



UNHCR 76th Executive Committee

Statement by Lori Bell (8 minutes)

Head of Evaluation Office

10 October 2025

Good afternoon, Chair, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Is UNHCR relevant and doing the right things? Are our efforts effective, and are they building stronger systems that deliver long-term benefits for the people we serve? What must we keep doing, where can we step back, and what are we uniquely positioned to do?

These are the questions at the heart of UNHCR's evaluations over the past year, and it's my pleasure to share our progress—and some challenges—as we reflect on UNHCR's evaluation work in today's fast-changing humanitarian landscape.

My objectives today are threefold:

to present a snapshot of where evaluation stands in UNHCR today

to highlight some key cross-cutting findings and challenges identified through recent evaluations, and

to consider what lies ahead - opportunities and anticipated hurdles.

Allow me to begin by emphasizing **why evaluation matters**, especially now. With growing needs and shrinking budgets, evaluation is one of our most important tools. It helps us sharpen the quality of our work, build trust through transparency, and ensure accountability. Most importantly, it tells us what works, why it works, and how to do better.

From July 2024 to June 2025, UNHCR completed 20 independent evaluations—five in collaboration with other UN agencies – reflecting the increasing number of multi-partner initiatives and areas of programming in which UNHCR is engaging.



Eleven were centralized evaluations, including key assessments of UNHCR's regionalization and decentralization reform, and emergency responses in Ukraine and Sudan. Country-level evaluations covered Peru, Brazil, Somalia, and Senegal. Finally we examined UNHCR's policy on preventing and responding to gender-based violence. A briefing on findings from the GBV evaluation will take place on 11 November — I hope to see many of you there.

Nine additional evaluations were commissioned by management —mostly donor-mandated — focused on areas like education, health, livelihoods, and durable solutions.

All 20 evaluations were externally reviewed and assessed – the average rating on quality was 65%, on par with the previous year.

One of the key objectives of UNHCR's evaluation strategy is to strengthen the **organization's ability to generate and use evidence**.

This past year, we finalized guidance for different types of evaluations, rolled out an Evaluation Support Package in three African regions (training 53 staff), and — responding to growing demand — introduced a formal job description for M&E roles in the field. We expect larger operations to start building this capacity in support of strong results-based management systems.

To further foster a culture of evidence and learning, we've made evaluations more accessible. Our AI-generated 10-minute podcasts were the innovation of the year for us — you'll find them on our website. We held a number of informal evaluation briefings for Member States and internal sessions for senior management and staff.

However, we still lack a formal system to track how evaluation findings translate into action. Timely follow-up and management responses remain a weak spot management needs to address.

In our annual Report on Evaluation, summary findings are presented on individual evaluations. Allow me today to share some **key recurrent evaluation findings**.

Localization: In places like Bangladesh and Mali, aligning with local systems and using area-based approaches improved ownership, social cohesion, and program coherence. But the concept of area-based approaches is still not well understood across UNHCR or the humanitarian sector writ large.



Legal Documentation: UNHCR advocacy for national reforms has improved access to legal documents—critical for accessing health, education, and economic opportunities. We’re continuing to explore this link in our ongoing **urban programming** evaluation.

Inclusion Gaps: Despite progress on gender, stronger partnerships with women-led organizations and better protection and economic outcomes for women and girls – evaluations show that the implementation of the Age, Gender and Diversity Policy remains uneven and there are gaps, especially for persons with disabilities. Accountability to affected populations also remains a sector-wide challenge – documented most recently in our joint evaluation of the UN’s humanitarian response in Somalia.

Finally we see recurrent evaluation findings around UNHCR’s delivery of **Cash Assistance:** Evaluations affirmed the relevance and effectiveness of cash-based interventions—in Ukraine, Peru, Mali, and Sudan. But inflation and market instability can limit impact, and we’re still relying too much on in-kind aid in some places. Digging deeper, a multi-country impact assessment of cash is under way, and an independent evaluation will follow in 2026. Reflecting the Humanitarian Reset roadmap, an important focus of this evaluation will be on **harmonized approaches and sustainable responses**.

The year ahead. There is not a single segment of this year’s Executive Committee that has not reflected on the **issue of budget constraints** and their impacts on UNHCR’s work – and evaluation is no exception. We are currently planning based on an assumption of a 50% cut in the Evaluation Office budget for 2026 compared to last year’s allocations – which will mean limiting new centralized evaluations for 2026 to only three or four important topics.

Country evaluations are of crucial importance for looking afresh at our presence and performance – and are vital tools to inform adjustments to our country strategy and footprint. In this regard I have prioritized an evaluation in **Syria** – a very large UNHCR operation - in a country with enormous needs for return and recovery support.

Earlier this year Member States provided a number of excellent suggestions on themes for our next global workplan. However at this stage the financial situation required us to prioritize only one new global evaluation. So many of you have spoken this week on the importance of **localization** – which is also a key commitment under the Humanitarian Reset. For this reason, and building on evaluations that have touched on this topic, in 2026 we will initiate a strategic evaluation on this topic. If there was ever an opportunity, no, a moral obligation, for a refugee-led evaluation it is this one – and I will be reaching out to some of you to explore how to build in genuine refugee participation in this important exercise.



With respect to joint evaluations, the Board of Auditors, in their 2024 report, recommended that my office, in liaison with other UN entities.... commission periodic inter-agency evaluations of Refugee Response Plans. We have identified the Joint Response Plan in Bangladesh as a potentially important learning opportunity – I will be reaching out before the end of the year to the government and to other partners to explore their interest.

Finally, demand for decentralized evaluations continues to rise, driven largely by donor requirements attached to tightly earmarked funding. A priority for 2026 will be to develop mechanisms and principles to ensure that limited unearmarked resources do not subsidize projectized funding and that all such evaluations are professionally managed and independently conducted.

In closing, UNHCR remains strongly committed to evaluation and learning. But in this tough financial climate, I am also considering whether our **Evaluation Policy**, originally set for review in 2027, should be updated sooner—especially in light of a planned revision of the broader policy on independent oversight.

I would like to thank **Member States – in particular Canada, the EU, France, the Russian Federation, Sweden, Switzerland, Ukraine, and the USA who participated in evaluation advisory groups over the last year**. Your feedback and interest, whether through briefings or consultations, are critical in helping UNHCR to move from evidence to action.

I welcome your questions, your feedback, and your continued collaboration. The Evaluation Office stands ready to engage with you at any time, to discuss findings, lessons, and opportunities for strengthening our impact.

Thank you

Word count: 1,180