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Programme questions: evaluation

Triennial review of recommendations from the programme evaluation of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services

Summary

The present report is submitted in accordance with the decision taken by the Committee for Programme and Coordination at its twenty-second session to review the implementation of Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) recommendations three years after the Committee had decided to endorse them ([A/37/38](#), para. 362). The triennial review determined the extent to which the five recommendations emanating from the OIOS programme evaluation of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) have been implemented.

The 2017 evaluation of UNHCR was focused on the role of UNHCR in the registration of refugees and asylum seekers and included five important recommendations. OIOS has determined that all five recommendations have been implemented.

In recommendation 1, OIOS asked UNHCR to update, complete and strengthen its policies and guidelines on registration. In response, UNHCR published its online Guidance on Registration and Identity Management in 2018, which replaced or superseded the registration-related materials cited in the recommendation. UNHCR also issued new guidance on protection and a toolkit of online protection resources. OIOS has determined that the recommendation has been implemented but noted that the finalization of one of the eight modules of the online guidance was pending at the time of the triennial review.

* The dates for the substantive session are tentative.

** [E/AC.51/2020/1](#).



In recommendation 2, OIOS asked UNHCR to identify country operations with low registration coverage and the reasons for access barriers and to articulate strategies for addressing them. To implement this recommendation, UNHCR has drawn on a network of senior registration and identity management officers based in regional offices, who monitor countries with low registration coverage and make recommendations on how to address barriers. In addition, two major internal change processes at UNHCR will enhance its capacity to identify and address such challenges. First, a process of regionalization has given regional bureaux more leeway to collect and analyse data, including on registration, and respond at the country level. Under a data transformation strategy, new units have been set up in those bureaux to manage and use all such data collected throughout UNHCR. OIOS has determined that the recommendation has been implemented.

In recommendation 3, OIOS asked UNHCR to finalize the development and accelerate the roll-out of the latest version of its information technology case management tool, proGres v4. Completion of the roll-out to all country operations, pending final amendments to address operational requirements and user feedback, is expected by the end of 2020. Based on the expectation that the updated system will be rolled out by the end of 2020, OIOS has determined that the recommendation has been implemented.

In recommendation 4, OIOS asked UNHCR to identify which registration data elements most enhance shared work with its partners. In response, UNHCR has taken steps to strengthen its capacity to share registration data with external parties through individual agreements, initiatives and templates. OIOS has determined that the recommendation has been implemented.

In recommendation 5, OIOS asked UNHCR to increase the number of operations reporting under registration-related objectives. UNHCR has demonstrated progress in operations reporting on its key strategic priority related to registration and improvements in the coverage of those reporting. It has carried out initiatives to improve data quality and is developing a new results-based management framework that will define corporate measurable results areas, mandatory indicators and country-specific results chains, enabling more comprehensive and richer reporting to reflect registration implementation.

I. Introduction

1. At its fifty-seventh session, in 2017, the Committee for Programme and Coordination considered the report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) on the evaluation of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) (E/AC.51/2017/10).
2. The Committee expressed appreciation for the report and recommended that the General Assembly endorse the five recommendations contained in paragraph 61.
3. In the present triennial review, OIOS examined the status of implementation of the five recommendations contained in its evaluation report. It was determined that all five had been implemented.
4. The methodology for the triennial review included:
 - (a) Review and analysis of biennial progress reports on the status of recommendations, which are monitored through the OIOS recommendation database;
 - (b) Analysis of relevant information, documents and reports obtained from UNHCR on various topics relating to the recommendations;
 - (c) Interviews conducted by telephone with UNHCR staff.
5. In its assessment, OIOS also took into consideration broader internal change processes at UNHCR, including an organizational restructuring designed to decentralize and regionalize operations, a revamped data management strategy (ES/2019/07) and a new results-based management framework. The first two processes began in 2019 and the latter soon after the completion of the OIOS report in 2017.
6. The present report incorporates comments received from UNHCR during the drafting process. A final draft was shared with UNHCR for its final comments, which are contained in the annex. OIOS expresses its appreciation to UNHCR for the cooperation extended in the preparation of the report.

II. Results

Recommendation 1

Updating, completing and strengthening policies and guidelines on registration

7. Recommendation 1 reads as follows:

In order to sustain momentum on recent relevance-, effectiveness- and efficiency-enhancing initiatives, UNHCR should:

1. Update the 2003 Handbook for Registration and related policies/guidelines, with a view to ensuring consistency across operations to the maximum degree feasible;
2. Complete the specifications of the Identity Management Quality Initiative;
3. Strengthen the progressive implementation of its Policy on the Protection of Personal Data of Persons of Concern to UNHCR, including the development of associated guidance and training to address data protection and refugee consent issues, both with UNHCR operations and among host Governments and other partners.

Indicators: (a) Handbook updated; (b) Identity Management Quality Initiative specifications completed; (c) data protection operational guidance developed; (d) evidence of promotion, implementation, coverage and use of (a)–(c).

8. In 2018, UNHCR published its online Guidance on Registration and Identity Management, which replaced the 2003 Handbook on Registration and superseded the completion of the Identity Management Quality Initiative. Webinars on the guidance were held in the last quarter of 2019 for 330 members of UNHCR staff in all seven regional bureaux and at headquarters. The guidance contains eight modules, each with a clickable table of contents to facilitate access, and an annex and includes several registration-related forms and templates. As evidence of the commitment of UNHCR to ensuring consistency in its registration policies and practices across different contexts, staff members who were interviewed highlighted module 2 of the guidance, on working with Governments and other partners, in which different registration scenarios are examined. Because the module was not yet available online at the time of the review, UNHCR shared a draft version with OIOS.

9. UNHCR has undertaken a range of initiatives to strengthen data protection since 2017. In July of that year, a senior data protection officer was appointed to the Division of International Protection. In August 2018, UNHCR issued its online Guidance on the Protection of Personal Data of Persons of Concern to UNHCR to assist its personnel in the application and interpretation of its Policy on the Protection of Personal Data of Persons of Concern to UNHCR. UNHCR has also entered into revised data-sharing agreements and project partnership agreements with operational and implementing partners. Those documents, which were either drafted or revised following the publication of the guidance, are available as a data protection toolkit on the UNHCR intranet.¹

10. Based on the above, OIOS has determined that this recommendation has been implemented. It notes, however, the importance of finalizing and publishing module 2 on working with Governments and other partners.

Recommendation 2

Identifying country operations with low registration coverage and reasons for access barriers

11. Recommendation 2 reads as follows:

In line with its mandate, and with the call of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to leave no one behind, UNHCR should:

1. In an evidence-based manner, identify country operations known to have low registration coverage, and also identify, within these operations, the underlying reasons for access barriers, and their implications for other aspects of the UNHCR mandate (assistance, protection and durable solutions);
2. Articulate, where low registration coverage has had negative impacts, plans for addressing challenges in a timely manner within each of these operations;
3. Building on data in this report, identify country operations where enhanced advocacy efforts are needed to ensure that the human rights of all persons of concern are protected in government-led registration processes, and undertake these efforts, as feasible.

¹ The toolkit includes the following: a data protection impact assessment template (revised in August 2018); a data sharing/transfers checklist (revised in August 2018); questions and answers on basic data protection (September 2018); a personal data breach notification form (October 2018); appendix 2 to the project partnership agreement (with revised article 12 on data protection, March 2019); annex F on the processing and protection of personal data of persons of concern (March 2019); a model template for annex F (December 2019); frequently asked questions on annex F (December 2019); and a model data-sharing agreement (December 2019).

Indicators: (a) underlying reasons for and implications of access barriers identified in low-coverage countries in an evidence-based manner; (b) plans for addressing country-specific challenges identified; (c) high-priority country operations identified and advocacy undertaken, wherever feasible; (d) evidence of promotion, implementation, coverage and use of (a)–(c).

12. According to staff members who were interviewed, UNHCR has, since 2017, drawn on a network of senior registration and identity management officers based in regional offices to monitor countries with low registration coverage and make recommendations, according to staff interviewed. Registration coverage in countries is systematically identified in an evidence-based manner through annual reporting by operations on the indicator “percentage of persons of concern registered on an individual basis”, under the global strategic priority of “fair protection processing and documentation”, as reported in the annual global strategic priorities progress report.

13. UNHCR has taken additional steps to address the issues identified in recommendation 2 through two of its ongoing reform processes: further decentralization of its operations and the transformation of its global data strategy. In January 2019, the High Commissioner announced that UNHCR would move its seven regional bureaux to the field in a far-reaching process of decentralization and regionalization. Bureau directors will be responsible for strategic decision-making and quality assurance in their respective regions, receiving guidance from headquarters and providing operational support to country operations. With regard to low registration coverage, the bureaux will be given the capacity to identify access barriers through more systematic monitoring and analysis (see para. 14) and the authority to take action in response.

14. At the same time, UNHCR revised its global data strategy, directly addressing the intent of recommendation 2. Most significantly, each regional bureau hosts a data, identity management and analysis unit, for which an initial hiring phase was nearing completion at the time of the triennial review, according to staff members who were interviewed. The units will systematically monitor registration coverage, coordinate the development of data systems and guide country operations on data management.² They are based on the experience of the director’s office in Amman for the Middle East and North Africa Bureau and, in addition to the OIOS evaluation, respond to an internal evaluation of data use and information management conducted in November 2019 by UNHCR. That evaluation, the focus of which was on operational data but in which registration data were also considered to the extent that they intersect with operational data systems and processes, contained findings similar to those of OIOS with regard to building capacity for monitoring country operations. It also contained a recommendation that UNHCR develop a data transformation strategy and road map, which was issued in September 2019, to harmonize all data management across UNHCR, whether from registration, results monitoring or population statistics. The units will be able to monitor and address issues such as low registration coverage. Staff members who were interviewed stressed that headquarters had not had the power or authority to do so under the previous arrangement. Those staff members also envisaged that the units would feed into broader knowledge management processes, serving as repositories not only of data, but also of tools, systems and best practices that could be shared through a more streamlined global knowledge system.

15. Based on the above, OIOS has determined that this recommendation has been completed. UNHCR should further leverage the change initiatives relating to regionalization and data transformation to meet the specific components of the

² UNHCR, *Data Transformation Strategy 2020–2025: Supporting Protection and Solutions* (September 2019).

recommendation for monitoring, understanding and addressing low registration coverage.

Recommendation 3

Finalizing the development and accelerating the roll-out of proGres v4

16. Recommendation 3 reads as follows:

In order to increase the accuracy, quality and robustness of registration data used in downstream processes, UNHCR should finalize the development and accelerate the roll-out of proGres v4 (proGres in Partnership).

Indicators: roll-out of proGres v4 accelerated, leading to evidence of higher accuracy and quality of registration data and more effective case management.

17. UNHCR finalized the development of proGres v4, as planned, in January 2019. However, the system was subsequently overtaken by additional organizational changes that have required further amendments to the system. UNHCR staff explained that they included new operational requirements relating to interoperability with other tools in the Population Registration and Identity Management EcoSystem, as well as other required modifications based on user feedback.

18. Nonetheless, UNHCR has accelerated the roll-out of the new version. Starting in February 2018, UNHCR prioritized the largest country operations for accelerated roll-out, expanding from 350,000 individual records in 37 operations to, by the end of January 2020, 11.5 million records in 74 out of 139 operations, with 5,100 users. Approximately two thirds of all individuals currently registered in proGres are now in version 4. Staff members who were interviewed said that the target date for completion of the deployment was the fourth quarter of 2020.

19. Based on the above and on the expectation that the roll-out of the updated system will be completed by the end of 2020, OIOS has determined that this recommendation has been implemented.

Recommendation 4

Identifying which registration data elements most enhance shared work with partners

20. Recommendation 4 reads as follows:

UNHCR should identify, with partners, which registration data elements most enhance their shared work on meeting the needs of refugees and asylum seekers. Pertinent indicators for these and any other data elements that are key to measuring the relevance, effectiveness and efficiency of inter-agency humanitarian action should then be developed and utilized to measure effectiveness, in close collaboration with key partners.

Indicator: registration data elements most valuable for key partners identified, indicators developed and monitored.

21. UNHCR has taken steps to strengthen its capacity for sharing registration data with external parties through individual agreements and initiatives with several key partners. In addition to documentation relating to its revised data-sharing and project partnership agreements (see para. 9), UNHCR provided OIOS with further documentation regarding the following: a data-sharing addendum concluded in September 2018 with the World Food Programme (WFP), which provides a general data-sharing framework and has been strengthened by joint UNHCR-WFP field missions to country operations to map context-specific data-sharing solutions. In September 2019, UNHCR and WFP established a workplan for operational alignment, which will enable the agencies to share personal data for the purpose of assistance.

That same month, UNHCR agreed in principle on a minimum common data set for affected populations to be used for the purpose of assistance with a number of partners in the framework of a common cash statement interoperability workstream. UNHCR also developed a data transfer platform, introducing a secure resettlement portal to share biographical and biometric data. The project was initiated with the United States of America in 2019 and will be expanded to other resettlement countries in 2020.

22. Based on the above, OIOS has determined that this recommendation has been implemented. Data-sharing agreements and initiatives should be further strengthened through ongoing revisions of the UNHCR results-based management framework and data management strategy, where relevant, so that shared data can be coordinated with broader data management systems and associated indicators.

Recommendation 5

Increasing the number of operations reporting under registration-related objectives

23. Recommendation 5 reads as follows:

In order to strengthen registration-related monitoring data so that they can be utilized more fully as a foundation for evidence-based planning and decision-making, UNHCR should increase the number of operations reporting under registration-related objectives on Global Focus Insight (or other appropriate outlets emanating from the results-based management revision project).

Indicator: number of operations reporting increased.

24. UNHCR has reported progress in increasing the number of operations reporting on the indicator “percentage of persons of concern registered on an individual basis”. In 2018, it was the global strategic priority indicator with the highest reporting rate across UNHCR: 100 of 139 operations or population groups reported, up from 91 in 2017. Of those 100, 76 per cent reported having registered at least 9 out of 10 persons of concern, which UNHCR deems to be the minimum acceptable rate of registration. That was also an increase from 2017, when 70 per cent of operations reported the minimum rate.

25. Staff members who were interviewed indicated that the revision of results-based management that has been under way throughout UNHCR since 2017 further addressed this recommendation. The aim of the revision is to streamline results management and reporting through a simplified global results framework and planning process. According to staff members, it will define corporate measurable results areas, mandatory indicators and country-specific results chains, thereby enabling more comprehensive and richer reporting to reflect registration implementation. Staff indicated that the revision project was due to be completed by mid-2022.

26. Staff members also pointed to a number of other data quality measures taken alongside the revision project. Since the OIOS evaluation, UNHCR has requested operations to run a verification script before and after conducting data verification exercises on their databases and to report back on data quality through a template. In 2018, the largest-ever verification exercise using UNHCR tools was undertaken in Uganda. A version of the verification script compatible with proGres v4 was under development at the time of this triennial review. The Guidance on Registration and Identity Management also contains extensive references to data quality measures and processes. The process of regionalization and the data transformation strategy are designed to generate new capacity in data collection, monitoring, storage and analysis at the national, regional and headquarters levels.

27. Based on the above, OIOS has determined that this recommendation has been implemented. UNHCR should continue progress by linking the broader results-based

management reform to the specific language in the recommendation with regard to enhancing registration-related monitoring data so that they can be utilized more fully as a foundation for evidence-based planning and decision-making.

III. Conclusion

28. UNHCR provided sufficient evidence to demonstrate that it has implemented all five recommendations from the programme evaluation. With regard to recommendation 3, momentum must be maintained to complete the roll-out of proGres v4 in 2020. UNHCR has demonstrated that it takes seriously the need identified in the evaluation report to improve registration policies, guidance, coverage, tools and data. OIOS notes that the regionalization process, data transformation strategy and new results-based management framework have the potential to reduce silos, streamline processes, enhance monitoring, analysis and data management capacity and lead to greater overall relevance, effectiveness and efficiency throughout the registration cycle.

29. Early indications of positive changes already identified, as documented or reported by UNHCR staff members who were interviewed, include: the support provided by the data, identity management and analysis unit of the Middle East and North Africa Bureau for the registration of more than 5 million refugees; the 2018 verification exercise conducted in Uganda, which improved the understanding of the Government and humanitarian community of the population of concern and set the framework for ensuring protection; a joint exercise to register approximately 820,000 Rohingya refugees, which was carried out on 31 December 2019 by UNHCR and the Government of Bangladesh and will be followed by joint continuous registration activities; the verification of 2.4 million Syrian refugees and asylum seekers in Turkey and the registration of 114,000 new arrivals; and the roll-out of proGres v4 in Kenya, which facilitated the verification of more than 208,000 individuals across four camps and the capture of biometric data of around 170,000 individuals above the age of 4 years.

(Signed) Fatoumata **Ndiaye**
Under-Secretary-General for Internal Oversight Services
March 2020

Annex***Comments received from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees**

1. Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Draft Report of the IED/OIOS on the Implementation of the Recommendations from the 2017 Programme Evaluation of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, shared with the High Commissioner on March 6, 2020.
2. The OIOS evaluation focused on the role of UNHCR in the registration of refugees and asylum seekers. In this regard, we would like to extend our thanks to IED/OIOS for a timely and constructive review of a very important area of UNHCR's work.
3. When people are forced to flee their homes to escape war, persecution or violence, registration by States or by UNHCR is the first step towards ensuring their protection. Thus, core to our protection mandate, UNHCR has been carefully and strategically investing in registration efforts across the world as a corporate priority.
4. The 2017 triennial review recognized that UNHCR has made great strides through these investments and the 2020 follow up report acknowledges the progress made on all five OIOS strategic recommendations.
5. While the report determined that all five recommendations have been implemented, our efforts continue. UNHCR is pleased to inform OIOS and the Committee for Programme and Coordination that, in the second half of 2019, based on the OIOS evaluation on registration and a more recently completed UNHCR managed strategic evaluation of our work on data, UNHCR launched a Data Transformation Strategy 2020–2025.
6. The strategy will further strengthen UNHCR's efforts in registration, protection and solutions. Innovative digital or e-registration in particular will pave the way for greater inter-operability that will offer better protection and services for refugees.
7. In closing, I would like to thank you and the OIOS evaluation staff for the contributions made through the evaluation to UNHCR's registration work.

(Signed) Filippo **Grandi**
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

* In the present annex, the Office of Internal Oversight Services sets out the full text of comments received from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. The practice has been instituted in line with General Assembly resolution [64/263](#), following the recommendation of the Independent Audit Advisory Committee.