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UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency

Evaluation Brief

Evaluation of UNHCR's Engagement in Humanitarian- Development Cooperation

UNHCR Evaluation Service

Purpose: support UNHCR in adapting its approach in light of the New Way of Working and the Global Compact on Refugees

Evaluation type and methods: developmental and longitudinal strategy and impact evaluation. Mixed methods including key informant interviews, focus group discussions, and statistical analysis of quasi-experimental data.

Implemented: 2018-2021 by GPPI and ISDC

Scope: Global with focus on Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Jordan, Niger

Commissioned by: Evaluation Service with funding from Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs Luxembourg

Evaluation Context

The policy context has changed.

There is a growing awareness that forced displacement is relevant to poverty reduction and development efforts, especially to the principle of “leave no one behind”. In turn, development is relevant to addressing forced displacement, especially to strengthen the inclusion and self-reliance of displaced people. Key stakeholders have committed to changing the way they respond to forced displacement against this background. The Global Compact on Refugees was affirmed in 2018, which envisions a multi-actor response to ease pressures on host countries; enhance refugee self-reliance; expand access to third-country solutions; and support conditions in refugees' countries of origin. UNHCR has a central role in these efforts, given its protection mandate for refugees and other persons of concern.

Key Findings

UNHCR systematically built partnerships with development actors and offers vital support.

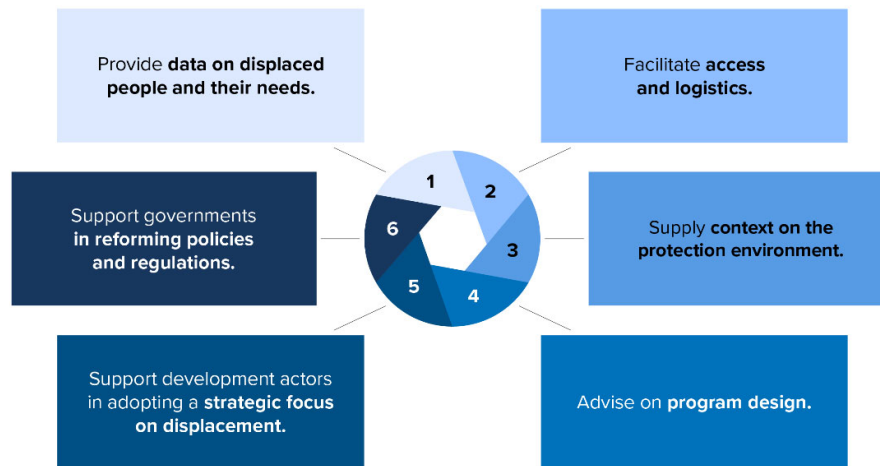
- UNHCR systematically built partnerships with a number of multilateral and bilateral development actors and increased operational cooperation with individual UN agencies.
- The cooperation with the World Bank Group is most exemplary. Among others, UNHCR has a formal role in assessing the protection frameworks of countries potentially eligible for funding under the Window for Host Communities and Refugees of the International Development Association. This partnership also prompted UNHCR to institutionalize its engagement in humanitarian-development cooperation by hiring a cadre of development experts.

In practice, UNHCR has provided vital support to development actors' program planning and implementation (figure 1).

The Level of Cooperation between UNHCR and development actors depends heavily on external factors.

The level of cooperation has depended heavily on the policies of host governments, on donor policies and priorities, and on other external factors. While UNHCR has had no influence on the strategic direction of development actors, it has helped to translate existing strategic focus on displacement into concrete commitments and agreements. What is more, UNHCR's protection mandate, strong field presence, data, and coordination role have enabled its support to development actors.

Figure 1: What can UNHCR offer to development actors?



Overall, enhanced humanitarian-development cooperation has had largely positive effects on refugees and other persons of concern.

The evaluation examined the effects of specific areas of action with respect to UNHCR's engagement with development cooperation. In the cases analysed, the vast majority of observed effects were positive, as in the case of the effects of work permits for Syrian refugees in Jordan (figure 2). The evaluation did raise the trade-offs of including refugees in national or local service systems which may mean lower service standards in the short term, until development interventions succeed in improving standards.

UNHCR's engagement in humanitarian-development cooperation has also shown positive effects for the response to the COVID pandemic. In several contexts, the pandemic response benefited from existing humanitarian-development cooperation, leading to integrated responses for both refugees and host communities.

Further opportunities for humanitarian-development cooperation exist.

Though it widely acknowledged that UNHCR's engagement in humanitarian-development cooperation has increased over the past five years, the evaluation found there are further opportunities to strengthen this cooperation. For example:

Figure 2: Effects of Work Permits for Syrian refugees in Jordan.



- UNHCR's engagement with the UN development system and development-oriented NGOs, could benefit from greater clarity and investment.
- UNHCR could transform its own programs more to focus systematically on gradually integrating refugees into local and national service systems.

Steps towards inclusion are possible even in challenging political environments (figure 3). For example, while inclusion of refugees into the national social protection system is not currently supported in Jordan, it has been possible to harmonize the criteria and modalities of the humanitarian cash facility with the national social protection system.

There are also further opportunities for UNHCR to provide thought leadership on protection issues and to fully leverage its protection expertise in development action. As the UN agency entrusted with the supervision of the Geneva Refugee Convention, UNHCR has unique competences in approaches to protection that focus on the rights and legal status of refugees, stateless, and other persons of concern. UNHCR can leverage these in its cooperation with development actors, for example by partnering on advocacy, supporting development actor planning or

collaborating on programs, including those that focus on governance and rule of law (figure 4).

UNHCR has adopted relevant measures, but can do more to address remaining constraints.

UNHCR policies and internal measures have played a major role in enabling the current level of engagement in humanitarian-development cooperation. The clear commitment to the agenda by UNHCR leadership has translated into a high degree of awareness and agreement across the organization, and new staff positions and units created to support such cooperation have enabled UNHCR's increased engagement with development actors. However, internal factors also constrain humanitarian-development cooperation, even as key parts of UNHCR's systems are currently undergoing reform.

The evaluation team makes six recommendations to encourage UNHCR to continue and adapt its focus on and investments in humanitarian-development cooperation.

Figure 3: Steps towards including refugees in national services are possible in different political environments

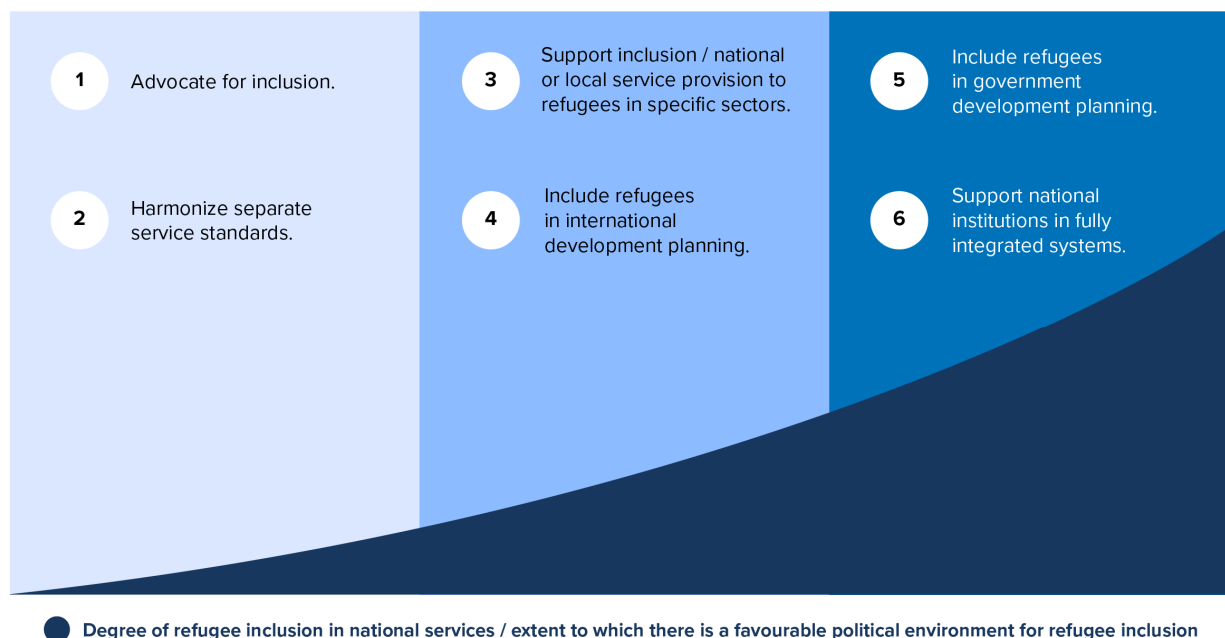
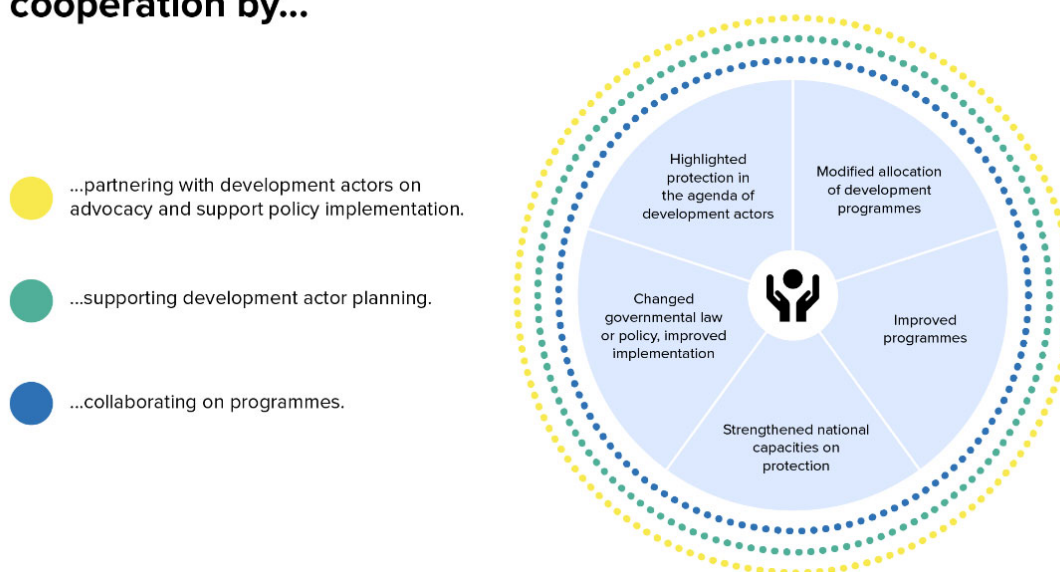


Figure 4: Protection and Humanitarian-development Cooperation

UNHCR can leverage protection through humanitarian-development cooperation by...



Recommended Actions

1. **Clarify UNHCR's objectives and priorities with respect to humanitarian-development cooperation** in the organisation's updated Strategic Directions, in the upcoming Development Action strategy paper, guidance on Multi Year Strategic Plans, and global partnership and sector strategies. UNHCR should specifically set out how it will

- strengthen engagement with the UN development system,
- expand cooperation with development actors on rule of law and access to justice,
- systematically cooperate with development actors on internal displacement,
- prepare and invest for its facilitation, supervision, monitoring, reporting and advocacy roles.

2. Systematically **pursue the integration of services for refugees with national and local service systems throughout UNHCR's own programs**, focusing multi-year planning on this objective and strengthening incentives.

3. Ensure that **UNHCR core budgets** for country operations and standard job descriptions include the time and resources needed to engage with development actors and processes. Clarify under what

conditions UNHCR seeks funding for its own activities from development actors and make these contributions additional to regular core budgets.

4. Make **UNHCR's support structure for humanitarian-development cooperation** more effective by clarifying the role of the Regional Bureaux and strengthening the focus of dedicated regional and country level positions on internal change processes.

5. Accelerate efforts to strengthen UNHCR's capacity for and practice of **collecting, analyzing and sharing data**.

6. Make the **role of protection in humanitarian-development cooperation** more explicit and exercise this role more actively, specifically in terms of

- planning and analysis,
- providing operational protection advice
- monitoring the situation of persons of concern
- cooperating directly with development actors.

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