Multi-cluster / sector Initial Rapid Needs Assessment (MIRA)

19 April 2023

Key points

- UNHCR has a responsibility to engage in, and support the MIRA at an early stage, to ensure that secondary data reviews, primary data collection methods and questions, and analysis of results incorporate protection concerns.

- Take ownership of elements of a MIRA (including analysis and interpretation of results) that concern clusters (co)led by UNHCR.

- Provide protection guidance to all clusters, and to the MIRA process as a whole.

1. Overview

A MIRA is an inter-agency needs assessment and analysis process, from which a joint strategic plan for emergency response is developed by the humanitarian country team. Although the MIRA may be modified for various emergency contexts and can be used to respond to IDP or non-refugee emergencies, the MIRA analytical framework and approach is the most effective in a sudden onset natural disaster, and is conducted in the first weeks of a disaster. The MIRA process focuses on producing a situational analysis during the first three days of the onset of a disaster, followed by a MIRA report to be released within 2 weeks of the start of a disaster.

A MIRA assessment also forms a part of the IASC Guidance for Inter-agency Contingency Planning and Emergency Response Preparedness. MIRAs are managed by OCHA under the overall guidance of the Humanitarian Coordinator (HC) in the first two weeks of a disaster.

MIRAs may be undertaken in coordination with host Governments, supported by the humanitarian community through clusters. At the global level, UNHCR is responsible for leading the emergency protection, shelter, camp coordination and management clusters, although leadership may vary at the country level in natural disaster situations.
2. Relevance for emergency operations

A MIRA may be undertaken if and when the following conditions are present:

- New and sudden onset disaster followed by a period of relative stability enabling humanitarian access;
- Urgent need for information required to inform coordinated planning and response;
- The humanitarian community in country is willing to share information and coordinate.

Please note: Additional details and an easy to use graph illustrating conditions which should be factored into a decision to conduct a MIRA are available in the "MIRA Multi-Sector Initial Rapid Assessment Guidance, Revision" of Jan 2015, page 2.

The MIRA is intended to support stakeholders to reach a shared understanding of the humanitarian situation and its likely evolution at its earliest stages to support initial strategic response decisions surrounding the following:

- The impact of the disaster, including scale and severity, priority needs, risks/vulnerabilities;
- The capacity to respond, both by national and international actors, including limitations; and
- Priority areas for intervention.

3. Main guidance

Underlying process - how does this work?

The MIRA methodology is comprised of the following fundamental elements: a secondary data review, collection of primary data, joint analysis and reporting.

According to the 2015 MIRA guidance, a successful MIRA requires a balanced small team with the required technical skill set represented by key actors within the emergency response. It's important to note that too large of an assessment team, may overwhelm the MIRA coordination process.

Secondary data review
The organizations participating in a MIRA collect and analyse quantitative and qualitative information pre and post disaster (for example, information surrounding the geographical area, people affected, or a sector etc.), and compile an analysis using an adapted MIRA analytical framework as a guide. Within the MIRA approach, inter-sectoral analysis is then conducted jointly and consensus is then reached on the most severely affected areas, persons or groups etc.
Secondary data plays a crucial role in the early stages of an emergency when it may be impossible to collect primary data because time, staff, resources and access may be limited. For more information on how to conduct a secondary data review, see the Entry on needs assessment for refugee emergencies (NARE). Where needed and in "mixed settings" where populations of humanitarian concern include refugees, IDPs and other affected groups, UNHCR may support the secondary data review, notably to collect information related to refugees (number, size of population, protection concerns, locations, demographics, etc.).

Primary data collection at community level; sampling size and site selection
Led by OCHA, the organizations involved identify and agree on parameters for designing and testing the MIRA sampling form, and determine how primary data will be collected (sampling methods, sites, timeframe, other specifics). As Cluster lead, UNHCR has a responsibility to support and participate in this phase, by attending relevant inter-agency meetings chaired by OCHA and actively contributing to and supporting the analysis process. UNHCR staff will also participate in this stage of the MIRA process by collecting data as members of inter-agency assessment teams.

Primary data collection within the MIRA involves the collection of data by a small inter-agency assessment team, which generally collects information through direct observation and by interviewing key informants, and holding community focus group discussions. Please note: Focus Group Discussions within the MIRA process are referred to as ‘Community Group Discussion’, and generally operate under the same principals as UNHCR's Focus Group Discussions.

During observation and interviews, keep these key questions in mind:

- What has changed over time? What has remained the same?
- What is surprising, important or different about one group (or time, or place) when compared to another?
- If conditions did not worsen, why not? If conditions worsen now, what will be the cause?
- What is the next level of detail required?

Direct observation provides a snapshot of an affected population or location. Observe (see, smell and hear) conditions and features of the community or place from a range of viewpoints. Walk across the community, avoid obvious routes (roads, paths or natural boundaries), to obtain a variety of perspectives and a balanced view.

Look around and talk to people, with a gender, age and diversity approach. See what is there, what is not there, and what should be there: observe water collection points, latrines, communal washing areas, schools, storage facilities, tea shops, cemeteries, markets, health facilities, religious centres. In markets, see what people buy and sell and note the prices of basic commodities.

Interviews with key informants. ‘Arrange interviews with individuals of different backgrounds, responsibilities, genders, ages, and religious and/or ethnic minorities to ensure a full picture of the affected community... Where an affected community includes different population groups, such as a host population and a displaced population, key informants should be selected from all groups of interest. Conduct Interviews (using tools and measurement that
can be compared) at each group level.'

**Situation analysis: summarizing secondary and primary data**
The MIRA process combines the secondary and primary data it has collected to generate an overall analysis. This includes possible scenarios (best case, worst case) of how the crisis is likely to unfold.

Coordinated by OCHA, a situation analysis should become available within 72 hours of the start of an emergency. The analysis is the product of discussion between all the humanitarian actors involved, and reports their agreed findings and the decisions that follow from them. Under OCHA's overall guidance/coordination, UNHCR contributes to this process by working in the cluster system, and providing field support, staff and analysis for clusters that UNHCR (co) leads or supports. UNHCR also participates in discussion and analysis of MIRA data at inter-agency MIRA meetings led by OCHA. The situational analysis is then continuously updated during the first two weeks of a disaster, and used as a basis from which to draft the MIRA report.

OCHA produces a MIRA report that contains the findings of the assessment within 2 weeks of the start of a disaster. The report informs more detailed response planning, including revised appeals, where applicable.

**UNHCR’s role and accountabilities**

In emergency IDP situations, UNHCR contributes to the MIRA process for the clusters it co(leads) during the MIRA assessment and analysis process and may directly contribute to the inter-sectoral review process of available pre-crisis and post-crisis secondary data as part of an assessment team working to produce the situational analysis within first three days of a disaster. Clusters/sectors may also carry-out sector-specific analysis, if the nature of the crisis makes this necessary.

UNHCR provides staff to participate in field assessment and data collection for MIRA and engages in inter-sectoral discussion and analysis of the data, and the MIRA report’s findings and decisions.

**Considerations for UNHCR’s engagement at country level**

Information management officers, and UNHCR cluster (co) leads (for the emergency protection, shelter, and camp coordination and management clusters as applicable), participate in and contribute to the MIRA process (from design to delivery, analysis and results).

UNHCR supports UNHCR-led clusters during MIRAs and will proactively participate through these
clusters in secondary data reviews, primary data collection, analysis, and MIRA results.

UNHCR may also take a lead role in analysing population estimates and trends in the context of a MIRA assessment.

Annexes

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4. Links

OCHA, Humanitarian Response, Needs assessment: Guidance & templates

5. Main contacts

Additional guidance, tools, support pages and contact information for global UNHCR led clusters are available online as follows:

- The CCCMCluster: [http://www.globalccmcluster.org](http://www.globalccmcluster.org)
- EmergencyShelter Cluster: [https://www.sheltercluster.org](https://www.sheltercluster.org)

The UNHCR Field Information Coordination and Support Section (FICSS) may also provide technical advice for more in-depth assessments relating to specific thematic areas falling under UNHCR's (co)led clusters, and can be contacted at: HQIM@unhcr.org.