

# 38.

## Importance of data-driven responses along the Central and Western Mediterranean Routes

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DATA

**Abstract:** *The field of mixed migration demands evidence-based programming. However, given the hidden, cross-border and mobile nature of mixed migration, gathering accurate data in this field is particularly challenging. This chapter builds on the experiences and lessons learned by the IOM's Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) and the Mixed Migration Centre's (MMC) Mixed Migration Monitoring Mechanism initiative (4Mi) during their data collection and analysis exercises carried out in the context of monitoring mixed migration across the Central and Western Mediterranean Routes. It elaborates on the ways in which the collected data have been used to inform internal programming of the organizations and, to the extent possible, of external actors. The chapter will also discuss how uses of the data can be improved by suggesting practical measures at different stages of the data management, information-sharing and coordination.*

### 3.8.1. Introduction

Evidence-based programming is a key component of efforts by the humanitarian community to improve the safety, protection and livelihoods of people who are traveling along precarious routes to and through Libya and across the Mediterranean: donors, governments and practitioners all emphasize the role of data and research as a basis for informed decision-making. To date, many of the tools developed to assess vulnerability and ensure appropriate assistance provision are based on camp or shelter settings, in which the population is better known and relatively more static and where access is more straightforward compared to irregular, mixed migration settings. In such contexts, household economic assessments, for instance, can be used to comprehensively assess material vulnerability of a given population.

The field of mixed migration<sup>3</sup> is no exception to the demand for evidenced-based programming. However – given the hidden, cross-border and mobile nature of mixed migration – gathering accurate data in this field proves particularly challenging. Mixed

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<sup>2</sup> IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix.

<sup>3</sup> The Mixed Migration Centre (MMC) and IOM broadly define mixed migration as cross-border movements of people, including refugees, fleeing persecution and conflict; victims of trafficking; and people seeking better lives and opportunities. Motivated to move by a multiplicity of factors, people in mixed flows have different legal statuses, as well as a variety of vulnerabilities. Although entitled to protection under international human rights law, they are exposed to multiple rights violations along their journeys. Those in mixed migration flows travel along similar routes, using similar means of travel – often travelling irregularly and wholly or partially assisted by migrant smugglers. More details about the MMC and IOM definitions can be found, at, respectively: [www.mixedmigration.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/terminology\\_MMC-en-fr.pdf](http://www.mixedmigration.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/terminology_MMC-en-fr.pdf) and [https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/iml\\_34\\_glossary.pdf](https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/iml_34_glossary.pdf) (p.141).

migration responses require the adaptation of previously existing models and approaches to the realities of complex, diverse and highly mobile target populations and contexts. They also require actors to reflect on the type of data needed, the volume of data, and when this volume of data becomes a limitation to decision-making and programming.

This chapter will build on the experiences and lessons learned by the IOM's Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM)<sup>4</sup> and the Mixed Migration Centre's (MMC's)<sup>5</sup> Mixed Migration Monitoring Mechanism initiative (4Mi) during their data collection and analysis exercises, carried out in the context of monitoring mixed migration across the CMR and the WMR. It will elaborate on the ways in which the collected data have been used to inform internal programming of the organizations and, to the extent possible, of external actors. The chapter will also discuss how the utility of the collected data can be improved, by suggesting practical measures at different stages of data management, information-sharing and coordination.

## 38.2. Displacement Tracking Matrix

In 2015, IOM's DTM established a Flow Monitoring Survey (FMS) to gather and disseminate information about the migrant populations moving through the Mediterranean into Europe. This includes monthly flow compilation reports, quarterly regional overviews and data sets on migration flows in countries of first arrival and other countries along the route in Europe. All data are collated by IOM in coordination with ministries of interior, coast guards, police forces and other relevant national authorities. The DTM system also includes migrants' surveys to capture additional and more in-depth data on the people on the move, including age, sex, areas of origin, levels of education, key transit points on their routes, motives and intentions.<sup>6</sup> Data has been collected at close to 1,200 flow monitoring points and slightly over 36,600 surveys have been conducted in Europe since 2015.

Similar data systems were further set up in West and Central Africa, North Africa, and East and Horn of Africa to capture data on migration flows, routes and profiles. The Flow Monitoring Counting Tool allows IOM to collect information on trends and volumes (5 million individual flows observed in West and Central Africa in 2017–2019 in 35 locations), the Survey Tool collects information on migrants' socioeconomic profile (over 190,000 collected en route in West, Central and Northern Africa) and the Migrants' Presence tool collects information on migrants' stocks in a city or a country (for example, Libya and Mauritania).

## 38.3. Mixed Migration Monitoring Mechanism initiative

Since 2014, MMC's 4Mi has been developing a unique network of field monitors situated along frequently used routes and in major migratory hubs around the world: East Africa and Yemen, West Africa, North Africa, Europe, Asia and Latin America.<sup>7</sup> MMC's 4Mi aims to offer a regular, standardized, quantitative and global system of collecting primary data on mixed migration. The male and female monitors of 4Mi conduct in-depth, structured interviews on a continuous basis. Where possible, they also interview smugglers and others involved in the facilitation of mixed migration. Monitors are trained and closely supervised, and use a smartphone-based application to record and transmit completed interviews to regional 4Mi hubs for storage and analysis.

<sup>4</sup> The Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) is a system to track and monitor displacement and population mobility. It is designed to regularly and systematically capture, process and disseminate information to provide a better understanding of the movements and evolving needs of displaced populations, whether on site or en route. DTM has been active since 2004 and has since then been implemented in 72 countries in the world. [DTM Info Sheet](#).

<sup>5</sup> MMC is part of and governed by the Danish Refugee Council (DRC), a leading humanitarian organization responding to displacement and mixed migration in 40 countries. While its institutional link to DRC ensures MMC's work is grounded in operational reality, it acts as an independent source of data, research, analysis and policy development on mixed migration for policymakers, practitioners, journalists and the broader humanitarian sector. The position of MMC does not necessarily reflect the position of DRC.

<sup>6</sup> Data and reports on migration flows captured by DTM data are uploaded to DTM's flow monitoring portal (<https://migration.iom.int/>). Reports on country, regional and cross-regional mobility trends may also be found on DTM's displacement portal (<https://displacement.iom.int/>).

<sup>7</sup> For more information about 4Mi, visit <http://www.mixedmigration.org/4mi/>.

As of early 2020, 4Mi collects approximately 1,000–1,200 interviews each month, and has conducted more than 35,000 interviews since the start of the project. The initiative predominantly uses a closed question survey to invite respondents to anonymously self-report on a wide range of issues related to their individual profiles, migration drivers, means of movement, conditions of movement, access to information, the smuggler economy, aspirations and destination choices, and assistance needs and gaps. To understand mixed migration along the CMR and WMR, MMC hubs based in West Africa, East Africa, North Africa and Europe adopt a routes-based approach and, where relevant, can combine and analyse the data collected through their respective 4Mi projects.

## 38.4. Using 4Mi and DTM migration data to inform the response across the Mediterranean route

In review of broader humanitarian frameworks spanning a multitude of humanitarian actors, IOM's DTM and MMC's 4Mi recognize five key areas in which data can influence programming: (a) needs assessment and analysis, (b) strategic response design, (c) resource mobilization, (d) implementation and monitoring, and (e) operational peer review and evaluation (MMC, 2020a). With the exception of "resource mobilization", this framework is used to illustrate how IOM's DTM and MMC's 4Mi impact the programming of organizations operating along the CMR and WMR. While DTM and 4Mi evidence and analysis are being used in initial needs assessments and analysis, strategic planning and resource mobilization stages of the programme cycle, the links between IOM DTM and MMC 4Mi data and programming in the latter stages of humanitarian programming still require strengthening. The following sections examine some key ways in which DTM and 4Mi have informed programming in these five areas.

### 38.4.1. Needs assessments and analysis

Since 2019, the Danish Research Council (DRC) has implemented a protection programme in Mali entitled "Protecting people on the move from Bamako to Gao", under the DFID-funded "Mediterranean Mixed Migration Response Programme" consortia, to provide protection assistance to migrants and reduce protection threats and human rights violations along the migration route, among other objectives. During the design phase of the programme, an assessment was carried out building on 4Mi data, including on profiles and protection incidents reported by people on the move. Additional route-based and qualitative data collected by MMC were also shared to inform a proposal to undertake a rapid protection evaluation on the Sévaré–Timbutku axis to adapt activities along this route following a deterioration of security conditions along the Sévaré and Gao route.

In the context of Libya, in 2018, DRC engaged 4Mi monitors to assist in a multisectoral needs assessment (MSNA) when the volatility and insecurity in Libya prevented DRC's access to migrant communities within Libya. Similarly, DTM flow monitoring activities in Libya have been providing a common operating picture for IOM and its partners concerning migratory routes and flows to and within Libya. In Libya, DTM has been conducting MSNAs through individual interviews (FMSs) and key informant interviews (Mobility Tracking) to identify and measure critical needs and potential programmatic responses. These assessments are conducted both as part of DTM's regular rounds (IOM, 2019a) and on an ad hoc basis, as part of DTM's event tracking to identify critical needs of conflict-affected migrants (such as during escalation of hostilities in Tripoli in 2019 (IOM, 2019b)). Findings are used both by IOM's programmes and partners, such as the Rapid Response Mechanism, implemented jointly by IOM, the World Food Programme (WFP), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Population Fund. DTM Libya's detention centre monitoring and related monthly information products (IOM, 2019c) have been providing monthly updates to humanitarian actors concerning the conditions in Libya's detention centres, and availability (or lack) of essential services such as protection services and migrant health assistance. Apart from multisectoral assessments, DTM Libya has also been conducting sector-specific in-depth migrant assessments, such as migrant food security assessments carried out jointly with WFP (IOM/WFP, 2019) and cross-border migrant health surveillance, implemented in close collaboration with IOM's Migrant Health Department, the World Health Organization (WHO) and national authorities.

### 38.4.2. Strategic response design

In terms of strategic response design, DTM and 4Mi data have shaped decisions on where and how programmes can intervene, at both the country and regional levels. The type of data needed to shape decisions and responses varies according to specific contexts, risks and needs surrounding the affected population and country or region. Data needed often consist of, but are not limited to, protection risks, number of affected households, units and individuals, as well as sex- and age-disaggregated data, to better inform a targeted response. The kind of response implemented will in turn vary according to the results of data collection and analysis.<sup>8</sup>

For example, 4Mi data collected in Libya, on the vulnerabilities of East African refugees and migrants who had passed through the Sudan, fed back to protection programmes in the Sudan, to better understand the trajectories of beneficiaries and explore the implications for the locations of DRC programming. Moreover, in Libya, intervening in a complex and challenging context – such as detention centres, where repeated human rights abuses occur – poses multiple ethical and programmatic dilemmas, and hence risks, for humanitarian organizations. In 2018, DRC carried out a review, in part drawing upon data from humanitarian needs questions integrated into DTM Libya's FMSs and from 4Mi, and concluded that only interventions that directly responded to the humanitarian imperative should be conducted, so as to offset these risks. Following its review, DRC stopped distributing material assistance such as non-food items, and halted its protection activities in detention centres, with the exception of providing detained refugees and migrants with the ability to make phone calls. Given the concern of exposing beneficiaries to harm, MMC aided DRC Libya in conducting interviews in southern Tunisia with migrants and refugees who had been detained in Libya. More broadly, in contributing to the annual Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO) and Humanitarian Response (HRP) Plan, DTM's Mobility Tracking has been critical to providing migrant stock data (IOM, 2019a) to identify priority locations with a high migrant presence, as well as informing sectoral People-in-Need (PiN) estimations through providing information on protection, shelter, health, education and food security needs and vulnerabilities through Multi-Sectoral Location Assessment (MSLA) and Flow Monitoring survey data.

Using IOM DTM data and MMC 4Mi data to understand changes in migration routes has also contributed to needs assessments and analysis for programming. DTM's flow counting tool in West and Central Africa draws a large picture of migratory routes and their evolution over time. Observation in Mali and the Niger at the borders with Algeria and Libya supported IOM and partners' understanding of route shifts following the implementation of various policies, and assisted field teams to adapt their assistance, particularly with returns from Algeria and Libya to the north of Mali and the Niger in 2018 and 2019.

Additionally, in Italy, DTM FMSs were collected from 2016 to 2018, with migrants arriving by sea and by land in the country. Collected data have been used by IOM Italy's counter-trafficking units deployed at disembarkation points in the southern regions to have more comprehensive profiles of those arriving by sea and of their reported experiences along their journeys, which might indicate vulnerability to human trafficking and exploitation upon arrival. The same data were analysed for the subsample of those entering by land from Slovenia and used to design an extended presence of protection units in the northern region of Friuli Venezia Giulia, and for the subsample of migrants from the Gambia, Guinea and Guinea-Bissau, and analysed by DTM staff to provide the baseline information on the profiles of newly arrived migrants for a study of diasporas from the Gambia, Guinea and Guinea-Bissau in Italy. The research was funded by the Italian Agency for Cooperation and Development within the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and coordinated by IOM Gambia with field support from IOM Italy. Through the collection and processing of primary and secondary data, the report outlines the current presence and historical evolution of the migration patterns of these three nationalities in Italy. It describes the educational background, employment status and other socioeconomic and demographic characteristics of diaspora members, as well as the flow of remittances. Moreover, the report examines the associative networks of each diaspora in Italy, and provides recommendations to foster the inclusion of diaspora members and organizations from the Gambia, Guinea and Guinea-Bissau in Italy.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> It is important to note that, before being analysed, all data collected by DTM and MMC 4Mi are first evaluated for quality.

<sup>9</sup> The report is available in English and French. Available at <https://publications.iom.int/books/diaspora-mapping-profile-gambia-guinea-and-guinea-bissau-diasporas-italy>.

### 38.4.3. Programming, implementation and monitoring

Currently, MMC is actively working to strengthen the links between data and programming specifically surrounding implementation and monitoring. When 4Mi monitors interview refugees and migrants, they spend significant time with them and receive information on different protection incidents they experienced or witnessed. The people interviewed are often in vulnerable situations; however, monitors are not in a position or trained to provide any assistance to them. The people they interview are often not reached by humanitarian agencies and have limited awareness of the services available to them. In Agadez, the Niger, MMC has worked together with International Rescue Committee (IRC) Niger to pilot an “orientation” system for 4Mi monitors to direct interviewed refugees and migrants towards the services of IRC. At the end of every interview, and regardless of whether the interview has been completed, 4Mi monitors ask respondents if they would like to receive a card with information on IRC, which provides services to persons who are vulnerable to and/or have experienced violations of their rights. MMC has produced a lessons-learned document from this pilot and orientation systems are currently being implemented by 4Mi in Libya and Tunisia. Moreover, in Tunisia, a new module added to the 4Mi core survey, developed in coordination with DRC protection staff, identified key areas of concern for refugees and migrants around their understanding of their migration status and access to legal assistance. These data were used to inform DRC’s Protection Help Desk programming in Medenine.

Further along the CMR in Libya, DTM integrated several humanitarian needs modules into its FMSs in 2019. The modular survey design allows for location-specific roll-out of combinations of the various modules related to food security, health, protection, non-food items, shelter and return intentions, depending on information needs and response capacity. For instance, the food security module is utilized to identify potential beneficiaries for IOM–WFP migrant food assistance, in line with vulnerability criteria previously identified in the migrant food security assessment jointly conducted by IOM and WFP in 2019 (IOM and WFP, 2019).

In Italy, DTM flow monitoring data and surveys collected in 2018 were used for an analysis on children and young adults (14–17 and 18–24 years old) from Côte d’Ivoire, at the request of the Italian Ministry of Labour and Social Policies (MLSP) in the framework of the cooperation between IOM and MLSP in unaccompanied and separated children (UASC) protection and family tracing activities. The analysis carried out by DTM staff supported the overall understanding of the national administration of this population, in correspondence with an increase in arrivals by sea of migrants from Côte d’Ivoire since mid-2018, and an increase in the relative presence of children from Côte d’Ivoire among UASC in the Italian reception system. The analysis was included in the mid-year monitoring report of the MLSP on UASC in reception, published with data as of June 2019.<sup>10</sup>

An added value of activities and operations implemented by DTM and MMC is the capacity to monitor and report against evolving trends at the country level, and increasingly at regional and cross-regional levels as well. At the heart of this monitoring is the objective of sharing not only humanitarian data, but better knowledge of complex and ever-transforming migration dynamics with key stakeholders, responders and policymakers.

## 38.5. Primary barriers to using evidence for programming

A few barriers have been identified in using DTM and 4Mi evidence for programming. The first is compatibility of research and programming timelines: as for every response, migration data products from DTM and 4Mi are not always relevant to programmatic needs, and tend rather to respond to a broader research purpose (or vice versa). Research timelines are often slower than response timelines, and data from DTM and 4Mi are less sensitive to changes over time due to the nature of sampling. Analysis may broadly support strategic design and initial operational roll-out, but is less relevant for ongoing programme interventions or for anticipating changes to the mixed migration

<sup>10</sup> The report is available (in Italian) at [www.lavoro.gov.it/documenti-e-norme/studi-e-statistiche/Documents/Report%20di%20monitoraggio%20I%20semestre%202019%20-%20I%20Minori%20Stranieri%20Non%20Accompagnati%20MSNA%20in%20Italia/Report-di-monitoraggio-MSNA-I-semestre-2019-30062019.pdf](http://www.lavoro.gov.it/documenti-e-norme/studi-e-statistiche/Documents/Report%20di%20monitoraggio%20I%20semestre%202019%20-%20I%20Minori%20Stranieri%20Non%20Accompagnati%20MSNA%20in%20Italia/Report-di-monitoraggio-MSNA-I-semestre-2019-30062019.pdf).

context.<sup>11</sup> Programmes often need to respond to faster and shorter funding and response cycles than do research projects. This limitation is rooted in the different timelines of rapid data collection for programmatic purposes versus data collection for research purposes; the first requires flexibility, the second stability. Relatedly, research findings are not always taking the additional step forward to analyse their implications for programming.

Representativeness, along with compatibility, poses a barrier for evidenced-based programming. Given the difficulty in accurately capturing mixed migration (such as border porosity, irregular nature of some of these movements and language barrier), DTM and 4Mi data are rarely representative of entire populations on the move. While they provide context-specific data that support programming in specific locations, these are not easily generalizable to support programmes in different areas or along different routes (lack of external validity).

Additionally, information management and coordination can constitute barriers in using DTM and 4Mi data to inform programming. In-depth reports require extended time to review, digest and strategize around for programme staff. In this regard, both IOM and MMC produce shorter snapshots of data and research and respond to direct requests for information from programming partners, and these modes of information dissemination could be further exploited.

At times, research cycles (from the development of terms of reference for research to data collection, analysis and dissemination) and programme response (from assessment, to operational decision making and implementation of the response) are not aligned. More effective and deliberate efforts need to be made to strengthen interactions in all phases of both processes. Research terms of reference need to be developed jointly with programme staff to help clarify from the beginning expectations and identify possible implications that a given study research can have for programming. Whenever possible, preliminary findings should be presented and discussed with programme staff, through operational workshops for instance, to start contributing to decision-making processes for operational responses as early as possible. Lastly, the analysis of humanitarian and protection consequences of research needs to be elaborated jointly with programme staff, so as to gather direct input and include them in the analysis and elaboration of recommendations. This will make recommendations as specific and tailored as possible and will facilitate ownership and early implementation by programme staff.

## 38.6. Ways forward/good practices

The following are some initial good practices to improve the effective use of data to inform programming for people on the move:

- (a) Create humanitarian research funding timelines alongside the programmatic ones, and raise awareness of donors and partners on the implications: Humanitarian programmatic funding generally runs on short-term cycles, whereas research timelines normally require longer timelines. Evidence from an Itad study on Department for International Development (United Kingdom) programming suggests that aligning data collection and humanitarian funding timelines links research and operations, which is mutually beneficial (Itad, 2018). Understanding the key moments where research can impact programming, at different stages of the research and programming cycles, and building in opportunities for coordination within project timelines and workplans, would ensure that data are being integrated on a regular basis and not at the end of projects.
- (b) Strengthen data needs analysis prior to data collection activities to have a clear understanding of what is expected: In doing so, engage practitioners and donors to capture their perspectives and expected data needs. This should also support a discussion on the research and programmatic purposes of the data collection, and will bring clarity on the expected flexibility of the activity.

<sup>11</sup> Given that 4Mi data are less sensitive to changes over time, MMC publishes Quarterly Mixed Migration Updates (QMMUs), based on secondary sources and other forms of primary data, which highlight the latest developments on mixed migration along the CMR, including policy shifts and border crossings, among others. The aim of the QMMU is, in part, to detect potential trends and signs of shifting mixed migration drivers and patterns. As of April 2020, MMC is testing out a new model for connecting with programming, by organizing a round table with programming staff to discuss the latest findings of the QMMU, and learn whether they align with or diverge from what frontline staff are seeing on the ground (MMC, 2020b).

- (c) Build in opportunities for programme adaptation based on new data and research: Use data at specific intervals of programming to assess “What change has occurred and why?” and “What does this mean for the programme?” (Derbyshire and Elbereth, 2016). Assuming that research and programming timelines are aligned, organizations and donors must allow for programme adaptations, which will likely have implications for programme length, cost and deliverables. Engaging in effective and ongoing communication of new evidence and innovation between research and programmes, within project consortia, but also outside, will ultimately provide data on the changing conditions key for providing improved services to beneficiaries.
- (d) Collect appropriate data to evaluate the humanitarian impact of programmes: Look beyond research objectives to better understand the data necessary to evaluate both the intended and unintended consequences of programming, and to build a counterfactual to programming outcomes.
- (e) Where possible, use data collection architectures for orientation and/or as another outreach mechanism for communities that may lack information about and access to assistance and services: Data collection can serve the dual purposes of both informing programmes and informing potential beneficiaries. Given the extensive time and resources used in data collection, this should also be harnessed as a potential point of contact where information can be shared.
- (f) Assume a routes-based approach when using data to inform programming at various stages along the migration journey: Improve mechanisms to feed data and research to programmes and policy earlier on, as well as further along the route. This also requires increased coordination and partnership between data collecting agencies and implementing partners, not just within country programming, but also across multiple countries. To most effectively work on route-based approaches, organizations must first work on horizontal inclusion within agencies to tackle coordination within the organization across countries, before looking to vertical inclusion, where coordination and partnership between organizations along a migration route can be adopted.

### Impact of COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has undoubtedly impacted mixed migration along the CMR and previously existing methods of data collection and analysis of mixed migration patterns and trends. To better inform migration programming along the route following the outbreak, mixed migration researchers adapted their data collection instruments and procedures to capture the new and evolving phenomena. Specifically, remote data collection methods and data protection safeguards were developed and introduced, which in turn impacted traditional ways of working with humanitarian actors. IOM DTM<sup>a</sup> has closely monitored the changing mobility trends, status, and restrictions on Points of Entry and adjusted country level data collection activities (flow monitoring) to examine the impacts of COVID-19 on mixed migration and to further explore the socioeconomic impacts of COVID on migrants' profiles and needs. MMC<sup>b</sup> has provided global, regional and country-level updates on the micro-level experiences of those moving along mixed migration routes to better understand how refugees and migrants perceive the pandemic, what steps they are taking to protect themselves, and how the pandemic is impacting upon their livelihoods, mixed migration drivers, and mobility patterns.

<sup>a</sup> For more details, see IOM DTM's [Mobility Impacts of COVID-19 webpage](#).

<sup>b</sup> For more details, see MMC (2020c) and visit MMC's [4MI FAQ webpage](#).



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