BRIEF

INTRODUCING MULTI-SECTOR NEEDS ASSESSMENTS (MSNA)

2024 | Global

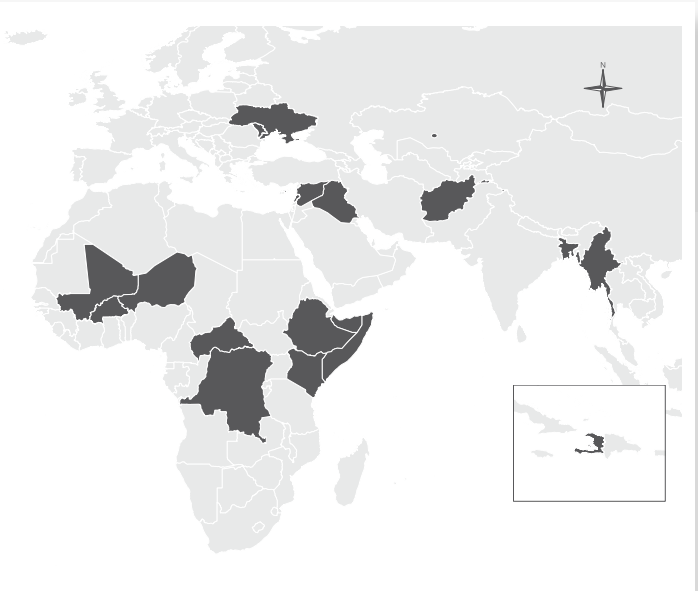
Why do we need MSNAs?

Grand Bargain signatories required that humanitarian needs assessments be impartial, unbiased, comprehensive, context-sensitive, timely and up-to-date. This requirement was designed to inform more effective and equitable prioritization of need. With the financial support from ECHO and USAID's Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA), and co-funding from other country-based donors, REACH has been supporting the facilitation of independent, crisis-wide Multi-sectoral Needs Assessments (MSNAs) since 2016, striving to meet these criteria.

MSNAs help promote a paradigm shift in how humanitarian needs are measured and how response is planned: REACH strives to contribute to a change in the approach to planning, prioritization and decision making, by promoting needs-based, evidence-based and people-centered decision making, therefore mitigating the influence of institutional priorities and narratives.

IMPACT Initiative believes that if MSNAs are designed effectively through research and development activities, and implemented systematically through joint research and analysis processes involving key humanitarian partners, people in need will receive a more effective, context-appropriate and equitable humanitarian assistance.

In 2023, REACH facilitated the implementation of MSNAs in 17 countries.



What is a REACH-facilitated MSNA?

Multi-Sector Needs Assessments are coordinated needs assessments designed to capture the magnitude and severity of the needs for all assessed population groups. REACH-facilitated MSNAs are conducted crisis-wide in order to provide information for annual humanitarian planning and prioritization decisions in-country at and global level.

MSNAs generally aim to answer the following questions:

- Who and where are the most in need?
- What are the main drivers of thoses needs?

MSNAs are systematically conducted within existing humanitarian coordination structures, which help to legitimize and foster information gathering and decision processes. Relevant humanitarian platforms are systematically involved at every stage of the cycle, and REACH Initiative (or other actors) can provide the required technical support in the following fora:

Inter-cluster coordination group (ICCG)

The ICCG influences the overall scope, timeline and coordination structure within which the MSNA will take place and signs off key MSNA milestones

Analysis team or humanitarian clusters

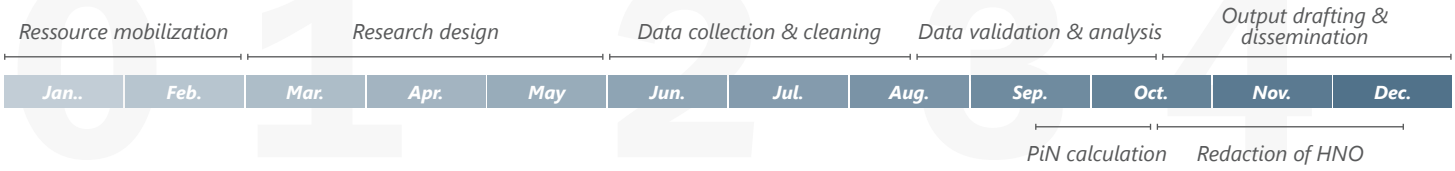
MSNA preliminary analysis results are used by the Analysis Team and Sectors/ Clusters, to inform the HPC along with all other available primary data sources.

Assessment or Analysis Working Group (AAWG)

REACH is usually the AAWG lead technical partner on MSNA research design and implementation; the methodology is designed in line with HPC priorities defined for the current year.

How to implement REACH-MSNA in country?

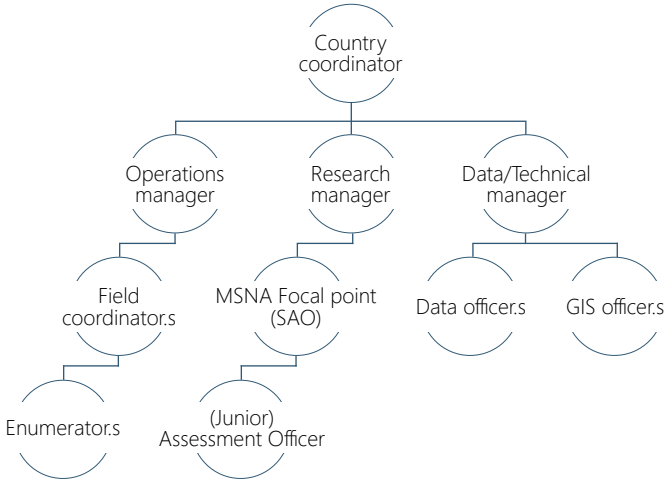
In most contexts where they are implemented, MSNAs serve as a **primary data source** for informing the Humanitarian Programme Cycle (HPC) and its analytical output, the Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO). For that purpose, the main stages of the MSNA cycle are usually aligned with the anual HPC timeline.



Nota bene - HPC and MSNA timelines are dependant on the nature of the crisis (protracted or sudden onset) and are set by humanitarian coordination in country, and can therefore vary accross contexts.

To ensure MSNAs smooth roll-out, the anticipated mobilization of sufficient financial and human resources are among the immutable pre-requisites.
Compared to other research cycles, MSNAs can sometimes be particularly intense, with large-scale data collection, extensive external engagement and partner coordination, and complex quantitative analysis elements. For that reason, and whenever possible, it is important to dedicate **enough well-skilled staff for the entire duration of the MSNA cycle**.

More information on MSNA suggested team' structure, roles and responsabilities can be found on the Humanitarian Prioritization & Planning unit (HPPU) site.



The research design phase is among the most important, where every components of the MSNA are either designed or decided upon at that stage, from the geographical scope of the research, to data collection tools and dissemination strategy to best inform the response. Overall, MSNA research design aims to answer three questions:

Who?

Defining which population groups (host community, refugees, Internally Displaced Persons - IDPs, etc.) the assessment should provide information on, and at what granularity level should the data be collected in order to follow the sampling strategy (representative/ indicative).

Where?

Determining the geographical scope of the assessment. In some complex security or logistical environments, some areas are categorized as "Hard to Reach". Eventually, REACH can work on developping additional methodologies in order to reach the population living in these remote areas and capture the information needed.

What?

Designing a multi-sectoral survey to capture the magnitude and severity of the needs for each population group. At this stage, REACH works closely with humanitarian clusters and sectoral experts in order to build the most relevant and context-specific questionnaire.

More questions on MSNA implementation in country?
Please visit IMPACT Intranet and check the Humanitarian Prioritization & Planning unit (HPPu) site or contact impact.geneva.msna@impact-initiatives.org.

Informing prioritization & planning

Step I. MSNA data

Since 2021, the Joint Inter-sectoral Analysis Framework (JIAF) has been adopted globally as the preferred analytical framework for HNO analysis.Across most HPC countries, the coordinating agency leading the process will **use MSNA data to inform the JIAF** and produce People in Need (PiN) figures for the HNO analysis. Additionally, **MSNAs are designed to be interoperable** with a variety of sectoral and multisectoral analytical frameworks.

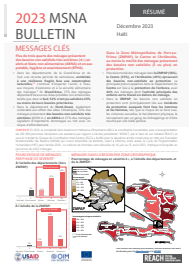
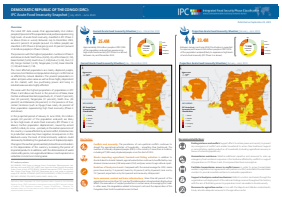
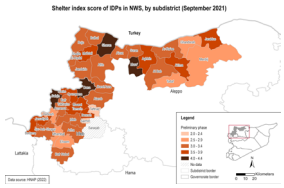
1 *Data source*

MSNA

2 *Analytical framework*

Joint Intersectoral Analysis Framework	REACH Informing more effective humanitarian action	IPC Integrated Food Security Phase Classification	Global Shelter Cluster ShelterCluster.org Coordinating Humanitarian Shelter
JIAF	*MSNA analysis framework*	*IPC framework*	*Shelter severity classification (SSC)*

3 *Analytical output*

			
Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO)	*MSNA Bulletin*	*Acute food inscecurity snapshot*	*Shelter index score**

Step II. MSNI analysis

The MSNI analysis framework produces the following outputs:

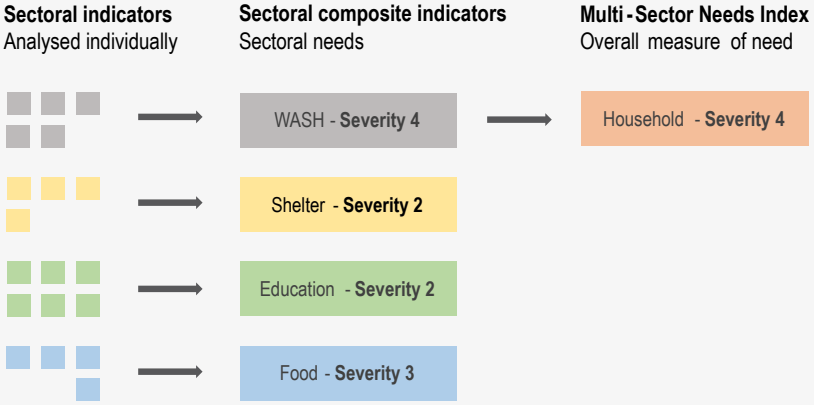
Sectoral composites
Categorisation of households based on whether they are currently meeting their basic needs, per sector.

Multi-sector needs index, MSNI
Composite indicator created by REACH to estimate the overall magnitude and severity of humanitarian needs across sectors, by population group and geographical areas.

Household needs profile
Overview of the co-occurence of sectoral needs for each household to identify the most common, or needs profile, among households of a population group or a geographical area.

MSNA or JIAF?
The MSNA analysis framework complements the JIAF. The JIAF comes from an inter-agency approach and uses various data sources to produce area-level outputs, where REACH MSNA analysis was developed by REACH Initiative and relies exclusively on MSNA household-level datasets, producing household-level outputs.

Constructing the MSNI analysis



* the figure displays an example of the Shelter Index score exercise rolled out in North West Syria in 2021.

MSNA metrics: measuring the intensity and complexity of a crisis

At this stage, the MSNA analysis framework has produced two components:

- a classification of all households by severity level across sectors - the living standards gap (LSG)
- an overall household severity, the multi-sector needs index (MSNI)

The next sections will focus on (un)packing these two components by switching lenses to different angles.

They enable to distinguish **four metrics** gathered into two groups for comparing areas: crisis intensity, computed with the MSNI, and crisis complexity, computed through LSGs.

NOTE: MSNA metrics and their convergence presented here result from ongoing exploratory efforts taken by the Research & Development team within IMPACT Initiatives Humanitarian Prioritization & Planning unit (HPPU), and should be considered as such.

1. Depth of the crisis (Metrics 1 and 2)

The first group of metrics consists of unpacking the MSNI. Households with MSNI score of 3 or higher are considered in need, as they are considered to have at least one sectoral LSG. A way to **understand how intense the crisis** is is to focus incrementaly on the MSNI scores, i.e., looking first at the % of households with MSNI score from 3 to 4+.

MSNI severity of 3 and higher

Metric 1

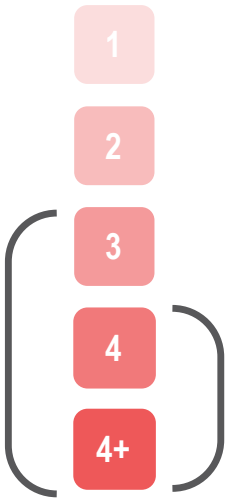
Metric 2

MSNI severity of 4 and higher

Intensity metrics allow to compare between areas the proportion of households in need, and, moving the lense towards higher levels of severities of needs, the proportion of households with acute needs (4, extreme and 4+, very extreme). It is to be noted that these metrics are insensitive to the number of sectoral needs (LSGs of 3 and above), therefore, it may not be sufficiently nuanced to distinguish between areas. Also, Metric 2 would only capture the experiences of households with the most severe needs, which can be less suitable for "Nexus" or transitioning contexts.

Case study: using Metrics 3 and 4

MSNI - Multi-sectoral severity score



Metric 1: % of households in need

Metric 2: % of households in acute need

Figure: % of households per severity phase:

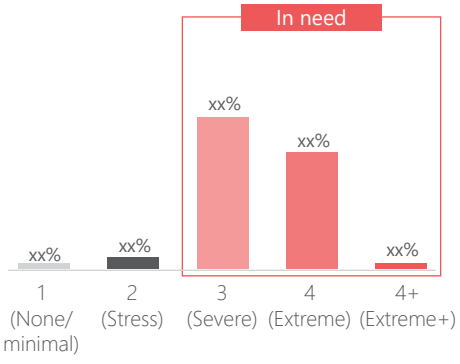
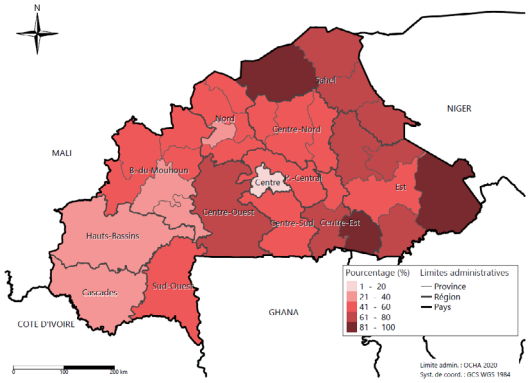


Figure: % of households per severity phase, per area:



2. Breadth of the crisis (Metrics 3 and 4)

The second group of metrics tries to measure how complex (or how diverse) the situation is for all households, moving the lenses to the number of experienced sectoral needs and their nature.

The average number of LSGs, or co-occurrences of sectoral needs, is a measure of the **overall complexity** of the humanitarian situation. If areas A and B have the same proportion of households in need (metrics 1 and 2), but area A has a greater average of sectors with needs than area B, it indicates that the humanitarian situation in area A is more complex *ceteris paribus* compared to area B.

Average number of sectors with needs

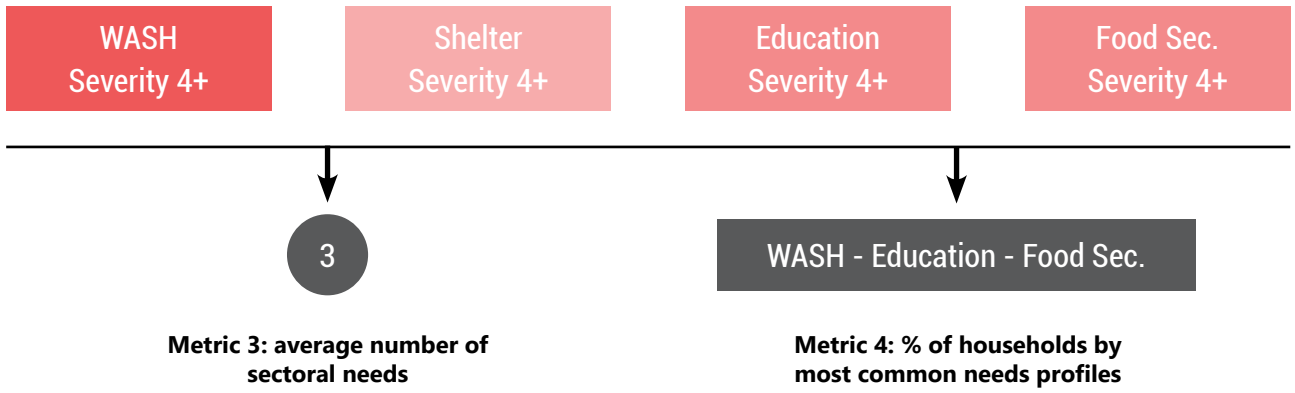
Metric 3

Metric 4

Household sectoral needs profile

Metric 4 consists of the most common "combinations" of LSGs among households in need, or "households needs profiles". It can consist of one or several LSGs. It completes Metric 3 with a qualitative lenses, helping to understand the **typology of the complexity** of a crisis. If both areas A and B have the same average of sectors with needs, then metric 4 emphasizes which sectors are the most common. It enables to prioritize sectorally coordinated responses and to understand the relationship between the intensity and the typology of a crisis.

Case study: using Metrics 3 and 4



3. The convergence of metrics

The convergence of metrics brings together MSNI and metrics 3 for each crisis or geographical area. The dashed lines of the average number of sectors with needs and the average MSNI score across areas gives a quadrant that distinguishes a typology between areas.

The example on the right is as follows:

Scenario 1: **LOWER** intensity in **FEWER** sectors
---- Areas in the bottom left corner (A, B, C).

Scenario 2: **LOWER** intensity in **MORE** sectors
---- Areas in the bottom right corner (D, E, F, G)

Scenario 3: **HIGHER** intensity in **MORE** sectors
---- Areas in the upper right corner (H, I, J, K, L, M).