



## REQUEST FOR QUOTATION

# Mobile Data for Humanitarian Action

August 2025

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# Requested Services and Deliverables

## **Overview**

The GSMA's Mobile for Humanitarian Innovation programme is seeking a research partner to deliver a strategic landscape study on the responsible use of mobile data in humanitarian contexts. The research will examine how different types of mobile data are currently being applied in practice, analyse the incentives and risks shaping mobile network operator and humanitarian collaborations, and identify opportunities to advance impactful partnerships.

GSMA is looking for a consultant with strong technical knowledge of mobile data, an understanding of cross-sectoral data sharing, and a track record of delivering high-quality research on humanitarian topics. The final outputs will be published externally and are intended to provide clear, actionable insights that support the ethical use of mobile data for humanitarian action.

## GSMA overview

### GSMA

The GSMA is a global organisation unifying the mobile ecosystem to discover, develop and deliver innovation foundational to positive business environments and societal change. Our vision is to unlock the full power of connectivity so that people, industry and society thrive. Representing mobile operators and organisations across the mobile ecosystem and adjacent industries, the GSMA delivers for its members across three broad pillars: Connectivity for Good, Industry Solutions and Events. For this project, the successful Respondent will contract with the GSMA Mobile for Development Foundation.

### GSMA Mobile for Development Foundation

The GSMA Mobile for Development Foundation, Inc. ("GSMA") is a U.S. 501(c)(3) charitable organisation. The Mobile for Development team (M4D) operates at the intersection of the mobile ecosystem and the development sector. Our aim is to stimulate digital innovation and deliver both sustainable business and large-scale socio-economic impact. Our research and insights platform, in-market expertise and community of partners push forward digital innovations and implementations that empower underserved populations. To date, we have impacted the lives of over 220 million people.

For this project, the successful Respondent will contract with the GSMA Mobile for Development Foundation.

### **GSMA's Mobile for Humanitarian Innovation (M4H) Programme**

The [GSMA Mobile for Humanitarian Innovation \(M4H\) programme](#) envisions an inclusive digital humanitarian future, where mobile and digital solutions provide affected populations with improved access to life-enhancing mobile-enabled services across preparedness, response, and recovery. The programme acts as a convenor between mobile network operators (MNOs), humanitarian actors and national governments to promote innovation, collaboration and impact in crisis settings.

This study is supported by the UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO), the GSMA, and its members.

## Background

The humanitarian sector is at a pivotal moment in navigating how to harness emerging technologies for greater impact. Across public and private actors, there is growing interest in how innovations such as big data, AI and machine learning can enable faster, more targeted humanitarian interventions. Yet these advances raise important questions around ethics, risk and accountability – challenges that continue to be debated.

The potential of mobile data for public good has long been recognised. In recent years, GSMA<sup>1</sup> and other key initiatives<sup>2</sup> have built a growing body of evidence exploring how mobile data – including call detail records, satellite and location data – can generate insights before, during and after crises. Use cases span a wide range of applications, from better navigating climate hazards<sup>3</sup>, tracking mobility patterns and supporting forced displacement analysis<sup>4</sup>, to more targeted cash assistance<sup>5</sup>. These approaches have been applied across diverse contexts, including Bangladesh, Haiti, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Nepal and Afghanistan. Against the backdrop of more sophisticated applications, demand from the humanitarian sector remains high for mobile data to support both strategic planning and operational response.

The realities, however, are complex. Mobile data is commercially sensitive, and mobile network operators can face reputational, legal and operational risks in sharing it – particularly in fragile or conflict-affected contexts where data misuse pose harm. In some emergencies, damaged infrastructure renders mobile data unusable, while diverse regulatory environments further complicate what is legally and practically feasible. While momentum continues to grow, data sharing agreements remain elusive. There is a need for more evidence on whether mobile data use in complex humanitarian settings can deliver consistent, meaningful value relative to the risks and investment required – helping to articulate a stronger shared value proposition for all stakeholders involved.

The GSMA M4H programme is commissioning this study to help deepen understanding of the landscape. It will explore what tangible impact mobile data has delivered in practice, how MNOs evaluate the risks and incentives of data-sharing in humanitarian contexts, and whether recent use cases signal a systemic shift or remain isolated pilots. The research will also examine which governance models and safeguards have proven most effective and responsible in real-world applications. By addressing these questions, the study aims to build a more grounded and practical understanding of how mobile data can be used both responsibly and effectively to support stronger humanitarian outcomes.

## Scope of work

This research marks M4H's first standalone study focused on the responsible use of mobile data in humanitarian contexts. Drawing on existing evidence from the programme and across the GSMA, it will examine the current sector state of play to identify what's working and where key barriers remain. It aims to:

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<sup>1</sup> GSMA resources such as [Mobile Big Data Solutions for a Better Future](#), [AI and Mobile Big Data: Use cases delivering SDG impact](#), [Mobile Big Data for Cities: Urban climate resilience strategies for low- and middle-income countries](#), [AI for Impact Toolkit](#) and [Navigating the Path of Responsible AI](#).

<sup>2</sup> For example the [World Bank's Global Data Facility Mobile Phone Data Program for Policy](#), [UN-CEBD Task Team on Mobile Phone Data](#), [Flowminder](#) and [GiveDirectly](#).

<sup>3</sup> [Responding quickly and effectively to disasters in Japan – KDDI Case study](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Assessing the Use of Call Detail Records \(CDR\) for Monitoring Mobility and Displacement](#)

<sup>5</sup> [In Bangladesh, AI targeted aid faster, cheaper, and often more accurately than manual methods](#)

1. Map how different types of mobile data are currently applied in humanitarian contexts.
2. Assess if and how these mobile data sources contribute to more targeted and impactful humanitarian interventions.
3. Examine the incentives and risks for MNOs in sharing data – clearly articulating both the barriers and business case for engagement.
4. Analyse data sharing models, including consent, anonymisation approaches and risk management practices used by MNOs, humanitarian partners and governments.
5. Establish a foundation for M4H's ongoing work on responsible data.

## Research questions

Key questions the research should explore include:

- How are different types of mobile data being used and shared in humanitarian contexts? What can we learn from key use cases?
- What impact has mobile data had on humanitarian decision-making, action and outcomes? Where are the limitations?
- What motivates MNOs to participate in humanitarian data sharing? What barriers or risks deter engagement?
- What challenges do humanitarian actors and MNOs face when establishing data-sharing partnerships?
- How are consent, anonymisation and governance handled in practice? What models have proven effective?
- What lessons can be drawn from broader data-sharing practices by other private sector actors?
- What would help advance responsible mobile data use in humanitarian contexts, and how can GSMA play a meaningful role?

## Methodology

The final methodology will be shaped in consultation with the selected consultant during the inception phase, but is expected to include:

1. **Literature review** – a comprehensive assessment of existing evidence on this topic, drawing from GSMA reports, academic evidence and broader sectoral evidence on mobile data for humanitarian action.
2. **Key informant interviews** with stakeholders including:
  - MNOs active in humanitarian projects
  - Humanitarian partners and donors
  - Technical partners and researchers
  - Regulators and policymakers (where relevant)
3. **Use case analysis** of concrete, recent examples of mobile data in humanitarian action. Each case study should describe elements such as the specific humanitarian context, mobile data type, sharing mechanism, incentives for participation, outcomes and lessons learned. Emphasis should be placed on recent, post-Covid use cases across low- and middle-income countries. Insights from high-income countries can be woven in to support the findings where relevant.
4. **Validation workshop** with selected stakeholders\* to test early findings and strengthen the relevance and accuracy of recommendations.

\*M4H is exploring the creation of a small technical working group to inform and support this research, offering expert input at key stages and helping ensure accuracy and application across both mobile and humanitarian sectors.

The research is expected to be completed largely remotely. GSMA will facilitate introductions to key stakeholders for interviews and engagement.

### **Expected outputs**

The format of the final outputs will be agreed with the selected consultant during the inception phase. At this stage, GSMA is considering two potential approaches, both aimed at delivering externally published content that contributes to sector-wide understanding.

#### **Option 1: Standalone landscape report**

A comprehensive publication synthesising the current landscape of responsible mobile data use in humanitarian contexts. Grounded in real-world case studies, the report would explore current and emerging data-sharing models, analyse the impact and limitations of mobile data applications, and assess the incentives and challenges facing MNO-humanitarian collaboration. It would also reflect on opportunities to strengthen responsible data practices and highlight the role GSMA can play in this evolving space.

#### **Option 2: Series of thematic briefs**

Alternatively, we may pursue the publication of concise, standalone briefs, each exploring a priority theme emerging from the research. These could include topics such as: enabling mobile data use in humanitarian action, deep dives into specific data sources (e.g. call detail records), balancing innovation and ethics in responsible mobile data use, and practical principles and lessons for mobile data sharing. This modular approach would allow for more targeted dissemination across stakeholder groups and provide the flexibility to expand the series over time as the sector evolves.

### **Deliverables**

Key deliverables from this study are expected to include:

1. A short inception report outlining the updated methodology, scope and timeline.
2. An annotated literature review summary (in Excel or another appropriate format)
3. A list of proposed key informants and draft interview tools, developed in consultation with the GSMA team
4. Comprehensive notes or transcripts from all stakeholder interviews
5. Draft and final versions of the agreed research outputs (either a standalone landscape report or a series of thematic briefs)

### **Timelines**

#### **Request for quotes**

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Deadline (2025)</b>
Terms of Reference shared	1 August
Submit questions to GSMA	08 August
Questions and answers circulated to all respondents	11 August
Request for quote deadline	20 August
Quote review	21 August
Supplier selection	29 August
Supplier contracted	12 September

## Indicative activities and deliverables timeline

Please note the indicative timeline will be adapted depending on the agreed output approach agreed between the supplier and GSMA.

Activity	Deadline (2025)
Kick off call to brief consultant on project background, ongoing partnership work and key documents	15 September
Inception report delivered with refined methodology, timeline and approach agreed	19 September
Desk research + proposed key informant interview approach drafted	3 October
Key informant interview list compiled and questions agreed	7 October
Stakeholder interviews	10 October-7 November
Analysis and write up	10 – 28 November
Validation workshop / stakeholder inputs	5 December
Final report/s	19 December

## Proposal requirements

Interested consultants are requested to submit:

### 1. Technical Proposal

- 1-page statement of suitability
- 1-2 page methodological approach
- Comments on Terms of Reference
- Relevant CV(s)

### 2. Financial Proposal

- Total estimated cost in GBP\* (excluding VAT)
- The cost should be inclusive of all expenses, including fees, insurance, liabilities, obligations, risks, and any other financial requirements associated with the performance of services and delivery of outputs.

\*The GSMA default currency requirement for all proposals is UK Pounds Sterling, this will be the contract currency for the successful consultant.

Due to GSMA compliance requirements, exact project budgets cannot be provided at this stage. You are, however, able to provide a few implementation/budget options that can help us assess value for money and we can align our project scope to the relevant budget after a consultant has been selected.

## Consultant requirements

### Essential

- Proven track record of delivering high quality research on digital humanitarian, digital development or data-for-good topics
- Strong technical understanding of mobile data – including its different types (e.g. call detail records, network data, customer data) and their application in humanitarian settings
- Familiarity with ethical, regulatory and risk considerations related to mobile data sharing and use

- Demonstrated ability to synthesise complex information and present it in a clear, accessible and actionable way
- Excellent stakeholder engagement and qualitative research skills, including experience conducting key informant interviews across sectors
- Demonstrated ability to produce concise, high-quality research outputs for publication

#### **Desirable**

- Experience working with or for the mobile industry, or on digital humanitarian projects
- Familiarity with the role of mobile data in low- and middle-income country contexts
- Experience working with or alongside GSMA, development donors, UN agencies or digital public goods initiatives
- Understanding of the challenges and opportunities of public-private data collaboration in humanitarian or development settings

The deadline to submit expressions of interest is 23:59 (UK time) on **20<sup>th</sup> August 2025**. Proposals should be submitted to Anna Colquhoun [acolquhoun@gsma.com](mailto:acolquhoun@gsma.com) and Angela Nkonu [ankonu@gsma.com](mailto:ankonu@gsma.com). GSMA anticipates that interviews with shortlisted candidates will be conducted on 27<sup>th</sup> – 28<sup>th</sup> August 2025.