



Evaluation of UNHCR's data use and information management approaches

EVALUATION REPORT
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Conducted by:
Stephen Ladek, Nur Abdelkhaliq Zamora, Scott Cameron, Siobhan Green,
and Caitlin Procter

A partnership between IOD PARC and IMC Worldwide

UNHCR Evaluation Service

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Evaluation Service

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

Case Postale 2500

1211 Genève 2

Switzerland

www.unhcr.org

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Evaluation manager / contact in UNHCR:	Christine Fu - fu@unhcr.org
Support staff:	Selam Araya Soum - soum@unhcr.org Cassie Yao – yaoy@unhcr.org

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Executive summary

Introduction and background

1. We live in an age of information, where ‘what is known’ can create efficiencies, unlock new opportunities and offer evidence for decision-making as never before. As the UN agency with the mandate to protect refugees, returnees and stateless people, UNHCR’s strategic and tactical use of information is paramount to fulfilling its mission of protecting and ensuring the development of durable solutions for persons of concern. With accurate, quality, timely and complete data, UNHCR is a credible authority on forced displacement, and can inspire confidence and trust, as well as drive impact and efficient use of its resources. In other words, UNHCR and its partners regularly and consistently require data for decision-making and resource allocation; and for raising funds and being accountable for results.
2. Within any organization – especially one with the size and reach of UNHCR – as more and more data and information are produced, a need arises for the management of both. In UNHCR, there are broadly three different types of data: financial, human resources and operational data. These data are currently managed in a number of different information systems. The organization understands the importance of active, efficient, and effective knowledge and information management for better delivery of programmes and protection for persons of concern to UNHCR; at the same time it faces external and internal changes and critical developments that will affect its work significantly in the coming 5–10 years. This evaluation comes at a time when governments around the world are seeking greater accountability and transparency on the impact, results, and appropriate and prudent use of humanitarian and development financing. Simultaneously, UNHCR’s change and transformation efforts include regionalization and decentralisation, revision of its results-based management system, and data and digital transformation.
3. What these changes reinforce for UNHCR is to improve its data and information systems for all three types of data. While this evaluation, and the rest of this report, focused on operational data, it is noted that the reforms mentioned are also being undertaken for financial and human resources data. At the time of this report, UNHCR’s improvement efforts can be categorized across five initiatives: 1) strengthening data integration and accessibility; 2) improving efficiency of operational data collection; 3) automating information and data analysis; 4) increasing data sharing; and 5) revamping UNHCR’s results-based management approach. This evaluation provides findings and recommendations to further improve and strengthen UNHCR’s data and information management.

Purpose and scope of the evaluation

4. This evaluation serves a dual and mutually reinforcing learning and accountability purpose: to contribute evidence and recommendations that will inform UNHCR’s data and information management (IM) systems and practice; and contribute to improved capacity for responsible, timely and purposeful data use and information management at various levels within UNHCR, in both its operational and coordination roles.
5. The evaluation has five key evaluation questions:
 - Describe the approaches and normative practices of UNHCR staff and partners in the collection, collation, processing, storing and management of operational data;
 - Map data and information flows within UNHCR from sub-office, country office, Regional Office and Headquarters and related data protection and security processes of UNHCR and others;
 - Assess UNHCR’s role in terms of data and information management in a Regional Refugee Response Plan (RRRP) and identify good practices and gaps;

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- Examine the extent to which operations are adjusting their data and information management approaches (systems, protocols and practices) to meet the commitments of the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF), Global Compact for Refugees (GCR), and Grand Bargain as well as UNHCR's regionalization and decentralisation process, Multi-year, Multi-partner programming approach and the results-based management (RBM) Renewal Project underway; and
 - What key steps have been taken by other UN agencies, similar organizations and thought leaders to improve the quality, timeliness and accuracy of operational data and IM that are applicable to improving UNHCR's ability to better carry out its mandate?
6. The evaluation covers the timeframe of 2017–March 2019, and focuses on UNHCR's operational data. Operational data is defined as data from population management activities, needs assessments, protection monitoring, vulnerability and protection risk assessments, programme implementation, case management and monitoring and evaluation. Registration data is not a specific focus of this evaluation, although it is considered to the extent it intersects with operational data systems and processes.

Evaluation methodology

7. As a strategic evaluation, the focus of the evaluation is forward-looking, in that the evidence gathered has been analysed with an understanding and consideration of the external and internal changes UNHCR is experiencing. Accordingly, the conclusions and recommendations are appropriately situated to provide maximum utility based on the evaluation's assessment of the future context.
8. The evaluation employed several key qualitative methods, including focus group and key informant interviews with over 170 UNHCR staff and partners at various levels of the organization, an extensive document review, direct observation of UNHCR operations and in-depth process mapping of data and IM approaches and practices using three case studies. The case studies are operations in Pakistan, the Syria regional refugee response and Zambia. The case studies were selected to represent specific cases across the spectrum of challenging contexts where UNHCR operates. The case studies represent diverse operations with varying types of population groups, partnerships, commitments, types of responses, and resources available. These case studies are not meant to be representative of all UNHCR operations or data and information management systems. Rather, they are to be used to derive learning about UNHCR's practices in varying contexts, which may be applicable to other operations with similar characteristics.

Key findings of UNHCR's current data and information management approaches

9. The evaluation notes that UNHCR has a plethora of data management systems in play for its operational data. This includes rich and meaningful data collected on persons of concern, their protection risks, services and assistance provided to them, and their access to solutions, socioeconomic improvements in their lives, and the contexts in which they live.
10. Data is collected, stored, analysed and shared within UNHCR through registration systems, sector-specific monitoring tools, assessments, and population databases. However, much of this data is collected in siloed systems, and data exchange, sharing, and pooling across these systems has not yet been done consistently. As a result, UNHCR is data rich, but the organization does not fully optimise this data by bringing together the different types collected to perform deeper analysis at either the operational level or at the organizational level.

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11. Based on the three case studies and information gathered globally, some consistent themes have emerged on UNHCR's current approaches to data and information management. These are summarized below, with additional detail in the findings section of the report.
 12. Much of UNHCR's work is currently undertaken by partners. Implementing partner data on monitoring and results could be better integrated. Partner monitoring frameworks and indicators are agreed when partner agreements are signed, and partners are expected to report against such indicators periodically (e.g. every month or every quarter). However, the data collected by partners are not always standardized by UNHCR. Therefore, it is not always feasible nor possible to aggregate the data at country, regional and global levels as a result of the lack of standardized indicators and indicator definitions. UNHCR also currently has no global system to enable the transfer and storing of raw data of programme monitoring and assessment data. There are some operations that have developed platforms or tools to enable partner reporting with a greater degree of automation, but there is yet to be an organization-wide system.
 13. Registration data, for those situations where UNHCR undertakes registration, is maintained in a standardised system. This evaluation did not look at this system in depth. A new version of the registration system, Progres v4, is being rolled out across the organization. However, many governments undertake registration themselves, and their systems may or may not always be compatible or shared with UNHCR. As a result, UNHCR currently holds registration data on a fraction of persons of concern. Protection monitoring data and case management data does exist in all operations, however the capture and storage of this may include paper forms, MS Excel sheets and MS Word documents.
 14. UNHCR operations regularly undertake assessments. Participatory assessments are undertaken annually in many operations. Age, gender, diversity assessments are also to be undertaken regularly. These assessments provide in-depth data and information on needs, vulnerabilities and priorities for persons of concern. There is, to the knowledge of the evaluation, no sampling methodology or frame to ensure that these assessments are undertaken in a rigorous manner. There is no common platform to collect, store, share and analyse assessment data.
 15. Data are inconsistent and of variable quality. Data quality was noticeably better when there was greater use of the data by partners and UNHCR. Data collection, storage and sharing at the operational level generally could be more efficient. Paper remains a common data collection methodology across the global operation, and systems for storing and sharing information are used inconsistently, or developed for specific operations by staff. Finally, the evaluation observed a dearth of dashboards or standard data products used at a management level to inform decision making or to provide an immediate understanding of the health of operations.
 16. While most UNHCR staff and partners are fully committed to protecting information about persons of concern, and while there is a strong framework for data protection (including data security and data sharing), the evaluation still found several instances where personal data was transferred using email and other channels which were not secure and information-sharing processes that are vulnerable to attack and/or security breaches. At the same time, aggregated data could be better used for accountability to affected persons. Data collected on persons of concern are not always shared back with communities. The evaluation team observed gaps in the fulfilment of sharing data and findings with persons of concern, especially after participatory assessments, needs assessments and routine monitoring.
 17. The key underlying factors that affect the current situation are complex and, as mentioned above, the organization recognizes that there is a need to transform the data and information management systems. There are a number of initiatives already in place that will address some of the key issues

mentioned above. These are commendable, and will benefit from ensuring that the factors mentioned below are also considered when planning and implementing this data transformation.

Factors that influence the current situation of UNHCR's data and information management

The current approach to data and information management is highly decentralised

18. UNHCR, like many large and complex organizations operating in rapidly changing and highly varied contexts, has a highly decentralised approach to data and information management. It also has many technical specialists across the organization in protection and solutions. Each operation, and each technical area requires a significant amount of data and information for operational decision-making and for global analysis and reporting. UNHCR does not currently have a data governance policy and structure that provides a “rule book”, for staff and partners around data standards that can bring some consistency and coherence across these areas and operations. UNHCR does not enforce global guidelines for data management. UNHCR does not currently maintain a global library, or standard set, of data collection tools that can be accessed and used by country and field offices. The evaluation finds that UNHCR staff rely on personal networks for the dissemination and discovery of tools and resources. Some sectors do provide global guidance but up-take and application by operations is not mandatory. As a result, there is evidence of duplication of effort in some instances, and evidence of inefficient and poor quality data management practices.

There needs to be a higher investment in data science and information management capacities

19. The organization does not adequately prioritize data management as a function at the country and regional levels. Currently, data science and information management are not seen as core functions of country and regional offices. Consequently, there are operations without any data scientists or information management officers (IMO). Short-term consultants are hired to cover data and information management needs that are seen as temporary. Very rarely, will an operation have multiple staff, specialising with expertise in data analysis, data management, statistical methods, geographic information system (GIS) mapping and information technology. In many cases, operations have only one or two IMOs, who are not specialised in all of the aforementioned areas. At the regional and headquarters levels, the breadth and depth of expertise in statistics, data analysis, data management and data integration could be improved.

Data sharing and data integration has not been adequately emphasized

20. There are limited data sharing platforms being used and information management teams often focus primarily on inter-agency clusters/working groups and are not tapped into by the rest of the operation. Positive shifts are already underway. UNHCR's Microdata Library and the creation of the Joint Data Centre in cooperation with the World Bank signal the organization's leadership and commitment to not only strengthening data on populations affected by forced displacement but also sharing it with the public. There are also emerging good practices in the establishment of an integrated data service unit in the Middle East and North Africa region, population-level risk and vulnerability assessments that are inter-agency and coordinated with national governments, and inter-agency research agendas and growing collaborations with research universities and institutes to address knowledge and evidence gaps. Such efforts need to be expanded and institutionalised.

There needs to be a far deeper understanding about data protection and data access, especially personal data

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21. The evaluation finds that much more can be done to ensure that personal data collected from persons of concern is anonymised before sharing, and that other types of data, such as aggregated data about needs and vulnerabilities, could be more easily accessible. The organization receives a number of data sharing requests from implementing and operational partners. Country operations spend a significant amount of time and energy reviewing these requests per the data protection due diligence process. This process can take up to several months, causing delays to activities and frustrations with partners.

Breaking information silos requires leveraging technology and changing gatekeeping behaviours

22. As mentioned earlier, the evaluation observes that UNHCR collects/collates a wide volume of data from needs assessments, community-based participatory assessments, vulnerability assessments, protection monitoring (case management), assistance monitoring and other special surveys (e.g. sector-specific and protection-related surveys). Without centralised data repositories at country, regional and global levels, the data remain sitting in the thematic area in which they were collected/collated. There currently exist technological solutions that UNHCR could apply to pull data from disparate datasystems without having to migrate data into one system. However, the culture around sharing one's data with other functional teams has been noted to be challenging at all levels within UNHCR. The lack of visibility of what data are available along with difficulties in accessing the data, limit UNHCR's ability to have a comprehensive understanding of the current and historical state of refugees and other persons of concern.

Conclusions

23. **The value proposition for UNHCR to make significant investments in data and IM is clear.**
- The evaluation finds that UNHCR urgently wants, and needs, better quality and more coherent data and analysis to make better strategic decisions, operational decisions, and show its results and performance to stakeholders;
 - It also notes that UNHCR is currently missing opportunities to use data and analysis in advocacy with states, especially when forced displacement discourses are politicised; and
 - Finally, as the UN Refugee Agency, UNHCR ought to be an authority on what is happening with refugees and other persons of concern, but this authority is being eroded by other players who are presenting and sharing data and information that is sometimes more compelling and interesting than UNHCR's data. Benchmarking efforts with other organizations have shown their prioritization of improvements in data and information management.
24. Based on this evaluation, the **gap between what UNHCR wants and where it currently is not that stark**. There are some straightforward, and not-so-difficult fixes that can help UNHCR become more efficient and have more aggregated data visualized and accessible. In particular, prioritizing some investments in data integration, data capacities and data norms and standards could be very helpful. **UNHCR has some excellent data/IM practices and some great capacity**, but this is often only seen in a few places and for a few operations. There is a need to institutionalise these good practices.
25. **Many factors influence why UNHCR cannot get a comprehensive sense of what difference its efforts are making with its resources at any level**, usually not even at a camp or a settlement or a local area level, let alone at the country operation, regional, or global levels. In particular, **data governance** (rule book and parameters) and **clear and empowered leadership** need strengthening.
26. The longer-term vision, where data become a strategic asset for UNHCR, needs to be supported by the development of a **costed, sequenced and thoughtful roadmap and strategy**. Rushing into expensive systems solutions without a roadmap will lose time and money in the long run.

Recommendations

In the context of UNHCR's current data and information systems, the internal and external changes it is facing, and the needs required to act as a leader on protection and solutions, the evaluation offers the following recommendations, with additional detail and sub-recommendations in the main body of the report:

Recommended actions	Responsible	Anticipated timeframe
<p>The evaluation emphasizes that an organization-wide prioritization would be essential to transform data within UNHCR to the asset that it can be.</p> <p>The evaluation recommends that UNHCR develop a data transformation strategy and roadmap, with key elements such as enforcing data norms and standards throughout the organization, cultivating strong data leadership, developing systems to integrate and pull data together, creating a data-first culture, and building capacities and confidence around statistics and evidence on persons of concern.</p>	SET*	Complete by Q4 2019
<p>The evaluation shows that UNHCR and its partners collect a wide array of data and the approach thus far has been decentralised. The organization can maximize the value of its data and information by following a set of global norms and standards to improve data quality, aggregation and interoperability of systems.</p> <p>The evaluation recommends that UNHCR establish a data management "rule book" that specifies the norms and conventions to govern and align the organization's data, stipulating the parameters for data collection, processing, protection, storage, analysis and use.</p>	SET	Start developing the rule book by Q4 2019
<p>As the organization looks to its future, exercising data leadership that is visible at global and regional levels will be a critical feature for its success.</p> <p>At the global level, the evaluation recommends that UNHCR rebrand and create a Data Service that oversees corporate data norms and standards for UNHCR and its partners, data interoperability between key data and IM systems, statistics and demographic data and digital identity and registration. Strong technical expertise in data science and past experience in executing data transformation at an organizational level would be beneficial for the Head of the Data Service.</p>	SET and DPSM*	Complete by Q3 2020
<p>As the Regional Bureaux will be set up in 7 geographic regions of the world, the evaluation recommends that UNHCR consider strengthening data and information management capacity at the regional level, and establishing the Regional Bureaux as the backstop support to country operations instead of HQ Copenhagen/Geneva. This could take the form of a consolidated team devoted to data and information management that mirrors the HQ functional composition or have data and IM functions embedded within relevant teams in the new Regional Bureaux structures.</p>	SET and Regional Bureaux	Complete by Q3 2020
<p>The organization has a wealth of data that are scattered across various data and information management systems. In order to optimize these data, it is worth investing in a technological solution that would facilitate</p>	SET with DPSM and DIST*	Plan of action established by Q4 2019

<p>UNHCR's ability to interrogate the data and draw more comprehensive analyses of the state of refugees, IDPs* and other persons of concern.</p> <p>The evaluation recommends that UNHCR invest in a solution that allows for data from different systems to be connected in such a way that allows for increased intersectoral and comprehensive analysis of the state of PoCs*. Different options could be explored, such as setting up a data lake where raw data can be pulled from different systems as opposed to a data warehouse that is a centralised repository for all integrated data sources.</p>		
<p>UNHCR should increase the availability, usability, integrity and security of data across its global operations. Overcoming many of UNHCR's data-related risks or missed opportunities can be accomplished through the development and execution of enterprise-level data governance. Changing the approach to data management will address the large amounts of data in unstructured formats and will provide standardized security over PoC data. A global data management "rule book" should incorporate this fundamental element.</p>	<p>SET with DIP* and DPSM</p>	<p>Start developing the rule book by Q4 2019</p>
<p>An increasing number of players are actively working in humanitarian-development settings. In order for UNHCR to lead as the authority on refugees and other populations affected by forced displacement, it is important to take an inclusive partnership approach.</p> <p>The evaluation already recommended that UNHCR develop a data transformation strategy. The strategy should acknowledge the importance of partnership and describe how UNHCR plans to engage with a wide range of stakeholders in carrying out its future data work.</p>	<p>SET</p>	<p>Complete by Q4 2019</p>

* **Abbreviations:** DIP = Division of International Protection; DIST = Division of Information Systems and Telecommunications; DPSM = Division of Programme Support and Management; SET = Senior Executive Team.

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List of abbreviations

AGD	Age, Gender and Diversity
BIMS	Biometric Identity Management System
CRRF	Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework
DEEP	Data Entry and Exploration Platform
DER	Division of External Relations
DESS	Division of Emergency, Security and Supply
DIMA	Data and Information Management and Analysis Team
DIP	Division of International Protection
DIST	Division of Information Systems and Telecommunications
DPSM	Division of Programme Support and Management
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
DRS	Division of Resilience and Solutions
FTS	Financial Tracking Service
GBVIMS	Gender-Based Violence Information Management System
GCR	Global Compact for Refugees
GIS	Geographic information system
HIS	Health Information System
HQ	Headquarters
IDPs	Internally displaced persons
IM	Information management
IMO	Information management officer
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IPS	Integrated Programme Services
IT	Information Technology
JDC	Joint Data Centre on Forced Displacement
KEQ	Key evaluation question
LMMS	Last Mile Mobile Solution
MDL	Microdata Library
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding

MS	Microsoft
MSRP	Managing Systems, Resources and People
MYMP	Multi-year/Multi-partner
NGOs	Non-governmental organizations
OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OECD-DAC	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development-Development Assistance Committee
OMC	Operation Management Cycle
PoC	Persons of concern
PPA	Project partnership agreement
ProGres	Profile Global Registration System
RAIS	Refugee Assistance Information System
RBM	Results-based Management
REMIS	Refugee Education Information Management System
RIDL	Raw Internal Data Library
RRRP	Regional Refugee Response Plan
RSD	Refuge Status Determination
SET	Senior Executive Team
SGBV	Sexual and gender-based violence
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	UN Children's Fund
WFP	World Food Programme

1. Introduction

1. We live in an age of information, where what is known can create efficiencies, unlock new opportunities and offer evidence for decision-making as never before. As the specialised UN Agency with a mandate to protect refugees, returnees and stateless people, UNHCR’s strategic and tactical use of information is paramount to fulfilling its mission of protecting and ensuring the development of durable solutions for persons of concern.

1.1 What we mean by data and information

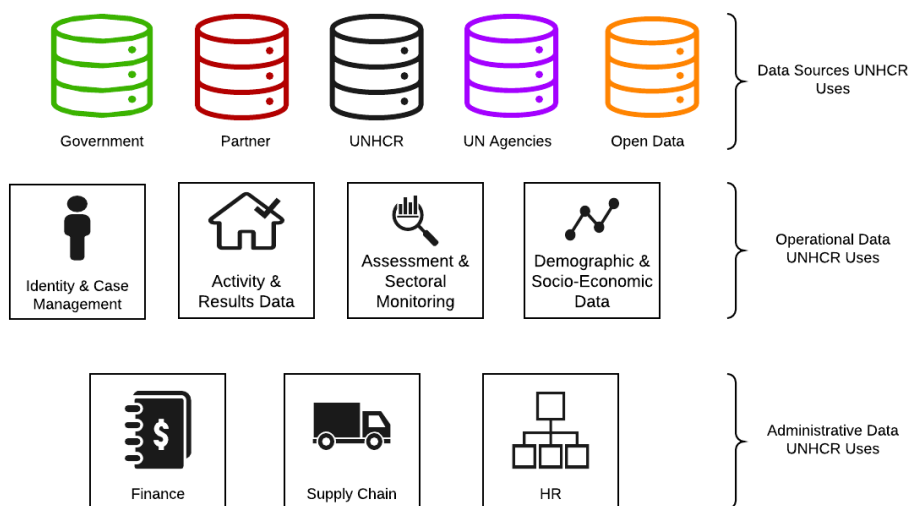
2. Information is the result of processing, organizing, analysing and structuring data. Information is what we present or report, so as to provide something meaningful or useful for decision makers about matters of policy, programmes and protection. Underlying all credible and high-quality information are reliable data. Data are the facts and figures, the quantitative and qualitative elements that are gathered and interpreted in order to create information. At times, the terms “data” and “information” may seem interchangeable.

3. Within any organization – especially one with the size and reach of UNHCR – as more data and information are produced, a need arises for the management of both. Data management is a process of acquiring, validating, storing, protecting, processing, and disseminating data that is required by UNHCR so that it is reliable, accessible and available in a timely and predictable manner. In contrast, information management is the process of identifying what information UNHCR needs, ensuring that information is acquired, organized and stored in usable formats, and subsequently using that information to inform actions and decisions.

1.2 Different types of data at UNHCR

4. In UNHCR, data can broadly be defined as administrative data, comprising human resources, supply chain and financial data and operational data (Figure 1). The operational data UNHCR interacts with includes data from individual identity and case management, UNHCR-funded programme activities and results, assessment and sectoral monitoring as well as demographic and socioeconomic data. Sources of these data include not only data managed by UNHCR but also data managed by implementing and operational partners, governments and publicly available data.

Figure 1: UNHCR Data types and sources



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5. Operational data in UNHCR is multifaceted and is comprised of: 1) population-level data on persons of concern captured in ProGres as well as other registration/enrolment of persons of concern, needs assessments, surveys, etc.; 2) impact and output data as per UNHCR's Results Framework in Focus; 3) protection case management and monitoring data; 4) sectoral monitoring data; and 5) regional refugee response/coordination data. Externally, there are data collected and managed by other agencies, member states and other public/private entities.
 6. As is expected with any large and complex organization, the data above is captured, stored, and analysed in a number of different data and information management systems, some at the global level, some for specific situations, and some for specific country operations.¹
 7. As a companion to this evaluation, UNHCR created an inventory of all systems used across the globe. This initiative identified many systems, which included different versions of proGres and systems that are not specifically structured databases. The inventory underscores that some current systems are not interconnected or interoperable, and may not share common data structures and definitions. Annex 1 describes some of these systems.

1.3 Current initiatives to improve data and information management

8. UNHCR is continually seeking ways to improve its data and information systems. From a risk management perspective, there is an understanding that failing to improve data and information systems would have consequences for the organization and the people UNHCR serves. At the time of this report, UNHCR's improvement efforts can be categorized across five initiatives: 1) strengthening data integration and accessibility; 2) improving efficiency of operational data collection; 3) automating information and data analysis; 4) increasing data sharing; and 5) revamping UNHCR's results-based management approach.

1.3.1 Efforts to strengthen data integration and accessibility

9. In 2018, UNHCR unveiled the Population Registration and Identity Management EcoSystem ([PRIMES](#)) as a new approach to aggregating data from registration and identity management. PRIMES is a platform that brings together UNHCR's case management and biometric systems, such as proGres and the Biometric Identity Management System ([BIMS](#)). A rapid registration tool has also been developed as well as the Dataport, which is the repository of statistics and data generated by the various applications of PRIMES. PRIMES is also able to integrate and share data with other internal and external applications. For example, Project X, the Refugee Assistance Information System ([RAIS](#)), the Global Distribution Tool ([GDT](#)) and Cash-ASSIST are currently being integrated into PRIMES. Externally, PRIMES can connect and communicate with systems such as [PRIMERO](#) (case management system used by multiple UN agencies and actors), ActivityInfo or state owned/operated systems. Finally, PRIMES envisions allowing persons of concern (PoC) to connect with, own and manage their identity-based data via a series of apps.
10. A second effort entails bringing together and curating the large amounts of operational data currently gathered, including needs assessment, protection monitoring, sectoral analysis data, vulnerability and household assessments, and activity monitoring data that UNHCR operations are directly or indirectly collecting (via implementing partners). In an effort to capture this vast collection of data in a structured manner, UNHCR has developed the Raw Internal Data Library (RIDL). RIDL is a globally-supported,

¹ An inventory of data systems used within UNHCR was completed by the Field Coordination and Support Section (FICSS) completed in March 2019. This inventory was developed to complement this evaluation. The evaluation did not review or observe all of the systems identified by the inventory, nor did it attempt to review or observe all systems in use at UNHCR.

centralised, and secure internal data repository which offers staff the opportunity to use raw data for more than one purpose, and preserve it for future use.

11. Finally, UNHCR is also developing a [Microdata Library](#) (MDL). The MDL will make curated and anonymized socio-economic data on persons of concern available to external audiences, such as operational partners, stakeholders or academia.

1.3.2 Efforts to improve efficiency of operational data collection

12. The evaluation case studies noted that data collection from persons of concern at UNHCR is commonly carried out manually (i.e. via paper and pen). However, UNHCR has recognized that manual, paper-based data collection is fraught with issues around data quality and efficiency. The organization is currently pushing forward initiatives to improve the efficiency of data collection in a number of ways.
13. UNHCR has adopted [Kobo Toolbox](#) as its mobile data collection platform. Kobo is an open source mobile application built on OpenDataKit that provides easy-to-use functionality for form building, a question library, and more. With an application such as Kobo, UNHCR is able to improve data quality through facilities like form-level validation rules in questionnaires. Kobo also works offline, enabling UNHCR staff to use it in remote field locations.
14. UNHCR is also seeking ways to automate data collection. For example, UNHCR has partnered with Tekelek to trial remote water tank monitoring. This initiative has installed mobile-connected monitoring sensors on water tanks in refugee camps. The sensors deliver real time water inventories to managers which contribute to a more efficient response and route planning for water delivery.

1.3.3 Efforts to automate data processing, analysis and visualization

15. While collecting data is a resource-intensive process, transforming that data (i.e. processing, analysing) into information that is fit for public consumption is often a labour-intensive undertaking. Analysis must also be presented with narrative to provide context and positioning. UNHCR is currently investing in ways to automate the reporting process for donors and other stakeholders.
16. As noted above, UNHCR has included the [Dataport](#) as a core portion of its PRIMES ecosystem. Currently, UNHCR employs the [Operational Data Portal](#) (found at data.unhcr.org) for public-facing statistics regarding persons of concern. Still under development, PRIMES envisions the Dataport as a repository that is automatically populated by data from proGres v4 and other registration systems. This data could then be used for functions such as contributing to global intelligence on displacement or providing a quality resource for analytical and comprehensive information on persons of concern, among other uses.
17. The Data Entry and Exploration Platform (DEEP) is an online Open Source platform that is an inter-agency joint initiative focused on improving situational and risk analysis for humanitarian crises. DEEP offers a suite of tools, tailored by UNHCR for analyzing both structured and unstructured qualitative data. The system filters through qualitative data based on the user's analytical framework specifications.

1.3.4 Efforts to increase data sharing

18. UNHCR works with other agencies, organizations, and governments to ensure the protection of persons of concern. Data sharing is an important aspect of this work. It helps reduce the risk of duplication, and increases collaboration and trust among actors. UNHCR has many data sharing agreements in place, particularly with governments, and is currently working on a number of initiatives to increase and improve how data is shared.

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19. UNHCR has finalized a global data sharing agreement with the World Food Programme (WFP) that is the first of its kind for the organization.² In Jordan, the agreement specifies processes, commitments and accountabilities for sharing data and information related to cash assistance, camps and communities weekly and bi-weekly, and includes stipulations on confidentiality, anonymization, and interoperability. The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between UNHCR and IMPACT/REACH on Information Management is nearing finalization and includes clauses on data transfer and sharing. There are ongoing discussions with UNICEF and the International Red Cross on the need for similar data sharing agreements.
 20. UNHCR in partnership with the World Bank has created the Joint Data Centre (JDC) on Forced Displacement in Copenhagen. The JDC will focus on collecting, analysing and disseminating anonymized micro data. This micro data will include household-level socioeconomic data such as income, consumption, skills, health status, and economic activity. The JDC will facilitate open access to these micro data, with adequate anonymization and safeguards to protect persons of concern and the integrity of data collected.
 21. Finally, UNHCR is exploring better ways of sharing data that include establishing a policy on open data, how to systematically identify, collect and effectively use information created by other organizations, and the creation (or adoption) of standards to enable better interaction with external sources. This work also includes a consideration of who UNHCR should work with, such as innovators, standard and policy setting bodies, other humanitarian organizations, development organizations, governments and persons of concern.

1.3.5 Revamping UNHCR's results-based management approach

22. At the time of this evaluation, UNHCR's corporate results-based management (RBM) tool is called [FOCUS](#). This system primarily reports on outputs, and UNHCR recognised that there is a need for more outcome-focused monitoring leading to longer-term impact. UNHCR is in the process of designing a new RBM tool that will transform how the organization reports on its programming, advocacy and coordination efforts.

1.4 UNHCR's evolving contextual landscape

23. UNHCR operates in a constantly changing environment. The growth of personal access to information, increased levels of displacement globally, and limited availability of funds create the need for UNHCR to adapt its data practices. In addition to these broader issues, UNHCR is confronting a number of specific external and internal changes that will have a profound effect on its data and information needs.

1.4.1 The global context that UNHCR operates in

24. The New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants of September 2016, whereby the UN General Assembly adopted a set of commitments to enhance the protection of refugees and migrants, also called upon UNHCR to develop and initiate the [Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework \(CRRF\)](#).³ The CRRF recognizes that sustainable assistance and durable solutions for refugees cannot be achieved without international cooperation. The CRRF seeks to achieve four objectives: 1) to ease pressures on countries that host large numbers of refugees; 2) to enhance refugee self-reliance; 3) to expand third-country solutions; and 4) to support conditions in countries of origin for return in safety and dignity.

² [Addendum on data sharing to the 2011 MoU between UNHCR and WFP](#).

³ [A/RES/71/1 Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 19 September 2016](#).

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25. Following the CRRF, the [Global Compact on Refugees](#) (GCR) was affirmed by the UN General Assembly in December 2018. The Global Compact on Refugees guides the international community by mobilizing political will, broadening the base of support, and activating arrangements for more equitable and predictable burden- and responsibility-sharing. A GCR indicator framework has been developed to strengthen the availability of global data structured around the four objectives, including arrangements to support burden- and responsibility-sharing, areas identified as being in need of support as well as interlinked aspects of displacement in host countries and countries of origin. A variety of data sources will inform the [GCR indicator framework](#), including from UNHCR and other UN and international agencies and national institutions.⁴
 26. Another factor that has implications for UNHCR's data needs is the growing scope and complexity around persons of concern. While camps remain a key feature in UNHCR's response, persons of concern are increasingly finding refuge in urban areas where social networks often exist, or greater education and economic opportunities are available. This change means that UNHCR may find itself confronted with programming for persons of concern in a more complex social and economic environment with both greater opportunities and risks. When considering the implications for UNHCR's data needs, this again points to much wider and deeper partnering – with local authorities and service providers – and increased sophistication around new ways of determining the needs of persons of concern and activities (e.g. the “big data” of social media).

1.4.2 Transformations underway within UNHCR

27. UNHCR is also undergoing internal transformations that will have specific effects on data and information systems, in particular UNHCR's organizational restructuring towards regionalization. Regionalization shifts Regional Bureaux staff and resources closer to persons of concern. This shift will necessitate a change in how data and information are created, curated and accessed. The vast majority of data will continue to originate at the operational field/response level (including data generated by partners or other organizations). But how data is transformed into useful information and how that information is used for decision-making and advocacy will need to be standardized, streamlined and structured so that decision makers at the country, regional and global levels have access to the right amount of information at the right times. As part of the Data Strategy which is currently being finalized, the Division has made some recommendations on how the new data structure at Bureaux could look, but will need to be accompanied by adapted processes and a strong data governance structure.
28. A final area of internal change is the organization's shift from an annual planning and budgeting cycle to a Multi-year/Multi-partner (MYMP) approach. MYMP protection and solutions' strategies allow country operations to maintain a longer-term focus on achieving solutions, while ensuring that immediate needs are addressed, the rights of all people of concern protected and host communities supported. MYMP, in concert with the development of the new RBM system, will catalyse a shift away from output-based performance monitoring to one focused on outcomes. As such, the data and information needed to monitor and assess progress will need to shift as well.
29. UNHCR's current needs, continued organizational evolution and external pressures underscore the value and criticality of the data and information UNHCR produces, curates and shares. Going forward, the findings of this evaluation offer insight into where and how UNHCR might make future investments in this area.

⁴ Global Compact on Refugees: [Indicator Framework](#). UNHCR. July 2019.

2. Purpose, audience and key areas of inquiry

2.1 Purpose

30. This evaluation serves a dual and mutually reinforcing learning and accountability purpose: to contribute evidence and recommendations that will inform UNHCR's IM systems and practice; and contribute to improved capacity for responsible, timely and purposeful data use and information management at various levels within UNHCR, in both its operational and coordination roles.

2.2 Audience

31. The primary audiences are UNHCR's Senior Executive Team (SET), Regional Bureaux, Division of Programme Support and Management (DPSM), Division of International Protection (DIP), Division of Information Systems and Telecommunications (DIST), Division of External Relations (DER), and Division of Resilience and Solutions (DRS) at Headquarters (HQ). Secondary audiences are regional and country offices.

2.3 Key areas of inquiry

32. The evaluation focused its efforts on answering the following five Key Evaluation Questions (KEQ):

KEQ1: How are information needs determined and the data necessary to fulfil these needs collected, collated, cleaned, analysed, stored and managed across UNHCR's operation management cycle?

KEQ2: To what extent is data shared internally and externally to inform operational planning, implementation, partner and programme management, and stakeholder coordination?

KEQ3: How effective is UNHCR in determining information needs and the data necessary to fulfil these needs collected, collated, cleaned, analysed, stored, managed and coordinated in interagency Refugee Response Plan situations?

KEQ4: What are the implications of the Global Compact on Refugees (as embodied by CRRF), the Humanitarian-Development Nexus, the Grand Bargain, and UNHCR organizational restructuring on UNHCR's practice concerning data and information management?

KEQ5: What key steps have been taken by other UN agencies, similar organizations and thought leaders to improve the quality, timeliness and accuracy of operational data and IM that are applicable to improving UNHCR's ability to better carry out its mandate?

3. Methodology

3.1 Scope

33. The evaluation covers the timeframe of 2017–March 2019, and focuses on UNHCR's operational data. Operational data is defined as data from population management activities, needs assessments, protection monitoring, vulnerability and protection risk assessments, programme implementation, case management and monitoring and evaluation. Registration data is not a specific focus of this evaluation, although it is considered to the extent it intersects with operational data systems and processes.
34. The evaluation focuses on how UNHCR operations consider, process, transform, use, manage and share data – and the processes and systems within which this happens.

3.2 Strategic nature of the evaluation

35. As a strategic evaluation, the focus of the evaluation is forward looking, in that, the evidence gathered has been analysed with an understanding and consideration of the external and internal changes UNHCR is experiencing. Accordingly, the conclusions and recommendations are appropriately situated to provide maximum utility based on the evaluation's assessment of the future context.
36. Contrary to typical evaluations, the assignment was conceived without specific measurement criteria (e.g. to assess progress) or expected outcomes, given that the scope of the evaluation is to review operational data practice and approaches. Therefore, the research methodologies of process mapping (see Annex 3 for details), key informant interviews, document review and observation were used to develop an understanding of organizational systems, practices, culture, structures and incentives/disincentives regarding data and information.
37. Importantly, as a strategic evaluation, the work is hypothesis-driven. Using a deductive process, it was expected that evidence gathered as a part of this work would confirm or nullify its hypothesis and then new hypotheses would be generated as the assignment proceeded. At inception, the evaluation was intended to provide a current (or "as is") snapshot of data and information management systems and processes that could be used to recommend changes that would enhance operational performance. However, as case study research unfolded, it became immediately clear that the evaluation needed to address fundamental issues related to data and information management across the organization.

3.3 Qualitative data

3.3.1 Key informant interviews

38. The evaluation team conducted a comprehensive set of individual and group key informant interviews with more than 170 people. Interviewees included UNHCR staff members, partners and other stakeholders.
39. Within UNHCR, the evaluation strived to ensure that perspectives from across the organization were included. The evaluation includes perspectives from the SET, DPSM, DIP, DIST, DER, DRS, and DESS. The evaluation connected with individuals within these divisions at all levels – HQ, Regional, Bureaux, country office and field office.
40. The evaluation also sought, and received, valuable perspectives from UNHCR's partners in implementation of the Syria regional refugee response, and operations in Pakistan and Zambia.

Perspectives from other stakeholders, such as government partners and other UN agencies, were also included in the evaluation's data collection.

3.3.2 Document review

41. The evaluation reviewed an exhaustive list of documentation related to UNHCR's operations and how data and information are used to achieve UNHCR's protection and programming goals. More than 150 documents, presentations and reports were provided to the evaluation team at the inception phase of the assignment and many more were collected, read and discussed over the course of the evaluation.

3.3.3 Observation

42. The evaluation team observed operations, systems and processes at:
 - UNHCR Headquarters (Geneva and Copenhagen);
 - In the Syria regional refugee response (Director's Office in Amman, Jordan Country Operation and Lebanon Country Operation);
 - Pakistan (Islamabad Head Office and Peshawar Field Office); and
 - Zambia (Lusaka Head Office, Mantapala and Meheba settlements).

3.3.4 Case study approach

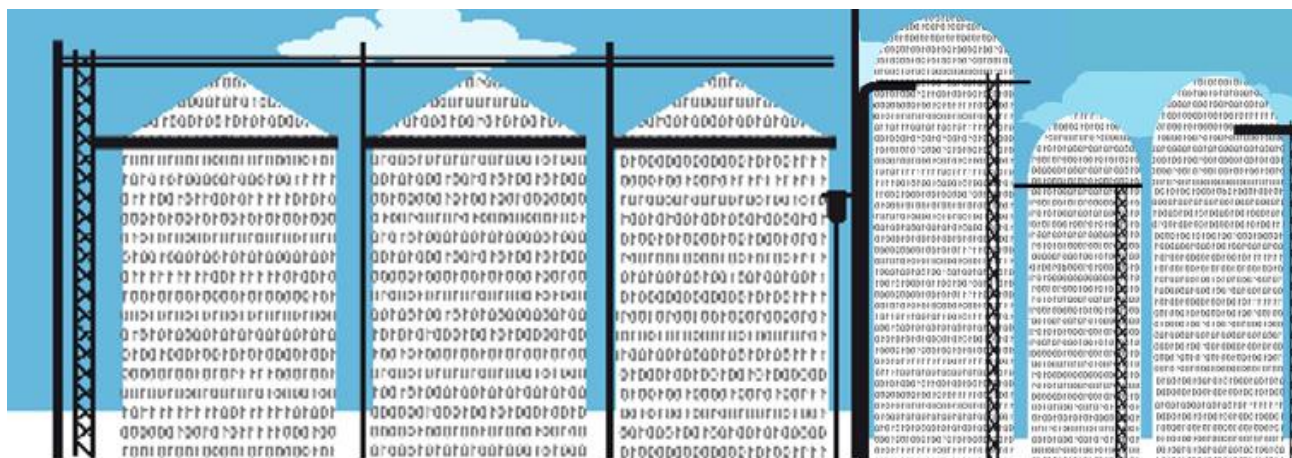
43. UNHCR's Evaluation Service, in consultation with DPSM and Regional Bureaux, identified three unique case studies to inform this evaluation. The case studies were selected to represent specific cases across the spectrum of challenging contexts where UNHCR operates. The case studies represent diverse operations with varying types of population groups, partnerships, commitments, types of responses, and resources available. These case studies are not meant to be representative of all UNHCR operations or data and information management systems. Rather, they are to be used to derive learning about UNHCR's practices in varying contexts, which may be applicable to other operations with similar characteristics.
44. The three case studies are:
 - [Pakistan](#) – Pakistan is a complex environment for persons of concern, hosting almost 1.4 million refugees and asylum seekers, as well as internally displaced persons, stateless persons, and returnees. It is a mixed situation, with both protracted and emergency responses needed, and a budget consistently at or above USD 100 million a year. The mix of types of persons of concern, types of situations, and medium resources offer an opportunity to generally assess data management systems and data utilization in similar contexts.
 - [Syria regional refugee response](#) – With over 5.6 million refugees across five countries, UNHCR's Syria regional refugee response is the largest and most complex case study with a budget around USD 2.5 billion a year. The case study includes field work in the Director's Office in Amman and country operations in Jordan and Lebanon. The case study focuses on UNHCR's data and IM coordination at the regional and country levels, exploring the data management systems, capacities, IM products and data use in this high resource context.
 - [Zambia](#) – This operation is the smallest of the case studies, both in terms of number of persons of concern and budget. Although primarily a protracted situation, the recent instability in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) has resulted in an increase in refugees in 2018. Zambia is also the only case of a country that is implementing the CRRF and also piloting a MYMP strategy. Because Zambia has no Information Management Officer (IMO) and more modest resources, it reflects a large percentage of UNHCR's operations working in protracted situations.

3.4 Limitations

45. **Representativeness of three countries / case studies.** The evaluation's findings are based on findings from three field visits to Pakistan, the Syria regional refugee response and Zambia. These field visits were supplemented with additional interviews with HQ staff in Copenhagen and Geneva, virtual meetings with other RRRP operations, and documentation review. However, this evaluation does not aim to represent the entire diversity in data management systems and practices across all UNHCR operations and the 130 countries that it works in. The evaluation's focus is on identifying whether there are organization-wide issues that affect efficient and effective management and use of data and information. This hypothesis-driven design allowed the evaluation to carefully and purposefully select cases that would provide learning across the differing situations and contexts.
46. **Representativeness of the programme areas (protection and sectoral areas) we examine in each case study.** Similarly, the evaluation investigated two to three programme areas in each field visit. In UNHCR's Results Framework, objectives are divided into nine rights groups or programme areas. The programme areas focused on were selected by country offices, with input from the Evaluation Manager and the evaluation team, where necessary. The data and IM systems and practices for these programme areas may or may not be representative of the systems and practices for other programme areas in that operation.
47. **Scope related to data itself.** This study focuses on operational data and information management and their associated systems in three country operations/offices, with additional input from HQ staff in Copenhagen and Geneva as well as staff working in other RRRPs. It aims to address questions related to the processes and systems used to collect, process, and share data and the decisions made using this data. The study also aims to make recommendations about how to improve data-related processes, systems and practices. This study does not aim to examine the accuracy or quality of any specific data set, nor the integrity of any data system. As such, the evaluation does not discuss the quality of data or data analyses conducted by UNHCR and its partners.

4. Findings

4.1 UNHCR's operational data is fragmented across many systems



48. Based on interviews with staff at HQs and in the field and direct observation in the three case studies, data management in UNHCR is sometimes conflicting and siloed. The complementary inventory to this evaluation found more than 60 individual systems actively being used. Many of these systems were conceived, designed, developed, and are now maintained, by the sections which they serve. For example, the Health Information System (HIS) is owned and operated by the Public Health section, and the Refugee Education Management Information System is owned and operated by Education. Other systems in use have been designed, developed and are managed by partner organizations or other UN agencies. Examples include PRIMERO (led by UNICEF⁵), ActivityInfo (developed in collaboration with UNICEF, UNHCR, OCHA), FTS, GBVMIS, SCOPE, Last Mile Mobile Solution (LMMS), and other UN reporting systems. The sector or functional-specific development and management of these systems has resulted in a working environment where data becomes siloed or trapped in the system in which it is collected. The evaluation also found that data is often not shared by gatekeepers or that it may be shared reluctantly, especially in raw form.
49. The data collected to fulfil specific needs often forms a fraction of the operational data UNHCR protection and programme staff use on a day-to-day basis. The case studies revealed that a significant amount of data used for operational decision making is collected, held or managed in unstructured formats (i.e. paper, MS Excel, MS Word). For example, when a needs assessment is performed, data are often collected first on paper then transferred to MS Excel. The MS Excel spreadsheet is then modified or used as the management tool. This data is then stored on the individual hard drive of a UNHCR staff member. There are no clear protocols for how and where to store this type of information so that others can access it in the future. RIDL is being developed to address this issue.
50. A third point on data fragmentation concerns UNHCR implementing partners. As illustrated by the case studies, raw data collected by partners is often held and managed by the partners; UNHCR normally only receives aggregated output data on selected indicators through periodic reports (e.g. number of people who were trained). Partners also provide situational context in reports. Further, UNHCR's partners vary in terms of data management practice. As such, some partners have highly sophisticated systems to collect and store data, while others default to MS Excel.

⁵ UNHCR is on the PRIMERO Coordination Committee (PCC); there is a joint PRIMERO-ProGres Working Group discussing interoperability and other technical issues.

51. In the Syria regional refugee response, the evaluation team detected silos within an operation based on organizational team structures. For example, the Information Management team, working primarily on inter-agency IM products, has access to a wealth of data and produces an impressive array of dashboards, GIS maps, technical briefs, etc. However, these resources are not well known internally among UNHCR staff who are not involved in inter-agency coordination. The creation of an integrated data service within the Director's Office in Amman reflects lessons learned to improve efficiency and coordination across data needs (see Box 1 for more information).

Box 1: Good Practice: *Development of the Data and Information Management and Analysis Team (DIMA)*

The Director's Office in Amman for the Middle East and North Africa Bureau (DOiA) created the Data and Information Management and Analysis (DIMA) unit in May 2018. This initiative stemmed from the recognition that different sectors had data and information capacities and resources, but that these were siloed, resulting in the loss of information or lack of capacity to analyse and use it across sectors and operations. The creation of DIMA has required sectors in the regional bureau to reassign their data and IM staff to join DIMA. The objectives of setting up DIMA included improving data collection, data coherence, data quality and data analysis. DIMA has double-hatted reporting to the head of MENA Protection Service (MPS) and to the Deputy Director.

52. The most important consequence of data fragmentation is the added effort necessary to consolidate data so that staff can perform integrated analysis across protection and programme delivery. This effort is compounded considering that UNHCR must deliver a range of informational products including donor reports, updates to host governments, organizational flagship products (e.g. annual population report), and time-sensitive, nuanced reporting in response to specific internal and external requests (e.g. needs assessments, situation analyses).

4.2 Operational data is sometimes inconsistent and of variable quality

53. The case study work detected that the consistency and quality of data within UNHCR is highly variable outside structured systems, such as the HIS. This variability is a result of a number of factors.

54. UNHCR does not currently have or enforce global guidelines for data quality assurance. Such guidelines would typically be defined as a part of global data governance documentation, or basically a "rule book," that provides standards and procedures for country operations to follow for any data collected and processed by UNHCR staff or implementing partner. Quality assurance guidelines would include items such as data management requirements, data cleaning and verification checks, standardized data collection tools and processes, and routine data quality assessment exercises with partners.

55. UNHCR does not currently employ a standard project management system across its global operations (NB: the software LogAlto is currently being tested in a few locations). As such, country and field offices individually monitor and manage program data from their operations. This includes all data and information received from implementing partners. As a result, MS Excel frequently becomes the default data management tool and individual hard drives become the default information repository.

56. UNHCR does not always use or provide/enforce standard indicators and reporting templates with implementing partners. The case studies revealed examples where different implementing partners for the same protection mandate reported using different formats and structures.

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57. These factors make it challenging to aggregate outputs and outcomes at the country operation level because of inconsistency and lack of a ‘single source of truth’.

4.3 UNHCR has rich data from assessments, but does not leverage it sufficiently for deeper analysis

58. The case studies found that UNHCR operations regularly collect assessment data, such as UNHCR’s annual community-based participatory assessment, which is supposed to be implemented as part of the annual programming cycle. The assessment forms the basis for the Annual Protection Report and Country Operations Plan for the following year. However, this data is then archived (almost always on the hard drive of an individual staff member) and is not used for any other purpose.
59. Like the participatory assessment, UNHCR regularly collects needs assessment data and data related to [Age, Gender and Diversity](#) (AGD). There is no organizational standardized system to store, share and analyse this data and to compare and contrast that with output or individual data (although there are initiatives underway to address this, such as MENA region’s efforts to digitize and systematize participatory assessments using Kobo-toolbox). The organization does not mine this data for trends or to help with the prediction of future needs or changes in behaviour of persons of concern.
60. Finally, because assessment data does not have a global “home” in which it can be stored, there is no way for the organization to realistically use this data for further analysis around vulnerabilities, needs and current political and socioeconomic situation of refugees and sub-populations (i.e. women, girls, youth, etc.). Without this analysis, UNHCR cannot publish findings and lead the global conversation on forcibly displaced persons. As mentioned earlier, RIDL is being developed and rolled out to address this.

4.4 Data collection, storage and sharing systems can be improved

61. The three case studies and interviews at UNHCR HQ underscored that common data collection, storage and sharing processes are inefficient. This creates a number of risks around data protection and quality, and constrains UNHCR’s ability to provide services consistent with it’s capacity.
62. Paper remains a common data collection methodology across the global operation. This requires significant amounts of human resources, time and funding to perform data collection, as well as an additional layer for data transformation (from paper to digital). Paper-based data collection is also fraught with data quality issues at both the time of recording information and when it is transferred to a digital format. In the case studies, Kobo is being used in Jordan and Lebanon (Syria regional refugee response) to a large degree, in Pakistan it is used on occasion, and is being introduced by one team in Zambia.
63. Duplication of effort often results from data collection inefficiencies. As an example from the Pakistan case study, the evaluation team observed that the country office performed both a participatory assessment and a community profiling exercise within 90 days of one another. At the same time, UNHCR had active partner activities in the communities assessed, creating a missed opportunity to collect any needed data. While the Pakistan example is only one data point, interviews across the case studies and HQ suggest this type of duplication is more of the norm than the exception.
64. There is inefficiency noted in the area of data collection tools. UNHCR does not currently maintain a global library or standard set of data collection tools that can be accessed and used by country and field offices, and if there are tools available staff are often unaware of them. This results in a situation where operations and programmes often build their own tools every time an assessment is performed. Several sectors have standard indicators and data collection instruments (survey forms); however,

uptake and application by operations is decentralised. There are efforts to standardize assessments in larger, more resource-rich operations, but it is not the norm across the organization. Data collected by unique tools cannot be aggregated to country, regional and global levels without effort and associated errors.

65. Use of one-time tools often results in non-representative sampling. Across the case studies, the evaluation team observed the default use of “samples of convenience” and small sample sizes for participatory assessments, rather than sampling methodologies that would be representative of the population. This was not the case across the board. Health and nutrition surveys were based on more scientific sampling standards. Another outlier to this were the population-level vulnerability surveys conducted in Jordan and Lebanon, which can resource the needed expertise.
66. Inefficiencies exist in sharing and accessing data. Across the case studies, the evaluation team observed a standard practice of using email as the default data sharing platform. Data files and information products are not stored in a centralised location that is accessible to all UNHCR staff who should have access to it – publicly available information products can be found at data.unhcr.org. Hence, finding needed information entails staff asking colleagues if they have this or that report and sifting through emails.
67. The evaluation found instances where data management and information management teams might not have coordinated efforts, resulting in duplication of efforts. Three specific examples highlight this issue. First, the evaluation team learned that UNHCR was using [ActivityInfo](#) in multiple country offices, but each of these offices interfaced directly with the vendor, resulting in a situation where UNHCR was paying a premium price for many individual licencing options, rather than through a negotiated corporate account/rate.⁶ Second, within the same operation in the Syria regional refugee response, there are two data management teams, one under registration and another under programme, plus an information management team. They sit in different locations and do not meet regularly. As a result, the data management teams are not always aware of all of the information products and tools developed by the IM teams and sometimes re-create the same tool or purchase a license to a different software instead of leveraging existing resources. Finally, the duplicative development of Project X in Lebanon and [CashAssist](#) at headquarters – systems that accomplish essentially the same outcome of authenticating and tracking cash disbursements – is an example of UNHCR country offices developing local solutions that may be replicable elsewhere but lack visibility with HQ uptake, support and continued development.

4.5 Challenges with data management systems in refugee coordination systems

68. UNHCR leads or co-leads the inter-agency planning and coordination for large scale and complex refugee situations, such as regional refugee response situations for the Americas, Burundi, DRC, Nigeria, South Sudan and Syria. These situations have a regional reach, by definition, and require a layer of oversight and management that is not possible at the country operation level.
69. Observations and interviews from the Syria regional refugee response case study, and conversations with the RRRP staff in the Americas, DRC, Nigeria and South Sudan underscored that UNHCR’s current efforts to coordinate information could be strengthened. For example, in the RRRPs, the evaluation finds that regional and particularly country-level analyses have the potential to generate more nuanced understanding on the situation of affected populations (i.e. the nature of the refugee outflux, the ability of host countries to respond to needs, the diversity and severity of the protection threats/risks that persons of concern face in different countries, the variability of the factors that

⁶ UNHCR staff at HQ identified this situation through analyzing financial data and rectified it.

influence decisions to return etc). Currently, the primary focus of regional refugee response information management is to facilitate coordinated funding appeals and the subsequent tracking of funding expenditures against activity outputs. More analysis of changes in the situation of persons of concern and host communities from UNHCR's response and collective efforts would provide further value-add to donors, host governments and the broader humanitarian community. The evaluation notes that the Syria regional refugee response has made strong efforts to improve country-level analyses.

70. The evaluation finds that the difficulties associated with data management in the RRRPs could be associated with the level of investment in the function. Typically, UNHCR allocates few staff to information management (e.g. one IMO and one reporting officer), which is an important aspect to effective response and coordination. These staff may find themselves overwhelmed with the basic tasks of requesting, receiving and processing data from myriad country offices and partners. The Jordan and Lebanon country offices are exceptions to this, where larger numbers of staff are allocated for data and information management that informs regional coordination. However, even in these settings, the evaluation found that the main thrust of activity remains focused on understanding funding requirements and tracking expenditures against activity outputs rather than generating evidence-based products to guide decision-making and policy engagement.

4.6 Challenges turning data into value-added decision-making

71. Across interviews during the case studies and at HQ, the evaluation team often heard respondents describe UNHCR as “data rich”. By this, respondents meant they believed that UNHCR collects a virtual mountain of information on a regular basis. If one considers just the required annual participatory assessment that is carried out by each country office, it is relatively easy to visualize how this mountain of data is created. However, as observed by the evaluation team, this data may not be linked to better, higher-quality, and more evidence-based decision-making across the organization.
72. Recognizing this, UNHCR created the position of Information Management Officer (IMO) in 2010 in an attempt to facilitate better and more consistent use of data in decision-making. At the time of this evaluation, while the number of IMOs globally continues to increase rapidly, the IMO initiative has been limited for a number of reasons. First, because of resource constraints, many UNHCR operations still do not have access to an IMO. Without this internal capacity, or at least access to this capacity at a regional level, country offices are left with the option of all value added data work being performed by already overwhelmed protection, programme or external relations staff. Second, as observed by the evaluation team, typically IMO duties and the products they are tasked with producing are external facing (e.g. generating donor reports or fact sheets for external consumption), and these products are not used internally for protection or programme management. While the protection monitoring data and registration data is used to inform protection activities, there is a need to use data to better inform programme management and for overall impact analysis linked to the improvement of the protection situation of persons of concern. Finally, the IMO position itself is rarely a manager-level position within the organization. Typically staffed at the P2/P3 level, the IMO position is often seen as an outlet for generating necessary outputs, rather than as one that can add value to strategy, planning and management.
73. IMO functions described above are a symptom of larger organizational culture issues related to data use in UNHCR. Across the case studies and at HQ, the evaluation team observed a dearth of dashboards or standard data products used at the management level to inform decision-making or to provide an immediate understanding of the health of operations. There were notable exceptions in the case studies in Pakistan (i.e. factsheets produced by the IMO) and the Syria regional refugee response (i.e. monthly reporting in the health sector).

74. Finally, the evaluation team has found that there may be a lack of prioritization on analysing data and disseminating evidence, besides the annual [Global Trends Report](#), outside the organization. Two examples of this are highlighted. First, the evaluation team observed that UNHCR tends to cooperate well with partners when it comes to providing data in response to specific data sharing requests. However, UNHCR typically does not seek or request data from other organizations. In some cases, this has led to UNHCR missing out on opportunities to be a thought leader in the response to displacement. For instance, the analysis on child displacement by UNICEF on their website and in the report, *Children on the Move*, utilized UNHCR’s refugee population statistics. Second, the World Bank study on returnees to Syria had 70+ dedicated researchers while UNHCR had 5 staff who provided comments on top of their existing workloads. In interviews with UNHCR country office staff, the general consensus was that the culture is geared towards “doing” with very little time or routine to take a step back and look at what is working, or trends based on deeper analysis of different types of data from protection and programme. Analyses such as this help drive the discourse on forced displacement response among policy and decision makers. Box 2 provides an example of an emerging good practice in the Syria regional refugee response.

Box 2: Good practice: research agendas

Development of inter-sectoral analytical frameworks to inform research and evidence building in DIMA, Jordan and Lebanon country offices.

UNHCR is also involved in inter-agency work to develop analytical frameworks, in an effort to reduce duplication and pool resources.

4.7 Access to data for persons of concern could be improved

75. UNHCR commits to including the perceptions, needs and experiences of persons of concern in all aspects of its operations. Nonetheless, the evaluation team observed gaps in the fulfilment of this commitment, specifically in sharing information back to persons of concern after participatory assessments, needs assessments and routine monitoring. As per corporate policy, persons of concern are clearly included in the data collection portion of the participatory assessment (Box 3) within the annual planning cycle. This was evident consistently across case studies. However, the results from the data collected by UNHCR – what is learned and what is decided – is rarely communicated back to them. For example, 40 process maps of different data routines were developed from the evaluation. Yet, when these maps were created, the sharing of data with refugee families and communities as clear and expected steps in the process was hardly, if ever, mentioned.

Box 3: Good practice: [Community-Based Participatory Assessments](#)

UNHCR has been implementing a Community-based Protection strategy since 2008 that promotes annual participatory assessments. This strategy relies upon the intimate involvement of persons of concern in the identification, reporting and resolution of issues that affect their well-being. UNHCR helps to identify individuals and support community structures that are ultimately used to identify issues when they arise and help those affected to find solutions via implementing partners. This type of protection delivery system helps to keep persons of concern knowledgeable about the data they share and what it is used for.

4.8 Data management is highly decentralised

76. At the time of this evaluation, UNHCR is taking steps to provide both data and information to stakeholders in ways that are easily accessible, and add value. Examples include the organization’s long-standing population data and the new Data Port. Achieving this requires consistent and standardized execution globally around data and information practices. However, the evaluation finds

that the management of data and information remains highly decentralised. At least four factors contribute to this, as observed in the case studies.

77. First, UNHCR does not currently have enforced global data norms and standards, policies and data structures that could serve as a “rule book” for staff and partners. Developing such an organization-wide rule book would significantly support the improvement of data quality overall, and set out protocols for structures and processes that ensure the right data is always available to the appropriate audiences at the right times. Without such standards, each country operation – and each unit within each operation – applies distinct approaches, resulting in the inefficiencies and other issues enumerated above.
78. Second, UNHCR does not prioritize data management as a function at the country level. Country offices do not have clear functional reporting lines at regional or HQ levels that would ultimately provide global guidance. Such structures and prioritization would go a long way in ensuring data quality and data security and the efficient and effective use of data.
79. Third, UNHCR’s current reliance on non-technical individuals making decisions related to data management (e.g. needs identification, collection, storage) contributes to poor resource allocation, decreased efficiencies and muted effectiveness. As observed at all levels during the evaluation, technical specialists are not currently empowered to contribute to management decisions. Indeed, this was a key consideration when creating DIMA in the MENA Regional office. The staff member leading the team has been given a high enough professional level (i.e. P5) to have the seniority necessary to be included in senior management meetings.
80. Finally, the evaluation team defined a practice within UNHCR that could be termed, “discovery by serendipity”. In brief, UNHCR staff often rely on personal networks for discovering what works, what does not and what is new/available for use across the organization instead of through a structured approach.

4.9 Data protection at the field level could be strengthened

81. Data protection relates to the standards and principles to ensure that the storage, dissemination and sharing of data in data bases and systems are such to prevent unwanted/non-authorized access to data. UNHCR has a data protection policy, a data protection officer, a steering committee and operational guidance to operationalize the policy. However, the application of the standards varies within countries and regions. The evaluation team observed that typical data collection, sharing and storage processes are highly vulnerable to attacks and/or breaches. Three examples illustrate this.
82. First, as mentioned earlier, the default method for data sharing at UNHCR is email, which is known to be unprotected and highly susceptible to unauthorized interception. Emails are sent with potentially sensitive information (either in the body or attached as MS Excel or MS Word documents) to both UNHCR staff and external partners and stakeholders. In all of the interviews and observations performed by the evaluation team, protocols around password protection or encryption of this information were never once mentioned. Indeed, during one debriefing session, senior management gave feedback to the evaluation team that it was known to UNHCR that the host government intercepts UNHCR email, as printouts of emails that had not been sent to government counterparts were seen in meetings by UNHCR staff.
83. Second, UNHCR performs a rigorous due diligence process for reviewing and clearing data sharing requests from partners, however; after data are shared, UNHCR does not perform follow-up data security standards checks on partners’ data management systems and practices. The sophistication

of implementing partners' data security varies and many lack the capacity and resources for sufficient data security.

84. Finally, UNHCR still relies on physical transfer of data in many of its operations, or transfer using unsecured options from the commercial market (e.g. Dropbox, Google Drive, WhatsApp). This could be in the form of paper files, by placing data onto a removable hard drive or pen drives, or using cloud-based services. Again, it was observed by the evaluation team that the protocols to ensure the security of this data against theft or loss were not known or not rigorously applied.

5. Conclusions

There is an organization-wide recognition of the value proposition for more coherent and coordinated data and information management. However, currently, data leadership at UNHCR is held across multiple divisions, sections within divisions and at varying organizational levels (HQ, Regional and Country).

The current approach towards data management in UNHCR is heavily decentralised. Information needs are defined, and at times tools and systems are developed by sectoral/thematic teams, and at other times for specific situations and operations. As a result, UNHCR is unable to leverage its existing data for deeper and more meaningful use, ensure consistency and quality across operations, and drive efficiency in data collection, storage and analysis. Further, the likelihood of contradictory and confusing information is increased. Greater coordination and stronger leadership on data and information management will need to be established quickly and clearly to address these issues.

Data literacy, and staff members' confidence and capacities to identify, manage and analyse operational data varies widely.

There has been inadequate investment in creating a "data first" culture and building the commensurate skills in data analysis and use. While there is a demand and appetite for data, and high appreciation for analytical products, the habitual use of evidence and information in decision-making and advocacy could be modeled and strengthened across all levels of the organization, particularly among managers.

Organizations similar to UNHCR have made significant investments in data science, data analysis, statistics and econometrics in recent years.

The evaluation notes that there is an internal perception that UNHCR lags behind other UN agencies, partners and others in its ability to produce and use data and evidence, especially quantitative evidence. Other UN agencies, in recognising the advantages that better data can provide, have made investments that UNHCR could learn from. For example, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) has recently restructured globally to include data as one of its five Divisions, with a Director to oversee it, and has drafted an information management strategy. WFP has named data as a "Top 5" priority, and the organization views data as one of its competitive advantages. Finally, UNICEF has also taken steps in prioritizing data with the creation of a Data Division, enumerating a strategic framework for data, and developing a co-led leadership/governance structure. UNICEF is also a leading voice in the call for an inter-agency knowledge exchange or data service that would create efficiencies and enforce standards.

Although UNHCR has a strong commitment and robust policy framework on data protection, actual practices in the field could be strengthened.

UNHCR staff generally understand that data related to persons of concern is sensitive and should be protected and they are committed to data protection. However, in the field, certain actions and practices are commonplace (e.g. sharing documents containing sensitive information via email without password or encryption protections) and undermine this core organizational value, thereby potentially exposing operational data to privacy breaches and risks for persons of concern.

UNHCR aspires to ensure that persons of concern have access to and control over their data and information, and that feedback from persons of concern is regularly received and used in decision-making.

UNHCR's commitments to accountability to affected populations are in line with international best practices. There are examples of good practices in the organization. However, on the whole, at the operational level, there is much more that needs to be done to ensure that persons of concern have access to their information, that assessment and other data is communicated back to communities, and that they participate in decisions.

UNHCR has made significant investments in systems and processes, however more needs to be done to ensure that data are integrated and interoperable.

An impressive array of data and IM systems exist within UNHCR, illustrating the solution-oriented mindset of staff operating within a decentralised approach to data management. However, considerations for systems interoperability have not been required or facilitated by HQ until recently (PRIMES). Being able to demonstrate accountability and results to donors while at the same time showing contributions to the GCR underscore the importance of being able to connect data across systems within UNHCR and across partner systems.

6. Recommendations

85. The evaluation has highlighted UNHCR's current data infrastructure and processes, discussed external and internal changes the organization is currently facing and reviewed the gaps in data practice that currently exist. In this section, we discuss what UNHCR will need to achieve in order to rise to the challenge of becoming a best-in-class data and information organization of the future.

6.1. Developing a global vision for UNHCR's data and information management

86. The evaluation emphasizes that an organization-wide prioritization would be essential to transform data within UNHCR to the asset that it can be. This evaluation is one of several indicators that UNHCR recognizes the potential advantage that data can provide. As the organization emphasises the strategic importance of data and makes commensurate investments to strengthen its systems, the organization will become more efficient and effective in harnessing its data to generate useful information for decision-making, for advocacy, and for demonstration of results.
87. In order for UNHCR to fulfil the promise of its current strategic directions, and to leapfrog into a leadership position in the humanitarian space, data and information will need to become the organization's most precious asset. As a first step, the evaluation recommends that the organization develop a data transformation strategy and roadmap with key elements such as enforcing data norms and standards throughout the organization, cultivating strong data leadership, developing systems to integrate and pull data together, creating a data-first culture, and building capacities and confidence around statistics and evidence on persons of concern.

6.2. Establish data governance through global norms and standards

88. The evaluation shows that UNHCR and its partners collect a wide array of data and the approach thus far has been decentralised. The organization can maximize the value of its data and information by getting high quality data on a timely basis that is relevant and useable by UNHCR and partners. This requires that data are collated, collected, processed, protected, analysed, stored and used according to organizational norms and standards.
89. The evaluation recommends that UNHCR establish a data management "rule book" that specifies the norms and conventions to govern and align the organization's data, stipulating the parameters for data collection, processing, protection, storage, analysis and use.

6.3. Exerting strong leadership and commitment on data and information

90. As the organization looks to its future, exercising data leadership that is visible at global and regional levels will be a critical feature for its success. With the regionalization and decentralisation process, the current approach of having a HQ-based technical support and coordination team for data and IM needs to also reconsider its function in order to make it fit for purpose. As the Regional Bureaux will be set up in seven geographic regions of the world, UNHCR should also consider strengthening data and information management capacity at the regional level, and establishing the Regional Bureaux as the backstop support to country operations instead of HQ Copenhagen/Geneva.
91. At the global level, the evaluation recommends that UNHCR rebrand and create a Data Service that oversees corporate data norms and standards for UNHCR and its partners, data interoperability between key data and IM systems, statistics and demographic data and digital identity and registration. Strong technical expertise in data science and past experience in executing data transformation at an organizational level would be beneficial for the Head of the Data Service.

6.4. Connecting UNHCR's data and information management systems

92. The organization has a wealth of data that are scattered across various data and information management systems. In order to optimize these data, it is worth investing in a technological solution that would facilitate UNHCR's ability to interrogate the data and draw more comprehensive analyses of the state of refugees, IDPs and other persons of concern.
93. The evaluation recommends that UNHCR invest in a solution that allows for data from different systems to be connected in such a way that allows for increased intersectoral and comprehensive analysis of the state of persons of concern. Different options could be explored, such as setting up a data lake where raw data can be pulled from different systems as opposed to a data warehouse that is a centralised repository for all integrated data sources.

6.5. Fostering an appreciation of data

94. Establishing a data management "rule book" and overseeing its implementation should supply UNHCR with higher quality data. Another important element that also affects data quality is data use. As more UNHCR staff and partners use the data, the quality will improve as users identify errors and gaps in data collection, processing, etc. Demand for data relies on an appreciation of data. The evaluation recommends that UNHCR develop a capacity-building plan for establishing a shared understanding of and appreciation for data-informed decision-making followed by skills training in basic data analysis and interpretation.
95. The evaluation also recommends working with Regional Bureaux or country operations willing to serve as pathfinders or data champions. Highlighting good practices across the organization can also help others to adapt if they see benefits to changing. The evaluation recommends that UNHCR consider the mechanisms it can use to incentivize/reward adoption of incorporating data use in their functional role.

6.6. Strengthening data protection at all levels

96. UNHCR should increase the availability, usability, integrity and security of data across its global operations. Overcoming many of UNHCR's data-related risks or missed opportunities can be accomplished through the development and execution of enterprise-level data governance. Changing the approach to data management will address the large amounts of data in unstructured formats and will provide standardized security over data related to persons of concern.

6.7. Leading by engaging with partners

97. An increasing number of players are actively working in humanitarian-development settings. In order for UNHCR to lead as the authority on refugees and other populations affected by forced displacement, it is important to take an inclusive partnership approach. The evaluation already recommended that UNHCR develop a data transformation strategy. The strategy should acknowledge the importance of partnership and describe how UNHCR plans to engage with a wide range of stakeholders in carrying out its future data work.

Annex 1: Terms of Reference

Evaluation of UNHCR's data use and information management approaches

Key Information at glance about the evaluation	
Title of the evaluation	Evaluation of UNHCR's data use and information management approaches
Timeframe of evaluation	July 2018 – March 2019
Type of exercise	Centralized evaluation (theory-based)
Evaluation commissioned by	UNHCR Evaluation Service

1. Introduction

1. Accurate, accessible and timely data are necessary for daily project management, policy-making, advocacy and coordination. Such data are also needed in every aspect of the operational management cycle – for situational understanding, strategy development, program planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. For data to have strategic value and to be strategically used, UNHCR staff at all levels in the organization need to create and/or access quality data regarding persons of concern and response activities (i.e. data about the humanitarian situation, persons of concern and program operations against a results framework and progress indicators. Moreover, to effectively merge data collection and data use into program management, organizations need to be able to mine all of the information entered into both unstructured (e.g. documents and spreadsheets) and structured sources (e.g. project databases). This is called strategic information (SI) or the intentional analysis of data and information to inform decision-making and achieve desired results. Increasingly more organizations in the development sector have established data analytic teams referred to as Strategic Information units, who provide analytic products such as dashboards, GIS maps, data analytic tools, fact sheets, etc. Large organizations, such as UNAIDS and USAID have established SI units to support data collection and analytic needs at HQ and in the field.
2. In addition, access to quality information is recognized as integral to humanitarian action and critical for facilitating protection and identifying solutions in support of government action. The ability to collect, analyze, disseminate and act on strategic information is essential to an effective response.⁷ Better information can lead to improved responses that directly benefit refugees, IDPs and other persons of concern. Information management (IM) was identified as a core responsibility of UNHCR⁸ and the organization developed a comprehensive strategy to support field operations in assuming organizational responsibilities for leading and coordinating IM in various contexts.⁹ UNHCR's IM strategy defines information and data management as "...the capture, handling, storage, analysis and dissemination of data pertaining specifically to operations and populations of concern, including demographic and statistical information. It involves information on needs and conditions, geo-referenced information and information related to protection and sector-specific concerns related to needs, delivery and impact in health, nutrition, water/sanitation, core relief items, shelter and education."¹⁰ The goal of IM in UNHCR is to provide and coordinate the sharing of quality information and data on persons of concern and operations in a predictable, innovative and useful way.
3. In UNHCR, IM-related tasks are officially thought to be conducted at the HQ, regional and field operation levels through a network of Information Management Officers (IMOs), Operational Data Management Specialists and IM focal points. However, much of the monitoring data used for daily project management, policy-making, advocacy and coordination at UNHCR is lead and collected by the technical units, specifically

⁷ UNOCHA. (2002). Symposium on Best Practices in Humanitarian Information Exchange. Geneva, Switzerland.

⁸ Tennant, Vicky. (2011). *A Model for Humanitarian Engagement in Refugee Emergencies*. Geneva, Switzerland: UNHCR.

⁹ UNHCR. (2012). Information and Data Management Strategy Paper 2012-2014.

¹⁰ UNHCR. (2012). Information and Data Management Strategy Paper 2012-2014.

Cash, Education, Energy, Livelihoods, Public Health, Sexual and Gender Based Violence and Child Protection teams.

4. Furthermore, technology has also contributed to a data revolution, spurring movements such as “big data” and “open data” across nearly every industry, including development and humanitarian work. Big data are extremely large data sets derived from everyday interactions with digital products or services that may be analyzed to reveal patterns, trends and associations to make operations more efficient and effective. Open data refers to data that are freely available in readily accessible formats and can be used, re-used and redistributed by anyone. The benefit of open data is that from easier access to information, other data users can generate knowledge and develop innovative services, interventions, products, etc. for economic and social gains and to realize the full value of data. Like other technological developments in this field – such as data mining, crowdsourcing and mobile phone applications – these also create situations in which data may more easily be misused or distorted as both the data collector and the data source are unable to control, reclaim, modify or delete the information. Persons of concern, humanitarian staff and organizations can be helped or harmed by new technologies – and data related activities more generally. For this reason, UNHCR’s adoption or adaptation of data trends and technology innovations should be guided by responsible data management practices and principles.
5. The impetus for this centralized evaluation arose based on a series of consultations with UNHCR staff in the field, regional and HQ offices. A centralized evaluation of UNHCR’s use of data and information management systems is timely given the Strategic Directions of the organization,¹¹ development of the Data Service, the establishment of the World Bank-UNHCR joint data center, the Results-based Management (RBM) change process underway, and the Data Project as well as UNHCR’s advisory role in the Centre for Humanitarian Data. There exists a high level of buy-in and desire to examine UNHCR’s current approach to and use of data and information (and its associated systems and processes) to inform organizational direction, strategy and practice. This is also not the first time UNHCR has reviewed its data practice, having conducted two large reviews of its organizational policies and procedures on refugee enumeration and statistics in 1993.
6. The evaluation is expected to yield insights and generate recommendations that will help strengthen UNHCR’s systems, processes and practices concerning data and information management, better enabling the organization to carry out its mandate for persons of concern.

2. Subject of the evaluation and its context

7. UNHCR has a long history of collecting and using data and information about populations of concern, their situations and related response activities. For example, the Profile Global Registration System (ProGres) was launched in 2003 as UNHCR’s enterprise registration tool, which allowed the organization to bring standards into registration and case management practices and improved data coherence by decommissioning the range of local databases, Excel sheets and other ad-hoc tools to conduct population data management. In early 2018, UNHCR launched Population Registration and Identity Management EcoSystem (PRIMES) as the new platform for all registration, identity and case management applications used in country operations.
8. The Field Information and Coordination Support Section (FICSS) was established in 2008, overseeing the collection, analysis and dissemination of operational data as well as providing technical support related to data collection methodologies for UNHCR.
9. A results-based management database was implemented corporately in 2010, through an IT tool called Focus. Program Analysis and Support Section (PASS), now integrated within a newly created Integrated Program Services (IPS) within DPSM, is responsible for policies and technical support related to the RBM.

¹¹ In *Strategic Directions 2017–2021*, the High Commissioner sets out the need for UNHCR to adapt and improve its information systems; to strengthen its capacity to gather, access and manage information; to become more adept in analyzing and presenting data in the form of evidence; and to adapt its staffing profile to reflect a greater emphasis on [...] data collation, collection, analysis and information management. These institutional changes are identified as being necessary for UNHCR to successfully pursue the five Strategic Directions.

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10. In addition to Focus, sector-specific data systems have been developed and are being used by Public Health, Cash, Energy, Education, Livelihood, SGBV and Child Protection teams to monitor protection of persons of concern and activities at the project/program and/or country operation level. In field operations implementing activities across multiple sectors, UNHCR staff and/or partners have to use different data systems for reporting – Focus and relevant sector-specific systems. An activity-based field monitoring tool is under development currently to address this data and information management need, though, Education, Energy, Livelihoods and Public Health have investigated significantly in monitoring indicators, tools and their own data platforms. For Education, the platform REMIS was launched in 2017; for Energy, the Integrated Refugee and Forcibly Displaced Energy Information System; and Livelihoods, the Integrated Refugee and Forcibly Displaced Livelihoods Information System will be launched by September 2018, and the Public Health team has recently updated the former Twine platform begun in 2013, and released in Q2 2018, the Integrated Refugee Public Health Information System. In order to deliver program impact, these four sectors have invested resources and time to ensure data needs are met.
 11. Furthermore, in addition to data about activities and response monitoring, operations collect/collate, analyze, share and use protection information related to persons of concern and their situations. This pertains for example to information about their protection needs (through needs assessments) and information about their overall protection environment (i.e. information about protection incidents, risks, threats and vulnerabilities and their coping mechanisms (through protection monitoring systems).
 12. More recently, UNHCR’s IM has increased its role in IM coordination, both in refugee and IDP settings. Refugee Response Plans (RRPs), which specifically concern refugees, are a UNHCR-led, inter-agency planning and coordination instrument for large-scale or complex refugee situations. RRP present the UNHCR-coordinated inter-agency response strategy to a refugee crisis and the corresponding financial requirements of all partners to ensure the coherence and complementarity of the humanitarian response. To respond to the Syria situation, UNHCR developed the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP), comprising the organization’s coordinated response strategy across 5 countries—Iraq, Lebanon, Turkey, Jordan and Egypt. In addition, in humanitarian response contexts for IDPs, UNHCR is the cluster lead for Protection, and co-lead with IFRC on Shelter and IOM on Camp Coordination and Camp Management and coordinates IM for each cluster it leads.
 13. Since the development of the IM Strategy in 2012, UNHCR has pursued a strategy to establish, maintain and support a network of IMOs at the field, regional and HQ level and to strengthen the data literacy and capacity of all staff (regardless of function), since information and data management is a responsibility of all staff.¹² The organization has also developed, rolled out and supported users on a number of tools to enable an efficient IM cycle and OMC, including on data collection (Kobo), data storage (RIDL), data analysis (DEEP) and data dissemination (Operational data portal, maps portal, population statistics portal). However, continuing challenges and constraints in data and information management have been reported at various levels of the organization and there are efforts underway currently to conduct a review of the organization’s data streams and information management systems. This evaluation is one component of this larger review and will inform future organizational direction and strategies regarding data and information management.

3. Purpose and objectives

14. The evaluation will serve a dual and mutually reinforcing learning and accountability purpose.¹³ The purpose of this centralized evaluation is to contribute evidence and recommendations that will inform UNHCR’s IM systems and practice, ultimately contributing to improved capacity for responsible, timely and purposeful data use and information management at various levels within UNHCR, in both its operational and coordination roles.
15. The primary audience is UNHCR Senior Executive Team, Division of Programme Support and Management, Division of International Protection, Division of Information Systems and Telecommunications, Division of

¹² UNHCR Programme Manual, Chapter 4 (June 2017), p.250.

¹³ **Accountability** – through assessing and reporting on implementation and results, and requesting management to formally respond to the evaluation. **Learning** – Describing as well as explaining results is necessary to generate insights and pointers for learning to improve future strategies– and if possible – in other contexts where UNHCR operations face similar opportunities and constraints.

External Relations and Division of Resilience and Solutions at HQ, regional bureaux, and regional and country offices.

4. Evaluation approach

4.1 Scope

16. The evaluation scope – relating to population, timeframe and locations – is as follows:

- **Timeframe** to be covered in the evaluation: 2012 – 2018
- Population location and details: 1) Syria regional refugee response (based in Amman, Jordan but may involve travel to another country in the Middle East region involved in the response), 2) Sudan, 3) Panama or Colombia and 4) Pakistan
- Data are defined for the scope of this evaluation to include all operational data, including data from population management activities, needs assessments, vulnerability and protection risk assessments, program implementation, case management, monitoring and evaluation, collected and/or collated by UNHCR and/or implementing partners.
- This evaluation examines UNHCR's practice around data, including data collated/collected by operational partners when the data and information requirements are determined by UNHCR. Broader data and IM practices by UNHCR as a lead agency in the Global Clusters are outside the scope of this evaluation and would entail a joint inter-agency evaluation with the unit of analysis being the Global Cluster model whilst the focus of this evaluation is on UNHCR.

4.2 Key Evaluation Questions (KEQs)

17. The evaluation will address the following headline questions. The analysis needed to answer them is likely to touch on other possible sub-questions and may be further refined during the evaluation inception phase.

KEQ 1: Based on four case studies of UNHCR country/regional operations, how are operational data and information needs determined and addressed (i.e. collated, collected, cleaned, analyzed, stored and managed) across the operation management cycle (OMC)?

This KEQ will also seek to answer the following sub-questions:

- What types of data and information are used to inform UNHCR's work at the country/regional operation level along the OMC?
- How do operational staff determine and prioritize data and information needs in the assessment and planning phase? How are the data then used to inform implementation?
- Which operational staff, partners and/or other stakeholders are involved in the process of determining data needs, collating/collecting, cleaning, analyzing, storing and managing data along the OMC? What role does the country/regional IMO(s) have and what role is also played by other stakeholders specifically at the sector level?
- After data and information needs have been identified at the operational level, how are data collated/collected, cleaned, analyzed, stored and managed at different points in the OMC and what is the associated level of burden to carry out such activities?
- How do country/regional operations consider feedback from and effective communication with persons of concern in operational data systems?
- To what extent are there gaps and/or inefficiencies in country/regional operations' practice around data and IM (i.e. data systems, collation/collection processes, storage, management, data analysis and use, staff capacities and functions, financial resources, etc.)?
- What are the primary challenges and constraints that UNHCR operations experience during the process of data collation/collection, cleaning, analysis, storage and management that hinder evidence-informed decision-making?

KEQ 2: From reviewing the different data and information management systems used in the four case studies regarding population-level data on persons of concern and operational data (i.e. Focus, protection and sector tools), to what extent are these data streams being shared (internally and externally), and used to inform operational planning, implementation, partner and program management as well as coordination with other agencies, member states and relevant stakeholders?

This KEQ will also seek to answer the following sub-questions:

- What data systems do operational staff use to access, store and disseminate data and information?
- To what extent and what purposes do operational data flow between country, regional offices and HQ offices and stakeholders (internal/external)?
- What are key challenges and issues with accessing, synthesizing and/or disseminating data and information via these various data systems at the country, regional and HQ offices?
- What data validation procedures and data quality assessments have been developed to support country operations and to what extent are they used in the field?
- How could organizational design around the central management of data and information at HQs and regional platforms be optimized to ensure that critical requirements across the organization are met?

KEQ 3: In RRP situations (i.e. Syria, South Sudan, Burundi, DRC, Nigeria) when UNHCR plays a leading role in the response, how effective is UNHCR in determining, addressing (i.e. collated, collected, cleaned, analyzed, stored and managed) and coordinating data and information management in this inter-agency space?

- What types of data and information are collected/collated in RRP situations and to what extent are those determined based on UNHCR's leadership?
- As the lead agency in these situations, how if at all, does UNHCR determine and prioritize data and information needs at different points in the response?
- To what extent are the data and information systems and requirements used in RRP situations supported and linked to organizational data systems, such as Focus?
- How does UNHCR coordinate data and information collection/collation and sharing within RRP situations?
- How do RRP situations consider feedback from and effective communication with persons of concern in its data systems?
- To what extent are there gaps and/or inefficiencies in UNHCR's coordination of data and IM in RRP situations?
- What are the primary challenges and constraints that UNHCR experiences in this role that hinder its ability to coordinate data and IM effectively?

KEQ 4: Looking forward, changes in the external environment due to the CRRF, UN Reform, Humanitarian-Development Nexus and the Grand Bargain coupled with internal changes discussed earlier in the ToR, what are the implications of these changes on UNHCR's practice concerning data and information management?

This KEQ will also seek to answer the following sub-questions:

- At the country operation level, what will UNHCR (and its partners) need to do in order to adapt its practice around data and information management in response to the aforementioned changes?
- What are the most helpful data/IM tools and SOPs (either produced by IMOs and/or other technical units) that UNHCR is currently using that should be replicated/scaled-up in meeting the organization's information needs under the CRRF and why?
- How can regional offices and HQ best support country operations to make these changes/updates?
- At the organizational level, what is the organization currently doing and/or planning to do in response to the aforementioned changes and what gaps, if any, does UNHCR need to address in order to position itself to meet future operational and coordination data and information management requirements?

KEQ 5: What concrete action steps should be taken in the short-, medium- and long-term in response to external/internal changes underway and issues identified in the evaluation to improve UNHCR's data and information management practice?

This KEQ will also seek to answer the following sub-questions:

- What key steps have other UN agencies, similar organizations and thought leaders in data and IM taken that are applicable to UNHCR's work?
- What actions should be prioritized based on the evaluation findings of the primary challenges and constraints that UNHCR operations experience during the process of data collation/collection, cleaning, analysis, storage and management that hinder evidence-informed decision-making?
- What should UNHCR do to address issues concerning data access, synthesis and dissemination across various data systems at the country, regional and HQ offices?
- Which actions can be implemented more rapidly and which actions require a higher level of effort and resourcing?

4.3 Approach and methodology

18. This is a theory-based, retrospective evaluation to understand UNHCR's current practices around data and IM in country operations and RRP situations in order to generate recommendations to improve how the organization collates, collects, cleans, stores, manages, analyses, disseminates, uses and coordinates data and information in order to better position UNHCR to carry out its mandate of international protection, humanitarian assistance and permanent solutions for persons of concern.
19. The methodology should be two-pronged: 1) Utilize a case-based evaluation approach to yield rich detail in the 4 selected case studies as well as RRP situations; and 2) Situational analysis of changes in the external environment and internally within UNHCR followed by a landscape mapping of how other UN agencies, similar organization and thought leaders in humanitarian/development sectors are positioning their data and information management systems and practice.
20. The evaluation methodology should use primarily qualitative methods to answer the five Key Evaluation Questions and Sub-questions. Methods appropriate for this evaluation include (but are not limited to) the following: 1) document review and content analysis; 2) focus group discussions and in-depth interviews with UNHCR staff, implementing partners, host governments and key inter-agency operational partners involved in RRP; 3) key informant interviews with UN agencies, humanitarian-development organizations and thought leaders in data and IM use; 4) field data collection in the four selected country operations, involving in-depth interviews and participatory workshops (e.g. data and IM systems mapping, data flow mapping) with UNHCR staff and implementing partners and key informant interviews with local stakeholders (operational partners, national host government, operational partners, etc.); and 5) systematic review of UNHCR's information and data management systems to understand the types of data captured, data use and interoperability between systems.
21. It is important that the evaluation methodology clearly illustrates from the 4 case studies how UNHCR country operations determine and prioritize what types of data are needed, and the process of how staff/partners collate, collect, clean, store, manage, analyze, disseminate and use operational data at different points of the Operation Management Cycle. This should result in process maps that clearly illustrate UNHCR's practice in each case study, including the stakeholders involved, their roles and responsibilities, data systems, data flows horizontally and vertically, etc. per the OMC.
22. In addition, the evaluation should provide a framework of data and information typologies in relation to their intended purpose and use (e.g. planning, advocacy, partner management, results-based management, donor reporting, etc.). This framework should also be able to demonstrate where there are data gaps based on changes in external and internal requirements.
23. UNHCR welcomes the use of diverse, participatory, and innovative evaluation methods. The methodology – including details on the data collection and analytical approach(es) used to answer the evaluation questions – will be designed by the evaluation team during the inception phase, and presented in an evaluation matrix.
24. The evaluation methodology is expected to:
 - a) Reflect an Age, Gender and Diversity (AGD) perspective in all primary data collection activities carried out as part of the evaluation – particularly with refugees.

- b) Employ a mixed-method approach incorporating qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis tools including the analysis of monitoring data – as available.
- c) Refer to and make use of relevant internationally agreed evaluation criteria such as those proposed by OECD-DAC and adapted by ALNAP for use in humanitarian evaluations.¹⁴
- d) Refer to and make use of relevant standards analytical frameworks.
- e) Gather and make use of a wide range of data sources (e.g. key informant interviews, direct observations, organizational documents, monitoring data, mission reports, coordination groups' meetings, strategy narratives, and indicator reports) in order to demonstrate impartiality of the analysis, minimize bias, and ensure the credibility of evaluation findings and conclusions.
- f) Be explicitly designed to address the key evaluation questions – taking into account evaluability, budget and timing constraints.

25. The evaluation team is responsible to gather, analyze and triangulate data (e.g. across types, sources and analysis modality) to demonstrate impartiality of the analysis, minimize bias, and ensure the credibility of evaluation findings and conclusions.

4.4 Evaluation quality assurance

26. The evaluation consultants are required to sign the UNHCR Code of Conduct, complete UNHCR's introductory protection training module, and respect UNHCR's confidentiality requirements.

27. In line with established standards for evaluation in the UN system, and the UN Ethical Guidelines for evaluations, evaluation in UNHCR is founded on the inter-connected principles of independence, impartiality, credibility and utility, which in practice call for: protecting sources and data; systematically seeking informed consent; respecting dignity and diversity; minimizing risk, harm and burden upon those who are the subject of, or participating in the evaluation, while at the same time not compromising the integrity of the exercise.

28. The evaluation is also expected to adhere with the 'Evaluation Quality Assurance' (EQA) guidance, which clarifies the quality requirements expected for UNHCR evaluation processes and products.

29. The Evaluation Manager will share and provide an orientation to the EQA at the start of the evaluation. Adherence to the EQA will be overseen by the Evaluation Manager with support from the UNHCR Evaluation Service as needed.

4.5 Data and information sources

30. Foundational documents to be reviewed include UNHCR's Results Framework, Global Strategic Priorities 2016–2017, Information and Data Management Strategy Paper (2012–2014), UNHCR Manual Program Manual, Chapter 4 (Part III), Information Management Toolkit. Below is an overview on some additional data and information available but not limited to the following:

- TOR and documents concerning the Data Project;
- Focus Practical and Smart-Guides;
- Global Focus Insight User Guide, Key Reports Explained and Dashboards Explained;
- Global Strategic Priorities Progress Reports (2014, 2015, 2016);
- UNHCR Global Reports from 2012–2017;
- UNHCR Global Trends reports from 2012–2017;
- Results-based Management Revision Project background, TOR and update reports;
- Policy on the protection of personal data of persons of concern to UNHCR;
- UNHCR Global Needs Assessment;
- Sector-specific assessment and monitoring tools, documents and database systems;
- Field-based activity information management system;
- Multi-Year Multi-Partner Approach;

¹⁴ See for example: Cosgrave and Buchanan-Smith (2017) [Guide de l'Evaluation de l'Action Humanitaire](#) (London: ALNAP); and Beck, T. (2006) [Evaluating Humanitarian Action using the OECD-DAC Criteria](#) (London: ALNAP).

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- Refugee Coordination Model and Refugee Response Plans; and
 - Review of UNHCR Policies and Practices: Mass Determination Programs.

5. Organization, management and conduct of the evaluation

31. UNHCR Evaluation Service will serve as the **Evaluation Manager**. They will be responsible for: **(i)** managing the day-to-day aspects of the evaluation process; **(ii)** acting as the main interlocutor with the evaluation team; **(iii)** providing the evaluators with required data and facilitating communication with relevant stakeholders; **(iv)** reviewing the interim deliverables and final reports to ensure quality – with the support of UNHCR FICSS, RBM and PASS teams at HQ and a Reference Group comprising UNHCR Divisions of International Protection, Resilience and Solutions, External Relations, Programme Support and Management and the Change Management Team as well as a member state.
32. The **Evaluation Team** will comprise a senior team leader and team members. The team is expected to produce written products of high standards, informed by evidence and triangulated data and analysis, copy-edited, and free from errors.
33. The language of work of this evaluation and its deliverables is English.¹⁵ Some interviews may need to be in Spanish and Arabic for fieldwork in the Americas and Middle East regions.

5.1 Expected deliverables and evaluation timeline

34. The evaluation should be carried out July 2018 to March 2019 will be managed following the timeline tabled below up to a maximum of 150 days, and will be contracted to an evaluation firm as follows (demonstrative and can vary):
- 80 days for the evaluation Team Leader; 100 days for the evaluation team members;
35. The key evaluation deliverables are:
- Inception report;
 - Data collection toolkit (including questionnaires, interview guides, focus group discussion guides) and details on the analytical framework developed for/used in the evaluation;
 - Final evaluation report including recommendations (30–40 pages excluding annexes); and
 - Executive summary in both French and English.¹⁶

¹⁵ The final evaluation report will be in English and should include an executive summary in both French and English.

¹⁶ The evaluation ToR, final report with annexes, and formal management response will be made public and posted on the evaluation section of the [UNHCR website](#). All other evaluation products (e.g. Inception Report) will be kept internal.

Annex 2: Sample list of data and information management systems used by UNHCR

This is a list of different data and information management systems that the evaluation discovered during the course of data collection and is not a comprehensive nor exhaustive inventory of everything that exists. This list is illustrative of the different types of data and systems that the organization manages.

1. **ActivityInfo**: A subscription-based, open-source, cloud-based programme monitoring system that is developed and maintained by BeDataDriven B.V. in The Hague.
2. **Biometric Identity Management System (BIMS)**: A system, integrated within ProGres version 4, that captures 10 fingerprints, 2 irises and photo data of persons of concern.
3. **CashAssist**: A corporate cash assistance management system that allows UNHCR and partners to deliver and track cash assistance to refugees and asylum-seekers. This system is being integrated with ProGres version 4.
4. **Finance and Human Resources system (MSRP)**: UNHCR currently uses PeopleSoft for the management of finance, supply chain and human resource data.
5. **FOCUS**: UNHCR's current bespoke results-based management system for tracking operational performance.
6. **FTS Financial Tracking**: An MS Excel-based system, developed by OCHA, to report financial pledges and contributions for humanitarian action.
7. **Global Distribution Tool**: A UNHCR-developed tool, integrated within ProGres version 4, that verifies identities at food distribution points and records delivery of assistance against these identities.
8. **Integrated Refugee and Forcibly Displaced Livelihoods Information System**: an online, cloud-based system for providing global livelihoods indicator data for tracking programme performance across operations.
9. **Integrated Refugee Health Information System (iRHIS)**:¹⁷ An online, cloud-based system for providing real-time health data for strategic planning, programming, evaluation, advocacy and research.
10. **IrisGuard**: A biometric identification system used in five countries in the MENA region for identity management of UNHCR's persons of concern and to authenticate provision of services to refugees, including financial services.
11. **Population Statistics Database**: The UNHCR PopStats database is a public-facing website that displays data about persons of concern. It can be accessed at <http://popstats.unhcr.org>.
12. **ProGres**: ProGres (Profile Global Registration System) is UNHCR's enterprise registration tool for refugees and asylum-seekers. Operational since 2003, version 4 of this system is currently being rolled out globally. Version 4 is a cloud-based system that allows for real-time data entry and retrieval. Beyond the core registration functionality, the system also offers modules that are used for the management of protection activities, such as Refugee Status Determination (RSD), Voluntary Repatriation and tracking of incidents of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) and child protection (CP).

¹⁷ iRHIS has replaced UNHCR's previous health information system, known as Twine.

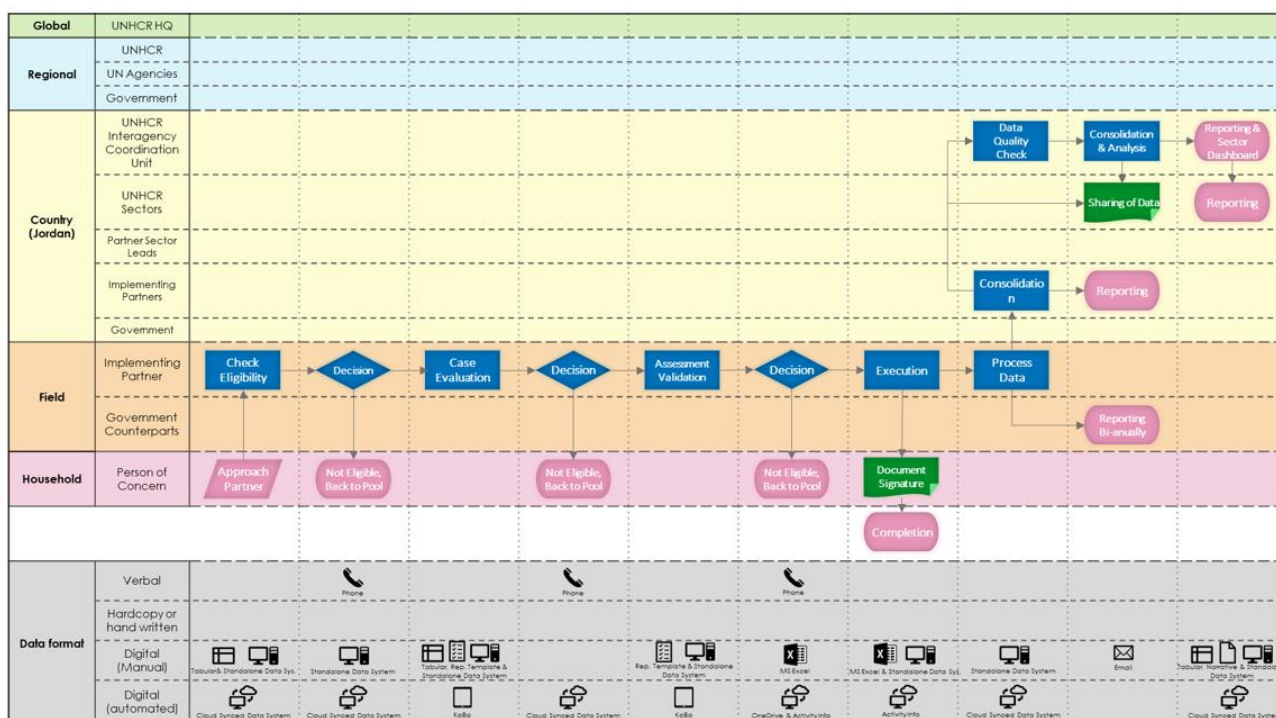
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13. **Project X:** A system developed by UNHCR Lebanon that provides interface between proGres registration data and case management data, and allows implementing partners access to this information. Project X is complementary to proGres and RAIS.
 14. **Refugee Assistance Information System (RAIS):** A system that consolidates population data at the regional level and allows partner staff to record activities and coordinate assistance. RAIS is currently the key inter-agency platform for case management in the areas of assistance, referrals, ticketing, etc. RAIS was developed, maintained and supported by DIMA in the MENA Bureau, with country operations managing access to the system by UNHCR staff and partners.
 15. **Refugee Education Information Management System (REMIS):** an online, cloud-based system for collecting and reporting education data for strategic planning, programming, evaluation, advocacy and research.
 16. **ReliefLink:** An automated system used to track distributed items in the absence of data for persons of concern.
 17. **SGBV Safety Audit system:** This system is under development and will include data from needs assessments and protection and response monitoring regarding sexual and gender-based violence to inform advocacy, decision-making and programming.

Annex 3: Overview of the process map approach

As part of the evaluation, three unique case studies provided an opportunity to understand examples of UNHCR’s diverse operations and how data and information management takes place in practice. Included in the case studies were ‘process maps’ which sought to visualize the flow of work to provide insight into how UNHCR currently approaches data and IM at the operational level.

The maps were developed collaboratively through consultations with UNHCR staff in country offices who explained step by step what happens during a decision-making process which includes the use of data. This could be the process of establishing community-based mechanisms in Pakistan, or where the data collection or decisions or referrals are made is recorded against levels from household level to global. The format that the data is collected in or transferred via is documented at each post, for example, whether by speaking to people in a meeting or by phone, using paper notes or MS Excel or UNHCR databases such as ProgGres.

The example below from the Syria response case study report illustrates UNHCR Jordan Country Office’s delivery of out-of-camp shelter. The process starts when a person of concern approaches an implementing partner. As the process continues, the later stages show that the data on the delivery of out-of-camp shelter is consolidated and shared with the country-level operating partner, and then UNHCR for quality checks and consolidation and analysis, allowing UNHCR to provide reporting information and contribute to the sector dashboard for information sharing.



“Process Map D: Jordan – Deliver: Out-of-camp shelter” from the evaluation of the Syria regional refugee response Case Study Report

The case studies generated over 30 process maps to inform an understanding of how data and information management interacts with decision-making, and to document the range and use of different data formats at different stages and levels of the organization.

Annex 4: List of evaluation respondents at HQs

Title	Team	Division	Location
Senior Statistician	FICSS	DPSM	CPH
Chief of Section	FICSS	DPSM	CPH
Senior Data Protection Officer	Protection Policy and Legal Advice Section	DIP	CPH
Registration Officer (Protection)	IMRS	DPSM	CPH
Chief of Section	IMRS	DPSM	CPH
Associate Education Officer (Monitoring and Accountability)	Education	DRS	CPH
Senior Advisor	Education	DRS	CPH
Senior Education Officer	Education	DRS	CPH
Senior Registration Officer	IMRS	DPSM	CPH
Statistician	FICSS	DPSM	CPH
IMO (Protection)	FICSS	DPSM	CPH
IMO (System Development & Support)	FICSS	DPSM	CPH
Senior ICT Officer	Solution Eng-BI	DIST	CPH
IMO (IDP)	FICSS	DPSM	CPH
Senior Digital Development Officer	Digital Engagement	PSP	CPH
Senior Desk Officer-Central Asia		Regional Bureau Asia	GVA
Division Director		DPSM	GVA
Senior Desk Officer-Venezuela		Regional Bureau Americas	GVA
Chief of Section-Public Health	Public Health Team	DPSM	GVA
Protection Management Officer	Integrated Programme Services	DPSM	GVA
Senior Desk Officer-Pakistan		Regional Bureau Asia	GVA
Senior CBI Officer	Global Cash Operations	DPSM	GVA
Deputy	Innovation	Executive Office	GVA
Senior CBI Officer	Global Cash Operations	DPSM	GVA
Economist	Partnerships, Analysis, Research and Knowledge Management	DRS	GVA
Senior Digital Development Officer	Digital Engagement	DER	GVA
Deputy Director	Comprehensive Solutions	DRS	GVA
Senior Project Manager (Interim section head)	Global Cash Operations	DPSM	GVA
Business Coordinator	Results-based Management	DPSM	GVA
Associate Programme Officer	Global Cash Operations	DPSM	GVA
Senior Resettlement Tracking Officer	Resettlement Unit	DIP	GVA
Senior Nutrition and Food Security Officer	Public Health Team	DPSM	GVA
Health Information System Officer	Public Health Team	DPSM	GVA
Associate Programme Officer	Global Cash Operations	DPSM	GVA
Senior Change Management Advisor	Change Management		GVA
Deputy Director	Technical & Field Support	DRS	GVA
Evaluation Officer	Evaluation Service		GVA
Senior Evaluation Officer	Evaluation Service		GVA
Senior Desk Officer – Sudan		Regional Bureau Africa	GVA
Head of Section	Public Health Unit	DPSM	GVA
Health Information System Officer	Public Health Unit	DPSM	GVA
Senior Public Health Officer	Public Health Unit	DPSM	GVA
Senior Nutrition Officer	Public Health Unit	DPSM	GVA

Senior WASH Officer	Public Health Unit	DPSM	GVA
Communications Officer		Regional Bureau Americas	GVA
Senior Desk Officer – Colombia		Regional Bureau Americas	GVA
Senior Regional Information Management Officer		Regional Office Panama	Colombia

CONTACT US

Evaluation Service

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
Case Postale 2500
1211 Genève 2
Switzerland
www.unhcr.org

Email: hqevaser@unhcr.org