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# Urban Profiling For Better Responses To Humanitarian Crises

2019

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Working Group 1 is led by



**UN-Habitat** is the United Nations programme working towards a better urban future. Its mission is to promote socially and environmentally sustainable human settlements development and the achievement of adequate shelter for all.



The **Joint IDP Profiling Service (JIPS)** is an inter-agency body that provides support to governments and humanitarian and development organisations seeking to improve locally owned information and analysis about displacement situations.



**IMPACT Initiatives** is a leading Geneva-based think-and-do tank, created in 2010 and firstly operationalized in 2012. IMPACT is a sister organization of ACTED. IMPACT implements assessment, monitoring & evaluation and organisational capacity-building programmes in direct partnership with aid actors or through its inter-agency initiatives, REACH and AGORA.

#### COVER PHOTO

Douma area of Eastern Ghouta, Syria.  
Abdullah Hammam, IRC.

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## About the Global Alliance

The Global Alliance for Urban Crises (the 'Alliance') is a global, multi-disciplinary and collaborative community of practice. The Alliance acts as an inclusive platform bringing together local governments, built environment professionals, academics, humanitarian and development actors, working to arrive at systemic change in the way we enable cities and urban communities to prevent, prepare for, and respond to urban crisis.

Launched at the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016, the Alliance is guided by the Urban Crisis Charter, which outlines four main commitments made by its members: 1) Prioritize local municipal leadership in determining response to urban crisis that is aligned with development trajectories and promotes the active participation of affected people – with special attention to the participation of women – and other key urban stakeholders; 2) Adopt urban resilience as a common framework to align human rights, humanitarian and development goals; 3) Manage urban displacement as a combined human rights, development and humanitarian concern; and 4) Build partnerships between city, national, regional and global levels across disciplines and professions, as well as ensure the involvement of local government and professional associations.

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## About this Document

This document is part of a series of knowledge products produced through the Alliance Working Groups, with financial support from EU Humanitarian Aid. The series are key steps in driving an agenda of change, when it comes to: 1) developing a better shared understanding of the complexities of urban crises; 2) strengthening engagement between local governments and humanitarian and development actors in particular; 3) developing a systems approach to protracted urban displacement; and 4) building urban resilience in the face of crisis. In addition, the Alliance also supported the development of an Urban Competency Framework, an HPN Good Practice Review, and a case study on urban disaster response in the Philippines.

Members of all Alliance constituencies in different geographic regions and a broad range of experts, have been engaged through joint consultations, and directly informed and contributed to the content of the Knowledge Products. Visit [www.urbancrises.org](http://www.urbancrises.org) to access the entire series.

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## Tables of acronyms

GAUC	Global Alliance for Urban Crises	JIPS	Joint IDP Profiling Service
HLP	Housing, land and property	NGO	Non-governmental organization
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee	UN-Habitat	United Nations Human Settlements Programme
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross	UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
IDP	Internally displaced person	UNOCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
IFR	International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies	WFP	World Food Programme
IOM	International Organization for Migration		

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# Summary

The Global Alliance for Urban Crises (GAUC)\* has been calling attention to the increasing frequency of natural and human-induced emergencies in urban areas. The Alliance's Urban Crises Charter<sup>1</sup> recognizes:

- Urban settings have specific characteristics that require effective, context-specific approaches to addressing vulnerability and risk reduction, preparedness, and crisis response
- The complexity of cities requires building on the local knowledge of local governments and urban communities
- The need to build interventions on existing urban service delivery systems, people's own recovery mechanisms, and the strength of the urban economy.

Members of the Alliance have focused on ways to tailor humanitarian response to the urban context by developing shared assessment and profiling tools, promoting joint analysis, and adapting coordination mechanisms. This document represents a critical step towards consolidating aspects of this work.

**Part I** begins with an overview of what urban profiling is and why it is useful for responding to a crisis. A definition of urban profiling is then proposed by the Alliance.

**Part II** presents four lessons from practice, bringing in experience from various approaches used by members of the Alliance to collect and analyze data on urban crises. Challenges and opportunities are described within each lesson followed by identification of good practices that can overcome the challenges. Where possible, examples are provided.

## Four lessons from practice:

1. Build clarity and trust throughout the process
2. Take a 'good enough approach'
3. Pursue a holistic analysis including people and places
4. Adapt methods to the nature and stage of the crisis.

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\* Referred to throughout the text as the 'Alliance'.





Enumerators preparing for a day in the field to analyse Colombian refugees living in Quito, Ecuador, JIPS-2013

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## Purpose

The purpose of this research is to provide urban crisis responders with greater clarity about the concept of urban profiling by identifying key elements as well as lessons and examples from practice. In essence, this knowledge product is intended to contribute to improving the alignment of efforts by the many actors involved in crisis response, including but not limited to local governments, civil society groups, humanitarian and development actors, built environment professionals and academics, among others.

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## Audience

The audience for this research is those preparing for and responding to crises that affect towns and cities, including crises that are naturally triggered or human induced, sudden or slow onset, or protracted in nature. The research is also intended to inform the main constituencies within the Alliance, including local governments, civil society groups, humanitarian and development actors, built environment professionals and academics, among others.

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## Methodology

The methodology comprised primary and secondary data collection and analysis. Twelve key informant interviews and two focus group discussions were held. A desk review of grey and academic literature was undertaken to triangulate information from the primary data collection methods. Toolkits, reports, guidance notes and case studies by and for practitioners comprised the majority of the literature reviewed. The findings were then validated through consultation workshops organized by the Alliance in Geneva, Kampala and Beirut. In addition, a team of reviewers spanning the different constituency groups of the Alliance offered ongoing support and guidance.

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# Part I: Overview

## What is urban profiling?

Urban profiling is an effective way of developing a shared understanding of the complexity of urban crisis environments across different systems, sectors and key actors, many of which are represented within the Alliance: humanitarian and development organizations, local governments, academics, civil society organizations and built environment professionals.

The Alliance's vision for urban profiling is to allow for a more complementary, holistic and sustained response in cities by:

1. Building on the knowledge and the capacity of all stakeholders
2. Better leveraging what cities and urban communities can and already do to contribute
3. Monitoring how the urban environment and its urban communities are changing and adapting
4. Aligning tailored humanitarian and development responses.

In this way, urban profiling provides a process for enabling a more effective way of working towards collective outcomes<sup>2</sup> in towns and cities when responding to a crisis. The Alliance provides the following definition:

**Urban profiling** is a collaborative process for collecting and analyzing data on the conditions of an urban area and its neighborhoods, the systems that organize them, and the needs, vulnerabilities and capacities of the population groups that reside in them, to inform decision-making and planning before, during or after a crisis situation. It helps to prioritize people and places most in need, taking into account both chronic and acute vulnerabilities. Ultimately, it creates a shared understanding of the situation to build the foundation for more contextualized, coordinated, complementary and holistic urban responses.

Urban profiling draws on the collective knowledge of national and local governments, humanitarian and development actors, built environment professionals, private sector, civil society, and communities – maximizing the contributions of all.

There is no need for a one-size-fits-all methodology and process for urban profiling. Urban profiling can be adapted based on the type of crisis, context, actors involved, most pressing questions at hand, the availability of reliable quantitative and qualitative data, and last but not least, the operational realities of the situation. The timeframes available for undertaking urban profiling and access constraints must be considered when designing the overall methodology. That said, there are a number of key elements that help ensure that urban profiling leads to relevant and useful results for informing urban crisis response.

## Key elements of urban profiling

While the technicalities of the methodology and process might vary according to the different approaches taken<sup>3</sup>, six commonalities that improve the effectiveness of profiling are identified:

1. **Incorporates spatial analysis:** The location and the nature of the different places within a town or city matter. An urban area's spatial organization is defined by its geography, road networks, control over land, and different systems, both hard (i.e. physical, such as roads, electricity, water, food) and soft (i.e. social and governance aspects, such as planning laws and regulations). Towns, cities and neighborhoods can function with different levels of effectiveness or efficiency. 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. The use of maps is central to analyzing and describing the results of urban profiling.
2. **Keeps people at the center:** Spatial analysis alone is insufficient – urban profiling considers how a society is organized, taking into account the differences within towns and cities. It is important to understand the capacities of urban communities to act, their vulnerabilities and their needs. This includes understanding the challenges faced and opportunities created by specific groups of people, such as those displaced by conflict or naturally-triggered disasters, or those returning from displacement elsewhere. This also entails recognizing that populations are diverse, and so are their needs. The needs of specific population groups must be analyzed both on their own and in relation to the urban population as a whole.
3. **Considers change over time:** The severity of a crisis is better understood when compared with an analysis of what is considered 'normal' for a town or city, for instance conditions before the crisis and a town or city's unique context and history. Comparing present vulnerabilities with past conditions also helps to explore what caused the changes over time. It is important to recognize that urban contexts remain dynamic and change throughout the crisis cycle, including as a result of crisis response.
4. **Analyzes the city as a whole:** The many different systems and sectors in a city are interlinked, as are the needs of the populations; these only come together in a holistic analysis of the city. It is important to analyze the differences and the connections between the parts of an urban context in order to tailor and prioritize interventions for an urban crisis. Addressing one specific need might require taking action in a couple of systems or sectors (e.g. fixing electricity supply to ensure access to piped water), requiring that sectors and systems be analyzed both on their own and in relation to the city as a whole.
5. **Establishes a collaborative process:** The process for collecting and analyzing information is as important as the results. Bringing together as many of the stakeholders as possible to contribute with data and knowledge and to take part in decision-making throughout the process builds trust in the data and establishes the foundation for a more coherent and coordinated response.
6. **Locally-owned process and results:** The relevance of the analysis depends on bringing together local knowledge, including from municipal governments, their technical departments, local built environment professionals, civil society, affected communities, and specialized international expertise. 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. This also supports a gradual deepening of the analysis and sustainability of the actions, moving from humanitarian response to planning for recovery and development, as humanitarian actors exit.



## Why use urban profiling?

### Adapting to an urbanizing world

No city, town, neighborhood or community is alike. They come in all sizes and shapes. They have their own histories, identities, economies and social cultural composition. Who governs them and how the urban systems<sup>4</sup> of food, basic services and infrastructure are organized vary widely. Cities themselves are composed of a wide variety of neighborhoods, and urban communities tend to be heterogeneous, often mixed in origin and background. Mobility is high, and people have diverse social support networks. Urbanization rates, capacities to plan and manage, changing economic realities, and the level of rule of law are all factors that result in different degrees of informality and chronic vulnerabilities, as well as levels of exclusion. Displacement can occur within the city, with families trying to stay close to their former communities, or cities can host significant numbers of displaced populations looking for refuge, anonymity, and access to services. People may feel compelled to move to certain places within a city based on a complex set of reasons: safety; adequate housing; access to livelihoods; access to education and healthcare, to name a few.

### Providing an umbrella to integrate different approaches

Against this backdrop, constituents within the Alliance have been experimenting with new ways to conduct assessments in urban areas in order to gain a better understanding of the context and the vulnerabilities of crisis-affected populations. This is cited as a key step to arrive at a more evidence-based, strategic and contextualized humanitarian and development response to crisis<sup>5</sup>. For example, the Global Shelter Cluster, through its shelter and settlements working group, and a wide variety of other actors, have been developing settlement-based approaches (which incorporate similar associated approaches such as area-based, neighborhood-based and place-based)<sup>6</sup>, allowing for more integrated responses in urban areas. Another example is that of the Global Food Security Cluster, and its urban working group, which has worked to develop new ways to identify and monitor vulnerabilities in urban settings to encourage more proactive and tailored responses. Additionally, actors focused on displacement, such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM) Cluster, the Global Protection Cluster, and local and national governments, to name a few, have implemented robust methodologies to profile displaced populations in urban settings, often in collaboration with the Joint IDP Profiling Service (JIPS), an inter-agency project established to support collaborative profiling exercises. Separately, UN-Habitat and other development actors have adapted basic urban planning tools to help map the way cities and neighborhoods are affected by crisis, seeking to generate data about the built environment and urban communities.

The inherent complexity of cities in crisis requires a combination of humanitarian and development interventions, aiming both at addressing acute needs and accelerating recovery, while taking long-term impact into account. It is therefore important for all actors involved in a response, including local governments and built environment professionals who are often overlooked by international humanitarian or development actors, to address acute and chronic needs jointly, remembering that these same actors approach these issues from different lenses. Local governments tend to have a more holistic view of their city and their communities, looking at a crisis as part of a longer-term development trajectory. When assessing priority needs in a city, humanitarian actors tend to focus on specific sectors to inform immediate life-saving needs and do not always connect the functioning of the urban contexts with chronic vulnerabilities or how towns and cities evolve over time. Their shift to more holistic analysis to identify how sectors and systems relate to each other, to inform longer-term planning, and to suggest how to build on existing structures in an urban context remains a work in progress. Approaches for understanding towns and cities by development actors, however, tend to be time consuming, and risk overlooking specific and acute vulnerabilities and protection concerns of crisis-affected groups.

In other words, differences in the priorities and time horizons of various response actors have implications for information needs, and therefore data collection and analysis. The existing approaches to data collection and analysis in cities provide specific information to inform a portion of the actors involved in urban crisis response, but do not always capture the full picture. In light of this, there is a need for clarity on how different approaches to collecting information throughout the crisis cycle can be brought together for a holistic and shared understanding of the sectors, systems and forces shaping the urban environment.

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## Part 2

# Lessons from practice

The four lessons in this section identify evidence of good practices to be considered for use during urban profiling. The lessons are drawn from research on various approaches used to collect and analyze data on urban crises, as well as from existing tools, templates and guidance made available to profiling practitioners<sup>7</sup>. Challenges and opportunities are described within each lesson, followed by strategies to help minimize the challenges. Where possible, examples are provided.

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### 1. Build clarity and trust throughout the process

Building clarity and trust throughout the profiling process is best done by bringing together relevant stakeholders to collect data and conduct analysis in the spirit of joint ownership and decision-making. Civil society groups, national and local government, academia, built environment professionals, the private sector, as well as humanitarian and development actors, all have a role to play in the process. Of particular importance is the participation of affected and host populations, including the most vulnerable.

An emphasis on diverse and representative collaboration builds a shared understanding of an urban area's crisis context and helps identify key unanswered questions. Collaboration from the start of the process enables stakeholders to share their different perspectives, needs, and time requirements. Clarifying these positions and reaching a compromise that works for all partners in the process are critical. This can be done through in-depth discussions to work towards agreement over the biggest information gaps and to identify the objectives of the data collection and analysis. Holding these discussions early on builds a shared vision for the remainder of the process.

Once an aim has been agreed to, the design of data collection and analysis methods can then be developed by stakeholders in a way that fosters joint ownership and representation of an urban area's contextual diversity. The decisions made on the methodology should ensure that the data collected fulfills the objectives and overall aim, while avoiding the collection of large datasets that go beyond the aim and objectives of the exercise. Evidence suggests that a mixed methods approach to collecting qualitative, quantitative and spatial data is critical to capturing different dimensions of a crisis.

Working across a diverse group of partners can be challenging, both for logistical and political reasons. To address the logistical difficulties of bringing together many partners under one process, it is helpful to agree on clear roles and responsibilities. A protocol of engagement<sup>8</sup> developed by the Alliance may assist to clarify the roles and responsibilities of different stakeholders in the data collection and analysis phases. Addressing the political challenges of establishing a common understanding of a situation can be more challenging. Key informants underscored that analysis of the root causes of vulnerability and exposure can mean shining a spotlight on corruption, power imbalances, inequitable policies or discriminatory practices. To address political challenges, especially in regard to conflict, the need to agree on the evidence may be difficult, but is especially important to avoid seeming to 'take a side'. Building shared ownership and trust in the process is essential to ensure all stakeholders involved are prepared to accept the results and may require repeated discussions until agreement is reached.

Building clarity and trust into a profiling process has unique challenges and opportunities that can be overcome with planning and careful consideration, as presented in the following good practices:



Altos de Florida Neighborhood, Bogota, Colombia, JIPS-2015

- **Start profiling activities with outreach to the stakeholders who are key to the response, with a specific focus on government, affected populations and host communities.** Announce intentions, gauge interest in participation, discuss aims, timeframe and scope. Discussion of these aspects of profiling are crucial to ensure that the aim and methods are based on the priority information needs of the stakeholders responding in that context, including the data required for communities to take their own decisions.
- **Facilitation and mediation skills are critical for reaching agreement on analysis of data.** Key informants engaged with profiling underscored that disagreements are often prompted by political considerations rather than methodological concerns. They also noted that practical guidance on facilitation and mediation, in particular in conflict settings, would be useful in future profiling activities to help maintain the trust in the process. JIPS is an example of a trusted actor that often supports profiling exercises in the field by mediating between partners and facilitating workshops.
- **Bring local expertise as much as possible into the process.** One common way to improve the quality of the data collected and to build on existing capacity is to draw as much as possible on local knowledge (e.g. municipal engineers, local planners, civil society, urban communities, etc.) and work with local enumerators, for example people affiliated with a local university or NGO. This can enable better access to marginalized population groups or help in navigating dense urban centers. Local organizations and people can also contribute knowledge to other phases in the process, in particular the design of the methodology and analysis.
- **Identify ways to include affected populations, especially the most vulnerable.** Many discussions at the global level seek to improve accountability to affected populations<sup>9</sup>. The collaborative process for building a shared understanding of an urban crisis is an opportunity to contribute to that effort. In particular, seek to represent marginalized groups within affected and host populations through giving a role in data collection and analysis of their own environment. The effectiveness of this approach is illustrated by participatory mapping initiatives<sup>10</sup> such as Missing Maps and the global YouthMappers network, Slum Dwellers' International and grassroots and community organizations such as the Huairou Commission focused on women's leadership, IFRC's participatory vulnerability and capacity assessments, UN-Habitat's People's Process, and various local special interest groups, such as women's groups, youth groups, and faith-based groups.



## 2. Take a 'good enough approach'

One of the biggest challenges and opportunities with profiling is building consensus around a 'good enough'<sup>11</sup> snapshot of a situation, with the most relevant and reliable data, while providing a basis for continuous deepening of the shared understanding as the context evolves through the crisis cycle. 'Good enough' is central to profiling because it implies taking a pragmatically acceptable approach that considers the operational constraints and challenges of data collection and analysis at a given point in time. Taking a 'good enough' approach addresses the misconception that profiling exercises are large-scale, expensive, resource heavy, time intensive—and therefore potentially unsuitable to guide humanitarian response.

Critical to the success of urban profiling is not aiming for the highest precision possible, but producing representative and reliable data and analysis that respond to the profiling aim and objectives, supported by sound methods rooted in scientific and good practice<sup>12</sup>. When profiling neighborhoods or cities, there are practical constraints related to the density of population and buildings, security and time. The approach chosen and the process for profiling should fit with the data needs, the reality of the situation, and the requirements to fulfill a shared understanding of the overall urban crisis context. In the sudden onset of a crisis, precise figures and rigorous statistical analysis are often not possible, nor are they necessarily needed to plan a response. As the situation evolves and the response becomes more intricate, further refined methods are called for.

UN-Habitat Libya City Profiling Workshop Tunis, JIPS-2017





The following good practices demonstrate ways to balance data needs, operational realities, and technical rigor:

- **Relevance, reliability and usefulness are better benchmarks than data accuracy**<sup>13</sup> and can be equally useful for decision-making. Good enough does not mean compromising on the integrity of the data. For decision-making to be effective, data should be<sup>14</sup>: 1) representative of the characteristics of a population; 2) representative of the trends within the context; 3) provide a range of the ways in which population groups differ from one another and; 4) repeatedly checked and monitored as time goes on to improve accuracy. For example, a profiling exercise led by the Global Protection Cluster in Mogadishu, Somalia in 2015-2016<sup>15</sup>, found that according to a generous interpretation of the 2008 Guiding Principles' definition of internal displacement<sup>16</sup>, nearly everyone in Mogadishu (and indeed the whole of Somalia) would be considered as an internally displaced person (IDP). Due to the fact that the description did not further clarify the situation, the profiling exercise focused on settlements where IDPs were known to be living in substandard conditions<sup>17</sup>. The information did not aim to give IDP population figures for the whole city, but it was good enough to make informed response decisions to improve conditions in those settlements.
- **Data is 'good enough' if it informs the profiling aim and objectives.** Knowing what 'good enough' means requires going back to the profile's goal. For instance, in 2007, UN-Habitat undertook profiling in Hargeisa, Somaliland as part of a participatory urban planning approach after the conflict left the city grappling with destruction, poverty and a lack of basic services. The profiling activity sought to understand how the city was organized and structured through analyzing the city's roads, natural features, administrative boundaries, functional layout (commerce, markets, industry, residential areas, public facilities), services and infrastructure (water, electricity, garbage collection points), as well as data regarding economic, social and environmental issues. In this case, data covering these particular topics was 'good enough' to enable decision-making around suitable locations for the settlement of returnees. In India in 2013, JIPS, the Feinstein International Centre (Tufts University) and UNHCR in Delhi sought to "explore the livelihoods of different groups (Afghan, Somali, and Myanmar) in order to inform UNHCR's work on promoting self-reliance"<sup>18</sup>. While many datasets seemed important, the focus was narrowed down to data primarily focused on assets listed within the sustainable livelihoods framework, which was 'good enough' to inform decisions for programs to support self-reliance<sup>19</sup>.
- **Use a mixed methods approach.** This is often the best way to meet the information needs of stakeholders seeking a shared understanding of the situation. Profiling is too often seen as a purely quantitative exercise represented by figures and statistics<sup>20</sup>. While quantitative data is a valuable approach that expresses information as numbers, it is most powerful when combined with qualitative data that provides insight into why conditions or challenges are the way they are and the different ways these manifest in people's daily lives. Quantitative data enhances understanding of complex situations by seeking to identify how people perceive the world around them, including their beliefs, intentions, attitudes and desires. Tools such as structured interviews, interactive mapping and/or focus group discussions can be used to collect qualitative data. Finally, analyzing qualitative data can be time intensive; it is important to plan for this in advance and match the amount of data collected with the time allotted for analysis.
- **Thoughtfully engage with new and alternative methods that identify trends and ranges; be aware of the limitations of others.** Methods that are 'new' to profiling include the use of big data, and social data mining. The use of remote sensing/satellite imagery, population mapping and the Delphi method<sup>21</sup> (triangulation of expert opinion) also continues to evolve. Big data – large datasets that are analyzed to explore patterns and trends – can inform humanitarian and development action. An instance where big data analysis has been useful is in regard to analyzing spending patterns tracked on mobile phone services, which can provide proxy indicators of income levels<sup>22</sup>. Community or population mapping and the Delphi method can also be 'good enough' methods that identify overarching themes and

trends when used in combination with other methods<sup>23</sup>. Be aware that registration (data about households or individuals that is used for case management purposes), census data (identifying every household), rapid population estimates (rough estimates based on secondary data and satellite imagery used when there is little information available or quick data is needed) are not adequate profiling methodologies on their own and should be used in conjunction with other more robust methods<sup>24</sup>.

- **Create better access to people and reduce suspicion.** Some people might not want to be identified, live in secure apartments or complexes that restrict enumerators from accessing them, or are simply at work during the day. To address issues of availability and suspicion, it is important to disseminate information about the profiling activity ahead of time to key networks such as neighborhood leaders, interest groups, religious centers, women's groups and savings clubs through appropriate media channels (e.g. radio, social media, public notes). Plan to collect data in the evening and on weekends in order to better cope with traffic volume and to capture the demographics of people who are not home during the weekdays.
- **Provide clear guidance on ensuring the protection of data and personal security throughout the entire process.** As digitized data platforms evolve, it is ever more important to set up clear guidance on data protection and security. ICRC's handbook *Data Protection in Humanitarian Action* states, "Protecting individuals' Personal Data is an integral part of protecting their life, integrity and dignity"<sup>25</sup>. Identifying where certain population groups live or activities they engage in may in fact put them in danger. Consult with relevant experts to produce appropriate guidance.
- **Move beyond description when analyzing information.** For example, when UN-Habitat produced a damage analysis as part of a neighborhood profile of the Old City of Homs in 2014, a number of methods were used<sup>26</sup>. These included pictures, maps and very high resolution (VHR) satellite imagery from the United Nations Operational Satellite Applications Programme (UNOSAT), as well as focus group discussions with local resource persons, that enabled the destruction to be traced to various sources, such as bombardment and drones, general wear and tear of the buildings, and the burning of buildings motivated by personal revenge after a ceasefire agreement. The analysis in this example not only gave a description of what happened, but also why. Identifying the origin of fires after the ceasefire pointed to the need for interventions to mitigate social tensions that were on the rise.

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### 3. Pursue a holistic analysis including people and places

Where people are living greatly defines their vulnerabilities and capacities to cope with and respond to crises. At the same time, their socio-cultural status and displacement situation (whether a refugee, IDP, returnee, migrant, or a local resident) might greatly affect where they end up in the city. It is vital for urban profiling to connect spatial analysis (to understand why different cities or neighborhoods are affected differently) with population data and analysis (to understand how diverse population groups are affected).

**Spatial analysis:** It is not always the case that an urban crisis affects the city as a whole; it is also unlikely that all areas of a city will be affected in the same way. Some neighborhoods might see an outpouring of people due to damage and destruction, while others might receive waves of displaced populations that place heavy strains on services and systems. For this reason, it is important for urban profiling to consider the differences in how some parts of the city are affected compared to other parts. Addressing the specificity of location is indeed the crux of a settlement approach. The interconnectivity of a town or city's systems often means that damage to infrastructure in one location is likely to lead to problems in another. For example, damaged

water pipes in one area of the city may prevent water delivery to another area of a city that appears undamaged. Moreover, certain areas of an urban center that are less equipped to deal with additional population pressures, such as informal settlements, may be more attractive to people who seek lower rental costs associated with a lack of adequate services. The urban and neighborhood profiling carried out by UN-Habitat in Iraq, Lebanon, Somalia, Syria and Yemen, illustrates ways to analyze comparisons by location in a city.

Population analysis: Populations living in a city are affected by crises in different ways. While this may seem obvious, it can be a challenge to ensure data collection and analysis properly capture the vast array of different experiences of populations in a dense urban environment. ICRC notes, “People’s experience is shaped by their location of displacement and situation in displacement, but it is also deeply influenced by their individual history and characteristics, their place of origin and patterns of displacement. Hence, within cities, people’s situations can vary radically”<sup>27</sup>. Understanding differences between population groups is critical for developing tailored responses that adequately meet short-term needs and address human rights violations where relevant, in order for groups experiencing discrimination to be able to enjoy longer-term well-being.

To analyze the connections between the people and their built environment it is important to know how urban systems (e.g. water, electricity, food, etc.) function and to map out key linkages between systems (such as how land tenure affects water supply), in order to better anticipate how to positively intervene with parts of urban systems.

The following good practices contribute to a better understanding of how different locations within urban areas can experience the impacts of crisis differently, and how this relates to the experience of the affected population groups within these same areas:

- **Define the spatial area(s) for profiling in order to place helpful parameters on a complex situation.** This action recognizes that space is limited and places a geographical catchment around the basis of analysis. Select a geographical area/sub-area by following the formal or informal parameters of a city, neighborhood or topographical area. Be aware that some systems (e.g. water, electricity) might extend beyond the identified boundaries. When using formal neighborhood boundaries, seek to understand if communities perceive the limits of their neighborhoods differently. More guidance on this is forthcoming<sup>28</sup>.
- **Use systems thinking to understand the interconnections between urban systems in a town or city.** Systems thinking is a flexible method of organizing information whereby the users select the urban systems that require understanding such as health care, education, road networks, or housing. Then, analysis of the inter-linkages and overlaps is undertaken. Urban systems can be organized based on the sectors represented in the cluster system. Or, they can be grouped based on the context. For example, for some towns and cities grouping basic infrastructure (water, sanitation, electricity) into one system and housing, land and property rights into another is a more helpful way to organize information because the overlaps are immediately obvious and difficult to separate. The primary value comes from understanding how the systems interlink, overlap and influence each other<sup>29</sup>. In another example, installing water pipes on a parcel of land identified as a new settlement for refugees and asylum seekers living in Kakuma camp, Kenya requires not only the pipes, but also electricity to transfer the water<sup>30</sup>. It requires thinking about other towns and cities surrounding the new development, for instance where the run-off water is going to go and how it will affect other ecosystems and the populations that live there.
- **Use an analytical framework that brings together urban systems and population data and needs.** An analytical framework is a conceptual tool that models a situation or a phenomenon and guides both the data collection and analysis. A recent example is that of the Urban Analysis Network Syria (UrbAN-S)<sup>31</sup>, which produced a framework that analyzes the impact of the Syrian conflict on urban areas and their populations, including large-scale displacement and physical damage of infrastructure and services. The framework assesses the conditions of five key urban systems: a) infrastructure and services; b) housing, land and property; c)

governance; d) economy; and e) social cohesion. For each system, information is collected from the population's perspective – what services they need most, and how accessible and reliable they are; and from the city's perspective – what the city is able to provide to meet the needs of the population, and how. Analyzing the gap between what the population needs and what the city is able to provide, through a comparison of the availability, quality, and accessibility of services in each neighborhood, helps to identify the most critical challenges to service provision. Through a holistic data collection and analysis process, this project aims to better inform planning, targeting and monitoring of both humanitarian and development interventions in Syrian cities.

- **Compare the situation of different population groups.** In order to assess whether certain populations are facing specific vulnerabilities or challenges compared to the wider population, a comparative approach can be taken. This helps to assess which responses to tailor to the specific needs of a group, and which responses can be designed to benefit an entire area within a city or the urban population as a whole. For example, in 2015, a profiling exercise that compared the situation of refugees, IDPs and host communities was undertaken in the governorate of Erbil, Iraq, in order to “establish an evidence-base for policy and practice recommendations for the Regional Government of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRG) and humanitarian and development actors in developing comprehensive, long-term responses to out-of-camp displacement concerns”<sup>32</sup>. Data collected focused on employment, financial security, education, attitudes and challenges to durable solutions, physical aspects of the city, such as housing and public services, and social aspects, such as social cohesion and the right to the city. A comparison of the displaced population and the host community in the Erbil Governorate's denser urban areas revealed differences in employment rates, with the refugee population getting access to jobs at higher rates than the internally displaced populations, who were dependent upon income transfers from the federal government. The comparison also showed that certain issues were affecting all three groups equally, such as a high proportion of monthly expenditures spent on rent due to increasing rental prices and a competitive housing market. Comparing the welfare of population groups enabled the identification of city-wide strategies for assistance and specialized interventions for different groups.
- **Enable disaggregation of population data.** To understand the specific situation of certain vulnerable groups of the population, it is important to collect household-level or individual-level data on populations that will best indicate why and how certain factors affect the vulnerability, capacity and resilience of different population groups. Consider variables such as sex, religion, ethnicity, legal status or displacement situation, country and area of origin. Data collected in general – both qualitative and quantitative – should be disaggregated in order to better tailor interventions to the specific needs of sub-groups of the urban population.
- **Maintain a vulnerability and capacity lens when profiling different population groups.** The World Food Programme's Vulnerability Analysis and Mapping (VAM) Unit has published guidance on profiling in urban areas in its *Essential Needs Assessment Interim Guidance Note*<sup>33</sup> on food security assessment. Vulnerability profiling is used by WFP and its partners to identify who is “unable to meet their essential needs, and to perform effective outcome monitoring amongst assisted households”<sup>34</sup>. WFP and its partners use a vulnerability lens in a crisis in order to understand who is vulnerable, what unmet needs make them vulnerable and why people are experiencing this degree of vulnerability at a given point of time<sup>35</sup>.
- **Consider connections across the urban-rural spectrum.** Urban areas do not exist in isolation; an understanding of inter-linkages with rural areas is required. For example, urban markets receive food and goods produced outside of the city. Analysis of the supply chain from farm to urban table should factor in things such as agricultural activities, pesticides, the quality and effectiveness of road networks, the physical safety of sellers inside city markets, and the regulations and enforcement of food safety procedures, prices and purchasing power within markets.



- **Use a spatial lens to act upon relevant aspects of housing, land and property rights.**

Though traditionally a development concern, crisis responders are increasingly seeking to understand systems of urban tenure and land ownership. In a response, analyzing trends related to HLP can influence decisions about how and where to accommodate displaced persons. This can both relate to accommodating the displaced in extension areas or enhancing existing capacities to prevent evictions, overcrowding, reduce the cost of rent to avoid indebtedness, and promote well-being through housing. The political nature of land ownership means that marginalized pieces of land are often used by the most vulnerable, leaving them in an insecure tenure situation, which complicates the provision of assistance or investment in more sustainable solutions. In other cases, if new land is allocated for the displaced, it is also often marginalized land with limited access to existing services, social networks and livelihood opportunities. Understanding why people are where they are and their particular circumstances (e.g. vulnerabilities, protection issues, access to housing, services) has a lot to do with understanding the underlying HLP issues. HLP considerations are also a fundamental aspect of achieving durable solutions for forcibly displaced populations<sup>36</sup>. Investing in infrastructure for affected vulnerable people in one location often means diverting funding away from vulnerable people in another location with similar chronic vulnerabilities. Therefore, profiling can be an important avenue for better understanding chronic and acute vulnerabilities in order to maximize the impact of interventions, support social cohesion, and mitigate protection concerns.

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## 4. Adapt methods to the nature and stage of the crisis

Profiling can be done in short or long timeframes, making it a versatile approach applicable to any stage of a naturally-triggered disaster or conflict. To date, profiling has been used as a crisis preparedness approach for understanding multi-hazard risks related to a range of shocks and stresses (such as climate change, rapid urbanization, governance and financial stresses). It has also been used to analyze situations of displacement as a result of conflict or a naturally-triggered disaster. There are fewer examples of profiling used in naturally-triggered disasters, however, and more evidence is needed to understand the application of urban profiling these types of crisis. The following good practices have been identified for using urban profiling in different crises and stages:

- Profiling can be used to build resilience before a crisis takes place<sup>37</sup>. Preparedness involves ensuring that municipal emergency services know what to do when a crisis hits; that there is, for example, sufficient electricity to support a sudden increase in population, that evacuation shelters are identified ahead of a typhoon, and that social protection systems are put in place to support people who have lost their homes due to disaster. Together, these types of considerations can be described as developing resilience strategies – strategies that help urban systems and people adapt positively in order to cope with shocks and stresses. City or neighborhood resilience strategies can be effective entry points for building the capacity of economic, physical, environmental and social systems to withstand the impacts of a crisis. UN-Habitat’s City Resilience Profiling Programme works with local and national governments to develop action plans and monitor resilience to multiple urban hazards<sup>38</sup>. One example of using profiling as a preparedness tool is that of a disaster risk reduction and preparedness plan for Balangoda, Sri Lanka, a city of 23,000 people exposed to landslides and floods due to recurrent cycles. The Open Cities Project<sup>39</sup> also uses similar methods to those used in profiling to support planning for more resilient cities in Africa.
- Profiling can be a particularly effective approach for analyzing situations of displacement that has become or risks becoming protracted as a result of conflict or a naturally-triggered disaster. Several examples of profiling exercises examining the situation of populations displaced by conflict have already been discussed from Mogadishu, Somalia and Erbil,

Iraq. These demonstrate different contexts where profiling provided evidence to inform strategies to support durable solutions as well as programs to encourage social cohesion between the host and displaced populations. Other examples of profiling used to inform responses to conflict include: 1) a neighborhood profile of Tabbaneh, in Tripoli, Lebanon<sup>40</sup>; 2) identification and profiling of conflict-affected Syrians in Yemen<sup>41</sup> and; and 3) living Conditions of displaced persons and host communities in urban Goma, DRC<sup>42</sup>. Profiling has also been used in post-disaster contexts. For example, in the reconstruction phase of the 2010 Haiti earthquake, a participatory urban profiling process was undertaken by UN-Habitat to compile an accurate, physical representation of the new urban reality of Canaan, an area where 250,000 people had chosen to relocate to without the support of government or humanitarian agencies<sup>43</sup>. Across 15 communes, urban dwellers worked together to document each street and piece of public infrastructure. The aim was to understand the current spatial structures and whether people would resettle in newer areas if the city and its services were expanded.

- There are fewer examples of profiling used in a rapid onset disaster. This research found a limited number of examples of profiling used in a rapid onset disaster. WFP has developed a guide for vulnerability and spatial analysis in sudden-onset disasters called *The 72-hour Assessment Approach* whereby a 'good enough' snapshot of the situation can be developed using available information and pre-disaster secondary data to fill the initial information vacuum<sup>44</sup>. One key informant also gave an example of using profiling after the 2017 earthquake in Ecuador. Local teams conducted profiling activities in 16 towns, assessing physical damage, and assessing temporary and permanent settlement options through analysis of land tenure data and access to basic services. When using profiling to understand situations after a rapid onset disaster, another key informant cautioned that "in sudden onset disasters, it is difficult to have the same level of collaboration and type of agreed-upon evidence base that most profiling exercises seek to achieve".
- Use global indicators where possible. Link profiling to relevant global indicators and frameworks such as the Sustainable Development Goal indicators related to hunger, poverty, security of tenure, access to water and sanitation and disaster risk, for example. Global indicators ensure urban profiling exercises contribute to data being collected towards longer-term outcomes and help to feed into development planning as the crisis moves to the recovery phase.

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## Way Forward

Urban profiling, as outlined in this paper, is a concept that builds on good practice from current, varied approaches to data collection and analysis in towns and cities at risk of or affected by a crisis. Urban profiling integrates several different elements into one approach for a more holistic analysis of a city's systems and its populations. Through a collaborative process, urban profiling intends to arrive at a shared understanding across key response actors, such as national and local governments, humanitarian and development actors, civil society, communities and the private sector. For the Alliance, this is key to enable more tailored interventions that take into account the complexity and diversity of towns and cities, leading to more contextualized, coordinated, complementary and holistic urban responses.

It is important to note that urban profiling as an approach and process continues to evolve. At its core, the process should be people-centered and spatially focused, recognizing that effective urban systems have a key role in enabling the well-being of urban populations. Urban profiling creates an evidence base that can support the joint actions, plans and strategies of local governments and other crisis response partners by identifying key trends and reasons why those trends occur. The collaborative nature of urban profiling provides an opportunity to achieve not only relevant and useful evidence but also reliable, robust and trusted. Applicable at all stages of a crisis, profiling works best when it is jointly owned by national and local governments and actors in the humanitarian and development community.

The Alliance has identified the following actions to fill gaps in knowledge in regard to urban profiling and work towards improved implementation:

1. Develop a stronger evidence base of urban profiling and its impact through: a) systematically documenting, compiling and sharing experiences and good practices in a user-friendly compendium similar to that of the Shelter Projects Series<sup>45</sup>; b) further analysis of the ways in which urban profiling can be used effectively across different types of crises in order to be deliberate about the ways in which profiling adjusts and adapts to emerging needs.
2. Advocate to ensure profiling is included as an approach that improves coordination and collaboration in future guidance on crisis response in towns and cities, in addition to alignment with the protocol for engagement between local governments and humanitarian and development actors<sup>46</sup>.
3. Further research into and testing of new approaches to data collection and spatial analysis (some of which have already been mentioned) can help to make urban profiling more nimble and adaptable to specific crisis settings and timelines.
4. Seek guidance from Global Clusters, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, and the Grand Bargain's Joint Needs Assessment Workstream on the ways in which urban profiling can be better integrated with other humanitarian assessment and programming tools, in an effort to achieve stronger collective crisis preparedness and response outcomes.

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# Endnotes

- 1 Global Alliance for Urban Crises. (nd). *Urban Crises Charter*. Geneva: Global Alliance for Urban Crises. See web link: <http://www.urbancrises.org/sites/default/files/2017-10/GAUC%20Charter%20EN.pdf>
- 2 A more effective way of working is described by UNOCHA as “working over multiple years, based on the comparative advantage of a diverse range of actors, including those outside the UN system, towards collective outcomes. Wherever possible, those efforts should reinforce and strengthen the capacities that already exist at national and local levels”. UNOCHA (2017). *New Way of Working*. Online: OCHA, p.6.
- 3 The concept of urban profiling builds on other profiling approaches that have been developed over the years to meet different data needs for informing decisions in crisis response. Some examples include displacement profiling supported by JIPS, disaster profiling by OFDA, city and neighborhood profiling by UN-Habitat and vulnerability profiling by WFP.
- 4 Urban systems are categories that help organise complicated, interconnected aspects of urban life. For example, basic services such as energy, water, and telecommunications may be grouped together. Or, aspects related to the built environment might form another system consisting of housing, land, property rights, along with buildings (houses and public buildings). A city is like a body: when one system is affected, it can have positive and negative influences on the way the entire city functions. Source: Rossi, A. (1982). *The Architecture of the City*. Boston: MIT Press.
- 5 IASC. (2015). *IASC Reference Module for the Implementation of the Humanitarian Programme Cycle* (Version 2.0). Online: IASC.
- 6 The terminology in this report reflects the understanding presented in the Global Shelter Cluster’s 2018 *State of Humanitarian Shelter and Settlements* report whereby “settlement-based” approach is the wider term that incorporates other approaches.
- 7 See also different tools and guidance developed by the Joint IDP Profiling Service, including the JIPS Essential Toolkit (JET – [www.jet.jips.org](http://www.jet.jips.org)). See web link: <https://www.jips.org/tools-and-guidance/>.
- 8 A protocol of engagement between humanitarian and development actors and local governments is one of four knowledge products developed by the Global Alliance for Urban Crises in 2018 - 2019. See also endnote 42.
- 9 IASC. (2017). *IASC Commitments on Accountability to Affected People and Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse*. Online: IASC.
- 10 UN-Habitat (2010). *Count Me in: Surveying for Tenure Security and Urban Land Management*. Kenya: UN-Habitat.
- 11 The concept of ‘good enough’ comes from the *Good Enough Guide* for impact measurement and accountability in emergencies. The ‘good enough’ approach “emphasises simple and practical solutions and encourages the user to choose tools that are safe, quick, and easy to implement”. Source: The Emergency Capacity Building Project (ECB). (2007). *The Good Enough Guide*. Online: Oxfam and World Vision International., p.1.
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- 13 Chemaly, W., Krynsky Baal, N. and Jacobsen, K. (2016). *Forced Displacement: Go Figure! Shaking the Box of Profiling IDP Situations*. Geneva: JIPS and Feinstein International Center.
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- 15 Somalia Protection Cluster, Somalia Disaster Management Agency, and Banadir Regional Administration (2016). *Internal Displacement Profiling in Mogadishu*. Online: UNHCR. See web link: <https://reliefweb.int/report/somalia/somalia-report-profiling-internally-displaced-persons-mogadishu>
- 16 Internally displaced persons are persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized State border. UNHCR (1998). *Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement*. 22 July 1998, ADM 1.1, PRL 12.1, PRO0/98/109. See web link: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/3c3da07f7.html>
- 17 Baal, N. and Ronkainen, L. (2017). *Obtaining Representative Data on IDPs: Challenges and Recommendations*. Online: UNHCR., p.1.
- 18 Jacobsen, K. et. al. (2013). *Refugees from Myanmar, Afghanistan and Somalia and their Indian Neighbours: A Comparative Study*. Online: Joint IDP Profiling Service, the Feinstein International Centre (Tufts University) and UNHCR.
- 19 The key data in the UNHCR exercise included identifying demographic and household characteristics as well as livelihood information related to employment, housing, financial security, physical safety and education. Source: Jacobsen, K. et. al. (2013). *Refugees from Myanmar, Afghanistan and Somalia and their Indian Neighbours: A Comparative Study*. Online: Joint IDP Profiling Service, the Feinstein International Centre (Tufts University) and UNHCR.



- 20 Chemaly, W., Krynsky Baal, N. and Jacobsen, K. (2016). *Forced Displacement: Go Figure! Shaking the Box of Profiling IDP Situations*. Geneva: JIPS and Feinstein International Center.
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- 25 Kuner, C. and Marelli (eds.) (2017). *Handbook on Data Protection in Humanitarian Action*. Geneva: Brussels Privacy Hub and ICRC.
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- 27 Grayson, C. and Cotroneo, A. (2018). *Displaced in Cities Experiencing and Responding to Urban Internal Displacement Outside Camps*. Online: ICRC. See web link: <https://www.icrc.org/en/publication/4344-displaced-cities-experiencing-and-responding-urban-internal-displacement-outside>
- 28 IMPACT Initiative's area-based assessment toolbox, for example, provides tools for defining areas of intervention for humanitarian actors. For a description, see web link: <http://www.impact-initiatives.org/settlement-based-assessment-and-analysis-in-contexts-of-displacement>
- 29 Sitko, P. and Goudswaard, S. (2018). *A Systems Approach to Urban Development: Six Lessons for Better Integrating Urbanisation Management in Asia And the Pacific*. Sydney: the Research Development Network (RDI).
- 30 As of January 2018, Kakuma camp and Kalobeyei Integrated Settlement had a population of 185,449 registered refugees and asylum seekers. Negotiations between UNHCR, the National Government, the County Government of Turkana and the host community resulted in the identification of land for a new settlement in Kalobeyei, 25km from Kakuma town. Access to services, including water connections will require analysis of existing systems of provision in neighboring towns and cities. Source: UNHCR Kenya. (2018). Kakuma Refugee Camp and Kalobeyei Integrated Settlement. Online: UNHCR. See web link: <http://www.unhcr.org/ke/kakuma-refugee-camp>
- 31 The Urban-S consortium is comprised of iMMAP, JIPS, Mercy Corps Humanitarian Action Team (HAT), and the European Commission Joint Research Council (JRC). It brings together complementary areas of partner expertise and capacities. After piloting the approach in different Syrian cities through 2019, the methodology will be published as a toolkit for adaptation in other regions. See web link: <https://www.jips.org/jips-news/improving-humanitarian-and-recovery-response-in-syria>
- 32 Erbil Refugee Council and UNHCR. (2016). *Displacement as challenge and opportunity - Urban profile: Refugees, internally displaced persons and host community, Erbil Governorate, Kurdistan Region of Iraq*. See web link: <https://reliefweb.int/report/iraq/displacement-challenge-and-opportunity-urban-profile-refugees-internally-displaced>
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- 34 WFP-VAM (Vulnerability Analysis and Mapping). (2018). *Essential Needs Assessment Guidance: Interim Guidance Note*. Rome: WFP-VAM.
- 35 Two main approaches to vulnerability profiling are used by the agency, sometimes separately, sometimes together, depending on the context and type of shock. These are: 1) a Rapid Essential Needs Assessment used primarily in sudden-onset emergencies requiring immediate humanitarian response; and 2) in-depth Essential Needs Assessment primarily applicable in protracted crises, contexts of chronic vulnerability, or in the recovery phase of a sudden-onset emergency.
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- 38 UN-Habitat (nd). *City Resilience Profiling Programme*. See web link: <https://unhabitat.org/urban-initiatives/initiatives-programmes/city-resilience-profiling-programme>
- 39 The Open Cities Project makes data available for building resilience and sustainable societies in Africa. See web link: <https://opencitiesproject.org>
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- 44 WFP-VAM (Vulnerability Analysis and Mapping). (2018). *The 72-hour Assessment Approach: A guide for vulnerability and spatial analysis in sudden-onset disasters*. Rome: WFP. See web link: <https://www.wfp.org/content/72-hour-assessment-approach-guide-vulnerability-spatial-analysis-sudden-onset-disasters-june-2018>
- 45 The Shelter Project Series is a learning tool that supports improved responses to crises. It is produced by the Shelter Cluster through a group of agencies within the cluster led by UN-HABITAT. It contains summaries of a range of experiences applied in crisis situations, and an appraisal of their successes and failures. See web link: <https://unhabitat.org/books/shelter-projects-20112012>
- 46 The Alliance is working to develop a globally endorsed and locally relevant protocol of engagement between local governments and humanitarian and development actors. Such a framework, acknowledging sovereignty and grounded in humanitarian principles, aims to ensure more effective collaboration, focused on needs assessment, information management, coordination arrangements, programming response, monitoring and evaluation considering the national and local context.

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