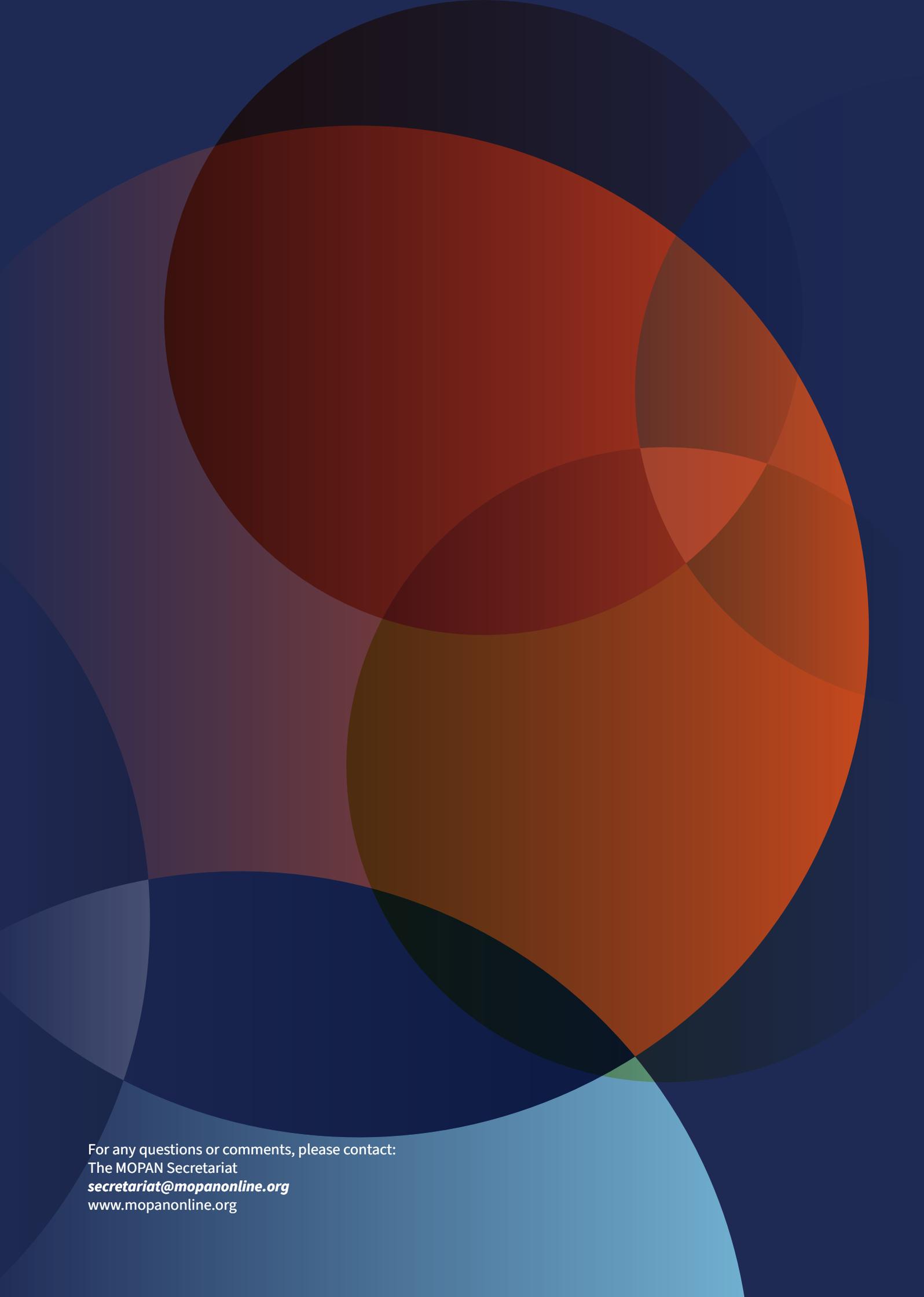


MOPAN ASSESSMENT REPORT

Office of the
United Nations
High Commissioner
for Refugees
(UNHCR)

 MOPAN

Published 2024



For any questions or comments, please contact:
The MOPAN Secretariat
secretariat@mopanonline.org
www.mopanonline.org

MOPAN ASSESSMENT REPORT

Office of the
United Nations
High Commissioner
for Refugees
(UNHCR)

EXPLANATORY NOTE

MOPAN is the only collective action mechanism that meets member countries' information needs regarding the performance of multilateral organisations. Through its institutional assessment report, MOPAN provides comprehensive, independent and credible performance information to inform members' engagement and accountability mechanisms.

MOPAN's assessment reports tell the story of the multilateral organisation and its performance. Through detailing the major findings and conclusions of the assessment, alongside the organisation's performance journeys, strengths and areas for improvement, the reports support member decision-making regarding multilateral organisations and the wider multilateral system.

This document is published under the responsibility of the Multilateral Organisation Performance Assessment Network (MOPAN). MOPAN is an independent body that is governed by a Steering Committee composed of representatives of all of its member countries and served by a permanent Secretariat. The Secretariat is hosted at the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and bound by its administrative rules and procedures and is independent in terms of financing and the content and implementation of its work programme.

This document, as well as any data and any map included herein, are without prejudice to the status of or sovereignty over any territory, to the delimitation of international frontiers and boundaries and to the name of any territory, city or area.

Please cite this publication as:

MOPAN (2024), *MOPAN Assessment of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)*, Multilateral Organisation Performance Assessment Network, Paris.

PREFACE

ABOUT MOPAN

The Multilateral Organisation Performance Assessment Network (MOPAN) comprises 22 members* that share a vision to promote an effective multilateral system trusted to deliver solutions to evolving global goals and local challenges.

MOPAN'S MISSION

MOPAN is a network of members that assess multilateral organisations, shape performance standards, and champion learning and insights to strengthen development and humanitarian results and promote accountability.

Capitalising on the Network's unique cross-multilateral system perspective and expertise, MOPAN members work together to deliver relevant, impartial, high-quality and timely performance information as a public good through an inclusive and transparent approach.

MOPAN's performance information mitigates risks, informs decision-making and supports change, helping to increase knowledge and trust among all stakeholders and ultimately to achieve a stronger and better-performing multilateral system.

FIGURE 1: MOPAN MEMBERS AS OF 1 OCTOBER 2023



*New Zealand and Türkiye are observers.

ABOUT THE ASSESSMENT OF THE OFFICE OF THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES

This report provides a diagnostic assessment and snapshot of the **Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees** (UNHCR), telling the story of UNHCR's performance within its mandate. It is the fourth MOPAN assessment of UNHCR, with the most recent being completed in 2017-18. This assessment therefore covers the period from January 2018 through August 2023, when the evidence collection for this assessment was completed.

The assessment was conducted through a rigorous process and took a collaborative approach, integrating the perspectives of a wide range of stakeholders. This approach provides multilateral organisations and Network members with a robust assessment of organisational strengths and areas where there is scope to improve organisational performance.

The assessment draws on multiple lines of evidence (documentary, survey and interviews) from sources within and outside the organisation to validate and triangulate findings across 12 key performance indicators, which are in turn broken down into more than 220 individual indicators.

In 2022, MOPAN's study on *Rethinking Effective Humanitarian Organisations* concluded that MOPAN needed to adapt its framework for assessing organisations working in crises to better reflect the nature of humanitarian operations – including the policy environment – and the practical requirements of working in crisis situations. MOPAN then worked under the guidance of a Humanitarian Advisory Group – including MOPAN members, multilateral organisations, policy leaders and think tanks – to develop an adapted framework for multilateral organisations primarily working in crisis contexts. That framework was applied for this assessment. The adapted framework aligns to the five MOPAN 3.1 performance areas: strategic, operational, relationship, performance management and results. However, the micro-indicators were adapted to ensure that they reflect the mandates of due diligence and learning needs of MOPAN members and multilateral organisations. The elements used to score organisations against the MOPAN rating scale were also adapted.



June 2023: UNHCR Assistant High Commissioner for Protection, Gillian Triggs, marks world Refugee Day in a speech to staff at UNHCR headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland, Photo: © UNHCR/ Susan Hopper



August, 2023: UN High Commissioner, Filippo Grandi addresses staff in the UNHCR Headquarters atrium on World Humanitarian Day which is marked on 19 August to commemorate the UN colleagues lost in the 19 August, 2003 bombing of the Canal Hotel in Iraq.

Photo: © UNHCR/
Susan Hopper

The following operating principles guided the implementation of this assessment. MOPAN's 2020 Methodology Manual describes how MOPAN's principles are operationalised.

Box 1: Operating principles

MOPAN will generate **credible, fair and accurate** assessments through:

- **implementing** an impartial, systematic and rigorous approach;
- **balancing breadth with depth**, adopting an appropriate balance between coverage and depth of information;
- **prioritising quality** of information over quantity;
- **adopting a systematic approach**, including the use of structured tools for enquiry/analysis;
- **providing transparency**, generating an “audit trail” of findings;
- **being efficient**, building layers of data, seeking to reduce burdens on organisations;
- **ensuring utility**, building organisational learning through an iterative process and accessible reporting;
- **being incisive**, through a focused methodology, which provides concise reporting to tell the story of an organisation's current performance.

Source: MOPAN 3.1 Methodology: Manual, http://www.mopanonline.org/ourwork/themopanapproach/MOPAN_3.1_Methodology.pdf.

This assessment report is composed of two parts, the Analysis Summary and the Technical and Statistical Annex. **Part I: Analysis Summary** is structured into four chapters. **Chapter 1** introduces the organisation and its context. **Chapter 2** presents a high-level overview of key findings. **Chapter 3** presents the scoring, and **Chapter 4** provides information about the assessment methodology and its process.

Detailed findings per key performance indicator and micro indicator are available on the MOPAN website www.mopanonline.org, alongside the results of the external partner survey and the list of supporting evidence documents.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The MOPAN assessment of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees was conducted under the overall strategic guidance of Suzanne Steensen, Head of the MOPAN Secretariat. Patrick Saez, Senior Advisor in the MOPAN Secretariat, peer-reviewed the report, which was prepared under the responsibility of Rachel Scott, with support from Camille Hewitt, who helped to finalise the report and the online interactive presentation.

The MOPAN network is very grateful to Edo Driessen (the Netherlands), Alexander Widmer (Switzerland) and Joanna Irish (United Kingdom) for championing this assessment of UNHCR on behalf of the MOPAN membership.

The assessment was conducted in co-operation with Agulhas Applied Knowledge. Willem van Eekelen led the assessment, and Anne Hammerstad (Deputy Team Leader) is the principal author of the report. A team comprised of Lauren Pett, Glyn Taylor, Shona Warren, Mazvita Mutambirwa, Sanum Jain and Sean McGovern also supported the assessment and contributed to the final report. The report also benefited from an external peer review, conducted by Julia Betts.

The external partner survey was administered by Cristina Serra Vallejo from the MOPAN Secretariat, who together with Corentin Beudaert-Ugolini supported the implementation and finalisation of the survey.

The report was proofread by Jill Gaston, and Baseline Arts Ltd provided the layout and graphic design.

MOPAN would like to convey appreciation to Henrik M. Nordentoft, Sirisome Sisomsack and other UNHCR staff, who internally co-ordinated the process including the substantive feedback on the final draft report.

This assessment would not have been possible without the close engagement and valuable contributions of many senior officials and technical staff from UNHCR and from representatives of humanitarian and development partners as well as other external partners who participated in in-depth interviews and the survey.

Finally, MOPAN is grateful to all Steering Committee representatives for supporting the assessment of UNHCR, as well as to its member countries for their financial contributions, making the report possible.

November 2023,
Ecuador: Ana Duchi,
a 7th-grade teacher
at Juan Montalvo
School has received
UNHCR training as
part of *Respiramos
Inclusión* (We
breathe Inclusion),
a methodology
designed and
implemented by
UNHCR in Ecuador
since 2013 to prevent
discrimination and
xenophobia in the
education system.

Photo: © UNHCR/
Jeoffrey Guillemard



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Explanatory Note	ii	Chapter IV. ABOUT THE ASSESSMENT	67
Preface	1	The assessment approach	68
Acknowledgements	4	Applying MOPAN 3.1 to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees	68
Abbreviations and Acronyms	6	Methodology for scoring and rating	70
		Assessment process	72
		Limitations	73
		References	73
Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees: Performance at a glance	7		
Overall performance reflections	8		
UNHCR's key strengths	9		
Areas for further improvement	11	Annex	74
Conclusion	14		
UNHCR's performance rating summary	15	FIGURES	
About the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees	16	Figure 1. MOPAN members as of 1 October 2023	1
About this Assessment	18	Figure 2. UNHCR's performance rating summary	15
		Figure 3. UNHCR global budget 2022	25
		Figure 4. MOPAN 3.1 performance scoring and rating scale	55
		Figure 5. MOPAN's 2019 rating scale applied to this assessment	71
		Figure 6. MOPAN assessment process	72
Chapter I. BACKGROUND TO THE OFFICE OF THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES	21	TABLES	
Introducing UNHCR	23	Table 1. MOPAN members' contributions to UNHCR in 2022	18
Situational analysis	26	Table 2. Performance areas and key performance indicators	69
References	28		
Chapter II. DETAILED LOOK AT FINDINGS	31	BOXES	
UNHCR's key strengths	33	Box 1. Operating principles	3
Some progress against areas MOPAN previously identified for improvement	36	Box 2. UNHCR has made progress on areas MOPAN previously identified for improvement	8
UNHCR's comprehensive reforms – state of play	41	Box 3. UNHCR's main strengths and areas for improvement	14
Some remaining challenges to ensure UNHCR is fit for the future	46	Box 4. Limitations of the exercise to assess KPIs 9-12 on results	65
Overall performance reflections	51		
References	52		
Chapter III. OVERVIEW OF SCORING	53		
Strategic management	55		
Operational management	57		
Relationship management	59		
Performance management	61		
Results	64		

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

AAP	Accountability to affected populations	OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
ADG	Age, gender and diversity	OIOS	Office of Internal Oversight Services
AOL	Above operating level	OL	Operating level
CCCM	Camp Coordination and Camp Management	PROMS	Project Reporting, Oversight and Monitoring Solution
COVID-19	Coronavirus disease	PSEA	Preventing sexual exploitation and abuse
DSPR	Division of Strategic Planning and Results	PSEAH	Prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse and harassment
ECOSOC	Economic and Social Council	RBM	Results-based management
EDG	Emergency Directors Group	SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
ERP	Enterprise resource planning	SEA	Sexual exploitation and abuse
ExCom	Executive Committee	SH	Sexual harassment
HDP	Humanitarian-development-peace	ToC	Theory of change
HQ	Headquarters	UN	United Nations
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee	UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
IDPs	Internally displaced people	UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
IFRC	International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies	UNICEF	United Nations Children Fund
IGO	Inspector General's Office	UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East
IT	Information technology	UNSDCF	United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework
KPI	Key performance indicator	USD	United States dollar
L3	Level 3	VCA	Victim-centred approach
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation And Learning	WFP	World Food Programme
M&E	Monitoring and evaluation		
MI	Micro-indicator		
MOPAN	Multilateral Organisation Performance Assessment Network		
NGO	Non-governmental organisation		



April 2023, Ethiopia: Somali refugees during first days at new settlement. UNHCR, Government and WFP staff distribute high energy biscuits to newly arrived refugees being relocated to Mirqaan Settlemente.

Photo: © UNHCR/
Diana Diaz

**OFFICE OF THE UNITED
NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER
FOR REFUGEES**
PERFORMANCE AT A GLANCE



OFFICE OF THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES: PERFORMANCE AT A GLANCE

OVERALL PERFORMANCE REFLECTIONS

Conflicts are increasingly protracted, new wars are spreading and global challenges like climate change are already creating significant knock-on effects for forced displacement situations. The human consequences of these factors are immense and growing. And yet, the multilateral system's capacity to respond is being constrained by the growing complexity of the operating environment, deteriorating levels of trust, and funding constraints and inefficiencies.

In this difficult geopolitical environment, and as displacement continues to rise, UNHCR concentrates on delivering protection, assistance and solutions for refugees, asylum-seekers, and internally displaced and stateless people – in more than 130 countries around the world. Doing this well requires the right business model to be fit for purpose for the evolving global and local challenges, and crises, of today and tomorrow.

That is what this MOPAN assessment of UNHCR is about. The overall conclusion is that UNHCR has retained key strengths and has made progress in key areas since the last time MOPAN assessed the organisation, in 2017-18, including in areas that MOPAN highlighted for improvement (Box 2), but there is also room for further improvement.

In this section, we provide an overview of the key findings from this assessment, focusing on areas of strength and outlining issues that UNHCR will still need to address to ensure it remains fit for the future to protect and support forcibly displaced and stateless people in the challenging and complex political and humanitarian contexts in which it operates.

Box 2. UNHCR has made progress on areas MOPAN previously identified for improvement

MOPAN's 2017-18 assessment of UNHCR highlighted four major areas for improvement. Good progress has been made in all areas, which now needs to be consolidated. The areas are:

1. UNHCR's strategic architecture and associated corporate results lack complete clarity – this assessment concludes that UNHCR has addressed weaknesses and ambiguities in its strategy and has identified eight areas for accelerated and targeted action (“focus areas”).
2. UNHCR has an operationally short-term, rather than medium-term, approach and mindset – this assessment concludes that a multi-year strategic and results-based planning framework is in place in theory but is not yet reflected in how UNHCR works.
3. UNHCR can improve its performance and knowledge management systems – this assessment concludes that UNHCR has improved its results reporting, but there are remaining challenges to further improve the quality of data and ensure their use in internal planning and external reporting.
4. UNHCR has scope to improve its operational co-ordination with United Nations (UN) partners at field level – this assessment concludes that UNHCR is an active and engaged member of inter-agency response co-ordination in internal displacement settings but could do better in climate and disaster situations.

UNHCR'S KEY STRENGTHS

UNHCR's mandate is strong, and its commitment to and focus on humanitarian principles and international refugee law run through its strategic priorities and operations

UNHCR's mandate is strong and unique and well reflected in its strategic directions and its operational priorities. It has helped the organisation maintain focus in times of a turbulent external operational environment and demanding internal organisational reforms. In line with this mandate, UNHCR retains a strong commitment to and focus on humanitarian principles and international refugee law. We found that UNHCR has a good understanding of its comparative advantages and complementarities to the mandates of key partners. The challenge is to consistently turn the strategy into results on the ground and report robustly on how it does so.

UNHCR is already seeing clear benefits of its comprehensive reform process

The previous MOPAN assessment noted a need for greater organisational cohesion and a more agile operating model. At that time, UNHCR had already begun a root-to-branch change process – a process that is not yet complete but is already bearing fruit. Improvements to highlight include:

- A clearer organisational structure, appropriately focused on decentralising decision-making authority to allow flexibility and agility at operational level.
- Clearer, consolidated and more streamlined policies, more easily accessible to staff and external stakeholders.
- Better data collection and reporting through the new COMPASS global results and planning framework, which offers better potential for multi-year results-based management – although further work will be needed to adjust indicators, strengthen results monitoring and socialise staff to use the COMPASS system to its full potential.
- A stronger infrastructure for preventing sexual exploitation and abuse and innovative solutions for victim support in relation to sexual harassment, both of which are shaped by active learning.
- Much-strengthened risk management, following a rigorous and benchmarked reform schedule which has already led to significant improvements and provides a clear direction of travel for the coming period.



February 2023, Central African Republic: Assistant High Commissioner Raouf Mazou visits Bria to explore durable solutions for displaced people. As part of the return process, in collaboration with the other actors of the Bria Durable Solutions working group, in 2022 the UNHCR supported nearly 800 displaced people in the return neighbourhoods.
Photo: © UNHCR/ Fidélia Bohissou

UNHCR demonstrates a clear leadership role in refugee situations and is an active and engaged member in inter-agency response co-ordination in internal displacement settings

UNHCR is integrated into and supportive of humanitarian system-wide approaches. In refugee situations, it plays a clear leadership role, in line with its mandate. It leads the Refugee Coordination Model (RCM), and in this role establishes sectoral co-ordination mechanisms, leads the refugee protection work group, ensures participation of refugees and host communities, and helps build capacity of other organisations, while the UNHCR representative maintains a direct line to government. Decentralisation has helped UNHCR work closely with and through country systems and actors. This is becoming increasingly common not just at national but also at local level.

The clarity and predictability of UNHCR's contribution to responses to internal displacement and mixed displacement situations through the Inter-Agency Standing Committee cluster mechanisms have been strengthened since the last MOPAN assessment. This is particularly the case in conflict-related displacement settings. UNHCR's contribution in climate-related and disaster-induced emergencies is more uneven. UNHCR has clarified its policy on the role it will play in situations of disasters, but in practice, the level and predictability of its contributions in such emergencies remain mixed.

UNHCR has an impressive emergency response mechanism which at its best leads to very rapid surge and timely scale-up in response to crises

UNHCR is a strong responder to crises and can be quick to scale up when needed, although this speed varies from crisis to crisis, as UNHCR's own Level 3 emergency evaluations confirm. UNHCR's annual budget includes a provision for operational reserves, and recent changes to the rules around the utilisation of these reserves for sudden onset and emerging crisis situations have strengthened UNHCR's agility when mobilising resources to address sudden emergencies. UNHCR's 2023 Policy on Emergency Preparedness and Response provides a comprehensive and action-oriented overarching framework, and its operations are generally proactive in their advance preparations, including with situational risk analysis and monitoring and the repositioning of stockpiles, in accordance with the policy.



November 2021, Afghanistan:
A UNHCR staff member assists displaced families waiting to receive winter cash assistance in Kabul. UNHCR and partners have distributed winter cash payments to 1,000 displaced families in the Afghan capital.
Photo: © UNHCR/Andrew McConnell

In Moldova and Uganda, the two countries visited by the MOPAN assessment team, UNHCR's surge responses were impressive, as was its response to the humanitarian crisis triggered by the Taliban's take-over of power in Afghanistan. In some other cases, particularly where UNHCR is less well established on the ground or if the causes of displacement are natural disasters rather than conflict, we noted that UNHCR's response was less timely.

UNHCR is strong on global advocacy, in line with its mandate and in pursuit of globally agreed agendas and goals

In a world in which the movement of refugees, asylum seekers and irregular migrants is increasingly seen as part of a single and largely unwanted phenomenon, UNHCR continues to play an important and constructive role in the global discourse, in developing knowledge products and conducting advocacy on behalf of forcibly displaced and stateless people. UNHCR has considerable convening power, and its ability to amplify the voice of people of concern, as well as its legal and technical expertise in relation to its mandate, are well respected. As the guardian of the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, UNHCR leads efforts to further the agenda of the Global Compact on Refugees and convenes the Global Refugee Forum, both of which are strong achievements in creating clear international frameworks on solidarity and burden-sharing, and refugee inclusion in whole-of-society approaches to finding solutions to refugee situations.

AREAS FOR FURTHER IMPROVEMENT

In a tightly earmarked funding environment, a growing key challenge to UNHCR is how to ensure resources are allocated according to need

The humanitarian funding environment is shifting, with a notable decline in the quality of funding – a trend that seems likely to continue, given the current geopolitical environment. While UNHCR's budget is growing this growth is largely coming in the form of earmarked funds. In proportional terms, UNHCR's unrestricted, core funding is at an all-time low, and strictly earmarked funding is at a high.

Most of UNHCR's funding is geographically earmarked, which limits the organisation's ability to align resource allocations with needs and with UNHCR's strategic priorities. In a prominent recent example, the Ukraine displacement crisis triggered large donor earmarks towards Ukrainian refugees and internally displaced people. However, these large funding flows to UNHCR Ukraine were not all additional funds – some came at the expense of other UNHCR operations. As a result, in 2022, the Ukraine response (including for neighbouring countries) was 88% funded, but the Rohingya crisis in Bangladesh, for example, was only 51% funded.

UNHCR's own analysis shows that the global distribution of funding that results from widespread earmarking is a poor match to the global distribution of needs. This suggests a need for further dialogue between UNHCR and its funders on how to improve the allocative efficiency of its funding.

But the assessment team also noted that it is currently difficult to assess to what extent UNHCR applies needs-based criteria for its core (unrestricted/flexible) funding allocations, and some funding allocations appear to have been based on other criteria. It would therefore be helpful for UNHCR to provide more detail in its reporting on how it allocates its core funding and to avoid spending core funding on operations that are relatively well funded compared to needs.

UNHCR needs to become a less demanding and more reasonable funding partner

The previous MOPAN assessment was critical of UNHCR's partnership approach. Since then, UNHCR has embedded sensible principles of partnership in its policies and simplified and digitalised its partnership management system (PROMS), which is being rolled out. Through PROMS, UNHCR aims to create more tailor-made partnership agreements where capacity building and control measures can be adjusted based on the partner's needs and gaps and the particular contextual risks faced by the operation. In practice, however, UNHCR continues in many cases to be an overly demanding partner, working according to a set of rigid reporting requirements that cannot be adapted



January 2022, Niger: Refugees, internally displaced and host community join forces on market garden project. Niger has hosted refugees who fled the conflict in Mali since 2012. Today, nearly 60,000 Malian refugees live in Niger, including about 36,000 in the Tillabéri region.

Photo: © UNHCR/
Colin Delfosse

according to the level of funding involved, the quality of the partnership or the strength of the implementing partners' own monitoring and control systems. This results in onerous and unnecessary reporting burdens for many partners and in reports that are not fully utilised by UNHCR itself.

UNHCR has signed up to the Grand Bargain commitment on quality funding, but this is not yet reflected in practice. UNHCR receives relatively little multi-year funding from its own donors and passes little of what it does receive on to its implementing partners. The predictability of partnerships is also an issue, with implementing partners across countries facing vastly different timelines and requirements for otherwise comparable interventions. Some partners felt more like they were treated as contractors: having very short time frames for partnership agreement proposals, little opportunity for input into project design, heavily monitored projects with monthly reporting at output level, and short and frequently renegotiated funding envelopes.

UNHCR's reform process aims to enable and instil a longer-term mindset into the organisation's work, but this is not yet operationalised

Multi-year planning at country and regional levels has been introduced with the new reporting and results-based management system COMPASS. All country offices are scheduled to have multi-year strategies in place as of the end of 2023. However, in practice, and as budgeting and funding are not yet multi-year, there has not yet been a transformation to a multi-year mindset. In most cases, UNHCR's ways of working, including with funded partners, continue to be on a shorter-term basis.

UNHCR has made significant efforts to develop a humanitarian-development-peace nexus way of working in protracted refugee situations and to support and encourage the inclusion of refugees in national development plans. However, dependencies and parallel systems remain a challenge in protracted refugee situations. While creating separate refugee response structures with governments may be a fast and effective way of establishing an emergency response capacity, it can become a roadblock to the longer-term aims of including refugees in national services and supporting them to become economically active and self-sufficient. UNHCR has made considerable efforts to develop better co-ordination with development actors (both national and international), but that work is not yet

visibly bearing fruit in terms of practical co-ordination and the “hand-over” of roles and responsibilities as and when more developmental approaches become appropriate. UNHCR is aware of the need for exit strategies that hand over responsibility to national governments and development actors, rather than taking on development roles itself, but has not yet found a systematic way of designing and following up on such strategies. In order not to be locked into unsustainable agreements and practices, nexus thinking needs to be in place from day one.

UNHCR’s restructuring has rendered the organisation better equipped to work coherently across divisions and levels, but the role of the regional bureaux is not sufficiently clear

The seven newly created regional bureaux have functions including operational support, programme planning, resource management, internal control and risk management. The proximity of regional bureaux to field operations is intended to support efficiency gains, and they were indeed central during the COVID-19 pandemic to UNHCR’s ability to “stay and deliver”. However, we found lingering confusion from country offices around delineation of responsibilities, oversight roles and reporting lines between regional bureaux and headquarters (HQ). As long as the role of the regional bureaux remains unsettled, there is a risk that some of their functions become an unnecessary added layer of bureaucracy, but also a risk that the regional bureaux develop into separate power bases adding potential for blurring or complicating communication lines and decision-making processes.

UNHCR’s internal oversight bodies have become more unambiguously independent, but external consultation and transparency can still be improved

UNHCR has adequate internal oversight, and steps have been taken to ensure the independence of oversight bodies. Key internal oversight positions of the Ombudsman, the Inspector-General, and the heads of the Evaluation Office and Ethics Office are explicit non-career positions. The oversight organs have only a modest budget allocation but are largely on top of their remits.

UNHCR has a different governance structure than other UN agencies, with the High Commissioner bound by the 1950 UNHCR Statute and a mandate “until the refugee problem is solved”. The UN General Assembly is the governing body of UNHCR, and the High Commissioner provides it with annual reports. UNHCR also has an Executive Committee (ExCom), which was established to provide advice to the High Commissioner and to approve the use of voluntary funds. ExCom is a consultative, not a governing, body. It has the authority to approve the UNHCR Programme Budget. While cognisant of the importance of respecting the mandate and the non-political character of the High Commissioner’s work, many external stakeholders, particularly among donors, noted that UNHCR could further strengthen its transparency and reporting practices and adopt a more consultative approach with ExCom. This would include informing and consulting in good time before major decisions are taken and looking into the possibility of systematically tabling the results of scrutiny reports and their management responses at ExCom Standing Committee meetings and would enable more interactive dialogue with member states. In return, ExCom members could do more to use the existing scrutiny reports and avoid individual and overlapping scrutiny requests.

There has been only mixed progress on cross-cutting issues

Overall, in this assessment, evidence shows that UNHCR’s performance in delivering gender outcomes has improved significantly and is now satisfactory. There is now an Age, Gender and Diversity (AGD) policy, data gathering and reporting is disaggregated, there is a roll-out plan for the policy and there are more resources allocated to gender issues. However, evaluation evidence suggests that the quality and quantity of gender-disaggregated data is work in progress, and staff awareness of the new policy is low but improving.

On environment and climate change, there has been some improvement, but actual performance and results are still uneven. There have been considerable efforts by UNHCR to incorporate climate and environment as cross-cutting issues, but action in these areas still depends largely on individual staff interest. There is an opportunity for a step change in this area with the imminent release of UNHCR’s Strategic Plan on Climate Action 2024-2030.

CONCLUSION

If UNHCR is to live up to its potential and deliver on its mandate to provide protection, response and solutions in today's complex geopolitical environment, it must have the right business model. The assessment concludes that UNHCR has made good progress towards the right strategic direction, systems and processes, and programmatic approaches to deliver effective results. Moving forward, there are also a range of areas for performance improvement to shore up UNHCR's foundations, and MOPAN will assess progress against these areas in the next assessment (Box 3).

Box 3. UNHCR's main strengths and areas for improvement

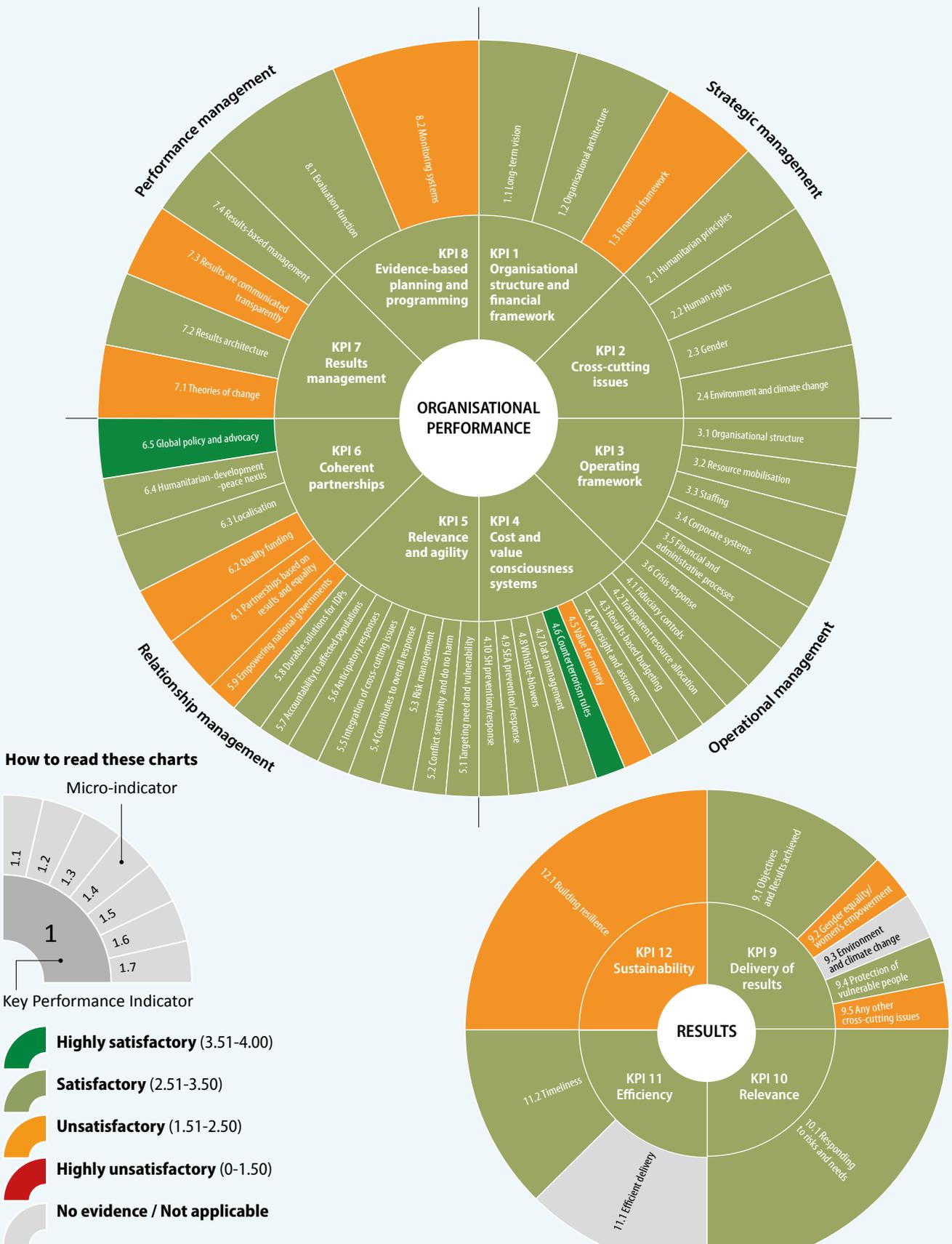
Strengths

- The mandate of UNHCR is strong, and its commitment to and focus on humanitarian principles and international refugee law run through its strategic priorities and operations.
- UNHCR plays a strong global advocacy role, in line with its mandate and in pursuit of globally agreed agendas and goals.
- UNHCR's leadership in furthering the agenda of the Global Compact on Refugees and its convening role for the Global Refugee Forum, are strong achievements in creating clear international frameworks on solidarity and burden-sharing.
- In refugee situations, UNHCR plays a leadership role in the international response in accordance with its mandate, and in the inter-agency humanitarian response mechanisms to other displacement situations, UNHCR plays a collaborative and positive role.
- An impressive emergency response mechanism leads at its best to very rapid surge and timely scale-up in response to crises.
- Decentralisation and comprehensive organisational reform are already bearing fruit and are supporting UNHCR's strategic directions and setting it on a path towards a multi-year outlook, even if further work is needed to make the most out of new processes and management tools.

Areas for Improvement

- Delivering the right cultural changes and incentives to shift towards a multi-year mindset and ways of working.
- Further strengthening the use of evidence in planning and programming, reinforcing the foundations laid by its new COMPASS reporting and results-based management and budgeting framework.
- Further clarifying and delivering on UNHCR's role in climate emergencies and disasters and delivering on climate and environmental goals more systematically.
- Continuing to consolidate the reform programme and clarifying and socialising the role of the regional bureaux.
- Rethinking refugee responses from a longer-term perspective, so that to the extent possible refugee emergencies are approached from day one in a manner that reduces the risk of UNHCR becoming "stuck" as the long-term principal service provider in protracted refugee situations.
- Continuing reforms towards becoming a less demanding and more reasonable partner in funded relationships
- Improving consultation with the Executive Committee and improving "no surprises" reporting to funders.

FIGURE 2: UNHCR'S PERFORMANCE RATING SUMMARY



ABOUT THE OFFICE OF THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was established in 1950 as the UN’s refugee agency, to provide assistance to the millions of refugees displaced during and in the aftermath of World War II. Together with the UNHCR Statute, the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol represent the legal cornerstone for UNHCR’s work and the “most comprehensive codification of the rights of refugees at the international level” (UNHCR, 2023). In addition to defining who is a refugee, the 1951 Convention sets out the rights to which refugees are entitled and enshrines fundamental principles of refugee protection including the strict prohibition of refoulement, which is widely recognised as a norm of customary international law:

No Contracting State shall expel or return (‘refouler’) a refugee in any manner whatsoever to the frontiers of territories where his life or freedom would be threatened on account of his race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion.

1951 Refugee Convention (UNHCR,1951)

Regional refugee law instruments, such as the 1969 OAU Convention governing Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa, the 1984 Cartagena Declaration on Refugees and the laws forming part of the Common European Asylum System, build upon the 1951 Convention and together constitute the global refugee legal framework.

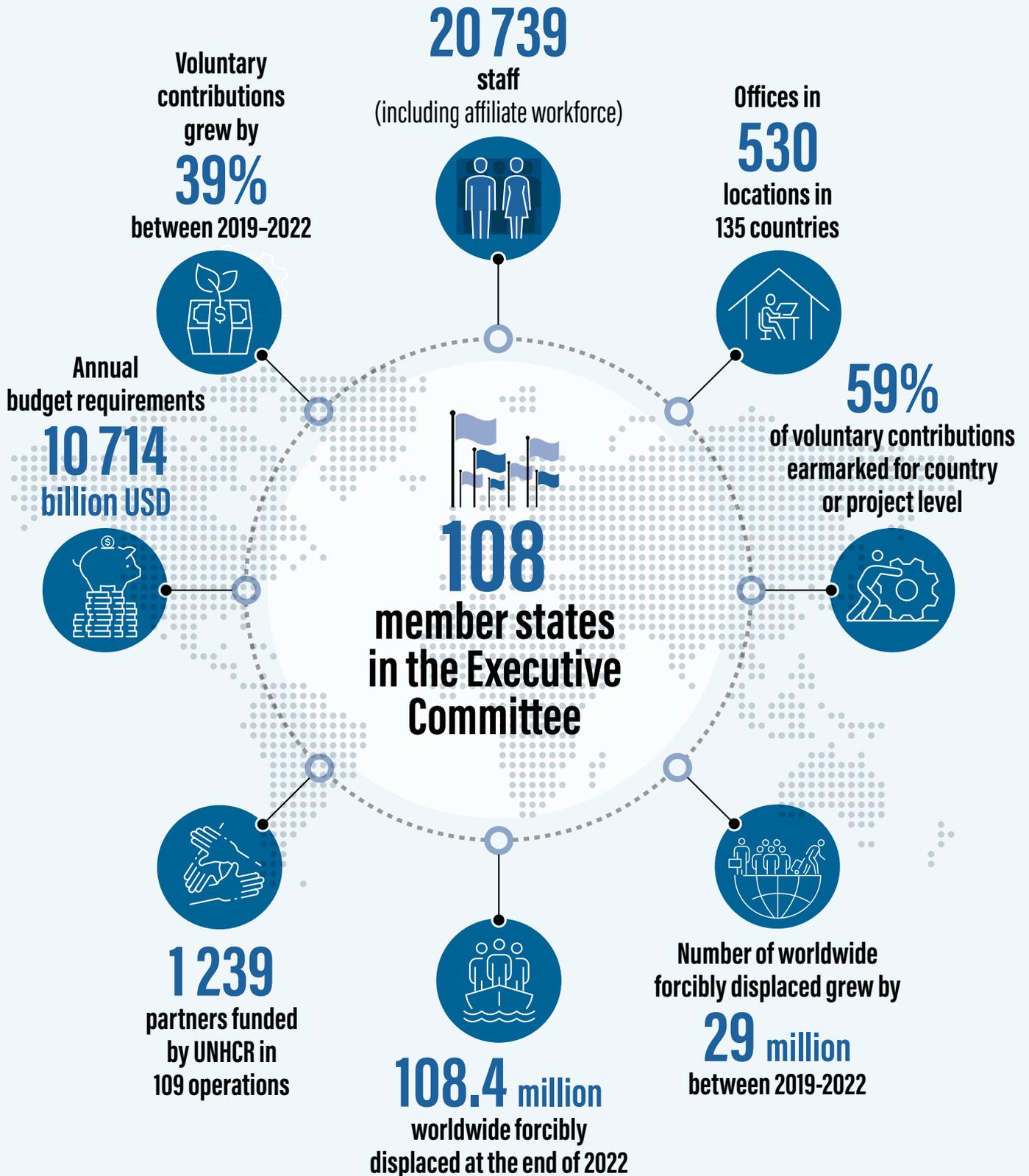
UNHCR is the world’s leading refugee agency, with offices in 135 countries and 20 739 staff in 2023. Since its inception in 1950, UNHCR has operated in an unprecedented external context, with 108.4 million people worldwide forcibly displaced in 2022 (UNHCR, 2023). Since the last MOPAN assessment, in 2017-18, the COVID-19 pandemic has created a global health emergency, conflicts have led to multiple large-scale displacement emergencies, while protracted refugee situations have continued with few solutions in sight, and climate impacts are aggravating multiple causes of forced displacement (UNHCR, 2023). The war in Ukraine, beginning in February 2022, has led to the world’s largest refugee crisis, with over 6 million Ukrainians becoming refugees (UNHCR, 2023). Within this difficult operating environment, UNHCR has established key multi-stakeholder initiatives with partners, notably the Global Compact for Refugees and others including the Window for Host Communities and Refugees as part of the World Bank’s IDA19. UNHCR’s annual budget has also evolved to reflect the increased number of people falling under its protection mandate, growing by 15.9% in 2022 compared to 2021 (UNGA, 2023).



March 2022, Italy: UNHCR staff met refugees from Ukraine on buses at the Ferneti border crossing from Slovenia into Italy, handed out information about asylum procedures and health care, and provided the refugees with water and snacks.

Photo: © UNHCR/
Dario Bosio

UNHCR IN NUMBERS



Sources: UNHCR Global Report 2022 and UNHCR Global Trends Report 2023.

TABLE 1. MOPAN MEMBERS' CONTRIBUTIONS TO UNHCR IN 2022

Member	Contributions USD
United States of America	2,195,608,503
Germany	535,769,917
Japan	167,708,064
Sweden	145,652,735
Norway	118,176,368
Netherlands	110,001,407
Denmark	106,949,997
United Kingdom	99,337,588
France	99,265,458
Italy	97,440,630
Canada	96,277,146
Switzerland	58,464,442
Australia	40,731,300
Spain	31,667,852
Ireland	28,694,142
Republic of Korea	28,232,363
Finland	27,497,582
Belgium	22,045,350
Qatar	21,501,968
Luxembourg	13,401,941
New Zealand	6,142,051
Türkiye	300,000

Source: [Global Report 2022](#) | [Global Focus \(unhcr.org\)](#)

ABOUT THIS ASSESSMENT

This is the fourth MOPAN assessment of UNHCR. The previous assessment was conducted in 2017-18. The Netherlands, Switzerland and the United Kingdom championed the assessment on behalf of the MOPAN network. This assessment covers the period from January 2018 to August 2023 and assesses whether UNHCR is fit for purpose in a rapidly evolving global context. The assessment draws on multiple lines of evidence (documentary, survey and interviews) from sources within and outside the organisation to validate and triangulate findings across 12 key performance indicators, which are in turn broken down into more than 220 individual indicators.

Methodology applied in this assessment

MOPAN's 2022 study on *Rethinking Effective Humanitarian Organisations* (MOPAN, 2022) concluded that MOPAN needed to adapt its framework for assessing organisations working in crises to better reflect the nature of humanitarian operations – including the policy environment – and the practical requirements of working in crisis situations. MOPAN then worked under the guidance of a Humanitarian Advisory Group – including MOPAN members, multilateral organisations, policy leaders and think tanks – to develop an adapted framework for multilateral organisations primarily working in crisis contexts. That framework was applied for this assessment. Key adaptations include:

- new crisis-specific areas, such as anticipatory action, humanitarian principles, the humanitarian-development-peace nexus, localisation and accountability to affected populations;
- increased focus on other critical areas such as procurement and staff safety and security;
- applying a crisis-specific lens to areas such as gender and preventing sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment.

The adapted framework aligns to the five MOPAN 3.1 performance areas: strategic, operational, relationship, performance management and results. However, the micro-indicators (Mis) were adapted to ensure that they reflect the due diligence and learning needs of MOPAN members and multilateral organisations. Accordingly, the elements to guide the rating against the MOPAN rating scale were also adapted to fit these Mis.

About MOPAN

MOPAN is a network of 22 members who assess multilateral organisations, shape performance standards, and champion learning and insights to strengthen development and humanitarian results and promote accountability. Capitalising on the Network's unique cross-multilateral system perspective and expertise, MOPAN members work together to deliver relevant, impartial, high-quality and timely performance information as a public good through an inclusive and transparent approach. MOPAN's performance information mitigates risks, informs decision-making and supports change, helping to increase knowledge and trust among all stakeholders and ultimately to achieve a stronger and better-performing multilateral system.

REFERENCES

MOPAN (2022), *Lessons in Multilateral Effectiveness: Rethinking Effective Humanitarian Organisations*, Multilateral Organisation Performance Assessment Network.

UN General Assembly, 2023, *Programme budget for 2024 of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees*, United Nations General Assembly, Retrieved from:
<https://www.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/2023-09/advance-copy-revision-programme-budget-english.pdf>.

UNHCR (2023a) *Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme Standing Committee Eighty-sixth meeting: Update on budgets and funding (2022 and 2023)*, 17 February 2023, Retrieved from:
<https://www.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/legacy-pdf/64088b554.pdf>.

UNHCR (2023b), *Budget and Expenditure, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees*, Retrieved from:
<https://reporting.unhcr.org/dashboards/budget-and-expenditure#:~:text=The%20Executive%20Committee%20at%20its,million%20for%20Junior%20Professional%20Officers.>

UNHCR (2023c), *Figures at a Glance, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees*, Retrieved from:
<https://www.unhcr.org/uk/about-unhcr/who-we-are/figures-glance.>

UNHCR (1951), *Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees*, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, <https://www.unhcr.org/media/convention-and-protocol-relating-status-refugees.>



BACKGROUND TO THE OFFICE OF THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES





INTRODUCING UNHCR

Mission and mandate

In Resolution 319 (IV) of 3 December 1949, the United Nations (UN) General Assembly decided to establish a High Commissioner's Office for Refugees as of 1 January 1951 to help millions of Europeans who had fled or lost their homes during and in the aftermath of World War II. The Statute of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees was adopted by the General Assembly on 14 December 1950 as Annex to Resolution 428 (V). UNHCR's mandate, as described in its Statute, is to provide international protection for refugees and to seek permanent solutions for them. UNHCR is the guardian of the 1951 UN Convention Related to the Status of Refugees, which has been ratified by 146 state parties. The Refugee Convention defines the term "refugee", outlines the rights of refugees and details the obligations of states to protect them. In 1967, the Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees removed the Convention's original limited application to those fleeing events taking place in Europe before January 1951, thus making its application and UNHCR's supervisory responsibilities global. The Refugee Convention and Protocol set clear obligations for states to ensure that the rights of refugees are protected, foremost among which is the legal principle of *non-refoulement*, which asserts that refugees should not be returned to a country where they face serious threats to their lives or freedom. Having routinely extended UNHCR's tenure for five years at the time, the General Assembly decided in 2003 to extend the refugee agency's mandate indefinitely "until the refugee problem is solved".

Since its inception, UNHCR has expanded from a small, mainly non-operational legal protection agency with a small office in Geneva (Hammerstad, 2014), to a global organisation operating in 137 countries, supported by seven regional bureaux, 20 739 staff and a budget based on UNHCR's assessment of needs of USD 10.66 billion for 2023 (as of September 2023) (UNHCR, 2023a). UNHCR responds to a broad range of crises around the world, including large-scale acute emergencies and an increasing number of protracted refugee situations. The number of displaced people has risen each year since 2012, and the number of "people of concern" to UNHCR – including refugees, asylum seekers, stateless persons, returnees (other than Palestinians who fall under UNRWA's mandate) and internally displaced people (IDPs) – is at a historical high at 112.6 million, 29.4 million of whom are classed as refugees or people in refugee-like situations (UNHCR, 2023b). UNHCR operates with a broader understanding of "refugee" than the UN Convention's focus on individual persecution. Its mandate covers all those displaced across borders due to conflict, generalised violence and other situations where the state is unable or unwilling to provide effective protection to its citizens. UNHCR is formally responsible within the UN system for co-ordinating protection and support to refugees in all refugee situations across the world. In addition to this, under the auspices of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, UNHCR leads the global humanitarian cluster on protection and co-leads the Shelter Cluster and the Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM) cluster in non-refugee situations caused by conflict. In situations of disaster-induced displacement, UNHCR leads the cluster on protection if it already has a presence in the affected country.

UNHCR's activities go beyond international legal protection to include all aspects of refugees' well-being, making UNHCR a leading humanitarian agency providing assistance to refugees around the globe. Its standard activities in refugee situations include registration, status determination, issuance of legal documents, provision of relief, emergency preparedness and elements of broader development work. UNHCR is also responsible for seeking permanent solutions for refugees, which it defines as voluntary repatriation to a refugee's country of origin, resettlement in a third country and local integration into the initial host country.

September 2019, Kenya: Margetu Dedefi, 14 uses braille in her classroom. Margetu and her fellow students at Mogadishu Primary School are supported by UNHCR and its partner, Educate a Child (EAC). Since 2012, the partnership has helped more than one million refugee and other displaced children gain access to school – many for the first time – as well as improving the quality of teaching, ensuring safer learning environments and providing essential supplies. Photo: © UNHCR/Hannah Maule-finch

Governance arrangements

UNHCR falls under the authority of the UN General Assembly (UNGA) and the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). The UNHCR Executive Committee (ExCom) meets annually in Geneva and approves the agency's programmes and budget, advises on international protection and discusses a range of substantive issues with UNHCR and inter-governmental and non-governmental organisations. These are presented by the High Commissioner who is appointed by the UNGA. ExCom consists of representatives from UN member states. Between ExCom plenary sessions, there is a Standing Committee that meets several times a year.

The High Commissioner serves a five-year term and is responsible for the direction and control of UNHCR, assisted by a Deputy High Commissioner and Assistant High Commissioners for Protection and Operations. The Inspector General's Office (IGO) is the cornerstone of UNHCR's system of independent oversight. The Head of Evaluation reports to the High Commissioner.

Organisational structure

UNHCR has a decentralised structure, with more than 90% of staff based in the field. The Geneva headquarters include divisions overseeing operations, protection and solutions, external relations, human resources, information technology, supply, administration and finance. The organisation also has Global Service Centres in Budapest and Copenhagen, providing support, including key administrative functions, for the organisation globally. Seven regional bureaux provide oversight and support to UNHCR's country offices and liaise with headquarters. They cover: the Americas; Asia and the Pacific; East and Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes Region; Europe; Middle East and North Africa; Southern Africa; and West and Central Africa.

Strategic planning

UNHCR has recently adopted a new corporate strategy: UNHCR's Strategic Directions 2022-2026. It is organised under five strategic directions: protect, respond, include, empower and solve. Setting out the global challenges (COVID-19, conflict and climate change) within which UNHCR must pursue these strategic directions, the document commits to ensuring a rigorous "flow of strategy into action", with linkages between the organisation's strategic directions and its planning at all levels. The strategy sets out eight focus areas for "additional, accelerated and targeted action" in the period 2022-26:

1. Safeguard international protection, including in the context of mixed movements
2. Strengthen accountability to the people we serve, especially women and children
3. Reinforce efforts to strengthen gender-based violence prevention, risk mitigation and response
4. Expand on, pursue and adapt options for resettlement and complementary pathways
5. Mainstream development engagement in our responses from the outset, especially by building coalitions with development partners
6. Grow engagement on responses and solutions for internally displaced people
7. Redouble efforts on statelessness so that the objectives of the #Ibelong campaign are best pursued
8. Proactively act to mitigate the effects of the climate change crisis on displacement and in line with UNHCR's protection mandate. (UNHCR, 2022)

At the organisational level, the Strategic Directions document commits UNHCR to:

1. Invest in our workforce and enabling work environment
2. Further leverage our decentralized operational presence
3. Strengthen and diversify our partnerships
4. Advance data, analysis and information relating to forcibly displaced and stateless people
5. Consolidate transformation towards managerial effectiveness. (UNHCR, 2022)

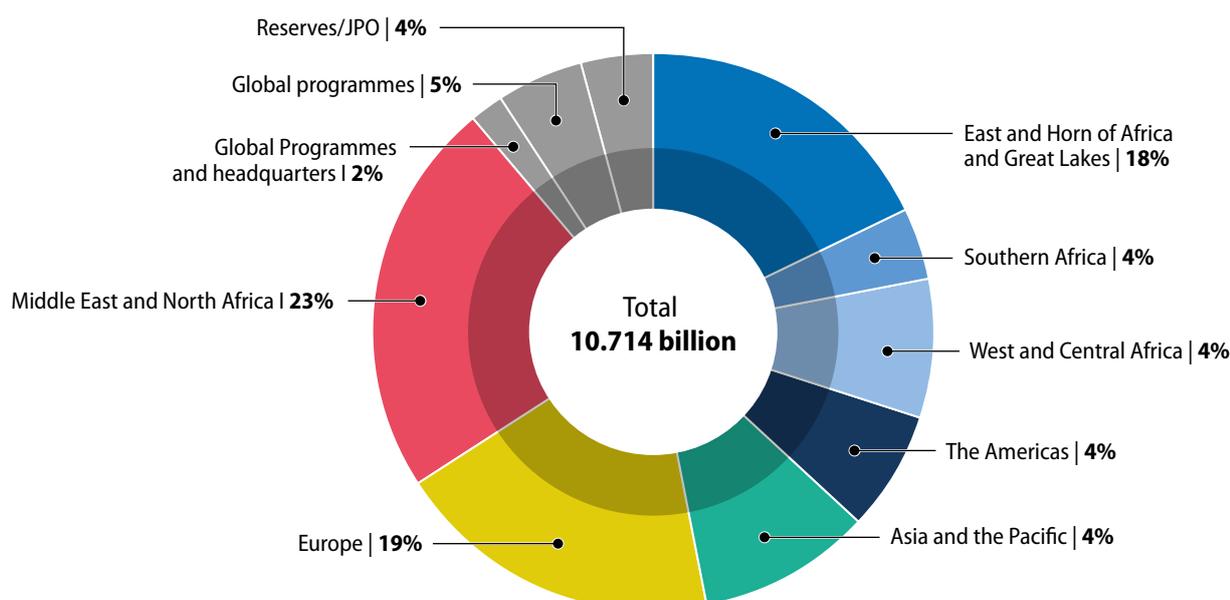
Finances and operations

UNHCR switched to needs-based budgeting and planning in 2008, preparing a budget based on its assessment of actual humanitarian needs, rather than one based on expected donor funding. Within each country, needs-based plans are, in principle, developed through a participatory approach, engaging with a range of stakeholders, including displaced populations (Figure 3).

Needs-based budgeting highlights the significant gap which exists between UNHCR's overall budget requirements and the funding it receives, which is mostly from voluntary contributions with a very small allocation from the UN regular budget. A high proportion of the funding is earmarked for specific situations, crises or activities. In 2022, UNHCR's budget was USD 10.714 billion, with USD 5.607 billion of this met by donor contributions and allocated to UNHCR's programmed activities (UNHCR, 2023c), leaving a gap of almost 50% between budgeted needs and available funding. While both the budget and the needs have increased in recent years, the funding gap has risen in dollar terms. The United States is by far the largest donor, in 2022 at 38% of overall voluntary contributions, followed by Germany (9%) and the European Union (4%) (UNHCR, 2023d, p. 23).

FIGURE 3. UNHCR GLOBAL BUDGET 2022

By region



Notes: 2023 current budget as approved by the High Commissioner as of October 2023; pending presentation to the ExCom's Standing Committee.

All other years are considered final for budget and expenditure data.

Source: 2024 budget as approved by the Executive Committee in October 2023 (<https://reporting.unhcr.org/dashboards/budget-and-expenditure?year=2022>).

UNHCR's annual programme budget for the coming year is presented to ExCom in the annual session in October. The budget may also be adjusted for unforeseen needs that arise over the course of the year by means of supplementary budgets. In 2020, for instance, two supplementary budgets were issued, for the COVID-19 pandemic (USD 404 million) and the displacement crisis in the central Sahel region (USD 59.7 million).

SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS

Organisational reforms

At the time of the previous MOPAN assessment in 2017/2018, UNHCR had begun a significant change management process to improve its operating model. As part of this, UNHCR has undertaken a decentralisation and regionalisation process, which has been core to its structural transformation. The process required structural reconfiguration at headquarters and strengthened support structures at regional level to ensure operations were supported more effectively by the regional bureaux. As of January 2023, seven regional bureaux (the Americas, East and Horn of Africa, Middle East and North Africa, West and Central Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Southern Africa, and Europe) became fully operational.

As part of the decentralisation process, additional authorities were devolved to the country and regional platforms, including specialised technical positions. Additional technical posts bolster the regional bureaux' capacities for protection, risk management and monitoring, external engagement, strategic planning and partnerships, and operational support, including human resources and supply chain management. Technical experts at regional and operational levels have functional links with divisions at headquarters.

While greater decision-making authority has been granted to those closer to the point of delivery, headquarters in Geneva retain the responsibility of ensuring global coherence and providing overall management and oversight. Its responsibilities include:

- providing legal and policy guidance
- establishing and updating standards for protection, assistance and solutions
- ensuring sound financial management and oversight
- providing functional guidance to the regional bureaux
- managing engagement with partners and other stakeholders at central level.

To support this new operating model, a Business Transformation Programme was initiated in 2020. The programme, which is still underway, is comprehensive, including new processes, systems and tools for results-based management, people management and human resources, business processes and systems, and data and digitalisation.

In 2021, UNHCR adopted a new corporate planning, budgeting and monitoring system known as COMPASS. This system aims to achieve a unified results architecture throughout the organisation, linked to UNHCR's strategic plan and corporate budget process. It includes a new Global Results Framework. The new system aims to achieve a progressive shift from an annual planning and reporting cycle towards a capacity to monitor long-term outcomes for forcibly displaced people. At the time of the 2017-18 MOPAN assessment, UNHCR had some elements of a results-based management (RBM) system in place but had yet to join them together into a unified results architecture linked to its corporate strategy. Its early attempts to implement RBM had proved overly complex and burdensome for staff, who often resorted to parallel, offline systems for monitoring emergency humanitarian operations. Furthermore, UNHCR struggled to link resource allocation and results (results-based budgeting), owing to its needs-based budgeting process. UNHCR has since invested substantial resources in RBM, with a new results architecture introduced in 2021, which for the first time is linked to a corporate budget organised by impact area. There has been further decentralisation in the budget process: the High Commissioner allocates budget envelopes to each region, based on

their anticipated needs, which then have delegated authority to allocate resources to country programmes, including for emergency situations, as needs evolve. The new budgeting system is also designed to enable UNHCR to track earmarked funding, which has been a perennial challenge as the system has to be flexible enough to accommodate regular in-year adjustments in both needs and resources.

Changes to the operating context

UNHCR operates in difficult and fast-changing contexts. In the past decade, the number of refugees, IDPs and other populations of concern to the agency has soared. The displacement crisis caused by the war in Ukraine has led to around 6 million refugees from Ukraine globally. Alongside Ukraine, protracted conflicts and displacement crises, such as those in Somalia, Sudan and Syria, continue with no solutions in sight. During the assessment period, the COVID-19 pandemic and efforts by national governments to contain the pandemic had impacts on both people's ability to flee to safety and the ability of UNHCR and its humanitarian partners to protect and assist refugees. Lockdowns and restrictions in many locations had a severe effect on displaced populations, disrupting their ability to access basic services and earn income, including in informal labour markets. Other longstanding humanitarian situations have erupted since the last MOPAN assessment into new large-scale emergencies, such as the arrival in 2017 of more than 700 000 Rohingya in Bangladesh, fleeing ethnic cleansing in Myanmar. In South America, 2.5 million Venezuelans fled their country in 2018, and there are currently 4.1 million Venezuelan refugees, asylum seekers and other migrants, mostly in South American countries.

Populations of concern to UNHCR have increased every year in the past decade (UNHCR, 2023c). The number of refugees under UNHCR's mandate nearly tripled from 10.4 million in 2011 to 29.4 million in 2023, while other forms of forced displacement are also on the rise. This steep growth is due to a few large displacement crises, with 52% of refugees under UNHCR's mandate originating from just three countries – Syrian Arab Republic (6.8 million), Ukraine (5.7 million), Afghanistan (5.7 million) (UNHCR, 2023d). Due to the protracted nature of so many displacement crises, many refugees only know a life in exile: over the period 2018-22, around 1.9 million children were born as refugees (UNHCR, 2023d, p. 18). The vast majority of refugees are hosted in developing countries (76%), where support for refugees should be balanced with assistance for host communities to avoid international support becoming a source of conflict.

Shifts in the policy environment

The policy environment in which UNHCR operates has also evolved. The World Humanitarian Summit of 2016, and the Grand Bargain struck at that event, have called for shifts in ways of working to get more means into the hands of people in need and to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of humanitarian action. Later, the Global Compact on Refugees (2018) set out a clear framework for more predictable and equitable responsibility sharing, reaffirming the need for international co-operation to deliver solutions for refugees and calling for a transformation of the way the world responds to refugee situations. Aligned with this, in 2022, UNHCR adhered to the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) Recommendation on the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus, a shift towards more coherent approaches to working between all actors in the same contexts. Most recently, the UN Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on Internal Displacement focused on how to prevent, respond to and achieve solutions to the increasingly protracted nature of internal displacement, with a UN Special Advisor now formulating recommendations on how key organisations including the International Organization for Migration, UNHCR and the United Nations Development Programme work together on achieving solutions to situations of internal displacement.

These important shifts in the operating context and policy environment have led UNHCR to make adjustments to the way it delivers its mandate, leading to a transformation of its business model and ways of working. The reforms that UNHCR has made to its systems and processes to deliver results in this new environment have been reviewed as part of this MOPAN assessment.

REFERENCES

Hammerstad, A. (2014), *The Rise and Decline of a Global Security Actor: UNHCR, Refugee Protection, and Security*, Oxford University Press.

UN General Assembly (2023), *Programme Budget for 2024 of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees*, United Nations General Assembly, <https://www.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/2023-09/advance-copy-revision-programme-budget-english.pdf>.

UNHCR (2023a), *Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme Standing Committee Eighty-sixth Meeting: Update on Budgets and Funding (2022 and 2023)*, 17 February 2023, <https://www.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/legacy-pdf/64088b554.pdf>.

UNHCR (2023b), *Budget and Expenditure*, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, <https://reporting.unhcr.org/dashboards/budget-and-expenditure#:~:text=The%20Executive%20Committee%20at%20its,million%20for%20Junior%20Professional%20Officers.>

UNHCR (2023c), *Figures at a Glance*, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, <https://www.unhcr.org/uk/about-unhcr/who-we-are/figures-glance>.

UNHCR (2023d), *Global Report 2022*, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, <https://reporting.unhcr.org/global-report-2022>.

UNHCR (2023e), *History of UNHCR*, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, <https://www.unhcr.org/about-unhcr/overview/history-unhcr#:~:text=UNHCR%20now%20has%2020%2C739%20personnel,108.4%20million%20people%20currently%20displaced.>

UNHCR (2023f), *Operational Data Portal Ukraine Refugee Situation*, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine> (accessed October 2023).

UNHCR (2023g), *Refugee Data Finder*, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, <https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics/>.

UNHCR (2023h), *The 1951 Refugee Convention*, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, <https://www.unhcr.org/uk/about-unhcr/who-we-are/1951-refugee-convention>.

UNHCR (2023i), *Where We Work*, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, <https://www.unhcr.org/uk/about-unhcr/where-we-work>.

UNHCR (2022), *UNHCR's Strategic Directions 2022-2026*, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, <https://reporting.unhcr.org/unhcr-strategic-directions-2022-2026>.

UNHCR (1951), *Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees*, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, <https://www.unhcr.org/media/convention-and-protocol-relating-status-refugees>.

March 2021, Chad: Adam Moussa, 38 years old and a father of seven, is a final-year student of Arabic Literature at King Faisal University in N'Djamena, Chad. Forced to flee Darfur in 2004, Adam participated in the DAFI programme, a cornerstone of UNHCR's investments in tertiary refugee students. It was launched in 1992 by UNHCR and the German government. Photo: © UNHCR/Antoine Tardy





DETAILED LOOK AT FINDINGS





The previous MOPAN assessment – in 2017/2018 – found that UNHCR’s organisational structure and business processes were not fully fit for purpose to meet the challenges of the future, with greater organisational coherence at headquarters and greater decentralisation needed. The previous MOPAN assessment also noted that UNHCR’s operating model had become excessively bureaucratic and lacking in agility. At that time, UNHCR had already begun its comprehensive change management process.

While not yet complete, the reforms moved on at a reasonable pace during the current assessment period. The changes are extensive. They include the regionalisation and decentralisation of operations, which came into effect in January 2020, and a root-to-branch business transformation programme, still underway, which includes a suite of cloud-based business solutions, digitalising of all UNHCR’s processes, and a new results-based management system, COMPASS.

This chapter provides an overview of UNHCR’s performance journey since the last MOPAN assessment, in 2017-18: highlighting UNHCR’s key strengths; looking at progress against areas that MOPAN had identified for improvement in that assessment; analysing the progress on UNHCR’s reforms; and outlining the next set of challenges that UNHCR will need to address to become fit for the future.

UNHCR’S KEY STRENGTHS

UNHCR’s mandate is strong, and its commitment to and focus on humanitarian principles and international refugee law run through its strategic priorities and operations

UNHCR has always had a clear and unique mandate, and this mandate is well reflected in its current corporate strategy and operational priorities. The clarity of the mandate has helped the organisation maintain its focus in a turbulent external environment and through a succession of large-scale, multi-year reforms. The refugee protection and solutions mandate is well understood and internalised among UNHCR staff. In line with the mandate, UNHCR retains a strong commitment to and focus on humanitarian principles and international refugee law in all its operations.

The strong and largely unambiguous mandate also helps UNHCR identify its own comparative advantages and complementarities alongside its partners, including the organisation’s role in contributing to the overall response in crisis settings, and in driving a strategic approach. It is thus no surprise that UNHCR has a clear understanding of its role in refugee emergencies, where it leads the co-ordination of the inter-agency response. In terms of strategic approach, MOPAN’s evidence finds that UNHCR’s multi-year Strategic Directions 2022-2026 is relevant and appropriate to the organisation’s mandate and global displacement trends (UNHCR, 2022). The Strategic Directions document is framed around the five people-centred principles of protect, respond, include, empower and solve, as in the previous (2017-21) strategy. These principles fully align with UNHCR’s mandate, humanitarian principles, international humanitarian law, international refugee law and the Global Compact on Refugees.

The challenge, of course, as highlighted by the survey evidence collected for this assessment is in turning the strategy into results on the ground. As one peer organisation noted, “[A]t conceptual/HQ level, UNHCR has a clear strategy and aims. However, there continues to be a large gap between aspirational commitments and ability to implement on the ground. This gap is not well understood or acknowledged at executive management level.”

September, 2023, South Sudan: Refugee Hana fled Khartoum, Sudan, after the conflict broke out, returning to her home country. Hana tragically lost both of her babies due to health complications. Increasing rates of measles and malnutrition in Sudan’s camps are claiming the lives of children under five years, with the disease being reported in new arrivals to South Sudan. UNHCR and partners are working to provide urgent assistance inside Sudan and across borders to prevent more deaths. Photo: © UNHCR/Ala Kheir

UNHCR is strong on global advocacy, in line with its mandate and in pursuit of globally agreed agendas and goals

In a world in which the movement of refugees, asylum seekers and irregular migrants is increasingly seen as part of a single and largely unwanted phenomenon, UNHCR continues to play an important and constructive role in the global discourse, in developing knowledge products and conducting advocacy on behalf of its people of concern. In these areas, the MOPAN evidence rates UNHCR's efforts as highly satisfactory. UNHCR has considerable convening power, and its ability to amplify the voice of people of concern, as well as its legal and technical expertise in relation to its mandate, are widely respected.

UNHCR's global policy and advocacy efforts are shaped by its mandate and strategic directions. In fields where it holds a comparative advantage, UNHCR plays a catalytic and enabling role and leads sizable coalitions of stakeholders. As the guardian of the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, UNHCR leads efforts to further the agenda of the Global Compact on Refugees – a significant achievement during this assessment period – and convenes the Global Refugee Forum, both of which are strong achievements in creating clear international frameworks on solidarity and burden-sharing, and refugee inclusion in whole-of-society approaches to finding solutions to refugee situations.

UNHCR also leads the Ending Statelessness Campaign, in line with its mandate by the United Nations (UN) General Assembly to prevent and reduce statelessness. In these cases, we have seen that UNHCR monitors and reports on progress and lessons learned to key audiences and the wider public. In fields that are relevant but not core to its mandate, such as climate change-related or disaster-induced displacement, UNHCR actively contributes to global efforts but appropriately does not position itself as a leader. The assessment team also heard strong commendation for UNHCR's collaboration with individual agencies in advocacy efforts, at global, regional and national levels, such as with UNICEF on promoting the protection and well-being of refugee children, and with the World Bank and regional development banks to advocate with refugee-hosting countries for development funding to encompass refugee populations. The evidence further shows that UNHCR has taken a leadership role in strengthening inter-agency policies and practice on preventing sexual exploitation and abuse in humanitarian situations (further details later in this chapter) and on the centrality of protection.

UNHCR demonstrates a clear leadership role in refugee situations

UNHCR is integrated into and supportive of humanitarian system-wide approaches. It leads the Refugee Coordination Model (RCM) and in this role establishes sectoral co-ordination mechanisms, leads the refugee protection work group, ensures participation from refugees and host communities, and helps build capacity of other organisations, while the UNHCR representative maintains a direct line to government. Decentralisation has helped UNHCR work closely with and through country systems and actors, which is becoming increasingly common not just at national but also at local level.

In protracted refugee situations, and in line with its commitments to the Global Compact on Refugees, we have seen evidence that UNHCR participates in the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF). For instance, the Uganda country office includes objectives from the UNSDCF for Uganda in its multi-year strategy and aligns explicitly with the Ugandan government's own national and district development plans. In interviews in Uganda, staff referenced the framework and the national and, particularly, district plans (working closely with district authorities in districts with large refugee populations).

Other stakeholders were generally positive about UNHCR's role in co-ordination, including respect for the mandates and roles of other organisations, in its capacity as lead agency (refugee emergencies) or cluster lead/co-lead. This said, inter-agency co-ordination can still be strengthened, as issues of duplication, overlap, unhelpful competition and gaps continue to surface. As discussed later, one gap UNHCR continues to grapple with is how to transition services for refugees to development actors in protracted refugee situations.

UNHCR has an impressive emergency response mechanism which at its best leads to very rapid surge and timely scale-up in response to crises

UNHCR is a solid responder to crises and can be quick to scale up when needed, although this can vary from crisis to crisis, as UNHCR’s own Level 3 (L3) emergency evaluations confirm. UNHCR has substantial operational reserves, and recent changes to the rules around their utilisation for sudden onset and emerging crisis situations have strengthened UNHCR’s agility when mobilising resources for sudden emergencies. In Moldova and Uganda, the two countries visited by the MOPAN assessment team, UNHCR’s surge responses were impressive, and a recent independent evaluation of UNHCR’s response to the crisis triggered by the Taliban’s takeover of power in Afghanistan noted that the speediness of UNHCR’s response was aided by very good preparedness and prepositioning of resources, concluding that the response was “a model of best practice”. In other cases, however, particularly where UNHCR is less established on the ground or if the causes of displacement are natural disasters rather than conflict, UNHCR’s response has been less timely and effective.

UNHCR’s 2023 Policy on Emergency Preparedness and Response provides a comprehensive and action-oriented overarching framework, and its operations are generally proactive in their advance preparations, including with situational risk analysis and monitoring and the prepositioning of stockpiles, in accordance with the policy. There are three emergency levels, with clear criteria for when, and by whom, an emergency level should be declared and a clear set of actions to be triggered by each declaration. Declarations of emergency are based on clear situational analysis. Emergency declarations remain in place for six months, after which they expire or are renewed, with clear processes for scale-down in place.

UNHCR has a global emergency stockpile catering for up to one million people, with stockpiles in seven different locations. It has clear policies and procedures for simplified procurement, logistics and other administrative measures in emergency situations. This includes simplifying partnership agreements and templates and streamlining procurement, as part of the introduction of PROMS, its new digital tool for partnership management. The 2023 Policy on Emergency Preparedness and Response outlines special emergency procedures for mobilising resources – in



September 2019, Kenya: Lydia, 37, was forced to flee from her home in Juba, South Sudan, amidst violence in August 2016. It took her three days to reach safety in northwestern Kenya’s Kakuma Refugee Camp, alongside her six children. Since arriving, her family has been registered and received a range of assistance from UNHCR, including mosquito netting to help protect family members from malaria.

Photo: © UNHCR/
Hannah Maule-ffin

terms of staffing, financial resources, supply, cash-based interventions and special partner management procedures. Additional support instruments are available for Levels 2 and 3 emergencies. UNHCR has robust internal surge mechanisms, including a permanent headquarters-based surge team, an Emergency Response Team, a Senior Corporate Emergency Roster and three functional rosters (Information Management, Inter-Agency Coordination and Registration). The mobilisation period for most rosters is 72 hours, and provisions are made for backfilling the positions that are temporarily vacated. The rosters have been strengthened and expanded with an increasing number of UNHCR staff (international and national). Staff at all levels can apply six to seven times a year to join the emergency roster, committing to making themselves available for three months to serve in an emergency.

Regionalisation is changing how UNHCR responds and scales up, with the regional bureaux now having their own supply co-ordinators and security co-ordinators. This worked well in the case of the Ukraine L3 emergency response, which was led by the Europe Bureau, supported by the Division for Emergency, Security and Supply, with mobilisation across UNHCR in a collective effort.

UNHCR also builds national surge rosters in some country operations. For instance, in Uganda, the UNHCR country office has its own roster to respond to new refugee influxes into the country (which happen regularly) without having to draw on the global emergency rosters, which enables a timely and context-appropriate response. An added benefit is that experience gained from being on the in-country roster has then enabled some national staff to join UNHCR's global emergency roster, allowing career progression.

SOME PROGRESS AGAINST AREAS MOPAN PREVIOUSLY IDENTIFIED FOR IMPROVEMENT

MOPAN's 2017-18 assessment of UNHCR highlighted four major areas for improvement:

1. UNHCR's strategic architecture and associated corporate results lack complete clarity.
2. UNHCR has an operationally short-term, rather than medium-term, approach and mindset.
3. UNHCR can improve its performance and knowledge management systems.
4. UNHCR has scope to improve its operational co-ordination with UN partners at field level.

Progress on addressing weaknesses and ambiguity in the strategy and results framework

The previous MOPAN assessment found UNHCR's strategic outlook unsatisfactory, chiefly because its Strategic Directions 2017-2021 did not provide a detailed roadmap for achieving results. In its management response, UNHCR committed to addressing weaknesses and ambiguities in its strategy and results framework, and it has successfully done so in some areas.

Indeed, for UNHCR's current strategic period, the organisation identifies eight areas for accelerated and targeted action (also called "focus areas"). These are areas of key importance to the five strategic directions, where UNHCR recognises that progress had been slow or difficult and extra efforts were needed. These focus areas facilitate an appropriately targeted approach to achieving progress within the framework of the strategic directions. However, as of August 2023, specific strategic action plans were completed for only two of these eight areas – on statelessness and engagement with development actors.

September 2023, Armenia: Syuzanna, 43, and her four children, Lilit, 10, and her three brothers, are among tens of thousands of refugees who have arrived in Goris, south-eastern Armenia, in less than a week. UNHCR is leading the inter-agency response, working with the UN Resident Coordinator's Office and is providing laptops and tablets to facilitate the registration of refugees, along with core relief items including foldable beds and mattresses. Photo: © UNHCR/Karen Minasyan



A multi-year strategic and results-based planning framework is in place in theory but is not yet reflected in how UNHCR works

MOPAN's 2017-18 assessment found that UNHCR had a short-term approach to operations and pointed to a need for medium- to long-term future planning.

This assessment confirmed that most operations have multi-year strategies, although these are at various levels of detail and sophistication. The multi-year planning was still in its first full cycle during this MOPAN assessment. UNHCR's new results-based management (RBM) system, COMPASS, has introduced multi-year strategic planning, a new global results framework, and a new planning, budget and reporting tool. By end of 2023, all country offices and regional bureaux will have multi-year strategies in place. COMPASS allows for programme planning and recording of results over a three- to five-year period linked to a newly developed global results framework aligned to the organisation's corporative objectives. The new multi-year programme cycle is divided into three main stages – Plan, Get and Show:

- **Plan:** situational analysis, vision, theory of change development, costed results frameworks, resource management plans, and monitoring and evaluation (M&E) plans
- **Get:** the implementation stage with monitoring, including of implementation through partners
- **Show:** the results reporting stage, with collation of results from the past year, with results recorded across the whole period of the multi-year strategy, following the M&E plan and reporting against a set of core (obligatory) and context-specific (elective) results indicators.

The three phases take place in annual cycles, where the results and lessons learned that are gathered and analysed in the Show phase are fed into the Plan phase for the next year.

COMPASS was used for the first time in 2022. Evidence from this assessment shows that this system is already a clear improvement over its predecessor, but further adjustments will be necessary if UNHCR is really to shift to a multi-year approach:

First, while UNHCR has usefully moved to multi-year plans, it should underpin these with stronger theories of change. Theories of change (ToCs), defined as explicit predictions of verifiable causal pathways that serve as a planning, monitoring and evaluation tool, are not yet systematically in place. This is particularly important for work related to the humanitarian-development-peace nexus. Once fully developed ToCs of sufficient quality are in place, UNHCR will also need to invest in capacity to evaluate ToC-based work, which is currently weak.

Second, a multi-year mindset is not yet embedded in UNHCR's ways of working, despite the reality of the long-term nature of protracted crisis situations. While UNHCR is rolling out multi-year planning, evidence from this assessment shows that multi-year budgeting and multi-year partnership frameworks are hardly in use so far, and multi-year programme agreements with implementing partners are still the exception. Moving towards a multi-year mindset will require two things:

- cultural changes in staff across the organisation, who are often more familiar with short-term, humanitarian delivery ways of working
- the right incentives, including improving the short duration and earmarking of much of UNHCR's funding.



December 2023, Kenya: Mixella Igiraneza, 15, was the best performing girl in the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE) in 2023.

She was admitted to the MPESA Academy where she will pursue her secondary education.

“I am big on gender equality,” She says. “Girls can be anything they want, they deserve to be educated and given equal opportunities as boys.”

Photo: © UNHCR/ Charity Nzomo

UNHCR has improved its results reporting, but there are remaining challenges to further improve the quality of data and ensure its use in internal planning and external reporting

The previous MOPAN assessment found that UNHCR’s RBM architecture was not clearly connected to a defined set of organisational goals. In this assessment, we found that, with the COMPASS framework, this connection is clear, combining multi-year results-based planning with a reporting framework to capture core as well as flexible, context-specific indicators at output, outcome and impact levels. The previous MOPAN assessment also found that weaknesses in UNHCR’s results and monitoring systems and a consequent lack of high-quality and reliable performance data meant that UNHCR made insufficient use of data in planning its work. This time around, there is a significant improvement in the situation with the introduction of COMPASS and the creation of the Division of Strategic Planning and Results (DSPR), dedicated to fostering data and evidence-driven strategic planning across UNHCR.

There is, however, a need to further refine the COMPASS indicators and reporting approaches, as the thorny issue of aggregating results from operational level to provide robust and meaningful global results data for UNHCR as an organisation is yet to be resolved. Not all operations have fully mastered all the reporting functionalities of the COMPASS tool, and the organisation continues to have weak monitoring and reporting capacity, with few staff at country level having M&E as a significant part of their job description. Reporting at outcome and impact levels, as opposed to outputs, remains a challenge.

The Division for Strategic Planning and Results (DSPR) is gathering feedback from the first full year of using COMPASS and is planning a review in 2024, which will be a useful first step. The next round of reflections on the COMPASS indicators is likely to further strengthen the foundations of UNHCR’s results-based management and budgeting, particularly if it focuses on establishing meaningful baselines and targets. It is also important to avoid confusion between the categories “zero”, “not applicable” and “unknown” when reporting data. Currently, the guidance is that “not applicable” is shown by leaving the field empty, which could easily lead to mistakes, and there is no “unknown” category at all. As a consequence, baseline data risks not being meaningful, as was found to be the case in the example of baselines and targets provided by DSPR to the MOPAN assessment team. Evidence also points to persistent

weaknesses in ensuring that the data gathered are systematically used in planning and in reporting to external stakeholders – weaknesses that are linked to the quality of the data itself and the lack of baselines from which to make sense of the results and establish appropriate future results targets. UNHCR could use the participatory assessments it invests in, which are often of very good quality, more fully in its forward planning and be more accountable towards populations of concern by providing systematic feedback about how engagement with them has shaped UNHCR’s operations.

UNHCR is an active and engaged member of inter-agency response co-ordination in internal displacement settings but could do better in climate and disaster situations

MOPAN’s evidence shows that UNHCR clarified its role in the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) cluster mechanisms during the assessment period, in contributing to the inter-agency responses to internally displaced people, and to mixed displacement situations. UNHCR is also an active member of IASC’s Emergency Directors Group (EDG) and the Operational Policy and Advocacy Group (OPAG). UNHCR co-chairs with InterAction the IASC Task Force 1 on Centrality of Protection. In conflict situations and conflict-related displacement, UNHCR leads the Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM) and Shelter clusters. The International Organization for Migration and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies respectively lead these clusters in natural disaster contexts. UNHCR leads the protection cluster in disaster situations if it already has an in-country presence and is requested to do so by the government.

However, while the clarity and predictability of UNHCR’s contribution to inter-agency responses to non-refugee displacement emergencies have been strengthened since the last MOPAN assessment, this is mainly in conflict-related displacement settings. UNHCR’s contribution to inter-agency responses to climate-related and disaster-induced emergencies remains patchy – with both good and poor examples during the review period. UNHCR has attempted to clarify its policy on the role it will play in situations of disasters, but in practice, the level and predictability of its contributions in such emergencies remain mixed.

Mixed progress on cross-cutting issues

Gender: The previous MOPAN assessment found UNHCR’s performance on gender indicators to be unsatisfactory across the board. In its management response, UNHCR acknowledged that “there is still a great deal to be done”.

Overall, in this assessment, evidence shows that UNHCR’s performance in delivering gender outcomes has improved significantly and is now satisfactory. At the start of the current assessment period, UNHCR refreshed and launched its new Age, Gender and Diversity (AGD) policy. It disaggregated its data gathering and reporting: COMPASS includes AGD indicators at impact, outcome and output areas, and a new organisational gender equality marker enables UNHCR to track outputs contributing to gender equality. However, this remains work in progress, as evaluation evidence from recent years suggests that the quality and quantity of gender-disaggregated data leave much to be desired. UNHCR has also increased the level of resources dedicated to gender issues. Although UNHCR made a roll-out plan for the policy implementation, staff awareness of the new policy appears to have been low in the years after its introduction but is improving.

Environment and climate change: The previous MOPAN assessment found UNHCR’s performance on all environment-related criteria to be either unsatisfactory or highly unsatisfactory. The current assessment found some improvement, with environmental sustainability and climate change a newly emerging agenda, but interviews for this assessment showed that actual performance and results are still uneven. A clear policy architecture and significant resource allocation on environment and climate change have been missing, and UNHCR has not captured evidence on related results. However, this may be about to change, as UNHCR is due to launch a multi-year Strategic Plan on Climate Action 2024-2030, building on its 2021 Strategic Framework for Climate Action, aligned with its Strategic Directions 2022-2026 and with the UN System-wide approach to Climate Action and the System-wide plan of action

on Disaster Risk Reduction. The considerable efforts by UNHCR to incorporate climate change and environmental factors as a cross-cutting issue throughout operations are for now more driven from the top of the organisation than they are inspired by action from country operations. The assessment evidence shows that there is some progress in delivery, but action is not yet systematically aligned with this strategic framework, and programming and results still depend on the level of individual staff interest. There is a clear need to include environmental indicators in monitoring activities and as cross-cutting issues in evaluations as part of mainstreaming environmental concerns across all the organisation's activities and plans.

UNHCR'S COMPREHENSIVE REFORMS – STATE OF PLAY

UNHCR's reforms, which were overdue at the time of the last MOPAN assessment, together form a comprehensive change management process that aims to improve the coherence of the operating model, which had become overly bureaucratic, centralised and lacking in agility. The change process has delivered a new organisational structure and included the replacement of substantially all of UNHCR's business processes – many of which were becoming obsolete.

Overall, the current MOPAN assessment finds the change management and decentralisation process to support UNHCR's strategic directions and to be appropriate for managing new challenges in the global environment and supporting new roles and commitments – such as leading the Global Compact for Refugees.

Many of the new business management processes are too recently adopted or still in the process of being rolled out for the MOPAN team to assess their impact. The new processes will need time and training to become consolidated practice and reach their full potential. This is recognised by UNHCR management, who see the process akin to building a brand-new house – a process that UNHCR has almost completed – but then needing time to settle in and appreciate all the opportunities and conveniences the new structure offers.

Some improvements and benefits from the organisational change process have already been realised

Some benefits from the reforms are already visible, including:

- A clearer organisational structure, appropriately focused on decentralising decision-making authority to allow flexibility and agility at operational level. COVID-19 provides a good example, where the decentralisation of operations and the digitalisation of ways of working gave all staff the ability to work remotely, allowing UNHCR to continue operations under the principle of “stay and deliver” during COVID-19 lock-downs and restrictions across the world.
- Clearer, consolidated and more streamlined policies, which are more accessible to staff and external stakeholders;
- Better data collection and reporting through the new COMPASS global results and planning framework, which offers greater potential for multi-year results-based management, although further improvements are needed.
- A stronger performance in the cross-cutting issues of gender outcomes and of environment and climate change, with many of the weaknesses identified in the previous MOPAN assessment receiving attention.
- A stronger infrastructure for preventing sexual exploitation and abuse and innovative solutions for victim support in relation to sexual harassment, both of which are shaped by active learning.
- Much-strengthened risk management, following a rigorous and benchmarked schedule for improvements, which has already led to significant improvements and provides a clear direction of travel for the coming period.

February 2023,
Panama: 24,634
people crossed
the Darien Jungle
in January 2023,
risking their lives
in the journey
northwards in
search of protection
and safety. The
UNHCR priority
is to meet the
humanitarian needs
of people in transit
through the Darien
and provide help
and legal support
for people who then
seek asylum.

Photo: © UNHCR/
Melissa Pinel



UNHCR's restructuring has rendered the organisation better equipped to work coherently across divisions and levels, but the role of the regional bureaux is not sufficiently clear

The MOPAN assessment concluded that UNHCR's restructuring has improved its internal coherence and its ability to address key cross-cutting issues. However, the assessment team heard, in a range of interviews at country, regional and headquarters levels, that the role of the regional bureaux in the new structure is not fully settled.

On paper, roles and responsibilities at all levels of the organisation – including the regional bureaux – are largely clear. The seven regional bureaux, which have been moved from headquarters to regional hubs, have functions including operational support, programme planning, resource management, internal control and risk management. The proximity of regional bureaux to field operations is intended to support efficiency gains.

The evidence shows that regionalisation did indeed prove useful during the COVID-19 pandemic and strengthened UNHCR's ability to "stay and deliver". In 2020, two-thirds of all procurement requested by country operations was approved by regional bureaux. In interviews with country offices, we heard of contextual support from regional bureaux to country operations when applying global policies in-country, and also policy and diplomatic support in linking country operations into regional policy processes.

But the team also found considerable lingering confusion in country offices, particularly around delineation of responsibilities, oversight roles and reporting lines between regional bureaux and headquarters. A 2022 Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) audit report and 2021 OIOS thematic audit of procurement both raised the issue that the delineation of responsibilities, oversight roles and reporting lines between regional bureaux and headquarters were not sufficiently clear, especially from the point of view of country offices.

There is a risk, unless these uncertainties and confusion are ironed out, that regional bureaux could become either a "middleman" – an added layer of bureaucracy – or a separate power base adding potential for blurring or complicating communication lines and decision-making processes. There is thus a need to clarify and socialise the

roles, responsibilities and lines of authority of the seven regional bureaux, and their lines of communication with staff in country offices.

Beyond the issues around the regional bureaux, decentralisation has allowed real devolution of decision-making authority to country level, facilitating more timely and appropriate programming decisions. Indeed, most staff and external stakeholders agree that the reforms were necessary and that the decentralisation (in particular) and regionalisation (to a lesser extent) processes have had a positive impact on organisational effectiveness. There has as yet not been a systematic or comprehensive assessment of the impact of the reforms on the organisation, but UNHCR's Evaluation Office has commissioned a global independent evaluation of decentralisation and regionalisation.¹

UNHCR has come far in developing a set of simplified and appropriate policies but needs to complete this process by moving towards the systematic implementation of these organisation-wide policies in an otherwise decentralised structure

As part of the reform process, UNHCR is now at an advanced stage in the development of a set of simplified and appropriate policies. This is a considerable improvement since the last MOPAN assessment, and the work to rationalise policies could be considered as a good practice example. However, while decentralisation facilitates contextualised decision-making, we also found that it has led to a somewhat inconsistent application of policies across country offices and regions – a finding noted also in evaluations and other assessments.

In particular, there are discrepancies in what UNHCR asks and expects from partners, and in how long it takes for it to make decisions, on similar issues in different localities. For instance, the same international non-governmental organisation (NGO) may submit comparable proposals in two different countries with comparable circumstances and be faced with significantly different conditions, requirements and approval processes.

The next stage of the policy rationalisation work is therefore to achieve more systematic implementation of the consolidated and streamlined set of policies, including strengthening knowledge of and adherence to cross-cutting policies on gender, child protection, and environment and climate change. This task has been made more challenging in a highly decentralised organisation – where the balance between coherence and contextualised operations is much more difficult. More mandatory guidelines with standardised requirements and timelines, and clear guidance on which aspects can be contextualised and which cannot, would help build greater consistency across UNHCR's operations.

New systems are yet to be fully embedded and socialised across the organisation

During this assessment period, UNHCR undertook a radical organisational overhaul, with new systems and processes continuing to be rolled out. The launch of the new Cloud ERP system took place in September 2023, after the evidence gathering for this MOPAN assessment. The Business Transformation Programme was initiated in 2020 and includes new tools for RBM; people management and human resources; data and digitalisation; supply chain management; partnership management and external engagement. We have heard that a key goal of the business transformation programme is to simplify UNHCR's processes and systems for operations and partnerships, and we conclude that UNHCR's move toward cloud-based technology platforms has indeed contributed – or will do so in the future once fully rolled out and mastered by all staff – to streamlining and digitalising key business processes:

- COMPASS: UNHCR's RBM system, which can help to improve multi-year planning, budgeting, monitoring and reporting on results and is a clear improvement on earlier systems – although teething problems are apparent after a first full year of reporting using COMPASS indicators was completed in 2022.

1. The MOPAN team was not able to see any early results from this evaluation.

- **Workday:** a cloud-based digital human resources management tool, which offers a unified real-time central repository for all workforce data and serves as the foundation for effective workforce planning. Workday has been difficult for country offices to adopt, causing a lot of extra work and frustration, but this seems now to be improving and the benefits of the platform are beginning to become visible.
- **Cloud ERP:** a new enterprise resource planning system replacing MSRP, offering a new cloud-based solution for finance and supply chain management, with new systems and processes for budget, finance and supply chain management, cash and treasury management, and logistic and inventory management.
- **PROMS (Project Reporting, Oversight and Monitoring Solution):** a system providing UNHCR operations and partners with an end-to-end automated system to support delivery and improve and simplify the partnership framework. PROMS will simplify and strengthen oversight and accountability for the activities implemented by partners and those implemented by UNHCR themselves, by removing the need for sending papers back and forth for signatures and instead creating virtual audit trails accessible in one place, which can be more easily monitored and audited.
- **Synergy:** a comprehensive relationship management platform to support external relationships by facilitating information sharing, retaining institutional knowledge and providing visibility on related activities taking place at all levels of the organisation.
- **Link:** the integrated connection to ensure that the different new systems and tools work together seamlessly, providing timely and accurate information for decision-making.



May 2023, Niger:
55 year-old Rabi Sallou, lives in the village of Jataka in the Bangui commune, Madaoua district, Niger. As part of the project financed by Education Cannot Wait she was provided with some goats, allowing her to start an income-generating activity.

Photo: © UNHCR/
Antonia Vadala

UNHCR's systems change process is necessary and appropriate, and has been generally well managed, but has placed strain on staff over a long period. With so many new business processes being rolled out in quick succession, a certain change fatigue has set in across the organisation, albeit combined with an appreciation that the new systems, once familiarised, will improve and simplify UNHCR's ways of working.

As expected for large-scale organisational reforms, our evidence shows that the sequencing of the introduction of various systems has not always been optimal, costs have been higher and time frames have sometimes been longer than expected, and roll-outs have not all been smooth.

Lessons from the change process could usefully be documented and shared with other organisations about to embark on similar organisation-wide transformations.

UNHCR has made its internal oversight bodies more unambiguously independent

There have also been changes to internal oversight, and the assessment concludes that UNHCR has made its internal oversight bodies more unambiguously independent. There is adequate internal oversight within UNHCR's structure, and steps have been taken to ensure the independence of oversight bodies. Key internal oversight positions of the Ombudsman, the Inspector-General's Office (IGO) and the head of the Evaluation Office are explicit non-career positions. The oversight organs have only a modest budget allocation (0.3% of UNHCR's budget, according to an unverified source), but we noted that they are largely on top of their remits, including oversight on risks and security.

In addition, the regionalisation process has allowed for the regional bureaux to play a stronger role in providing support and oversight to country operations. In risk management, as part of UNHCR's transformation programme, we noted that the role of the regional bureaux in the second line of defence oversight functions has been strengthened. The regional bureaux also play a role in the first line of defence through assisting country operations with additional skills (including thematic expertise) and resources to perform an activity and provide managerial oversight and quality assurance. However, we found a lack of clarity on how the regional bureaux play this role and some uncertainty at country level on how oversight and accountability lines are divided between headquarters and regional levels, which need to be addressed.

UNHCR has a strong set of victim-centred policies and infrastructure for the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment

UNHCR now has a well-developed set of policies on the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment (PSEAH) in its operations under the banner of "sexual misconduct". These policies meet UN and other international standards and requirements and have an appropriate focus on victim-centred approaches. The policies apply to all categories of personnel. Since 2018, preventing sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA) has been under the remit of the Office of the Senior Coordinator on Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and Sexual Harassment (PSEAH Unit). The team comprises seven staff at headquarters, under the leadership of the Senior Coordinator, who recently retired after having overseen, with the support of UNHCR management, a strong upward trajectory in UNHCR policies and practice on PSEAH. We encourage UNHCR to fill this important senior post again quickly. The team is supported by 400 part-time focal points who meet regularly with the PSEAH Unit to share updates, feedback, and learning, with major operations such as Ukraine having dedicated PSEA focal points due to high-risk exposure in those places. UNHCR has a PSEAH training package which includes mandatory training on PSEAH, with a 97% compliance rate. UNHCR also conducts a range of non-mandatory learning activities and mainstreams PSEAH into other thematic training, although stakeholder feedback on the value of online training was mixed.

UNHCR has invested time and resources into a range of inter-agency PSEAH initiatives. During the High Commissioners' leadership of the IASC, UNHCR led the production of a range of training and capacity-building materials on PSEAH. It has a strong approach to the UN PSEA Partner Capacity initiative, with operations assessing 80% of NGO partners

since 2022 (as of end 2022) and supporting partners with capacity-strengthening, including making training on investigations available to them.

UNHCR uses Clearcheck as part of its employee due diligence process. The number of candidates that were screened in 2022 for UNHCR positions in Clearcheck was 12 472. UNHCR was also the first UN agency to pilot the Misconduct Disclosure Scheme to prevent rehiring of perpetrators.

UNHCR reports on cases of sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment in a public and timely manner. In the period 2018 to June 2023, there were 616 allegations, 491 allegations of sexual misconduct against implementing partners and 125 against UNHCR personnel. To support community-led efforts against sexual exploitation and abuse, UNHCR set up a PSEA Community Outreach and Communications Fund. The Organisation has invested in specific response initiatives to support UNHCR staff who are victims/survivors of sexual harassment by other staff and to build trust in the UNHCR system, which we assessed as satisfactory. This includes the transferring of the position of the Senior Victim Care Officer from the Human Resources Department to the PSEAH Unit and the creation of a secure, confidential information technology system that allows victims to disclose their experiences and tells victims if other staff have reported the same perpetrator, in hope of the victim feeling more comfortable to formally report their experiences.

SOME REMAINING CHALLENGES TO ENSURE UNHCR IS FIT FOR THE FUTURE

UNHCR will experience serious challenges to the execution of its mandate that it will need to face head on

UNHCR's mandate has always been clear and compelling, but its role and responsibilities have also significantly changed over the past 70 years, in line with shifting global priorities and evolving local challenges. Crises have become more systematically protracted in nature, the range of risks that drive forced displacement has expanded, the needs of affected people are now widely accepted to be multidimensional rather than just limited to basic goods and services, and the global policy environment – notably under the Global Compact – has shifted the goalposts around refugee hosting, solutions, conditions for return and the need to promote refugee self-reliance. To face these current and future challenges, there are several areas of ambiguity that UNHCR will need to address in close co-ordination and dialogue with a broad range of partners. These include:

- the humanitarian-development-peace nexus, where emerging internal clarity within UNHCR on its strategic priorities and role is not yet matched with clarity among UNHCR's partners on where and how on the humanitarian-development continuum they should “meet” UNHCR;
- people displaced in the context of climate change who need protection but fall outside the international refugee protection framework,² as evidence from this MOPAN assessment confirms evaluation findings that although UNHCR has clarified that people displaced in the context of climate change fall under its mandate, it has an uneven record and continued ambiguity on its practical role in supporting populations affected by natural disasters and environmental degradation; and
- migrants who are deemed to be “irregular” by national authorities but who may need forms of protection that may fall outside the international refugee protection framework.

Dependencies and parallel systems remain a challenge in protracted refugee situations

In protracted refugee situations, UNHCR promotes integration and self-sufficiency of refugees within host communities, local economies and social services. As part of this aim, and where this is a meaningful possibility, the organisation

2. Recognising that people displaced in the context of climate change may also experience human rights violations and conflict, as well as persecution within the meaning of the 1951 Refugee Convention (UNHCR, 2020a, p. 4).

works closely with governments, including local government, to strengthen their capacity to respond to refugee and internally displaced people emergencies. In addition, we have seen that regional and national refugee response plans ensure that government, local authorities and local NGOs are part of the planning and implementation of refugee emergency response right from the beginning.

However, despite these ambitions, UNHCR often ends up building parallel refugee response mechanisms and institutions. These are not necessarily entirely stand-alone structures but may include working with separate bodies set up specifically for refugee support more than with line ministries. In sudden-onset crises, such as in Moldova, evidence shows that the establishment of parallel structures can facilitate timely action. However, as crises become protracted, such mechanisms, government-led but nevertheless parallel to a host government's main delivery mechanisms, can cause UNHCR to become “stuck” as the ongoing service provider. For example, as the assessment team saw in Uganda, UNHCR has helped build, and supports financially, technically and with capacity building, a Department for Refugees within the Prime Minister's Office. While engagement with line ministries, the ministry of statistics/planning and the ministry of finance has strengthened as part of efforts to transition essential services for refugees in education and health to national systems, practices such as salary supplements and asset transfers to government officials, as well as the paying of recurring costs for health care and teaching staff, create strong expectations and establish commitments and practices that down the line become very difficult to terminate. While a “separate” refugee structure inside government may be a fast and effective way of establishing an emergency response capacity in national governments, without clear expectations, and agreements on transition with national authorities and development actors, it can become a roadblock to the longer-term aims of including refugees in national services and supporting them to become economically active and self-sufficient.

Further, in protracted crises where a humanitarian-development-peace nexus approach is critical, the assessment saw that UNHCR has made considerable efforts to develop better co-ordination with development actors (both national and international). However, that work is not yet visibly bearing fruit in terms of practical co-ordination and the “hand-over” of roles and responsibilities, as more developmental approaches become appropriate. UNHCR is aware of the need for exit strategies, rather than taking on development roles itself. However, in order not to be locked into unsustainable agreements and practices, nexus thinking needs to be in place from day one. From the evidence collected for this assessment, and from feedback from UNHCR staff both at headquarters and in country offices, we conclude that:

- A strategy for handing over responsibility to national governments needs to be put in place at as early a stage in an emergency as possible. Such a strategy should identify key partners in government while treating refugees as people with capacities and agency that could be nurtured towards self-reliance.
- UNHCR needs to give careful thought from the onset of an emergency to ways of working that hamper such transfers of responsibility, such as asset transfers and salary supplements to government officials, as these create strong expectations and are very difficult to terminate without losing goodwill and breaking commitments with host governments.

UNHCR needs to move towards being a less demanding and more reasonable funding partner

UNHCR's management response to critical findings in the last MOPAN review about UNHCR's partnerships was that UNHCR “will continue to strengthen the cooperation with UNHCR's key partners” at central level and in the field. Since then, we have seen that UNHCR has embedded sensible principles of partnership in its policies and simplified and digitalised its partnership management system (PROMS).

In practice, however, UNHCR continues in many cases to be an overly demanding partner. Our assessment concluded that UNHCR staff are engaged and respectful but often work according to a set of rigid reporting requirements that



November 2023, Argentina: Sabrina Barats and Belen Jodar are two activists who work as a popular educators in the Ecumenical Association of Cuyo, a Civil Society Organization located in Mendoza, Argentina. They help refugees, asylum seekers and migrant women build safe spaces to share knowledge and advocate for their rights.

Photo: © UNHCR/
Marcelo Aguilar Lopez

cannot be adapted according to the level of funding involved, the quality of the partnership or the strength of the implementing partners' own monitoring and control systems. This results in onerous and unnecessary reporting burdens for many partners. In interviews, UNHCR staff noted a growing awareness that the organisation's control framework may have become too heavy and that it does not do enough to "be a good partner".

To UNHCR's credit, the organisation is moving away from a one-size-fits-all approach towards the simplified procedures of the new PROMS partner management system. As part of this, UNHCR is creating more tailor-made partnership agreements where capacity-building and control measures can be adjusted based on the partner's needs and gaps and the particular contextual risks faced by the operation. However, the assessment found that this new approach has not yet fed through to all country operations. For example, the assessment team heard from some international partners that they were still required to sign numerous partnership agreements in different country locations, despite long-standing co-operation with UNHCR, which led to duplicative work for all parties. We also found a continued emphasis on monitoring outputs rather than assessing outcomes and the impact of interventions funded by UNHCR.

UNHCR has signed up to the Grand Bargain commitment on quality funding, but this is not yet reflected in practice. UNHCR receives little multi-year funding from its own donors and passes little on to its implementing partners. The predictability of partnerships is also an issue, with implementing partners across countries facing vastly different timelines and requirements for otherwise comparable interventions, and with the differences not reflective of – and thus not explained by – variations in risk analyses or contextual challenges. Indeed, our evidence shows that some NGO partners felt UNHCR treated them too much like contractors. This included being given (1) very short time frames for partnership agreement proposals, (2) little opportunity for input into project design left to implement heavily monitored projects with monthly reporting at output level, and (3) short and frequently renegotiated funding envelopes. We also saw that in some operations, where UNHCR's own funding situation was stretched and uncertain, partners are given contracts for as little as one to three months at a time, on a revolving basis.

There are calls for UNHCR to strengthen consultation and transparency with the Executive Committee

UNHCR has a different governance structure than other UN agencies, with the High Commissioner bound by the 1950 UNHCR Statute and a mandate "until the refugee problem is solved". The UN General Assembly is the governing body of UNHCR, and the High Commissioner provides it with annual reports. UNHCR also has an Executive Committee

(ExCom), which was established to provide advice to the High Commissioner and to approve the use of voluntary funds. ExCom and its Standing Committee is a consultative, not a governing, body. It has the authority to approve the UNHCR Programme Budget, and OIOS provides the ExCom with a yearly overview of its audit activities. OIOS audit reports and formal evaluations are available online but are not tabled for discussion. (Other OIOS products are not necessarily made public.) Regular integrity updates are, however, provided to ExCom by the Inspector-General of UNHCR.

In interviews for this assessment, several external stakeholders, particularly among donors, noted that UNHCR could strengthen its transparency and reporting practices and its relationship with member states and adopt a more consultative approach with ExCom. In particular, the stakeholders consulted for this assessment requested that UNHCR:

- inform in good time ExCom and its Standing Committee before the High Commissioner takes key decisions;
- provide more proactive access to relevant UNHCR documents – while the assessment team at the same time notes that government stakeholders should avoid individual onerous and overlapping demands;
- look into the possibility of systematically tabling the results of scrutiny reports, such as independent evaluations, OIOS internal audits and the management responses, at ExCom and potentially develop opportunities for more interactive dialogue with member states.

A careful and considered balance must be struck: any shift in the relationship with ExCom should take as its starting point the independence of the High Commissioner, as set down in UNHCR’s statutes and mandate. This independence is key to UNHCR’s role and legitimacy as the guardian of the UN Refugee Convention and its ability to fulfil its refugee protection mandate without undue impositions. The assessment also noted that ExCom and its main donors do not always utilise the scrutiny roles of OIOS, UNHCR’s independent evaluation office, and indeed MOPAN to the full, leading to overlapping scrutiny processes. The conclusion is thus that UNHCR should do more to consult – rather than just share information – with ExCom prior to decisions being taken, and that ExCom members could in return do more to use the results of scrutiny bodies more systematically and avoid individual and overlapping scrutiny requests to the extent possible.

In a tightly earmarked funding environment, a growing key challenge to UNHCR is how to ensure resources are allocated according to need

The humanitarian funding environment is shifting, with a notable decline in the quantity and quality of funding – a trend that seems likely to continue, given the current geopolitical environment. UNHCR is at risk from two related issues. Firstly, UNHCR’s budget is growing, but this growth is largely coming in the form of earmarked funds. In proportional terms, UNHCR’s unrestricted, core funding is at an all-time low, and strictly earmarked funding is at a high. In 2022, 51% of the 2022 portion of multi-year funding was earmarked or tightly earmarked (UNHCR, 2023). Secondly, in a stretched funding environment, dependency on a small pool of donors is risky. UNHCR’s donor base remains highly dependent on a small number of large donors, in particular the United States.

In terms of dependence, UNHCR is actively reaching out to new donors, and over the assessment period, UNHCR succeeded in diversifying its funding base, including by attracting additional funds from private donors, which is commendable. However, this has not significantly reduced the risk of exposure to a few key funders.

Earmarking and its impact on allocating resources in line with need is, however, the bigger problem. Most of UNHCR’s funding is geographically earmarked, which has a range of consequences. Firstly, we have seen evidence that earmarks limit the organisation’s ability to align resource allocations with needs and with UNHCR’s strategic priorities. In a

prominent recent example, the Ukraine displacement crisis triggered large donor earmarks towards Ukrainian refugees and internally displaced people. However, these large funding flows to UNHCR Ukraine were not additional funds – instead, they came at the expense of other UNHCR operations. As a result, in 2022, the Ukraine response (including for neighbouring countries) was 88% funded, but the Rohingya crisis in Bangladesh, for example, was only 51% funded. This forced UNHCR to cut already inadequate cash transfers and support services in some contexts to below the level needed. A second impact was seen in regions affected by the inflow of Ukrainian refugees. For example, in Moldova, high levels of funding enabled UNHCR to provide levels of support – and create expectations – that it will not be able to sustain once funding levels dwindle, even if the level of need does not fundamentally change.

To its credit, UNHCR's response to this diversion of funding to the Ukrainian crisis was quick, and its messages about forgotten emergencies were prominently communicated from many levels of the organisation. This reduced – but did not eliminate – the diversion of funding away from areas of great need to others that were arguably already adequately funded. UNHCR's analysis shows that the global distribution of funding that results from widespread earmarking is a poor match to the global distribution of needs. This suggests a need for further dialogue between UNHCR and its funders on how to improve the allocative efficiency of its funding.

UNHCR has a single integrated annual budget that brings together unearmarked and earmarked funding. This budget is presented to and adopted by ExCom, after which – in December every year – UNHCR hosts a pledging conference where states can indicate their potential pledges. At the end of the annual pledging conference, usually only a small proportion of UNHCR's budget requirements will have been covered by pledges. This funding uncertainty (very noticeable in the Uganda operation that the MOPAN team visited) makes planning difficult. The existence of unearmarked, softly earmarked or multi-year funding is essential for UNHCR in filling funding gaps for budgeted activities – as well as mobilising rapid responses to new emergencies – while waiting for other (earmarked) funding to come through during the course of the year.

This said, it is currently difficult to assess to what extent UNHCR applies needs-based criteria for core (unrestricted/flexible) funding allocations. Global overviews suggest that this may not be consistently done. For example, UNHCR's 2020 report shows that UNHCR spent the same proportion of unearmarked funding in Europe (9.6% of total) at the end of the year as it did in Africa (9% of total) (percentages calculated from UNCHR, 2021, Table 5, p. 39). That year, UNHCR did not report any underfunded crises in Europe (UNHCR, 2020b; UNHCR, 2021). It would therefore be helpful for UNHCR to provide more detail in its reporting on how it allocates its core funding, to avoid spending core funding on relatively well-funded operations compared to needs and to report on compliance.

UNHCR's communication with donors on integrity and risk issues has improved but is not always timely

A good relationship with donors – necessary to have the right quantity and quality of funding – is underpinned by trust in the stewardship of the funds that are provided. This MOPAN assessment determined that UNHCR's communication with donors on integrity issues and risk has improved, but there is further work to do.

On the positive side, the IGO reports on integrity issues including both a statistical digest to the Standing Committee in March and a report to ExCom in October. There are quarterly integrity briefings to ExCom which also include risk management updates. Summaries of strategic risks are shared with member states, and the integrity agenda for the September Standing Committee meeting highlights developments on integrity risks.

If OIOS identifies any reputational risks or emerging issues in its internal auditing role, these are flagged with UNHCR's donor relations for them to relay to donors. While this sometimes works as it should, donors and other stakeholders note that UNHCR is not always timely in its reporting of emerging integrity issues and potential scandals. The IGO's 2018 report noted that “reporting to member states on investigations was identified as needing improvement” (ExCom, 2018). Since then, UNHCR has had a “no surprises” donor communication policy. While communications

on integrity issues and scandals have improved as a result, the assessment team heard – including in our mission to Uganda – that the policy could be implemented more fully and in a timelier fashion. This includes providing upstream communications in the form of early warning messages, rather than waiting until investigations have ended.

OVERALL PERFORMANCE REFLECTIONS

UNHCR has made important progress since the last MOPAN assessment and has retained key strengths. UNHCR has a strong mandate and a commitment to and focus on humanitarian principles and international refugee law that run through its strategic priorities and operations. Its enormous change process since the last MOPAN assessment is bearing fruit across a range of areas, allowing a stronger strategic direction combined with flexibility and agility at operational level. UNHCR has an impressive emergency response mechanism which at its best leads to very rapid surge and timely scale-up in response to displacement crises. It plays a clear leadership role in refugee emergencies and is an active, engaged member of inter-agency humanitarian response co-ordination mechanisms in other displacement settings, particularly in the case of conflict-related displacement. UNHCR is an influential global advocate in a difficult global environment, and its stewardship of the Global Refugee Compact is a particularly notable achievement. Its policies and infrastructure for the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment are strong, and UNHCR is a leader among UN-wide efforts in this area.

Many of the reforms and improvements need to be bedded down. UNHCR's restructuring has rendered the organisation better equipped to work coherently across divisions and levels, although the role of the regional bureaux is not sufficiently clear. The COMPASS multi-year results reporting and planning tool is already a clear improvement, but UNHCR needs to build on this to develop a truly multi-year mindset within the organisation. There is also a need to strengthen UNHCR's monitoring, evaluation and learning capacity at operational level and systematically establish realistic baselines and meaningful targets as part of its results-based planning. There is also a need to address the risk that the highly decentralised decision-making structure can lead to policy fragmentation, by socialising and embedding new policies across organisational levels and ensuring a benchmarking of standards.

UNHCR and its donors face important challenges together: the rising levels of geographically and thematically earmarked funding from donors is undermining UNHCR's ability to allocate resources according to its strategic priorities and the magnitude of needs; and UNHCR's communication with external governance bodies and donors needs further improvement in terms of timeliness, transparency and dialogue. At operational level, UNHCR has made significant efforts in furthering the agenda of the humanitarian-development-peace nexus, but the transition from humanitarian to development actors remains challenging, and dependencies and parallel systems remain an issue in protracted refugee situations.

Future considerations

This MOPAN assessment suggests key areas of focus for UNHCR in the coming period, based on the findings presented in this chapter:

- Delivering the right cultural changes and incentives to shift towards a multi-year mindset and related ways of working.
- Further strengthening the use of evidence in planning and programming, which will require reinforcing the foundations of UNHCR's results-based management and budgeting; strengthening skills and capacity to develop theories of change, baselines and targets for programming; making more use of the data generated from participatory assessments in planning; and continuing the strengthening of UNHCR's independent evaluation function – particularly through a more systematic approach to monitoring and reporting on progress in response to evaluation recommendations.

- Clarifying and delivering on UNHCR’s role in climate emergencies and disasters and delivering on environment and climate goals more systematically.
- Continuing to consolidate the reform programme, including:
 - clarifying and socialising the role of the regional bureaux;
 - providing guidance on which policies can be contextualised and which cannot;
 - continuing to implement and monitor the positive and (unintended) negative impacts of systems change;
 - documenting lessons from the change process to benefit other multilateral organisations about to embark on similar organisation-wide transformations.
- Addressing – in dialogue with partners – upstream challenges including around people displaced in the context of climate change, irregular migrants, and the way of working with development and peace partners.
- Rethinking refugee responses and how they should be approached from day one to avoid becoming “stuck” as the long-term principal service provider in protracted refugee situations.
- Becoming a less demanding and more reasonable partner, particularly in funded relationships.
- Improving consultation and transparency with the Executive Committee, setting out clearly the criteria for allocating core funding and increasing “no surprises” reporting to funders.

REFERENCES

ExCom (2018), *Report on Activities of the Inspector General’s Office*, United Nations General Assembly, 23 July 2018, Executive Committee of the High Commissioner’s Programme, <https://www.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/legacy-pdf/5b7aca2d4.pdf>.

UNHCR (2023), *Global Focus: Flexible Funding*, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, <https://reporting.unhcr.org/dashboards/flexible-funding#:~:text=Multi%2Dyear%20funding%20increased%20from,as%20an%20emergency%20in%202022>.

UNHCR (2022), *UNHCR’s Strategic Directions 2022-2026*, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2022, <https://reporting.unhcr.org/unhcr-strategic-directions-2022-2026>.

UNHCR (2021), *Report on Use of Flexible Funding in 2020*, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, <https://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/Flexible%20Funding%20Report%202020.pdf>.

UNHCR (2020a), *Legal Considerations Regarding Claims for International Protection Made in the Context of the Adverse Effects of Climate Change and Disasters*, October, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, <https://www.refworld.org/docid/5f75f2734.html>.

UNHCR (2020b), *Consequences of Underfunding in 2020*, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, September 2020, <https://www.unhcr.org/underfunding-2020/wp-content/uploads/sites/107/2020/09/Underfunding-2020-Full-Report.pdf>.

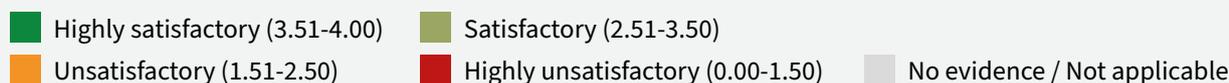
OVERVIEW OF SCORING





The MOPAN assessment process involves scoring multilateral organisations against each key performance indicator (KPI), micro-indicator and element, using the following rating scale.

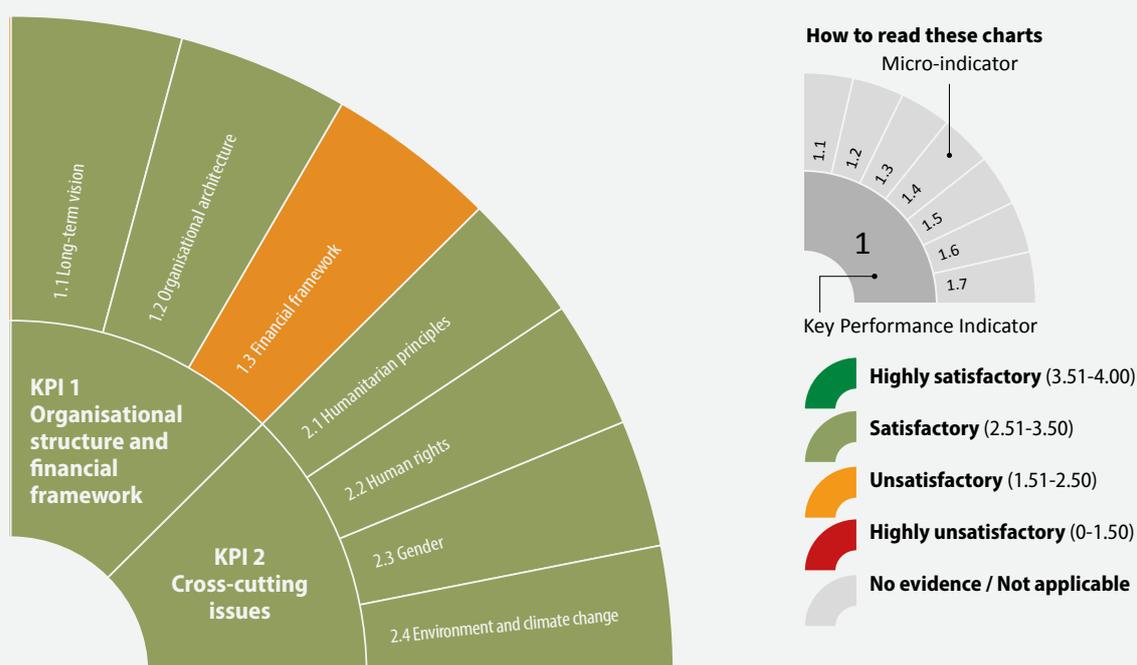
FIGURE 4. MOPAN 3.1 PERFORMANCE SCORING AND RATING SCALE, METHODOLOGY 3.1



This section provides a summary explanation of the ratings that have been assessed for UNHCR against each KPI. Full details of findings and performance scores at each level can be found online on the MOPAN website: www.mopanonline.org

STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

The **strategic management** performance area explores whether there is a clear strategic direction in place that is geared to key functions, intended results and the integration of relevant cross-cutting priorities. This area is assessed through the two key performance indicators specified below:



KPI 1 – Organisational architecture and financial framework:

The previous MOPAN assessment found UNHCR’s strategic outlook to be unsatisfactory, chiefly because UNHCR’s Strategic Directions 2017-2021 did not provide a detailed roadmap for achieving results, and it unhelpfully overlapped with UNHCR’s Global Strategic Priorities. UNHCR’s management response to that MOPAN assessment confirmed there were weaknesses and ambiguities in these fields and committed to addressing them. The current MOPAN review acknowledges progress and considers UNHCR’s current strategic outlook to be satisfactory.

November 2023, Afghanistan: In the village of Fatih Abad, in the Surkhrod district of Nangarhar province, a transformative initiative is taking shape, courtesy of UNHCR in partnership with WAW (Women for Afghan Women). This collaborative effort is aimed at providing sustainable, permanent shelters for vulnerable families in the region, extending a lifeline to those in need of safe and stable housing. Photo: © UNHCR/ Oxygen Empire Media Production

The previous MOPAN assessment found that, at headquarters level, UNHCR's structure and functions were not fully fit for purpose and were lacking in internal coherence. Since then, UNHCR has continued its transformational change journey, and we assessed that the organisational structure has improved as a result. The newly created layer of regional bureaux speeds up some of UNHCR's processes and facilitates access to internal expert advice, but it is posing some challenges as well, particularly around clarity on roles and responsibilities. These may prove to be transitional. Sensitivities and ambiguities mean that some internal processes and flows of communication that are not time-critical are still overly slow.

UNHCR has a single integrated annual budget that is informed by needs assessments and brings together unearmarked and earmarked funding. There are plans to pilot multi-year budgeting in five countries in 2024, although plans to include Uganda among the pilot countries, which the MOPAN team was told would happen, were cancelled in the latter part of 2023. The continuing trend of tightly earmarked funding would make multi-year budgeting challenging to achieve for the organisation as a whole. Despite some success in diversifying funding, including from private donors, UNHCR remains highly dependent on a small number of large donors, in particular the United States.

KPI 2 – Cross-cutting issues:

On humanitarian principles. The previous MOPAN assessment did not assess UNHCR against humanitarian principles. In this review, we found that humanitarian principles are strongly integrated into UNHCR's policies, part of its training and tracked. This is also the case for international refugee law principles.

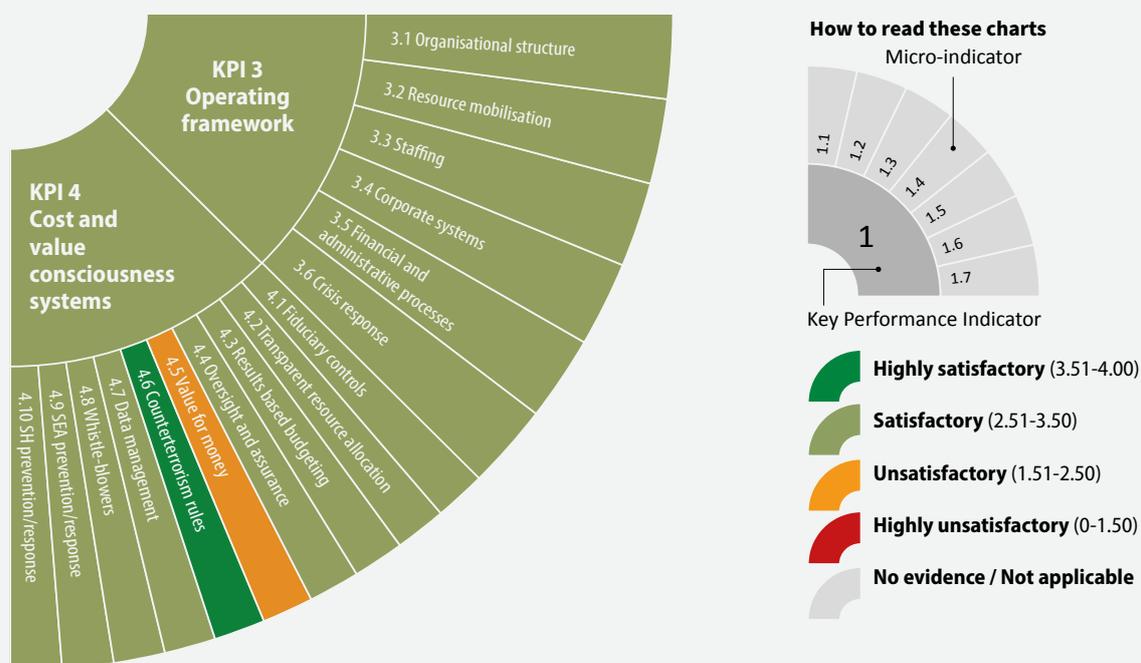
On protection and human rights. The previous MOPAN assessment concluded that human rights and protection are central to UNHCR's mandate and are comprehensively integrated across strategic and operational practice. In this review, we found that this is still by and large the case. However, in situations of patchy performance on protection or insufficient alignment with the work of other protection actors, or when there is siloing of activities across different protection needs, vulnerable groups are at risk of being left behind. Moreover, UNHCR faces difficult choices in situations of extreme underfunding, adverse national legal frameworks and extreme fragility. In extreme conditions, there is no absolute minimum that all UNHCR programming have in common, and country offices have considerable freedom to set priorities.

On gender. The previous MOPAN assessment found UNHCR's performance on five out of its six gender criteria to be unsatisfactory, and its performance on the sixth criterion (on human and financial resources) to be highly unsatisfactory. In its management response, UNHCR acknowledged that "there is still a great deal to be done" in this field. At the start of our current review period, UNHCR refreshed and launched its new Age, Gender and Diversity (AGD) policy. It disaggregated its data gathering and reporting and increased the level of resources dedicated to gender issues. Though UNHCR made a roll-out plan for the policy implementation, staff awareness of the new policy appears to have been low in the years after its introduction. Nonetheless, we found that UNHCR's overall performance in delivering gender outcomes has improved significantly and is now satisfactory.

On environment and climate change. The previous MOPAN review found UNHCR's performance on all environment-related criteria to be either unsatisfactory or highly unsatisfactory. The current review found environmental sustainability and climate change to be a newly emerging agenda, where performance still depends upon the level of interest among the responsible staff. A clear policy architecture and significant resource allocation were missing, and UNHCR did not capture evidence on results. By the end of our assessment period, UNHCR was about to launch a Strategic Plan for Climate Action 2024-2030. This plan builds on the 2021 Strategic Framework for Climate Action, which aligns with its Strategic Directions and with the United Nations (UN) System-wide approach to Climate Action and the System-wide plan of action on Disaster Risk Reduction. There is some progress in country operations, but action is not yet systematically aligned with this strategic framework.

OPERATIONAL MANAGEMENT

The **operational management** performance area gauges to what extent the assets and capacities organised behind strategic direction and intended results ensure relevance, agility and accountability. This area is assessed through the two key performance indicators specified below:



KPI 3 – Operating model:

At the time of the previous MOPAN assessment, UNHCR had begun its comprehensive change management process to improve the coherence of its operating model, which had become overly bureaucratic, centralised and lacking in agility. The current MOPAN assessment confirms that UNHCR’s decentralisation and regionalisation process supports the organisation’s strategic directions and global commitments and helps it adapt and respond to changes in its operating environment. The regional bureaux provide support and oversight to field operations, but there is still a need to clarify and socialise their roles, responsibilities, and lines of authority and communication. The decentralisation process has allowed real devolution of decision-making authority to country level. UNHCR’s decentralisation and business transformation reforms have led to a series of changes that will support more effective and rapid resource mobilisation. UNHCR could, however, do better with drawing funding from pooled humanitarian funding mechanisms. UNHCR has done well with soliciting funding from the private sector, but its appeals to government donors for providing a larger portion of their funding as flexible funding has not managed to reverse the trend of increasingly strict earmarking of funds.

UNHCR has invested in the development and support of its staff and is close to achieving its gender parity goal. UNHCR has strengthened its welfare and psychosocial support services and is promoting, with support from the senior leadership, a “speak-up culture” across the organisation. It is not clear, however, whether UNHCR globally is doing enough to ensure capacity needs are identified and addressed through staff upskilling and recruitment. UNHCR has gone through an enormous change management process, with the launch of a range of new digital systems, some already rolled out and others underway. The change is necessary but causing strain on staff during the transition period.

UNHCR procurement is generally fit for purpose for crisis contexts, and the organisation delivers in a timely manner across a range of emergency contexts. Within the significant constraints of funding restrictions from earmarking, evidence from evaluations suggests that UNHCR often does a reasonable job of prioritising according to needs and vulnerable groups within country operations. UNHCR has improved supply chain management (SCM), but gaps and problems continue to exist. The organisation adopted the three lines of defence model in 2017, and we saw many examples of how the model is used and well understood across the organisation, not only by units and teams specifically in charge of internal control and integrity functions but also by country offices and headquarters divisions.

UNHCR is a quick responder to crises and can be quick to scale up when needed, although this can vary from crisis to crisis, as Level 3 (L3) emergency evaluations confirm. UNHCR's 2023 Policy on Emergency Preparedness and Response provides an overarching framework for emergency preparedness and response, covering when to trigger emergency declarations and at what level; processes triggered at each level; processes for scale down after the emergency phase; and principles for co-ordination internally and with other actors. UNHCR's emergency response functions are strong.

KPI 4 – Cost- and value-conscious systems:

The independence and position of ethics and integrity services were bolstered across UNHCR during the assessment period. UNHCR has a clear policy, a suite of strong guidelines and mandatory training on fraud and corruption, but audits suggest policy compliance needs strengthening. There are effective mechanisms in place for reporting suspected misconduct, with timely and independent investigations by the Investigations Service of the Inspector-General's Office (IGO). While UNHCR's communications on fraud and other integrity issues have improved, we found that its "no surprises" policy could be implemented more fully and in a timelier fashion.

UNHCR's new COMPASS planning, reporting and budgeting framework helps ensure that priority areas are reflected in budgeting. Given its tightly earmarked funding, UNHCR does a good job of matching spending to strategic priorities and consistently advocates for funding according to need, with a strong campaign for underfunded operations. It would, however, be helpful for UNHCR to provide more detail in its reporting on how it allocates its core/unearmarked funding to avoid spending core funding on relatively well-funded operations compared to needs. UNHCR's corporate budgets are organised by corporate impact and outcome areas, across all levels.

UNHCR has made its oversight bodies more unambiguously independent since the last MOPAN assessment. Key oversight positions are non-career positions (Inspector General, Head of Evaluation, Ombudsman, Director of Ethics Office) and do not have a previous relationship with the organisation. The Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) and the IGO are independent and have full control of their own work programmes. Notwithstanding its modest budget, at 0.3% of UNHCR's overall spending, UNHCR's internal oversight functions are coping with their remit, although the growing investigation caseload means resources and capacity are stretched. UNHCR has an effective system to consolidate the work plans and recommendations of independent oversight providers, utilising an online platform for each. The closing of OIOS recommendations is done consultatively with management and the internal audit team.

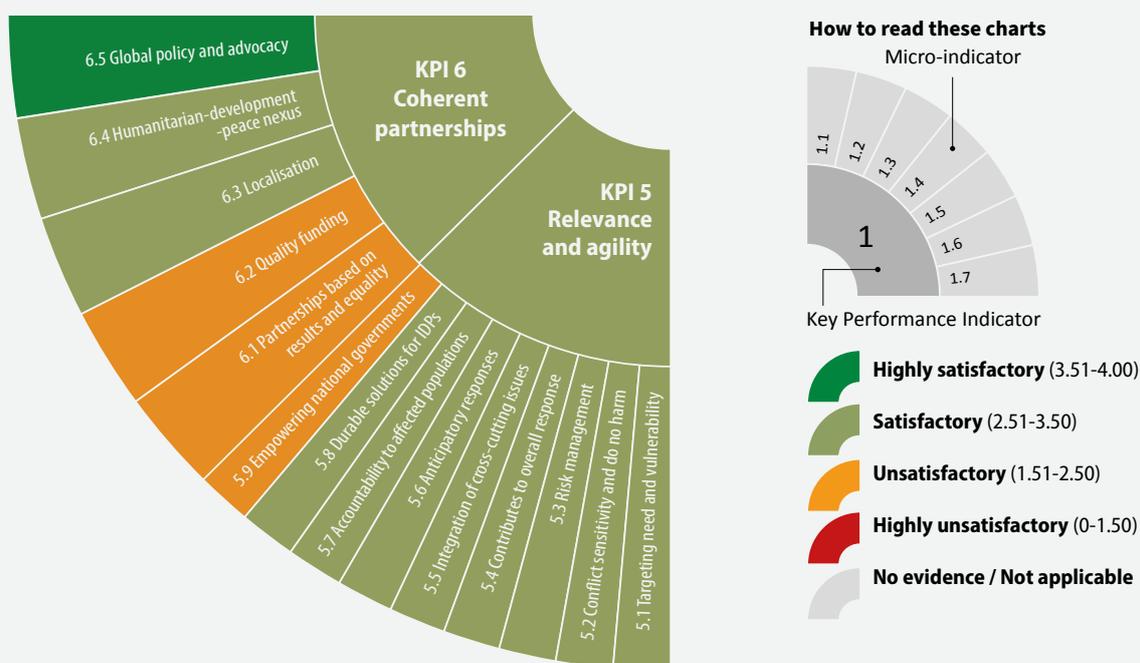
Data responsibility was not assessed in the previous MOPAN assessment of UNHCR. Overall, UNHCR is compliant at headquarters level after years of improving its systems. The General Policy on Personal Data Protection and Privacy is in the process of being rolled out, which means improvements remain ongoing. Management of mis- and disinformation is prioritised in the Digital Transformation Strategy, centred around digital communication risk management. With the rise of the use of social media in affected communities, targeted and comprehensive guidance for field operations on how to deal with the topic has been developed, but practice could be strengthened.

Whistleblower policies and processes are strong. The anti-retaliation policy was strengthened in 2022, including the broadening of the scope of who is protected and a clearer and more robust process for dealing with cases. On preventing sexual exploitation and abuse, UNHCR has made impressive progress since 2018 and is ahead of the game

among UN and other international organisations on many aspects. UNHCR was the first UN agency to have a victim-centred approach policy. It has a well-resourced headquarters team, regional focal points, mandatory training for staff and partners, and dedicated capacity in high-risk situations. UNHCR reports publicly on sexual exploitation and abuse statistics. It was the first UN entity to pilot the Misconduct Disclosure Scheme, which aims to prevent perpetrators from being employed outside of the UN system. This is a step beyond the UN-wide ClearCheck. UNHCR has similar strengths in its prevention of sexual harassment (SH) approach, including victim support and initiatives to foster a “speak-up culture”. UNHCR has created an innovative SH matching system to encourage reporting and is making good use of feedback mechanisms to improve its systems and processes. Monitoring and reporting on progress on SH activities against the action plan need to be improved.

RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT

The **relationship management** performance area looks at whether the organisation has engaged in inclusive partnerships – and to what extent – to support relevance, leverage effective solutions and maximise results. This area is assessed through the two key performance indicators specified below:



KPI 5 – Relevance and agility:

UNHCR conducts a large number of participatory multi-sector needs and vulnerability assessments every year. These are joint or shared where possible and are fed into programming and budget decisions. UNHCR requires its needs assessments to be rights-based and protection-centred and has protection expertise at all levels of the organisation. UNHCR’s stronger focus on durable solutions and the humanitarian-development-peace nexus means a need for new skills while at the same time recognising that UNHCR’s role is not to become a development actor itself.

UNHCR follows clear criteria for prioritising and ranking the severity of needs and crises. Prioritising between crises is difficult due to earmarking, and the situation is more one of UNHCR doing what it can with the funding available in many underfunded refugee situations. In this situation, ensuring that at the end of the year, unearmarked funding has primarily been spent on operations and crises where the needs are most acute is an urgent priority, and more clarity is needed in UNHCR’s reporting to show how the organisation ensures this.

COMPASS includes age, gender and diversity (AGD) indicators at impact, outcome and output areas, and a new organisational gender equality marker enables UNHCR to track outputs contributing to gender equality. COMPASS does not yet have robust baselines (or any at all in many cases), which affects the ability to monitor progress on AGD indicators as well as the ability to determine robust and meaningful results targets.

UNHCR's "risk management journey" has successfully followed a demanding schedule for improvement, with the potential to make UNHCR a leader within the UN system. UNHCR includes conflict sensitivity and "do no harm" principles in its planning but cites protection and political sensitivities as the reason for not systematically providing conflict analyses in strategy documents.

UNHCR is an active and constructive participant in country co-ordination efforts, according to its comparative advantage. It takes a leadership role in refugee emergencies and has clearer responsibilities and more predictability in when and how it responds to IDPs and mixed situations. It has become better at sharing data with partners, but improvements in how and when UNHCR shares data need to continue.

UNHCR has good anticipatory response systems and structures in place for early warning, and warnings are heeded through trigger mechanisms in the emergency contingency planning and acted on through rapid response. Wherever possible, UNHCR works with host governments to develop their contingency plans. However, while UNHCR invests appropriately in anticipatory responses, it operates in highly unpredictable contexts and even the worst-case scenarios of recent crises have underestimated their magnitude.

UNHCR's commitment to accountability to affected populations is one of the eight priority or focus areas in the strategic directions. UNHCR actively seeks to use the views of communities to improve programming, using feedback and complaints mechanisms, with further improvements still sought. UNHCR is committed to working closely with national authorities and does so routinely. However, it has not yet found the recipe for advocating towards and capacitating governments to move from short-term humanitarian to longer-term economic inclusion models for refugee populations.

KPI 6 – Coherent partnerships:

UNHCR's management response to the last MOPAN review's critical findings in relation to UNHCR's partnerships was that "UNHCR will continue to strengthen the cooperation with UNHCR's key partners at central level and in the field". Since then, UNHCR has embedded sensible principles of partnership in its policies and systems but continues in many cases to pose onerous and sometimes excessive control and output reporting requirements on its partners, with less emphasis on quality outcome monitoring and learning. UNHCR ranks partnerships – with both strategic and implementing partners – as core to its success. It engages a broad range of stakeholders for comprehensive solutions to refugee situations. Its new COMPASS results-based planning system has partner consultation built into the annual programme planning cycle. UNHCR's partnerships are often long-term.

UNHCR has committed to the Grand Bargain's enabling priority related to quality funding, but this is not reflected in UNHCR's strategic directions. UNHCR receives relatively little multi-year funding itself and passes disproportionately little of this on to its implementing partners. The predictability of funding is also an issue, with implementing partners across countries facing vastly different timelines and requirements for otherwise comparable interventions, suggesting that UNHCR lacks standardised approaches to this.

UNHCR has been an active supporter of localisation, in particular capacitating refugee-led organisations. UNHCR works with government actors, often in close partnerships. While it tries not to build parallel international structures, it can end up building separate, parallel structures for refugee response with a sub-set of government. In sudden-onset crises, such as in Moldova, this may facilitate timely action, but once refugee situations become protracted,

such as in Uganda, working with separate bodies set up specifically for refugee support as its main partners risks militating against longer-term aims of inclusion in national services and supporting refugees to become economically active and self-sufficient residents in their host country.

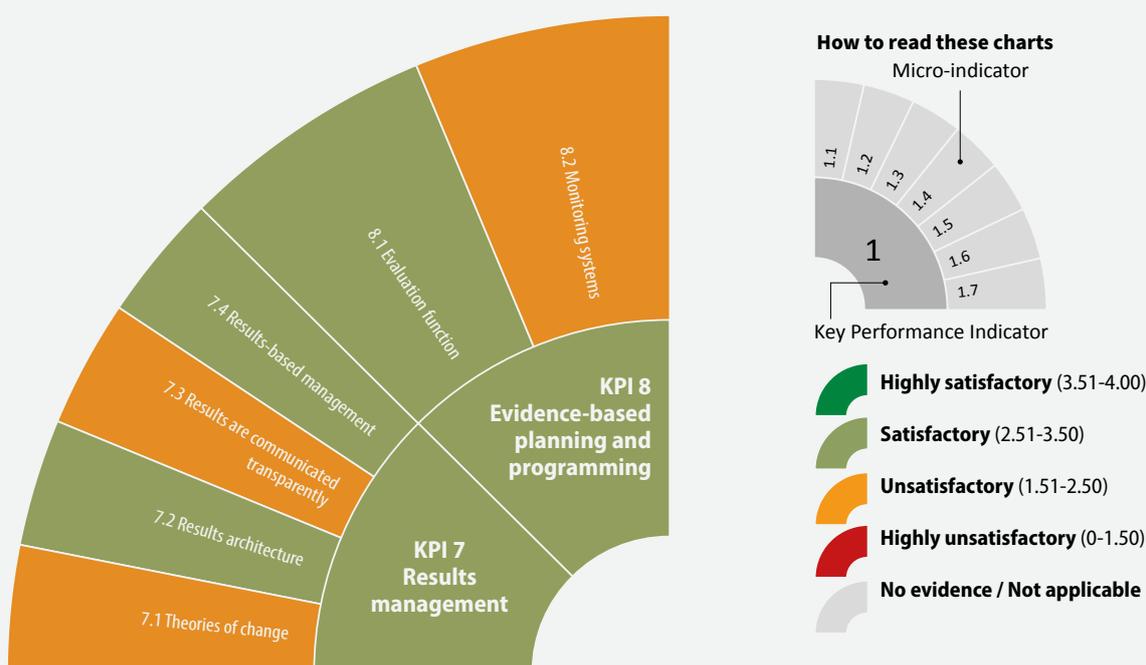
The humanitarian-development-peace nexus has become a focus strategic priority for UNHCR, with the overall ambition of finding durable solutions for refugees through integration and inclusion into national services and job markets. In 2023, UNHCR completed its Focus Area Strategic Plan for Engaging Development Actors. UNHCR staff are well informed about conflict dynamics, but UNHCR does not produce formal conflict analysis reports, let alone share them.

Despite close working with development actors, and successful funding campaigns, most importantly leading to the World Bank Group’s large pledge at the 2020 Global Refugee Forum, UNHCR has found it difficult to find actors to work with to bridge the gap in services if UNHCR exits from humanitarian support. A 2021 Humanitarian Development Evaluation found that increased co-operation on humanitarian-development issues had not translated to UNHCR being able to hand over responsibilities to other actors and undertake reprioritisation.

In fields that are core to its mandate, UNHCR plays a catalytic and enabling advocacy role and leads sizable coalitions of stakeholders. As the guardian of the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, this applies to the Global Compact on Refugees and the Global Refugee Forum. It also applies to the Ending Statelessness Campaign, as UNHCR is mandated by the UN General Assembly to prevent and reduce statelessness. In fields that are relevant but not core to its mandate, UNHCR actively contributes to global efforts. This is the case for issues such as disaster-induced displacement and displacement related to the effects of climate change.

PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

The **performance management** performance area assesses the existence of systems geared to managing and accounting for development and humanitarian results and the use of performance information, including evaluation and lesson-learning. This area is assessed through the two key performance indicators specified below:





KPI 7 – Results management:

UNHCR's Strategic Directions (protect, respond, include, empower and solve), with eight areas for accelerated action, facilitate an appropriately targeted approach to achieving corporate objectives. The strategic directions are accompanied by a new global results framework, COMPASS, which is a clear improvement on the previous results framework. There is a clear line running from strategic directions to focus areas, and to the global results framework and its indicators at impact, outcome and output levels. Theories of change are being created but remain mostly underdeveloped. Decentralisation, combined with the introduction of COMPASS, focus area strategies and multi-year country strategies, is a step change in facilitating horizontal working across outcome areas, although much of this remains work in progress.

The previous MOPAN assessment found that UNHCR's results-based management (RBM) architecture was not clearly connected to a defined set of organisational goals. With the COMPASS framework, this connection is clear, combining multi-year results-based planning with a reporting framework to capture core as well as flexible, context-specific indicators at output, outcome and impact levels. The COMPASS framework has been discussed and developed since 2019, with 2022 being the first year of use.

UNHCR recognises the need to maintain and further strengthen the trust of donors, other UN member states, partners and the public through evidence-based reporting. However, partners and donors find UNHCR's information sharing to be unpredictable, partial and insufficiently frequent. Accessible communication plans and principles would enhance the predictability of UNHCR's communications. The COMPASS system may facilitate this, as it could provide the basis on which UNHCR can produce transparent, prompt and regular results data. It is too early to assess whether it will be used in this way. For the 2022 results report, UNHCR was not yet able to produce aggregated results reporting and could not yet present credible and meaningful baselines and targets.

The previous MOPAN assessment found that weaknesses in UNHCR's results and monitoring systems and the consequent lack of high-quality and reliable performance data meant that UNHCR made insufficient use of data when planning its work. The introduction of COMPASS and the creation of the Division of Strategic Planning and Results (DSPR), dedicated to fostering data- and evidence-driven strategic planning across UNHCR, have significantly improved this situation. UNHCR is now a more data-driven organisation, and COMPASS is likely to further strengthen the way in which the organisation feeds results into planning.

KPI 8 – Evidence-based planning and programming:

UNHCR's corporate evaluation function has been significantly strengthened since the last MOPAN assessment, in the independence of its function, the quality of its work and the geographic and thematic spread of its evaluations. The Head of Evaluations is sufficiently independent, and transparency in the publication of evaluation results is good – although significantly stronger at headquarters and global levels than at country level. However, UNHCR's funding for evaluations is well below the percentage of turnover recommended for UN agencies. The plans for an expanded role of the regional bureaux in a decentralised evaluation function have pros and cons but entail risks to the independence of this function, risks that may be mitigated through Senior Regional Evaluation Officers reporting directly to the Head of Evaluation at headquarters.

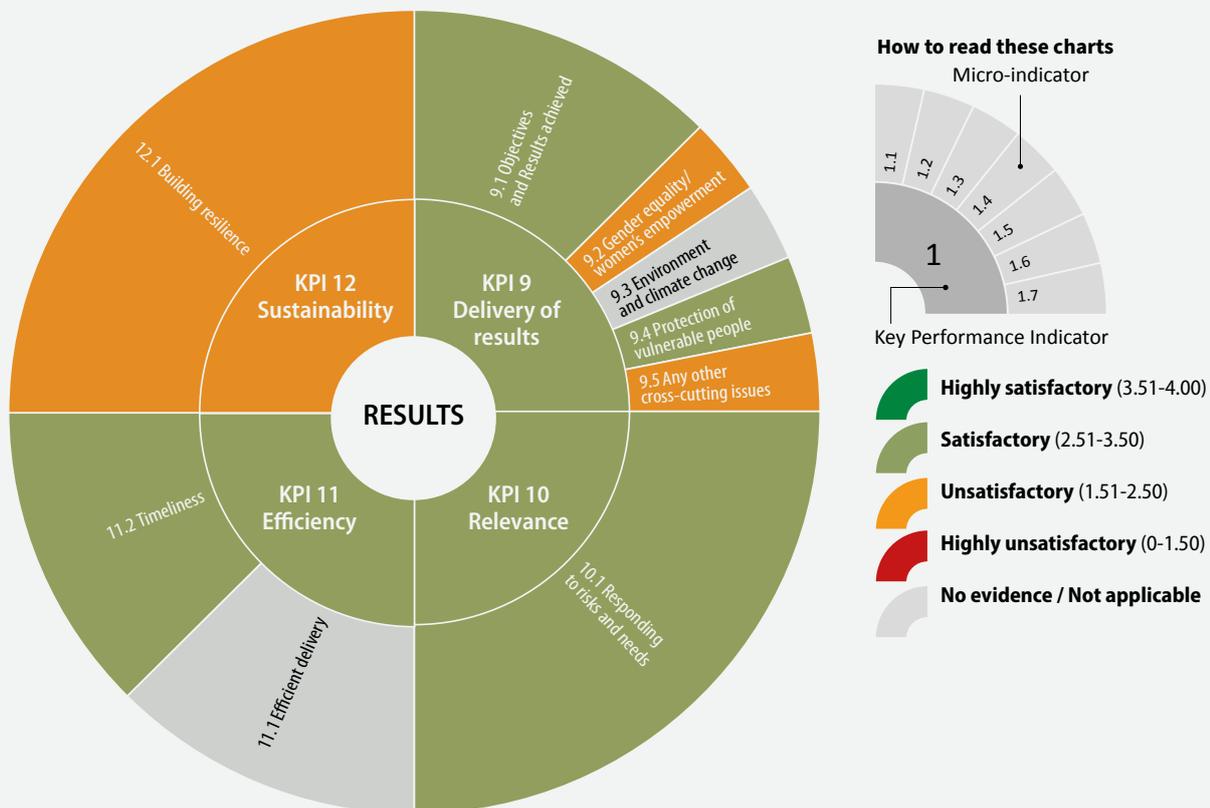
UNHCR's RBM system, COMPASS, is a significant improvement from its previous tool, FOCUS, and the level of quality control and support from the Division for Strategic Planning and Results (DSPR) to country operations has been boosted. DSPR has invested considerably in results monitoring and measurement, although the challenge with establishing robust baselines and realistic targets continues to exist within COMPASS.

All country offices now have to set out a reporting framework in their multi-year strategies, listing the impact and outcomes they want to achieve and using a combination of core and flexible (adapted to the operational context) indicators for monitoring these. Monitoring of indicators is required of all operations. There is a clear and robust annual planning process in place where results data are used together with situation analyses and stakeholder consultation to plan adaptations to the multi-year strategy, although offices are at different stages in making the most out of the improved COMPASS system. The monitoring system allows operations to flag poor and strong performance. An important challenge for further progress is monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) capacity at country level, since COMPASS is only as good as the data entered into it. Poor monitoring data or gaps continue to be a challenge for both evaluation and COMPASS.

Much of UNHCR’s results are achieved through implementing partners, and UNHCR monitors its partners closely, across all aspects of their activities on behalf of or funded by UNHCR. Partner monitoring tends towards being more focused on control functions than on results and, in the area of results reporting, it places more emphasis on monitoring outputs than outcomes and is often unnecessarily onerous for partners. A process for addressing poor partner performance exists. We found strong reporting practices in some of the country offices in our sample, with implementing partners’ performance monitored and reported on; when problems or opportunities were identified, they were acted on. We saw examples of partnerships being discontinued due to poor results and good practice being replicated and conditions being renegotiated when partnership arrangements proved overly cumbersome.

RESULTS

The **results** performance area assesses whether development and humanitarian objectives are achieved and whether results contribute to normative and cross-cutting goals. This area is assessed through the four key performance indicators specified below.



Box 4. Limitations of the exercise to assess KPIs 9-12 on results

This analysis is based on results findings from a limited number of UNHCR evaluations from 2022 to 2023. The MOPAN assessment team did not conduct any results assessments itself and relied on drawing on existing results data, where evaluations of the data had already taken place through UNHCR's own independent evaluation programme. As noted in MI 8.2, UNHCR had a weak MEL system during the assessment phase, although part of the objectives of the new RBM system, COMPASS, is to strengthen results monitoring and reporting, so that UNHCR can more easily and accurately attribute its contributions to results and outcomes. It was not possible to exploit UNHCR's annual results reports in thematic areas, which were shared with us, for this assessment of results, since most of these do not have baselines or realistic targets or discuss UNHCR's direct or indirect contributions to results.

The potential improvements with COMPASS have not yet filtered through into evaluations' ability to assess results. Most of the UNHCR evaluations selected for this KPI 9-12 results assessment noted the weakness of UNHCR's results monitoring. As a result, the evidence base for these four KPIs is weak. This is particularly the case for KPI 11 on efficiency, which was often not evaluated, or only tangentially so, in the sample of evaluation reports used.

UNHCR shared a selection of annual results reports for particular sectors, such as education, mental health and cash support. However, these are not tagged to particular activities, projects or trajectories, so it is difficult to gauge if results are good/poor/adequate considering the nature of the interventions and circumstances in which they were conducted (with some exceptions). These 2022 results reports were therefore used lightly. Finally, UNHCR noted that it has conducted results reporting with baselines and targets for 50 of its country operations. MOPAN does not have resources to assess individual country reporting and did not use these reports.

The ten evaluations chosen were randomly selected based on the following criteria: quality of the methodology (only evaluations deemed of good quality were included); recent publication, with only evaluations from 2022 and 2023 included; a mix of thematic and country-level evaluations and a selection of L3 emergency evaluations. Based on these, a random selection was made from a long list of evaluations.

KPI 9 – Delivery of results:

Most of UNHCR's evaluations noted that weak monitoring of results or MEL systems in general has made it difficult to assess the effectiveness of UNHCR activities and the results they contribute to. As a result, the evidence is weak for all the results reported, with not enough evidence in the sample to score results on climate change and environmental protection (MI 9.3) and very limited evidence on gender.

This said, the evaluations, to the extent they are able to gather and triangulate effectiveness data, add up to an overall satisfactory score within a mixed bag of results rating from weak to excellent.

For the two evaluations in the sample that were of specific project results in specific countries, and where the project in question had a MEL component as part of its design (which is why that particular evaluation was conducted and why there was good data the evaluators could use), the evaluation also found that results were strong (translated to "highly satisfactory" in the MOPAN scoring system). While a sample of ten evaluations is not strong enough for robust generalisation, this points towards stronger MEL being correlated to better-designed and -targeted interventions. It also emphasises the importance of UNHCR improving the quality of its programme monitoring to ensure it captures contributions to results, not only outputs.

KPI 10 – Relevance:

Generally, UNHCR’s activities are relevant, and the organisation works well with other actors within national and regional inter-agency response plans and national development plans. The two health-related programme evaluations – on maternal and newborn health and on refugees living with noncommunicable diseases – both receive top scores for relevance. Both consulted widely before design, and interventions were highly pertinent to needs, filling gaps and improving service provisions – in alignment with priorities of local and national actors.

On the other side of the spectrum, both country strategic evaluations in the sample scored unsatisfactory on KPI 10. Both noted a need to align UNHCR’s strategic priorities with the strongest needs in a deteriorating funding situation where difficult funding decisions must be made. The Zambia evaluation recommended that “operational planning be scaled back to reflect realistically available resourcing and that planning prioritizes core needs”. The Sudan country strategic evaluation found that, while UNHCR conducts quality needs assessments, it does not always design its activities around these and is too responsive to the needs of donors relative to those of people of concern and host communities.

KPI 11 – Efficiency:

There was insufficient evidence in the sample of evaluations to score this KPI. None of the evaluations conducted in-depth value for money assessments. For the evaluations of the two programme-specific interventions, which benefited from better MEL than the rest of the sample, these two programmes also did well on timely, efficient delivery. The L3 Afghanistan emergency evaluation also found that UNHCR was “very efficient in deploying timely and adequate resources to meet emergency needs”, with the speediness of the response aided by very good preparedness and prepositioning of resources. Indeed, the L3 Afghanistan evaluation saw UNHCR’s response as a “model of good practice”. However, the other two L3 evaluations, in Ethiopia and in response to Cyclone Idai, found delays and lack of nimbleness in the response.

Some evaluations had value for money concerns. The global thematic evaluation on child protection found spending on child protection to vary considerably and noted that underfunding led to worse value for money. The Sudan and Zambia country strategic evaluations focused on value for money concerns and delays due to short-term budgets and partnership agreements and slow human resources and budget processes. With a move to multi-year operational planning underway, this should improve. However, the extent to which value for money gains are made will also depend on the extent to which efficiency calculations are included in planning. The ten evaluations in our sample suggest that there is little data on how value for money principles are pursued in programme planning.

KPI 12 – Sustainability:

There are positive trends in L3 emergency responses as well as country strategic plans including strategies for transition to development actors and durability of results, although much of this remains at the planning stage. The global evaluation of UNHCR’s approach to statelessness concludes: “[K]ey informants noted that UNHCR’s culture is dominated by humanitarian emergency thinking and practices. These include prioritization of life-saving activities, one-year budget and planning cycles, and a tendency to emphasize areas where UNHCR has a dominant mandate, rather than long-term systems change, human rights and development approaches.” The evaluation of UNHCR’s humanitarian-development co-operation notes that the results from UNHCR work on co-operating with development actors and national governments on refugee inclusion in national services and safety nets would lead to more sustainable approaches – but also notes it is early days with important challenges to achieving this transition.

ABOUT THE ASSESSMENT



THE ASSESSMENT APPROACH

The approach to MOPAN assessments has evolved over time to adjust to the needs of the multilateral system. The MOPAN 3.1 methodology is the latest iteration and has been used in all MOPAN assessments, including this one, since its endorsement by MOPAN members in early 2020 (MOPAN 2020).

Following MOPAN's 2022 study on *Rethinking Effective Humanitarian Organisations* (MOPAN, 2022a), MOPAN held consultations with major stakeholders including MOPAN members, the DAC-UN Dialogue Group and the Grand Bargain signatories. This uncovered a significant appetite for MOPAN to assess, or at least to promote, learning on progress towards global policy commitments with a particular focus on organisational change management and the right business models.

An adapted framework for multilateral organisations primarily working in crisis contexts was developed and applied for this assessment. The adapted framework aligns to the five MOPAN 3.1 performance areas: strategic, operational, relationship, performance management and results. However, the micro-indicators (MIs) were adapted to ensure that they apply a crisis lens. Accordingly, the Elements to guide the rating against the MOPAN rating scale were also adapted to fit these MIs.

Table 2 lists the performance areas and indicators used in MOPAN 3.1.

APPLYING MOPAN 3.1 TO THE OFFICE OF THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES

Interpretations and adaptations to the methodology

For this assessment, MOPAN used the Adapted Framework for Organisations Working in Crises, developed in 2022 under the guidance of MOPAN's Humanitarian Advisory Group, with the following notes and adjustments to ensure relevance to the mandate of UNHCR:

- We noted that the groups of concern to UNHCR – forcibly displaced groups and stateless groups – are highly vulnerable. When the framework mentions vulnerable people and the “most vulnerable”, we considered this to relate to particularly vulnerable people within these groups.
- We also considered international refugee law in the context of indicators 1.1.1, 2.1.1, 2.1.3 and 2.1.4.
- We changed indicator 2.2.1 into: “Guidance, processes and/or other systems and checks are in place to ensure that the most critical concerns related to human rights and protection and other refugee rights are addressed in a given context.”
- We added “leads or” to indicator 5.4.1, which changed into: “The organisation actively leads or participates in country co-ordination efforts, including IASC (Inter-Agency Standing Committee), HCT (Humanitarian Country Teams), clusters and other structures.”
- We added “logistics” to indicator 5.4.4, which changed into: “Country, regional and/or sector strategies identify the organisation's comparative advantage to ensure potential synergies (advocacy, knowledge and skills, etc.) and integrated responses (joint programming, logistics, warm handoffs, cost savings and efficiencies, etc.) with partners.”
- We changed indicators 6.1.4 into: “Where possible, partnerships start long before an emergency arises and, in the case of the Global Compact on Refugees in particular, include issues related to recovery and development.”

TABLE 2. PERFORMANCE AREAS AND KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Aspect	Performance area	Key performance indicator (KPI)
Organisational effectiveness	Strategic management	KPI 1: Organisational architecture and financial framework enable mandate implementation and achievement of expected results
		KPI 2: Structures and mechanisms are in place and applied to support the implementation of global frameworks for cross-cutting issues at all levels
	Operational management	KPI 3: Operating model and human and financial resources support relevance and agility
		KPI 4: Organisational systems are cost- and value-conscious and enable financial transparency and accountability
	Relationship management	KPI 5: Operational planning and intervention design tools support relevance and agility in partnerships
		KPI 6: The organisation works in coherent partnerships directed at leveraging and catalysing the use of resources and results
	Performance management	KPI 7: The focus on results is strong, transparent and explicitly geared towards function
		KPI 8: The organisation applies evidence-based planning and programming
Development / humanitarian effectiveness	Results	KPI 9: Development and humanitarian objectives are achieved, and results contribute to normative and cross-cutting goals
		KPI 10: Interventions are relevant to the needs and priorities of affected people, as the organisation works towards results in areas within its mandate
		KPI 11: Results are delivered efficiently
		KPI 12: Results are sustainable

Source: MOPAN (2022b), MOPAN Adapted Framework for MOs Working in Crises, Multilateral Organisation Performance Assessment Network, Paris.

- The framework only covers durable solutions in the context of internally displaced people. We also considered UNHCR's work in the context of durable solutions more widely.

Lines of evidence

This assessment relied on three lines of evidence: a document review, a partner survey, and staff interviews and consultations. The assessment team collected and reviewed a significant body of evidence:

A document review: This comprised publicly available documents as well as guidelines and policies that are “current and in force”. They were limited to those in final form (not draft versions), recognised by management and available in English. The list of documents reviewed is available on the MOPAN website.

An online survey: External partners were sent an online survey. A total of 313 partners responded to the survey, a 36% response rate for the sample provided by MOPAN members and UNHCR, and an 80% response rate for those who registered to the survey via a generic link. The survey was conducted for four weeks from June 2023 until July 2023. Key survey results are available on the MOPAN website in an interactive format.

Interviews and consultations: These were undertaken virtually between 22 May 2023 and 16 August 2023 as follows:

- a total of 33 interviews with UNHCR staff groups of which 10 were country/regional level interviews;
- a total of 9 interviews with key external partners and stakeholders at headquarters level.

Moldova and Uganda field visits

Two visits were undertaken by the assessment team: Moldova UNHCR and Uganda UNHCR offices in June and July 2023 respectively.

- Moldova: a total of 8 interviews with UNHCR field office staff groups, a total of 18 interviews with key external partners and stakeholders, and focus group discussions with people of concern
- Uganda: a total of 9 interviews with UNHCR field office staff groups, a total of 16 interviews with key external partners and stakeholders, and focus group discussions with people of concern.

METHODOLOGY FOR SCORING AND RATING

The approach to scoring and rating under MOPAN 3.1 was described in the 2020 Methodology Manual and can be found on MOPAN's website.

Each of the 12 KPIs contains several MIs, which vary in number. The KPI rating was calculated by taking the average of the ratings of its constituent MIs.

Scoring of KPIs 1-8

The scoring of KPIs 1-8 is based upon an aggregated scoring of the MIs. Each MI contains several elements, which vary in number, that represent international good practice. Taking the average of the constituent scores per element, a score is then calculated per MI. The same logic is pursued at aggregation to the KPI level, to ensure a consistent approach. Taking the average of the constituent scores per MI, an aggregated score is then calculated per KPI.

Scoring of KPIs 9-12

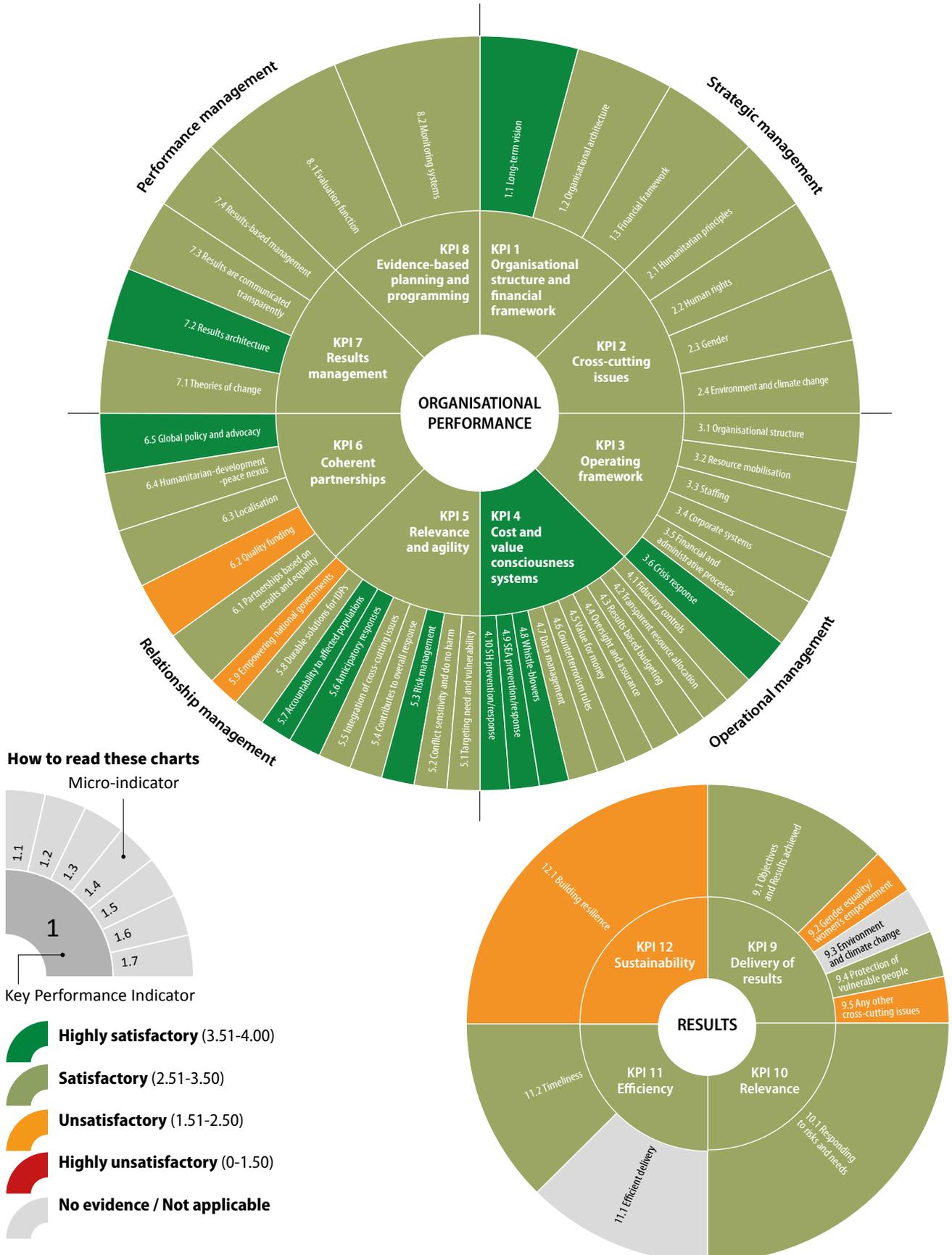
The scoring of KPIs 9-12 is based upon a meta-analysis of evaluations and performance information, rated at the MI level and aggregated to the KPI level. In this assessment of UNHCR, the potential improvements with COMPASS have not yet filtered through into evaluation results. Most of the evaluations selected for this KPI 9-12 results assessment note the weakness of UNHCR's results monitoring. As a result, the evidence base for these four KPIs is weak. This is particularly the case for KPI 11 on efficiency, which was often not evaluated, or only tangentially so, in the sample of evaluation reports used.

Rating scales

Whenever scores are aggregated, rating scales are used to translate scores into ratings that summarise the assessment across KPIs and MIs. The rating scale used under MOPAN 3.1 is shown below:

 Highly satisfactory (3.51-4.00)	 High evidence confidence
 Satisfactory (2.51-3.50)	 Medium evidence confidence
 Unsatisfactory (1.51-2.50)	 Low evidence confidence
 Highly unsatisfactory (0.00-1.50)	
 No evidence / Not applicable	

FIGURE 5. MOPAN'S 2019 RATING SCALE APPLIED TO THIS ASSESSMENT



A score of “N/E” means “no evidence” and indicates that the assessment team could not find any evidence but was not confident of whether or not there was evidence to be found. The team assumes that “no evidence” does not necessarily mean that the element is not present (which would result in a zero score). Elements rated N/E are excluded from any calculation of the average. A significant number of N/E scores in a report indicates an assessment limitation. A note indicating “N/A” means that an element was considered to be “not applicable”. This usually owes to the organisation’s specific nature.

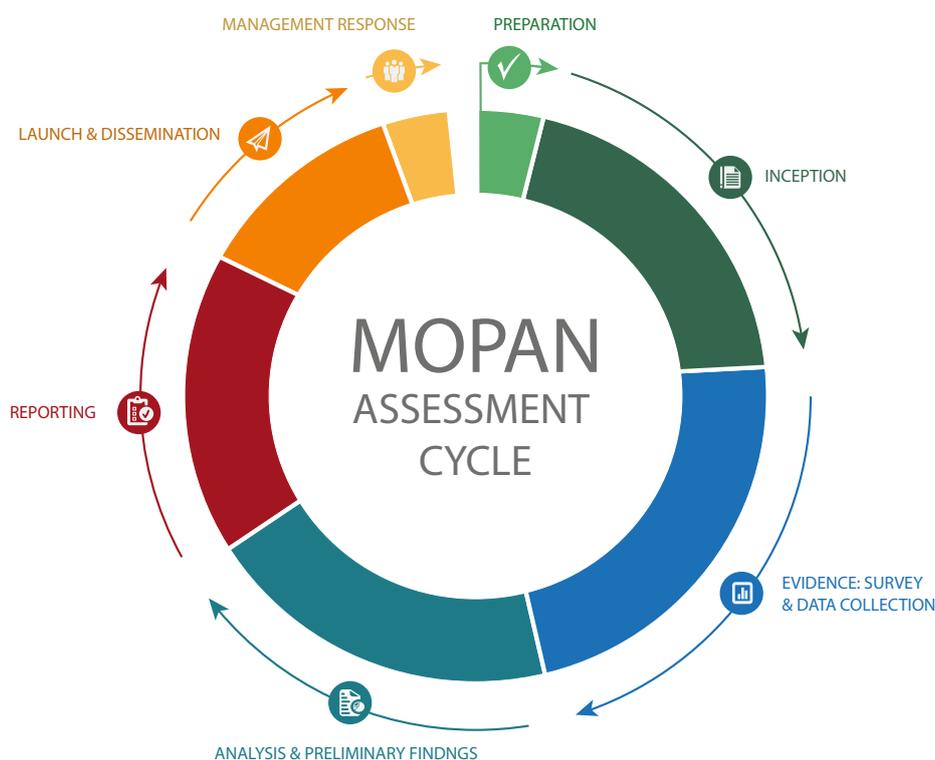
Changes to MOPAN’s rating system

MOPAN’s methodology is continuously evolving, and a notable change concerns how ratings (and their corresponding colours) are applied based on the scores at MI and KPI levels. In 2019, the rating scale was adjusted, and the threshold for each rating was raised to reflect the increasing demands of organisational performance in the multilateral system. Figure 5 shows how UNHCR’s performance in the current assessment would have been rated under the 2019 scale. The underlying scores and approach to scoring are unaffected.

ASSESSMENT PROCESS

MOPAN’s assessment process is shown in Figure 6.

FIGURE 6. MOPAN ASSESSMENT PROCESS



Source: MOPAN



September 2019,
Sudan: UNHCR
Storage facility in
the free zone in Port
Sudan. It is the main
hub where items
are stored then
distributed to the
rest of the country.

Photo: © UNHCR/
Ala Kheir

LIMITATIONS

The assessment applies a standardised framework that provides a picture of the organisation's performance. Thus, any general strengths and limitations of the MOPAN 3.1 methodology, which are laid out in MOPAN 3.1, Section 8, apply to this assessment, too. In addition, there is a limitation that is specific to this assessment of UNHCR.

The assessment team conducted a number of group interviews with senior UNHCR staff. In the presence of their colleagues, people are typically more at ease discussing the various strengths of the organisation they work for than they are discussing fields in which the organisation could strengthen its performance. This was indeed the case. Our evidence in relation to fields in which the organisation could improve is therefore mostly from internal and external assessment reports, our country visits, and our interviews and survey with external stakeholders. This limitation did not significantly impact the assessment's confidence ratings.

The evidence base for KPIs 9 to 12 on results is significantly more limited than for the other KPIs, as it relies on a relatively small sample of ten independent evaluations to provide a basis for conclusions. As a consequence, and in contrast to the rest of the KPIs, the evidence underpinning the findings under KPIs 9, 10, 11 and 12 is categorised as weak.

REFERENCES

MOPAN (2022a), *Lessons in Multilateral Effectiveness: Rethinking Effective Humanitarian Organisations*, Multilateral Organisation Performance Assessment Network, <https://www.mopanonline.org/analysis/items/lessons-in-multilateral-effectiveness-humanitarian-organisations.htm>.

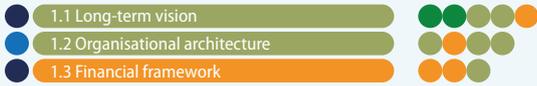
MOPAN (2022b), *MOPAN Adapted Framework for MOs Working in Crises*, Multilateral Organisation Performance Assessment Network, Paris.

ANNEX

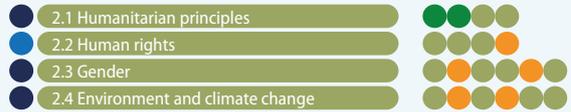
UNHCR PERFORMANCE OVERVIEW CURRENT RATING

Strategic management

KPI 1: Organisational architecture and financial framework

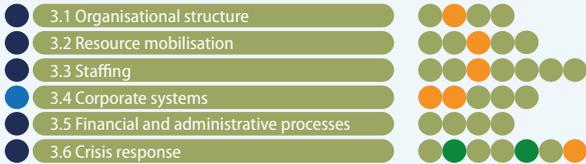


KPI 2: Cross-cutting issues



Operational management

KPI 3: Operating framework

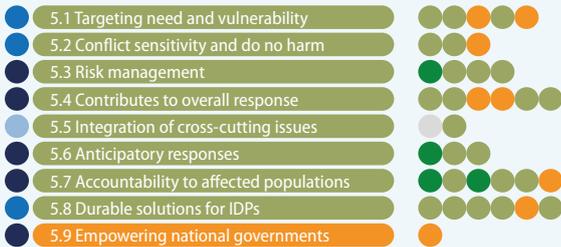


KPI 4: Cost- and value-conscious systems



Relationship management

KPI 5: Relevance and agility



KPI 6: Coherent partnerships



Performance management

KPI 7: Results management



KPI 8: Evidence-based planning and programming

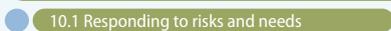


Results

KPI 9: Achievement of results



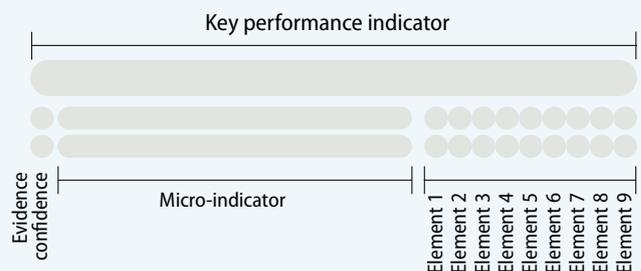
KPI 10: Relevance



KPI 11: Efficient delivery

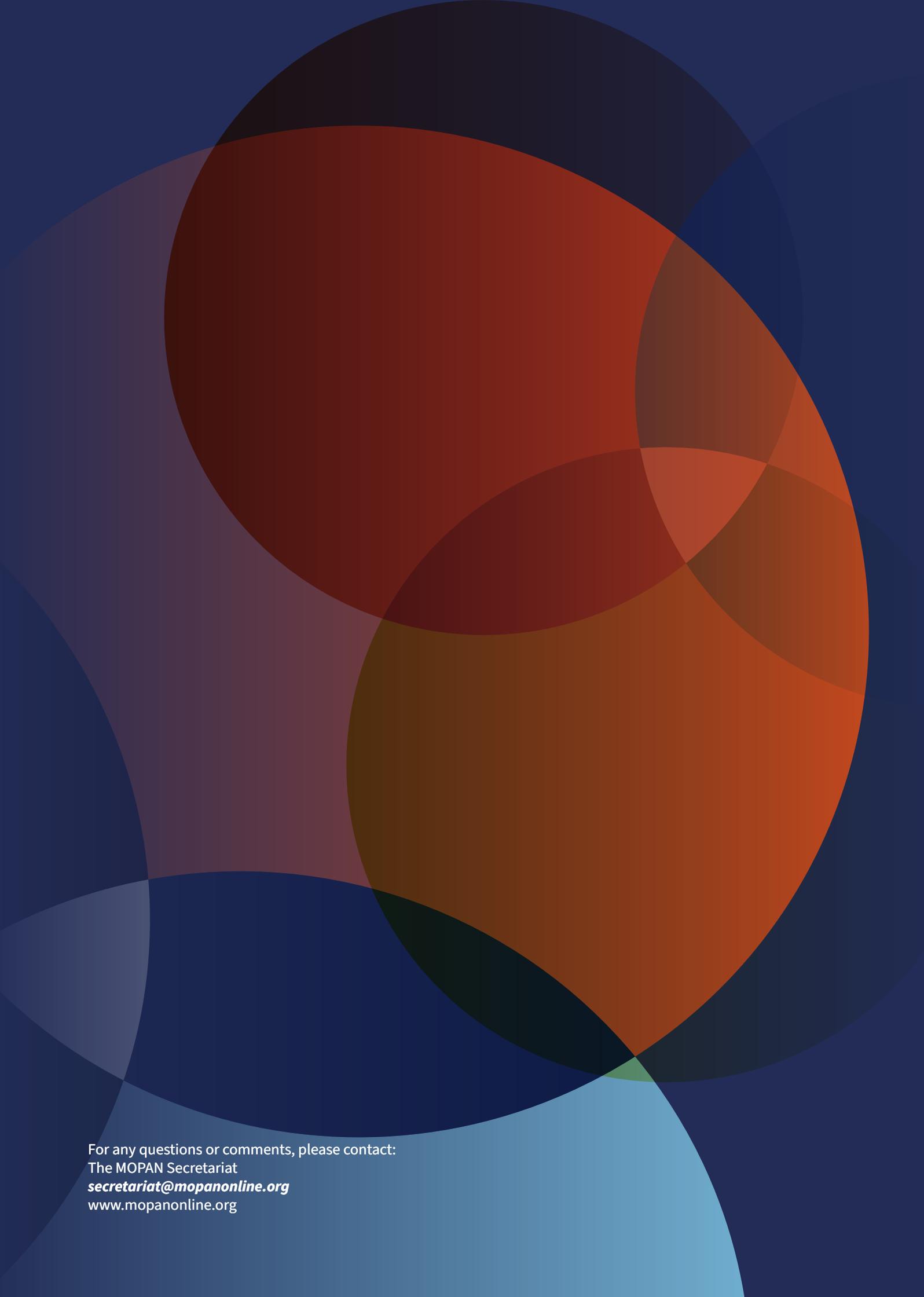


KPI 12: Sustainability



For any questions or comments, please contact:
The MOPAN Secretariat
secretariat@mopanonline.org
www.mopanonline.org





For any questions or comments, please contact:
The MOPAN Secretariat
secretariat@mopanonline.org
www.mopanonline.org