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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 2024 to June 2025, 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)). For the full list of evaluations and annexes referred to in this report, see <https://www.unhcr.org/about-unhcr/overview/evaluation-office>.



I. Introduction

1. Between July 2024 and June 2025, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) published 20 independent evaluations (see annex I) of which five were joint with other partners.¹ This report outlines the progress made in strengthening the evaluation function across UNHCR with respect to the implementation of the evaluation policy, the new evaluation strategy and its pillars (coverage, capacity and culture) as well as key and recurrent findings emerging from evaluations.

II. Progress in strengthening the evaluation function

2. The Evaluation Office has initiated the preparation of four sets of guidance on evaluation (decentralization, emergency response, strategic and thematic, and country strategy). They will be finalized and published in 2025 and are designed to help meet the need for robust, credible evidence by equipping UNHCR staff and partners with practical tools to commission, manage and use evaluations effectively at all levels of the organization. UNHCR also contributed to the publication of the guidance of the United Nations Evaluation Group on integrating humanitarian principles into evaluation of humanitarian action, a practical expression of the commitment of UNHCR to upholding humanitarian principles through accountability, learning and continuous improvement in a rapidly changing humanitarian landscape.

3. In 2024, the budget for the Evaluation Office was \$6.9 million. This represented approximately 0.13 per cent of the organization's total expenditure in 2024 (on par with 2023). As of mid-2025, the Evaluation Office has an amended operating level budget of \$5 million for the current year, reflecting the financial cuts made across the organization in the face of a significant reduction in funding. Budget shortfalls have resulted in a reduction in Evaluation Office staffing levels and in the number of centralized evaluations commissioned for the reporting period 2025 to 2026.

4. UNHCR evaluations that were completed in 2024 were subject to independent external assessment and achieved an overall quality rating of 65 per cent (slightly higher for centralized evaluations), largely the same as in 2023. Payment freezes and budget cuts in 2025 have resulted in a reduced use of external quality assurance, except in cases involving post-completion quality assessment. As a result, the Evaluation Office is increasing their support for decentralized evaluations.

5. One of the key objectives of the UNHCR 2024–2027 evaluation strategy is to strengthen the organization's ability to generate and use evidence across all levels. To this end, the Evaluation Office, the Division of Human Resources, the Division for Strategic Planning and Results, regional bureaux and country operations have worked together to enhance staff capacities by updating job descriptions, integrating evaluation into the skills catalogue, revising the Handbook on Field Presence and establishing monitoring and evaluation focal points and networks across regions. Capacity development efforts have included piloting an evaluation support package in the three regions of Africa with webinars, clinics and certified external training completed by 53 staff in operations. Evaluation is also being embedded in broader training and learning initiatives, such as in the Monitoring Learning Journey of the Division of Strategic Planning and Results; the Programming for Protection course in the Division of International Protection; the Data Academy of the Global Data Service; and webinars for senior staff led by the Division of Human Resources. In addition, UNHCR has established a new generic job description for a monitoring evaluation officer for the regional and country levels.

6. The Evaluation Office continued to promote the use of evaluations for both learning and accountability purposes, holding a number of informal briefings for Member States on major evaluations (decentralization and regionalization, crises responses to the Sudan and Ukraine situation); providing evaluation briefings internally through senior management and

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to all staff; and successfully piloting the use of artificial intelligence to generate short podcasts on key evaluation findings and recommendations. While several offices prepared one- and two-year follow-up reports, a formal management process to systematically monitor and report on evidence-based decision-making has yet to be established. Overall, timely management responses to evaluation recommendations continue to be a challenge.

III. Evaluation highlights

A. Global strategies and focus areas

7. The decentralization and regionalization reform aimed to empower country operations, enhance organizational agility and strengthen partnerships. An independent evaluation by Deloitte found that the reform intent aligned with the strategic goals of UNHCR and the United Nations. However, implementation was hindered by the absence of a clear definition of what UNHCR would look like once the reform was complete (an explicit 'end-state'). The creation of bureaux in geographic regions and the strengthening of country operations was found to enhance collaboration with key partners, improve efficiency in emergency response and improve the appropriateness and agility of UNHCR responses on the ground. However, a lack of clarity regarding roles, accountabilities and authorities was found to complicate the collaboration between different levels of the organization, while structural differences among bureaux were found to impede cross-regional cooperation and mobility. While the decentralization process increased efficiency, certain functions were transferred in an incomplete manner, leading to an overlap of responsibilities. In the areas of strategic planning and staff capacity development, an increased level of centralized support was recommended to ensure the balance between global priorities, and local realities and needs. The evaluation provided 13 recommendations to optimize progress moving forward, with the management response partially agreeing with 10 and agreeing with 3.

8. The evaluation of the organization's efforts to prevent, mitigate and respond to gender-based violence offers critical insights into the strengths and persistent challenges across policy guidance, programme implementation and organizational support. While the policy on the prevention of gender-based violence offers strategic direction, its limited visibility and ownership, especially outside the refugee coordination model framework, hinders broader applicability. UNHCR excels in survivor-centred response and case management, with recognized leadership and effective multi-sectoral integration, particularly in refugee settings. However, systemic issues such as staff burnout, funding constraints and inconsistent monitoring weaken service quality. Efforts to mitigate the risk of gender-based violence and to encourage the widespread adoption of the policy show promise in some sectors but remain inconsistent, often impacted by resource constraints and accountability gaps. Prevention efforts, often reduced to awareness-raising due to funding cuts, have been more successful when rooted in long-term, locally-tailored strategies. Operations management reveals progress in data use and in the prioritization of resources to prevent gender-based violence. However, concerns about the strategic emphasis by management and inconsistent funding highlight the need for stronger advocacy and global positioning. The field presence of UNHCR remains its greatest comparative advantage, enhancing the organization's access and influence, but also exposing the organization to sustainability challenges when other actors withdraw. The evaluation team made eight recommendations, to which the management response is due before the plenary meeting of the 2025 Executive Committee.

9. In 2024, the Evaluation Office and the UNHCR Regional Bureau for the Middle East and North Africa jointly commissioned a thematic evaluation of phone-based contact centres covering Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Libya, Mauritania and Tunisia. These centres provide a means of communicating with refugee communities, allowing for feedback, complaints and referral to services. These centres have generally enhanced access to services across diverse populations, though access challenges persist due to technology adaptation issues, SIM card restrictions and localized information gaps, such as the lack of detailed and location-specific information that interviewees identified as critical to navigating available services. Efforts to improve efficiency through automation have helped streamline operations but sometimes

compromise user satisfaction, particularly among callers who prefer human interaction. Limited financial and accessibility data, along with weak feedback mechanisms, further constrain accurate assessments of cost-efficiency and inclusiveness of all forcibly displaced and stateless people in the call centre services. The effectiveness of the centres varies widely by context and vulnerability level of the users, with key trust factors linked to wait times, interpreter quality, and credibility of the system on behalf of the users. As in other evaluations, the centres continue to face challenges in reporting back to users on how users' input has informed decisions, and there is limited evidence on how their analysis supports adaptive programming. To further strengthen phone-based contact centres in the region and beyond, the evaluation made eight recommendations, to which a management response is expected by the end of October 2025.

B. Emergency responses

10. The evaluation of the UNHCR response to the level-three crisis in Ukraine, covering the period February 2022 to March 2024, found that UNHCR provided timely, relevant protection and assistance at scale, including effective cash-based interventions, shelter interventions, legal advice and aid, delivered in a manner consistent with humanitarian principles. Strong partnerships, flexible funding and continuous adaptation by UNHCR to the evolving context were key enablers of the UNHCR response. The evaluation found that despite the large amount of assistance provided in the form of cash, in-kind support was still overused. The evaluation also highlighted the support by UNHCR for government-led social protection and area-based approaches but noted a lack of coherence across the international humanitarian system on transition planning and support for localization and area-based approaches.

11. The evaluation of the UNHCR humanitarian response to the Sudan situation from mid-2023 to mid-2024 covered Chad, Egypt, South Sudan and the Sudan. It found that UNHCR and its partners provided timely emergency aid to forcibly displaced and stateless persons while incorporating a long-term strategy in line with the humanitarian–development–peace nexus approach, though evidence of sustainability and impact remained limited. Investment in the refugee coordination model improved coordination between agencies, but there was inconsistent participation in some countries, which raised concerns. The evaluation recommended that UNHCR systematically integrate resilience and sustainable responses from the outset of crisis interventions to better address longer-term needs; apply cross-regional and cross-border best practices; expand minimum requirements for monitoring; refine its prioritization approach; and enhance coordination (including through the roll-out of the new refugee coordination model guidance).

C. Country strategies

12. The country strategy evaluation for Peru reflects the evolving role of UNHCR as Peru became a key host country, now hosting over 1.5 million Venezuelans. The evaluation found that UNHCR strengthened asylum and protection systems, supported mixed movement responses and expanded humanitarian aid during the pandemic. It emphasized the success of UNHCR in localizing protection through community-led and refugee-led partnerships and in facilitating social integration. Progress was made with respect to refugees' access to health and education, but coverage and coordination with authorities remained limited. The evaluation concluded that the presence of UNHCR significantly enhanced the protection landscape in Peru, but called for stronger inter-agency coordination, more consistent internal collaboration and deeper municipal engagement. Key recommendations included continuing support to national asylum governance; improving coordination across migration platforms; expanding livelihood partnerships; and strengthening data systems and field presence.

13. The country strategy evaluation for Brazil highlighted its growing role as a host country, with over 1 million Venezuelans entering between 2017 and 2024. By November 2024, an estimated 626,885 refugees remained in Brazil. UNHCR has been central in shaping the response of Brazil through Operation Welcome, supporting documentation, reception and internal relocation for both refugees and migrants. UNHCR strengthened national asylum

procedures through digitalization and technical support, however, disparities remain for non-Venezuelan applicants. UNHCR engagement with authorities at the municipal level remained limited, particularly in cities receiving forcibly displaced persons. Advocacy by UNHCR generated increased public awareness of refugee issues and advanced opportunities for socioeconomic inclusion, but structural barriers such as discrimination, documentation gaps and limited economic opportunities continue to undermine the long-term integration of refugees. Recommendations included strengthening the asylum system and localization as well as promoting refugee access to public services, including health, education and social assistance.

14. The evaluation of the operations of UNHCR in Somalia highlighted the challenge of delivering large-scale humanitarian responses in fragile, crisis-prone displacement contexts while aiming to reduce aid dependency, building national protection systems, and promoting self-reliance. Despite the important contribution of UNHCR to policy milestones and efforts to localize aid and strengthen asylum systems, progress has been constrained by resource limitations, rigid planning models, as well as output-focused approaches that have undermined strategic impact. Efforts to integrate conflict- and climate-sensitive programming and shift toward area-based approaches show promise, but urban-focused aid has deepened rural-urban gaps and worsened tensions, poverty and environmental harm in cities. While UNHCR improved cost-efficiency and local capacity by reducing the number of partnerships and international staff and prioritizing nationalization and decentralization, high staff turnover and gaps in protection expertise undermined continuity and weakened institutional memory. The reduction in the number of partners weakened grassroots engagement, while transactional partnerships limited shared decision-making and transformative impact. While the strong field presence of UNHCR is an asset, the organization faces growing tension between carrying out its mandate, achieving strategic goals, confronting operational realities and acknowledging the need for adaptive, quality-driven engagement.

15. Drawing mainly from the evaluation in 2024 of the strategy of the UNHCR Regional Representation in Senegal and the evaluation in 2018 of country operations in Angola, Botswana and Namibia, an evidence brief was prepared for internal use, summarizing key lessons to guide office downsizing and closures. Three critical lessons emerged: firstly, the importance of structured, jointly agreed exit strategies with national partners to safeguard credibility and ensure sustainable transitions; secondly, the need to base restructuring on thorough analysis and strategic reallocation of resources, rather than cost-cutting alone; and finally, the value of sustained engagement with the broader United Nations system to maintain visibility and support refugee inclusion efforts. The lessons have informed decision-making in the context of important budget reductions in 2025 and the need to reconfigure presence at the country level in all regions.

D. Decentralized evaluations

16. During the reporting period, nine decentralized evaluations were completed, of which six were donor-mandated, reflecting a growing trend in donor-required project evaluations. These covered a range of themes including inclusive education, access to energy, health, gender equality, livelihoods, economic inclusion and durable solutions. Annex I provides the full list of completed evaluations, and annex II outlines ongoing and planned decentralized evaluations for the reporting period 2025 to 2026.²

17. A joint multi-country evaluation assessing progress of the inclusion of refugees in national education systems was completed by the Regional Bureau for the East and Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes together with the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD). The evaluation found that while commitments made with respect to laws, policies, planning and strategy were, by and large, achieved by Member States, no State has fulfilled its commitment to integrate refugee schools into national education systems. Fewer resources were devoted to governance and management, which are needed to facilitate, guide and oversee implementation, supervision and monitoring at the national level. The evaluation

² See <https://www.unhcr.org/about-unhcr/overview/evaluation-office>.

noted that the degree to which refugee inclusion in national education systems can be achieved is affected by complementary rights, notably the right to move, the right to work and the right to documentation; all of which are in the process of being strengthened by IGAD Member States.

E. Joint and system-wide results

18. Several of the decentralized evaluations completed over the past 12 months were carried out with other agencies (see annex I).³ In addition, the Evaluation Office contributed to an independent, system-wide humanitarian evaluation of the 2022 and 2023 drought response in Somalia. The evaluation noted that the scaled-up collective response played a critical role in preventing famine and saving tens of thousands of lives. While the response was facilitated by the expansion of humanitarian access to marginalized communities and hard-to-reach areas, challenges remained in addressing the risk of indiscriminate attacks on civilians. The humanitarian country team prioritized life-saving interventions, scaling back on livelihood and resilience activities, which contributed to erosion of resilience in affected communities. Unintended outcomes stemmed from risks associated with overlooked diversion of aid, inefficient coordination, weak accountability to affected people, and the pull factor of aid drawing internally displaced people to informal urban camps. This has left many drought-affected rural communities in vulnerable conditions with limited access to livelihoods and services.

IV. Innovation

19. In December 2024, UNHCR participated in the United Nations Children's Fund and World Food Programme Global Impact Evaluation Forum and co-organized a panel discussion around impact evaluation in contexts of conflict. This event led to the creation of a working group on impact evaluation, as part of the United Nations Evaluation Group, in which UNHCR now plays an active role. The first phase of an impact evaluation is being designed with the Global Data Service and the Iraq operation to examine costs and benefits of new digital gateway tools for refugee registration and services.

20. The Evaluation Office is leveraging artificial intelligence to strengthen the accessibility and the use of evaluation evidence. Tools powered by artificial intelligence are being used to synthesize findings, identify recurrent challenges and support strategic planning. The Evaluation Office has developed and disseminated several podcasts generated by artificial intelligence, making key findings from evaluations more accessible to both internal and external audiences.

21. To support strategic planning and evaluation, colleagues in the Africa regions synthesized recurrent findings from 23 evaluations into a series of guiding questions in a document designed to inform multi-year programming.

V. Future outlook

22. Efforts to streamline operations within the United Nations system, such as the UN80 Initiative and the Humanitarian Reset, have potential implications for evaluation practice. In the context of the updated strategy of the United Nations Evaluation Group, member agencies reaffirmed the importance of evaluation as a critical tool for strengthening the quality and effectiveness of the United Nations system and its programming across sectors and reinforcing trust in the multilateral system. In this regard, humanitarian agencies of the United Nations have been conducting inter-agency humanitarian evaluations of emergency responses. Discussions continue in order to identify areas of work where consolidated efforts might be appropriate, for example in the conduct of joint impact evaluations that consider the

³ See <https://www.unhcr.org/about-unhcr/overview/evaluation-office>.

combined results of operations carried out by agencies in the United Nations system and in the establishment of a unified quality assessment system.
