

# Emergency Registration

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## Key points

- UNHCR should deploy qualified registration staff as soon as possible to assess, support, and develop a registration strategy and implementation plan
- Registration is costly. Make sure that adequate human and financial resources are allocated for registration activities
- Identify and prioritize persons with specific needs at all stages of registration
- Involve and coordinate with Government, UN sister agencies (WFP, UNICEF, etc.), NGOs and the refugee community
- Inform all stakeholders broadly about registration procedures, emphasizing data protection, using a variety of formats and channels

## 1. Overview

Registration of refugees and asylum-seekers is a core component of UNHCR's emergency response. It underpins lifesaving humanitarian and protection assistance, including the timely identification of persons with specific needs and their referral for targeted interventions. In an emergency, registration enables access to documentation, assistance, protection, and services, and safeguards against detention and refoulment. UNHCR may also register IDPs or other population groups in emergencies, with the specific purpose of managing assistance programs or protection delivery. With UNHCR increasingly providing cash assistance, the urgency for registration has heightened, given the financial regulations that necessitate strict identity management practices for recipients of such aid. Registration programmes must always consider the specific objectives of the operation, the role of the Government and Partners, and where and how refugees arrive and reside in the country of asylum.

Emergency registration differs from non-emergency registration in the scope and urgency of data

collection and in the operational constraints imposed by infrastructure and capacity on the ground. In emergencies, UNHCR prioritizes individual registration, focusing on the minimum essential data required at both person and household level to enable timely protection and assistance. More detailed information, including guidance on how to conduct registration activities, methodologies, tools, and helpful resources, can be found in the Emergency module of UNHCR's [Guidance on Registration and Identity Management](#) and the [Checklist for Registration in Emergencies](#). This information takes into account various factors ensuring that the process aligns with the specific conditions and needs of the emergency situation.

## 2. Relevance for emergency operations

Registration is a critical tool for targeting assistance and achieving protection objectives. The integrity and accuracy of registration processes are essential for proper documentation and the provision of cash assistance, particularly when carried out through digital payment providers. Registration is achieved through individually interviewing displaced persons. This data is vital for the identification of specific needs which may require urgent intervention of follow up by specialized partners. Aggregated data, derived from individual registration, also utilized for resource planning, fundraising, and evaluating the effectiveness of assistance during an emergency response.

Coordination is essential among the growing array of governmental and non-governmental actors involved in emergency response, aiming to mitigate the risk of duplicate registration. In refugee displacement contexts, UNHCR often takes the lead in this coordination, leveraging its mandated authority and extensive experience in registration and identity management. Where infrastructure and literacy levels permit, the deployment of innovative technologies, such as remote (pre-) registration and digital proof of registration, can enhance access to displaced populations and efficiencies in processing. This is especially valuable in complex mass displacement situations, aligning with UNHCR's continued commitment to effective and responsive aid delivery.

### Protection Objectives

- Persons receive initial basic protection against arbitrary arrest, forcible recruitment, detention and refoulement

- Persons at risk and with specific needs are identified and referred to appropriate protection services

- Protection and assistance interventions are planned, coordinated, and implemented, and programmes to provide durable and effective solutions are prepared

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- Ensure that persons are individually known, and that men and women are issued documentation on equal terms

- Ensure the ethical and responsible use of registration data, safeguarding the rights, dignity, and privacy of those registered.

### 3. Building a Registration Response in Emergencies

#### Underlying Principles

While States are primarily responsible for registration, UNHCR may help to plan or carry out registration, jointly with the Government or on its behalf. UNHCR may also conduct registration independently in accordance with its mandate, including for the planning and delivery of specific forms of assistance such as cash.

In emergency situations, UNHCR registration principles and standards should be used to identify gaps in registration systems, plan emergency registration processes, assess the protection implications of decisions, and prioritize registration resources appropriately.

Emergency registration activities that are initiated too long after the initial stages of forced displacement or without adequate planning, resources or expertise deployed on the ground may result in under-registration or multiple registrations. This may cause outcomes that fail to assist populations or that hinder planning, management and effective protection responses.

#### Key Decisions

**Why is registration being conducted?** Before launching emergency registration, UNHCR registration and protection colleagues should agree on clear objectives. They should define why registration is being carried out and which individuals and groups are to be registered. This will, in turn, determine the data that need to be collected to support both the immediate lifesaving response and longer term protection and solutions planning.

Data requirements should be realistic and proportionate to available capacity and infrastructure and should be expected to evolve over time. In the initial phase of an emergency, data collection should be limited to the minimum essential information required to deliver urgent humanitarian and protection assistance and to identify and refer persons with specific needs. Additional data elements can be collected later as the situation stabilizes and operational capacity improves.

**Who will participate in registration?** Many stakeholders, often with competing priorities, are involved in registration, including governments, partners, and the displaced community. Data Sharing Agreements must be developed before sharing data externally. To avoid duplication of registration and ensure coordinated assistance and other interventions, the **alignment of partners is crucial** from the onset of the emergency.

**How will the registration be done?** The selection of the appropriate registration methodology and allocation of associated resources requires careful planning and understanding of various factors under very compressed timelines. This includes consideration of registration sites, interview methods, timing, staffing, equipment, training, information requirements, complaint procedures, data capture, documentation issuance, and budgeting. Collaborative insights from protection, programming, administration, information technology, and registration experts are essential to ensure a comprehensive and efficient process.

## Key Steps

- See the [Guidance on Registration and Identity Management](#) for more details on each of the following steps.
- **Registration should begin as soon as possible** after individuals and families within a displaced population have stopped moving and have settled in a particular location. Waiting until movement has ceased or stabilized offers advantages in terms of ensuring data accuracy, resource allocation, and the capacity to provide timely and repeatable assistance.
- **Conduct an initial assessment**, including determining how many people require registration, [arrival rates](#), [population demographics](#) including location, where registration can take place, human and material resource requirements.
- In the context of emergency registration, a **comprehensive strategy or plan must be formulated** to address various aspects of the process. A Registration Officer, working closely with colleagues in protection, program, administration, HR, supply, and other domains, must consider the following:
  1. **Objectives:** Establish clear registration objectives encompassing both protection and assistance delivery perspectives.
  2. **Gap Analysis:** Identify and analyze any gaps or shortcomings acknowledging existing registration processes or structures that need to be augmented or replaced.
  3. **Risk Analysis:** Assess the risks faced by displaced persons and staff, including potential threats and mitigation strategies.
  4. **Data Elements to Collect:** Outline the specific data to be collected, including personal

information and other individual protection information. When selecting the data set, ensure that only the minimum necessary data is collected, in line with the principle of data minimization.

5. **Appropriate Use of Biometrics:** Determine if and how biometric data will be utilized, ensuring ethical and secure handling. In the absence of biometrics, incorporate other integrity elements in the planning to ensure that identities are unique..
6. **Methods and Technologies:** Identify the registration methods and technologies to be used, tailored to the unique needs and constraints of the operation.
7. **Locations and Site Location Designation:** Designate the locations where registration will take place, ensuring accessibility, efficiency, and safety in the site layout.

The strategy must also analyze these elements to determine staffing and technical support needs, stakeholder roles and responsibilities, and financial and equipment requirements. The Registration Officer may request assistance from regional Data Identity Management and Analysis (DIMA) colleagues or Digital Identity and Registration Section (DIRS) in HQ to align with best practices and organizational policies.

- **Select and prepare registration sites and facilities.** Registration sites should be located away from areas affected by armed conflict, insecurity, and violence. The sites must be accessible for both refugees and personnel. Design the site layout allowing people to move rapidly through the registration process in a one-way flow. Keep in mind, security screening, crowd control, queue system, waiting areas, shade, toilets and sanitation, lighting, interview space with privacy, etc.
- **Determine household and individual data needs.** Data needs are primarily informed by the purpose of registration. Group pre-registration is the collection of core data on a group travelling together and is not generally accepted as formal registration. Group pre-registration is primarily used to organize movements of population, facilitate initial assistance distribution (including cash), and schedule individual registration.

In situations where infrastructure, literacy, and computer skills permit, contemplate implementing digital or remote (pre-) registration methods. This can include online self-service tools to pre-register and take appointments, issuing digital proof of registration, and providing information in advance of the registration interview online. These technologies can enhance accessibility, reduce redundancy, and expand reach, especially in complex mass displacement situations. Integrating digital strategies with traditional registration methods can ensure a comprehensive approach.

- **Register all persons individually as soon as possible.** See the Guidance on

Registration for details on the minimum data set for different levels of individual registration.

- **Prepare Standard Operating Procedures (SOP)** to describe how to conduct each step in the registration process, how to record the data, roles and responsibilities, referral mechanisms, etc.
- **Establish fraud management and complaint mechanisms.** Strong supervision and an effective complaint mechanism are also important components of procedures to identify and prevent fraud. Responsibilities should be separated clearly in the SOPs.
- **Prepare data sharing agreements and define the conditions and terms of data sharing.** Host governments and partners often need access to certain registration data elements for planning purposes and to implement their own activities. Before concluding a data sharing agreement (DSA) or signing partnership agreements, UNHCR must assess the level of data protection afforded by the government or other partners involved in registration. It may do this by means of a data protection impact assessment (DPIA), to ensure that the systems and tools of the government or other third party provide a level of data protection that is comparable to that provided by UNHCR's [General Policy on Personal Data Protection and Privacy](#) (GDPP) and [Policy on Protection of Personal Data of Persons of Concern to UNHCR](#).
- **Design and conduct an information campaign to explain the benefits and risks of registration.** People may be unfamiliar with UNHCR, and the reasons for registration may not be well understood. To provide information related to the registration process, organize an information campaign using multiple media and message delivery formats. Accurate information improves access to registration, reduces anxiety, avoids misunderstanding, and promotes voluntary participation. Ensure language and formats are culturally appropriate, take account of overall literacy levels and the diversity of languages spoken, and use images that portray underlying messages accurately.
- **Train registration staff. Provide guidance on protection principles and registration procedures.** Good training is an essential precondition of effective registration and protection. Formal training should be followed by on-the-job coaching when registration activities commence.
- **Undertake registration interviews and meet every individual.** Interviews may take place either face to face or, where conditions allow, remotely. Together with protection colleagues, specify the content of registration interviews. Include appropriate guidance on questioning. Guidance must be specific to the operational context of the emergency operation. Scheduling of appointments may be conducted through a self-service application and can reduce the number of times people have to travel to a registration site.

Providing information in advance of the registration interview, e.g. online, can reduce the time of the registration interview.

- **Data Quality and Integrity.** Maintaining the highest standards of data quality is essential during the registration process. Key considerations include:

1. **Accuracy and Validation:** Data capture should be reviewed by dedicated staff. Direct validation by checking the accuracy of names and dates of birth with the data subject after collection is required before documentation is issued. As a separate effort, undertake routine data validation queries and reports to augment quality assurance.

2. **Avoiding Duplicate Registrations:** Ensuring unique identities is vital, especially when linking assistance to the registration process. Duplication can result in unintended consequences, such as providing excessive benefits to the same individuals. Measures to avoid duplicate registrations include:

- Preventing duplicates both within a specific UNHCR operation or regionally.
- Managing external duplicates where individuals might be registered both with UNHCR and other organizations.
- Implementing digital strategies and technologies to enhance identity uniqueness and reduce redundancy.
- **Establish referral mechanisms.** Identify and prioritize persons with specific needs. Emergency registration processes should always include procedures for recording, referring, and tracking persons with specific needs. This is a key protection objective of registration.
- **Unaccompanied and separated children are particularly vulnerable.** They must be registered as soon as they are identified, and cases should be reported immediately to the UNHCR Protection Officer.
- **Provide Documentation.** Collaborate with protection colleagues and senior management to determine the most suitable type of documentation to be issued and by whom. Consider the operation's capacity when determining the period of validity for documents, such as ID cards, proof of registration, certificates, and attestations (with or without a government logo). As there is a growing trend towards digital identity, it's crucial to explore potential digital means for individuals to verify and authenticate their identities, thereby facilitating their access to services.

## Key Management Considerations

Managers of field operations, including Representatives and Heads of Office, are responsible for ensuring that registration and population data management activities are undertaken, that the highest possible standards are maintained, and that operational requirements are covered and continue to be met.

Registration activities have a direct impact on both the overall protection response and programme planning and execution. From the onset of an emergency, registration expertise is vital to ensure oversight, formulate and execute the registration strategy, and to bolster the operational response.

## Resources and partnerships

**External Partners.** Key stakeholders include the host government, displaced individuals, other UN agencies, and NGOs, both those carrying out activities and those offering resources. From the outset of the emergency response, UNHCR should engage all relevant stakeholders and strive to build and sustain collaboration and a sense of ownership of shared goals. In that spirit, UNHCR and its partners should cooperate to reduce duplication and increase transparency and communication. Relevant coordination forums include protection working groups or interagency cash working groups, amongst others. UNHCR generally supports its partners under project partnership agreements (which include data sharing agreements), through training and performance management.

**Internal Resources.** Registration staff usually need to coordinate with many internal partners in UNHCR, including PI/Communications, Information Management and ICT colleagues, Field Protection, SGBV and other specific protection work units, Supply/logistics, and Administration/HR. They may also need to obtain support and advice from the regional bureaux or headquarters. The Identity Management and Registration Officer may establish coordination and communication mechanisms to ensure registration activities achieve their purpose and have their intended impact on protection and assistance.

**Database.** In emergencies, staff can use the Population Registration and Identity Management EcoSystem (PRIMES) tools, including Rapid Application (Rapp) to collect reception and registration data quickly, this should then be synchronized to the UNHCR's corporate registration, identity and case management tool proGres. Collection of biometrics data with Biometric Identity Management System (BIMS) is also recommended should the operational context allow. Depending on the operational context government and partners may be granted access to the PRIMES tools. Also consider tools for pre-registration and self-service tool for taking appointments. Seek advice from DIRS in HQ or from Regional DIMA colleagues.

Where feasible, operations should use UNHCR's Digital Gateway, a self-service platform that provides secure digital access to country information, registration appointments and selected protection services via web and mobile. It enables forcibly displaced and stateless persons to manage their contact details, receive targeted messages and, where available, view their case and assistance status. In emergencies, where connectivity, digital literacy and protection risks permit, the Gateway can complement PRIMES by supporting remote (pre-)registration, appointment management and two-way communication, in coordination with the Global Data



Service and the relevant Bureau.



A Sudanese asylum-seeker is being assisted by a UNHCR staff member to use the new registration tool. © UNHCR/Pedro Costa Gomes

**Registration supplies.** Prepare a list of all the items required (including specifications). DIRS maintains a stockpile of registration materials in Copenhagen for rapid deployment to the field. Requests to DIRS for registration materials should be limited to materials that cannot be purchased locally in a timely manner. See more about the stockpile, stocks and ordering procedures [here](#) (accessible to UNHCR staff only).

**Staffing.** If expertise is not available locally, experienced, and qualified staff should be requested to join the operation on mission or short assignments. Contact DESS for requests to deploy registration officers to plan and oversee registration staff. For more information see the entries [Requesting emergency deployments from UNHCR internal deployment mechanism | UNHCR](#) and [Requesting deployments from emergency standby partners | UNHCR](#).

Staffing requirements may be calculated by estimating the size of the population concerned, the planned throughput at each registration site, and the anticipated registration approach, including datasets, tools, and process. Take account of the scale and type of the emergency response. In large operations, for instance, team leaders should be assigned to each step in the registration process to coordinate staff; mobile or shelter-to-shelter registration may require more staffing than registration at a fixed location. Where the host government leads emergency registration, UNHCR may need to allocate fewer and different staff.

Determine what additional staff is required, including how many of each category. Depending on the urgency, the operation may consider international staff on mission, emergency response team (ERT), temporary assignments or appointments, affiliate workforce arrangements, etc.

Local staff can be recruited initially on individual contractor agreements as well as through partners. All staffing arrangements will need to be regularly reassessed as the emergency evolves.

The staff functions include:

- Entry and security
- Reception and admission
- Data collection and interview
- Assessment by protection or community services staff
- Data quality control
- Photo/biometrics' capture
- Document issuance
- Supervisory (Registration Officer, operations data management, team lead)
- Refugee helpers, security guards and crowd control personnel, interpreters, administrative and filing clerks, drivers

All the staff will need to be trained in their functions. Hold regular staff meetings and establish mechanisms for feedback and complaints; listen to your staff's suggestions.

**Budgets.** Once all aspects of resourcing described above are built into an agreed Registration strategy and methodology, a detailed budget should be prepared. In doing so liaise with programme colleagues to confirm that funds are available. The budget should cover (as applicable):

- All the equipment required to support registration activities
- Personnel, staff meals, DSA, and incentives for government and security personnel
- Personnel accommodation and infrastructure

- Rental fees for registration locations (community halls, schools, other premises)
- Staff transport, including vehicle rental and fuel

## **Post emergency phase**

Emergency Registration typically serves as an initial step in supporting UNHCR's response to an emergency influx, leading to a more detailed individual registration, such as for determining refugee status or exploring long-term solution pathways. Consequently, registration processes and data requirements evolve over time, and the stakeholders may shift, as seen when registration responsibilities transfer from UNHCR to the Government. Recognizing these dynamics early on is crucial.

## **4. Links**

[Guidance on Registration and Identity Management Registration Stockpile \(UNHCR Intranet\) \(accessible to UNHCR staff only\)](#) [Checklist for Registration in Emergencies](#)

## **5. Main contacts**

GDS DIRS Functional Mailbox [hqdirs@unhcr.org](mailto:hqdirs@unhcr.org)