



UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency

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UNHCR Country Strategy Evaluation: Egypt

Executive Summary
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Executive Summary

Evaluation purpose and scope

This is a formative Country Strategy Evaluation (CSE) with the **purpose** of generating evidence, insights and learning to inform the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees' (UNHCR's) future operational planning and strategy in Egypt.

The **scope** of the evaluation is UNHCR operations in Egypt from 2016 to 2020 albeit, in keeping with the formative purpose, focusing on 2019 and 2020. The evaluation analyses key results of the country operation, alongside the contributing and constraining contextual factors that have an impact on performance and future strategic direction, including the global direction of refugee management, such as through the UNHCR Strategic Directions and the Global Compact for Refugees (GCR).

The **primary audience** for the evaluation is the UNHCR Egypt Country Operation. Secondary audiences include the UNHCR Regional Bureau, UNHCR Headquarters and other UNHCR country operations (particularly those also working under the Syria Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan – 3RP – framework). Other audiences include other actors and stakeholders in Egypt working with refugees (including the Government of Egypt – GOE).

Evaluation approach and methodology

The evaluation utilized a mixed-methods approach against an evaluation framework of three areas of inquiry and was carried out between November 2019 and April 2021. The evaluation time frame was initially planned as being between November 2019 (with the inception mission in December 2019) and May 2020, with a planned data collection mission in April 2020. However, because of the COVID-19 situation, the data collection phase was delayed until November 2020, with analysis and reporting taking place after this and the time frame subsequently significantly expanded.

The three Areas of Inquiry (AOIs) specified in the terms of reference (TOR) provided the overall framework for the evaluation and were further developed for the Egypt context. The three AOIs were:

- AOI 1: Results to date: What have been the results across different areas of assistance, protection and solutions as achieved by the UNHCR country operation and what contextual and operational factors and decisions have contributed to or impeded these results?
- AOI 2: Assessing strategic coherence: How strategically has UNHCR been positioned within the country context, and how well aligned is the programme with the changing/evolving needs of persons of concern (POC)? To what extent do the strategy and country operational plan (COP) have coherence and/or alignment with the work of other actors?
- AOI 3: Translating learning into action: How can UNHCR build on results achieved to date and further leverage UNHCR's strategic position and influence within the country, to optimize the potential impact of collective efforts towards protection and solutions for UNHCR persons of concern, and the communities that host them?

Following the development of the evaluation matrix, data collection tools, data recording tools and data collation tools were generated. Primary data collection tools included key informant interview (KII) protocols to

guide interviews in a consistent manner and a focus group discussion (FGD) methodology to guide group discussions in an ethical manner, ensuring the principles of do no harm. Data recording tools included templates for all team members to record and collate evidence in a consistent manner to contribute to a comprehensive and coherent evidence database.

The CSE reviewed 58 documents and held 45 KIIs; there were 102 refugee FGD participants.

Summary of Findings

AOI 1 findings summary: UNHCR Egypt has achieved significant successes with comparatively limited funding with regard to protection; risks and the challenges within the operation can be categorized into components of (a) documentation, or lack thereof, (b) access to durable solutions, (c) detention issues and (d) protection for the most vulnerable. In addition, the operation is widely credited with contributing to progress towards the national asylum law, which is a potentially seminal achievement. With regard to basic needs, UNHCR has a clear and coherent policy framed around meeting immediate needs and working towards ensuring long-term needs are met through inclusion in national systems.

UNHCR has also effectively managed the coordination of refugee assistance through leadership of different coordination mechanisms. This is widely appreciated by all stakeholders and perceived as impactful in terms of both operational/informational factors and increasing the visibility of POC on the development assistance agenda.

Despite multiple feedback mechanisms being in place, refugees continue to highlight difficulties in accessing assistance when they experience challenges. Further, other actors who work with POC report some difficulties in accessing required data, which highlights a potential miscommunication about data sharing protocols. There is no evidence to suggest differing levels of access to feedback based on gender or age although there are differences in perceived access to assistance and feedback from different nationalities.¹

The UNHCR Egypt Representative has dual accreditations with both GOE for leadership of the refugee response in Egypt and with the League of Arab States (LAS), a regional organization covering the Arab region. These are two separate functions that are performed with different modalities, bilateral diplomacy for the former and multilateral diplomacy for the latter. On the latter, UNHCR Egypt has contributed significantly to emerging LAS frameworks that will ultimately have benefits across the region.

AOI 2 findings summary: UNHCR Egypt navigates a complex country context effectively and strategically but there is a delicate balance between ensuring a continuing close relationship with GOE and visibly defending the rights of refugees and other POC. In addition to the specific socioeconomic and policy context of Egypt, there is a unique refugee environment consisting of both a dual protection space – registered asylum seekers and refugees compared with approximately 6 million foreign nationals among whom there are persons in need of international protection – and a dual financing framework for Syrian and non-Syrian refugees. UNHCR has sought pragmatic and balanced solutions well adapted to this context.

With regard to the COVID-19 pandemic, UNHCR has adapted both internally (such as reviewing office working spaces and processes and procedures) and externally, by anticipating the protection impact of delayed processes resulting in expired or absent documentation and advocating with GOE for leniency

¹ There is a unique refugee environment in Egypt consisting of both a dual protection space – registered asylum seekers and refugees compared with approximately 6 million foreign nationals among whom there are persons in need of international protection – and a dual financing framework for Syrian and non-Syrian refugees. UNHCR has sought pragmatic and balanced solutions well adapted to this context.

towards this. Further, UNHCR Cairo instituted regular meetings with implementing partners.² While advocacy with GOE remains a strong solution, feedback from POC themselves is that there is perceived continued restriction to access services without renewed documentation.³

AOI 3 findings summary: The national asylum law presents a significant and seminal opportunity for transferring refugee responsibility to GOE but also, depending on how the law is framed, a potential risk *vis-à-vis* human rights standard.

There are a number of opportunities for UNHCR Egypt to be more catalytic by influencing other actors to provide more for POC in Egypt, and UNHCR has built a solid foundation to increasingly achieve this in the future. Furthermore, there have been some potentially inspiring developments triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic with regard to cash transfers and alignment with national social protection programmes. An opportunity created by UNHCR Egypt within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic has been the idea of including the most vulnerable refugees and migrants in national social safety nets with the financial support of development donors. The United Nations Resident Coordinator (UNRC) in Egypt referred to this new plan as the 'Grand Social Bargain'. This constitutes a rare and propitious opportunity aligned with the letter and the spirit of both the Grand Bargain, the GCR, the Global Compact for Migrants (GCM), the SDGs, and the idea of leave no one behind.

Conclusions

1. UNHCR Egypt has achieved significant successes with comparatively limited funding with regard to protection. In addition, it is widely credited with contributing to progress towards the national asylum law, which is a potentially seminal achievement. This has been accomplished based on a primary pillar within the approach being **maintaining excellent relations with GOE**. However, there is a delicate balance between ensuring a continuing close relationship with GOE and visibly defending the rights of refugees, and this balance may become even more difficult to hold if the new asylum law has challenging components that are not aligned with global standards. The UNHCR modality of working, within which advocacy with GOE is seen as key to achieving results for POC, should not be underestimated and has had some success, but is not without challenges. When outcomes are highlighted as achieved, these are sometimes not actual outcomes for POC but rather outcomes for the advocacy. A notable concern raised by many respondents and refugees – although not necessarily indicative of a trend – is the agreement for extended residency, which has not yet been effected.

2. UNHCR holds a unique role in protection services, whereas there are in fact other actors who can – and should – provide essential sectoral services to meet basic needs. By **further influencing other actors** towards increased investment and accountability, particularly sectoral lead UN agencies, more of UNHCR's budget could be allocated to the protection services that no other agency can provide. This of course requires willingness from other partners to fund and implement, and arrangements for such with the government. Utilizing the strong foundation of UNHCR's participation and leadership in the coordination system but evolving this into a more collaborative and responsibility-sharing platform could influence more actors to provide more for POC. However, this would also require rethinking data sharing protocols which currently do not encourage other actors, particularly development partners, to include POC within their programming without access to the data which justifies that inclusion. Equally, there are opportunities for harmonizing cash-based interventions

² Information provided by UNHCR Egypt.

³ UNHCR Egypt highlight that this is a temporary problem and will be resolved by the end of 2021 or early 2022.

(CBI) across actors and ensuring more multipurpose CBI, and enhanced vulnerability targeting.

3. UNHCR has worked hard to ensure a fair and favourable environment for all refugees and asylum seekers despite the complexities in Egypt of the dual protection space (registered refugees and asylum seekers vs. unregistered migrants and foreigners) and the dual financing instruments. While some non-Syrian refugees still feel a sense of discrimination, many partners and donors applaud UNHCR's efforts to maintain a **One Refugee Approach** within Egypt, despite the complexities. Furthermore, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, UNHCR, IOM and UNRC have worked together to further reduce the space between refugee, asylum seeker and migrant – something that is in fact a “*mini-revolution*”⁴ within UNHCR and that goes even further than the One Refugee Approach towards operating more fully within the humanitarian–development nexus space.

4. Despite the obvious effort UNHCR Egypt makes towards communicating with communities (CwC)/engaging with communities, there is consistently, a strong feeling among POC – either because expectations are too high or because feedback mechanisms are not as functional as necessary – that their voices are not heard and their challenges are not addressed. This is clear both from this evaluation and from UNHCR annual participatory assessments. UNHCR has historically worked under CwC and AAP concepts globally. Originally, CwC was more of a communication tool than a protection tool, and UNHCR Egypt has situated CwC under external relations for this reason: however, notwithstanding the investment and effort made, CwC is still not functioning optimally and therefore consideration for changing modalities, including the positioning within UNHCR Egypt, is necessary.

5. With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, there have been both significant challenges but also windows of opportunities for UNHCR to fast-track and streamline processes. UNHCR itself recognizes that protection activities have suffered because of the enforced suspension of many in-person services because of the pandemic. After adjusting working practices at the beginning of the pandemic in March 2020, UNHCR adapted plans for remote interviewing for refugee status determination (RSD) and resettlement where possible by June 2020 and then proceeded to purchase hardware for this to happen. Registration was more difficult but UNHCR further adapted modalities to accomplish this. Despite these efforts, there remains a significant backlog for all documentation processes. However, UNHCR has also been quick to recognize potential windows of opportunity for learning from COVID-19, both internally – with regard to considering the new modalities of working as permanently more cost-efficient where possible – and externally by seeking to leverage the potential to integrate non-nationals into the Egyptian social protection scheme, for example.

Recommendations

UNHCR Egypt should consider how to best continue working closely with the Government of Egypt while ensuring both the rights of refugees are protected and other humanitarian and development actors have confidence in UNHCR maintaining that protective authority

UNHCR should develop a plan to become more catalytic and influence greater burden-sharing with other partners

⁴ UNHCR key informant

UNHCR Egypt should consider both a rationalisation of sectors and increased nexus working

UNHCR Egypt should review and revise the CwC/AAP approach

UNHCR should investigate the longer-term costing implications of the remote working model