Evaluation Brief

What have we learned?   
  
The evaluation considered UNHCR's information and data management practices across three country operations targeting forcibly displaced populations. Several challenges were identified that impact the effectiveness of operational management. These included:   
  
- Inadequate data collection methods: A lack of standardized, efficient data collection processes leads to incomplete or inaccurate data, as seen in instances of duplicate entries, missing information, and inconsistencies. This undermines decision-making, as illustrated by a case where multiple registrations resulted in an inaccurate picture of the displaced population, hindering aid distribution and service planning.   
  
- Insufficient staff training: Limited training and capacity in data management, especially in field offices, result in errors and inefficient practices. For example, untrained staff may misclassify or misunderstand data, leading to misleading analysis and incorrect decisions about resource allocation.   
  
- Disconnected systems and data silos: A fragmented landscape of data systems and platforms prevents a holistic view of operations. In one instance, the lack of integrated information led to an inability to cross-reference data, causing inefficiencies in identifying and assisting vulnerable cases.   
  
- Limited data analysis and use: There is a need for enhanced data analysis capacity, as currently, data is often collected but not sufficiently analyzed or used effectively for decision-making. This was evident in a situation where critical trends among the displaced population were not identified timely, leading to inadequate preparations for a sudden surge in demand for specific services.   
  
- External data sharing challenges: Restrictions on data sharing between stakeholders can hinder collaboration and coordination. This issue, stemming from privacy concerns and data protection regulations, has led to a lack of trust and efficient planning with external partners.   
  
How did we get there?   
  
These challenges are systemic issues, rooted in a combination of resource constraints, training gaps, and the organization's cultural mindset towards data and information management. A key underlying factor is the evolving nature of displacement patterns, which strains traditional data collection and management methods. The rapid increase in complex displacement crises demands a more dynamic and adaptive approach, which the current systems struggle to accommodate.   
  
What is working well?   
  
Despite the challenges, the evaluation identified several good practices and successes. These include:   
  
- Dedication and expertise of staff: UNHCR personnel, especially in field offices, demonstrate a strong commitment to assisting displaced populations. Their dedication, local knowledge, and expertise are key strengths. This was evident in their ability to adapt to changing circumstances and find innovative solutions.   
  
- Effective coordination mechanisms: In several instances, the evaluation witnessed effective interagency coordination, which led to successful outcomes. Well-coordinated responses, built on shared data and information, have resulted in efficient delivery of aid and services.   
  
- New technologies for data collection: The use of innovative technologies, such as biometric registration and digital mapping tools, has enhanced data accuracy and efficiency in some operations. These methods improve the overall quality of data, enabling better decision-making.   
  
Now, what to do?   
  
The evaluation recommends a comprehensive approach to enhance UNHCR's information and data management practices:   
  
Operational Level:   
  
- Standardize data collection methods and tools: Develop robust, practical guidelines for data collection, ensuring consistency and accuracy across operations.   
- Enhance staff training: Increase investment in training and capacity building, especially in field offices, to improve data management skills and reduce errors.   
- Promote data sharing: Encourage the exchange of data between agencies and partners to enable better coordination and decision-making, while ensuring necessary privacy safeguards.   
  
Organizational Level:   
  
- Establish dedicated data analysis units: Create specialized teams to analyze and interpret data holistically, providing timely insights for operational planning.   
- Augment resources for innovation: Invest in resources and technologies that support innovative data collection and analysis methods, ensuring staff have the tools they need.   
  
Strategic Level:   
  
- Revisit data privacy policies: Review and adapt data sharing policies to facilitate more open collaboration while maintaining necessary protections.   
- Embrace a culture of data-driven decision-making: Encourage a mindset shift towards embracing data as a critical tool, fostering an environment that values evidence-based decisions.   
  
Conclusion:   
  
Effective data management is pivotal as the scope and complexity of displacement crises continue to evolve. By addressing systemic challenges and building on existing strengths, UNHCR can enhance its ability to assist vulnerable populations, transforming data into a powerful tool for humanitarian action.

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