

Conclusion

140. Brief answers to each of the evaluation questions are provided below. The rationale for each of the conclusions is presented in the preceding Discussion and Recommendation section.

Has participation in the PLP had an impact on the staff members' knowledge, skills and attitudes?

141. The PLP has a definite impact on an individuals' knowledge of protection and the UNHCR mandate. PLP graduates are more knowledgeable about and confident in carrying out the UNHCR mandate. They tend to be less hesitant, ask broader and deeper questions and know where they can find the information they need to address a problem. Some have improved their analytical, research, communication and team-building skills, but the effects of the PLP on participants' skills and attitudes are less pronounced than its significant impact on knowledge. Note that the impact on individual graduates varied widely, as they entered the programme with different levels of education and experience. Some had law degrees and others did not. About 40% of the graduates had less than five years' experience with UNHCR, while 25% had been with the organization for 10 years or more. Despite these variances, when asked whether they would recommend the programme to a colleague, 100% of the 84 graduates who answered the question said 'yes'.

Has the PLP had an impact on the effective protection of refugees and other persons of concern to UNHCR?

142. Although a direct link between the completion of the PLP and the effect on the protection of refugees was not made during this study, PLP graduates, supervisors and peers indicated that PLP graduates were better informed about the UNHCR mandate and the issues affecting refugees than were non-participants. Supervisors and peers reported that the PLP nurtures enthusiasm and renews individuals' interest in their jobs and protection issues in general. Non-governmental organizations also recognised the benefits of having trained protection officers in the field. It can be inferred that if the individuals and the duty stations in which they work are affected by the outcomes of the PLP, the refugees benefit. However, the evaluation team suggests that the UNHCR must make additional efforts to actually measure the impact of its services on refugees. It is easy to measure how many refugees are fed and how many blankets are distributed, but it is more challenging to measure the quality and effectiveness of human services. The evaluation team made the attempt, but due to logistical difficulties, it was not able to carry out a direct impact assessment within the brief duration of the study.

Can the PLP be improved?

143. Overall, the contents of the different phases of the PLP are comprehensive and in general appropriate for participants. Nevertheless, the evaluation team proposes

that five scenarios be considered in order to make the PLP more effective. The scenarios describe how the PLP could be altered to best meet the needs of UNHCR and its staff. Scenario A presents the essential alterations that should be made to the programme. It requires the fewest resources to implement. Scenario B describes the division of the current PLP into an induction course and a protection course or programme. This scenario has the potential to address all of the concerns raised by PLP participants and graduates. Scenarios C and E are enhancements of Scenarios A and B. Note that the scenarios are arranged in order of the increasing amount of resources required to implement them.

Scenario A

144. The following changes should be made to improve the current version of the PLP:

- Provide individualised, timely feedback. This was the major concern raised by graduates, in-progress participants, non-completers and workshop attendees. It must be addressed. Currently, limited individualised feedback is provided. General feedback is provided to groups of learners, but there can be lengthy delays between when an item is submitted and the receipt of feedback. Additional resources must be added to the PLP team. If not, fewer participants should be admitted to the programme.
- Adjust the content in self-study units 1–4 to form two units and place several topics under a heading such as Persons of Concern.
- Reduce the number of assignments that must be reviewed by the PLP team or tutors. Perhaps only four assignments should be submitted, but participants should still be provided with numerous exercises that they can check themselves or with colleagues. These exercises should require different levels of effort on the part of the participants. Some should be appropriate for those with limited protection experience and others should be appropriate for those with extensive experience.
- Remove repetitious reading material in the self-study phase and include recent academic or non-UNHCR material on issues related to UNHCR's mandate. Participants should be exposed to different points of view, as they are likely to be involved with other agencies and organizations when they are at their duty stations.
- Provide simplified summaries of complex material in order to assist those who do not have a legal background and/or whose first language is not English.
- Allow participants to submit their assignments online. All duty stations do not have this capability, but more than half do and the numbers are increasing each year. Electronic forms of the assignment sheets can easily be provided. The Track Change feature in Microsoft Word can be used to make comments on the participants' submissions. This will not require the level of connectivity that is required for e-learning.

CONCLUSION

- Include an assessment component comprising the self-study exercises (each submitted assignment would be graded), the successful completion of the Phase 3 field project and assessment reports by a supervisor and one peer 6 months after the completion of the three phases. If individuals have extensive experience and want credit without enrolling in the programme, they must pass a comprehensive challenge examination comprising written and oral components.
- Increase the time allocation for completing the self-study modules from six months to eight months. (Note that this change would only be necessary if the suggested content changes are not made and individualised, timely feedback is not provided.)
- Increase the length of the workshop by one day to allow additional time for participants to discuss and develop protection strategies and seek feedback and advice regarding their Phase 3 field projects. Considering the effort and resources that are required to mount the workshop and cover the travel expenses for the participants, the cost of extending the workshop by one day is negligible. This extra day will be extremely useful for the participants.
- Provide additional guidance and support while participants work on their Phase 3 projects. Supervisors should assume a more active role during this phase. It cannot be overemphasized that supervisors have the responsibility to nurture and support staff in their learning. Further, those staff who are well-trained require less support in the field than those who have limited knowledge and skills.
- Implement an online listserv or refresher course or workshop that will keep PLP graduates informed about relevant changes in UNHCR policies and outline new protection techniques. It should include best practices from around the globe. A community of practice could be established to support graduates and encourage the sharing of ideas and practical tips.
- Engage a PLP committee to review the PLP content and participant feedback on an annual basis. This committee should have representation from the Protection Capacity Section of the Department of International Protection and UNHCR units such as those involved in legal matters, programme and resettlement.

Scenario B

145. The PLP could be divided into an induction and a protection course.

- The induction would be available online and in a compact-disc format. This induction programme could be part of the planned 'Welcome to the UN' compact disc, but it would be preferable to make it a separate disc. It would focus on UNHCR and emphasize its activities and the protection of refugees and other persons of concern. It would be mandatory for all UNHCR staff. In addition to the basic induction, if there are adequate resources and where there are sufficient numbers, consideration should be given to holding a one-day induction workshop to allow for experience

sharing, team building, updates on current and future UNHCR initiatives and the opportunity to meet UNHCR leaders.

- The protection course would be mandatory for protection, programme, resettlement and field officers, as well as public information staff. It would be optional for everyone else. It would be based on the current PLP programme, but more advanced activities would be added.
- The management of protection could be offered as a short module within the Thematic Protection Learning Programme.

Refer also to the comments associated with the next question, which asks whether the PLP should be mandatory.

Scenario C

146. The PLP should be available in two additional languages, French and Spanish. This could be considered as complementary to Scenario A or B above. However, it may be feasible to offer only the workshop in additional languages. The United Nations conducts its business in seven languages, yet the PLP is restricted to one. Language should not be a barrier to learning in international organizations.

Scenario D

147. The PLP could be converted into a format similar to that of the Management Learning Programme (MLP), in which the content and activities are modularised. This format would offer flexibility and provide opportunities for staff to specialise. Note that the MLP was previously known as the Middle-Management Learning Programme (MMLP).

Scenario E

148. An e-learning version of the PLP could be developed that makes the best use of telecommunications technologies and the interactive and just-in-time learning capabilities of the Internet. The e-learning version would be based on the content in Scenarios A or B above.

149. Although some may be hesitant in implementing e-learning, a form of distance education, it should be noted that 'there is no significant difference in the achievement of students in well-designed distance learning programs and the achievement of those in traditional face-to-face programs, based on standard performance measures'^{27 28}. As reported by Chute, Thompson and Hancock (1999), below are 10 benefits that organizations have achieved with distance education or e-learning. Note that many are congruent with UNHCR training needs.

²⁷ A. G. Chute, M. M. Thompson and B. W. Hancock. (1999). *The McGraw-Hill Handbook of Distance Learning*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill. p. 15.

²⁸ T. L. Russel. (1999). *The No Significant Difference Phenomenon*. Chapel Hill, NC: Office of Instructional Telecommunications, North Carolina University.
<http://cuda.teleeducation.nb.ca/nosignificantdifference/>

CONCLUSION

1. Distance learning increases the impact and productivity of dollars invested in training and education programs.
2. Distance learning reduces travel costs and makes time formerly spent travelling available for more productive purposes.
3. Distance learning allows the training of more people, more often, in short learning sessions that are easier to schedule and coordinate.
4. Distance learning is scaleable; it offers the ability to add students and instructors as needed without incurring significant additional expenses.
5. Distance learning programmes deliver a consistent message that can quickly be disseminated company-wide to ensure the consistency and quality of the work performed by employees or students.
6. Distance learning provides for real-time updates and just-in-time information access.
7. Distance learning programs can be delivered to work or home sites that are convenient for students.
8. Distance learning offers live interactive programs that can be delivered to multiple networked sites for group learning and collaborative problem solving.
9. Distance learning programs are learner-centered, affording students more control of the pacing, sequencing, and style of interaction of the learning experience.
10. Distance learning offers easy access to learning resources and remote experts [who are] internal and external to the organization.²⁹

150. However, e-learning may limit access to UNHCR personnel, as all duty stations do not have the necessary telecommunications connectivity. When they do, the quality of the transmission may be unreliable and/or poor. This concern is not an issue if the e-learning course is a glorified page-turner, but good online courses are highly interactive and make full use of the graphic and media capabilities of the Internet. An e-learning version of the PLP could be developed at this time, but it is unlikely to be accessible to those who need it most – those staff assigned to deep duty stations and it will require the expenditure of a significant amount of resources.

151. If the UNHCR wants to pursue an investigation of the applicability of e-learning to the PLP, it may be helpful to review literature available from the sources below.

- American Society for Training and Development, www.astd.org
- Association for the Advancement of Computers in Education, www.aace.org
- The Journal of Asynchronous Learning Networks,
- <http://www.sloan-c.org/publications/jaln/index.asp>
- Cause/Effect and Educom Review, <http://www.educause.edu/>
- Commonwealth of Learning, www.col.org
- Distance Education and Training Council, www.detc.org

²⁹ A. G. Chute, M. M. Thompson and B. W. Hancock. (1999). *The McGraw-Hill Handbook of Distance Learning*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill. p. 5-6.

- E-Learning Europa, <http://www.elearningeuropa.info/>
- European Distance Education Network, www.eden-online.org
- International Council for Open and Distance Education, www.icde.org
- United States Distance Learning Association, www.usdla.org
- Teaching on the Net, www.teachingonthenet.org
- The Web of Asynchronous Learning Networks, www.aln.org
- The World Bank Distance EducationNet,
<http://wbweb4.worldbank.org/DistEd/Teaching/design.html>

Should the PLP be mandatory for UNHCR staff?

152. In its present form, the PLP should not be mandatory. If it is revised as recommended in this report and learner support issues are addressed, consideration should be given to requiring protection staff to take the programme. The evaluation team recommends that the current programme be split into two as outlined below. Each course or programme would have its own mandatory requirements.

An induction course

153. This course would provide an overview of UNHCR's mandate and activities, as well as introduce the audience to the basics of protection. It would be available online and in a compact disc format. It would be mandatory for all UNHCR staff. If there are adequate resources and where there are sufficient numbers, consideration should be given to holding a one-day induction workshop to allow for experience sharing, team building, updates on current and future UNHCR initiatives and opportunities to meet UNHCR leaders.

A protection course or programme

154. This would be based on the current PLP. In addition to the changes recommended in this report, this new course would include advanced material on protection, as many who are likely to take it will have a legal background and/or extensive experience. The course would be mandatory for protection, programme, resettlement and field officers, as well as public information staff. If the individuals assigned to a protection post have not completed the PLP, they should be required to do so within the first three years of their assignment. If the staff believe that they already have the knowledge and skills that the course offers, they should be able to take a rigorous challenge examination. The exam should contain written and oral components so that individuals can demonstrate skills such as effective consultation with refugees and other persons of concern to UNHCR. If they pass the exam, they would not be required to take the course.

155. Regardless of the format taken by the PLP or any learning programme within UNHCR, learning must be perceived as being mandatory. Everyone should be encouraged to improve themselves continuously. Learning should not be seen as something that interferes with daily work, rather it should be considered as a vital element of the organization. It must be fully supported by supervisors and other decision makers. Once staff perceive that the organization is implementing existing

learning guidelines fairly and that the completion of learning programmes are seriously considered in any career advancement proceedings, learning will become mandatory.

Can the PLP be used or modified to support the protection interests and roles of key UNHCR stakeholders?

156. Yes, the PLP can be used to meet the training interests of key UNHCR stakeholders. However, it is currently very UNHCR-oriented. If it were to be used for stakeholders, additional resources would have to be added to the self-study and workshop components, including a glossary of UNHCR terms, an explanation of UNHCR approaches and readings that present diverse points of view regarding protection. Further, it must be recognised that discussions among UNHCR personnel may be inhibited if externals are present at the workshop. Despite the benefits of cross-fertilisation that would be derived from having a mixed audience, given the high demand for the PLP within UNHCR, the Protection Capacity Section should focus on targeting UNHCR staff rather than expanding the programme to an external audience.

Additional comments

157. The UNHCR, particularly the Protection Capacity Section, should be commended for its efforts to improve the quality of training that it provides its staff. However, some changes **must** be made to the PLP so that it can better serve UNHCR staff and ultimately enable them to provide better services to refugees. Also, the programme must reflect best practices in distance learning. Considering the mandate and size of the organization, it is essential that additional resources be provided to the Protection Capacity Section so it can ensure that those who directly serve refugees have the knowledge and skills they need. Adequate learning programmes are essential to maintain and refresh the knowledge and skills of UNHCR staff.

158. It is imperative that UNHCR improve its coordination of learning programmes in order to remove any overlaps in content and delivery and inform its constituents about all the learning opportunities offered by the organization and how they are linked.

159. Supervisors must recognise the importance of training themselves and having trained and qualified staff. They must be willing to support their colleagues in their training efforts and actively participate in the role of coach or mentor. Once staff have successfully completed UNHCR or other training, this should be taken into account when career appointments are made or posts are assigned. It is an irony in the humanitarian world that the most challenging places need the best people. The organization must not shy away from its responsibility to ensure that its staff are well-trained and able to do their jobs effectively. Refugees count on qualified personnel to provide guidance and make decisions that significantly affect their lives. We must always keep in mind the trust that refugees have in UNHCR personnel.