

NEEDS ASSESSMENT HANDBOOK



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Foreword: UNHCR's Strategic Approach to Needs Assessments

'We require needs assessments that are impartial, unbiased, comprehensive, context-sensitive, timely and up-to-date. Needs assessments must provide a sound evidence base for humanitarian response plans and prioritised appeals with due regard for specific accountabilities of mandated agencies [...] The needs assessment process must be coordinated, impartial, collaborative and fully transparent with a clear distinction between the analysis of data and the subsequent prioritisation and decision-making.'

– The Grand Bargain, World Humanitarian Summit (Turkey, 23 May 2016) ¹

As a result of the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016, the Grand Bargain established 10 commitments for aid organizations and donors to work together efficiently, transparently, and harmoniously in order to better deliver protection and assistance to the millions of people facing emergency needs. One of these commitments calls for the improvement of needs assessments, notably by:

1. *Providing a single, comprehensive, cross-sectoral, methodologically sound, and impartial overall assessment of needs for each crisis to inform strategic decisions;*
2. *Coordinating and streamlining data collection to ensure compatibility, quality and comparability, and avoid over-assessment and duplication;*
3. *Sharing needs assessment data in a timely manner, with the appropriate mitigation of protection and privacy risks; and*
4. *Prioritizing humanitarian response across sectors based on evidence established by the analysis.*²

Given that UNHCR is one of the signatories of the Grand Bargain, the agency's *Needs Assessment Handbook* and its accompanying online *Needs Assessment Toolkit* provide guidance on how to accomplish these objectives.

UNHCR operations have been conducting collaborative, protection-sensitive needs assessments for years. However, the rigour demanded by donors and formalized by

¹ The Grand Bargain: A Shared Commitment to Better Serve People in Need, Istanbul (Turkey), 23 May 2016.

² With regard to needs assessments (Commitment 5), the Grand Bargain also stipulates that the signatories must 'dedicate resources and involve independent specialists within the clusters to strengthen data collection and analysis in a fully transparent, collaborative process'; 'commission independent reviews and evaluations of the quality of needs assessment findings and their use'; and, 'conduct risk and vulnerability analysis with development partners and local authorities'. Moreover, under Commitment 4 to 'Reduce duplication and management costs with periodic functional review', there is a commitment to 'reduce the costs and measure the gained efficiencies of delivering assistance with technology (including green) and innovation', for example by 'expanding the use of mobile technology for needs assessments/post-distribution monitoring'. These commitments will be dealt with through other UNHCR initiatives.

the cluster system to adequately address the needs and priorities of populations of concern now requires UNHCR to engage in more formal, methodologically sound, and transparent processes for joint assessments and joint analysis.

Joint and harmonized assessments lead to efficiencies, prevent the over-assessment of populations of concern, and help establish a common inter-agency understanding of a situation at the outset of a crisis and throughout the programme management cycle. Recognizing the importance of maintaining the link between needs assessments and monitoring, regular joint needs analysis provides an evidence base for medium- and long-term planning, including multi-year protection and solutions strategies. Similarly, to bridge the humanitarian and development gap, links are being strengthened with development frameworks and assessments such as UNDAF, Recovery and Peace-building Assessments (RPBA), and socio-economic research by actors such as the World Bank.

This Handbook represents the first guidance UNHCR has produced on needs assessment that applies to all sectors, situations, methods, and populations of concern. Although the Handbook should not be considered policy, it serves the similar purpose of committing the Office and its staff members to a set of global principles, objectives, standards, procedures, and working methods. As the culmination of years of research and broad consultations, it consolidates practices, standards, and guidance from across UNHCR and operationalizes the *IASC Operational Guidance on Coordinated Assessments in Humanitarian Crises*.

With this Handbook, UNHCR seeks to build on its strengths and core mandate to ensure that the centrality of protection is mainstreamed in all needs assessments. For a humanitarian response to be protection-oriented, it is essential to understand and seek to prevent, mitigate, and/or end actual and potential risks. This requires a continuous analysis of the needs, risks, threats, vulnerabilities, and capacities of affected persons on the one hand, and of the commitment and capacities of duty bearers to address risk factors on the other. Such an analysis provides the evidence base for programming, advocacy, and other activities that aim to change behaviours and policies in support of a more favourable protection environment and better protection outcomes.³

Needs assessment activities are characterized as any exercise conducted to understand the various needs of a population. In practice there are different assessment tools and methods that can be used. It is good practice to establish a comprehensive assessment strategy that employs various assessment tools to meet the needs of each sector, based on the level and types of operational data required to achieve the identified purpose. See Annex 7 for more details on common assessments terms and relationships.⁴

³ IASC, Policy on Protection in Humanitarian Action, 2016.

⁴ Note that there is sometimes confusion between needs assessments, the UNHCR Tool for Participatory Assessments, and participatory approaches. All needs assessments must adhere to the principles and practices of participatory approaches. While the scope and activities of participation may depend on the specific context of each situation, participatory and community-based approaches are 'the way UNHCR does business.' Needs assessment activities, on the other hand, are characterized as an exercise conducted at a single point in time to understand the various needs of a population. In practice there are many different assessment approaches and tools that can be used to undertake needs assessments, including highly qualitative approaches such as the UNHCR Tool for Participatory Assessments and/or a more quantitative assessment approach such as IDP profiling (i.e. a household level, representative survey). Both methods are types of assessments within the broader protection information management category of Needs Assessments, but they employ different data collection techniques, which alter how operations can use the resulting data.

Regardless of the type of assessment chosen, participatory approaches must apply and guide all aspects of assessment activities. While the scope of participation may depend on the specific context of each situation, continuous participatory approaches are standard UNHCR practice.

The Handbook is structured in two parts. The first, which is recommended for all audiences, defines need assessments and their different types; describes coordination modalities; outlines the roles and responsibilities of different actors in refugee situations, IDP situations, and mixed situations; provides an overview of the steps to conduct needs assessments and the principles that should guide them; and explains the relationship between needs assessments and other information systems. The second part of the Handbook provides detailed practical guidance on how to conduct needs assessments in the field. It can be used as a reference text, with readers referring to specific steps and sections as needed based on their role in the operation or the needs assessment, and the type of situation.

In addition to the Handbook and supporting Toolkit, there is an e-learning programme that is open to all interested staff members and UNHCR partners. The e-learning component is complimentary to the Handbook and provides further guidance on how to operationalize assessments. The programme illustrates case studies, field practices, and lessons learned from needs assessments within UNHCR operations.⁵

We recognize that needs assessment practices and requirements evolve over time as new operational environments emerge and new policies are introduced. For example, the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) will amplify refugee host population voices in needs assessments. New innovations and strengthened humanitarian partnerships will continue to drive the need for and emergence of new techniques and standards. In order to respond to and capture those changes, UNHCR will regularly update the Needs Assessment Toolkit and has a dedicated email address available to receive feedback on an ongoing basis (HQNA@unhcr.org). This is part of our wider commitment to continue to professionalize needs assessment practices in order to improve protection outcomes for the populations we serve.

⁵ The Needs Assessment E-learning modules can be found on Learn and Connect. There is also an introductory Needs Assessment module within the Operational Data Management Learning Programme, ODMLP, (Module 25).

Acknowledgement

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The Handbook is based on existing UNHCR guidance and practice on needs assessment that have been consolidated into a single reference source. It also reflects inter-agency guidance and tools on needs assessments, including guidance from the Assessment Capacities Project (ACAPS) and the IASC Needs Assessment Task Force.

Purpose

The purpose of the UNHCR Needs Assessment Handbook is twofold:

- To delineate UNHCR's role in the coordination of humanitarian needs assessments; and
- To offer practical advice on how to appropriately design and conduct needs assessments and needs analyses for informed decision-making and needs-based response planning.⁶

The Handbook provides an assessment framework for UNHCR in a variety of contexts.

Scope

This Handbook is designed for use by all UNHCR staff and partners involved in needs assessments. This includes those responsible for overseeing an assessment and those directly undertaking, managing, or coordinating such a process, whether specialists or generalists.

The Handbook will apply in all UNHCR operations⁷ and phases, from preparedness to emergency response to protracted situations, in four distinct planning and coordination models:

- UNHCR Operations Management Cycle;
- UNHCR-led response in refugee situations;
- UNHCR as cluster lead and cluster member in IDP situations and other non-refugee humanitarian crises; and
- UNHCR in mixed situations with refugees and IDPs.⁸

Note that, as a general matter, UNHCR does not provide in-kind humanitarian assistance to stateless populations nor conduct regular needs assessments with regard to stateless populations. UNHCR implements its statelessness mandate to identify and protect

⁶ UNHCR, *Programme Manual* (Chapter 4), 2016.

⁷ This Handbook provides technical guidance that applies to all types of settings and groups of persons of concern to UNHCR, though approaches for assessments might differ and render a need for customized guidance and tools, such as for stateless. References to available and relevant resources feature in the Needs Assessment Toolkit.

⁸ Note that while there are only three distinct planning models, in practice UNHCR often has to coordinate in a fourth situation: mixed. A mixed situation is one where the humanitarian community must respond to both refugees and IDPs.

stateless persons and to prevent and reduce statelessness primarily through advocacy with governments and others, and without humanitarian needs assessments. While needs assessments generally are not conducted in statelessness situations, many of the general information management and protection principles outlined in this Handbook will apply to statelessness responses, too. For more information on UNHCR's approach to statelessness, refer to: *Statelessness: An Analytical Framework for Prevention, Reduction and Protection* (UNHCR, 2008).

Part 1 of this Handbook is particularly relevant for those responsible for deciding whether to undertake a needs assessment and for ensuring the use of needs analysis in the programme cycle. Part 1 builds upon the *UNHCR Programme Manual* (Chapter 4), Part II: Assessments.

Part 2 is especially relevant for practitioners involved in the practicalities of undertaking needs assessments in field operations. It describes the methodology and design requirements for a successful needs assessment and refers to standardized support tools and best practices for UNHCR operations, which are available in an online toolbox.⁹ Part 2 also refers to general external guidelines on good assessment practices; as there are numerous specific assessment tools that change frequently, the main ones are presented in Annex 3 and are available in the toolbox.

⁹ UNHCR, *Emergency IM Toolkit: Needs Assessments*.

UNHCR and the wider humanitarian community undertake needs assessments to inform a broad spectrum of decisions. Put simply, if humanitarian actors do not know what the needs are, how can they respond to them effectively?

PART 1

Needs Assessment In UNHCR Operations

Needs Assessment Overview

Definition and Purpose of Needs Assessments

Needs assessments involve systematically gathering and analysing information relating to the needs, conditions, and capacities of persons of concern – diverse women, men, girls, and boys of all ages, including those with specific needs – in order to determine gaps between a current situation and agreed standards. It must be conducted with the active involvement of persons of concern.

A needs assessment is defined as a data collection exercise usually conducted at a single point in time to gain an understanding of the protection issues, availability of resources, sources of problems and their impact on the affected population. (Protection Information Management [PIM] matrix, 2016)¹⁰

A needs assessment is triggered by a need to better understand a particular situation and the conditions faced by populations of concern, whether in the context of a response to a sudden crisis or an ongoing planning effort during a protracted crisis.¹¹ A needs assessment seeks to do some or all of the following:

- Identify the different protection needs and risks of diverse women, men, girls, and boys of concern, and establish priorities.
- Estimate the severity of conditions faced by diverse women, men, girls, and boys of concern, and establish priorities.
- Create a common understanding of differences in needs and reflect the diversity of conditions faced by relevant groups of persons of concern, including older women and men; persons with disabilities; persons belonging to minority groups; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons (LGBTI); and others.
- Identify existing capacities and resources of persons of concern, including positive and negative coping mechanisms, as well as partners and governments.
- Inform emergency or longer-term/multi-year programme responses to close gaps between an affected population's current status and the desired state.

¹⁰ The PIM Matrix can be found [here](#).

¹¹ Planning could refer to a humanitarian or refugee response plan or to long-term planning such as a multi-year, multi-partner protection and solutions strategy.

- Support operational and strategic decision-making, including targeting.¹²
- Avoid causing harm with humanitarian interventions.
- Inform the design of further assessments based in identified information gaps.

A well planned and executed needs assessment – ideally conducted jointly or in collaboration with partners – provides stakeholders (UN agencies, governments, partners, persons of concern, etc.) with a common understanding of the situation, humanitarian needs, and capacities. It assists in designing appropriate and proportionate programmes and activities by enabling evidence-based and transparent decision-making. Needs assessments can help provide the information required to make difficult prioritization decisions in light of constraints in resource allocation. An inability to prioritize humanitarian assistance and protection can lead to unnecessary suffering and even loss of life.

The centrality of protection should be considered throughout the assessment and be participatory, aiming to include the full spectrum of age, gender, and diversity of persons of concern. The level of participation will vary with the accessibility of the groups of persons of concern, size of the assessment, type of crisis, sectors to be assessed, and objectives.

Needs assessments are critical to ensure core humanitarian principles are upheld, including the following:

- **Humanitarian assistance and protection is both rights-based and needs-based:** Persons of concern should be involved in the identification of their priority needs, and receive assistance and protection relevant to and appropriate for their needs and in full respect of their rights.
- **Humanitarian assistance and protection promotes and does not undermine safe local coping mechanisms and capacities:** Affected populations are resilient and on their own will develop ways to cope with risks in order to fulfil their needs.
- **The respective needs of different population groups are identified and understood:** Not all affected groups will have the same needs. Not only will humanitarian needs differ for people of different sexes, ages, cultural, ethnic and religious backgrounds, sexual orientation, and disabilities but also based on factors that might increase the risk of protection incidents, on socio-economic factors, and on other issues.
- **Decisions regarding humanitarian assistance and protection are based on verifiable information:** In order to explain the provision of assistance and ensure protection to populations – for instance, type of intervention, amount of assistance and protection, or the populations targeted – the humanitarian community needs verifiable information that provides both transparency and evidence for the decision-making process.

Decisions that need to be taken when conducting a needs assessment include the following:

- What information is needed to provide the necessary evidence base?
- Will the assessment serve multiple sectors or thematic areas?
- Will the assessment be a joint or harmonized assessment?

¹² While needs assessments can play a role in operational and strategic decision-making, frequently more in-depth information is needed for selecting target populations.

- Which geographic areas and populations will the assessment cover?
- What type of assessment is needed given the situation: initial, rapid, or in-depth?
- What is the host state's capacity to lead and coordinate the needs assessment, and how can UNHCR and other partners support this leadership of the process?

Some needs assessments focus on only one sector (e.g. shelter) or issue (e.g. sexual and gender-based violence), while others such as the Multi-Cluster/Sector Initial Rapid Assessment (MIRA) focus on several sectors (e.g. shelter, CCCM). In general, multi-sectoral assessments aim to compare needs, severity, and priorities across sectors of interest and at a single point in time. Since the breadth of the assessment is as large as the number of sectors covered, the depth of information collected is generally reduced. Multi-sectoral assessments are preferably used at the beginning of a crisis, after a substantial change in a situation, or at well-identified points during the year (e.g. to support the Humanitarian Needs Overview or the Refugee Response Plan) to provide a comprehensive overview of the situation and to inform overall response strategies.

Sector-specific assessments allow for more in-depth understanding of key issues, risks, and capacities within sectors. These tend to be better adapted to support specific cluster or sector strategies, programmes, and operations.

Coordination Modalities for Needs Assessments

Coordination mechanisms around humanitarian needs assessments have changed in the past decade due to the broader humanitarian reform process. Under this model, a UNHCR office may coordinate a multi-agency joint needs assessment in a refugee emergency, participate in a multi-cluster joint assessment in an IDP context coordinated by OCHA, coordinate a cluster-specific needs assessment as a cluster lead, or take on a lead role within a sector or multi-sector assessment in a mixed displacement situation. Additionally, in-depth needs assessments are fundamental for robust medium- and long-term (i.e. multi-year) planning in protracted situations and for laying the foundation for durable solutions in contexts of both refugees and IDPs.

UNHCR follows the *IASC Operational Guidance for Coordinated Assessments in Humanitarian Crises*¹³ to ensure effective coordination, produce comparable data, and promote a shared vision of needs and situations. Coordinated assessments should be planned and carried out through partnerships with government (where feasible), humanitarian actors, national civil society, and development actors with the participation of persons of concern. The results should be analysed and subsequently shared with the broader humanitarian and development communities. In addition to saving time and resources, coordinating assessments ensures complementarity in data coverage and avoids duplication of efforts.

¹³ IASC, *Operational Guidance for Coordinated Assessment in Humanitarian Crises*, 2012.

There are different degrees of coordination for assessments:

Uncoordinated assessments are conducted without the knowledge of or without consideration for other ongoing initiatives. They often result in multiple assessments, the use of different methodologies, and the production of various reports on similar issues, situations, or persons of concern. The results often are neither shared nor interoperable, and cannot be used to inform a joint analysis and common understanding of a situation. A lack of coordination of assessments also can cause harm to populations of concern, who may be asked multiple times about their needs by different actors, including about potentially sensitive or traumatic issues.

Coordinated assessments are planned and carried out in partnership, with results shared with the broader humanitarian and development communities, as well as with persons of concern, to identify the needs, conditions, priorities, and capacities of affected populations. Such assessments range from inter- and intra-cluster/thematic joint assessments to harmonized single-agency assessments. The two types of coordinated assessments are:

- **Joint needs assessments** occur when multiple organizations have an interest in using similar data collection methodologies to conduct an assessment in specific geographic locations, or when organizations have an interest in the same thematic area. Data collection, processing, and analysis take place as a single process among agencies within and between clusters/thematic areas, and lead to the production of a jointly owned output (i.e. single report).
- **Harmonized needs assessments** are conducted by a single agency and provide an alternative to joint assessments in situations where there is a compelling reason to do separate assessments, due to operational considerations, protection concerns, or the need for specialist data collectors or different methodologies. Harmonized needs assessments must adhere to agreed standards in order to facilitate cross-analysis, including but not limited to geographic data standards and agreed thematic indicators.

The critical aspect of a coordinated assessment approach is ensuring the participation of key stakeholders in all steps of the process to promote common understanding of the objectives, data collection and analysis methodologies, findings, and priority issues. Table 1 summarizes the different types of coordinated approaches.

Table 1 Coordinated assessment modalities

Type	Definition	Output	Implementation
Joint Needs Assessment JOINT ✓ Single assessment form ✓ Single methodology ✓ Single report 	Data collection, processing, and analysis form a single process among agencies. All agencies and organizations involved in planning and design follow the same methodology and use the same tools.	A single report representing the agreed interpretation and analysis of needs by several agencies or organizations.	• Establish a multi-organization coalition through which to pool resources to support the assessment. • Agree with partners on common methodologies and data collection tools including internationally recognized best practices for researching, documenting, and monitoring protection concerns. • Conduct a joint analysis to agree on the interpretation of findings
Harmonized Needs Assessment HARMONIZED ✓ Multiple assessments with common indicators ✓ Standardized approach ✓ Joint analysis 	Data collection, processing, and analysis are conducted separately, adhering to shared standards such as the use of key indicators and common operational datasets, including geographical standards.	Multiple needs assessments reports or databases that can be cross-analysed, aggregated, and used for a shared or joint analysis.	• Agree with partners on which population classifications and indicators will be used across multiple needs assessments. • Use the IASC Common Operational Datasets¹⁴ and UNHCR data standards. • Share needs assessments to cross-analyse results.
Uncoordinated Assessments UNCOORDINATED ✓ Multiple Assessments ✓ Multiple Methodologies ✓ Multiple Reports 	Datasets are not interoperable, and results cannot be used to inform the overall analysis.	'Over-assessment' leads to risks and harms that outweigh benefits for individuals and communities. Avoid this situation using one of the two techniques outlined above.	• Multiple disconnected assessment reports that may or may not be available for distribution. Duplicated or redundant needs assessments. Thematic or geographic gaps in needs assessment information.

Types of Needs Assessments

Different types of assessments are commonly used during humanitarian emergencies. Each is designed for responding to specific information needs and often corresponds to a particular point in the course of an emergency or programme cycle.

Needs assessment types vary in depth, research method, time frame, and cost. Table 2 outlines the three most common assessment types and distinguishes between them based on several criteria.

¹⁴ Common operational datasets (CODs) are predictable, core sets of data that are standardized among the humanitarian community and serve to support operations. Fundamental operational datasets (FODs) are datasets that are required to support multiple cluster/sector operations and that complement the CODs. UNHCR has a responsibility both to update and to use the IASC CODs and FODs in its information systems. The datasets are available at: <http://cod.humanitarianresponse.info/country-region>.

Table 2 Types of needs assessment

Criteria	Initial Assessment	Rapid Assessment	In-depth Assessment
Objectives	- Define scale and severity of the crisis. - Estimate women, men, girls, and boys in need. - Identify and locate affected populations and groups considering age, gender, and diversity. - Establish key priorities. - Define access constraints.	- Define impact of crisis. - Estimate women, men, girls, and boys in need by population groups of concern. - Assess severity of needs of affected groups and areas. - Capture views of different groups of affected populations through consultation. - Establish key priorities with affected populations. - Identify information gaps.	- Envision comprehensive, durable solutions that inform needs assessment. - Define and quantify needs including more in-depth sectoral and operational information. - Provide detailed and statistically representative data. - Capture representative views of affected populations through joint consultation with them. - Establish baseline for needs and response monitoring.
Type of decisions to inform	- Initial response decisions. - Rapid assessment design. - Emergency funding appeals.	- Initial planning of humanitarian response. - Define focus for subsequent in-depth assessments. - Provide recommendations for strategic planning.	- Inform detailed planning and scope of humanitarian relief, early recovery, and durable solutions. - Adjust ongoing response. - Provide recommendations for programme and operational planning.
Timeframe	3-5 days	2-4 weeks	1-4 months
Design	- Secondary data analysis only. - Small number of field visits, if feasible.	- Secondary and primary data analysis. - Primary data is gathered at the community level. - Qualitative research methods.	- Secondary and primary data analysis. - Primary data is gathered at the community, institution, household, or individual level. - Quantitative and qualitative research methods.
Sampling strategy	Convenience/ purposive sampling	Purposive sampling	Representative sampling
Data collection techniques	Flyover, direct observations, key informant interviews. <i>Field tool:</i> Checklist	Community group discussion, key informant interviews, direct observation, focus group discussion (in some instances). <i>Field tool:</i> Semi-structured questionnaire	Household/individual interviews, highly stratified focus group discussions, direct observation. <i>Field tool:</i> Structured questionnaire
Unit of measurement	Province, district, or sub-district; community or village	Community or institution	Community, household, individual
Resources	Very limited time and resources	Limited time and resources	Sufficient time and resources
Cost	\$	\$\$	\$\$\$
Outputs	Secondary data review report. Emergency call or appeal.	Sector/multi-overview reports. Prioritization of needs and responses, geographic locations, and population sub-groups.	Detailed thematic/multi-thematic assessment reports

Needs assessments should be differentiated from monitoring systems, which tend to continuously collect information on affected areas and population groups in order to track changes and trends over time. Because monitoring systems generate information on protection risks and trends as well as on programme performance, they can be used

as an early warning system to trigger needs assessments if conditions deteriorate. Conversely, needs assessments can highlight the need for ongoing monitoring of particular issues, population groups, geographic areas, or programmes. In quickly changing situations, monitoring systems may have an increased frequency of reporting. In slow-onset emergencies, numerous monitoring systems may already be in place before a new crisis occurs. Finally, needs assessments can simply assist in filling information gaps that remain despite existing monitoring systems.

As an important factor, the unit of measurement¹⁵ needs to be considered early on, as it will change depending on the level of detail sought. Typically, rapid assessments examine communities (e.g. camps, villages, etc.), while in-depth assessments look at individual conditions. The unit of measurement chosen will have a significant impact on the amount of data that needs to be collected, processed, and analysed. Community-level assessments generally will have less data volume than a household-level assessment.

Deciding which type of assessment to use will depend largely on the type or level of decision that needs to be made (i.e. at the strategic vs. operational level), the time frame given for informing decision-making, and the resources available.

When to Conduct a Needs Assessment

Needs assessments help to inform a broad range of decisions and is a step in UNHCR's Operations Management Cycle (Figure 1). The degree and pace of the cycle varies according to the scope and nature of an individual operation. This is true whether the cycle encompasses, for instance, regular programmes in protracted or stable situations, emergency responses, or dynamic population movement patterns.

In practice, several processes within the Operations Management Cycle may occur at the same time. For example, one programme may be under evaluation while another is being implemented and yet another is being re-designed. Some processes may be repeated several times if programme monitoring reveals the need for modifications. This is of particular importance in emergencies and dynamic or complex situations. Monitoring and evaluation undertaken as part of the programme management cycle should feed into any needs assessment. Using existing information from these sources will assist in the design of any needs assessment and avoid duplication of work.

Fig. 1 UNHCR Operations Management Cycle



¹⁵ The unit of measurement is the quantity used as a standard of measure in the data collection phase of an assessment. Typical units of measurement include individuals, households, affected groups, communities, camps, facilities, etc. Units of measurement can be aggregated to greater units of analysis, but not the reverse. Smaller units of measurement result in greater data volume than larger units of measurement. Selecting the right unit of measurement during the planning and design phase is thus important.

In a refugee crisis, a needs assessment or needs analysis is used to inform a Refugee Response Plan (RRP). Similarly, in a cluster context, these might be needed to complete a Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO) or to inform a Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP), a cluster strategy, or a Flash Appeal.

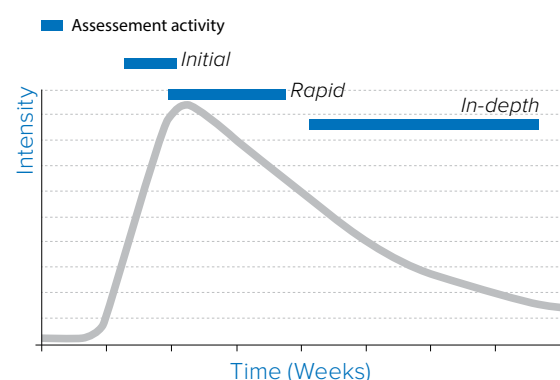
Regardless of annual or multi-year planning, regular requirements, or the setting, it is the operation that will decide whether to conduct an assessment (see Table 3).

Table 3 Appropriateness of conducting a needs assessment

Needs assessments are appropriate and recommended when:	Needs assessments are inappropriate and not recommended when:
• A new crisis has emerged. • A sudden and/or substantial change happens in an existing crisis. • Additional information about a specific situation or for decision-making (e.g., medium- and long-term strategies) is required. • Contingency planning is undertaken. • A change of policy provides new opportunities. • New funding requires the identification of needs and prioritization of resource allocation.	• Programmatic decisions have already been made, and the assessment results will have no operational relevance. • Additional information is not required. • Conducting an assessment will put data collectors, respondents or community members in harm's way. • An assessment's results will be incorrect or extremely biased, or its effectiveness will be limited due to known factors. • The negative impact of raised expectations outweighs the benefits of data collection. • An affected population has reported that it feels over-assessed or will be negatively affected by a further assessment.

It is important to understand how these specific situations may require adapted strategies to meet all the information needs.

Fig. 2 Assessment strategy for sudden-onset emergencies



Sudden-onset emergencies

In the case of a new sudden-onset emergency or a sudden substantial change in an existing crisis, information is needed urgently to inform emergency actions. In this case, an initial and/or a rapid assessment will be required to inform emergency decisions and priorities (i.e. in the Initial and Revised Flash Appeals). The information will be less detailed and precise in order to quickly obtain a preliminary snapshot of the situation. Later assessments may be staggered and/or linked to inform each other and provide regular updates on the conditions of affected populations, using more robust and quantitative methods as needed.

For sudden-onset emergencies, it is also good practice to regularly carry out safety audits and service mappings to support identification of SGBV immediate risks and mitigating factors. Based on observation, safety audits assess risks related to camp layout, WASH, resource availability, and the provision of humanitarian services and assistance.

Service mapping consists of gathering via interview with services providers (and maintaining up-to-date) information about service provision.¹⁶

Slow-onset crises

In a slow-onset crisis such as a relatively small-scale and steady influx of refugees (Figure 3) or repetitive droughts (Figure 4), the progression of the crisis is slower, more predictable, and does not change frequently.

Fig. 3 Assessment strategy for **slow-onset crises**

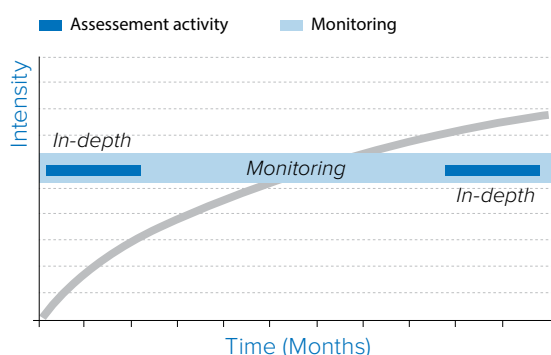
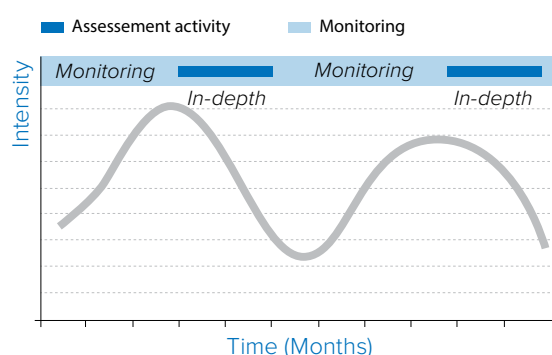


Fig. 4 Assessment strategy for **cyclical crises**



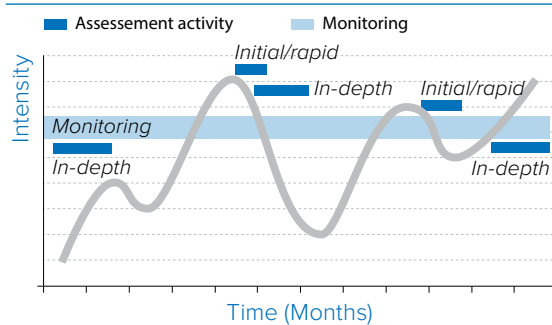
The decision-making and planning time frames – which the needs assessments are to inform – are well-identified (i.e. it is easier to plan for in-depth assessments accordingly). In this case, multi-sectoral or sectoral in-depth needs assessments are recommended to support medium- and long-term planning, and will be implemented at regular and strategic intervals (i.e. to inform HNOs, Comprehensive Needs Assessments, multi-year solutions strategies, etc.). The methodology used should be comparable to allow for trends analysis from one assessment cycle to the next. A key component should be a secondary data review that can be jointly analysed by partners.

Complex emergencies

In unpredictable complex emergencies, multiple cycles of violence or escalations of crisis may regularly occur, and instability and stability might coexist depending on time and geographical area. In such situations, regular analysis of situational monitoring data can help identify potential trends that may trigger further needs assessments.

Stability and safety are the main factors that determine which type of assessment to use and the sequencing. In a relatively accessible and

Fig. 5 Assessment strategy for **unpredictable conflict or complex emergencies**



¹⁶ See: Template for safety audit and service mapping resources, available at: <http://gbvresponders.org>.

stable context, any type of assessment may be appropriate. In an unstable situation, initial and rapid assessments may be the only options available to obtain the minimal information required to inform strategic planning and programme activities.

When considering an in-depth assessment in unstable areas, the validity over time of the collected information needs to be reviewed against expected changes in the context. Secondary data should always be reviewed and jointly analysed to inform needs assessment findings. If access is difficult, secondary data might be the resource to rely on.

More details on types of crises and how the focus, methods, and tools of needs assessments might differ are presented in Part 2 of this Handbook.

Assessment Strategy

Varying contexts call for different assessment approaches. UNHCR operations, sectors, and clusters should develop an assessment strategy that is clearly linked to decision-making processes and other existing information systems (i.e. protection monitoring systems and population data management systems). Different types of emergencies as well as longer-term and multi-year planning in different contexts will require an assessment strategy. By linking various types of assessments within one assessment strategy, UNHCR can significantly improve response activities and, ultimately, our operational relevance.

Preparedness

Experience from past crises shows that preparing for needs assessments at the operations level prior to a crisis considerably improves their quality and timeliness when emergencies occur. Assessment preparedness activities involve:

- Maintaining an updated assessment registry;
- Selecting and designing assessment methodologies and tools for different types of scenarios in coordination with national authorities' disaster response mechanisms and/or refugee /IDP/returnee protection state structures, depending on context;
- Agreeing on Standard Operating Procedures, including coordination modalities and triggers for assessments;
- Compiling baseline data and risk profiles;
- Training assessment teams, including on data protection policy and standards (confidentiality, informed consent), assessments tools (interview skills, focus groups techniques), and piloting assessment tools;
- Agreeing on reporting templates and types of analysis;

- Identifying focal points within each participating organization; and
- For remotely monitored areas, establishing and building the capacity of a network of data collectors who can execute a needs assessment.

Roles and Responsibilities for Needs Assessments

UNHCR's role in needs assessments will vary by context, but within every UNHCR operation, clear responsibilities should be outlined. This Handbook focuses on needs assessments in four distinct planning and coordination models. These roles are summarized in Table 6.

Operations Management Cycle: All UNHCR Operations

The Operations Management Cycle is the process by which a UNHCR office organizes its programming (see Figure 1). While conceptually the cycle operates in a sequential fashion – assessment → planning → implementation → monitoring → reporting → audit → evaluation – in reality certain phases often take place simultaneously (e.g. assessment and implementation) or repeatedly (e.g. monitoring throughout the year, reporting at mid-year and year-end), depending on the situation and operational realities. The Operations Management Cycle should be dynamic and include constant adjustments to programming, reflecting the variable nature of the environments in which UNHCR works.

Although UNHCR generally engages with persons of concern over several years, the Operations Management Cycle takes place on an annual basis, in alignment with the formal approval of UNHCR's programme and associated budget on a yearly basis (1 January to 31 December). While a formal assessment exercise must take place annually (normally in the January-to-March period), assessment should be a constant activity that feeds regular adjustments to programme design and resource allocation.

An assessment is mandatory before the preparation of the annual planning exercise. The Comprehensive Needs Assessment (CNA) is the basis for the operations plan submitted by each UNHCR office for approval by the High Commissioner. The CNA often consists of secondary data sources, ongoing monitoring data, and assessment data, both quantitative and qualitative (i.e. the Participatory Assessment Tool). In a multi-year plan setting, the results will inform the multi-year strategy and in case of major changes in results relative to previous years, trigger revision of the multi-year strategy.

Effective programme design depends on building an accurate understanding of protection risks and gaps, as well as the capacities of persons of concern, through assessment. That process also must document the gap between the current situation of persons of concern and agreed standards, and identify the underlying causes of challenges faced by persons of concern, which UNHCR programming will then seek to address. In addition, assessment provides the elements required by the Multi-Functional Team (MFT)

to make difficult prioritization decisions in light of resource-allocation constraints. At all times, assessment data is complemented by continuous monitoring.

A critical preparatory step in the planning process is to ensure that all of this information is then consolidated and reviewed. Ultimately, the aim here is to identify the total needs for the following year in the CNA, on which UNHCR's response (the operations plan) will be based. This step normally takes place in January, before the preparation of the operations plan.

The problems of persons of concern identified during assessments inform and guide the planning and design processes. Planning is the process by which the findings from assessments are translated into the design of the response, taking into account the local context as well as global and regional priorities. This phase involves an important resource allocation element as operations formulate comprehensive budgets (OP), based on total needs identified and an analysis of implementation capacities, and prioritized budgets (OL), based on projected income available.

Planning serves to establish UNHCR's vision for an operation, design the actions that will be taken to meet the identified objectives, reach agreement on indicators and targets to measure progress, and develop the budget needed to achieve expected results. Planning is the key moment in the Operations Management Cycle to ensure that evidence generated through assessments, monitoring, and reporting is used to make programming and resource allocation decisions. Moreover, planning provides an opportunity to ensure a level of consistency among operations, focusing on global and regional priorities and the associated strategies.

The Global Needs Assessment (GNA) aggregates the CNAs and provides a comprehensive picture of the humanitarian needs of persons of concern to UNHCR. The GNA feeds into the determination of the agency's global budget needs.

Refugee Situations: UNHCR-led Response

In refugee situations, as per the *Refugee Coordination Model* (RCM),¹⁷ UNHCR prepares for, leads (or co-leads with a government counterpart), and coordinates a multi-sector response in partnership with other agencies and government. In these roles, needs assessments are a starting point for prioritization, planning, and evolving programmatic design. As such, UNHCR is accountable for coordinating needs assessments, exhibiting appropriate sector leadership, establishing appropriate coordination mechanisms (e.g. sector coordination meetings, information management, and data sharing), and advocating on behalf of refugees.

To assume this responsibility, UNHCR commits to ensure that the necessary skills and resources to undertake needs assessments are available or provided to those involved in responding to a crisis as well as a protracted situation. The activities can be shared between humanitarian partners, but UNHCR must ensure that appropriate tools, skills, and leadership exist to facilitate coordinated needs assessments.

¹⁷ UNHCR, *Refugee Coordination Model*, 2015.

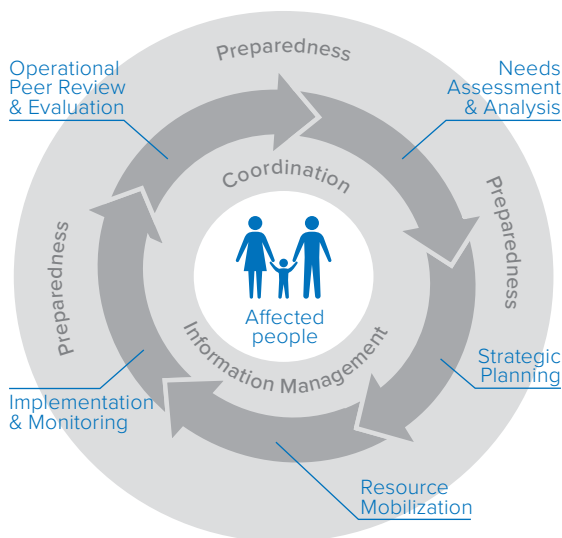
- In the first stages of a refugee emergency, UNHCR Representatives must take the lead in coordinating a joint multi-sector needs assessment.
- In any refugee situation, including protracted situations, UNHCR managers also must solicit needs assessment information from other organizations and disseminate results.
- Lists of planned and undertaken assessments by all actors in a refugee situation should be stored in an assessment registry, and needs assessment reports that are cleared for dissemination should be available on refugee situation web portals such as <http://data.unhcr.org>.
- UNHCR also should provide authoritative Common Operational Datasets, including master geographic datasets, for refugee situations.

Table 4 outlines some approaches designed to support UNHCR in this role.

Table 4 Main approaches designed for refugee situations

Joint Assessment Mission (JAM)	Needs Assessment For Refugee Emergencies (NARE)	Rapid Protection Assessment (RPA)
The purpose of a UNHCR/WFP joint assessment mission is to understand the situation, needs, risks, and vulnerabilities of refugees, returnees (and host populations) with regard to food security and nutrition. UNHCR and the World Food Programme (WFP) have a long-standing agreement to share the roles and responsibilities for this joint food security and nutrition assessment. The objectives of a JAM are to: • Document the food security and nutritional situation of refugees and/or returnees; • Review the quality and appropriateness of ongoing food security and nutrition-related interventions; • Identify effective food security, nutrition, and/or livelihood interventions to protect and ensure the food security and nutritional status of refugees and/or returnees; • Identify timing, location, and duration for chosen interventions; and • Assemble data to enable UNHCR and WFP country offices to develop a Joint Plan of Action (JPA). The JAM process may take up to six months and requires timely forward planning in order to be successful. More information can be found in the JAM guidelines.	The Needs Assessment for Refugee Emergencies (NARE) is a highly customizable initial multi-sectoral needs assessment checklist for undertaking joint rapid assessments in refugee emergencies. The checklist is designed to help UNHCR operations implement multi-sector needs assessments when there has been a sudden and significant forced displacement across borders. The NARE can also be used when there is a sudden influx into an existing refugee operational environment or in an operation where previous assessments have been inadequate. • NARE highlights information that is derived from pre-crisis and post-crisis secondary data analysis, before the primary data collection begins. • For primary data collection, the NARE suggests data elements that can be derived from facility visits, observations, key informants, and focus group discussions. • It promotes the cross-analysis of information derived from multiple methodologies across multiple sectors to ensure a rapid, relatively complete picture. More information is available in the NARE guidelines.	The RPA helps protection staff, clusters, and other protection agencies collect relevant information to identify key protection concerns and information gaps following an emergency according to an agreed common methodology. An RPA will identify: • Key protection concerns in the emergency; • Who is affected, how many and where are they, which population groups are affected most severely; • Gaps in response and capacities, taking into account the coping strategies and preferences of affected populations. The objective is to assist protection teams to elaborate a strategic plan or an action plan containing: • Prioritized protection concerns on which the protection team will focus; • General strategic approach that the team will follow to address these concerns; • Projects and activities to be implemented, in a coordinated way, to take forward the strategic approach. More information is available in the Rapid Protection Assessment Toolkit.

Fig. 6 The Humanitarian Programme Cycle (IASC)



IDP and Non-refugee Situations

UNHCR as cluster lead

In an IDP situation or in other non-refugee humanitarian crises, the Resident/Humanitarian Coordinator leads the implementation of the Humanitarian Programme Cycle (HPC),¹⁸ which was established as a result of the Transformative Agenda initiated by IASC in 2011. Much like UNHCR's Operational Management Cycle described above, the HPC is a single strategic process that runs through the cycle of inter-agency coordination in IDP/non-refugee emergency responses. Many of the phases have outputs that humanitarian partners, including UNHCR, come together to produce, such as a Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP). As with the UNHCR cycle, needs assessment is a critical stage in the programme cycle – indeed, one on which subsequent stages depend.

Supported by OCHA or another designated agency, the Resident/Humanitarian Coordinator may lead a Multi-Cluster/Sector Initial Rapid Assessment (MIRA) at the start of an emergency or facilitate inter-cluster joint needs analysis for a Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO) during more protracted crises (see Table 5 for more details).

Table 5 Multi-cluster approaches designed for IDP situations

Multi Sector/Cluster Initial Rapid Assessment (MIRA)	Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO)
Carried out by key stakeholders during the first weeks following a sudden-onset crisis, the MIRA aims to provide basic information on the needs of affected populations and to support the identification of strategic humanitarian priorities, considering specific needs, respective age, gender, and diversity. It facilitates all participating humanitarian actors to reach, from the outset, a common understanding of the situation and its likely evolution, and to agree immediately on priorities. The MIRA should be carried out under the auspices of the Resident/Humanitarian Coordinator and, wherever possible, should be led by the government. The process underpinning the MIRA aims to be sufficiently explicit to prevent misinterpretation but flexible enough to be adapted to the specific context of each crisis while minimizing delays in the assessment schedule. More information is available in the MIRA guidance.	The HNO promotes a shared understanding of the impact and evolution of a crisis within the Humanitarian Country Team and informs strategic response planning. This ensures that credible evidence and a joint analysis of needs underpin an effective and targeted humanitarian response. The HNO document describes the impact of the humanitarian crisis, provides strong protection analysis that draws on meaningful engagement with affected populations, and explains an estimate of which population groups have been affected and where. It also analyses their situation; identifies their diverse perspectives, risks, capacities, and vulnerabilities; and gives an overview of the operational environment. More information is available in the HNO Guidance and IASC (EDG), Preliminary Guidance Note: Protection and Accountability to Affected Populations in the Humanitarian Programme Cycle.

¹⁸ IASC, *Reference Module for the Implementation of the Humanitarian Programme Cycle*, 2015.

The IASC Protection Policy defines the centrality of protection in humanitarian action as well as the process for its implementation at the country level. This includes a focus on developing an HCT protection strategy and the need to implement this across the HPC.¹⁹

As lead of the Protection Cluster and co-lead of the Shelter Cluster and the Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM) Cluster,²⁰ UNHCR is expected to play a key role and take responsibility in supporting coordinated needs assessment processes. Often this means representing the agency's clusters in joint needs assessment coordination fora chaired by OCHA or the Humanitarian Country Team. UNHCR also takes a leadership role in promoting protection-sensitive assessment methodologies and practice.

As a cluster lead, UNHCR is also responsible for coordinating assessments within its clusters, including organizing a joint in-depth sector/cluster-specific needs assessment in which cluster members can participate. The agency also is responsible for tracking needs assessments undertaken by its cluster members in an assessment registry and assisting in disseminating the results. UNHCR should promote the use of standard CODs used in needs assessments, including geographic and population data, among its cluster members.

UNHCR as cluster member

In addition to its cluster responsibilities, UNHCR has responsibilities as an operational agency. For instance, it is expected to participate as a member in relevant clusters, collaborate in contingency planning, make available current stockpiles of relief items, and support any local capacity enhancement. Such responsibilities also include sharing information on assessments already undertaken by UNHCR and participating in joint assessments and analysis at the cluster level, as well as monitoring, tracking, and reporting. The agency also is expected to participate in other relevant clusters.

Mixed Situations

Refugees and IDPs

In some cases, the humanitarian community faces situations of displacement that include the presence of both refugees and IDPs, either in the same geographic area or in separate areas within a country. The Refugee Coordination Model is designed to adapt to a situation where cluster structures also exist, in order to harmonize approaches and reduce duplication.

Regardless of what form the model takes, UNHCR's mandate, responsibilities, and accountabilities remain unchanged. The agency will lead specific strategic planning exercises and coordinate or play a leading role in any inter-agency needs assessment activities relevant to IDPs and other affected populations.²¹

¹⁹ IASC, *Policy on Protection in Humanitarian Action*, 2016.

²⁰ The Shelter and CCCM clusters are led by UNHCR in conflict-induced displacements.

²¹ Further guidance on policy and operations in mixed responses is outlined in the UNHCR-OCHA Joint Note on Mixed Situations: Coordination in Practice, 2014.

Refugees and migrants

To assist government and others with incorporating protection considerations, UNHCR has developed the 10-Point Plan of Action on Refugee Protection and Mixed Migration.²²

Table 6 Responsibilities in different coordination settings

	All UNHCR Operations	UNHCR-led coordination in refugee situations
Description	Needs assessments are conducted throughout the year to maintain an up-to-date understanding of needs protection risks, and capacities of persons of concern, feeding into individual programmes through the required steps of the Operations Management Cycle.	In refugee contexts, UNHCR coordinates a multi-sector response guided by an overarching protection and durable solutions strategy (e.g. RRF, multi-year, multi-partner Protection and Solutions Strategy). This role includes leading a coordinated needs assessment approach.
Role	Programme design, budget prioritization, and protection response and advocacy.	Lead coordinated needs assessments including a joint assessment and needs analysis.
Detailed responsibilities	- Establish an assessment strategy, including an analytical framework based on information needs and decisions to be informed. - Gather and maintain data on core situation and needs indicators. - Conduct a comprehensive needs assessment annually, including a participatory assessment.	- Establish an assessment strategy, including an analytical framework based on information needs and decisions to be informed. - Gather and maintain data on core situation and needs indicators. - Lead a coordinated needs assessment approach (joint and harmonized assessments) considering specific needs respective age, gender, and diversity (AGD). - Lead an assessment coordination forum, i.e. Assessment Working Group (AWG) or Assessment and Refugee Information Management Working Group (ARIMWG). - Maintain a refugee assessment registry for UNHCR and partners. - Lead and undertake protection assessment. - Establish and promote SOPs/protocols for data collection and sharing including data protection considerations. - Promote minimum standards for age, gender, and diversity - Lead on joint multi-sector assessment when applicable. - Facilitate joint multi-sector needs analysis on a regular basis for response planning.
Main tools	Focus Needs Assessment in Refugee Emergencies Checklist (NARE) Comprehensive Needs Assessment (CNA) Participatory Assessment Tool Joint Assessment Missions (JAM)	NARE Assessment registry Sector-specific assessments Participatory Assessment Tool UNHCR data portal (http://data.unhcr.org)

Resourcing Assessments

It is crucial that appropriate resources be made available for the needs assessment and analysis process, including financial resources, human resources, technical expertise, and logistics support. Dedicated and qualified resources are required for undertaking data collection and analysis in a transparent and collaborative manner in UNHCR operations and within the clusters the agency leads.

²² UNHCR, 10-Point Plan of Action on Refugee Protection and Mixed Migration (2016 Update), 2016.

Cluster system in IDP/non-refugee situations

In an IDP situation, OCHA will lead needs assessments and analysis in support of the Humanitarian Programme Cycle and a needs-based strategic planning process.

UNHCR takes a key role in the clusters it is leading (normally Protection, CCCM, and Shelter).

Lead intra-cluster joint and coordinated assessments and analysis in Protection, CCCM, and Shelter clusters, and function as the cluster representative in inter-cluster joint and coordinated assessments and analysis.

Be an active participant in non-UNHCR-led clusters that are relevant to UNHCR programming.

- Support a coordinated needs assessment approach.
 - Contribute meaningfully to relevant working groups (i.e. AWG).
 - Promote minimum standards for AGD and data protection.
 - Establish an analytical framework and analysis plan for UNHCR-led clusters.
 - Gather and maintain data on core situation and needs indicators.
 - Maintain an assessment registry for UNHCR-led clusters.
 - Contribute as a cluster representative to joint assessments (e.g. MIRA).
 - Lead on joint multi-agency cluster assessment in UNHCR-led clusters.
 - Follow SOPs/protocols for data collection and sharing.
 - Promote the use of agreed tools and relevant data standards for coordinated assessments at the inter-agency or cluster level.
 - Undertake joint needs analysis for UNHCR-led clusters and contribute to inter-cluster joint analysis.
-

Multi-cluster Initial Rapid Assessment (MIRA)

Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO)

Cluster detailed assessments (e.g., CCCM Needs Assessment toolkit)

Rapid Protection Assessment Toolkit, RPAT)

Participatory Assessment Tool

Humanitarian Response Web Portal (<https://www.humanitarianresponse.info>)

Leading an assessment exercise includes a spectrum of responsibilities: setting objectives, identifying necessary technical expertise, coordinating data collection and analysis activities, sharing findings to inform response planning and programming, and reporting back to persons of concern. A person with assessment expertise will lead and coordinate planned needs assessments in a gender-balanced multifunctional team with sector experts and other relevant technical specialists with a good understanding of the local context.

Deciding to conduct a needs assessment that includes primary data collection in the field will have budgetary implications. Any related budget should include an estimate of supplies, personnel, training, transportation, communications, and security requirements. The costs of a needs assessment should be a reasonable investment and proportionate to the scale and scope of a crisis and expected benefits for the population of concern. If a joint needs assessment is planned, decisions will need to be taken on how best to pool resources from multiple agencies and organizations. Due consideration also should be given to the use of existing resources within communities of concern, and ensuring whenever possible that persons of concern be engaged in planning and implementing assessments.

Outsourcing a needs assessment to a third party is possible if UNHCR has the funds but cannot internally meet the personnel, expertise, or logistical requirements to undertake the process. However, if this is done, specific requirements should apply to ensure quality and the respect of protection principles.

Table 7 UNHCR roles and functions for needs assessments

UNHCR Role	Functions
UNHCR Representative	- Assumes overall responsibility to ensure: - Assessment is conducted in a coordinated manner - A protection-centred and rights-based approach, including age, gender, and diversity criteria - Accountability to affected populations, such as ensuring consultations with them throughout the assessment process, and sharing results with them - Coordination with and endorsement of government, unless not possible due to context - Adequate financial and human resources are available
Programme Officers and where needed, a dedicated Assessment Coordinator	- Coordinate most needs assessments - Plan the assessment and advocate for appropriate resources - Lead the development of an analytical framework - Identify information gaps and establish a needs assessment plan - Ensure participation of relevant stakeholders, including coordinating sector leads in multi-sectoral refugee assessments - Link assessment results and findings to budget prioritization, response planning, and programming - Provide response and programme monitoring data for secondary data reviews in needs analysis - Lead joint needs assessment in refugee situations - Ensure protection and AGD-centred, rights-based approach
Protection Officers	- Advocate for the systematic inclusion of protection-related questions into needs assessments methodologies (as well as the inclusion of coping mechanisms and community capacities to mitigate SGBV risks as key areas of inquiry) - Lead certain assessments, including protection assessments in IDP and refugee settings and specific, protection-focused assessment exercises, including those relating to sensitive issues such as children protection, SGBV, and vulnerable data subjects - Identify what data and information is sensitive within the operation and take appropriate measures to adhere to protection information management and data protection principles - Train and sensitize data collectors and stakeholders on safe and ethical information management principles and good practices - Lead participatory assessment and engagement of affected populations in all assessments - Participate in joint assessment missions and field visits - Provide protection monitoring data for secondary data reviews in needs analysis and identify appropriate tools - Identify protection proxy indicators in other sectors' assessment data - Use needs assessment data in protection programme design and protection advocacy

...

Technical specialists, sector leads, and/or cluster coordinators	Provide sector expertise to: • Lead sector/cluster assessments • Conduct regular sectoral needs analysis and contribute to multi-sectoral analysis • Contribute to general assessments and/or joint assessments • Advocate for appropriate resources • Participate in joint assessment missions and field visits • Consult protection stakeholders to ensure the integration of protection issues and mitigation of protection risks
Information Management Officers	Provide technical and information management support, particularly on how needs assessments should be undertaken. • Ensure technical standardization (i.e. promotion of CODs and data standards) • Ensure protection information management principles are adhered to with respect to all assessment activities • Support design of data collection tools, sampling frameworks, data storage systems, and analytical products • Train data collectors/enumerators • Support analysis • Generate data visualization products, including dashboards, infographics, and maps • Disseminate cleared needs assessment reports and products on email distribution lists, web portals, and other means • Coordinate with other agencies' or clusters' information management officers
Admin/finance /logistics	Ensure adequate human resources and logistical support for the operation and/or the UNHCR-led clusters

Principles in Conducting Needs Assessments

In order to ensure that appropriate attention is given to the diverse needs of persons of concern, UNHCR promotes key principles for needs assessments as well as participatory approaches and a protection-centred, rights-based approach.

Key Principles for Needs Assessment

All needs assessment activities in which UNHCR participates, as lead or supporting agency, are expected to adhere to key principles:

- **Do no harm:** Information sources should be protected by complying with best practices regarding privacy and confidentiality, and seeking informed consent. Always keep in mind the safety of those who ask for and provide information, and note that any recorded information will need to be safeguarded against illicit use and sharing. The assessment process should not have a negative impact on societal tensions or exploit any segment of the population visited or interviewed. All needs assessments should result in a cleaned data set, eliminating all household identifiers.
- **Relevance:** Always keep in mind the purpose of the assessment, and collect and analyse only the data that is required for the specified decision-making task. Existing information needs to be compiled and reviewed before any decision is made to collect new data.

-
- **Adequacy:** The scope of the assessment should reflect the extent and nature of the crisis. The costs of collecting data should not outweigh the benefits of having it.
 - **Timeliness:** The need for accuracy, comprehensiveness, and detail should be weighed against the speed with which critical decisions need to be made. Findings and related analysis should be disseminated in time to support decision-making.
 - **Validity:** Standardized and rigorous procedures for the collection and analysis of data should be used to ensure credible results and minimize bias. Evidence should be provided to support findings and conclusions.
 - **Transparency:** Methodologies and approaches used during an assessment should be made available. This includes any assumptions made during the analysis or any potential limitations on either the accuracy of the data or the sources used.
 - **Impartiality:** A predefined analysis plan will ensure a predictive and objective process, and will minimize bias.
 - **Disaggregation:** Ensure that the data is always disaggregated by sex, age, and other relevant factors including geographic area and sector, and that adequate analysis is conducted so that the assessment accurately captures the needs, conditions, priorities, and capacities.
 - **Coordination:** Ensure that all stakeholders know when and where assessments are carried out. Involving a broad set of actors will strengthen the quality and usability of findings and their impact on the humanitarian response.
 - **Sharing:** Share findings with other actors, national authorities, and the affected population while adhering to data-sharing principles and agreed data-sharing protocols or agreements, as relevant.
 - **Preparedness:** Assessments are best undertaken when preparedness measures have been implemented and agreed in advance among stakeholders. Modalities for assessments should be part of contingency planning.
 - **Secondary data:** Maximum use should be made of available secondary data. Primary data collection should focus on determining what has changed, validating data, and filling gaps in validated available secondary information.
 - **Continuity:** No assessment is a one-off event. Rather, it is a process that should continue throughout a situation, adding to information on gaps and needs, and meeting any requirements for more detailed information to support operational decision-making. Always take steps in the design and implementation of each assessment to ensure comparability between data collected at different points in order to monitor trends.

- **Age, Gender, and Diversity:** Humanitarian assistance must be needs-based and consider that different groups within an affected population will have both common and unique needs, in line with the AGD approach. Persons of concern do not experience emergencies or their aftermath in the same way. Protection risks, needs, priorities, capacities, resilience, and coping mechanisms are varied, depending not only on age, gender, social roles, and other forms of diversity but also on the extent to which groups are able to participate in finding durable solutions to their situations.

Rights-Based Approach ²³

A rights-based approach is a conceptual framework that integrates the norms, standards, and principles of the international human rights system into the policies, programmes, and processes of development and humanitarian actors. It therefore focuses on both procedures and outcomes.

A rights-based approach is founded on the principles of participation and empowering individuals and communities to promote change and enable them to exercise their rights and comply with their duties. It identifies rights holders (women, girls, boys, and men of concern) and duty bearers (principally the State and its agents), and seeks to strengthen the capacities of rights holders to make their claims and of duty bearers to satisfy those claims.

This requires an attitudinal shift in how humanitarian actors work with and for persons of concern. They are no longer viewed as beneficiaries of aid but as rights holders with legal entitlements. This shift requires that our policies, programmes, and activities be based on international legal standards, and that members and leaders of the community consider their roles as both rights holders and duty bearers.

With all actors, it is important to analyse the obstacles to exercising these responsibilities and ways to overcome them. For example, States have a duty to provide education for children, while parents have a responsibility to encourage their children to attend school, providing that they have access to schools and the means to support their attendance. If necessary, UNHCR and partners may have to advocate for change so that such legislation conforms to human rights instruments.

Participatory Approach, Community Engagement, and Accountability

Needs assessments must adhere to the principles and practices of participatory and community-based approaches. While the scope and activities of participation may depend on the specific context of each situation, participatory and community-based approaches are standard practices in UNHCR.

²³ See UNHCR, *A Community-based Approach in UNHCR Operations*, 2008.

Although needs assessment activities are characterized as an exercise conducted at a single point in time to understand the various needs of a population, in practice different assessment approaches and tools can be used. These include highly qualitative approaches such as the UNHCR Tool for Participatory Assessments as well as more-quantitative assessment approaches such as IDP Profiling. The Needs Assessment Handbook is not a substitute for the Participatory Assessment Tool but rather has been developed to complement the various tools by providing a framework for needs assessments.

Regardless of the tool or approach chosen, participatory and community-based approaches must apply and guide all relevant aspects of assessment activities. It is good practice to establish a comprehensive assessment strategy that employs various assessment approaches to meet the needs of each sector, based on the level and types of operational data required to achieve the identified purpose.

Ensuring that persons of concern can exercise their right to participate in decision-making regarding their own lives, their family, and their communities requires meaningfully involving them in the full programme cycle, including all the needs assessment steps. Although it is crucial to use participatory assessment methods (see the *UNHCR Tool for Participatory Assessment in Operations*) when data is collated and collected, diverse women, men, girls, and boys of concern should be involved in the other needs assessment steps as well. That includes understanding the context, defining the information needs, conducting the analysis, and sharing information – for instance, through refugee outreach volunteers. Specific initiatives may be needed to ensure the full involvement of all persons of concern, including older women and men, youth, persons with disabilities, and LGBTI persons.

Accountability can be ensured by continuously consulting persons of concern and strengthening their participation in decisions that impact their lives.²⁴

To conduct a needs assessment in a participatory manner²⁵ means to listen to diverse women, men, girls, and boys of concern speak about their own needs, priorities, and capacities so that they can take part and influence decisions instead of being passively subjected to them. A participatory assessment supports response design that leverages community capacities to increase equitable access to protection, services, and assistance. It will ensure:

- A more accurate and comprehensive understanding of a situation, including underlying causes;
- Minimized risks of exclusion of the needs, priorities, and capacities of marginalized groups by ensuring a balanced representation of all AGD groups;
- Identification of existing capacities and coping mechanisms in order to draw upon them in the response;

²⁴ UNHCR, *Operational Guidance for Accountability to Affected Populations*, 2016.

²⁵ UNHCR, *Tool for Participatory Assessment in Operations*, 2006.

- Recognition and understanding of power relations among groups; and
- Contribution to improved relations between persons of concern and UNHCR and its partners.

For more information on participatory assessments, please see the *UNHCR Tool for Participatory Assessment in Operations*.

Protection-centred Approach

There are a number of protection practices that need to be respected when collecting and handling information at any stage of a needs assessment. By incorporating these principles at the initial stages of a needs assessment, UNHCR can ensure that its activities target the most vulnerable, enhance safety and dignity, and protect and promote the human rights of beneficiaries.

- **Confidentiality:** The safety of those who either ask for or provide information is critical. Be mindful of which individuals are used as information sources, ensuring the confidentiality of participants in a needs assessment, being sensitive to who might overhear interviews, and/or not visiting particularly insecure areas.
- **Sensitivity:** When interviewing survivors and witnesses, assessment teams should be mindful of any suffering experienced by the affected population. Sensitivity is particularly important regarding the potential for re-traumatization and vicarious victimization. The assessment team should have referral information available for when immediate mitigation and remedial actions are needed.
- **Integrity:** Assessment teams must treat all informants, interviewees, and co-workers with decency and respect at all times, and carry out their assigned tasks with integrity. Data collection teams should introduce themselves clearly and respectfully to assessment participants, and explain the goals and limitations of the assessment process, how the information will be used, and with whom it will be shared.
- **Informed consent:** Assessment teams must specifically ask respondents for their consent to use any information they provide. When interviewing children, parental consent must be sought as well as the child's assent. A respondent can always decline to answer a specific question. Personal information can never be disclosed or transferred for purposes other than those for which it was originally collected and for which consent was explicitly given.
- **Safeguard recorded information:** All data and information management activities must adhere to international standards of data protection.²⁶ Ensure the permanent confidentiality of recorded information, including the identity of respondents. Be mindful never to collect more information on individuals than is needed for analytical purposes. Consider using coded language and passwords, as well

²⁶ UNHCR, *Policy on the Protection of Personal Data of Persons of Concern to UNHCR*, 2015.

as keeping personally identifiable information separate from other information provided by respondents.

- **Participation and inclusion:** Action must be taken to ensure that participation in a needs assessment by diverse women, men, girls, and boys – including persons with disabilities, older persons, youth, and LGBTI persons – is adequately captured.

Link to other processes and information systems

The role and success of needs assessments in a humanitarian response depend on the extent to which they responsibly inform decision-making processes and contribute to other information systems. These other systems may include:

- Population Data Management;
- Registration of Refugees and Asylum-seekers in proGres;
- IDP Enrolment for Assistance;
- Profiling Displacement Situations;
- Targeting; and
- Protection Information Management Systems.

Population Data Management and Needs Assessments

Population data management (PDM) – the systematic recording of the number and characteristics of a population in a specific place and time – is essential for needs assessments, programming, monitoring, and effective protection and assistance. Population figures form the basis for population planning groups ('PPGs' in UNHCR's Focus software) and are most useful to operations when based on a well-defined Humanitarian Profile.²⁷ To assist in understanding our persons of concern better, population figures can be further broken down by various characteristics necessary for programming and planning (e.g. demographic, specific need, socio-economic, or displacement profiles).

Population data management and needs assessment systems are crucial to generate information that support decision-making and to help structure evidence-based operation plans. Population data is often the denominator and baseline for humanitarian indicators

²⁷ IASC, Guidelines on the Humanitarian Profile Common Operational Dataset, 2010. *The Humanitarian Profile Support Guidance on Humanitarian Population Figures* (guidance on how to calculate affected population and population in need figures) is available [here](#).

that serve as a basis for comparison and analysis over time. Population data is also regularly required by the needs assessment process to evaluate the scale and severity of humanitarian crises and to prioritize what populations need. Further, when planning needs assessments, population figures – disaggregated by age, sex, and other demographic data, as well as location data – help to identify targeted population groups and to determine the appropriate geographical coverage of a needs assessment exercise. Conversely, in some situations, needs assessments will trigger the introduction of population data management activities in particular geographic areas or for specific groups of displaced persons.

The most common methodologies used to collect population data within UNHCR are estimation, profiling, registration (including when only for the purpose of enrolment for assistance), and secondary data reviews. In most cases, context, time, and resources will determine the extent to which various PDM methods are appropriate and can be feasibly implemented. That being said, the choice should always be guided by the level and types of operational data required by the operation in order to achieve the identified purpose. For example, estimations might be sufficient to quickly generate an approximate figure of the total population in a given site for advocacy purposes, but a more rigorous methodology such as registration would be required if the operation needs an accurate count and description of a population to generate a detailed distribution list or do case management. Since different PDM methods will generate population figures of differing types and depth, their usefulness and value for needs assessment activities will vary.

The following sections describe common PDM methods and discuss their relationship to needs assessment activities.²⁸

Registration of Refugees and Asylum-seekers in proGres²⁹

Continuous, individual registration of refugees and asylum-seekers is one of UNHCR's core protection activities, both at the onset of a crisis and in protracted situations. In addition to enabling case management, registration generates disaggregated population figures and allows UNHCR to identify persons with specific needs who may require targeted interventions.

Registration is conducted as soon as practically possible, and regular updates of registration data are required as a situation continues. Aggregated statistical data from registration incorporated into a needs assessment may help in the prioritization of assistance or the tailoring of programmes for the population.

In a refugee situation, data from registration and proGres can be used in needs assess-

²⁸ Registration, profiling, estimations, and secondary data reviews are common PDM methods. These are implemented with techniques such as area-based sampling, focus group discussions, key informants, surveys, remote sensing, flow monitoring, and counting (e.g. the number of shelters).

²⁹ ProGres (Profile Global Registration System) is UNHCR's enterprise registration tool, which implements the registration standards defined in ExCom Conclusion No. 91 on the Registration of Refugees and Asylum-Seekers.

ments in multiple ways:

- **Source of population figures:**³⁰ Registration data is often the primary source of population figures in refugee situations. Needs assessment analyses require such figures in order to ascertain the severity of a situation (i.e. in terms of the number of affected populations) and to calculate indicators (i.e. baseline population figures are used as denominators to calculate the result of indicators).
- **Vulnerabilities related to family composition:** Statistics on needs can be derived from family composition, including unaccompanied children, households headed by single or female parents, and unaccompanied elderly persons. Even in emergency household registration, it is possible to derive needs information from family composition.
- **Vulnerabilities related to specific needs:** Important data on the number of persons with disabilities, individuals with a serious medical condition, pregnant teenagers and other children-at-risk, and other types of specific needs are often recorded.
- **Population sample frame:** If primary data collection will be undertaken in a needs assessment, population figures from the registration system can be used as the basis for calculating survey samples.
- **Additional needs assessment data:** In some cases additional questions are recorded – for example, with regard to a refugee's living situation. Responses can then be collated and analysed, and later incorporated into a needs assessment analysis.

IDP Enrolment for Assistance

In refugee situations, UNHCR is a major provider of population figures due to its role in registration, and often leads the collection and management of data. By contrast, in situations of internal displacement, UNHCR's role in PDM is less standardized, since the registration of nationals in their own country poses specific challenges and risks that should be considered. Sometimes called 'IDP enrolment for assistance', IDP registration involves the collection of biodata on selected individuals or households for the purposes of tracking assistance, case management, or other protection interventions.

There are a number of differences between registration in refugee and IDP contexts. Refugee and asylum-seeker registration denotes an international legal status and the protections that come with it, while IDP registration does not. Unlike registration activities with refugees, IDP enrolment for assistance is not associated with status, nor is it associated with the re-establishment of identity. Registration of asylum-seekers and refugees can be a goal in and of itself due to UNHCR's mandate, while for IDPs it is not. An IDP will not be enrolled just because s/he is internally displaced or because s/he is a

³⁰ In the absence of detailed registration data, population estimates may be required to guide sample sizing for needs assessments and programming. See IASC, *Humanitarian Population Figures*, 2016.

person of concern for UNHCR. Rather, only a targeted sub-set of the IDP population will be registered, and only when household- or individual-level data is required to facilitate and/or monitor the provision of assistance, protection, or services.³¹ Finally, registering IDPs in conflict zones may create protection risks, especially when the government or national army is a party to the conflict. Rather than conducting a comprehensive registration as in refugee settings, UNHCR collects the least amount of data that is required to support the purpose.³²

Unlike the registration of refugees and asylum seekers, IDP registration relies on needs assessments in two distinct ways:

- **Registration decision:** Information from needs assessments is used to determine if and what type of household-level assistance and services are required, and thus whether enrolling IDPs is necessary.
- **Eligibility criteria:** Information from needs assessments is used to identify the eligibility criteria for being enrolled, i.e. what types of persons and households will be targeted for distributions and assistance.

In short, needs assessments generate information that helps the operation decide if IDPs should be registered in order to provide assistance or services, and if so, to identify and prioritize which IDPs should be registered for this purpose.

Note that given its narrow purpose and light touch, the population figures generated by IDP registration are less comprehensive than those generated by refugee registration: They do not represent the total IDP population and therefore cannot be used as denominators for indicators. Moreover, the data from IDP registration is usually less usable in secondary data analysis for needs assessments than the data from refugee registration, which will be more exhaustive, comprehensive, and detailed. Instead, the data from needs assessments will be useful for decisions about IDP registration, as explained previously.

Profiling Displacement Situations

Profiling is the collaborative process of identifying internally displaced groups or individuals through data collection. It is intended to build a comprehensive picture of a displacement situation including demographics, needs, strengths, and vulnerabilities, often in comparison with host populations. Profiling is used to provide an evidence base for governments as well as humanitarian and development actors to advocate and fund-raise for an improved response; to inform joint programming, policy development, and long-term solutions for the displaced; or to address other problems identified during the

³¹ In IDP settings, 'light touch' registration involves the collection of only that data which is necessary to establish identity for the provision of assistance. Contrast this with comprehensive registration in refugee settings, which leads to the issuance of identity and entitlement documentation and is used for Refugee Status Determination, protection and community services interventions, durable solution assistance, and the planning and targeting of assistance and services.

³² In all cases, a thorough analysis is required before undertaking IDP enrolment to ensure that 'do no harm' and other core principles are respected.

profiling exercise.

Like joint needs assessments, profiling is collaborative in nature, ensuring coordination between governments, humanitarian, and development actors in order to produce agreed upon results and inform joint action. Profiling makes use of multiple quantitative and qualitative methodologies for data collection and analysis, often involving household surveys with representative sampling. The core goal is to provide reliable estimates of the number of persons of concern, their characteristics (age, sex, location, diversity), and often their needs, capacities, coping mechanisms, and intentions. A profiling exercise may:

- Provide population-profiling elements and characteristics;
- Contain a needs assessment component that can be considered in needs analysis; and
- Provide a solid basis by which to identify the need for specific sector assessments.

In contrast to profiling, a needs assessment typically will use population data from external sources or rapid population estimation.³³ While needs assessments may be conducted during all phases of a humanitarian response, profiling is usually preferable in the later phases of a crisis. By that point, up-to-date and agreed disaggregated population figures are often lacking, or a comprehensive picture of opportunities and obstacles for achieving durable solutions is needed to inform policy development.

Profiling and needs assessments can be seen as complementary in many cases. They can be conducted simultaneously or in tandem to optimize resources or when access to the affected population is likely to be difficult or expensive.

Sources for more information on profiling during displacement situations include the following:

- JIPS website: www.jips.org
- JIPS Essential Toolkit (JET): www.jet.jips.org
- Profiling and Assessment Resource Kit (PARK): www.parkdatabase.org
- Dynamic Analysis and Reporting Tool (DART): www.dart.jips.org

Targeting

Targeting is a process that aims to ensure that persons of concern are supported with the most appropriate intervention(s) to address their needs and reinforce their ability to exercise their rights.³⁴ Within the UNHCR programming cycle, the targeting process starts with needs assessments and programme design, and is part of plan-

³³ ACAPS, *Technical Brief: Estimation of affected population figures*, 2012.

³⁴ UNHCR's *Operational Guidance for Targeting* (forthcoming).

ning for implementation.

As targeting is needs-based, understanding the needs of a population is a critical component of this process. Information from needs assessments feeds into the definition of targeting eligibility criteria, which describe the characteristics of intended beneficiary groups. In general, eligibility criteria are chosen to reduce inclusion errors (i.e. persons that are not targeted benefit from the activity) and exclusion errors (i.e. persons in the target group do not benefit from the activity). The process of formulating eligibility criteria varies between contexts (emergency or protracted), understanding of the needs and vulnerabilities of the population and/or various sub-groups, and the type of analysis that is most feasible and appropriate.

Needs assessments may be undertaken at several points in the targeting process. For example, information from a community-level needs assessment may be used to prioritize the themes upon which targeting eligibility criteria will be based. The results of the data analysis will identify certain sets of indicators that are either directly associated with or proxies of a specific situation of individuals and/or households – for example, the most affected, poorest, most vulnerable, or households in certain categories. Often a set of indicators is used to define the eligibility criteria, but the types of indicators and number of indicators can vary by situation and context.

Applying eligibility criteria to a population of concern will lead to a broader understanding and projection of comprehensive needs. It is then possible to estimate how many persons of concern need to be targeted for required interventions and to determine if a smaller or larger number of persons of concern need to be considered. Household-level needs assessments may be conducted to identify which households meet the eligibility criteria. After targeted assistance has been provided, additional assessments may be undertaken to see if the needs have been met.

Protection Information Management Systems³⁵

Needs assessments are implemented as part of an information ecosystem. They should not duplicate other information systems or try to replace them but rather complement and build upon them. This implies understanding the purpose and scope of existing information systems and building linkages between needs assessments and other core information management systems, notably protection information management (PIM) systems. An overview of common PIM systems and their relationship(s) to needs assessments are described in Table 8:

³⁵ PIM provides quality data and information on individuals and groups of persons affected by natural or man-made disasters in a safe, reliable, and meaningful way. See more on <http://pim.guide/>.

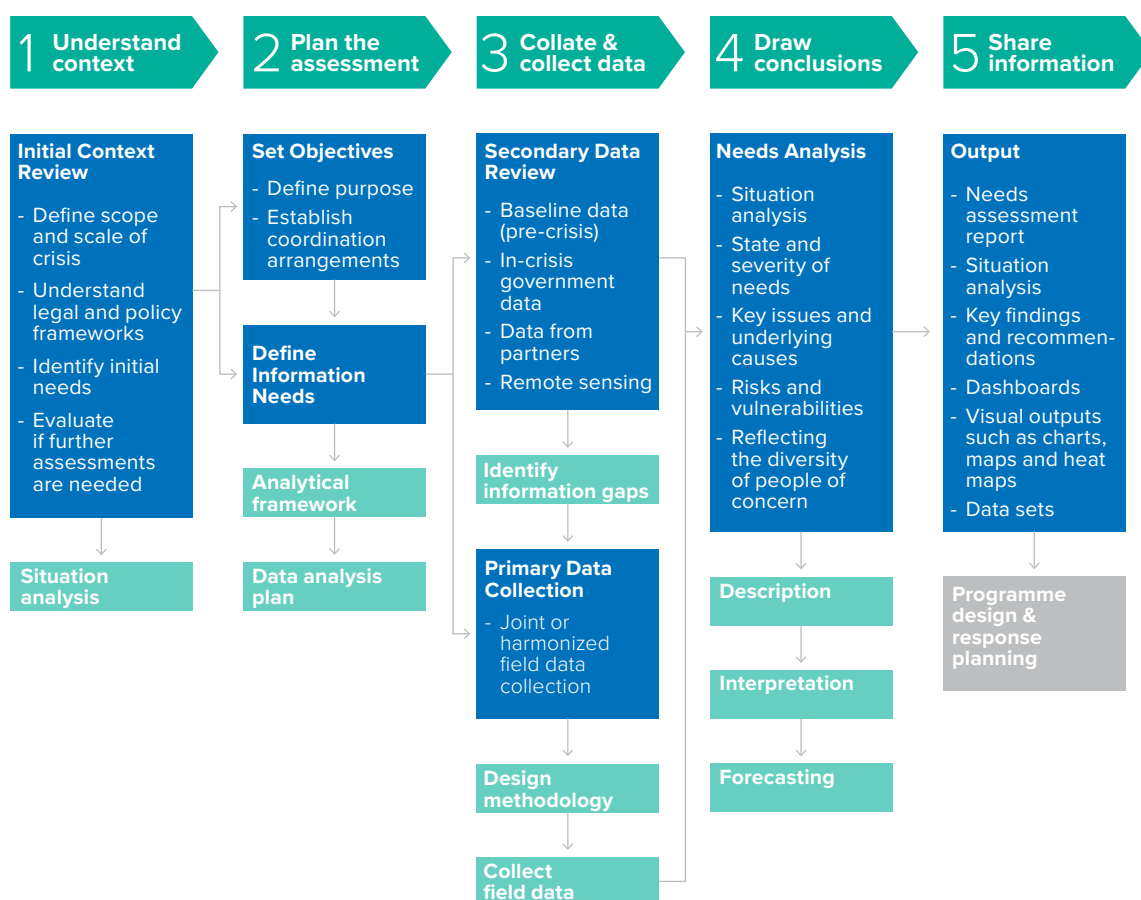
Table 8 Needs assessments linkages to PIM systems

Type of PIM system and definition	Relation to needs assessment
Protection monitoring systems systematically and regularly collect, verify and analyse information over an extended period of time in order to identify violations of rights and protection risks for populations of concern for the purpose of informing effective responses.	• Needs assessment activities help prioritize protection monitoring activities (i.e. identifying protection risks and threats at a certain time and place, and over time), the populations to target, or specific geographic locations that may need to be monitored over time. • Needs assessment activities can be triggered by protection monitoring data, which may need further inquiry in the form of an in-depth assessment. • Needs assessment activities can inform the type and level of protection monitoring that is needed, including duration of system. • Aggregate indicators from protection monitoring systems can be used as secondary data in needs assessments.
Case management systems support the provision of protection and/or targeted interventions to identified individuals or groups through the management of data – from case identification to case closure – related to a specific case.	• Needs assessment activities can identify urgent action cases that are referred to case management systems (i.e. follow up cases). • Needs assessment activities can identify vulnerability profiles and help inform the scope and scale of case management systems and services. • Needs assessment activities can be informed by aggregated case management data (i.e. patterns of cases can indicate trends in needs and inform further assessments).
Response monitoring and evaluation systems involve the continuous and coordinated review of implementation of response to measure whether planned activities deliver the expected outputs and protection outcomes and impact, both positive and negative. Evaluation is distinct but compliments monitoring by asking questions around causal linkages, looking at intended and unintended results. Evaluation is not continuous but rather periodic and targeted.	• Needs assessment activities can use data from protection response monitoring systems as secondary data. • Needs assessment activities can inform the development of indicators and the identification of protection response priorities. • Needs assessment data can be used as part of a larger programme evaluation process.
Population data management systems record the number and characteristics (disaggregated by sex, age, demographics, and diversity) of a population in a specific place and time period, for the purpose of programming effective prevention and response.	• Needs assessment designers use population data to develop a methodology and sampling frame. • Needs assessment activities require population data to help set a baseline for assessments and indicators. • Needs assessment data includes population data as a denominator for representative needs assessments.

The Needs Assessment Process

Needs assessments are informed by key principles and implemented following a systematic process with key steps. Their complexity and scope will vary depending on the scale and context of emergencies. Figure 7 summarizes the needs assessment process and its main outputs, and each step and its associated activities are briefly described below. The process is described in detail in Part 2 of this Handbook.

Fig. 7 Needs assessment process



Step 1: Understand Context

An initial desk review of available information to understand the context is conducted prior to any planning or data collection activity. This involves analysing existing pre-crisis data and information collected by other actors (e.g. humanitarian organizations, national or local governments, civil society organizations) on the current situation. The aim is to build an initial understanding of the context and the crisis drivers in order to define further information needs, determine whether a needs assessment is needed, and identify

which type of assessment will best address the information needs given available time and resources. Results of the review are summarized into a **situation analysis**, which seeks to:

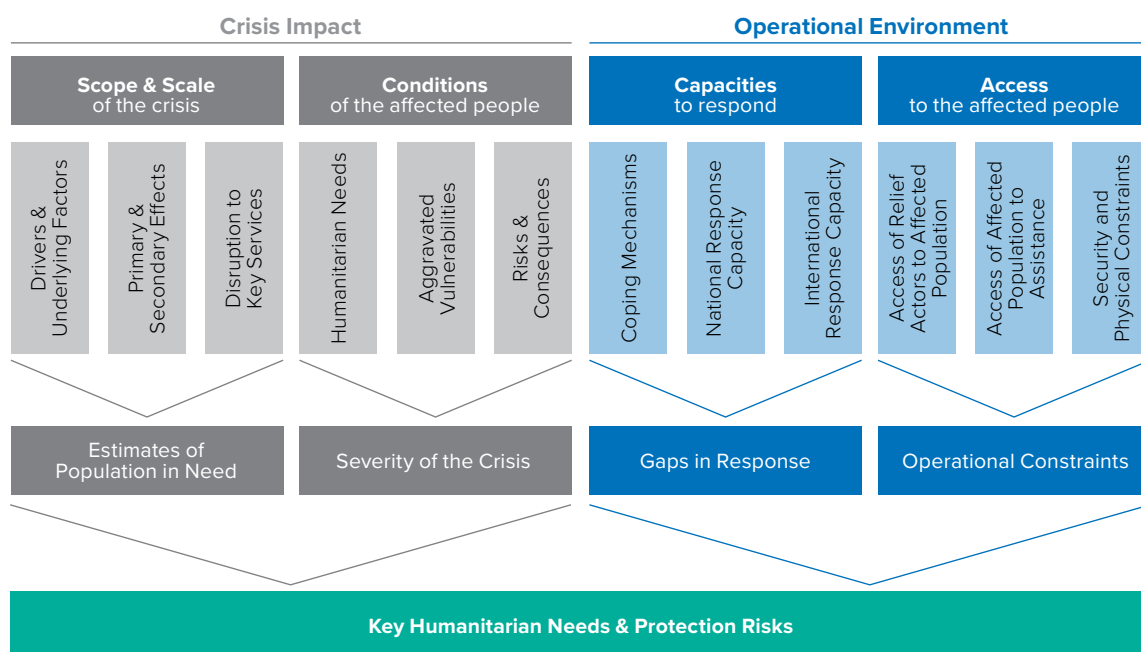
- Define the scope, scale, and context of the current situation;
- Identify the initial needs and roles of affected women, men, girls, and boys of concern, including any sub-groups that have particular needs such as persons with disabilities, older persons, youth, or LGBTI persons;
- Understand the socio-political context and relevant legal/policy frameworks; and
- Identify protection risks and likely evolution, including projections based on data from previous similar emergencies that have happened with this population or in this context.

Step 2: Plan the Needs Assessment

Based on the results of the context review, the assessment project outline can be developed. Minimum requirements include:

- Clear and precise **objectives and focus** for the needs assessment, keeping in mind the purpose of the needs assessment, guiding principles for safe and ethical protection-related information management, the needs assessment coverage (populations, sectors, and geographic areas), the types of decisions that need to be informed, and the time frame by which they need to be made.
- An **assessment project outline**, including data collection and analysis methodologies, data collection tools, analysis plans, training and pilot plans, budget, human resources requirements, work plan, terms of reference, etc.
- **Coordination modalities and arrangements** if multiple actors are involved, including a plan on how to engage affected populations in the needs assessment process.
- Detailed information needs, organized into an **analytical framework** that shows the linkages between information categories and how they intersect analytically. An example of an analytical framework is proposed in Figure 8 and described in the text box that follows.
- An **analysis plan** that operationalizes the analytical framework and details indicators and sources for each information element sought, as well as how the information will be analysed.

Fig. 8 Example of analytical framework



The analytical framework:

- Supports and guides the collection and analysis of secondary and primary data by identifying key analytical questions;
- Provides a way to organize what data to collect and how to analyse it, and as well as how to describe the relationships and interactions between the elements that are to be measured;
- Supports a common analysis of where humanitarian needs and protection risks are most severe and which population groups are most in need; and
- Serves as a communication tool between stakeholders and should be considered as a reference throughout the needs assessment process.

Step 3: Collate and Collect Data

Needs assessments rely on both secondary and primary data and should always start with a desk review of available information, based on the analysis plan and in support of the analytical framework. For the purpose of this Handbook, primary data is defined as data that has been collected within the scope of a current needs assessment exercise, while secondary data has been collected outside that scope and for other purposes.

The **secondary data review** should be undertaken to understand the situation through consolidation of data that has been collected outside the scope of the current assessment exercise. Potential sources of data within UNHCR include previous assessments, situation reports, operations plans, and registration systems such as proGres, protection monitoring and case management systems, Focus, and sector-specific monitoring

systems such as Twine. Common sources of relevant secondary information outside UNHCR include other humanitarian and development actors, as well as government, civil society organizations, and educational and research institutes.

An important step in the secondary data review is to identify information gaps by comparing what information needs have been identified with the available data that has been consolidated. **Primary data collection** can then be considered in order to help validate information already collected and/or fill identified gaps in existing information. Different methods can be used to fill these gaps, including direct observations, focus group discussions, and interviews with persons of concern. These methods must be designed to ensure that women, men, girls, and boys (including older people, persons with disabilities, youth, LGBTI persons, those with specific needs, minorities, and indigenous peoples) are given the opportunity to express their needs, priorities, and capacities.

An assessment registry should keep track of conducted and planned assessments, while a data repository should store assessment reports and data from a secondary data review. Data from primary data collection in the field is generally compiled into databases.

Step 4: Draw Conclusions: Needs Analysis

Needs analysis is a process that aims to make sense of information and to draw conclusions about the severity of conditions and humanitarian needs priorities. There are four different phases of analysis, including:

- **Description:** Grouping, summarizing, and comparing data based on the analysis plan in order to identify trends, patterns, outliers, and anomalies.
- **Explanation:** Determining why certain patterns and trends are present or emerging, and the underlying factors and processes that led to their existence.
- **Interpretation:** Drawing conclusions on severity and priorities. Interpretation also involves judging the amount of evidence that supports those conclusions and estimating the extent to which the findings can apply to others settings.
- **Anticipation:** Predicting or forecasting a situation's likely evolution(s) based on past and present data. This step provides information about potential future events and their expected consequences for the affected population, and helps to identify new and emerging risks.

Generally, the interpretation and anticipation phases of analysis are conducted jointly among the assessment stakeholders, i.e. in a workshop setting. Findings from the analysis are compiled into a final report, and all processing and analytical decisions are documented. The report and the assessment findings are the basis for a subsequent response analysis that draws strategic, programmatic, or operational conclusions based on current and forecasted severity and priorities.

Step 5: Share Information

The findings from the analysis step should be transposed into clear and persuasive information products and shared with relevant stakeholders. The most common output from such a process is the needs assessment report, including a concise summary of key findings and recommendations to assist decision-making. Assessment results can be disseminated through many other information products in condensed formats, including verbal presentations and briefings. Dashboards, maps, and infographics can be used to visually illustrate the main findings and messages of the assessment.

Data, methods, and findings are shared as widely as possible with other agencies and actors in the humanitarian response. This includes the affected populations and assessed communities, who also should be given explanations about how the information will be used and what decisions it will impact. Protocols or agreements for the sharing of data should regulate the sharing of findings and raw data. It is important to share both internally and externally – including with persons of concern – but only after protection risks for all the actors who were or will be involved (i.e. data collectors, subjects, managers, disseminators, etc.) have been identified and mitigation strategies been agreed.³⁶

More details about the step-by-step approach to the assessment process are provided in Part 2 of this Handbook.

³⁶ UNHCR, *Policy on the Protection of Personal Data of Persons of Concern*, 2015; UNHCR, *Information Classification, Handling and Disclosure Policy*, 2010.

Additional Resources & Guidance

UNHCR needs assessment support documents and tools

Needs Assessment for Refugee Emergencies (NARE) checklist

Assists UNHCR operations with initial multi-sectoral needs assessments when there has been a significant sudden forced displacement of populations across borders.

The UNHCR Tool for Participatory Assessment in Operations

Ensures that refugees or other persons of concern – women and men of all ages and backgrounds – are given the opportunity to identify and voice their own protection risks, priorities, and solutions.

Joint Assessment Missions (JAM) Practical Guide

Aids in understanding the situation, needs, risks, and vulnerabilities of refugees, returnees, and host populations with regard to food security and nutrition.

Handbook for Emergencies

Online guide for agile, effective, and community-based humanitarian emergency response.

Emergency Information Management Toolkit

Provides information management advice and tools to inform humanitarian response in a refugee emergency and other operational settings.

Policy on the Protection of Personal Data of Persons of Concern to UNHCR

Lays down the rules and principles relating to the processing of personal data of persons of concern to UNHCR.

Age, Gender and Diversity Policy

Provides guidance on a systematic application of an Age, Gender and Diversity (AGD) approach to ensure that all persons of concern enjoy their rights on an equal footing and are able to participate in the decisions that affect their lives.

Understanding Community-Based Protection

Guides UNHCR staff and partners to integrate community-based approaches to protection into their humanitarian work.

Inter-agency needs assessment support documents and tools

IASC Operational Guidance for Coordinated Assessments

Promotes a coordinated approach to needs assessments. While established for IDP settings and the cluster system, it can guide the RCM.

IASC Multi Sector/Cluster Initial Rapid Assessment (MIRA)

Documents an inter-agency process enabling actors to reach, from the outset, a common understanding of a situation, priority needs, and likely evolution for joint response planning and resource mobilization.

IASC Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO)

Provides an overview for developing a humanitarian needs overview (HNO), explains the purpose of a joint analytical process, the main steps required, and the different roles and responsibilities entailed.

IASC/EDG Protection and Accountability to Affected Populations in the HRP

Sets out actions to be undertaken throughout the humanitarian programme cycle (HPC) to fulfil commitments on Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP) and to ensure that protection is central to humanitarian response.

IASC Policy on Protection in Humanitarian Action

Defines the centrality of protection in humanitarian action as well as the process for its implementation at the country level. It seeks to reinforce the complementary roles, mandates, and expertise of all relevant actors.

IASC Operational Guidance on Responsibilities of Sector/Cluster Leads and OCHA in Information Management

Sets out responsibilities by cluster/sector leads and OCHA for information management (IM) activities, support national information systems, standards, build local capacities, and maintain appropriate links with relevant national and local authorities.

NRC/IDMC/OCHA Guidance on Profiling Internally Displaced Persons

Provides guidance on how to reach a commonly agreed number of IDPs in a given location/situation by a variety of profiling methodologies.

Other resources

Profiling and Assessment Resource Kit (PARK)

Contains easily accessible and practical tools that serve to improve planning, implementation, and dissemination of information that articulates the needs of displacement-affected populations.

Joint IDP Profiling Service (JIPS) Toolkit

Compiles JIPS' best-practice tools and guides for profiling exercises in IDP situations.

Assessment Capacities Project (ACAPS) Resources

Resource library for needs assessment technical guidance and resource documents.

NEEDS ASSESSMENT HANDBOOK

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FRONT COVER:

SYRIA. A COLLECTIVE SHELTER IN LATAKIA FOR PEOPLE DISPLACED BY THE CONFLICT.

Internally displaced persons queue for food at a collective shelter in the Sports City complex in Latakia, Syria. It is home to over 3000 displaced persons who fled the conflict, mostly from Aleppo and Idlib province.

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This document along with further information on global displacement is available on UNHCR's website:
<http://www.unhcr.org>

