PEER REVIEW OF THE EVALUATION FUNCTION AT THE OFFICE OF THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES (UNHCR)

August 2021

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PEER REVIEW FEATURES

This Peer Review of UNHCR's evaluation function was conducted under the provisions contained in the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) Framework for Professional Peer Reviews of the Evaluation Function of UN system organizations and the OECD DAC. It is the first Peer Review of UNHCR's evaluation function and was conducted at the request of UNHCR. The Peer Review Panel comprised six members:

- Andrea Cook, Panel Chair, Director of Evaluation, World Food Programme
- Demetra Arapakos, Chief of Section, Inspection and Evaluation Division, UN Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS/IED)
- Nanna Hvidt, Director of Evaluation, Learning & Quality (ELQ), Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- Susan Kyle, Program Officer for UNHCR, Office of Multilateral Coordination and External Relations (MCE), Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM), Department of State
- Antoine Ouellet-Drouin, former Head of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation at the International Committee of the Red Cross in Geneva.
- Johan Schaar, Associate Senior Fellow with the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), Chair of ALNAP, vice chair of the Expert Group for Aid Studies under the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs

Daniel Arghiros was the Senior Evaluation Consultant to the Panel.

The Panel would like to thank the Head of the Evaluation Service, the Evaluation Service team and UNHCR for facilitating and engaging with the review in such a collaborative way. The Panel would also like to thank all those to whom they spoke for their open and frank contributions.

The views expressed in this report are those of the members of the Peer Review Panel in their individual capacities.

The review was guided by the central question in the Terms of Reference (ToR), namely, to assess whether UNHCR's "evaluation policy, evaluation function and its evaluation products are independent, credible and useful for learning and accountability purposes". In line with the ToR the Peer Review also focuses on the quality of use and follow up of evaluations across the organisation; and their contribution to accountability, learning and improvement.

The Peer Review provides recommendations to UNHCR senior leadership and its governing bodies, the Standing Committee and Executive Committee (ExCom), as well as staff of the Evaluation Service, Regional Bureaux and country offices. The review covers the entire

evaluation system comprising both the central and decentralized evaluation functions. [1] It assesses the role and strategic positioning of financial and human resourcing, evaluation planning, evaluation use, and quality assurance mechanisms. The review focuses on the period 2016 to the end of 2020.

THE UNHCR EVALUATION FUNCTION

The Evaluation Service is in practice a very young evaluation service. Before 2016, UNHCR had a joint Policy Development and Evaluation Service. Its capacity and policies to conduct centralized evaluations were relatively undeveloped. In October 2016, the High Commissioner issued UNHCR's revised evaluation policy, establishing a dedicated Evaluation Service reporting directly to him. The policy addressed many of the gaps in policy or areas of weakness identified by previous assessments. Subsequently, the first Head of the Evaluation Service was recruited externally and took her position in June 2017.

The Evaluation Service is establishing the evaluation function during a time of fundamental change and reform in the organisation. The Service has had to ensure that what it is building is attuned to changing organisational structures and to new core businesses processes, as well as an entirely new results-based management system. Further, UNHCR's way of working is also in flux and this has implications for appetite and capacity to absorb further change at all levels of the organisation.

To operationalise the Policy the Evaluation Service developed a five-year Evaluation Strategy (2018 to 2022). It sets out the vision in which "the use of evaluative evidence is normal and habitual in designing, targeting and delivering strategies, policies, and programmes…." It has a theory of change "focused on increasing both demand and supply of evaluations". UNHCR's evaluation planning and coverage have significantly improved since 2016. The selection of topics for centralized evaluations is more strategic and coverage has increased markedly.

In terms of resources, the evaluation budget line is submitted to UNHCR's Executive Committee for approval as a separate line, whilst the High Commissioner approves the Evaluation Service's budget internally. The Evaluation Service budget has been gradually increasing, and once spending authority is given it can be spent at the discretion of the Head of the Evaluation Service. Since 2015, the Evaluation Service's budget for which it had spending authority has increased from $4.2m in 2015 to $6.2m in 2021. To put this growth in context, in 2013 the budget was just $1.58m.

The Evaluation Service's staffing has increased over the last two years. It had seven full time positions, five of which were evaluation officer positions, between 2015 and 2019, and has

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[1] A note on terminology: the terms 'central evaluation function' and the 'decentralized evaluation function' are used solely to differentiate between the levels being discussed. In practice there is just one encompassing evaluation function in UNHCR.

had 12 positions since 2020, nine of which are evaluation officer positions. Three of these staff members are outposted to Regional Bureaux as Regional Senior Evaluation Officers.

The Evaluation Service is seeking to align with and support UNHCR's ongoing regionalisation and decentralisation reforms. In line with its evaluation strategy, the Evaluation Service is expanding its regional presence by posting Senior Evaluation Officers in Regional Bureaux to better support decentralized evaluations and it recently published guidance for those conducting decentralized evaluation.

SUMMARY ASSESSMENT AGAINST THE PEER REVIEW CRITERIA

The Panel considers that the evaluation function in UNHCR has made impressive progress in the last few years and it is clearly continuing to develop in the right direction. The Evaluation Service has strengthened its performance and the relevance of evaluation to UNHCR. It is conveying consistent messages to the organisation and has a strong professional team. The Panel congratulates the staff of the Evaluation Service for what it has achieved over the last few years and UNHCR's management for facilitating its development. The Panel's interviews indicate that there is broad understanding of the role of the evaluation function in UNHCR (with a mix of appreciative and less appreciative views). The Panel also heard evidence that evaluations had impacted on policies and programming.

Before detailing the Panel's findings and recommendations, the following paragraphs summarise the Panel's reflections on where UNHCR stands against the three key OECD-DAC/UNEG norms and standards of independence, credibility, and utility:

INDEPENDENCE

Within UNHCR's governance structures the degree of independence the evaluation function is probably as strong as is it can be. The Head of the evaluation function reports to the High Commissioner; and the High Commissioner, in principle, approves the budget and workplan. It falls short of full functional independence as envisaged by UNEG norms and standards. However, the Panel and the Head of the Evaluation Service consider that in practice it is adequate: the Head of Service has sufficient autonomy to manage a pre-agreed budget, select evaluands, and issue evaluation reports. There is a need to further tighten provisions related to the appointment, tenure and dismissal of the position of Head of Service.

In some agencies, an evaluation function can rely on an external governing body to nudge the organisation into applying learning from evaluations. Governance structures in UNHCR mean this is not quite so relevant here: UNHCR's Executive Committee is an advisory body, and the High Commissioner holds ultimate accountability on behalf of the General Assembly. Thus, responsibility for ensuring the organisation learns from evaluation lies more with the office of the High Commissioner and the Senior Executive Team (SET) and less with Member States. Member States still have a role to play, as we set out below.

CREDIBILITY

In terms of credibility the Service is working to ensure evaluations get stronger. It has a cohort of professional staff and is establishing the standards and systems to support credible evaluations. The Evaluation Service piloted post-hoc external quality assessments of a sample of evaluations in 2019 and of all evaluations in 2020 and they show that overall reports are of "good quality" and have improved over the last two years. The Evaluation Service's new quality assurance system should help the Service to continue to lift quality in future.

UTILITY

The Evaluation Service is also driving changes to ensure its outputs add utility/value. The organisation's evaluation culture is still at the early stages of being established and, according to interviewees, many staff outside the Service have yet to be convinced of the value of evaluation. Alongside building the decentralized evaluation system, this is probably where the Evaluation Service needs to place the strongest emphasis, and this is where the Peer Review Panel focuses most of its attention.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Panel considers that UNHCR has a developing evaluation culture. The Panel heard appreciation from some senior managers of the contribution evaluation can make to supporting learning and accountability. But this was not widespread. Interviews indicated that there is a relatively undeveloped evaluation culture in Regional Bureaux and country offices. Evaluation is not yet fully valued as a way of generating useful lessons.

This is not surprising as UNHCR has only had a professional evaluation service since 2016 and this should not undermine appreciation of the substantial progress that has been achieved to date. The Panel further notes that with several foundational reforms underway, UNHCR's operational context is highly challenging. Managers and staff have multiple competing priorities and have limited capacity to adopt further change. Given all this, the Panel considers that the Evaluation Service needs to carefully calibrate the planned pace of change and ensure strong and deep engagement with UNHCR management is built into change processes. This finding and recommendation informs many of the more specific recommendations the Panel makes.

The Panel notes one of the transformation workstreams, the integration of a new RBM approach into UNHCR's systems, presents the Evaluation Service with an opening. The Panel notes that the move to multi-year planning provides a significant opportunity to embed evaluation at country level within the programme cycle. There is strong potential for synergies with evaluation: together the RBM system and evaluation can help reinforce learning and accountability in the organisation – and help encourage managers to review their operational assumptions as well as results. The Panel notes that a key feature of the new RBM system is to integrate evaluation as part of the programming and strategic planning cycles of the organization. Operations are now required to identify priorities for creating results evidence; they are asked to plan for all evaluations foreseen during a strategy period and to sequence and cost them in resource and management plans. Through the RBM system, the Evaluation

Service has an institutional mandate to mainstream evaluation in UNHCR's systems and culture.

The Panel considers the Evaluation Service could be more strategic in work planning (detailed in a section below) and needs to take purposeful steps to build demand and engender a learning culture. It needs to be clearly aligned with organisational priorities, identified through a consultative process. The Panel also considers that the 2021-2022 work plan is perhaps too ambitious, both in terms of the Evaluation Service's delivery capacity and UNHCR's absorptive capacity. There is a need to rationalise the number of centralized evaluation planned. Going forwards, evaluations will need to be supported carefully so they build a learning culture. The Panel also considers that plans for decentralized evaluation are perhaps over-ambitious, given the support systems that the Evaluation Service has in place, but also given the multitude of changes impacting country offices. A highly graduated approach to building interest and buy-in to decentralized evaluation would be appropriate.

The Panel notes that evaluation will only ever be one tool to further learning in UNHCR. There are other kinds of instruments that UNHCR can deploy to mainstream learning throughout the organisation. For example, UNHCR could also explore rapid assessments, which would promote learning from operations to complement that coming from evaluations.

The Evaluation Service would be well placed to ensure its evaluations support learning if it could identify how learning happens in the different contexts UNHCR works in. The Service could seek to identify how evaluations are perceived and used by operations and policy units. It would then be able to feed evaluative lessons into decision-making settings.

The report now sets out key findings and 10 associated recommendations. In some cases, the main recommendation is accompanied by sub-recommendations. The Panel considers that the recommendations should be implemented progressively over a five-year period, in a way that integrates with broader institutional changes in UNHCR. The recommendations are interrelated and are therefore indivisible: we recommended they are implemented as a single package. Together they should help initiate a mutually reinforcing cycle of delivering greater value, demand and interest. But we recognize that building an evaluation culture in an organization as large, varied and with such a challenging mandate as UNHCR will take time.

The text in parentheses after each recommendation identifies who would be responsible for taking action.

THE ROLE OF SENIOR MANAGEMENT IN ENGENDERING AN EVALUATION CULTURE

The Panel considers that for UNHCR to develop a robust evaluation function there is a need for senior management to demonstrate to the organisation that evaluation, and learning from evaluation, is a corporate priority. The Senior Executive Team can set the tone by stressing the value of evaluation to learning and strengthening performance. Regional Directors will also need to help drive the use of evaluation in the regions and operations under them, and to lend their weight to establishing an evaluation culture in their regions.

Senior management can create an expectation that all those designing policies and programmes have considered and integrated evaluative lessons into their planning, driving this same approach downwards. It can also consider whether there are adequate reflection/learning opportunities built into UNHCR's management structures and establishing them if not.

UNHCR could consider establishing a forum to enable the Evaluation Service to work with senior management from policy and programme units and directors of Regional Bureaux to develop the evaluation function. With the adoption of its 2016 Evaluation Policy, WFP established an Evaluation Function Steering Group to drive implementation issues requiring action or buy-in from outside its Office of Evaluation. This played an important role in helping make the evaluation function effective - driving the roll out of support to decentralized evaluation and providing high-level support for financing and staffing issues. A comparable steering group could play a similar role in UNHCR – particularly to aid the roll out of decentralized evaluation and promote corporate uptake of evaluation evidence.

The Panel notes that outside the Evaluation Service, managers in UNHCR do not have job performance goals relating to evaluation, for example, relating to the follow up and use of evaluation, or to their specific responsibilities for management of decentralized evaluation. If UNHCR can integrate evaluation-related performance goals, it could start to incentivise the greater use of evaluations. WFP has done this and can offer UNHCR some practical examples of effective practice.

Recommendation 1: To help guide the development of an effective evaluation function across UNHCR, the Panel recommends the following measures:

> *1.1) Senior management and the Evaluation Service should consider how the they can establish a forum to jointly guide the development of the evaluation function - for example with an Evaluation Function Steering Group – particularly with a view to building engagement on plans to support decentralized evaluation.*

> *1.2) UNHCR consider introducing a metric related to the use of evaluation in the performance goals of senior managers.*

(For: Senior Managers, the Evaluation Service)

ENHANCING INDEPENDENCE

The Panel notes that governance arrangements in place in UNHCR give the evaluation function an adequate degree of functional independence. However, the Panel recommends additional measures that will enhance the independence of the evaluation function. The Panel recommends that the Evaluation Policy, setting out these conditions, should be endorsed by ExCom to give the Policy the support of the Governing Board (see 8.2 below).

Recommendation 2: To enhance the independence of UNHCR's evaluation function, the Panel recommends that the next Evaluation Policy should set out the following conditions related to the recruitment, tenure and dismissal of the Head of Service:

2.1) The next Evaluation Policy should establish the following:

> *a) Clarify the term limit for the Head of the Evaluation Service, and confirm whether the incumbent can take another post in UNHCR after this role (best practice would suggest not).*

> *b) Regarding recruitment for the Head of the Evaluation Service position, the Panel recommends that the High Commissioner makes the appointment in consultation with the Independent Audit and Oversight Committee (IAOC) – as is required for the appointment of the Inspector General, and that a member of the IAOC should also be a recruitment panel member.*

2.2) Regarding the dismissal of the Head of the Evaluation Service, the Panel recommends that the next Evaluation Policy requires the High Commissioner to decide "following advice of the IAOC and in consultation with the Chair of Excom", mirroring conditions relating to the Inspector General (the Independence Oversight Policy will also need to be revised to reflect this).

(For: Evaluation Service, Senior Management)

RESOURCES FOR THE EVALUATION FUNCTION

FINANCING THE EVALUATION FUNCTION

The Panel notes that the Evaluation Service budget has been steadily increasing. As a percentage of UNHCR's total expenditure the Evaluation Service's budget has increased from 0.07% in 2017 to 0.11% in 2020. The target the Joint Inspection Unit considers appropriate for UN evaluation functions is between 0.5% and 3% of total expenditure.[2] At 0.11% the UNHCR evaluation function is still very far from the lower end of this scale. The Panel considers that the next Evaluation Policy should set a target percentage of total UNHCR expenditure the organisation should aspire to reach in, say, five years. The current Evaluation Policy does not contain a goal. This target should be set at a level that allows UNHCR to establish a fully operational evaluation function and will need to be based on a forecast of UNHCR's future resources. This percentage should capture the totality of target spending on the evaluation function, including both the likely cost of decentralized evaluations and the cost of supporting the decentralized evaluation function. It will need to be realistic and proportionate, and the Panel recommends that UNHCR takes a phased and gradual approach to reaching the target.

If the next Evaluation Policy is endorsed by the ExCom, as the Panel recommends, as well as being approved by the High Commissioner, the target percentage will give visibility to the funding of the evaluation function. The IAOC should also routinely review and comment on

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[2] Joint Inspection Unit, 2014, Analysis of the Evaluation Function in the United Nations System. P.29

the extent to which UNHCR is meeting this commitment; Member States should review the IAOC's reports and respond to management if they are not being adhered to.

Recommendation 3: The Panel recommends that the next Evaluation Policy identifies a five-year target percentage of total UNHCR expenditure dedicated to the evaluation function, broken down into annual increments. This target should be set at a level that allows UNHCR to establish a fully operational evaluation function (i.e., centralized and decentralized evaluations).

(For: Evaluation Service, Senior Management, IAOC, Member States)

HUMAN RESOURCES

The Evaluation Policy states that at least 50 per cent of positions in the Evaluation Service should be externally recruited evaluation experts, and 50 percent staff "rotating" into the Service from other UNHCR units. The Panel endorses this approach and recommends that it continues. The Panel considers that the evaluation function continues to need to combine specialist expertise with appropriately skilled staff who have organizational knowledge of UNHCR. The Panel notes that UNHCR's Division of Human Resources is reviewing the number of expert posts in different functions, aiming to standardise criteria for these posts across the organisation.

Recommendation 4: The Panel recommends that the next Evaluation Policy extends the current 50% specialist/50% rotational staffing model, and that UNHCR continues to facilitate its implementation.

(For: Evaluation Service, Division of Human Resources Department)

WORK PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION

The Panel noted in the body of the report that the Evaluation Service's work planning is now more strategic than it has ever been but there are ways it could still be strengthened. The Panel considers that the draft 2021-2022 plan is likely to be overambitious given both the Evaluation Service's current capacity and its immediate aim to build and support the decentralized evaluation system. To be able to deliver quality processes and outcomes, the Evaluation Service will likely need to reduce the number of evaluations it plans to complete. It will be necessary to balance delivering high quality centralized evaluations whilst simultaneously supporting the decentralized evaluation system. The Evaluation Service can also take steps to ensure its coverage meets UNHCR's strategic needs by first mapping the organisation's policy universe and using this to define what constitutes an appropriate level of evaluation coverage.

Recommendation 5: The Panel recommends the Evaluation Service, in collaboration with management, takes the following steps to strengthen evaluation planning:

5.1) It is recommended that the Evaluation Service build in a structured consultative process to define coverage. This would include discussions with management and

oversight bodies, and the Evaluation Service will need to balance demand with its capacity to deliver.

5.2) Consistently invest in the planning and scoping of centralized evaluations, so the evaluation is sequenced with key decision-making processes (e.g. the design of a new policy or approach) and deliver findings to support them.

5.3) Define the coverage norms for various kinds of evaluation so that coverage plans best meet the strategic needs of UNHCR. To do this, in turn, the Evaluation Service will need to:

> *a) Map out the UNHCR policy universe (which appears very broad) and then define what, within this, constitutes an appropriate level of evaluation coverage.*

> *b) For strategic/thematic evaluations conduct a consultative review of priorities together with UNHCR management to inform the rolling workplan.*

> *c) Determine appropriate coverage and a consistent methodological approach for Country Strategy Evaluations considering the shift to multi-year country programmes.*

> *d) Ensure appropriately balanced coverage for evaluations of L3 responses taking account other evaluations (namely, country programme evaluation coverage/ protracted emergencies/multi-country emergencies/ inter agency humanitarian evaluations) and audits.*

5.4) Consider integrating an approach to work planning at the centralized level that prioritises evaluands which will add the most strategic value to the organisation. Criteria to consider include: value, profile, or whether there is an intention to scale up replicate a novel approach. In time, the Evaluation Service could also encourage Regional Bureaux and country offices to pursue the same approach for decentralized evaluations.

5.5) Consider how the Evaluation Service wants UNHCR to engage with system-wide evaluations and UNSDCF evaluations. Engagement will need to be factored into the centralized evaluation workplan, and guidance given for how regional and country operations should engage, given capacity requirements and availability.

5.6) Clarify the budget norms for various kinds of decentralized evaluations. This would help units that are considering commissioning different kinds of decentralized evaluations to budget appropriately from the outset.

> *(For: Evaluation Service)*

EVALUATION MANAGEMENT, CONDUCT AND TYPE

The Panel considers that the Evaluation Service can take steps to further enhance the credibility and utility of centralized evaluations – particularly to help meet demand for timely evaluation findings. These measures could help the Evaluation Service build demand for evaluation within UNHCR.

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Management commented that most of the time mandatory L3 emergency evaluations are completed after the emergency phase and therefore units managing emergencies may not find them of immediate value.[3] However, the Panel observes that many emergencies will turn into a protracted event, so these evaluations are likely to be useful for informing long-term protracted interventions and to feed into corporate level strategy. As noted under work planning, there is a need to ensure appropriately balanced coverage for evaluations of L3 responses in light of Country Strategy Evaluation coverage/multi-country emergencies/ inter agency humanitarian evaluations, and considering audit requirements - to avoid overburdening operations.

Notwithstanding the Evaluation Service's use of formative evaluations, the Panel heard demand for more rapid feedback from evaluations. The Evaluation Service may want to consider experimenting with rapid evaluations:

Recommendation 6: To enhance the credibility and utility of evaluations the Panel recommends the Evaluation Service consider how it can:

> *6.1) Further strengthen the quality of engagement with the evaluand throughout the evaluation process, and through key touch points, to enhance the uptake and use of evaluations.*

> *6.2) Seek to reduce the time taken to undertake centralized evaluations – from start to finish – to enhance the relevance of evaluation findings; and take steps to ensure the timely completion of evaluations – in line with agreed timelines - so they do feed into the decision points anticipated at the planning stage.*

> *6.3) Continue to carefully safeguard the quality of evaluations, given that weaker evaluations undermine the perception of utility and cause reputational damage.*

> *6.4) To better meet demand for strategic learning and faster feedback loops the Panel recommends the Evaluation Service:*

>> *a) Consider deploying more developmental and formative evaluations.*

>> *b) Consider conducting rapid evaluations when faster feedback is necessary. These will require "lighter and faster" methodologies and would emphasise learning over accountability.*

DEVELOPING THE DECENTRALIZED EVALUATION SYSTEM

The Panel fully endorses the Evaluation Service's commitment to establish an effective decentralized evaluation function – aligning evaluation with UNHCR's ongoing regionalisation

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[3] "Evaluation of a Level 3 refugee emergency situation shall be conducted within 18 months or earlier as may be requested by the High Commissioner, and commissioned and managed by the Evaluation Service", Evaluation Policy, p.4.

and decentralisation reforms. It is also the case that, decentralized evaluations should help inform UNHCR how its various organizational changes are working in practice, and help it modify its approach.

The Panel considered what can realistically be achieved for the next 4-5 years – basing its judgement on the broader maturity of the organisation in terms of RBM, learning, evidence generation and the pace of decentralisation, and what the drivers for accountability and learning are at the country and regional level. As with its broader strategy, the Evaluation Service is clearly going in the right direction, but the Panel considers that it needs to invest more in ensuring stronger support systems are in place before coverage expands in the way envisaged by the new RBM guidance. Specifically, if country offices begin to commission at least one decentralized evaluation every policy cycle – as the new RBM guidance states – the Evaluation Service will need to have established stronger support systems in headquarters and Regional Bureaux.

There is currently very little capacity to manage decentralized evaluations at country office level and this is unlikely to change in the next couple of years. Regional Bureaux and country offices are overwhelmed by UNHCR's current reforms, leaving little bandwidth or spare capacity. The Panel's interviews indicate that there is also limited interest in evaluation at country level. Thus, building interest and demand is one of the Evaluation Service's primary challenges. If the new (centralised) Country Strategy Evaluations are implemented in such a way as to deliver real value to country offices, this could begin to stimulate interest and demand. But they will need careful management to deliver this. In terms of tactics, therefore, the Panel recommends that the Evaluation Service prioritises ensuring Country Strategy Evaluations are high quality and impactful.

The Panel thus recommends that the Evaluation Service reviews its approach. It may help if the Evaluation Service sets out how it plans to deliver the decentralized evaluation function in a short strategy document, developed collaboratively, that sets out the governance of the decentralized evaluation function, expectations and roles and responsibilities of all parties, and a phased approach to roll-out. The Evaluation Service could draw lessons from WFP and UNICEF about how they built their decentralized evaluation systems. There is also a UNEG working group on supporting decentralized evaluation, which may also be able to provide useful guidance.

Currently Regional Senior Evaluation Officers are perceived by Regional Bureaux to be accountable to the Evaluation Service and not to the Bureau they are posted to. Officially the positions are supposed to be simultaneously part of the centralized evaluation service and the decentralized evaluation function. The Panel considers this arrangement is not optimal: it prevents Regional Bureaux from developing ownership and interest in evaluation. Regional Bureaux perceive these positions as outposted headquarters staff whose job it is to service the needs of the Evaluation Service rather than the Regional Bureau.

The Evaluation Service has deployed Senior Regional Evaluation Officers to three of the seven Regional Bureaux. It seeks to support the other Regional Bureaux with Evaluation Service staff from Geneva. Staff based in the Regional Bureaux will build regional capacity in and ownership

of evaluation more effectively than Geneva-based staff could. The Panel therefore encourages UNHCR to seek to add Senior Regional Evaluation Officer to all remaining Regional Bureaux.

The Panel makes the following specific comments and recommendations:

Recommendation 7: To further develop the decentralized evaluation function, the Panel recommends the Evaluation Service considers the following:

> *7.1) The Panel recommends the Evaluation Service sets out the governance of the decentralized evaluation function, and expectations and roles and responsibilities of all parties, and a phased approach to roll-out in a short strategy document – that is developed in consultation with senior managers.*

> *7.2) The Evaluation Service needs to consider how it can support the development of the decentralized evaluation function from Geneva more intensively. Currently, only one officer, the de facto deputy, is responsible for developing the support systems and guidance to establish the decentralized evaluation function. The Panel considers this inadequate.*

> *7.3) To build regional ownership of evaluation the Panel recommends that all Senior Regional Evaluation Officers report to the Regional Director/Deputy Regional Director, with a 'dotted' technical reporting line to the Evaluation Service. This is an arrangement adopted by most other UN agencies with regional evaluation experts.*

> *7.4) UNHCR will more effectively develop an evaluation culture and practices outside Geneva if there is dedicated support in all Regional Bureaux: the Panel recommends UNHCR deploys Senior Regional Evaluation Officer in all the Regional Bureaux.*

> *7.5) If the Evaluation Service acts upon recommendation 7.3, Regional Senior Evaluation Officers can no longer be considered part of the central Evaluation Service. This in turn has implications for how UNHCR conducts Country Strategy Evaluations. Two options are possible:*

>> *a) Senior Regional Evaluation Officers could continue to manage Country Strategy Evaluations if they are reclassified as decentralized evaluations. This would be appropriate even if they report to the Regional Bureau rather than the Evaluation Service (in line with UNICEF practice) provided that these officers can act with independence.*

>> *OR*

>> *b) Senior Regional Evaluation Officers focus on decentralized evaluation support, promotion of evaluation uptake, and learning, and Country Strategic Plan evaluations are managed be the Evaluation Service from Geneva.*

> *7.6) The Evaluation Service needs to consider how to ringfence funds for decentralized evaluations – to ensure that a lack of finance does not prevent Regional Bureaux or country offices from commissioning evaluations. The Panel recommends that the Evaluation Service consider whether it wants to establish a special facility to*

complement country office funds for decentralized evaluations – with something like the equivalent of WFP's Contingency Evaluation Fund.

7.7) The Panel recommends that the Evaluation Service should commission a consultant to review the implementation of its strategy to establish the decentralized evaluation function after two to three years to inform course correction. This would provide the Evaluation Service with information to adapt its strategy, if necessary.

(For: Evaluation Service, Senior Management, Regional Bureaux Directors)

STRENGTHENING RELATIONS WITH GOVERNING BODIES AND SEEKING GOVERNING BODY ENDORSEMENT FOR UNHCR'S NEXT EVALUATION POLICY

The Panel considers the Evaluation Service has an opportunity to strengthen its engagement with UNHCR's Member States. The Evaluation Service can engage more systematically to cultivate Member States' interest in learning from evaluations – asking them, in turn, to encourage UNHCR's management to drive this approach through the organisation.

The Panel considers that, rather than seeking formal sessions in annual ExCom meetings, the Evaluation Service could organise regular informal meetings or briefings on specific topics to share learning from related evaluations.

The Panel considers that the next Evaluation Policy should be submitted to and be endorsed by ExCom to give the Policy the support of the Governing Board. This would ensure that the changes recommended by the Panel – relating largely to independence and budget – are given a measure of independence from the management function.

Recommendation 8: The Panel recommends that the Evaluation Service:

8.1) regularly brief interested Member States on findings from key products (from evaluations to syntheses) in informal briefings. The Panel also encourages Member States to engage with the Evaluation Service and to consider how to encourage UNHCR management to adopt learning from evaluations.

8.2) submits the next Evaluation Policy for the formal endorsement of the Executive Committee.

(For the Senior Management, Evaluation Service, Member States)

OVERSIGHT FUNCTIONS: AUDIT AND THE INDEPENDENT AUDIT AND OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE

The Panel's interviews indicate there is continuing potential for overlap between OIOS's country operation performance audits and the Evaluation Service Country Strategy Evaluations. The Panel encourages OIOS and the Evaluation Service to continue to liaise closely to coordinate their work so as avoid duplication and to minimise the burden on

operations, with the facilitation of the Inspector General if necessary. The Panel notes that evaluations provide a distinct perspective all forms of audit, including performance audits. Evaluations assess the logic underpinning approaches, helping operations to question their assumptions and modify their approach.

As noted in the body of the report, the Independent Audit and Oversight Committee (IAOC) has played a valuable role in guiding the evolution of UNHCR's evaluation function over the last seven years. In early 2019 the ToR and criteria for membership of the Independent Audit and Oversight were revised to include a requirement for all members "to the extent possible, have experience" in evaluation.[4] This is welcome but the Panel considers that it is critical that the Committee can devote specialist expertise to reviewing how the evaluation function is developing in the coming few years. The Committee could have greater influence over the evolution of the function if it included an evaluation specialist with a mandate to review the function in more detail. The Peer Review therefore recommends that the IAOC permanently adds an evaluation specialist to its membership – for example, an individual who has played a senior role in the evaluation function of another UN function. This would require its Committee's ToR to be revised again.

Recommendation 9: The Panel recommends a senior evaluation specialist is added as a permanent member of the Independent Audit and Oversight Committee (e.g., an individual who held a senior role in the evaluation function of another UN function).

(For: Member States, Senior Management, IAOC Chair)

ACCOUNTABILITY AND THE EVALUATION FUNCTION

The Panel notes that accountability is viewed in relatively negative terms in some parts of the organisation. Evaluation is sometimes associated with this. The Panel considers that the Evaluation Service could try to counter negative connotations by showing how accountability systems can strengthen the organisation. By independently evidencing effective performance, evaluations can help build the support of Member States.

In terms of following up the impact of how agreed recommendations are implemented, the Panel endorses the Evaluation Service's intention to track what action was taken after a management response was agreed – in a light touch way. The Evaluation Service is experimenting with how best to do this after 12 months, but the Panel also recommends that the Evaluation Service experiments with following up on the second- and third-year anniversaries to track evaluation follow-up. This exercise can contribute lessons both to the Evaluation Service, on how to ensure recommendations gain traction, but also to the evaluand – by encouraging them to reflect on how they are adapting their practice.

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[4] See UNHCR (2011) Establishment of an Independent Audit and Oversight Committee, 51st Standing Committee Meeting and UNHCR (2011) Establishment of an Independent Audit and Oversight Committee, 51st Standing Committee Meeting.

Recommendation 10: The Panel recommends that the Evaluation Service considers following up the implementation of agreed evaluation recommendations on the second- and third-year anniversaries, as a way of driving both accountability and learning.

(For: Evaluation Service)

1. INTRODUCTION

ABOUT THE PEER REVIEW

This Peer Review of UNHCR's evaluation function was conducted under the provisions contained in the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) Framework for Professional Peer Reviews of the Evaluation Function of UN organizations and the OECD DAC. It is the first Peer Review of UNHCR's evaluation function and was conducted at the request of UNHCR, and fulfils a commitment to conduct a Peer Review in 2021 made in the Evaluation Policy. The Peer Review Panel comprised six members:

- Andrea Cook, Panel Chair, Director of Evaluation, World Food Programme
- Demetra Arapakos, Chief of Section, Inspection and Evaluation Division, UN Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS/IED)
- Nanna Hvidt, Director of Evaluation, Learning & Quality (ELQ), Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- Susan Kyle, Program Officer for UNHCR, Office of Multilateral Coordination and External Relations (MCE), Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM), Department of State
- Antoine Ouellet-Drouin, former Head of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation at the International Committee of the Red Cross in Geneva.
- Johan Schaar, Associate Senior Fellow with the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), Chair of ALNAP, vice chair of the Expert Group for Aid Studies under the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs

Daniel Arghiros was the Senior Evaluation Consultant to the Panel.

The Panel would like to thank the Head of the Evaluation Service, the Evaluation Service team and UNHCR for facilitating and engaging with the review in such a collaborative way. The Panel would also like to thank all those to whom they spoke for their open and frank contributions.

The views expressed in this report are those of the members of the Peer Review Panel in their individual capacities.

PURPOSE AND SCOPE

The review was guided by the central question in the Terms of Reference (ToR), namely, to assess whether UNHCR's "evaluation policy, evaluation function and its evaluation products are independent, credible and useful for learning and accountability purposes". In line with the ToR the Peer Review also focuses on the quality of use and follow up of evaluations across the organisation; and their contribution to accountability, learning and improvement.

The Peer Review provides recommendations to UNHCR senior leadership and its governing bodies, the Standing Committee and Executive Committee (ExCom), as well as staff of the Evaluation Service, Regional Bureaux and country offices. The review covers the entire evaluation system comprising both the central and decentralized evaluation functions. [1] It assesses the role and strategic positioning of financial and human resourcing, evaluation planning, evaluation use, and quality assurance mechanisms. The review focuses on the period 2016 to the end of 2020.

PEER REVIEW APPROACH, PROCESS AND LIMITATIONS

The review was guided by the three core criteria, defined in the UNEG Norms and Standards for Evaluation, that need to be satisfied for evaluation functions and products to be considered of high quality: i) the independence of evaluations and of the evaluation system, ii) the credibility of evaluations and iii) the utility of evaluations.

The Peer Review Panel was formed and agreed the Terms of Reference in late 2020. The external consultant was recruited in December 2020. The consultant conducted remote interviews with UNHCR staff in February and March 2021. Based on interviews, an extensive literature review and a Self-Assessment produced by the Evaluation Service, the consultant produced a Preliminary Assessment document. Building on the observations in the Preliminary Assessment, the Panel then held remote meetings between 19 and 30 April 2021. The Panel met a broad range of stakeholders. This included UNHCR senior managers from Departments, Divisions and Regional Bureaux, members of the ExCom, and the Chair of the Independent Audit and Oversight Committee (see Annex 2 for a full list of interlocutors).

To prepare for this Peer Review, the Evaluation Service produced a self-assessment report against UNEG Norms and Standards. The framework analyses the level of maturity of the evaluation function and was developed by the UN Evaluation Group in 2019. The Panel considers the Evaluation Service's self-assessment is a helpful reflection of UNHCR's evaluation practice. This report draws on evidence and analysis from all these inputs.

Due to Covid-19 travel restrictions the entire assessment was conducted remotely. Possibly because all involved were used to working virtually, the Panel felt that it achieved a similar quality of engagement and understanding as would be achieved from a face-to-face mission. The Panel also held a peer exchange meeting with the Evaluation Service staff, in which the Panel shared their experience on issues the Evaluation Service prioritised. UNHCR also established a reference group comprising senior staff from different parts of the organisation for the Peer Review: the reference group commented on the draft report.

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[1] A note on terminology: the terms 'central evaluation function' and the 'decentralized evaluation function' are used solely to differentiate between the levels being discussed. In practice there is just one encompassing evaluation function in UNHCR.

From the broad range of issues set out in the Peer Review Terms of Reference the Panel chose to focus on a subset considered of the greatest future strategic importance for the evaluation function.

The report first outlines the key features of the UNHCR evaluation function then assesses the systems in place that support the independence, credibility, and utility of the evaluation function. The concluding section sets out how the Panel considers the evaluation function can be enhanced: it brings together key findings and recommendations the Panel considers UNHCR should take forward.

ASSESSMENT OVERVIEW

The Evaluation Service is in practice a very young evaluation service. Before 2016, UNHCR had a joint Policy Development and Evaluation Service. Its capacity and policies to conduct centralized evaluations were relatively undeveloped. UNHCR's Evaluation Policy establishing a professional evaluation service was approved in October 2016 but the first dedicated Evaluation Head assumed her post in June 2017.

The Panel considers that the evaluation function in UNHCR has made impressive progress in the last few years, and it is clearly continuing to develop in the right direction. Since 2016, as well as trying to establish the utility of the Service, it has focused on strengthening the centralized evaluation function and on establishing the decentralized evaluation function. It has focused on ensuring systems and standards are in place to strengthen the quality of evaluations, whilst also creating value for the organisation in terms of both learning and accountability. In terms of utility, there is evidence that evaluations have fed into new strategies at an organizational level – and have had an impact on policies and programmes. Broadly, the fundamentals needed for a robust centralized evaluation function are either in place or there is a plan to put them in place. The Evaluation Service has an adequate degree of independence; it also has a sound Policy and Strategy - which whilst in need of updating, set out the parameters of the evaluation function. In terms of resources funds have been adequate but will need to expand as the function matures. Likewise, the Evaluation Service has an appropriate mix and number of staff for present needs, and it is important that it continues to be able to recruit a mix of specialist and rotational staff. However, as UNHCR develops the function this staffing need is likely to increase. The Evaluation Service is aligning the Service to UNHCR's regionalisation and decentralisation reforms and is building capacity to support decentralized evaluations – posting evaluation officers to three of UNHCR's Regional Bureaux. This work is still in its early stages.

In the last section of the report the Panel makes a series of detailed recommendations relating to how the evaluation function can be further developed. The Panel has one overarching reflection that applies to many of its observations: to successfully establish the evaluation function, there needs to be greater engagement between management and the Evaluation Service. Stronger engagement is needed to unlock institutional ownership of evaluation, which the Panel currently considers weak, and to build an evaluation culture. It is needed in

the identification of centralized evaluations, and it is needed to underpin the development of UNHCR's decentralized evaluation system. The Panel considers there also needs to be stronger institutional engagement and buy-in for the Evaluation Service's plans to expand both centralized and decentralized evaluation services. A stronger evaluation culture would help UNHCR ensure it is delivering effective programmes, inform its strategic decision-making, and give its donors assurance that their funding is delivering the intended results.

UNHCR INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT

UNHCR is establishing the evaluation function during a time of fundamental change and reform in the organisation. It has had to ensure that what it is building is attuned to changing organisational structures and to new core businesses processes, as well as an entirely new results-based management system. UNHCR's ways of working are in flux and this has implications for the appetite and capacity to absorb further change at all levels of the organisation.

About UNHCR

Mission and mandate: UNHCR was created in 1950, during the aftermath of the Second World War, to help Europeans refugees. Its mandate is defined by the 1950 UNHCR Statute. The basis of UNHCR's work is the 1951 Refugee Convention (ratified by 145 state parties). UNHCR serves as the guardian of the 1951 Convention and its 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees. Its core principle is that refugees should not be returned to a country where they face serious threats to their lives or their freedom. UNHCR's mandate extends to statelessness and supporting internally displaced people.

Governance: UNHCR is governed by the United Nations (UN) General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). The UNHCR Executive Committee, which meets annually in Geneva, approves the agency's biennial programmes and the budget. Between plenary sessions, a Standing Committee meets to take forward the Executive Committee's work. There are three meetings a year with each focusing on Operations, Management or Finance. The High Commissioner is appointed by the UN General Assembly and is responsible for the direction and control of UNHCR; he or she serves a five-year term. The current High Commissioner was appointed in January 2016. His mandate has been extended by 2.5 years.

Organisational structure: Headquartered in Geneva, as of May 2020 UNHCR had 17,324 national and international staff working in 135 countries. The organisation's structure is decentralised, with 90% of its staff based in field locations. Seven Regional Bureaux, which were moved out of headquarters in late 2019 and in 2020, liaise between UNHCR's Country Offices and headquarters.

Strategy: UNHCR's core business is working with governments to ensure that the 1951 Convention is honoured, by providing protection and pursuing solutions for refugees and the internally displaced and working to prevent and reduce statelessness. In mid-2020, the total population of concern to UNHCR stood at 79.5 million people.

Activities: UNHCR provides a range of services under the broad umbrella of the protection of persons of concern. It co-ordinates refugee responses and, within a global "cluster system", leads or co-leads the Protection, Shelter, and Camp Co-ordination and Camp Management Clusters for conflict induced internal displacement. It provides basic services such as health, livelihoods, shelter, water and sanitation as well as camp management. UNHCR also engages in advocacy; refugee status determination; comprehensive solutions, including voluntary repatriation, resettlement and local integration; and community protection; and it works to end statelessness.

Finances: UNHCR received $5.224 billion in 2020, but had a funding gap of $3.908 billion. 85% of its funds were voluntary contributions from governments and the EU, just 1% (£40m) was from the UN regular budget.

Sources[2]

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[2] UNHCR - Figures at a Glance, UNHCR Funding Update as at 31 December 2020, MOPAN, 2019, 2017-18 Assessments: Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Report

COMMITMENT TO SUPPORTING THE GLOBAL COMPACT ON REFUGEES.

Within the last two years UNHCR has adopted a role facilitating a new global approach to refugees. This complements and adds to its pre-existing mandate. Following the 2016 New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants and the development of the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF), UNHCR was tasked with developing a "global compact on refugees" (the "Global Compact"). The High Commissioner proposed the text of the Global Compact on Refugees and it was approved by the UN General Assembly in December 2018.

One of the key principles of the Global Compact on Refugees is burden-sharing and UNHCR's increasing its emphasis on partnership with governments and development actors.

At the same time, the New York Declaration set in motion a process for the negotiation of a separate Global Compact to support safe, regular and orderly migration, which has now been adopted.

As a new framework, the Global Compact on Refugees challenges the way UNHCR works. It also gives UNHCR a whole new set of reporting and operational responsibilities – both at headquarters and in the field - in addition to its existing mandate.

UNHCR'S REGIONALIZATION AND DECENTRALIZATION REFORMS

In late 2019 UNHCR began to change its structures to place capacities, authorities, and resources closer to the field and to promote greater flexibility and agility. UNHCR's Bureaux were moved from Geneva to their respective regions, and two additional African Bureaux were created to provide greater coverage in Africa.

The reform process also involves increasingly decentralising expertise, structures and functions, decision-making and resources to both Regional Bureaux and country offices. At the time of the Peer Review an internal review was underway to assess the process, and how relations between Regional Bureaux HQ Divisions and country offices and entities (including the Evaluation Service) were evolving.

The Regional Bureaux are seen as part of field operations rather than HQ. Regional Bureaux directors have a lot of autonomy, and this affects how the Evaluation Service needs to go about building ownership for evaluation outside headquarters.

BUSINESS TRANSFORMATION,

At the same time as changing its organisational structures, UNHCR has reorganised its operational systems and structures, UNHCR has been driving a wide-ranging change management process. This aims to align UNHCR's operating model to the ambitions of its strategic plan (called "Strategic Directions"). The plan entails restructuring entities in

headquarters to ensure the organisation is fit for purpose and simplifying the policy architecture to make it more coherent.[3]

RESULTS-BASED MANAGEMENT (RBM)

The MOPAN assessment of 2017-2018 considered that UNHCR needed to improve coherence between its strategic vision and corporate results. To address this UNHCR is revising its entire RBM approach. In 2019 the Division of Strategic Planning and Results (DSPR) was established to strengthen UNHCRs programming, reporting, planning, budgeting, and partner management. The Division of Strategic Planning and Results also leads in establishing the organization's performance monitoring and results management system. The former head of the Evaluation Service is director of this new Division.

The Evaluation Service engages closely with the new Division and has supported the roll-out of the results-based management system, ensuring that evaluation plays a key role at various stages of the programme cycle. The new RBM system integrates evaluation as part of the programming and strategic planning cycles of the organization. Operations must now identify priorities for creating results evidence. They are asked to plan for all evaluations foreseen during a strategy period and to sequence and cost them in resource and management plans.[4] To date all the Evaluation Service staff, including Regional Senior Evaluation Officers, supported training in the RBM system for country offices.

The Panel notes that as UNHCR rolls out its new RBM policy, there is strong potential for synergies between the RBM system and evaluation. Together monitoring and evaluation can help reinforce learning and accountability in the organisation – and help encourage managers to review their operational assumptions as well as results.

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[3] MOPAN, February 2019, 2017-18 Assessments: Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Report, p.14.

[4] UNHCR, January 2021, COMPASS Guidance: Strategic Planning – Developing a monitoring and evaluation plan.

2. UNHCR'S EVALUATION FUNCTION

EVOLUTION AND BACKGROUND

The following section sets out the development and status of UNHCR's evaluation function, focusing on the period since the introduction of the October 2016 Evaluation Policy, which replaced a 2010 policy.

Before the current Policy created the Evaluation Service, UNHCR's evaluation function was managed by a unit with a dual mandate, the 'Policy Development and Evaluation Service' (PDES). It supported research and policy advice/development as well as conducting evaluations. It was staffed mostly by "rotational" staff from within UNHCR. In practice few centralized and decentralized evaluations were conducted. Reports were published but management responses were not mandatory or published.

PREVIOUS ASSESSMENTS

UNHCR's evaluation function has been subject to several independent reviews in the last seven years – though not a Peer Review. The 2014 JIU report on the evaluation functions of all UN bodies placed UNHCR's evaluation function in its relatively low "Level 2" category. UNHCR's evaluation function was judged as: "Being developed and ad hoc".[5]

The UN Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) conducted a focused review of UNHCR's evaluation capacity in 2013. It noted that the Policy Development and Evaluation Service "does not adequately articulate a clear and distinct role for the function nor link evaluation explicitly to the mandates, goals and strategic priorities of UNHCR" and that resources for evaluation were "low". It stated that the evaluation function "does not fully meet the norms and standards of the United Nations Evaluation Group for evaluation independence, credibility and utility", noting it has "limited independence" because of its dual role and "dual reporting lines to the High Commissioner and Deputy High Commissioner".[6] Other assessments reached similar conclusions.[7]

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[5] Joint Inspection Unit (2014), Analysis of the Evaluation Function in the United Nations System. Joint Inspection Unit, Geneva, p.78

[6] OIOS (2013) Review of the evaluation capacity of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, p.2

[7] The Evaluation Service's 2018 Evaluation Strategy noted that: "the Board of Auditors (BoA), the Independent Audit and Oversight Committee (IAOC), the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) and the Office of Internal Oversight Services/Inspection and Evaluation Division (OIOS/IED)" had all identified a "need for enhancing the use of evaluations in the organization and to build stronger capacity at all levels of the organizations, and greater investment in and commitment to evaluation". UNHCR (2018) Evaluation Service Strategy 2018-2022, p2.

The 2018 MOPAN report (Key Performance indicator 8) rated UNHCR as satisfactory on evaluation: "Overall, UNHCR's evaluation function is improving, although it does not yet meet all the required standards of the UN system."[8] It also noted that "The evaluation function is not fully independent structurally, functionally, or in budget" – a statement that is discussed in the section below on independence.

THE 2016 EVALUATION POLICY

In October 2016, the High Commissioner issued UNHCR's revised evaluation policy, establishing a dedicated Evaluation Service reporting directly to him. The policy addressed many of the gaps in policy or areas of weakness identified by previous assessments. Subsequently, the first Head of the Evaluation Service was recruited externally and took her position in June 2017.

The Policy highlights the importance of having an evaluation function that is independent from management functions. This conflation was behind the decision to restructure the Policy Development and Evaluation Service into a dedicated Evaluation Service.

The Head of the Evaluation Service reports directly to the High Commissioner. The policy requires the Head of the Evaluation Service to submit annual workplans, together with required resources, for the High Commissioner's approval. In practice these are two separate processes. The work plan is discussed with the High Commissioner, but budgeting takes place in the second quarter of each year with the rest of the organization.

The Policy defines two levels of evaluations, centralized and decentralized:

i) **centralized evaluations**, commissioned and managed by the Evaluation Service, primarily focusing on policies, strategies, programmes and themes of corporate significance at the global, strategic and institutional levels, as well as on level-3 refugee emergency operations;

ii) **decentralized evaluations**, commissioned and managed by relevant UNHCR bureaux, divisions and country offices, focusing on activities, themes, operational areas, and programmes at the regional or country level.

The Policy explicitly incorporates the evaluation principles of independence, impartiality, credibility and utility, and reflects United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) "Norms and standards for evaluation" as issued in June 2016.[9]

The Policy's human resource provision was intended to ensure that the Evaluation Service had the professional skills to manage evaluations. It stipulates that at least 50 per cent of the positions in the Evaluation Service should be filled by externally recruited evaluation experts (this is the same as WFP's current policy). UNHCR recruited external evaluation specialists

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[8] MOPAN (2019), p40

[9] UNEG (2016/2017) Norms and Standards for Evaluation

under this new policy (though internal candidates are still sought before external applicants for expert posts). All expert posts, including that of the Head of the Evaluation Service, are for a fixed term, renewable. There is no time limit placed on the tenure of the Head.[10]

The 2016 Evaluation Policy made it mandatory for UNHCR to publish all evaluations online, and for management responses to be prepared and published with each evaluation. It also made it mandatory for all evaluations to be conducted by external contractors rather than by UNHCR staff. The Evaluation Policy introduces a requirement to quality-assure all evaluation processes and products (for both centralized and decentralized evaluations). The Evaluation Service issued "pilot" quality assurance guidelines in November 2016[11] and intends to update this guidance in 2021. It contracted an external quality review facility in 2020.

EVALUATION STRATEGY

To operationalise the Policy the Evaluation Service developed a five-year Evaluation Strategy (2018 to 2022).[12] It sets out the vision in which "the use of evaluative evidence is normal and habitual in designing, targeting and delivering strategies, policies, and programmes…." It has a theory of change "focused on increasing both demand and supply of evaluations".[13]

The strategy sets out six steps for achieving the theory of change and states that the approach to implementing UNHCR's evaluation policy consists of both promoting an evaluative culture and ensuring accountability for the effective use of funds. The Strategy commits the Evaluation Service to taking a collaborative approach to evaluation topic selection, while maintaining its structural independence. The Strategy also sets out the Evaluation Service's workstream pillars in terms of: coverage, utility, capacity, and linkages. The Evaluation Service reports on these workstreams in each annual report to the Executive Committee.

The Evaluation Service appears to have pivoted effectively to ensure it adapted to the challenges created by COVID-19. The Evaluation Service reviewed what the COVID-19 crisis meant in terms of evidence needs to help UNHCR better respond to the crisis, and assessed the implications for the evaluation function more broadly. Annex 4 sets out the Evaluation Service's response in detail.

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[10] In the response to the first draft of the Preliminary Assessment the Head commented that the Evaluation Policy's stated aim that "UNHCR personnel managing centralised evaluations must not have been, nor be expected to be in the near future, directly responsible for the policy setting, design or management of the subject being evaluated" is in contradiction with the policy's provision that the Evaluation Service team is comprised of mixed rotational and expert posts.

[11] UNHCR (2016) Pilot Guidance on Evaluation Quality Assurance, November 2016

[12] UNHCR (2018) Evaluation Service Strategy 2018-2022

[13] To elaborate: "The aim is to build positive evaluation practice across the organization in undertaking and using evaluative evidence more systematically; raising awareness and stimulating demand for more reflective and evaluative analysis; and, building buy-in, capacity and ownership for evaluation." Evaluation Service Strategy.

EVALUATION PLANNING AND COVERAGE

UNHCR's evaluation planning and coverage have significantly improved since 2016. The selection of topics for centralized evaluations is more strategic and coverage has increased markedly. The Evaluation Service has not yet developed coverage norms for the different kinds of centralized evaluations (apart from L3 responses) in the policy or strategy.

The Evaluation Service has more than quadrupled the number of evaluations since 2016. In 2016 UNHCR published two centralized and two decentralized evaluations – far below what would be expected for an agency of UNHCR's size – rising to 11 and 9 respectively in 2020.

Year (July to June)	Centralized evaluations	Decentralized evaluations
2016-2017	2	2
2017-2018	4	5
2018-2019	6	6
2019-2020	11	9

Sources.[14]

In 2020, the Evaluation Service mapped the geographic coverage of evaluations conducted over the past five years showing that almost half of UNHCR's operations have been evaluated during the period.[15] It notes that over 60 countries have been subject to evaluations and evaluation case studies over the period. UNHCR publishes planned and ongoing evaluations on the UNHCR's website and lists them in the Evaluation Service's reports to the Executive Committee.

The Evaluation Service currently produces rolling two-year workplans (they were annual prior to 2020). These set out the principles underpinning the choice of evaluations and the priorities, listing the evaluations to be undertaken.[16] In its self-assessment the Evaluation Service considers its evaluation planning could be strengthened, noting that "Evaluations are planned but the selection criteria are unclear and/or not systematically applied" (Issue 40). The Head of the Evaluation Service developed a draft concept note outlining a more reflexive and thorough process for developing Evaluation Plans.[17] It addresses the process for

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[14] 2017 to 2020: Evaluation Service Annual Reports to the Executive Committee; the figure for 2016-2017 is from the 2020 report as the Evaluation Service's 2015/16 and 2016/17 Annual Reports do not state how many evaluations were competed.

[15] UNHCR (2020) Report on Evaluation, ExCom 71th Session P.3

[16] See for example UNHCR (2020) UNHCR Evaluation Plan 2020/21 – Responding to covid-19 June, 2020

[17] UNHCR (2021) Concept note - preparing for evaluation plan 2021-22 draft

developing both centralized evaluation plans and rolling plans for decentralized regional and country level evaluations.

The Evaluation Service is focusing increasingly on evaluations that reflect on UNHCR's corporate performance. The MOPAN study noted that up to 2017 "Despite recent investment, UNHCR's evaluation function has produced as yet few corporate-level evaluations, with most relating to individual projects or programmes."[18] Recent published evaluations and the 2020-21 and draft 2021-22 workplans show that the Evaluation Service has or intends to conduct more corporate-level evaluations. [19] This MOPAN observation would therefore not be justified now.

The Evaluation Service asked the Panel to suggest how evaluation planning can be further strengthened, and the Panel makes a series of recommendations in section 7.2.

TYPES OF EVALUATION

The Evaluation Service conducts several types of evaluations. The table below is drawn from the Evaluation Service's 2021 decentralized evaluation guidance and shows which evaluations are centralised, decentralised and which can be either. It also includes the newer category of Country Strategy Evaluations, which are currently considered centralized evaluations.

CENTRALIZED EVALUATIONS (the Evaluation Service leads)[20]

Object of evaluation	Definition	Primary audience
Global Strategic or Thematic Evaluation (GSE)	Addresses an organization-wide policy, strategy, framework or thematic area of corporate significance to UNHCR. May also evaluate institutional practices, systems and processes related to organizational effectiveness and efficiency; or a function or service within UNHCR. Cuts across geographies (one, several or all regions) Addresses an area of significant investment or strategic importance to UNHCR	Senior Executive Team, Senior Management Committee (SMC) and division primarily addressed by the evaluation, member states supporting in or very active in the issue being evaluated.

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[18] MOPAN 2019, p.19.

[19] Some examples include evaluations: Completed: 2019 Evaluation of UNHCR's Engagement with the Private Sector; UNHCR, November 2019, Evaluation of UNHCR's data use and information management approaches, Evaluation of UNHCR's Global Fleet Management. Planned or ongoing: Evaluation of Humanitarian Development Cooperation (year 3); UNHCR's Approaches to Learning and Development; Implementation of UNHCR's 2018 Age, Gender and Diversity Policy (year 2).

[20] Source: UNHCR (2021) Decentralized Evaluation Guidelines: a Guide for Managing Decentralized Evaluation in UNHCR, p.9. The content of the original table has been abbreviated/edited.

Country Strategy Evaluation (CSE)	Addresses one country operation. Focuses on strategic positioning, comparative advantage, organizational results and performance, and partnerships over a period of three to five years Feeds into planning for next multi-year UNHCR country strategy. Feeds into country level UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework evaluations	Relevant Regional Bureaux Director, Country Representative and staff. HQ division(s) or service(s) related to scope of CSE
Level 3 Emergency Response Evaluation (L3E)	Addresses a specific L3 emergency (major UNHCR emergency response) Mandated by Policy to be carried out within 18 months of the emergency's declaration Can be one country or multi-country May address a specific emergency response or a thematic area	SMC and Director of Emergency, Security and Supply (DESS) and relevant divisions (GPC, CCCM, etc.). Relevant regional bureaux Directors and Country Representatives

DECENTRALIZED EVALUATIONS (division / bureau / country operation leads)

Object of evaluation	Definition	Primary audience
Decentralized Thematic or Multi-Country Evaluation (DTE)	Addresses a particular divisional framework or theme, regional or country strategy Focused on one division (or theme within one division), region or country	Director, division or regional bureau or Country Representative as determined by the focus other evaluation
Programme or Project (PPE)	Focuses on a specific programme or project May be one unit, country or multi-country	Programme Management Staff at division / regional bureau or country operation as determined by the focus of the evaluation

CENTRALIZED OR DECENTRALIZED EVALUATIONS

Object of evaluation	Definition	Primary audience
Level 2 Emergency Response Evaluation (L2E)	Addresses a specific L2 emergency (major UNHCR emergency response) L2 evaluations may be centralized or decentralized Can be one country or multi-country Addresses results and performance of UNHCR in an emergency context	Senior Executive Team, Senior Management Committee (SMC) and division primarily addressed by the evaluation
Inter-Agency Evaluations (IAE)	Could be humanitarian, Inter-Agency Humanitarian Emergency Evaluations (IAHEs) that are emergency-specific or thematic	Senior Executive Team, Senior Management Committee (SMC) and division primarily addressed by the evaluation

The Evaluation Service also conducts some formative multi-year longitudinal evaluations that contribute real time feedback. They are intended to help UNHCR build cumulative evidence to inform course correction, while supporting wider organizational learning in strategic areas.[21]

Notwithstanding the use of formative evaluations, the Panel heard demand for more rapid feedback from evaluations. Staff were interested in more timely completion of reports, in improved engagement so learning is fed back throughout evaluation processes, and in the use of evaluation products with a shorter timeline. Section 7.2 of this report offers some suggestions on how it could meet this demand through the conduct of evaluations. The Evaluation Service may want to consider adding "rapid evaluation" to its repertoire to help satisfy the need for rapid learning. These are relatively quick assessments meant only for internal consumption to provide data to inform more immediate decision-making – a form of light touch evaluation. They can be done inhouse, by a team of consultants who you can deploy quickly, or by blended teams. They emphasise learning over accountability. Well designed and supported developmental evaluations may also meet this need.[22]

FINANCING THE EVALUATION FUNCTION

The evaluation budget line is submitted to UNHCR's Executive Committee for approval as a separate line, whilst the High Commissioner approves the Evaluation Service's budget internally. UNHCR has a fluctuating core and none-core resourcing mechanism as it depends for funding on voluntary contribution. There is a regular requirement to reallocate and reprioritize resources. The Evaluation Service noted that this has an impact on its funding.

The Evaluation Service budget has been gradually increasing, and once spending authority is given it can be spent at the discretion of the Head of the Evaluation Service. Since 2015, the Evaluation Service's budget for which it had spending authority has increased from $4.2m in 2015 to $6.2m in 2021.[23] To put this growth in context, when OIOS reviewed the evaluation function in 2013 the budget was just $1.58m.

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[21] At the end of 2020 there were ongoing three longitudinal evaluations: i) UNHCR's engagement in humanitarian-development cooperation 2018-2021; ii) Implementation of UNHCR's 2018 age, gender and diversity policy; and iii) UNHCR's emergency response to the Venezuela situation 2019-2020. Source: Report to Executive Committee 2020.

[22] Several different terms are used to refer to rapid evaluations. Terms include: real-time evaluation, rapid feedback evaluation, rapid-cycle evaluation, rapid appraisal. OIOS refers to them as "advisories".

[23] The Evaluation Service's 2021 official budget is $15,293,543.77 but its spending authority is $6,169,394.31. The official budget is Evaluation Service's costed budget and would have allowed the Service to expand. However, it received spending authority for less than half the official budget. Figures used in the report are those relating to budgets for which the Evaluation Service has received spending authority. The Evaluation Service's budget has two categories of contributions

The Evaluation Strategy stated that the Service's "five-year budget proposal has a starting point of 0.07% of total expenditure in 2017" and plans a gradual increase starting in 2018. It does not state a target percentage, nor does the Evaluation Policy.

The Evaluation Service expenditure as a proportion of UNHCR's Programme Expenditure has trended upwards, amounting to around 0.11% in 2020.

Year	Percentage of Expenditure
2015	0.09%
2016	0.06%
2017	0.05%
2018	0.09%
2019	0.11%
2020	0.11%[24]

The Panel considers that, in line the indicative range identified by the UN's Joint Inspection Unit, the next Evaluation Policy should set a target percentage of total UNHCR expenditure, and this should be embedded in its next Evaluation Policy.[25] This is set out in section 7.2.

In terms of allocating funding for decentralized evaluations, the Evaluation Policy requires Divisions, Regional Bureaux, and country offices to allocate resources from their approved annual budgets. Depending on the availability of funds, these may be supplemented by the Evaluation Service. The 2021 budget contains an allocation of $268,000 to support decentralized evaluations. The Evaluation Service said that it would like to secure more core resources in future to finance stronger support for the decentralized evaluation function. It

from UNHCR voluntary contributions: "operating level" (OL) funds and "above operating level" (AOL). The Evaluation Service's de facto budget is the "operating level" (OL) figure as this is what it is authorized to spend. The "Above operating level" budget (AOL) "represents projects that are accepted but have not been prioritised for funding". These higher figures have not been presented here.

[24] Figures for 2015 to 2019 are from a spreadsheet supplied by the Evaluation Service This note explains how the 2020 figure was calculated (not on spreadsheet). A Spreadsheet provided by the Evaluation Service uses the actual expenditure of the Evaluation Service as the measure. As a percentage of actual Evaluation Service expenditure the figure is 0.11 for 2020. However, the 2020 Annual Report to the Executive Committee evaluation stated that the budget for 2020 was $11.5 million and this constituted 0.2 per cent of programme expenditure. The spreadsheet did not contain a total UNHCR expenditure figure, so this was taken from UNHCR's website ($5.224 billion) and the consultant made the 2020 calculations

[25] The target the Joint Inspection Unit considers appropriate for UN evaluation functions is between 0.5% and 3% of total expenditure (Joint Inspection Unit, 2014, Analysis of the Evaluation Function in the United Nations System. P.29),

will need to consider how to ringfence funds for decentralized evaluations – to ensure that a lack of finance does not prevent Regional Bureaux or country office from commissioning evaluations. In section 7.2 the Panel recommends that the Evaluation Service consider setting up a special facility to complement country office funds for decentralized evaluations.

STAFFING – CAPACITY

The Evaluation Service's staffing has increased over the last two years. It had seven full time positions, five of which were evaluation officer positions, between 2015 and 2019, and has had 12 positions since 2020, nine of which are evaluation officer positions.[26] Three of these staff members are outposted to Regional Bureaux as Regional Senior Evaluation Officers. The Evaluation Service noted that it lacks junior evaluation staff – most are P4 level - and that it intends to recruit staff at this level in future.

As noted above, the Policy states that at least 50 per cent of the positions in the Evaluation Service should be filled by externally recruited evaluation experts, and 50 percent are filled by staff "rotating" into the Service from other UNHCR units. The Panel endorses this approach to staffing the evaluation function and recommends that it continues. The Panel considers that the evaluation function continues to need to combine specialist expertise with appropriately skilled staff who have organizational knowledge of UNHCR. UNHCR's Department of Human Resources is reviewing the number of expert posts in different functions, aiming to standardise criteria for these posts across the organisation. The Panel considers that the next Evaluation Policy should extend the current 50% specialist/50% rotational staffing model, and that UNHCR continues to facilitate its implementation. At present most of the Evaluation Service's staff are external recruits. Over time UNHCR will need to consider how it can recruit internal staff with the core required competences: as there are very few M&E positions in field operations UNHCR staff have few opportunities to develop the skills that the Evaluation Service needs.

THE EVALUATION OF HUMANITARIAN INTERVENTIONS IN POLITICALLY SENSITIVE CONTEXTS

With its protection mandate, UNHCR's mandate is more political than that of most other UN agencies. Evaluations will sometimes make direct or implied criticisms of the government in which vulnerable refugees and other persons of concern were hosted. Given that evaluations are public documents, UNHCR country offices can be concerned that these criticisms would alienate the host government, on whom they depend for access. Evaluators noted that they tended to be flexible with the country office to accommodate these concerns and agreed appropriate text after several rounds of discussion.

The Panel takes note of this tension and discussed it with staff in the Evaluation Service during the Peer Review. Panel members shared their experience of dealing with it in their

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[26] Source: spreadsheet supplied by the Evaluation Service.

organisations. They noted that it is critical to discuss these risks with the policy or intervention owner at the outset and then at regular touch points, and that careful drafting and the selective use of internal briefing notes are also key.

EVALUATION MANDATE OF THE INSPECTION AND EVALUATION DIVISION OF OIOS

The Inspection and Evaluation Division of the UN Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS/IED) has a mandate to conduct evaluations in UNHCR and to quality assure UNHCR's Evaluation Service, as it is an Office of the General Assembly. [27] OIOS/IED can and has conducted its own evaluations of UNHCR activity.[28] UNHCR therefore has both an external evaluation as well as internal evaluation function. UNHCR's Policy on Independent Oversight states that the Evaluation Service "is responsible for coordinating all matters with OIOS/IED". The Chief of Section of the Inspection and Evaluation Division of the UN Office of Internal Oversight Services was a member of the Peer Review Panel.

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[27] . OIOS/IED has a mandate from the General Assembly to perform "inspections of UNHCR's evaluation function to assure the General Assembly that it is robust enough to conduct evaluations for the Organization." UNHCR (2019) Policy on Independent Oversight 2019, p.8

[28] OIOS/IED conducted an evaluation in 2017 on the role of UNHCR in the registration of refugees and asylum seekers from 2012 to 2016; and it reported on the implementation of the report's recommendations in 2020.OIOS (2017) Evaluation of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR); OIOS (2020) Triennial review of recommendations from the programme evaluation of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (March 2020).

3. GOVERNANCE AND INDEPENDENCE OF THE EVALUATION FUNCTION

UNEG Norm 4: Independence (of Evaluations & Organizational)

Independence of evaluation is necessary for credibility, influences the ways in which an evaluation is used and allows evaluators to be impartial and free from undue pressure throughout the evaluation process. The independence of the evaluation function comprises two key aspects — behavioural independence and organizational independence.

Behavioural independence entails the ability to evaluate without undue influence by any party. Evaluators must have the full freedom to conduct their evaluative work impartially, without the risk of negative effects on their career development, and must be able to freely express their assessment. The independence of the evaluation function underpins the free access to information that evaluators should have on the evaluation subject.

Organizational independence requires that the central evaluation function is positioned independently from management functions, carries the responsibility of setting the evaluation agenda and is provided with adequate resources to conduct its work. Organizational independence also necessitates that evaluation managers have full discretion to directly submit evaluation reports to the appropriate level of decision-making and that they should report directly to an organization's governing body and/or the executive head. Independence is vested in the Evaluation Head to directly commission, produce, publish and disseminate duly quality-assured evaluation reports in the public domain without undue influence by any party. (UNEG Norms and Standards, p.11)

Given UNHCR's governance arrangements, the Evaluation Service has as much organizational independence as could be expected. UNHCR is governed not by an Executive Board but by the United Nations General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council. The High Commissioner is appointed by the General Assembly and is accountable to it. The Panel notes that the governance arrangements in place give the evaluation function an adequate degree of functional independence.

Organizational independence: The Head of the Evaluation Service (D1) is appointed by and reports to the High Commissioner. UNHCR's governance structures probably make this the only viable reporting line. However, UNHCR's current Independence Oversight Policy does not require the High Commissioner to make the appointment in consultation with the Independent Audit and Oversight Committee (IAOC) – whilst this is required for the appointment of the Inspector General. The Head position is classified as a non-rotational expert post and does not have a term limit. The previous Head did, however, rotate into a management position. The Independent Oversight Policy does not say how the Head of

Evaluation can be dismissed whilst the Inspector General can only be dismissed by the High Commissioner "following advice of the IAOC and in consultation with the Chair of ExCom". [29] Thus, the position of the Inspector General has greater independence than the Head of the Evaluation Service.

The Evaluation Service is separated from programme management functions. The Evaluation Service's own reporting considers it adequate, and Panel interviews show that it has functional independence. The Evaluation Policy outlines the behavioural and organizational independence dimensions of evaluation in UNHCR, and interviews indicate they are broadly applied.

The MOPAN assessment considered that "The central evaluation function is not yet fully independent in all respects" [30] which UNHCR refuted on the grounds that the High Commissioner is the only viable reporting line for the evaluation function given UNHCR's governance arrangements.[31]

In section 7.2 the Panel recommends some measures that aim to enhance the organizational independence of the evaluation function.

Behavioural independence: The pilot "Guidance on Evaluation and Related Quality Assurance" states that the evaluation principles of independence, impartiality, credibility and utility are to be adhered to at all stages of the evaluation. Evaluations are to be conducted by external, independent consultants "without undue influence or pressure from any party, including the programme being evaluated." The 2018 Strategy also sets out clear lines of authority and responsibility in the conduct of evaluations.

Interviews indicate that whilst Service staff encounter some resistance to evaluations - due to either concern for the political repercussions, or a latent resistance to critical scrutiny – this has not prevented the Evaluation Service from conducting evaluations on topics it identifies or from publishing evaluations.

Financial independence: As described above, there is a separate budget line for evaluation, and the Head of the Service has full control over the deployment of resources once the budget is approved. Resources have increased steadily since 2017.

Planning the Workplan: The Head of Evaluation has "significant" discretion over the centralised evaluation work programme. It is submitted for approval of the High

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[29] UNHCR (2019) Policy on Independent Oversight 2019, Section 54. g) iii.

[30] The MOPAN 2019 basis for this conclusions is as follows:"While the Evaluation Service is held separate from management functions, the Head of the Evaluation Service reports to the High Commissioner. This includes preparing a shortlist of proposed evaluations for the annual Centralised Evaluation Work Plan, the selection from which requires agreement by the High Commissioner and Deputy High Commissioner. Budgetary independence is similarly constrained, with the High Commissioner approving the budget for the Centralised Evaluation Work Plan", p40.

[31] UNHCR, 22 October 2019, UNHCR Management Response to 2017-018 MOPAN Assessment.

Commissioner. In its self-assessment the Evaluation Service states that: "There are safeguards for independence and no violations of independence" and interviewees could not cite instances where this was challenged.

Clearance, release, and presentation of evaluation reports: The Evaluation Service can issue reports independently. The Evaluation Policy does say draft centralized evaluations need to be given to the Senior Executive Team, but the Head of the Evaluation Service stated that in practice, after a rigorous validation process, she and her predecessor just share the final report.[32] There are no reports of interference.

Reporting: The Head of Evaluation issues an Annual Report directly to the Executive Committee. This is a separate and comprehensive overview of evaluation in the organization.

ENGAGEMENT WITH SENIOR MANAGEMENT

The Panel heard appreciation of the contribution evaluation makes to supporting learning and accountability from some senior managers. But this was not widespread either in headquarters or among Regional Directors.

The Evaluation Service does engage with individual senior leaders: the Head of the Evaluation Service presents highlights of major evaluations to the High Commissioner quarterly and meets the Deputy High Commissioner and the Assistant High Commissioners monthly. The Head of Evaluation attends Senior Management Committee meetings as an observer. But interviews indicate that in their current form these do not afford a space to discuss findings from strategically significant evaluations or to discuss strategic issues related to the evaluation function in UNHCR as a whole.[33] There is no thus management-level forum in which to discuss institutional issues related to the evaluation function, or to review strategically important evaluation findings to feed into corporate decision making. There is also no oversight committee that includes management and oversight entities.

This Peer Review finds that this is an area for improvement. The IAOC's 2018-2019 report also noted the need to strengthen engagement: "Frequent interaction should take place between the Evaluation Service and management to ensure that findings are reflected in future action plans and used as the basis for long term changes in future programming.[34]. The Panel offers

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[32] Evaluation Policy 2016, para 37, p.10: "the draft report shall be shared for comments with the senior managers concerned, including members of the SET for centralised evaluations."

[33] The Senior Management Committee includes the membership of the Senior Executive Team and all Divisional and Regional Directors. The Senior Executive Team comprises the High Commissioner, the Deputy High Commissioner, the Assistant High Commissioners for Operations and Policy, and the Chef de Cabinet. UNHCR also has a Transformation Governance Board that oversees the Business Transformation Programme.

[34] UNHCR (2019) Report of the Independent Audit and Oversight Committee, 2018/2019

suggestions on how engagement and support from senior management could be enhanced in the last section of the report.

STRENGTHENING RELATIONS WITH GOVERNING BODIES

In line with the governance arrangements outlined above, the Executive Committee does not represent Member States in the same way that an Executive Board does in other UN agencies or multilaterals. UNHCR's Executive Committee is a proxy for the General Assembly. Apart from approving UNHCR's budget they have only an advisory role.

Executive Committee meetings are too large to serve as a forum to discuss strategic evaluation findings.[35] There are three Standing Committee meetings annually – subsets of the Executive Committee. These focus on Operations, International Protection, Management and Finance. Some evaluation findings are fed into papers for these Standing Committee meetings.

While all evaluation reports are published and available to Member States, the Evaluation Service has not proactively or systematically engaged with and presented evaluations to Member States. Aside from the annual report, the former Head of Service apparently presented only twice to the Executive Committee between 2016 and 2019. The Evaluation Service engages some donor Member States directly by inviting them to be members of Evaluation Reference Groups.

The report/presentation from the Head of the Evaluation Service is a standing agenda item at UNHCR's annual Executive Committee meetings. The Head of the Evaluation Service presented a report to Member States in early May, a little after the Panel interviewed Member States. The Head stated she will solicit interest in having more regular specific presentations on specific evaluations.

The Panel endorses this approach and considers the Evaluation Service has an opportunity to strengthen its engagement with UNHCR's Member States. Executive Committee members interviewed by the Panel noted they would appreciate greater interaction on evaluation. The Evaluation Service can engage more systematically to cultivate Member States' interest in learning from evaluations – encouraging them, in turn, to encourage UNHCR's management to drive this approach through the organisation. As we note in section 7.2, the Panel considers that, rather than seeking formal sessions in annual ExCom meetings, the Evaluation Service could organise regular informal meetings or briefings on specific topics to share learning from related evaluations.

THE EVALUATION SERVICE IN RELATION TO UNHCR'S OVERSIGHT REGIME

The Evaluation Service is considered part of UNHCR's "3rd line of defence". It is also itself subject to scrutiny from UNHCR's Independent Audit and Oversight Committee. Given the

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[35] It has 106 members, but all UN Member States are invited to its meetings; NGOs and other organisations also attend so a meeting could include 200 representatives.

potential for overlap between audits and evaluation, both the entities are increasingly coordinating their activities. The Panel notes that this needs to continue to prevent perceived and actual duplication of effort. The Inspector General has a mandate to ensure there is coherence between the oversight functions.

THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE INDEPENDENT AUDIT AND OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE TO UNHCR'S EVALUATION FUNCTION AND SCOPE TO ENHANCE IT

The Independent Audit and Oversight Committee (IAOC) has played a valuable role in guiding the evolution of UNHCR's evaluation function over the last seven years. The IAOC was established by a decision of the Standing Committee in June 2011 and its members are independent of UNHCR and its management. The Committee serves in an expert advisory capacity to assist the High Commissioner and the Executive Committee in exercising their oversight responsibilities.

It has served as an effective champion and constructive critic for the evaluation function. For example, the Committee urged UNHCR to establish a robust, professional and independent evaluation function in its 2014-2015 report. Critically, in the 2015-2016 Committee report recommended that "policy development" should be separated from the evaluation function. In 2017 it raised resourcing concerns, urging management to consider "setting aside, on a mandatory and annual basis, a pre-determined percentage of programme resources for funding evaluation assignments", a recommendation that this Peer Review also makes in section 7.2. Most recently, in its 2019-2020 report, the Committee encouraged the Evaluation Service to "to ensure that the evaluation function was adjusted, in line with UNHCR's decentralization and regionalization process, to enable the regional bureaux to assume increased ownership of evaluation processes" – something the Service is now doing.[36]

The original ToR of the committee (2011) did not include a mandate to cover the evaluation function but the Committee consistently reported on it regardless. In early 2019 the ToR and criteria for membership of the Independent Audit and Oversight were revised to include a requirement for all members "to the extent possible, have experience" in evaluation (in addition to other fields of experience).[37] The Panel welcomes this, and it is clear that the Committee has already played a robust role in promoting the evaluation function. However, the Panel considers that the Committee could have greater influence over the evolution of the evaluation function if this amendment went further and the Committee included an evaluation specialist with a mandate to review the function in more detail. This recommendation is set out in section 7.2.

COORDINATION OF EVALUATION AND AUDIT

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[36] UNHCR (2020) Report of the Independent Audit and Oversight Committee, 2019/2020, p.5

[37] See UNHCR (2011) Establishment of an Independent Audit and Oversight Committee, 51st Standing Committee Meeting and UNHCR (2011) Establishment of an Independent Audit and Oversight Committee, 51st Standing Committee Meeting.

As OIOS, which serves as UNHCR's internal auditor, begins to conduct more performance audits, particularly on country programmes, there has been overlap between the approach and coverage of evaluations and OIOS country operation audits. The Panel's interview with OIOS indicate there is likely to continue to be a measure of "competition" in the oversight space.

UNHCR's 2019 oversight policy empowers the Inspector General to assist coordination between the different oversight bodies, "to facilitate coherence and avoid overlap" by convening meetings among the parties.[38] In its 2020 report the Independent Audit and Oversight Committee encouraged "the continuation of cooperation between evaluation and other oversight functions to avoid redundancies and to foster collective efforts towards comprehensive combined assurance between audits and evaluation".[39]

The Evaluation Service's self-assessment notes that significant discussions took place in 2020 on coordination and the elimination of geographic and substantive overlap. It notes that the key opportunity in 2021 to further strengthen synergies and remove areas of overlap are the revision of the Evaluation Policy; and the creation of a new MoU to be signed between UNHCR and OIOS for the provision of internal audit services. The Panel encourages OIOS and the Evaluation Service to continue to liaise to coordinate their work so as avoid duplication and to minimise the burden on regional and country operations. The Panel notes that evaluations provide distinctive added value to operations that performance audits do not. Evaluations assess the logic underpinning approaches, helping operations to question their assumptions and modify their approach and importantly to assess longer term relevance and effectiveness.

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[38] UNHCR (2019) Policy on Independent Oversight 2019, p.9.

[39] UNHCR (2020) Report of the Independent Audit and Oversight Committee, 2019/2020, p.5.

4. CREDIBILITY

UNEG Norm 3: Credibility.

Evaluations must be credible. Credibility is grounded on independence, impartiality and a rigorous methodology. Key elements of credibility include transparent evaluation processes, inclusive approaches involving relevant stakeholders and robust quality assurance systems. Evaluation results (or findings) and recommendations are derived from — or informed by — the conscientious, explicit and judicious use of the best available, objective, reliable and valid data and by accurate quantitative and qualitative analysis of evidence. Credibility requires that evaluations are ethically conducted and managed by evaluators that exhibit professional and cultural competencies.

The quality of UNHCR evaluations has improved over the last few years. This is evident from feedback received from interviewees outside the Service and from post-hoc quality assessment reports on evaluations completed since 2018. The improvement is a significant achievement because quality was previously assessed as an area of weakness.

The 2013 OIOS assessment of the credibility of the evaluation function noted highly variable evaluation quality, as well as a lack of qualified evaluation professionals in UNHCR.[40] Since this assessment the Evaluation Service has addressed both. Drawing on UNEG norms and standards, the 2016 Evaluation Policy set out a series of standards to support the credibility of evaluation processes and products, and made progress in implementing them. The Evaluation Service issued "pilot" evaluation quality assurance guidelines in November 2016 that still underpin its current standards. These are UNHCR's first comprehensive guidelines and cover all phases in the evaluation process as well as issues such as ethics. The quality criteria the Evaluation Service now uses are set out in three instruments to be used at ToR, inception report and evaluation report stages. The Evaluation Service shares this guidance with contracted companies and individual consultants, and they serve as a tool for Regional Bureaux, divisions and country offices who are managing decentralized evaluations. The Evaluation Service intends to update the "pilot" guidance in 2021.[41]

Further, to help it identify good practice and areas for improvement, and to report credibly on quality, the Evaluation Service's now commissions annual post-hoc quality assurance reports. The Service commissioned its first post-hoc quality assurance assessment on a sample of 50% of evaluations (11) completed in 2018 and 2019. This serves as a baseline for

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[40] OIOS (2013) Review of the evaluation capacity of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees p.12

[41] New guidance issued in February 2021 to address decentralized evaluations supersedes the pilot guidance related to decentralized evaluations. The section on decentralized evaluation system reviews this new guidance.

subsequent annual post-hoc quality assurance reports.[42] The report identified strengths and weaknesses and concluded that the sample met the required standards in most cases – and exceeded them in some. The Evaluation Service then commissioned a post-hoc quality assurance of all 11 evaluations completed in 2020.[43] Overall, the reports were considered of "good quality". The study considered there had been an "Overall improvement in 2020 across all sections compared with the baseline annual review 2018/19". The report on 2020 evaluations notes that "some gaps and variability are still present across the reports, especially in the methodology section".

The Peer Review terms of reference ask for the assessment of a sample of evaluation reports against UNEG standards. The assessment framework and methodology used by the post-hoc quality assurance contractors was reviewed and was deemed robust, such that it was not necessary to review independently the quality of a sample of centralized and decentralized evaluations.

In terms of internal staff capability, the Evaluation Service has increased the number of professional evaluation staff since the OIOS assessment. In 2013 OIOS found that the Policy Development and Evaluation Service had no evaluation professionals on its staff.[44] In 2015 the Evaluation Service had five specialist positions and in 2020 it had nine. The Evaluation Service now has the required expertise to ensure standards are applied. As noted in the section above on staffing, the credibility of the Service and its products would be affected if it was unable to recruit experts to the Service – it needs to be able to continue its policy of recruiting external experts to at least half of its positions.

The Evaluation Service has applied a range of evaluation methodologies. These include: longitudinal, prospective, remote data collection, mixed methods, surveys and case studies. It notes that the general absence of monitoring data and of theories of change make it harder to conduct robust credible evaluations. The Evaluation Service notes that it uses a range of controls and stakeholder engagement points to support evaluation quality and validity. It uses: quality assurance tools; UNEG quality checklists; consultants who are thematic experts; reference groups and periodic meetings with stakeholders.

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[42] Evaluations were reviewed against 35 quality criteria, grouped into six sections: 1. Structure and clarity. 2.Context. 3.Purpose, scope, objectives and key questions. 4. Methodology. 5. Analysis, findings and conclusions. 6. Lessons and recommendations.

[43] UNHCR (2021) UNHCR Evaluation Quality Assurance 2020 Annual Review (written by IOD PARC)

[44] The Head of the Policy Development and Evaluation Service was required to have experience in evaluation, none of the other professional staff in the Service were. They were internal staff members on four- to five-year rotational posts who had "no evaluation training, experience or competencies relating to evaluation" (Source OIOS 2014, p.11).

The Evaluation Service is also seeking to familiarise UNHCR staff outside the Service with the purpose and standards of evaluation[45] and is considering building evaluation knowledge by creating a regionalized training-of-trainers process.[46] It also mentors decentralized evaluation managers. The Evaluation Service does not have formal training for managers of decentralized evaluations. There would be room for more formalised training approaches as the decentralized evaluation function matures.

Panel interviewees cited examples of evaluations they considered weaker but these were issued more than two years ago. The Panel notes that variability of evaluation quality does reputational damage that can linger and be hard to combat. Section 7.2 contains some suggestions to the Evaluation Service on how it can further safeguard the quality of evaluations.

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5. UTILITY

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UNEG Norm 2 Utility

In commissioning and conducting an evaluation, there should be a clear intention to use the resulting analysis, conclusions or recommendations to inform decisions and actions. The utility of evaluation is manifest through its use in making relevant and timely contributions to organizational learning, informed decision-making processes and accountability for results. Evaluations could also be used to contribute beyond the organization by generating knowledge and empowering stakeholders. (UNEG Norms and Standards, p.10)

Historically, poor utility has been an issue for the evaluation function. The 2014 Joint Inspection Unit report rated UNHCR as on "step 2" of 5 on a scale of evaluation utility.[47] Since then the Evaluation Service has pushed utility to the fore. The Peer Review ToR reflects how the Evaluation Service values it, stating: 'The most important role that evaluation currently

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[45] It delivered a webinar with UNHCR's Global Learning and Development Centre as part of a "compliance in programme management" learning programme series. A total of 143 programme and project control officers, working in country offices and regional bureaux, participated in the webinar.

[46] UNHCR (2020) Report on Evaluation, ExCom 71th Session, p.8.

[47] JIU 2014

plays in UNHCR is of convening – facilitating stop-and-reflect moments and promoting organization-wide learning". But for several reasons, deepening utility probably remains one of its greatest challenges – alongside (and relatedly) building the decentralized evaluation system (outside HQ).

The Evaluation Service highlights the contribution to learning the function is seeking to drive and gives concrete guidance on how the Service intends to enhance utility.[48] However, Service staff noted they need to do more to demonstrate the utility of evaluations. The self-assessment notes that "the organisational culture is beginning to take evaluations on board but has not yet fully understood the value/utility".

The Service notes that it tries to time evaluations so their results can inform policies under review or development.[49] The Panel endorses this approach and notes this should be a continuing priority.

Annual reports to ExCom give examples of the utility of specific evaluations – how they have led to more efficient use of resources, informed strategic priorities and new ways of working, and informed UNHCR how to respond quickly to volatile humanitarian settings.[50] There is also evidence that evaluations have fed into new strategies at an organizational level. [51] Interviewees cited examples of evaluations that have had an impact on policies and programmes. For example, one noted that the Evaluation Service's evaluations help UNHCR

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[48] "The utility of evaluations at centralised and decentralised levels shall be assured and enhanced by: (i) Ensuring adequate preparatory analysis to determine the timeliness and readiness of a subject or intervention (such as a strategy, policy, theme, programme or project) to be evaluated in a timely, useful and credible fashion; (ii) Clearly defining and communicating the intention to use the results of all evaluations in pertinent decision-making processes, organizational learning and improving programmatic planning, delivery and accountability; (iii) Strategically planning and initiating evaluations in a timely manner, while striving to ensure an adequate alignment with the programming/ operational/policy development and reporting cycles; (iv) Assuring leadership support at all relevant levels for both centralised and decentralised evaluations; (v) Establishing clear mechanisms and processes for response to key evaluation findings and recommendations and follow-up; and (vi) Ensuring the accessibility of evaluation results, making reports publicly available, and actively communicating and disseminating evaluation findings and conclusions". Source: Evaluation Policy 2016, para 26

[49] Examples the Evaluation Service gives of evaluations that feed into reviews are: Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse Review, Development and Learning Evaluation, Global Fleet Evaluation. Examples given of evaluations that feed into major events are: the Global Refugee Forum, Evaluation of Returns, Humanitarian-Development Longitudinal Evaluation, Statelessness Evaluation.

[50] UNHCR, 2020 ExCom 71th Session Statement from the Head of Evaluation Service 2020

[51] Examples given: Evaluation of UNHCR Livelihood Strategies and Approaches 2018, Data and Information Management 2019, Global Fleet Management 2018, Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse review 2019, Decentralized baseline evaluation of the Ikea Foundation Livelihoods and Energy Projects Among Somali Refugees and Hosts in Melkadida (Ethiopia).

"articulate the value of protection" in a way it could not have done without evaluative evidence.

Interviewees also raised issues that highlight areas for continued improvement. The most common concern was that evaluations do not provide timely learning – particularly for emergency operations. Interviewees felt that findings come too late to be useful, and expressed concern that the process from beginning to end takes too long. The uneven quality of recommendations and need for them to be actionable was also noted.

The Evaluation Service has clearly made progress in developing the utility – or value added – of evaluation in UNHCR. But there is still progress to be made. The Panel makes a series of suggestions for how the Evaluation Service can make progress in the final section of the report.

FOLLOW UP AND USE OF RECOMMENDATIONS

The Evaluation Service's policy states that all centralized and decentralized evaluations require a management response. They must be submitted within two months of the evaluation report's finalisation, and are published alongside the report on UNHCR's internal and external websites. In its 2020 report the Independent Audit and Oversight Committee concluded that "evaluation findings generally received timely attention and response from management and were incorporated into strategic and operational decisions." However, Interviewees considered that broadly UNHCR does not yet recognise the value of management responses and its contribution as a learning mechanism. The average time for managers to issue a management response in 2020 was 120 days/4 months.

No entity in UNHCR has formal responsibility for tracking follow up to management responses so the Evaluation Service is taking this up. In 2021 all centralized evaluation managers will be expected to follow up on what has been done to implement recommendations from evaluations they managed in 2020. The Evaluation Service is exploring how best to do this and has not been prescriptive. The Evaluation Service anticipates that these "12-month on" reports will help it identify common implementation blockages or common issues. The Evaluation Service has the option of integrating data on the implementation of agreed recommendations into a reporting tool used by audit.

LEARNING AND KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

COMMUNICATING FINDINGS AND LESSONS

The Evaluation Service has developed an innovative Communication and Engagement Strategy (October 2020). [52] It has also recruited a longer-term consultant to help it implement the strategy.

Evaluation managers, with support of the communications expert, are now expected to develop and implement a communication plan for each evaluation. They must do stakeholder mapping, an earlier requirement, but are expected take a more strategic approach to spark debate and learning - using more innovative methods of communication. Some evaluations have already integrated new practices including concept notes, videos and infographics. It is too early for the practices recommended in the strategy to have fed through to the perception of evaluation users. The Communication Strategy includes a monitoring framework that should allow the Evaluation Service to see how effective its communications are.

The Evaluation Service shares evaluation results internally through internal workshops, validation workshops, webinars and high-level UNHCR events. It publishes all evaluations on its external website, the UN Evaluation Group website and ReliefWeb.

5. THE DECENTRALIZED EVALUATION SYSTEM

The Evaluation Service is seeking to align with and support UNHCR's ongoing regionalisation and decentralisation reforms. The Peer Review terms of reference specifically ask the Panel to comment on how appropriate its approach to supporting the "nascent decentralized evaluation function" is.[53] This section sets out how the decentralized evaluation function has been established to date. The final section of the report presents the Panel's views on how the Evaluation Service could adjust its approach, with specific recommendations.

SUPPORT SYSTEMS FOR DECENTRALIZED EVALUATION

In its self-assessment, the Evaluation Service notes that the linkages between the central and decentralized functions are being established" and that "Support to decentralised evaluation functions is nascent". This section describes what the Evaluation Service has put in place to date.

DEPLOYMENT OF SENIOR REGIONAL EVALUATION OFFICERS TO REGIONAL BUREAUX

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[52] UNHCR (2020) Evaluation Service Communication and Engagement Strategy 2020-2024

[53] Peer Review Panel Terms of Reference 1.3 a. To note, decentralized evaluations are also conducted by HQ based services and divisions, and the Evaluation Service provides some support to these. These systems are relatively well established, and Peer Review does not focus on these.

In line with its evaluation strategy, the Evaluation Service is expanding its regional presence by posting Senior Evaluation Officers in Regional Bureaux principally to better support decentralized evaluations. In August 2019 one position was established in the Americas (Panama) as a pilot. During COVID-19 conditions in mid to late 2020 two further staff members were recruited to the Regional Bureaux for the East and Horn of Africa and Great Lakes region (Nairobi); and for West and Central Africa (Dakar). There are now Regional Senior Evaluation Officers in three of UNHCR's seven Regional Bureaux, with discussions ongoing on posting Officers to two additional Bureaux.

The salaries of Regional Senior Evaluation Officers are paid by the Evaluation Service and they report directly to the P5 Senior Evaluation Coordinator in the Service. They have a functional reporting line to the Bureau Director and work closely with the regional Senior Management Team, including the "Strategic Planning Pillar", which has responsibility for rolling out and overseeing UNHCR's new RBM systems. Each placement is framed by a "Service Level Agreement" that sets out the responsibilities the Evaluation Service and Regional Bureau adopt with the placement.

Regional Senior Evaluation Officers have a dual mandate: they are responsible for supporting both the decentralized and centralized functions. [54] Their decentralized evaluation duties require them to: facilitate drafting of regional evaluation plans, support planning and delivery of decentralized evaluations, provide quality assurance of evaluation documents, design and deliver capacity building, assist their regions and operations to identify evidence gaps and priorities, and provide inputs to programmes, yearly planning and mid-year reviews.

At the same time Regional Senior Evaluation Officers are full members of the central Evaluation Service. For example, they are asked to comment on documents, input to guidance and manage Country Strategy Evaluations. Before Regional Senior Evaluation Officers were posted to Regional Bureau these were all managed by Geneva-based Evaluation Service staff. There is now an intention for Regional Senior Evaluation Officers to manage these centralized evaluations themselves (and some have begun) in their capacity as Evaluation Service staff. In regions without a Regional Senior Evaluation Officer, Geneva-based staff continue to manage Country Strategy Evaluations and backstop decentralized evaluations.

Regional Senior Evaluation Officers do not currently control additional budgets to facilitate their work, or to hire additional staff. That this was discussed as a future option but has not yet been introduced.

Some of the Regional Bureaux staff interviewed by the Panel noted some confusion as to roles and responsibilities of Regional Senior Evaluation Officers and considered they will not add value to the region because they are not accountable to the Regional Bureau. They expressed

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[54] This is a relatively rare approach in other UN organisations that have dual function and Panel members had not seen this arrangement elsewhere. Other units in UNHCR 'outpost' headquarters staff to Regional Bureaux, so this is not a unique approach within UNHCR.

concern about the way the postholders were still part of the centralized evaluation function as well as servicing the Regional Bureau.

QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM

Evaluation Officers in HQ have provided substantial quality assurance support to those managing decentralized evaluations outside HQ. This has stretched their capacity and continues to do so in regions without a Senior Regional Evaluation Officer. Responsibility was passed to Regional Senior Evaluation Officers in the three regions, but is still a major call on their time.

To address this, Evaluation Service has established an outsourced quality assurance system for decentralized evaluations. Use is mandatory for evaluation managers of decentralized evaluations and optional for centralized evaluations: ToR, inception reports and final reports are subject to an independent quality assurance review. This facility takes the burden of quality assurance from Senior Regional Evaluation Officers and HQ staff. Decentralized evaluations are also subject to the new post-hoc quality assessment review outlined above, in the Credibility section.

DECENTRALIZED EVALUATION GUIDELINES

The Evaluation Service recently developed comprehensive and accessible guidance for those managing decentralized evaluation.[55] Issued in February 2021, it contains process maps for the lifecycle of a decentralized evaluation, from planning to issuing a management response. It also spells out what measures must be taken to safeguard the independence and impartiality of an evaluation. The new guidance should help ensure staff are well-equipped to produce quality decentralized evaluations.

To enhance the impartiality and independence of decentralized evaluations it is mandatory for evaluation managers to contract external parties to conduct evaluations. The Evaluation Service has established Framework Agreements with companies that provide evaluation services and evaluation managers can access these.

FINANCING DECENTRALIZED EVALUATIONS

The Evaluation Policy states that offices and operations budget and pay for decentralized evaluations. In practice they are sometimes supplemented with earmarked Evaluation Service funds. The Evaluation Service ringfences a small budget for support to decentralized evaluation in part to encourage Divisions, Regional Bureaux and country offices to undertake them. There is internal discussion on how it should deploy these funds in future. Panel interviewees expressed concern about the cost of decentralized evaluations – and the inability or reluctance of country operations to fund evaluations at the expense of front-line delivery.

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[55] UNHCR (2021) Decentralized Evaluation Guidelines: a Guide for Managing Decentralized Evaluation in UNHCR

Section 7.2 suggests the Evaluation Service could address this with a special facility to provide complementary incentive-based funding and by clarifying the cost of different kinds of evaluation.

To date UNHCR's decentralized evaluation work programme has been unstructured. Evaluation plans have not been prepared at regional or central level. There has not been a formal process that requires senior management (of the related unit) to agree a decentralized evaluation and the Evaluation Service generally learns one is planned after the decision has been made. Evaluation planning is not synchronised with the rest of the organisation's planning cycle and few if any country operations integrated evaluations in their annual work plans.

This should all change and improve over time. The roll out of UNHCR's new RBM system should help establish a more structured and strategic approach to decentralized evaluation. Country operations are now required to include plans and budgets for decentralized evaluations they intend to conduct within their new Country Strategies. Guidance states that M&E plan should include one to two evaluations over a period of 4-5 years. The three Regional Senior Evaluation will facilitate the development of evaluation strategies and plans within their regions. They will lead engagement with countries and Bureaux around needs, interest, and evidence gaps. This should gradually lead to a more strategic approach at this level.

The Evaluation Service has noted that coverage will expand gradually, and therefore anticipates that there will be time for the Evaluation Service to build support to keep pace with a rise in the number of decentralized evaluations. Developing an M&E Plan is optional rather than mandatory for 2021 and to date very few operations have registered evaluations in their 2022-2025 strategies. The Evaluation Service also expects that in the next couple of years very few country offices will commit to conducting evaluations in their plans but that this will grow over time. So, while the longer-term target is for every operation to conduct at least one decentralized evaluation every 4–5-year cycle, coverage expansion should be gradual.

Whilst this norm is included in new RBM guidance it has not yet been formalised by the Evaluation Service.

The Panel's and the consultant's interviews and the Evaluation Service's own comments indicate there is currently limited capacity in many Regional Bureaux and country offices to conduct decentralised evaluations. The Panel also notes that the willingness of Regional Bureaux and country offices to initiate decentralised evaluations is highly variable. Awareness is also uneven. Several interviewees judged there is also a very weak evaluation culture. This is what could be expected in the early stages of a change management process.

Interviewees noted that the capacity of country offices to manage evaluations is a key constraint. Country offices generally do not have M&E officers who could in principle serve as

evaluation managers. Interviewees also noted that country offices have relatively high staff turnover so institutional memory within country offices is often very short. This is partly due to UNHCR's rotational policy especially in hardship posts. Thus, the Evaluation Service is seeking to build capability from a low base and in a context that is not particularly conducive.

In the last section of this report the Panel offers its advice to the Evaluation Service and UNHCR on how the process of developing the decentralized evaluation system could be enhanced.

6. PARTNERSHIPS & NETWORKS, HUMAN RIGHTS AND GENDER

The Evaluation Service contributes to inter-agency evaluations, playing a technical and leadership role. For example, it contributed to the revision of the UNEG evaluation ethical principles and the development of a draft system-wide evaluation policy.[56] The Head of Evaluation is Vice-Chair of the Executive Steering Committee in UNEG. The Service also takes part in UN reform and harmonization initiatives. It is has conducted joint and system-wide evaluations with other UN agencies.[57] The Head of Evaluation currently serves as alternate UNEG focal point in a newly established OECD DAC core group that will lead a COVID-19 Global Evaluation Coalition, and is a member of the Steering Group of the Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation (IAHE) body, which is under the Inter-Agency Standing Committee.

The MOPAN study noted that human rights and protection "are comprehensively integrated across strategic and operational practice" and this is true of evaluation also.[58] Almost all UNHCR evaluations address the extent to which refugees enjoy their rights, and the role UNHCR plays in both individual asylum regimes as well as humanitarian settings. Human rights are thus fully embedded into Evaluation Service evaluations.

With respect to gender, evaluations are guided by the UNHCR's Age, Gender and Diversity policy, which requires the inclusion of the needs of women and girls in displacement. Consultants must explicitly address the impact of displacement, or asylum, on women and girls. The IOD PARC quality assurance review noted in its baseline quality assurance study of

[56] UNHCR (2020) Report on Evaluation, ExCom 71th Session, p.9.

[57] These include: i) the response to the droughts in Ethiopia; ii) the cyclone response in Mozambique; iii) the refugee response synthesis in Bangladesh, and iv) an inter-agency synthesis of evaluations that have looked at the United Nations collective response to "Children on the move". The Evaluation Service is also supporting a joint evaluation of UNAIDS Joint Programme's work on preventing and responding to gender-based violence against women and girls and is contributing to adapting this Joint Programme's interventions because of the increase in gender-based violence during the COVID-19 pandemic.

[58] MOPAN, February 2019, 2017-18 Assessments: Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Report, p.25

11 evaluations that "a more in-depth analysis of gender, disability, and age issues would strengthen the evaluation reports, including greater attention to disaggregated data".[59]

The Evaluation Service also produces dedicated evaluations on issues related to gender related risks that result from displacement, and lack of access to rights. These evaluations are reported in successive Annual Reports on Evaluation to the Executive Committee. The MOPAN study noted that eight of 17 evaluations reviewed "reported substantively on gender-related results".[60] The Evaluation Service's evaluations also contribute to UNHCR's own accountability for gender equality by providing evidence-based assessments of gender policies and practices. For example, it is conducting a multi-year evaluation of the implementation of UNHCR's 2018 age, gender and diversity policy (2019-2022).

Not surprisingly, the Evaluation Service and its regional officers are not yet able to consider how to support national capacity in evaluation: the decentralized evaluation system is still being established. There is hence no mention of national evaluation capacity development (NECD) in the Service's Evaluation Policy or Strategy. Whilst there is no planned workstream to build national capacity, there may be incidental support through the engagement of national authorities on some Evaluation Reference Groups: the Evaluation Service's recently launched guidance for managing a decentralized evaluation recommends establishing an Evaluation Reference Group and, where appropriate including government counterparts alongside other relevant stakeholders.[61] Looking to the future, to implement the Global Refugee Compact commitments the Evaluation Service may need to integrate support to national evaluation capacity in its new policy, paced in line with the development of the decentralized evaluation function.

7. KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 SUMMARY ASSESSMENT

The Panel considers that the evaluation function in UNHCR has made impressive progress in the last few years and it is clearly continuing to develop in the right direction. The Evaluation Service has strengthened its performance and the relevance of evaluation to UNHCR. It is

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[59] IOD PARC (2020) UNHCR Evaluation Quality Assurance: Baseline Analysis 2018-19, June 2020, p.5

[60] MOPAN, February 2019, 2017-18 Assessments: Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Report, p. 45

[61] UNHCR (2021) Decentralized Evaluation Guidelines: a Guide for Managing Decentralized Evaluation in UNHCR p.40

conveying consistent messages to the organisation and has a strong professional team. The Panel congratulates the staff of the Evaluation Service for what it has achieved over the last few years and UNHCR's management for facilitating its development. The Panel's interviews indicate that there is broad understanding of the role of the evaluation function in UNHCR (with a mix of appreciative and less appreciative views). The Panel also heard evidence that evaluations had impacted on policies and programming.

Before detailing the Panel's findings and recommendations, the following paragraphs summarise the Panel's reflections on where UNHCR stands against the three key OECD-DAC/UNEG norms and standards of independence, credibility, and utility:

INDEPENDENCE

Within UNHCR's governance structures the degree of independence the evaluation function is probably as strong as is it can be. The Head of the evaluation function reports to the High Commissioner; and the High Commissioner, in principle, approves the budget and workplan. It falls short of full functional independence as envisaged by UNEG norms and standards. However, the Panel and the Head of the Evaluation Service consider that in practice it is adequate: the Head of Service has sufficient autonomy to manage a pre-agreed budget, select evaluands, and issue evaluation reports. There is a need to further tighten provisions related to the appointment, tenure and dismissal of the position of Head of Service.

In some agencies, an evaluation function can rely on an external governing body to nudge the organisation into applying learning from evaluations. Governance structures in UNHCR mean this is not quite so relevant here: UNHCR's Executive Committee is an advisory body, and the High Commissioner holds ultimate accountability on behalf of the General Assembly. Thus, responsibility for ensuring the organisation learns from evaluation lies more with the office of the High Commissioner and the Senior Executive Team (SET) and less with Member States. Member States still have a role to play, as we set out below.

CREDIBILITY

In terms of credibility the Service is working to ensure evaluations get stronger. It has a cohort of professional staff and is establishing the standards and systems to support credible evaluations. The Evaluation Service piloted post-hoc external quality assessments of a sample of evaluations in 2019 and of all evaluations in 2020 and they show that overall reports are of "good quality" and have improved over the last two years. The Evaluation Service's new quality assurance system should help the Service to continue to lift quality in future.

UTILITY

The Evaluation Service is also driving changes to ensure its outputs add utility/value. The organisation's evaluation culture is still at the early stages of being established and, according to interviewees, many staff outside the Service have yet to be convinced of the value of evaluation. Alongside building the decentralized evaluation system, this is probably where the

Evaluation Service needs to place the strongest emphasis, and this is where the Peer Review Panel focuses most of its attention.

7.2 FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Panel considers that UNHCR has a developing evaluation culture. The Panel heard appreciation from some senior managers of the contribution evaluation can make to supporting learning and accountability. But this was not widespread. Interviews indicated that there is a relatively undeveloped evaluation culture in Regional Bureaux and country offices. Evaluation is not yet fully valued as a way of generating useful lessons.

This is not surprising as UNHCR has only had a professional evaluation service since 2016 and this should not undermine appreciation of the substantial progress that has been achieved to date. The Panel further notes that with several foundational reforms underway, UNHCR's operational context is highly challenging. Managers and staff have multiple competing priorities and have limited capacity to adopt further change. Given all this, the Panel considers that the Evaluation Service needs to carefully calibrate the planned pace of change and ensure strong and deep engagement with UNHCR management is built into change processes. This finding and recommendation informs many of the more specific recommendations the Panel makes.

The Panel notes one of the transformation workstreams, the integration of a new RBM approach into UNHCR's systems, presents the Evaluation Service with an opening. The Panel notes that the move to multi-year planning provides a significant opportunity to embed evaluation at country level within the programme cycle. There is strong potential for synergies with evaluation: together the RBM system and evaluation can help reinforce learning and accountability in the organisation – and help encourage managers to review their operational assumptions as well as results. The Panel notes that a key feature of the new RBM system is to integrate evaluation as part of the programming and strategic planning cycles of the organization. Operations are now required to identify priorities for creating results evidence; they are asked to plan for all evaluations foreseen during a strategy period and to sequence and cost them in resource and management plans. Through the RBM system, the Evaluation Service has an institutional mandate to mainstream evaluation in UNHCR's systems and culture.

The Panel considers the Evaluation Service could be more strategic in work planning (detailed in a section below) and needs to take purposeful steps to build demand and engender a learning culture. It needs to be clearly aligned with organisational priorities, identified through a consultative process. The Panel also considers that the 2021-2022 work plan is perhaps too ambitious, both in terms of the Evaluation Service's delivery capacity and UNHCR's absorptive capacity. There is a need to rationalise the number of centralized evaluation planned. Going forwards, evaluations will need to be supported carefully so they build a learning culture. The Panel also considers that plans for decentralized evaluation are perhaps over-ambitious, given the support systems that the Evaluation Service has in place, but also given the multitude of changes impacting country offices. A highly graduated approach to building interest and buy-in to decentralized evaluation would be appropriate.

The Panel notes that evaluation will only ever be one tool to further learning in UNHCR. There are other kinds of instruments that UNHCR can deploy to mainstream learning throughout the organisation. For example, UNHCR could also explore rapid assessments, which would promote learning from operations to complement that coming from evaluations.

The Evaluation Service would be well placed to ensure its evaluations support learning if it could identify how learning happens in the different contexts UNHCR works in. The Service could seek to identify how evaluations are perceived and used by operations and policy units. It would then be able to feed evaluative lessons into decision-making settings.

The report now sets out key findings and 10 associated recommendations. In some cases, the main recommendation is accompanied by sub-recommendations. The Panel considers that the recommendations should be implemented progressively over a five year period, in a way that integrates with broader institutional changes in UNHCR. The recommendations are interrelated and are therefore indivisible: we recommended they are implemented as a single package. Together they should help initiate a mutually reinforcing cycle of delivering greater value, demand and interest. But we recognize that building an evaluation culture in an organization as large, varied and with such a challenging mandate as UNHCR will take time.

The text in parentheses after each recommendation identifies who would be responsible for taking action.

THE ROLE OF SENIOR MANAGEMENT IN ENGENDERING AN EVALUATION CULTURE

The Panel considers that for UNHCR to develop a robust evaluation function there is a need for senior management to demonstrate to the organisation that evaluation, and learning from evaluation, is a corporate priority. The Senior Executive Team can set the tone by stressing the value of evaluation to learning and strengthening performance. Regional Directors will also need to help drive the use of evaluation in the regions and operations under them, and to lend their weight to establishing an evaluation culture in their regions.

Senior management can create an expectation that all those designing policies and programmes have considered and integrated evaluative lessons into their planning, driving this same approach downwards. It can also consider whether there are adequate reflection/learning opportunities built into UNHCR's management structures and establishing them if not.

UNHCR could consider establishing a forum to enable the Evaluation Service to work with senior management from policy and programme units and directors of Regional Bureaux to develop the evaluation function. With the adoption of its 2016 Evaluation Policy, WFP established an Evaluation Function Steering Group to drive implementation issues requiring action or buy-in from outside its Office of Evaluation. This played an important role in helping make the evaluation function effective - driving the roll out of support to decentralized evaluation and providing high-level support for financing and staffing issues. A comparable

steering group could play a similar role in UNHCR – particularly to aid the roll out of decentralized evaluation and promote corporate uptake of evaluation evidence.

The Panel notes that outside the Evaluation Service, managers in UNHCR do not have job performance goals relating to evaluation, for example, relating to the follow up and use of evaluation, or to their specific responsibilities for management of decentralized evaluation. If UNHCR can integrate evaluation-related performance goals, it could start to incentivise the greater use of evaluations. WFP has done this and can offer UNHCR some practical examples of effective practice.

Recommendation 1: To help guide the development of an effective evaluation function across UNHCR, the Panel recommends the following measures:

> *1.1) Senior management and the Evaluation Service should consider how the they can establish a forum to jointly guide the development of the evaluation function - for example with an Evaluation Function Steering Group – particularly with a view to building engagement on plans to support decentralized evaluation.*

> *1.2) UNHCR consider introducing a metric related to the use of evaluation in the performance goals of senior managers.*

(For: Senior Managers, the Evaluation Service)

ENHANCING INDEPENDENCE

The Panel notes that governance arrangements in place in UNHCR give the evaluation function an adequate degree of functional independence. However, the Panel recommends additional measures that will enhance the independence of the evaluation function. The Panel recommends that the Evaluation Policy, setting out these conditions, should be endorsed by ExCom to give the Policy the support of the Governing Board (see 8.2 below).

Recommendation 2: To enhance the independence of UNHCR's evaluation function, the Panel recommends that the next Evaluation Policy should set out the following conditions related to the recruitment, tenure and dismissal of the Head of Service:

> *2.1) The next Evaluation Policy should establish the following:*

>> *a) Clarify the term limit for the Head of the Evaluation Service, and confirm whether the incumbent can take another post in UNHCR after this role (best practice would suggest not).*

>> *b) Regarding recruitment for the Head of the Evaluation Service position, the Panel recommends that the High Commissioner makes the appointment in consultation with the Independent Audit and Oversight Committee (IAOC) – as is required for the appointment of the Inspector General, and that a member of the IAOC should also be a recruitment panel member.*

> *2.2) Regarding the dismissal of the Head of the Evaluation Service, the Panel recommends that the next Evaluation Policy requires the High Commissioner to*

> *decide "following advice of the IAOC and in consultation with the Chair of Excom",
> mirroring conditions relating to the Inspector General (the Independence Oversight
> Policy will also need to be revised to reflect this).*

(For: Evaluation Service, Senior Management)

RESOURCES FOR THE EVALUATION FUNCTION

FINANCING THE EVALUATION FUNCTION

The Panel notes that the Evaluation Service budget has been steadily increasing. As a percentage of UNHCR's total expenditure the Evaluation Service's budget has increased from 0.07% in 2017 to 0.11% in 2020. The target the Joint Inspection Unit considers appropriate for UN evaluation functions is between 0.5% and 3% of total expenditure.[62] At 0.11% the UNHCR evaluation function is still very far from the lower end of this scale. The Panel considers that the next Evaluation Policy should set a target percentage of total UNHCR expenditure the organisation should aspire to reach in, say, five years. The current Evaluation Policy does not contain a goal. This target should be set at a level that allows UNHCR to establish a fully operational evaluation function and will need to be based on a forecast of UNHCR's future resources. This percentage should capture the totality of target spending on the evaluation function, including both the likely cost of decentralized evaluations and the cost of supporting the decentralized evaluation function. It will need to be realistic and proportionate, and the Panel recommends that UNHCR takes a phased and gradual approach to reaching the target.

If the next Evaluation Policy is endorsed by the ExCom, as the Panel recommends, as well as being approved by the High Commissioner, the target percentage will give visibility to the funding of the evaluation function. The IAOC should also routinely review and comment on the extent to which UNHCR is meeting this commitment; Member States should review the IAOC's reports and respond to management if they are not being adhered to.

Recommendation 3: The Panel recommends that the next Evaluation Policy identifies a five-year target percentage of total UNHCR expenditure dedicated to the evaluation function, broken down into annual increments. This target should be set at a level that allows UNHCR to establish a fully operational evaluation function (i.e., centralized and decentralized evaluations).

(For: Evaluation Service, Senior Management, IAOC, Member States)

HUMAN RESOURCES

The Evaluation Policy states that at least 50 per cent of positions in the Evaluation Service should be externally recruited evaluation experts, and 50 percent staff "rotating" into the

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[62] Joint Inspection Unit, 2014, Analysis of the Evaluation Function in the United Nations System. P.29

Service from other UNHCR units. The Panel endorses this approach and recommends that it continues. The Panel considers that the evaluation function continues to need to combine specialist expertise with appropriately skilled staff who have organizational knowledge of UNHCR. The Panel notes that UNHCR's Division of Human Resources is reviewing the number of expert posts in different functions, aiming to standardise criteria for these posts across the organisation.

Recommendation 4: The Panel recommends that the next Evaluation Policy extends the current 50% specialist/50% rotational staffing model, and that UNHCR continues to facilitate its implementation.

(For: Evaluation Service, Division of Human Resources Department)

WORK PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION

The Panel noted in the body of the report that the Evaluation Service's work planning is now more strategic than it has ever been but there are ways it could still be strengthened. The Panel considers that the draft 2021-2022 plan is likely to be overambitious given both the Evaluation Service's current capacity and its immediate aim to build and support the decentralized evaluation system. To be able to deliver quality processes and outcomes, the Evaluation Service will likely need to reduce the number of evaluations it plans to complete. It will be necessary to balance delivering high quality centralized evaluations whilst simultaneously supporting the decentralized evaluation system. The Evaluation Service can also take steps to ensure its coverage meets UNHCR's strategic needs by first mapping the organisation's policy universe and using this to define what constitutes an appropriate level of evaluation coverage.

Recommendation 5: The Panel recommends the Evaluation Service, in collaboration with management, takes the following steps to strengthen evaluation planning:

> *5.1) It is recommended that the Evaluation Service build in a structured consultative process to define coverage. This would include discussions with management and oversight bodies, and the Evaluation Service will need to balance demand with its capacity to deliver.*

> *5.2) Consistently invest in the planning and scoping of centralized evaluations, so the evaluation is sequenced with key decision-making processes (e.g. the design of a new policy or approach) and deliver findings to support them.*

> *5.3) Define the coverage norms for various kinds of evaluation so that coverage plans best meet the strategic needs of UNHCR. To do this, in turn, the Evaluation Service will need to:*

>> *a) Map out the UNHCR policy universe (which appears very broad) and then define what, within this, constitutes an appropriate level of evaluation coverage.*

>> *b) For strategic/thematic evaluations conduct a consultative review of priorities together with UNHCR management to inform the rolling workplan.*

c) Determine appropriate coverage and a consistent methodological approach for Country Strategy Evaluations considering the shift to multi-year country programmes.

d) Ensure appropriately balanced coverage for evaluations of L3 responses taking account other evaluations (namely, country programme evaluation coverage/ protracted emergencies/multi-country emergencies/ inter agency humanitarian evaluations) and audits.

5.4) Consider integrating an approach to work planning at the centralized level that prioritises evaluands which will add the most strategic value to the organisation. Criteria to consider include: value, profile, or whether there is an intention to scale up replicate a novel approach. In time, the Evaluation Service could also encourage Regional Bureaux and country offices to pursue the same approach for decentralized evaluations.

5.5) Consider how the Evaluation Service wants UNHCR to engage with system-wide evaluations and UNSDCF evaluations. Engagement will need to be factored into the centralized evaluation workplan, and guidance given for how regional and country operations should engage, given capacity requirements and availability.

5.6) Clarify the budget norms for various kinds of decentralized evaluations. This would help units that are considering commissioning different kinds of decentralized evaluations to budget appropriately from the outset.

(For: Evaluation Service)

EVALUATION MANAGEMENT, CONDUCT AND TYPE

The Panel considers that the Evaluation Service can take steps to further enhance the credibility and utility of centralized evaluations – particularly to help meet demand for timely evaluation findings. These measures could help the Evaluation Service build demand for evaluation within UNHCR.

Management commented that most of the time mandatory L3 emergency evaluations are completed after the emergency phase and therefore units managing emergencies may not find them of immediate value.[63] However, the Panel observes that many emergencies will turn into a protracted event, so these evaluations are likely to be useful for informing long-term protracted interventions and to feed into corporate level strategy. As noted under work planning, there is a need to ensure appropriately balanced coverage for evaluations of L3 responses in light of Country Strategy Evaluation coverage/multi-country emergencies/ inter

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[63] "Evaluation of a Level 3 refugee emergency situation shall be conducted within 18 months or earlier as may be requested by the High Commissioner, and commissioned and managed by the Evaluation Service", Evaluation Policy, p.4.

agency humanitarian evaluations, and considering audit requirements - to avoid overburdening operations.

Notwithstanding the Evaluation Service's use of formative evaluations, the Panel heard demand for more rapid feedback from evaluations. The Evaluation Service may want to consider experimenting with rapid evaluations:

Recommendation 6: To enhance the credibility and utility of evaluations the Panel recommends the Evaluation Service consider how it can:

> *6.1) Further strengthen the quality of engagement with the evaluand throughout the evaluation process, and through key touch points, to enhance the uptake and use of evaluations.*

> *6.2) Seek to reduce the time taken to undertake centralized evaluations – from start to finish – to enhance the relevance of evaluation findings; and take steps to ensure the timely completion of evaluations – in line with agreed timelines - so they do feed into the decision points anticipated at the planning stage.*

> *6.3) Continue to carefully safeguard the quality of evaluations, given that weaker evaluations undermine the perception of utility and cause reputational damage.*

> *6.4) To better meet demand for strategic learning and faster feedback loops the Panel recommends the Evaluation Service:*

>> *a) Consider deploying more developmental and formative evaluations.*

>> *b) Consider conducting rapid evaluations when faster feedback is necessary. These will require "lighter and faster" methodologies and would emphasise learning over accountability.*

DEVELOPING THE DECENTRALIZED EVALUATION SYSTEM

The Panel fully endorses the Evaluation Service's commitment to establish an effective decentralized evaluation function – aligning evaluation with UNHCR's ongoing regionalisation and decentralisation reforms. It is also the case that, decentralized evaluations should help inform UNHCR how its various organizational changes are working in practice, and help it modify its approach.

The Panel considered what can realistically be achieved for the next 4-5 years – basing its judgement on the broader maturity of the organisation in terms of RBM, learning, evidence generation and the pace of decentralisation, and what the drivers for accountability and learning are at the country and regional level. As with its broader strategy, the Evaluation Service is clearly going in the right direction, but the Panel considers that it needs to invest more in ensuring stronger support systems are in place before coverage expands in the way envisaged by the new RBM guidance. Specifically, if country offices begin to commission at least one decentralized evaluation every policy cycle – as the new RBM guidance states – the

Evaluation Service will need to have established stronger support systems in headquarters and Regional Bureaux.

There is currently very little capacity to manage decentralized evaluations at country office level and this is unlikely to change in the next couple of years. Regional Bureaux and country offices are overwhelmed by UNHCR's current reforms, leaving little bandwidth or spare capacity. The Panel's interviews indicate that there is also limited interest in evaluation at country level. Thus, building interest and demand is one of the Evaluation Service's primary challenges. If the new (centralised) Country Strategy Evaluations are implemented in such a way as to deliver real value to country offices, this could begin to stimulate interest and demand. But they will need careful management to deliver this. In terms of tactics, therefore, the Panel recommends that the Evaluation Service prioritises ensuring Country Strategy Evaluations are high quality and impactful.

The Panel thus recommends that the Evaluation Service reviews its approach. It may help if the Evaluation Service sets out how it plans to deliver the decentralized evaluation function in a short strategy document, developed collaboratively, that sets out the governance of the decentralized evaluation function, expectations and roles and responsibilities of all parties, and a phased approach to roll-out. The Evaluation Service could draw lessons from WFP and UNICEF about how they built their decentralized evaluation systems. There is also a UNEG working group on supporting decentralized evaluation, which may also be able to provide useful guidance.

Currently Regional Senior Evaluation Officers are perceived by Regional Bureaux to be accountable to the Evaluation Service and not to the Bureau they are posted to. Officially the positions are supposed to be simultaneously part of the centralized evaluation service and the decentralized evaluation function. The Panel considers this arrangement is not optimal: it prevents Regional Bureaux from developing ownership and interest in evaluation. Regional Bureaux perceive these positions as outposted headquarters staff whose job it is to service the needs of the Evaluation Service rather than the Regional Bureau.

The Evaluation Service has deployed Senior Regional Evaluation Officers to three of the seven Regional Bureaux. It seeks to support the other Regional Bureaux with Evaluation Service staff from Geneva. Staff based in the Regional Bureaux will build regional capacity in and ownership of evaluation more effectively than Geneva-based staff could. The Panel therefore encourages UNHCR to seek to add Senior Regional Evaluation Officer to all remaining Regional Bureaux.

The Panel makes the following specific comments and recommendations:

Recommendation 7: To further develop the decentralized evaluation function, the Panel recommends the Evaluation Service considers the following:

> *7.1) The Panel recommends the Evaluation Service sets out the governance of the decentralized evaluation function, and expectations and roles and responsibilities of all parties, and a phased approach to roll-out in a short strategy document – that is developed in consultation with senior managers.*

7.2) The Evaluation Service needs to consider how it can support the development of the decentralized evaluation function from Geneva more intensively. Currently, only one officer, the de facto deputy, is responsible for developing the support systems and guidance to establish the decentralized evaluation function. The Panel considers this inadequate.

7.3) To build regional ownership of evaluation the Panel recommends that all Senior Regional Evaluation Officers report to the Regional Director/Deputy Regional Director, with a 'dotted' technical reporting line to the Evaluation Service. This is an arrangement adopted by most other UN agencies with regional evaluation experts.

7.4) UNHCR will more effectively develop an evaluation culture and practices outside Geneva if there is dedicated support in all Regional Bureaux: the Panel recommends UNHCR deploys Senior Regional Evaluation Officer in all the Regional Bureaux.

7.5) If the Evaluation Service acts upon recommendation 7.3, Regional Senior Evaluation Officers can no longer be considered part of the central Evaluation Service. This in turn has implications for how UNHCR conducts Country Strategy Evaluations. Two options are possible:

> *a) Senior Regional Evaluation Officers could continue to manage Country Strategy Evaluations if they are reclassified as decentralized evaluations. This would be appropriate even if they report to the Regional Bureau rather than the Evaluation Service (in line with UNICEF practice) provided that these officers can act with independence.*

> *OR*

> *b) Senior Regional Evaluation Officers focus on decentralized evaluation support, promotion of evaluation uptake, and learning, and Country Strategic Plan evaluations are managed be the Evaluation Service from Geneva.*

7.6) The Evaluation Service needs to consider how to ringfence funds for decentralized evaluations – to ensure that a lack of finance does not prevent Regional Bureaux or country offices from commissioning evaluations. The Panel recommends that the Evaluation Service consider whether it wants to establish a special facility to complement country office funds for decentralized evaluations – with something like the equivalent of WFP's Contingency Evaluation Fund.

7.7) The Panel recommends that the Evaluation Service should commission a consultant to review the implementation of its strategy to establish the decentralized evaluation function after two to three years to inform course correction. This would provide the Evaluation Service with information to adapt its strategy, if necessary.

(For: Evaluation Service, Senior Management, Regional Bureaux Directors)

STRENGTHENING RELATIONS WITH GOVERNING BODIES AND SEEKING GOVERNING BODY ENDORSEMENT FOR UNHCR'S NEXT EVALUATION POLICY

The Panel considers the Evaluation Service has an opportunity to strengthen its engagement with UNHCR's Member States. The Evaluation Service can engage more systematically to cultivate Member States' interest in learning from evaluations – asking them, in turn, to encourage UNHCR's management to drive this approach through the organisation.

The Panel considers that, rather than seeking formal sessions in annual ExCom meetings, the Evaluation Service could organise regular informal meetings or briefings on specific topics to share learning from related evaluations.

The Panel considers that the next Evaluation Policy should be submitted to and be endorsed by ExCom to give the Policy the support of the Governing Board. This would ensure that the changes recommended by the Panel – relating largely to independence and budget – are given a measure of independence from the management function.

Recommendation 8: The Panel recommends that the Evaluation Service:

8.1) regularly brief interested Member States on findings from key products (from evaluations to syntheses) in informal briefings. The Panel also encourages Member States to engage with the Evaluation Service and to consider how to encourage UNHCR management to adopt learning from evaluations.

8.2) submits the next Evaluation Policy for the formal endorsement of the Executive Committee.

(For the Senior Management, Evaluation Service, Member States)

OVERSIGHT FUNCTIONS: AUDIT AND THE INDEPENDENT AUDIT AND OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE

The Panel's interviews indicate there is continuing potential for overlap between OIOS's country operation performance audits and the Evaluation Service Country Strategy Evaluations. The Panel encourages OIOS and the Evaluation Service to continue to liaise closely to coordinate their work so as avoid duplication and to minimise the burden on operations, with the facilitation of the Inspector General if necessary. The Panel notes that evaluations provide a distinct perspective all forms of audit, including performance audits. Evaluations assess the logic underpinning approaches, helping operations to question their assumptions and modify their approach.

As noted in the body of the report, the Independent Audit and Oversight Committee (IAOC) has played a valuable role in guiding the evolution of UNHCR's evaluation function over the last seven years. In early 2019 the ToR and criteria for membership of the Independent Audit and Oversight were revised to include a requirement for all members "to the extent possible,

have experience" in evaluation.[64] This is welcome but the Panel considers that it is critical that the Committee can devote specialist expertise to reviewing how the evaluation function is developing in the coming few years. The Committee could have greater influence over the evolution of the function if it included an evaluation specialist with a mandate to review the function in more detail. The Peer Review therefore recommends that the IAOC permanently adds an evaluation specialist to its membership – for example, an individual who has played a senior role in the evaluation function of another UN function. This would require its Committee's ToR to be revised again.

Recommendation 9: The Panel recommends a senior evaluation specialist is added as a permanent member of the Independent Audit and Oversight Committee (e.g., an individual who held a senior role in the evaluation function of another UN function).

(For: Member States, Senior Management, IAOC Chair)

ACCOUNTABILITY AND THE EVALUATION FUNCTION

The Panel notes that accountability is viewed in relatively negative terms in some parts of the organisation. Evaluation is sometimes associated with this. The Panel considers that the Evaluation Service could try to counter negative connotations by showing how accountability systems can strengthen the organisation. By independently evidencing effective performance, evaluations can help build the support of Member States.

In terms of following up the impact of how agreed recommendations are implemented, the Panel endorses the Evaluation Service's intention to track what action was taken after a management response was agreed – in a light touch way. The Evaluation Service is experimenting with how best to do this after 12 months, but the Panel also recommends that the Evaluation Service experiments with following up on the second- and third-year anniversaries to track evaluation follow-up. This exercise can contribute lessons both to the Evaluation Service, on how to ensure recommendations gain traction, but also to the evaluand – by encouraging them to reflect on how they are adapting their practice.

Recommendation 10: The Panel recommends that the Evaluation Service considers following up the implementation of agreed evaluation recommendations on the second- and third-year anniversaries, as a way of driving both accountability and learning.

(For: Evaluation Service)

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[64] See UNHCR (2011) Establishment of an Independent Audit and Oversight Committee, 51st Standing Committee Meeting and UNHCR (2011) Establishment of an Independent Audit and Oversight Committee, 51st Standing Committee Meeting.

ANNEXES

ANNEX 1: ACRONYMS

CRRF	Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework
DSPR	Division of Strategic Planning and Results
ExCom	Executive Committee
IAHE	Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation
IAOC	Independent Audit and Oversight Committee
JIU	Joint Inspection Unit
MOPAN	Multilateral Organisation Performance Assessment Network
NECD	National Evaluation Capacity Development
OECD DAC	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Development Assistance Committee
OIOS	UN Office of Internal Oversight Services
OIOS/IED	Inspection and Evaluation Division of the UN Office of Internal Oversight Services
RBM	Results Based Management
SET	Senior Executive Team
SMC	Senior Management Committee
UNEG	UN Evaluation Group
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
WFP	World Food Programme

ANNEX 2: PERSONS MET

UNHCR Staff

Kelly Clements, Deputy High Commissioner

Ann Ochwo Rwego, Head OIOS Internal Audit

Annika Sandlund, Head of Service, Partnerships

Anthony Garnett, UNHCR's Inspector General

Betsy Lippman, Senior Advisor Partnerships, Division of Resilience and Solutions, Humanitarian Nexus

Diane Goodman, Senior Coordinator

Eddie Yee Woo Guo, Director, Inspections and Evaluation Division (IED), OIOS

Ellen Hansen, Head of Governance Service

George Woode Snr. Transition Coordinator

Hovig Etyemezian, Head of Innovation Service

Jozef Merkx, Representative, Colombia

Krishna Menon, Acting Head OIOS Internal Audit

Kristine Hambrouck, Deputy Director, East and Horn of Africa & Great Lakes Africa Regional Bureau

Malika Parent, Chair of Independent Audit and Oversight Committee

Mamadou Dian Balde, Deputy Director, Division of Resilience and Solutions

Meeting with representatives of the Executive Committee (Governing body)

Monica Noro, Deputy Director MENA Region

Noriko Takagi, RBM Business Coordinator

Ritu Shroff, Director of the Division of Strategic Planning and Results

Robin Ellis, Deputy Director Division of Emergency

Robin Ellis, Deputy Director, Division of Emergency, Security and Supply (DESS)

Sakura Atsumi Head, Strategic Planning & Management Services, Regional Bureau for Southern Africa

Shahrzad Tadjbakhsh, UNHCR's Chef de Cabinet

Stephan Ulrich Grieb, Deputy Director. Division Human Resources

Steven Corliss Director for Change

Tayyar Sukru Cansizoglu, Deputy Director, Annual Review & Budget Analysis Service, Division of Strategic Planning & Result

Xavier Creach, Head of Protection Services, West and Central Africa Bureau

UNHCR Member State Representatives

Anne Keah, Counsellor, Permanent Mission to the United Nations Office at Geneva, Kenya

Gregor Schotten, Counsellor (Humanitarian Affairs) Permanent Mission to the United Nations Office at Geneva, Germany

Katarina Clifford, Counsellor, Permanent Delegation to the United Nations Office at Geneva, EU

Lucas Hage, Second Secretary, Permanent Mission to the United Nations Office at Geneva, Brazil

Nabil Ferzli, Second Secretary, Permanent Mission to the United Nations Office at Geneva, Lebanon

Paulina Ceballos Zapata, Adviser, Permanent Mission to the United Nations Office at Geneva, Mexico

Evaluation Service Staff

Lori Bell, Head of Evaluation Service Geneva

Johan Cels, Senior Policy Advisor Geneva

David Rider Smith, Senior Evaluation Coordinator Geneva

Nabila Hameed, Senior Evaluation Officer Geneva

Marcel van Maastrigt, Senior Evaluation Officer Geneva

Christine Fu, Senior Evaluation Officer Geneva

Henri van der Idsert, Senior Evaluation Officer Geneva

Selam Soum Araya, Senior Resource Management Associate Geneva

Assel Paji, Communications Officer

Susan Bird, Senior Regional Evaluation Officer, Panama City, Regional Bureau for the Americas

Iesha Singh, Senior Evaluation Officer Dakar, Senegal Regional Bureau for West and Central Africa

Malene Nielsen, Senior Evaluation Officer Nairobi, Kenya Regional Bureau for East and Horn of Africa & Great Lakes

Joel Kinahan, Evaluation Officer Geneva,

Dante Sanchez Torres, Evaluation Consultant

Fanni Bunevacz, Administration Assistant, Geneva

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ANNEX 4: THE EVALUATION SERVICE'S COVID-19 RESPONSE

The following bullet points set out Evaluation Service's response to date. The Evaluation Service:[1]

- Adapted its UNHCRs 2020/21 rolling evaluation workplan in light of UNHCR's COVID L2 Activation and global pandemic. This set out the Service's new principles and priorities[2]
- Used new remote approaches to conduct evaluations and to make fuller use of existing evaluative evidence. It continued to implement its work plan and initiated 19 evaluations in 2020 under COVID-19 conditions.
- Developed an approach to evaluating UNHCR's response to COVID-19 that mainstreams relevant questions into ongoing and new evaluations - to avoid burdening operations with additional reporting requests.
- The service prepared two briefs: lessons learned from the response to Ebola in refugee settings; and a synthesis of key learning from evaluations related to UNHCR's main COVID-19 scale-up strategies. This latter evaluation brief draws on evidence from over 15 evaluations carried out by UNHCR since 2018, structured around risks highlighted by COVID situation reports.

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[1] If not specified, evidence is from the Evaluation Service's 2020 report to the Executive Committee.

[2] UNHCR (2020) Evaluation Brief: UNHCR Evaluation Plan 2020/21 – Responding to COVID-19 June, 2020

- Became a member of a core group of OECD DAC that will lead the COVID-19 Global Evaluation Coalition. This allowed UNHCR to advocate for refugees and other displaced groups to be central in planned evaluations in 2020-2021.
- Is planning a real-time Evaluation of UNHCR L2 response in COVID affected countries to start by mid-2021.[3]
- Initiated a Joint Evaluation of the international response to protect refugee rights during Covid-19 pandemic, under the auspices of the Global Eval Coalition, with Finland, Colombia, Uganda and ALNAP.
- The Evaluation Service is also part of the management group for the IAHE of COVID-19 pandemic response, including the Global Humanitarian Response Plan and scale-up, coordinated by OCHA.
- Assigned a staff member to work with an internal COVID-19 analytical team in support of longer-term forecasting of the impacts of the pandemic on people of concern to UNHCR.
- Took steps to maintain strong relations between the Evaluation Service and other divisions. As staff moved to homeworking, to maintain Evaluation Service's links, the Head of Evaluation Service allocated staff members to serve in Focal point roles with UNHCR's divisions.
- collaborated with the Inspector Generals' Office and OIOS to adapt oversight plans to situational challenges and priorities.

ANNEX 5: INITIATIVES TO STRENGTHEN UTILITY AND UTILISATION OF EVALUATIONS

The Evaluation Strategy makes strengthening the utility and utilisation of evaluations one of the Evaluation Service's four "pillars of work". It sets out the series measures the evaluation function will take. These and an update on implementation provided by the Evaluation Service are presented below. The text in the inset bullet notes action taken, as provided by the Evaluation Service:

- *Link evaluative thinking with our programme planning and budgeting processes*
  - *The Evaluation Service notes in 2020 it worked hard to ensuring evaluation is seen in the RBM cycle.*

- *Undertake evaluation preparatory work in-house, including front-loading scoping studies (e.g. literature review); evaluability assessments and horizon/issues scanning to help define strategic questions.*

  - *The Evaluation Service has recruited two long-term consultants to support this work in-house*

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[3] UNHCR (2020) Report on Evaluation, ExCom 71th Session

- *Strengthen the crafting of TORs with colleagues—particularly in unpacking programme logic, identifying key evaluation questions, and thinking about methodologies.*

  - *The Evaluation Service notes this is a continuing challenge but anticipates that UNHCR's new corporate programme management system (COMPAS) and roll out of RBM may help.*

- *Build stronger relationships with evaluation firms and consultants and follow them more closely on content and process.*

  - *The Evaluation Service has drafted new TOR for establishing long-term agreements and they will soon go out for tender.*

- *Undertake more efforts to disseminate evaluation findings through a range of communication approaches.*

  - *As set out in the paragraphs on communications below, the Evaluation Service issued its first communications strategy in 2020 and has a consultant supporting implementation.*

- *Ensure that actionable recommendations are co-created where possible and are vetted for feasibility and fit for the organization, e.g. build in stakeholder workshops to co-create recommendations in all evaluations.*

  - *The Evaluation Service notes that this is still a challenge: despite a healthy validation and co-creation process, recommendations are often rejected or partially accepted and management response submissions are late.*

- *Continue to institutionalize management responses and improve how we craft and manage them [4]*

  - *Prior to 2020, the Evaluation Service did not quality assure management responses: it now coaches management on what is required and checks that the management response is reasonable given the recommendations.*

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[4] Evaluation Strategy ,p.5

Terms of Reference

UNEG/DAC Professional Peer Review of UNHCR's Evaluation Function 2021

1. Introduction and objectives of UNEG Peer Reviews

UNEG/DAC peer reviews seek to answer a central question: 'Are the UN agency's evaluation policy, evaluation function and its evaluation products independent, credible and useful for learning and accountability purposes, as assessed by a panel of professional evaluation peers against the UNEG Norms and Standards and the evidence base provided'.

As described in the 2011 *UNEG Framework for Professional Peer Reviews of the Evaluation Function of UN Organisations[1],* peer reviews are an established modality for capacity building within the field of international development cooperation. Relying on mutual trust among the organizations and professionals involved, peer reviews attempt to stimulate organizations to change, achieve goals and meet standards through dialogue, interactive investigation and shared experience.

First developed in 2005 and updated in 2016[2], UNEG and OECD/DAC evaluation norms and standards provide a clear normative framework for UNEG/DAC peer reviews through a series of ten general Norms that should be upheld in the conduct of any evaluation; four institutional norms that should be reflected in the management and governance of evaluation functions and a set of associated standards which support the implementation of these normative principles.

UNEG/DAC peer reviews of evaluation functions have several purposes:

Firstly, they provide an independent and professional assessment on the extent to which the UNEG Norms and Standards have been adopted in the organization concerned. This assessment may lead to the formulation of potential improvements in evaluation policy and practice.

Secondly, they build greater knowledge, confidence and support greater use of evaluation systems by management, governing bodies and others. This may lead – if appropriate – to better understanding of the current quality and needed improvements in evaluation; better integration of the evaluation function and evaluation findings into performance management; improved evaluation practice throughout the organization; and stronger evaluation planning and budgeting

Thirdly, within the organization being assessed, peer reviews provide a means to 'evaluate the evaluators 'against an established set of professional standards, thus ensuring a necessary degree of independence from management in assessing the performance of the evaluation function.

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[1] http://www.unevaluation.org/document/detail/945

[2] http://www.unevaluation.org/document/detail/1914

Finally, in sharing good practice, experience and mutual learning, peer reviews can contribute to strengthening internal evaluation capacity across the UN system and build external confidence in UN evaluation system, thus potentially reducing demands for external assessment of the organisation's performance and effectiveness[3]'

In answering the core question, peer reviews should focus on three core issues that are central to the Norms and Standards: the independence of the evaluation function, and the credibility and utility of its products.

The peer review should also assess the extent to which the evaluation function contributes to the accountability of the organization for the public resources entrusted to it, as well as its ability to support the strategic learning agenda of the organization.

The intended audiences for peer reviews are typically decision-makers (senior management, governing bodies, the Head of Evaluation and agency evaluators) and other users of the evaluation – including, where appropriate, the intended beneficiaries in UN Member Countries.

2. Background to the UNHCR peer review (including key points from any previous reviews/assessments of the evaluation function)

The evaluation function in UNHCR has evolved considerably over the past decade. Under the 2010 policy, evaluations were conducted by mixed teams that included external experts, partners and UNHCR staff – there was a strong focus on learning and the Evaluation Service also supported research and policy advice/development. Evaluation findings and recommendations of all major evaluations were presented to members of the Executive Office and Senior Management Committee. Reports were published but management responses were not mandatory (or published). In practice few evaluations were conducted.

In 2016 a new Policy was approved which strengthened the independence of the function while still promoting a strong focus on learning. From 2016 the Evaluation Service was responsible strictly for evaluation and the number of completed evaluations each year has significantly increased since – as has the evaluation budget. In 2019 and 2020, in response to reforms and regionalization within UNHCR, new regional evaluation posts have been established in 3 of 7 Regional Bureaus and revised evaluation guidance has been produced. An external quality assurance system is being tested – as is one year follow up reporting against the management response. The Evaluation Service comprises 11 evaluation staff (50% rotational) plus operational, administrative and communications support. On average 8-10 centralized and a similar number of decentralized evaluations are published each year. Evaluation expenditure has doubled between 2016 and 2020 but still hovers at just over 0.1% of organizational programmatic expenditure (2019). Geographic and substantive distribution of evaluations have been mapped and show gradually increasing coverage.

Independent reviews conducted over the past 5-6 years or so of UNHCR's evaluation function include the 2014 JIU report, the OIOS Evaluation Dashboard 2016-17 and the 2017/18 MOPAN.

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[3] Ibid, page 3

The 2014 Joint Inspection Unit report rated UNHCR as on "step 2" of 5 on a scale of evaluation utility.

The OIOS assessment made the following observations: The evaluation plans and procedures can be further strengthened, including:

- Evaluation plan articulation of the purpose of evaluations, resources for the evaluations, a formal procedure for developing evaluation plans, and procedure for submission to the head of the entity or governing body for review/approval.
- Establishment of evaluation procedures for: developing an evaluation workplan; developing action plans for implementing evaluation recommendations; and tracking and/or monitoring the implementation of evaluation recommendations.
- Expenditure on evaluation can be increased to meet a minimum of 0.5% of programme expenditure.   Report quality: While of overall high quality, evaluation reports can achieve a greater integration of human rights dimensions.

The 2018 MOPAN report (KPI 8) rated UNHCR as satisfactory on the evaluation: "UNHCR's evaluation function is building momentum, although it does not yet meet all best practice standards. UNHCR launched its strongly revised Evaluation Policy, strengthened its Evaluation Service, and issued a guidance manual (including for Quality Assurance) in 2016. A 5-year Evaluation Strategy was developed in 2017, in close consultation with staff from other Departments. The policy aims to improve evaluative coverage, with demonstrable success so far, and to foster and strengthen an organisational culture of learning and accountability for results. The new evaluation policy describes the types and potential triggers for evaluation as well as stipulating the requirement for management responses to key findings and recommendations within a clear timeframe. However, as yet, the evaluation service is not fully independent, either structurally, operationally, or in budgetary terms. At this stage, few formal incentives or requirements are evident to ensure demonstration of the evidence base in designing new interventions. UNHCR does not have a formal knowledge management function as yet."

3. Purpose, Subject, Scope and Limitations of the Peer Review

The main purpose of the UNHCR Peer Review is to strengthen the UNHCR evaluation function so that it can effectively contribute to organizational decision-making, learning and accountability for results and programme effectiveness.

The Peer Review will determine if the evaluation function and its products are independent; credible; and useful for learning and accountability purposes, as assessed against UN standards and in relation to what is fit-for-purpose for UNHCR

The Peer Review shall provide actionable recommendations to UNHCR High Commissioner, Senior Executive Team (SET), Senior Management Committee (SMC), Evaluation Office and Executive Committee aimed at improving the overall quality of the evaluation function. More specifically, the recommendations should inform, inter alia, decision-making about the positioning of the evaluation function in UNHCR, its governance, resourcing (including both human and financial capacity), evaluation planning, evaluation use, quality assurance mechanisms.

The Peer Review will take into particular consideration the current reforms ongoing in UNHCR – notably regionalization/decentralization, business transformation, results-based management, and the organization's commitment to supporting the Global Compact on Refugees.

The scope includes the entire evaluation function: both centralized and decentralized. The Peer review will look at progress made in strengthening the evaluation function in UNHCR since the approval of the 2016 evaluation policy, and the extent has the 2018-2022 evaluation strategy been effectively implemented – with the view of providing strategic inputs into the updated/new evaluation policy, to be finalized before the end of 2021, and eventual strategy revision

A potential constraint is that the Peer Review is likely to be undertaken largely remotely due to COVID-19. Unlike when a Panel mission is undertaken, there is a risk that panel members will find it challenging to dedicate sufficient time to the peer review. The PR Chair will need to discuss this, and remote data gathering approaches, with the panel during the inception phase.

The panel should assess the UNHCR evaluation function, not only from a norms/standards perspective, but also from a fit-for-purpose/organization point of view. To do this, the panel should be comprised of experts bringing in a range of experience – and from different types of organizations including but going beyond the UNEG and DAC membership. UNHCR is a humanitarian organization in its truest sense – highly operational and with limited interest in/capacity for consideration of academic/theoretical models. The most important role that evaluation currently plays in UNHCR is of convening – facilitating stop-and-reflect moments and promoting organization-wide learning to enable the organization to deliver protection and humanitarian assistance to persons of concern (refugees, IDPs, stateless) on the ground.

4. Approach and methods for UNEG peer reviews

The findings in UNEG peer reviews are typically based on a mix of secondary and primary data, comprising both desk review and key informant interview and focus group techniques from in-person engagement with members of UNEG evaluation offices and key stakeholders of the agency's evaluation function.

They also rely on an assessment of how developed the evaluation function is assessed against the *Maturity Matrix* for UNEG evaluation functions which is operationalized against a set of 48 performance criteria organized according to the Norms and Standards including benchmark

Taken together, these lines of evidence and assessment framework provide a standard normative framework for UNEG peer reviewers to answer the core question of the peer review mentioned above.

UNEG Peer Reviews typically include the following stages:

Preparation: During this period, the focus will be on the finalization of the ToR for the peer review, the composition of the Panel, the recruitment of the consultant and the collection of key documents relevant to the peer review

Self-Assessment: The agency being assessed undertakes a self-assessment of the evaluation function against the UNEG Norms and Standards, using the maturity matrix for UNEG peer reviews presented to the AGM in 2020. This self-assessment should be conducted by the

evaluation entity being assessed involving the full range of evaluation officers subject to the assessment in both centralized and decentralized offices as appropriate. The UNHCR self-assessment was completed over Nov/Dec 2020.

Initial Written Assessment: The consultant supporting the panel should conduct an extensive document review and, potentially, together with the Chair of the Panel undertake a (virtual) mission to UNHCR to consult with the Evaluation Office to support the drafting of a preliminary assessment of the evaluation function and of the evaluations which will be discussed with Evaluation Office staff.

As part of the initial written assessment, the expert consultant who supports the Panel reporting to the Panel Chair should conduct an assessment of a sample of evaluation reports against the UNEG template for evaluation reports.[4] This will be supplemented by the external quality assessment that all UNHCR evaluation reports finalized during 2020 will undergo as part of the pilot QA system.

(Virtual) mission of the panel to UNHCR: Equipped with the preliminary assessment, the Panel should conduct an initial (virtual) visit to UNHCR. This should include a round of meetings, interviews and focus group discussions with staff, UNHCR senior management (at all levels of the organization) and members of the Board and key external stakeholders.

Reporting and dissemination: The Panel produces a final draft report and powerpoint for discussion with senior management and representatives of the Executive Committee (ExComm October 2021). This will also be the opportunity for a peer exchange session with the Office of Evaluation.

Once the report has been finalized, the agency produces a management response which are disseminated together both by the agency as well as by the UNEG Peer Review Working Group on the UNEG website.

The deadlines for the current exercise are as follows:

Preparation	December-April, 2020
Self-Assessment	31 December, 2020
Preliminary Assessment	5 April, 2021
Panel meetings with UNHCR Headquarters (virtual)	19-30 April, 2021
Reporting	June-July 2021
Dissemination	August-October 2021

5. Core assessment criteria and evaluation questions [normative framework]

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[4] http://www.unevaluation.org/document/detail/607

The assessment framework for the peer review is made up a number of distinct elements which combine to enable the Panel to answer the overall question posed common to all UNEG peer reviews:

Are the agency′s evaluation policy, strategy, functions and its products: independent; credible; and useful for learning and accountability purposes, as assessed by a panel of professional evaluation peers against the UN Norms and Standards and evidence base"?

These elements include: a) the UNEG maturity matrix for Peer Reviews which operationalises the Norms and Standards into an assessment rubric including pre-defined levels of maturity for each performance criterion; b) a set of general evaluation questions organized by central features of any UNEG Member evaluation function and c) a set of more specific questions that are particular to the agency being assessed and which help strengthen the potential of the peer review to the agency's management and Evaluation Office.

 a.   UNEG Maturity Matrix for Peer Reviews[5]

Drawing on the revised Norms and Standards, and also the objective for a peer review modality that could be accessed by all UN evaluation offices, UNEG updated in 2020 the operational framework for peer reviews proposing a performance rubric organized explicitly around the ten general norms that evaluation functions should exhibit in the conduct of any evaluation as well as the four institutional norms that should be reflected in the management.

Operationalised into a set of forty-eight organisational and performance criteria for reviewers to assess, the assessment rubric is presented in the form of a maturity index, with four 'levels ' or 'benchmarks 'of maturity clearly defined for each of the performance criteria.

In proposing these benchmarks, the rubric is intended not only to produce a one-off assessment of the maturity of the evaluation function against the UNEG Norms and Standards but also a clear pathway for organizational strengthening which can support the professionalization activities of UNEG members going forward. This is in support of the commitment that UN Evaluation Offices make when becoming members of UNEG.

 b. Key evaluation questions (organized around the core normative standards for evaluation in the UN system: independence, credibility and utility) and building on the UNEG Maturity Matrix[6] will look at the Evaluation policy, strategy, governance and management of the function, evaluation planning and quality, evaluation follow up and use and external influence, partnerships and positioning

A.   The EVALUATION POLICY in particular:

 A.1. The extent to which the evaluation policy conforms with UNEG Norms and Standards, internal and external contextual changes and requirements, such as

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[5] http://www.unevaluation.org/document/download/3591

[6] See for example the DAC – UNEG document

delivering on Agenda 2030, and whether it needs to be updated in view of recent changes and ongoing transformation within UNHCR, the role of the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework in evaluation, and the System Wide Evaluation Policy under preparation;

A.2.   The extent to which the evaluation policy is consistent with, and is able to influence, other UNHCR policies or frameworks relevant to the evaluation function (notably those concerning strategic planning and budgeting, oversight, results-based management and monitoring; research, data collection and analysis and knowledge management; enterprise risk management; and human resources);

A.3.   The extent to which the theory of change developed in the evaluation strategy is logical and comprehensive; is used to operationalise the Policy in the corporate evaluation strategy, and its assumptions are validated, and risks mitigated;

A.4.   The extent to which the UNHCR Evaluation Policy integrates Gender, Human Rights, Humanitarian Principles, Equity, and Ethical Principles and it adequately reflects the recent developments in the field of evaluation (technical skills and knowledge, approaches and methods, data).

B.   GOVERNANCE arrangements, including the following:

B.1.   The extent to which the roles & responsibilities, as defined in the Policy are adequately operationalized, and how it has changed the organizational relationships of the Evaluation Service with the Senior Executive Team, Senior Management Committee, Executive Committee, and IAOC;

B.2.   The extent to which the arrangements for oversight of the centralised evaluation function by the Executive Office and Executive Committee and of the decentralized evaluation activities by commissioning entities are in line with the UNEG Norms and Standards and how they work in practice;

B.3.   The extent to which the contractual arrangements for the post of Head of Evaluation, including recruitment, performance management and termination, contributes to the structural and behavioral independence of the function and the extent to which the Head of Evaluation has adequate access and opportunities to contribute to key corporate processes and decisions, including the deliberations of UNHCR's Executive Committee; and whether the institutional 'space' given to the role allows the post-holder and Evaluation Service more generally to exert influence where necessary.

C.   MANAGEMENT of the Evaluation Function, including the following:

C.1.   How far management arrangements and working procedures of the evaluation function at centralised and decentralised levels support the fulfilment of evaluation policy commitments and the achievement of the evaluation policy's objectives;

C.2.   The development, provision and use of guidance, methods and tools to support and strengthen management of evaluations at central and decentralized levels and establish clear linkages and a division of labour between the two levels

C.4. Ability to respond effectively to crises (including both mandate-specific crises such as the Sahel emergency 2020, and cross-cutting emergencies such as the COVID-19 pandemic) and emerging organizational imperatives.

D. EVALUATION PLANNING, including consideration of the following:

D.1. Relevance and appropriateness of the methods, process and criteria used for planning and prioritizing the selection of evaluation topics for both centralized and decentralized evaluations, while considering other exercises such as strategic planning, audits and reviews;

D.2. The extent to which topics selected for evaluation meet the strategic needs and demands of UNHCR's key stakeholders, balancing accountability and learning both at centralized and decentralized level;

D.3. The balance of effort between: i) UNHCR corporate evaluation work and joint and system-wide evaluation work; and ii) between undertaking new evaluations in order to generate new evidence and synthesising and disseminating existing evidence.

E. EVALUATION QUALITY at each level of the organization, including attention to the following:

E.1. The quality and credibility of the evaluations (as perceived by key user stakeholders and as benchmarked against evaluation norms and standards) from the planning process through the conduct of the evaluations to the appropriateness of evaluation methods, and of evidence-based findings, conclusions, and recommendations;

E.2. The extent to which UNHCR evaluations integrate ethical considerations Gender, Human Rights, Equity, and Humanitarian principles in line with relevant UNEG and international standards;

E.3. The independence of evaluation teams and team leaders, systems to ensure the quality of the team, assessing the appropriateness of evaluation approach setup in the Policy (outsourcing of evaluation conduct to independent evaluation teams);

E.4. The adequacy of the evaluation quality assurance system for all evaluation types (centralized, decentralized) including any post-hoc quality assessment conducted on all final evaluation reports:

F. EVALUATION FOLLOW UP AND USE - important aspects include the following:

F.1. The type and level of engagement of internal and external stakeholders from the evaluation planning process onwards to their use of evaluation evidence to develop new policies, strategies, programmes, and country strategic plans and support learning, enhancing accountability and organizational improvement at the relevant levels;

F.2.   Appropriateness of communication and dissemination approaches to support use internally and externally (persons of concern, member states, and partners), and to ensure the language and content is relevant and useful to stakeholders in the field.

F.3.   Responsibilities for the follow-up of lessons and recommendations, including arrangements for preparation and implementation of a formal Management Response.

G. PARTNERSHIPS AND POSITIONING of the Evaluation Service:

G.1.   Extent to which partnerships in evaluation e.g. by collaborating in joint system-wide or country-led evaluation initiatives, have evolved effectively;

G.2.   Extent to which collaborations with evaluation partners have been effective in facilitating global humanitarian effectiveness accountability as intended in the evaluation policy;

G.3.   In effectively engaging with external entities e.g. the UN Evaluation Group, EvalPartners, ALNAP, DIME, or contributing to Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluations and other joint evaluations in order to achieve partnership objectives.

H. FINANCIAL RESOURCES of the Evaluation Function, including the following:

H.1.   Are the Evaluation Service, Regional Bureaux and Country Offices adequately financed to allow for the commissioning of high-quality credible, useful, and timely evaluations;

H.2.   Does UNHCR adequately invest the necessary financial resources to support the delivery of high-quality centralized and decentralized evaluations – how appropriate and sustainable are evaluation funding mechanisms;

I. Human resources for the Evaluation Function, including the following:

I.1.   Have the Evaluation Service, Regional Bureaux and country offices an adequate staffing in terms of gender and diversity and of rotational and non-rotational posts to allow for the conduct of the evaluation function at all levels and the commissioning of high-quality credible, useful, and timely evaluations;

I.2.   Extent to which evaluation capacities are appropriate at all levels of the organizations and for various stakeholder groups to deliver the evaluation policy.

I.3.   Extent to which evaluation teams are appropriately resourced (profiles, gender and diversity); and how do they relate to the rest of the organization.

c. Specific questions that the agency would like the peer reviewers to address:

- Given not only the humanitarian mission of the organization but also the sensitivity of many of the topics covered by evaluative exercises, how can the evaluation function

strike a balance between accountability/transparency and protection of UNHCR's mandate to stay and deliver in very challenging political contexts?

- How appropriate is the approach to support the nascent decentralized evaluation function, and what more should be done given available resources? What is the right mix of global strategic (centralized) and regionally/programme specific (decentralized) evaluations going forward in terms of balance and coverage?

- What good practices are in place that should be maintained and/or further institutionalized and shared? In particular, how can the evaluation function enhance its contribution to knowledge management and learning within the organization?

- What lessons can be drawn to guide the development of the overall evaluation function in UNHCR in line with the UNHCR's corporate strategy and reforms in the coming 5 years?

- What lessons/learning can be drawn about the evaluation function, and how it operates and performs in the COVID-19 context, that should be taken into account going forward?

- How can the Evaluation Service course correct in the final 12-18 months of its current Strategy, which runs through 2022, and how can those reflections and emerging lessons inform if/how to renew or refresh that Strategy thereafter?

- How can the evaluation function, especially for the purpose of learning and knowledge sharing, engage a broader range of internal and external stakeholders (including local partners and refugees), especially in the context of regionalisation and decentralisation, and the Global Compact and the localisation agenda, respectively?

- How can the UN Evaluation Group also adapt to a changing humanitarian context, especially drawing in lessons from partners outside the UN and of partners and organisations working locally, to ensure that evaluation better serves an operational UN humanitarian agency such as UNHCR.

6. Panel composition

In view of the need for the Panel to reflect the mandate of UNHCR and forward-looking areas of reform: refugees/IDPs/stateless people, refugee rights, decentralization, and humanitarian action, the Panel will be comprised of evaluation experts from a variety of peer organizations that have a similar mandate and are similarly organized to UNHCR's evaluation function:

Andrea Cook – Director, WFP Office of Evaluation

Demetra Arapakos – OIOS

Johan Schaar – ALNAP Steering Committee

Susan Kyle – Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration

Antoine Ouellet-Drouin – International Committee of the Red Cross

Nanna Hdvit – Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Denmark

7. Conducting the Peer Review

The key actors involved in a UNEG peer review include: i) the Agency requesting the peer review [UNHCR]; ii) the Peer Review Panel which is responsible – supported by an expert consultant - for conducting the Peer Review exercise and producing the peer review report; iii) the Peer Review Working Group which, representing UNEG, and supported by the EvalNet Secretariat, is the custodian of the peer review exercise and responsible for the overall quality of the report.

The primary responsibility for the peer review rests with the Panel which is led by the Panel Chair and supported by expert evaluators from UN Evaluation offices as well as OECD DAC Member Evaluation Offices. Panels can also be supported by thematic experts that bring specific knowledge of aspects of the evaluation function.

The Panel is supported by an expert consultant who should be a senior professional with knowledge and experience of how UN evaluation functions work, strong drafting skills as well the ability to work with senior UN evaluators.

The Peer Review exercise is overseen by the UNEG Peer Review Working Group which in line with UNEG's responsibility as the custodian of the peer review modality is responsible for ensuring that the exercise proceeds according to good practice in international evaluation. The PRWG provides guidance and support at all stages of the exercise and also has a role in signing off on the quality of the reports in line with relevant standards.

8. Key documents to be consulted
- UNHCR evaluation policy 2016 and strategy 2018-2022.
- 2020 UNHCR evaluation communications strategy.
- UNHCR Strategic Directions and related Results Framework
- ExCom Reports – annually 2016-2020
- External reviews of the evaluation function (MOPAN, JIU, OIOS)
- UNHCR Evaluation Reports and Management Responses
- IOD Parc Quality Review – UNHCR Evaluation Reports 2018/19 and 2020.
- UNHCR Annual Evaluation Workplans, budget and expenditure 2018/19/20
- UNHCR Guidelines for the Conduct of Decentralized Evaluations
- JD's of UNHCR evaluation staff
- Evaluation budget 2015-2020
- 2019 UNHCR Oversight Coordination Policy
- UNHCR RBM materials

9. Key persons to be met
- Evaluation Service colleagues (past and present)
- Senior Executive Team and selected members of the Senior Mgmt Committee (Directors)
- Country Representatives in countries where evaluations have recently been conducted.
- Inspector General
- Sample of evaluation team leaders

- Peer evaluation units that have partnered with ES (UNICEF, OCHA, IOM).
- Potentially ExCom members.

10. Timeline for the peer review

Dec 2020:   Consultant recruited

Feb 2021:   ToR finalized

March 2021:   Consultant's desk review of evaluation function

April 2021:   Consultants' Preliminary Assessment shared; UNHCR presentation to
Panel

April 2021:   Peer Review Panel consultation/meetings with UNHCR (remote)

August 2021:   Final Peer Review report received by UNHCR

Oct 2021:   Report to the Executive Committee

July-Oct 2021:   Evaluation Policy revised; and Dec 2021 approved by HC

11. Resources

UNHCR will provide funds for the purposes of recruiting a senior consultant to support the overall PR process. The initial estimated cost of this consultancy is 60,000 USD. Panel members are thanked for their contribution to the peer review and will be recognized as individuals and on the part of their organizations in the report.