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A needs assessment encompasses much more than just creating a form and asking questions. From the initial planning to the dissemination of results, each step of the assessment process is critical to the overall success of the exercise.
Part 2 of this Handbook is targeted to UNHCR staff who will implement assessments. It outlines in detail the needs assessment process through the following steps, which were briefly described in Part 1:

1. Understand the context;
2. Plan the needs assessment;
3. Collate and collect data;
4. Draw conclusions; and
5. Share information.

**Fig. 1** Needs assessment process
STEP 1: Understand the Context

As highlighted in Part 1, before planning any field visits, it is crucial to understand a situation’s context and the information landscape. Doing so helps in defining information needs and gaps, and in deciding whether to conduct a needs assessment.

In a new emergency or after a sudden or substantial change in an existing emergency, an initial situation analysis should be conducted. This process seeks to analyse available pre-crisis data as well as initial reports on the situation from humanitarian and development actors, government, civil society, media, persons of concern, and other stakeholders.

In an ongoing emergency or protracted situation, however, the situation analysis is likely to play a more significant role in determining the need for and scope of any further assessment. This process will be more systematic and thorough, as generally more detailed information and data will be available.

Situation analysis activities will include, at a minimum:

- Defining the crisis context and characteristics, including:
  - Crisis drivers and underlying factors;
  - Geographical scope and scale of the crisis;
  - General social, economic, security, and political context, as well as applicable legal and policy frameworks;
  - Known/likely humanitarian consequences;
  - Displacement drivers, trends, and patterns;
  - Affected population groups and humanitarian profile, and differentiation between sub-groups considering age, gender, and diversity (if data is available);
  - Historical, political, and social dynamics within and between groups, including marginalized groups and relationships between displaced populations and host communities;
  - Vulnerabilities and protection risks;
  - Operational constraints and humanitarian access (e.g. security, physical obstacles); and
  - Stakeholder capacity, including national actors (i.e. government, civil society, and human rights organizations), international actors, and affected populations (i.e. their capacities, coping mechanisms, and community-based protection mechanisms).

- Defining information needs, including main topics of interest, geographical areas, and target population groups.

- Identifying and prioritizing information gaps by comparing existing or available information with the list of information needs.

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1 As in most contexts, the first step toward an effective response to statelessness is to fully understand the nature of the problem. However, the challenges that arise in the context of statelessness are often complex and affect large numbers of people. Effective responses require applying standards set out in international law. Many of the issues may also be transnational in character. For more information, see Chapter 1 in UNHCR, Statelessness: An Analytical Framework for Prevention, Reduction and Protection, 2008.
Main results for the situation analysis include:

✓ Crisis context and characteristics have been assessed.
✓ A situation analysis has been developed.
✓ Information needs have been identified.

Resources in the Toolkit:
→ Situation analysis template
→ Humanitarian profile support guidance
→ Rapid Protection Assessment Toolkit

Different types of emergencies and contexts will require different types of needs assessments and methods, and it is important to understand how those specific situations may require adapted methods and tools. Tables 1 and 2 present characteristics of different settings – namely conflict vs. natural disaster emergencies, and rural vs. urban settings – and the actions to take in each.
### Table 1  
Situations and actions: Conflict vs. natural disaster settings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONFLICT SETTINGS</th>
<th>NATURAL DISASTERS SETTINGS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Characteristics</strong></td>
<td><strong>Sudden-onset disaster</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Complex and protracted situations</td>
<td>• Crisis event(s) often unforeseen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Displacement tends to be protection-induced</td>
<td>• Continuous crisis development allows predictable evolution and forecasting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Deterioration of national institutional capacities and economic situation over time</td>
<td>• Often temporary in nature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Administrative boundaries and place names may change or be used inconsistently by different parties to the conflict</td>
<td>• Sudden exacerbation of pre-existing vulnerabilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Insecure environments reduce access to areas and populations</td>
<td>• General community resilience largely remains (unless multiple disasters occur in short sequence)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Unpredictable evolution over time, with multiple data baselines to compare over multiple periods (i.e. ‘pre-crisis’ and ‘post-crisis’ are more complex to define because the conflict is ongoing, although often at varying intensities of violence)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Exacerbation of pre-existing vulnerabilities and negative impact on resilience</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Skewed population distribution</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Risk of politically biased response by government when party to the conflict</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### Actions To Take

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONFLICT SETTINGS</th>
<th>NATURAL DISASTERS SETTINGS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Establish system of multiple assessments (initial and rapid) in a harmonized approach</td>
<td>• Undertake preparedness measures in anticipation of event(s), including developing needs assessment methodologies and tools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Conduct assessments in both areas of origin and areas of displacement because displacement may last longer and be repetitive (i.e. secondary or multiple displacements)</td>
<td>• Establish a coordinated assessment approach for regular joint analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Undertake regular needs analysis to monitor key indicators for needs and protection risks, considering specific needs and risks related to age, gender, and diversity</td>
<td>• Undertake rapid assessments initially and in-depth assessments when time allows and situation has stabilized</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Gauge expiration time of any data collected, based on the evolution of the conflict and displacement patterns</td>
<td>• Work towards durable solutions to support early recovery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Develop methods for remote assessment for inaccessible or hard-to-reach areas and hard-to-reach population groups</td>
<td>• Understand market recovery to support implementation through multiple response modalities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Establish strategies to work with parties to the conflict to gain access</td>
<td>• Where appropriate, work closely with government to enhance local capacity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Ensure safety and protection of both respondents and assessors, and of sensitive data</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Establish participatory consultation and engagement of persons of concern, ensuring the involvement of subgroups groups according to age, gender, and diversity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Engage with CSOs, including women’s and LGBTI rights organizations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Ensure that reasons for displacement and the profile of displaced populations are well-understood in the needs assessment findings</td>
<td></td>
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</table>
### Table 2  Situations and actions: Rural vs. urban settings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>RURAL</strong></th>
<th><strong>URBAN</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Characteristics</strong></td>
<td><strong>Characteristics</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Homogeneous demographic patterns (i.e. standard family size and composition)</td>
<td>- Heterogeneous demographic patterns (i.e. varying family sizes and composition)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Mainly subsistent, agrarian, and traditional livelihoods</td>
<td>- Persons of concern are displaced among a large and dense population, and may frequently move in and out of urban areas, making it difficult to identify them, in particular women and children at risk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Persons of concern are often identified by the community/ies</td>
<td>- Variety of social and economic status and livelihoods as well as age, gender, and diversity creates diverse needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Standard vulnerability groups apply (e.g. elderly, people with disabilities, single-headed households, children at risk)</td>
<td>- A dynamic and shifting environment results in data becoming obsolete shortly after collection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Social structures and hierarchies often remain intact, which in some cases may hinder women or discriminated sub-groups from accessing assistance and services, as well as equal participation</td>
<td>- Traditional social hierarchies disrupted with often different and competing leadership and representatives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Identification of key informants and representatives of the community and/or affected population groups is relative easy</td>
<td>- The geographic expanse of a city, greater insecurity, and the lack of clear boundaries due to growing informal settlements create logistical and methodological challenges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Generally a more stable environment than urban settings, so the data has a longer validity</td>
<td>- Typically vulnerable people might have other opportunities (e.g. a working single mother)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Heterogeneous demographic patterns (i.e. varying family sizes and composition)</td>
<td>- Some vulnerable groups choose anonymity for their own protection, so additional measures are needed to enable identification, protection, and access to assistance and services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Persons of concern are displaced among a large and dense population, and may frequently move in and out of urban areas, making it difficult to identify them, in particular women and children at risk</td>
<td>- A greater variety of communication channels to disseminate or raise awareness represents both a challenge and an opportunity</td>
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### Actions To Take

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>RURAL</strong></th>
<th><strong>URBAN</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Utilize reliable sampling methods (e.g. probability sampling) with often stable sample frame or qualitative methods (e.g. purposive sampling)</td>
<td>- Consider respondent-driven or snowball sampling methods, since establishing a sample frame can be challenging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Identify key female and male informants that represent different aspects of displaced and host populations</td>
<td>- A qualitative mapping of areas through key informant interviews may be helpful for understanding where displaced populations and other affected populations are most likely to live</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- With reliable sampling and a combination of key informant interviews, household interviews, and direct observation, in-depth information and quantitative information can be derived</td>
<td>- Community-based information methods must reflect the social make-up of the selected area as well as address age, gender, and diversity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Consider respondent-driven or snowball sampling methods, since establishing a sample frame can be challenging</td>
<td>- Set alternative times of day for interviews, since heads of household tend to be away more often during the day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- A qualitative mapping of areas through key informant interviews may be helpful for understanding where displaced populations and other affected populations are most likely to live</td>
<td>- Plan to interview in a location where people tend to gather (‘intercept-point sampling’), such as outside a community centre or in a town square, to reach populations that may not be likely to receive a referral through snowball sampling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Community-based information methods must reflect the social make-up of the selected area as well as address age, gender, and diversity</td>
<td>- Utilize other means of interviews such as phone interviews, crowd sourcing, and SMS surveys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Set alternative times of day for interviews, since heads of household tend to be away more often during the day</td>
<td>- Focus more on relative numbers and distribution patterns than on absolute numbers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Plan to interview in a location where people tend to gather (‘intercept-point sampling’), such as outside a community centre or in a town square, to reach populations that may not be likely to receive a referral through snowball sampling</td>
<td>- More frequent updates of needs data are required with a focus on identifying trends and movement patterns</td>
</tr>
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2 According to Article 1 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), ‘Persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.’
• Engage civil society and persons of concern through participatory methods to assess needs, priorities, and capacities to ensure inclusion of all age, gender, and diversity related sub-groups, including women’s and LGBTI rights organizations, as well as hard-to-reach groups (e.g. people with disabilities, young mothers, and people with minority-language backgrounds)

• Conduct focus group discussions by sex, age, and other relevant diversity factors to provide qualitative information that contextualizes, offers nuance to, or otherwise complements other quantitative findings, and provide formats that allow access also for hard-to-reach groups

• Prioritize an understanding of pre-existing and exacerbated vulnerabilities

### Profiling Displacement Situations in Urban Contexts

In light of the added complexity of collecting data in urban areas, the Joint IDP Profiling Service developed Guidance for Profiling Urban Displacement Situations (June 2014). This document provides practical tips for developing methodologies adapted to urban areas through a collaborative process.

Examples from two urban profiling exercises of refugees living in Quito, Ecuador (2013), and in Delhi, India (2013), highlight several challenges but also opportunities.

In Ecuador, the vast mix of actors was unwieldy until a coordination platform was set up that brought together national and local authorities, relevant UN agencies, and NGOs, as well as academic and technical institutions, including the National Statistical Office of Ecuador. Through this platform, the exercise was able to benefit from the shared interest and variety of expertise of all actors.

The vastness of Delhi made it difficult to know what geographic areas to cover in the profiling exercise. In order to select relevant neighbourhoods where refugees lived, the partners took advantage of the fact that the UNHCR proGres database includes addresses of registered refugees to get a first indication of where some refugee populations cluster. This was later triangulated using qualitative and participatory methods such as key informant interviews and community mapping.
STEP 2: Plan the Needs Assessment

Ensuring the successful implementation of a needs assessment, as well as the appropriate use of its results, requires adequate planning and agreement between key stakeholders, including persons of concern. Careful attention to this phase will help save time later by ensuring that issues related to quality, ethics, analysis standards, data protection measures, and information-sharing mechanisms are discussed and agreed at the outset. This section will detail the following key activities and outputs of the planning phase of a needs assessment:

- Setting objectives;
- Determining coordination arrangements;
- Detailing information needs; and
- Setting data-management procedures.

Setting Objectives

Based on the situation analysis (Step 1), stating clear objectives of purpose and coverage – including geographical scope, population groups and sub-groups to be assessed, and topics to be covered – will support a common understanding of what the needs assessment will deliver. It also will help to identify appropriate methodologies and frame the analysis. For any assessment to be undertaken, the parameters outlined in Table 3 should be agreed among all partners. See Annex 1 for further considerations.

Table 3 Components of an assessment concept note

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parameters</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General objectives</td>
<td>Provide decision-makers with information that is robust enough to enable them to set priorities and make informed decisions about community response and programmes, based on:</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Key needs and their severity</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Existing capacities and coping mechanisms</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Initial information on preferences, including modality of response (cash, in-kind, combination)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Protection risks and threats to diverse women, men, girls and boys in the affected populations and host communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scope, geographical coverage</td>
<td>Establish geographic boundaries and units of reporting, e.g.:</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Affected areas vs. non-affected areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Administrative units (provinces, departments, districts, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Camp vs. out-of-campus populations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Urban vs. rural settings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Targeted groups (^3)</td>
<td>Clearly define groups to be assessed (e.g. diverse women, men, girls, and boys):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Persons of concern: Refugees, IDPs, stateless, asylum-seekers, host communities and returnees, including vulnerable people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Persons facing additional risk, including women and girls, unaccompanied and separated children, older women and men, persons from religious, cultural, and/or language-minority backgrounds, men of fighting age, and those with specific needs such as persons with mental and/or physical disabilities, LGBTI, single older persons, survivors of SGBV, etc.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3 Targeted groups can be combined with geographic scope to further define the groups to be assessed. For example, the assessment may focus on at-risk older people in rural areas, or on separated and unaccompanied children in IDP settlements.
| Clusters/sectors or themes | Ensure clearly defined topics to be assessed, e.g.:  
• Protection (e.g. child protection, education, prevention of SGBV), CCCM, food and nutrition, public health, shelter and core relief items, WASH, livelihoods, durable solutions |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Time frame                | • Establish a realistic time frame, based on the objective, available resources, security, and other constraints  
• Ensure that data can be collected, processed, and analysed in time to be fed into the relevant planning cycle and that the outputs can be delivered in a timely fashion to inform response planning and design |
| Assessment coordination    | Identify organizations, agencies, or individuals in charge of the assessment coordination, and their respective roles and responsibilities |
| Outputs                   | Pre-define the outputs and their respective dissemination plans:  
• Report templates and outlines  
• Type of graphs and maps |

Main results include:
✓ Decision on objectives and scope of the assessment have been discussed and agreed by key stakeholders, including persons of concern and decision-makers, and are clearly outlined in the assessment project outline.

Resources in the Toolkit:
➔ Assessment project outline template

**Determine Coordination Arrangements**
Clear coordination structures are required in a needs assessment. This is particularly important when multiple actors are involved, such as in a refugee situation when UNHCR may lead joint multi-sectoral and multi-thematic needs assessments, or in IDP situations when UNHCR may coordinate intra-cluster multi-agency needs assessments. The structure and size of the coordination arrangement will vary by context (refugee situation, IDP situation, or mixed), size of assessment, type of crisis, sectors to be assessed, and organizational mandates.

During a refugee situation, the assessment team will need to coordinate with assessment teams in the country of origin and surrounding countries of asylum to ensure a coherent analysis of and response to the situation. Common coordination tasks include:

- Undertaking a stakeholder mapping to ensure the involvement of relevant organizations – humanitarian and development agencies, civil society organizations, government counterparts – and people with the right expertise and skills;
- Involving affected communities and their representatives throughout the assessment process, differentiating among sub-groups regarding age, gender, and diversity;
- Establishing an appropriate coordination mechanism for facilitating agreement on needs assessment activities and data sharing. This could include establishing the following:
● A steering group or committee for governance and management. This will determine the scope, provide the budget, oversee the implementation, and endorse the findings of the needs assessment. Note that adherence to participatory and community-based approaches is imperative for the success of any steering group, committee, or technical working group.

● A technical working group/analysis team will serve as a forum for developing the methodology, compiling and analysing secondary data, processing and analysing primary data, and implementing and coordinating the joint assessment and analysis. It will develop and implement the data analysis plan (see below), and will promote the adoption of tools and methodologies to support harmonized assessments and help build ownership.

● If needed, field data-collection teams will visit selected sites and collect data. These teams should be multi-functional and gender-balanced, and should include staff from local, regional, or national government bodies (where appropriate) as well as a range of humanitarian and development actors, particularly those with sector expertise. They also should include members with technical experience in programming and assessments, and those with local knowledge.

### Needs Assessment Coordinator

Large-scale joint assessments will require a dedicated assessment coordination function, responsible for the following:

- Facilitating the assessment forum (i.e. steering group or committee);
- Coordinating assessment teams (i.e. field data collection team and technical working group);
- Facilitating consensus around the objectives, information needs, scope of the exercise, data analysis plan, data sharing modalities, and dissemination plan;
- Negotiating with stakeholders who may have relevant secondary data that can contribute to the analysis;
- Mobilizing financial resources, material, and logistics;
- Planning for and mobilizing additional human resources at different steps of the assessment implementation (e.g. field data collection, analysis, data entry, etc.);
- Encouraging stakeholders and when appropriate government to take part in the assessment;
- Liaising with external actors and persons of concern to manage their expectations around the assessment results, and ensure buy-in and ownership of the assessment; and
- Promoting and ensuring the use of the information for decision-making and response planning.

The coordinator will work with multidisciplinary teams and sector/cluster experts and may be supported by information management specialists, such as those with expertise in data analysis, reporting, GIS, and/or statistics (if representative sampling is required).

### Main results include:

- The roles and contributions of national and international stakeholders as well as persons of concern are clearly detailed in the assessment project outline.
- Description of coordination mechanisms is drafted and made available, including description of mandate, composition, and roles and responsibilities.

### Resources in the Toolkit:

- IASC, *Operational Guidance for Coordinated Assessments in Humanitarian Crises, 2012*
Detail Information Needs

Based on the situation analysis and in collaboration with decision-makers and persons of concern, assessment teams review the initial list of information needs, identify what is already known, and determine what is perceived as any lack of or gap in information. In addition, they:

- Define the minimum set of sectoral data needed to undertake evidence-based analysis supporting established objective(s);
- Identify thematically cross-cutting issues (e.g. livelihood, security, environment, protection risks, and resilience); and
- Describe the links or correlations between elements that are to be informed (i.e. needs and response information allow for a determination of any gaps in the response).

The core information collected will generally focus on the needs of affected populations of concern, including their priorities, capacities, and potential risks, including age, gender, and diversity.

Available thematic and sectoral frameworks should build on the overall analytical framework (see Needs Assessment Toolkit). For example, see below for livelihoods minimum criteria.
Considering UNHCR’s Minimum Criteria for Livelihoods
During the Needs Assessment

The minimum criteria are designed to ensure that operations meet basic standards for livelihoods programming, have the required expertise and evidence, and are able to demonstrate impact. To help refugees and other persons of concern achieve self-reliance is an important part of UNHCR’s work throughout all phases of displacement. Self-reliance is the ability of people, households, or communities to meet their basic needs and to enjoy social and economic rights in a sustainable and dignified way.

The figure below describes the steps to be taken and is supported by guidance available within the Toolkit, which contains further information on UNHCR’s Minimum Criteria for Livelihoods. Note that the criteria below should be integrated into other planned assessment activities as part of a comprehensive assessment strategy.
Socio-Economic Data and Needs Assessments

Increased targeting of food, cash, and livelihoods programs has generated an increasing recognition that socio-economic indicators can play a vital role among a basket of other indicators reflecting poverty. Collecting basic information on socio-economic stratification of households can help inform the planning process and where appropriate frame a wider targeting of assistance. UNDP measures multidimensional poverty in an index as a combination of the severe deprivations that people face at the same time. Socio-economic conditions are often an attributing factor rendering a person poor. Assessing a household’s socio-economic status in relation to the surrounding community can help identify a wider set of factors in multidimensional poverty and is imperative as the basis for better understanding our persons of concern in order to inform programmatic response to address their needs. For this purpose, needs assessments can be critical to identifying proxies that may be good indicators for the socio-economic situations of households and/or individuals. For further information, please see the Needs Assessment Toolkit.

Additional information might also be needed and collected through the needs assessment on how best to deliver the response – for instance, understanding how best to communicate with the affected population or transfer modalities for delivering aid and services. For more information, see the text box below.

Considering Assistance Modalities During the Needs Assessment

There are three main transfer modalities for the delivery of assistance or services to persons of concern: cash, vouchers, and in-kind. A combination of these can also be used. Cash and vouchers, also known as cash-based interventions (CBIs), offer persons of concern flexibility to meet their needs through existing markets and service providers. In-kind assistance, on the other hand, can be useful when existing markets cannot respond to identified needs.

Needs assessments are useful to gather information from persons of concern and market actors on which transfer modality, or which combination, is most appropriate. The collected information will specify how people prefer to receive assistance, clarify consumer habits, and give initial indication of the capacity of existing markets to respond to identified needs. It can also identify potential protection risks and how to enable equitable access and use of CBIs. The following key questions for persons of concern should be considered:

- Do you currently depend on markets?
- Are you able to access markets? If not, why?
- What are you buying? Where do you buy it from?
- Do you have any reliable or regular sources of income? If so, what are they?
- How do you prefer to receive assistance, by cash, vouchers, or in-kind?
- Does receiving assistance pose any security/protection concerns (e.g. fear of assault when returning from distribution point or escalation of domestic violence)? Will different modalities pose different risks? Do you have any ideas on how these risks can be reduced?
- If you were to receive cash assistance, what would you be most likely to spend it on?

If markets are functional and people prefer cash or vouchers over in-kind assistance to meet their needs, cash-based interventions may be an option for delivering assistance and services. Understanding which transfer modality for assistance is most appropriate to use in a response can be researched in the context of a needs assessment. The final choice of transfer modality may only be taken after a separate comprehensive feasibility and response analysis is conducted, but information collected during a needs assessment will be helpful in giving a preliminary indication of the most appropriate modality (or combination) for responding to protection and humanitarian needs. Among other aims, the response analysis will further define market capacity, explore various cash or voucher delivery mechanisms, analyse the protection risks and benefits of different modalities of assistance, and assess the cost-efficiency of the available modalities.
Analytical framework

The information needs can be structured and detailed in different ways, and one common method is to use an analytical framework. This provides a way to visually organize what data to collect – describing the relationships, interactions, and causes and effects between elements that are to be measured – and how to structure the analysis.

The analytical framework requires identifying analytical questions and sub-questions of interest, particularly thematic and cross-cutting ones, where advanced discussions can ensure efficiency, comparability, and predictability in the data gathering and analysis. It provides a structured, systematic, and comprehensive approach to the planning and execution of needs assessments, including the analytical process. By doing so, such a framework reduces bias and supports a common analysis of where humanitarian needs are most severe and which population groups are most in need, considering age, gender, and diversity.

The analytical framework also serves as a communication tool between stakeholders, and should be considered as a reference throughout the programme cycle. The framework is not static: It should be regularly updated as events and the response evolve and new types of information become available or are required.

The framework is not intended as an instrument to gather statistics directly, nor is it a substitute for existing international standards or guidance provided by UNHCR. Rather, it serves as a tool to facilitate dialogue around joint analysis and to draw together available information without missing key questions.

See Statelessness: An Analytical Framework for Prevention, Reduction and Protection (UNHCR, 2008) for an example of what key questions may be captured in the analysis framework (and subsequent analysis plan) for statelessness. While other sectors or areas of responsibilities may have different key questions, the domains of ‘Scope & Scale’, ‘Conditions’, ‘Capacities’ and ‘Access’ must be considered, as these play a particularly important role in ensuring a holistic analysis and maximizing the operational value of related data and information.4

The framework will be applied using the main categories of analysis, as required by the objectives of the assessment. Those could be geographical areas or population groups, and can be combined as necessary (e.g. to compare the needs of female and male IDPs and host community members in five provinces and across three sectors of interest). The framework will also describe how information needs are changing over time (i.e. the shift of information needs for life-saving measures to more long-term planning and durable solutions).
Table 4  Standard categories of analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Geographical characteristics</th>
<th>Population group characteristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Administrative area (e.g. province A vs. province B)</td>
<td>• Affected groups (e.g. IDPs/refugees/returnees/stateless/host communities)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Which province has been worst affected by, for instance, a natural disaster?</td>
<td>• Are certain groups more affected/exposed to more risks than others, either in terms of quantity (number of risks) or diversity (types of risks)? How do different groups cope with the emergency situation?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Setting (e.g. urban/rural, coastal/inland)</td>
<td>• Vulnerable groups (e.g. children at risk)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Is the population affected differently in different settings? For example, how is their access to goods and services (e.g., markets) affected?</td>
<td>• How are different vulnerable groups such as women and girls, persons with disabilities, and LGBTI persons affected differently? To what extent are existing vulnerabilities exacerbated by the crisis?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Distance (e.g. to earthquake epicentre or conflict zone)</td>
<td>• Socio-economic groups (e.g. farmers vs. wage workers, religious groups, and ethnic groups)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Are humanitarian needs greater when nearer the earthquake epicentre than in other places? Are people in areas of high conflict intensity more affected than others?</td>
<td>• Are certain groups more affected due to their origin, religion, trade, or level of poverty?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Composite (e.g. areas with high population density within a particular distance of the storm-track)</td>
<td>• Gender, age (e.g. early childhood, younger children and adolescents, older adolescents, youth, adults and older men and women) and diversity (e.g. LGBTI, diverse cultural, religious, or language backgrounds)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Is the humanitarian impact in coastal areas affected by tidal surge greater than in inland areas affected by extreme winds?</td>
<td>• How do existing gender inequalities affect the vulnerabilities, protection risks, and unequal participation and access of different groups within the affected population? Does the crisis exacerbate existing gender-, age-, and diversity-based discrimination? Does the crisis exacerbate discrimination against specific minorities?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data analysis plan

A data analysis plan is the operational extension of the analytical framework. It should be developed to guide the compilation or collection of data for each domain of the analytical framework, and to identify appropriate indicators for measurement. The analysis plan should be drafted before primary data collection is undertaken and in parallel with the review of secondary data (Step 3). In turn, it will facilitate the analysis (Step 4). A strong data analysis plan ensures that:

- All necessary data is collected for analysis.
- Time is not wasted in collecting data that is available from other sources, will not help to achieve the assessment objectives, and/or will not be used.
- Indicators are formally stated and described.
- The data to collect from primary vs. secondary sources, including identification of information gaps and reliability, is recorded.
- Analytical outputs are identified and understood by all stakeholders.

The data analysis plan template features several columns, each corresponding to a step in the process of information gathering and analysis, as shown by the example in Figure 3. The person leading the needs assessment fills out the analysis plan with input from sector experts and the technical working group, and keeps it updated throughout the process.
To develop an analysis plan:

1. List the key analytical questions to be answered based on the analytical framework and establish corresponding indicators, data required, and available baseline or set target, where feasible. When selecting and defining indicators to collect and measure, ensure a reasonable balance between the following:

   - The importance of the information (for operations, strategies, programmes, advocacy), for instance:
     - Protection risks created by the collection exercise for data collectors and data subjects, and the protection benefits of having that information;
     - The degree to which the information has relevance (for multiple end users) or is appropriate to the activities planned or being undertaken within the crisis; and
     - Its representativeness of the affected population, including by age, sex, and diversity.

   - The time and effort required to obtain the information, including:
     - The accessibility of data/information sources;
     - The anticipated duration of the data’s validity in a dynamic environment;
     - The level of accuracy and precision desired; and
     - The human, financial, material, and technical resources required.

2. Record relevant sources of available secondary data in the template, thus also revealing gaps.

3. Assess the level of trust of the source and the information. Only relevant and credible information should be included in the analysis. To assess the level of trust, a rating system is applied (see Step 3, Secondary Data Review).

---

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2. Record relevant sources of available secondary data in the template, thus also revealing gaps.

3. Assess the level of trust of the source and the information. Only relevant and credible information should be included in the analysis. To assess the level of trust, a rating system is applied (see Step 3, Secondary Data Review).
4. Finally, describe the planned analytical output and relations between elements.

5. As new information emerges and is consolidated – particular during Step 3 – update the analysis plan.

Main results include:
✓ Minimum information requirements and analytical questions are structured in the analytical framework.
✓ A data analysis plan with indicators to guide data collation and collection has been developed by the technical working group.
✓ The analysis framework and analysis plan have been validated by the steering committee and representatives from the affected population.
✓ The analysis plan is updated as more information and sources becomes available and is consolidated, or the situation changes.

Resources in the Toolkit:
→ Needs Assessment in Refugee Emergencies (NARE) checklist
→ Guidance and templates for analytical framework and data analysis plan
→ Indicator guidance

5 See Gender-sensitive Indicators, Annex 6.
Measuring by Using Indicators

A direct indicator is a measurable, evidence-based scale providing specific information on the condition of the object under study. For example, if we want to know if a camp is overcrowded, we will measure the average camp area per person (square metres). If we want to know the enrolment rate for primary school, we would measure the % of primary school-aged girls enrolled in primary education and the % of primary school-aged boys enrolled in primary education.

Indicators can also measure progress toward pre-defined results at different levels (e.g. performance / output indicators and impact / outcome indicators). Indicators are often a direct and quantitative measure, such as a percentage or share, rate (i.e. birth rate), or ratio (i.e. inhabitants per doctor).

Indicators can also be qualitative, such as people’s judgments and perceptions about a subject (i.e. those who feel safe and secure). Qualitative indicators are valuable to study changes in people’s lives and communities, as they seek to measure long-term effects and focus on people’s experiences. Quantitative data can provide numeric measures for indicators, while qualitative data can provide information about why certain patterns or trends are observed.

To make the analytical topics and questions more evidence-based and measurable, needs and situation indicators should be established in order to set standards and benchmarks gauging the severity of a situation. Indicators and their targets should be established in ways that are ‘SMART’, i.e. specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time-bound. Also, consider and indicate where disaggregated data (i.e. age, gender, and other forms of diversity) is appropriate. Sex and age disaggregation of data is highly encouraged whenever possible in order to enable more accurate understanding of needs, priorities, and capacity and to guide the design of adequate protection and assistance services.

The relation with an analytical question could be one question corresponding to many indicators. Note that an indicator also could be used to inform other analytical questions, or it could function as a proxy or indirect indicator for another analytical question that is difficult to measure with a direct indicator.

Proxy indicators

A proxy indicator is an indirect measurement that is used when direct measures are not possible. As a substitute, it provides a measurement of a phenomenon that exhibits the same trend or characteristics as the thing we wish to measure. In other words, when we cannot or have not measured something that we want to know about, we can measure something else that follows the same pattern, or measure something similar.

For example, if school enrolment data shows a sudden increase in dropouts when the harvest season begins, this can be a proxy indicator for child labour in the agriculture industry.

There can be several reasons to formulate a proxy indicator:

- When the subject of interest cannot be measured directly. This is particularly the case for more qualitative subjects such as behavioural change, living conditions, or good governance, or for areas with limited or no access.
- When the methodology required does not match the allowed time frame for report submission (e.g. daily food intake), the measurement of indirect indicators can be more time- and cost-effective.
- When the subject of analysis can be measured directly but is too sensitive to do so due to cultural taboos, a security situation or other reasons.
- Proxy indicators may have a causal relationship and correlation to other indicators. This correlation can be either positive or negative. When a proxy indicator has a negative pattern, it does the opposite of whatever is not being measured.

Reference indicators

UNHCR is consistently using performance (i.e. output) and impact (i.e. outcome) indicators in support of the Result-Based Management framework and Focus. While establishing a needs indicator, make sure to consider existing performance and impact indicators for reference.

The global clusters have established a joint humanitarian indicator registry (housed on ReliefWeb and HumanitarianResponse.info) to support field operations with the aim of standardizing and enhancing comparability across emergencies.

Another initiative is JIPS’s project to operationalize the IASC Framework on Durable Solutions for Internally Displaced Persons by developing agreed indicators, tools, and methodologies for comprehensive yet practical approaches to durable solutions analysis in displacement situations.
Setting Data-Management Procedures

The technical working group should set procedures for collation, quality control, and processing of data. It should also ensure the protection and safeguarding of personal information by following UNHCR’s Data Protection Policy.\(^6\) This includes establishing protocols among partners for the sharing of different types of information (e.g. raw vs. aggregated data vs. findings) and agreeing on how to share information or findings with persons of concern in an accessible and culturally appropriate manner.\(^7\) Related protocols must define the following:

- Type of metadata to describe the dataset (date of collection, geographic coverage, methodology);
- Geographical units (use of country P-codes\(^8\) and/or agreed administrative place names, disaggregation levels, and other technical standards);
- Who owns the data and who has what rights to change or modify the data;
- Determination of whether datasets should be cleared or sanitized prior to sharing, and by whom;
- Who has what rights to access the data at each level of aggregation and sensitivity; and
- Details on data confidentiality and safeguarding of information.

During primary data collection, the assessment teams will need to ensure that collected data is stored and referenced properly, ready to be used for later analyses. Irrespective of the method used for collection and storage, all data should indicate:

- Location or geographical area to which the data is applicable, using agreed standards (i.e. CODs);
- Population segment or affected groups from which the observation is derived;
- Sector(s) or sub-sector(s) the observation represents or belongs to, or other themes of interest (e.g. humanitarian access, response capacity, etc.);
- Date on which the data was collected or the information to which it refers;
- Basic information about the assessor, such as sex;
- Basic information about the respondent, such as age, sex, and other aspects of diversity; and
- A unique identifier for each questionnaire.

Data storage or archiving protocols need to be identified for safeguarding data. UNHCR has established a safe server environment to store data using the mobile data-collection tool KoBo Toolbox, which is available for all UNHCR operations. See more information about how to set up and access data storage solutions and the use of mobile data collection in the Needs Assessment Toolkit.

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\(^8\) P-code is an abbreviated term for ‘place code’. P-codes are similar to ZIP codes or postal codes and are part of a data-management system that provides unique reference codes to thousands of locations.
Handling a large amount of data always has constituted challenges. The use of paper forms for interviews, for instance, can result in delays in analysis due to long data-entry requirements. Likewise, poor data entry can have a significant impact on the quality of an assessment, and related errors surface for several reasons – glitches in the data-entry process, poor transformations and merges when multiple data sources are brought together, or missing data. Fortunately, mobile data collection offers an efficient way to minimize those concerns. Moreover, setting up clear procedures for data cleaning and providing close support to the data-entry clerk goes a long way toward minimizing errors.

The outsourcing of information management services is a growing practice. In such a situation, it is crucial to ensure that the organization or company follows agreed ethical and protection standards, uses established analytical frameworks, and agrees to data-sharing protocols that are consistent with UNHCR practices and values.

### Outsourcing Information Management Services

While outsourcing often is seen as a quick win for country offices, the following questions should be considered in order to ensure a successful collaboration and reliable results at the end of any needs assessment initiative.

#### Assessing the project proposal:

- Will local and/or international UNHCR staff be trained as part of the project?
- Does the project proposal include a participatory, protection-focused, and AGD approach?
- Who will own the data gathered within the project? Who is authorized to see, process, use, share, or store the data?
- Is some of the work included within the project already occurring within the operation?
- How will responsibility for information management be divided between UNHCR and the proposed external organization?
- Will the project introduce new information systems? If yes, how will these relate to existing systems?
- Have the proposed outputs or deliverables been aligned with strategic and operational priorities, including realistic timeframes, appropriate units of analysis, audience-specific targeted products, etc.?
- Are the costs of the project proportionate to the value of the output?
- Is the investment being made in outsourcing IM work rationalized with investment that could be made within UNHCR to increase IM capacity within the operation?
- Do the process and supporting tools used to achieve the deliverables meet UNHCR standards and practices?

#### Formalizing a partner agreement, MOU, or commercial contract:

If a decision is taken to collaborate with a partner on information management, it is recommended that the following clauses, or some customized version of these clauses, be included in any partner agreement, memorandum of understanding or contract:

- UNHCR retains ownership of the data and will have full access at all times to an updated copy of the database.
- UNHCR and partner-generated data should not to be used without permission in other projects or for unauthorized purposes.
- The partner should consult UNHCR prior to sharing or publicly posting personal or focused information arising from the project, as defined in the MOU.
- The partner should not approach additional donors for the project without notifying UNHCR in advance.
- Geographic data used for the project should match that of the IASC Common Operational Datasets (CODs) or the UNHCR equivalents.
Main results include:
✓ Procedures and staff responsible for data collection, management, and storage are identified.
✓ Protocols for managing and safeguarding data records, checking and validating data entry, tracking changes, and ensuring clean datasets for analysis are in place.
✓ File naming conventions, metadata standards, and procedures for archiving and keeping up-to-date back-ups are established.

Resources in the Toolkit:
→ UNHCR, *Policy on the Protection of Personal Data of Persons of Concern, 2015*
→ Example of data-sharing protocol
STEP 3: **COLLATE AND COLLECT DATA**

Data collection in assessments can be broadly grouped into two areas, based on the type of data collated or collected: secondary and primary. As defined earlier, secondary data is that which is external to a particular needs assessment exercise (i.e. collected for other purposes), while primary data has been collected within the context of a time-bound assessment. Not all assessments will include a primary data collection component: For instance, a Humanitarian Needs Overview is generally conducted using only existing secondary data.

**Population Movements and Displacement**

Population movements create significant challenges for a humanitarian response. It is important to collect and analyse information on population movement and displacement patterns in order to identify whether particular types of communities or population segments are more prone to movement, as well as any reasons for this. Such information gives an indication of the level and type of coping mechanisms being used by affected populations, and subsequently can help in projecting the possible size of a population of concern. Information about population movement patterns will inform what type of needs assessment should be undertaken.

Displacement patterns take multiple forms and continue to evolve, and more than one such form can be observed in a given context. A broad pattern can be seen in terms of whether a displaced community stays together:

1. An entire community relocates to another place, e.g. a village decides to relocate.

   In such situations, the overall social unit can remain somewhat intact, with established community leaders staying in charge. In general, communities relocating together will have a greater ability to establish coping mechanisms to deal with the effects of displacement.

2. When communities cannot stay together, displacement may follow one of several patterns:

   - Individuals or households from various locations may relocate to the same location;
   - Individuals or households from one location may relocate to several locations; or
   - Individuals or households from several sites may disperse among many sites.

---

**Fig. 4 Displacement patterns**

1. ![Diagram of a single community moving to a new location]

2A. ![Diagram of dispersed communities moving to multiple locations]

2B. ![Diagram of dispersed communities moving to multiple locations]

2C. ![Diagram of dispersed communities moving to multiple locations]
In situations with scattered or dispersed displacement, community members will need to overcome challenges without established community structures. Without established social covenants, identified community leaders, or governance structures, traditional community-level coping mechanisms may be unavailable. Even if they do exist, they are likely to function poorly.

When designing a needs assessment, it is important to take into consideration the type of displacement patterns observed. Social structures and power relations should be considered when identifying key informants or respondents. Accurate population stock and flow figures should be available to support the analysis (see Table 5).

**Table 5  Population stock and flow figures**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population stock figures</th>
<th>Population flow figures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population stock figures measure the number of people on a single day and render a snapshot of a community’s make-up. Stock figures are often starting or ending points of flow figures. A stock figure must always have a date associated with it.</td>
<td>Flow figures measure changes in population over a specified period. It is particularly important to understand where people relocate. A flow figure must always indicate what period it measured.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Stock and flow figures are important data points to understand, monitor, and analyse population movement patterns and trends. Multiple sources and methodologies are available, and which to choose will depend on access to the displaced population and the context of the crisis. These sources and methodologies include:
- Registration;
- Spot-check methods;
- Analysis of aerial and satellite images;
- ‘Quick count’ methods;\(^9\)
- Tracking cell phone usage, i.e. call-determination records;
- Flow monitoring, meaning observing people’s movements in areas of operation by placing enumerators at key locations (bridges, border crossings) who count passing individuals and conduct short interviews; and
- Collecting data at points of arrival.\(^{10}\)

Main results include:
- Population data structured as humanitarian profile.

**Resources in the Toolkit:**

**Secondary Data Review**

Secondary data review (SDR) is an often-overlooked component of an assessment, although it is critical to establishing a thorough understanding of a situation. An SDR ensures that all available data is used before investments are made to collect primary data, contextualizes primary data, and helps to avoid duplication of effort. It is recommended that operations maintain an updated secondary data review.


Based on the data analysis plan, the SDR establishes what is known and unknown about a situation and its impact, including details on the size and status of the affected population and the severity of conditions. The review involves collecting and analysing pre-crisis and crisis-specific information, statistics, demographics, and other relevant data at various levels of aggregation. In refugee situations, secondary information from both the country of origin and the country of asylum will be relevant. The main tasks to undertake for an SDR are detailed in Table 6.

**Table 6 Main steps in undertaking a secondary data review**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Objectives</th>
<th>Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Compile</td>
<td>Tracking and compiling pre- and in-crisis data and information</td>
<td>• Locate, track, and compile pre- and in-crisis information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Establish or utilize existing assessment registries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Establish a data repository and archive all data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Update data analysis plan with new sources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organize</td>
<td>Tagging information for easy retrieval and consolidation based on established analytical questions in the analytical framework</td>
<td>• Establish main categories of analysis (e.g. rural vs. urban) and tag information accordingly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Get population data and store at the lowest possible level of disaggregation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Use agreed data-management procedures and standards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Validate</td>
<td>Determining usability and trustworthiness of the information based on reliability of the source and robustness of the method</td>
<td>• Check that collated data is fit for purpose in terms of resolution, time, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Check sources’ credentials, possible motives for bias, past record of accuracy, and technical expertise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Check methods used to collect and analyse data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Ensure that sources are validated based on criteria outlined in the data analysis plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consolidate</td>
<td>Summarizing data by grouping similar data and consolidating related findings</td>
<td>• Summarize findings by geographical area, population groups of interest, and/or topics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Highlight differences or similarities of findings between geographical areas, groups of interest, and/or topics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Prepare visuals to aid and illustrate the analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Identify information gaps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analyse</td>
<td>Undertaking analysis with subject-matter experts based on the prepared analytical framework and analysis plan</td>
<td>• Use established analytical framework as the basis for analysis and interpretation, within and across sectors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>For more detailed analysis steps, see Step 4 on needs analysis</td>
<td>• Check credibility of information by assessing the degree of corroboration and convergence of evidence between multiple independent sources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Ensure sector-level analysis by subject-matter experts from agencies or clusters and representatives of the affected population</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Facilitate joint analysis to identify key inter-sector issues, as well as severity of needs and risks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Validate analysis and findings involving broad set of stakeholders, including representatives of the affected population</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Both pre-crisis and in-crisis information should be collated in order to allow for time comparisons when relevant. The collated assessment reports and data should be recorded in an assessment registry, which stores basic information about the data sources and methods used for collection. In addition, it is also important to establish a data repository and archive all data, and make it accessible to the stakeholders involved.

Pre-crisis secondary data
Basic information on the country context, including baseline data and general information about the general political, economic, social, and security environment, is collected to gain a more in-depth understanding of the characteristics related to local vulnerabilities, opportunities, capacities, and risks. Pre-crisis secondary data includes available lessons learned on the impact of previous similar events, as well as information about relevant upcoming events (e.g. elections, seasonal change, etc.).

Table 7 Pre-crisis information sources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-crisis information required</th>
<th>Possible sources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Population figures and demographics (e.g. population breakdown by sex, age, and other forms of diversity)</td>
<td>• National statistics offices, censuses, and relevant line ministries ¹¹</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Socio-economic data (e.g. average household size, gender roles, livelihood practices, religion and beliefs, languages)</td>
<td>• UNHCR resources include Country Operation Plans, registration system (ProCris), protection case-management systems, TWINE, Focus, EMIS, GVBIMS, CP IMS, UNHCR Statistical Yearbook, web portal (data.unhcr.org), map portal (maps.unhcr.org/en/search), and previous assessment results</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Existing vulnerabilities</td>
<td>• IASC Common Operational Datasets (CODs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Protection profile and risks</td>
<td>• Humanitarian Data Exchange (HDX) (data.humdata.org/)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Spatial data (political/administrative boundaries, settlement locations), maps, and satellite imagery</td>
<td>• ReliefWeb (<a href="http://reliefweb.int">http://reliefweb.int</a>) or Humanitarian Response Web (<a href="http://www.humanitarianresponse.info/">www.humanitarianresponse.info/</a>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Health and nutrition data (mortality, morbidity, and malnutrition data)</td>
<td>• UNMAS Information Management System for Mine Action (IMSMA) Database</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• WASH information (existing water sources, type of soil)</td>
<td>• World Bank development indicators, Millennium Development Goals, other development partners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Location and status of infrastructure (roads, health facilities, communications)</td>
<td>• Previous appeals, Humanitarian Needs Overviews (HNOs), and Humanitarian Response Plans (HRPs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Contingency plans</td>
<td>• World Health Organization country epidemiological profiles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Upcoming events (elections, winter, etc.)</td>
<td>• UNICEF Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS) data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Legal, political, and environmental data</td>
<td>• Remote sensing, Operational Satellite Applications Programme (UNOSAT), UNGGIM</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹¹ In refugee or mixed situations, consider country of origin and country of asylum.
In-crisis secondary data
In-crisis secondary data constitutes information directly related to the impact of the current situation. This could include, for example, information about the influx of refugees since a conflict started or about cholera rates in IDP settlements. This data is generally used and analysed to help determine the most affected regions, populations, sectors, and sites, and those that require further assessment.

Table 8  In-crisis information sources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In-crisis information required</th>
<th>Possible Sources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Problem areas for key sectors (what is an issue, what is not)</td>
<td>• ReliefWeb, Humanitarian Response Web</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Population estimates for UNHCR persons of concern by sex, age and diversity (e.g. number, locations, types)</td>
<td>• UNHCR data portal and map portal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Humanitarian access constraints (e.g. due to insecurity, logistics, weather, infrastructure)</td>
<td>• Civil society organizations, government, and UN agency situation reports (including UNDSS, DPKO, OCHA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Affected geographical areas</td>
<td>• Cluster and inter-cluster reports, websites, and meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Presence or absence of humanitarian actors in affected locations</td>
<td>• UNMAS Information Management System for Mine Action (IMSMA) Database</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Protection incidents (e.g. types, locations, victims, alleged perpetrators)</td>
<td>• OCHA security incidents and humanitarian access database</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Remote sensing, Operational Satellite Applications Programme (UNOSAT), UN-GGIM, International Charter on Space and Major Disasters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Social media, other media, blogs, crowdsourcing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Personal networks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Funding appeals</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Validate: Level of trust in secondary data
Assessing the level of trust in collated information is an iterative process, including the assessment of a single piece of evidence or a body of evidence, and the conclusions. Generally, the more information from independent sources about a specific topic, the better the opportunities for triangulation and the easier to assess trustworthiness.

Table 9  Validation criteria for level of trust

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria for assessment of level of trust</th>
<th>ASSESSING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>One piece of evidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Several pieces of evidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conclusions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fitness for purpose (timeliness, comprehensiveness, granularity, relevance to analysis questions, interoperability with other data)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reliability of the source (technical expertise, track record for accuracy, motive for bias)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robustness of method used to collect the data (data collection methods, sampling strategy, validity)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Credibility of information (degree of corroboration with other pieces of evidence originating from independent sources, plausibility in context)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strength of underlying logic (from weak to strong logical inferences, analytical writing, strength of logical reasoning)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transparency (reproducibility, documentation of data and methods, metadata)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
If inconsistent information is found, assessment teams will estimate the trustworthiness of each detail based on an evaluation of the sources and the method of collection, and will document discrepancies and assumptions.

The analysis team undertaking the SDR (see text box below) must have quantitative and qualitative research and analysis skills to ensure a comprehensive and accurate review. A thorough secondary data review requires resources and time, and can be undertaken remotely. However, robust links to field operations are necessary, and a good understanding of the local context (such as geographic areas and cultural norms) will be required for the final interpretation of any secondary data.

### Analysis Team

In order to undertake a secondary data review in a coordinated manner, a best practice is to form an analysis team involving agencies and stakeholders with sectoral expertise and local knowledge and experience. The analysis team or technical working group will support joint analysis with an agreement on the findings and output of the analysis.

A team leader such as an assessment coordinator or experienced data analyst leads the secondary data review with sectoral experts. He/she is supported by information management specialists with expertise in data analysis, GIS, remote sensing, or statistics. The team should ensure the following:

- A common assessment registry and a repository for reports and datasets is established (storage and sharing applications such as Dropbox are commonly used as quick and collaborative solutions).
- In this central repository, members of the team collate relevant reports and assessments.
- Roles and responsibilities are shared among members and sector specialists, and should be decided upon early in the process.
- A report template for the secondary data review is outlined, consolidating the sector reviews and facilitating cross-sector analysis and findings.

The final step of the secondary data review is to identify information gaps by comparing the existing consolidated data to the information needs that were agreed in the data analysis plan. The gaps can be geographical (i.e. areas of coverage), thematic (e.g. sectoral information or specific questions), time (e.g. information on ethnic composition in 1960 but not 2016), or in terms of a lack of perspective (e.g. sub-group of affected population based on age, gender, and diversity considerations). Once the gaps have been identified, discussion can begin on what primary data will be collected, how, and by whom.

Main results include:

- Relevant information is captured and assessed for trustworthiness.
- Information systems and initiatives (e.g. assessments, monitoring systems, etc.) are mapped and tracked through the assessment registry.
- Both pre- and in-crisis information is collected, validated, and stored.
- Secondary data is reviewed and analysed, resulting in a report.
- Information gaps are identified by comparing available information against the information needs in the data analysis plan.
Resources in the Toolkit:
- ACAPS, Technical brief: Secondary Data Review, 2014
- Assessment registry template
- Secondary data review template

Primary Data Collection
If information gaps emerge from the secondary data review when compared with the data analysis plan, collection of primary data is required.

Refining objectives and analysis plans
Based on the findings of the secondary data review, if needed the team will revise the objectives (set in the assessment project outline) to clarify the purpose and coverage of primary data collection. The data analysis plan also will be revised to identify indicators and analytical questions that remain to be answered through primary data collection.

Designing the methodology
The appropriateness and feasibility of different data collection methodologies will depend on the objectives of the primary data collection exercise (i.e. key questions to be answered), constraints (time, resources, access, etc.), and expected benefits and costs (in terms of protection outcomes, security risks, etc.). Context is also important, and the main elements to consider are:

- Scale of the emergency (e.g. in terms of the number of people and/or areas affected, or the severity of the effects);
- Stability of the crisis and frequency of changes in the operational environment;
- Security context for data collectors and subjects, and for the data itself (e.g. level of sensitivity at collection points, transfer points, sharing points, storage points, etc.);
- Value and operational importance of the information to be collected;
- Resources and capacity available to collect the primary data;
- Protection risks associated with the assessment; and
- Possible over-assessment of any population group.

Note that more than one technique can be used to meet the purposes of the exercise. The decision tree below can be helpful in deciding which research methods should be chosen.
The elements described in Figure 5 will influence the methodology, which describes how the research will proceed. At a minimum this needs to detail:

- Type of information to collect;
- Level of information to collect (e.g. individual, household, community, institution);
- Data-collection techniques (e.g. focus group discussions);
- Unit of measurement;
- Sample methods and strategy;
- Data collection tools; and
- Data capture methods (e.g. mobiles, paper questionnaires).
Needs assessment tools and standards have been developed for particular purposes and settings, which could serve as a starting point for adaptation. For additional tools and standards, see Annex 2, ‘Standardized Assessment Tools’.

In a situation with no or little access to affected areas, field data collection can be hampered. For guidance, see the text box below on need assessment in hard-to-reach areas.

**Needs Assessment in Hard-To-Reach or Inaccessible Areas**

Many people are hard to reach due to a variety of factors, including armed conflict and limited means of transport, making it challenging to identify their most pressing needs. For example, it is difficult to access besieged communities, which in turn often forces humanitarian actors to rely on information based on rumour and assumption. Remote assessment methods have been devised to improve and instil a systematic approach to data collection, even in inaccessible areas. These include:

- **Remote sensing for in-depth damage assessment and determination of other visual characteristics of geographical areas of interests.**
  - Remote sensing requires appropriate satellite imagery or aerial photographs, combined with expertise in imagery analysis and local knowledge of the ground situation.
  - Drones or unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) are increasingly being used to support humanitarian action.
- **Identification of key informants such as IDPs/refugees with information about their area of origin.**
  - Collect information from newly-arrived female and male IDPs, returnees, or refugees.
  - Establish a network of key female and male informants who have access to information from and are in regular contact with the area of interest. Often there exists a regular flow of movement and/or communication between persons of concern who have stayed in affected areas and those who have fled.
  - To avoid bias, facilitate group interviews to capture the views of multiple key informants, rather than relying on a single key informant.

By harnessing a regular flow of information, key information can be provided to humanitarian actors. This will improve the basis for response planning and programming purposes, and will ensure an evidence-based response. While that might not result in a full and unbiased understanding of needs, it will provide a systematic approach, rather than relying on assumptions of needs in areas that are difficult to access.

Finally, triangulation of findings with other informants and any available secondary data is crucial, as there are few means of objectively verifying the information.

See Needs Assessment Toolkit for more examples and tips on hard-to-reach populations.

**Data-collection techniques**

There are different methods for collecting primary data. Each has advantages and disadvantages, and each provides qualitative and quantitative data in different proportions. Often techniques are combined to strengthen the analysis (i.e. make it more comprehensive) and look at the information from different points of view. Table 10 summarizes the most commonly used techniques in different types of needs assessments.
Table 10  Data-collection techniques and appropriate use for each technique

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Means of collection</th>
<th>Respondent group</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Initial</th>
<th>Rapid</th>
<th>In-depth</th>
<th>Monitoring</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Key informant interviews</td>
<td>Structured or semi-structured questionnaire adapted to respondent’s expected knowledge</td>
<td>Individuals with prior and specific knowledge on an issue, situation, group, or location</td>
<td>• Gather information about the impact of the crisis among different population groups, protection risks, challenges, opportunities, and resilience</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct observation</td>
<td>Structured (looking for) and unstructured (looking at) observation (sounds, smells, visual impressions, for instance the presence and absence of things and people, taste, touch)</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>• Discover conditions and specific features of an affected site or a population</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus group discussions</td>
<td>Semi-structured interview with a group of individuals to gain information on conditions, situations, experience, expectations, or perceptions through group interaction</td>
<td>Small population groups sharing certain characteristics (e.g. age, sex, diversity factors, economic status)</td>
<td>• Listen to affected population</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community group discussions</td>
<td>Discussion with a diverse group of individuals from a specific community</td>
<td>Diverse groups of individuals from the selected community representing different groups, household situations, and characteristics</td>
<td>• Gain information on conditions, experience, expectations, or perceptions to ensure different points of view</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household visits</td>
<td>Structured interviews with members of households to gain information on conditions, situations, experience, expectations, or perceptions. Teams observe the living conditions of these households</td>
<td>Female and male heads of household (or other representatives of the households, e.g. caregivers, including where these are single women or children)</td>
<td>• Understand the condition and situation based on pre-defined indicators</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Resources in the Toolkit:

- ACAPS, Technical brief: Direct Observation and Key Informant Interview Techniques for primary data collection during rapid assessments
- UNHCR, Instructions for Rapid Assessment Focus Group Discussions
- UNHCR, Tool for Participatory Assessment in Operations

12 For more information on interviews and focus group discussions, please see the UNHCR, Tool for Participatory Assessment in Operations, 2006.
Units of measurement

Data is generally collected at specific levels called units of measurement, which also determine the level of analysis. There are four principal units of measurement in humanitarian needs assessment. It is important to note that different units should not be combined on a single data-collection form.

- **Community-level** assessments take place at the neighbourhood, village, or camp level. The aim is to evaluate the availability and quality of community-shared resources; the existence of community-level needs, risks, and threats; and the coping mechanisms within a community.

- **Institution-level** assessments look at the availability and quality of services and the condition of key public buildings such as schools and hospitals. In some situations, there may be more than one such institution for a particular community.

- **Household-level** assessments are carried out to evaluate the needs of a household and are usually conducted with a representative or the head of household. A household is defined as a group of persons (one or more) living together who make common provisions for food or other essentials of living (e.g. stove, shelter).

- **Individual-level** assessments evaluate the needs of individuals. Such an assessment should be disaggregated by sex, age, and other diversity factors (e.g. instances when the needs of some individuals in a household differ from those of others within the same household due to their gender, age, or other diversity or vulnerability criteria).

The unit of measurement used in a needs assessment directly affects the types of data that can be gathered and the types of questions to include in the data collection form, if applicable. Here are some examples of how, for instance, health-themed questions on a data collection form could differ depending on the unit of analysis used:

- **Community level:** Is there a functioning health facility in this village?
- **Institution level:** How many doctors work at this health facility?
- **Household level:** Can your family afford to buy medicines?
- **Individual level:** What vaccines have you had?

### Volume of Data

The choice of unit of measurement has an impact on the volume of data generated by the assessment. As the unit of measurement gets ‘smaller’ in order to improve the accuracy of data (e.g. individual level rather than community level), the volume of data increases.

For example, a community-level assessment for five camps will result in the collection of five data-collection forms. However, if there are 1,000 households in each of those five camps and a 10 per cent sample is needed for a household-level assessment, this will result in the collection of 500 forms. Similarly, if there are five family members in each household and an individual-level assessment is needed, this will result in 2,500 forms.

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13 The term ‘household’ can be defined in a variety of ways. It is important that each operation clearly articulates the definition it uses. See the Needs Assessment Toolkit for further information and definitions. Approaches to ‘household’ can include specificities such as MF – household (HH) with both male adult and female adult, MNF – HH with male adult and no female adult, FNM – HH with female adult and no male adult, and CNA – HH with no adult, i.e. child-headed household.
Sampling methods
Sampling is the process of selecting a small number of elements from a larger, defined target group. In most assessments, a sample of population or sites will need to be created because time, resource, and other constraints make it impossible to assess all populations and sites. This selection may be carried out through probability or non-probability sampling, the choice of which will depend largely on the availability of resources and the type and objectives of the assessment.

Results from representative probability sampling can be extrapolated from the study population to a broader population. Any assessment findings from an exercise using non-probability sampling, on the other hand, cannot be extrapolated statistically and can describe only areas visited and individuals interviewed.

In general, initial or rapid assessments will use non-probability sampling due to lack of time, while in-depth assessments will use probability sampling. In addition, probability sampling generally consumes more resources than non-probability sampling. As such, when choosing the methodology, there is often a trade-off between the representativeness and diversity of the sample, and the efficiency and timeliness with which data can be collected.14

For an in-depth assessment or in the context of a monitoring system, more time and resources are generally available, and assessment teams should seek to collect more-detailed information. In such situations, in order to allow for the generalization of results to the overall population of interest, the use of probability sampling is recommended. See Annex 3 for an overview of the different sample methods.

Factors commonly influencing the choice of sampling method include the following:

- Nature and quality of the sampling frame;
- Accuracy requirements;
- Type and level of detail of analysis expected;
- Available resources (time, human, material, financial, technological); and
- Context and operational concerns (e.g. humanitarian access).

Drawing a Representative Sample
The information gathered from the small number of units visited can be generalized to the entire affected population if a representative sample method has been applied. The sample will be drawn from the sampling frame, a master list of the population or elements to be assessed. The sampling frame needs to be clearly defined, within which a variety of sampling methods can be employed, individually or in combination. The formulas vary for establishing a statistically significant sample size.

A calculator for sample size is available at [http://www.surveysystem.com/sscalc.htm](http://www.surveysystem.com/sscalc.htm).

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14 See Annex 5 for a summary of sampling methods.
Probability sampling gives every target subject in an area equal chance of being selected for assessment. This method is appropriate if the target group is homogeneous and a complete list of all target subjects is available. If a simple random sampling method is used, for example, target subjects may be selected using numbers generated electronically to obtain a representative sample.

Non-probability sampling is diversity-driven and aimed at sampling as many units as possible. Units (e.g. sites) can be stratified using criteria such as urban/rural, affected populations in camps/outside camps, etc. Under this process, the criteria used for selection should be set to address the differences between sites. Characteristics that may influence site selection include the following:

- **Density:** The affected population is located in urban versus rural areas;
- **Livelihood or agro-ecological zone:** These are areas where people share broad common livelihood-sustaining activities (farming, pastoralism, fishing);
- **Geography:** Altitude and/or topography (the population is located in coastal, riverine, plains, mountains, etc.);
- **Severity of situation:** The population is located in the most affected areas, either directly or indirectly;
- **Pre-existing vulnerabilities:** The population is located in areas with higher or lower access to services, levels of poverty, prevalence of chronic malnutrition, etc.;
- **Security:** Access and constraints due to insecurity; and
- **Administrative units:** The population is within a given district, department, province, etc.

Purposive sampling is often recommended for rapid assessments because the sampling ensures target subjects with different characteristics are selected. Purposive sampling is useful for conducting needs assessments on a limited budget, where there is capacity to reach only a smaller number of sites. Results based on purposive sampling cannot be generalized to cover an entire population.

Purposive sampling involves a two-part process. The first part is to define which selection criteria are important to consider, according to the assessment objectives. The second is to visit sites that represent a cross-section of these. Potentially important types and characteristics for such sites could include the following:

- Sites with the most urgent needs (based on secondary data review);
- Sites where little is known or key information is lacking (knowledge gaps); or
- Sites showing one or several typical situations or groups of concern for the analysis, such as the following:
  - IDPs vs. non-IDPs;
  - Persons of concern in rural vs. urban areas; or
  - Directly vs. indirectly affected populations.
Another type of sampling is **respondent-driven** or the similar **snowball sampling**. This approach attempts to uncover new informants within a particular group by asking respondents to identify others who might know about a particular topic or who share the same characteristics as the respondent group. This technique is particularly useful in locating ‘hidden’ populations or members of a specific population (e.g. identifying IDPs in urban settings). However, it can be subject to considerable selection bias.

**Resources in the Toolkit:**
- Annex 3: Sampling methods
- ACAPS, *Technical brief: Purposive Sampling and Site Selection*

**Design of the data-collection tool**

The design of the data-collection tool will depend on the unit of analysis (e.g. household, community, individual) and the chosen data-collection techniques (direct observation, key informant interview, focus group discussion, etc.). A primary data collection exercise might require more than one data-collection tool or instrument, and each needs to be designed purposefully. As noted earlier, make sure not to combine different units of measurements in a single data-collection form.

A common tool used to capture information during needs assessment is a structured or semi-structured questionnaire. In designing a questionnaire, a major difficulty is making it both relevant to the context and understandable to all stakeholders. A questionnaire needs to be designed by someone with the appropriate technical expertise, a good understanding of principles and practices regarding communicating with the affected population, and a good grasp of the context. Too often, generic questionnaires are used that do not fulfil the requirements of the needs assessment and consequently waste considerable resources.

The analytical framework and analysis plan will guide the design of questions to ensure that only relevant and needed information is included in the instrument. The introduction of any new, unrelated questions should be considered very carefully, only with a clear rationale; if included, they should be recorded in the data analysis plan.

When designing questionnaires, consider the following:

- Keep the questions as brief as possible, based on the questionnaire’s purpose, the identified information needs, and the amount of time you expect to have available to complete a questionnaire.
- Keep the wording simple and to the point, and do not use long sentences or uncommon words.
- Avoid ambiguity; the meaning of both the questions and the possible answers should be clear.
- Avoid threatening questions, giving due consideration to cultural and other sensitivities.
● Keep a question related to one subject (i.e. one topic per question; do not ask two questions in one).

● Ensure clarity in terms of which questions require a single response and which require multiple answers. Note that the analysis will be directly impacted by this choice.

● Avoid leading questions.

Draft questionnaires need to be translated if necessary and should be tested prior to deployment. Using a small test sample, observe the collection of data and review the questionnaire with the interviewers and, if possible, with respondents. Identify any protection risks or concerns for data subjects and/or data collectors, and develop preventive and mitigation strategies.

Questionnaires should always ask information about age, sex, and other relevant diversity factors, even if the survey is anonymous. It is standard good practice to include these questions at the end of the questionnaire to avoid bias. Examples of language to use include:

- **Sex:** Female/Male/Other
- **Age:**
  - Early childhood (ages 0-5)
  - Younger children and adolescents (6-12)
  - Older adolescents (13-17)
  - Youth (18-24)
  - Adults (25-59)
  - Older men and women (60+)

Here are some other diversity questions that can be useful to include at the end of a questionnaire to enable disaggregated analysis:

- **Sexual orientation and gender identity;**
- **Disabilities;**
- **Religion (depending on population); and**
- **Ethnicity (depending on population).**

Resources in the Toolkit:

- Examples of questionnaires via the Profiling and Assessment Resource Kit (PARK): http://www.parkdatabase.org

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15 For definitions of LGBTI, see UNHCR, Protecting person with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities, 2015, p. 5.
Data-capture methods
Traditionally, data has been collected with paper and pen and then entered into a database such as Excel for processing, storing, and analysis. Increasingly, primary data collection is conducted using mobile data-collection systems, e.g. through the use of mobile phones, tablets, or Personal Digital Assistants (PDAs) that allow for real-time data collection, uploading, analysis, and sharing. These are considered more efficient than paper-based forms, which take longer to process. When contemplating using mobile data collection, consider the following pros and cons:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pros</th>
<th>Cons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Easy management of the data with a central server</td>
<td>• Difficult to manage qualitative data and free text answers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Real-time data submission allows for checking quality and correcting mistakes while assessors are still in the field</td>
<td>• Can disturb the interview if the respondent feels insecure or uncomfortable with the device</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• No transcribing or data entry needed</td>
<td>• Use of mobile devices can put respondent and assessor at risk in some settings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Allows for clean data through built-in integrity check</td>
<td>• The assessor has to choose options (or decline to answer) if the respondent offers an unclear answer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Increased security, as forms/responses are safely uploaded without paper trails that could be confiscated, e.g. at a checkpoint</td>
<td>• Mobile devices are easily lost or stolen, or become obsolete</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Less resource intensive with no printing needed</td>
<td>• At varied scales, the process is dependent on cell-phone coverage for synchronization with the server</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Easy capture of observation data (images, video, GPS points)</td>
<td>• Power sources are needed to recharge devices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Allows for instant visualization and mapping</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Numerous tools for mobile data collection exist. Most commonly used in humanitarian settings are the Open Data Kit (ODK) or customized versions such as KoBoToolbox.

KoBoToolbox

KoBoToolbox is a suite of tools for mobile data collection intended for field use. The software is free and open-source. UNHCR has adapted it and developed a unique and secure server available to all field operations.

It is set up for humanitarian workers in crisis situations, as well as aid professionals and researchers working in developing countries. It is an efficient and effective mobile data-collection tool widely used across humanitarian crises, especially where time is of the essence.

KoBoToolbox was developed by the Harvard Humanitarian Initiative in collaboration with the United Nations and IRC.

For further information from UNHCR Headquarters, contact: HQIM@unhcr.org

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16 See: http://www.kobotoolbox.org/.
Training of assessment teams

The assessment teams need to receive adequate and timely training, as well as clear reporting lines and job descriptions. The length of this training can range from one day for rapid assessments to up to one week for in-depth assessments. At minimum, these trainings should include the following:

- Assessment background, objectives, time frame, geographical scope, and methodology;
- Team structure, roles and responsibilities, reporting and communication lines, and reporting/debriefing requirements;
- Site and target group selection process and guidance;
- Techniques and tools to be used such as questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, or direct observation techniques, including mobile data collection where relevant;
- Interview techniques and inter-personal skills (see Table 12);
- Techniques on how to implement an ethical and protection-focused approach, including AGD awareness, understanding and signing of a code of conduct and a confidentiality agreement;
- Instructions on referral mechanisms for any persons identified as needing urgent attention (e.g. unaccompanied children, medical cases, survivors of sexual and gender-based violence);
- Strategies to enhance data quality and reduce bias;
- Security protocols and emergency procedures; and
- Administrative and logistics arrangements, such as transport and accommodation.

17 See Needs Assessment Toolkit for further guidance on assessment training.
**Table 12  Tips on how to conduct interviews**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Do</th>
<th>Don’t</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Establish contact first by introducing yourself, the team, and the organization. Explain the purpose of the assessment to the respondents and that all information will remain confidential.</td>
<td>Don’t influence responses or probe for additional information that is not required. Instead, show empathy for the respondent and interest in understanding his/her views as relevant to the purpose of the assessment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obtain consent from all adult participants and parents or guardians for any child participants. Inform respondents that they can refuse to take part in the assessment without negative consequences, and that they can refrain from answering specific questions. If the interview will be recorded on a device, explain how the recording will be used and protected.</td>
<td>Don’t take pictures or videos of individuals or record a conversation without their informed consent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hold the interview in a place that can put the respondents at ease and ensure their security.</td>
<td>Don’t ask intrusive questions or use a judgmental tone. Instead, be aware of what is considered intrusive in the cultural context. Avoid arguing with or challenging the respondent; rather, let the respondent do most of the talking, and intervene mostly to clarify.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Try to obtain responses from multiple sources whenever possible. Involve all groups, particularly persons with specific needs, to ensure the assessment reflects the diversity of needs experienced by different groups.</td>
<td>Don’t ask questions, particularly those related to protection, in front of armed personnel, security personnel, officials, or other persons who could create protection risks for respondents. This can include male members of the family.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establish a rapport through friendly behaviour in order to inspire confidence and trust. Be an active, attentive listener and record proceedings properly.</td>
<td>Don’t get stuck on a question. If the respondent is uncomfortable with certain questions, do not insist that he/she answer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect the dignity of individuals and local customs at all times. Use local impartial and properly trained language interpreters to ensure an inclusive approach. Ensure that interpreters are familiar with any technical terms that may be used during the interview.</td>
<td>Don’t talk to other participants about a specific interview. Respect the confidentiality extended.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pace yourself according to the time you have allotted for the interview. For each interviewee, note your own observations about the process and content of the interview.</td>
<td>Don’t prevent respondents from asking you questions at the end of the interview.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be sensitive to gender, age, and diversity. This includes ensuring female assessors and translators are available for female groups or individual respondents and vice-versa; and ensuring that communication methods are adapted for persons with disabilities, children, persons with low literacy, etc.</td>
<td>Don’t create expectations or make promises about future humanitarian or other support.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In a household survey setting, wherever possible verify answers through observation by data collectors. This can help to triangulate information in a simple, non-intrusive way.</td>
<td>Don’t make assumptions about gender roles, or about women’s and men’s needs and priorities.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Resources in the Toolkit:
- ACAPS, Technical brief: Building an Effective Assessment Teams
- UNHCR, Listen and Learn: Participatory Assessment with Children and Adolescents
- UNHCR, Brief Instructions for Rapid Assessment Focus Group Discussions
- UNHCR, Ethical Considerations Guide, Rapid Protection Assessment Tool
- Template for terms of reference for assessors/field assessment team/team leaders
- Template for code of conduct and confidentiality agreement
Inclusion of age, gender, and diversity

There are practical ways to include perspectives across age groups, gender, and other aspects of diversity in field assessments. These include encouraging the participation in the review process of community-based organizations and the representation of women, men, girls, and boys but also people with diverse cultural, religious, or language backgrounds. It also means committing to share results with affected communities and, if possible, validating the findings with them before finalization and dissemination.

To ensure that needs assessment information is fully representative of a community’s diversity, staff should:

- Ensure involvement of all segments of a population. In this, outreach to more isolated and less mobile persons might be required, including those with health issues or disabilities, women with babies, and older persons.
- Use key informants from different social strata in structured interviews.
- Conduct focus group discussions according to AGD principles (e.g. have separate discussions for men, women, boys, girls, minorities, people with disabilities).
- Triangulate data from many social strata to obtain information on the variety of experiences faced by different groups in the affected population.
- Include questions and themes that might be relevant to marginalized or less-vocal segments of communities.
- Collaborate with specialized non-governmental organizations that work with more isolated groups (such as older persons, persons with disabilities, minorities, and children) to enhance participation by these groups in needs assessment exercises.
- Engage with community structures (e.g. committees for youth, women, and persons with disabilities).
- Ensure that crisis-affected communities and humanitarian actors jointly identify a community’s protection risks, existing capacities, and the community members’ own priorities for intervention.

Resources in the Toolkit:
- UNHCR, Age, Gender and Diversity Policy
- UNHCR, Community-based Protection (Standing Committee Report)
STEP 4: **Draw Conclusions: Needs Analysis**

Analysis is a systematic and iterative sense-making process guided by the analytical framework and analysis plan that are defined for a specific needs assessment exercise (see Step 2). The more detailed the analysis plan, the more automatic and straightforward the needs analysis will be, with minimized bias.

Analysis is an ongoing activity throughout the needs assessment. It should start as soon as data becomes available, rather than waiting until after it has all been collected. In order to be able to reproduce analysis results and to transparently provide evidence of how the findings and conclusions were drawn, the entire analysis process needs to be documented.

The needs analysis will often combine qualitative and quantitative approaches. The exact combination will depend on the purpose of the exercise and the sampling method used, and the differences and limitations of each must be understood when undertaking the needs analysis. Needs analysis aims to accomplish the following:

- Describe and understand the severity of conditions of various affected groups, including sub-groups according to age, gender, diversity, or locations;
- Explain cause-and-effect phenomena;
- Identify and prioritize main needs, protection concerns, vulnerabilities, and risks; and
- Predict subsequent impacts of the crisis.

**Fig. 6 Analytical tasks**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WHO, WHAT, WHERE, WHEN?</th>
<th>WHY?</th>
<th>SO WHAT?</th>
<th>WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Summarize and consolidate relevant observations</td>
<td>- Look for connections and relationships between observations</td>
<td>- Evaluate the evidence and draw conclusions</td>
<td>- Identify aggravated and emerging risks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Identify patterns and trends</td>
<td>- Determine why particular conditions are observed</td>
<td>- Identify the severity of existing or potential concerns, vulnerabilities, risks</td>
<td>- Anticipate likely evolution over time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Compare temporal and geographical data spanning different social groups, sex, age and other diversity groups</td>
<td>- Understand underlying processes and factors creating protection concerns, vulnerabilities or risks</td>
<td>- Prioritize geographical areas, groups and protection concerns/risks based on an assessment of severity or scope</td>
<td>- Develop scenarios</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Identify the extent to which findings can apply to another setting or population group</td>
<td></td>
<td>- Identify the extent to which findings can apply to another setting or population group</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is important to ensure not only that needs analysis is done but also that we do not skip the imperative intermediary step between needs analysis and programme design, i.e. response analysis. Response analysis involves the selection of appropriate and feasible response options to address unmet need, while minimizing potential harmful side effects.

See UNHCR, Participatory Assessment in Operations and Programming for Protection on Learn and Connect for further information on 'Systematizing the information gathered', 'Follow-up Actions', and 'Comprehensive Analysis of the Findings and Prioritization'.
Analysis steps are incremental, and each builds on the results of the previous step to provide additional information and value.

**Description**

Describing data means to state what the numbers indicate. This requires compiling large amounts of data into a representation that makes it easier to compare and identify the main points, important stories, and useful messages in the data. For example, the description process involves grouping similar data (e.g. all data from IDPs in a province) and summarizing this into higher-level measurements or statements.

Basic descriptive statistics such as median, mode, or mean can be used for quantitative data (e.g. on average, 57 per cent of IDPs indicated tensions with their host communities). On the other hand, higher concepts or themes can be used to synthesize qualitative data (e.g. most [80%] of key informants mentioned growing animosities and rising numbers of incidents between IDPs and the host community). Grouping and summarization is made easier if data-management procedures have been put in place during the planning process, and definitions and categories are clearly stated and agreed.

After summarization, comparing data will allow for the identification of similarities and differences between two or more measurements. Comparisons allow patterns, trends, anomalies, or outliers in the data to emerge, providing the basis for findings and key messages. Most types of comparison are possible for use in a needs analysis, but the following are used most often in needs assessment:

- **When conventions or standards** are commonly applied, they can be used as the reference values for calculations, e.g. UNHCR standards or SPHERE minimum standards. If external standards do not exist or additional contrasts are required, pick salient reference values within the data (e.g. the average access to clean water in a middle-income neighbourhood before vs. after a crisis).

- **Geographical** comparisons entail comparing different geographically delineated areas, e.g. two provinces, areas of higher- vs. lower-conflict intensity, etc. This type of comparison can be extended to other defined elements with spatial attributes such as the type of setting (e.g. rural vs. urban or camps vs. non-camps).

- **Socio-economic group** and other diversity comparisons allow for the identification of different levels of need between different types of populations or affected groups (e.g. agro-pastoralists vs. farmers, hosts vs. IDPs, ethnic group A vs. ethnic group B). This is especially useful in describing the variation of needs between and within affected groups identified in the humanitarian profile.

- **Sex and age** comparison is essential for all humanitarian assessment in order to understand the different needs, priorities, and capabilities of women, men, girls,

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20 ‘Tagging’ observations around specific categories of analysis (e.g. geographical locations, affected groups, sectors or sub-sectors, or other themes) allows for quick filtering and re-organization of data depending on analytical needs.

21 The Sphere Handbook: Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Response is one of the most widely known and internationally recognized sets of common principles and universal minimum standards in life-saving areas of humanitarian response.
and boys in key age groups. In addition, analysis of the needs, priorities, and capabilities of other marginalized groups is key for comprehensive analysis, including persons with disabilities, LGBTI persons, minorities, and indigenous people.

- **Time** comparisons are also useful. They are sometimes employed as a proxy measure for showing the impact of the crisis or as a measure of the evolution of the response.

**Fig. 7** Common stories or interesting patterns emerging from the descriptive analysis involve:

**Ranking:** Comparison of one measure to another as well as quantitative order

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Measure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kenya</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tanzania</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sierra Leone</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Costa Rica</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tajikistan</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Ecuador</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Kenya</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saudi Arabia</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Part of the whole:** Comparison of a measure to the whole

**Distribution:** Comparison of the distribution of values for one or multiple subdivisions

**Time series:** Comparison of a measure taken over equal time periods

**Deviation:** Comparison of the difference between a measure and a reference measure

**Spatial:** Comparison of a measure based on spatial characteristics
Main results for the descriptive analysis include:

- Secondary and primary data are grouped and summarized based on the analysis plan and pre-identified categories of analysis, e.g. urban vs. rural, etc.
- Comparisons of results based on relevant characteristics such as geographical areas, population groups, or time highlight similarities and differences.
- Key patterns, trends, anomalies, and outliers emerge from the comparisons and are described.

Resources in the Toolkit:


Explanation

Explanatory analysis looks for associations, correlations, and more generally for connections between observations and measurements. It is an extension of the descriptive phase and allows for the identification of key underlying factors based on careful investigation of relationships, processes, or causal mechanisms.

Identifying relationships is an important part of the analysis process, because it prepares for moving from a simple description of the population conditions and settings to explanations of why and how things happened as they did. This level of analysis implies carefully connecting the dots and assessing whether two or more variables, conditions, or observations vary according to a pattern, if there is a strong or weak

Correlation: comparison of two set of measures to determine if as one data set goes up, the other set correspondingly goes up or down, and how strongly

![Graph showing correlation between mortality rate and life expectancy at birth](image)

22 See the Needs Assessment Toolkit for examples of analysis and helpful tools available to support the analysis phase. For example, CARE, Rapid Gender Analysis for Emergencies Tool, and UNRWA, Gender Analysis Manual, 2011.
relationship linking them, and if one is a cause of or contributor to another. The main underlying processes that impact the well-being of the affected population should be carefully identified and verified, as they will constitute the basis for further operational and programmatic recommendations.

As an effect of small samples, complex mechanisms, and combinations, uncertainties regarding the most accurate explanation often arise, and several reasonable explanations might account for the current conditions. Assessment teams should develop hypotheses and rival explanations, none of which should be discarded until sufficient evidence is gathered to identify the most plausible.

**Association, Correlation, and Causation**

Pattern detection and recognition allows for the identification of specific associations within the data.

An association is any relationship, correspondence, connection, or link between two or more variables of interest whose dependence can be measured and verified. Simply put, there is association when two variables move together, but one does not influence or cause the other.

The term association is closely related to the term correlation, and both imply that two or more variables vary according to some pattern. However, correlation is primarily interested in measuring the degree to which the association of the variables tends to adhere to a certain pattern. Correlation is positive when the values increase together and is negative when one value decreases as the other increases.

Remember that just because two variables have a statistical relationship with each other does not mean that one is responsible for or causes the other.

Causation is the relationship between cause and effect, where one factor causes another. It implies identifying the start variables (baseline conditions that will have changed), the intermediate variables (events, states, processes, and/or factors that initiate changes or action of some kind), and the outcomes (the consequent and final results, positive or negative, of start and mediating variables).

Analysts should be cautious and should not treat simultaneity (or co-occurrence) as causation. Note that a correlation does not necessarily imply a causal relationship. However, if two things are causally linked, they will be correlated.

**Underlying factors:** Comparison, identification and structure of contributing factors and causal mechanisms
Main results for the explanatory analysis include:

- Associations and correlations are detected and their strength described.
- Contributing factors and underlying processes are described.
- Factors likely contributing the most to observed outcomes are identified.
- Explanations and/or alternative or rival hypotheses are developed.

**Interpretation**

Interpretation is the process of attaching meaning to data. It aims to move beyond findings to instead draw well-supported conclusions through careful argumentation, evaluation of strength of evidence, and attention to plausibility in context.

Interpretation demands objective and careful analytical judgement. Often the same data can be interpreted in different ways by different analysts with differing levels of expertise, biases, assumptions, and areas of focus. To overcome this issue, it is helpful to involve other partners and stakeholders in the analysis process, including persons of concern (e.g. through a workshop with local experts or affected populations, meeting with stakeholders, consultation with clusters or sector experts, etc.). With regard to consulting persons of concern, ensure a setting that allows for consultation with sub-groups regarding age, gender, and diversity.

Not all humanitarian issues have the same importance. Some contribute more than others to the deterioration of the physical, mental, or social well-being of an affected population, and thus these need priority attention. Establishing the intensity or risk of harmful consequences if nothing is done to address a particular issue, as well as how many people are currently facing those conditions, allows for issues to be prioritized based on their actual or expected negative outcomes and their prevalence among a given population. Beyond issues, priority should also be established for geographical areas or population groups that are the most severely impacted.

Strengths and limitations of the evidence that supports final conclusions and the reasoning behind analytical judgments must be assessed in order to detect possible flaws in argumentation and establish the trustworthiness and credibility of conclusions. Conclusions derived from assumptions rather than the available data should be clearly flagged.
and communicated as such to avoid any risk of misinterpretation or accusations of bias.

In cases where a random sample has been used, interpretation also implies determining the conditions and extent to which findings can apply to others places, humanitarian sectors, or population groups through careful generalization and extrapolation.

Finally, operational recommendations need to be provided on the issues that have been identified as the most severe and highest priority.

The following is a set of questions frequently used when interpreting needs assessment data:

- What was learned? What are the results? What is known about similar past crises in the region, and what does this tell us about the current findings? Is it plausible?

- What is new, what was expected, and what has changed since the emergency started? What has stayed the same when everything else has changed, and why did the crisis change it? What is surprising? What is not surprising and does not need to be presented or explained in detail? If the situation for certain groups or areas did not worsen, why not?

- What is important or different about one group, time, or place when compared to another? Are patterns consistent across different groups and sources of information? Do they make sense? How does one geographical area differ from another, and why? What trends can be observed?

- What conditions are the most severe? How many people face those conditions? What are the critical issues or concerns to be addressed in the short, middle, and longer term?

- What is the source of the evidence? How credible are the findings? What are the limitations of the analysis? Could chance or bias explain the results? How do the results compare with those from other studies? Are the patterns meaningful signals, or do they simply represent the ‘noise’ in the data? How big is the difference or change in conditions and behaviour? What differences are bigger than the imprecision of the measurement?

- What conclusions can be drawn? What are the most important messages? What theories or mechanisms might account for these findings? What alternative hypotheses can be suggested?

- What is missing? What is the next level of detail required? Where do gaps in knowledge persist? Are those gaps on issues that are not well understood and where further study is needed? What are the next research steps?
Joint Analysis and Validation of Findings

To ensure that all relevant stakeholders, including persons of concern, are sufficiently involved in the analysis process, at minimum an external validation of the analysis and its findings is necessary before the findings are more widely shared and disseminated.

While a broad-spectrum analysis team may work together to ensure expertise in technical subject matter, a joint analysis process with a broader group – including representatives from the affected population and, where possible and appropriate, relevant government stakeholders – ensures sufficient buy-in by a broader stakeholder group and the consideration of local knowledge in the findings.

Joint analysis also reduces the risk of duplication and wasted resources.

With these aims in mind, a workshop or presentation could be arranged to:

- Present the purpose of the exercise, the data collection method, the analysis method, and limitations (e.g. only few areas surveyed due to access constraints);
- Present analytical outputs, preliminary findings, conclusions, and interpretations;
- Validate these with participants, after exploring possible biases, distortions, gaps, and alternatives;
- Generate ownership of the results; and
- Discuss and agree on key issues and priority needs.

A collective process of joint analysis can consolidate sector-level with inter-sectoral analysis. Sector-level analysis involves consolidation, processing, and analysis of data collected for each sector. On the other hand, inter-sectoral analysis facilitates discussion so that intra- and inter-sectoral findings and knowledge can be shared and consolidated in a structured manner, cross-cutting issues can be identified, and a common understanding of the situation can be built.

Main results for the interpretive analysis include:

- Severity and priorities have been identified across geographical areas, sectors, and population groups.
- The distinct assistance and protection needs of girls, boys, women, and men have been identified, along with how discrimination might impact their access to services or assistance.
- Strength of evidence has been reviewed to determine degree of confidence in and trustworthiness of final results. Each piece of information is clearly sourced, and distinctions are made between facts and assumptions.
- The extent to which the findings can apply to other settings, geographical areas, or population groups has been assessed.
- Key stakeholders, including the affected population, have been consulted to interpret the findings and have agreed on final conclusions and recommendations.

Resources in the Toolkit:
Anticipation

The next level of analysis is to anticipate future developments and envisage different possible outcomes and evolutions for the current situation. Response interventions usually take place a period of time after the analysis is done. Therefore, conditions previously identified may have changed between the initial data collection and the implementation of the response. To ensure future programming remains aligned with the realities on the ground, this type of analysis involves identifying probable developments (i.e. scenarios) and attempting to predict how these might impact current conditions and the nature and severity of needs for different groups in different areas.

Anticipatory analysis identifies the likelihood of future events and trends in a specifically identified time frame (e.g. three to six months, one year), based on current and historical data. It combines predictions (a one-off estimate of a specific event in the future) and forecast (identifying a set of possible futures that include probability estimates of occurrence and the severity of humanitarian impact). Predicting and forecasting are an integral part of scenario-building in response planning and will also usually inform preparedness activities.

Typical steps for forecasting include the following:

- **Extend current conditions to forecast future outcomes**: Using historical data and trends therein, forecast how the situation will evolve in the short to medium term or how it already has evolved since the data was collected. Consider the impact on humanitarian needs and the ability to respond to those needs if there is no significant change in the direction of the trend.

- **Examine and develop alternative futures**: Analysis of an extension of current trends (as per the above) does not factor in new developments. Identify alternative ways the situation might develop if other events or situations arise to anticipate a change in context and assess how different the outcomes would be from the initial/current situation.

- **Validate scenarios**: Develop scenarios based on the above. Scenarios are discussed in groups, workshops, or meetings to assess their likelihood and potential humanitarian impact, based on expert judgement and comparison with similar events in the past, either in-country or in similar contexts.

- **Compare results**: Monitor the situation and compare the actual results with the predicted results. This is an important step to improve forecasting procedures, tools, and assumptions for future use.
Main results for the anticipatory analysis include:

✓ Factors, assumptions, and drivers that might change or exacerbate the crisis are clearly highlighted, such as lack of governance capacity, gender inequalities and social discrimination, or the development of an ongoing crisis event such as drought or flooding.

✓ Distinctions between current and future potential conditions are clearly established.

✓ Implications of potential developments on needs, risks, threats, vulnerabilities, and coping mechanisms are identified and inform the planning of programmes and interventions.

✓ Scenario triggers are clearly identified and monitored.

Resources in the Toolkit:

→ ACAPS, Technical brief: Scenario Building: How to Build Scenarios in Preparation for or During Humanitarian Crises, 2016
STEP 5: Share Information

In order for a needs assessment to serve its purpose and have operational impact for the benefit of affected populations, analysis results must be communicated in a timely and effective manner, and disseminated to appropriate audiences. Needs assessment results can inform strategic response planning, project design, programming, resource allocation decisions, advocacy, fundraising, and reporting. Such information is also a tool of accountability to communities and donors. A dissemination plan should be established at the planning phase of the exercise, since each end user of the findings may require them to be presented via different products and platforms.

Protocols for data sharing in support of a coordinated needs assessment approach should be negotiated and signed to regulate the sharing of aggregated findings and/or raw data. It is important to share this information both internally and externally as appropriate, based on agreed dissemination plans and data-sharing protocols, and after having identified and mitigated any potential protection concerns.

Assessment Report

A report produced at the end of the assessment process can be adjusted to suit a number of audiences, but it must at all times be structured to assist with the defined purpose and objective(s). The report should be as short as possible, and the outline should be developed at the outset of the needs assessment initiative in order for stakeholders to agree on expectations and anticipated results. For long reports, an executive summary of the assessment findings should appear at the beginning. Needs assessment reports should include the following:

- Clearly stated purpose, objectives, and scope of the needs assessment;
- A description of the populations and geographic areas covered by the assessment, and the dates when data collection took place;
- A detailed description of the methodologies used in the data collection and sampling, including any known limitations;
- A context description including scope and scale of the crisis, socio-political context, evolution of the events, and applicable legal frameworks;
- Clearly stated findings, conclusions, and recommendations to assist users in determining what further actions are required. These can include the following:
  - An indication of needs, priorities, challenges, and capacities disaggregated and analysed by sex, age, and other population sub-groups (e.g. persons with disabilities, LGBTI persons, survivors of SGBV, minorities, and indigenous persons);
  - An indication of the targeted beneficiary community’s own solutions and priorities for humanitarian intervention;
Prioritization of particular gaps, sectors, geographic areas, and population sub-sets based on analysis of the severity, depth, and estimated prevalence of the problem; and

Where possible, a comparison of current living standards with a baseline or established benchmarks.

Strategic use of data visualization and highlighted text boxes within the report, which can direct attention to particularly important information;

Description of the analysis method(s) used, documentation of any assumptions made and how conclusions were reached; and

Acknowledgement of all organizations participating in the needs assessment, such as UN agencies, NGOs, government entities, and academic institutions.

Needs assessment reports should be released as soon as possible, i.e. as soon as validated and approved by relevant stakeholders. Data on needs becomes stale very quickly, particularly as more assessments are conducted and the situation on the ground changes. Data should always be presented as disaggregated by sex, age and diversity criteria. Consider sharing preliminary findings with relevant stakeholders prior to the final report, especially if approval is required before publication.

Keep the validation and consultation process as short as possible without compromising quality, consensus, and buy-in. The finalization process may significantly delay the release of a report, perhaps to allow for finishing touches or to await approval from multiple parties. In all cases, make sure that the results and key findings are available for use in strategic and operational decision-making as soon as possible.

**Dissemination of Findings**

As emphasized throughout this Handbook, the primary reason for doing an assessment is to use the information gathered to make decisions and take action that can improve the effectiveness of UNHCR and humanitarian community programming as well as inform community response in meeting the needs of an affected population.

In order to promote information sharing, it may be necessary to create different versions of a needs assessment report to follow UNHCR’s data-sharing guidelines and any related protocols that have been established (e.g. one with restricted circulation and a second that can be shared more broadly). Personal data, including photographs of individuals, should not be shared as part of an assessment report.

Collected information, including raw data that is not considered sensitive or does not include personally identifiable data, should be shared as widely as possible, as per the dissemination strategy agreed in the planning stage. This includes the government when possible and appropriate, implementing and operational partners, the media, donors, NGOs, and other UN agencies.
The affected population also needs to be made aware of the results to ensure impact of the needs assessment. This improves accountability to affected populations and allows persons of concern to improve information-based community or even individual response. The information should include both needs findings and how these will be translated into programmes. Information should be available in multiple formats in order to ensure access by groups with diverse means of communication (e.g. persons with visual, hearing, or intellectual disabilities; persons with low literacy; children; persons who use minority languages). It is important to highlight that communication channels remain open toward persons of concern after the needs assessment is finalized, to regularly adapt the response based on the suggestions and recommendations received.

In order to properly manage expectations, it is important to clearly communicate limitations on follow-up actions and commitments, including by using negative or hard messages. For instance, neither UNHCR alone nor the broader humanitarian community will be able to respond to all identified priorities. Such clear communication toward unmet needs not only increases acceptance of development and humanitarian agencies but also allows persons of concern to develop community or individual responses to unmet needs in a clearer frame.

In order to inform and disseminate findings, assessment organizers need to identify appropriate and accessible communication channels and formats in the planning stage. The dissemination strategy must always consider protection risks associated with dissemination through different platforms and means, and identify appropriate mitigation strategies.

Disseminating assessment findings through multiple channels increases the likelihood that the information will be used in decision-making. In addition to the assessment report, assessment results can be disseminated through multiple other information products in condensed formats. Options include dashboards, maps, infographics, and camp profiles.

Aside from traditional hard-copy dissemination, there are many ways to distribute assessment findings electronically, including the following:

- UNHCR operational web portals, Refworld;
- Shared humanitarian portals such as HDX, HumanitarianResponse.info, and ReliefWeb;
- Cluster-specific websites (i.e. sheltercluster.org, globalprotectioncluster.org, globalcccmcluster.org);
- Social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Google Plus, Yammer; and
- File synchronization services such as Sharepoint, Dropbox, and the Humanitarian Kiosk.
Main results for dissemination include:

✓ As a first step to quickly inform response, preliminary findings are consolidated and presented clearly, with the methodology and limitations included as background, to key selected partners and/or stakeholders.
✓ A dissemination plan with clearly defined audiences, information product outlines, and distribution channels has been established at the planning stage.
✓ Reports and materials are tailored to defined audiences.
✓ Data sharing protocols are established and respected when disseminating data and information product(s).
✓ Feedback is provided to assessed communities by sharing the results of the assessment and outcomes (e.g. response planning).

❌ Resources in the Toolkit:
- Report template
- Dissemination plan template