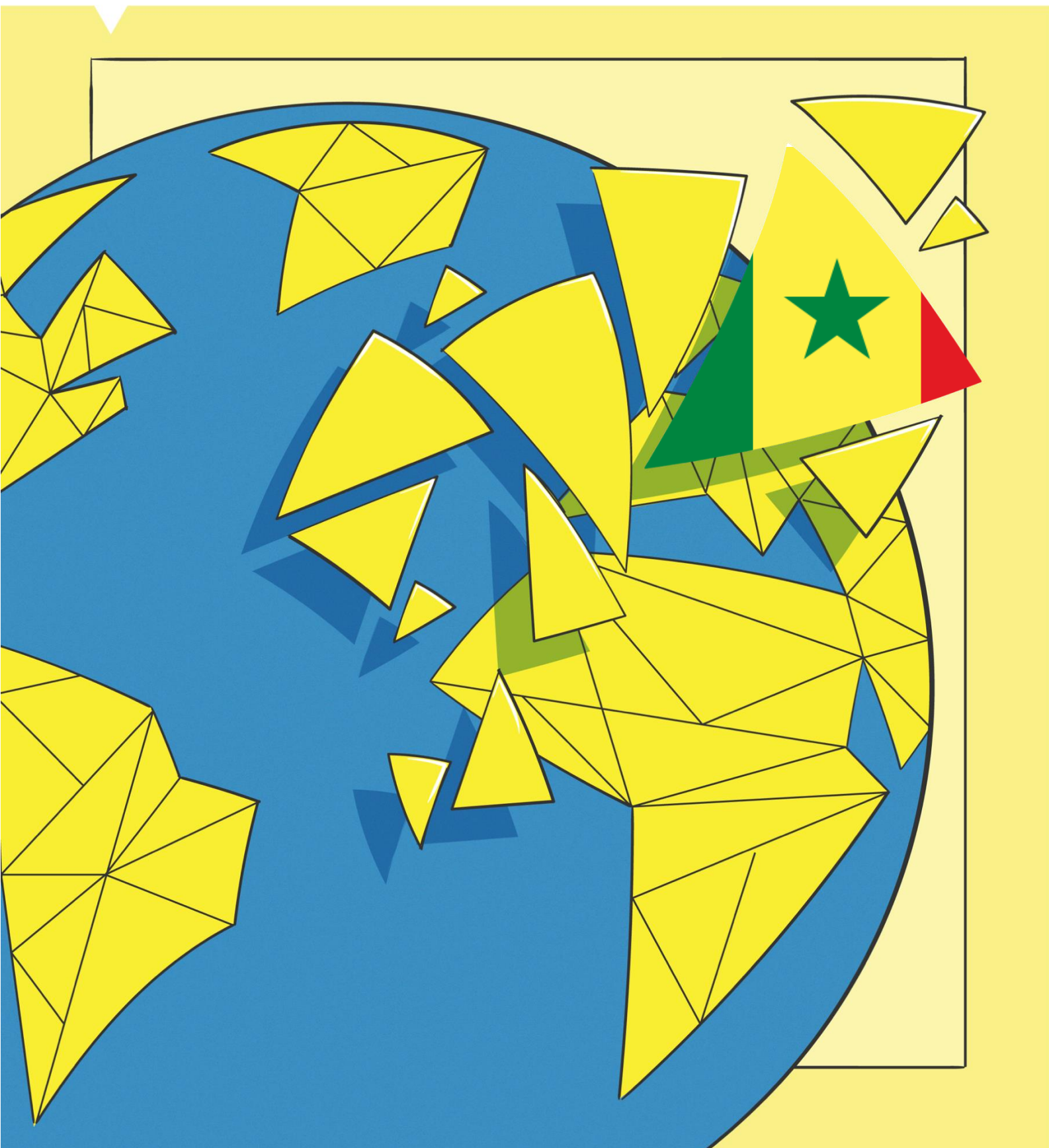


BUREAU D'ÉVALUATION

Évaluation de la stratégie du Bureau Multi-pays de Sénégal 2021 – 2024



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

The evaluation of the UNHCR Multi-Country Office Senegal (MCO Senegal) strategy is part of a series of country strategy evaluations designed to feed into organizational learning and planning processes. Its aim is to provide evidence to improve protection interventions, solutions and assistance to forcibly displaced and stateless people and communities, as well as host communities.

The MCO Senegal was created in 2020 as part of UNHCR's decentralization and regionalization reform to strengthen operational efficiency and strategic coherence in several countries. Prior to its creation, UNHCR operations in West Africa were overseen by a Regional Representation covering 15 countries. The MCO Senegal was designed to bring together operations in Senegal, Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Guinea, Togo, Benin, Sierra Leone and Cabo Verde. This reorganization was motivated by common characteristics between these countries, including protracted refugee situations, low donor commitment and a focus on local integration solutions.

Until 2022, the MCO Senegal operated in Senegal alongside three National Offices in Guinea-Bissau, Guinea, and Togo. The former Regional Representation made the decision to close the National Offices in Guinea-Bissau and Guinea, and the MCO Senegal was required to implement these closures within a tight timeframe. After several months of transition, the MCO decided in 2023 to maintain the Togo office in response to the level 1 (L1) emergency declared in the coastal countries, which required rapid reorganization. As of 2024, with Togo and Benin were moved under the new MCO Côte d'Ivoire, the MCO Senegal has refocused its activities on the five remaining countries, with a physical presence limited to Senegal.

The evaluation covers UNHCR's activities and performance in the countries under the MCO for the period 2021-2024. Although Togo and Benin are no longer part of the MCO, they are included in this evaluation to examine the effects of the L1 emergency declarations in 2020 and 2023 on the functioning, internal organization, and actions undertaken by the MCO Senegal in these two countries, while also analyzing the coordination between MCO Senegal and the Regional Bureau.

The evaluation, carried out from April to December 2024, included data collection from July to September with field missions to Senegal, Guinea-Bissau and Benin. Conclusions and recommendations were prepared in December 2024. Adopting a grounded theory approach, the evaluation analyzed the mechanisms influencing results, identified good practices and weaknesses, and combined qualitative and quantitative methods, including interviews, field visits and documentary analysis. A workshop validated the findings. Governance involved an Evaluation Reference Group (ERG) and internal and external quality control, while respecting international ethical standards.

FINDINGS

Relevance and coherence

UNHCR's work in the countries covered by the MCO Senegal was relevant and coherent in the search for durable solutions for long-term refugees, the integration of statelessness risks into programming, and, to a lesser extent, in the response to emergencies and mixed movements. These priorities were broadly aligned with UNHCR and ECOWAS strategies, but only partially with MCO country priorities and the needs of forcibly displaced and stateless people.

The limited use of organizational tools to identify needs, the closure of national offices and the reduction in UNHCR's capacity and presence have resulted in a lack of reliable quantitative data, particularly concerning the Benin and Togo borders, mixed movements and internal displacements in Casamance and Togo. National partners, faced with growing risks in border areas, attempted to monitor entry flows. Still, their resources were insufficient to comprehensively analyse needs in these highly porous zones.

UNHCR's positioning and response decisions in MCO countries were influenced by the assumption of a gradual reduction in the number of refugees in protracted situations and by a scenario of consolidating durable solutions. However, these decisions did not sufficiently account for contextual developments or chronic and emerging needs. Operationally, priority was given to naturalization and voluntary repatriation (for the Ivorian population), which shaped the MCO's organizational structure, transformation, and cooperation with states. However, the closure of the National Offices was a major strategic decision that did not align with government expectations.

Effectiveness and sustainability

UNHCR has played a key role in maintaining protection environments, developing legal frameworks and supporting national asylum systems in MCO countries. However, these systems, heavily dependent on external funding, are now weakened and encounter structural difficulties, which vary from country to country. These include the identification of refugees at borders in a context of mixed flows, registration, the quality of the refugee status determination procedure, and the production and recognition of refugee cards. With regard to statelessness, the objective of eradicating it by 2024, according to the Banjul action plan, has not been achieved, and risks of statelessness persist in all countries.

The restructuring of UNHCR's presence in MCO countries, combined with funding constraints, has led to a reduction in basic assistance and the inclusion of forcibly displaced people in social services. In the context of increasing budget restrictions and post-pandemic COVID-19 inflation, this reduction has likely worsened the living conditions of forcibly displaced people, particularly in countries where social protection systems are limited or non-existent. These challenges disproportionately affect the most vulnerable groups. Additionally, the discontinuation of educational grants, which previously helped families cover schooling costs, poses a risk to school enrollment, especially for girls.

The strategy of durable solutions through naturalization of long-term refugees shows contrasting results between Guinea-Bissau and Senegal. The strategy in Guinea-Bissau was successful thanks to a holistic approach and a governmental and community

commitment that incorporated legal, economic, social and cultural dimensions into the integration process. Conversely, reducing a local refugee integration strategy to its sole dimension of legal naturalization, as in the case of Mauritanian refugees in Senegal, did not have the desired impact. In terms of return, the experience with Ivorian refugees has been a success, thanks to the joint efforts of the UNHCR and the countries concerned.

Assessment of the L1 response to the crisis in Benin and Togo was severely limited by the lack of available data. Although UNHCR anticipated the effects of the Burkina Faso crisis and declared an L1 emergency in 2020, the implementation of appropriate measures was delayed, mainly due to pandemic-related border closures, lack of resources and the process of closing National Offices, which was poorly understood and not accepted by national partners. However, UNHCR has tried to make up for its lack of territorial presence through initiatives to facilitate registration and access to refugee status for displaced people, protection monitoring (with a well-structured gender approach) and developing innovative community-based approaches.

MCO Senegal structure adapted to its purpose

The MCO Senegal faced the challenges of reduced resources in a changing context, preventing it from consolidating a structure adapted to meet UNHCR's objectives and aspirations. The division of responsibilities, supervision and functions between the Regional Bureau, the MCO and the National Offices lacked clarity, generating inefficiencies.

On the budgetary front, significant discrepancies between operational plan (OP) and operating level (OL) budgets exacerbated the tension between planning and resource prioritization. At the same time, downsizing and inadequate and inappropriate staff allocation have weakened technical capabilities. Finally, the growing imbalance between administrative expenditure (ABOD), human resources (STAFF), and operational expenditure (OPS), while not inherently negative in an environment where UNHCR is enabling partners and governments to play a more prominent role, reveals a weakness in the management of budget priorities within the MCO. The staff structure and activities did not adequately support increased engagement with key actors who could help create a more conducive environment for protection and solutions, ultimately hindering the achievement of objectives.

The MCO Senegal funding model relies heavily on unearmarked funds, with a significant dependence on a single donor (USA), creating considerable risks. Additionally, the allocation of funds for the L1 emergency in Benin and Togo in 2023 lacks proper documentation and transparency.

UNHCR's positioning vis-à-vis the UN Country Teams was not adapted to contribute to the objectives of the UNHCR strategy, particularly to develop synergies with other key players and in terms of local integration and mixed movements.

The closure of the National Offices was communicated in advance in writing to the National Commissions, but was not accompanied by a clear roadmap, which had organizational and operational consequences.

CONCLUSIONS

Strategic dimension

C1) UNHCR's institutional, technical and material support to the countries covered by the MCO Senegal has been decisive in developing a good capacity for advocacy with states, and maintaining generally favorable national protection environments. However, strategic decisions taken in recent years have weakened its positioning and capacity to influence and act vis-à-vis national institutions.

C2) The closure of National Offices was carried out without a clear, orderly and planned handover with national institutions, which had a negative impact on UNHCR's reputation and credibility with government partners, and affected its ability to fulfill its mandate of protection and solutions for forcibly displaced and stateless people.

Operational dimension

C3) Progress in developing national asylum systems (thanks to UNHCR's advocacy, expertise and material and human support) has been partial, fragile and at risk of deteriorating in all MCO countries.

C4) UNHCR has not put in place sufficient mechanisms, explored partnerships or been able to mobilize resources to implement the route-based approach in MCO countries in order to monitor and respond to international protection needs in a context where mixed movements have increased significantly.

C5) UNHCR's local integration strategies aimed at reducing the number of long-term refugees have yielded mixed results: positive outcomes in Guinea-Bissau and a protracted situation in Senegal. This highlights the complexity of developing durable solutions for impoverished populations in fragile economic, social, and political contexts, where basic social services and public finances are limited.

C6) Most of the risks identified by UNHCR in its strategy and planning have materialized, which, combined with partial or incomplete analyses or assumptions, has limited the scope, effectiveness and sustainability of many interventions.

Organizational dimension

C7) The MCO concept was launched by UNHCR for the first time in 2020 in the sub-region, with a fresh approach and the aim of gaining effectiveness and efficiency. However, internal difficulties have hampered its consolidation as a new organizational model, preventing MCO Senegal from developing an internal structure and organization adapted to changing country needs.

C8) The structuring of the MCO Senegal provided technical expertise, supporting the implementation of activities and enabling each unit to focus on its responsibilities. In addition, the MCO Senegal demonstrated flexibility in the face of the L1 emergency, mobilizing available resources to meet immediate needs. However, the significant reduction in staff numbers, combined with the sometimes inadequate personnel profiles, accentuated the challenges in setting up the MCO Senegal.

C9) The design of MCO Senegal results framework for MCO countries, based on the "3S" (solutions, systems, statelessness), is a new and relevant approach. However, this approach is not visible in the overall COMPASS results framework (and therefore in the

budget design), which has limited detailed monitoring, disaggregation of activities implemented and budget executed, including the response to emergency L1.

10) The quantitative data generated by the operation (made available for evaluation) are of irregular quality, in terms of reliability, consistency and clarity of presentation. This limited the depth of certain analyses.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Considering recent changes in staffing and structures, these recommendations aim to guide the reorganization of UNHCR's presence in the coastal countries of the West and Central Africa region to best ensure the respect of its mandate and the fulfillment of its strategic objectives.

Strategic dimension

R1) Improve UNHCR's capacity for dialogue and its positioning vis-à-vis national partners, particularly in countries where institutional communication channels have weakened. UNHCR could strengthen communication with national partners to clarify obligations and expectations, while identifying "entry points" appropriate to each country. There is also an opportunity to capitalize on Guinea-Bissau's experience of durable solutions.

R2) Strengthen capacity to analyze and respond to sub-regional mixed movements. UNHCR could strengthen interaction with national partners to better understand local contexts and forced displacement routes, and develop a route-based approach, in collaboration with IOM. The elaboration of a Joint Response Plan could serve as a reference for developing national roadmaps within the framework of the "expanded Sahel" strategy and for implementing joint actions with other UN agencies and partners.

Operational dimension

R3) Consolidate the functioning of national asylum systems to ensure essential protection standards. UNHCR could continue to develop specific action plans with National Commissions to prioritize the review of key refugee status determination procedures and identify mechanisms to empower the functioning of the asylum system. In addition, UNHCR could promote the development of mapping exercises to identify progress and obstacles by country, as well as advocacy actions to improve access to refugee status and facilitate domestication of the clauses of the African Union's Additional Protocol on Statelessness and Access to Nationality.

R4) Expand national protection and socio-economic integration ecosystems, with a view to "sustainable response". UNHCR could base its programming exercises on mapping of national programs, UN agencies and major cooperation agencies, to identify synergies and include fundraising objectives. In addition, UNHCR could develop a partnership and fundraising strategy to foster inclusive public policies and the socio-economic integration of refugees. In the field of education and livelihoods, UNHCR could redefine a sub-regional education strategy based on new partnerships to strengthen school enrolment and vocational training, as well as a roadmap to promote access to employment and income-generating activities.

R5) Develop emergency preparedness and response capacities in countries along the Atlantic coast due to the wider effects of the Sahel crisis. UNHCR could consider

strengthening its collaboration with the ECOWAS National Early Warning and Response Mechanisms for risk monitoring and predictive analysis. Technical support could also be provided for the revision of country-specific contingency plans.

Organizational dimension

R6) Review the governance and management mechanisms between the different levels of UNHCR to enable a more harmonious and efficient management of activities. UNHCR could consider incorporating the results of the recent evaluation of the regionalization and decentralization reform to clarify roles and responsibilities between the Regional Bureau and operations covering coastal countries. In terms of human resources, it would be appropriate to adjust the distribution of human resources according to protection needs and solutions, while encouraging nationalization and localization. In a context of budget restrictions, a revision of the Handbook for Designing Field Presences could be envisaged, particularly regarding the reduction and closure of different types of offices. To improve accountability, UNHCR could audit the mobilization of funds for the L1 emergency response in Togo and Benin, and in general, strengthen transparency and accountability regarding funding and results achieved.

R7) Strengthen the results orientation of planning and monitoring mechanisms. UNHCR could consider setting up continuous monitoring mechanisms, including reliable data, indicators and SMART targets disaggregated by countries covered by operations covering coastal countries. Adapting planning based more on available resources than on needs alone might also be helpful.