

UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES  
EVALUATION AND POLICY ANALYSIS UNIT



## UNHCR's evaluation policy

September 2002

## **Evaluation and Policy Analysis Unit**

UNHCR's Evaluation and Policy Analysis Unit (EPAU) is committed to the systematic examination and assessment of UNHCR policies, programmes, projects and practices. EPAU 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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## 1. Evaluation in UNHCR

Since the establishment of the Evaluation and Policy Analysis Unit (EPAU) in September 1999, UNHCR has made a concerted effort to enhance the quality and expand the quantity of the evaluation activities it undertakes.<sup>1</sup> UNHCR is now introducing an evaluation policy that is intended to make a further contribution towards UNHCR's capacity for organizational learning, performance review and public accountability.

This policy, which takes effect on 1 January 2003, has been developed on the basis of consultations between EPAU, the Executive Office, the Senior Management Committee and Oversight Committee, as well as UNHCR's Executive Committee. It also draws upon a review of UNHCR's evaluation function, undertaken by an independent consultant one year after the establishment of EPAU.<sup>2</sup>

To support the introduction of this new evaluation policy, EPAU will produce a number of additional resources:

- guidelines on the management of externally-led evaluations;
- a 'toolbox' of self-evaluation procedures and methods;
- an introduction to the evaluation function for staff deployed in the field; and,
- a guide to the methods employed in 'real-time' emergency evaluations.

With the introduction of this policy, UNHCR will increase its level of evaluation activity in a phased and principled manner, and in close association with other components of UNHCR's organizational learning and performance review frameworks. UNHCR will employ evaluation methods that are effective and innovative, and will introduce more systematic and dynamic approaches to the utilization of evaluation findings.

While EPAU will continue to be the focal point for evaluation activities in UNHCR, particular efforts will be 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, and in that respect, will strive to ensure:

- that managers are fully committed to organizational learning and performance review;

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<sup>1</sup> See 'UNHCR's evaluation plan and activities', EC/51/SC/CRP.19, Standing Committee, June 2001.

<sup>2</sup> 'Improving the effectiveness of UNHCR's evaluation function', Simon Lawry-White, Vine Management Consulting, September 2000.

- that using evaluation to bring about change is positively encouraged; and,
- that staff are held accountable for the activities they manage.

All UNHCR staff members and consultants who are directly engaged in evaluation projects will be required to give an undertaking that they will respect this policy. The content and implementation of the policy will be regularly reviewed, and may be revised on that basis.

### *1.1 The role of evaluation*

Drawing upon the description provided in the OECD/DAC's evaluation principles, 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.<sup>3</sup>

Evaluation is one component of UNHCR's broader performance review framework, which also includes activities such as inspection, audit, programme monitoring and protection oversight.<sup>4</sup> UNHCR will strive to ensure that these activities function in a coherent and complementary manner. To facilitate this task, EPAU will participate in meetings of the Oversight Committee, and will coordinate its activities with other entities represented on that committee.

UNHCR also recognizes the important relationship that exists between organizational and individual learning. EPAU will consequently work in close association with the Staff Development Section (SDS), so as to ensure that evaluation findings are incorporated into UNHCR's training modules and programmes. At the same time, steps will be taken to ensure that the management learning programmes administered by SDS include a focus on the evaluation function.

### *1.2 Evaluation purposes*

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.

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<sup>3</sup> OECD Development Assistance Committee, 'Principles for evaluation of development assistance', Paris, 1991.

<sup>4</sup> See 'UNHCR's organisational oversight and performance review framework', EC/50/SC/INF.6, Standing Committee, September 2000.

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 training and 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.

### *1.3 Evaluation principles and standards*

UNHCR's evaluation function will be 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 extensive use of external evaluators.

- Consultation* UNHCR's stakeholders, including refugees whenever possible, participate in the identification, planning, implementation and utilization of evaluation projects; evaluation findings and recommendations are never placed in the public domain without such consultation.
- Relevance* Evaluations focus on those operations, functions and operational policy issues 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 refugees and other people of concern to the organization
- Integrity* Staff members and external evaluators engaged by UNHCR will maintain the highest possible professional and personal standards. In particular, they will 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 EPAU or to the Inspector-General.

#### *1.4 Beneficiary rights*

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

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

### *1.5 Evaluation guidelines*

In recent years, many different actors have prepared guidelines for the evaluation of humanitarian programmes, setting out the procedures, principles and criteria to be employed by such reviews.

Given the duplication of effort that has already taken place, UNHCR does not intend to establish an additional set of evaluation guidelines. The organization does, however, encourage the use of existing guidelines, the most useful of which can be accessed from the Evaluation and Policy Analysis page of the UNHCR website ([www.unhcr.ch](http://www.unhcr.ch)).

## **2. UNHCR's commitment to evaluation**

UNHCR is committed to increasing and improving:

- the level of evaluation activity within the organization;
- the effectiveness of its evaluation methods and management; and,
- the utilization of evaluation findings and recommendations.

### *2.1 Phased development*

With the introduction of this policy, the obligations of management to undertake and make effective use of evaluations will be progressively strengthened. At the same time, the ability of managers and other staff members to assume such responsibilities will be enhanced by means of training, the introduction of relevant evaluation tools and other capacity-building activities.

### *2.2 Resource commitment*

UNHCR is committed to allocating the resources required for this evaluation policy to be fully and effectively implemented. In that respect, governments are invited to provide the organization with financial support for evaluation activities. Governments and other actors are also invited to play an active role in UNHCR's evaluation function by seconding appropriately qualified personnel to EPAU or to specific evaluation projects.

### *2.3 Minimum levels of evaluation*

UNHCR has adopted the following parameters to ensure that the organization undertakes a minimum level of evaluation activity.

a) Evaluation and Policy Analysis Unit

With the introduction of this policy, EPAU will:

- undertake or commission at least one global, thematic or policy evaluation each year;
- undertake or commission an evaluation of any large-scale emergency operation within six months of its establishment;
- organize or participate in at least one joint or inter-agency evaluation each year; and,
- facilitate at least two self-evaluation exercises in the field each year.

b) Regional bureaux

From 2002, every Regional Bureau will commission at least one externally-led evaluation each year, with priority given to the review of large, long-term programmes and those not evaluated within the last five years. The regional bureaux will also commission an externally-led evaluation of any large-scale repatriation and reintegration operation, during the course of the operation or within six months of its completion.

All evaluations commissioned by the Regional Bureaux will be undertaken in accordance with this policy statement and with UNHCR's guidelines on the management of externally-led evaluations. Such evaluations will receive technical support and guidance from EPAU, which may also make funding available for such evaluations .

EPAU will be notified of all planned evaluations and sent copies of all evaluation reports. EPAU will be given the opportunity to comment on the terms of reference for all evaluation projects planned or proposed by the regional bureaux.

c) Field offices

UNHCR offices in the field are encouraged to commission, undertake or participate in evaluations of their programmes., with technical support, guidance and funding provided by EPAU. Such offices are also encouraged to undertake periodic participatory self-evaluation exercises. To facilitate this task, EPAU will provide field offices with a self-evaluation 'toolbox'.

### **3. The conduct of evaluation in UNHCR**

UNHCR recognises a diversity of evaluation types and encourages managers to select the most appropriate approach for each project. Evaluations may:

- be focused on a policy, a function, a programme, a project , practice or set of procedures;
- be conducted at an early stage of an operation (in 'real-time'), at a mid-point or upon completion;
- use a range of different evaluative, analytical and participatory techniques;
- be fully external and independent or involve UNHCR staff and partners.

### *3.1 Terms of reference*

Separate terms of reference will be established for every evaluation project initiated by UNHCR. These terms of reference will 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.

### *3.2 External evaluations*

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

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

### *3.3 Mixed evaluation teams*

UNHCR encourages the establishment of mixed evaluation teams, comprising any combination of external consultants, representatives of states and partner organizations, as well as UNHCR staff. However constituted, UNHCR evaluation teams should ideally include both women and men, be culturally diverse and multidisciplinary in nature.

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 EPAU. UNHCR staff who participate in an evaluation team should not normally have had any direct responsibility for the activity being evaluated.

### *3.4 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.

To ensure that self-evaluation exercises are undertaken in a consistent and principled manner, EPAU will develop a 'toolbox' to provide guidance in this matter.

### *3.5 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 operations 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.

With the introduction of this policy, UNHCR will strive 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:<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Michael Quinn Patton, *Utilization Focused Evaluation: The New Century Text*, Sage Publications, London, 1997.

- decisions concerning the terms of reference, design, methods and timing of any evaluation project will be 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 will be undertaken to identify the intended users of the project and to ensure their active participation in it;
- while each evaluation project will normally result in the preparation of a final report, other activities and outputs will be 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 will be summarized, communicated to and discussed with relevant entities and managers within UNHCR so as to ensure that they are effectively utilized.

To facilitate the introduction of this approach, a Steering Committee will be established for each major evaluation project, involving key internal and external stakeholders. The functions of the Steering Committee will be 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.

### *3.6 Consultation processes*

UNHCR expects an extensive process of consultation to take place before an evaluation team formally places its findings and recommendations 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 initial findings and recommendations.

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.

### *3.7 Disseminating findings*

The findings and recommendations of all major evaluation projects will be presented to the Senior Management Committee. Where appropriate, similar briefings will be provided to other groups of internal and external stakeholders.

UNHCR is committed to placing evaluation findings in the public domain and to ensuring their effective dissemination. All evaluation reports will be published in hard copy and disseminated to a broad range of interested parties within and outside the organization. They will also be available on demand. Reports and other outputs will be placed and announced on UNHCR's internal and external websites.

### *3.8 Management response*

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

To meet this objective, managers are expected to respond appropriately to the findings and recommendations of any evaluation project, especially those which focus on ongoing programmes and activities. In such cases, evaluation findings and recommendations should be used by field offices in the development of their Country Operations Plans. Regional Bureaux should also report on the way in which evaluation findings and recommendations are being utilized in the global and mid-year reports issued by UNHCR.

Within three months of the receipt of a final evaluation report, the manager responsible for the activity under review will ensure that a management response is produced and sent, through EPAU, to the Assistant High Commissioner. In the case of global and thematic reviews, the management response will be prepared by the Assistant High Commissioner and presented to the High Commissioner.

The response will comment on the findings of the evaluation and describe what action is being taken to implement each of the accepted recommendations. It will also provide a full explanation in relation to any recommendation that is rejected. A manager may be called upon by the Executive Office to explain how the findings and recommendations of any evaluation project are being utilized.

### *3.9 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 review will be undertaken, so as to ensure that UNHCR's evaluation principles, procedures and methods are both appropriate and effective.

### *3.10 Relations with the Executive Committee*

UNHCR will continue to provide regular reports on its 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 EPAU 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. UNHCR will normally issue a management response to any external evaluation of its activities, in accordance with the management response requirement introduced elsewhere in this policy statement .

EPAU, or another entity designated by the Assistant High Commissioner, will act as a Headquarters focal point for any external evaluation of UNHCR activities. The designated focal point will be responsible for ensuring that the findings and recommendations of such reviews are disseminated to appropriate UNHCR managers, staff and offices

### *3.11 Relations with evaluation fora*

UNHCR is committed to an active engagement with international evaluation fora, particularly the UN's Inter-Agency Working Group on Evaluation and the Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in

Humanitarian Action (ALNAP). All UNHCR evaluations will be made available to ALNAP so as to ensure that they are incorporated in that organization's database and its annual review of humanitarian evaluations.

#### **4. The Evaluation and Policy Analysis Unit**

UNHCR has established a dedicated unit, reporting to the Assistant High Commissioner, which has overall responsibility for the development of the organization's evaluation function.

EPAU's primary task is to ensure that UNHCR management, staff and partners are provided with relevant information, analysis and recommendations. Responsibility for the implementation of those recommendations, however, lies with the manager of the operation or activity under review.

##### *4.1 EPAU work programme*

With the introduction of this policy, EPAU will continue to undertake, commission and participate in evaluation projects. In this respect, EPAU will establish a flexible and rolling work programme, focusing on evaluations which assess UNHCR's role and performance in relation to key operations and operational policy issues. EPAU may also undertake or commission evaluations of Headquarters functions.

The EPAU work programme will incorporate project proposals identified by senior management, other entities within UNHCR, external stakeholders and by EPAU itself. The work programme will be approved by the Assistant High Commissioner and presented to the Oversight Committee.

##### *4.2 Development of the evaluation function*

In addition to its direct role in the evaluation of UNHCR activities, EPAU is responsible for ensuring the effective development and devolution of the organization's evaluation function. This task involves:

- working with other UNHCR entities so as to encourage a broader sense of ownership and involvement in relation to the evaluation function;

- helping to build organizational capacity for evaluation and supporting the spread of good evaluation practice across the organization;
- advising other parts of the organization on the effective conduct and management of evaluation;
- developing evaluation tools, procedures, methods and standards;
- introducing innovative evaluation methods; and,
- acting as a focal point for inter-agency evaluation initiatives and representing UNHCR at inter-agency evaluation fora.

#### *4.3 Policy analysis and research*

The Assistant High Commissioner may call upon EPAU to undertake research on and provide an analysis of key refugee-related policy issues. To facilitate this task, EPAU will act as a focal point for UNHCR's relations with individuals, institutions and professional associations which are engaged in research on refugee and humanitarian issues. The unit will also be responsible for the publication of UNHCR's working paper series, 'New Issues in Refugee Research'.

#### *4.4 Evaluation advisory group*

With the introduction of this policy, an evaluation advisory group will be established, enabling external stakeholders (Executive Committee members, NGOs, other UN agencies, etc.) to be kept abreast of evaluation activities in UNHCR and to provide UNHCR with guidance on the development and utilization of the organization's evaluation function. Members of the group may be invited to sit on the Steering Committees established in relation to specific evaluation projects.