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

12 January 2024

## Key points

- A MIRA is an inter-agency needs assessment and analysis process that is carried out within the first three days of a disaster under the guidance of the Humanitarian Coordinator. It forms the basis for the humanitarian country team's (HCT) joint strategic plan for emergency response
- UNHCR engages in and supports the MIRA at an early stage to ensure that protection concerns are incorporated in secondary data reviews, primary data collection methods, and results analysis
- UNHCR is expected to take ownership of MIRA elements, including analysis and interpretation of results that concern clusters (co-)led by UNHCR
- UNHCR provides protection guidance to the overall MIRA process

## 1. Overview

*This entry should be read in conjunction with the entry on Emergency Response Preparedness* approach (IASC)*, the Humanitarian Response Plans (HRPs) and Flash Appeals (FAs), the Cluster approach and the International Coordination Architecture; you may also want to consider information in the Needs assessment for refugee emergencies (NARE).*

A MIRA is an inter-agency needs assessment and analysis process that forms the basis for the humanitarian country team's (HCT) joint strategic plan for emergency response. While the MIRA analytical framework and approach may be adapted to various emergency contexts and can be used to respond to IDP or non-refugee emergencies, it is most effective in a sudden onset natural disaster, when conducted within the first weeks.

The MIRA process focuses on producing a situational analysis during the first three days after the onset of a disaster or an escalation, followed by a MIRA report within two weeks. MIRAs are managed by OCHA under the overall guidance of the Humanitarian Coordinator (HC), supported by the humanitarian community through clusters, and may be undertaken in coordination with host governments. They are included in the IASC Guidance for Inter-agency Contingency Planning and Emergency Response Preparedness.

# 2. Relevance for emergency operations

A MIRA may be undertaken 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.

**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 2015 "MIRA Multi-Sector Initial Rapid Assessment Guidance ", (page 2).

The MIRA is intended to support stakeholders in reaching a shared understanding of the humanitarian situation and its likely evolution at its earliest stages to inform initial strategic response decisions in relation to:

- 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

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 IASC MIRA guidance, a successful MIRA requires a small team of key response actors with the required technical skillset; 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. e.g. information on the geographical area, people or sectors affected, using an adapted MIRA analytical framework as a guide. Within the MIRA approach, inter-sectoral analysis is then conducted jointly and consensus is reached on the most severely affected areas, population 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. 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.). For more information on how to conduct a secondary data review, see the entry on needs assessment for refugee emergencies (NARE).

**Primary data collection at community level; sampling size and site selection**
Led by OCHA, partaking organizations 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 participate in this phase by attending OCHA-chaired inter-agency meetings and supporting the analysis process with contributions. UNHCR staff will participate in this stage of the MIRA process by collecting data as members of inter-agency assessment teams. A small inter-agency assessment team collects primary data for the MIRA, generally through direct observation, key informants interviews and community focus group discussions.

**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. UNHCR may directly contribute to the inter-sectoral review process of available pre-crisis and post–crisis secondary data as part of an assessment team that produces the situational analysis within the first three days of a disaster. Clusters/sectors may also carry out a sector-specific analysis where needed.

UNHCR staff will participate in MIRA field assessments and data collection and engage in inter-sectoral discussions and analysis of the data. UNHCR will also contribute to the MIRA report findings and decisions.

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

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

UNHCR supports UNHCR-led clusters during MIRAs and participates 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.

# 4. Links

Needs assessments: guidance & templates (OCHA) MIRA Guidance (2015) Needs assessment for refugee emergencies (NARE) The Cooperation Framework IASC Guidance for Inter-agency Contingency Planning and Emergency Response Prep… CCCM Cluster Global Protection Cluster

Shelter Cluster

# 5. Main contacts

- For technical advice and information on in-depth assessments relating to thematic areas falling under UNHCR's (co-)led clusters, please contact the Assessment Team (Division of Strategic Planning and Results)
- Global Protection Cluster: gpc@unhcr.org
- Global Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM) Cluster: HQGLOBCC@unhcr.org
- Global Shelter Cluster: HQShelter@unhcr.org