understanding of current staffing structures and their alignment with D&R objectives
- Decentralization of training has allowed it to become more contextually adapted, but the absence of central oversight threatens the global coherence of capacity development

### CULTURE AND WAYS OF WORKING

- Culture has repeatedly been identified as a key enabler of the D&R reform but has been largely overlooked in implementation
- The lack of a strong, overarching culture strategy and the impact of COVID-19 led to significant variations in the evolution of culture across regions, driven by individual leadership personalities rather than institutional mechanisms
- COVID-19 negatively influenced aspects of the implementation of the reform

#### ► Improve coherence in Regional Bureaux organizational design and sub-national Office classification by reviewing the original D&R framework

##### Key actions include:

- Adopt a globally consistent minimum structure for Regional Bureaux, allowing local flexibility with clear justifications for deviations approved by the Senior Executive Team
- Ensure appropriate classification of sub-national offices (Sub-Offices, Field Offices, etc.) based on the Handbook for Designing Field Presences, maintaining consistency in delegated authority across regions
- Country Office Representatives are responsible for ensuring this consistency, with second-line oversight

#### ► Streamline coordination in a matrix organization to better support smaller operations

##### Key actions include:

- Simplify coordination within Regional Bureaux to reduce reporting burdens caused by decentralized structures

#### ► Strengthen workforce planning, including a comprehensive skills mapping exercise, to inform optimal staffing

##### Key actions include:

- Reinforce global overview of the workforce to balance regional and global priorities
- Improve data quality on skills and roles (technical, non-technical, multiple responsibilities) for better workforce planning
- Strengthen oversight to ensure workforce planning aligns with strategic plans

#### ► Establish an organization-wide learning strategy, including clear responsibilities on training and minimum learning curricula in relevant areas to ensure consistent learning outcomes across all regions

##### Key actions include:

- Create a global minimum curriculum for key functional areas and systems training
- Implement a central mechanism to track training and outcomes
- Balance standardized training with flexibility for regional adaptation

#### ► Prioritize cultural changes to enable D&R

- Leverage the 2024 Culture Assessment to integrate relevant elements. Initiatives like training and seminars should focus on skill development for Directors, Representatives, and Managers, emphasizing empowerment and accountability while aligning with the UN leadership framework to drive growth and effectiveness

#### ► Link roles, accountabilities, and authorities (RAA) framework with Performance Management

- Link performance management with the RAA to further enhance a culture of accountability, a formal feedback mechanism between HQ and Regional Bureaux and Regional Bureaux and respective field operations, and a meaningful forum within existing structures to facilitate exchange on global priorities that require cross-regional collaboration in a decentralized structure