

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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ROLES, ACCOUNTABILITIES AND AUTHORITIES (RAA)

- D&R aimed to support decentralized decision-making through a clear framework for roles, accountabilities and authorities (RAA)
- Six years later, the RAA framework is still not widely used or understood beyond Senior Management
- The corporate dissemination activities of the RAA fell short of ensuring the proper adoption of the RAA framework across all levels of the organization
- No RAA exist at the National Office or Sub-Office levels, although accountabilities also lie there in line with the resource allocation framework (RAF)

TECHNICAL SUPPORT AND OVERSIGHT

- D&R aimed to decentralize authority and strengthen oversight across the organization with the support of the revised three lines model, but the model in its current application creates overlaps and unclear roles
- Dual roles across Multi-Country/Country Offices, Regional Bureaux, and HQ create confusion in oversight responsibilities
- Regional Bureaux tend to prioritize technical support over 2nd line oversight, despite added capacity from regional risk advisors, and regional evaluation officers

To ensure effective RAA use across organization, UNHCR could consider

- **Ensure accountability of Senior Management for establishing clear responsibilities in their respective entities using the RAA as a starting point and for driving their socialization within their respective entities**

Key actions include:

- Linking the RAA to individual performance objectives/ Terms of Reference of Directors/Representatives informed by annual workplans and reviews to strengthen accountability
- Enhance practical utility of RAA by giving team/functional leaders flexibility and authority to cascade RAA down to their own staff/team members in line with functional responsibilities and measurable performance objective reviews
- Managers across organizational entities shall ensure familiarity with the RAA within their entities through strong socialization efforts

- **Ensure that the framework is aligned with the organization's decentralized operating model, in particular the roles and accountabilities**

Key actions include:

- Consider inclusion of the Sub-Office/National Office level in the RAA framework to ensure clarity on delegation of authority at sub-national level, or conversely re-consider the utility/need for standardized delegation of authority at the sub-national level, considering the lessons learned from various regions

- **Translate conceptual guidance into specific oversight plans based on risk assessments**

- Incorporate the three lines model into the RAA to define HQ, Regional Bureaux, and Multi-Country/Country Offices roles in strategic planning and oversight, ensuring complementarity
- Clarify and document the roles of HQ and Regional Bureaux in both technical assistance and oversight/risk management to prevent conflicts of interest
- Align with Office of Internal Oversight Services audits to develop criteria for prioritizing support and risk-based monitoring across Regional Bureaux