Evaluation Brief

What have we learned?

The evaluation considered UNHCR's ability to effectively capture, analyze and use data on forcibly displaced people to improve efficiency and impact. Several challenges were identified that impact the quality and usability of data, ultimately hindering decision-making and resource allocation. These include:

- Inadequate data systems and processes: Outdated or inefficient data storage and management systems lead to incomplete or inaccurate records. For instance, multiple databases for different stages of displacement cause inconsistencies and make long-term tracking difficult.

- Insufficient staff training and resources: Limited training on data collection and analysis, as well as a lack of dedicated resources, result in poor data quality and an inability to derive meaningful insights. This is exacerbated by high staff turnover, which disrupts institutional knowledge.

- Lack of feedback loops: There is a disconnect between those collecting data and those using it for decision-making. Without feedback mechanisms, data collectors don't adapt their approaches, leading to irrelevant or misleading information being gathered.

- Gaps in communication with displaced populations: Effective communication mechanisms with persons of concern are often lacking, which limits the organization's understanding of their needs and abilities, leading to potential mistargeting of resources.

- Inconsistent data practices across regions: The absence of standardized data collection protocols and definitions across different country operations means that comparisons, analyses, and strategic planning are challenged by inconsistent datasets.

How did we get there?

These challenges arise from several root causes, including a lack of clear guidelines and support at the central level, which results in varying practices across countries. This leads to inconsistencies and knowledge gaps, as each country operation re-invents processes. Furthermore, the rapid pace of change and increasing complexity of displacement crises seem to overwhelm existing systems and capacities.

What is working well?

Despite the challenges, some successful initiatives were identified. These include the establishment of dedicated data analysis units in some regional operations, which have improved data quality and insights. Additionally, the use of innovative technologies, such as mobile data collection tools, has enhanced efficiency and timeliness. These positive examples demonstrate the potential for effective data management and offer lessons that can be learned across all operations.

Now, what to do?

The evaluation makes several recommendations to address these issues:

Operational Level:

- Implement standardized protocols for data collection, ensuring consistency across countries. Establish a central unit to support country operations in harmonizing definitions, tools, and processes.

- Enhance data collection methods by incorporating feedback loops and improving communication with displaced populations. Develop practical guidelines for staff on data collection ethics.

Organizational Level:

- Increase investment in staff training, particularly in data analysis capacities. Create a central pool of specialized data analysts to support country operations.

- Establish clear guidelines and incentives for knowledge transfer and retention, especially during high staff turnover.

Strategic Level:

- Develop a centralized, secure, and integrated digital platform for data storage and management, with robust data protection measures.

- Review and strengthen the organization's data privacy policies, especially when using third-party data collection tools.

Conclusion:

Effective data management and use are critical to UNHCR's mission. Addressing these challenges is essential to ensure efficient and impactful operations, and ultimately, better serve the needs of forcibly displaced populations.

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