



Evaluation of UNHCR's Engagement in Humanitarian- Development Cooperation

+1 Year Follow-Up Report

Evaluation Office

Purpose: Support UNHCR in deepening its engagement with development partners by tracking how UNHCR has followed up on the evaluation's recommendations in 2022, presenting new evidence on lessons learned, good practices, and the effects of the use of nexus approaches 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 in Kenya and Jordan.

Scope: Global, with focus on Jordan, Kenya & Mauritania

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

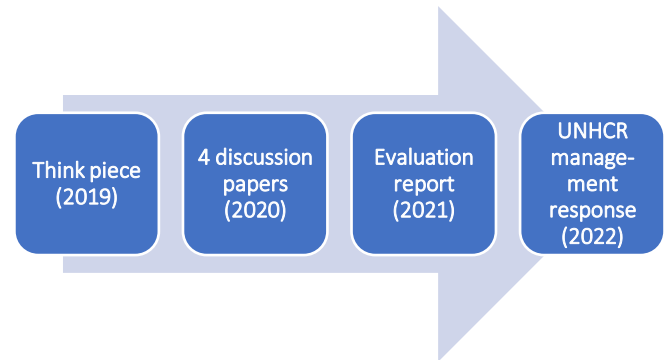
Independent Team: GPPi and ISDC

Evaluation Context

Five years ago, the UNHCR Evaluation Office commissioned a longitudinal evaluation of UNHCR's engagement in humanitarian-development cooperation, spanning the period from 2018 to 2021. The evaluation was intended to support UNHCR in an institutional change process that put more emphasis on supporting the inclusion and self-reliance of refugees and on cooperating with development actors in this endeavour. The evaluation generated various analysis to encourage reflection and support learning (Figure 1).

Evaluation Brief

Figure 1: Timeline of Original Evaluation



Following on from the original evaluation the Evaluation Office commissioned an extension of the evaluation to track how UNHCR had followed up on the evaluation's recommendations in 2022 and to present new evidence on lessons learned, good practices, and the effects of humanitarian-development cooperation on refugees. Please refer to the [2021 report](#) for full findings and recommendations.

Key Findings

UNHCR remains committed to humanitarian-development cooperation and has made progress on implementing recommendations requiring technical capacities and tools.

UNHCR faces a challenging environment, characterized by many competing priorities and growing financial pressure. Despite these challenges, its commitment to humanitarian-development cooperation in general - and to an agenda promoting the inclusion and self-reliance of displaced people in particular - has remained high.

UNHCR's commitment to humanitarian-development cooperation is reflected in the progress made in following up on many of the recommendations made in the original evaluation, especially where they require strengthening technical capacity or developing tools.

Notable developments include:

- UNHCR’s new results-based management system COMPASS and incipient practice of developing multi-year plans in country operations enable longer-term thinking and a more strategic focus on refugee inclusion and self-reliance. The new approach also enables country operations to develop multi-year budget projections.
- The number of staff members dedicated to development cooperation has continued to increase and efforts to deploy staff members with a development background, for example as part of the response to the war in Ukraine relatively early on, are visible.
- There has been continued investment in collecting more relevant data as well as an increasing effort to strengthen UNHCR’s capacity to provide data analysis.
- Guidance on when UNHCR should – and when it should not – seek to mobilize financial resources from development actors for its own activities has been adopted, including clear instructions on who needs to be consulted as part of the process.
- UNHCR has invested in further developing tools for providing analyses of the protection situation of displaced people to development actors. There have also been more examples in which UNHCR’s protection staff have started to play a more active role in cooperation with development actors.

UNHCR has made less progress on contentious issues and issues requiring more deep-seated change.

While consulted staff members recognize the progress made on the points above, they emphasized that a range of key sticking points have not yet been addressed, or that they have not been addressed satisfactorily. Examples include:

- There is no consensus or agreed definition on key concepts like inclusion.

- The commitment to humanitarian-development cooperation at country level remains dependent on the priorities of UNHCR’s country-level management and is thus high in some country operations, but much lower in others.
- UNHCR’s headquarters decided that multi-year contributions from development actors would lead to an increase in the authorized budget of a country operation in the first year of the project. For subsequent years, the initial operating level allocations for country operations already include these contributions, so that they do not lead to subsequent increases. Most consulted country-level stakeholders would prefer to treat multi-year development contributions continuously as “additional” so that the resources remain clearly earmarked for the activities agreed on with the development partner.
- Country-level stakeholders continue to see addressing UNHCR’s constraints in data sharing, which currently require lengthy processes for arriving at data sharing agreements, as a priority. Ongoing efforts to conclude a global data sharing agreement with the World Bank are a promising step in the right direction.
- While UNHCR has further developed its formal tools for delivering protection analyses to development actors, not much progress has been visible at country level in addressing the limitations in its ability to provide less formal and more applied advice on how to address protection concerns in development programme planning. However, the Division of International Protection has recently established a policy unit to help build capacity and address this issue.



Refugee inclusion has overwhelmingly positive, even if some concerns remain about potential decreases in service quality following inclusion in national services.

The evaluation team used rigorous quantitative methods to analyse UNHCR datasets and established what effects humanitarian-development cooperation has had on refugees and other persons served by UNHCR. **The results of these analyses are overwhelmingly positive.**

In **Jordan**, the original evaluation had already demonstrated that enabling Syrian refugees to get work permits had significant positive effects – not only their protection situation. Households with work permits were significantly less likely to have specific legal or physical protection needs. Holding a work permit also significantly decreased the prospects of having to accept risky, degrading, exploitative or illegal jobs to meet basic needs as well as of having to send children to work. New data collected after the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic demonstrate that these effects remain robust in the event of a profound external shock like the pandemic.

In **Kenya**, data collected from various groups of refugees demonstrate that it is not the camp or settlement type as such that determines how self-reliant refugees are. Rather, the strongest drivers of refugee self-reliance in this context **are access to services** (especially to electricity, credit, and communication). Such enabling factors also have a positive effect on the refugees' sense of well-being, as does the quantity of aid they receive. The quantitative analysis also shows that gender matters. Living in a female-headed household has a significant negative effect on economic self-reliance and particularly on the chances of being employed.

While the positive results of these quantitative studies are irrefutable, refugees consulted about other examples of their inclusion in national or local service systems often express a concern that they might lose access to humanitarian assistance and services, and that services provided by the state might not be of as high quality. To date, UNHCR lacks a coherent position

on how to handle such situations and potential trade-offs.

Lessons Learned:

Experiences with including refugees in national service systems in different sectors have generated valuable lessons.

Some of the more generalizable lessons include:

- The importance of involving the people we serve, from the beginning, in planning for the transition to national service systems - in order to be transparent about, and potentially address concerns displaced people may have about losing access to humanitarian assistance and services.
- Including displaced people in national data systems is often the first step for including them in public service systems. The current lack of guidance in UNHCR on how to address concerns about data security can hamper this process.
- Mobilizing sufficient and sustainable financing for the inclusion of refugees in national service systems often remains a challenge, as expectations of governments, humanitarian and development actors on who should cover the recurring costs of such inclusion diverge.
- Promoting the inclusion of displaced people in national service systems requires a good understanding of these systems, their set-up and functioning, including of access constraints for displaced people and of the authorities who are responsible for these systems at the different levels of local, regional and national administration.



Conclusions:

To stay the course, UNHCR should urgently tackle the outstanding, often more contentious issues.

The findings of this evaluation follow up report confirm that UNHCR is on the right track in its efforts to engage systematically in development cooperation. Notwithstanding the significant efforts UNHCR has already made, UNHCR could further embed an evidence culture within the organization and to continue to reduce impediments to the sharing of UNHCR generated data, which remains an important challenge. Furthermore, as the evaluation case studies show, comprehensive contextualised knowledge of national systems (e.g. education, social protection and health) is key, as is involving refugees in discussions about transitions to national services from the outset in any inclusion strategy.

Finally, to stay the course as it enters the fifth year after the adoption of the Global Compact on Refugees, UNHCR needs to tackle the outstanding issues identified in the original evaluation.

1. UNHCR should urgently continue the process of defining under what circumstances it seeks to mobilize financial resources from development actors for its own activities. UNHCR should also reconsider whether it would be possible to treat the entirety of multi-year contributions from development actors as additional to the internally authorized budgets of its country operations (the “operating level”).
2. Equally important is to remove remaining obstacles that keep its staff members from focusing fully and strategically on supporting the inclusion of refugees in national systems. This would require *inter alia* defining what inclusion means and clarifying how UNHCR handles situations that entail a trade-off between inclusion and service standards.

Contact us: For further information please reach out to Joel Kinahan (kinahan@unhcr.org)

Full report available here

Other Evaluation Resources:

[Link to Evaluation Report video](#)

[Link to Evaluation Report 2018-2021](#)

[Link to Management Response 2022](#)

