



GRAND BARGAIN PRINCIPLES FOR COORDINATED NEEDS ASSESSMENT ETHOS

The collection and analysis of data and information a situation, how it affects the lives and livelihoods of people and ensuing needs is critical to informing an effective and efficient humanitarian response. Ensuring the resulting analysis is credible and engenders confidence and trust is, thus, of paramount importance. So, too, are assurances that respect for those we seek to assist remains at the center of all needs assessment and analysis activities.

The purpose of this document is to outline the values, principles and ethical behaviour within the work of coordinated needs assessment¹ and analysis for humanitarian situations. These principles represent core values that have been agreed to by organizations at the global level, in particular, the Code of Conduct and the Humanitarian Charter, and are implemented at global, regional and operational levels. They are consistent with existing interagency guidance and commitments, including the IASC Operational Guidance on the Coordination of Assessments in Humanitarian Emergencies, the IASC Commitments on Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP), the IASC Grand Bargain Participation Revolution Recommendations, the Core Humanitarian Standard, Protection Information Management Principles, Protection Mainstreaming principles, the Good Humanitarian Donorship initiative, and the UN Privacy Policy Group Personal Data Protection and Privacy Principles. This document is intended to establish the ethos for coordinated needs assessment and analysis among humanitarian actors broadly, both international and national, including assistance and service providers, sector/cluster coordinators, government entities and donors. The principles establish a common ethos for sound and ethical organizational conduct and activities in coordinated needs assessments.

Organizations that adopt this document commit to the following principles:

¹ Within this document, the phrase “needs assessment” refers to needs assessment and needs analysis. Coordinated assessments are divided into two types: during a joint, or common, assessment, data collection, processing and analysis form one single process among agencies within and between clusters/sectors, leading to a single report. Harmonized assessments refer to data collection processing and analysis activities which are undertaken separately, but the data is sufficiently comparable (because of the use of common operational datasets, key indicators, and geographical and temporal synchronization) to be compiled into a single database, and to serve as the subject of a shared analysis. (IASC, Operational Guidance for Coordinated Assessments in Humanitarian Crises 2012).

1. People-centered and inclusive

Needs assessment activities are guided by the interests and well-being of the population, who, to the maximum extent feasible, are invited to participate and are included or represented in all relevant phases of the assessment from data collection to analysis.

Assessments are designed and implemented with due respect for the population affected, considering their rights, security, dignity and self-worth, and recognition of the value of assessment respondents' time. Throughout, special attention should be given to people with special needs.

- a. Assessments must be sensitive to age, sex, and all relevant aspects of **diversity**². Wherever individuals or households are the unit of measurement in needs assessments, the data is disaggregated as a minimum by sex, age and disability, and, where possible, other relevant diversity factors. This should not pose a risk to protection or re-identification to assessed individuals or groups.
- b. To be **inclusive**, assessments consider languages spoken, the time of the day data is collected, and the way questions are phrased. Efforts are made to include local organizations in the design and implementation, while taking their possible profile and affiliation into account as part of the risk assessment. Where possible, communities are notified that an assessment will take place and are consulted on the methodology, goals, approach to inclusivity, and how the findings will be communicated. Throughout the process, expectations of communities and individuals for humanitarian intervention must be managed.
- c. Assessments should **reflect the vision and voice of the affected population** through the identification of their priority needs, information and modalities, coping mechanisms, local capacities and preferred solutions. Assessment results should be validated by and shared with community members to ensure the information has been interpreted correctly and to provide transparency into the evidence-base behind humanitarian decision-making. This information is shared with Humanitarian Country Teams and other relevant stakeholders by the assessment coordination team to inform the situation analysis and response planning. Appropriate referral and feedback mechanisms to facilitate access to immediate assistance where required, and feedback on the assessment and aid delivery, should be established in accordance with protocols on **accountability to affected people**.

² **Diversity** refers to different values, attitudes, cultural perspectives, beliefs, ethnicities, nationalities, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, health, social and economic status, skills, and other specific personal characteristics. Diversity characteristics vary from person to person and intersect, making each person unique. Respecting diversity means recognizing and valuing those differences and creating a protective, inclusive, and non-discriminatory environment where everyone's rights are upheld. (UNHCR Age, Gender and Diversity Policy, 2018).

2. Do no harm

A needs assessment does not result in harm to affected population, data collectors or any other staff or individual contributing to the exercise, nor does it constrict humanitarian space for actors participating in the assessment or in the entire response.

Needs assessment activities must include a **risk assessment** and take steps, if necessary, to mitigate identified risks. The risk assessment looks at foreseeable negative consequences that may result from data collection, processing, analysis, dissemination and subsequent actions or service delivery. This risk analysis takes into account the context-specific risks of not only collecting personally identifiable information (PII), but demographically identifiable information (DII) about groups, including their activity patterns.

3. Impartiality

All assessments are undertaken in an impartial manner while identifying and minimizing bias and avoiding pre-identified conclusions. The civilian character of humanitarian datasets is maintained so that they do not provide information useful to or biased towards actors in armed conflict.

4. Competency and capacity

Actors engaging in needs assessment activities are accountable for ensuring that these are guided and conducted by staff in a multi-functional team who are appropriately skilled in the requisite needs assessments and data management competencies and/or thematic areas they are assessing.³ Organizations commit to continuous learning and to improving competencies of staff engaging in needs assessment.

5. Clear objectives

Assessments are designed to inform specific response decisions that seek to meet the clearly identified humanitarian needs of crisis-affected populations, while enabling early recovery and preventing the creation of new risks. Only the data that is required for the specified decision-making task, and is not already available through other channels, is collected and analyzed.

³ This includes: collecting and safeguarding data on sensitive issues, such as sexual and gender-based Violence (SGBV) related data, information about unaccompanied minors, and other data collection that may affect particularly vulnerable populations.

- a. **The purpose is clearly defined and be proportional to both the identified risk and costs vis-à-vis the expected response.** The design and subsequent analysis will be technically appropriate for the situation and purpose. This joint analysis will inform response planning, resource prioritization, protection analysis, advocacy, and other purposes.
- b. Primary data is collected **only when the required data is not already available or cannot be collected by other means.** The intended assessment outcome justifies the time required from respondents, whether it will contribute to assessment fatigue and whether it will be used to inform responses to contribute to meaningful improvement in the lives of the affected population

6. Coordination and data minimization

All actors implementing assessment activities commit to coordinate on assessments, promote a shared vision of needs and priorities, ensure compatibility, quality and comparability, and avoid over-assessment. This includes promoting joint and harmonized activities between humanitarian actors, development actors and among other stakeholders.

- a. To the extent possible, needs assessment activities avoid the duplication of other assessment efforts and instead build upon existing efforts and mechanisms and support interoperability. Actors initiate and participate in **regular collaborative analysis**, which includes, as far as appropriate, all relevant national and international actors.
- b. Needs assessment plans strive for **data minimization**, i.e. the collection of the minimal amount of viable data necessary to effectively complete the assessment. Data minimization is critical for preventing assessment fatigue among populations, mitigating the risks of targeting and exploitation that data can create and magnify, and prevent “data deluge” or the collection of data beyond that which humanitarian actors can absorb and use. Coordination is essential at each stage of the assessment to achieve data minimization in an intentional and rules-based manner.

7. Minimum Technical Standards

All assessments adhere to minimum technical standards appropriate to the context and assessment objectives. A secondary data review must be undertaken prior to initiating a plan for primary data collection and analysis. Each assessment is based on an appropriate methodology which is documented and signed off with the assessment coordination team prior to initiating

operations. Minimum standards for sampling methodologies, site selection, questionnaire design, data processing, analysis and reporting⁴ throughout the assessment are met.

8. Informed consent, confidentiality and data security

Persons providing information in a needs assessment must grant permission in full knowledge of how the information they provide will be used, how it will be processed and who will have access to it. Needs assessment practices adhere to international standards of data protection and data security, including the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), where required, or other applicable regulations. In the case of collecting group/community-wide data, key stakeholders who are broadly representative within these communities are notified and consulted before an assessment is initiated to ensure the data agency⁵ of populations.

9. Transparency

A clear explanation of the assessment methodology, tools and approaches should be available. This includes any assumptions, concerns over data quality/sources, and limitations. Similarly, methods and reasoning used to produce findings, interpretations, conclusions and judgements are documented. Metadata⁶ is shared between organizations undertaking joint analysis.

10. Enabling joint analysis

Actors implementing coordinated needs assessments (both multi-sectoral and sector-specific) commit to designing data collection instruments and coordinating the assessments to enable joint analysis. Data collection approaches (sampling, timing) and definitions of key terms and indicators will be harmonized where possible to enable data interoperability and the combination of various sources of data and information. Actors actively engage in the analysis of data and information resulting from different needs assessments with the view to obtain a holistic understanding of the situation, needs and causes of needs across multiple sectors.

⁴ Minimum technical standards for reporting of findings include, for example, triangulating available data, not confusing correlation for causality, or avoiding non-significant disaggregations.

⁵ "Data agency" is the concept that everyone has the right to agency over the collection, use, and disclosure of their personally identifiable information (PII) and aggregate data that includes their personal information, such as demographically identifiable information (DII). Populations have the right to be reasonably informed about information activities during all phases of information acquisition and use. The right to data agency encompasses the right to protection from non-consensual experimentation, and includes the concepts of informed consent, participation, and notification of data collection and uses. (see "Signal Code," Harvard Humanitarian Initiative <https://hhi.harvard.edu/publications/signal-code-human-rights-approach-information-during-crisis>).

⁶ Metadata is data about data or data that defines or describes other data. Metadata is additional information or documentation about your dataset that will make it easier for others to understand and put your data into context. <https://centre.humdata.org/providing-metadata-for-your-datasets-on-hdx/>.

11. Documenting and addressing alternative or dissenting interpretations

During the joint needs assessment and analysis process, alternative or dissenting interpretations of shared evidence are documented and addressed. The acknowledgement of alternative or different interpretations or dissenting opinions based on shared evidence during joint needs analysis processes should be viewed as a strength, and not a weakness. Participants in joint analysis should not feel silenced or coerced into agreement in the final analytical product due to the pressure to participate in joint needs assessment.⁷

12. Sharing results (open data and analysis)

Organizations commit to open data and transparency in balance with risks of reidentification of personal data or doing harm. Assessment results, analysis as well as microdata will be shared in a timely manner with other actors, national authorities, and the affected population within the constraints of purpose specification, do no harm principles, data privacy and agreed data-sharing protocols, legislation or agreements, as relevant. Assessment coordination bodies routinely maintain and update assessment registries.

⁷ If these views cannot be reconciled in a transparent process such as new data collection or a review of analytical techniques, acknowledging alternative interpretations may require footnotes or highlighted comment boxes for smaller differences in analysis, or cross-referenced minority reports for more significant differences in interpretation.