

Using the “Assess the Information Landscape” Step of the PIM Process to Build A New Protection Monitoring System

Data Policy Officer in UNHCR’s Global Data Service, Rachelle Cloutier explains how she used the “Assessing the Information Landscape” step of the PIM Process to support the development of a protection monitoring system.

Rachelle Cloutier is a Data Policy Officer in UNHCR’s Global Data Service. Prior to her current role, she was Information Management Officer (Protection) in UNHCR HQ’s Field Information and Coordination Support Section (FICSS), a role in which she provided technical field support and training on information management.

Reviewing the existing protection monitoring system

As part of her field support role, Rachelle was requested to undertake a mission to a country operation that wanted to expand its protection monitoring system for an IDP response.

There had been a significant change in the context, with a worsening of the conflict and a large increase in the number of IDPs. Colleagues in the operation knew the situation was getting worse, but felt that they did not sufficiently understand how much worse it was getting and in which ways. They anticipated that a revised and expanded protection monitoring system would be able to provide answers to these questions.

Rachelle describes the challenges with the existing protection monitoring system and the different views about how these should be addressed:

To its credit, a local NGO was somehow managing to collect information in the most impossible of circumstances. Nonetheless, the operation was facing a common problem with protection monitoring, which is that the system was not generating findings or at least, these were not being reported in a product that could be used to support evidence-informed decisions.

There were different views on how to address this situation. One was, ‘Let’s redesign the system, and just get it done’. The other view was that the operation first had to take a step back and decide if protection monitoring was the right system to meet the need. Protection monitoring requires a much more sustained commitment, since it is an ongoing system rather than a one-off exercise. We had to make sure there was proportionality in the effort-to-utility ratio, and that the solution was as light-touch as possible, both for our own resources and for the burden it represents for the people who provide the information. In the end, the decision was made to take a step back.

Assessing the Information Landscape

Rachelle explains the process they followed:

In collaboration with the regional office, it was agreed to start with a ‘deep dive’ into Step 1 of the PIM Process and conduct a broad review and analysis of the protection information landscape. This step would ensure that we “think before we do”, i.e., that we clearly defined and prioritised the information needs and information purposes, and identified possible gaps. This was seen as essential to ensuring that the system we designed – be it protection monitoring or not – was fit-for-purpose and provided information that was actually usable, useful, and used. The review of the information landscape also had implications for programming and staffing, as the operation had to ensure alignment between the scope and scale of the [protection monitoring] system and the resources available.

Use of the PIM Matrix in combination with the PIM Process

A working meeting was organised over 2.5 days to create the space for Protection and Information Management (IM) colleagues from all six field offices in the country to learn about the theory of the PIM Process - and to put it into practice.

Rachelle explains that she also used the PIM Matrix as part of this workshop:

Colleagues used the PIM Matrix to map existing internal and external PIM systems in the country. It was a real eye-opener for many, as they discovered the existence of new systems and new actors in their landscape. We then did group work to dig deeper into the information landscape



Use of the PIM Matrix to map PIM systems

Participants created a comprehensive list of key protection issues, informed by existing internal and inter-agency strategies. We then identified five prioritised protection issues, and these were unpacked into detailed lists of specific information needs and purposes. Based on the lists, participants could then conduct a desk review to see if information is already available or if it needs to be collected. To wrap up and consolidate the lessons from the exercises, colleagues developed an action plan to strengthen evidence-informed decisions for protection outcomes.

After my mission, colleagues were then able to take the second step of [the PIM Process and] design a protection monitoring system with a shared vision and understanding, one that was connected to strategic priorities and avoided duplicative efforts thanks to the mapping of existing systems and data sources.



Listing protection concerns during a workshop

The Value of Asking the Fundamental Questions

The use of the PIM Process and its first step to “Assess the Information Landscape” proved valuable to the redesign of the protection monitoring system. Rachelle explains:

Usually, [when considering protection monitoring], people start with drafting a questionnaire. With the PIM Process, people get that “aha moment” that there are actually six steps before we get to the questionnaire. That changes everything. Instead of starting with ‘I am going to write a questionnaire’ [which ends up having] 80 questions, only a fraction of which ever gets used, they can start with the key questions that guide all the next decisions: purpose and information needs.

What I love about the PIM Process is that it is built to ‘force’ us -- in a positive sense -- to respect the PIM Principles. If you follow it, you do, for example, get your Defined purpose, you do engage with communities (People-Centred & Inclusive), and you define your information sharing (Coordination & Collaboration).

If colleagues start with defining their purpose and [their] information needs — if they can answer that key question of ‘What do you need to know and why?’ -- this will trigger all the discussions that need to happen and inform all the design decisions that come later. That is the hidden power of ‘Assessing the information landscape’, as it helps people answer these fundamental questions.

PIM Highlights

- PMS has a clearly defined purpose ([PIM Principles](#), [PIM Process](#))
- Development of PMS started with an assessment of the information landscape (PIM Process)
- The PIM Matrix was used to inform the development of the PMS ([PIM Matrix](#))
- Use of “Assess the Information Landscape” stage of the PIM Process ensured the PMS also reflected PIM Principles (PIM Principles, PIM Process)