Unlocking efficiency: The power of strong asylum case management systems
Outcome Report
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Online Format

Introduction

The second technical meeting of the Asylum Capacity Support Group (ACSG) Dialogue Platform was held on 26 June 2024 on the topic "Unlocking efficiency: The power of strong asylum case management systems". The session was co-moderated by the National Committee for Refugees Department of Immigration, within the Ministry of Justice and Public Security, Brazil and the ACSG Secretariat.[1] The meeting brought together 119 participants representing States (national asylum authorities and Geneva-based Permanent Missions), regional entities, civil-society organizations, academics and UNHCR.

The discussion highlighted the benefits of well-designed case management systems in enhancing the efficiency of asylum processing. During the discussion, States and UNHCR highlighted successful case management practices, focusing on essential features of robust systems, as well as associated challenges, lessons, and strategies for improving case management systems. Presentations were delivered by representatives of the Mexican Commission for Refugee Assistance, the Swedish Migration Agency, the Colombian Refugee Status Determination Working Group of the Vice Ministry of Multilateral Affairs, and UNHCR. The Brazilian co-moderator further highlighted the experiences in Brazil during the opening remarks. The following were some of the key takeaways and recommendations from the discussion:

Background: Importance of strong asylum case management systems

- In the face of continued high number of asylum applications and the complexities posed by mixed movements of refugees and migrants, strong asylum systems to process applications for international protection fairly and efficiently are more crucial than ever.
- Although there is no quick solution, differentiation of case processing approaches can ensure that asylum institutions are able to reduce the amount of time spent determining applications while maintaining quality and integrity. Implementation of differentiation requires the identification of different claim types and profiles which, combined with country of origin information analysis, form the basis for simplification of the status determination procedures.
- Effective registration procedures and case management systems are crucial for implementing differentiation of case processing approaches. Outdated case management systems present significant challenges to efficiency.
- Some States have enhanced their asylum case management systems by strengthening data collection, seamlessly integrating the asylum data with other government databases, and efficiently triaging asylum applications for different procedures to ensure fair and efficient processing as well as managing backlogs of pending applications.
- Enhancements of case management systems has necessitated moving away from paper-based systems. Although some asylum systems still rely on paper applications, the absence of digitized

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[1] The ACSG activities are coordinated by the ACSG Secretariat, established in UNHCR's Division of International Protection. For information on the coordination role of the Secretariat, see the ACSG Guide to Working Modalities.

information makes analyzing pending cases and determining appropriate processing approaches labor-intensive. Physical filing and case management systems further hinder effective data utilization. For instance, the inability to identify profiles based on multiple data points significantly impedes the efficient identification of applications eligible for differentiated processing.

Improving asylum case management systems: Key features and considerations

➢ **Data driven procedures and quality control**

- Collecting relevant datasets during the registration stage is critical for differentiation of asylum procedures. Datasets that capture essential information to identify profiles and claim types, such as nationality, religion, gender, and specific needs, play a pivotal role in the allocation of cases to different tracks. For instance, if profiles are diverse and require detailed fact-finding, a regular asylum process may be more appropriate. In contrast, if profiles are more homogeneous, simplified case processing methods can be more effective. This enables planning and prioritizing of applications especially in the event of an increased flow of applications.
- Regular updates of processing status and results are the cornerstone of a robust case management system. Regular data updates were emphasized as essential for accuracy and reliability. When data is up to date, it can generate reports in real-time, tracking key indicators such as recognition rates, review decisions, and more.
- Reliable data streamlines case management as it empowers case officers to correct errors or inconsistencies that might cause delays, ultimately improving efficiency. Additionally, quality data serves as evidence in legal proceedings and informs policy development. By identifying trends, gaps, and areas for improvement, it contributes to better decision-making.

➢ **Reporting and case profile analysis**

- A well-designed case management system facilitates **in-depth analysis of the processing status of applicants** in the asylum procedure (awaiting interviews, awaiting assessment, pending review etc.). In addition, the system should categorize information based on different data sets such as nationality, religion, gender, and specific needs etc. to enable planning of targeted interventions.
- A **customizable and adaptive reporting** functionality within case management systems supports national asylum authorities to **monitor trends in real-time** and enhance case processing. Built-in reporting features allow the creation of customized reports based on specific criteria, including recommendation rates, recognition rates, rejection rates, review decisions, and review dates. By generating these reports, authorities gain valuable insights into case trends, staff productivity, and identify potential bottlenecks, enabling timely process adjustments.
- Access to readily available data also plays an important role in shaping an optimal asylum case processing strategy. For instance, a clearer view of the backlog can enable identification of targeted **triage strategies based on applicant profiles**. By identifying applications with high recognition rates, the system can offer broader statistical insights to help authorities make informed decisions, identify bottlenecks, and allocate resources efficiently. By monitoring trends and identifying vulnerable populations, authorities can tailor their responses accordingly.

➢ **Automation and Digitalization**

- The **complete digitalization of asylum case processing** allows for all asylum applications to be managed within a single database throughout the entire process. Examples of what such a database contains includes application form(s), scanned ID documents, interview records, and decisions. Importantly, multiple officers can access the same case simultaneously which reduces duplication and time spent on a case, increasing efficiency. Adopting a digitalized case management system further facilitates managing pending cases, ensuring effective communication with applicants, and integrating data from multiple databases across various government agencies.
- Through full digitalization, States can automate specific aspects of the asylum process e.g., by using partial or complete automation for tasks such as extending residence permits or processing financial aid applications for asylum-seekers.
- Overall, the transition from paper-based to a digitalized and single unified case management systems has been transformative, enabling national asylum authorities to effectively address the challenges of information residing in various systems, and improve case management.

➢ **Interoperability, data exchange and data protection**

- Key features to consider in the design of an integrated case management system is a comprehensive database that stores all relevant information related to the different steps in the asylum procedure in one place as well as a system that interacts seamlessly with other government systems. **This integration streamlines data sharing**, reduces duplication of State resources and enhances coordination among different agencies involved in the process.
- An important feature of an integrated system is access to authorized personnel based on their roles (e.g., case managers, caseworkers, legal representatives etc.) This **task-based access** is critical to ensure the security and protection of sensitive personal data of asylum-seekers.
- Integration of systems allows caseworkers to update case notes and send tasks to other personnel through the system, schedule appointments, and communicate with asylum-seekers requesting additional information, while a case manager can assign cases to a specific team and use the system to reallocate cases from one officer to another or team, or send relevant documents to legal representatives to access etc.
- Where possible, the system should make information traceable i.e who accessed specific cases, when, and what changes were made. Preventing data being altered without leaving a clear trail enhances accountability and helps identify any unauthorized access and ensures data integrity.

Asylum-seeker interaction

- Case management systems can enhance interaction with asylum-seekers by facilitating information flow and enabling them to make enquiries. Systems can facilitate submission of necessary information, enable asylum-seekers to easily monitor the status of their cases in real-time, receive automated notifications on the status of their case, including when their cases are finalized or if additional information is required to process their cases.
- An integrated and interoperable system can also facilitate **communication and interaction with other stakeholders supporting the application of the asylum-seekers** e.g., caseworkers and legal representatives thereby enhancing information sharing and coordination.

Key takeaways

- **Data protection measures** were emphasized as crucial to ensure adherence to government guidelines and legal requirements concerning data security, ensuring the safety of users' personal information.

- Case management systems should be **user friendly** for staff i.e. they must showcase important information in an easily accessible manner for all users of the system, whether these are handbooks or guidelines for case officers or case managers to use different aspects of the system, and policy guidance concerning specific caseloads.

- When designing online case management systems accessible to asylum-seekers whether for self-registration purposes or accessing services, several factors must be considered, for instance, having a **multilingual interface** to accommodate diverse language preferences of asylum-seekers as well as having a **user-friendly interface accessible via both mobile and web devices** to ensure broader accessibility. Given that many asylum-seekers rely on mobile devices, an intuitive, responsive design is vital for ease of access. Additionally, addressing digital literacy challenges would be essential for effective engagement.

- Building on lessons learned from previous systems, where different processes across different platforms resulted in gaps and errors, the need for managing all asylum applications within a **single information system** covering every stage of the asylum procedure was emphasized to ensure clarity, seamless coordination and streamlined asylum processing.

- **Technological advancements** play a growing role in tailoring services to specific nationalities, profiles, or individual needs. While automation can save time and resources, it must be balanced with human intervention and oversight.

- **Resource allocation and oversight** in developing a robust case management system was emphasized as critical along with learning from the experiences of other States.

- Technological innovations can help to promptly address the increasing number of asylum applications, but they also require **investing in continuous adaptations** to improve the user-friendliness and accessibility of case management systems.

- **Regular trainings** for staff and other stakeholders is essential for effectively using case management systems, keeping everyone up-to-date, reducing errors and maintaining system effectiveness.

- The design/development team play a critical role in creating effective case management systems. Given that legal professionals and/or civil servants often lack experience in system development, it becomes essential to bridge the gap between IT teams and operational colleagues. **Experts who understand both technical intricacies and operational requirements** play a pivotal role, ensuring seamless coordination and effective communication during system development.

- Transforming or developing a case management system should be a strategic decision, aiming to enhance rights and protection for asylum-seekers. By addressing challenges and fostering collaboration, national authorities can create effective systems that truly make a difference.

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