



Briefing on UNHCR-World Bank Joint Data Center on Forced Displacement

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Palais des Nations, Geneva

Participants: Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, European Union, Finland, India, International Council of Voluntary Agencies, Korea, Latvia, Sweden, Switzerland, United States.

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Preliminary remarks:

- Several requests to organize this briefing.
- Attracted interest and support from earlier briefings.
- On 12 October afternoon, the JDC will be inaugurated by the UN Secretary General. (SG speech available [here](#)).
- Staff recruitment is going on, about 30% of staff on sight. The JDC has a logo; and will have a website soon.

JDC origins:

- Often at UNHCR, learning opportunities occur during crises. Especially, those identified as drivers of this initiative was the crisis in Syria and its impact in Lebanon.
- At the time, UNHCR contributed to a study on the economic and social impact of crisis in Lebanon published in 2019. It became apparent that we were sitting on a lot of interesting data in the region and esp. in Lebanon and Jordan, which may be useful in coming up with protection approaches.
- Then the WB developed a study on '[The mobility of displaced Syrians: an economic and social analysis](#)'. The updated report titled "The Economic and Social Impact of the Syrian conflict" will be presented at the WB in Washington on 18 October.
- There is sometimes the assumption that we know everything about displaced populations and that we have sufficient information and statistics to plan and allocate resources. However, it is not the case. If you think about the population that we do not want to leave behind in the context of the SDGs, you will not find clear indicators on refugees, IDPs or stateless people. So, there was a real need to address this gap.
- The starting point is the data collected in the early weeks/months of an emergency but it is not easy to do so in a consistent and accurate way on a long-term basis, with a lot of population moving. It also takes time for populations to stabilize, meaning the data collected early may not be reflective of circumstances and opportunities. Those fleeing an immediate threat are often in a traumatized state, far from living in normal conditions and this impacts host populations, markets, prices, employment opportunities, presents huge pressures on services, competition for natural resources, etc. This has a significant impact at the local level.
- Capturing all this has become increasingly important, especially because 70% of refugee situations become protracted. Refugees in protracted situations usually stay in the same situation for five years. Important to see what happens afterwards as well.



- Very often protracted situations do literally get left behind and no one follows what is occurring. Situations are protracted but people don't stay protected. They find means to move on and sometimes with risks.
- To leave no one behind we need to understand what circumstances people are in many years after movements. We tried to do this for first time in Lebanon in 2014 and found that many live below the poverty line. This was the first time we used standards to measure welfare in a refugee situation.
- From there, we thought that we needed to build a more systematic approach and the idea of a Joint Data Center grew out of this.
- The success was to establish clear vulnerability criteria and a baseline to measure any progress we wish to secure.
- SDGs did not capture particular circumstances of refugees, IDPs, and stateless people. So, UNHCR developed its position on the SDGs and set out to see who is left behind, where, why, and most challenging, how far they are left behind. We cannot answer those questions without methodology. This is what the JDC will work on.

Internal workings and governance systems:

- A UNHCR-WB MoU was signed in April 2017. It then took some time to effectively open the JDC. It took a lot of administrative, legal and financial engineering to build this initiative.
- The JDC is initially planned to be open for a duration of four years. Denmark generously offered a site to host it within the UN City in Copenhagen and donated 17 million USD as base funding to allow center to get running.
- Drafting the vision and function was the next step in setting up the JDC (looking at key objectives), rather than focusing on financing and legal requirements. This proved to be a wise choice because lawyers and financiers took time to figure out their part.
- The goal was to contribute to the global capture of data. Build on the Expert Group on Refugee and Internally Displaced Persons Statistics (EGRIS) which did a good work in encouraging the inclusion of an indicator on refugees in the SDGs. Corresponding with regional statistical bureaus, we think the JDC can help going forward with this, also by strengthening the capacity of statistical offices to capture this kind of data.
- There is sometimes the idea that this data is being collected. In our experience, it is not because host countries tend to see refugees as foreigners. This results also in additional costs because refugee populations tend to use services but this is not accounted for in programming and budgeting. As a consequence, people are left behind and left out. One of the JDC aims is to strengthen national statistics offices to capture this data systematically.
- The JDC does not intend to recruit many data collectors, demographers, statisticians. It will rather work closely with WB and UNHCR staff to improve our own systems and methodologies for collection and analysis. The budget will be concentrated in engaging through existing channels and agreements with host countries and statistical bureaus and offices. This will be one of the key objectives in the early years. Doing it from an external agency coming in would not be sustainable. Also, it is a lot more efficient to capacitate national agencies.
- It takes a long time to organize and this needs to be planned well ahead. So over the last few weeks, we agreed that the WB would approach 10 host countries to include



refugees in their national data, through the next household budget survey (poverty assessments). The JDC has an agreement for the next four years with those countries. For example, in a country like Uganda which hosts a large and diverse refugee population (including South Sudanese in the north and Burundians in the south), driving a sample requires a careful exercise, a national survey.

- The JDC job will be to help design the sampling required. Sampling is an important procedure in itself. The point is to see how resources are allocated efficiently and that most vulnerable are targeted.
- The JDC will also result in producing useful comparable data. There is often the assumption that refugees are poorer/worse off than their hosts, but this is not necessarily true. There are situations where some refugees may be better supported than host populations, often because emergencies develop in under-served locations, with lower connectivity levels, etc. There is scope for encouraging greater investment in those areas if hosts also benefit from the assistance provided. This is one aspect of GCR. Contribution to a global system is necessary.
- UNHCR will not always be producing data or doing registration since this is a governmental prerogative. They should therefore be assisted in their process and to ensure data is carefully anonymized.
- The process of anonymization sounds very technical and it is, but it is important to build trust in the quality of data and its use. This is a gap we identified and the WB has developed a software that automatically anonymizes data, so that it is impossible to recognize the source. It is important because other analysts will have access to the data.

Spread of coverage:

- The strong initial focus is on **refugees** and on micro-data, i.e. poverty at household level. this can be done better after the emergency phase, what there is some stability.
- When a survey is done you see what a family consume, what assets the family has (electricity, etc.) and what the income is (which member of the family is working, etc.).
- **IDPs** are a different challenge, partly due to the volatility and insecurity of many IDP situations and partly because IDPs are citizens of their States and responsibility is with States. Internal displacement can also take many forms, sometimes becoming protracted, resembling refugee situations, sometimes being temporary. This will be a focus but with emphasis on protracted situations, where governments are comfortable with data collection and where there is access.
- **Stateless populations** will also be covered. One could argue that stateless people are not displaced as refugees and IDPs are, but we argue they are legally and socially displaced in their country. Findings from studies in Kenya will soon be published. This will help put data in the wider domain so that it can be studied.
- Another JDC objective is to promote innovation. A lot of technological advances that we think can increasingly be used to inform work more efficiently.

Governance arrangements

- Last week, the first meeting of the JDC Strategic Advisory Council took place in Copenhagen, including participants from States, Academia, UN agencies, NGOs, refugees, etc. It was an open, participatory event and we were satisfied with feedback.



- The point was to give the opportunity to inform management on what they should do, their emphases and priorities.
- It was also agreed that the Management Committee we will have 4 constituencies: the WB, UNHCR, contributing donors, and refugee hosting States. Each constituency will have up to 3 participants so making the Management Committee a body with about 12 members. Their primary function will be to take decisions on the work plan proposed by JDC staff. The participation of host countries is particularly welcome as it gives credibility and momentum too, through their own statistical offices.
- The first meeting of the JDC Management Committee is expected to take place at the end of November or early December, hoping that by that time, JDC staff will have made enough progress on their 2020 work plan.
- There were questions on whether JDC work would encroach on country agreements with WB or UNHCR. Should not be the case.
- WB is very client-oriented so it will not place on its own agenda activities on JDC. It is also a fact that host country agreements have been built over years, so would need to see how they are relevant to this work. This is not really a concern.
- In future, the JDC will also certainly contribute to 2 other areas of work: **GCR indicators** and **measuring the impact of hosting and protecting refugees**.
 - GCR paragraphs 45 to 48 are focused on data. The spirit of the GCR is one of collective endeavor across constituencies, which will allow us to share progress. The exercise of developing the indicators for the Compact has been challenging but is now close to being finalized: the July version is as near as we are going to get to the final GRF product. Going forward, this will need to be developed at country level. This will have to be discussed in more details and we see the JDC will help to frame some of those indicators.
 - On measuring impact exercise, in Omnibus resolutions UNHCR was asked by States to support and coordinate the exercise. We anticipate more on this workstream over the next years. There will be a report in time for the GRF. The next workshop is scheduled for 6-7 November, to take stock of work so far and to decide on the exact content of the report. An updated document may be produced for the next June Standing Committee. We think there will be opportunities for the JDC to contribute to the discussion.

Examples of products for next year:

- The current micro-data library will probably be expanded and made accessible more widely. It currently includes a few data sets and is accessible only to a few stakeholders.
- We hope to make the data sharing protocol available, which will involve developing standards, methodologies for sampling and data collection.
- There will be some capacity building exercises for national statistical offices.
- At least 2 household surveys are planned for next year.
- Internally, we are working to ensure UNHCR Progress/registration software incorporates additional fields to capture socio-economic data more consistently.
- A JDC website will soon be launched.



Questions & Answers

Sweden

- On data and collection: you have a microdata library and you said it will be expanded and more accessible. The WB has a data system. Is this where the JDC is going? Or how do you ensure necessary data protection?
- On a household basis, what are the risks of doing this? How do you ensure capturing all angles and that data is disaggregated?

United States

- The JDC will be a tremendous game-changer.
- Some of the data will be used to ensure the most vulnerable are targeted. This seems to get into the needs versus status debate that UNHCR has grappled with for some time.
- Could you share who are the ten countries you are planning to work with?
- On data sharing, are you doing outreach with academics and others and thinking about their role?

UNHCR

- Anonymization is extremely important. The WB did a study on Lebanon in 2013-2014 and the first question asked by UNHCR staff at the time was on anonymization. We found a way to do it and since then the WB has developed a software. Some materials are already on the WB website.
- On household data disaggregation, we have various household configurations and various models of disaggregation. One of the challenges in the exercise is sometimes figuring out who is related to whom; finding who is part of which family.
- The broad data field will certainly want to disaggregate data, for instance on gender-based. All exclusions are magnified in camp settings. There is a study that will be published on gender in the camp setting.
- On vulnerability needs versus status, important data set. We do know that poor families suffer when there is a protracted situation. This is one of the challenges for the implementation of the GCR. The challenge is not so much to apply in an emergency context but later. It can be the same indicators that we find in poverty statistics. So looking at the differential between difficult experience the first three years of an emergency and what happened after. When situations are stabilized, you have a clearer readout of who is most vulnerable looking at household dependency ratios, number of disabled, literacy levels, etc. The differential between what is experienced in emergency phase and at later stage is important. We can also use sophisticated tools that now exist, such as minimum expenditure basket used around the world.
- We are also conscious that in certain settings it can be the case that refugees receive more help than host communities. Over time, the level of assistance provided to refugees will inevitably have to decline to narrow the gap between what is provided to refugees and hosts. On the other hand, we need to compare 'like with like' and refugees do not have the same opportunities as hosts.
- The 10 countries we will work with include Chad, Niger, Ethiopia, Uganda. Will come back to you with more information.



- Working with other partners: the ambition is to catalyze interest in the socio-economic dimension. For example, the JDC is working with Yale University on Cox's Bazar to ensure we capture this kind of data early on.
- JDC is also very interested in the Venezuela crisis, looking at socio-economics impacts in neighboring countries. A study has already been published on [Colombia](#), and hopefully soon on Brazil and Ecuador.
- This kind of briefings in Geneva could happen periodically. The JDC Head will come regularly to Geneva and can brief stakeholders, particularly once the work plan is established.