EVALUATION OFFICE | EVO/2025/06

Independent Evaluation of Data Systems in MENA: Multi-country evaluation of phone-based contact centres

MAIN REPORT | July 2025

Conducted by IOD Parc

UNHCR Evaluation Office

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Evaluation information at a glance	
Title of the evaluation:	Data Systems in MENA: Multi-country evaluation of phone-based contact centres
Timeframe covered:	2021-24
Completion year:	2025
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Country:	Egypt, Jordan, Iraq, Libya, Mauritania, and Tunisia
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ACRONYMS AND ABREVIATIONS

AAP	Accountability to Affected People
AGD	Age, Gender and Diversity
API	Application Programming Interface
CBI	Cash-based Intervention
CBP	Community-based Protection
CBP-IMS	Community-based Protection Information Management Systems
CDAC	Communication with Disaster-affected Communities
CERF	Central Emergency Response Fund
CFM	Communication and Feedback Mechanism (usually replaced now by FCRM)
CO	Country Operation
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
CRM	Customer Relationship Management
CSO	Civil Society Organization
CWC	Communication with Communities
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DAG	Data Analysis Group
D-Country	Country for In-depth Evaluation Analysis
DER	Division of External Relations
DIMA	Data Information Management and Analysis
DIP	Division for International Protection
EQ	Evaluation Question
ERG	Evaluation Reference Group
ET	Evaluation Team
EvO	Evaluation Office
FAQ	Frequently Asked Question
FCRM	Feedback, Complains and Response Mechanism
FDSP	Forcibly Displaced and Stateless People
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FO	Field Officer
GBV	Gender-based Violence
GDPR	Global Data Protection Regulations
GDS	Global Data Service
HQ	Headquarters
HR	Human Rights
IASC	Inter-agency Standing Committee
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
ID	Identification
IDP	Internally Displaced Person(s)
IIC	Iraq Information Centre
IM	Information Management
IVR	Interactive Voice Response
KII	Key Informant Interview
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
L-Country	Country for Light Touch Evaluation Analysis
LGBTIQ+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and Queer plus
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
OA	Outcome Area
ODM	Operational Data Manager

OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PBCC	Phone-based Contact Centre
ProgGres	Profile Global Registration System
PSEA	Protection against Sexual Exploitation and Abuse
QA	Quality Assurance
RAIS	Refugee Assistance Information System
RB	Regional Bureau
RKBP	Refugee Knowledge Base Platform
RLO	Refugee-led Organizations
SIM	Subscriber Identity Module
SMS	Short Messaging Service
SoPs	Standard Operating Procedures
ToR	Terms of Reference
UNEG	United Nations Evaluation Group
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNHCR	United Nations High Commission for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Agency for Children
UNOPS	United Nations Operations
WFP	World Food Programme

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

1. The multi-country evaluation of phone-based contact centres (PBCCs) was commissioned by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Regional Bureau (RB), managed by the Evaluation Office (EvO) and undertaken by IOD PARC. It considered the relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, coherence, and strategic positioning of UNHCR's approach and utilization of PBCCs. The purpose of the evaluation was to identify lessons and good practices to inform the development and strategic positioning of PBCCs as part of UNHCR's approaches to Accountability to Affected People (AAP).

2. The scope of the evaluation spanned 2021-24. Data was drawn from six country studies in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Iraq, Libya, Mauritania, and Tunisia, and from a range of regional and global interviews. A total of 230 participants, including 102 forcibly displaced and stateless people (FDSP) were involved in the evaluation as key informants. Refugee engagement was a priority for the evaluation methodology and included debriefing sessions to validate emerging findings, engagement in the co-production of recommendations, as well as in focus group discussions (FGDs) and interviews. The report presents 21 key findings, 5 conclusions and 8 recommendations.

Context

3. The country operations (COs) considered in the evaluation have quite distinct and dynamic contexts. Four of the COs were primarily serving refugees and asylum seekers, with Iraq and Libya being characterized by a significant Internally Displaced Person (IDP) population. Of the six countries studied, only Jordan had a relatively stable population served by UNHCR for the time period 2021-24. Iraq experienced a decrease in the number of IDPs. Other countries saw increased numbers with new arrivals of FDSP due to escalation of conflict in Sudan and Mali, as well as changes in the settlement patterns of FDSP within countries as people moved between locations.

4. The PBCC models across the six countries were similarly diverse, as they evolved in response to learning and developments in both the country contexts and available technology options. PBCC comprise call centres, hotlines and helplines and are an important tool for UNHCR Accountability to Affected People (AAP) with potential to facilitate communication and transparency. The subject of calls varies by context but often relates to requests for registration, protection and cash services.

5. Some of the key features distinguishing the PBCCs across the six countries include the following organizational factors:

a) Whether UNHCR runs a system in-house (e.g., Jordan) or contracted it out to another organization, such as a non-governmental organization (NGO) (e.g., in Libya).

b) Whether UNHCR runs one central PBCC (e.g., Jordan) or also supported additional hotlines often run by implementing partners, sometimes offering specialist services,

such as relating to cash-based initiatives (CBIs), health, or legal services (e.g., in Egypt and Mauritania).

c) Whether a system is interagency and what that means , i.e., whether it was (i) the entry point for UNHCR and only its implementing partners (e.g. Egypt) or (ii) a collective service for other UN organizations accessible to the full range of people they served, (e.g., the Iraq Information Centre up until 2022).

d) Whether the system is centralized i.e. located in/managed as one centralized service center (e.g., Egypt and Jordan) or decentralized systems, with different systems in specific geographic areas, such as in Iraq since 2022 and Mauritania up until 2024. Decentralized systems can be run by UNHCR, a partner, or both.

Findings

Relevance

6. PBCC have generally been accessible to most people served by UNHCR providing an inclusive channel for FDSP to access UNHCR though there is some preference for communication through social media from younger populations and for face-to-face contact for older people and those with special needs. At times of high demand or limited capacity gaining access to a line or operator has been extremely difficult with callers choosing to pay for third parties' help or using bots to get through to the PBCC. Technology options such as the use of interactive voice response (IVR) both enhanced access to PBCCs and presented some challenges, with some people adapting to its use and some facing difficulties inputting data. Government restrictions on phone or SIM card purchase restricts PBCC access in some contexts.

7. COs had systems to maintain information bases through knowledge platforms and frequently-asked-question (FAQ) resources with liaison across CO and engagement with FDSP key enablers to ensure its relevance. However, these can take time to adapt in times of change and smaller operations tended to have less systematic knowledge bases. In some countries, notably in the more centralized systems, callers found the localized information less adequate for their purposes.

Efficiency

8. UNHCR has been making clear efforts to support the efficiency of PBCC set-ups and processes across the various models. UNHCR COs are drawing on learning from the RB and other COs in the design and management of their PBCCs. Ongoing learning enabled processes to be continually improved.

9. UNHCR's PBCCs tended to be operating at full capacity. Some struggle to meet the demand for the many roles they are asked to fulfil as a channel for all four AAP actions (information, feedback, communication and transparency and program learning and adaptation) as well as being an entry point in some contexts for registration and other services. The processes for receiving calls, handling data and requests, and making referrals were usually efficient. Processes for referrals and data handling were found to be less efficient in the COs using hotlines and helplines rather than call centres.

10. UNHCR makes gooduse of technologies and systems to streamline and automate workflows to reduce the burden on call operators and to process as many calls as possible. The Refugee Assistance Information System (RAIS) is a tool that is consistently used and is a key driver of efficiency.1 However, improving process efficiency for UNHCR sometimes comes at the expense of efficiency and satisfaction for the FDSP callers. For example, while IVR makes it more efficient for UNHCR to process calls, callers expressed a preference for engaging directly with a call agent (PBCC operator).

11. UNHCR's management of cost-efficiency is impeded by data limitations such as regular gaps in analysis of indirect costs and costs of additional hotlines set up for specific programmes (e.g., CBIs and health or legal services). This also limited the evaluation team's ability to compare the cost efficiency of different models. Other data limitations also contributed to this, such as the limited data on the number of people unable to access the PBCCs and limitations in the quality of data on FDSP users' gender and other characteristics.

Effectiveness

12. PBCC are asked to fulfil a wide range of roles. The primary objectives of PBCCs in specific contexts and times were rarely explicitly defined, making it difficult to assess their effectiveness. PBCCs play a clear role during emergency response when there are rapidly increasing FDSP populations. PBCCs enable access to registration and other services though developments in other communication channels, including UNHCR's Digital Gateway, may change this. While FDSP are appreciative of PBCC services and quality particularly being able to talk with an operator when they gain access, most COs at the functional unit struggle to respond to the scale of referrals they receive from the PBCC. This is especially the case when FDSP populations are large and units' resources are limited. In these instances, PBCCs are not effective in closing feedback loops. There is limited communication back to FDSP on their actions due capacity constraints meaning that FDSP are not easily able to find out progress on their query. The key factors influencing FDSP satisfaction levels with PBCC is waiting time, quality of operators interaction, relevance of information PBCC provides and speed of follow-up to their queries.

13. Appropriate internal information management systems for PBCCs were found to be in place and being used in most countries. They are critical in securely centralizing personal and case information in one place and in ensuring that these can be accessed in a smooth and efficient manner. In operations where data is not stored on proper information systems there were found to be some challenges to data security, such as risks of identity fraud, unauthorized access, or data breaches and these tended to be more apparent on hotlines and helplines than fully-fledged call centres. There are mixed views on the best approach to identity verification with data security measures impeding some people's access to the PBCC.

14. PBCC data are used to analyse patterns and trends in queries and their relation to the scale and location of UNHCR services. However, there is limited evidence that UNHCR combines this data with feedback from other communication channels to assess and improve program or service quality. This integration could address broader questions

[1] The Refugee Assistance Information System (RAIS) is a custom-built web application, developed in-house by RB MENA. It allows UNHCR and partner staff to record activities and coordinate assistance, allowing staff and partners to be better equipped to respond to needs and engage in case management across a) large and diverse populations and b) diverse information and communication channels.

beyond just the PBCC, encompassing all AAP data. Feedback on the PBCC itself. has been received and acted upon

15. CO monitoring of effectiveness is limited with most COs focused on volume of calls handled and individual operator performance rather than the PBCC outcomes. There is less attention to indicators such the responsiveness of PBCCs, action following referral and their contribution to protection outcomes. The evaluation found limited evidence that PBCCs are being monitored to improve their role in two-way communication and their role in building trust despite trust in the PBCC being found to impact on levels of trust in UNHCR. Some COs are working to establish systems to track more closely CO actions responding to caller queries and these show potential.

Coherence

16. UNHCR staff's awareness of the strengths and limitations of the PBCC in their country context and for some specific groups has enabled PBCCs to be appropriately used as part of the wider communication and transparency ecosystem. However the priority role of the PBCC vis-à-vis other AAP methods was rarely made explicit. The challenges that FDSP faced to reach PBCC operators suggests greater prioritisation or resourcing is needed.

17. The evaluation found strong links between PBCC and COs functional units and partners regarding information and training. However, there was found to be less systematic connectedness regarding partners' own hotlines, even when supported by UNHCR. When there was significant investment in interagency coordination for AAP, there were evident benefits for the coherence of UNHCR's PBCC at the sectoral level.

Strategic Positioning

18. While there are clear lessons being learned from UNHCR's experiences across countries and models, they do not translate automatically into a blueprint for any particular context given the range and dynamism of the variables relevant to UNHCR CO decisions. Data gaps in cost-effectiveness of different models including inter-agency models also challenge decision-making to optimize resources.

19. Horizon scanning helped UNHCR to anticipate some implications of changes in context and technology. Senior management support was found to be essential to galvanize the necessary cross-CO resources and inputs to ensure PBCCs' effectiveness in changing context e.g. new population movements. However, PBCCs adaptation to evolving contexts or technology changes have tended to be time consuming and impeded by slow decision-making particularly when there are resource allocation implications. Managing changes has been more effective when iterative processes involve both users and UNHCR multi-functional teams from across the CO.

Conclusions

20. PBCCs form a relevant and important part of the AAP eco-system enabling inclusive FDSP access to UNHCR including for information and access to services. An up-to-date knowledge base including localised information has proven vital and is aided by engagement with FDSP including specialised groups working with people with specific needs and vulnerabilities as well as supported by input from across the UNHCR CO and good inter-agency cooperation.

21. PBCC play a crucial role in enabling FDSP communication with UNHCR. Nonetheless many systems are under considerable pressure particularly when FDSP populations are rising and there is high demand for certain services notably for registration appointments. Efficiency improvements have been enabled through good use of technology and continual learning. Developments in technology, notably UNHCR's Digital Gateway, have implications for the future roles of PBCC and may help relieve some pressure on PBCC allowing it to focus on areas where two-way communication is best deployed. However, managing adaptation to changing contexts though aided by horizon scanning and scenario planning has proven difficult with limited measures in place to enable rapid scale up or down.

22. Data gathered through PBCC has been used mainly to track macro-level trends in volume of calls handled, referral rates and used to refer individual queries to relevant functions rather than also being collated and analysed for program learning and adaptation. Even in relation to individual callers, management data usually track referral rates much better than action taken in response to the callers' queries making management, and evaluation of PBCC's effectiveness in terms of its contribution to the four AAP actions and protection outcomes difficult. Evolving monitoring methods in some COs shows potential.

23. Satisfaction with PBCC has been limited by long waiting times, limited communication with FDSP to close feedback loops and CO limited capacity to cope with the large volume of FDSP queries raised particularly in times of change. This suggests the need for more focused prioritisation of the role of PBCC in specific contexts.

24. However, FDSP positive assessment of a) operator quality, itself supported by good training and support for the operators b) the provision of interpreters and c) the importance of a direct channel for access to relevant information and services such as registration appointments and protection and program advice demonstrates their value as a channel for two-way communication with FDSP. PBCC are demonstrating a clear role in communication and transparency.

25. Management of PBCC has been rigorous on some levels e.g. monitoring operator quality and call handling volume and length but limited by data gaps particularly relating to costs and effectiveness. A limitation has been that monitoring and management has been skewed towards efficiency rather than linked with effectiveness indicators such as quality of user experience and PBCC's contribution to AAP and protection outcomes.

26. As all agencies face funding pressures and technological opportunities, interagency cooperation on broader AAP will shape UNHCR's approach to collective PBCC engagement in different contexts. External trends highlight the need for UNHCR to position itself as a reliable and visible interagency actor, particularly through data sharing and collaboration.

27. While there are clear lessons from each model of PBCC, there is no blue-print for PBCC across context types, all models need some tailoring at country level. Key factors to influence choice and adaptation of PBCC models including trends in populations served by UNHCR, extent to which UNHCR wants to use the PBCC to build a direct relationship with FDSP e.g. in difficult to access contexts, . technology available, quality of inter-agency cooperation and other communication channels available and their relative roles, costs and accessibility.

Recommendations

28. **Recommendation 1. Strategic aims and priorities:** Make explicit the aim(s) of the PBCC in each specific country context in terms of its strategic objectives, priority services and functions, and review this annually as well for emergency responses involving a multi-functional team.

29. **Recommendation 2. Preparedness for change:** Build into the design and development of each PBCC preparedness for changes in context, technology and levels of demand for PBCC services.

30. **Recommendation 3. Ensuring the accessibility and relevance of PBCC information and services:** Invest in more participation of FDSP in the design stage of PBCCs to identify community priorities, barriers to access and measures to overcome them, as well as to ensure the relevance of PBCC information and services.

31. **Recommendation 4. Tailoring standards for efficiency**: Building on global level guidance, adapt and implement an approach and standards across the region for efficiency that drive the PBCC's strategic purpose, whilst upholding UNHCR's mandate and a high-quality service for FDSP service users. Ensure that efficiency standards and approaches are tailored to the PBCC's role and strategic purpose within a specific context.

32. **Recommendation 5. Management of PBCC for cost-effectiveness:** Enhance the management of PBCC through a focus on cost-effectiveness that combines holistic analysis of costs and efficiency together with analysis of PBCC effectiveness in terms of outcomes including user satisfaction; referral rates, accuracy and action; effectiveness of feedback loop; and PBCC's contribution to protection outcomes.

33. **Recommendation 6. Use of data for program learning and adaptation**: Enhance the use of PBCC data for learning and program adaptation by undertaking more in-depth analyses and its integration with other feedback data.

34. **Recommendation 7. Positioning and interagency cooperation:** Position UNHCR in each country and locally as a visible and active interagency actor in relation to PBCCs e.g. by sharing data and analysis, co-leading AAP/Communicating with Communities (CWC) working groups.

35. **Recommendation 8. Sharing lessons and promoting learning globally**: Feed key findings, lessons and good practices from this regional evaluation into global tools, guidance and positioning, as appropriate.

1 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1. This multi-country evaluation of phone-based contact centres (PBCCs), which was commissioned by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Regional Bureau (RB) and funded by the UNHCR's Evaluation Office, was undertaken by IOD PARC. It considered the relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, coherence, and strategic positioning of UNHCR's approach and utilization of PBCCs. [2] . PBCC comprise phone- centres, hotlines and helplines and are an important tool for UNHCR Accountability to Affected People (AAP) with potential to facilitate communication and transparency.

2. The intended users of the evaluation are key UNHCR stakeholders, such as the MENA Country Operation (CO) teams and the RB MENA team, including members of the CO and RB senior executive team. At the global level, the key stakeholders include the UNHCR Division for International Protection (DIP) and the Global Data Service (GDS). The Digital Service team, which is in the Division of External Relations (DER), and the Innovation Service may also benefit from this study. Other parts of UNHCR are also relevant, particularly the Program and Assistance departments at CO and RB levels. Moreover, other relevant stakeholders include UNHCR's strategic and implementing partners at the country level; partners in Accountability to Affected People (AAP) – e.g., those who are part of the Interagency Standing Committee (IASC) and the interagency groups on AAP and communication with disaster-affected communities (CDAC) – and related interagency structures at the country level.

3. The evaluation is timely, given it comes as the MENA RB is rolling out its AAP toolkit[3] and as UNHCR is developing its guidance on the establishment of call centres and contact centres at a global level; a Global Contact Centre solution is currently being developed by HQ as part of the Digital Gateway project.[4] UNHCR is also developing an AAP Focus Area Strategy. It also coincided with the launch of the interagency standards for collective feedback mechanisms with which UNHCR has been closely involved.[5]

[2] The priorities for the evaluation were set by UNHCR following an internal consultation process for the terms of reference and confirmed during the inception phase.

[3] UNHCR, 2024, MENA Accountability to Affected People Toolkit: Strengthening the inclusion and accountability to affected people

[4] UNHCR, Guidance note to establish call centres and contact centres, Draft V3. Unpublished.; UNHCR, 2025, Digital Gateway, available at: https://www.unhcr.org/digitalstrategy/the-digital-gateway/

[5] IASC, 2025. IASC Standards for Collective Feedback Mechanisms

2 PURPOSE, SCOPE AND METHOD OF THE EVALUATION

2.1. Purpose and scope

4. The purpose of the evaluation was to identify lessons and good practices to inform updates and improvements in the strategic positioning, approach, practice, guidance, and tools with regards to PBCC as part of AAP.

5. The specific objectives of the evaluation were to assess PBCCs' performance in Egypt, Jordan, Iraq, Libya, Mauritania and Tunisia over the years 2021-24 and to learn lessons for CO, RB and HQ use in the future. This includes the following:

- Providing an assessment of the relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, coherence, approach, and use of the PBCCs in RB MENA.
- Identifying evidence of PBCCs' contribution to or limitations in the four actions comprising the UNHCR AAP framework: 1) participation and inclusion 2) communication and transparency, 3) feedback and response, and 4) organizational learning and adaptation.
- Considering the extent to which UNHCR's own capacity, structures, and processes are aligned and fit for purpose to run the centres; and
- Distilling lessons and formulating recommendations, particularly relating to the strategic positioning of UNHCR in relation to PBCCs, as well as optimizing their relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, and coherence in different contexts.

6. The scope of the evaluation spans 2021-24. It focuses on the experience of six countries from across the MENA region.[6] It included a consideration of the PBCC as part of the broader AAP approach, but did not delve into other AAP mechanisms. It focused on the intended users of the PBCCs: forcibly displaced and stateless people (FDSP).

2.2. Methodology

2.2.1. Evaluation approach, key methods and stakeholders

7. This evaluation is learning and user-focused. It is primarily formative, with an aim to identify lessons to support UNHCR's future use, approach and positioning in relation to PBCC. The evaluation is organised around the five evaluation questions which are below.

- **EQ1. Relevance.** How relevant are the information and services provided by the call centres, hotline/helplines to the users' information and service needs (including users with specific needs and diverse profiles)?

- **EQ2. Efficiency:** To what extent are the call centres, hotline/helplines operated efficiently?

[6] The evaluation's sample of countries originally included Lebanon as a 7th country. However, Lebanon was removed from the selection due to the escalation of violence and insecurity erupted in September 2024 and subsequent emergency response.

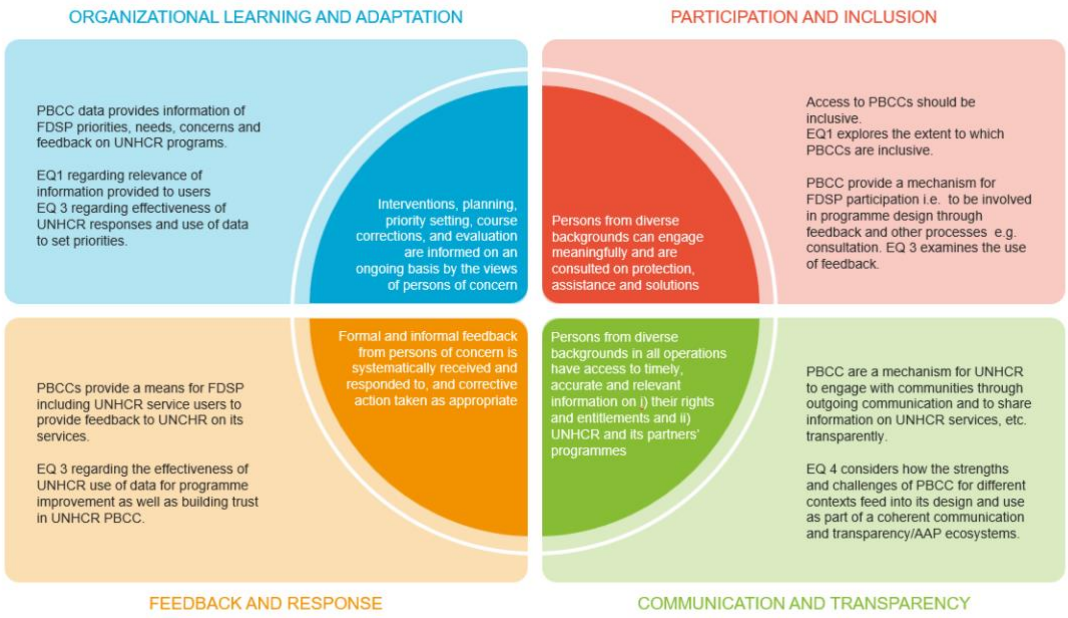
- **EQ3. Effectiveness:** How effective are call centres, hotlines/helplines in strengthening two-way communication and transparency, in building relationships and trust with users?

- **EQ4. Coherence** - To what extent do call centres, hotlines/helplines operate coherently and in a coordinated manner along the four interconnected AAP core actions?

- **EQ5. Strategic Positioning** – What are the implications for UNHCR MENA's operations and strategic positioning in relation to PBCC at regional and country levels including in relation to inter-agency centres?

8. The UNHCR AAP framework informed the evaluation approach. Figure 1 below shows the linkage between the evaluation questions and the AAP framework, along with some of the areas explored as potential connections between PBCCs and the dimensions of the framework. The evaluation data collection and analysis was guided by an evaluation matrix, which was developed with UNHCR during the inception phase. This lays out the more detailed sub-questions and criteria for assessment (Annex 4).

Figure 1: PBCC in AAP and linkage to evaluation questions (evaluation team's adaptation based on UNHCR AAP framework)



Source: Based on UNHCR's AAP framework[7]

9. The evaluation approach sought to be participatory and inclusive, ensured through methodologies that engaged a wide range of stakeholders from within and outside UNHCR, including implementing and strategic partners. CO debriefings were conducted in each of the six countries covered by the evaluation. Additionally, a series of multi-country meetings were held to share emerging findings and collaboratively develop recommendations. These meetings engaged staff from the six UNHCR COs, as well as colleagues at regional and global levels.

10. The evaluation employed a mixed-methods and multi-country approach, including an analysis of available secondary user and financial data to explore efficiency and effectiveness.

[7] UNHCR (2020) Operational Guidance on Accountability to Affected People (AAP)

Qualitative primary data was gathered through key informant interviews (KIIs) and focus group discussions (FGDs) with stakeholders at various levels (See Figure 2 below for details).

11. The evaluation placed a strong emphasis on refugee engagement. In addition to data collection with FDSP, interviews were conducted through various channels across all evaluation countries, including discussions with representatives of RLOs, community members, and UNHCR community volunteers (see Figure 3 below for further details).

12. The evaluation team (ET) held two debriefing sessions with refugees to share emerging findings, conducted online validation discussions with FDSP in Egypt and Jordan, and held an online meeting to co-produce recommendations with refugee participation from multiple countries. Additionally, UNHCR will further involve refugees in communicating the final evaluation findings, which will be made available in multiple languages and accessible formats to RDSP. This engagement has been well-received by refugees, providing valuable insights for the evaluation and demonstrating the application of AAP principles

13. The evaluation country studies were divided into two types: In-depth (D) country studies (Egypt and Jordan) involved in-country data collection by the evaluation team over 5-6 days with a wide range of stakeholders involved including refugees. Light-touch (L) country studies (Iraq, Libya, Mauritania, and Tunisia) were undertaken remotely with a smaller sample of stakeholders. These studies represented different contexts, phases of UNHCR operation, populations of interest, and PBCC models.

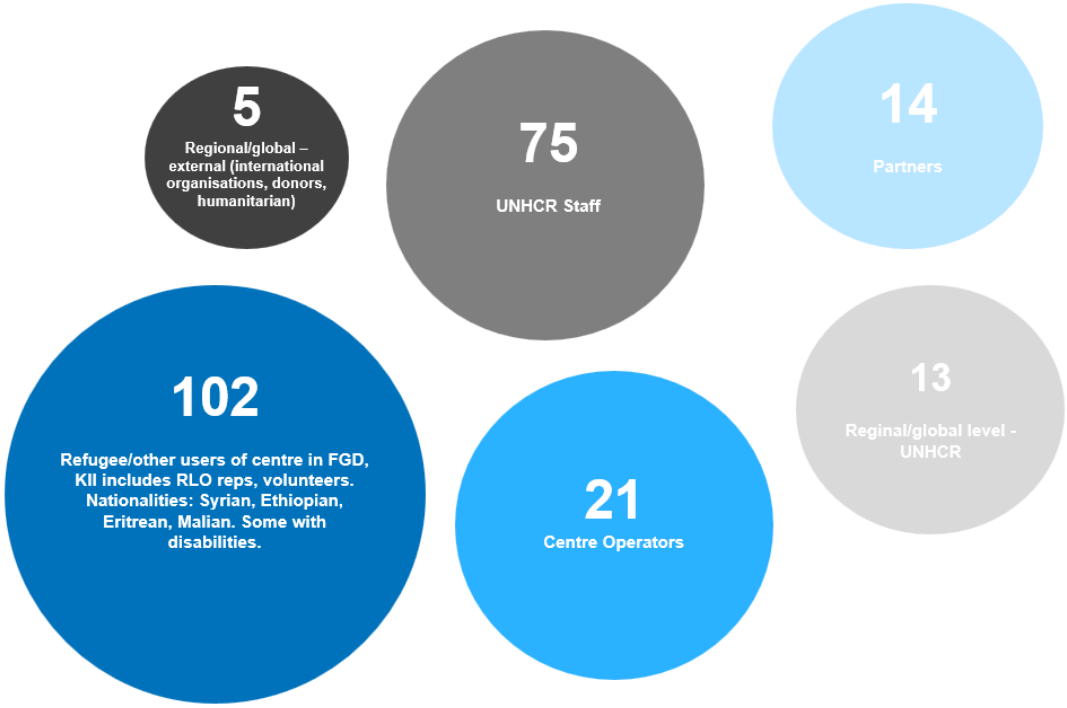
14. Key data collection and analysis methods included document reviews, participation of 230 individuals in data collection (details in Figure 2), analysis of quantitative data on PBCCs, and country-specific analyses based on triangulated data from interviews, FGDs, and documentary evidence. Initial findings were shared through debriefing sessions and online meetings, with further engagement of refugees in refining recommendations.

15. Meetings to share emerging findings and workshops for conclusions and recommendations were held with UNHCR in January and February 2025.

Table 1: Data collection with refugees and asylum seekers

Country	Male (Total = 53)	Female (Total = 49)	Data collection method
Egypt	22	17	39 via 6 FGD including 1 for people with disabilities and 3 KIIs with RLO leaders
Iraq	1	1	2 refugee representatives via remote KII
Jordan	21	29	FGDs with 5 camp leaders,37 helpline users,8 outreach volunteers
Libya	1	-	1 KII with community volunteer
Mauritania	1	-	1 community leader
Tunisia	5	4	1 FGD with 9 community volunteers

Figure 2: Stakeholder Participation



16. An overview of the Refugee Engagement Approach is presented in Figure 3 below:

Figure 3: Refugee engagement approach.

Refugee engagement approach

The evaluation mainstreamed an Accountability to Affected People approach which ensured the involvement of FDSP representatives throughout the evaluation process. The design phase was centred around the four components of the AAP framework. In addition to FDSPs' participation in data collection, the evaluation convened a 'refugee panel' of refugee representatives who accompanied the evaluation through the analysis, reporting and learning dissemination phases. The panel included a mix of male and female refugees from the region based in Egypt, Jordan, Libya, Mauritania and Tunisia representing a range of nationalities: Ethiopian, Somalian, Sudanese, Syrian and Yemeni.

Data collection

- Refugee engagement in the evaluation data collection phase was through focus group discussions and key informant interviews that were held in face-to-face meetings in Amman, Cairo and Alexandria. These were part of the two in-depth country studies with some additional remote interviews. In other light-touch countries refugee engagement was included where it could be arranged in cooperation with the UNHCR.
- The face-to-face FGD with refugees included both discussion around a prepared Focus Group Discussion guide (see inception report annex) as well as participatory exercises such as ranking exercise to identify the priority of call-centres in relation to other communication methods and the reasons why for different types of refugee.
- UNHCR together with partners identified the refugees to be involved in line with the criteria developed by the evaluation team which sought to include a diversity of countries of origin, age, gender and people with disabilities including communication challenges.

Country debriefs for findings validation

- During data collection, the evaluation team identified volunteer refugee representatives to take part in the Refugee Engagement Panel's subsequent activities.

- The evaluation team then held group debriefing sessions for each country and shared a presentation of key findings focused on relevance and effectiveness for validation and discussion with the panel. Debriefings took pace remotely using a combination of Zoom, Microsoft Teams and WhatsApp voice notes where connection was weak.

Validation of conclusions and co-creation of recommendations

- Following the drafting of the evaluation report, the evaluation team met again with the Refugee Engagement Panel and presented the evaluation's conclusions and recommendations. The refugee participants provided feedback, which was incorporated into the final report as appropriate.

Learning and dissemination

- As the consultancy with the evaluation team ends with the final report, the Refugee Engagement Panel participants will continue to work directly with UNHCR to support the community dissemination of the evaluation findings.

2.3. Evaluation management and governance

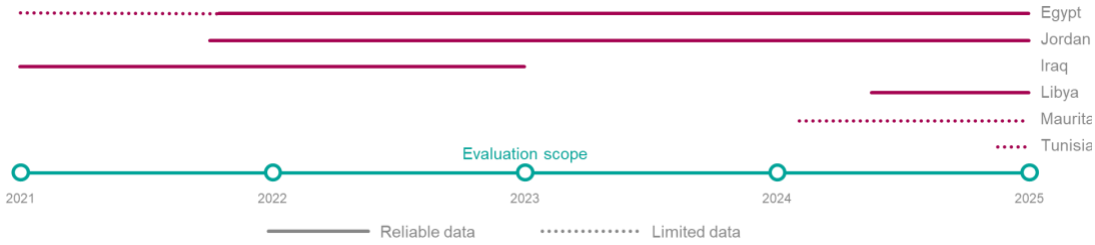
17. The evaluation was managed by the UNHCR's Evaluation Office (EvO). An evaluation reference group (ERG), comprising representatives from each of the participating UNHCR COs, as well as RB and HQ participants, was involved and provided feedback at key stages of the evaluation process, including inception, emerging findings, and the draft conclusions and recommendations stages.

2.4. Limitations and mitigations

18. **Data constraints**. UNHCR have strict data protection controls in place to protect the personal details of refugees, and no curated anonymized/ synonymized data was available on PBCC performance during the inception or data collection phases. As a mitigating measure COs played an essential role in providing high-level aggregates to support the evaluation. In some countries, PBCC data were significantly limited. This was partly due to the range of ways that PBCCs have evolved in each country, e.g., moving from contracted-out to UNHCR-managed centres (see later detail in Section 3.4 and Annexes 8 and 9). Where monthly data could not be sourced, high level data was requested to provide a sense of overall volume and dynamics.

19. Data was available for varying time periods across the evaluation countries studied, as illustrated in Figure 4, below.

Figure 4: Data availability across sampled countries.



20. Within the scope of the evaluation (from January 2021 to November 2024), data were lacking in Jordan for the period before September 2021[8]; in Iraq for the period after December 2022 (due to the Iraq Information Centre (IIC) closure); in Libya for the period before May 2024 (due to transition from WFP); and in Mauritania and Tunisia for the full period[9]. Countries with more developed PBCCs and associated data systems enabled much more detailed analyses. Given the unevenness and inconsistency in the data across operations, the report draws mostly on the in-country data, aligning across countries where it is possible to do so.

21. Likewise, financial data is very limited. This gap is associated with how operations fund PBCCs: sometimes they are considered a distinct activity, at others they are subsumed in the wider communications ecosystem. The analysis of the available financial data is included in Section 4.2, as there were some trends and findings, however, differences in quality and the ways that costs are reported limits some forms of analysis, e.g., detailed comparison across countries and models.

22. **The variety of PBCC models and the range and complexity of country contexts**: While lessons could be derived from each country context, a comparison across countries was not always feasible. In particular, the diversity of the models within broad categories, such as interagency or contracted-out PBCC, made assessments by "type" of PBCC difficult. Assessments of the type of PBCC were further challenged by the dynamic nature of the PBCC evolution in the evaluation time period. For instance, five out of six of the COs studied had gone or were going through significant developments in their model of PBCC during the evaluation. However, the evaluation was able to derive lessons from the specific contexts studied at different phases, e.g., lessons on scaling-up and down, which are relevant to other COs, are shared in the report.

23. **AGD analysis** of PBCC data, and understanding who the users of the feedback system were, was a challenge for the evaluation due to the way identification is managed in data systems. Very often, UNHCR does not know who has called at the individual level because, for example, an enhanced IVR system may have collected the case ID, which only represents a group of people (the household). Although RAIS offers the facility to log the individual caller ID, the interviewees in the KIIs indicated this is not often assigned and the system defaults to the head of the household when this name was not provided (also known as the Principal Applicant ID). Regional AGD was possible, but it was based on a mixed dataset, in which sometimes the person who called was logged, but in most cases, it was the Principal Applicant's details. This meant that accurate analyses of some aspects of

[8] Data from 2021 until Sep 2022 was not available due to technical issues which affected the recording of data.

[9] UNHCR CO Tunisia established a new PBCC just a few months before the evaluation data collection phase.

PBCC usage was not possible, including some comparisons across countries and PBCC models. The analyses that were possible are shared in this report, along with some additional analyses of trends that were discernable.

3 CONTEXT AND UNHCR'S OPERATION

3.1. Regional context

24. The MENA region is characterized by large-scale and long-term forced displacement. Countries across the region host significant populations of refugees, Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and other persons in need of international protection. The Syria Regional Crisis began in 2011 and, to date, has been the main driver of forced displacement in the region, with a total of 5.6 million Syrian refugees registered across Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, and Türkiye.[10] In 2023, the Sudan Crisis resulted in mass displacement, including the influx of 2.9 million refugees and asylum seekers into neighboring countries, such as Egypt and Libya.[11] In addition, countries in the MENA region host refugee and asylum seeker populations from countries such as Ethiopia, Iraq, Mali, Somalia and Yemen, as well as Palestinian refugees. Several countries in the region have significant IDP populations, with 1.2 million IDPs in Iraq,125,000 in Libya, and 6.9 million in Syria.[12] North African countries, including Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Mauritania, Morrocco, and Tunisia, also experience large mixed movements of people (including those on the move from conflict and persecution, or for economic reasons). They are transit countries, hosting people in need of international protection on the central Mediterranean and eastern Mediterranean routes.[13]

25. Refugee rights in the MENA region are largely upheld by international law: the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol. While Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Morocco, Mauritania, and Tunisia are signatories of the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol, Iraq, Lebanon and Syria are not, despite their large refugee populations. While Libya is not party to the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees or its Protocol, it has ratified the 1969 Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa. It is also party to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights. Although international refugee law upholds the principle of non-refoulment, there have been violations of this principle within the region. For instance, some human rights organizations critique Lebanon for deporting Syrian refugees back to Syria, where they may be persecuted. They also indicate instances in Jordan where refugees have been pressured into returning to their countries of origin.[14]

26. Across the region, refugees continue to face a range of rights violations and protection concerns relating to registration, access to legal documentation, risk of statelessness, child protection violations, and gender-based violence (GBV).[15] The registration of refugees is

[10] UNHCR (2024) Regional Bureau MENA Multi-Year Strategy Report 2023-2024

[11] UNHCR Global Data

[12] UNHCR Global Data

[13] UNHCR (2024) Regional Bureau MENA Multi-Year Strategy Report 2023-2024

[14] MENA Rights Group (2022) Joint Report on the Erosion of the Non-Refoulement Principle in Lebanon since 2018; Human Rights Watch (2023) Jordan Events of 2023

[15] Regional Refugee Response and Resilience Plan (2023) Annual Report 2023

increasingly challenging in some contexts, and the registration of new asylum seekers has been paused in Jordan since 2019 and in Tunisia since 2024. Registration of Syrians has been paused in Lebanon since 2015.

27. The representation of vulnerable minority groups among FDSP in the MENA region is high. Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex or Queer (LGBTIQ+) -identifying refugees face significant protection risks within the MENA region as a result of legislative, social, and cultural persecution, including the criminalization of LGBTIQ+ expression, relations, and association.[16] Moreover, more than one million children from Sudan are displaced across international borders.[17] Refugees with disabilities also face multiple and intersectional barriers to accessing their rights and are at a greater risk of exclusion.[18] In total, 34% of refugee families in Jordan and 30% of refugee families in Lebanon were found to have at least one member with a disability.[19] Age and associated vulnerabilities, such as child protection concerns, are prevalent among FDSP populations in the region. In total, 48% of registered Syrian refugees in the region are children under the age of 18.[20] Approximately 48% of refugees and asylum seekers targeted by the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan[21] are women and girls. In total, 53% of Sudanese new arrivals in Egypt are women and girls and 36% are women and girls in Libya.[22]

3.2. Country contexts and operations

28. The COs considered in the evaluation have quite different contexts. One of the key variants include the nature of the population served by UNHCR and how stable it is. Four of the COs were primarily serving refugees and asylum seekers, with Iraq and Libya characterized by a significant IDP population. Of the six countries studied, only Jordan had a relatively stable population served by UNHCR during 2021-24. Other countries saw increased numbers because of new arrivals of FDSP due to escalation of the conflict in Sudan and Mali, as well as changes in the settlement patterns of FDSP. For example, in Mauritania, growing numbers of people were primarily in the Mali–Mauritania borders, both inside and outside the main camp. In Iraq, the major change was the closure of some IDP camps and the overall shift in the interagency strategy towards durable solutions and development. Figure 5 below shows the official statistics (actual numbers are expected to be higher in some cases) for these refugee populations and how they have both changed over time and differ in scale among countries.

[16] UNHCR (2016) Gay and transgender refugees seek safety in the Middle East; UNHCR (2016) Protecting Persons with Diverse Sexual Orientations and Gender Identities: A Global Report on UNHCR's Efforts to Protect Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Intersex Asylum-Seekers and Refugees

[17] UNICEF (2024) Staggering Crisis in Sudan Leaves Families Reeling

[18] UNHCR (2019) Power of Inclusion

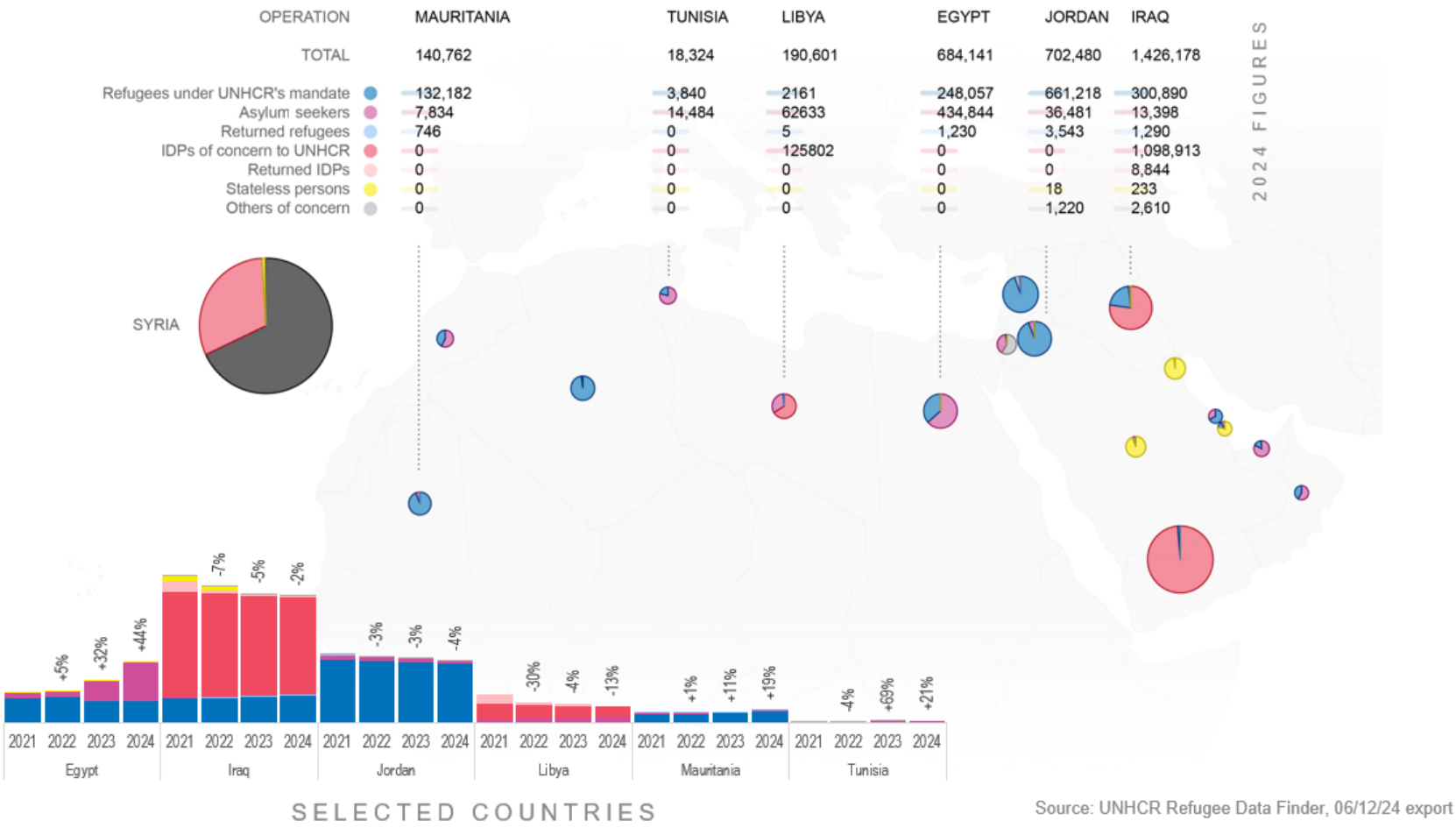
[19] Regional Refugee Response and Resilience Plan (2023) Annual Report 2023

[20] Regional Refugee Response and Resilience Plan (2023) Annual Report 2023

[21] It is important to note that the plan covers those displaced by the Syria Crisis

[22] Sudan Emergency Regional Response Plan (2024) proGres Report January – April 2024

Figure 5: FDSP Population trends in evaluation countries 2021-2024.



Source: UNHCR Refugee Data Finder, 06/12/24 export

3.3. UNHCR's approach to AAP and phone-based contact centres

29. UNHCR's AAP framework is comprised of four core components, which come together to outline UNHCR's commitment to AAP. This is in-line with the IASC AAP framework.[23] The AAP framework upholds the inclusive participation of FDSP in key decisions and processes throughout the operations management cycle.[24] The framework also emphasizes that UNHCR should provide inclusive opportunities for participation, feedback and response, as well as ongoing communication and transparency for the continuous organizational learning and adaption of programs.[25] The four dimensions of the AAP framework are upheld in the 2018 Age, Gender and Diversity Policy in Core Actions 2-5: Participation and Inclusion corresponds to Core Action 2; Communication and Transparency corresponds to Core Action 3; Feedback and Response corresponds to Core Action 4; and Organization Learning and Adaption corresponds to Core Action 5.[26]

30. The AAP approaches and mechanisms contribute to UNHCR's Impact Area 3 in its 2022 Results Framework: Empowering Communities and Achieving Gender Equality. AAP mechanisms specifically concur with Outcome Area 7 (OA7), Community Engagement and Women's Empowerment Indicator 7.2: Proportion of people who have access to safe feedback and response, and indicator 7.1 on participation of FDSP throughout all programming phases.[27] The Results Framework does not include specific indicators on PBCC.

31. UNHCR uses a range of methods and channels to communicate and engage with FDSP. These include in-person options, such as community meetings, community volunteers, helpdesks that include some mobile facilities, FGDs, and complaint boxes. They also include digital and phone-based options, such as WhatsApp, email, hotlines and duty phones, and PBCCs. PBCCs are a critical tool for AAP. This was most notable during the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, when there were limited options for in-person communication with FDSP, which has also influenced UNHCR's ongoing methods of engagement with FDSP.

32. PBCCs are an increasingly important tool in enabling contact with populations in hard-to-reach and conflict-affected settings, where humanitarian access is limited. PBCCs have evolved organically and look different across the COs. UNHCR is working to establish a corporate contact center solution, encompassing an omnichannel and customer relationship management (CRM) system. The development of this solution is part of the broader Digital Gateway project, which aims to create an easily accessible digital entry-point, which people can use to obtain and exchange information with UNHCR, receive services, and find solutions to their problems in a remote and unattended manner. A global toolkit for contact centres is also under development and will capture best practices and guidance for operations establishing or upgrading PBCCs.[28] Such developments are reflected in the wider sector, where there has been a growth in interest in digital

[23]Framework: Collective accountability to affect people. IASC Taskforce 2. 2023

[24] UNHCR (2020) UNHCR AAP Operational Guidance

[25] UNHCR (2020) UNHCR AAP Operational Guidance

[26] UNHCR (2018) Policy on Age, Gender and Diversity Accountability

[27] UNHCR (2022) Global Results Framework; Inception KII

[28] Inception KII

technologies for engagement with affected communities. This was evident in the evaluation team's literature review and in later interviews at the global level,. [29]

3.4. UNHCR PBCCs in the MENA region

33. **Organizational characteristics**. PBCCs in MENA are characterized by their diversity. The evaluation's Terms of Reference (ToR) and inception report categorized PBCCs in three ways: 1) call centres; 2) hotlines/helplines; and 3) less sophisticated hotlines, i.e., a phone staffed by a UNHCR/partner duty officer, often as part of and in addition to other responsibilities. However, later data gathering revealed greater diversity. Some of the key features distinguishing the PBCCs across the six countries included the following organizational factors:

a) Whether UNHCR ran a system *in-house or contracted* it out to another organization.
b) Whether UNHCR runs a single, central PBCC or also supports *additional hotlines, which are often run by implementing partners, maybe for a specialist service, such as cash-based interventions (CBIs), health or legal services.*
c) Whether a system is *an interagency system and what that means,* i.e., whether it is the entry point to UNHCR and its implementing partners, or a collective service for other organizations, such as WFP and other United Nations (UN) agencies, for the range of people they serve.
d) *Whether the system is centralized or decentralized*. Some PBCCs are located in/managed as one single service center, whereas others are decentralized, with different systems in a specific province of other geographic areas. Decentralized systems can be run by UNHCR, a partner or by both.

34. Furthermore, the model of the PBCCs utilized in each CO has evolved over time in response to the evolving context, lessons and technology options. A summary of the models is outlined in Table 2 below. A more detailed description of each country's PBCC can be found in Annex 8.

[29] See Annex 2 – bibliography of documents reviewed.

Table 2: Summary of key characteristics in PBCC models (evaluation countries)

Country	In-house or contracted out	Centralized or decentralized	Collective system or UNHCR focus	Additional hotlines supported by UNHCR?
Egypt	In-house but changing to contracted out model	Centralized	UNHCR focus but some change in 2024	Yes, but centralizing in 2025
Iraq	Contracted out in IIC time to United Nations Operations (UNOPS)	Centralized up to 2023 in IIC and decentralized 2023 onwards to partners	Collective up to 2023 and UNHCR focus from 2023	Yes – CBI
Jordan	In-house	Centralized	UNHCR focus	No
Libya	Contracted out -Moomken (NGO)	Centralized	Was collective and now UNHCR	Yes
Mauritania	Contracted out (NGO) and previously a mix	Centralized but previously decentralized	UNHCR focus	Yes
Tunisia	In-house previously contracted out	Centralized but moved from rotational staff model to full-time operators	UNHCR focus	No

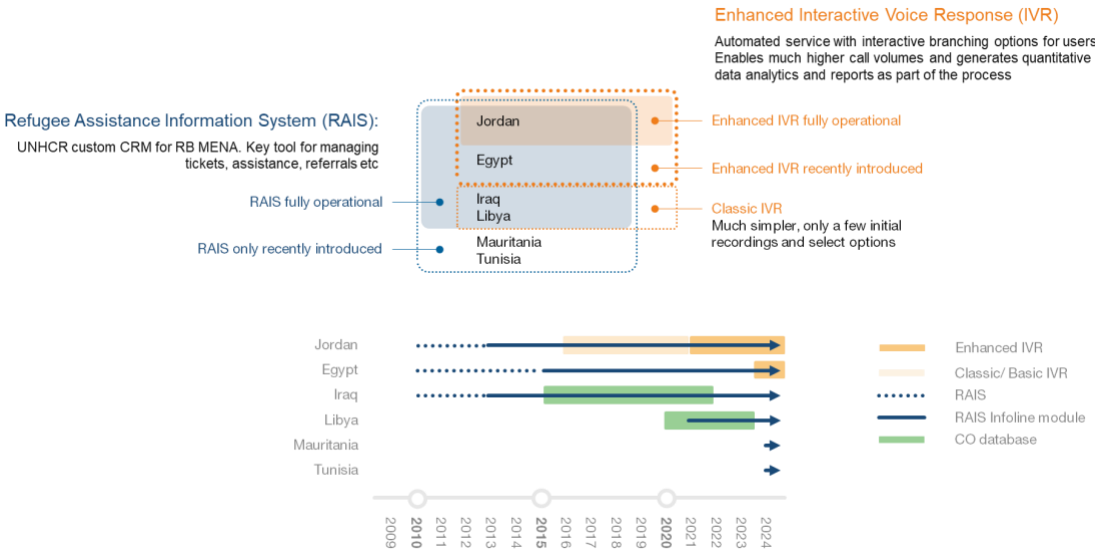
Source: Inception interviews with UNHCR country and regional staff

35. **Technology**. PBCCs evolved in terms of the technology and data management systems used. Changes happened at different times. The graphic below demonstrates the range of data management[30] and other systems used to support the PBCCs at the time of the evaluation's data collection phase[31] and the different times that these came on board. A key technology used in some PBCCs is Interactive Voice Response (**IVR**) is a technology. This enables FDSP to call a number, listen to a range of options, and interact through their phone to navigate the pre-set menus. Depending on their request, they may hear the information they need though a voice recording, or they may be connected with a human agent. Basic IVR only handles a couple of standard introductory questions, then all calls are passed to an agent. Enhance IVR, which is used in Jordan and was being introduced in Egypt at the time of the evaluation, can handle some requests on its own, by offering an automated voice response based on the pre-programmed branching logic. Further detail on PBCC technology systems and a glossary to introduce some of the key technologies is included in Annex 5 and 6.

[30] RAIS is a web application developed in RB MENA. Infoline is a module within RAIS designed to record and manage requests.

[31] Systems are evolving so some changes are already in development, e.g., the development of enhanced IVR in Libya.

Figure 6: Technologies in use across the PBCCs studied and their evolution.



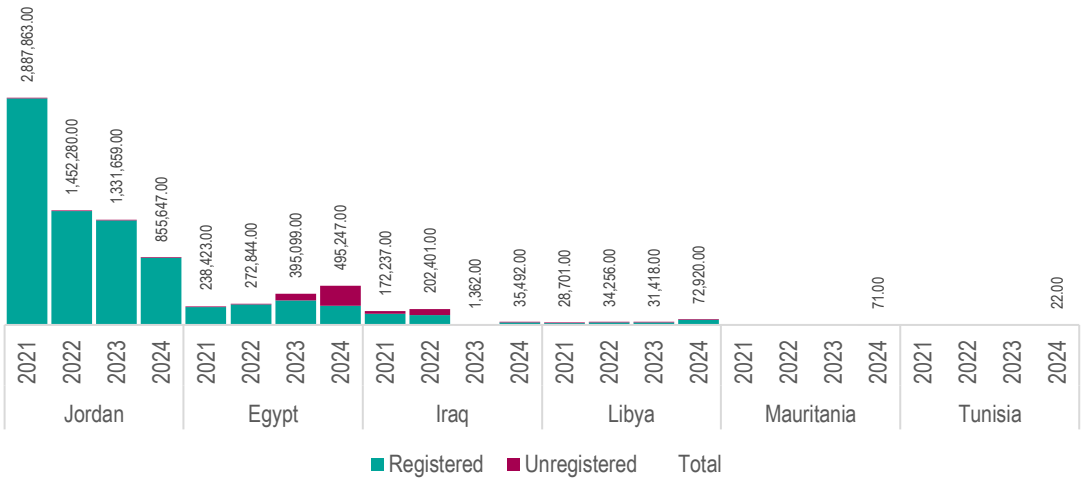
Source: Inception interviews with UNHCR country and regional staff

36. **Volume and nature of calls**. The scale of demand and the volume of calls that each country's PBCC handled varied widely between countries, as would be expected given the difference in the size of the populations of interest in the different contexts (presented in Figure 7 below). There were also variations in the level of unregistered callers, reflecting the differing conditions for FDSP in each country. While the evaluation encountered some constraints in analyzing the data (see Section 2.4, Section 4.2, and Annex 7), some trends in usage were clear.

37. Figure 7 illustrates the greater number of calls received by the PBCC in Jordan than those in other countries, reflecting the scale of its FDSP population for the total time period considered by the evaluation and the in-country developments, such as the introduction of a facility for resettlement queries as well as the COVID-19 lockdowns in 2021, a factor affecting all countries. However, an increasing volume of calls is seen in other countries (while Jordan numbers drop) as they experienced influx of FDSP (some countries' experience is less well captured here e.g. Mauritania). The figures were based on the data logged as tickets in RAIS.[32] Slightly different figures are captured when using other sources of data such as CISCO but the overall trend and message is consistent regarding the large differences in volume of calls per country. (For further detail on call volumes per month see Annex 7 for further details).

[32] RAIS tickets (filtered to calls as the source) provide a record of calls logged, whether they require any follow-up from UNCHR and partners (referral).

Figure 7: Caller volume across evaluation countries in MENA (numbers as registered in RAIS)[33]



Source: RAIS regional dashboard

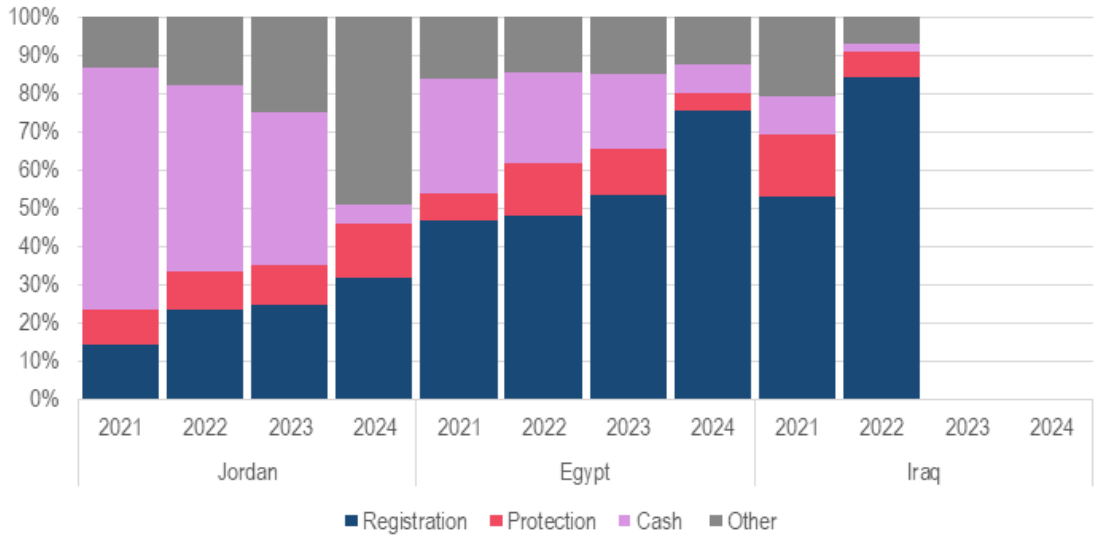
38. **Subject of calls**. The subject of the calls varies according to context. The call topics indicated that there have been high volumes of calls related to registration. This was particularly evident in Egypt's PBCC, which saw its calls related to registration increase from 47% of calls in 2021 to 76% in 2024, as the numbers of FDSP from Sudan increased rapidly.[34] The surge in registration-related call numbers experienced by Jordan's PBCC was lower, rising from 14% of calls to 32%. This aligns with Jordan stopping the registration of new refugees in 2019, with lockdowns, and the introduction of a resettlement function to the system. The data also indicated that calls for cash assistance are declining. This was found to be most prevalent in Jordan, where cash assistance eligibility was changed in 2023. However, there are limitations in how far the data can be interpreted because, in two of the countries represented, Iraq and Egypt, there is an additional PBCC for CBI assistance, which is run by a partner in each country. However, the data from this is not reflected here, highlighting some of the challenges in interpreting the data.

Source: UNHCR PBCC teams

[33] Tunisia shows very low numbers of calls handled as at the time of data analysis and writing the fully fledged PBCC had only recently opened

[34] UNHCR (2025) Evaluation of UNHCR's Multi-Country L3 Emergency Response to the Sudan Situation

Figure 8: The proportion of calls by subject, per year, as a percentage of the total



Source: UNHCR PBCC teams

4 KEY FINDINGS

4.1. EQ1. RELEVANCE: How relevant are the information and services provided by the call centres hotline/helplines to the users' information and services' needs (including users with specific needs and diverse profiles)?

39. This section discusses the relevance of PBCCs' information and services to the needs of FDSP. It assesses PBCCs' accessibility, and the accuracy, consistency, and relevance of the information provided, and the ranking of PBCCs by FDSP among the range of available communication channels.

4.1.1. Accessibility of call centres, hotline/helplines to users, including those in hard-to-reach areas due to poor network as well as those with specific needs and diverse profiles

Figure 9: App being used by refugee to access the Egypt Infoline indicating 287 calls made in efforts to connect to the Infoline.

40. **Key finding 1: PBCCs are generally accessible to those served by UNHCR, but there are barriers in specific contexts and for some people. These barriers include some countries' restrictions on access to SIM cards; limited network coverage; costs and communication challenges due to minority languages; or special needs and disabilities. However, accessibility is not the same as reachability, which is limited by call centre/hotline capacity and the volume of callers.**

41. Across the six countries studied, the evaluation found that people served by UNHCR were comfortable using the phone to access it. However, there were some limitations in people's access to a phone, for example, due to government restrictions on SIM cards, particularly for people undocumented or not yet registered for asylum in Egypt, Libya, Mauritania, and Tunisia. UNHCR interviewees in Libya and Mauritania also highlighted cultural barriers with proportionally lower numbers of women calling than men. Most countries have a high

concentration of phones, including smartphones, which has enabled some technological advances, such as enhanced IVR.[35]

42. The introduction of IVR in Jordan, Libya, Egypt, and Iraq presented challenges to FDSP. The evaluation's FGDs in Jordan and Egypt and UNHCR's own assessments found some people struggled to enter the required identity and security information to access a PBCC system. However, when IVR worked well, callers did appreciate the information that could be provided to them via enhanced IVR-systems, e.g., on eligibility for cash assistance or updates on their resettlement case. In the FGDs, FDSP highlighted that even basic IVR, which only directs callers to the appropriate language facility and service, and which may still require a significant waiting period, provided some reassurance to callers that they were through to the system.

43. One factor that enabled access was the provision of interpretation services, with most countries providing a range of languages (e.g., seven in Egypt and six in Libya). However, FGD participants highlighted some challenges with understanding the accents of either the operators or interpreters. It was also found that some minority languages were not catered for, which, as shared in the Jordan FGD, can hinder a callers' privacy because they have to bring their own interpreter to the call.[36] During the FGDs in Egypt, FDSP expressed their discomfort at engaging with an interpreter from another ethnic group of their country of origin, particularly where there was conflict between these groups in the country of origin. The example highlights the sensitivities around the recruitment of interpreters.

44. Another factor enabling access was highlighted in both the Egypt FGD and in the UNHCR interviews in Mauritania: community leaders played an important role in informing new asylum seekers about PBCCs and help orient them to use it. Another important dimension in the evaluation timespan was that lockdowns associated with COVID-19 drove more people to use the PBCC and also UNHCR's use of them increased as they became one of the main means for FDSP and UNHCR to connect directly.

Figure 10: Refugee feedback on accessibility challenges.

"*When I called, my call was answered, but I had to wait 13 minutes in the queue before reaching an operator*" (FGD, Alexandria Male)

"*The partner hotlines are another issue entirely. They always change their numbers"* (FGD, Sudanese Men).

45. The FGD evidence on the extent to which cost could be a barrier to the use of PBCCs varied across countries. Most countries already have a cost for the call or are moving towards these as budgets for subsidized telephone use have come under pressure, e.g., Jordan ended the toll-free number, and Libya is also anticipating this move. Egypt CO had a short-term experiment in providing free loaded SIM cards to vulnerable FSDPs which could also facilitate PBCC access, but this proved too expensive to sustain. Some callers reported that they had personally purchased software or third-party apps that enabled repeat calls to UNHCR. This software made it easier to repeatedly call UNHCR PBCCs and increased their chances of accessing an operator when lines were extremely busy.

[35] Enhanced IVR has the automated capacity to provide information to some caller queries – discussed later and in Annex number 5.

[36] In Jordan, the Helpline IVR supports three languages: Arabic, English and Somali. Whereas the agents handling calls are able to support in English and Arabic languages only.

Otherwise, it was reported that many hours or even days of calling was needed to access the PBCCs services at times. However, purchasing software increased the costs of accessing PBCCs. FDSP's views about the affordability of PBCCs depended partly on the costs they were accustomed to paying in-country. For example, during the FGDs in Jordan, FDSP referred to the challenge of paying for calls, but they had only recently had the subsidies removed. In contrast, in Egypt, the FGD participants said that they were prepared to pay as long they could access operators and have their queries resolved, but they had less experience of subsidies. However, it should also be noted that the costs and resources available to FDSP may also differ.

46. Disability proved a challenge for callers to access a PBCC. In Egypt and Jordan, in the evaluation's FGD, difficulties using IVR were discussed, with users finding inputting security data in the time available difficult. Those with communication challenges sometimes secured the help of a friend to make calls, however, a security caution to control fraud meant that operators in Egypt would sometimes terminate the call when they heard that a second person was present. In Jordan, some elderly and illiterate people reported not being fast enough to enter the numbers or requiring assistance from someone else. COs in some countries (including Egypt) reported beginning new cooperations with disability-focused civil society organizations (CSOs), which may help to address this issue. In Libya, UNHCR engaged with people with disabilities in a series of FGDs to help them establish the Knowledge Base Platform (see the Good Practice box). However, the evaluation did not find evidence of participatory approaches in the development of the communication channels themselves.

Figure 11: Accessibility challenges expressed by caller and call operator.

"*The IVR does not clearly explain what data to input. For example, entering a full birthdate instead of just the year leads to disconnections"* (FGD, Egypt, Female Sudanese participant).

"I allow a second person to assist, but some operators might not, due to fraud risks" (Infoline (PBCC) Agent, Egypt).

47. The key access issue for PBCC users was their ability to gain access to the system and reach an operator or the relevant information on IVR. This was not consistently possible across countries. Busy lines and the need for repeat calls, often many hundreds of times, were commonly reported in Egypt, Jordan and Iraq during the IIC. In these locations, the capacity of the UNHCR in terms of its lines, operators and hours of access, were not adequate for the range of services the PBCCs aimed to provide or for the size of the population served. This remained a problem despite efforts to increase the scale of the service, e.g., with increases in the number of operators in Egypt in 2023 (from 12 to 28 operators). Hotlines and other less sophisticated methods were also found to have struggled with the volume of calls.

4.1.2. Accuracy and consistency of information provided by PBCCs.

48. Key finding 2: The information provided on UNHCR services is usually consistent across communication channels, which is aided by use of a shared knowledge base across a CO, as well as operator training. However, FDSP users reported inaccuracies at times in their case details and in the information shared about other organizations' services and contact

details. Refugees often highlighted a desire for more detailed and faster information and services e.g. follow- up to their requests.

49. PBCCs are supported by a range of knowledge bases to ensure their information and services are accurate, up-to-date and consistent across communication channels. The most sophisticated method is in Libya, which has developed a Refugee Knowledge Base Platform (RKBP) to support call operators (see the good practice box below). Tunisia has learned from this system. The PBCC operators in Egypt and Iraq used the Help website's pages as the basis of information. In Mauritania and Tunisia, there is a frequently asked questions (FAQ) resource.

50. The FGDs and KIIs in Jordan and Egypt found that callers particularly valued the information from the PBCCs that they could not find easily elsewhere. They emphasized their desire for detailed and localized information relevant to their location. A limitation in the use of the Help website by PBCC operators is that FDSP callers can usually access this level of information themselves and are looking for something more detailed. The RKBP in Libya contains additional detail to that available in public as does that of Tunisia. UNHCR interviewees reported that the more decentralized systems, such as the current system in Iraq and Mauritania's older system, had localized information.

Figure 12: Good practice example 1 - Refugee Knowledge Base Platform in Libya

Good practice example - Refugee Knowledge Base Platform: Libya
This is an online, structured platform to support operators with relevant information on each thematic area including Cash-based Interventions (CBI), Gender-based violence (GBV) and Child Protection (CP). It is a live and dynamic platform, which is continuously updated. The platform is organized by the community-based protection (CBP) team and includes the main sources of information and tips to help operators provide information to the callers.

51. In addition to the common knowledge bases used by all countries, the establishment of systematic cooperation between communication or external relations teams and community-based protection and PBCC management was important in ensuring that consistent information was provided across communication channels. These three functional units tended to be the most involved in communicating with communities through community-based media, social media, and other communication channels, including the PBCCs. Systematic cooperation in a regularly structured meeting was important and was reported in the Jordan and Egypt CO KIIs, among others.

52. The evaluation found there was a strong emphasis in PBCCs to provide high-quality training to operators to ensure the accuracy of their information. The two countries visited in the evaluation both managed their PBCCs in-house and the quality and care of the operators towards the callers was both evident and prioritized by the operators themselves, as well as their management. Training in these countries, as well as in Iraq's IIC and in Tunisia and Libya, included classroom sessions with both thematic information on areas of queries and a focus on communication skills and regular refresher training. Shadowing and coaching were also used to support new operators. In Egypt, the operators and Infoline management shared that they had clear guidelines of when to refer more specialist or sensitive cases onwards to another unit to avoid going beyond their areas of competence. Training in confidentiality was also strong and operators in Iraq's IIC and the partners in Egypt considered it a means to build trust with FDSP.

4.1.3. How call centres, hotlines/helplines ensure and enhance the relevance of the information and services they provide, based on context changes and the users' feedback and information needs (including persons with specific needs and diverse profiles)

53. Key finding 3: Adaptations to PBCCs' information or knowledge bases are prompted by PBCC operator feedback, thematic units, and community input. While annual assessments identify FDSP information priorities, ongoing adjustments and group-specific analyses are limited. Effective changes require cross-organizational effort, but securing prioritization during intense response phases is challenging.

54. The evaluation found that COs had undertaken an assessment of communication preferences and information needs, however, this was mostly through a small part of the lengthy and wide-ranging Participatory Needs Assessment process that is carried out in most countries. Occasional Communication with Communities (CWC) assessments provided more detailed information, but their regularity varied between countries, with only Jordan holding a regular specific PBCC process every six months.

55. When PBCC systems change, the evaluation found that the COs tended to prioritize assessing information needs. For example, Egypt CO planned a more in-depth information needs assessment in 2025, which was delayed from 2024 as part of its transition process to a new PBCC system, as well as due to changes in the external context. Similarly, in Iraq the CO reviewed information needs and communication preferences as part of the change from the IIC to the new decentralized system.

56. However, the information needs of FDSP can change rapidly if the context changes in their country of residence or country of origin. This was evident during the data collection in Egypt, when the Syrian context changed and FDSP raised many questions about their potential return or ability to remain in Egypt. The stage of FDSP's journey in a country also affects the information needed. Data from RAIS showed the heavy demand for registration services in countries with many new arrivals, e.g., for arrivals from Sudan in Egypt since 2023.37 Conversely, in Iraq, where many Syrian refugees have lived for over ten years, UNHCR interviewees reported that many of the information needs related more to accommodation and employment opportunities – some of these could be provided by refugee-led information platforms.

57. UNHCR interviews reported that functional units may prompt updates to knowledge bases, although this often involved quite routine details, such as changes in opening times/days of registration desks in Egypt or the contact details of partners. Some of the latter, given the complexity of the referral systems and the network of service providers, proved difficult to maintain. This was not only a challenge for PBCCs, but also more broadly for referral systems. The IIC reported that by 2022 it had the service mapping details of more than 200 organizations, which inevitably changed over time.38

58. For FDSP, the relevance of the information provided by PBCCs can be overshadowed by their dissatisfaction with the facts that are shared with them, e.g., regarding the scale of assistance available and their eligibility for it. The interviews with UNHCR staff and the

[37] See Annex 8 for additional details.

[38] UNHCR, UNOPS Final Project Performance Report of Project 700018 (IIC), 2022

FGDs with FDSP in Jordan and Egypt emphasized the importance of honesty with callers about the situation and pressures on UNHCR's own operations.

4.1.4. Ranking of call centres among communities' preferred communication channels

Figure 13: FGD communication preferences ranking exercise.

59. Key finding 4: PBCCs are popular communication channels across countries. The evidence indicated variations by age and other factors. For example, younger, urban, and more highly educated FDSP preferred to use social media for most information and liked using PBCC for queries, while older people and those with particular needs often preferred face-to-face interaction. Context and the factors of cost, time, and reachability, and the quality of information/services from each service all affected individuals' preferences.

Figure 14: Factors affected communication channel preferences.

Factors affecting communication channel preferences and PBCC ranking

- *Context* – network coverage, electricity, availability of other methods, and the nature of callers' settlement (camp or urban).
- *Callers' characteristics and circumstances* – technical ability, age, communication abilities, access to phone, affordability of calls, and privacy.
- *Nature of query* – sensitivity and ability to have a conversation in private, urgency and ability to access assistance fast, and the PBCC's reputation for access.

60. Evidence from the FGDs with FDSP and UNHCR's own assessments in annual participatory assessments found variations in the preferences of FDSP towards different communication channels, as outlined below.

- In Egypt, in the FGDs, FDSP tended to rank the helpdesk and Facebook more highly than the Infoline run by UNHCR. FDSP valued the access to information videos via Facebook, noting that even older participants appreciated this. However, participants also noted the disadvantages associated with these channels, e.g., costs; the time taken to reach the helpdesk; and the inability for them to post questions or comments on the Egypt CO's Facebook page, which was mainly used for information dissemination.

- In a Jordan FGD, a short messaging service (SMS), a WhatsApp chatbot, and Facebook were all ranked above the Helpline by FDSP though not all FDSP were aware of the alternative methods.

- In Libya, these same trends were found by UNHCR's CWC study, which was undertaken in 2021.[39] However, it also found that trust was an important element in informing people's preferences; as well as that preferences varied by location, i.e., face-to-face methods were more favored in non-urban areas. The study also found that people based in the capital trusted the internet more highly than those who were based outside of it.

- In Tunisia, UNHCR staff indicated that WhatsApp was FDSPs' preferred method of communication, and this was integrated into the new PBCC in 2024.

- In Mauritania, there were distinct differences based on locations and gender. Urban FDSP preferred phone-based contact, while camp-based FDSP preferred face-to-face contact when it was easily reachable.[40] Community leaders also noted the trust that people in-camp had in the helpdesk staff and the lower use of PBCCs by women. Trust in face-to-face methods was also a feature noted in the Jordan camps by the UNHCR interviewees.

Figure 15: Refugee feedback on communication channels.

Long days of queuing and incidents outside the compound discourage people from relying on this channel [face to face helpdesk]" (FGD Sudanese Men).

"During emergencies, refugees prefer partners over the Infoline because it feels impersonal and unhelpful" (FGD Sudanese Men).

"*If someone in our WhatsApp group reports an emergency, we contact UNHCR directly. The call center is not operational 24 hours a day and does not function during the night. In such cases, we directly call the HRC officials for each sector to address the urgent needs. UNHCR focal points are very responsive, and we frequently interact with them."* (Community Leader, Mauritania)

4.2. EQ2. EFFICIENCY: To what extent are the call centres, hotline/ helplines operated efficiently?

61. This section considers the efficiency of PBCC. It assesses how efficiency has been integrated into the design of COs' evolving PBCC, its consideration in crucial PBCC processes and systems as well as in resource allocation and PBCC management.

4.2.1. Efficiency and PBCC design

PBCC design and learning across the region

62. Key finding 5: Across all COs, there was clear evidence that the process of designing, scaling up, and improving PBCCs draws on existing knowledge and resources from the

[39] UNHCR Libya, 2021, Strategy for Communication with Communities, Transcultural Campaigning for UNHCR

[40] UNHCR Hotline Urban Areas Report, September 2024; MENA Regional Bureau Mission Report, March 2024; and KII with community leader, Mauritania and Jordan.

UNHCR MENA RB. UNHCR tools, specialist knowledge, and assets from other country operations and the RB are leveraged.

63. A strong focus is placed upon learning from other operations. There are very few knowledge siloes, and operations engage in knowledge sharing with counterparts, although COs also reported the need for more guidance on existing models, particularly for countries in times of transition. The RB in MENA is an essential actor in centralizing and disseminating knowledge about PBCC across the region. This is illustrated through the technical support for the rollout of RAIS; in designing call centres, including concept notes (e.g., Tunisia);[41] and through the MENA AAP toolkit, which incorporates operating models for the Jordan Helpline and the Iraq IIC.[42]

64. COs also support each other. For example, there is a clear learning exchange between the most mature and sophisticated set-up in Jordan and those countries currently undergoing transitions to in-house call centres, such as Libya and Tunisia (see good practice box below).[43] Sharing learning is also evident within complex change processes such as the rollout of IVR. For example, the Jordan CO's IVR branching and technical documentation were made available to the Egypt CO alongside in-person support to set up IVR there.[44]

65. However, designing an efficient PBCC and determining the best set-up for each country's operation is an iterative process. While learning from other operations is crucial, it is equally important to tailor the PBCC to the local context and ensure that models remain responsive to changes in context, reflecting an agile design. The evaluation found that what works in one context may lead to challenges in another. For example, in Mauritania, the CO is aiming to centralize its three partner-run hotlines as FDSP numbers are growing and because of the inefficiencies of the decentralized structure.[45] Whereas in Iraq, the CO has moved towards a partner-led decentralized structure, which is more reflective and responsive to the operational context and the different needs of FDSP across the country.[46] Crucially, in Iraq, UNHCR maintains governance and oversight, as well as consistent monitoring data via RAIS as this is deployed for partners, making a decentralized structure more viable.

Figure 16: Good Practice example 2 - design process of PBCC in Tunisia

Good practice example – Design process of PBCC in Tunisia
The design of the helpline services in Tunisia have drawn on a range of cross-regional expertise. The services were designed with technical input from RB MENA, Tunisian call centre staff participated in a shadowing visit to the Jordan helpline call centre, and CO Libya shared learnings with CO Tunisia on their experience of digitalizing their FAQ platform.

Leveraging automation for efficiency

66. Key finding 6: COs have designed efficient PBCC models, which leverage automation to a high standard. Crucially, PBCC development reflects some user-centered design (according to both UNHCR PBCC staff and FDSP callers) to determine and meet UNHCR's

[41] UNHCR (2024) Concept Note: Establishment of the UNCHR Contact Centre in Tunisia
[42] UNHCR Tunisia staff; UNHCR (2024) MENA Accountability to Affect People (AAP Toolkit: Strengthening Inclusion and Accountability to Affected People
[43] UNHCR Tunisia staff, UNHCR Libya staff
[44] UNHCR Egypt staff
[45] UNHCR Mauritania staff
[46] UNHCR Iraq staff

and FDSP's needs, which is essential when undertaking complex digital transformation processes, such as the rollout of enhanced IVR.

67. Across the countries that have a high level of workflow automation, such as Jordan and Egypt, PBCC models have been designed through an iterative process and in collaboration with functional units to determine and cater for FDSP needs. Staff from functional units were appreciative of this approach and satisfied with the efficiency outputs enabled by better-automated processes when it was fully established (Jordan).47 These include a better quality of referral, lighter caseloads for PBCC staff, and fewer duplicate tickets and referrals.

Figure 17: Good practice example 3 – using enhanced IVR to automate processes in Jordan.

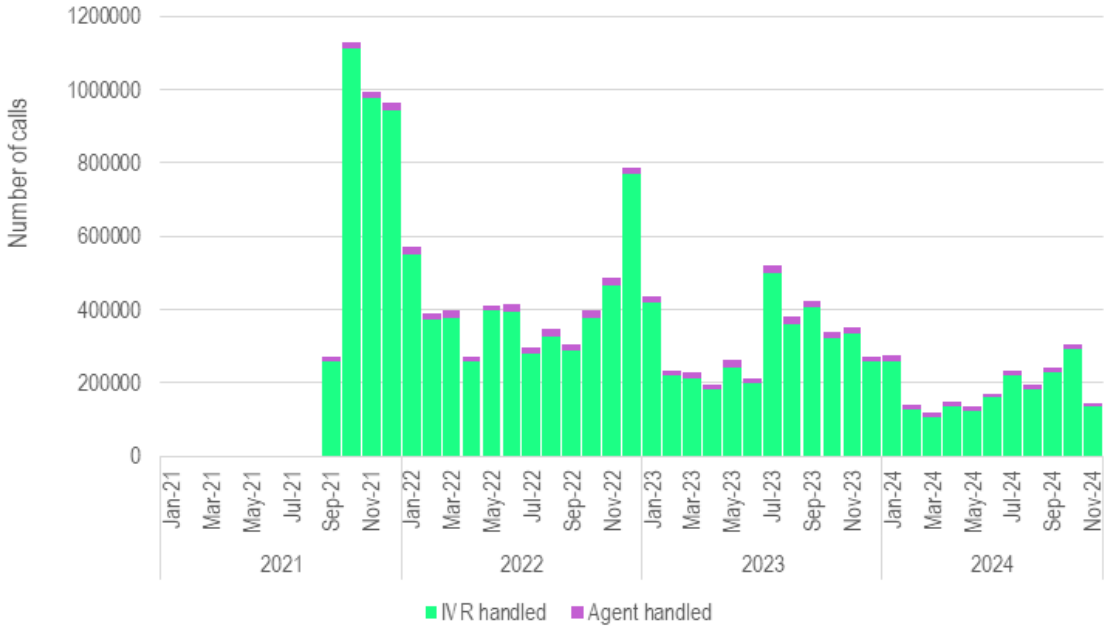
Good practice example – Using enhanced IVR to automate processes in Jordan
IVR was introduced primarily to provide efficiency gains and to tackle the issues of large call volumes and long waiting times, which, in turn, reduced the burden of effort on human call operators, who were under a lot of pressure. A key benefit of IVR is in automating repetitive processes, handling those common areas of every flow and taking over the 'low-skill' tasks to enable human operators to focus on the high-skilled tasks, such as interpretation, counselling and feedback. IVR is configured in line with need and, while it requires a certain level of technical knowledge to introduce and maintain, the level of complexity and comprehensiveness can differ in operations. It can be relatively basic, where the IVR only deals with standard introductory questions before passing all calls on to agents. In Jordan however IVR is more advanced (referred to as enhanced IVR). The IVR is able to deal with some requests on its own by offering an automated voice response based on the pre-programmed branching logic. IVR can be configured to call data from other applications, perform logical tests, and run calculations to determine a response for a caller (e.g., if they are eligible for assistance and, if not, when they might be eligible).

68. An important development in some countries has been the introduction of enhanced IVR (Figure 18). It allows PBCCs to process a higher number of calls, as demonstrated by Jordan, where IVR can handle ~90% of calls, significantly reducing the throughflow handled by the agents.48

[47] UNHCR Jordan staff

[48] UNHCR Jordan staff. Data shared by UNHCR Jordan DAG unit.

Figure 18: The proportion of calls handled by enhanced IVR, Jordan



Source: Jordan Data Analysis Group (DAG)

69. IVR is the most complicated automated process to deploy; therefore, although it does increase efficiencies, it takes significant time and resource investment to roll it out.[49] As with any digital transformation process, some technical issues have prevailed after rollouts. However, the collaborative way in which UNHCR technical teams have worked with functional units on complicated processes, such as the design of IVR trees, has helped to smooth the process and resulted in a system that works for the core user base within UNHCR. Key aspects of this approach include consistency, patience, a user-centric (both for call operators and FDSP) approach to design, good technical knowledge, and the ability to interpret the service needs of FDSP into technical solutions. A phased approach to the rollout of IVR has helped ease the transition for both UNHCR staff and FDSP callers. For example, the Jordan CO is undertaking a phased rollout of IVR to refugee camps by moving certain services, such as appointment booking, to IVR one at a time. This is a sensible way to introduce change as it makes it easier to respond to technical faults and reduce demand on phone lines, in addition to gently introducing FDSP callers to a new system.[50]

Ensuring that tools support logical and efficient workflows

70. Key finding 7: UNHCR makes good use of tools and systems, such as IVR and RAIS, which help to ensure that data and workflows are logical and efficient. These tools support maintaining good quality data and reducing the duplication of effort where possible. Some greater focus on the quality of caller experience for FDSP is important in order to strike a balance between efficiency of workflows for UNHCR and a satisfactory user experience for callers.

71. The evaluation found clear evidence that in more sophisticated set-ups (e.g., in Jordan) the technology resources available are used to leverage workflow efficiencies. For

[49] UNHCR Jordan staff; UNHCR Egypt staff

[50] UNHCR Jordan staff

example, UNHCR intelligently uses tools as part of its broader ecosystem by integrating UNHCR tools and 'off-the-shelf' applications.[51] This includes auto-creating tickets and referrals in RAIS based on caller selections, creating closed tickets when a call has been resolved, using IVR application programming interface (API) calls to handle specific requests. Other examples include intelligent IVR upgrades and the way data are drawn down via a data highway[52] and from RAIS.

72. Both classic IVR and enhanced IVR are important tools for introducing greater workflow efficiency. Classic IVR brings clear gains in filtering out calls that are not relevant/eligible for UNHCR support, as well as providing basic details for those handling the call or directing the callers to an appropriate agent based on their language selection. Enhanced IVR branching is very efficient in terms of allowing callers to access exactly the service they need and to be referred quickly if they are eligible. Similarly, RAIS's ability to determine whether someone is eligible for assistance in certain scenarios is leveraged by advanced IVR in Jordan via an API to introduce efficiency gains. This means that a significant number of calls can be handled directly by IVR, without requiring the assistance of an agent, freeing up agents' time to focus on more urgent or complex cases.[53] This removes a known barrier in that accessing agents can be difficult for callers, primarily due to on-call waiting times (usually after an initial IVR navigation). Figure 19 indicates the percentage of calls that reach an agent, relative to all verified calls[54] (pink line at the bottom) and to a subset of calls deemed by the IVR to be 'agent relevant' (purple line at the top). This shows the effects of IVR filtering where the proportion of calls reaching an agent is low in the context of all verified calls (5.7% monthly average and consistently lower than 11.6%). The purple line further indicates that not all 'agent relevant' calls (as determined by IVR) reach an agent (58.7% avg), with waiting times still a notable issue for callers. IVR effectively bypasses this known barrier for callers and provides an efficient route to connect a request with relevant follow up and action.

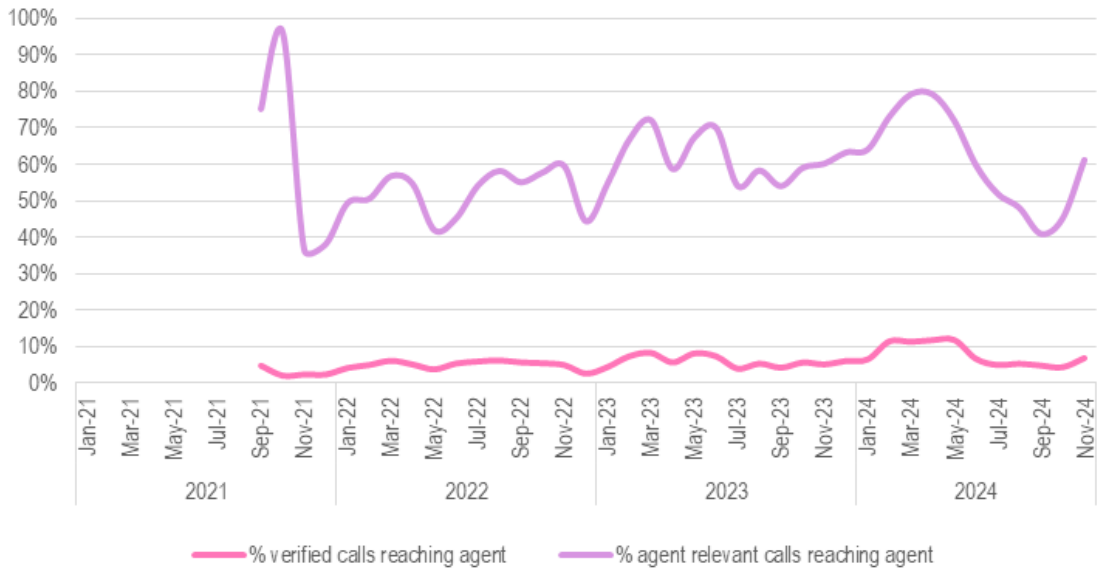
[51] UNHCR DIMA staff

[52] The data highway is a Json file, which provides a sub-set of data as a source for the enhanced IVR. It was developed as a means for retrieving the required data from proGres when UNHCR were experiencing syncing issues between proGres and RAIS. It also improves the performance of enhanced IVR and is used by other in-country tools.

[53] UNHCR Jordan staff

[54] Verified calls describes where callers pass the initial menus in the IVR branching to verify their identify.

Figure 19: The proportion agent relevant calls reaching an agent



Source: Jordan Data Analysis Group (DAG)

73. Technology is leveraged to good effect in creating efficiency gains by reducing the duplication of effort.55 Call operators across the region have a clear understanding of ticketing systems, referral pathways, and when to leverage each system, RAIS, or proGres.56 The evaluation found that there are very few non-corporate single-use57 custom tools in use. This aids efficiency at the ecosystem level, with fewer differently configured interfaces being used, generating differently configured data. Where there are single-use tools in use, such as RAIS, these respond to a defined need. For example, RAIS was developed originally because it filled a gap that corporate tools could not satisfy.58 RAIS pulls data from proGres daily. To some extent, these systems are duplicative because they store much of the same data, but, broadly, their functions are very different, with a clear separation of registration tasks and assistance-based tasks. Importantly, RAIS is deployed and well-socialized among service providers/partners.

74. There was some evidence to suggest that workflow efficiency (e.g., the calling process) may be too engineered towards volume and the time spent on calls rather than on the quality of the experience. For instance, although enhanced IVR reduces the workload of call operators and reduces call length, it can be challenging for callers to navigate the menu. For example, in Jordan, there is no option to navigate backwards in the menu if callers select the wrong option and there is no option to select multiple assistance types per call. This increases call volumes because FDSP callers must hang up and repeat their

[55] Across all operations, a clear example of duplication of effort was found when FDSP contact UNHCR multiple times regarding the same issue meaning that UNHCR must process a referral and respond to a query multiple times. In situations where demand for UNHCR information and services is high, and assuming that cases are being processed in good time, some of this multiplicity in contacting UNHCR presents a clear efficiency issue at scale. UNHCR have a responsibility (to everyone who then cannot contact UNHCR due to busy lines) to manage the throughflow of requests coming into them, filter it to determine which are 'legitimate' or 'eligible', then focus on serving those people.

[56] UNHCR staff from Jordan, Egypt, Iraq and Tunisia

[57] Tools and systems that have been developed by individual operations/regional bureaux and are not widely used by UNHCR at the corporate level.

[58] UNHCR DIMA staff

calls multiple times if they make a mistake, they are seeking multiple assistance types, or their data entry is not fast enough. This is particularly poignant given the issue that most callers struggle to access the IVR channel in the first instance when the lines are busy.

4.2.2. Efficiency and data and information management

75. Key finding 8: Across most COs studied in the evaluation except Mauritania, information systems were found to be in place and being used. Proper information systems are critical in securely centralizing personal and case information in one place and in ensuring that these can be accessed in a smooth and efficient manner. In operations where data is not stored on proper information systems there were found to be some challenges to data security, such as risks of identity fraud, unauthorized access, or data breaches. There are mixed views on the best approach to identity verification.

Data management and the use of information systems

76. Most of the operations covered by the evaluation (e.g., Egypt, Jordan, Iraq, Libya, and Tunisia) make use of the corporate tools available (proGres) and of regional tools (RAIS) to support their PBCC operations. To note in Tunisia, such tools were recently introduced and before that, systematic data was lacking. In Mauritania, the PBCC function was found to be less sophisticated due to its reliance on manual tracking of calls in Excel and lack of integrated information system, but it was in the process of introducing RAIS at the time of the data collection.

77. The use of RAIS and proGres elevates the practices and principles to a good standard by default. The systems offer useful functionality and flexibility to give staff the best chance of managing data effectively. There are also benefits to using tailor-made solutions such as RAIS and proGres, including a robust level of data security, in-house technical support, and the ability customize RAIS locally and to configure the system to share relevant information with partners. This means that systems can adequately meet the needs of COs, supporting their ability to respond to local contexts and creating efficiencies in referral processes.

Data quality and data sharing

78. Data is primarily generated by people entering details into information systems. With enhanced IVR, a proportion of this is automated through the branching selections, and Cisco applications collect basic system-generated analytics (e.g., call durations). The data-gathering process is underpinned by clear training and guidance. Data quality is certainly enhanced by the applications in use. The less sophisticated operations, which have lower technical capacity and resources available, face many of the associated issues because they do not benefit from the more advanced applications. For example, in Tunisia, information management has been strengthened with the recent deployment of RAIS, late in 2024. Prior to RAIS, staff were tracking communications through proGres and sometimes through Excel. In principle, this is not an issue, but because of issues such as weaker data governance and oversight, fewer routines, and fewer common standards, data is often of a lower quality, being fragmented and unreliable for analysis purposes. These instances provide a useful contrast to operations using a single, centralized, UNHCR-sponsored tool, where staff can ask and respond to more complex questions about their data, and more readily use it to inform decision-making.

Data sharing

79. In addition to sharing via information systems, there were examples where data was being stored and shared locally. For example, in Mauritania which does not yet use RAIS (although it is in the process of deploying it), case data are stored and shared in Excel and across multiple operations there were examples of case information being shared by email.[59] This does raise some challenges for data security, as data that is stored outside of secure systems is more vulnerable and may expose UNHCR and FDSP to undue risk.

80. In Egypt, although RAIS is accessible to some partners, the interviewees in-country reported that it cannot be accessed by refugee-led partners due to concerns about sharing individuals' confidential information with other refugees and asylum seekers.[60] A similar limitation was observed in Libya, where the PBCC implementing partner does not have direct access to proGres as the system can only be accessed by UNHCR for data protection reasons. However, as proGres holds personal data, which is necessary to enable operators to deal with calls, data and reporting must be shared back and forth between UNHCR and its implementing partner. This leads to process inefficiencies in the PBCC as data cannot be shared equitably with all partners. The implementing partner is reliant on UNHCR supplying information, meaning it takes longer to handle queries. Even where UNHCR and interagency partners, such as WFP, have global data sharing agreements, it is challenging to operationalize these at the country-level and there are still challenges in accessing the UNHCR data needed for them to carry out their referral work. This challenge was raised in both Egypt and Mauritania.

Identity verification

81. Across all PBCC operations, UNHCR performs caller identity verification as a standard practice to uphold security and access to information. This is performed regardless of the sophistication of the PBCC. The evaluation found very mixed views on the security and efficacy of these checks, with opinions varying among the UNHCR staff and callers. In Jordan, UNHCR staff indicated that there was potential to strengthen the security of identity checks conducted by the IVR. The current system requests personal details, which could be accessed by individuals outside of the caller's family and misused. Staff reported a desire to strengthen identity verification by introducing passcodes or other checks, bringing them in line with other industries such as banking.[61] However, in other countries, such as Egypt, call operators and FDSP callers stated that security requirements were a barrier to access. FDSP callers found the level of information required to verify their identity to be off-putting, while call operators and callers both reported that the process requiring operators to end the call if they believed the caller was not alone, was highly inefficient as it forced FDSP callers to repeat their call. This is a significant barrier for callers who may require an interpreter or other assistance to contact the PBCC.[62]

RAIS

82. **Key finding 9: RAIS is crucial to the success of many PBCC initiatives in RB MENA. It is widely used across COs, providing a user-friendly interface, sophisticated**

[59] UNHCR Mauritania staff

[60] UNHCR Egypt partners

[61] UNHCR Jordan staff

[62] UNHCR Egypt staff; FDSP FGDs in Egypt

options for digitalizing workflows, and the ability to customize it to suit different needs. However, there are some challenges in terms of its limitations in tracing records from inception to close and in ensuring partners' access.

83. RAIS was the favored tool among UNCHR staff and call operators across the six countries.63 Of those staff who had used both RAIS and less sophisticated models under different systems (e.g., Microsoft Excel and SMS Viewer), they stated that RAIS has brought clear efficiency gains and has simplified workflows.64 Some call operators also stated that they preferred using RAIS to proGres as it enabled clearer tracking of calls and queries.65 Partners in Libya were pleased with the introduction of RAIS as it has provided them with greater capabilities in processing caller requests and has linked them with an actual service, rather than just re-referring callers. With the support of RB MENA technical specialists, RAIS can also be easily customized to suit the needs of different operations and can be managed and updated by country-level staff once established. It can also enable a sophisticated information environment in countries where it is well-established, such as Jordan.

84. However, although RAIS is undoubtedly a powerful tool, one key challenge, identified by regional stakeholders, is that it is "not a proper ticketing tool". Specifically, this refers to the limited functionality for tracking information requests/tickets/referrals through the system once generated, particularly when tickets are referred between multiple functional units. This makes it harder to track cases and queries through the case's lifecycle as the linkage between related tickets and referrals is limited.66 This issue is partly due to how RAIS users do or do not make use of certain built-in features (e.g., the function to close tickets or to input the actions taken on tickets), whereas in other cases it is the application itself lacking the ability to physically create a link between related items in a way that a single request can be traced.

85. In COs where RAIS was not available before November 2024, such as Mauritania and Tunisia, issues were found regarding the consistency, quality and completeness of their data. This was found to affect them to the extent that they struggle to report on specific services and activities in a coherent way.67

Aging Technologies

86. **Key finding 10: Some of the widely used systems, such as Cisco and RAIS, are aging, which poses a challenge to PBCC sustainability. It could also create a potential problem as COs continue to adopt the same systems.**

87. RAIS is considered old in digital terms and may be behind the curve of technology developments. It is built on old software, which has implications for maintenance and security. Separate to its age, there are also challenges in some countries concerning the system's operating capacity and performance. UNHCR have taken steps to mitigate these

[63] UNHCR staff in Jordan, Egypt, Iraq and Tunisia

[64] UNHCR Tunisia staff

[65] UNHCR Tunisia staff

[66] UNHCR DIMA staff

[67] UNHCR staff in Mauritania and Tunisia

performance issues, with the Data Information Management and Analysis (DIMA) team increasing the capacity inside Microsoft Azure68 in October 2024.69

88. An additional challenge is that RAIS's component parts have been coded by different developers. This makes the system very difficult and time-consuming to maintain from a software engineering perspective. There is an understanding between DIMA and Global Data Service (GDS) that RAIS should be phased out and that, while a tailored information system needs to exist due to a clear user requirement, any new system should be built on a different platform to leverage recent upgrades in technology, remove the age-related risks, and create fewer unnecessary maintenance issues. Given the scale of RAIS, this will take significant time and effort. The Digital Gateway Contact Centre solution, to be piloted in 2025, will address these challenges, as it is built on a newer technology stack (Microsoft Power Platform), and is planned to be integrated with proGres. However, in the short term, in the absence of an alternative, RAIS will continue to be used and expanded into other operations. However, it is important that the COs implementing RAIS are aware of potential technical issues in the system.70

89. Several COs raised concerns about the age of the Cisco system in its use across the region. The widely utilized Cisco system was adopted by Jordan, which has run the system for many years.71 However, stakeholders acknowledged that the current Cisco system is not one of the most recent packages. While the system should continue to function sufficiently, it is less flexible than new models and could become difficult to maintain or more expensive due to obsolescence. An emerging example of this was seen in Tunisia. Here, the Helpline services call center aims to integrate WhatsApp channels alongside a traditional telephone set-up. The operation is due to implement Cisco in early 2025, drawing on the same software used by the Jordan Helpline. However, Cisco does not allow for the integration of WhatsApp.72 This highlights inefficiencies in the use of the Tunisian PBCC as a key contact channel, as it must be managed and maintained separately from the rest of the PBCC's channels.

Data generation

90. **Key finding 11: Overall, routine reporting was found to be useful, but further efficiencies could be introduced, e.g., reducing some duplication in processes. It could also benefit from greater depth and cohesion in reporting on variables of interest, including more in-depth age, gender and diversity (AGD) analyses.**

91. Routine reporting is prevalent within each CO, particularly those with fully-fledged call centres. However, this was also seen in some decentralized systems, such as Iraq's current PBCC. These typically take the form of sequential monthly reports to senior management on the key usage figures. Often, these are published products, which may utilize data analytics tools with set templates to assist with specific parts of the workflow (e.g., Microsoft PowerBI). In some places, the production process includes instances of unnecessary loops, involving multiple parties or manual effort, which could be reduced. The data generated are useful for dynamic products such as dashboards, which are used

[68] Microsoft Azure is a cloud computing platform that provides cloud services, including those for computing, analytics, storage and networking.

[69] UNHCR DIMA staff

[70] UNHCR DIMA staff; UNHCR HQ staff

[71] UNHCR Jordan staff

[72] UNHCR Tunisia staff

by COs. Sometimes these are linked directly to sources where elsewhere they may work from sequential data exports. The latter process would require some manual effort.

92. As a regional tool, RAIS can access and synthesize any data included in it at the CO level. However, it should be recognized that some of the PBCC figures (e.g., call volumes) may be held in Cisco applications. RAIS tracks where requests from callers make it through the system, resulting in either a record of a call (ticket) or a call to action (referral). Custom reports (mainly tables) can be generated in RAIS for monitoring purposes. For the high-level PBCC statistics, dashboards are available at the regional level.

93. At the country level, although PBCC reporting is customizable, the scope is often quite narrow, focusing on the call volumes, call durations, the timing of calls, and the categorization of subject matter of calls (i.e., on feedback, complaints, and responses that are referred to UNHCR's/partners' key protection and assistance services). There is less information available on the quality of calls. Data from PBCCs is not shared beyond the RB and does not feature in any standard UNHCR corporate reporting processes.

4.2.3. Efficiency and the allocation and management of resources

Human resources

94. **Key finding 12: There is no ideal blueprint for the appropriate human resourcing levels required for PBCCs. UNHCR has struggled to strike the right balance across contexts to respond to the scale of demand with the resources available and avoid staff burnout.**

95. UNHCR's PBCC staffing levels varies by context, with models including full-time UNHCR call operators, rotational UNHCR staff,[73] and partner-led teams. While each has strengths and weaknesses (see EQ5), the evaluation found full-time call operators to be the most efficient model. Rotational staff often struggle to balance PBCC duties with other responsibilities, particularly as caller numbers increase when there is an influx of new FDSP, leading to inefficiencies and burnout.[74]

96. Staffing levels depend on context, resources, and evolving needs, which, in turn, requires flexibility. Although the full PBCC model is nascent in Tunisia, there was evidence of good practice in enabling flexibility with call operators' time, utilizing it across the two phone lines, WhatsApp, and its survey operations depending on the flow of calls and the level of contact on each channel.[75] Outsourced models may offer easier staffing adjustments – or at least move the responsibility for it to the contractor or partner. However, budget constraints and unpredictable changes pose challenges. Although Egypt CO expanded its PBCC capacity in 2023, consolidating operations, demand has remained overwhelming because of the volume of calls associated with the rapid increase in FDSP. Staff across the COs noted difficulties in scaling up PBCCs rapidly for large-scale emergencies where demand from callers contacting UNHCR to request services and protection support outstrips UNHCR's ability to resource enough phone lines to respond to calls in a timely manner.

[73] UNHCR staff assigned to other functions who took on contact centre shifts in addition to their other work.

[74] UNHCR staff in Tunisia and Mauritania

[75] UNHCR Tunisia staff

97. Demand often exceeds PBCC capacity, leading to high pressure and potential burnout among call operators, especially due to heavy workloads and the emotional toll of frontline assistance. Some mental health support exists, for example, Jordan offers tai chi and team lunches; Tunisia provides peer support and psychologist access,[76] and Egypt has held a team retreat. However, some of these supports are outside of work hours, making participation difficult. Call operators reported that they feel most fulfilled when they can directly assist callers rather than just making referrals, highlighting the need for information to be available for callers and ideally to some extent accessible to operators regarding the extent of progress on callers' queries primarily for FSDPs but also to reinforce PBCC operators' morale. [77]

Financial resources

98. Key finding 13: COs do not have a clear understanding of the costs associated with different PBCC models, including the costs of transitioning between different models. This impacts decision-making.

99. The evaluation found a significant data gap in the financial data held by COs, which was partly due to the way that financial data were organized. This meant that data were not always available for indirect costs, such as updating information databases, configuring technical systems, and training staff. Data were also often unavailable for time costs, such as the staff time required to change processes, such as during IVR rollouts, recording messages, and communicating with FDSP about changes in the PBCC services. Furthermore, in COs that have additional dedicated partner hotlines and helplines – for example, Egypt, Iraq and Mauritania have these for CBIs – some partners' costs are not included in the overall PBCC budgets, even where partners' helplines and hotlines are funded by UNHCR. This leads to overall confusion about the true costs of various PBCC models. That said, the overall budgets for PBCCs, shared by UNHCR, showed wide variations across countries. These ranged from a budget of USD1.7 million in Iraq at the height of the IIC in 2021, to approximately USD30,000 for PBCC in Mauritania in 2024 (further detail are provided in Annex 9).

100. UNHCR staff also reported anecdotally that there are significant costs, both direct and in terms of staff time, in moving between different PBCC models. However, the evaluation found an evidence gap in costing these transitions.[78] Each CO has a different approach to funding their PBCC. For example, in some countries, the PBCC is funded through core funding, while in others it is tied to funding for a particular programmatic area and supported by a specific donor.

101. Noting the above challenges, the evaluation used the available data to explore some aspects of the costs of PBCCs, at least in terms of the patterns displayed in Figure 20, below.

[76] UNCHR staff in Jordan and Tunisia

[77] UNCHR staff in Jordan and Tunisia

[78] UNHCR staff in Egypt, Libya and Tunisia

Figure 20: PBCC financial costs (with breakdown by core component for Egypt, Jordan and Mauritania)

Source: Financial data provided by UNCHR

102. The key costs for the PBCCs are as follows:

- **Staffing and related hardware and software** comprised approximately two-thirds of the PBCC budget for the COs in which data were available. Some hardware and software costs were proportionate to the number of operators, e.g., licenses and equipment.
- **Some significant short-term costs related to technology** upgrades or developments, notably the introduction of enhanced IVR in Jordan and Egypt which were associated with significant costs (approximately USD100,000 in Egypt for IVR set-up).
- **External technical support** comprised 10-17% of the overall PBCC budgets and is highly valued.
- **Some COs have provided financial support to subsidize the costs** to FDSP. For example, in Jordan refugees were previously eligible for the Zain SIM card which allowed for free calls to the Helpline. However, this was phased out due to the high costs – it had accounted for approximately 24% of the Jordanian PBCC budget.
- **Finally, some costs are covered at the regional level,** e.g., those relating to Azure hosting costs and previous costs in the development of RAIS.

103. A further analysis of the PBCCs' costs is presented in Annex 8. The data were not sufficient to analyze the relative costs of different models due to the aforementioned reasons, including data gaps and the variation in the features of different PBCC models.

4.2.4. Efficiency in PBCC processes – receiving calls, identifying individuals' case data, handling requests, making referrals, and commencing outbound calls.

104. Key finding 14: Within PBCCs evaluated, the processes for receiving calls, handling data and requests, and making referrals were generally found to be efficient. However, these processes were found to be less efficient in the COs using hotlines and helplines rather than call centres. Referral processes also become less efficient once referrals reach technical or functional units due to the high volumes of referrals and their limited capacity to respond.

Enablers of process efficiency

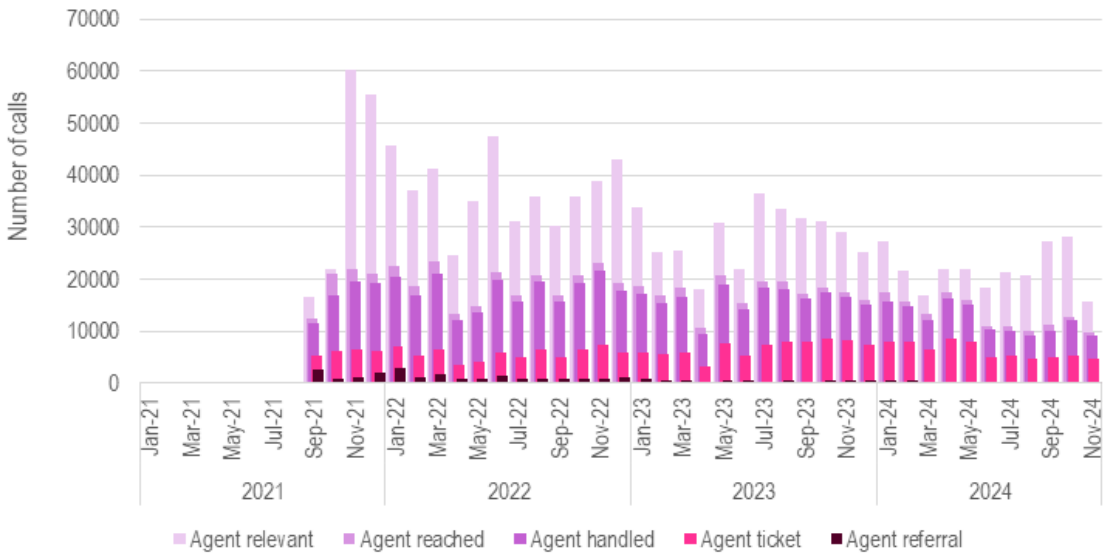
105. In operations with full call centres, such as Egypt, Jordan, Libya, Tunisia (since November 2024), and Iraq (under the IIC model), the processes for receiving calls, identifying case data, handling requests, and making referrals are generally efficient thanks to clear standard operating procedures (SOPs) and guidelines for call operators, which are adhered to and tailored to each operation's PBCC set up.[79] Call operators reported that they are familiar with processes and functional unit staff were satisfied with the quality and timeliness of referrals. Call operators also reported that the data and information necessary for case management are accessible to operators and provide a full and accurate account of a user's profile and needs.[80] Processes such as enhanced IVR are efficient in filtering the volume of calls that reach UNHCR, identifying those that require referrals for further assistance (see Figure 21 for Jordan's data on agent-relevant calls). This clearly shows that, although callers might struggle to reach an agent (agent-relevant calls), their call can be dealt with by the agent once they get through, with only a small proportion of them

[79] UNHCR staff and call operators in Egypt, Jordan, Iraq, and Tunisia

[80] Call operators in Egypt, Jordan, Tunisia and Libya

needing a further referral (agent-referred calls). However, FDSP interviews in other countries reported lower levels of satisfaction with their referral experiences with different systems (see 4.3).

Figure 21: Agent (operator)-relevant calls and scale of those dealt with versus those referred – Jordan only.[81]

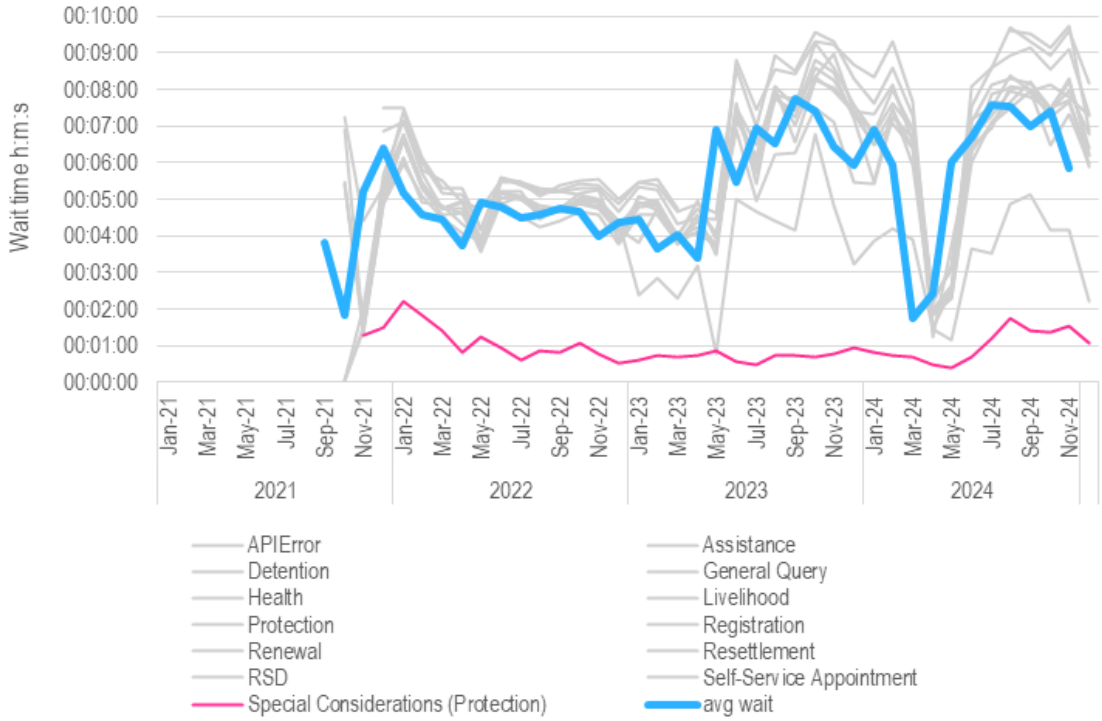


Source: Jordan Data Analysis Group (DAG)

106. Further benefits of the enhanced IVR used in Jordan is its ability to fast track calls. The evidence suggests its effectiveness in this capacity, as seen in Figure 22, below. In Jordan, which has the most advanced IVR, urgent calls or calls with special protection considerations are identified and fast-tracked to call operators (Figure 22). In Figure 22, the blue line indicates the average wait time of calls, whereas the pink line reflects the significantly lower wait time experienced because of the IVR's ability to fast track special protection consideration calls. However, given that this is a highly advanced feature of IVR, it is not possible with the classic IVR systems used in Egypt or with the less sophisticated set-ups used in Iraq, Libya, Tunisia, and Mauritania.

[81] Agent relevant describes calls which (due to IVR branching) should be handled by an agent, Agent reached describes whether those calls reach an agent, agent handled is whether they are marked as satisfactorily handled by an agent (i.e. caller gets a response), agent ticket is whether the agent feels they need to create a ticket, and agent referral is whether the agent feels they need to create a referral (ticket and referral as per RAIS, constitutes 'an action' or 'a need for something specific).

Figure 22: Average call wait time versus fast-track call wait time – Jordan only.



Source: Jordan Data Analysis Group (DAG)

Barriers to process efficiency

107. The main barriers to highly efficient processes are breakdowns and bottlenecks in technical systems. For example, in Jordan, call operators reported that RAIS is regularly offline due to technical difficulties.82 This results in call operators keeping logs in Excel, which must be uploaded to RAIS later, leading to a larger and more manual workload. The root cause of this was found to be the capacity of the system – although this capacity was increased in October 2024. Additionally, Tunisia has faced challenges in transitioning to RAIS from a process that was based on combining proGres and Excel. The former system was more labor-intensive in terms of capturing data and meant that referral information was not always complete.83

108. The evaluation found limited evidence of call centres being used for outbound calls, except in Tunisia, where the call center is routinely used to deliver surveys and communicate the outcomes of queries and eligibility assessments to FDSP (see the good practice example box under EQ3). However, in Iraq, the practice for operators to make outbound calls to create registration appointments caused significant bottlenecks. In part, this was due to operators being incentivized to prioritize outbound calls because their targets focused on the number of appointments created and of outgoing calls made but also due to the capacity of the system not matching the demands placed up on.

109. Processes are less efficient in operations using hotlines and helplines, such as in Mauritania and Tunisia before November 2024. Processes in these models were managed

[82] Call operators in Jordan

[83] UNHCR staff and call operators in Tunisia

manually, often using many different systems, such as Excel, proGres, SMS Look-up, and emails, from which data must be triangulated. Here, processes were found to be more manual and time-consuming and resulted in a significant lack of reliable data.[84] In Tunisia, the CO reported that during their rotational helpline phase, there were challenges in ensuring that rotational call operators gathered and input caller data and made referrals in a systematic manner. In operations that did not use RAIS, such as Libya, Tunisia, and Mauritania, it was also much harder to identify callers and access their referral history.[85] This has the potential to result in multiple referrals for the same issue.

Referrals to units and partners

110. Although referral processes within call centres have good SoPs, in the KIIs, efficiency was reported to deteriorate in practice. For example, within functional units, the evaluation found less adherence to SoPs and referrals were often managed among teams via email or word-of-mouth. This meant that information was not properly updated in RAIS and proGres in a timely manner. Staff in functional units reported that they also found it challenging to quickly process the volume of referrals, leading to a longer waiting time for FDSP.

111. These factors were seen to have several negative implications for process efficiency. Firstly, it makes it challenging to track the progress of tickets and harder to develop an accurate picture of when tickets are closed. In turn, this makes it harder for call operators to update FDSP callers on the status of their queries. Furthermore, several call operators reported that the lack of timely updates on tickets and slow response rates to queries leads to FDSP callers making repeat calls to follow up on the status of their queries, driving up call volumes and potentially making it harder for new callers to access the PBCC. In Jordan, both refugees and staff reported that, on occasion, the IVR has provided refugees with inaccurate information about their eligibility for assistance because data in RAIS, which is integrated with the IVR to directly provide information about the caller via their registration number, was not up to date.[86]

112. In Mauritania, similar challenges were observed in making referrals between partners. The decentralized model, which does not use RAIS, lacks a structured system to support referrals. Consequently, referrals are managed in a more ad hoc manner via email, phone calls between partners, and by providing FDSP callers with phone numbers for the other hotlines.[87] This creates a bottleneck in managing the referral processes. The Mauritania CO is putting RAIS into operation to address this challenge. In contrast, in Iraq's new decentralized PBCC system, partners have strong processes for making direct referrals. This is enabled by their access to RAIS, which means they can make referrals to each other without going through UNHCR as an intermediary, which had been the case in the IIC and had slowed down the referral process.

Efficiency for callers

113. Finally, there is a need to separate process efficiency for UNHCR from process efficiency for FDSP callers. In Jordan and Egypt, refugees and asylum seekers did not find PBCC processes efficient. They consistently reported long waiting times to speak with an operator

[84] UNHCR Tunisia staff

[85] UNHCR Mauritania staff

[86] UNHCR call operators in Jordan; FDSP FGDs in Jordan

[87] UNHCR Mauritania staff

and found navigating IVR trees cumbersome. Data provided by UNHCR in Jordan shows the average time spent speaking to an agent (on average 2 minutes 23 seconds) is heavily outweighed by the time spent waiting to connect with an agent (on average 5 minutes 17 seconds after IVR branching is completed and not including wait time to entre the IVR system). This is in addition to first trying to access the call channel to get through to the IVR, which can take multiple attempts. In Egypt, FDSP reported they are often provided with phone numbers for relevant partners rather than receiving direct referrals. While this increases efficiencies for UNHCR, it is not satisfactory for callers who have to begin the process of trying to seek assistance again via another system.88 Furthermore, FDSP reported inaccuracies in the data held about their query and inaccuracies in information provided to them. Moreover, the KIIs with some partners regarding the accuracy of referrals to them suggest that better tracking of the implementation of referral systems would be valuable. These experiences strongly link to PBCCs effectiveness, which is discussed in Section 4.3.

Figure 23: Refugee experience in contacting the IIC in Iraq during the inter-agency PBCC system phase.

"*It was free, so anyone could call, but there was a lot of pressure, not easy for them to answer. 100 times I would try to get to the operator. The operator due to the load, would not answer quickly – but when the operator would answer if they can reply, they say they will answer and although it took some time, they would answer".*

4.2.5. PBCCs' management of performance to ensure optimal functionality and capacity.

114. Key finding 15: The performance management of PBCCs varies significantly by country and according to the operational set up and maturity. Well-established call centres use the data they generate to inform their ongoing work practices. However, in less sophisticated or newer PBCCs there is a need to strengthen the quality and use of data.

Quantitative monitoring

115. In the well-established PBCCs in Jordan, Egypt, Libya, Iraq, there is a clear use of data at the PBCC operational level. Data are largely used by those managing the PBCC, but there is also reporting to senior management and functional unit colleagues on a weekly or monthly basis depending on the operation.89 A good example of the use of data to improve call center performance is Egypt, where data informs course corrections, such as the merger of two centres in Alexandria and Cairo into one unit and changes in staffing levels to try to meet demand. Other good examples include Libya – where data are used to follow up with relevant functional units when a ticket or referral has been open for a long time – and Jordan, were data on call volumes informed a decision to re-route certain services via the IVR.90 The Data Analysis Group (DAG) in Jordan reported that they run supplementary analyses to consider the robustness of the system.91 In some operations, UNHCR

[88] FDSP FGDs in Jordan and Egypt

[89] UNHCR staff in Jordan, Egypt, Iraq and Tunisia

[90] UNHCR staff in Egypt and Libya

[91] UNHCR Jordan staff

monitors partner-implemented PBCCs. Data play a crucial role in this, and it is the basis of the monitoring practices. In Iraq, UNHCR has dashboards in place, which provide monitoring data via RAIS. In Libya, data are reportedly used to monitor the performance of the implementing partner.92

116. However, there are limitations in the PBCC data, which impose limitations on data analysis and data use in monitoring performance. Data are not compiled as standard to form a single dataset for analyses and the available data varies greatly across the COs. The key limitations in using data to monitor and manage performance across the region include the following:

- UNHCR does not have a good understanding of how many attempted calls are made, relative to how many calls make it through to the phone lines.
- In most cases, UNHCR does not know who called the PBCC because the case ID at the family level links to the principal applicant's details in analysis products. This framing seems to be inconsistently applied across operations.
- There are no built-in signals to detect system outages. When systems are offline, helpline operators tend to notice because of the higher call volumes or specific information being unavailable when people call. They relay this to the technical units.
- Across all COs, data on tracking what happens after the call has been dealt with (e.g., tickets, referrals and related assistance) was found to be a weakness. Most of the time, this is limited to what is available in RAIS, which is dependent on staff to update the status using the available functionality. Reporting on ticket/referral status is neither routinely present in reporting nor is it used to encourage follow-up; however, there are some exceptions to this, such as in Libya, where referral status forms part of the standard report. As discussed under EQ2.4, the challenge here is that referrals are made via different routes and not always in RAIS.

117. Some systems enable data analysis that can support the management of PBCCs. For example, the evaluation's analysis of the proportion of unique, first time, and repeat callers may have implications for PBCC design going forward, e.g., if a high proportion of calls are from first-time callers, more time may be required per call (see Annex 8 for more information). However, most systems had limited qualitative monitoring which is discussed further in the following Section 4.3 on effectiveness.

4.3. EQ3: EFFECTIVENESS: How effective are call centres and hotlines/helplines in strengthening two-way communication and transparency, and in building relationships and trust with users?

118. This section considers the effectiveness of PBCCs. In particular, the evaluation assessed the factors that influence user satisfaction with PBCCs, the extent to which the data collected are used to inform program learning and adaptation, PBCCs' performance in

[92] UNHCR Libya staff

communicating with users about the status of their query (closing the feedback loop), and data's overall role in strengthening two-way communication and trust.

4.3.1. Factors influencing user-satisfaction and trust in different models of PBCC.

Drivers of satisfaction and trust

119. Key finding 16: Key factors affecting user satisfaction and trust in PBCC were its accessibility, speed and communication about follow up to their queries, the quality of the operators, accuracy of information provided and callers' familiarity with PBCC. Linked to the findings under relevance, user satisfaction and trust were also seen to vary according to population and vulnerabilities.

120. Across all contexts, the evaluation found recurring trends in factors that drive user satisfaction. Firstly, the strength of call operators is a common factor across all contexts considered. Overall, the FDSP who participated in the evaluation were satisfied with the quality of service provided by call operators in terms of their competence and professionalism, as well as their attitude towards them as callers.[93] Refugees and asylum seekers in Egypt and Tunisia appreciated when call operators were empathetic and provided high-quality and accurate information.[94] In Libya, staff reported that refugees were happy when they could speak to operators of the same gender as themselves.[95] The user satisfaction survey data in Jordan indicated that, although it takes callers a long time to connect with an operator, the operators are helpful once callers reach them.[96] In Jordan, which has the most advanced IVR set-up, there is a clear preference for speaking with an operator rather than the IVR, as reflected in both satisfaction surveys, the 2024 Communication with Communities survey, and the evaluation's FGDs.

121.

122. Investment in training and support for operators played a clear role in supporting this quality as well as operators' own commitment to support FDSP. In Jordan and Egypt, PBCCs have a strong focus on call operator coaching and supervision to support a systematic and high-quality service. Additionally, in Libya there is a dedicated focal point from UNHCR in the partner's center. Call operators in Tunisia (who had been in post for 4 weeks a at the time of data collection) also emphasized the importance of strong support and feedback to help them improve their work and provide additional benefit to the populations they serve. Feedback was welcomed both from their team leader and from the functional units, particularly feedback on the quality and content of the referrals.[97]

123. Familiarity with the PBCC also influences the callers' levels of satisfaction. In Jordan, there was clear evidence that levels of satisfaction are influenced positively by familiarity and regular use of the Helpline system.[98] Refugees in urban areas who had used the Helpline for many years were more satisfied with the service than those in camps where Helpline had been recently introduced. This stems from the fact that those in urban areas

[93] FGDs in Egypt, Jordan and Tunisia

[94] FGDs in Egypt and Tunisia

[95] UNHCR Libya staff

[96] UNHCR Jordan Helpline User Satisfaction Surveys 2021-2024

[97] Call operators in Tunisia

[98] UNHCR Jordan (2024) Communication with Communities Survey 2024

understood how Helpline worked and had clearer expectations regarding its functions and how it could benefit them than those in the camps.[99] However, in Iraq, when the system changed from the IIC to a decentralized, partner-led model, the extent of communication that is needed to embed an understanding of systems was revealed; and a large-scale, multi-media communication campaign was launched to inform FDSP about the new system. The campaign involved partners, social media, and other channels. However, even with this widespread campaign, there were still queries regarding the new system many months later. This was also the case in Jordan with regards to the rollout of Helpline to camp-based populations. UNHCR Jordan engaged with community representatives in camps; shared posters with information about Helpline; and disseminated information about it in front of UNCHR offices and via helpdesks inside the camps. These examples reflect the substantial amount of time needed to introduce a significant change such as a shift from in-person to helpline contact channels.

Drivers of dissatisfaction and trust

124. Key finding 17: Dissatisfaction with PBCC stems from long waiting times, challenges in reaching operators, and poor or slow feedback/updates on queries. Effective systems can build trust in UNHCR more generally. Factors that drive dissatisfaction also undermine trust in the PBCC.

125. The FDSP who participated in the evaluation trusted the PBCC in their country.[100] There was some evidence to suggest that a centralized PBCC model helps to build trust, both in the PBCC itself and in UNHCR more broadly. In Jordan, having a single phone number for Helpline has aided refugees and asylum seekers in building trust as they know it is the number of UNHCR. Jordan's Helpline was also cited by both FGD participants and UNHCR staff as being a useful tool in combatting misinformation, as refugees and asylum seekers can call the Helpline phone number to verify information they have received elsewhere.[101] A similar example was reported in Iraq under the IIC, where one centralized phone number helped to build trust. This is an important factor in contexts with high levels of fraud, where scammers impersonate aid actors. It is also potentially a risk in partner-led systems, given the larger number of actors and numbers involved. [102] Key drivers of dissatisfaction across all PBCC models noted earlier were long waiting times and slow or no clear follow up to caller queries.

Figure 24: FGD female participants in Jordan discussing access to the Helpline.

"If you have kids or are busy you are unhappy if they are busy"

"You might get an answer or not – if you don't get an answer, you are unhappy and despair"

"If they don't answer and a customer walk in then I have to start over"

[99] UNHCR Jordan staff, FGDs and refugee KIIs in Jordan

[100] FGDs in Egypt, Jordan and Tunisia; UNHCR Jordan (2024) Communication with Communities Survey

[101] UNHCR Jordan staff and FGDs in Jordan

[102] UNHCR Iraq staff

126. Factors that directly undermine the trust in PBCCs relate to access issues for those with specific vulnerabilities. This was seen to be common across all PBCC models and is driven more by callers' vulnerabilities than by the type of PBCC model. Participants stated that those with particular vulnerabilities, such as the LGBTIQ+ community and GBV survivors, were less comfortable relying on interpreters and peer support to use the helpline, particularly those from their own communities; therefore, they may have greater trust issues when using the PBCC. In Jordan, those with lower levels of digital literacy, such as some camp-based refugees, were reported to have lower levels of trust in Jordan's Helpline, as they were less comfortable and familiar with accessing digital support. It was reported by UNHCR staff that this demographic was particularly wary because of the prevalence of fraud cases in the Jordanian context.

4.3.2. Extent the data and information collected are subsequently analyzed and used to inform effective response and programming (in reference to AAP core actions, and to Feedback and Response and Learning and Adaptation)

127. Key finding 18: Across all countries, PBCC data are shared with functional units in the CO and are used to inform understanding of patterns and trends in the use of PBCCs and other UNHCR services. There was evidence of some COs using data for general program knowledge, but little evidence that data informs program learning and adaptation.

128. COs' ability to learn from data and the potential to make program adaptions is dictated by limitations in data availability and quality, and also by COs' ability to process and analyze data. The extent to which UNHCR uses data for feedback and response and learning and adaptation varies across the COs and the different PBCC models (with Jordan having the most sophisticated data available). One limitation for wider program learning is that PBCC data are not integrated with the feedback and response data collected from other AAP mechanisms and services, preventing a full picture of the feedback on program learning from being formed (discussed in Section 4.4. and in the good practice example from Iraq).

129. Nonetheless, the evaluation did find some evidence that operations do use call center data, and the feedback received via the PBCCs, to identify and learn from patterns and trends. This enables a greater understanding of who is calling the PBCCs, why they are calling, and the pertinent issues. It also highlights challenges in service provision more broadly. Jordan presented the most sophisticated case (see the good practice example box)[103]. In Egypt, the Infoline produces regular monthly reports, which are shared within UNHCR Egypt and offer some insights into refugee contact.[104] In Libya, there is evidence that call center data are used to enable a quick response to emergency cases. Here, feedback data from the call center is shared with UNHCR and helps to inform messaging to FDSP.[105]

130. There were also examples from COs with less sophisticated data management systems. For example, in Mauritania, feedback gathered via the hotlines is discussed during weekly coordination meetings. In some cases, this has led to adaptations, such as increasing the number of health focal points in Mbera camp and streamlining referral mechanisms for legal assistance in Nouakchott. In Tunisia, the Helpline Services were used to implement the education survey. UNHCR staff reported that the survey's findings challenged their pre-existing assumptions about education within their context, which they found useful in

[103] UNHCR Jordan staff

[104] UNHCR Egypt staff

[105] UNHCR Libya staff

supporting their advocacy efforts. These findings were presented to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to help strengthen their collaboration in the education sector.[106]

Figure 25: Good practice example 4 - Helpline data use in Jordan

Good practice example - Helpline data use in Jordan

- Jordan presents a good practice example of gathering, analysing and sharing Helpline-generated data within the CO to inform learning about programs and services. Examples of how Helpline data are used across the CO include the following:
- Senior management use the Helpline data, such as trends in caller numbers, locations, and the subjects of queries to inform actions and decision-making. For example, management staff working on cash and resettlement noted that they use data (e.g. number of times individuals call the Helpline) to identify priority cases for follow-ups and home visits
- UNHCR units use Helpline data to understand trends in support, such as surges in queries about cash assistance. This enables the units to either amend messaging delivered via Helpline and other communication channels or investigate problems further.
- The Helpline data provides an opportunity to reflect on whether messaging around program is consistent and responsive to needs. One stakeholder reported "A facility like a Helpline is a must in out of camps settings, otherwise you can't really manage it… you do not know where the refugees are if you need to speak to them, or what they know of how their needs are changing."
- Units receive Helpline's satisfaction survey data. While this focuses on Helpline itself, the data are of value to certain units, such as the Protection Unit, in assessing how effective different communication mechanisms are.
- CBIs receive quarterly extracts of the available data on how many people have contacted Helpline in relation to CBIs. This helps to provide insight into who is active or inactive, which can then be used to follow up with households for prioritization and inclusion purposes. The unit also conducts analyses of how many callers have requested home visits for cash eligibility assessments.
- Helpline staff coordinate with management or units if they notice a trend occurring in data or in calls as they come through, for example, an increase in self-harm-related calls, which require urgent action.

4.3.3. Effectiveness of informing users about their query/case resolution status (closing the feedback loop).

131. Key finding 19: There was very limited evidence that PBCCs are effectively closing the feedback loop with users. Across all the PBCC models and operations (other than in Tunisia), significant gaps were found in updating refugees on their query status despite referral processes to functional units being relatively efficient.

Figure 26: Good Practice example 5 - Closing the feedback loop in Tunisia.

Good practice example - Closing the feedback loop in Tunisia

From an early stage of the helpline service, Tunisia has embedded a practice of performing outbound follow-up calls to communicate the outcomes of all queries. Call operators receive communications on closed cases from the units as well as lists with the outcomes of eligibility assessments for services. Call operators are then responsible for communicating outcomes to FDSP.

[106] UNHCR Tunisia staff

132. Across all COs (except for Tunisia), updating users on their query or case resolution status and closing the feedback loop was found to have limited effectiveness. Call operators in Jordan and Egypt reported that they do not always have up-to-date information on callers' case status so they cannot always provide detailed updates to callers. This then drives up the volume of repeat calls, as callers must phone the PBCC again to check on updates.[107] As discussed under EQ2 Efficiency, there are several key barriers to closing feedback loops, including bottlenecks in processes and queries coming into functional units from multiple sources, such as helpdesks, PBCCs, and community volunteers. Finally, the capacity of CO units to close feedback loops is also an issue. In Iraq (under the IIC), there was a strong intention to provide updates to callers, however, the number of outbound calls required blocked call lines, limiting the number of inbound calls that could reach the operators.[108] Some CO functional units were clear about their limited capacity to deal with the scale of the enquiries they receive.

133. However, there were some emerging examples of good practice in closing feedback loops with callers. So far, the Tunisia operations have provided updates systematically (see good practice example box). In Jordan, Libya and Mauritania, there is evidence of more regular updates to callers on cases pertaining to GBV and legal emergencies.[109] In Iraq, the feedback, complaints and response mechanism (CRM) system provides automatic prompts when cases are not followed up or closed in a timely manner and the new model also allows for referral tracking across all feedback mechanisms, including the PBCCs.[110] This supports UNHCR in monitoring partners' closing of feedback loops with callers.

134. A major challenge in providing timely updates to callers regarding their query and case resolution status is how RAIS as an application is used. RAIS does have functionality that shows if a case is opened or closed and to show when a case is closed. However, details of the actions taken to close the case are only shown if these are entered into the system by UNHCR staff. The challenge in updating callers on their query arises because information on status and actions taken to close the case are not always systematically entered into RAIS by staff, despite SOP guidance.

4.3.4. Effectiveness of how PBCCs track and enhance their role in strengthening two-way communication and building trust.

135. Key finding 20: Most COs are not tracking how PBCCs can enhance their role in strengthening two-way communication and building trust. Jordan showed effective use of Helpline-specific satisfaction surveys, but elsewhere PBCC monitoring/management is focused on tracking the volume of calls, the speed of calls and costs (albeit with limited data) with limited focus on quality and outcomes.

136. Overall, there was limited evidence that operators are tracking and enhancing their role in strengthening two-way communication and building trust. The only CO that tracks this systematically is Jordan, via its regular user satisfaction surveys and dedicated FGDs, where PBCC users can provide feedback on their experiences, the ease of using Jordan's Helpline, and recommendations for improvements. Under the IIC in Iraq, there was good

[107] UNHCR Jordan, User Satisfaction Survey data

[108] UNHCR Iraq staff

[109] UNHCR staff in Jordan, Libya and Mauritania

[110] UNHCR Iraq staff

practice at an interagency level in tracking the levels of trust and the prevalence of misinformation during the COVID-19 pandemic, but this has not been continued in the current model.[111]

137. The majority of PBCCs' performance monitoring in the more established call centres (Egypt, Iraq and Libya) is via quantitative key performance indicators (KPIs) (see EQ2 Efficiency), which do not account for factors such as two-way communication and building trust. In Mauritania and Tunisia, KPIs and the monitoring of PBCCs is nascent and does not yet include useful metrics for monitoring these factors.

138. Tracking effectiveness in two-way communication and trust is important for any model of PBCC. There is evidence that UNHCR does have insights into these factors through informal feedback to UNHCR staff and community volunteers, but this is not systematically integrated into feedback systems. Indeed, staff who participated in the evaluation did indicate good insights into FDSP's perceptions of PBCCs across all the country contexts.112 If formal data collection is lacking, then there is strong potential to systematically integrate the feedback on the PBCC gathered from other AAP communication channels to provide a clearer view of the PBCC's effectiveness for users and make any necessary adaptations.

4.4. EQ4. COHERENCE: To what extent do call centres, hotlines/helplines operate coherently and in a coordinated manner along the four interconnected AAP core actions.

139. This section considers the coherence of UNHCR PBCCs within the wider AAP framework. In particular, it considers how the PBCC at the country level is connected and linked to other UNHCR methods for communicating with communities, how they cooperate with UNHCR's sectors and partners, and their coherence with the wider interagency approach to AAP.

4.4.1. The coherence and coordination of UNHCR PBCCs within the overall UNHCR communication and transparency ecosystem

140. **Key finding 21**: **UNHCR PBCCs are well coordinated with other country-level communication and transparency mechanisms, which is supported by staff's strong awareness of each system's strengths and limitations. Contributing factors to coherence include communication strategies and integrated community data analysis. However, coordination could be enhanced through better data disaggregation, leveraging technological advancements, and consistently integrating PBCC feedback with other sources.**

[111] UNHCR Iraq staff

[112] UNHCR staff in Egypt, Jordan, Libya, Iraq, Tunisia and Mauritania

Figure 27: UNHCR information, communication and transparency ecosystem

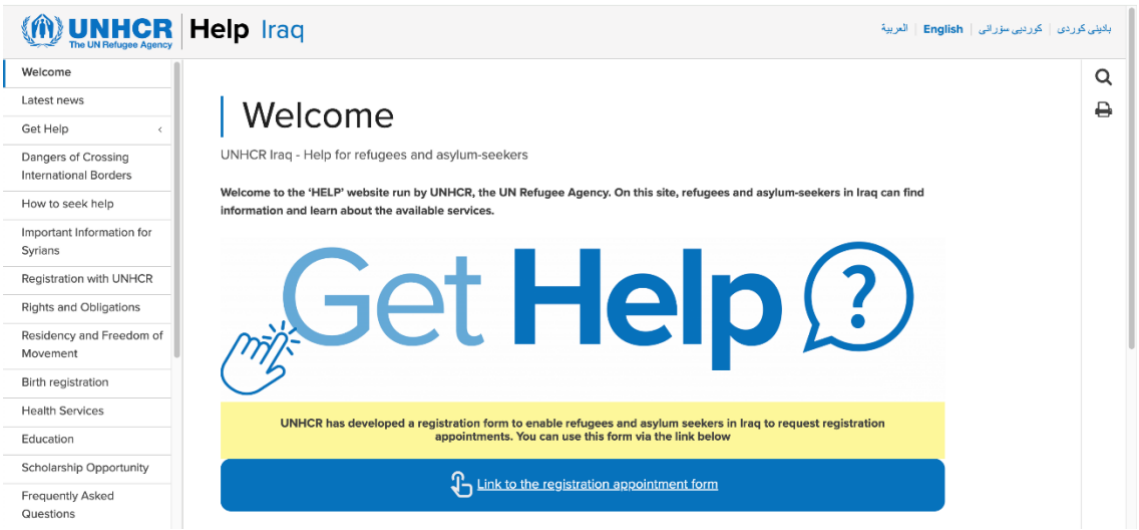
UNHCR information, communication and transparency eco-system
The UNHCR communication and transparency ecosystem is made up of multiple communication methods, including the following:

- *Social media:* WhatsApp groups, Facebook postings, and meetings
- *Community level methods:* community-based volunteers (often refugees); community meetings; and engagement with community leaders, including leaders of RLOs.
- *Emerging technology options:* for example, the online platform in Egypt allowing asylum seekers to request registration appointments, which is part of the global Digital Gateway initiative
- *Online* information sources, including Help website country pages.
- *Material sources* – E.g. Posters, brochures of services for refugees.
- *Telephone* – SMS messaging; phone calls

141. The evaluation interviews highlighted UNHCR staff's strong awareness of the strengths and limitations of the PBCC used in their country. This was often informed by the community-based protection team's engagement at the community level. Their analysis of strengths and limitations aligned with the evaluation's findings on accessibility, two-way communication capacity, and limitations being more context- and person-specific.

142. An approach that promoted coherence within the UNHCR communication and transparency ecosystem is the integration of multiple communication methods under shared PBCC management, as seen in Tunisia, where the contact centre team handles WhatsApp, email, and phone queries.

Figure 28: Example from UNHCR Help Website in Iraq



143. The evaluation interviews with UNHCR staff in Iraq and with external stakeholders at the global level revealed their view of the high costs and profile of a PBCC relative to other methods of communication and concerns that they can overshadow and divert resources from other communication methods. This view was consistently heard and sustained despite the full costs of PBCC not usually being accessible, so perceptions are based on knowledge of costs that are actually lower than the real, full costs (see section 4.2 efficiency). External stakeholders also noted that this was a view shared by other

agencies.[113] However, some COs tended to consider the cost as justified, particularly in places where other methods of communication and contact with FDSP are more constrained due to access issues. The ability of PBCC to be a two-way communication channel, as well as a means to provide information, is part of the reason that costs of PBCC are seen as justified by some stakeholders. Evidence of the relative cost-effectiveness of different communication channels for different roles e.g. information provision, appointment setting, consultation and advice, and access to emergency services was not available.

144. Communication strategies that incorporated PBCCs well as all other communication (including information) channels were found to be valuable for coherence. However, they were usually limited by not being future-looking, i.e. taking into account the implications of evolving technology for PBCC and developments in other communication channels. The implications of technology for all communication channels is relevant given the inter-connectedness of the role of PBCC with the role and performance of other methods.

145. Another limitation was the extent of the analysis of disaggregated data e.g., for different language groups and specific special needs relevant to PBCC use. Given that technology is evolving quickly both in terms of refugees' access to and use of technology as well as within UNHCR, this information and analysis is important. Some of this knowledge on the evolution of technology is often held in more detail within the information and communication technology (ICT) and information management (IM) departments, rather than within the CBP unit, which led the development of the communication and transparency strategies.

146. An area where the evaluation found more variation was in the extent to which feedback and other data gathered through the PBCCs were considered in an integrated process, with additional feedback data received through other channels for program learning and adaptation (ie at the macro-level as opposed to responding to an individual's query). An interesting development in Iraq was a communication and feedback system that combines all of the feedback and then produces a single report for various internal audiences (see good practice box below). However, in some other countries, such as Egypt, the integrated communication and feedback mechanism (CFM) reports produced by CBP do not include data from the PBCCs, although they combine data from other sources such as community centres, surveys and other channels.

Figure 29: Good practice example 6 - Integration of PBCC data with other feedback in Iraq's CFM system for program learning and adaptation.

Good Practice Example - Integration of PBCC data with other feedback in Iraq's CFM system
In the new CFM system in Iraq, all communication and feedback data are combined in one report. In the decentralized system, partners provide a range of communication channels, including some form of PBCC access in the geographic area of their responsibility. The data from the PBCC is combined with feedback from other channels, such as community centres, surveys and other channels. This feeds into reports that are shared with UNHCR management. This evolving system seeks to develop the depth of analysis to support program learning. Feedback data can be broken down by region, contact method, and other factors. This is a new system, but it shows promise.

147. Overall, the evaluation found that PBCC made some contribution to the four dimensions of the UNHCR AAP framework. In most COs, its role was found to be most developed as a

[113] KIIs with external stakeholders from other international organizations.

means of communication and transparency. Its potential as a feedback system that could support program learning and adaptation is an area that was less developed despite a few notable exceptions, due to limitations in data analysis highlighted in the previous sections (needing more depth and integration with other feedback data).

4.4.2. Coherence and coordination of UNHCR PBCCs with other sectors and partners

148. Key finding 22: There is strong and systematic coordination by PBCC management with protection thematic units as well as communication and external relations functional units. Coordination with ICT/ IM is increasing, enhanced by multi-functional teams. Interaction with other UNHCR units, field offices and partners including those with helplines was less systematic across countries and across time.

149. The evaluation found that structured coordination mechanisms play a key role in aligning UNHCR call centres with functions, partners and sectors. Multi-functional teams in Jordan, Libya and Egypt provided a platform for PBCC decision-making and ensured accuracy in the knowledge base used. They also provided feedback on call quality. Strong coordination between the PBCC management and UNHCR's communication and external relations teams, as seen in Egypt and Jordan, further enhances coherence, particularly in relation to consistency of communication across different channels. As PBCCs become more sophisticated, collaboration with ICT and IM units has become essential. These teams bring technical expertise, often from outside the sector, and support in-house systems and data analysis. Their role has been crucial in system evolution, such as Egypt's enhanced IVR integration and similar plans in Libya. However, this support is not a standard ICT function and is often provided beyond formal job descriptions.

150. Decisions on PBCC use for specific services varied in their consideration of broader PBCC performance. In some countries, such as Iraq and Egypt, programs operated separate call centres for CBIs due to the high call volumes. In both cases, a dedicated CBI hotline that was run by an implementing partner reduced traffic on the already busy main PBCC. Iraq's IIC further improved coordination by granting IIC operators access to CBI beneficiary lists, ensuring proper referrals for any callers. While future technology may allow integration under a common number, this was not feasible when separate lines were established. Conversely, some program decisions have caused line blockages as highlighted in the earlier cited example of Iraq IIC operators being tasked with calling out to relevant FDSP for registration appointments.

4.4.3. Coherence of UNHCR PBCCs with the wider interagency AAP approach in-country

151. Key finding 23: The coherence of UNHCR PBCCs with other AAP systems is strengthened through interagency working groups (e.g., CBP or CWC), which are often co-chaired by UNHCR. Established referral and information exchange systems further enhance collaboration and trust. In the absence of such structures, coordination depends on bilateral agreements, the success of which can be influenced by the resources available, interagency dynamics, and time constraints.

152. The evaluation found that UNCHR's participation (often in a leadership role) in interagency groups supports the coherence of the PBCCs within the AAP system. For example, UNHCR co-chaired the communication with communities (CWC) inter-agency working group in Iraq in 2021-22, the CBP interagency group, and the interagency senior management meetings in Egypt. These were found to be important forums which UNHCR

used or planned to use to discuss PBCCs. For example, in Egypt UNHCR raised the move to a contracted-out PBCC model which has potential to be a broader inter-agency channel. In some countries, such as Egypt, the groups have produced a shared strategy for communication. Interviews with UNHCR staff and other agencies indicated that this has helped build cooperation in the sector. It has also provided a useful forum for UNHCR to share plans for future developments, e.g., its planned move to an interagency PBCC system in Egypt (which would be led by the CO) to replace its own phoneline and the hotlines of UNHCR partners. UNHCR would also welcome other agencies to join. In Jordan, although there is a Protection Working Group that deals with CBP and AAP and an interagency Protection against sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA) Network, the CO staff in Jordan stated that UNHCR has bilateral agreements and discussions with key agencies for Helpline referrals.

153. At the sectoral level, interviews at the global level with UNHCR and with a donor indicated the trend is towards interagency cooperation on AAP, often building on a perceived assumption that it will be more cost-effective because of cost sharing. However, the evaluation did not identify evidence in support of this assumption due to the limited information available about the full range of costs of the different centres, as discussed earlier.

154. At the broader interagency level, interviews with other international organizations highlighted the pressure on all agency's AAP budgets. The financial environment makes a reliance on the interagency joint funding of PBCCs risky. Past experience has shown that other agencies sometimes end the funding of a shared system when contexts change. This was seen in Libya when WFP withdrew from the funding and management of the partner-run helpline, which UNHCR has now taken over. This was also seen in Iraq as the context evolved in 2022.

155. There are a number of developments at the interagency level that may impact on PBCCs. One development is in shared interagency Information Management Systems, including for child protection and GBV. These are significant because they are the location for inter-agency analysis of trends and feedback data. These have been considered in Egypt as part of the planning process for the move to an interagency PBCC. Another key advancement is the development of shared interagency core standards for AAP, in which UNHCR has played an essential role.114

156. Despite these trends, some countries continued to experience a relatively fragmented AAP environment, with no interagency structure to drive cooperation. Smaller operations, such as Mauritania and Tunisia, highlighted that most agencies tended to operate independently in terms of information provision and feedback systems.

157. The evaluation interviews with UNHCR highlighted the importance of senior-level engagement in discussions about cooperation, particularly on sensitive issues such as cost-sharing or co-funding a system. These may need to be taken up at the protection interagency working group rather than at the CWC or CBP level. Senior level engagement is also sometimes needed to ensure the smooth progress of discussions on other sensitive areas, such as data sharing, as part of building an interagency environment of cooperation

[114] IASC Task Force 2 on Accountability to Affected People, 2023, Framework: Collective Accountability to Affected People (AAP) available at: https://alnap.org/help-library/resources/core-humanitarian-standard-on-quality-and-accountability-2024

and trust. The evaluation interviews found that this was not always present, particularly if organizations had a long history of working independently in siloes.

4.5. EQ5. STRATEGIC POSITIONING: What are the implications for RB MENA's and operations' strategic positioning vis-a-vis call centres, hotline/helplines at regional and country levels, including interagency centres?

158. This section considers UNHCR's strategic positioning in relation to the utility of PBCCs. It presents the evaluation's findings regarding lessons from UNHCR's experiences in different types of operational contexts and with different models of PBCC. It also considers some of the lessons from internal management on transition and some of the key external trends: the financial pressures on humanitarian responses, trends in interagency cooperation and developments in technology, and the implications of these factors for UNHCR's strategic positioning.

4.5.1. Lessons and good practices from the PBCC experience at different stages of an operation

159. **Key finding 24: Lessons from the UNHCR experience in different country contexts have highlighted the need for PBCCs to be flexible to enable change; to manage change through a structured plan with dedicated individual(s) to manage the process in cooperation with a multi-functional team; and to have visible management support to galvanize the necessary cross-CO support needed for change. UNHCR's effective positioning depends on its active horizon scanning and nimble decision-making to adapt.**

160. Nearly all the countries that the evaluation studied had experienced significant contextual changes, for example, the populations of interest to UNHCR increased significantly in scale in Egypt, Mauritania and Tunisia while Iraq had gone through a major change in 2022 when some IDP camps closed, and the cluster system was deactivated. Some key lessons on scaling up, scaling down, and transitions are outlined in the following sections.

4.5.2. Lessons on scaling down

161. The evaluation explored Iraq's experience, where UNHCR's operational environment and strategy changed as some IDP camps were closed, meaning that the cluster system was deactivated and the approach moved to one more focused on durable solutions for refugees and internally-displaced people. As some donors and international partners withdrew or changed strategy, ending their support for the interagency IIC, UNHCR developed its program to shift to a more decentralized, partner-led CFM system. This included using decentralized, partner-led phone lines as one of a number of communication channels overseen by UNHCR and linked to it through RAIS. UNHCR appointed one partner per province of interest or operation for UNHCR including in KRI and Federal Iraq to operate a multi-channel complaints and feedback mechanism, which includes a hotline or similar form of PBCC as part of it. This decentralized CFM system is in addition to a centralized partner-run PBCC dedicated to UNHCR CBI programming. The CFM partner provides information on UNHCR services in the province, referrals, and sometimes other

specialized services such as GBV or legal. This depends on its range of services with the PBCC/hotline element operating as one part of a range of methods for information provision and communication with FDSP. Figure 30 presents lessons learned on scaling down a PBCC from Iraq's experience.

Figure 30: Lessons learned from scaling down in Iraq.

Lessons from scaling down in Iraq

Key lessons:

- **Preparedness and regular horizon scanning enable anticipation of needed changes in PBCC but slow decision-making impedes nimble adaptation**. UNHCR's shift in strategy and utility of PBCCs was driven by the wider contextual change, as well as resource constraints. Other actors' decisions impacted on the viability and appropriateness of the interagency system. UNHCR considered its options for PBCC as it was clear that the cluster system would be closing, the inter-agency approach transitioning from humanitarian to a greater focus on durable solutions and donor support was reducing rapidly. One of these options was for UNHCR to support the IIC itself but this was decided against for reasons including cost and "fit" with its strategy. Instead, UNHCR decided to adopt a model of a decentralized AAP/CFM system run by a partner in each province of focus for UNHCR activities and this in turn, included some form of PBCC run by the partner in that province. However, the process of transition from IIC to a decentralized, integrated AAP/CFM system was made more difficult by the lateness of UNHCR's decision not to continue to run the IIC independently and the future system it would adopt made in September 2022.Challenges to the transition were exacerbated by internal delays in cost extensions for the transition which limited time and increased pressure on the transition process.

- **Information and data management needs continuity and time when PBCC systems are changed.** A good practice was implemented in data management to ensure the change in system did not lead to a loss of ICC data – it was downloaded and transferred to UNHCR Erbil by the end of 2022, thought this was an intensive experience due to the relatively late decision to move UNHCR's system from IIC to a new model. The use of RAIS by IIC's partner (United Nations Operations - UNOPS) and by the new AAP partners also provided some continuity in data management.

- **Widespread participation in the design and sustained communication of change is vital to ensure FDSP access to evolving systems**. Partners were involved in the design of the new system. There was some consultation with communities about priority information needs and channel preferences. UNHCR implemented a widespread, multi-channel system to communicate the change to communities, with community leaders and volunteers playing an important role in promoting awareness. Despite this, questions about IIC continued even after two years, indicating the scale of communication needed.

- **Corporate support to those leading the change is essential**. Iraq CO felt it was finding its way without experience from elsewhere to draw on in how to manage the transition. Despite a supportive RB, practical guidance based on others' experience for this process

of transition from inter-agency to UNHCR-managed PBCC system as part of a wider transition from humanitarian to development strategies did not exist.

- **Delegating some information sharing from PBCC to refugee and IDP-led communication can enhance self-reliance.** The new context highlighted different PBCC and CWC options to enable more emphasis on inclusion and self-reliance, e.g. with information being primarily offered through a refugee-led information platforms rather than through the PBCC. This was in line with the wider UNHCR strategy to promote inclusion and self-reliance. Opportunities were also sought to engage the authorities with some CFM systems, e.g., including the local authority in matters relating to education. Experience showed the need for clarity about the declining levels of assistance and for sensitive communication from operators, which in turn needs support and training as it is a difficult job for operators to convey unwelcome information. However, FDSP appreciated clarity from operators regarding their changing level of assistance.

- **Consider the implications for PBCC operators of transition of services from UNHCR to authorities.** There were also challenges during the transition of service provision from humanitarian actors to the government and authorities, particularly when some services would no longer be available. Although this was beyond the scope of the PBCC, it still had implications for it, e.g., for the information provided by operators and the knowledge base, as well as the need for sensitive engagement with concerned FDSP callers.

4.5.3. Lessons on scaling up.

162. Egypt, Mauritania and Tunisia were all coping with recently increased numbers of asylum-seekers and refugees during the evaluation's time period. The COs tended to scale up and centralize their PBCC systems when the population of interest increased significantly. Lessons from this experience related to the financial and time investments needed to set up central call centres, the consideration needed for FDSP arriving into or already settled in different parts of the country, and being aware of how changes might impact FDSP already in the country and their access to UNHCR via the PBCC. The experience of Tunisia is shared in Figure 31.

Figure 31: Lessons learned from scaling up in Tunisia

Lessons learned from scaling up in Tunisia

When the partner ceased its operations in Tunisia in 2024, UNHCR set up a new PBCC in Tunisia, rapidly moving it from a contracted-out system to in-house. Initially, the CO Tunisia set up a center that was staffed by protection staff who were on duty or "on rotation". This quickly transitioned to a fully staffed PBCC.

Key lessons:

- **Setting up a call center requires a significant investment of time and resources from across a CO.** Some key activities include the following: the procurement of equipment; the recruitment and training of operators in the relevant systems, including RAIS; the establishment and maintenance of a knowledge base for operators' use; and the communication of the system to FDSP. COs need to allocate such resources (staff time and financial) from the outset.

- **The visibility of senior-level management support is essential** to secure buy-in across the CO at a time of high pressure, and when embedding a new tool.

- **Focusing on the basics in a newly established system is crucial** for an accelerated start up (e.g., leaving detailed system considerations such as enhanced IVR until later).

- **Using protection staff in a call center can provide an interim solution but only in the very short-term**. Appoint full-time operators for a centralized system as soon as possible because loading additional responsibilities on existing staff, even on a rotational basis, can cause burnout and inefficiencies in the PBCC implementation.

- **The need to focus on staff wellbeing to avoid burnout**, ensure continuity of operations, and reduce staff turnover for example considering hours worked, providing team and individual support during working hours.

- **Developing differentiated information** for FDSP arriving or already residing in the country and in different locations is necessary in a combined knowledge base. **Considering the impact on existing FDSP communities** and their access to UNHCR PBCC when developing a service focused on new arrivals is essential.

- **Ensuring that clear, coordinated counselling lines are run by the PBCC is crucial**, as is offering support from relevant units in training, information/knowledge building, and quality control.

- **Ensuring the use of a robust database,** such as RAIS, that supports ticketing, referrals, and the tracking of communications in one place is key.

- **Establishing and reviewing KPIs** to guide the system's development is also important. KPIs should also have a focus on quality, not only quantity and cost.

4.5.4. Lessons from managing change

163. Many of the lessons from each type of context, including those detailed above, relate to the management of change. Key factors that support UNHCR in adapting its use of PBCC to a changing context include the following:

- **Deciding on a change as early as possible** is important because change takes time to establish and communicate it to FDSP and all staff and partners, especially given the multi-functional nature of a PBCC. However, internal and external decisions (or lack/delay thereof) can make change abrupt and challenging. In both Iraq and Libya, the decisions to change their PBCC structure were only taken respectively one and two quarters before the change occurred.[115] The UNHCR interviewees shared that this was partly due to late decisions by partners to withdraw funding, but that it was also delayed by UNHCR processes for considering alternative options and adaptations. Late decisions put considerable pressure on the process, which usually involves new partner agreements, training operators in new data management systems (e.g., RAIS), and communication campaigns to convey the new numbers or systems to FDSP.

- **Structured plans and multi-function teams should both be guided by dedicated personnel** (e.g. an Infoline/PBCC transition coordinator for a temporary period) to help guide the processes. This is crucial given that transition in PBCCs is complex and involves many

[115] UNHCR/UNOPS. Project Performance Report. Final Report. 2022.

functional units. The involvement of ICT and IM was seen to support change in Egypt and in Jordan as the IVR evolved, and in Libya as the new PBCC system was established in 2024.

- **Visible senior-level management support was** highlighted in the UNHCR interviews in Tunisia and Egypt as a key factor in galvanizing the necessary buy-in across a CO to support the changes in a PBCC and interagency cooperation.

- **Communication strategies, including close work with community leaders and volunteers,** has been helpful in familiarizing FDSP with PBCCs during times of change. This emerged in Iraq's transition from IIC to a decentralized system and is part of the plan for Egypt's change process. Integrated, widespread, multi-channel, and sustained communication with communities is crucial in managing change and sustaining FDSP access in an evolving PBCC system. Updated knowledge bases and FAQs are essential for operators and other staff during a transition process.

- **The role of the RB and HQ in supporting, sharing experiences from elsewhere, and prioritizing countries in transition** for advisory and technical support is important in helping management to transition. All countries highlighted the importance of other COs and of RB support to help them through times of change. However, most COs also reported the need for more support in understanding the options for PBCCs. The present evaluation and the forthcoming UNHCR global guidance on PBCC represent a concrete help with this.

- **Proactively liaising with the humanitarian sector has been crucial in managing change** for both UNHCR's own partners and within the broader interagency AAP/CWC system, especially as changes in UNHCR have implications for their own AAP systems and beneficiaries. Such interaction was reported as important in Mauritania, Iraq and Egypt.

4.5.5. Lessons from models of PBCC and appropriateness to different contexts

164. Key finding 25: Lessons from different PBCC models indicated that there is no universal PBCC blueprint due to the many context-specific variables. Models will need country-specific adaptation. Key factors in selecting an appropriate model include the level of interagency coordination, the need for UNHCR-specific systems, available technologies, population trends, the presence of alternative communication channels, and analysis of the relative costs of different PBCC models.

165. The evaluation considered a range of different PBCC models, which were in operation in the COs evaluated. As highlighted in Section 3, the evaluation found a diverse range of models, well beyond the initial three models considered at the outset of the evaluation. These included variations within management (in-house or externally contracted out); the extent of the interagency components of PBCC; centralized and decentralized models and staffing systems; and whether protection or full-time operators staffed the lines. The strengths and lessons regarding approaches to different systems and reflections on the types of contexts to which they are relevant are detailed in the table below.

166. The table below details key strengths and lessons across the range of PBCC models explored in the evaluation. These models are not mutually exclusive and reflect the models studied in the evaluation (see also Section 3.2, Table 1). It should be noted that, of the six countries studied, four have a predominantly refugee/asylum seeker population, with only Iraq and Libya being countries where UNHCR had significant responsibilities for IDPs. The models are summarized below, as follows:

a) Interagency (collective) PBCC: Supports a range of organizations – including UNHCR, but also potentially other UN agencies. It is not necessarily confined to access by FDSP but also to those served by other agencies e.g. food insecure households?. Examples of this model include the Iraq IIC and Libya's helpline up to 2024, which was led by WFP.

b) Centralized, single UNHCR PBCC: This serves UNHCR's interests primarily and is the single PBCC supported by UNHCR without additional hotlines, helplines, or other PBCCs supported by UNHCR (whether UNHCR or partner-led). Examples include Jordan's Helpline.

c) Decentralized or localized PBCC: This is a PBCC that has been established for a specific geographical area. It may be run by UNHCR or by a partner and is likely to result in multiple PBCCs per country if the population is in more than in one location. Examples include Iraq's CFM since 2023 and Mauritania (2022).

d) Contracted-out PBCC: This is when the implementation of the PBCC is contracted out by UNHCR (or an interagency group) to another entity to provide a PBCC service for FDSP. The provider may be a humanitarian or a commercial provider. Examples include Libya, Mauritania (2024), and Iraq.

e) PBCC managed in-house: This is when UNHCR directly manages the PBCC. Examples include Egypt, Jordan and Tunisia (2024).

f) Protection-team-staffed PBCC: This contrasts with a UNHCR-managed model that has full-time operators. Instead, this model of PBCC may simply comprise a UNHCR duty officer and a protection officer, who is responsible for the mobile phoneline that FDSP can call to access UNHCR. Responsibility often rotates between the staff. Examples include Mauritania (2021-23).

Table 3: PBCC Models Strengths and Lessons

PBCC model	Strengths	Lessons	Contexts where relevant
Interagency (collective) PBCC	• Positive benefits for refugees – single number- acts as a one-stop shop. • One known number builds trust in the system. • System for interagency coordination of PBCC can provide an efficient platform to ensure up-to-date mapping of services and information to support effective referrals.	• PBCC can be over-loaded, with multiple demands on it for a wide range of callers. Therefore, it needs a large number of lines and operators to avoid lines becoming blocked and an effective system to direct calls to the correct provider. • There is a lack of evidence that cost sharing	• There are effective interagency cooperation mechanisms in place. • Population of interest across organizations are anticipated to be in place for an extended period. • Evidence provides a reliable

PBCC model	Strengths	Lessons	Contexts where relevant
		equates to cost saving (for UNHCR or as a collective), despite widespread assumptions about this. • Less orientation to UNHCR-specific priorities. • Requires considerable investments in coordination, e.g., UNHCR co-leadership (CWC/AAP interagency groups), to ensure UNHCR interests are met. • Data sharing agreements need to be in place before starting • Quality assurance to meet UNHCR's standards is important. • Needs a shared database, e.g. RAIS, for efficiency.	assumption of sustained interagency interest to co-fund. • Contexts in which new arrivals need assistance from multiple agencies to enable easy access to information on collective assistance and the collective picture of support provided.
Centralized, single UNHCR PBCC	• Easier/lower cost of training operators due to central location. • Supports coherence, consistency, and equity (in terms of FDSP chances to access the center).	• There needs to be a system to ensure localized information is available to callers regardless of their location – this may be the role of the field office. There is a	• UNHCR is leading the refugee coordination model and can integrate its implementing partners to the

PBCC model	Strengths	Lessons	Contexts where relevant
	• PBCC organizational proximity to UNHCR units/technical capacity can enable more rapid updating of information bases and training. • Multiple language requirements and facilities for special needs may be more cost effective in a centralized system.	danger that centrally based PBCCs focus their information provision on information relevant to the capital if that is their base. • Requires sufficient lines and capacity to enable access for refugees and can damage UNHCR's reputation and its relationship with refugees if capacity is lacking.	system relatively easily. • Good quality ICT and IM capacity in COs support a sophisticated central system. • Dispersed, FDSP populations, where multiple local PBCCs are not feasible. • Contexts that are politically sensitive or rapidly changing and UNHCR needs greater control over information being shared.
Decentralised or localised PBCC	• It can be underpinned by staff/operators with good understanding and information on local assistance and dynamics. • Can integrate connections with the local authorities. • It can more easily link with refugee-led information platforms to support self-reliance. • Can integrate other communication methods easily, especially when all run by same partner. • Frees up UNHCR CO central capacity so PBCC managers can focus on oversight, quality assurance, and the analysis of trends rather than day-to-day management.	• Shared standards and the systematic monitoring of performance is important for consistency in service across regions. • Monitoring standards and performance is important for consistency. • It can be UNHCR only or interagency. • Common database (e.g., RAIS) to ensure consistency for	• FSDPs in clear and differentiated locations (geographically and in terms of context, services available, and risk factors). • Either UNHCR field structure or a partner with capacity is present in each setting to implement or monitor PBCC. • Development contexts or those transitioning towards durable solutions as

PBCC model	Strengths	Lessons	Contexts where relevant
		multiple centers is required.	well as some humanitarian contexts e.g. where there is highly differentiated contexts within the country.
Contracted- out PBCC	• Reduces management load on UNHCR, e.g., Human Resources teams, ICT, and other internal support services. • Can bring in expertise and experience from other experiences, including the private sector. • Potentially greater flexibility to increase the number of operators.	• Needs clear standards and a UNHCR quality assurance process, including ability to access calls/recordings. • Needs to build in capacity for change in scale. • More difficult to organize training, information updates, and changes in the knowledge base. • If the centre is run by a commercial operator, UNHCR staff have reservations regarding care for refugees, loss of refugee contact with UNHCR, and a system motivated by profit. • Need for strong data protection and management.	• When UNHCR capacity is low, including ICT. • When partners or other agencies with capacity and experience in running call centres exist. • When independence of contracted agency can be guaranteed.

PBCC model	Strengths	Lessons	Contexts where relevant
		• Analysis of data for program learning still needs input from technical units to integrate their programmatic and contextual knowledge. • More difficult to integrate data/feedback with other UNHCR-run AAP methods.	
In-house management	• It is easier to manage quality and to update the information base and training. • Can be shaped in response to UNHCR priorities and adapted quickly. • Data protection and management can be more easily assured.	• Management and support required from a range of units, including support services (e.g., HR, IM, XT Relations, and ICT) can be demanding. • Adaptations and change take time and are often needed when many other changes are underway (e.g., for scale up/down).	• Sensitive contexts where information is difficult to share in public and UNHCR wants to maintain a close relationship with refugees, including those who are difficult to access. • CO capacity has the technical skills to manage and support a system. • No suitable partner is available to run a PBCC.

PBCC model	Strengths	Lessons	Contexts where relevant
Protection-team-staffed PBCC	• Direct contact between FDSP and protection staff for advice and action.	• Often poor documentation and a weak referral/follow-up system due to many demands on staff. • In rotational models, where protection staff take on full-time duties to staff the hotline for limited periods (part-time or all day), rotating can support swifter local follow-up albeit sometimes less well documented or systematic. • Can provide a valuable interim measure while a central line or other new system is being established.	• Small-scale populations, which have many alternative methods for FDSP to access channels for information, feedback, and other services (e.g., registration appointments). • Countries in times of transition, when a new system is being set up (time-limited). • Decentralized system where protection staff may hold significant information across the range of services available. • Low-resource countries, but only in the short term.

4.5.6. Implications of external trends for UNHCR strategic positioning in the use of PBCCs

167. Key finding 26: External trends highlight the need for UNHCR to position itself as a reliable and visible interagency actor, particularly through data sharing and collaboration. As all agencies face funding pressures and technological opportunities, interagency cooperation on broader AAP will shape UNHCR's approach to collective PBCC engagement in different contexts.

168. The COs covered by the evaluation highlighted UNHCR's awareness of the key trends impacting the utility of PBCCs. External stakeholder interviews also indicated that other agencies are grappling with some of the same dynamics in relation to their own AAP

systems. Some of the emerging implications are outlined below which relate to interagency cooperation, funding pressures and technology.

169. **The first key trend relates to interagency cooperation**. Global stakeholders highlighted the increasing emphasis from humanitarian agencies and donors on greater interagency cooperation, including in AAP.[116] The external interviews indicated that donors are highly interested in how the sector works together in general in humanitarian responses, including in AAP. This does not necessarily mean a collective interagency PBCC, which is likely to need more analysis of some of the factors highlighted above. However, the importance of UNHCR being able to demonstrate its contribution, and be visible, in interagency developments at country level will be important for funding and for AAP's effectiveness.

170. Developments in interagency cooperation on data and information management will also be relevant, e.g., the introduction in countries of interagency CBP–IMS and GBV–IMS. These systems tend to rely on sharing anonymized data for analysis. Data sharing agreements may also be helpful in interagency cooperation in PBCCs – such as global-level data sharing agreements between UNHCR with WFP and the World Bank[117]. The evidence suggests that these facilitated the cooperation of collective interagency PBCCs, such as in Iraq and Libya. They may also have implications for the shared data analysis of trends, although this is part of a wider CFM discussion, rather than specific only to PBCCs. There may also be differences in whether a context is predominantly refugee or includes significant IDPs or other populations supported by either UNHCR or organizations. The context will have an impact on the coordination structure in operation.

171. **The second key trend is the sustained and growing funding pressures on humanitarian action**. This reinforces the demand for cost-effectiveness including cost-efficiency analyses across all aspects of responses, including PBCCs. Understanding and being able to demonstrate the full costs and benefits of different communication channels, from both UNHCR's and FDSP's perspectives will be essential for informed decision-making about the choice of PBCC model and how to integrate it with other communication channels. It will enable UNHCR to demonstrate value for money.

172. **The third trend is that rapid technological advancements are shaping PBCCs, refugee communication, and other channels**. External stakeholders highlighted the potential efficiencies – such as artificial intelligence (AI) for data analysis – and also potential benefits – such as speech-to-text functions for people with communication challenges. Some agencies, including UNHCR, are exploring speech-to-text functions, at least at the global level. However, ensuring data protection for vulnerable populations will be critical. One implication for UNHCR is that it needs to stay updated on these developments, keeping COs, RBs and HQ aligned, and also building into PBCC development the potential to adapt to new technologies as they emerge.

5 CONCLUSIONS AND LESSONS

173. This section presents the conclusions of the evaluation in relation to the dimensions of relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, coherence, and strategic positioning. Each conclusion

[116] UNICEF.2023. Technical Brief-AAP inter-agency coordination.

[117] UNHCR Working Paper, 2023, UNHCR Data sharing agreements with other UN entities and International Organisations.

references the key lessons and good practices identified in the evaluation that enhance that dimension of the PBCC.

Relevance

Conclusion 1: UNHCR's PBCCs are accessible to most people served by UNHCR. Key enabling factors are the scale of phone ownership, technological introductions such as IVR, widespread communication about PBCC systems and community leaders and volunteers' roles in orienting FDSP on PBCC use. FDSP participation in PBCC design and knowledge based is essential. However, limitations in access are experienced by some, including people with disabilities and communication impairments PBCCs' relevance is enabled by regular and timely updates of knowledge bases involving multi-functional teams drawn from across UNHCR CO, including field offices and FDSP. But being able to reach a PBCC operator or line is impeded by its capacity and multiple roles it seeks to play in each country.

174. UNHCR's PBCCs accessibility across various countries has been facilitated by widespread phone ownership, including smartphones. In some contexts, PBCCs serve as a primary direct contact point between UNHCR and FDSP when in-person access is limited. Access to PBCCs is limited in some countries and for specific groups, such as people with communication disabilities. Multi-functional teams from UNHCR COs as well as community sources play a crucial role in adapting PBCCs to evolving contexts including in terms of priority information needs and technology options available. (Figure 12: Good practice example 1 - Refugee Knowledge Base Platform in Libya), (Figure 16: Good Practice example 2 - design process of PBCC in Tunisia).

175. High call volumes sometimes overwhelm some PBCC systems, leading to FDSP frustration and use of methods like bots or third-party callers, incurring additional costs for them. Technology such as enhanced IVR improves accessibility in certain contexts but presents new challenges for some users needing specialised support (Figure 17: Good practice example 3 – using enhanced IVR to automate processes in Jordan.

176. Lessons emphasize the importance of regular data-driven assessments on FDSP information priorities and communication preferences, including input from groups facing communication challenges. Systematic collaboration across UNHCR COs, including field offices, is crucial to maintaining PBCC's information base and thus relevance amid changing contexts in host and origin countries.

Efficiency

Conclusion 2: UNHCR has paid close attention to efficiency in the design of PBCCs, effectively leveraging learning from across COs and the RB as well using technology, such as RAIS and IVR which show clear efficiency benefits. Changes in the PBCC system require proper planning and timely decision-making to allow sufficient time for adaptation, data transfer, training, and capacity development, as well as communication with communities. COs' management of efficiency was hindered by data gaps and a focus on cost-efficiency rather than a clear linkage with management of PBCC's effectiveness.

177. Times of change in contexts and in a PBCC system present challenges. Facilitating change in a PBCC is time consuming, so early decision-making has been shown to be key to enable a smooth transition when systems change (e.g., from an interagency system to UNHCR-managed model) or when PBCC contact numbers or systems change (e.g., with the introduction of IVR). This requires time for the associated measures, such as the training of operators, data transfer, communication with communities, and coordination with partners and the sector.

178. Changes in context can also be a challenge when PBCC's have limited flexibility with regards to capacity. Therefore, from the outset of PBCC's design it is important to incorporate adaptability e.g., building in the facility for more phone lines and operators, or building this capacity into partner contracts in the case of contracted-out systems. Technologies like RAIS and IVR enhance operational efficiency and data continuity, supporting partner referrals and ensuring effective crisis response despite resource constraints.

179. There are limitations in COs' ability to manage efficiency due to gaps in the data used to track costs, e.g., excluding indirect costs, not considering the costs or the extent of use of hotlines run by partners with UNHCR support; and not considering the costs to FDSP to gain access, e.g., cost of SIM cards, call fees, time queuing, and apps for redialing PBCC phone numbers (if and where refugees choose to use these). Furthermore, indicators for tracking the efficiency of PBCCs have focused on the volume of calls and have been delinked from the monitoring of a system's effectiveness.

180. Other lessons for efficiency include the importance of close collaboration among PBCC operators and PBCC management staff, functional unit staff, and partners to identify and mitigate bottlenecks and optimize workflows. Close collaboration can also identify new opportunities for efficiency in how PBCC are used e.g. as other communication systems such as digital methods provided through UNHCR's Digital Gateway evolve.

Effectiveness

Conclusion 3: User satisfaction with PBCCs was directly linked to the capacity of both the PBCC and the wider UNHCR CO. This capacity influenced key factors such as caller waiting time and the responsiveness and speed with which UNHCR resolved queries. Other significant factors included the relevance of information, which sometimes lacked local detail in centralized systems, and the competence and attitude of operators, who were generally found to be positive and supportive. A single PBCC number built trust in fraud-affected contexts but raised concerns among FDSP about system overload. COs' monitoring of PBCC effectiveness was found to be limited, as was their use of PBCC data for 'participation and inclusion' in program design (as opposed to PBCC design) and 'program learning and adaptation,' two core AAP components. CO priorities for PBCCs were not always explicit. At times this lead to competing demands on PBBC resources and challenges in assessing effectiveness.

181. Assessing PBCC effectiveness across the AAP framework dimensions is constrained by limited data availability and inconsistent monitoring across COs. While many COs collect basic call data (e.g. volume, location, type) there was limited systematic analysis of feedback to data to inform program learning and adaptation (rather than PBCC learning and adaptation which was done) though good practices from CO show how feedback data can be integrated across communication channels for improved learning and response (Figure 25: Good practice example 4 - Helpline data use in Jordan).This relates to wider questions about AAP systems and use of AAP data for program adaptation.

182. Where PBCCs are decentralized or implemented by partners, maintaining centralized oversight remains essential to ensure quality and consistency in delivery, referral, and follow-up). Current performance tracking tends to emphasize quantitative metrics over qualitative aspects like user experience or protection outcomes, missing opportunities for meaningful improvement aligned with AAP commitments. There is significant room to enhance the monitoring of FDSP satisfaction levels, trust in the system, and the quality of the user experience. Furthermore, the effectiveness of most PBCCs in closing the feedback loops, responding to queries, and following up on actions is not consistently monitored or reported on across the COs (Figure 26: Good Practice example 5 - Closing the feedback

loop in Tunisia. Greater clarity regarding PBCC aims and priorities in specific contexts could enhance monitoring of effectiveness particularly when resource and capacity constraints lead to systems being overloaded from competing demands on their potential uses across the AAP framework and CO strategic priorities e.g. between fulfilling potential roles as a feedback mechanism, information source or gateway to registration.

Coherence

Conclusion 4: UNHCR appropriately uses PBCCs within its broader communication and transparency eco-systems, enabled by staff's knowledge of PBCCs' strengths and limitations in specific country contexts. However, the coordination and coherence with partner hotlines was weaker. An important mechanism to support coherence was structured internal cooperation between teams for consistent communication across communication channels and the development of PBCC as part of a coherent system. Senior management's role was essential to ensure cross-organizational coordination and in strengthening interagency cooperation.

183. There is an appropriate use of PBCC as part of broader communication and transparency systems, which was enabled by UNHCR's staff's awareness of the strengths and limitations of PBCC in their country context. Methods for decision-making around PBCC that combine consideration of other communication channels and their relative cost-effectiveness, as well as methods that combine these channels to support planning and decision-making create a coherent communication and transparency ecosystem. This responds to different groups' priorities and preferences though such choices are not always explicit or documented and potentially need greater prioritization or resourcing to avoid being over-loaded.

184. There have tended to be strong links between PBCCs and UNHCR functional units, particularly within protection, which enables the consistency of information. However, there is less coherence with partners' hotlines, e.g., use for CBI and sometimes for emergency access. Furthermore, data on their use and performance is not always incorporated with "core" PBCC system data (Figure 29: Good practice example 6 - Integration of PBCC data with other feedback in Iraq's CFM system for program learning and adaptation.)

185. Coherence across UNHCR communication and transparency ecosystems is supported by structured communication processes that regularly bring together:

- Functional units of external relations/communications, community-based protection, and PBCC management to ensure consistency in communication.
- Sectoral or thematic units within and beyond protection, as well as field offices to support information, training and quality, as well as to contribute to data analysis for programme learning and adaptation.
- IM/ICT as part of a multi-functional team, with thematic experts in technology options and information management being a part of PBCC development and utility.

Furthermore, senior management's role is vital for the following reasons:

- Internally, they need to be visibly supporting the various units in their prioritization of tasks to enable the PBCC effectiveness.
- Externally, they need to support interagency cooperation to progress interagency discussions on sensitive issues, such as data sharing and cost-sharing. Interagency cooperation and

coherence in PBCC links directly with the quality of interagency cooperation in AAP and the humanitarian responses more generally. UNHCR leadership roles make a significant contribution to its coherence.

Strategic Positioning

Conclusion 5: The appropriate PBCC model for each country context is dependent on its context and the CO strategic priorities. The strategic positioning of each model at the sector level benefitted from UNHCR's investment in interagency cooperation. More regular horizon scanning, to anticipate the implications for PBCC of contextual shifts and technological advancements, can support preparedness but also need timely decision-making for nimble adaptation when contexts change and to sustain their effectiveness and strategic positioning.

186. There are no easy answers on the 'best choice' for a PBCC model in a particular country. All models need to be adapted to the context and judgements should be based on an analysis of context and strategic priorities (Table 3). All models of PBCC are enhanced by good interagency cooperation, e.g., for service mapping, referral effectiveness, the development of analysis and also knowledge of other agencies' plans that can impact UNHCR's own options and plans. Choice of appropriate models are influenced by factors including: trends in population; technology options available; resources available; extent to which UNHCR wants to use the PBCC to build a direct relationship with FDSP e.g. in contexts where access is difficult and levels of inter-agency cooperation are limited. The quality of interagency cooperation around PBCC is linked to the quality of the wider interagency cooperation. UNHCR's leadership in interagency cooperation on AAP and CWC can support effective PBCC.

187. There is external pressure to demonstrate interagency cooperation and for resources to be maximized. There are also pressures within UNHCR, including financial pressures, and across agencies, which can both support and constrain cooperation. A clear area for cooperation lies around the shared experience of exploring the opportunities presented by technology for AAP, generally, and PBCC, in particular. However, despite widespread assumptions regarding the cost-effectiveness of a collective, unified interagency PBCC, there is limited evidence on how the performance of such a system compares with UNHCR-managed systems for FDSP and how this might vary according to the context and nature of the vulnerable populations supported by the humanitarian sector e.g., whether it is different in contexts with a large IDP population rather than a predominantly refugee-context.

188. Other lessons deriving from the dynamism of contexts and the impact on PBCCs, along with the time and financial resources needed to adapt a PBCC, highlight the importance of horizon scanning (Figure 30: Lessons learned from scaling down in Iraq. Figure 31: Lessons learned from scaling up in Tunisia)They emphasize the importance of clearly defining the strategic aim of a PBCC in a specific context, given its multiple roles. Without clear priorities, there is a risk of overloading the PBCC. Horizon scanning is important for anticipating the implications of contextual change for UNHCR's PBCC, such as changes in strategic partners' priorities. It is also important in keeping abreast of technological developments both in terms of FDSP use of technology and what is accessible to UNHCR in different country contexts, as these may affect the options available for UNHCR. . UNHCR's long-term planning systems provide opportunities to integrate such scanning and scenario planning.

189.

6 RECOMMENDATIONS

190. The recommendations below respond to the conclusions and build on the evidence in findings of good practice, lessons, and the areas that need further development to strengthen and maximize the potential of PBCCs and the resources allocated to them.

Recommendation 1: Strategic aims and priorities

Recommendation 1: Make explicit the aim(s) of the PBCC in each specific country context in terms of its strategic objectives, priority services and functions, and review this regularly involving a multi-functional team as contexts evolve.
Relevant key findings (KF) and conclusions: KF25; KF21. Conclusions 3, 4 and 5.
Responsible lead: CO Protection with support of other CO multi-functional team (MFT) functions and RB MENA (MPS/CBP, IM).
Timespan: Next 6 months

Suggested actions

a) Develop more specific UNHCR aims for the use of PBCC in a particular country context in the annual planning process and for emergency response plans to guide the prioritization of services and functions. Aims should be more detailed than stating information provision and two-way communication roles. The priorities for the PBCC should be based on the comparative advantage of PBCCs in a given context and their relationship to other communication channels and roles they play. Undertake decision-making on PBCC as part of a broader UNHCR strategy for communicating with FDSP, better aligned to the AAP framework's core actions.

- In the articulation of aims, include clarity regarding the role of PBCC to high-demand services e.g. CBI, access to registration appointments.

  Also include clarity on the relationship of the core PBCC to any partner hotlines, particularly those supported by UNHCR.

b) Consistently engage technology-focused functions (e.g., ICT and IM staff at country level, ODM/DIMA at regional level, and PDSS/GDS at global level) together with CBP/programs in decision-making around PBCC development to ensure that other technology developments and service requirements are considered. At the country level, multi-functional teams provide a good structure for this.

c) Review emerging experiences of creating omni-channel approaches for two-way communication, e.g., Tunisia's experience in integrating communication channels in a common system.

d) Draw on the findings of the above review in c) as well as assessments of information and communication needs, priorities and preferences to design the PBCC potentially as

part of an integrated system combining it with other channels including in-person, digital channels (e.g., apps and platforms).

e) Develop and ensure the design, standards and developments in the PBCC are based on a combination of effectiveness and efficiency indicators and that they relate to its strategic aim(s) as well as clearly identifying their role in and then measuring against the four AAP commitments (see recommendation 4 and 5 together their suggested actions).

Recommendation 2: Preparedness for change

Recommendation 2: Build into the design and development of each PBCC preparedness for changes in context, technology and levels of demand for PBCC services.
Relevant key findings (KF) and conclusions: KF 10 and 24. Conclusions 2 and 5
Responsible lead: CO Protection with support of other CO MFT functions, RB MENA (MPS/CBP and IM) and in consultation with HQ (DIP, GDS, ICT).
Timespan: Next 12 months

Suggested actions

a) Build in capacity for the expansion/contraction of the number of lines and channels. This includes having plans for change in the following:

- Human capacity, e.g., national rosters of operators or partners that can expand the number of operators in an emergency.
- Effective and relevant training (e-) modules for operators during emergencies, or times of high turnover (including on the refugee knowledge base platform).
- Financial capacity to enable these systems to be activated through contingency funds or access to emergency funds; and
- Provision for change in the partner contracts of any contracted-out system, and clarity regarding responsibilities for how this will be resourced.

b) Plan for the future-proofing of PBCCs to ensure that software systems remain appropriate and sustainable by:

- Building in flexibility for technology change and integrating with other means of communication and identity management (e.g., the Digital Gateway).
- Involve cooperation across all levels of UNHCR when assessing software systems that are used in PBCCs. Leverage expertise at global and regional levels to ensure that any new software systems introduced at the CO level use up-to-date and UNHCR-approved technology.
- Avoid developing customized CRMs at country-level but instead deploy existing in-house tools where these have adequate support and evidence of success (e.g.

RAIS). Where customized tools must be used, refrain from committing to long-term agreements with service providers to enable a shift to corporate tools when feasible.

c) Integrate PBCCs into emergency preparedness systems, to be considered as a standard emergency response tool. In preparedness guidance, include steps for setting it up and/or evolving it as the context develops (e.g., scaling up/down) with particular input needed for transition from humanitarian to development contexts.

Recommendation 3. Ensuring the accessibility and relevance of PBCC information and services

Recommendation 3: Invest in more participation of FDSP in the design stage of PBCCs to identify community priorities, barriers to access, and measures to overcome them as well as to ensure the relevance of PBCC information and services.
Relevant key findings (KF) and conclusions: KF1, 2; Conclusion 1.
Responsible lead: CO Protection with support of other CO MFT functions, PBCC management and RB MENA (MPS/CBP and IM)
Timespan: Next 12 months

Suggested actions

a) Employ user-designed principles to ensure the sustained relevance of information, services and access through i) Regular (at least annual) stand-alone assessments of information needs and priorities and communication channel preferences drawing on tools in the UNHCR AAP Toolkit; ii) Form partnerships with groups with special needs to identify barriers to access and ways to address them; Iii) Involve groups with experience of impairment in testing PBCC systems and innovations for their accessibility.

b) Integrate facilities for people with communication disabilities and impairments, e.g., the option for video calls (with potential for a sign language option), speech-to-text functions, and voice-notes, with support from RB MENA (MPS/CBP and IM).

c) Make systematic the use of UNHCR multi-functional teams to inform the PBCC knowledge base and include involvement of field offices for local knowledge to incorporate; and engage UNHCR in country of origin, as necessary.

d) Structure engagement between PBCC management, communications, and CBP for consistent communication across channels and for the rapid updating of the knowledge bases used by PBCC operators and others.

e) At times of change in the country of origin/residence/other, establish a system to rapidly update the information priorities of FDSP through systematic engagement with community networks. Accelerate the updating of the PBCC knowledge base at this time.

f) Communicate findings on priorities identified for communication and PBCC services **to** the community including through community leaders, social media and other methods.

g) Ensure clear information is accessible to FDSP regarding any costs associated with the use of the PBCC e.g. cost of charges by operators for phone calls.

Recommendation 4. Tailoring standards for efficiency

Recommendation 4: Adapt and implement global level PBCC guidance covering an approach and standards for efficiency that drive the PBCC's strategic purpose, whilst upholding UNHCR's mandate and a high-quality service for FDSP service users. Ensure that efficiency standards and approaches can be tailored to the PBCC's role and strategic purpose within a specific context.
Relevant key findings (KF) and conclusions: KF 7; Conclusion 2.
Responsible lead: RB MENA (MPS/CBP and IM) in consultation with HQ (DIP and GDS) and COs.
Timespan: Next 6 months

Suggested actions

a) Drawing on global guidance, establish standards for efficiency that relate to UNHCR's PBCC aims at regional/global levels and adapt to specific country systems (as distinct from being driven by private sector standards).

b) Ensure that approaches uphold humanitarian principles and the need to provide a high-quality service for FDSP. Avoid unintentional compromise on this by using performance metrics for efficiency that combine the quality of calls and their effectiveness with the quantity of calls and other efficiency metrics (see recommendation 5 below).

c) When making decisions about how to enhance cost-efficiency, consider how operator welfare is affected by responding to any increases in targets for handled calls per day.

d) Orient data collection and performance management towards the full-service cycle and not just call analytics.

- Building on global level guidance, adapt and apply UNHCR KPIs on call quality, e.g., operator knowledge, escalation of issues, and call etiquette.

- Ensure COs have in place approaches and standards to track and understand better how tickets and referrals are processed.

e) Ensure clear and effective systems are in place for the prioritization of urgent cases, ideally including 24/7 access for callers with critical protection cases.

    - Identify and invest in re-routing specific subsets of callers through alternative cost-effective communication channels, which will relieve the pressure on PBCCs (e.g., platforms for information provision, registration appointment bookings, and tracking status updates).

    - Ensure clarity for FDSP in the process of accessing services when there is an urgent need. Highlight the relationship/role of partners' hotlines and emergency service provision.

f) Identify and address processes that are causing blockages in the PBCC workflow and involve PBCC operators in the analysis and resolution.

Recommendation 5: Management of PBCC for cost-effectiveness

Recommendation 5. Enhance the management of PBCC through a focus on cost-effectiveness that combines holistic analysis of costs and efficiency together with analysis of PBCC effectiveness in terms of outcomes including user satisfaction; referral rates, accuracy and action; effectiveness of feedback loop; and PBCC's contribution to protection outcomes.
Relevant key findings (KF) and conclusions: KF 13, 16,19,20. Conclusion 2 and 3.
Responsible lead: CO Protection and with support of other CO MFT functions and RB MENA (MPS/CBP, IM).
Timespan: By end of 2025
Suggested actions a) Ensure analyses of costs include the full range of costs, including direct costs (e.g., staff, software, equipment, and licenses) and indirect costs. Include the requirements of UNHCR support services (e.g., ICT, IM, HR and finance) in the analysis process, as well as partner hotline costs and service provision.

b) Analyze and consider the implications of patterns of caller composition and trends on the design of a PBCC (e.g., the proportion of new unique callers who may need more time per call and the scale of duplicate calls; new arrivals vs. established populations). Note peaks in trends or emergencies and how these have been managed.

c) Develop standards (adapted at CO level to CO strategic priorities) for user satisfaction; referral rates, accuracy and action; effectiveness of feedback loop; and PBCC's contribution to protection outcomes.

d) Consistently and regularly use methods to assess user satisfaction among different groups and explore how levels can be improved. This can be through satisfaction surveys at the end of a call and/or through community centers and draw on the tools in the existing MENA AAP toolkit.

e) Develop and systematically use methods to track referral rates and the accuracy of referrals, along with the level/speed/quality of actions following referrals.

f) Develop methods to understand the contributions of PBCC services (e.g., direct information, counselling and referrals) to protection outcomes and include them in the regular reporting of the CO. Share results of this monitoring with refugee leaders and community leaders every 3-6 months.

Recommendation 6: Use of data for program learning and adaptation

Recommendation 6. Enhance the use of PBCC feedback data for program learning and adaptation through more in-depth analyses and its integration with other feedback data.
Relevant key findings (KF) and conclusions: KF 15, 18. Conclusion 3.
Responsible lead: CO Protection with support of other CO MFT functions and RB MENA (MPS/CBP and IM)
Timespan: Next 6 months

Suggested actions

a) Build on current models (e.g., Iraq) that integrate PBCC feedback on services and assistance with other sources of feedback.

b) Building on the enhanced performance measures in recommendations 4 and 5, deepen reports from PBCC feedback data, with more analyses of trends, the content of calls, and others in line with sector/program requests.

c) Regularly review the feedback for implications on program adaptation. Create action plans for program changes and follow up on their implementation as part of regular reporting to CO management.

Recommendation 7: Positioning and interagency cooperation

Recommendation 7: Position UNHCR in each country and locally as a visible and active interagency actor in relation to PBCCs.
Relevant key findings (KF) and conclusions: KF 23, 26. Conclusion 5.
Responsible lead: CO Protection and senior management, with support from RB MENA and HQ.
Timespan: Next 6 months

Suggested actions

a) Across COs, consistently share anonymized data from PBCCs to enable interagency trends analyses and shared contextual analyses.

b) Closely follow interagency initiatives, such as the Central Emergency Response Fund's (CERF's) pilot projects in collective AAP, to explore their implications for UNHCR PBCCs and share their lessons across COs.

c) Advocate for a global interagency study on costs, benefits, and appropriate contexts for interagency collective PBCCs.

d) Explore further options for interagency collaboration on the use of new technologies in relation to PBCCs and the contribution of UNHCR to this.

e) Invest in interagency coordination on AAP/CWC. Where it is not mature**,** i.e. not formally structured, lead a process to establish forums for interagency coordination and where it exists, play an active role in it.

f) Ensure that COs are aware of UNHCR's role in the development of relevant interagency tools such as the IASC resources for collective AAP[118].

[118] For example, IASC Standards for Collective Feedback Mechanisms, 2025

g) Ensure clear UNHCR terminology is used when referred to interagency PBCCs that distinguishes if the term refers to collective systems (e.g. a single PBCC that serves UNHCR, WFP, other agencies) or only to UNHCR and UNHCR implementing partners.

Recommendation 8: Sharing lessons and promoting learning globally

Recommendation 8: Feed key findings, lessons and good practices from this regional evaluation into global tools, guidance and positioning, as appropriate
Relevant key findings (KF) and conclusions: KF 25; Conclusion 5
Responsible lead: DIP, in consultation with GDS, ICT, DER and RBs.
Timespan: Next 6 months
Suggested actions a) Integrate relevant lessons from the evaluation into the new Contact Centre Toolkit and any associated good practice guides to support CO PBCC development. b) Disseminate evaluation findings, with a view to promoting use of the evaluation results (key findings, lessons and good practices, recommendations for improvements) with UNHCR relevant audiences at RB and CO levels (e.g., CBP, PBCC management, IMs) particularly lessons regarding scaling up, down, exit and factors to consider when deciding upon PBCC models for specific contexts. For example disseminate during trainings, info sharing sessions and consultations, newsletters, etc.

7 ANNEXES

Annex 1: Terms of Reference

Annex 2: Bibliography

Annex 3: Evaluation Participants

Annex 4: Evaluation Matrix

Annex 5: UNHCR Data and information ecosystem and glossary of information management terms

Annex 6: Glossary of Information Management Terms

Annex 7: Data analysis

Annex 8: Analysis of PBCC Financial Data

Annex: 9 Country Context and PBCC Overview