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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 2021 to June 2022, 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)).



I. Introduction

1. During the period covered in this report (July 2021-June 2022), UNHCR completed 21 evaluations, 1 review and 1 evaluative synthesis, and initiated 34 new evaluations, all aligned with the organization's strategic areas of work.

2. An independent peer review was carried out by the United Nations Evaluation Group framework for professional peer reviews of the evaluation function of United Nations system organizations and the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.¹ The findings showed that the UNHCR evaluation function continues to progress, with performance and relevance having been enhanced since the previous review in 2013. The peer review provided strategic recommendations that have informed a new evaluation policy (2022-2026), which is currently being finalized.

II. Highlights of selected evaluations

3. Below are the highlights of selected evaluations completed in the course of the reporting period.

UNHCR engagement with humanitarian-development cooperation

4. The three-year evaluation of the organization's engagement with humanitarian-development cooperation found that UNHCR has implemented a number of effective institutional measures and reforms that contributed to greater levels of engagement with development cooperation. For example, together with its partners, UNHCR supported the Government of Jordan in providing work permits to refugees. This has had a significant impact on the protection of Syrian refugees in the country and their income. The evaluation recommended that UNHCR continue to support the inclusion of refugees in national and local services. It further suggested that the capacity for and the practice of collecting, analysing and sharing data with relevant stakeholders be strengthened. UNHCR was encouraged to make more explicit the role of protection in humanitarian-development cooperation. The evaluation also proposed that the organization clarify humanitarian-development cooperation priorities and objectives, including in terms of how these relate to engagement within the United Nations system and in internal displacement situations. In addition, the evaluation recommended clarifying internal systems and structures related to budgeting, the use of development funding and the accountabilities of the regional bureaux.

UNHCR asylum capacity development

5. The readiness of governments to improve the management of their national asylum systems is crucial to the success of the organization's investments in asylum capacity development. The evaluation found that progress has been made since 2014 in the organization's approach to, and delivery of, asylum capacity development support. UNHCR has been effective in the application and implementation of wide-ranging tools, practices and technical guidance to promote the development of asylum capacity with national governments. However, the evaluation identified that UNHCR's pragmatic and adaptive approach can hamper the capture and transfer of broader lessons learned, and that the lack of engagement of refugees and asylum-seekers in asylum capacity development is a significant gap in the effectiveness of the approach. The evaluation further notes that UNHCR should put a greater focus on the sustainability of its capacity-building work with a view to producing better protection outcomes instead of substituting government capacity in the short term. Overall, the evaluation suggests that the best results are achieved when asylum capacity development efforts are part of multi-stakeholder processes.

¹ Available from <https://www.unhcr.org/publications/brochures/621c9f154/peer-review-evaluation-function-unhcr.html>.

UNHCR repatriation programmes and activities

6. The voluntary return of refugees to their country of origin in safety and dignity has long been regarded by the international community as the preferred durable solution for refugees. The evaluation found that over the past decades, these principles have been put to the test given that the rate of returns has declined sharply due to prolonged conflicts and limited opportunities for reintegration. The two main models traditionally used by UNHCR during repatriation activities (i.e. the promotion or facilitation of returns) are resource-intensive, take place in situations of low risk and are based on the assumption that a country of origin is transitioning towards peace and stability. The evaluation found that when facilitated returns are scaled down for security reasons (as is often the case in protracted crises), a large number of refugees opt to return outside of formal frameworks, often with limited access to assistance provided by UNHCR. While there are clear examples of success that relate to the organization's support of self-organized returns, this modality entails several contextual and operational challenges that make a coherent response difficult. The evaluation recommended that UNHCR improve its support of self-organized returns by promoting an operational understanding of voluntary repatriation that fully captures the complexity of the choices made by the prospective returnees. This can be achieved by ensuring that the views of refugees are considered in the design and implementation of voluntary repatriation activities.

Longitudinal evaluation of the age, gender and diversity policy of 2018

7. The first report of this three-year evaluation showed that the workforce of UNHCR and partners continued to be largely guided by the age, gender and diversity mainstreaming policy of 2010. The evaluation highlighted how regular participatory exercises with persons of concern, including with the support of permanent representative structures in camp settings, were examples of inclusion, particularly for women and older people. However, funding shortfalls sometimes precluded the implementation of participatory assessment results. Although the evaluation found that programming is age- and gender-differentiated, inclusive approaches for individuals who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex individuals, as well as for people living with disabilities, could be strengthened.

Synthesis of evaluative evidence on the UNHCR response to the COVID-19 pandemic

8. The synthesis examined evidence from 27 evaluations conducted between 2020 and 2022 and included additional information collected through interviews with the workforce of UNHCR. The findings suggested that UNHCR stayed and delivered during the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, though at considerable cost to its workforce. The synthesis further showed that the organization's legal and technical capacity, convening power, advocacy, expertise in refugee situations and knowledge of statelessness and asylum have been highlighted in evaluations from around the world. Nevertheless, some areas of work unrelated to health have suffered (e.g. the prevention and response to gender-based violence). In addition, the needs of vulnerable individuals could not be entirely met in the context of the remote delivery of assistance.

Joint evaluation of the protection of the fundamental rights of refugees during the COVID-19 pandemic

9. The joint evaluation was carried out by UNHCR, the Governments of Colombia, Finland and Uganda, the Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance, and the COVID-19 Global Evaluation Coalition.² It revealed how protection actors made extraordinary efforts in support of refugee rights in the face of an unprecedented global health emergency. However, the evaluation also found evidence that some States introduced measures restricting the rights of refugees during the COVID-19 pandemic. In some cases, restrictive practices adopted at the height of the pandemic were retained or reinforced as security measures. The evaluation recommended that exceptions be made for refugees and asylum-seekers when borders are closed in the context of a pandemic or large-scale

² The COVID-19 Global Evaluation Coalition is an independent collaboration of the development evaluation units of States, United Nations agencies and multilateral institutions.

emergency. The evaluation also suggested reinforcing specific measures to strengthen collective preparedness and made a call to maintain in-person protection services during displacement crises, especially for survivors of gender-based violence, children at risk and their caregivers, and others with specific protection needs.

UNHCR response to multiple emergencies in Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger

10. The evaluation found that UNHCR was largely effective in responding to the needs of various populations of concern in accessible areas of the Sahel region. However, its policy on emergency preparedness and response was seen as an impediment to tailored regional and country-level responses. The evaluation revealed differences in the coverage across population groups in the three countries. While these disparities partly reflected diverging views among the workforce and partners about the role of UNHCR in internal displacement situations, they also resulted from high levels of insecurity in some areas. In this regard, close collaboration with local partners was crucial; local partners had access to zones that were otherwise inaccessible to UNHCR. Local partners also continued to assist and protect persons of concern to UNHCR in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

UNHCR response to the 2019-2020 internal displacement emergency in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

11. The evaluation findings showed that after the activation of the level-3 emergency in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, increased resources supported a scale-up of activities, which helped save lives. However, the scale-up could not address the many needs. The standardized level-3 activation duration and budget parameters of the organization's policy on emergency preparedness and response do not take the scale of the given emergency into consideration. This makes the policy seem rigid, particularly in the context of the recurrent crises in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Nevertheless, the evaluation found that the protection data and analysis reports of UNHCR enabled targeted programming by the humanitarian actors in the country. Feedback mechanisms closed the circle and included the community-based identification of solutions, which was considered a good practice.

Joint evaluation with the United Nations Children's Fund on the blueprint for joint action for refugee children

12. In 2020, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) launched a blueprint for joint action for refugee children, promoting enhanced collaboration on education, protection, and water and sanitation. The evaluation findings revealed that the blueprint has benefitted from strong leadership support and that the inclusion of refugee children in national plans, budgets and service delivery systems remains the focus of both agencies. The knowledge and expertise of UNICEF and UNHCR have been successfully leveraged in their partnership, and good examples related to programme delivery and advocacy on behalf of refugee children are already being developed. However, whether the blueprint has resulted in more efficient ways of working remains unclear. Anecdotal evidence has shown that the partnership is leading to more effective ways of working and is contributing to refugee inclusion in a number of countries. The evaluation findings will inform a new global partnership framework between the two organizations.

Inter-agency humanitarian evaluation in Yemen

13. Yemen has seen one of the largest and most significant humanitarian responses ever coordinated by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) system.³ Over two thirds of the population in Yemen is considered in need, and since 2015, an estimated \$16 billion has been raised and expended in response to the country's situation. Today, the protracted conflict and humanitarian crisis in Yemen has resulted in large numbers of people remaining in need of protection services. The evaluation found that protection has not been made central to the humanitarian response in Yemen and remains one of the most underfunded sectors in

³ The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) is the longest-standing and highest-level humanitarian coordination forum.

the framework of the humanitarian response plan. More needs to be done to effectively promote protection mainstreaming. The evaluation further recommended that the humanitarian community take stock of the “localization agenda” and the role of local non-governmental organizations in addressing protection concerns.

Evaluation of the regional refugee and resilience plan for the Syrian Arab Republic situation

14. The regional refugee and resilience plan is a strategic coordination, planning, advocacy, fundraising and programming platform for humanitarian and development partners to respond to the Syrian Arab Republic situation. The evaluation that was commissioned by UNHCR and the United Nations Development Programme on behalf of the plan’s Joint Secretariat found that there is room for improvement in three areas: coordination; information dissemination; and support mechanisms for country-level learning and planning functions. While the regional refugee and resilience plan has successfully included several key initiatives as well as tools and standards across its country chapters, coordination bodies should further enhance efforts to align regional resources with national agendas and priorities.

Country strategy evaluations

15. Country strategy evaluations were conducted in Mexico, the Sudan and Zambia, as well as in the multi-country operations in Baltic and Nordic countries. These evaluations contribute to multi-year strategic planning. They found that the capacity to undertake effective advocacy emerged in several countries as a critical area of work, particularly with respect to leveraging partnerships towards the realization of the comprehensive refugee response framework and the Global Compact on Refugees, including the implementation of pledges made at the Global Refugee Forum in 2019.

16. During the reporting period, the cross-cutting findings that emerged from evaluations have shown that UNHCR could benefit from the implementation of a wide range of recommendations. These include: (i) strengthening capacity for advocacy at the country level; (ii) addressing recurrent policy implementation gaps; and (iii) understanding, planning for, and adapting to, increasingly complex operational contexts. In this respect, the importance of robust data and analysis that support effective planning and advocacy has been consistently highlighted in the evaluations. Finally, the organization’s use of area-based approaches appears to be yielding positive results for refugees, returnees, internally displaced persons and host communities; this warrants further attention and potential expansion in the future.

III. Evaluation coverage and quality

17. The quantity and quality of evaluations have improved steadily over the years. The evaluation workplan for 2022 includes 31 evaluations (14 centralized and 17 decentralized evaluations).

18. An external facility reviewed and assessed the evaluations that UNHCR completed in 2021 and gave a quality rating of 71 per cent. This is consistent with the quality rating of 72 per cent in 2020 and a notable increase from 58 per cent in 2018-2019. The independent quality assurance system, which was initiated in 2018-2019, is being used by evaluation managers at headquarters, as well as in divisions, bureaux and country operations, to ensure compliance with international evaluation norms and standards. It also enables the analysis of evaluation quality trends over time.

19. In line with recommendations emanating from the 2021 peer review of the UNHCR evaluation function and associated management response, the new evaluation policy (2022-2026) introduces quantitative coverage norms. This will ensure that all major policies, themes, contexts and geographies of the organization’s operational work are evaluated at some stage over a 5 to 10-year period.

IV. Evaluation capacity

20. The Evaluation Service remains committed to partnering with the management of UNHCR to develop internal capacity to commission and use evaluations across different levels of the organization. During the reporting period, an additional regional evaluation position was established in the Middle East and North Africa regional bureau, bringing the total regions covered by core evaluation staff to four (Americas; the East and Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes; and West and Central Africa are the others), out of the seven regional bureaux.

21. Regarding the development of the evaluation competency, on-the-job learning and coaching of evaluation managers remain a core priority. Alongside experiential learning, flexible learning approaches, such as a virtual monitoring and evaluation community of practice for the UNHCR workforce, have been developed, providing experience-sharing opportunities, including during the global “learn@work” week. A guide to evaluation in UNHCR for the smoother and more structured induction of new staff has also been developed.

22. In an effort to support the “One United Nations” initiative, UNHCR has been engaging with the United Nations Evaluation Group in order to develop a system-wide certificated course for mid-level evaluators and evaluation managers.

V. Linkages: evaluation, results-based management and oversight

23. The Evaluation Service continued to partner with operations, regional bureaux and headquarters divisions to support the monitoring and evaluation component of multi-year strategies which form an integral part of COMPASS, the UNHCR results-based management system for planning and budgeting. This was undertaken in several ways, including by supporting multi-functional teams in the development of regional and country-level monitoring and evaluation plans; contributing to COMPASS guidance; by providing resources for online training; revising the online course on multi-year monitoring and evaluation plans; and by co-delivering virtual sessions to over 200 members of the monitoring and evaluation community of practice.

24. In 2022, a new consolidated recommendation tracker was designed and launched. Starting from this year, management will be able to see all “open recommendations” coming from audits and evaluations in a user-friendly dashboard intended to prompt timely follow-up action. One of the features of the new UNHCR evaluation policy (2022-2026) will include a requirement for management reporting on evaluation recommendations for a two-year period after the completion of evaluations.

VI. Relevance and utilization

25. Evaluations continue to inform thinking and programming, provide assurance of alignment with the organization’s strategic directions, as well as generate new knowledge and evidence that may be contrary to commonly held views.

26. Selected examples of such evaluations include:

- A three-year evaluation of the pilot on alternatives to detention provided new evidence that alternatives to detentions can be cost-effective, safe and viable pathways. The evaluation has been widely discussed and referenced in ongoing discussions on asylum policy in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.
- Following the 2021 statelessness evaluation, management has reported progress against all seven recommendations. This has included but is not limited to: (i) the development of a statelessness strategy as part of the organization’s global strategic directions (2022-2026); (ii) clear messaging from management to operations on the need to consider prioritizing statelessness in internal resource allocation processes;

(iii) the development of a regional induction briefing for representatives and operations; (iv) work to establish a global alliance against statelessness; and (v) initiatives to strengthen advocacy around non-discrimination, equality and development.

- Building on the 2019 evaluation on data use and information management, UNHCR has significantly advanced its data work and data maturity. The first UNHCR data transformation strategy (2020-2025) has been developed and approved. UNHCR also established the Global Data Service, and important investments in data capacity and services at the regional level have been made. While work on data governance, norms and standards is well under way, significant changes to the organization's data culture and data literacy continue to be needed. UNHCR plans to commission a mid-term evaluation of the data transformation strategy (2020-2025) to support scale-up efforts or make any course correction required.

27. In late 2021, UNHCR prepared a guidance note on management response, which is designed to strengthen the timeliness, quality and effectiveness of follow-up to evaluations.

28. UNHCR continues to strengthen its evaluation communications and outreach. Short briefs, videos, infographics, interactive annual reports, internal and external webinars and web-based evaluation content were all used to amplify messages stemming from 2021 and 2022 evaluations. One example is the 2021 [annual report](#) of the Evaluation Service that has been disseminated among the UNHCR workforce and partners, as well as Member States.

29. As reforms related to decentralization continue to be implemented at UNHCR, evaluation will become an increasingly important tool for management decision-making and advocacy, particularly evaluations commissioned at country and regional levels. Such evaluations help foster innovation and partnerships, and support course correction as needed.

Annex I

Overview of completed evaluations, July 2021-June 2022⁴

<i>Evaluations</i>	<i>Countries concerned</i>
<i>Centralized</i>	
<i>Global thematic/strategic evaluations</i>	
- UNHCR engagement in humanitarian-development cooperation	Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Jordan, the Niger
- Longitudinal evaluation of the implementation of the UNHCR Age, gender and diversity policy - year 1	Burundi, Central African Republic, Colombia, Congo, Iran (Islamic Republic of), United Republic of Tanzania
- UNHCR support for strengthening national asylum systems	Costa Rica, Morocco, the Niger, Philippines, South Africa, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
- Repatriation programmes and activities	Chad, Greece, Kenya, Mexico, Thailand
<i>Country strategy evaluations</i>	
- UNHCR country strategy evaluation Zambia	Zambia
- Country strategy evaluation in the Sudan	The Sudan
- Country strategy evaluation in Mexico	Mexico
- Multi-country operations in Baltic and Nordic countries	Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Sweden
<i>Emergency response evaluations</i>	
- UNHCR response to the 2019-2020 internal displacement emergency in the Democratic Republic of the Congo	Democratic Republic of the Congo
- UNHCR response to multiple emergencies in Burkina Faso, Mali, the Niger	Burkina Faso, Mali, the Niger
<i>Joint evaluations</i>	
- UNHCR/UNICEF fair deal (blueprint) for refugee children - round 1	Bangladesh, Cameroon, Ecuador, Ethiopia, Honduras, Indonesia, Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, Rwanda
- Inter-agency humanitarian evaluation Yemen	Yemen
- Protection of the fundamental rights of refugees during the COVID-19 pandemic	Global

⁴ All evaluations and management responses are published and can be assessed from www.unhcr.org/evaluation-and-research.html.

Evaluative synthesis

- Synthesis of evaluative evidence on the UNHCR response to the COVID-19 pandemic Global

*Decentralized**Country level*

- “Action access”, alternatives to detention pilot – year 1 United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
- “Somos panas” Colombia communication campaign Colombia
- Mid-term process evaluation of the IKEA Foundation livelihoods and energy projects among Somali refugees and host communities in Ethiopia Ethiopia

Regional and multi-country level

- Project on saving maternal and newborn lives in refugee situations in Cameroon, Chad and the Niger Cameroon, Chad, the Niger
- UNHCR child protection programming (2017-2019) Cameroon, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ethiopia, Europe (regional), Iraq (federal), Iran (Islamic Republic of), Morocco, Thailand
- Project on caring for refugees with non-communicable diseases Cameroon, Jordan, Rwanda, Uganda
- Regional refugee and resilience plan for the Syrian Arab Republic situation Middle East and North Africa (regional)
- Relevance and effectiveness of sports programming for refugee inclusion and protection Mexico, Rwanda

Evaluative review

- Independent review of workplace race equity and equality Global

Annex II

Overview of ongoing and planned evaluations, July 2022-June 2023

<i>Evaluations</i>	<i>Countries concerned</i>
<i>Centralized</i>	
<i>Global thematic/strategic evaluations</i>	
- UNHCR engagement in humanitarian development cooperation – 1-year extension	Jordan, Kenya, Mauritania, Global
- Longitudinal evaluation of the implementation of the UNHCR 2018 age, gender and diversity policy – year 2 and 3	Global
- Development partnerships, solutions and disengagement strategies	To be determined
- Gender-based violence	To be determined
- Internal displacement policy implementation	To be determined
- Regionalization and decentralization	To be determined
- Regional and country coordination platforms in mixed flow contexts (joint evaluation with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs)	To be determined
<i>Country strategy evaluations</i>	
- Country strategy evaluation in Zimbabwe	Zimbabwe
- Country strategy evaluation in Nepal	Nepal
- Country strategy evaluation in South Sudan	South Sudan
- Country strategy evaluation in Ecuador	Ecuador
<i>Emergency evaluations</i>	
- UNHCR level-3 response to the emergency in northern Ethiopia	Ethiopia
- UNHCR level-3 response to the emergency in Afghanistan	Afghanistan
- UNHCR level-3 response to the emergency in Ukraine	Hungary, Poland, Republic of Moldova, Ukraine
<i>Joint evaluations</i>	
- Inter-agency humanitarian evaluation of the global humanitarian response plan/COVID-19	Global
- UNHCR/UNICEF fair deal (blueprint) for refugee children – round 2	Bangladesh, Cameroon, Ecuador, Ethiopia, Honduras, Indonesia, Italy, Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, Rwanda, Uganda

	Ethiopia
- Inter-agency humanitarian evaluation of the response to the humanitarian crisis in northern Ethiopia	
	Afghanistan
- Inter-agency humanitarian evaluation of the response to the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan	
<i>Evaluative synthesis</i>	
	Global
- Evaluative synthesis on accountability to affected populations	
<u><i>Decentralized</i></u>	
<i>Country level</i>	
- Basic needs and livelihoods in Costa Rica	Costa Rica
- United Kingdom Home Office community engagement pilot on alternatives to detention - series 2	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
- UNHCR/World Food Programme multi-purpose cash assistance under the Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations in Lebanon	Lebanon
- IOM/UNHCR evaluation of the Peacebuilding Fund project in Mauritania	Mauritania
- UNHCR livelihood programme in the Syrian Arab Republic	Syrian Arab Republic
- Evaluation of the IKEA Foundation livelihoods Misizi marshland agricultural project in Rwanda	Rwanda
- Endline evaluation of the IKEA Foundation livelihoods and energy projects among Somali refugees and host communities in Ethiopia	Ethiopia
- Joint Danida Danish Baseline/UNHCR evaluation of the climate-smart agriculture and market development for enhancing livelihoods of refugees and their host communities in Rwanda	Rwanda
- Internal displacement operations and transition strategy in the Philippines	Philippines
- Livelihoods using cash as a modality in Burkina Faso	Burkina Faso
<i>Regional and multi-country level</i>	
- Joint UNICEF/UNHCR/Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau (German Development Bank)	To be determined

- evaluation of the multi-country regional water and sanitation project in the Horn of Africa
- Joint UNHCR/World Diabetes Foundation evaluation of the multi-country baseline study of non-communicable diseases Burundi, the Sudan, United Republic of Tanzania
 - Multi-country shelter and settlement programming Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Mali, the Niger
 - Chad refugee livelihoods and economic inclusion Chad
 - African Development Bank COVID-19 evaluation in the Sahel Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, the Niger
 - Joint International Labour Organization/European Union/UNHCR/IOM/United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime evaluation of the Southern Africa mixed migration To be determined
 - Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative (DAFI) tertiary scholarship programme Ecuador, Jordan, Rwanda, South Africa, Türkiye, Uganda
 - Process evaluation of the humanitarian education accelerator – innovation To be determined
 - Evaluation of the Instant network schools project Mozambique
 - Multi-country evaluation on the Djibouti declaration Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan, the Sudan, Uganda
 - Multi-country evaluation on health, education and economic inclusion To be determined
 - Global data transformation strategy (2020-2025) Global
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