

UNHCR Evaluation Management Response	
Evaluation title:	Evaluation of UNHCR's Repatriation Programmes and Activities 2015–2021
UNHCR evaluation reference:	ES/2022/04
Entity that commissioned the evaluation:	Evaluation Office (Geneva)
Due Date for Management Response:	31 July 2022
Date Management Response Completed:	21 November 2022
Coordinator of the Management Response:	Bernadette Castel-Hollingsworth (Deputy Director of Field Protection Services, DIP) with support from Jasmine Ketabchi (Durable Solutions Officer, DIP) and Anchinesh Maheteme (Snr. Durable Solutions Officer, DRS)
Management Response cleared by:	Gillian Triggs (Assistant High-Commissioner Protection)

General comments on the evaluation:	<p>The evaluation of UNHCR's Repatriation Programmes and Activities (2015-2021) has been useful in identifying existing gaps, areas that need improvement and in providing clear recommendations. These recommendations will be useful to guide the forthcoming update of relevant policies and key operational guidance, in particular the 1996 Voluntary Repatriation Handbook and the 2004 Handbook for Repatriation and Reintegration Activities as well as the 2008 Policy Framework and Implementation Strategy: UNHCR's Role in Support of the Return & Reintegration of Displaced Population. A small reference group will be established to ensure that the recommendations of the evaluation are followed up on. Meeting of the reference group will take place at least once per year. As six recommendations require actions from RB level, the reference group should ideally comprise members from both HQ divisions and RBs.</p> <p>Furthermore, the evaluation findings and recommendations provide a useful momentum around ongoing work at regional level, regarding returns monitoring and efforts set in place to better understand returnee profiles, perceptions, and intentions, among other.</p>
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RECOMMENDATION 1:	<p>Attenuate the operational bias placed on return and reintegration by the formal statement, conveyed in UNHCR policy, that this solution is the most preferable for refugees, and place greater emphasis on contextual realities, returnee needs and the principles of voluntariness, safety, and dignity in assisted returns.</p> <p>Suggested actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Update the Policy Framework and Implementation Strategy on UNHCR's Role in Support of the Return and Reintegration of Displaced Populations (August 2008) to acknowledge the complexity of return and reintegration
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		<p>in different contexts, further clarifying UNHCR's role in supporting different modalities of return, including self-organised returns.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Noting the necessity for collective action across multiple actors, enhance conditions for voluntariness in returns by giving refugees more latitude in their use of UNHCR support, and more flexibility in the way they stage their return. In consultation with states and in the respect of their sovereignty, explore possible modalities of support enabling temporary returns and 'circular' movements between countries of asylum and countries of origin to allow refugees to better secure their livelihoods in their countries of origin and to rely on phased return strategies to mitigate risk to themselves and their households. In addition to reporting on numerical targets for the number of voluntary returns through UNHCR's global results framework, consider establishing clearer standards, supported by indicators where possible, for the operationalisation of the principles of voluntariness, safety and dignity in assisted returns, so that these can guide multi-year strategies at regional and operational levels. 				
Management response:		<input type="checkbox"/> Agree <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Partially agree <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree				
Reasons (if partially agree or disagree):		While acknowledging the complexities around return and reintegration and that return is not a linear process, it is legally and operationally challenging for UNHCR to support temporary returns and 'circular movements' between countries of asylum and countries of origin, as per the second suggested action above.				
Unit or function responsible:		DIP, DRS				
Top-line planned actions		By whom	Comments	Expected completion date	Progress After 1 Year	
					Status Update	Comments
1	Strengthen the contextual analysis in relation to return and reintegration and monitoring of returnee needs.	DIP, DRS, RBs	<p>UNHCR recently introduced a new strategic planning and results framework with the COMPASS system. This system will support UNHCR to better plan, budget and monitor the impact of our work, and move to multi-year planning, in collaboration with other UN agencies and host governments. A key component of COMPASS is the Situation Analysis of the condition of people of concern within the broader context.</p> <p>In addition, UNHCR is strengthening its work on protection monitoring in view of improving its understanding of the factors enabling and constraining</p>	<p>Dec 22</p> <p>June 23</p>		

			return as well as the challenges to reintegration. In this regard, colleagues of the East Horn of Africa and Great Lakes bureau have developed a return monitoring toolkit to systematize, harmonize return monitoring initiatives in the region. Project 21 developed by the Bureau of West and Central Africa aims at harmonizing protection data collection and analysis across the region.			
2	Strengthen how perceptions and intentions surveys are conducted.	DIP, DRS and RBs	UNHCR has put significant efforts in improving and harmonizing its work around refugee perceptions and intentions particularly to ensure a coherent approach at regional level and per situation (e.g., seven surveys on refugees' perceptions and intentions on return to Syria). However, additional endeavours are needed to understand better the profiles, aspirations and decision-making strategies of returnees and reflect the complexities around return.	Dec 23		
3	Operationalisation of the principles of voluntariness, safety, and dignity.	DIP, RBs	The draft updated Operational Guidelines on Voluntary Repatriation contain guidance on returns in adverse circumstances and on UNHCR's possible operational engagement. DIP and RBs will work together to develop additional guidance on benchmarks and redline to operationalise the key principles of voluntariness, safety, and dignity, so that UNHCR engagement in such return movements is tailored to the context.	June 24		
RECOMMENDATION 2:		<p>Update the 1996 Handbook on Voluntary Repatriation: International Protection and the 2004 Handbook for Repatriation and Reintegration Activities – to reflect contemporary norms and policy orientations conveyed in the GCR and Strategic Directions, and to provide guidance on new approaches and tools.</p> <p>Suggested actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> In the new guidance, reflect the recommendations in this report, and address gaps on the following issues: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> reframe voluntary repatriation assistance through the lens of the five core Strategic Directions, and address gaps related to inclusion, empowerment, and solutions (solve); 				

	<p>2) place renewed emphasis on mixed situations and comprehensive solutions, integrated programming, and harmonised/area-based approaches to achieving sustainable reintegration for returnees;</p> <p>3) address the criticality of supporting refugees who return independently, outside of formal repatriation operations;</p> <p>4) reconcile notions of durable solutions and cooperation with development and peace actors, and place greater emphasis on UNHCR's ambition to proactively contribute to finding solutions to root causes, as articulated within the Strategic Direction of 'Solve';</p> <p>5) update the tools for outreach and information management in support of prospective returnees.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Revise the models used to conceptualise reintegration, bearing in mind that the linear conception of transition conveyed by the 4Rs Framework is no longer widely held and that advances in area-based programming warrant the updating of best practice in this area. 																						
Management response:	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Agree <input type="checkbox"/> Partially agree <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree																						
Reasons (if partially agree or disagree):																							
Unit or function responsible:	Assistant High Commissioner for Protection and Operations in collaboration with DIP and DRS																						
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RECOMMENDATION 3:	In the design of return and reintegration support interventions, place heavier emphasis on needs assessment and analysis. In particular, ensure that the needs and vulnerabilities of refugees who return independently, outside of formal repatriation operations, are accurately captured and reflected in assessments and programme design.																						

		<p>Suggested actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adopt a more evidence-based approach that captures and addresses key elements of the operating context, including self-organised returns. Develop internal communication material (aligned to the five core Strategic Directions) to support this vision and reference the GCR's mention of the need to support refugees who return independently, outside of formal repatriation support operations. • In countries of asylum, dedicate resources and devise modalities for better outreach and engagement activities aimed at refugees who are considering return, including those planning to return by their own means, in view of assessing their needs and circumstances more accurately. • In countries of origin, scale up protection monitoring in border areas and known areas of return. Establish support hubs which returnees, including those who have returned by their own means, can approach for advice and legal and non-legal assistance. Use these hubs to collect first-hand evidence from returnees on the circumstances of their return. • At HQ and Regional Bureau level, establish repositories of knowledge and best practice on returns and reintegration, to be fed into by COs involved in assisted returns. • Increase inclusion of refugee-led organisations within the discussion. 				
Management response:		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Agree <input type="checkbox"/> Partially agree <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree				
Reasons (if partially agree or disagree):						
Unit or function responsible:		DIP, DRS and RBs				
Top line planned actions		By whom	Comments	Expected completion date	Progress After 1 Year	
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1	Strengthen protection monitoring activities in countries of origin.	RBs and DIP	As mentioned under recommendation 1, UNHCR is strengthening its work on protection monitoring and protection analysis also in the context of return. Significant work to systematize, harmonize information and analysis has been done, for example, by the regional bureau for East and Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes. Data gathering and protection analysis specifically includes spontaneous returns and their	Ongoing June 23		

			challenges in repatriation. The possibility of scaling up protection monitoring will depend on availability of resources. In many operations, community centers serve already as information hubs where returnees receive information on the availability of services and assistance, sometimes directly by local authorities. In other operations, call centers, hotlines are in place and accessible to returnees.			
2	Stock taking and lessons learnt on support to spontaneous returns.	DIP and DRS	DIP and DRS will take stock and analyse lessons learnt in relation to support to spontaneous returns in view of developing guidance on areas of support to refugees who decided to return spontaneously in order to support the sustainability of return but not create pull factors.	June 23		
3	Establish repositories of knowledge and best practices on return and reintegration.	RBs, DIP and DRS	RBs have started to compile information, tools and best practices in their respective regions. These efforts need to be expanded, carried out/updated more systematically and consolidated by DIP and DRS.	June 23 but remains a continuous effort		
RECOMMENDATION 4:		Structurally enhance the participation of prospective returnees in decisions relating to their return. Suggested actions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> In countries of asylum, encourage UNHCR staff to adhere more consistently to existing UNHCR guidance on the participation of refugees – including women – in consultations surrounding the modalities for their return (1996 Handbook on Voluntary Repatriation, pp. 14, 16, 19, 30). To support and complement outreach activities aimed at refugees who are considering return, design templates for accountability mechanisms that span both prospective and actual returnees and give them a voice in the design and conduct of repatriation support interventions. 				
Management response:		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Agree <input type="checkbox"/> Partially agree <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree				
Reasons (if partially agree or disagree):						
Unit or function responsible:		DIP in close collaboration with the Protection Pillar at regional bureau level				
Top line planned actions		By whom	Comments		Progress After 1 Year	

				Expected completion date	Status Update	Comments
1	Make refugee participation in repatriation planning and programming more meaningful.	DIP and RBs	UNHCR is finalizing a toolkit on applying participatory methodologies across the programming phases. RBs and DIP will support the country operations in operationalizing this in the context of repatriation.	Dec 2022 and ongoing efforts in 2023		
2	Review how “Go and See” and “Come and Tell” visits are conducted.	RBs, with DIP and DRS	Mostly due to Covid-19, these visits have been suspended. UNHCR will assess how these visits can be conducted, in an AGD sensitive manner, on a more regular basis and with the use of modern technology.	July 23		
RECOMMENDATION 5:		Based on a more systematic assessment of contexts of return, including linking more information from refugees in countries of asylum (such as intention surveys) with monitoring activities in countries of origin, explore modalities for reintegration support that better accommodate the need of many returnees to retain some mobility post-return. Suggested actions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In countries of asylum, engage with a selected number of prospective returnees who are willing to maintain contact post-return. Rely on these individuals as a sample group that can be approached for evidence and insights on obstacles and opportunities in reintegration. • Explore the possibility of mainstreaming modalities of reintegration support that are not geographically confined, such as mobile cash and online vocational training. • In designing needs- and context-appropriate interventions – which will also inform local development priorities – draw on repositories of knowledge held by local actors. Ideally, a repository of localised knowledge should be recorded and maintained at the level of the operation and regional bureaux. 				
Management response:		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Agree <input type="checkbox"/> Partially agree <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree				
Reasons (if partially agree or disagree):						
Unit or function responsible:		RBs with support from DRS and DIP				
Top line planned actions		By whom	Comments		Progress After 1 Year	

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1	Strengthen a return and reintegration continuum between CoA and CoO	RBs with DIP and DRS with the support from GDS and DIMAs	RBs, with support from DIP and DRS, will continue to strengthen, where needed, collaboration and coordination activities between operations in CoA and CoO from an earlier stage in view of supporting identification and addressing information needs, reintegration and protection challenges upon return and sharing of data to inform future returns. In the context of monitoring the implementation of the Comprehensive Solutions Strategy of Ivorian refugees, for instance, task force meetings are organized on a regular basis with all CoAs and CoO involved. Country operations may identify prospective returnees who are willing to maintain contact post-return to gather evidence and insights on obstacles and opportunities in reintegration.	Ongoing		
RECOMMENDATION 6:		Ensure that the information supplied by UNHCR to prospective returnees, in view of supporting their decisions on return, is more timely and more localised. Suggested actions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In countries of origin, develop dedicated capacity for the ongoing collection of information on conditions at sub-national level in areas of return, and develop a strategy for systematic documentation of localised knowledge and evidence in support of sustainable reintegration. This information should encompass conditions for access to public services in countries of origin and the inclusion of returnees in national systems. • Provide guidance to COs in countries of origin and countries of asylum on information-sharing and how to harmonise their information management activities. 				
Management response:		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Agree <input type="checkbox"/> Partially agree <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree				
Reasons (if partially agree or disagree):						
Unit or function responsible:		RBs in collaboration with DIP and DRS				
Top line planned actions		By whom	Comments		Progress After 1 Year	

			Expected completion date	Status Update	Comments
1	Review and strengthen information gathering and dissemination on areas of return.	RBs with support from DIP, DRS and DER	<p>Several initiatives are ongoing to improve the relevance of information provided to prospective returnees and to improve and modernise its dissemination through digital capacity. Examples of the latter include work around the help platform, owned and managed by each country operation, accessible by refugees and local organizations as well as use of the 2021 UNHCR guide on Using Social Media in Community-Based Protection. UNHCR also seeks to make better use of and to include information from surveys of other organizations, like UNDP and the World Bank, in the information provision to prospective returnees.</p> <p>In collaboration with DER (Digital Service), UNHCR will review existing digital platforms and create templates to ensure that operations accurately outline return pathways, designing them to enable refugee/returnee information and feedback as well as enhancing information sharing, accountability, transparency, fraud prevention and regional consistency.</p> <p>In relation to provision of information, efforts have been dedicated at regional level to develop a standard format for country operations on area of return profiles as information collected by each operation significantly differed. In addition, regional bureaux have created dedicated digital platforms/websites as a repository of tools and material on repatriation. As an example, significant work has been done on digital inclusion by the regional bureau of West and Central Africa (link here) where in the context of the Comprehensive Solutions Strategy for Ivorian refugees, an extensive #Return2CIV CwC toolbox with various materials (posters, videos, factsheets, etc) along with an extensive Q&A have been used during the sensitization campaigns (including through social media), and to support counselling sessions of prospective returnees.</p>	Dec 23	

RECOMMENDATION 7:		<p>For the collection and dissemination of information relating to conditions in countries of origin, as well as for outreach activities aimed at the greater inclusion of refugees in repatriation programming, mainstream the use of digital platforms and social media tools.</p> <p>Suggested actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review existing digital platforms and create templates for platforms that can be established at regional level and accessed by refugees and local organisations on an ongoing basis. Ensure that these platforms are designed to enable refugee/returnee inputs and information-sharing. Dedicate resources and create capabilities for the management of these platforms by regional bureaux. 				
Management response:		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Agree <input type="checkbox"/> Partially agree <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree				
Reasons (if partially agree or disagree):						
Unit or function responsible:		RBs in collaboration with DIP and DRS				
Top line planned actions		By whom	Comments	Expected completion date	Progress After 1 Year	
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			Merged with the response provided under recommendation No. 6.			
RECOMMENDATION 8		<p>Drawing on the framework set by UNSG Decision 2011/20, achieve better clarity on how the two distinct conceptions of Durable Solutions held by UNHCR and its development partners should be integrated at operational level, notably as regards shared leadership and the joint coordination of relevant programmes.</p> <p>Suggested actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> In guidance on repatriation and reintegration, make reference to UNSG Decision No. 2011/20 on Durable Solutions, as well as the 2017 Durable Solutions Handbook published by UNDP on behalf of the Global Cluster for Early Recovery and the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Framework on Durable Solutions. Provide more detailed guidance on how to harmonise the programme design and implementation work of both agencies, and on what modalities should be deployed for programme-level cooperation between UNHCR and development actors more generally, in mixed situations involving both refugees and IDPs. 				

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Building on experience gained in UNHCR's advocacy to support the inclusion of refugees in national development plans, develop advocacy strategies to secure the earlier engagement and greater participation of both governments and development actors in reintegration efforts. Building on the framework for durable solutions (2003): develop clearer standards, supported by indicators where possible, for UNHCR's catalytic role as envisioned in the GCR, and support operations in their effort to proactively engage with development and political actors, support peacebuilding initiatives, and leverage opportunities for reintegration. 																														
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RECOMMENDATION 9:	At country and regional levels, support the development of broader and better integrated multi-partner platforms. Suggested actions:																														

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop regional frameworks for return and reintegration that further operationalise the principles of voluntariness, safety and dignity, with a strong focus on strengthening national and local capacity. • Develop an engagement strategy for international, national, and local actors in supporting reintegration by proactively sharing programme data and supporting the design of modalities for joint interventions that leverage UNHCR's strong operational presence. • Promote and mainstream coordination architectures that can achieve efficiencies and economies of scale by spanning mixed caseloads, as well as by pooling programme information and enabling joint approaches. • Build on existing good practice platforms such as SSAR and MIRPS, and reinforce UNHCR's support to governments in facilitating tripartite agreements to ensure coherent work across a broader range of partners, particularly in the area of sustainable reintegration and durable solutions for returnees. Ensure that there is common understanding and consensus among partners regarding definitions, frameworks, roles and responsibilities regarding durable solutions and reintegration. 				
Management response:		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Agree <input type="checkbox"/> Partially agree <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree				
Reasons (if partially agree or disagree):						
Unit or function responsible:		RBs with the support of DRS and DIP				
Top line planned actions		By whom	Comments	Expected completion date	Progress After 1 Year	
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1	Galvanize multi-stakeholder support to countries of origin in view of creating conditions for return in safety and dignity (GCR objective 4).	RBs with support from DRS and DIP	Ahead of the 2023 GRF, RBs with the support of DRS and DIP will work closely with different stakeholders to develop and implement pledges to support return and reintegration conditions.	Dec 23		
2	Building and strengthening regional and national agreements.	RBs, DRS with the support of DIP	RBs with support from DRS continue to support the work of regional platforms, including the soon to be established support platform on CAR, following the Yaoundé Declaration, as well as national agreements like the Sudan and South Sudan country plans under the Solutions Initiative.	Ongoing		

			UNHCR will continue to advocate with the governments of CoO and CoA to establish tripartite agreements to ensure refugee protection before and during return.			
3	Revise return/reintegration assistance for IDPs and refugee returnees.	RBs and DRS	UNHCR has harmonized return packages for refugees returning to the same areas (The use and calculation of cash grants in voluntary repatriation). With COMPASS, UNHCR is moving towards needs assistance versus status based and adopting area-based approaches.	Ongoing		
RECOMMENDATION 10:		<p>Structure budgets and design funding instruments that support reintegration intervention spanning mixed caseloads of returned refugees, returned IDPs and local communities.</p> <p>Suggested actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In donor-facing narratives, present reintegration as a needs-based rather than status-based area of intervention. In donor reporting on return and reintegration, minimise the use of status-specific indicators and prefer needs-based indicators where possible. • Where appropriate, explore opportunities to establish country-based funding instruments, such as multi-donor trust funds, that can cover mixed reintegration caseloads and are accessible by multiple partners, and are therefore supportive of a multi-stakeholder approach to reintegration. • Explore the feasibility of achieving better funding convergence across UNHCR's Pillar 3 (Reintegration programme) and Pillar 4 (IDP programme), including connecting to debates on innovative financing for IDP solutions. • Increase the pool of resources available for programming for reintegration – by proactively sharing programme data and by supporting the design of modalities for joint interventions that leverage UNHCR's strong operational presence. 				
Management response:		<input type="checkbox"/> Agree <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Partially agree <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree				
Reasons (if partially agree or disagree):		<p>UNHCR agrees with Finding 16 of the Evaluation “There is some evidence to suggest that sustainability in returns can be improved through a broad-based approach to reintegration support, encompassing returned refugees alongside other affected groups. As well as being easier to fund, this broader-based approach is likely to provide better opportunities for efficiencies and economies of scale in programme delivery. Other avenues to secure better sustainability or returns are worth exploring, but are less promising.”</p>				

		<p>UNHCR also agrees that (Finding 16) “the sustainability of returns might potentially be increased by tapping into existing funding streams for activities that support reintegration, through partnerships with development actors that can contribute their own resources to this objective. For example, to complement its working relationship with UNDP in CAR, UNHCR has engaged in consultations with the World Bank to explore prospects for a cooperation framework.”</p> <p>On the other hand, “establishing a (new) multi-donor trust fund” is a lengthy process, with no guarantee that funding will materialize once the fund is established. In addition, funding disbursed through multi-partner trust funds is usually tightly earmarked. As such, UNHCR would not single out establishing multi-donor trust funds as the optimal solution to close the funding gap for reintegration programmes.</p> <p>Rather, UNCHR would suggest, in line with Finding 16, to prioritize existing funding streams, and continue to advocate for flexible funding. Flexible funding, particularly unearmarked funding, greatly facilitates UNHCR’s ability to have a greater impact on prioritized needs with limited resources, regardless of status.</p> <p>In addition to advocating for flexible funding that would benefit different population groups, UNHCR will continue to enhance operational partnerships with development actors. Among others, it will advocate for the inclusion of different populations that it serves in development plans, with a view to promoting sustainable reintegration.</p>				
Unit or function responsible:		DER and DSPR in collaboration with the RBs- DRS and DIP to engage in relevant discussions				
Top line planned actions		By whom	Comments	Expected completion date	Progress After 1 Year	
					Status Update	Comments
1	Strengthen needs-based planning.	DSPR	UNHCR's new results-based management system facilitates planning and monitoring across different population types by designing results frameworks that are structured around impacts and outcomes for persons of concern (and no longer by the budgetary pillars 1-4). At the same time, information on pillars is kept at the output level to ensure appropriate reporting. This approach allows UNHCR to plan for results based on needs while reporting on results as well as	July 23		

			<p>population types, if required. An analysis of the approved strategies will be available on a yearly basis.</p> <p>UNHCR is currently revising its Programme handbook (chapter 4) and its programming approaches, which may include considerations of area-based approaches.</p>			
2	Better leverage of existing funding streams.	DER	<p>UNHCR will continue to advocate for flexible funding, including but not limited to existing funding streams</p> <p>Flexible funding, particularly unearmarked funding, greatly facilitates UNHCR's ability to have a greater impact on prioritized needs with limited resources, regardless of status.</p>	Ongoing		