



UNHCR's evaluation policy

August 2010

Policy Development and Evaluation Service

UNHCR's Policy Development and Evaluation Service (PDES) is committed to the systematic examination and assessment of UNHCR policies, programmes, projects, practices and partnerships. PDES also promotes rigorous research on issues related to the work of UNHCR and encourages an active exchange of ideas and information between humanitarian practitioners, policymakers and the research community. All of these activities are undertaken with the purpose of strengthening UNHCR's operational effectiveness, thereby enhancing the organization's capacity to fulfil its mandate on behalf of refugees and other displaced people. The work of the unit is guided by the principles of transparency, independence, consultation, relevance and integrity.

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All PDES evaluation reports are placed in the public domain. Electronic versions are posted on the UNHCR website and hard copies can be obtained by contacting PDES. They may be quoted, cited and copied, provided that the source is acknowledged. The views expressed in PDES evaluation reports and other publications are not necessarily those of UNHCR. The designations and maps used do not imply the expression of any opinion or recognition on the part of UNHCR concerning the legal status of a territory or of its authorities.

UNHCR's evaluation policy

This document presents UNHCR's evaluation policy and explains the role of the organization's Policy Development and Evaluation Service (PDES).

UNHCR's evaluation policy is based upon the 'Standards for evaluation in the UN system' and 'Norms for evaluation in the UN system', prepared by the UN Evaluation Group (UNEG).

UNHCR also subscribes to UNEG's 'Ethical Guidelines and Code of Conduct'. All of these documents can be accessed at the UNEG website, www.uneval.org.

All UNHCR staff members and consultants who are engaged in evaluation projects are required to give an undertaking that they will respect this policy and respect the UNHCR Code of Conduct.

To support the implementation of the policy, UNHCR has produced a number of other documents:

- 'How to manage evaluations',
- 'Real time evaluations: some frequently asked questions', and,
- 'Organizing participatory self-evaluations'.

All of these documents can be accessed and downloaded from the PDES webpage: www.unhcr.org/research/3b850c744.html.

While PDES is the focal point for evaluation activities in UNHCR, particular efforts are being made to develop a broader sense of ownership and involvement in relation to the evaluation function.

UNHCR also recognizes the need to develop an organizational culture that is amenable to the development of an effective evaluation function. In that respect, the Office is striving to ensure that managers and staff members are fully committed to evaluation and learning, and that using evaluation to bring about change is positively encouraged throughout the organization.

The purpose of evaluation

UNHCR defines evaluation as the analysis and assessment, as systematic and objective as possible, of the organization's policies, programmes, practices, partnerships and procedures, focusing on their planning, design, implementation and impact.

The primary purpose of UNHCR's evaluation function is to provide UNHCR managers, staff and partner organizations with useful information, analysis and recommendations, thereby enabling the organization to engage in effective policymaking, planning, programming and implementation.

At the same time, evaluation fulfils a number of other important purposes. These include:

- assisting UNHCR to derive lessons from its operational experience, thereby enabling the organization to perform more effectively in future;
- providing stakeholders, especially refugees, with an opportunity to present their perceptions and assessments of UNHCR's activities;
- reinforcing UNHCR's accountability to refugees, partner organizations and the Executive Committee;
- promoting a better understanding, within and outside UNHCR, of the organization's programmes, policies and operational environment;
- encouraging team-building through the implementation of participatory and consultative evaluation methods;
- drawing organizational and international attention to specific refugee issues and operations;
- documenting UNHCR's experiences, thereby contributing to the development of the organization's institutional memory;
- identifying examples of good practice that can be incorporated in UNHCR's learning programmes;
- promoting inter-agency cooperation through the implementation of joint evaluation activities; and,
- fostering a transparent, inquisitive and self-critical organizational culture within UNHCR.

Evaluation principles

UNHCR's evaluation function is guided by the following principles:

- Transparency* Evaluation activities are conducted openly; terms of reference, findings and recommendations are always placed in the public domain; major evaluation contracts are awarded through a process of competitive bidding.
- Independence* The findings and recommendations of evaluation projects are not subject to the control or interference of senior UNHCR management; the independence of the evaluation function is ensured through the use of external evaluators.
- Consultation* UNHCR's stakeholders participate in the identification, planning, implementation and utilization of evaluation projects; relevant stakeholders are always consulted before evaluation findings and recommendations are placed in the public domain.
- Relevance* Evaluations focus on those policy issues, activities and operations that are of most direct concern to UNHCR, its partners and beneficiaries; evaluations are used as a means of enhancing the organization's capacity to fulfil its mandate on behalf of people of concern to the organization.
- Integrity* Staff members and external evaluators engaged by UNHCR are expected to maintain the highest possible professional and personal standards. In particular, they must ensure the honesty and integrity of the evaluation process, and respect the security and dignity of the stakeholders with whom they interact. Information and documentation gathered in the course of an evaluation project may not be used for any other purpose without the prior permission of UNHCR. Evaluators who collect significant evidence on issues which fall beyond their terms of reference should provide that information immediately and on a confidential basis to the Head of PDES or to the Inspector-General.

Beneficiaries

The primary concern of all evaluations is the impact of UNHCR's work on the rights and welfare of beneficiaries, even when the evaluation relates to entities and functions that do not have a direct impact on people of concern to the organization.

UNHCR is striving to develop evaluation methods that enable beneficiaries to articulate their opinions and aspirations. In reviewing UNHCR's operational activities, evaluation projects adopt a disaggregated approach to beneficiary and other populations, taking due account of issues such as gender, age, socio-economic status and other forms of diversity. To the extent possible, all evaluations undertaken or commissioned by UNHCR include a focus on protection and human rights issues.

The conduct of evaluation in UNHCR

UNHCR recognizes the value of employing a diversity of evaluation types and methods according to the policy, programme or practice under review. These include:

- independent evaluations;
- mixed evaluations;
- real-time evaluations;
- joint and inter-agency evaluations;
- participatory self-evaluations;
- beneficiary-based evaluations

Specific terms of reference are established for every evaluation project initiated by UNHCR. These terms of reference identify the background to and rationale for the project; the primary issues to be addressed; the evaluative criteria to be employed; the methodology to be used; the process established to ensure stakeholder consultation; and the different means whereby evaluation findings and recommendations will be utilized.

UNHCR recognizes the value of external and externally-led evaluations, particularly when the programme or activity under review is a large, highly publicized or controversial one.

Evaluation consultancy opportunities with UNHCR are widely advertised and competitive procedures are employed to select consultants and consultancy teams or companies. Contractual arrangements with consultancy companies conform to UNHCR's procurement regulations.

Consultancy teams and companies are paid only for satisfactory work, completed in accordance with their terms of reference. All evaluations are properly budgeted and undertaken in a cost-effective and timely manner.

UNHCR encourages the establishment of mixed evaluation teams, comprising any combination of external consultants, representatives of partner organizations, as well as UNHCR staff. However constituted, UNHCR evaluation teams are to the extent possible gender-balanced, culturally diverse and multifunctional in composition.

Participation in mixed evaluation teams represents an important learning opportunity for UNHCR staff members, who are also encouraged to avail themselves of the evaluation training opportunities offered by PDES. UNHCR staff who participate in evaluation teams should not have had any direct responsibility for the activity being evaluated.

Self-evaluation exercises

UNHCR wishes to promote the use of participatory self-evaluation exercises because, when properly planned and managed, they are a cost-effective means of:

- giving a voice to beneficiaries and other affected populations;
- improving collaboration with and between UNHCR's implementing partners;
- providing UNHCR staff with learning opportunities; and,
- providing information, analysis and recommendations that can be put to immediate use.

Utilization focus

In UNHCR, as in many other humanitarian organizations, evaluation has traditionally focused on the preparation of a final report, containing a set of recommendations that managers are expected to implement in a given timeframe.

Experience has shown that evaluations of this nature can act as an important catalyst for change, especially when they are timely and their recommendations enjoy the strong support of senior management and other influential stakeholders.

In many cases, however, evaluation recommendations go unimplemented, often because they lack such support, because they are perceived as

unrealistic or inappropriate by programme staff, or because the situation on the ground has changed by the time the report is published.

Under the terms of this policy, UNHCR strives to enhance the impact of the evaluation function by pursuing what is known professionally as a 'utilization-focused' approach to evaluation, based on the following principles:

- decisions concerning the terms of reference, design, methods and timing of any evaluation project are made in such a way as to maximize the potential for the findings and recommendations of that project to be effectively utilized;
- at the outset of any evaluation project, a stakeholder analysis is undertaken to identify the intended users of the project and to ensure their active participation in it;
- while each evaluation project normally results in the preparation of a final report, other activities and outputs are generated (e.g. workshops, training materials, published articles and audio-visual presentations) so as to maximize the potential for findings and recommendations to be used;
- particular findings and recommendations of any evaluation project are summarized, communicated to and discussed with relevant entities and managers within UNHCR so as to ensure that they are effectively utilized.

To facilitate this approach, a Steering Committee is established for each major evaluation project, involving key internal and external stakeholders. The functions of the Steering Committee are to assist in the following areas: establishing terms of reference for the project; selecting external evaluators; reviewing preliminary findings and recommendations; establishing a dissemination and utilization strategy.

Consultation processes

UNHCR expects an extensive process of consultation to take place before the findings and recommendations of an evaluation project are placed in the public domain. UNHCR particularly encourages the use of mid-term workshops and consultations, enabling Steering Committee members and other stakeholders to review an evaluation team's interim conclusions.

The organization also expects draft evaluation reports and other preliminary outputs to be shared for comments with key stakeholders, including

managers who are responsible for the activity under review. Evaluation teams, whether or not they are externally led, are expected to consider and take due account of these comments, but are not obliged to incorporate them in their final outputs.

Disseminating findings

The findings and recommendations of all major evaluation projects are presented to members of the Executive Office and Senior Management Committee. Where appropriate, briefings are also provided to other internal and external stakeholders.

UNHCR is committed to placing evaluation findings in the public domain and to ensuring their effective dissemination. All evaluation reports and other outputs are posted on the UNHCR website, published in hard copy and disseminated to a broad range of interested parties within and outside the organization.

Follow-up

Effective mechanisms are required to ensure that UNHCR's investment in evaluation leads to real improvements in the quality and impact of the organization's work.

To meet this objective, the Terms of Reference of each evaluation project specify the ways in which the findings and recommendations of the project are to be utilized.

Once an evaluation project is completed, the Executive Office may issue a directive to senior managers in relation to the implementation of specific evaluation recommendations, for which they are to be held accountable.

A review of the follow-up process is undertaken six months after the publication of each evaluation report.

Quality control

With an expansion in the level of evaluation activity and expenditure within the organization, UNHCR recognizes the importance of maintaining the highest possible evaluation standards. To achieve this objective, the organization encourages internal and external stakeholders to comment on the findings, recommendations and general quality of its evaluation projects.

At the conclusion of each major evaluation project, a lessons learned exercise on the conduct of the project is undertaken, so as to ensure that UNHCR's evaluation principles, procedures and methods are both appropriate and effective.

Relations with the Executive Committee

PDES provides regular reports on evaluation activities to formal and informal meetings of the Executive Committee.

UNHCR recognizes the desire of Executive Committee members and observers to request, commission, undertake and participate in evaluations, and encourages them to do this in close consultation with PDES and UNHCR management so as to avoid any duplication of effort and to minimize the pressures placed on the organization's field offices.

Evaluations of UNHCR activities by Executive Committee members and observers should ideally be consistent with the organization's own evaluation principles and procedures, as set out in this policy statement. In the interests of consistency and transparency, the organization encourages its partners to place all evaluations of UNHCR activities in the public domain.

PDES, or another entity designated by the Executive Office, acts as a Headquarters focal point for any external evaluation of UNHCR activities. The designated focal point is responsible for ensuring that the findings and recommendations of such reviews are disseminated to appropriate UNHCR managers, staff members and offices.

Relations with evaluation fora

UNHCR is committed to an active engagement with international evaluation fora, particularly UNEG and the Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action (ALNAP). All UNHCR evaluations are made available to ALNAP so as to ensure that they are incorporated in that organization's database and its annual review of humanitarian evaluations.

The Policy Development and Evaluation Service

PDES is located in the Executive Office. The Head of Service reports to the High Commissioner (on policy matters) and the Deputy High Commissioner (on evaluation matters) and works in close coordination with the Assistant

High Commissioners for Operations and Protection. The Head of PDES attends meetings of the Senior Management Committee.

The PDES work programme is established on the basis of regular consultations with the Executive Office and Executive Committee, as well as UN, NGO and academic partners.

Policy analysis and development

PDES provides UNHCR with a forward-looking policy analysis and development capacity, enabling the Executive Office to understand how global developments are affecting (or likely to affect) the discharge of UNHCR's mandated responsibilities.

PDES also assists the Executive Office to identify the need for new or revised policy statements and, in close consultation with other Divisions, Departments and Regional Bureaux, contributes to their formulation, dissemination and promotion.

PDES focuses primarily on the formulation of global operational policies and is not normally involved in the formulation of policies in areas such as finance, administration, procurement or human resource management.

PDES actively engages with and makes use of external partners (academia, research institutes, UN and NGO partners) in the area of policy analysis and development.

PDES pursues an active programme of research on refugee, humanitarian and migration issues and acts as a key interlocutor for external researchers and research organizations on non-legal matters. The Service is responsible for the publication of the series 'New Issues in Refugee Research' and sits on the editorial and advisory boards of a variety of journals, institutes and research networks.

Evaluation

As explained in this policy statement, PDES is responsible for the management and development of UNHCR's evaluation function. More specifically this responsibility entails:

- undertaking, commissioning and managing evaluations of UNHCR activities;

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- ensuring the effective devolution of evaluation activities to other UNHCR entities while maintaining the highest possible evaluation standards;
- reviewing and revising UNHCR's evaluation policy and procedures;
- introducing and testing new evaluation methodologies;
- providing training to UNHCR staff on evaluation objectives and methods;
- organizing UNHCR's participation in joint and inter-agency evaluation projects;
- acting as focal point for UNHCR's relationship with UNEG and ALNAP;
- liaising and ensuring effective coordination with UNHCR's inspection, audit and monitoring functions; and,
- supporting senior management in its efforts to ensure the effective utilization of evaluation findings and recommendations.