



INTERNAL AUDIT DIVISION

REPORT 2024/056

Audit of the use of the Profile Global Registration System at the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

UNHCR needed to ensure consistent use of proGres across the country operations while addressing gaps in data quality and interoperability between proGres and other systems

13 November 2024

Assignment No. AR2023-160-01

Audit of the use of the Profile Global Registration System at the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) conducted an audit of the use of the Profile Global Registration System (proGres) at the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The objective of the audit was to assess whether proGres was used efficiently and effectively to meet UNHCR's business needs, in line with applicable policies and procedures and operational context. The audit covered the period from 1 January 2022 to 31 December 2023 and included review of: (a) effectiveness and extent of use of proGres; (b) accuracy, completeness, consistency and validity of data and information; (c) interoperability of proGres with other internal and external applications/systems; and (d) oversight and monitoring by the second line.

ProGres as UNHCR's corporate registration, identity and case management tool supported the delivery of protection, solutions and assistance to forcibly displaced persons. However, there was inconsistent use of proGres across the country operations. OIOS observed gaps in data accuracy, completeness, consistency and validity, which presented a heightened risk of errors and potential fraud. Furthermore, OIOS observed inadequate access management and interoperability between proGres and other systems.

OIOS made eight recommendations. To address issues identified in the audit, UNHCR needed to:

- Ensure that country operations consistently use the proGres child protection and GBV modules;
- Finalize and implement the Registration Data Quality Assurance Framework and through reinforced monitoring by the second line ensure country operations' compliance with data collection and maintenance rules;
- Reinforce guidance to Regional Bureaux and country operations on what constitutes substantial biodata changes and how they can effectively monitor related controls in this regard;
- Address the data synchronization issues between proGres, and other interoperable tools used in its Population Registration and Identity Management Eco-System (PRIMES);
- Enhance the flow of data from the Refugee Assistance Information System into proGres for enhanced data quality between the two systems;
- Enhance the interoperability of the Global Distribution Tool and the proGres assistance module, thereby ensuring verifiability and audit trail of assistance;
- Reinforce the logical access controls to proGres from Workday and the partnership management system; and
- Strengthen second line oversight and support of country operations' implementation of standard operating procedures concerning access to proGres.

UNHCR accepted all recommendations and has initiated action to implement them. Actions required to close the recommendations are indicated in Annex I.

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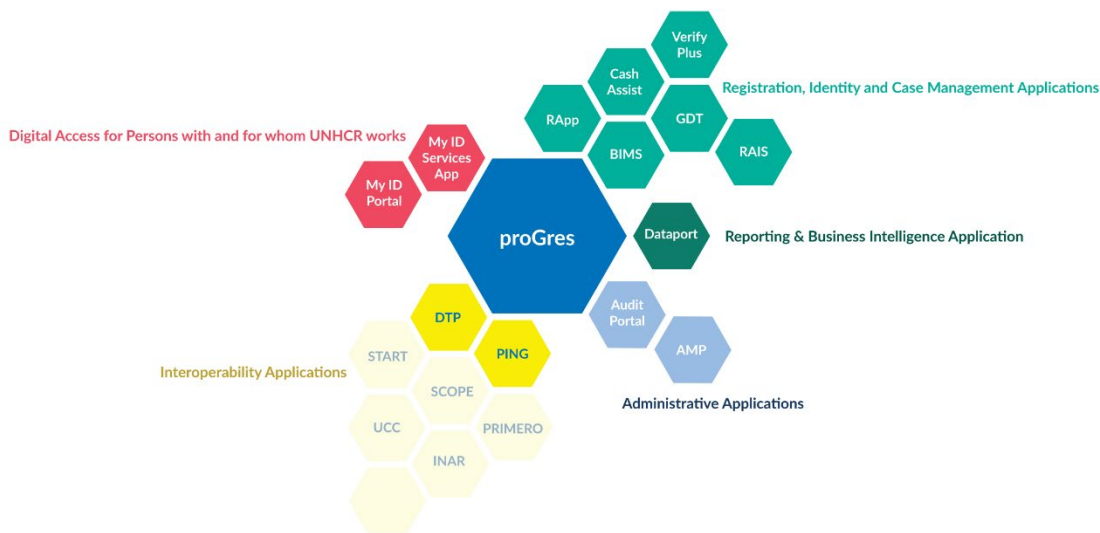
Audit of the use of the Profile Global Registration System at the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

I. BACKGROUND

1. The Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) conducted an audit of the use of the Profile Global Registration System (proGres) at the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

2. UNHCR has used proGres since 2003 as its corporate registration, identity and case management tool. ProGres has, over the years, become the backbone of UNHCR's field operations and is now a key instrument for the delivery and tracking of protection, assistance and durable solutions interventions. In April 2015, UNHCR rolled out proGres v4, its latest iteration comprising the following nine modules: registration, refugee status determination (RSD), child protection, gender-based violence (GBV), assistance, fraud, resettlement, voluntary repatriation, and legal and physical protection. As at 24 May 2024 a total of 159 UNHCR entities were using one or more modules of this system and by the end of 2023 there were 28.2 million people registered in UNHCR's PRIMES¹ system.

Figure 1: proGres and related tools



3. ProGres is the core system of PRIMES interoperating with the other related tools as shown in figure 1. The other tools covered in this audit include: (a) Rapid Application (RApp) used to record registration, identity and case management data online and offline; (b) Biometric Identity Management System (BIMS) used to record biometric information for identity verification; (c) Global Distribution Tool (GDT) used to track the distribution of assistance to beneficiaries; (d) CashAssist used to manage cash assistance distributed to beneficiaries; (e) Dataport used to analyze proGres data using interactive statistical templates such as dashboards and reports; (f) Verify Plus used to verify the authenticity of documentation issued by UNHCR; (g) Access Management Portal (AMP) used to manage proGres and RApp user access at operational level; and (h) Refugee Assistance Information System (RAIS), a locally developed application,

¹ The Population Registration and Identity Management Eco-System (PRIMES) is a concept that brings together a set of interoperable tools used for: (a) registration, identity and case management, and assistance; (b) business intelligence for statistical reporting and data analysis; (c) administrative purposes to provide access rights and permissions to users as well as examine and monitor data; (d) interoperability to exchange data internally and externally; and (e) digital access for persons with and for whom UNHCR works to allow access to UNHCR's services via PRIMES.

used primarily in the operations under the Regional Bureau for the Middle East and North Africa (RBMENA) to record assistance to forcibly displaced persons.

4. The Global Data Service (GDS) is a dedicated unit of UNHCR focused on the collection and management of operational data including the stewardship of proGres, that supports UNHCR's mandate to deliver protection, solutions and assistance in collaboration with Headquarters Divisions, Regional Bureaux, and country operations. It reports directly to the Executive Office of the High Commissioner and is responsible for developing and disseminating policies, guidance, norms and standards related to operational data. The Data, Identity Management and Analysis (DIMA) Units under regional bureaux provide second-line support to country operations for all operational data-related activities and for all forcibly displaced persons.

5. Comments provided by UNHCR are incorporated in italics.

II. AUDIT OBJECTIVE, SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

6. The objective of the audit was to assess whether proGres was used efficiently and effectively to meet UNHCR's business needs, in line with applicable policies and procedures and operational context.

7. This audit was included in the 2023 risk-based work plan of OIOS because proGres is a core UNHCR system for the delivery of protection, solutions and assistance to forcibly displaced persons and inaccurate or unreliable data increased the risks of inappropriate response to their needs.

8. OIOS conducted this audit from February to July 2024. The audit covered the period from 1 January 2022 to 31 December 2023. It covered the following seven country operations² and the respective Regional Bureaux: Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) under the Regional Bureau for Southern Africa; Egypt and Syria under RBMENA; Ethiopia under the Regional Bureau for East and Horn of Africa and Great Lakes; Iran and Pakistan under the Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific; and Mexico under the Regional Bureau for the Americas.

9. Based on an activity-level risk assessment, the audit covered these high risk areas: (a) effectiveness and extent of use of proGres; (b) accuracy, completeness, consistency and validity of data; and (c) interoperability of proGres with other internal and external applications/systems. The audit covered 6 of the 9 proGres modules, i.e., registration, RSD, child protection, GBV, assistance and fraud. The voluntary repatriation, and legal and physical protection modules were not covered because of reduced usage/activity, while resettlement processes have been the subject of separate audits.

10. The audit methodology included: (a) interviews of key personnel; (b) review of proGres-related documentation at the global and operational level; (c) analytical review of 692,169 individual records registered in 2022-2023; (d) physical observation of system usage and functioning, including the walkthrough of the samples of 37 child protection, GBV, RSD, and fraud cases; (e) assessment of interoperability of proGres with PRIMES tools; (f) sample testing of controls covering data integrity, data synchronization and interoperability; and (g) administration of questionnaires³.

11. The audit was conducted in accordance with the International Standards for the Professional Practice of Internal Auditing.

² Selected on the basis on the usage of proGres, in consultation with UNHCR.

³ The areas covered included usage of proGres modules, usage of other PRIMES tools, by UNHCR staff and partners etc.

III. AUDIT RESULTS

A. Effectiveness and extent of use of proGres

Need to use the proGres child protection and GBV modules and Primero when operational context allowed

12. The seven country operations reviewed in this audit used proGres modules to varying extents based on operational context as shown in table 1. In DRC and Ethiopia, UNHCR and the government partners jointly conducted the registration of forcibly displaced persons while in Egypt, Mexico and Syria, UNHCR registered forcibly displaced persons. In Iran and Pakistan, registration of forcibly displaced persons is done by the government. In Iran, UNHCR had no access to the government database but maintained its own registration data for purposes of RSD and resettlement. In Pakistan, UNHCR had access to the government database only for purposes of avoiding duplicate registration of asylum seekers.

Table 1. Use of proGres globally and of the six modules reviewed in the seven country operations

Module	Global total	DRC	Egypt	Ethiopia	Iran	Mexico	Pakistan	Syria
Registration	124	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
RSD	113	N/A ⁴	Yes	Yes	Yes	No ⁵	Yes	Yes
Child protection	92	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
GBV	90	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Assistance	124	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Fraud	110	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

13. In March 2023, UNHCR issued a position brief on the use of proGres Child Protection and Gender-based Violence Modules and of Primero (CPIMS+ and GBVIMS+)⁶ by UNHCR staff and partners. It noted that country operations must use the child protection and GBV modules in proGres to record direct implementation of related services and referral to other services. In addition, UNHCR encouraged the use of CPIMS+ and GBVIMS+ as the preferred information management systems for partners. However, these systems were not consistently used as noted below.

- Five of the seven country operations used the proGres' child protection module. DRC and Syria did not, as shown in table 1. In DRC, the partners used the Systeme d'Analyse et de Response (SAR) which was developed for use by the country operation and collected basic protection information, but there was no link between SAR and the proGres' child protection module. Syria used Excel spreadsheets and planned to roll out the proGres' child protection module for refugees and asylum seekers after the training in 2023 and completion of the Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) on child protection.
- In case of Ethiopia, the country operation used the proGres child protection module in 4 of the 8 business units. Two of the five partners in Ethiopia used CPIMS while three used Excel spreadsheets to record and manage child protection cases.
- DRC, Ethiopia, Egypt and Syria did not use the proGres' GBV module, as shown in table 1. In DRC, the partners managed cases using the government GBV database. In Ethiopia, two partners used GBVIMS while the other four used Excel spreadsheets to record and manage GBV cases. Egypt and Syria did not use the proGres' GBV module and instead used Excel spreadsheets and

⁴ To be rolled out in 2024 in line with the government decision that new arrivals from Burundi will go through an individual status recognition.

⁵ Not applicable because RSD is conducted by the government.

⁶ Child Protection Information Management System and GBV Information Management System, respectively.

they planned to roll out the module in 2024 after completion of the related training and UNHCR GBV SOPs. The manual case management and recording of child protection and GBV cases in the Excel spreadsheets was inefficient and prone to errors and resulted in duplication of work. Furthermore, the lack of standardized data fields in Excel spreadsheets used across offices created difficulties in consolidating, generating statistical data and conducting meaningful trend analysis.

- UNHCR granted partners access to the proGres' child protection module in Mexico enabling them to record the assessment and interview results directly in the module. However, in Egypt and Pakistan, the work done for child protection by partners such as assessments and interviews were recorded by UNHCR staff in the proGres' child protection module on behalf of the partners. This arrangement of uploading the work done by partners into proGres was error prone and inefficient and it was an added burden for UNHCR protection staff. Moreover, these partners were funded by UNHCR to perform case management and this included the recording of such activities. No reason was provided by UNHCR as to why partners in these country operations were not encouraged to use the CPIMS and GBVIMS which were the preferred tools.

14. These inconsistent practices across country operations suggested the need for better enforcement of existing guidance and closer monitoring by the second line.

(1) The UNHCR Division of International Protection, should: (a) assess the efficacy and determine modalities that country operations will use to upload partner activities in proGres; (b) support partners in the use of automated case management systems; and (c) in coordination with Regional Bureaux ensure that country operations consistently use proGres child protection and GBV modules for direct implementation.

UNHCR accepted recommendation 1 and stated that noting the complexity and cost of the issue, implementing recommendation 1(b) would require an extended timeline.

There was scope for the full and effective use of the fraud module by country operations

15. While the seven operations use the fraud module, there was a need to promote increased use of the module across the operations and enhancing country operations' capacity to identify and systematically record fraud allegations and the timely recording of fraud cases by the country operations. UNHCR agreed on the need for a more holistic use of the fraud module, for it to become the prime repository of fraud cases. The Fraud Module in proGres had also been updated to align with the revised 2024 Anti-Fraud Policy and accompanying procedures. In view of the action taken, no recommendation is being raised.

Use of Dataport and Verify Plus could be improved

16. Dataport is a business intelligence tool used to extract proGres data in statistical templates such as dashboards and reports. DRC, Egypt and Pakistan used the Dataport for statistical reporting and trend analysis. Ethiopia, Iran, Mexico did not use the Dataport because of the system's limited functionality, e.g., limited fields for display and lack of socio-economic data for operational needs and statistical reporting. Syria did not use it in view of the small refugee case load. UNHCR acknowledged performance issues in Dataport arising from migration to the cloud and in terms of synchronization but added that there were no limitations in terms of capabilities of Dataport itself.

17. Verify Plus is used to verify the authenticity of documentation issued by UNHCR. Out of the 7 country operations, only Syria used the system. Iran and Mexico did not, since no UNHCR documentations were issued to forcibly displaced persons. Pakistan issued only a limited number of UNHCR documentations to forcibly displaced persons, hence, not using Verify Plus was justified. However, DRC,

Egypt and Ethiopia which issued large numbers of UNHCR documentations also did not use Verify Plus, although Egypt and Ethiopia were planning to transition to Verify Plus. UNHCR noted that while they advocated for the use of Verify plus in UNHCR-issued documents, this was not mandatory, and the operational context needed to be considered. In view of the response, no additional recommendations are raised on Dataport and Verify Plus.

B. Accuracy, completeness, consistency and validity of data

18. Registration is the process of recording, verifying and updating information on forcibly displaced persons and is an essential tool for UNHCR service delivery. Per the proGres Registration Baseline SOP, while some registration fields are mandatory, such as name, sex, date of birth and country of origin, the specific dataset to be captured at the registration level is based on the operational context and requirements. Country operations are responsible for the registration. Under its Roles, Accountabilities and Authorities (RAAs), GDS is responsible for defining and enforcing controls in the operational data, including those of the forcibly displaced persons. Units within Regional Bureaux, which includes DIMA, provide second-line support to country operations for all operational data-related activities including fraud mitigating measures.

19. An important anti-fraud measure is to ensure that an identity is accurate and constant, except for data fields that varied over time, e.g., family composition and specific needs. Changes to registration data are material if they include substantial modifications to the name, sex, parents' name, date of birth, and ethnicity; and affect the eligibility requirements to access UNHCR services. In such cases, SOPs require that such changes should be made in proGres through the creation of an inconsistency record, referred to the designated staff for resolution, and authorized by the Unit Head or Authorized Officer.

Material changes were made to registration data without justification

20. The audit reviewed changes in biodata stored in proGres through a comparison of the current and previous values of key parameters and noted major changes in biodata in 19 individual records out of the 220 records reviewed. In these cases, the difference between the original and the updated date of birth was more than five years. The review was done only for the 'date of birth' parameter because other parameters did not store the previous value in proGres. Given the limited extent of the review, there could be other instances of unjustified changes. For 16 records the process status was changed from 'active' to either 'closed', 'inactive' or 'erroneous' and subsequently reverted to 'active' and the status change was followed by modification of key biodata fields.

21. The audit also identified 12 cases of complete or partial substitutions of the identity in the proGres records in one country operation. For instance, there were significant modifications to the name (12 cases), date of birth (12 cases), sex (5 cases), ethnicity (10 cases), and parent's names (11 cases). None of these changes were supported by justification in the proGres as required in SOPs. This raised the risk of including persons ineligible for international refugee protection, refugee status and other benefits. These manipulations to proGres data were made by one general service staff and the country operation reported that the records were under review, and the status of the individuals was still 'Active'. In another country operation, changes were made in two cases by overwriting existing proGres records. Another operation created 103 dummy cases in March 2023 in preparation for the migration to cloud; four of which were populated with personal data and converted to individual registration cases.

22. In the 12 cases for one country operation where major unauthorized and potentially fraudulent changes were made, OIOS concluded that such changes were possible because there was neither inbuilt control in proGres that flagged substantial changes by a staff member, nor was there a requirement that such major modifications trigger an automatic review through proGres. Although controls existed in SOPs,

these were not mirrored in proGres, which meant that these could be overridden. An inbuilt audit function was available to DIMA but was not effectively used to identify these potentially fraudulent changes. Data managers had access to run database scripts, however, this control was not adequately used.

There were important issues in data quality

23. Quality of data⁷ is critical to guide strategy development, policy making and programming choices including mitigation of fraud and error risks. Under its RAAs, GDS is responsible for ensuring that quality and coherent data related to persons of concern is systematically, responsibly and efficiently collected.

24. The audit reviewed 692,169 individual records (registered in 2022-2023) consisting of 637,152 with ‘active’ status. The review identified instances of incomplete, inaccurate, and inconsistent data entries that remained undetected in the seven country operations, as summarized in table 2. These included individuals: (a) without both parents’ names; (b) without ‘location’ or address; (c) without ‘country of origin;’ (d) with inconsistencies regarding their ‘sex’ and ‘relationship to focal point;’ and (e) with inconsistent ‘marital status’ and ‘relationship to focal point.’ UNHCR commented that these data fields were not considered as core data. Nonetheless, OIOS considers such data is critical for fraud prevention and detection, operational efficiency and for subsequent protection, solution and assistance interventions.

Table 2. **Data quality issues on registration**

Attribute	DRC	Egypt	Ethiopia	Iran	Mexico	Pakistan	Syria	Total
Total population of individuals with ‘Active’ status	64,244	242,619	120,256	93,273	58,282	56,951	1,527	637,152
Individuals without both parents’ names	31,340	14,808	45,631	98	39,419	46	2	131,344
Individuals with ‘location’ fields blank	48	281	684	77	5,977	873	-	7,940
Individuals with ‘Country of origin’ blank	27	-	-	-	1	-	-	28
Inconsistent sex & relationship to focal point (FP) ⁸	5	23	5	13	32	3	1	82
Inconsistent marital status & relationship to FP ⁹	356	474	260	21	212	70	-	1,393

25. Egypt, Iran, Pakistan and Syria subsequently acted upon some of these issues. OIOS also observed that there were inconsistencies between the reports generated from proGres and data stored in individual records in proGres. For example, the generated reports did not have data of ‘owning office’ and ‘specific needs’ in 531,172 and 156,067 records, respectively, while sample scrutiny revealed that these fields were present but not captured in the generated reports that needed to be addressed by GDS. On individuals without parents’ names, Egypt, Mexico, and Pakistan stated that: (i) they simplified the registration data set during emergency; (ii) the data was not mandatory and thus only updated during continuous registration; or (iii) the data were mandatory only for prioritized cases. The data set at initial registration stage should be complete and adequate to minimize consequent costs of data cleansing.

26. As a rule, each individual registered in the registration module is assigned a process status of being either active, closed, hold, erroneous or inactive. For individuals with status of closed, hold, erroneous or, inactive, the justification for the status change needed to be indicated in the data field ‘process change reason.’ Of the 55,017 individuals with status other than ‘Active’, the ‘Process change reason’ field was left blank in 192 records. Such data was important for protection, solutions and assistance interventions.

⁷ Refers to a set of characteristics that make the data fit for the purpose for which it is processed. It includes accuracy, relevance, sufficiency, integrity, completeness, usability, validity, coherence, accessibility, comparability, and timeliness.

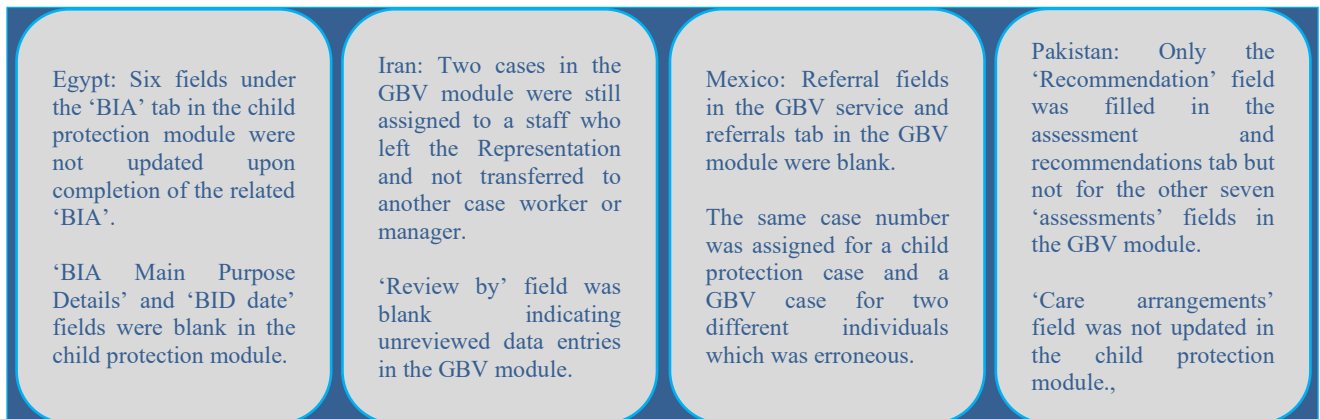
⁸ For example, sex was ‘Female’ but relationship to focal point is ‘Son’, ‘Brother’ or ‘Father’, etc.

⁹ For example, marital status was ‘Single’ but Relationship to focal point was ‘Husband’, ‘Wife’, ‘In-Law – Son’, ‘In-Law – Daughter’, etc.

27. The audit also performed a walkthrough of the process of data entry and review for the select samples of 37 child protection, GBV, fraud and RSD cases. The data quality was generally acceptable but there were instances of incomplete, inaccurate and inconsistent data entries. Examples are presented in figure 2.

28. Data quality particularly at the entry phase is important as subsequent rectification would entail avoidable costs. One country operation budgeted \$454,720 for 14 temporary registration assistants in October 2022 to conduct data quality checks. The exercise identified around 700,000 records with errors; 600,000 of which had been cleansed by December 2023. The remaining errors were mapped against the available data in proGres and around 50,000 errors were cleansed through bulk updates.

Figure 2. Examples of incomplete, inaccurate and inconsistent data entries



29. These shortcomings occurred because of gaps in existing technical and process controls and as a result, country operations could not ensure data quality. Further, the second line, i.e., the Regional Bureaux and GDS, did not effectively review and monitor data entry by country operations. The presence of potential fraud within registration undermines broader protection processes and this could cause reputational damage to UNHCR thereby adversely affecting donor confidence, programme funding and potentially result in the suspension of resettlement/complementary pathways programmes. GDS reported to OIOS that some of the weaknesses identified would be mitigated by the planned introduction of the Registration Data Quality Assurance Framework, which was yet to be finalized. The Framework outlined the quality dimensions for registration data including accuracy, completeness, consistency, validity and integrity; and the recommended actions for improving data quality.

- (2) **The UNHCR Global Data Service should: (a) finalize and implement the Registration Data Quality Assurance Framework; and (b) support the Data, Identity Management and Analysis staff at the Regional Bureaux to monitor compliance of country operations with established rules regarding collection and maintenance of quality data.**

UNHCR accepted recommendation 2.

- (3) **The UNHCR Global Data Service should: (a) define what constitutes substantial biodata changes with focus on high risk for fraud; and (b) guide the Regional Bureaux and country operations in the implementation of effective monitoring controls on substantial biodata changes.**

UNHCR accepted recommendation 3 and stated that the Division of International Protection would be a critical contributor in their capacity as the owner and custodian of the fraud module in proGres and in overseeing the anti-fraud and integrity work globally.

The feasibility of maintaining case management documentations in proGres needed to be reassessed

30. The audit noted that arrangements for the maintenance of documentation for directly implemented child protection, GBV and fraud cases were not efficient. For instance, OIOS walkthrough of samples of cases of child protection, GBV and fraud revealed that Egypt, Iran, Mexico, Pakistan maintained documentations on managed cases separately in a secured Teams Channel or SharePoint instead of uploading them in proGres.

31. UNHCR agreed that an integrated approach to case management was preferred but that there were significant technical and resource implications. The storage of case management documentation in the database may have performance implications by significantly increasing the size of proGres. UNHCR explained that the solutions (such as active links in proGres to the documents stored in safe external repositories) would be part of the reassessment. In view of the measures under consideration, no recommendation is raised.

C. Interoperability of proGres with other internal and external applications/systems

32. Interoperability is the ability of equipment, systems, apps or products from different vendors to operate together in a coordinated way without an end user's involvement. A connected data landscape is key to efficient and seamless functioning. The PRIMES Interoperability Gateway ensures a reliable, secure, and streamlined exchange of personal data in PRIMES applications with partners. This leads to enhanced privacy and protection of personal data, improved assistance coordination, and ensuring interoperability between UNHCR systems and tools as well as with partner systems to easily and safely be able to share data as required. Under the RAAs, GDS is expected to lead interoperability and integration of operational data and related corporate systems, to ensure responsible management and use of operational data across the Organization.

33. Data synchronization is a process of ensuring the prevalence of consistent data across different systems, applications, or databases. The data synchronization ensures that data maintains its integrity and reliability to support accurate and timely decision-making, no matter where the data resides.

34. OIOS' review identified synchronization issues between proGres and: (a) offline servers such as RApp and BIMS; (b) CashAssist; and (c) GDT.

Use of RApp and offline BIMS as options to the internet connectivity issues

35. RApp was used offline to record registration, identity, and case management data that was synchronized with proGres once the system was connected to the internet. DRC and Ethiopia used RApp due to internet connectivity issues where proGres did not work. Mexico had been using RApp since 2019 due to internet connectivity issues in some urban and remote locations but discontinued this in 2020 due to data synchronization issues with proGres. Country operations commented that the prevalence of these issues made registration and assistance interventions more difficult and slowed down the registration process due to the need to constantly monitor data.

36. BIMS is used to capture biometric information such as fingerprints and iris scans for identity verification. All the country operations reviewed used BIMS except Mexico which preferred to work with the government’s biometric verification services to avoid multiple registrations of forcibly displaced persons. DRC and Ethiopia used the offline BIMS due to internet connectivity issues. Data in the offline BIMS was synchronized with the online BIMS and proGres once connected to the internet. A partner in Ethiopia commented that data synchronization between the offline and online BIMS was a challenge.

37. The use of RApp and offline BIMS in locations with weak or no internet connectivity and delayed onward data synchronization with proGres impacted the maintenance and quality of data required by case workers to deliver protection, solutions and assistance. This led to challenges such as: (a) registration data inconsistencies, loss and gaps in data synchronization with proGres; and (b) additional burden on case workers who had to constantly monitor data update in proGres and could not perform their tasks online.

38. The Division of Information Systems and Telecommunications commented that they had supported country operations in finding solutions to internet connectivity issues such as the use of RApp and offline BIMS. However, OIOS noted that these alternative options to internet connectivity issues were not fully effective due to the protracted synchronization issues experienced by country operations.

39. OIOS’ assessment was supported by the synchronization incidents for RApp and BIMS reported to the Global Service Desk in 2022-2023. Of the 1,410 incidents pertaining to RApp, 340 or nearly a quarter were related to synchronization and took between 7 to 621 days to resolve (average was 54). For BIMS, synchronization incidents were some 5 per cent of the total incidents and took between 7 to 214 days to resolve (average was 38).

Need for action plan to address data synchronization between proGres’ assistance module, and CashAssist and GDT

40. Egypt, Ethiopia, Mexico and Syria used CashAssist to manage cash assistance to beneficiaries totaling \$25.3 million in 2022-2023. Mexico used it since 2020 and had experienced synchronization issues between proGres’ assistance module and CashAssist which resulted in duplicate and lost records.

41. OIOS’ review indicated data inaccuracies and inconsistencies between CashAssist and the proGres’ assistance module. For example, different registration groups appeared in CashAssist and the proGres’ assistance module referring to the same transaction, as observed in two cases in Ethiopia. In 38 cases in Ethiopia and 3 in Syria, the transactions had ‘erroneous’ status in CashAssist but tagged as ‘active’ in the proGres’ assistance module. Table 3 shows other data inconsistencies such as the difference in the number of persons covered for the cash assistance and inconsistent delivery dates per CashAssist and the proGres’ assistance module. These errors impacted the integrity of data on the recipients of cash assistance.

Table 3. ‘Active’ cash assistance records with inconsistencies for the period 2022-2023

Country operation	Total number of records synchronized from CashAssist to proGres assistance module	Records with different number of persons covered in the two systems	Records with different delivery dates in the two systems
Ethiopia	26,905	8,811	25
Mexico	67,324	35,214	2,693
Syria	53,599	22,445	0

42. Inflated number of records were observed in proGres because the same records from CashAssist or GDT were uploaded multiple times in the proGres’ assistance module, each time with a new ‘Assistance ID’. This resulted in overstatement of assistance in the proGres assistance module. In case of Ethiopia, the

unique identifier from GDT itself was repeated, and the combined effect of this error within GDT and the duplicate uploads in the proGres' assistance module increased the occurrence of 'External ID'. For example, a specific external ID appeared in seven records in the proGres' assistance module. In reality, the assistance was provided to two different registration groups, but had the same GDT identifier. While country operations deactivated some erroneously uploaded records, there still remained erroneous records with 'active' status as shown in table 4.

Table 4. Duplicate records

Country operation	Total records uploaded from CashAssist/GDT	Number of records uploaded more than once	Maximum number of times the record duplicated
DRC	78,765	283	2
Ethiopia	1,138,948	59,190	7
Iran	30,854	334	3
Mexico	58,564	5,766	6
Pakistan	5,138	118	2
Syria	53,327	225	3

43. The existence of discordant data resulted in the duplications, operational inefficiencies and errors. Without successful data synchronization, UNHCR lacked assurance that staff were at all times working with the up-to-date and accurate information. These shortcomings occurred because of the lack of a comprehensive action plan to address the root causes of data synchronization issues.

(4) The UNHCR Global Data Service, in coordination with the Division of Information Systems and Telecommunications, and Division of Resilience and Solutions should implement an action plan to identify and address the root causes of data synchronization issues between proGres and other PRIMES tools.

UNHCR accepted recommendation 4.

Need to improve the data flow between the proGres' assistance module and RAIS

44. Country operations managed various kinds of cash and non-cash assistance using corporate systems such as CashAssist and GDT. These corporate systems used data from proGres registration module for targeting beneficiaries and the resultant assistance information from these corporate systems flowed back to the proGres assistance module. The proGres' assistance module had proven useful, e.g., crucial for targeting, verification, and recording the assistance and all seven country operations used the module for recording various types of assistance.

45. Egypt also used RAIS, a locally developed system for managing non-cash and certain cash assistance such as education, protection, winterization, in addition to the corporate systems. RAIS, which was accessible to partners, sourced registration data from proGres to process and record assistance but these assistance records did not flow back to the proGres assistance module. However, this setup was inefficient as the assistance records were maintained in different systems, i.e., non-cash assistance and cash assistance in RAIS, while multi-purpose cash assistance was recorded in the proGres' assistance module. GDS noted that since Egypt was using locally developed application, it was their responsibility to reconcile the RAIS data with the proGres assistance module.

46. The audit identified data inaccuracies and inconsistencies in 123 assistance records between proGres and RAIS. These related to 11 registration groups where the family sizes in RAIS were larger than what was in the proGres registration module. For example, the family size that received cash for education

and emergency assistance in 2023 was seven per RAIS and three according to the proGres' registration module. This was subsequently revised to seven on 7 May 2024. In 124 cases, the assistance predated the registration, which implied that beneficiaries were paid before being registered. The country operation commented that in exceptional cases of heightened protection risk, assistance was provided before registering forcibly displaced persons. In 94 cases, the assistance was provided when the status of the individuals was either closed, inactive, or on hold.

47. The shortcomings occurred due to inadequate monitoring of the data quality between the RAIS and proGres systems. This impacted the quality of data used in managing assistance and if unmitigated would increase the risks of fraud and error.

(5) The UNHCR Regional Bureau for the Middle East and North Africa, in coordination with the Global Data Service, should ensure smooth flow of data from the Refugee Assistance Information System into proGres to ensure enhanced data quality for decision-making.

UNHCR accepted recommendation 5.

Need to enhance interoperability of GDT with the proGres' assistance module

48. The audit could not verify how the GDT operated and its interoperability with proGres. GDT is used to track the distribution of assistance to beneficiaries and 4 of the 7 country operations used it. Egypt, Mexico and Syria did not use GDT because it was deemed as not required based on their operational context. DRC, Ethiopia and Iran used the offline GDT and only Pakistan used the online GDT.

49. However, the audit noted that it was impossible to observe the interoperability between GDT and proGres without an active distribution plan. This was because by design, GDT did not store its own data but rather pulled it from proGres when a plan was created and synchronized the distribution results with the assistance module in proGres when the plan was closed. Hence, the audit was unable to walk through the GDT processes in Pakistan in the absence of an active distribution plan at the time of the audit. Instead, the audit reviewed the data consistency from the GDT distribution reports (in Excel spreadsheets provided by the country operation) with the records in the assistance module in Pakistan. The distribution reports indicated that 7,531 registration groups were provided with assistance in 2022-2023 but the assistance module showed 5,138 registration groups. By design GDT should store data on individual transactions as is the case in CashAssist so there is appropriate audit trail for verifiability and to mitigate fraud and error.

50. The lack of interoperability between GDT and proGres assistance module resulted in the inability to track and verify assistance.

(6) The UNHCR Global Data Service should enhance the interoperability of the Global Distribution Tool with the proGres assistance module for ensuring verifiability and audit trail of assistance.

UNHCR accepted recommendation 6.

Need for robust monitoring of user access management to mitigate the risk of breach of confidentiality

51. The UNHCR Data Transformation Strategy for 2020-2025 advocates for data protection and security of personal data of forcibly displaced persons. AMP is used to manage proGres and RApp user access at operational level and all the seven country operations used it. However, Ethiopia, Iran and Mexico did not have SOPs on user access management. Instead, they implemented the procedures for requesting

and approving access to proGres based on the global proGres user guide and Representative's memorandum on the designation of data controller and data protection focal point. This posed risks of: (a) inability to monitor implementation with established procedures; (b) unauthorized access; and (c) compromised confidentiality of data and information.

52. As at 24 April 2024, the user access data in AMP showed deficiencies either caused by the system and/or human error. Of the 14,432 'active' users, 12,831 did not have 'access end date'; 6,342 of whom were partner staff and 6,489 UNHCR staff. There were also 1,822 active accounts in the seven country operations reviewed without 'access end date' implying indefinite access. This, as noted by GDS, contravened UNHCR guidance that stipulated that the 'access end date' was mandatory for partner staff and they that they should be given access up to the partnership agreement end date (stored in UNHCR's project management solution called the Project, Reporting, Oversight and Monitoring Solution) but no later than 12 months from creation of access rights. For UNHCR staff, access was given up to the contract end date plus 30 days extension which automatically expired after contract end or separation date.

53. Of the 14,432 'active' users, 1,601 had 'access end date' of which 166 pertained to partners staff who had access beyond the first quarter of 2025, not aligned with the partnership agreement end date. This diluted the control over logical access to proGres. For instance, 55 partners staff in DRC, Ethiopia and Mexico had access end dates between the second quarter of 2025 and 2028. In Ethiopia, its government partner had access to proGres with both the requester and approver functions, which was contrary to the internal control principle of segregation of functions and left UNHCR with the reduced control of post-facto monitoring only. The audit noted that this partner created 21 user accounts with lengthy access end dates, which indicated poor access controls that compromised confidentiality of data and information. Country operations agreed that there was a need for tighter control over logical access.

54. There were five UNHCR staff with access beyond the contract end date available in Workday, i.e., ranging between 7 and 23 months which meant that the staff's 'access end date' was much longer than the assignment end date. GDS commented that these five cases were caused by manual data entry error in the 'access end date' field in Workday, which was not integrated with proGres. OIOS also noted lapses in access controls which posed risks of unauthorized access. For instance, 13 staff who separated from UNHCR but still had active access rights in proGres including one in Ethiopia. Two of the 13 staff had separated in 2023 but still had active status as at 24 April 2024, or more than one month past the reglementary 30-day extension period after separation date.

55. The audit also identified lapses in monitoring of dormant or inactive accounts that posed risks of misuse. Of the 14,432 'active' users, 5,986 had logged in into proGres at least once and the records showed a finite last login date while the remaining 8,446 had never logged in. Of the total 5,986 who had logged in at least once, 596 had not logged in since the last two years including 56 in DRC, Ethiopia, Iran, Mexico, Pakistan and Syria. Of the 8,446 who had never logged in, 874 were created more than two years ago including 75 in DRC, Egypt, Ethiopia, Pakistan and Syria.

56. GDS noted that this may be due to a bug that did not consistently update the 'last login date' in AMP when such date changed in proGres. On other hand, the country operations attributed this to synchronization issues between proGres and AMP where UNHCR and partners staff who regularly accessed proGres but their logins were not recorded. They also noted that they periodically monitor user activity data to address discrepancies and deactivate unused accounts. They however, faced challenges due to the accuracy of the 'last login date' in AMP which impacted the reliability of available information for user account management.

57. The shortcomings occurred because of the inadequate monitoring of user access management, increasing the risks of breach of confidentiality and unauthorized access.

- (7) The UNHCR Global Data Service, should enhance the logical access control to proGres through: (a) assessing the feasibility of automated information sharing between Workday, proGres, and the Project, Reporting, Oversight and Monitoring Solution, to align users' access with their contract terms; and (b) identifying and addressing technical issues in the Access Management Portal such as storing of user access history.**

UNHCR accepted recommendation 7 and stated that these elements are already included in the scope of the ongoing project improving the Access Management Portal.

- (8) The UNHCR Regional Bureaux, in coordination with the Global Data Service, should strengthen their oversight and support to country operations by: (a) developing and comply with standard operating procedures regarding access to proGres; and (b) monitoring partner staff user access for alignment with agreed access end dates.**

UNHCR accepted recommendation 8.

IV. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

58. OIOS wishes to express its appreciation to the management and staff of UNHCR for the assistance and cooperation extended to the auditors during this assignment.

Internal Audit Division
Office of Internal Oversight Services

STATUS OF AUDIT RECOMMENDATIONS

Audit of the use of the Profile Global Registration System at the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

Rec. no.	Recommendation	Critical ¹⁰ / Important ¹¹	C/ O ¹²	Actions needed to close recommendation	Implementation date ¹³
1	The UNHCR Division of International Protection, should: (a) assess the efficacy and determine modalities that country operations will use to upload partner activities in proGres; (b) support partners in the use of automated case management systems; and (c) in coordination with Regional Bureaux ensure that country operations consistently use proGres child protection and GBV modules for direct implementation.	Important	O	Receipt of assessment results on the modalities regarding uploading of partner activities in proGres, evidence that partners are supported in using automated case management systems and that proGres child protection and GBV modules are used for direct implementation.	31 December 2026
2	The UNHCR Global Data Service should: (a) finalize and implement the Registration Data Quality Assurance Framework; and (b) support the Data, Identity Management and Analysis staff at the Regional Bureaux to monitor compliance of country operations with established rules regarding collection and maintenance of quality data.	Important	O	Issuance and implementation of the Registration Data Quality Assurance Framework and evidence of capacity building to enhance monitoring over country operations' compliance with data quality and maintenance rules.	31 December 2025
3	The UNHCR Global Data Service should: (a) define what constitutes substantial biodata changes with focus on high risk for fraud; and (b) guide the Regional Bureaux and country operations in the implementation of effective monitoring controls on substantial biodata changes.	Important	O	Definition of substantial biodata changes and evidence of implementation of effective monitoring controls on substantial biodata changes.	31 December 2025
4	The UNHCR Global Data Service, in coordination with the Division of Information Systems and Telecommunications, and Division of Resilience and Solutions should implement an action plan to	Important	O	Implementation of action plan to identify and address root causes of data synchronization issues between proGres and other PRIMES tools.	31 December 2025

¹⁰ Critical recommendations address those risk issues that require immediate management attention. Failure to take action could have a critical or significant adverse impact on the Organization.

¹¹ Important recommendations address those risk issues that require timely management attention. Failure to take action could have a high or moderate adverse impact on the Organization.

¹² Please note the value C denotes closed recommendations whereas O refers to open recommendations.

¹³ Date provided by UNHCR in response to recommendations.

STATUS OF AUDIT RECOMMENDATIONS

Audit of the use of the Profile Global Registration System at the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

Rec. no.	Recommendation	Critical ¹⁰ / Important ¹¹	C/ O ¹²	Actions needed to close recommendation	Implementation date ¹³
	identify and address the root causes of data synchronization issues between proGres and other PRIMES tools.				
5	The UNHCR Regional Bureau for the Middle East and North Africa, in coordination with the Global Data Service, should ensure smooth flow of data from the Refugee Assistance Information System into proGres to ensure enhanced data quality for decision-making.	Important	O	Receipt of evidence of smooth flow of data from the Refugee Assistance Information System into proGres.	31 December 2025
6	The UNHCR Global Data Service should enhance the interoperability of the Global Distribution Tool with the proGres assistance module for ensuring verifiability and audit trail of assistance.	Important	O	Receipt of evidence of enhanced interoperability of GDT with proGres assistance module.	31 December 2025
7	The UNHCR Global Data Service, should enhance the logical access control to proGres through: (a) assessing the feasibility of automated information sharing between Workday, proGres, and the Project, Reporting, Oversight and Monitoring Solution, to align users' access with their contract terms; and (b) identifying and addressing technical issues in the Access Management Portal such as storing of user access history.	Important	O	Receipt of assessment conducted for automated information sharing between Workday, proGres and PROMS in aligning users' access with their contract terms and resolution of technical issues in the Access Management Portal.	31 December 2025
8	The UNHCR Regional Bureaux, in coordination with the Global Data Service, should strengthen their oversight and support to country operations by: (a) developing and comply with standard operating procedures regarding access to proGres; and (b) monitoring partner staff user access for alignment with agreed access end dates.	Important	O	Receipt of evidence of strengthened oversight and support to country operations through: (a) consistent implementation of SOPs regarding access to proGres; and (b) improved monitoring of partner staff user access.	31 December 2025

APPENDIX I

Management Response

Management Response

Audit of the use of the Profile Global Registration System at the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

Rec. no.	Recommendation	Critical ¹⁴ / Important ¹⁵	Accepted? (Yes/No)	Title of responsible individual	Implementation date	UNHCR comments
1	The UNHCR Division of International Protection, should: (a) assess the efficacy and determine modalities that country operations will use to upload partner activities in proGres; (b) support partners in the use of automated case management systems; and (c) in coordination with Regional Bureaux ensure that country operations consistently use proGres child protection and GBV modules for direct implementation.	Important	Yes	Director, Division of International Protection	31 December 2026	UNHCR accepts recommendations 1(a), 1(b) and 1(c). Noting the complexity and cost of the issue, implementing 1(b) will require an extended timeline.
2	The UNHCR Global Data Service should: (a) finalize and implement the Registration Data Quality Assurance Framework; and (b) support the Data, Identity Management and Analysis staff at the Regional Bureaux to monitor compliance of country operations with established rules regarding collection and maintenance of quality data.	Important	Yes	Head of Service, Global Data Service	31 December 2025	UNHCR accepts recommendations 2(a) and 2(b).
3	The UNHCR Global Data Service should: (a) define what constitutes substantial biodata changes with focus on high risk for fraud; and (b) guide the Regional Bureaux and country operations in the implementation of effective monitoring controls on substantial biodata changes.	Important	Yes	Head of Service, Global Data Service	31 December 2025	UNHCR accepts recommendations 3(a) and 3(b). It is noted that the Division of International Protection will be a critical contributor in their capacity as the owner and custodian of the Fraud module in proGres and the division

¹⁴ Critical recommendations address those risk issues that require immediate management attention. Failure to take action could have a critical or significant adverse impact on the Organization.

¹⁵ Important recommendations address those risk issues that require timely management attention. Failure to take action could have a high or moderate adverse impact on the Organization.

Rec. no.	Recommendation	Critical ¹⁴ / Important ¹⁵	Accepted? (Yes/No)	Title of responsible individual	Implementation date	UNHCR comments
						overseeing the antifraud and integrity work globally.
4	The UNHCR Global Data Service, in coordination with the Division of Information Systems and Telecommunications, and Division of Resilience and Solutions should implement an action plan to identify and address the root causes of data synchronization issues between proGres and other PRIMES tools.	Important	Yes	Head of Service, Global Data Service / Director, Division of Information Systems Telecommunications / Director, Division of Resilience and Solutions	31 December 2025	UNHCR accepts the recommendation.
5	The UNHCR Regional Bureau for the Middle East and North Africa, in coordination with the Global Data Service, should ensure smooth flow of data from the Refugee Assistance Information System into proGres to ensure enhanced data quality for decision-making.	Important	Yes	Director of the Regional Bureau for the Middle East and North Africa / Head of Service, Global Data Service	31 December 2025	UNHCR accepts the recommendation.
6	The UNHCR Global Data Service should enhance the interoperability of the Global Distribution Tool with the proGres assistance module for ensuring verifiability and audit trail of assistance.	Important	Yes	Head of Service, Global Data Service	31 December 2025	UNHCR accepts the recommendation.
7	The UNHCR Global Data Service, should enhance the logical access control to proGres through: (a) assessing the feasibility of automated information sharing between Workday, proGres, and the Project, Reporting, Oversight and Monitoring Solution, to align users' access with their contract terms; and (b) identifying and addressing technical issues in the	Important	Yes	Head of Service, Global Data Service	31 December 2025	UNHCR accepts recommendations 7(a) and 7(b). UNHCR notes that these elements are already included in the scope of the ongoing project improving Access Management Portal (AMP).

Rec. no.	Recommendation	Critical¹⁴/ Important¹⁵	Accepted? (Yes/No)	Title of responsible individual	Implementation date	UNHCR comments
	Access Management Portal such as storing of user access history.					
8	The UNHCR Regional Bureaux, in coordination with the Global Data Service, should strengthen their oversight and support to country operations by: (a) developing and comply with standard operating procedures regarding access to proGres; and (b) monitoring partner staff user access for alignment with agreed access end dates.	Important	Yes	Head of Service, Global Data Service/ Directors of UNHCR Regional Bureaux	31 December 2025	UNHCR accepts recommendations 8(a) and 8(b).