



UNITED NATIONS
UNIVERSITY

Centre for Policy Research

Policy Memo

CONFLICT EXIT DATA MANAGEMENT AND INTEGRATION AT THE UNITED NATIONS

Aladdin Shamoug
Jessica Caus
Siobhan O'Neil
Kato Van Broeckhoven

MANAGING EXITS
FROM ARMED CONFLICT

Aladdin Shamoug was Data Integration Consultant at United Nations University Centre for Policy Research until May 2020. **Jessica Caus** is Research Associate at United Nations University Centre for Policy Research. **Dr Siobhan O’Neil** is Project Director of the Managing Exits from Armed Conflict Project at United Nations University Centre for Policy Research. **Kato Van Broeckhoven** is Project Manager of the Managing Exits from Armed Conflict Project at United Nations University Centre for Policy Research.

MANAGING EXITS FROM ARMED CONFLICT



UNITED NATIONS
UNIVERSITY
Centre for Policy Research



Norwegian Ministry
of Foreign Affairs



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
Confédération suisse
Confederazione Svizzera
Confederaziun svizra

Federal Department of Foreign Affairs FDFA



Foreign &
Commonwealth
Office



United Nations
Peacekeeping



United Nations University Centre for Policy Research (UNU-CPR) wishes to express its deep appreciation to all the experts across the UN system who contributed to the preparation of this report. The authors are particularly grateful to those UN colleagues and partners from their respective headquarters and field missions who attended the November 2019 workshop, engaged bilaterally, and/or provided feedback on the draft of this policy memo.

This memo, and the research and convening that supported it, were undertaken as part of UNU-CPR’s Managing Exits from Armed Conflict (MEAC) project. MEAC is a multi-donor, multi-partner initiative to develop a unified, rigorous approach to examining how and why individuals exit armed conflict and evaluating the efficacy of interventions meant to support their transitions. While the memo benefited from feedback from MEAC’s donors and institutional partners, it does not necessarily represent their official policies or positions.

ISBN: 978-92-808-6521-9

All content (text, visualizations, graphics), except where otherwise specified or attributed, is published under a Creative Commons Attribution- Noncommercial-Share Alike IGO license (CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO). Using, re-posting and citing this content is allowed without prior permission.

CONTENTS

2	Executive Summary
4	Introduction
6	Section I. The Current State of Conflict Exit-related Data Management Across the UN
	A. Focus
	B. Management
	C. Development & Utility
	D. Ownership
	E. Accessibility & Interoperability
8	Section II. The Conflict Exit Data: The Integration Status Quo at the UN Today
10	Section III. MEAC's Data
	A. Individual to National-level Data
	B. Core and Related Outcomes of Interest
	C. Subjective versus Objective Data & Self- versus Externally-Reported Data
	D. Quantitative versus Qualitative Assessment Approaches
	E. Primary versus Secondary Data
	F. Data Sensitivities
13	Section IV. MEAC's Data Management
14	Section V. Data Integration Beyond MEAC
15	Section VI. Recommendations
18	Section VII. Conclusion
19	Section VIII. References
20	Section IX. Annexes
24	Endnotes

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In conflict-affected settings, the possibility of large-scale ex-combatant re-recruitment and/or continued participation in conflict-related or criminal violence are among the international community's biggest concerns. Unfortunately, little is known about the dynamics of conflict transitions nor about the effectiveness of interventions meant to bolster and sustain them, making it difficult to craft effective interventions to help end conflict cycles. This lack of knowledge is in large part due to the fact that conflict exits, the needs of affected populations, and the programming meant to support them (e.g. Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration [DDR], child/community reintegration) are rarely the subject of systematic, rigorous study and assessment.

Across UN programming, rarely does data get collected that speaks to why people decide to abandon the fight and how they do so sustainably. Even rarer are coordinated efforts to collect the same types of data or integrate such data across UN programmes or partners, partly due to operational challenges, the lack of incentives, limited institutional capacity, and funding constraints.

United Nations University Centre for Policy Research's (UNU-CPR's) Managing Exits from Armed Conflict (MEAC) project seeks to redress this gap. By advancing a common, rigorous assessment approach and developing survey tools to assist UN partners, MEAC seeks to contribute to a burgeoning, common evidence base on these "conflict exits" and the impact of programmes that seek to bolster them, to support coherent policy and programmatic decisions in the UN.¹

In many ways, the MEAC data collection – and the opportunities and challenges that will inevitably arise during the course of this project – reflect the larger

dynamics that impact the collection, sharing, and integration of conflict exit-related data across the UN. Therefore, the question of how best to manage the data collected for the MEAC project led UNU-CPR to examine the current landscape of data management policies, practices, and platforms used across the UN. This policy memo outlines the landscape of conflict exit-related data that emerged from this investigation and the challenges and opportunities it represents for the UN to become a data-driven organization to support conflict exits.

While the review of existing practices and platforms may not be fully comprehensive, it still revealed a landscape of relatively disparate and siloed data management efforts in the conflict exits space and raised relevant questions about whether the status quo is optimal for supporting the design and implementation of effective interventions to prevent and respond to conflict. While many of these platforms were not designed with explicit sharing and integration functions in mind (nor explicitly focused on conflict exits or programme assessments), in effect the resulting data siloes hinder cross-learning and entail opportunity costs.

UNU-CPR's review of these platforms revealed a lack of systematic data integration and sharing within and across UN entities that was confirmed by various practitioners, end users, and data management personnel consulted for this memo. They attributed this status quo to various factors. While there are certainly technical issues that frustrate data integration of conflict exit-related data in the UN today, the main obstacles to further sharing and integration appear to be organizational and political. Organizations seem to be reluctant to sharing data, often due to sensitivity, privacy, and ownership concerns. The risk of data exposure or breaches (especially with

regard to data on vulnerable subjects) is among the foremost concerns across the UN, and the benefits of data sharing and integration (e.g., reduced duplication, enhanced synergies, opportunities for cross-learning) may not be fully recognized or seen as outweighing the risks. Furthermore, data integration across the UN is also inhibited by the lack of integration mandates and a resulting lack of funding, expertise, bandwidth, and capacity across the system.

The current data management ecosystem for conflict exit-related data has significant policy and programming implications across the UN and beyond.

- First, siloing information makes it difficult to learn across programmes and contexts, resulting in missed opportunities for learning and innovation.
- Second, UN entities do not take advantage of economies of scale when it comes to data management technology and services.
- Third, the lack of a large, shared common evidence base makes it difficult to craft coherent policies and mandates and makes it challenging to effectively allocate resources.
- Fourth, lack of systematic sharing and coordination may cause redundancies and waste precious resources in recollecting data that was - or is currently being - collected by other agencies and partners.
- Fifth, opportunities may be missed in that integrating data from different sources can produce new knowledge that was previously not available.

“The current data management ecosystem for conflict exit-related data has significant policy and programming implications across the UN and beyond.”

The identified data integration challenges in the conflict exits space are reflective of the broader cultural and institutional differences in the UN system when it comes to data sharing and integration. The recent Data Strategy of the Secretary-General for Action by Everyone, Everywhere with Insight, Impact and Integrity 2020-22 confirms that the UN is not yet equipped for systematic data sharing and integration practices within – let alone across – UN entities. The strategy

“While there are certainly technical issues that frustrate data integration of conflict exit-related data in the UN today, the main obstacles to further sharing and integration appear to be organizational and political.”

lays out a framework for a data-driven transformation of the UN, helping the organization create more value from its data, particularly with regard to peace and security, the very goal championed by MEAC. Indeed, on a small scale, MEAC – with its partnership approach, devotion to robust evidence collection, and integration efforts – is a proof of concept for the vision laid out in the Secretary-General’s strategy.

The potential for the innovations and gains made by MEAC to be taken up by the UN system – and the potential for the UN to transform into a data-driven organization as envisioned by the Secretary-General – hinges not just on the quality of the data collected, but also on the prospects for enhanced data sharing and cross-learning within and across the UN system. The memo therefore concludes with recommendations on how to further data integration efforts at the UN more broadly:

1. **Address data ownership and sensitivity** to mitigate concerns about data security and help build confidence in cross-organizational data integration.
2. **Work to build trust** between all stakeholders involved, as an overarching condition for any successful data integration effort.
3. **Incentivize data sharing** by promoting its advantages, publicly praising agencies that share their data, or potentially by mandating.
4. **Involve all working levels through a multi-dimensional plan**, being mindful of the respective needs of both practitioners in the field and their colleagues at the headquarters, and including all relevant perspectives in any data integration enterprise.
5. **Establish quality control measures across the UN system**, which will raise standards and help remedy potential discrepancies between different data platforms.
6. **Promote innovation** by building on the lessons learned, trust-building, and innovations advanced by small-scale proof of concept data integration projects.

INTRODUCTION

United Nations University Centre for Policy Research (UNU-CPR), in partnership with the United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPO), UN Development Programme (UNDP), UNICEF, the World Bank and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the Governments of Norway, Switzerland, and the UK,² is leading the Managing Exits from Armed Conflict (MEAC) project – a multi-year, multi-country effort to build a common, robust evidence base on conflict exits and evaluate the impact of various United Nations programmes that seek to support individuals and communities exiting armed forces and groups and transitioning to civilian life. MEAC’s goal is to ensure that policymakers and practitioners on the ground have the information necessary to craft coherent, evidence-based, and effective policies and programmes. Ultimately, a better understanding of the factors that facilitate exits from armed conflict, and conflict transitions more broadly, will enhance the international community’s capacity to interrupt conflict cycles and support transitions towards sustainable peace.

To this end, MEAC produced an Agreed Conflict Exits Assessment Framework and accompanying survey tools to guide the collection of robust data on individual- and community-level conflict transitions and assess the impact of UN programmes meant to support exits from armed forces and groups. MEAC will roll out these tools in a multi-year pilot test. In Nigeria, starting in 2020, UNU-CPR and its partners launched a multi-year study on conflict exits to evaluate the impact of various programmes that are meant to help children, youth and adults transition to civilian life after association with armed forces and groups (e.g., Boko Haram and CJTF). This type of longitudinal study will result in the collection (in regular intervals) of anonymized individual- and community-level data on re-recruitment and conflict- and criminal-related violence indicators (social, economic, political, and psychological well-being) as well as metrics of security and stability. The data collection will span different UN agency programmes, their participants, and

geographic areas. It represents the first conflict exit-related cross-agency, cross-programme data collection and integration effort.

In June 2020, UNU-CPR launched an 18-month MEAC case study in Colombia. This case study will apply the MEAC approach and indicators to examining outcomes for different cohorts of children and adults who went through various iterations of reintegration and reincorporation³ programming – or none at all due to changes in eligibility criteria and approach. In many ways, the MEAC data collection – and the opportunities and challenges that will inevitably arise during the course of this project – are reflective of some of the larger dynamics that impact the collection, sharing, and integration of conflict exit-related data across the UN.

One of the key aspects to achieving the goals of MEAC (and reflecting the “One UN” approach it seeks to promote) is the effective and safe integration⁴ and sharing of the data it collects. MEAC’s efforts to do so offer an opportunity to take stock of how conflict exit-related data is currently being managed and shared across the UN today. Another key goal of MEAC is to contribute to a robust and shared evidence base on conflict exits, which has led to a focus not just on the types of data that should be collected and how, but also how that data could be optimally structured and integrated. As such, MEAC serves as a springboard for looking more broadly at how data can be better integrated across the UN to reduce duplication, enhance synergies, and improve the coherence of the UN efforts to prevent and resolve conflict. This exercise coincides with the publication of the Data Strategy of the Secretary-General for Action by Everyone, Everywhere with Insight, Impact and Integrity 2020-22, which makes it all the more relevant and timely.⁵ The strategy lays out a framework for enhancing data action and integration across the UN, helping the organization create more value from its data, particularly with regard to peace and security, the very goal championed by MEAC.⁶

Focusing specifically on data related to conflict exits, UNU-CPR undertook a review of existing data management⁷ guidelines, policies, and practices intended to inform MEAC's own data management procedures. This policy memo builds on bilateral consultations, workshop findings, and a review of existing data management and protection⁸ guidance. The memo starts by exploring the current state of management and integration of conflict exit-related

data across the UN as well as challenges, opportunities, and benefits to enhancing data integration in this space. From there, the memo identifies MEAC's data management and integration needs and potential ways forward for the project. It concludes with considering ways to further data integration beyond MEAC in order to build the international community's capacity to effectively support conflict exits going forward.

I. THE CURRENT STATE OF CONFLICT EXIT-RELATED DATA MANAGEMENT ACROSS THE UN

In 2019, UNU-CPR led an effort to survey the landscape of data management, integration, and sharing policies and practices across the UN as they relate to conflict exit data. After extensive bilateral consultations with UN and other international community actors collecting and managing related data, UNU-CPR held a workshop in November 2019, bringing together technical, end user, and managerial perspectives on the current state of, and prospects for, further data integration in the UN. The workshop highlighted aspects of the current constellation of data management platforms and accompanying policies and practices. But with so many disparate data management efforts relevant to conflict exits across the UN, the landscape it produced is not comprehensive. Yet, even with persistent gaps, the review led by the MEAC project raised relevant questions about whether the status quo is optimal for supporting the design and implementation of effective and efficient interventions to prevent and respond to conflict.

A. Focus

There are a variety of UN organizations collecting information on conflict transitions but most focus on a particular subset of those involved in them (e.g., formerly associated children, adults who have gone through a DDR programme), a particular period in that transition (e.g., right after demobilization, post-return to the community), or focus only on data related to the programming they support (e.g., psychosocial interventions, job training). For example, DPO directly collects, or supports the State's collection of, data related to the D and D components of DDR (disarmament and demobilization); UNDP historically led the R (reintegration) aspect of DDR support and collected data related to reintegration programming; IOM also has been providing reintegration support for adults exiting armed groups/forces, particularly in non-peacekeeping mission contexts and collecting data related to that population and their interventions; and UNICEF collects information on formerly associated children as part of their case management.

B. Management

A review of the related data management practices of UN partners suggests divergent approaches for gathering and managing the data relevant to, and collected around, their interventions to support conflict exits. For example, UNDP developed and used to use the Disarmament, Demobilization, Reintegration and Arms Management (DREAM) data platform to manage reintegration data; IOM uses the Information, Counselling, and Referral Service (ICRS) to register and profile individuals receiving reintegration assistance, and integrate available services; UNICEF developed Primero to manage individual reintegration cases and record gender-based violence incidents for monitoring and is used by both UNICEF staff and other UN implementing partners (e.g., UNFPA); and DPO (then the Department of Peacekeeping Operations [DPKO]) developed the Situational Awareness Geospatial Enterprise (SAGE) - a web-based database used in mission settings for collecting and managing data on security incidents. DPO recently started rolling out its Comprehensive Planning and Performance Assessment System (CPAS), a tool for missions that supports integrated planning, allowing missions to collect and collate data and analysis from multiple sources to assess the impact and performance of UN peacekeeping missions. Missions have often developed separate data systems, managed by DDR components, which focus on the disarmament and demobilization phases.⁹ In examining these systems and interviewing those who use them, it became clear that existing data on conflict exits is often siloed between – and even within – individual UN organizations. Some of the platforms above can be and have been used by more than one agency (e.g., Primero), but this does not seem to have led to more systematic data sharing and integration practices within – let alone across – platforms. Most of the data management practices and platforms used across the UN to collect, store, and analyse data related to conflict exits were not specifically designed with this particular focus to begin with.

C. Development & Utility

Data management platforms are often developed in the respective headquarters of the UN agencies, while data entry and management usually take place at the field level. The headquarters typically serve a supportive function for the field, where field users in return provide data to help guide the overall planning process. This is not the case in peacekeeping contexts, where platform development and management are done by the mission.

For each system in UNU-CPR's review, it became clear that different types of users have different reasons for using their organization's platform(s). While efficient individual case management is likely the priority for practitioners on the ground who provide follow-up and referrals, headquarters colleagues or those with different responsibilities may be focused more on incident reporting or personnel accountability. The level of granularity also differs depending on the system in question. While some of the data platforms described above are focused on individual-level data, others like CPAS are mission-wide in the orientation. While CPAS may gather a few indicators related to DDR outcomes for a particular mission, a platform used specifically by DDR or reintegration practitioners to manage programming and/or beneficiary data would likely gather many more. As such, the utility of certain features of these platforms will differ depending on the focus and the needs of a particular user. Even when well-designed systems exist, not all users may be able to use them to their fullest if there are challenges to collecting robust data: a system may support comprehensive case management, but the data collection necessary to support it may not be possible in contexts characterized by insecurity and hard-to-reach beneficiaries, overstretched resources, limited expertise or equipment on the ground, and the potential for information to be lost in transfer, for instance between partners or mediums (e.g., paper records versus electronic data input). Moreover, the type of long-term assessment MEAC seeks to advance rarely aligns with UN programming timelines and short-term funding for reintegration interventions.

D. Ownership

The discussed existing data systems across the UN generally operate under the rule that data ownership remains with those who collect the information. However, the exact application of this rule varies by context. For CPAS, DPO's Division of Policy, Evaluation,

and Training provides support and oversees the database, but the ownership of the data remains with the missions. For Primero, each organization that inputs data owns that data in the system. In SAGE, for example, information about security incidents is collected by several actors but the ultimate ownership lies with DPO as the custodian of the platform. Data on DREAM, meanwhile, was collected, managed, and hosted by UNDP. Other partners who input data can use and control their own data in the system, while overall ownership remains with UNDP. Finally, data on the ICRS database is collected, managed, and hosted only by IOM. In some cases where IOM has supported national reintegration efforts, it has helped fund and co-develop data management platforms that are eventually handed over to the national authorities leading reintegration support. For example, in Colombia, IOM co-developed SAME with the Colombian Reintegration Agency (now the Agency for Reincorporation and Normalization (ARN))¹⁰ over the course of approximately twelve years between 2005 and 2017 before it was merged with the ARN-managed SIR system around 2018.

E. Accessibility & Interoperability

Access to upload, view, or use data on most existing UN data collection platforms is only granted to specific partners and users. Access to databases such as Primero is limited to registered partners who use the platform to upload or access their own data. Only platform administrators can access all records in the database. For example, the United Nations Population Fund's (UNFPA's) records on gender-based violence are fully accessible to UNFPA (and those who are permitted by UNFPA), while others have more limited access or none at all. For CPAS and SAGE, data is only accessible to personnel who have the proper authorization (the same applies to data platforms created by DDR components within peace operations), although steps have been, and continue to be, taken to ensure data can be shared across systems.

Many of the current UN platforms that host conflict exit-related data are not designed to easily or fully interoperate with each other. Some of them have – albeit limited – integration functions that allow them to import data from other platforms. While the technical capacities of the platforms would allow for further integration, particularly when they are built off the same basic platform, it is not always clear if there is consistent organizational support for doing so.

II. THE CONFLICT EXIT DATA: THE INTEGRATION STATUS QUO AT THE UN TODAY

Ultimately, workshop participants agreed (and the partial landscape that informed the workshop confirmed) that there are still gaps in the mapping of conflict exit data across the UN. Without a better understanding of the current state of data management in this space it will be hard to fully explore the range of alternate integration configurations. That said, there was a general sense from the practitioners, end users, and data management personnel across the UN consulted by UNU-CPR that data management remained largely siloed between and within individual UN agencies, funds and programmes. As affirmed in the Secretary-General's data strategy, the UN does not yet have a comprehensive approach to data collection and management, nor has the value of collecting data to support the work of the UN been fully recognized or utilized. Data integration and sharing are not standard practice, and remain relatively infrequent and *ad hoc*. This is largely due to (or an indication of) uneven data cultures, capabilities and practices across the UN, some technological shortcomings, lacking horizontal governance structures, and as yet a general unpreparedness of the UN to be a fully data-driven organization.¹¹ Even though there have been some data integration efforts that have yielded interesting results – such as the uncovering of a relationship between fuel prices and terrorist activity in Somalia¹² – these seem to be exceptions rather than the norm.

Workshop participants agreed that while there are certainly technical issues that frustrate data integration of conflict exit-related data in the UN today, the main obstacles to further sharing and integration appear to be organizational and political. Workshop participants spoke of the inherent reluctance to sharing data, often due to sensitivity (especially with regard to data on vulnerable subjects), privacy and ownership concerns as well as lack of bandwidth and capacity, buy-in from partners, or incentives to share as enduring challenges. Another point raised during bilateral consultations was that, so far, data collection in peacebuilding has

been largely motivated by accountability reasons only, necessitating a broader culture shift across the UN to raise awareness of and incentives for other core benefits of enhanced data action beyond accountability – most notably the learning opportunities it entails.

Data integration is a challenging process that is seen as involving risk. The risk of data breaches that could expose personal sensitive information of programme beneficiaries and the related privacy, security, and reputational costs are foremost concerns across the UN. Workshop participants discussed how UN entities are predisposed to avoiding risk. This is particularly true for those organizations that deal with more personal, medical, or legal data (e.g., Médecins Sans Frontières, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], IOM, UNICEF).¹³ The benefits of data integration (e.g., revealing new connections between seemingly disparate phenomena) do not appear to be fully appreciated and might not be perceived as outweighing the risks. Moreover, risk is often treated in binary terms – it is accepted or it is neutralized. Rarely do organizations take a true probabilistic assessment approach to evaluating data integration risk that gauges the likelihood of exposure and the consequences of unintended data release.

Data integration across the UN is inhibited not only by risk avoidance, but also by the lack of integration mandates and related capacities across the system. Except for UN agencies for which data management and integration is part of their mandate (e.g., the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, UNOSAT - UNITAR's Operational Satellite Applications Programme – the UN International Computing Centre, the International Telecommunication Union, and the UN Office of Information and Communications Technology), most UN organizations lack the technological expertise and bandwidth needed for data integration (and data management more generally). Those UN agencies

without such mandates would stand to benefit from initiating and/or expanding training for privacy impact assessments¹⁴ to extend capacities in this space.

Workshop participants further identified a lack – and sometimes absence – of funding for data integration initiatives as a major challenge to data integration across the UN. This is likely correlated with mandates for data integration but is also exacerbated by a general underfunding of some UN organizations. The UN's humanitarian and development agencies are often under-funded, operate with short project-based timelines, and many of them struggle to keep the core activities of their programmes up and running. Hence, data integration may register low on their list of funding priorities. Donors, on the other hand, rarely require, prioritize, or provide explicit budget lines to fund data integration within or across the UN entities and programmes they support.

The partial picture that emerged from MEAC's review has made clear that the current data management ecosystem for conflict exit-related data has significant policy and programming implications for the UN and beyond. First, siloing information makes it difficult to learn across programmes, entities, and contexts. As a result, lessons learned in one place or by one UN actor are not likely to influence the work of others quickly; unnecessary mistakes continue to be made; and innovations are not taken up – all to the detriment of the people the UN seeks to serve. Second, UN entities do not take advantage of economies of scale when it comes to data management technology and services. Third, the lack of a large, shared common evidence

base makes it difficult to craft coherent policies and mandates and makes it challenging to effectively allocate resources. Fourth, lack of systematic sharing and coordination may cause redundancies and waste precious resources in recollecting data that was – or is currently being – collected by other agencies and partners.¹⁵ Fifth, opportunities may be missed in that integrating data from different sources can produce new knowledge that was previously not available. For example, having data about security incidents (e.g., from the the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project [ACLED] database) integrated with infrastructure damage estimation using space image analysis (from UNOSAT) might help determine the material cost of a conflict in certain areas and support resource allocation. A lack of data integration mechanisms may result in missed opportunities to know more – and make better informed decisions – from existing data sources. It is important to emphasize that the data integration challenges laid out in this section are reflective of the larger cultural and institutional differences that characterize the various parts of the UN system. To more effectively integrate data, it is necessary to address the underlying structures and cultures that shape them.

This section laid out a sketch of the current landscape of conflict exit-related data integration across the UN, along with some of the challenges and opportunities it presents. This is the space that the MEAC project is operating in and that it seeks to support. Following this broader context, the next sections drill down into MEAC's approach to data management and integration.

III. MEAC'S DATA

To understand the data management needs of the MEAC project, it is necessary to reflect on the project's approach to data collection and the types of data it seeks to collect. In seeking to enhance the rigor and comparability of assessments across the UN, the MEAC project has articulated a common approach for: assessing interventions intended to support individuals and communities transitioning away from association with an armed group/force and reintegrate into civilian life, a converging vision for what exit "success" looks like, and a roadmap for studying individual trajectories out of armed conflict. This roadmap will then be used to inform several multi-year pilot studies that, in turn, will help further refine the framework and generate significant data on how and why individuals become involved in conflict, the nature of their involvement, their motivations for leaving, and the factors and interventions that helped shift their orientation away from armed conflict. For these pilots to assess conflict exits and the impact of various programmes meant to support them, it will be necessary to collect, synthesize, and analyse a variety of data points over a period of time.

A. Individual to National-level Data

MEAC will collect data at different levels, including the individual, family, and community level, as well as structural/national-level data, often for the same outcomes. For example, when trying to understand economic outcomes in a context, MEAC may collect both individual employment metrics (e.g., hours worked last week in exchange for money or goods) and national employment/unemployment rates.

B. Core and Related Outcomes of Interest

Given that conflict exits are complex and multifaceted, a single outcome or indicator on its own is unlikely to signal whether an individual has fully and permanently transitioned away from conflict. It will therefore be necessary to gather a number of indicators that represent no longer being involved in, supportive of, or oriented to conflict (e.g., desistance from conflict-

related violence, signs of disengagement from active conflict parties, decreased support for violent conflict, and rejection of norms that justify conflict-related violence).¹⁶ Recognizing that a successful exit from armed conflict means different things to different people – and yet, our ability to create coherent policymaking and programming hinges on a comparable, robust evidence base – MEAC promotes a semi-universal core index of outcomes that can be contextualized to different settings.

In addition to the core outcomes of interest, a series of supporting conditions and outcomes are thought to be signs of, or contribute to, successful and sustainable transitions away from armed conflict. MEAC seeks to gather information on five broadly conceptualized categories of conditions that support or, in some cases are indicators of, successful and sustainable conflict exit including:¹⁷ measures of economic well-being, social well-being, political/civic engagement, psychological well-being, and "rule of law" (e.g., perceptions around security, governance).¹⁸ Such metrics will include everything from employment, measures of acceptance and stigma, established anxiety and depression scales, feelings of security, and access to basic services.

In addition to these outcomes, MEAC will need to collect a wealth of demographic information on individuals – while protecting the personally identifiable information needed to follow up with respondents over time – to help contextualize individual and community progress. This includes everything from socio-economic status, gender, marriage status, dependents, etc. To understand the full trajectory of individuals and communities, MEAC will collect information around the factors that led to involvement with the armed group(s)/force(s) and experiences with the armed group(s)/force(s) and, as a result, collect one of the largest data sets on how and why people became involved with armed actors in the first place.

MEAC's assessment approach requires collecting more and better-quality data than many UN partners currently collect. On the one hand, collecting more data would certainly imply costs. On the other hand,

through MEAC's approach, data can be integrated across agencies, reducing the need for multiple siloed and costly assessments that overlap, thereby generating synergies and cost-efficiency. Furthermore, by collecting data in regular intervals, it becomes possible that one UN partner's impact assessment – e.g. of a programme that is ending – informs the needs assessment of a programme that is just in the design phase. So, while MEAC seeks to gather more data than a typical UN assessment, the type of data it collects has wide utility across UN partners at different stages of programming, if properly integrated. As such, MEAC's approach will ultimately reduce the burden on UN partners, beneficiaries and respondents in their communities.

C. Subjective versus Objective Data & Self- versus Externally-Reported Data

Many of the outcomes of interest listed above can only be collected with self-reported surveys. Yet, individuals who continue to serve in or support an armed group/force or who are involved in conflict-related violence may be hesitant to admit as much. It is important to note that incentives to underreports may lead to inaccuracies in this data collection method – and overly optimistic assessments of behavioural change if used on their own. MEAC advocates for the use of different research approaches, points of entry, and data sources to triangulate information and provide a more accurate picture of conflict transitions. This includes gathering family- and community-level data, which can both contextualize the transitions (or lack thereof) of those individuals leaving armed groups/forces and provide another data point to verify self-reported data. In addition to the subjective assessments provided by community or family members, it is also possible to collect more objective data at the community level. By creating community observatories to collect data at regular intervals (e.g., whether there conflict-related graffiti in the town square, children playing in the street on Wednesday afternoons), it becomes possible to contextualize individual transition trajectories within broader community realities.

D. Quantitative versus Qualitative Assessment Approaches

Many of the aforementioned types of data are quantitative in nature. That is to say, they are metrics that are quantified such as a salary (e.g., 20,000 pesos a month), or organized as a rank or scale (e.g., satisfied with current income, neither satisfied or dissatisfied, dissatisfied with current income). These types of

data points can be used in statistical analyses. The MEAC project's major innovation is piloting large-scale quantitative, longitudinal assessment practices. With a rigorous quantitative assessment approach, MEAC will be able to answer – with confidence – enduring questions about the impact of various interventions intended to bolster and promote successful and sustainable conflict exits.

That said, quantitative methodologies alone are not well-suited for answering related questions around the motivations, reasoning, and experiences related to why some individuals and communities succeed in fully and sustainably exiting armed conflict. To do so, MEAC will employ a mixed-methods approach that also incorporates qualitative (e.g., semi-structured in-person interviews, focus groups) research methods that can enhance the rigour and dimensions of an assessment, help address contextual challenges (i.e., use alternative methods when others are not possible), lead to more confident conclusions (i.e., when getting converging results from different methodological approaches) and/or uncover a greater diversity of perspectives.

E. Primary versus Secondary Data

Thus far, the data described has been largely related to MEAC-specific collection of original, primary data,¹⁹ but there are various other data sources available in the pilot locations that could help augment the original data collection. Secondary data, which other researchers, non-governmental organization, UN agencies, or governments gathered for their own purposes, may be useful in verifying or supplementing MEAC primary data. This is especially true for data that MEAC could not reasonably collect within its current resources or operating timeframe, such as socio-economic indicators from before the conflict (e.g., metrics of literacy and per capita income) or conflict incident data (e.g., the open source ACLED project's data on 420,000 conflict-related incidents). Given that MEAC was not involved in collecting such data and some of it may be the result of calculations (on which there may be limited visibility), the inclusion of such secondary data needs to be assessed on a case-by-case basis. How such data streams can be integrated into MEAC's original data is one of the questions examined in this memo.

F. Data Sensitivities

The collection and management of information related to individuals once associated with armed groups/forces is always sensitive. This sensitivity is heightened in contexts where conflict is ongoing and some of the

groups involved are listed as terrorist or characterized as such (or as “violent extremist”).

The types and quantity of data collected during the MEAC project, and the related sensitivities, put certain demands on the approach to managing this data, especially with regard to security, sharing, and integration. Given these needs, and the landscape of current data management practices across the UN outlined in Section I of this memo, there is not a natural home for the MEAC data in the UN at this point. As a result, UNU-CPR has designed a short-term, in-house

approach for the safe and effective management of the MEAC data, which is briefly detailed in the following section. The prospects for the long-term management of the MEAC data after the project ends and, more broadly, how to advance the effective management of conflict exit-related data across the UN, requires additional reflection. The prospects for further integration of such data, and recommendations for advancing the Secretary-General’s vision of the UN becoming a data-driven organization, are examined in Sections V, VI, and VII.

IV. MEAC'S DATA MANAGEMENT

As made clear by the landscape of data hubs used across the UN detailed in this memo, there is currently no data hub that is well suited to storing the type of data that MEAC will collect. Nor is there an existing system that would facilitate the type of integration with outside sources and the sharing with UN partners that MEAC envisions. As a result, MEAC has developed a project-specific solution to managing its data.

MEAC's data management approach follows the entire lifecycle of data from project design to data collection, storage, protection, processing, and sharing. Its approach works to balance ethical research principles, best practices for protecting personal information, and effective data management standards. This data management approach, and the platforms it relies on, represent an effective – but short-term – approach tailored to the needs of the MEAC initiative, but it does not advance the broader need for further data integration across conflict exit-related work in the UN.²⁰

During the course of the project, MEAC's data will be encrypted and safely stored but may eventually need to be migrated to a different long-term storage location that would facilitate sharing and ensure protection after the MEAC project comes to an end.²¹ MEAC is currently slated to run through 2022, but the goal has always been to effectuate long-term change across the UN with regard to assessing interventions meant to support conflict exits. There is a spectrum of options to ensure MEAC effectuates such change. At the low end, facilitating better quality and more comparable data collection amongst the relevant UN partners will help position the UN to learn across contexts. At the more ambitious end of the spectrum, building the infrastructure for facilitating the integration of such data and guiding its regular collection – and, in the process, starting to chip away at the cultural challenges that make integration difficult – will go further to ensuring the UN becomes the fully data-driven organization the Secretary General's plan challenges it to be.²²

V. DATA INTEGRATION BEYOND MEAC

From its outset, MEAC has sought to inform and support UN interventions that seek to help individuals and communities transition away from conflict. Through the release of its Agreed Conflict Exit Assessment Framework and a series of accompanying assessment tools, MEAC has tried to enhance the quality and comparability of evidence around conflict exits and the impact of programmes and policies meant to support them. If every UN entity working to support conflict exits begins to collect more rigorous and comparable assessment data, their capacity to craft more effective interventions will improve. Likewise, the UN will be increasingly able to draw lessons across contexts that can inform more effective policymaking, mandating, and resource allocation. These gains could be exponentially advanced if high-quality, comparable data is systematically collected, integrated and shared across contexts, programmes, and providers. By institutionalizing the MEAC approach and strengthening data integration across existing platforms or, more ambitiously, building a stand-alone conflict exits data hub to house conflict transition data from across the UN system, the UN could start to achieve the goals outlined in the Secretary-General's data strategy.

As mentioned earlier, the Secretary-General's strategy sets forth a framework for making the UN a fully data-driven organization, including enhanced data integration, clear horizontal data governance structures and enhanced analytic capabilities (factors that chief data officers identified as critical for data and analytics success).²³ In other words, the strategy seeks to make data a "shared strategic asset" across the organization, facilitating synergies and real-time learning.²⁴ With peace and security being one of the strategy's priority areas, MEAC represents a unique example of how these efforts could be implemented in the space of conflict exits and prevention. There is a strong alignment between MEAC's long-term vision and the one laid out in the Secretary-General's strategy, a vision of a data culture "that values openness & sharing by default," of better collaboration between entities that embraces the notion of data 'stewardship' instead of hoarding for optimal data use.²⁵ The next section lays out recommendations for how this type of integration might be advanced in the context of the MEAC project and beyond.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

As Section I of this memo has shown, there are still gaps in MEAC's mapping of conflict exit data platforms across the UN. The difficulty of fully and accurately depicting the landscape of data management and sharing efforts across the UN system may be a product of the nature of the system itself: with largely siloed data collection and storage efforts scattered across UN agencies, programmes, and funds and very little systematic integration of conflict exit-related data across them, it is very difficult to identify all the relevant efforts. Despite MEAC's outreach and research, certain data management efforts – and possibly examples of data integration and sharing – have likely escaped scrutiny.

While the landscape of conflict exit-related data management across the UN remains incomprehensive, the process of compiling the relevant information and engaging with different parts of the UN system revealed several dynamics. The current disparate conflict exit-related data ecosystem at the UN is not well equipped to generate a robust, common evidence base from which to make informed and coherent policy and programming decisions. The default stance for most UN agencies, funds and programmes is to shy away from data integration, either because of perceived risks, lack of appreciation for the potential benefits, the challenges associated with integrating varied data, and the lack of funding, bandwidth, or expertise to facilitate sharing. The status quo of conflict exit-related data management in the UN is unlikely to redress the persistent knowledge gaps about what policies and programmes are effective and efficient at facilitating conflict transitions. To enhance data integration and advance a “One UN” approach to institutional learning, the following recommendations are worthy of consideration:

1. Addressing data ownership and sensitivity

As most organizations in the reintegration space collect and deal with sensitive data, addressing and mitigating concerns about data security, privacy and ownership is an essential precondition for advancing integration efforts. Effective measures need to be put in place that

safeguard data privacy throughout all stages, from data collection to storage, management, sharing and integration. This has even more urgency with regard to data about vulnerable subjects such as children. If an integrated data system is to be put in place, the questions about who owns the data and who can access and use it need to be carefully thought through. Deploying a credential system – one that assigns different levels of access to different stakeholders – can be a useful measure and has already proven effective in some of the systems discussed in this memo, such as Primero and CPAS. Setting carefully crafted standards around issues of ownership and sensitivity is key to any effort to integrate conflict exit-related data. Without addressing this adequately, political buy-in will be unlikely.

2. Building trust

In the same vein, and as an overarching condition, any integration effort needs to go hand-in-hand with building trust between all stakeholders involved. Having clear agreements, guidance and training in place that tackle issues around data protection and ownership, as addressed above, is certainly needed to incentivize and empower UN partners and their staff to share their data and facilitate cross-learning. Depending on the issue and area of focus, this trust-building may not be limited to UN parties, but will need to include national governments, demobilized armed groups themselves, and local implementing partners and community leaders. The availability of technical solutions for data integration alone is not sufficient when the political dynamics are not conducive to sharing information. The example of the DDR process in Colombia shows how a technically promising data management platform was compromised due to political objections raised by the FARC against collecting information about its former members in a database developed – and used – by the government before signing the peace agreement. One practical approach to building trust would be the use of small, discreet data integration projects involving a few UN partners that would likely face less initial resistance and require less bandwidth. Small-scale pilot tests could help further identify challenges and

highlight opportunities for data integration, establish multi-dimensional relationships across the UN, and incrementally build trust.

3. Incentivizing data sharing

To enhance data integration across the UN, the incentives to share data across programmes, organizations, and borders need to be enhanced.

Firstly, promoting the advantages of data sharing may help shift UN organizations' risk/reward calculus. For example, highlighting the results of merging formerly distinct datasets (e.g., the uncovering of a relationship between the frequency of terrorist attacks and fuel prices in Somalia, as discussed earlier) shows the potential for data integration to uncover to previously hidden patterns, which may point to important ways to prevent or respond to violence. It must be clear that UN agencies not only could benefit from having access to the data of other organizations but also the potential social good that may result from making their data available to others. In the private sector, some companies have recognized that other entities – whose interests and mandates do not overlap with theirs – could benefit from having access to their data. For example, Uber shared an anonymized copy of its ride data (including information on traffic jams) with municipalities and transportation authorities to help them improve infrastructure, circulation choices and their services. Similarly, the World Bank has signed agreements with major tech companies such as Google, Uber, or Facebook to have access to their anonymized data for development planning and programming. Data sharing can facilitate positive policy and programming changes within UN organizations and other social good beyond them. To effectively promote the advantages of data sharing, in order to shift the risk/reward calculus, it is necessary to speak to the specific needs of different types of data users. This requires a multi-prong communications effort tailored to tap into the incentives and operational realities of different actors in the system, recognizing what resonates with those in charge of donor reporting will vary differently from those of programme facilitators on the ground.

Secondly, praising those agencies who share and integrate data could be a useful technique to foster integration and to inform organizations about shortages in their data sharing capacities. This has already been employed in certain field settings where the names of those entities that shared their data for the reporting period were regularly published, to highlight those that are sharing and those that are not. The Humanitarian Data Exchange (HDX) platform

uses a similar technique, where the organizations that publish and share more get their names and contributions highlighted and show up earlier in searches, unlike those who share less or not at all. This technique puts organizations that share more in a better position when it comes to referencing and reusability of their data in research and publications, which results in better publicity and visibility. In addition, engaging leadership across the system is seen as key to creating the data-driven culture the Secretary-General envisions for the UN.²⁶ By laying out a vision for furthering data integration, setting the agenda, and modeling behavior, leaders can help shift an organization's approach to shaping and sharing data.

Thirdly, beyond encouragement, data sharing and integration could become increasingly mandated in the UN. Today, there are only a few UN agencies with explicit integration mandates and it is unlikely that many more will join their ranks in short order. That said, while the Secretary-General's data strategy does not specifically call for including data integration in the mandates of UN agencies, programmes and funds, its call to view data as a shared strategic asset and enhance the role it plays in every pillar and function of the UN could lead to further formalization of data integration efforts. Other parts of the UN system could also encourage or require further data integration. For example, the Security Council could continue to build on its recent emphasis on the importance of quality data collection, analysis, and sharing to enhance the efficacy of peacekeeping missions. In Security Council Resolution 2447, for instance, the Council requested the Secretary General "ensure data streams related to the effectiveness of peacekeeping operations, including peacekeeping performance data, to include police, justice and corrections institutions, are centralized to improve analytics and evaluation of mission operations."²⁷

4. Involving all working levels through a multi-dimensional plan

To enhance data sharing and integration in a way that will be most useful in and across the UN, it is important that efforts not be top-down processes led entirely at the headquarters level. Practitioners in the field, for instance, are not necessarily the "end users" of an organization's data collection and management system, but rather often drive the adaption of platforms to their own needs. Moreover, local implementing partners are key stakeholders in designing and using such systems. As such, their voices and perspectives need to be included in any data integration enterprise, requiring a multi-dimensional plan that addresses bureaucratic,

political, and technical challenges and opportunities at multiple levels. Another aspect to consider in this regard is that, again, the data management lifecycle in the conflict exit realm also involves other, non-UN, stakeholders such as national or state governments or even demobilized armed groups or traditional leaders and civil society. The constellation of actors – along with the implications for data collection, use, access, and ownership – varies depending on each context, which is why those actors (and their data literacy and related capacities) need to also be accounted for in any roadmap forward.

5. Standardization and quality control

To advance data sharing and integration across the UN, it is important to establish quality control measures across the system. As an integral first step to remedy potential discrepancies between different datasets, the MEAC project is working towards facilitating a convergence in the approach to assessment and the type and structure of data that UN actors working on conflict exits collect in the first place. However, even if there is growing alignment on data collection, measures will need to be put in place to not only properly format the data for integration but also to

scrub and review it to ensure quality. How this should be done and who should do it are key questions that need to be answered early in any campaign to enhance data integration for conflict exits at the UN. A steering group with each entity sharing information – guided by data management experts and working with researchers and analysts – could collaboratively determine these minimum standards and guidelines. Again, a small pilot integration project might serve as a good test case for highlighting and troubleshooting these issues.

6. Innovation

If a few small-scale data integration projects are initiated, they may serve as opportunities to explore related possibilities such as data extrapolation, artificial intelligence (AI) and remote sensing, as these hold promising potential for innovating the UN's work. Especially in contexts with ongoing conflicts or generally heightened insecurity, collecting quality data – let alone accessing these settings – can be challenging if not impossible. Using new technologies could address some of these challenges and help practitioners better support beneficiaries and their communities around the world.

VII. CONCLUSION

Ultimately, to make significant strides towards further integrating conflict exit-related data across the UN will require a multi-dimensional approach that addresses the bureaucratic, political, and technical challenges laid out in this memo. For example, it is not enough to provide institutional incentives to share data if they do not trickle down to influence the incentives of the individuals who would be responsible for facilitating data exchanges and integration. While there are some significant challenges that need to be overcome to further data sharing and integration in this space, there are also opportunities that can be seized. In some ways, UNU-CPR's MEAC project presents just such an opportunity. It is a multi-UN partner effort to manage the collection of original, sensitive data. If MEAC's data collection leads to improved responses on the ground in the contexts where it works, it may serve as a step towards incrementally advancing data sharing and integration in the conflict exit space. With the right funding, there are certainly a wealth of technological tools to assist the practical work of integrating and sharing data. Yet, technical solutions alone cannot address the current lack of integration across the

UN. Ultimately, the political and organizational will to collect, integrate and utilize data is crucial for any real change to occur.

The Secretary-General's data strategy addresses this very issue, recognizing that without widespread cultural and organizational change, it is unlikely that the UN will ever truly transform into the type of data-driven organization envisioned therein. One of the key practical recommendations the strategy promotes to effectuate such change is the use of "data use cases" to incrementally build trust, demonstrate value, and shift incentives. MEAC is just such a data use case. Its efforts to collect and analyse data to promote assessment and learning, integrate data across UN partners, and inform the design and implementation of tailored and more effective interventions to stop conflict cycles reflect the strategy's core goals. To ensure that data use cases like MEAC effectuate substantial and lasting change, however, there needs to be a means to ensure that their networks, structures and lessons learned are institutionalized so they continue to influence policy and practice moving forward.

VIII. REFERENCES

- ¹ Inter-Agency Standing Committee, *Inter-Agency Standing Committee Policy on Protection in Humanitarian Action* (Geneva: IASC, 2016).
- ² International Committee of the Red Cross, *ICRC Rules on Personal Data Protection* (Geneva: ICRC, 2016).
- ³ International Organization for Migration, *IOM Data Protection Manual* (Geneva: IOM, 2017).
- ⁴ Jos Berens, Ulrich Mans and Stefaan Verhulst, *Mapping and Comparing Responsible Data Approaches*, Social Science Research Network (New York: New York University Governance Lab and Leiden University Centre for Innovation, 2016).
- ⁵ United Nations, *Provisional Guidance Note on the Intersections Between the Monitoring, Analysis and Reporting Arrangements (MARA) and the Gender-Based Violence Information Management System (GBVIMS)* (New York: United Nations, 2015).
- ⁶ United Nations, *Data Strategy of the Secretary-General for Action by Everyone, Everywhere* (New York: United Nations, 2020).
- ⁷ United Nations Children's Fund, *Data for Children Strategic Framework* (New York: UNICEF, 2017).
- ⁸ United Nations Children's Fund, *Good Practice Principles on Information Handling and Management in Child Protection Information Management Systems* (New York: UNICEF, 2016).
- ⁹ United Nations Children's Fund, *Procedure for Ethical Standards in Research, Evaluation, Data Collection and Analysis* (New York: UNICEF, 2015), CF/PD/DRP/2015-001.
- ¹⁰ United Nations Development Group, *Data Privacy, Ethics and Protection: Guidance Note on Big Data for Achievement of the 2030 Agenda* (New York: United Nations, 2017).
- ¹¹ United Nations Development Programme, *Information Disclosure Policy* (Geneva: United Nations, 2019).
- ¹² United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, *Policy on the Protection of Personal Data of Persons of Concern to UNHCR* (Geneva: UNHCR, 2015).
- ¹³ United Nations Population Fund, *Information Disclosure Policy* (New York: UNPF, 2008).
- ¹⁴ Louis Joinet, *Guidelines for the Regulation of Computerized Personal Data Files: Final Report* (New York: UN Economic and Social Council's Subcommission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, 1988), E/CN.4/Sub.2/1988/22).
- ¹⁵ Unni Karunakara, "Data Sharing in a Humanitarian Organization: The Experience of Médecins Sans Frontières", *PLOS Medicine* 10, 12 (2013).

IX. ANNEXES

ANNEX I

EXAMPLES OF EXISTING UN DATA PLATFORMS IN THE CONFLICT EXITS SPACE²⁸

CPAS

Comprehensive Performance Assessment System (CPAS) is a new planning and performance assessment system that will enable peacekeeping missions to conduct integrated planning and assess the impact and performance of the peacekeeping missions as a whole through data collection and analysis. CPAS aims to improve the effective delivery of mission mandates by promoting more flexible, responsive planning; evidence-based decision making; and enhanced communications, transparency and accountability. CPAS has been implemented in eight pilot missions to date.

DREAM

Disarmament, Demobilization, Reintegration and Arms Management (DREAM) is a UNDP-developed software that is customized to specific DDR contexts to support the initial registration of combatants, transitional payments and benefits, the monitoring of the distribution of small arms and light weapons, reintegration through trainings, and work projects for each registered participant, and overall reporting.

ICRS

IOM uses the Information, Counselling and Referral Service (ICRS), an integrated registration system and database platform. ICRS facilitates case management by integrating services for clients receiving reintegration assistance, including registration, profiling, and counselling. ICRS also links with a referral service to connect individuals and communities to external support offered by other stakeholders or service providers (e.g., health services, education and training, legal support).

Primero

Primero is an open source, browser-based application that supports protection programmes by providing secure case management, family tracing, and incident monitoring capabilities. The Primero project began in 2013 after many years of inter-agency collaboration. Its goal is to bring more coherent, cost effective, and user-friendly information management tools to the Child Protection and Gender-Based Violence sectors. Primero allows users to document events and violations, in order to provide programmes with timely information on risk factors and violation patterns. Individual survivors of violence can then be linked up with the services they need.

SAGE

Situational Awareness Geospatial Enterprise (SAGE) is a web-based database system that allows UN military, police and civilians in UN peace operations (both peacekeeping operations and special political missions) to log security incidents, events and activities. The development of SAGE made it possible to leverage state-of-the-art methodological tools to enable predictive peacekeeping. SAGE is powered by the Ushahidi platform, an online platform originally developed to map reports of violent incidents in Kenya during the post-election violence in 2008.

ANNEX II

EXAMPLES OF REFERENCE POLICIES AND TOOLS

UNICEF - Good Practice Principles on Information Handling and Management in Child Protection Information Management Systems

A guidance document developed by UNICEF. The principles are grouped according to each aspect of the CPIMS design – planning, collection, storage and transmission and sharing. It draws on existing guidance in the child protection, information management and related fields as well as on interviews and discussions with key stakeholders, field staff and specialists to determine and address current priority issues on information handling and management in CPIMS (see UNICEF).

IOM – IOM Data Protection Manual

IOM's publication on protecting personal data in the context of migrant assistance lays out 13 key data protection principles and provides guidelines, as well as operational templates and checklists, for protecting personal data during collection, storage, disclosure, and disposal (see IOM).

UNDP – UNDP Information Disclosure Policy

UNDP's policy outlines how to balance the need for transparency with the protection of personal information. In addition, in particular country contexts, certain information collected by UNDP may remain sensitive and needs to be kept confidential. The document outlines how to weigh the potential harm of disclosure with the public interest and the review and appeal process for information requests (see UNDP).

United Nations Statistical Division - Data Interoperability: A Practitioner's Guide to Joining Up Data in the Development Sector

A structured framework around five areas that the collaborative has identified as integral to the development of more interoperable data systems at scale over time: interoperability, data management, and governance; canonical data and metadata models; classifications and vocabularies; standardized interfaces; and linked data. The guide aims for clarity and accessibility while simultaneously exploring technically complex issues (see UNSD).

UN High-Level Committee on Management - Personal Data Protection and Privacy Principles

A set of principles adopted by the UN High-Level Committee on Management (HLCM). It aims to: “(i) harmonize standards for the protection of personal data across the United Nations System Organizations; (ii) facilitate the accountable processing of personal data for the purposes of implementing the mandates of the United Nations System Organizations; and (iii) ensure respect for the human rights and fundamental freedoms of individuals, in particular the right to privacy.” These principles provide a framework for the processing of personal data by any UN Organization (see UN Archives).

UN Global Pulse - Integrating Big Data into the Monitoring and Evaluation of Development Programmes

This UN Global Pulse report lies the foundations – and provides guidelines – for evaluators, evaluation and programme managers, policy makers and funding agencies on how to take advantage of the rapidly emerging field of big data in the design and implementation of systems for monitoring and evaluating development programmes (see UN Global Pulse).

UNICEF - Data for Children (Strategic Framework)

The UNICEF framework focuses on data for and about children, the well-being and perspectives of children and their families, the environments in which they live, and the ways that services and systems reach – or fail to reach – them. The framework begins with UNICEF’s approach to data work, laying out the necessity of a “demand-driven data model that maintains an appropriate balance between demand for, supply and use of data” (see UNICEF).

UNHCR – Data Transformation Strategy (2019)

The strategy presents UNHCR’s vision of and principles for its data and information management, describing key priority actions to enhance UNHCR’s role as a data-driven organization, fostering the use of quality data while safeguarding data protection and security (see UNHCR).

Committee of the Chief Statisticians of the UN System – Principles Governing International Statistical Activities

A set of general principles setting forth good practices regarding the production and use of international statistics, including ways to ensure data quality and confidentiality as well as enhanced collaboration and knowledge sharing. (see UNSD).

Committee of Chief Statisticians of the UN System – System-wide Roadmap for Innovating UN Data and Statistics

A roadmap conceptualized as complementary to the Secretary-General’s overarching data strategy. While the Data Strategy focuses on the internal functioning of the UN at the entity and organizational level, the roadmap is more operational in its focus and aims at supporting not only the UN system itself, but also national statistical systems. Its overall goal is to innovate UN data and statistics with a view to “strengthen the position of the UN system as a primary provider of global data” to deliver coordinated support to Member States (see UNSD).

Principles for Digital Development

The Principles for Digital Development – created in consultation with various international organizations (including UNICEF, UNDP, the World Health Organization, and the World Bank),

foundations, and national development agencies – are nine guidelines unifying previously created principles (such as the UNICEF Innovation Principles of 2009, the Greentree Principles of 2010, and the UK Design Principles, among others). They are designed to “help integrate best practices into technology-enabled programs and are intended to be updated and refined over time”, providing guidance for all phases of development project life cycles (see Principles for Digital Development).

Médecins Sans Frontières – MSF Data Sharing Policy

A policy that applies to all health data generated in MSF programs or sites, where MSF acts as a custodian for such data. It includes but is not limited to data generated from: health information systems, patient records, surveillance activities, quality control activities, surveys, research, patients’ or research participants’ human biological material (see MSF).

International Committee of the Red Cross – ICRC Rules on Personal Data Protection

A reference document with rules to ensure that the ICRC can carry out its mandate under international humanitarian law (IHL) and the Statutes of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (Statutes of the Movement) while abiding by internationally recognized standards for protecting personal data. These rules apply solely to the processing of personal data (see ICRC).

United Nations Development Group - Data Privacy, Ethics and Protection: Guidance Note on Big Data for Achievement of the 2030 Agenda

A guidance note on big data relevant for the 2030 agenda. It has been approved through the United Nations Development Group (UNDG) and applies to all member entities of the UNDG and its working mechanisms. It caters to three purposes: establishing common principles across the UNDG, serving as a risk-management tool, and setting principles for obtaining, retention, use and quality control for data from the private sector (see UNDG).

ENDNOTES

- 1 To this end, MEAC produced an Agreed Conflict Exits Assessment Framework and accompanying survey tools to guide the collection of robust data on individual- and community-level conflict transitions and assess the impact of UN programmes meant to support exits from armed groups/forces. MEAC will roll out these tools in a multi-year, multi-country pilot test. In Nigeria, starting in 2020, UNU-CPR and its partners launched a two-year study on conflict exits to evaluate the impact of various programmes that are meant to help children, youth and adults to transition to civilian life after association with armed groups and armed forces (e.g., Boko Haram and CJTF). This type of longitudinal study will result in the collection (in regular intervals) of anonymized individual- and community-level data on recidivism and continued involvement in conflict- and criminal-related violence; social, economic, political, and psychological well-being; as well as metrics of security and stability. The project represents the first conflict exit-related cross-agency, cross-programme data collection and integration effort. In June 2020, UNU-CPR launched an 18-month MEAC case study in Colombia. This case study will apply the MEAC approach and indicators to examining outcomes for different cohorts of children and adults who went through various iterations of reintegration and reincorporation programming – or none at all, due to changes in eligibility criteria and approach.
- 2 From November 2018 – July 2019, Sida (Sweden) and Folke Bernadotte Academy (FBA) were core donor and institutional partners, respectively, in the first phase of the MEAC project and their contributions (financial and otherwise) were central to the creation of the Agreed Assessment Framework and survey template tools. The second pilot testing phase of the project began in August 2019 and will run through December 2022.
- 3 In Colombia, one of the two MEAC case study countries, the terms reincorporation and reintegration are used to describe two separate processes. The reincorporation process is a result of the 2016 peace agreement between the government of Colombia and the FARC-EP. Reincorporation is specific to the support provided to former FARC-EP combatants who are transitioning to civilian life. Reincorporation is separate from Colombia’s long-standing reintegration process, which supports the transition of individuals who voluntarily demobilise from armed groups active in the conflict. MEAC’s pilot in Colombia aims to collect data from both processes. In other countries, the terms used to describe assistance aimed at supporting conflict exits differ. In Nigeria, “reorientation” is increasingly understood by the public as services to support for former Boko Haram affiliates in their return to society. Other terms often used in this space include rehabilitation, resettlement, and for some, reconciliation. MEAC’s broad view of conflict exits – and programming meant to support them – would allow for the study and assessments of all of these types of interventions regardless of their labeling.
- 4 “Data integration involves combining data residing in different sources and providing users with a unified view of them.” United Nations, *Data Strategy of the Secretary-General for Action by Everyone, Everywhere* (New York: United Nations, 2020): 79. In general, there are three techniques used in data integration: spatial data integration, statistical data integration, and big data integration.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 Other priority areas of the strategy (some of which also overlap with MEAC) include: Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) progress, climate action, gender equality, human rights and the rule of law, governance and ethics for the future, UN reform, and data protection and privacy.
- 7 “Data management describes the practices, architectural techniques, and tools for achieving consistent access to and delivery of data across the spectrum of data subject areas and data structure types in an enterprise.” United Nations, *Data Strategy of the Secretary-General for Action by Everyone, Everywhere*: 79.
- 8 Data protection is a “framework for processing of “personal data,” defined as information relating to an identified or identifiable natural person by, or on behalf of, the United Nations System Organizations in carrying out their mandated activities.” United Nations, *Data Strategy of the Secretary-General for Action by Everyone, Everywhere*: 80.

- 9 A comprehensive overview of further peacekeeping data and information resources is accessible through the Peace Operations (PO) Intranet and is currently being updated.
- 10 Then known as the Colombian Reintegration Agency (ACR).
- 11 United Nations, *Data Strategy of the Secretary-General for Action by Everyone, Everywhere*.
- 12 UNU-CPR, MEAC Conflict Exit Data Management and Integration Workshop, 12 November 2019, New York.
- 13 For example, see Unni Karunakara, "Data Sharing in a Humanitarian Organization: The Experience of Médecins Sans Frontières," *PLOS Medicine* 10, 12 (2013); or UNICEF, *Good Practice Principles on Information Handling and Management in Child Protection Information Management Systems* (New York: UNICEF, 2016).
- 14 For example, the ELAN Data starter kit offers resources for training. The Cash Learning Partnership, "Introducing the ELAN Data Starter Kit," 14 June 2016.
- 15 There are measures that attempt to redress this problem, and which have some impact, but without proper coordination and data mechanisms in place, redundancies and resource waste remain a challenge.
- 16 While recognizing that there are significant differences in the character of "civilian" life across contexts, there are certain universal norms that the UN tries to promote in its conflict exit support that are largely captured here by the "conflict exit" index (e.g., commitment to pursue political change non-violently). As such, it is necessary to try to capture progress towards these core values and goals promoted by the international community.
- 17 The causal relationship between certain outcomes and conditions is often unclear. For example, is attaining meaningful employment an indication of a successful exit from armed conflict, or does it help facilitate it? Given the lack of longitudinal data on the subject, it is difficult to know at this stage.
- 18 "Rule of law" is used here broadly to capture a wide range of security conditions, clarity and confidence in the rules that govern society, and respect for equal protection under and access to these rules.
- 19 Primary data is original and unique data which is directly collected by the researcher from a source such as observations, surveys, questionnaires, case studies and interviews.
- 20 MEAC's data management approach is guided by comprehensive Data Protection Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs).
- 21 If the MEAC project comes to an end, but there is value in another partner continuing some of the data collection with the same respondents, there is the potential option to transfer the data. Numerous ethical and organizational requirements would need to be met before such a transfer could be considered. If the MEAC project has ended and data collection is discontinued, there is still enormous value in maintaining the scrubbed, de-identified survey data for continued analysis. Given the holistic, in-depth approach employed by MEAC, the wealth of data collected will provide a trove for researchers, Monitoring & Evaluation/assessment officers, and their practitioner partners for years to come. Under this scenario, several factors will determine the best long-term management options for the MEAC data, including costs; organizational support; expertise and bandwidth; data ownership and access; data security components (e.g., encryption, masking, erasure, and backup); and technical capacities for integration.
- 22 United Nations, *Data Strategy of the Secretary-General for Action by Everyone, Everywhere*.
- 23 United Nations, *Data Strategy of the Secretary-General for Action by Everyone, Everywhere*.
- 24 Ibid.
- 25 Ibid.
- 26 Ibid: 28.
- 27 United Nations Security Council, "Resolution 2447, adopted by the Security Council at its 8420th meeting," United Nations, 13 December 2018, S/RES/2447.
- 28 This list is not exhaustive. There are some field-driven data driven platforms that are context specific and not represented here. For example, DDR components in the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic and the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali developed their own data platforms.

**MANAGING EXITS
FROM ARMED CONFLICT**



UNITED NATIONS
UNIVERSITY
Centre for Policy Research

cpr.unu.edu
@UNUCPR

767 Third Avenue, 35th Floor
New York, NY
10017