

Context

Mandate: UNHCR (The United Nations High Commission for Refugees) is mandated by the UN to lead and coordinate international action for the worldwide protection of refugees and the resolution of refugee problems. UNHCR strives to ensure that everyone can exercise the right to seek asylum and find safe refuge in another state, and to return home voluntarily. By assisting refugees to return to their own country or to settle permanently in another country, UNHCR also seeks lasting solutions to their plight.

UNHCR's mandate is set out in the organisation's Statute, and guided by the 1951 United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol. International refugee law provides an essential framework of principles for UNHCR's humanitarian activities.

UNHCR has increasingly provided assistance and protection for Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) who have been forcibly displaced but do not legally qualify as refugees as they remain in their country of origin and remain the responsibility of their own government. UNHCR's action to protect and assist IDPs has been supported by the General Assembly and responsibilities agreed within the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC).

Size: UNHCR has 5901 staff in 263 offices in 116 countries and currently helps 20.8 million people (January 2006 figures). The staff complement will be reduced to 5289 in 2007, of which 823 will be at Headquarters. ⁽¹⁾

Key Issues: UNHCR is facing a new and challenging environment in the context of humanitarian reform, competition for humanitarian resources, and an expansion of its responsibilities to include IDPs. UNHCR has taken on lead responsibility for the camp co-ordination and management, emergency shelter and protection clusters for conflict affected IDPs - these were found to be critical sectoral gaps in the 2005 Humanitarian Response Review. UNHCR is also undergoing a number of internal reforms to strengthen its capacity to respond to the needs of its beneficiaries. This includes implementing Results Based Management systems and structural and management reform.

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Is UNHCR *BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE?*

Summary UNHCR is undergoing an internal reform process which should improve its ability to build for the future. Critical to this is the implementation of the planned Results Based Management Framework and related activities. It has recently enhanced its monitoring, evaluation and lesson learning capacity. The real indication of success will be how well these initiatives translate into improved performance on the ground. To meet the demands imposed by these reforms UNHCR has invested in training which will focus on strategic leadership and senior management skills.

Commitment to Continual Improvement

Does the Board require management to act on performance results?

✓ UNHCR has a strong position on monitoring, evaluation and lesson learning, with monitoring and review of the corporate strategy taking place continuously. UNHCR's Policy Development and Evaluation Service (PDES, which replaced the Evaluation and Policy Analysis Unit in 2006) conducts systematic evaluations of UNHCR activities in order to provide information, analysis and recommendations for improving planning, implementation and impact of UNHCR's efforts on behalf of refugees and other people of concern.² A key concern for the PDES is to ensure findings and recommendations are effectively utilized by UNHCR. The PDES reports directly to the High Commissioner and forms part of the Executive Office, and therefore enjoys a higher profile than EPAU did.³

✓ The ExCom (ExCom) requires UNHCR to report periodically on its performance in implementing the recommendations of audits and evaluations.

Building Knowledge and Lesson Learning

Does UNHCR have adequate mechanisms for spreading lesson learning?

✓ UNHCR has highlighted that lesson-learning is the responsibility of management as a whole. PDES will ensure that the information, analysis, recommendations and lessons learned that emanate from UNHCR's evaluation programme are effectively utilized for policy making, strategic planning and programme design.³

Results Based Management: To what extent does UNHCR manage by results?

⇔ In late '90s, UNHCR introduced a new Operations Management System (OMS) (e.g. situation approach, core problem analysis, hierarchy of objectives, standards and indicators, participatory analysis among stakeholders, performance monitoring, etc.) In 2005 and 2006 UNHCR developed Results Based Management (RBM) software and processes which were rolled out in 10 pilot countries in 2007 and 2008 and will be rolled out globally in 2008 and 2009. It is hoped this will institutionalise the need to manage by results and individual accountability within the organisation. RBM is a new approach that is designed to help ensure that all organisational processes support the achievement of results as effectively as possible. It will: define strategic goals to provide a focus for action; specify the expected results and align programme, resources, processes and people behind them; improve monitoring and performance/impact assessment; integrate lessons learnt into future actions; and ensure accountability of individuals, teams and partners based on continual feedback.⁴

⇔ There is renewed effort to improve the quality of performance appraisal, tackle underperformance and improve the links to learning and assessment. To date there have been inconsistencies in the quality of performance appraisal.⁵

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Staff Development

What training is undertaken by UNHCR staff?

✓ UNHCR has Learning and Policy Guidelines which guide staff training. In 2005, \$3.2m of UNHCR's budget was spent on staff training and a total of 5,953 people (3,202 UNHCR staff and 2,751 participants from implementing partners) undertook training, although some may have participated on more than one course. Courses undertaken: 339 staff trained in programme management; 381 staff trained on the Management Learning Programme; and 231 staff attended the Protection Learning Programme.⁶

What is the level of staff satisfaction?

⇔ A Global Staff Survey was carried out in November/December of 2006, which was analysed in January 2007. The survey shows overall job satisfaction for 85% of the staff, but dissatisfaction with the appointments and promotions processes, and their transparency. UNHCR confirmed that the findings are informing the structural management change process and follow up on areas identified as highest priority (e.g. staff dissatisfaction with the appointments, postings and recommendations process) has been initiated.²⁴

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How well is UNHCR *MANAGING* its *RESOURCES*?

Summary

UNHCR has to work hard to attract enough funding to cover planned activities in common with other UN humanitarian agencies. High administration and management costs are being tackled through job cuts and savings, at a time when UNHCR's responsibilities have increased to include IDPs.

Corporate Governance and Strategy

Is UNHCR's corporate strategy based on a clear definition of mandate and comparative advantage?

× UNHCR does not have a corporate strategy, despite attempts in 2006 to develop one. The organisation does have Global Strategic Objectives which are based on its mandate and comparative advantage. DFID believes that UNHCR has a comparative advantage in dealing with IDPs, although it does not have a "legal" mandate to do so. The organisation is increasingly embracing its new responsibility for IDPs. UNHCR and DFID agree that renegotiating the mandate to include IDPs could run the risk of weakening it.

⇔ UNHCR will present to ExCom in October 2007 its 2008-2009 Programme Budget document which summarises the organisation's strategy, programme of work and resource requirements for the first time for a two year period. UNHCR presented, and the ExCom Standing Committee endorsed, UNHCR's Strategic Plan for the 2008-2009 Biennium as UNHCR's contribution to the UN Strategic Framework for the period 2008-2009²⁵.

Resource Management

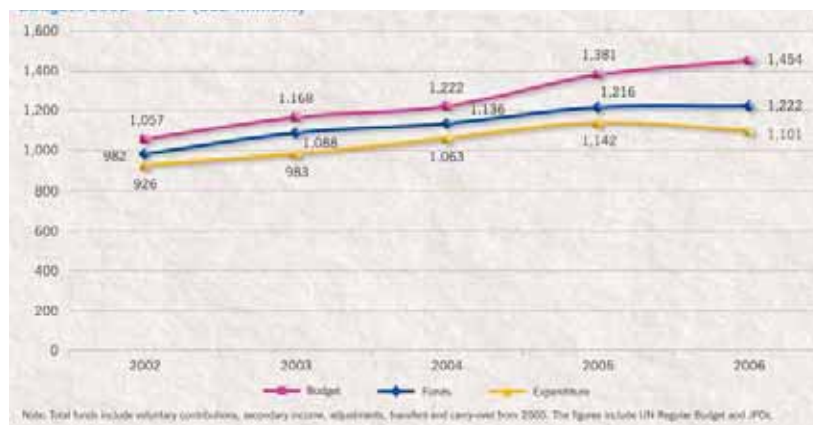
What is the disbursement ratio (i.e. commitments versus disbursements: Paris Declaration Indicator 7)?

⇔ The ratio of expenditure to funds available was 90% in 2006 (US\$1,101m spent of US\$1,222m available funds).⁷

⇔ UNHCR's annual budget is approved by the ExCom member states. Assessed contributions direct from the UN account for 3% of the annual budget with UNHCR reliant on voluntary contributions to cover the remainder of its projected programme needs. UNHCR does not normally receive enough voluntary contributions to close this gap and has a recurrent problem with funding its programmes. 10 major donors account for 80% of voluntary contributions to the UNHCR budget and UNHCR is susceptible to fluctuations in these contributions. A high proportion of the voluntary contributions are earmarked, further complicating the budgetary picture. In 2004, the gap between budgeted activities (approved by ExCom) and contributions received was \$28.9m, in 2005 \$102.2m. Early in 2006 UNHCR projected that they would have a large gap between planned work and contributions, as shown in figure D below. With this in mind they instituted across-the-board programme cuts and cost savings at HQ. UNHCR's management reform programme will aim to improve resource management within these constraints.⁸

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Figure D - Budget, funds and expenditure for the Annual and Supplementary Programme Budgets 2002-2006 (USD millions)



× As figure D ⁽⁷⁾ shows, there are differences between funds available and funds expended. This occurs for a number of reasons including the earmarking of funds by donors, and the disbursement of funds by donors late in the year, which creates further inflexibility. UNHCR is also susceptible to exchange rate fluctuations. In late 2005, UNHCR were suffering a budget deficit for this reason and requested donors respond to this with additional disbursements. Over a longer timescale, UNHCR estimate the net effect of currency rate fluctuations to be level. ¹⁰

What is the administrative efficiency ratio (i.e. average gross expenditure per staff member)?

Not applicable

What is the average cost per \$ disbursed (gross)?

Not applicable

What is the ratio of administrative costs compared with disbursements?

⇔ In 2005, UNHCR spent 31% of its budget on programme support, management and administrative costs. In order to reverse rising administration costs, in mid-2006 UNHCR started a comprehensive structural and management review to identify cost-cutting measures. ¹¹

How well is UNHCR's resource allocation criteria aligned with its corporate strategy and comparative advantage?

× The organisation sets Global Strategic Objectives but does not have a corporate strategy. The majority of UNHCR's funding is earmarked to countries or regions (approx 80%) which could lead to difficulties allocating resources in alignment with the Global Strategy Objectives.

⇔ The Global Strategic Objectives have been complemented with a set of global performance targets to facilitate planning as well as resource allocation decisions and reporting. Moreover, UNHCR recognised that the current budgetary system had several inherent weaknesses and saw a need to adopt a comprehensive, transparent system that would ensure increased predictability of funding, reduce earmarking and enable a fairer distribution of resources. The redesigned Unified Budget will

- Synchronise the planning and programming cycle with IDP cluster activities
- Be more conducive to the implementation of the Results-Based Management system
- Enable a clear distinction between work with refugees and IDPs
- Put UNHCR in a better position to mobilise resources
- Enable UNHCR to provide a more flexible response. ¹¹
- The proposed new unified budget structure should enable UNHCR to take advantage more effectively of information technology investments both planned and made already.

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Staff Management

To what extent is staff recruitment, postings and promotions meritocratic and transparent?

✓ UNHCR policy stipulates that recruitment is meritocratic.¹² All jobs are advertised and filled through a competitive process. The new International Professional Roster is UNHCR's mechanism for recruiting qualified staff, especially at the entry level, for posts where there is no internal staff available. External candidates for the Roster must have passed an Entry Test. The first such test was administered worldwide on 18 March 2004.

⇔ A review, published in January 2006,²² found that there was staff dissatisfaction with promotions and postings. The review hints at a culture where promotions are made not on skills and suitability to perform senior roles but according to "seniority and the influence of sponsors". Promotions are not currently systematically linked to performance, assessment and participation in training. In response to these criticisms, UNHCR is developing an integrated management assessment framework to improve management capacity; identify managerial potential early on; and link learning, assessment and appointments. The target group for assessment will be middle managers who are on track for more senior management positions.

⇔ Another Global Staff Survey was carried out in November/December of 2006, which was analysed in January 2007. The survey shows overall job satisfaction for 85% of the staff, but dissatisfaction with the appointments and promotions processes, and their transparency. UNHCR confirmed that the findings are informing the structural management change process and follow up on areas identified as highest priority has been initiated.²⁴

✓ A new leadership training programme targeting senior management, "The Strategic Leadership Learning Programme", was piloted in 2006. This initiative is based on the recommendations of an organization-wide learning-needs analysis. In 2007, UNHCR will evaluate the pilot phase and will extend the training to senior managers across the organization.¹²

Operational Management

Is UNHCR sufficiently decentralised to enable it to respond flexibly to country demand?

✓ 85% of UNHCR staff are based overseas.¹ It is unclear how flexible UNHCR is in moving these staff around the organisation to respond to different priorities. Further information is required from UNHCR to enable analysis of whether there is sufficient flexibility.

⇔ As a humanitarian agency, UNHCR recognises that it must be able to deploy staff quickly and effectively. Following the Indian Ocean Tsunami, UNHCR reviewed its emergency preparedness, identified weaknesses and has developed a plan of action to address these.

What is the speed of project approvals and disbursements?

⇔ UNHCR's Annual Programme Budget (AB) is endorsed by the ExCom and implementation starts on the first day of the new year. Agreements are signed with partners usually covering the whole year, however, disbursement is subject to availability of funds. Up to 40 per cent of the annually required funds are available at the beginning of the year, announced at the November/December Pledging Conference. The balance is raised through the year. Supplementary Programmes (SP) are implemented after the ExCom's approval of the AB and are implemented as and when funds become available. The Office can issue temporary loans from overall income to kick-start implementation.²⁶

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How well is UNHCR managing its *PARTNERSHIPS*?

Summary UNHCR has strong partnerships with donors, implementing partners and developing country governments. Partnerships with other UN agencies can sometimes be difficult, but recent humanitarian reforms are encouraging UNHCR to coordinate better.

Voice

What mechanisms exist for developing countries to influence the strategy of UNHCR?

✓ UNHCR's Executive Committee (ExCom) is its governing board and it is made up of 70 member states which include developing countries. ExCom meets in Geneva annually to review and approve UNHCR's programmes and budget; advise on international protection and discuss a wide range of other issues with UNHCR and its intergovernmental and non-governmental partners. ExCom's Standing Committee meets several times each year to take forward the committee's between plenary sessions.¹⁴

✓ In addition UNHCR has bilateral relations with developing country governments when operational in those countries. This provides refugee and IDP hosting governments the opportunity to discuss protection and operational issues with UNHCR.

How actively is UNHCR promoting the participation of civil society?

✓ NGOs are an integral part of UNHCR's modus operandi. UNHCR continues to forge effective partnerships with NGOs in order to achieve its core priorities of advocacy, providing protection and assistance, and finding durable solutions for persons of concern. In 2005, UNHCR channelled over 20% of its annual budget through partnerships with 645 NGOs of whom 480 were national NGOs.¹⁵

⇔ Implementing partners and NGOs are invited to informal consultations leading up to ExCom and they are invited to attend ExCom as observers, although in practice only the larger international NGOs have the capacity to engage at this level.¹⁶

Beneficiaries

What mechanisms are in place to assess needs of beneficiaries and feed beneficiary voice back into programme planning through monitoring, reviews and evaluation?

✓ In 2006 UNHCR mainstreamed age, gender and diversity using a participatory needs assessment methodology. UNHCR's revised guidelines for programme planning and operational protection guidance on programme design and implementation incorporate "Community-based approaches, including refugee participation".¹⁷

Partnership Behaviour

What mechanisms are in place to seek feedback on partnership behaviour and what do the results show?

⇔ As humanitarian crises have become more complex, UNHCR has stepped up its collaboration with other agencies such as World Food Program (WFP), the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), the World Health Organization (WHO), the UN Development Program (UNDP), the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM). Partnerships with development actors are essential to UNHCR's work of promoting durable solutions. The competence and experience of development organisations greatly contributes to the UNHCR's humanitarian relief activities for refugees and other persons of concern.¹⁸

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✓ UNHCR has taken on lead responsibility for the camp co-ordination and management, emergency shelter and protection clusters for conflict affected IDPs - these were found to be critical sectoral gaps in the 2005 Humanitarian Response Review. ⁽¹⁹⁾ The partnership aspects of the Cluster Approach will be assessed in inter-agency reviews. An interim report of the cluster approach has found that it has helped to strengthen partnerships, yet challenges remain, especially with engagement with NGOs. UNHCR will contribute to the newly created Global Humanitarian Platform to strengthen collaboration. ²³

Alignment

To what extent does UNHCR foster government ownership in the programme cycle?

✓ In refugee situations, the host government is essential to UNHCR planning. Refugee hosting governments have responsibilities under international refugee law to assist and protect refugees calling on UNHCR for assistance if necessary. The challenge remains in getting refugees incorporated into national poverty reduction strategies when host countries have competing priorities. Responding to the needs of IDPs is still fairly new to UNHCR and this may need a different type of relationship with governments. If governments are party to the causes of the internal displacement there may be no government ownership possible and the international community may have to intervene to offer assistance and protection to displaced people.

Does UNHCR use local and regional procurement where appropriate?

✓ UNHCR's Procurement Policy states that sources of supply should have a wide geographical distribution. For procurement not covered by framework agreements, UNHCR encourages local procurement from developing countries, in particular from the area of UNHCR operations, where this can be done competitively. ¹⁴

In what ways has UNHCR been aligning its strategy/programme/projects with common humanitarian plans?

✓ UNHCR informed us that they are closely associated with the C(H)AP process in all countries that have such a mechanism (except PTO that is the responsibility of UNRWA). As part of the structural and management change process, UNHCR drafted a new Budget Structure that aims to provide more flexibility for the Office to participate in a meaningful manner in the cluster approach and activities related to durable solutions for refugees and IDPs. ²⁷

Harmonisation

To what extent does UNHCR participate in Inter-Agency Country Team coordination activities such as sector working groups/thematic groups?

✓ DFID consider that UNHCR will need to increase its working as a partner within the UN country team. Its additional responsibilities under the cluster approach mean that joined-up working will become more critical. This requires a cultural shift in the organisation. Pooled funding initiatives, clusters and the humanitarian reforms will act as catalysts to push UNHCR into more participatory behaviours. By December 2006 UNHCR received nearly \$48 million from the CERF and Pooled Funds. ¹⁵

To what extent does UNHCR share information with other agencies and donors?

✓ UNHCR's role in the Cluster Approach increases the need for the organisation to share information with other agencies. Information has always been shared with donors in order to raise funds, but this has generally been information on the activities needed to assist and protect UNHCR's persons of concern.

What evidence is there of harmonising procurement and consulting services procedures, disbursement policies and evaluation practices amongst the humanitarian agencies?

Information not available.

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What do we know about UNHCR's COUNTRY / GLOBAL RESULTS?

Summary UNHCR is an organisation delivering on the front-line of humanitarian assistance but there is limited information available on the impact of its activities. Evaluations are reflective and critical and have an impact on policy changes at the global level. It is difficult to assess whether these filter down to field level.

Country/Global Results

What information is available on the UNHCR's performance at country level?

⇔ UNHCR reports annually on its global operations in Global Reports. This is used as standardized reporting for a number of donors in the spirit of Good Humanitarian Donorship. This is a self-assessment of progress and is complemented by internal evaluations. The reporting tends to list activities rather than impact, but we and a number of other donors are pressing for greater impact standard setting and measurement.¹⁶

✓ The Inspector General's Office in UNHCR is tasked with inspections on the quality management of UNHCR operations.

⇔ The new RBM system should enable UNHCR to better track and report on results in the field, at the outcome and impact levels.

What evidence is there of the independence, credibility and utility of UNHCR's own evaluations?

✓ UNHCR is committed to strengthening its evaluation capacity and the quality of the evaluations it undertakes, to ensure that the lessons learned are fed back into programming. The new Policy Development and Evaluation Service (PDES) was set up in 2006 and a set of evaluation procedures has been designed to protect the independence of the evaluation function and to ensure that it meets the UN system's norms and standards for evaluation.

✓ In addition to internal evaluations, a number of independent evaluations are carried out by external consultants and NGOs of specific areas of UNHCR work, policy and training programmes. The NGO Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Actions (ALNAP) holds a number of these evaluations on its database, further strengthening the lesson-learning from UNHCR programmes.

What impact is UNHCR having at the country/global level?

⇔ Impact is not systematically measured by UNHCR itself in terms of quantitative data, such as reduction in malnutrition or mortality rates. UNHCR is planning to introduce Results Based Management that should help improve the organisation's ability to collect and collate data in a comprehensive manner.

Examples of some recent initiatives are set out below:¹⁴

✓ Although not traditionally involved in natural disasters UNHCR responded to the October 2005 South Asia Earthquake, and played a key role as part of a concerted international effort. They established 4 four temporary field locations in Aceh to assist 100,000 displaced persons and permanent shelters for over 1,200 families. In Sri Lanka, emergency assistance was provided for 32,000 families and transitional shelter for 55,000 families.

✓ Since 2002 UNHCR has assisted in the repatriation of 3.5 million Afghans and provided US\$93 million in cash grants providing a cash inflow to some of the most remote areas of the country. 140,000 homes have been constructed benefiting more than 840,000 people. The programme of repatriation continues. For 2006 UNHCR plan to provide a further 19,000 homes helping more than 115,000 people.

✓ In the Sudan UNHCR are putting in place initiatives to respond to an estimated 4 million voluntary

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returnees (IDPs and refugees). In 2005 100,000 refugees have returned to South Sudan, of which 30,000 have received direct assistance from UNHCR in the form of transportation and basic household supplies.

Portfolio Quality

What is the % of projects/programmes which met their targets?

Information not available

How does this vary across sectors, regions and countries?

As above

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