



Evaluation Brief

Evaluation of UNHCR's Response to the Level 3 IDP Emergency in the Democratic Republic of Congo

Purpose: In line with UNHCR's Emergency Policy, and Policy on Evaluation, which stipulates a mandatory evaluation of all Level 3 emergency operations, this evaluation sets out to assess UNHCR's emergency response to the Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) emergency in the DRC from November 2019 to November 2020, in Ituri, North Kivu and South Kivu provinces, for accountability and learning purposes.

Evaluation type: L3 Emergency Response

Methods: Mixed-methods including internal-, and external key informant interviews, focus group discussions with displaced people.

Implemented: 2020 – 2021, by Veronique De Clerck, Eva Capa, Don Johnston, Marcel van Maastrigt.

Scope: Whole of organization response to the DRC crisis in the northeast of the country and coherence with UNHCR's Emergency and IDP policies.

Commissioned by: the Evaluation Office

Evaluation Context

In mid-2019, increasing violence in the three Eastern provinces of North Kivu, South Kivu and Ituri led to massive displacements. By the end of 2019, an estimated 4,5 million people were internally displaced in East Congo.

In addition to the internal displacements, the DRC hosted over 524,000 refugees from Burundi, the Central African Republic, Rwanda and South Sudan. Multiple health crises present further challenges to the humanitarian situation in the DRC: Ebola, measles, the plague, cholera, and Covid-19.

As a result of the recurrent internal displacements and influxes of refugees, the DRC has been in different humanitarian emergency situations for 9 out of the last 10 years.

UNHCR declared a Level 3 Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) emergency in Ituri, North, and South Kivu in November 2019 to enable the operation to increase staffing and receive the operational resources required to address the protection, assistance and coordination needs in the context of the rapidly deteriorating situation.

Key Findings

Effective Adaptation of the IDP Policy

The evaluation found the DRC operation to be proactive in adapting elements of the 'IDP Policy' into a DRC-specific approach in the three provinces, resulting in a Framework for Engagement and Disengagement in chronic and repeated displacement situations in the Eastern DRC. The operation, among other things, ensured that protection considerations remained at the heart of the humanitarian response, provided a detailed protection analysis to guide the overall response and implemented a community-based approach, geared towards the identification of solutions.

Notwithstanding the positive efforts by the operation, the evaluation found that an uneven understanding of UNHCR's protection role in IDP displacements with staff negatively impacted UNHCR's effectiveness, as well as the perceptions of the organisation's responsibilities and mandate.

Uneven Relevance of the Emergency Policy

The Emergency Policy prescribes standardized duration and core budget limits for all emergency declarations,

rendering the support provided through the Policy to appear inflexible, particularly in the DRC context with recurrent displacement emergencies resulting in high levels of unmet humanitarian needs. The Emergency Policy's one-size-fits-all provisions limited its relevance, and ultimately impact. Activation mechanisms, fast track and support procedures and changes in authority triggered by an L3 declaration were not well understood by the country operation. The timing and amounts of budget disbursements were not predictable. There is no specific M&E framework to monitor and analyse outcomes or impact of the L3 response as a whole.

The deactivation of the Level 3 designation and related abrupt reduction in funds after 9 months was detrimental to maintaining the minimum appropriate response capacity in this protracted crisis. The operation nevertheless has continued its efforts to maintain emergency levels of response and essential operations and activities.

The evaluation found a positive impact from the deployment of officers from UNHCR's Emergency Preparedness and Response Section (EPRS) and roster members from its Emergency Response Team (ERT) in scaling up operations in the initial months of the emergency. The support provided by the Division of Emergency, Security and Supply (DESS) was perceived as strong and appropriate with a good understanding of the complex challenges in a protracted crisis environment. The support by the Regional Bureau (RB) was seen as comprehensive and efficient.

UNHCR Data Collection and Analysis Supports Targeted Interventions in the Overall Response

The operation had introduced a new approach to data collection and analysis; the *Système de Réponse et d'Analyse*. SAR aims, as its main goal, to support evidence-based and targeted programming by all humanitarian actors in DRC. The protection-based data collection and analysis served to confirm the centrality of protection in the response. The reports, published on the Protection Cluster website, include interrelated (cross-sectoral) needs of all populations in an area and the reasons for displacement. The innovative approach to protection monitoring included the community-based identification of solutions. Both the protection data, as well as the identified solutions, served to guide the response by humanitarian actors.

Community-Based Approach Underpins UNHCR Response

UNHCR piloted several community-based protection projects focusing on existing community groups and supporting them in identifying needs and acting upon their priorities.

The capacity building of community actors and local authorities and the involvement of the Persons of Concern (PoC) in Community-Based Protection were seen as appropriate modalities in recurrent and protracted crises; however, they only addressed a small proportion of the needs due to the limited access as a result of security, and COVID related restrictions. The scope of the community-based protection monitoring was largely limited to accessible areas in North Kivu and Ituri. Multi-purpose cash is assessed as an appropriate and effective assistance modality, allowing for targeted support to women and girls at risk. The scope and scale of the multi-purpose cash assistance was limited to areas where UNHCR and partners had access. PoC gave positive feedback on UNHCR's cash, co-habitation, and income-generating activities.

UNHCR's programs reflected a recognition that the participation of disaster-affected people and their capacities and strategies are integral to humanitarian response. Though confronted with numerous significant security and access restrictions, UNHCR's exemplary community engagement practices endeavoured to contribute to durable solutions.

Recommendations

1. The DRC operation and Regional Bureau (RB), in light of the overwhelming needs and overall lack of humanitarian funding in the DRC, should agree on UNHCR's priorities in the DRC and the related future budget allocation to enable long term planning and render the level of attainable results explicit.
2. The DRC operation should further develop its national/local advocacy strategy. Linked to this, the regional bureau is to reinforce a regional advocacy approach to ensure protracted crises, such as in DRC, receive the necessary media and donor attention.
3. The DRC operation, as the protection cluster lead, and with the support of the Division of International Protection (DIP), should formulate and implement a protection mainstreaming

approach, further developing prevention-, and response to Gender Based Violence (GBV) and Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) strategies to guide the broader humanitarian response.

4. Division of Emergency Security and Supply (DESS) is to include M&E resources (tools and staff) as part of tailored Level 3 response plans.
5. DIP, with the support of the RB, is to develop a supportive (phased) roll-out strategy for new/recent protection policies and approaches.
6. DESS and relevant units in the Division of Resilience and Solutions (DRS), DIP and Division of Strategic Planning and Results (DSPR) should prepare actionable guidance for operations on the resources to support the continuation of an emergency response as well as the transition from an emergency response to durable solutions.

Good Practises

1. The operation has been commended by various key informants for the protection reports that provided detailed information on situations of conflict, protection incidents, rights violations, and the resulting displacements in eastern DRC. The reports provided specific information on the population (e.g., numbers, location, ethnic background) being targeted in the violations, the type of violations, number of individuals affected, and the resulting displacement. The reports were widely seen as providing an added value to the more generic reports provided by the UN mission and IOM. One donor representative commended UNHCR for the efforts in providing all actors in DRC with an 'analytical baseline'.
2. The operation put in place community-based protection monitoring structures that remained effective during periods of restricted access for humanitarian staff. Community protection monitors among the IDP local populations, and local authorities were trained to identify protection risks and violations. This enabled a continuation of protection monitoring even when access for humanitarian staff was further curtailed. Local capacities were built to estimate the number of displaced persons in their area and determine their needs and report this information to

authorities and humanitarian actors. The community monitors were also trained in identifying local solutions to the needs of the displaced as well as the local population.

3. The operation initiated income-generating activities (IGA), in particular for women, in endemically insecure areas. This provided a level of self-reliance that became apparent when access to humanitarian staff was curtailed as a result of COVID measures and the IGA continued and even adapted to the production of COVID masks and other items.
4. Despite the many challenges posed by the context and scale of the IDP emergency, UNHCR was able to introduce partial aspects of the "rolling response approach", a concept which emerged from the previous 2018 Level 3 response evaluation in the DRC. In that evaluation, a rolling response refers to establishing a flexible, predictable, responsive emergency approach to recurrent crises, aimed at establishing long-term protocols for staffing, assistance, and collaboration modalities. The approach uses agreed tools to address the issues raised by affected communities, supports local and national infrastructure to better respond to emergencies and invest in local staff and builds in-country expertise, including through an emergency roster system and training opportunities within the operation.

Full evaluation report available [here](#).

Contact us: for further information please reach out to Marcel van Maastrigt (maastrig@unhcr.org) from the Evaluation Office.

