3.6 Assessments and profiling

Assessments provide the basis on which many of the key decisions in an emergency are made, and as such are a vital part of emergency response. Similarly, profiling is aimed at understanding the needs of displaced people, usually in conflict settings. Undertaking assessments and profiling in urban areas in relation to conflict and disasters is complex for many reasons: density, spread, sheer numbers of people, ‘hidden’ vulnerability (where people may prefer to remain invisible), and existing high levels of poverty, which makes it
difficult to identify people in need specifically due to humanitarian circumstances (such as IDPs and refugees in protracted crises).

In recent years, aid agencies and academics have done a considerable amount of work to improve practice and knowledge in urban assessment and profiling. This section discusses multi-sectoral and single-sector assessments, identifies a number of sector-specific urban assessment toolkits, and reviews profiling in urban displacement. The section ends by referencing assessments relating to urban violence. This section closely links to the sections on targeting and response analysis and context analysis. It also relates to Section 3.4 on geospatial analysis and mapping.

### 3.6.1 Multi-sectoral assessments

A 2017 systematic review of best practice in urban assessments recommends taking a multi-sectoral approach:

> Sector-based vulnerability analyses and targeting approaches are ill suited to complex urban crises, where needs are interrelated. A population’s needs for shelter, WaSH, health, food security and livelihoods do not exist in isolation from one another. Rather, needs interact to shape vulnerability, and must thus be met with a multi-sectoral approach to guide targeting.\(^{75}\)

Taking a multi-sectoral approach in urban areas is also recommended in IFRC’s shelter assessment guidelines.\(^{76}\) There are however concerns about multi-sectoral assessments. For instance, in addressing shelter, there is a risk that needs are reduced ‘purely to the number of damaged buildings’, and that ‘Nuances such as markets analysis, tenure needs and spatial uses are therefore lost’\(^{77}\) (single-sector assessments are discussed further below).

A number of multi-sectoral assessment toolkits are available. Urban-specific toolkits include the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC)’s urban multi-sector vulnerability assessment tool (UMVAT).\(^ {78}\) This is used in displacement contexts and includes advice on initial assessment planning, tool contextualisation, data analysis and report writing. Tools include: a multi-sector questionnaire for use in KoBo Toolbox for mobile devices; a guidance

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78 See http://pubs.iied.org/10823IIED/?k=USA.
Another source of urban-specific technical guidance is ACAPS’ *Rapid Humanitarian Assessment in Urban Settings*, which covers research questions and approaches according to a number of urban themes. See www.alnap.org/resource/20125.

Other multi-sectoral assessment toolkits that have an urban application include:

- **Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment (VCA),** a longstanding approach which ‘uses various participatory tools to gauge people’s exposure to and capacity to resist natural hazards’. VCA draws on participatory methodologies such as Participatory Rapid Appraisal (PRA). While often used in rural areas, VCA has strong application in urban settlements. IFRC’s manual *Integrating Climate Change and Urban Risks into the VCA* provides useful guidance and steps for conducting urban VCAs. See www.ifrc.org/Global/Publications/disasters/reducing_risks/VCA/1260200-VCA-EN-LR2.pdf.

- **UNHCR’s *Emergency Handbook*** is an online, easy-to-navigate source of information and links. The handbook provides urban-oriented information on assessments (albeit of a rather general nature) according to sectors. See https://emergency.unhcr.org.

- **The IASC’s Multi Cluster/Sector Initial Rapid Assessment (MIRA),** which is intended to be undertaken within the first two weeks of a disaster. The aim is to enable humanitarian actors to ‘develop a joint strategic plan, mobilise resources and monitor the situation and the response’. There are five stages to the MIRA process: 1. Initiation; 2. Secondary data analysis; 3. Community-level assessments; 4. Analysis; and 5. Dissemination. See https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/iasc-transformative-agenda/documents-public/multi-clustersector-initial-rapid-assessment-mira-manual.

### 3.6.2 Sector-specific urban assessment toolkits

A number of sectors are ‘urbanising’ their approaches. For example the Food Security and Livelihoods in Urban Settings Working Group has produced a number of guidance documents on conducting food security assessments in urban areas, piloting new approaches in a number of cities including Harare, Guatemala City and Kinshasa. See https://fscluster.org/food-security-and-livelihoods-urban/workinggroup/food-security-and-livelihoods-urban.

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79 VCA is widely used by the IFRC and Red Cross Red Crescent National Societies: see www.ifrc.org/vca. It is based on Anderson and Woodrow’s work in developing a capacity and vulnerability analysis (CVA) tool. See M. Anderson and P. Woodrow, *Rising from the Ashes: Development Strategies in Times of Disaster* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1989).

A number of learning products have emerged around the use of cash and assessments. Although developed primarily as a guide to implementing cash transfers in urban contexts, *Cash Transfer Programming in Urban Emergencies*, published by the Cash Learning Partnership (CaLP), includes advice on how existing assessment tools can be applied to urban contexts. See [www.cashlearning.org/downloads/resources/calp/CaLP_Urban_Toolkit_web.pdf](http://www.cashlearning.org/downloads/resources/calp/CaLP_Urban_Toolkit_web.pdf).

### 3.6.3 Profiling in urban displacement

Profiling can be defined as ‘The collaborative process of identifying internally displaced groups or individuals through data collection, including counting, and analysis, in order to take action to advocate on their behalf, to protect and assist them and, eventually, to help bring about a solution to their displacement’. 

In urban areas, profiling has been used to ‘obtain better information about the range of experiences, needs and capacities of the displaced, their host families and their non-displaced neighbours in urban settings’. The Global Alliance for Urban Crises identifies six elements of urban profiling:

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**Box 3.10 The Syria Needs Analysis Project**

The Syria Needs Analysis Project (SNAP) was undertaken by ACAPS and MapAction from 2012 to 2015. The aim was to provide information to operational agencies working with Syrian refugees living in urban areas of Jordan. Particular challenges included limited information and a fast-changing situation. In this context, SNAP aimed to contribute to improved targeting and more efficient responses by providing capacity-building and technical support for undertaking assessments. Key activities included secondary data reviews within multi-sector needs analyses, producing scenarios relating to different political and conflict-related outcomes (in order to enable better planning) and analysis of sectors.


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81 Cross and Johnston, *Cash Transfer Programming in Urban Emergencies* ([www.urban-response.org/resource/7056](http://www.urban-response.org/resource/7056)).


1. The use of spatial analysis, wherein ‘[urban] conditions are analyzed at granular levels to be able to understand the specific challenges of different neighborhoods and the types of short and long-term responses required’.

2. Prioritising a people-centred approach – ‘The needs of specific population groups must be analyzed both on their own and in relation to the urban population as a whole’.

3. Recognising change over time, i.e. noting history and ‘Comparing present vulnerabilities with past conditions’.

4. Analyse the entirety of a city, noting in particular the interlinked nature of systems.

5. Collaborative action ‘for a more coherent and coordinated response’.

6. Local ownership: ‘Bringing in local stakeholders both as drivers of the process as well as conveners of expertise can vastly enrich the usefulness of the data and the quality of the analysis’.

For further discussion and elaboration and lessons from practice, see P. Sitko and A. Massella, *Urban Profiling For Better Responses To Humanitarian Crises*, GAUC, 2019 (http://urbancrises.org/resource-library/).

Undertaking a profiling exercise can be expensive and complex. Clarity among actors on the purpose and scope of the work is important. One study found that, in profiling undertaken in the Middle East, ‘many of the people involved did not realise at the beginning that the extensive data-collection and analysis exercises undertaken would not directly result in a useable targeting tool’ leading to ‘widespread frustration at the perceived slowness of the process’. 

Supporters of profiling argue that it is necessary in order to better tailor responses to assist displaced people in complex urban environments. According to the Joint IDP Profiling Service (JIPS), profiling comprises:

- A process of data gathering, beginning with building consensus on what needs to be gathered and how, with a validation at the end by relevant stakeholders.
- Collaboration is important, among key stakeholders such as government and NGOs. In this respect, profiling is an important means of engaging with affected communities.


• Comparing displaced and non-displaced communities in order to improve targeting.

• Data is disaggregated, e.g. by location, gender and age.

JIPS is an inter-agency service established in 2009 to provide technical support to government, humanitarian and development actors seeking to improve their information about internally displaced populations. See www.jips.org/.

Profiling toolkits include:

• The JIPS Essential Toolkit (JET) provides online tools including questionnaires, data collection and data analysis approaches for profiling. See https://jet.jips.org/.

• Developing a Profiling Methodology for Displaced People in Urban Areas provides profiling tools and training modules for use by implementing organisations.

• The Profiling and Assessment Resource Kit (PARK) is an online database of documents, tools and guidelines for profiling and joint assessment activities. See www.parkdatabase.org/.

• UN-Habitat’s City Resilience Profiling Programme (CRPP) ‘focuses on providing national and local governments with tools for measuring and increasing resilience to multi-hazard impacts, including those associated with climate change’. The aim is to ‘develop a comprehensive and integrated urban planning and management approach for profiling and monitoring the resilience of any city to all plausible hazards’. See https://unhabitat.org/urban-initiatives/initiatives-programmes/city-resilience-profiling-programme/. UN-Habitat’s City Resilience Profiling Tool can be found at http://urbanresiliencehub.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/CRPT-Guide.pdf.


Box 3.11 Profiling refugee groups and local communities in Delhi

In 2013, JIPS and the Feinstein International Center undertook a profiling exercise of Afghan, Burmese, Somali and Indian households in the same neighbourhoods in the Indian capital Delhi. The aim was to identify differences in vulnerabilities. The findings indicated that vulnerabilities were indeed different. For example, Burmese and Somali refugees had more difficulty finding housing and jobs than Afghans and Indians.

3.6.4 Undertaking assessments relating to urban violence

Assessments in relation to urban violence inevitably need careful planning. The ALNAP Lessons Paper *Humanitarian Interventions in Situations of Urban Violence* recommends and discusses a number of steps, such as the need to carefully assess local needs and strengths, to conduct repeat assessments and to use a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. See also Section 1.2.2 on urban violence.

In summary, assessments are vital to effective programming in post-disaster and conflict situations. A range of tools exist, and more are almost certainly on the way as knowledge and expertise in urban programming continue to develop. Multi-sectoral assessments are considered good practice, though these may not always be the ‘right’ approach in every context. The visualisation of data through maps and spatial analysis is an important aspect. Profiling is also increasingly gaining recognition as a valuable tool for ‘rooting’ humanitarian action within specific contexts.

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