JORDAN REFUGEE RESPONSE
INTER-SECTOR WORKING GROUP

Standard Operating Procedures for needs assessments

This document is intended to remain relevant and useful, so will be revised and updated according to need, but the first revision will be done by the ISWG after a trial period of two months.

Context, purpose and scope of this document

1. Context

With the conflict in Syria ongoing, refugees continue to enter Jordan in search of protection and safety. As the Syrian refugee population grows in Jordan, and as persons of concern move internally within the country, developing their own coping strategies, the information needs of humanitarian organisations increase. The humanitarian community looks for an accurate and reliable understanding of beneficiaries' needs in order to be able to better design programming to support and assist.

Following discussions at Sector Working Groups, and subsequently at the Inter-Sector Working Group level, including with the Host Community Support Platform[1], some of the challenges that are faced at field level are:

- a lack of systematic coordination of assessments;
- an automatic tendency to aim for primary data collection;
- a lack of sharing of results meaning that secondary data is not readily available;
- a duplication of information needs.

The Inter-Sector Working Group (ISWG) understands that these challenges have caused over-assessment and 'assessment fatigue' within beneficiaries, causing frustration, and potentially skewing the results of surveys.

2. Purpose of this document

The establishment of common Standard Operating Procedures for conducting, coordinating and sharing the results of assessments was identified, by the ISWG, as a priority. These SOPs are intended to guide agencies through the process of coordinating needs assessments, within the Regional Response Plan (RRP). These SOPs focus on supporting and promoting information-sharing between agencies, and ensuring that appropriate Sector Working Groups are able to provide technical input where relevant.

3. Scope of this document

These SOPs apply to all data collection exercises (whether primary or secondary) involving any part of the refugee or host communities in Jordan, whether as part of the RRP including:

- knowledge, attitudes and practice (KAP) surveys;
- needs assessments;

[1] This tool is primarily for use by the Refugee Response sector system. The Resident Coordinator's Officer and the HCSP attended the workshop on Coordinated Needs Assessments in January, and have subsequently been involved in the design of the on-line registry tool. The on-line tool has been designed to allow the possibility of the NRP/HCSP/Task Force structure being part of the approval process. In addition, it is possible to embed the online registry into the HCSP website. However, the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation (MoPIC) and the HCSP Steering Committee would have to approve any use of this tool, or these SOPs, before they could be applied or adapted to the HCSP.

- contextual analysis or research by individuals, organisations or institutions; and
- large project or programme evaluations.

These SOPs do not apply to data collection activities which are considered part of normal programming, including:

- gathering of output-level data;
- post-Distribution Monitoring (PDM) activities; and
- beneficiary selection activities for approved projects.

Additional guidance will be made available for external researchers – please contact Kaleem ur Rehman, rehmank@unhcr.org.

This SOP does not cover obtaining government approval for assessments. Requesting authorisation from MOPIC is a separate and parallel process which agencies should go through. Additionally, agencies should seek the approval of the appropriate line ministries. Lastly, approval by the Syrian Refugee Affairs Directorate (SRAD) is required in some geographical locations, such as in Zaatari Camp.[2]

Principles

When planning, conducting or reporting a needs assessment with any part of the refugee or host communities in Jordan, agencies should be guided by the following principles:

Assessment design

- Assessments should inform decision-making: agencies conducting assessments should have a clear understanding of how the information from an assessment will be used prior to starting the assessment process.
- Assessments should include a review of secondary data, where such data is available. Primary data collection should only be undertaken if information is not available already through data collection that is completed or in progress or is not available through key informant interviews with service providers, and if the primary data collection would fill a clearly identified information gap. If similar information is available through secondary data, and it can be taken to be reasonably current, further primary data collection should be avoided.
- Primary data collection activities should be coordinated wherever possible. This can either be through joint assessments where agencies collaborate to undertake the same data collection exercise, or harmonised assessments with agencies agreeing a minimum set of data to collect and a standard methodology to ensure that information is comparable.
- Data collection activities should be participatory wherever possible, including affected populations in the design, implementation and analysis of the data. The results should be shared with the affected population, and in particular, efforts should be made to advise the informants of the results of the assessment. Data should be verified with assessment participants, and triangulated where possible.
- The sample size for assessments should be the minimum possible whilst ensuring that the assessment provides sufficient data to be representative of the target population. Additionally, the number of women, girls, boys and men should be statistically representative of the target population.
- Assessments should have ethical justification for being conducted. Research that can equally be carried out on populations not of concern should be restricted, and studies limited to questions that cannot be addressed in any other context. Research should be of direct benefit to the target population.
- The 'Do No Harm' principle should be understood and strictly adhered to in all situations. The intended benefit to assessment participants must be balanced against the risks involved in conducting the assessments. This includes: being mindful of the mental capacity of the informants; the likely

[2] In Zaatari Camp, the finalised questions should be presented to SRAD for approval. This is an obligatory step, and likely to be applicable to Azraq too, once it opens.

(unintended) consequences of participation; the confidentiality in the space of consultation; and the length of time for consultation etc.

- Mitigation measures against any identified risks must be in place before any primary data collection commences. This may include offering services or counselling as part of the primary data collection phases, which is only possible with qualified and experienced members of the assessment team. (See Ethics Checklist, Annex 2)
- Assessments that relate to SGBV will follow the WHO Ethical and safety recommendations for researching, documenting and monitoring sexual violence in emergencies *(http://www.who.int/gender/documents/OMS_Ethics&Safety10Aug07.pdf)*

Assessment implementation

- Participants in assessments (interviewees, focus group participants, etc) should give 'informed consent', understanding why they are asked to share information and how that information will be used. This includes the degree to which information will remain confidential and how it will be shared with third parties. For participants under 18, informed consent should additionally be sought from parents or legal guardians.
- The assessment should seek the views of women, girls, boys and men of all age groups, in ways that are both ethical and culturally-sensitive, and likely to collect valid information about their respective needs (including specific needs, such as those relating to disability, injury or ageing), unless the assessment is focussing on a particular sub-group.
- Assessors should be in the position to refer individuals to appropriate support mechanisms should difficult issues be discussed or raised, such as protection concerns, including sexual or gender-based violence.
- Organisations should not provide incentives to households participating in assessments, as this causes bias.

Process

In order to ensure appropriate coordination of assessments, an agency wishing to conduct an assessment should go through the following process, with further details on each step detailed below:

1. Define the objective for the assessment, and how the information will be used;
2. Complete the Ethics Checklist (see Annex 2);
3. Upload the proposed assessment data onto the Refugee Response[3] Assessments Registry; http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/country.php?id=107
4. Inform geographic coordination structures (Camp Management, or urban coordination systems);
5. Inform geographic sector WGs, where applicable;
6. Inform country-level sector WGs;
7. Share questionnaire with sector chairs, where requested (for primary data collection[4] only);
8. Sector WG chairs (or Sub-sector WG chairs) mark assessments as 'approved' in the Refugee Response Assessments Registry (for primary data collection only);
9. Conduct primary data collection;
10. Update information on the Refugee Response Assessments Registry;
11. Share the assessment findings with corresponding coordination mechanisms (both geographic and sector-based).

[3] NB the registry is set up for HCSP/NRP/Task Forces. However, use of the registry will first require approval by the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation.
[4] Primary data collection includes any data collection activity where the source of information is direct contact with human subjects, including both refugees and Jordanian citizens.

Despite many steps, this is not an intensive process, and several steps can be undertaken in parallel (see attached flowchart). Agencies should allow a minimum of two weeks, however, to complete this process, and this procedure should not take more than six weeks. In general sufficient time should be allowed to ensure that a Sector WG meeting can take place during which upcoming assessments are discussed. Agencies wishing to undertake assessments should be able to discuss the objectives of the assessment, and potentially the type of questions asked.

Though the responsibility for these steps lies with the agency conducting the assessment, there is a proposal that staff are dedicated to supporting agencies in undertaking these processes. Assessments Coordination Officers are hosted by NRC (for Zaatari and Azraq Camps) and by UNHCR (for host communities), or order to facilitate the process of coordination of assessments. The role of the ACOs would be then to guide agencies through these stages, for example facilitating communication with coordination mechanisms where suitable.

Agencies are expected to go through the process outlined above. In exceptional circumstances, however, such as during periods of emergency operations, the process can be fast-tracked.

1. *Define the objective for the assessment, and how the information will be used*

Information about all previous and planned assessments should be in the Refugee Response Assessments Registry. Agencies will be expected to review previous and planned assessments that address similar data. When proposing to undertake primary data collection, agencies will be encouraged to demonstrate a suitably thorough secondary data review as justification.

It should be clear, from the outset, what exact information is sought through the assessment, and how the data will be used, such as what programmatic decisions will the information inform.

The ACO could support by providing links to assessments that collect similar data to the proposed data collection exercise.

2. *Complete Ethics Checklist (Annex 2)*

The Ethics Checklist is intended to first assist agencies in addressing ethical concerns in the planning phases and, second, to aid sector leads in the review of proposed assessments.

3. *Upload the proposed assessment data onto the Refugee Response Assessments Registry http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/country.php?id=107*

Details of the planned assessment should be uploaded into the Refugee Response Assessments Registry. This will include the expected data to be collected, the methodology, the target population, the sample size and the time frame. (This information may not be completely available at this stage, but any information that is available should be uploaded, and missing information should be completed / changing information should be updated as soon as possible.) Registering plans as early as possible will allow other agencies to know what data is due to be collected. This will include whether the assessment is expected to include primary data collection, or only a secondary data review.

The ACO could support by advising the agency on what information is required in the Registry, and checking data quality and consistency in the uploaded information.

4. *Review data in the Assessments Registry*

Information about all previous and planned assessments should be in the Refugee Response Assessments Registry. Agencies will be expected to review previous and planned assessments that address similar data. When proposing to undertake primary data collection, agencies will be encouraged to demonstrate a suitably thorough secondary data review as justification.

The ACO could support by providing links to assessments that collect similar data to the proposed data collection exercise.

5. *Inform geographic coordination structures (Camp Management, or urban coordination systems)*

On a regular basis, geographic coordination structures are expected to review what assessments are planned in their areas. If there is the opportunity for collaboration or joint data collection, they will be encouraged to promote this amongst participating agencies.

The ACO could support by providing the coordinator with a list of newly proposed or updated assessments within the relevant geographical area, including links to the assessment in the Assessment Registry, as well as a list of other planned assessments for information and reference.

6. Inform geographic sector WGs, where applicable

On a regular basis, geographic sector WGs are expected to review what assessments are planned in their areas. If there is the opportunity for collaboration or joint data collection, they will be encouraged to promote this amongst participating agencies.

The ACO could support by providing the coordinator with a list of newly proposed or updated assessments within the relevant geographical area and sector, including links to the assessment in the Assessment Registry, as well as a list of other planned assessments for information and reference.

7. Inform country-level sector WGs

On a regular basis, country-level sector WGs mechanisms are expected to review what assessments are planned in their areas. If there is the opportunity for collaboration or joint data collection, they will be encouraged to promote this amongst participating agencies. The agency proposing the assessment should check with the Sector Leads that their lines of inquiry are useful for the relevant sectors. If not, prioritized lines of inquiry should be incorporated into the assessment.

The ACO could support by providing the coordinator with a list of newly proposed or updated assessments within the relevant sector, including links to the assessment in the Assessment Registry, as well as a list of other planned assessments for information and reference.

8. Share questionnaire with sector chairs where requested (for primary data collection only)

Sector WG chairs can request to see the questionnaire, to ensure it will collect relevant data from a technical standpoint and seek data which is prioritised by the Sector WG. If, after having informed country-level sector WGs, the chair requests to see a copy of the questionnaire to be used, a final draft should be shared with them if they ask. Sector WG chairs will then have three working days during which to raise questions, or to request the assessment be put on hold until a full Sector WG meeting can be held, or at least feedback sought via email. Feedback should be provided within three weeks.

The ACO could support this process by reminding sector chairs of upcoming deadlines for responses.

9. Sector WG chairs mark assessments as 'approved' in the Refugee Response Assessments Registry (for primary data collection only)

If the following criteria are met:

- primary data collection is justified;
- there are no apparent ethical considerations or concerns;
- the assessment is expected to collect useful and relevant data for the sector;
- the data collection methods for women, girls, boys and men are valid; and
- the Sector WG chairs have no comments on the questionnaire

they can then mark the assessment as 'approved' in the Refugee Response Assessments Registry, to confirm that this process has been followed sufficiently.

This approval process applies equally to sub-sector WG chairs, where the assessment falls just under one sub-sector. If it falls under multiple sub-sectors of one sector, the Sector chair becomes responsible to approve the assessment. Assessments across multiple sectors will need the approval of the Inter Sector WG Chair, who is responsible for gathering feedback from each relevant Sector WG chair.

The ACO could support by doing this on behalf of Sector WG chairs, upon their instruction.

10. Conduct primary data collection

The agency conducts the primary data collection. Following data collection, Sector WG chairs can offer support and guidance on data analysis, if appropriate.

11. Update information on the Refugee Response Assessments Registry

On completion of the assessment, the agency should check the information on the Refugee Response Assessments Registry, and update it. Assessment results and analysis should also be uploaded.

The ACO could support by advising the agency on what information is required in the Registry, and checking data quality and consistency in the uploaded information.

12. Share the assessment report with corresponding coordination mechanisms (both geographic and sector-based)

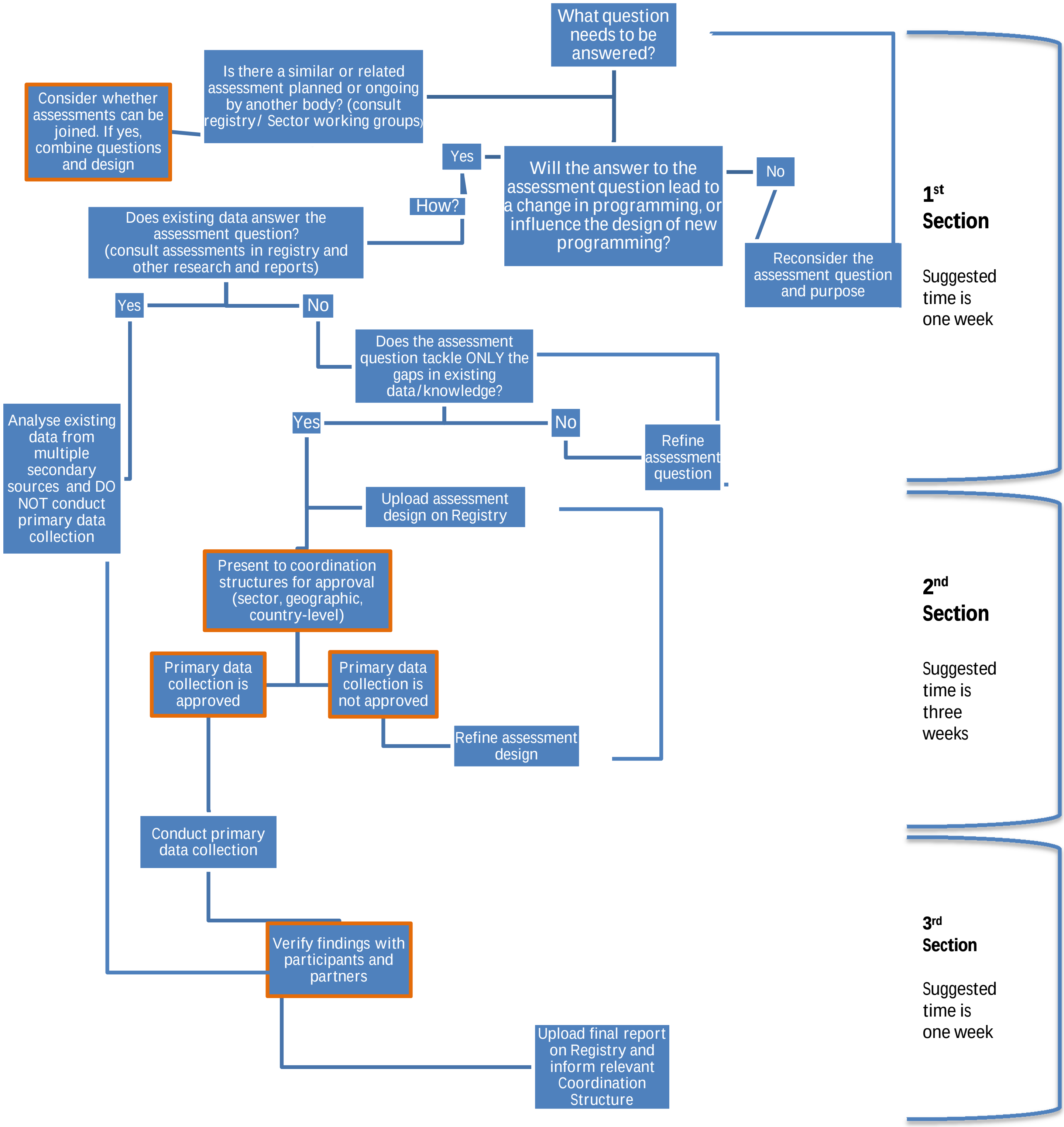
Results of the assessment are shared with the appropriate coordination mechanisms. It is recommended to present the information back to Sector WGs, but this does not constitute endorsement of the analysis. The information provided back to the sectors should include a summary of findings as well as any recommended actions for the relevant Sectors. Where possible, this should also include information about the link between the assessment findings and activities of the agency such as planned interventions or programme modifications. The original data would remain owned by the agency undertaking the assessment.

The ACO could support by providing the coordinator with a list recently updated and completed assessments within the relevant geographical area and/or sector, including links to the analysis in the Assessment Registry. The update could potentially include a summary of key findings from relevant assessments, as well as a list of other completed assessments for information and reference.

Dispute resolution

- Disagreement between the Sector Chair and a requesting organization on the rejection of an assessment can be referred to the Inter-Sector Working Group. The review will not take longer than 2 weeks.
- Disagreement between the Inter-Sector Working Group and a requesting organization on the rejection of an assessment can be referred to the Inter-Agency Task Force. The review will not take longer than 4 weeks.
- Should the review be urgent, the UNHCR Representative, in consultation with the sector chair and the head of the requesting organization, can take a final decision.
- Assessments which remain unfunded and unimplemented for six months after the initial planned date will be removed from the Assessments Registry.

Annex 1 – flowchart of steps



Annex 2 – Ethics Checklist

When planning, conducting and reporting a needs assessment with any part of the refugee or host communities in Jordan, agencies should be guided by the principles contained in [XXX], above. To this end, the checklist below should be completed and shared with Sector leads in order to assist in their review of assessment proposals.

- **What information is sought from the assessment?**

- **What relationship does the information sought bear to programming for the refugee or host communities? What impact, if any, will it have on programming?**

- **How far does existing secondary data inform the programmatic design/improvement described above?**

- **What are the risks involved in conducting the assessment? How are these risks mitigated?**

Phase	**Risks (i.e. to quality of data)**	**Mitigating measures**
Secondary data collection	-unrepresentative sample -non-disaggregated data (W,G,B,M) -scope of existing secondary data too narrow -methodology of existing reports was flawed -major or significant informants were not consulted -data not verified	
Phase	**Risks**	**Mitigating measures**
Primary data collection	-consent may not be free and informed (especially if working with children) -participants are not fully able to refuse to participate (especially if participants are approached through service providers) -information may not be treated confidentially -assessment team does not have expertise to deal with protection or other issues arising -assessment team does not have information on referral pathways/SOPs -similar questions have already been posed and so participants' answers may be influenced	

- **How is age, gender and diversity incorporated into the proposed sample?**

Annex 3 – Accessing the Online Assessment Registry Tool

The online registry tool can be accessed using the inter-agency web portal. Following is the link to access:

http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/country.php?id=107

Login Details

There are 3 types of user logins to be used to access the Admin Panel of the online registry tool. Every login has different access rights and responsibilities.

1. *Partner*
2. *Assessment Approver*
3. *Admin*

1. ***Partner account:***
   It is a Needs Assessment Admin account for partners. This account can create new assessments and edit those assessments created by this user. The user has also the option to change the password.

2. ***Assessment Approver:***
   This account is for sector leads/ Inter-Sector chair who can see and edit every assessment in the registry, but only has access to the 'approval' fields, the general information about the edited assessment is displayed, but only in read-only mode. The user has also the option to change the password.

3. ***Admin:***
   This account is for focal point who will have the admin rights to maintain the online tool and manage assigning the user accounts to partners and assessment approvers.

Requesting User accounts:

All the user login requests should be forwarded to Kaleem ur Rehman (rehmank@unhcr.org)