NRC NORWEGIAN REFUGEE COUNCIL

Evaluation Terms of Reference – CORE Pilot

DATES: [INSERT]

EVALUATION/REVIEW MANAGER: [STEVE HALLAM]

BASED: [INSERT]

1   Background information

1.1 NRC Context

NRC operates in 40+ countries delivering assistance to displacement-affected populations through programme activities such as shelter, WASH, education, ICLA, protection, livelihoods and multi-purpose cash. NRC currently has global digital systems for data collection (NRC Collect based on KoboToolbox), and global reporting (GORS based on DHIS2).

While we have these functioning systems, NRC does not have a comprehensive, global system for registration, service tracking, case management and participant relationship management: This information is crucial for effective programme implementation including accurate, timely, and secure information on:

- Who NRC assists
- What services are delivered
- How feedback, referrals, and service requests are managed
- Reporting with ease the outputs/outcomes that are achieved and reported

Across NRC, these processes are currently hindered by:

- Manual, Excel-based systems

- Fragmented tools for registration, CFM, and service tracking
- Inconsistent workflows across areas and countries
- Weak integration with global reporting systems (GORS)
- Data-protection risks
- Lack of a unified participant record

These challenges undermine accountability, operational efficiency, data quality, and donor compliance.

1.2 Evolution of the CORE Project

Since 2015, NRC has pursued ways to unify programme data systems. Early efforts were fragmented. In 2022, NRC relaunched the CORE project under the Global Programme Section (GPS) with a new governance model and a commitment to address systemic limitations in existing approaches.

The **Project Initiation Document (PID, Gate 2 2023)** concluded that NRC should build an in-house digital platform capable of:

- A shared participant database
- Standardised programme workflows
- Interoperable APIs with other global software solutions.
- Strong access controls & humanitarian/GDPR compliance
- Deployability in low-bandwidth contexts

CORE adopted a "modular monolith" approach: one integrated platform, with the conceptual of modularisation later.

1.3 The Minimum Viable Product (MVP)

Due to global shocks and budget reductions, only a reduced subset of the modules planned for the current version was developed:

- Registration module
- Service Tracking module
- CFM backend (CRM foundation for managing CFM-generated data)

Deferred (non-MVP) features include advanced offline support, automated GORS pipelines, dashboards, expense management, GIS, and GDPR self-service. NRC will have to evaluate the additional cost of the development & the value brought about these features against other tools.

1.4 Purpose of the 2025 Pilot

The pilot is the first real-world deployment of CORE. It is explicitly designed as a gating point to inform NRC's strategic decision:

Should NRC scale CORE, adopt a modular/federated approach, or discontinue in favour of lighter off-the-shelf solutions?

The pilot will test CORE against criteria defined in the CORE Learning Agenda:

1. Technical functioning & security
2. Efficiency & data-quality gains
3. CO capacity to maintain & govern it
4. Architectural sustainability & total cost of ownership (TCO)
5. Added value versus off-the-shelf alternatives (e.g., ActivityInfo, ESPO CRM, Kobo extensions)

The evaluation commissioned under this ToR will be the central evidence base for this organisational decision.

2 Purpose of the evaluation and intended use

2.1 Overarching Purpose

To conduct an independent, mixed-methods evaluation of the CORE V2 Pilot to determine:

- Whether CORE meets the functional, operational, and architectural criteria required for scale
- Whether it delivers measurable advantages over existing or alternative tools
- Whether NRC can sustainably maintain and govern the system
- Whether the investment and TCO are justified relative to sector realities

2.2 Intended Use

The evaluation will be used by:

- **Senior management** – decision on the direction (FO Director and Deputy SG)
- **Global Programme Section, Management Team (GPSMT)** – recommendation on the direction: scale, redesign, or pivot from CORE
- **ICT** – architectural alignment, sustainability, and integration implications
- **Country Offices** – assessing readiness and implications for future adoption
- **Organisational Strategy and Senior Management Group** – investment decisions
- **Donors & Partners** – evidence of due diligence and digital governance

3 Scope and lines of inquiry

The evaluation must address the CORE Learning Agenda's five primary criteria.

EQ1 – Technical Functionality & Safety

- Does CORE function reliably and securely across real CO environments?
- Are uptime, responsiveness, low-bandwidth performance, and stability acceptable?
- Are data-protection features functioning and compliant with NRC standards?

Evidence Sources: performance monitoring, DPIA, penetration testing, system logs, usability surveys.

EQ2 – Efficiency & Data-Quality Gains

- Does CORE meaningfully reduce workload, duplication, and error rates?
- Does it improve timeliness and accuracy of data needed for GORS?
- Does registration deduplication function effectively?
- How does efficiency compare to Excel baselines and to alternatives?

Evidence Sources: process mapping, transaction logs, before/after analysis, CO interviews.

EQ3 – CO Ability to Maintain & Govern CORE
- Can COs manage configurations, user access, and routine administration?
- What level of support is required from HO or vendors?
- Are costs within realistic bounds for CO and HO budgets?
- Are digital literacy and connectivity sufficient?

Evidence Sources: training assessments, cost-tracking, helpdesk tickets, CO interviews.

EQ4 – Architectural Sustainability & Total Cost of Ownership
- Is CORE aligned with NRC's target digital architecture principles (low coupling, interoperability, manageable complexity)?
- What is the projected long-term TCO (licensing, support, staff, infrastructure)?
- How does CORE compare architecturally and financially to alternatives?

Evidence Sources: architecture review, TCO modelling, ICT assessments.

EQ5 – Added Value Versus Alternatives
- Does CORE deliver unique value that other solutions cannot provide?
- Is CORE more reliable, comprehensive, or interoperable?
- Do COs prefer CORE's approach compared to lighter or off-the-shelf tools?

Evidence Sources: CO comparative interviews, benchmark tables, user testing.

4 Methodology

The evaluator should propose a rigorous mixed-methods design. NRC expects:

4.1 Desk Review
- CORE PID, MVP specs, UX/UI artefacts, V2 scoping outputs
- Learning Agenda, business case, architecture principles
- Performance logs,
- CO SOPs, workflows, current system baselines.

4.2 Quantitative Methods
- System performance metrics
- Analysis of usage and transaction logs
- Before/after workflow-time measurement
- Duplicate detection performance
- Cost & TCO modelling (in collaboration with NRC)

4.3 Qualitative Methods
- CO interviews (programme, MEAL, IM, Digital, ICT, management)
- Usability assessments
- Comparative analysis with off-the-shelf tools
- Governance and sustainability analysis

4.4 Evaluation Matrix & Sampling
- The evaluator will submit a full Evaluation Matrix in the Inception Report.

4.5 Ethical Considerations

- Comply with NRC Safeguarding Policy & Code of Conduct
- Guarantee data confidentiality and participant privacy
- Use secure data storage & transfer
- Ensure no risk to staff or participants during data collection

5   Evaluation follow up and learning

The evaluation will be used to make a global recommendation on participant registration, service tracking, case management and information management of digital Community Feedback Mechanisms.

6   Management of the evaluation

Evaluation will be managed by the Global Lead for Digital Programme Systems who will co-ordinate with relevant the Global Programme Section Management and ICT Management teams.

7   Deliverables and reporting deadlines

Deliverable 1 — Draft Inception Report
- Desk review summary
- Detailed methodology
- Ethical safeguards
- Data-collection tools
- Work plan & timeline
- Comparative framework (for off-the-shelf alternatives)

Deliverable 2 — Final Inception Report
- Incorporating Steering Committee feedback.

Deliverable 3 — Fieldwork Report
- Weekly updates + emerging findings.

Deliverable 4 — Draft Evaluation Report
Structure aligned with NRC standards:
- Executive summary
- Background
- Purpose & scope
- Methods
- Findings per evaluation question
- Comparative assessment (CORE vs alternatives)

- Cost-benefit & TCO analysis
- Conclusions
- Annexes (evaluation matrix, tools, persons interviewed, documents reviewed)

Deliverable 5 — Final Evaluation Report
- With integrated feedback.

8   Timeframe

Phase	Deliverable	Dates
1	Scoping + Draft Inception Report	Week 3
2	Data collection + weekly briefs	Week 3 - 8
3	Draft Evaluation Report	Week 10
4	Final Evaluation Report	Week 12

9   Evaluation consultant team

The evaluation team must demonstrate:
- Technical/working knowledge and experience of information management and digital systems for humanitarian organisations
- At least 7 years of evaluation/ research experience
- Demonstrated experience evaluating complex digital products (CRM, case management, MIS, ERP, etc.)
- Experience with mixed methods approaches, including strong quantitative and qualitative evaluation skills
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- Capacity to analyse system logs, technical performance metrics, and architecture
- Experience in total cost of ownership modelling and cost-benefit analysis
- Sector Knowledge and experience of working in the humanitarian sector, including in a CO position for at least two years
- Understanding of programme-cycle workflows in humanitarian operations
- Familiarity with MEL, CFM, CRM and registration systems
- Understanding of digital interoperability, API-based integration, and data models

Soft Requirements
- Ability to produce concise, influential reports
- Experience engaging with senior management
- Gender-balanced team preferred

10   Application process and requirements

Applications must include:

- Proposal and methodological considerations with indicative workplan, maximum 5 pages
- Comments on the ToR
- Detailed budget
- CVs of team members
- Sample of similar previous work

Maximum considered bid value will be 20,000 USD

Please submit bids before 10-Dec-2025

Submit bids to steve.hallam@nrc.no

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