



SYRIA MULTI-SECTORAL NEEDS ASSESSMENT

LESSONS LEARNED

DOCUMENT PRODUCED BY OCHA, REACH AND SNAP, ON BEHALF OF THE SYRIA ASSESSMENT AND MONITORING INITIATIVE AND THE HLG

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MSNA LESSONS LEARNED INTRODUCTION

This document consolidates lessons learned on the Multi-Sector Needs Assessment that was conducted on behalf of the Humanitarian Liaison Group (HLG) in Syria in August and September 2014 including the findings of the Lesson Learned workshop conducted with all stakeholders of the MSNA in November 2014 under the auspices of the Syria Monitoring and Assessment Initiative (SAMI).

Lessons learned are captured to inform the design and process of further assessments in Syria, to review implementation of previously identified lessons as well as to identify good practice in conducting multi-sectoral, multi-agency needs assessments. Considering the highly dynamic situation in the Syrian context, some lessons that have been identified to be relevant now might not be applicable in the future and might be worth re-visiting when the time comes for a new assessment.

This document consists of the following chapters:

- A. Review of Lessons Learned, common challenges and improvements in comparison to the previous lessons identified conducting multi-sector, multi-agency humanitarian needs assessments in Syria.
- B. Lessons Identified from the MSNA process for each step of the assessment cycle.

A. REVIEW OF LESSONS LEARNED, COMMON CHALLENGES AND IMPROVEMENTS

1. Main Lessons Learned

- Improved coordination capacity during the MSNA was essential to a successful assessment exercise, this included ensuring equal co-chairmanship of the Assessment Working Group and a clear division of roles and responsibilities. Better documentation of the different stages of the assessment including the established agreements further contributed to better accountability of the participating stakeholders to the overall process. Improved coordination further contributed to

closer cooperation with the regional offices of different involved organizations in light of a regional approach.

- Provision of improved technical capacity by the organisations participating in the coordination of the assessment further contributed to its success. Better pre-agreements on the technical aspects of the assessment comparing to SINA enabled a smooth collaborative process.
- Improved management of the field work, particularly with regards to defining the geographical coverage of the assessment and the division of labour between contributing partners was achieved through a rigorous approach during which one enumerator was assigned to assess one particular sub-district. It was ensured that all enumerators were clear on the areas to be covered. This resulted in an improved, larger geographic coverage including the assessment of needs in the Southern Governorates, which further contributed to achieving a more comprehensive picture of the “whole of Syria”.
- Better monitoring of the different stages of the assessment by the lead agencies was achieved.
- Improved, more detailed sector-specific scales were used to measure severity and confidence to contribute to better quality of the collected information.
- With the structured training provided to debriefers for the first time, the debriefing process was strengthened.

2. Main Common Challenges

- A comparison with the previous multi-sector, multi-agency needs assessment SINA showed that both assessments have been appraised to be beyond the scope of a rapid assessment, including too much technical detail defying the purpose of a rapid assessment.
- Both exercises noted significant challenges when it comes to managing human resources, planning, managing assessment coverage agreements and logistics in general, including translation and operational management and progress tracking.
- Conflict dynamics affected the data collection process in both exercises and hampered the access of enumerators to Syria, including increasing constraints to reach Turkey for training and debriefings.

3. Main suggested solutions

- Coordination of such a large-scale, multi-agency exercise remains the key element to conducting an assessment and improving its efficiency. Better coordination will further improve existing gaps in managing the overall process, achieving better participation, increasing geographic coverage and reducing administrative and logistical requirements.
- Simplifying the assessment tools, reducing the information requirements to “absolutely need to know” data points, increased coordination with sectors and thus strengthened assessment planning will reduce the timeframe and technicality of the tools to enable a rapid assessment and more frequent updates.
- Enhancing assessment capacity across all stakeholders is further key to ensure better buy-in and increased capacity to undertake similar exercises in the future.

B. MSNA LESSONS IDENTIFIED

1. Assessment Planning

- A huge challenge remains for such assessments to be anticipatory and strategic in nature, particularly taking into account seasonality of the assessment when planning it. Seasonal events which particularly affected the timeframe and results of the MSNA included:
 - Ramadan/Harvest impact on FSL
 - School summer holiday on Education
 - Drought conditions and summer temperatures for WASH
- The assessment planning phase must include an overview of the required resources – human and financial;
- A budget needs to be included from the beginning of the process-with identified custodian over the budget and a working budget line for administrative costs.
- **Recommendation:** It is recommended to establish an assessment calendar reflecting recurring seasonal events influencing both the process of conducting an assessment (such as holiday season, harvest, school holidays) as well as the anticipated results. In addition

an assessment calendar will be useful when planning and determining resource availability to conduct the assessment, overlap with in-depth sectoral assessments as well as set funding cycles.

- It remains crucial to plan assessments in un-assessed areas. Unvisited areas are most likely more affected and with more severe humanitarian needs

2. Process Management

i. Reflecting on Roles and Responsibilities of AWG/TWG

- The Terms of Reference (ToR) for the assessment working group (AWG and here specifically SAMI) and the assessment coordination team should be more detailed and validated, outlining:
 - The assessment coordination team, roles and responsibilities
 - A detailed work plan capturing responsibilities of team members/organizations needs to be in place. This reference document is particularly important when facilitating staff turnover as needed, structuring the process and upholding greater accountability to tasks and timelines.
- Joint chairmanship of SAMI/TWG proved to foster equal representation of chairs in the coordination team and ultimately improve coordination and accountability, which was reported as one of the key gaps in previous exercises.
- In the future, aligning with a Whole of Syria approach, the role and responsibilities of the remaining regional offices should be defined at the beginning of the assessment in order ensure better coordination during the assessment (e.g agreeing on field participation, potential coverage, analysis and feedback). This will allow also for better monitoring and reporting on the progress of the assessment at each stage.

ii. Assessment Coordination

- Taking note from the SINA, extra care was taken throughout the MSNA to discuss potentially contentious issues and ambiguous concepts, and reach agreements on these in advance. These discussions were documented, shared and agreed on by the coordination team through consensus. This allowed for following pre-

determined procedures, thereby avoiding debilitating disagreements on key issues (e.g. PiN).

Recommendation: Similar good practices should be taken in the future. While laborious, it proved a beneficial process, particularly in politically-charged environments.

iii. Operational Participation and Management

- To avoid excess burden, and reliance, on only one or few individual organizations to carry out the data collection, it is advisable to increase the diversity of the agencies contributing field researchers and have each contributing agency put forward a manageable number of enumerators (and if applicable, other resources contributed).
- Including Syrian NGOs is key to ease the burden and share the cost during data collection. In addition, inclusion of Syrian NGOs can significantly contribute to a larger geographic coverage and better access to areas previously unassessed or difficult to reach by INGOs. A better integration of Syrian NGOs would need to go hand in hand with capacity building measures as well as, capacity and stakeholder mapping and improved communication.
- Concrete confirmation (in writing) of participation and contribution should be obtained prior to the training of enumerators from each partner interested in contributing to the assessment.
- Contributing NGOs should be made aware of the extent of their duty of care, and confirmation of this should also be obtained. Duty of care may include some of the following:
 - Bearing the costs of accommodation and travel of their enumerators to/when in Turkey (including travel necessary to debrief and deliver the results of the primary data)
 - Financial compensation for services during the assessment
 - Security and movements inside Syria
 - Monitoring of completion of assessment duties as outlined
- A Duty of Care meeting was held to outline responsibilities of partner organizations with regards to their enumerators and coverage tracking.
- During the MSNA, as reported in other large-scale assessments in Syria, enumerators might have been burdened with other tasks (e.g. their usual duties), which may have prevented them from being able

to complete the questionnaire to the standards required by the methodology. Contributing stakeholders to the MSNA highlighted that the need to manage expectations and be sensible with regards to the burden on enumerators in collecting a large amount of data in sometimes extremely challenging and insecure areas. It is imperative to collect only what is deemed to be information “absolutely need to know” for operations to minimize the risks for staff spending time in the field

- Some organizations provided enumerators at the last-minute, and as such had less understanding of the methodology as there was less time to benefit from training. In the future, a wider call for participation should be done to avoid last-minute addition. A set of well-defined rules for participation would be needed as well.
- **Recommendation:** It should be clearly communicated to contributing NGOs during the Duty of Care meeting that their contributed field researchers should be freed of their normal duties throughout the timeframe allotted for the assessment activities (training, data collection and debriefing) in order to allow them to complete their research tasks as demanded by the assessment methodology and with adequate quality. Both the commitment of enumerators’ time, as well as the commitment to collect all data as outlined, needs to be re-confirmed with participating organizations, particularly if they are participating in such assessment activities for the first time.

iv. Enumerator management/tracking

- The debriefing co-leads were regularly communicating with contributing NGOs in order to ensure data collection efforts were underway and in order to schedule the debriefings. This allowed for proper tracking of the data collection process, as well as enabled better planning for the debriefings in terms of time management and human resources (number of debriefers needed per day).
- In order to ensure sufficient debriefers and space are available on a given day, it is best to stagger debriefings as much as possible so as to avoid a situation in which many debriefings are scheduled (either in-person or on Skype) to occur in one week. In situations where one agency is contributing a significant number of enumerators, it is especially important that the NGO should stagger the arrival of its enumerators in conjunction with the debriefing process as a whole.

- Having both an MSNA email account and hotline number (phone with credit) that could be used by enumerators proved to be helpful. Both are recommended for future use in facilitating such exercises.
- Though the email account was not used extensively for fielding technical questions, it was predominantly used for sending in completed questionnaires and photographs.
- The hotline was also not used for fielding technical questions, but it was very useful in facilitating the scheduling of some debriefings (in-person and over Skype), providing directions to debriefing site, and in some instances for conducting full debriefings in areas with no internet.

v. Division of geographic coverage

- Capacity, security and ability to follow-up should be main considerations for determining the achievable and manageable assessment coverage. Less coverage with a higher success is better than greater coverage with less accuracy.
- Geographical coverage by enumerators should be confirmed at the end of the training, with the consent of the enumerators. Should there be decisions to switch areas – or security considerations/protocols precluding enumerators from going to certain places – these updates should be communicated immediately and regularly to the Coordination Team to allow for proper documentation and adjustments to coverage. This will help prevent unplanned redundancies – and prevent bringing enumerators over for debriefings, adding undue effort and risk on the field researcher, and additional burden on debriefers.
- Where there are unplanned redundancies, care should be taken in communicating with the enumerators so as to ensure they do not feel their effort was in waste.

3. Methodology

i. Scope and scale

- The **timeframe of the assessment** was set to be too long for a rapid multi-sectoral needs assessment, with a hybrid questionnaire which included elements of in-depth sectoral assessments. The extended timeline resulted in assessment fatigue among stakeholders, turnover in staff, limited lifespan of the data, extra cost to cover permanent

positions, etc. The long timeframe of the assessment was not adapted to the fast evolution of the situation inside Syria.

- **Recommendation:**
 - This calls for a review/revision of the assessment strategy, including a more robust assessment planning, enhanced capacity-building for conducting coordinated needs assessments and support to sector assessment initiatives.
 - Establishment of a monitoring/surveillance system is crucial which integrates with more in-depth sectoral assessments - and thus eases the requirement on macro-level assessments to be more comprehensive; assessments can be either in-depth or macro-level, but not in-between.
- **Gender bias** needs to be acknowledged in limitations and addressed when planning the next assessment. However, this should be done whilst understanding the nature of the Syrian crisis (war) and the cultural context.
 - The MSNA was dependent on the resources put forward by participating organisations. In spite of advocacy and awareness-raising on the impact of potential gender bias on the data quality, partners seconded only very few female enumerators; in general, there are only very few female enumerator staff available.
 - Due to security reasons, in many locations women would not be able to collect data without accompaniment (hence only 7% female enumerators). Whenever possible, female field researchers were partnered with male counterparts (husband/wife, brother/sister, father/daughter) in order to increase the number of participating female enumerators.
 - Within Syria there are currently very few women key informants available.
- While the MSNA included a section covering communications, a better integration of the **voice of the affected community** is needed through specific techniques like community group discussions (CGD), focus group discussions (FGD), or household (HH) interviews. Nevertheless, this section should be kept in the future and become part of the core model as it yielded important results highlighting humanitarian access constraints, protection concerns (such as missing persons, family separation, loss of documentation) and

supported cross-sectoral analysis findings. Nevertheless, more effort should be made to increase Communication with Communities and Accountability to Affected Populations.

- **Recommendation:** Given the limitations of heavily relying on Key Informant interviews, utilization of more participatory methods should be considered, especially in terms of exploring issues concerning protection and vulnerable groups where considered relevant, possible and accessible.
- **The debriefing process** serves as a critical juncture for both validating the data and collecting qualitative information through semi-structured interviews with enumerators. The information gathered through the debriefings was found to be useful in contextualizing the data and had potential for further analysis. The qualitative information derived from the debriefings is information collected for the purpose of the assessment by the enumerators, through direct observation and the process of filling the questionnaire. Thus it could be considered as qualitative primary data, acknowledging the limitations of its second-hand nature. However, during the MSNA there were no clear guidelines developed explaining the extent to which debriefing notes could be used.
- **Recommendation:** In future, the uses of debriefing information should be pre-determined as part of the methodology.
- When access and security conditions inside Syria allow in future exercises, methodology needs to be reviewed: purposive sampling is not representative and findings can't be extrapolated, which is a serious shortcoming.

ii. Severity Scales

- The MSNA, as the previous assessment efforts covering the North of Syria, has used severity scales to measure the impact of the crisis, which consists of measuring the intensity (degree of harm) and size (number and proportion of people affected) of the population affected.
- Phrasing in the Severity Scales could be modified in order to adequately reflect the Key Informant perspective (and not be worded so as to reflect the population's perspective). For example, assessing the population's access to services and goods can be best expressed by the population itself; as such, for KI methodology, the questions

should be rephrased to reflect the KI's perception of coverage (e.g. in Health professionals assessing facility's estimated coverage and reach or expressing priorities for both males and females when mostly male KIs are consulted).

- It needs to be noted that while the assessed sectors defined and agreed on sector-specific severity scales, no severity scale was designed for measuring the severity of protection and livelihood needs. It remains essential in the future, as a Whole of Syria approach is implemented, that the same tool is used to measure impact of the crisis across and between all humanitarian actors in a joint, coordinated approach to ensure comparability of the information.
- **Recommendation:** Preparing sample "scenarios" for each severity ranking in each sector was perceived well both by trainers and participants in the Joint Analysis Session as well as by sectors and their members seeking to perform further analysis on the MSNA data. Further utilization of the tool was encouraged.
- The severity scale is a complex tool and a clear review of its usability and methodology is needed, particularly in the training phase.

iii. People in Need (PiN)

- A contentious issue in previous assessments, the matter of calculating the number of People in Need (PiN) was discussed early in the assessment. Different opinions and calculation options were presented and thoroughly discussed, and a paper documenting the positions (and their pros/cons) was produced (see PiN Paper). A consensus-based discussion was taken within the Coordination Team, and the calculation method was predetermined before data began to come in. The paper was also presented to the ISCG for discussion and final consensus, allowing for a transparent and constructive process in dealing with a particularly sensitive issue.

iv. Discarding criteria

- During the data-cleaning and validation phase, it became evident, that several datasets need to be excluded from the analysis. Specific criteria were developed for the MSNA to allow for a structured and traceable process to discard datasets of doubtful quality:

- Out of the 148 expected debriefings, 22 were not completed for the following reasons: the enumerators could not reach their sub-districts and field research was not conducted (11); the debriefing team could not get in touch with enumerators to schedule a debriefing (2); the debriefing was not completed (2); or the questionnaires were not fully filled (3).
- Out of the 20 problematic questionnaires, 18 had to be discarded (mostly for inadequate coverage, remote assessment, or unusable data).
- The criteria to discard questionnaires were as follows:
 - Remote assessment as it contradicts agreed methodology
 - Enumerator was not able to cover 75% of the population or areas of the sub-districts. If this criteria is applied in the future, it needs to be determined if due to the nature of the conflict, the lack of access and high mobility of population it serves a valid discarding rationale.
 - Completed debriefing of the questionnaire
 - Inconsistencies with population figures were tackled as follows:
 - In sub-districts reporting a stable condition (no fighting, no displacement) the population figures were examined against available population figures (in this case OCHA Governorate profiles). If figures were within the range of 25%, the questionnaire was kept. If they were not, at least 3 additional KI are consulted prior to taking a decision to discard the population figures.
 - In sub-districts reporting conflict in the past 30 days figures were supposed to be in the range of 40% of available SDR/OCHA Governorate profiles; otherwise the population figures were discarded.
- Questionnaires that were more difficult to deal with (quality of data had been deemed questionable) involved going into the details (contacting debriefers, seeking other sources, looking at the SDR, Governorate Profiles etc.), and deciding to save them.
- The whole process was documented, and decisions were taken in consensus.
- **Recommendation:** A revision of the discarding process and criteria should be considered. In a conflict area, discarding a questionnaire because less than 75% of the sub-district was visited is too restrictive. There should be extra checks at the debriefing level for these types of

issues, but the criteria should trigger measures that try to save the questionnaire rather than eliminate it.

4. Tool Design

- The length of the questionnaire and the detailed questions were the consequence of the lack of sectoral in-depth assessments and the real need for better information after more than three years since the beginning of the conflict. A clear mapping is needed to identify where information requirements can be best met either by sectoral assessments or by multi sector assessment. In addition, technical solutions need to be defined by each sector to identify the feasibility of sectoral assessments.
- The questionnaire design was the result of a complex negotiation process, as all sectors identified detailed information requirements due to the lack of in-depth sectoral assessments.
- Including questions that are better asked on HH level contributed to making the assessment more technical on the sectoral level, requiring further training to the enumerators and better understanding of the concepts used.
- Given the lack of access to conduct in-depth HH surveys in Syria, this compromise on the level of information collected needed to be acknowledged and the elongated timeframe of the assessment contextualized.
- **Recommendation:**
- More time needs to be spent on explaining the methodology and objectives of the assessment before the questionnaire design begins in order to manage expectations as to the purpose and results of rapid multi-sectoral, multi-agency needs assessments.
- The SAMI should support/recommend that each sector has to conduct their own assessment to avoid unrealistic expectations from multi-sectoral needs assessments. Technical support might be needed for some sectors.
- Seeing as Protection was not a standalone section, it was streamlined throughout the questionnaire. However, the design and analysis plan did not clearly highlight the protection linkages, making it challenging to identify and cull out the protection elements during the analysis phase.
- **Recommendation:**

- As such, if Protection is streamlined, the protection elements and linkages need to be clearly identified in the analysis plan.
- Additional consideration should be given to having a standalone Protection section which collects all the information related to protection, as it is difficult to otherwise capture main protection issues.
- Special care should be taken in drafting questions that may be touching on especially sensitive issues (including how these questions should be asked by enumerators, etc.).
- The use of observation tools (such as the one used in SINA) should be considered for gathering additional Protection information, cross-checking the questionnaire and supporting the debriefing phase.
- A Severity Ranking tool should be developed for Protection as well.
- Capturing more specifically the KI profile (male/female, etc.) would better account for some of the gender imbalance and strengthen the analysis.
- **Recommendation:** Mobile data collection tools might help with aggregating this information. Consideration should be given for using such tools to systematically gather metadata only.

i. Questionnaire

- The length of the questionnaire presented several main challenges for enumerators:
 - It was reported to be difficult to compile the different observations and KI interviews into one final KI form.
 - The high technicality of the questionnaire required in-depth training on sectoral concepts and their application
 - Some questions were deemed too sensitive and were not easy for enumerators to inquire about.
 - Enumerators had difficulties collecting figures/hard data – particularly ascertaining the # of people in acute need vs. # of people in need, despite the confidence level tool that was provided (which was developed in anticipation of this challenge).
- **Recommendation:** Include a session in the training that addresses training on combining information (merging different reliabilities, addressing conflicting information within a sub-district to reflect variability of situations, types of information, different levels of information, etc.)

Including explanations on the concepts/sectoral technical aspects in the training, alongside training on *how* to collect information.

- Enumerators were asked to collect information about concepts/technical aspects they were not familiar with and/or understood, including specific sectoral information. As enumerators were recruited from regular programme staff, there were concerns with some enumerators who rejected collecting information on sectors they themselves were not working in or their organization was not responding in. This bears a risk of overspecialization of enumerators.

5. Enumerator Training

i. Logistics

- The training was the only part not included in the Roles and Responsibility document; more emphasis should be put on this important phase to avoid miscommunication and last-minute changes in arrangements.

Recommendation: Ensure that clear timetables for logistical needs and focal points are developed and assigned in advance.

- Lack of planning, budgeting and under-estimation of costs and efforts on mobilizing so many participants led to the need for last-minute identification of funds to cover costs on several occasions.

Recommendation: An assessment budget should be built in the early stages of planning the assessment, as well as identification of funding sources prior to the rollout of the assessment stages.

- On several of the training days and in the training venues, the lunch options were not considered adequate for full days of training.

Recommendation: A sit-down lunch should be arranged in advance with the training venue (and/or surrounding area) so as to acknowledge the effort required by field-researchers to come to the training (oftentimes traveling for several days) and the long days associated with the training itself.

- Due to various logistical constraints, training rooms were often not suitable for accommodating the number of participants (training rooms were too small and/or were not temperature-appropriate) throughout the long training days.

Recommendation: As much as is possible, training venue rooms should be visited in advance to ensure they are appropriate for the conditions and number of participants.

Training rooms should also be confirmed with the venue to ensure there is a clear understanding by the training/coordination team what resources are available for this so as to allow for appropriate (contingency) planning.

- Printing arrangements and costs were underestimated.

Recommendation: Ensure that printing and printing costs are included in the budget and timetable planning.

ii. Training Modules/Manual

- As with enumerators, trainers contributed by participating agencies should be freed to perform only one task and focus on delivering the training(s). If that is not possible, these trainers should be removed from the pool so as to allow proper staffing for the training in advance.

- Different trainers passed on information differently, so there were some cases in which enumerators brought back different issues. These issues included:

- How to calculate population figures
- How to ascertain the CURRENT population figures (especially considering number of deaths, births, figures provided by LCs, etc.)
- Definition of “People in Acute Need” (this was not clear in the training and was a figure that was hard to obtain)
- Comparison to 2011 when asking about pre-conflict information and population figures was difficult (enumerators compared to a year or a few months prior; this was especially challenging for those enumerators trained remotely)

- The time and schedule needed for translating materials were underestimated and were particularly challenged due to the proximity to the occurrence of Eid, resulting in pulling trainers from their training tasks and overall placing additional burden on them (and thus possibly compromising the quality of the training):

- Oftentimes trainers and/or other staff were pulled during the training to finalize the translation of materials.
- In many instances the translation was also inadequate, necessitating additional translation and correction on the part of trainers.

Recommendation: Given the last-minute nature of translating documents in “real-time”, two key recommendations for ensuring a smooth translation process should be considered:

- Have a translator available on retainer, including both before and during the training to allow for flexible translation services.

- Ensure translator has good understanding of humanitarian concepts and methodology in order to ensure the proper translation and explanation of terms into Arabic.
- Including debriefers in the training of enumerators was deemed very beneficial to debriefers and strengthened the debriefing process. The training specific to debriefers (covering semi-structured interviews, cross-checking techniques and practice, etc.) was included and was useful as well.
- The participation of protection experts in the ToT and the Protection Glossary provided to enumerators during their training were highly appreciated by both trainers and enumerators. As such, both elements should be included in future trainings and assessments of this kind.

iii. Turkey-based Training

- The official request to the Turkish authorities should include as many details as possible (exact number of participants, purpose of the training, location and time etc.). This documentation is often required given the context, and particularly when an activity involves large groups of Syrians gathered. The official request should also be made in advance and as per the requirements by the authorities.
The MSNA process allowed for proper liaising with the authorities in both Hatay and Gaziantep, which allowed the trainings to move forward with relative ease.
- A Turkish-speaking staff member should be present at all times during the training. This is necessary to facilitate direct and clear communication with the Turkish police, authorities or venue staff as needed.
- Due to limited Arabic-speaking assessment trainers, no trainings for individual stakeholders should take place.
- Two waves of training were conducted, due to the limited availability of Arabic-speaking assessment trainers. This should be considered as good practice for future assessments, as it:
 - reduces logistics coordination at one point in time
 - enables more coordination team members to be dedicated and available per training room/site
 - reduces the pressure on trainers and allows for smaller groups of trainees
- Giving enumerators certificates both at the completion of the training, and a certificate following the completion of their debriefing, was a well-

received gesture by enumerators. Each certificate signified the completion of a different stage of the assessment, and was thus merited and appreciated by the field researchers.

Recommendation: Recognition for the efforts and completion of critical phases of the assessment should be rewarded with a certificate.

iv. Remote Training

- Preparing the remote training package placed a burden on already over-tasked trainers.
- **Recommendation:** Preparation of the remote training package should occur during the ToT and/or before the training phase begins. Additionally, the tasks of consolidating and recording slides should be shifted from trainers to other personnel (possibly a translator available on retainer) – or a few trainers should be designated to work on this from the beginning in order to improve burden-sharing and the timeline for getting this product ready.
- Debriefers identified that many of the enumerators trained remotely often had the information – or could access it – but misreported the information due to a lack of understanding of the questionnaire/methodology. Once explained to them by the debriefer(s), often they were able to retrieve the correct information.
Recommendation: Having a trainer and/or member of the coordination team following up directly with field-researchers trained remotely might mitigate some of these critical pitfalls. Direct/scheduled follow-up and contact with field-researchers would allow:
 - Field-researchers to ask questions and allow for asserting whether a basic understanding of the material was achieved.
 - Confirmation of the assigned areas that are to be covered by these field researchers, as assignments were mismatched and not clearly understood by many enumerators.
- Conduct the remote training either before or during the other training – not after the in-person training(s) – to ensure alignment between all enumerators' timelines, as well as give remotely-trained enumerators sufficient time to prepare and conduct their portion of research.
- It is recommended to update the Concept Note that details the limitations of Remote Training and ensure organizations are fully aware about the

fact that data collected by their remotely-trained enumerators is likely to be of lower quality and thus with a higher risk of being discarded.

6. Data Collection

i. Data gathering in the field

- Regular (daily) communication and interaction between the teams covering enumerator tracking, debriefing, and data management is necessary to ensure all work-streams are aligned. This will also allow proper tracking of what areas were finally covered, how many questionnaires were available per area, etc. **Recommendation:** Frequent (daily, every two days) check-ins between all teams during the debriefing phase on these matters. Alternatively, maintaining one unique document (and a backup), shared by all the parties involved and managed by one person, would facilitate this communication.
- For districts that are covered by more than one field researcher, it should be decided whether one questionnaire will be completed for the whole area – or whether several questionnaires will be considered. If several questionnaires should be completed, debriefers could be tasked with consolidating the questionnaire into one so that it is most representative of the situation in that sub-district.

ii. Data collection

- Enumerators had trouble collecting figures/hard data – particularly ascertaining the # of people in acute need vs. # of people in need.
- When enumerators were sent to areas they were unfamiliar with, the quality of the data was negatively impacted. At least one sub-district was discarded as a result of this – and the main explanation given by enumerators for poor knowledge of data was their lack of familiarity in the area.
- **Recommendation:** It is preferable to send enumerators to places with which they are familiar, as highlighted in past assessments.

7. Debriefing process

- To allow for more efficient management, it would be useful to clearly outline the responsibilities involved with managing the debriefing process.

Some of the duties include coordinating with NGOs regarding scheduling debriefings; supporting debriefers; logistics of the room; restocking refreshments; managing the debriefing data entry process.

- To ease logistical issues, it is recommended to have a printer available in the debriefing room (or in close proximity to the room and/or the co-leads to have printing capacity). This will minimize the time and effort required in getting questionnaire forms to debriefers for review.
- Regular monitoring of the MSNA email account (both before and during the debriefing process) allowed for prompt printing and/or ensuring that all completed questionnaires were accounted for.

i. Training Process

- Having debriefers trained with the enumerators proved to be useful and beneficial to the process. Seeing as debriefers received the same training, they were very clear on enumerators' expected deliverables and were able to question them more thoroughly during the debriefing. This generally significantly enhanced the quality of data and ensured a more rigorous quality control process.

ii. Debriefing of enumerators

- Conducting all the debriefings in one large room (with another small room available for spillover) worked well. The size of the room gave each team of debriefers their own space whilst also allowing them to get assistance as needed from the debriefing co-leads.
- Debriefers were often paired using with a “strong/less strong” logic. This allowed for development of a rhythm for debriefing as a team, and also helped enhance the quality of the debriefing as well as strengthening the debriefers' skills.
- Most debriefing pairs involved native Arabic speakers (predominantly Syrian) also fluent in English. In the past, Arabic/English speaker pairs were used, and the value added of having a stronger English speaker as part of the pair should be considered (e.g. quicker translation of notes into English, using more elaborate description in the notes, etc.) and possibly prioritized should the resources for such pairings be available.

- The debriefing process was long given that some of the questions were repeated after asking and discussing the questionnaire.

Recommendation:

- Find techniques to demonstrate how the questions are intended to gather the how/why – rather than the same information that can be gathered in the questionnaire – and use that in the training. Also, show how notes should be taken during the checking of questionnaires so as to avoid duplication of questions and elongating the debriefing session.
- Review Debriefing Notes structure and format (bearing in mind data entry of debriefing notes). Debriefers were given feedback on their debriefing notes. Debriefers found this exercise to be helpful in constructing their notes and avoiding gaps and mistakes. However, feedback should be given early in the process (shortly after they've taken their first notes) so as to avoid repeating mistakes and gaps throughout a large number of debriefings.
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- **Recommendation:** Sometimes it was harder for a debriefer to identify mistakes given his/her lack of familiarity with the sub-district they were debriefing.

Recommendation: As was originally planned, provide debriefers with SDR/prior assessments/etc. before the debriefings commence in order to improve their contextual understanding and allow for better reality-checks (delays from sectors in submitting SDR prevented sharing supporting resources to the debriefers).

 - To the extent possible, organize debriefers in a way that allows each debriefer to continuously debrief enumerators from only one or two governorates for the duration of the debriefing process. This may consolidate each debriefer's saturation of information per governorate.
- Despite anticipated challenges, Skype debriefings were still possible to conduct and were facilitated very well. The following points were crucial for allowing Skype debriefings to occur as successfully as they did:

- Constant communication with the contributing NGOs to schedule the Skype sessions. The tentative time and the Skype IDs, as well as the completed questionnaires, were obtained prior to the debriefing.
 - The Skype IDs were added onto the MSNA Skype accounts to allow for getting in touch with enumerators on an ad-hoc basis (due to unpredictable connectivity conditions).
 - The completed questionnaires were printed in advance of the call to allow for review by debriefer before the debriefing occurred.
- In some instances, the dedicated debriefers were able to use cellphone line (used as the MSNA hotline) and/or Viber to communicate with the field researchers and conduct the debriefings.
- In cases where an NGO is planning on conducting a large number of debriefings via Skype (10+) it is recommended to have an NGO focal point present in the debriefing room for the main days allotted for these debriefings. Having a focal point present allows for better addressing the ad-hoc nature of managing to make contact with enumerators and linking them with debriefers.
- To shorten the amount of time on Skype, debriefers reviewed the questionnaires before the debriefing began, outlining the major points requiring clarification and discussion.
- Debriefers maintaining the utmost flexibility for taking on Skype debriefings as the occasion arise. To allow for debriefers to take over Skype debriefings in instances where contact was lost mid-debriefings, debriefers were asked to take thorough notes demarcating where the debriefing stopped.

iii. Psychosocial support for enumerators & debriefers

- Considering previous experiences of debriefing enumerators, providing appropriate psychosocial support (PSS) for enumerators was taken into account during the MSNA. In consultation with an NGO providing PSS, several formats for

possible counseling were attempted throughout the duration of the debriefing period. Several challenges were encountered in trying to make these services known and available to enumerators, but it proved to be a meaningful and helpful exercise that should be improved in the future. Consideration on how to best streamline such services should be taken early on in the planning phases, in consultation with both the provider(s) of PSS and the contributing NGOs. Some of these points should include:

- Offering opportunities for individual vs. group discussions, setting specific times for these sessions
- Informing enumerators in advance of these opportunities
- Finding appropriate language to describe these opportunities so as to make them more appealing/useful
- Possibly offer stress-management techniques during the training
- Given some of the difficult stories and descriptions debriefers were documenting throughout the debriefing, it is proposed that the locally available PSS should be made to known to them. Additional consideration should be given to possibly running a group discussion with all debriefers following the debriefing phase to provide a space for such processing to occur.

iv. Debriefing of debriefers

- For the first time, debriefers were consulted in a half-day debriefing as well once debriefings were completed. Given their level of saturation with the data collected (particularly those debriefers who conducted a large number of debriefings), their insight was considered to be valuable – and very useful to the information management and analysis teams. Through several exercises, the other teams were able to capture debriefers' insights on major trends they picked up throughout the debriefings. This strengthened the linkage between the debriefing and data processing stages, and prepared the other teams for the next stages of the assessment.

Recommendation:

- It is recommended to continue this practice in future.

- Consider providing a more robust structure to such an exercise, potentially also including a session that would enhance the analysis capacity of debriefers.

v. Debriefing data entry

- With a short timeframe for conducting debriefings and a large number of debriefing notes, waiting to upload/enter the notes into the database created a serious backlog that jeopardized their inclusion in the analysis.

Recommendation: Entering of debriefing notes should commence as quickly/early as possible in the process.

- Ways of automatically importing debriefing notes – a process which would ensure proper tagging for qualitative data and all category options (especially for Protection) – should be explored in order to expedite the process and make it more efficient.
- Structuring the debriefing database format prior to the debriefings, would also allow for the notes to be entered simultaneously and facilitate direct clarification of notes with the debriefers as the process is ongoing.
- The debriefing form needs to be improved and more “data compliant”. Additionally, and since population figures prove difficult, debriefing could include more visual ways to represent the sub-district coverage (small maps with surface covered by enumerator) and the humanitarian profile (small organigram with boxes ticked if the group is present). This proves useful when cleaning the population figures data and when revisiting the questionnaire is needed.

vi. Debriefing Database

- The Debriefing Database served as a useful tool for contextualizing data. In certain instances, particularly for the Protection Sector, it was a source of information that was highly sought. However, the debriefing notes were not outlined in the Methodology as a direct information source that could be fully drawn upon for analysis.

8. Data Management

i. Database design

- The MSNA database is an MS Access based tool, developed specifically for the MSNA, and therefore had limited technical capabilities (namely given the limited timeframe and resources for its development).
 - The Access database was flexible, so it was easy and fast for the team to update, troubleshoot and modify the database design.
 - However, there were some limitations in terms of data validation and ease of use by data entry personnel.

Recommendation: It is recommended to build a platform for data entry (it could be online) for better and more accurate and efficient data entry/validation processes, while at the same time allowing the sustainability and ease of modification and maintenance by the team.

- Use of a centralized database to store data during the data entry process helped avoid a step of data consolidation into one file.
- The database could have been improved with the following points:
 - Implementing security roles, login credentials and a login log.
 - Storing data as separate equivalent values instead of recoding the dataset (i.e. ranking questions, and then converting 1's to 3's, etc.).
- The first batch of questionnaires entered in the database was used as a test to improve the database.

Recommendation: In the future, this testing should be done before the first day of data entry in order to minimize the intervention when real data is in the database.

ii. Data entry

- Data cleaning must start as soon as a few questionnaire have been entered, in order to provide feedback to both debriefers and data entry personnel on common mistakes, allowing to improve further debriefings and data entry practice.

- There was constant communication between the debriefing and the data entry teams throughout the debriefing phase, which was critical given these processes were happening in parallel (as was emphasized in the SINA LL document). This allowed for smoother progress tracking and data entry process. This allowed for easy and immediate clarification of inconsistencies or questions on the questionnaire forms prior to entry in the database.
- To manage the data entry process, a checklist was prepared and questionnaires were checked before handing over to the data entry personnel. A rigorous checking of questionnaires is recommended to avoid logical inconsistencies before handing over the questionnaire to data entry personnel.
- While the data entry interface was functional, several improvements could be made to it – and should guide the development of future interfaces:
 - User interface should be more friendly and conforming with the order of questions in the questionnaire and more consistent with the paper version of the questionnaire.
 - Multi-language user interface should be considered for Arabic speakers, particularly as the questionnaires were in Arabic.
 - Extensive data validation rules, validating and notifying wrongly entered data, would have helped to ensure data quality and avoid a laborious cleaning process later on (e.g. maximum three entries accepted for ranking questions, or rules applied to validate population figures).
 - Use of calculated fields where possible to reduce data entry errors.

Recommendation: To allow for easier management of data entry personnel and controlling the quality of their work, it is recommended to do the following:

- Having a consistent data entry team that does not change throughout the data entry process (i.e. it is better to have five fixed and sustained persons than 15 persons changing every few days). The learning curve for data entry is long (it could take a full day to familiarize with the tools), and having new

people coming in disrupts the workflow and does not allow for maximizing the skill of those who go through the learning curve.

- Briefing the data entry clerks about: the different parts of the questionnaire; instructions on how to fill the data in the database; how to deal with different responses if there are issues with the paper responses; the assessment process; and the importance of data entry accuracy. Giving this background will contribute to improving the quality of data entry.
- To have a data cleaning logbook

iii. Data processing

- A document outlining different cleaning steps and logical consistency checks helped all IMO's to follow the same cleaning process. The document included regular updates documenting steps and points to consider while cleaning the database. The document could be as extensive as possible, outlining all validation rules and the process to follow involved in the cleaning.
- While several sprints were done with the IM team, a more detailed training session should be dedicated to explain underlying concepts used for the processing and analysis (i.e. weighted median, severities, etc.).
- Participation of sector IMO's in the Data Team should be encouraged (the presence of the FSL IMO during the MSNA analysis phase proved to be extremely valuable).
- IMO's should be encouraged to get familiar with reference documents (Dataset Preparation and Data Analysis) beforehand.
- One IMO per section of the report was a good set up. All sections should be reviewed and cross-checked for data glitches by at least one other IMO.
- Additional things that would have improved the data processing include:
 - Clearly document (ideally in one master document) which tools (e.g. Tableau or Excel) were used to create each table, graph and heat-map and where the original files are saved. This will prevent confusion and enable all team members

access to the tools/data needed to adjust visuals as needed at different points in time.

- Certain questions did not follow the specific analysis template, and should have been identified as such at the beginning.
- The mix of graphic tools created some confusion in identifying the final graphics at the end.
Recommendation: Using a log sheet of graphs documenting their final version, location path and the tool used to create them would prevent this confusion.

iv. Mapping

- It is recommended to prepare a list of maps required and communicate with the mapping team so that the mapping team could have sufficient time to produce several bigger trellis maps that would have been useful and helpful to the analysis team.
- Clearly demarcating boundaries for city sectors should have been completed while assigning areas to enumerators. This would help mitigate coverage gaps in the city sectors.

v. Graphics

- The color template should be finalized ahead of the graphics phase.
- Identifying a graphic designer (and a backup) should be done ahead of time to allow for proper vetting with sufficient lead-time for completing the graphing and report layout phases.

9. Analysis

i. Secondary Data Analysis

- The secondary data review (SDR) was very thorough due to the extensive work of the team leading this work-stream. As planned, the SDR provided a solid baseline with which to compare the results of the primary data collection.
- A detailed process and plan was devised before the SDR began, allowing for using a wide variety of sources.
- The team coordinating this phase should ensure that sectors have the capacity to prepare their secondary data analysis in line with the timeline.

Recommendation: Appropriate resources should be dedicated to the process of SDR. If sectors do not have the capacity to prepare their SDR, the Coordination Team should allot capacity and time to carry this out on behalf of and in consultation with the sectors.

- SDR templates were prepared for sectors to use as a guide throughout this process. The template was prepared in conjunction with some of the general reporting guidelines outlined for the final report, which proved useful in the final phases of report-writing.

Recommendation: The template was useful to all the sectors, and as such should be provided to partners in future exercises.

ii. Primary Data Analysis

- Team ups of IMOs performing data cleaning and processing with analysts was successful. However where possible and where capacity exists, data processing and analysis should be conducted by the same dedicated team members. Good understanding of the nature of the data collected, common mistakes recorded, general emerging patterns are key for understanding the bigger picture.
- Feedback from sectors was overall very useful and constructive for the analysis. The continued involvement of sectors enhances the quality of the analysis and reporting. As such a useful and effective strategy for engagement should be pursued. This is especially important as there were certain instance in which extreme effort was needed to get sectoral feedback for their analysis of the primary data.

iii. Joint Analysis

- Set clear objectives and goals for the Joint Analysis Workshop.
- Be specific in instructing the working groups/audience as to what is expected from them in terms of use of approach to validate findings, as well as output from the group work.
- Beware not to overload audience and go into too much detail in terms of methodology used in order to allow for participants to come to conclusions and formulate simple key messages.
- When asking plenary and groups to identify and formulate key messages/findings make sure that these refer to key findings of the needs assessment, and not key recommendations in terms of response and strategic planning.

- Materials provided for preparation prior to and during the Joint Analysis Workshop shall be limited in order not to overwhelm participants and to better steer the conversation.
- A neutral facilitator who has not been involved in the assessment itself is recommended to facilitate the workshop. This would give the group more space to develop their own recommendations/key messages without being bound to the findings of the assessment. However it is recommended that the Coordination Team/analysts are available to attend the group work and to steer discussions, convening at times to provide feedback on the process and outputs.

10. Reporting

i. Report Structure & Template

- The reporting process and structure were outlined early in the process, which helped smooth the path for the writing phase. Steps deemed as critical to make this a constructive and useful process include:
 - The report structure reflected the analysis plan of the assessment, which allowed for later simplifying the report structure
 - Mini-joint analysis and brainstorming sessions on the content of the report proved to be crucial for the final draft
- The report structure proposed in advance was weak, unrealistic and did not take into consideration design options and structure from past assessments.

Recommendation: It is important to have a template ready and shared in advance with sectors, that can be used for the SDR and that should be filled as soon as possible. It is strongly recommended to start writing as possible in the final report template.

ii. Report Writing

- Several steps were critical to facilitating the writing phase and identified as good practice. These included:
 - A clear linkage between the information management team and analysis/reporting team allowed for translation of ideas and findings into report content. This was further enhanced by the fact that those writing the report were also directly involved in the analysis phase.

- The writing phase was carefully planned and outlined with a concrete timetable to meet the report deadline.
- Regular communication regarding work in-progress, which allowed for structuring the overall workflow.
- A small team was designated for drafting the report. This was a very effective process, which allowed for:
 - Consistency in language, tone and style.
 - Clearly defined responsibilities per team member, strengthening accountability.
 - Adherence to page limits.
 - Adherence to the timetable and all deadlines, including those relating to first drafts out to sectors for their feedback; final drafts; and final edits.
 - Sharing the tasks of consolidating and implementing feedback from all the sectors.
 - Assigning focal points for compiling different sections of the report.
- Communication with Editor a few weeks in advance proved to be important. Likewise, it was important to share style guidelines with the Editor in advance to ensure clarity on the editing process and adherence to style protocols envisioned and agreed on by the team.

iii. Report Dissemination

- **Recommendation:** The translation of the final report into Arabic and Turkish should be considered in both assessment timetables and budgets. This would allow for swift dissemination among key stakeholders in the context following the finalization and validation of the report.