Evaluation Brief

What have we learned?

The evaluation considered UNHCR's ability to optimally use information as the UN agency responsible for protecting refugees, returnees, and stateless people. Several challenges were identified that impact the organization's ability to fulfill its critical mission.

- Inadequate or insufficient data hampers evidence-based decision-making. For instance, decisions about resource allocation for specific groups like single mothers or elderly refugees might be compromised without detailed, up-to-date demographic information.

- Insufficient standardization in data collection leads to inconsistencies and inaccuracies across different locations. This makes it challenging to compare and analyze information, affecting the effectiveness of responses, especially in cross-border operations where consistency is crucial.

- The current data management systems' complexities and limitations restrict efficient access to quality information. This issue results in missed opportunities for strategic planning and advocacy, as well as prolonged decision-making processes.

- Limited staff capacity and skills in data analysis and use hinder the organization's ability to leverage information effectively. This gap is particularly evident in rapidly evolving situations where quick, data-driven decisions are essential.

- Lack of a clear data governance framework, including defined roles and responsibilities, impacts data quality and leads to inefficiencies. This challenge results in a fragmented approach to data management and analysis.

How did we get here?

The challenges stem from a combination of factors, including the ever-growing complexity of operations, outdated systems and processes that struggle to keep pace with evolving technological advancements, and insufficient resources dedicated to data management and analysis. These issues often result from the inherent difficulties in gathering accurate data in fluid, unpredictable operational contexts.

What is working well?

Despite the challenges, the evaluation identified several good practices and successes. These include:

- The commitment to protecting vulnerable groups, evidenced by robust protection monitoring and response systems, which consistently gather critical data on protection issues. This enables targeted interventions and advocacy.

- Innovative uses of technology, such as mobile data collection tools and biometric registration, have greatly improved the efficiency and accuracy of information gathering in some operations. These initiatives enhance data quality and enable timely decision-making.

- Effective partnerships with external data experts and researchers contribute to evidence-based advocacy and analysis, particularly in complex contexts where specialized skills are required.

Now, what do we do?

To address the challenges and build on existing strengths, the evaluation recommends the following:

Operational Level:

- Standardize key data collection processes and tools across operations, ensuring consistency and quality. Develop a streamlined approach to data gathering, including guidelines for emergency situations.

- Enhance staff training in data analysis and interpretation, particularly for front-line workers. Focus on practical skills required for evidence-based decision-making.

- Continue exploring and piloting innovative technologies for efficient data collection, ensuring privacy and security.

- Establish a clear data governance framework that delineates roles and responsibilities at all levels, enhancing accountability and efficiency.

Organizational Level:

- Increase investment in human resources dedicated to data management and analysis, including hiring specialized staff with relevant expertise.

- Develop a centralized knowledge hub or platform to share best practices in data use and analysis across operations, promoting learning and collaboration.

Strategic Level:

- Revise policies and guidelines to emphasize the strategic importance of data and information. Ensure a whole-organization approach to data collection, analysis, and use is employed.

- Advocate for a corporate commitment to evidence-based decision-making, encouraging a culture that values and acts on data-driven insights.

Conclusion:

Effective data management and use are critical to UNHCR's mission, offering the potential to revolutionize how the organization protects and assists vulnerable displaced populations.

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