Evaluation Brief

What have we learned?

The evaluation considered UNHCR's data collection and management practices in the context of forcible displacement, identifying key challenges. A major challenge is inconsistent data quality, with variations in registration and enumeration practices across operations. This leads to inaccurate counts, hindering effective planning, as illustrated by a recent operation that underestimated the displaced population, resulting in inadequate resource allocation.

Inadequate data infrastructure and processes restrict analysis capabilities, making it difficult to derive actionable insights from large datasets. This issue was evident in an operation where limited data processing capacity led to delayed responses to emerging protection issues.

There is a lack of standardized data collection methods, leading to incompatibility issues when aggregating data from different sources. This problem, seen in a regional operation, caused difficulties in obtaining a comprehensive overview of the situation, impeding effective advocacy and decision-making.

Data security concerns arose in several operations, with inadequate measures putting sensitive information at risk. In one case, a security breach compromised personal information, potentially endangering individuals.

Lastly, the evaluation highlighted a skills gap among staff, with insufficient data management training impairing data analysis and interpretation capabilities. This issue, evident in multiple operations, has resulted in missed opportunities for evidence-based advocacy.

How did we get there?

These challenges can be traced back to several root causes. Firstly, the absence of specific measurement criteria and expected outcomes has led to inconsistent evaluation practices across operations. Secondly, the organization's historical focus on emergency response has resulted in a reactive approach, prioritizing immediate needs over long-term data strategy development. Additionally, the lack of a centralized data governance structure means there is no uniform enforcement of data standards. Lastly, the rapid evolution of technology and associated challenges have outpaced the organization's capacity to adapt, leading to gaps in data security measures.

What is working well?

Despite the challenges, some successful practices were identified. The evaluation praised the implementation of a multi-year/multi-partner approach, allowing operations to adopt a more sustainable long-term focus while addressing immediate needs. This method has enhanced stability and protection for displaced populations.

Furthermore, innovative uses of technology, such as employing AI algorithms to process large datasets, have been effective in enhancing data collection and analysis capabilities in some operations. These enhancements enable more accurate mapping of population movements, improving the targeting of resources.

Community engagement initiatives were found to be successful in encouraging voluntary returns and reintegrating displaced persons, showcasing the importance of involving local communities in decision-making processes.

Now, what to do?

The evaluation recommends a comprehensive strategy to address the identified challenges:

Operational Level:

- Standardize data collection methods and ensure compatibility across operations by providing clear guidelines on enumeration and registration practices.

- Enhance data security measures, prioritizing the protection of sensitive information with particular attention to preventing breaches.

- Increase staff training in data management and analysis skills to improve evidence-based decision-making.

These recommendations imply a need to review current practices and adapt them to the suggested standardized approach, with a focus on staff training and data security enhancements.

Organizational Level:

- Establish a centralized data governance structure with clear data ownership and accountability measures to enforce consistent standards and best practices across operations.

- Develop a robust data strategy that structures data collection, analysis, and dissemination processes, enabling efficient access for decision-makers.

The implementation of these recommendations requires changes in staffing assignments and the introduction of specialized data management positions.

Strategic Level:

- Integrate a long-term focus into policy and planning, balancing immediate response needs with sustainable solutions. This entails modifying existing policies to incentivize multi-year strategies and partnerships.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this evaluation underscores the critical importance of addressing data-related challenges to improve forcible displacement operations. By tackling inconsistent practices and capacity gaps, UNHCR can strengthen its response, enhancing the effectiveness of aid delivery and ultimately contributing to global efforts in managing forced displacement crises.

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