

UNHCR-WFP Joint Hub Country Exchange

Planning and Implementing Joint Needs Assessments: Lessons from Egypt, Zimbabwe, South Sudan

October 2025



Photo Credit: © WFP/Cynthia R. Matonhodze

BACKGROUND

As humanitarian resources shrink and refugee numbers continue to rise, we need to ensure that assistance reaches the most vulnerable, based on a robust assessment of needs and capacities. In this learning exchange, WFP and UNHCR colleagues from Egypt, Zimbabwe and South Sudan discussed their experiences of planning and implementing joint needs assessments and shared their successes, challenges and lessons learned. The Joint Hub facilitated the session and produced this summary of discussions.

EGYPT

CONTEXT

Egypt has experienced a dramatic shift in its refugee landscape, particularly following the Sudan crisis. The number of registered refugees has tripled since March 2023, reaching over 1.4 million, with Sudanese nationals comprising 75 percent of the population. Economic instability—including inflation and currency depreciation—has further exacerbated vulnerabilities for both refugees and host communities. According to the joint assessment conducted by WFP and UNHCR, with support from the Joint Hub, 65 percent of refugee households are highly or extremely vulnerable, and 58 percent are food insecure. More than half of refugees live below the Survival Minimum Expenditure Basket (SMEB).

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS AND ENABLING FACTORS

In 2024-2025, a comprehensive vulnerability assessment was conducted and a joint targeting model for assistance was developed. A new assessment and targeting approach were urgently needed, as the previous targeting approach was based on the 2016-18 assessment. This milestone was achieved through strong collaboration between WFP, UNHCR, and Egypt's Central Bureau of Statistics (CAPMAS), which facilitated field access and enhanced credibility. The Joint Hub provided technical support, ensuring analytical rigor and evidence-based decision-making.

CHALLENGES

The team faced delays in finalizing data-sharing agreements and legal protocols, which slowed the start of data collection. The absence of a dedicated joint coordinator added to the complexity, and frequent changes in refugee phone numbers complicated sampling. Despite these hurdles, the teams maintained momentum through regular internal coordination and a collaborative mindset.

LESSONS LEARNED

Egypt's experience highlighted the importance of clear communication between teams, and with refugees, realistic planning, and integrating qualitative insights into statistical models. Communication with communities, and all community consultations, were conducted jointly by WFP and UNHCR staff, thereby ensuring a harmonized approach, and that no vulnerable groups were overlooked. The team also emphasized the importance of selecting targeting criteria that are both accurate and cost-efficient, avoiding overly complex indicators that are difficult to update in dynamic urban contexts.

For further information, see: [Egypt - WFP-UNHCR Joint Hub](#)

ZIMBABWE

CONTEXT

The joint assessment done in 2023/2024 in Zimbabwe focused on the Tongogara Refugee Settlement, which hosts 23,000 refugees and asylum seekers – representing over 70 percent of the country's refugee population. The context was shaped by economic pressures, reduced funding, and new arrivals from DRC and Mozambique. The assessment was conducted collaboratively by WFP and UNHCR, with support from government agencies, NGOs, and the Joint Hub. A mixed-methods approach was adopted, combining household surveys, focus group discussions, and key informant interviews.

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS AND ENABLING FACTORS

Zimbabwe's success stemmed from inclusive team dynamics, strategic alignment with government structures, and the use of standardized protocols and monitoring systems. The Joint Hub provided technical guidance and ensured consistency in data collection and analysis. The involvement of multiple stakeholders—including government departments and NGO partners—strengthened the assessment's credibility and operational feasibility.

CHALLENGES

Several challenges emerged during implementation. Discrepancies in population data affected sampling accuracy, while conflicting partner schedules led to delays. Socioeconomic diversity within the camp required multi-stage sampling so that the results were generalizable. The sampling also required adaptive tools and real time feedback to ensure that data was of good quality and that the sampling approach was appropriate. Triangulating data sources, using flexible workflows and stratified analysis helped to address these issues.

LESSONS LEARNED

The Zimbabwe teams emphasized the need for early community engagement to build trust and ensure the assessment was adapted to the local context. Capacity mapping helped assign roles effectively, and contingency planning allowed the teams to adapt to field realities. The use of interpreters from the local community during data collection improved the quality and accuracy of responses, particularly in linguistically diverse settings.

For further information, see: [Zimbabwe - WFP-UNHCR Joint Hub](#)

SOUTH SUDAN

CONTEXT

South Sudan hosts over 600,000 refugees, the majority of whom are from Sudan. The country faces high levels of food insecurity, and refugees often settle in structurally vulnerable areas. Building on a 2021 recommendation, the country team shifted from status-based to needs-based targeting. The WFP-UNHCR joint assessment was based on an expanded version of WFP's Post-Distribution Monitoring (PDM) survey to include protection as well as food security indicators, while qualitative data was collected through focus group discussions and key informant interviews. The assessment was done before the Sudan crisis.

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS AND ENABLING FACTORS

The assessment benefited from strong collaboration between WFP, UNHCR, the government, and the Joint Hub. The use of livelihood zones to cluster refugee camps helped tailor the analysis and programming to the local context. Triangulation of quantitative and qualitative data strengthened the analysis and ensured that findings were both representative and contextually grounded.

CHALLENGES

Challenges included limited sample sizes in some camps and differences in livelihood contexts that required separate analysis. The long duration required to develop the targeting approach also strained staff's availability for regular coordination meetings. These issues were mitigated by adjusting sampling strategies and maintaining flexible timelines.

LESSONS LEARNED

South Sudan's experience underscored the importance of involving all stakeholders—including host communities—from the outset. Synchronizing data collection methods and establishing clear governance structures were essential to bridging technical and managerial priorities. The team also stressed the need to contextualize data and avoid overreliance on quantitative data alone.

For further information, see: [South Sudan - WFP-UNHCR Joint Hub](#)

CROSS-CUTTING THEMES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Across all three countries, several common themes emerged:

- Joint planning and WFP-UNHCR coordination are essential to successful assessments.
- Mixed method approaches—combining quantitative and qualitative data—enhance depth, accuracy, and relevance.
- Community engagement improves trust, participation, and the quality of findings.
- Triangulation of data sources ensures robust analysis and inclusive targeting.
- Working with national counterparts and government agencies strengthens sustainability and national ownership.
- Clear governance structures (within WFP and UNHCR) and communication protocols streamline implementation and reduce delays

CONTACTS

Thank you to the following colleagues who presented during this session:

Egypt: Rasha Batarseh, UNHCR Programme CBI Officer <batarseh@unhcr.org>, Omneya Mansour, WFP Head of Vulnerability, Assessment and Mapping (VAM) omneya.mansour@wfp.org

Zimbabwe: Chenjerai Tom, WFP Vulnerability, Assessment and Mapping Officer, chenjerai.tom@wfp.org

South Sudan: John Vuga, WFP Vulnerability, Assessment and Mapping Officer, john.vuga@wfp.org

