



UNITED NATIONS OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES (UNHCR)

BACKGROUND

Established in 1950 by the UN General Assembly, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is responsible for providing operational support and coordination to a wide range of private and public actors in order to safeguard the rights and well-being of refugees and displaced persons worldwide. UNHCR offers legal and humanitarian assistance as well as educational programmes to 32.9 million people.

ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE

The UN General Assembly elects members of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). Members of the UNHCR Executive Committee (ExCom) are selected by the ECOSOC from among UN members, and then appoint the UNHCR High Commissioner.

ACCOUNTABILITY SUMMARY

TRANSPARENCY

The UNHCR Archives *Access Policy* provides guidance and clearly identifies 'general' and 'specific' restrictions applied to materials held by the UNHCR Archives. However, these restrictions apply to the release of information that is at least 20 years old. No similar publicly available documentation guides transparency and disclosure policy for more recent materials. However, the *Community-based Approach in UNHCR Operations* document makes a general commitment to transparency in field operations. It requires informing people of concern and duty bearers about UNHCR's protection mandate, policies and capacities as well as being open about what the organisation is able to provide and its resource limitations.

The Director of External Relations and the Deputy High Commissioner are responsible for ensuring transparent practices within UNHCR. Based on publicly available information, UNHCR does not provide training to staff on what, when and how information should be made public. Both the *Access Policy* and the *Community-Based Approach in UNHCR Operations* are made available on the UNHCR website in English.

PARTICIPATION – EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

The UNHCR has a number of publicly available documents which guide and encourage the organisation's engagement with key stakeholders: the *UNHCR Code of Conduct and Explanatory Note*, the *UNHCR Tool for Participatory Assessment in Operations*, the *Community-based Approach in UNHCR Operations* manual, and the *Policy on Reinforcing a Community Development Approach*. This final document explicitly mandates the active participation of refugee communities in UNHCR's activities. UNHCR's *NGO Partnerships in Refugee Protection* sets guidelines for engagement with NGOs. NGOs can also apply for observer status with the Executive Committee, which allows them to attend both plenary sessions and meetings of the ExCom.

The Director of External Relations and Deputy High Commissioner have been identified as having responsibility for overseeing engagement with NGOs at the global level. The Coordinator of the NGO Liaison Unit oversees NGO engagement in governance issues. At the country level, this responsibility lies with the country and regional representatives. Training on stakeholder engagement techniques is common procedure in UNHCR's learning programme, from induction level up to the senior management. UNHCR also convenes annual consultations with NGOs, allowing them to raise issues, network, and exchange views with senior UNHCR staff.

PARTICIPATION – MEMBER CONTROL

The UN General Assembly votes to elect ECOSOC members. The ECOSOC then elects the Executive Committee of the UNHCR (ExCom) whose membership is to consist of representatives of 20 to 25 UN member states (in practice there are currently 76 members). Although established by ECOSOC, which elects its members on the basis of one member one vote, the Executive Committee functions as a subsidiary organ of the General Assembly to which it reports. No procedures are mentioned in the *ExCom Rules of Procedure* relating to specifically to the dismissal of individuals on the executive.

Headquarters: Geneva, Switzerland

Countries of operation: 110

Budget: US\$1.45 billion (2007)

Employees: 6,300 (2007)

Website: www.unhcr.org

Accountability Initiatives signed:

- Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide
- UN Declaration on Human Rights
- The SPHERE Project

2008 GLOBAL ACCOUNTABILITY REPORT RATINGS			
Dimension	Score	IGO Rank	2008 Rank
Transparency	29%	6	21
Participation: External Stakeholder Engagement	83%	2	5
Participation: Member Control	90%	2=	11=
Evaluation	83%	3	8=
Complaints & Response: Internal	93%	1=	1=
Complaints & Response: External	34%	5	11=
Overall	65%	5	11=

= denotes tied ranking
UNHCR did not engage with the research process

EVALUATION

Both UNHCR's *Evaluation Policy* and *How to manage evaluations: Seven Steps* set out principles and standards to staff on how evaluations should be executed and managed as well as how to engage with external stakeholders throughout the process. UNHCR commits to placing evaluation findings in the public domain and to their effective dissemination to key stakeholders within and outside the organisation through workshops, training materials, published articles and other presentations. UNHCR applies most good practice principles and seeks evaluations that provide an analysis of key refugee-related policy issues. However, UNHCR does not commit to evaluating performance in relation to its strategic plan or its key internal management and administrative policies.

The *Policy Development and Evaluation Service* has overall responsibility for the systematic examination of UNHCR's policies and for ensuring that the unit's findings are incorporated into UNHCR's planning, programming and policymaking processes. According to the *Evaluation Policy*, the ability of staff members to undertake and make effective use of evaluations, will be enhanced by means of training, the introduction of relevant evaluation tools and other capacity-building activities. The *Policies* are only available for download in English on the UNHCR website.

COMPLAINTS AND RESPONSE – INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL COMPLAINTS

Whilst UNHCR has no clear publicly available policy on how general complaints will be investigated, it has issued a formal *Whistleblower Policy*. However, because protection against retaliation only applies to people with direct contractual relations with UNHCR, this policy does not extend to most external stakeholders. Retaliation complaints are investigated via the UN Ethics Office, a body that is structurally independent of the UNHCR. The *UNHCR Code of Conduct* details procedures for reporting allegations of misconduct and non-compliance with the organisation policies, specifically stating that the document should be made known to UNHCR staff and to NGOs working with UNHCR. It commits to protecting confidentiality and the independence of those assessing, investigating and responding to complaints.

UNHCR's *Procedural Standards for Refugee Status Determination* sets standards for both internal and external complainants to report on misconduct by UNHCR staff and implementing partners, or procedural unfairness, including complaints regarding the quality, availability or conduct of interpreters and denial of access to UNHCR premises or staff. UNHCR does not commit to ensuring the independence of those assessing, investigating and responding to external complaints or to providing external parties with appeal mechanisms.

The Deputy Inspector General is the person to whom complaints related to the *Code of Conduct* procedure should be made; he is also responsible for providing training to staff involved in complaints handling, which involves delivering workshops to inspection staff. However, only members of the inspection unit and staff having agreed to take part in inspections on a case by case basis receive training. Regular *Code of Conduct* training, including refreshers, is mandatory for all staff, these trainings are carried out at all levels, and in local languages where necessary. Furthermore, UNHCR commits to post the complaints procedure, including relevant contact information, clearly outside each UNHCR Office.

ONGOING ACCOUNTABILITY REFORMS

AUNHCR intends to establish a Steering Committee for each major evaluation project in order to design the terms of reference for the project, select external evaluators, review preliminary findings and create a dissemination and utilisation strategy.

PERFORMANCE SNAPSHOT

The UNHCR scores consistently well across almost all dimensions of accountability capabilities, reflecting a focus on beneficiary participation, including their inclusion in evaluation and the existence of targeted complaints handling for asylum seekers. UNHCR's main weakness lies in its lack of a transparency policy covering recent information. As a result, UNHCR ties for 5th ranking within the IGO sector and is tied for 11th ranking overall.

