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Reports relating to programme and administrative
oversight and evaluation

Evaluation and Policy Development

Report by the High Commissioner

Summary

The present report has been prepared in conformity with the decision of the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme to receive a report on evaluation at its annual plenary session under item (vi) of the agenda: Reports relating to programme and administrative oversight and evaluation (A/AC.96/1003, para. 25.1(f)(vi)). The period covered by this report is from mid-2007 to mid-2008.

I. INTRODUCTION

1. During the past year, the Policy Development and Evaluation Service (PDES) has focused its activities on issues and operations that are of particular interest to UNHCR and the Executive Committee.
2. At the same time, the Service has made continued efforts to strengthen and integrate the policy development and evaluation functions, to ensure the effective dissemination and utilization of evaluation findings and recommendations, and to promote the principles of transparency and accountability within the Office.
3. In this context, the High Commissioner has requested PDES to lead UNHCR's involvement in a Peer Review on Accountability to Disaster-Affected Populations which is being coordinated by the Steering Committee on Humanitarian Response and which involves eight other major humanitarian organizations. The other components of the current PDES work programme are structured as follows.

II. REFUGEE PROTECTION AND INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION

4. PDES played a central role in the preparation of the first High Commissioner's Dialogue on Protection Challenges in December 2007, which focused on mixed movements and the interface between refugee protection and international migration. As a follow-up to the Dialogue's discussion of "protection gaps", PDES has published a study on international protection for trafficked persons and those who fear being trafficked: initiated an evaluation of UNHCR's role in relation to human trafficking: and is preparing an effective practice guide on this issue for UNHCR staff. The Service has also published studies on the situation of "stranded migrants" who find themselves trapped in transit countries, as well as an analysis of international norms and standards relating to the removal of rejected asylum-seekers.
5. The Service has completed a review of State practice in relation to the treatment of unaccompanied and separated children in mixed movements, and also plans to evaluate UNHCR's operational role in a number of these movements, focusing initially on the Mediterranean region.
6. The High Commissioner has requested PDES to prepare a position paper on the implications of climate change, environmental degradation and natural disasters for the work of UNHCR. In that context, the Service has published one study on climate change and forced migration, and another on the impact of environmental degradation on the relations between refugees and host populations in East Africa.
7. PDES has continued to act as UNHCR's focal point for high-level relations with the Global Migration Group, the Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD) and the International Organization for Migration. The Service will provide a paper on mixed movements and refugee protection for the civil society component of the second GFMD meeting, to be held in Manila in October 2008.

III. THE RETURN AND REINTEGRATION OF DISPLACED POPULATIONS

8. PDES has continued to work on the reformulation and articulation of UNHCR policy on the return and reintegration of displaced populations and in that context has been engaged in a number of meetings with the Executive Committee.

9. To ensure that the policymaking process is empirically well-founded, the Service has initiated a series of evaluations of UNHCR return and reintegration programmes, commencing with those in Angola and Southern Sudan. In association with the Division of Operational Support, PDES also convened an inter-agency workshop on the use of cash grants in voluntary repatriation programmes.

10. At the request of the Assistant High Commissioner (Protection), PDES prepared a paper on the policy issues and dilemmas arising in situations where voluntary repatriation is taking place to countries where “ethnic cleansing” or “ethnic engineering” has taken place.

IV. PROTECTION AND SOLUTIONS FOR PERSONS OF CONCERN TO UNHCR

11. PDES has managed an independent evaluation of UNHCR’s role in preventing and responding to sexual and gender-based violence in situations of human displacement. The evaluation has been guided by a Steering Committee that brings together a number of Executive Committee members, as well representatives of relevant United Nations agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and UNHCR sections.

12. At the request of the Executive Committee, the Service commissioned an independent evaluation of the use and impact of the Conclusions on International Protection. The findings and recommendations of that review were presented to Executive Committee members in June 2008. In addition, PDES has published an analysis of UNHCR’s role in the refugee protection regime, focusing on the means and methods that the Office can employ in encouraging States to respect the founding principles of that regime. Another PDES study examined the protection of forced migrants in Islamic law.

13. PDES has played a central role in the formulation of the High Commissioner’s Initiative on Protracted Refugee Situations, and in that context prepared a Standing Committee paper on the issue. The Service also completed a global inventory of local integration initiatives and, in association with the Regional Bureau for Africa, published a study on the potential of the ECOWAS Protocol on the Free Movement of Persons in facilitating the solution of local integration in West Africa. Working closely with the Regional Bureau for Asia, PDES also completed a strategic review of UNHCR’s role in the Afghan refugee situation.

14. The Service will be responsible for drafting the background paper to the second meeting of the High Commissioner’s Dialogue on Protection Challenges, which will focus on protracted situations of displacement, including those in urban areas. PDES has completed an initial study on IDPs in urban areas and is assisting the Division of Protection Services in the finalization of a new UNHCR policy on refugees in urban areas.

V. HUMANITARIAN AND UNITED NATIONS REFORM

15. PDES is acting as UNHCR's focal point in relation to the second phase of the inter-agency evaluation of the Cluster Approach led by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). At the request of the Assistant High Commissioner (Operations) the Service has also prepared a paper on the implications of the Cluster Approach for UNHCR's work in relation to refugee situations and mixed movements. In association with the Division of Operational Support, PDES has completed a stocktaking of UNHCR's engagement with the Delivering as One initiative, and is reviewing the role and experience of the Office in Integrated United Nations Missions.

VI. STRENGTHENING UNHCR'S POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND EVALUATION FUNCTION

16. PDES has continued to augment its capacity during the past year, through the addition of a Junior Professional Officer (JPO) post, the expansion of its consultancy budget and the establishment of an active internship programme. Members of the Service have benefited from external and specialized evaluation training, while PDES has provided introductory training in the purposes and methods of evaluation to approximately 20 mid and senior-level UNHCR staff members.

17. The Service has completed a review and reformulation of UNHCR's evaluation policy, drawing extensively on the Norms and Standards for Evaluation in the United Nations System, established by the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG). In view of the varied scope and nature of the evaluations undertaken and commissioned by PDES, the new policy does not include a standard response or follow-up mechanism. With the introduction of the new policy, the response and follow-up mechanism to be employed in relation to any evaluation will be specified in the terms of reference established for each review.

18. PDES has continued to represent UNHCR in relation to UNEG and ALNAP (Active Learning Network on Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action). The Service has also acted as UNHCR's focal point for a number of external or inter-agency evaluation initiatives: a United Nations Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) review on strengthening the role of evaluation and the application of evaluation findings to programme design, delivery and policy directives; an OIOS thematic evaluation of lessons-learned protocols and practices in the United Nations system; and a Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) evaluation of the UNHCR programme for internally displaced persons in Georgia.

19. Finally, PDES has contributed to the Oversight Committee's efforts to define and delineate the respective roles of evaluation, inspection and audit within the Office, and has also participated in ongoing discussions concerning UNHCR's programme review function.
